



# GROWING WINGS:

Tools  
for  
Surviving & Thriving

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*(Please note: the following tools are not in any particular order, nor am I a mental health professional. If you are in distress, get the help you need to stay safe. These are simply tools that work for me, and might for you, too. I have left spaces between text for you to write your own notes, variations, and tools.)*

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Life can get to us.

It can seem like we are in fast-forward, like a hamster running in a wheel, and yet going nowhere. It is important to be able to regroup, to ground, to press the “reset” button, *every single day*.



I have been open about my own struggles with mental health; I had post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) run rampant in my life for decades, without realizing what was “wrong” with me.

I am not “cured,” but am on a path of healing.

As time has gone on, I have come to a point where *I am grateful for those dark times*. They have given me unexpected gifts of wisdom, resilience, connection and compassion.

With all my heart I believe this will—or may already—be true for you as well. But before we can see our darkest times as a “gift” *we’ve got to survive them!* The way is made easier by sharing with each other.



I have gathered tools over the years that have helped me keep moving forward when I wanted nothing more than to stop.

I share these with you, knowing that some may not resonate with you. But we don't need fifty different tools to work; we only need a few, and if those few are potent enough, ***we can grow wings and fly to places of joy, self-awareness, and gratitude.***

**Tool 1: Let it all out**

Self-respect, and self-care can come hard. We can be pulled in a million directions and without realizing it, put ourselves dead-last.

We become strangers to ourselves, not knowing why we may have flares of temper, or crying jags, or a general lethargy.



We can peel back the layers by writing *morning pages*.

From the book, *The Artist's Way*, by Julia Cameron, morning pages purge one's mind of the internal dialogue that can rattle along nonstop.

Basically, you write nonstop for three pages of whatever surfaces.

This isn't for showing other people.

Often the stuff written is petty, whiny, and vindictive, but it's important to get it out of one's head. (If it's really personal stuff *I shred it* when I'm done!)

It's surprising how much your subconscious will reveal to you, if given the chance, which is why it's important to write the full three pages.



Variation: After the brain-drain, go back and *make the negatives into positives*. For example, "Today I feel like I'm going to explode, I can't do this!!..." becomes "Today I am going to be strong...I can do this!"

You just go over the written page and cross out the negatives and write over them the positive, affirming statements.

Another variation from *The Artist's Way* is to ask questions of your "inner child" by writing questions from your adult self, using your dominant hand.

Answer it with your non-dominant hand from the perspective of your child self. It's kind of eerie how tapped in you can get to that ageless child within.

It's a way to bypass the critical adult brain and have a good chat with the part of you that is often overlooked and silenced and who, if ignored, *can be running the show* even when we are old and gray!

It's simple, but powerful.



*Journaling* is also powerful. It can be anything you want it to be, but not necessarily the "purge" of morning pages.

This can be a peaceful time. It can also be a time for spoiling yourself a little, as picking a nice journal out, and a pen that you enjoy writing with, can feel like luxuries (I spend a lot of time picking out pens and journals!).

If you are stressed, light a candle, put on music that inspires you, and write.

If you are stuck in a negative spiral, try writing a *gratitude journal*. Gratitude changes negativity to positive, powerful energy in an instant.



It can ease depression, despair and chronic pain.

Even the act of *smiling* is powerful and releases hormones that increase our feeling of happiness. So even when smiling is the *last thing* you feel like doing, crack open a smile and feel an instant hit of wellbeing.

Practice gratitude by writing out a list of the things you are grateful for.

Start slow--list five things you are grateful for; if you think of more, keep going.

As you allow yourself to think of those things, smile a huge SMILE, and *feel the gratitude well up*.

### Tool 2: Meditate

I learned Transcendental Meditation, and recommend it, but there are many other ways to meditate.



For people on the go, there are meditation apps; I tried one called **Headspace**.

I really like it, as the guide's voice gives just enough prompts without becoming distracting or annoying, and the basic level is free. There are others, such as **Insight Timer**, **iMindfulness** and **Buddhify**, to name a few.

*Breathing* is also an easy, powerful way to declutter the mind and you don't need an app to do it!

There are many breathing meditations, but an easy one to breathe in for 3 counts, hold for 3, out for 6.



Another way is to *be aware of the space between breaths*.

You “watch” your breath as you breathe in and are aware of the moment of stillness before your body exhales. You do the same on your next inhale, simply observing the spaces between your natural, unforced breathing.

Mindful breathing helps reset your emotional balance.

Another powerful meditation tool is listening to “brain entrainment” CDs from **Sacred Acoustics** ([www.sacredacoustics.com](http://www.sacredacoustics.com)).

Sacred Acoustics uses modulated brainwave patterns (delta, theta, and alpha rhythms) to help the brain get into a deep state of awareness and profound relaxation. They even have a *free* 20-minute download to get you started.

### Tool 3: “See” it and Believe it

Visualize yourself strong and happy.



In Deepak Chopra’s book, ***Ageless Body Timeless Mind***, he asks the reader to think of a moment when they were supremely happy.

He asks them to be back in that moment, to feel what they felt...the sun on their face...the wind in their hair...grass under their feet...whatever it was they felt and to be back *in that moment*.

*The body will not know it isn't back there* but will respond to the “reality” the mind is presenting. Stress levels will decrease, and the same level of joy will be felt in the present time. It's kind of amazing.



Another important tool in visualization, especially powerful for young people, is doing a *vision board* where you can clip photos/pictures of things that symbolize how you want to feel and be.

Hang it in a room where you see it often. *Celebrate it*. This is your heart speaking to you about who you can be, who you truly are.

This “vision” may change, as you change.

*Allow for the growth and leave an area where you can paste/pin on new things. Let it be an expression of hope and joy for a future that you are building foundations for, today.*

#### **Tool 4: Walk-it-Off**

*Walking, the physical movement of swinging our arms and legs and moving through the world, has a way of realigning our energies.*



A brisk walk can quickly shift a heavy mood, especially if we walk in a beautiful area.

A slow walk can be meditative. You can stop and really look at something: a leaf; a flower; the way the branches gracefully reach from a tree.

If you are really struggling, practice breathing in and out in time with your stride, or repeat a prayer or an affirmation, over and over again.

Immersing yourself in the moment, being present to the life that is humming all around you, can help get you out of whatever hamster-wheel mind-loop your thoughts are on.

### **Tool 5: Butterfly Hug**

A butterfly hug is a derivation on EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) therapy which has been used to treat PTSD sufferers.

It is also used for calming anxiety and is done by crossing your arms and tapping alternately on your shoulders.



It can be done discreetly—cross your arms, and with both hands below your crossed arms, alternate tapping your fingers on your rib cage—so that even in public you can calm yourself.

While helping to alleviate anxiety, *it also allows the mind to process trauma,\** instead of leaving those memories raw, unresolved and reactive.

*\*CAUTION: If the 'butterfly hug' releases memories that are too overwhelming, STOP. Find a skilled EMDR therapist so you can safely continue. EMDR therapy is intense and difficult, but if you are suffering relentless bouts of PTSD, it is a lifesaver.*

### **Tool 6: Exercise = Mind + Body**

Stress and anxiety make us live in our heads.

*Movement* helps reconnects us to our bodies and releases the stress that has accumulated in them.



*Dancing* to music is an awesome way to reconnect mind and body. Swing your arms in *large figure 8 patterns\** around your body to help generate a feeling a well-being.

*\*The figure 8, or "eternity sign," is a pattern found all throughout the body's energy systems; reinforcing that crossover pattern reinforces patterns of health.*

I'm taking an online Qigong course for women through **The Shift Network** ([www.theshiftnetwork.com](http://www.theshiftnetwork.com)) and I love how gentle it is. Qigong's gentle movements get my energy flowing, easing pain and creating space.

There are many free Tai Chi classes, yoga classes, Qigong, and any number of activities online.

Sometimes moving feels too painful, though.

If that's the case, be gentle with yourself. If you are able, *stand with your hands raised over your head in a "V"* and allow compassion for yourself to flow through you. If you can't do that, *imagine yourself doing it...and smile.*



*It will feel like oil on rusted joints.*

### Tool 9: Sensory

Highly sensitive people are affected by their environment.

*Smells* (good ones, anyway) can be powerful grounding tools. Go to the health store and try out testers of essential oils.



If there is one that you love, have it on hand when your thoughts race, and deep-breathe it in.

Lavender is one which can be used in a lot of ways.

If you find it calming, put a few drops of lavender oil on a tissue and put it under your pillowcase so you can smell it as you rest.

Colors are grounding, too. You can do simple “color therapy” by buying clothes in colors and textures that you respond to.

*Invest in clothes that are made of natural fabrics.*



If you have a highly sensitive child, even things like getting seamless socks that don’t rub against their toes will help them feel better.

Clothes that are made of comfortable materials and in colours that you love will feel like warm hugs when you put them on.

*Crystals* can also be powerful in grounding us.

While many people believe that crystals have healing properties, whether you believe that or not, they are beautiful and connect us to the exquisite beauty of the natural world.



I always have *salt lamps* on, and find they make a real difference with how I feel, not the least because of their luminous beauty.

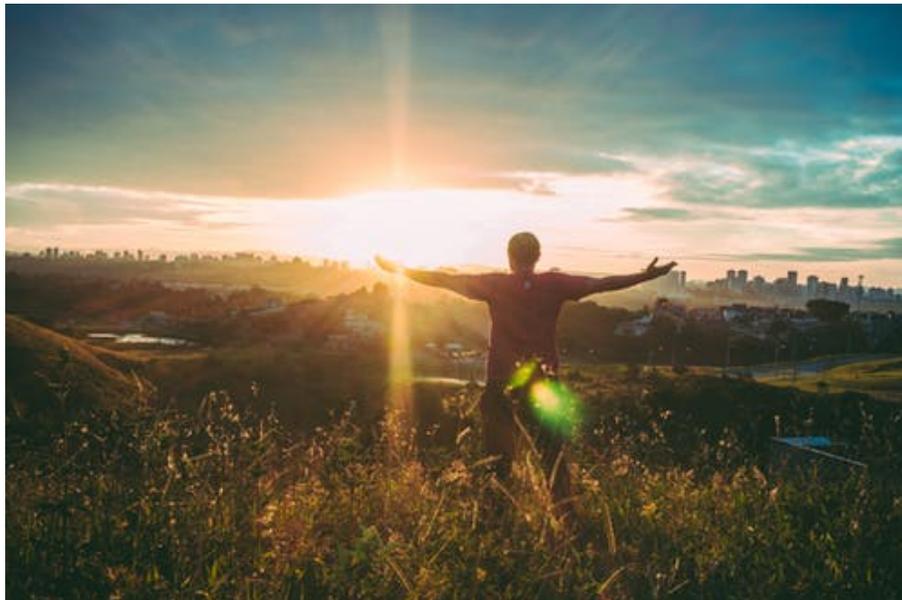
### **Tool 8: Prayer and/or Affirmations**

I pray every day, starting and ending my day with prayer.

If I am in distress, I pray over and over, while breathing deeply. If you aren't religious, there are other ways to connect to life-force energy.

I do this next exercise every single day. It grounds me and fills me with light and hope.

Rub your hands together, really making the palms connect, and lay your hands flat on your thighs. You can also hold your arms up in a "V".



*Visualize love running down through your entire body, down your legs, through the soles of your feet and rooting deep into the center of the earth.*

Now visualize that connection flowing back up from the earth's center, through you, and to a star directly above you in the sky.

Imagine the energy swirling up and down, *with you as its vessel.*

Imagine the energy becomes soft, golden light, growing within you until it blooms into a protective sphere that completely surrounds you. *Hold this vision in your mind.* (With practice, this grounding exercise can be done in seconds.)

If your arms are raised, lower them. Place your hands anywhere on your body that feels like it needs extra attention. If you're not sure where to put them, lay your hands over your heart.

Try saying an affirmation, like, *"I am filled with health and light."*



Tune into your body as you say the affirmation.

Is there resistance? Some people describe resistance as a "heaviness." If you feel that heaviness, imagine you have a fire extinguisher in your hands, but *one that sprays light.*

In all the areas of resistance or heaviness, *spray it with light*. Imagine yourself sparkling with that light. You can add colors to it—anything that makes you happy.

The power of the mind is such that *your imagination will go far in helping shift ingrained patterns of thought*.



One thing that was a huge revelation for me, was that *I am NOT my thoughts*.

Eckhart Tolle's book, ***The Power of Now***, helped me to become "the compassionate observer" of my own thoughts and feelings.

Now I know to *look for the space* between racing thoughts and the ever-present hum of light within all of us that remains unchanged.

Like waves that surge over a deep body of water, below the waves is stillness.



### **Tool 9: Shifting Energies**

Energy medicine has made a profound change in my life.

And as “woo-woo” as that may sound to skeptics, there is substantial proof that our bodies are indeed governed by energy (scientific studies can be found at [www.innersource.net](http://www.innersource.net) and typing in “scientific studies” in the search bar).

Traumatic experiences, and/or damaging beliefs, get “stuck” in our bodies.

In energy medicine, “*stuck*” energy equals imbalance, which can eventually lead to disease.



A good first step in improving overall health is to do the *Daily Energy Routine*. The DER is a series of movements that help keep our energies flowing optimally.

Several gifted teachers\* share free Daily Energy Routine videos on YouTube.

\*Teachers such as Prune Harris ([www.pruneharris.com](http://www.pruneharris.com)), Donna Eden ([www.edenmethod.com](http://www.edenmethod.com)) and my teacher in energy medicine, Eva Gold (<http://em4all.com>), offer videos on a number of subjects that help people find balance. For a Qigong variation, look at Marisa Bellaria

([www.yoqi.com](http://www.yoqi.com)), and for a yoga spin on energy medicine, visit Lauren Walker at (<https://www.energymedicineyoga.net>).

If you are an “energy sponge” and often feel scrambled or ungrounded, especially in a crowd, I recommend you try doing the DER and note the changes in how you feel.

Another energy medicine powerhouse is the *Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT)*. Tapping is like having a periscope into my subconscious mind; EFT gives me the means to “tap” into what is going on, deep inside.



*Tapping* can be used for people of all ages, and can be targeted to help with specific issues, such as anxiety, excess anger, lack of self-esteem and even weight loss.

I subscribe to the app, ***The Tapping Solution***, ([www.thetappingsolution.com](http://www.thetappingsolution.com)) which I highly recommend. It has a “menu” of whatever issues you need to focus on and has guided tapping meditation.

Marcella Friel’s book, ***Tap, Taste, Heal: Use Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) to Eat Joyfully and Love Your Body*** is about getting to the root of *why* we hold onto extra weight. She also shares free, instructional videos on YouTube.



There are so many resources, so many talented people who are sharing their insight, that I encourage you to search for what truly resonates with you.

Whether you are just beginning your healing journey or are a “Lifer” like me, *we all have something to share.*

**In Conclusion:**

Healing is a journey, not a destination.

When I forget that, I feel frustrated and discouraged that “old stuff” keeps resurfacing.

When I remember that even the most harrowing of experiences can guide me more and more to who I am, I calm down.



*There is a grace that comes from accepting oneself, accepting all the parts that are still hurting, still a little undone.*

As human beings, we have an innate desire to keep growing, keep learning, and to transcend.

While I am a writer and an artist, not a mental health professional, I believe we can support each other's journey toward well-being and peace.

The books that I write and/or illustrate, for [children](#) and [young adults \(of all ages\)](#), are my way of helping make the world a better place, and I invite you to read them.

I have also started an online boutique that raises money for charity, at <http://www.balsaraboutique.com/> and would love for you to visit.



Wishing you peace and abundant blessings,

Andrea

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