

# THE JOURNEY INTO STILLNESS

*A GUIDED 3-WEEK JOURNAL FOR HEALING,  
RESILIENCE, AND POST-TRAUMA GROUNDING*

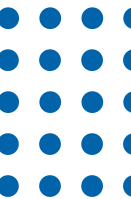
Created by James Stinson, IV, MSW

2025

trauma survivors  
**network**  
provided by **ATS**  
survive. connect. rebuild.



**THIS BOOK BELONGS TO:**





*To Jeff, Debbie, and Allen-- Thank you for helping me develop this project and informing it with your lived experiences. I appreciate your vulnerability. I am forever in awe of your resilience and am thankful that you took the time to engage and constructively critique this project. You all are beyond amazing. Without you, there would be no journal. With you, there is a resource we can share with many!*

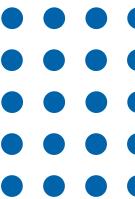
*To Amanda-- Thank you for supporting me through the development of this journal. I could not have asked for a better field instructor. You are an amazing social worker, colleague, and friend. Continue to shine that light that you shine, as it is noticed, seen, and appreciated.*



*To every trauma survivor-- This is for YOU. For your courage in waking up each day, even when the weight of your experiences try to hold you down. For the quiet strength it takes to keep going, to feel, to heal, and to hope again. May these pages meet you with gentleness. May they help you discover peace. May they remind you that your story matters, your pain is valid, and your healing is not a race-- it's a journey. This is for the ones still finding their voice, the ones rediscovering their worth, and the ones who've learned to live in their reality.*

*You are not broken.*

*You are becoming.*



# PTSD: The Echo of Survival



Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, (PTSD), is a psychiatric condition that occurs in individuals who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event that overwhelms their ability to cope. It happens as a result of our brain trying to protect us and is a natural response to extreme stress-- not a personal weakness or flaw.



## Common symptoms include:

- Intrusive memories, nightmares, or flashbacks
- Avoidance of reminders of the trauma
- Emotional numbness or feeling disconnected
- Hyper vigilance, irritability, or difficulty sleeping

It's also SUPER important to know that PTSD and its symptoms can vary greatly depending on the individual, the type of trauma, and the emotions tied to it.

# MINDFULNESS: The Soft Awareness



Mindfulness is the practice of showing up in the present moment-- not to fix, judge, or escape it, but to gently notice it. It's about noticing your thoughts, feelings, and surroundings without trying to change or judge them. For someone experiencing PTSD or anxiety, mindfulness can help create a sense of safety and grounding by reconnecting with what's happening right now, rather than being overwhelmed by past memories or future fears.

Research shows that mindfulness can significantly reduce symptoms of PTSD by helping individuals regulate their emotions, decrease anxiety, and improve overall wellbeing. Studies have shown that practices like mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) can lead to measurable improvements in trauma-related symptoms, especially when tailored to be trauma-sensitive (Polusny, Erbes, Thuras, et al., 2015).



**Mindfulness is the art of being here,  
now,  
on purpose,  
with compassion**



# ABOUT

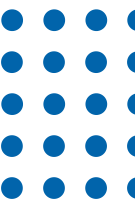
The Journey Into Stillness is a guided 3-week retreat in book form, created with trauma survivors in mind—especially those living with or experiencing symptoms related to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Acute Stress Disorder. Whether you’ve been formally diagnosed or are simply seeking grounding in the aftermath of difficult experiences, this book offers space, structure, and support for your healing.

Each week invites you into a deeper layer of reflection through mindfulness practices, gentle psychoeducation, and intentional journaling prompts. You’ll explore what safety, presence, and self-compassion can look like in your daily life, while slowly building your own toolkit for resilience.

This is not just a journal. It’s a pause. A soft return to yourself. A reminder that healing is possible—and that stillness is not the absence of movement, but the presence of peace.

## YOUR STORY: The Song of Survival

Your story is a powerful reminder that your lived experience isn’t just a series of painful events-- it’s a testament to your resilience. Your story is your lifeline: a way to reclaim identity, honor your strength, and find meaning in chaos. It’s not about having a perfect narrative-- it’s about recognizing that every moment you’ve endured is part of a survival song. Sharing it, even just with yourself, can be healing.





This beautifully aligns with the principles of narrative therapy, a therapeutic approach that helps individuals reshape how they see themselves through storytelling, or even journaling. Research suggests that narrative exposure therapy can lead to significant reductions in PTSD symptoms, offering a structured way to transform traumatic memories into a coherent and empowering personal narrative. Trauma is known to distort identity—making you feel broken, powerless, or stuck. Narrative therapy invites you to reclaim your story.

## HOW TO BEGIN: Your Journey into Stillness

1. Each day has a new prompt! Read and answer it on the lines provided. Be as descriptive as you feel able.
2. After writing down your thoughts, read why the prompt was important. This will help in processing the material!
3. After reading the importance, reflect on the prompt and your experiences. What did you learn? How do you feel? Feel free to write about anything. This is YOUR space!

**Now it's your turn to gently begin your  
journey into stillness**































# WEEK ONE

## Day 6: The Ground Beneath Me

When everything feels uncertain, what grounds you? Make a list or write a short reflection on the people, objects, rituals, or thoughts that help you feel steady-- even if for a moment.

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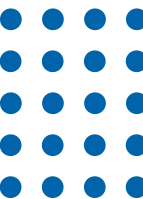
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I am supported. I am grounded. I can feel the earth holding me up







# WEEK ONE

## Day 7: I am Still Here



Look back on your week. What did you notice about yourself? Even if it was challenging, what helped you return to life? End with this sentence: “I am still here because...” and let yourself finish it as many times as you need!

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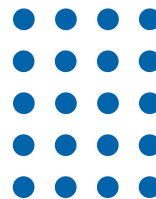
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I am still here. I am still becoming. My presence is proof of my resilience







# WEEK TWO

## Day 1: Whisper of Worry



Do you feel hypervigilant? Anxiety? Where do you feel this in your body? Describe a time where it has shown up for you. What does this tell you about your inner world?

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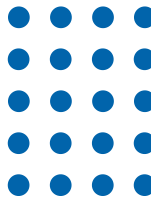
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I am not in danger. My body is just a good listener. I can thank it, and gently guide it back to rest

































# WEEK TWO

## Day 6: Why was this important?

It's important to externalize self-criticism! This "inner critic" can make you feel unworthy of care and incapable of change. By writing down what this voice says, you can begin to separate your true self from the negative thoughts, choosing to listen with compassion instead!

### Reflection

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# WEEK TWO

## Day 7: Resilience of Being



Look back on the past week and all you've journaled about. What is one new thing you understand about your trauma or its effects? What small steps did you take this week? Where did your resilience shine?

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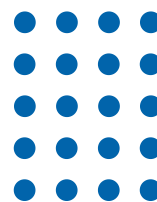
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I am still here. My presence is proof of my resilience.































# WEEK THREE

## Day 5: Architect of your Future



You are the architect of your life. What is one small, manageable action you will commit to this week that aligns with the person you are becoming? This isn't about being "healed", but about taking one small, intentional step.

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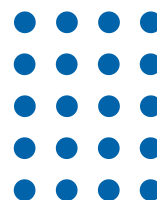
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I am an active participant in my future. Every small step is meaningful















# WEEK THREE

## Day 7: Why was this important?

This is the closing ceremony and the most impactful moment of narrative therapy. It encourages you to synthesize your discoveries. By consciously affirming the reasons for your resilience and finishing the phrase, you embed the lessons of the retreat and step forward as the active author of your life!

### Reflection

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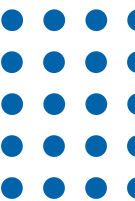
# CLOSING



Thank you for the courage it took to simply open these pages. Thank you for the openness you brought to each difficult prompt, the vulnerability you showed in revisiting challenging memories, and the persistence you demonstrated in showing up for yourself, day after day.

You have faced a journey into stillness, which is not the absence of movement, but the presence of peace. You have affirmed that your story matters, your pain is valid, and your healing is not a race, but a journey.

Please carry the strength you've uncovered here with you. Remember that you are the architect of your future, and you have the power to gently guide your nervous system back to rest.





# SOURCES

American Psychiatric Association. “Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5-TR).” Psychiatry.org, American Psychiatric Association, 2022, [www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm](http://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm).

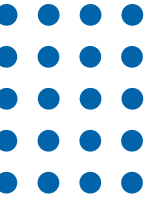
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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Stinson, IV, MSW, is a dedicated advocate for survivors of various trauma and injuries. During the creation of this text, he served in a dual capacity as a Trauma Survivor Network (TSN) Intern and an Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Intervention Specialist at R Adams Cowley Shock Trauma Center in Baltimore, MD.

James received his Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) from the University of Georgia in 2024 and received his Master of Social Work (MSW) from the University of Michigan in 2025. He is currently pursuing his Doctor of Health Administration (DHA) degree from Oklahoma State University. Fueled by his passion for serving and helping others, James continues to dedicate his career to supporting individuals impacted by diverse forms of trauma, with a focus on fostering resilience and empowering them as they navigate their personal paths to recovery.



**YOU ARE NOT BROKEN.  
YOU ARE BECOMING.  
YOUR PRESENCE IS PROOF OF YOUR RESILIENCE.**

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survive. connect. rebuild.

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