



A little guide for

Life's Tough Times

BY ANNIE WRIGHT, LMFT

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Contents

<u>Introduction.</u>	1
1. <u>Stage One: The Crisis.</u>	5
2. <u>Stage Two: Disintegration.</u>	14
3. <u>Stage Three: Waiting and Ideating.</u>	22
4. <u>Stage Four: Moving Forward.</u>	29
5. <u>Conclusion.</u>	33
<u>About The Author.</u>	37
<u>Disclaimer.</u>	38

Introduction.

“I am not afraid of storms for I am learning how to sail my ship.” – Louisa May Alcott

“She could never go back and make some of the details pretty. All she could do was move forward and make the whole beautiful.” – Terri St. Cloud

WELCOME.

If you’re reading this, I’m imagining that you might be going through a tough time at this moment.

With COVID-19 changing the landscape of our work externally and internally, really, who isn’t going through a hard time?

And if COVID-19 didn’t bring you here, perhaps something else hard and challenging did.

No matter what brought you here, I’m glad you’re reading this little book and hope that even one line of this brings you

comfort, clarity, a deep breath of relief, or a small kindling of hope if that's what you need.

There are some core beliefs at the heart of this little book that I'd like to share with you:

First, I believe tough times in life are absolutely inevitable for all of us – they're baked into this human contract we signed up for. I also believe the duration, frequency, acuity, and triggers of these tough times are going to be unique for each of us and that there is no one prescriptive formula for what causes them, how they will feel, how long they will last, or what you will personally need to get through them.

Second, I do, however, believe that even though these tough times look different for each of us, there's also rhythm and a framework to how our dark nights of the soul unfold, phases to the process that, when understood, may help to organize what may feel like an out-of-control, chaotic, and painful time.

Third, I believe that everyone deserves support and an abundance of resources to help see themselves through times of challenge. And yet, because what works for one person may not always work for another, I've included a wide variety of ideas, resources, and modalities for you to explore, and, if they resonate, to add to your own toolkit of coping mechanisms.

Fourth, you are the expert of your own experience – not me, not your partner, your family, your friends, etc. So I invite you to read this book lightly, absorbing what resonates with you and leaving the rest, allowing the suggestions and words to catalyze your own ideas about what might work best for you through this time.

Finally, trust the process. I believe that we humans are remarkably resilient and capable of making our way through

Introduction.

tremendous suffering even though it may not always seem that way. So that's the place where I'd like to invite you to trust the process; trust that, no matter what's unfolding for you right now, you will be okay, you will make it through this.

I'd like to invite you to please be really gentle and patient with yourself through this journey.

Again, I hope that you find some measure of comfort and value out of this little guide wherever and however you find yourself in life.

However, please note that this book is not a substitute for clinical or medical advice.

This handbook is general education material and not psychotherapeutic advice.

If you need therapeutic support and you live in the state of California, I highly encourage you to reach out to me and my team at the therapy center I founded – [Evergreen Counseling](#) – so that we may assist you directly.

You matter. And you deserve support.

Warmly,

Annie Wright, LMFT

Berkeley, California, April 2020

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Stage One: The Crisis.

As I mentioned in the introduction, while everyone's tough times in life will look very different, I have come to believe that there are certain stages to these times.

I also believe that within each stage, we are called upon emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually to show up for certain tasks.

The remainder of this little guide details out the stages, the tasks inherent to each, and suggests tools and resources you might explore and employ to support yourself across each stage.

And the first of these stages is The Crisis Stage.

This is the stage when the crisis of your life has just happened, where the onset of the tough time begins.

Today, for the world, one version of a tough time has arrived in the form of COVID-19, an unprecedented experience that few living have ever gone through.

Sometimes, though, these tough times will be triggered by a singular event that comes on suddenly and acutely – like

a diagnosis, a breakup with your partner, betrayal by your sister, or the death of your pet.

And sometimes the catalyst for this tough time is far less dramatic and easy to pinpoint.

Sometimes it may look like a dawning in your awareness of something uncomfortable – like realizing why you never liked being around that certain family member, or finally admitting to yourself that you never wanted to be a lawyer in the first place.

And often, for many of us, it's a series of events – isolated and protracted – that can trigger the onset of a particularly tough time in life.

Some of us might relate to only having several tough times a year, while others of us might experience daily life as a series of tough times that cycle up and down.

Some of us might relate to only having several tough times a year, while others of us might experience daily life as a series of tough times that cycle up and down.

Whatever and however the tough time in your life is triggered and no matter how often they occur, it's common for many of us to experience shock and disorientation in this stage – like we have no clue what's up, what's down, and what's true for us anymore.

And this makes total sense!

When the external or internal structures of our lives change – whether or not we wanted them or initiated them – it can be very unsettling and destabilizing on every level, especially emotionally.

Because of this, during this stage of your very tough time, your only tasks right now are to stabilize and ground yourself, shore up your supports as much as possible, live

Stage One: The Crisis.

in the smallest slice of time you can manage, and comfort yourself as much as possible.

**YOUR TASKS DURING THIS TIME & WHAT
THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE:**

Stabilize & Ground.

When destabilization and disorientation happens, it's time to stabilize and ground in order to bring some solidity back to your emotional and mental worlds.

To ground on a physical level, see if you can do something to help bring you back to your body – put your hands on your jeans and rub them against the fabric.

Feel your feet on the floor and curl your toes, slowly making contact with the ground.

On a mental level, this might include taking visual and mental stock of what's literally stable in your life despite the tough time – the literal external structures.

Is your house or apartment stable and standing?

Can you notice the strong walls, the firm floor, the roof overhead?

Can you feel the couch cushion underneath your butt?

The floors under your feet?

There is stability surrounding you in your home.

Look for more external structures.

Do you have an income coming in? A bi-monthly paycheck?

Enough cash to pay for rent this month? Food in the fridge? Clean water to drink?

Good. Keep noticing how you might have some literal stability of resources surrounding you.

Another grounding task during this time might include trying to keep and maintain your daily routine as much as possible so you have a predictable rhythm and hourly structure to rely on.

If you don't have established daily routines, that's okay.

Practice one or two things mindfully and slowly.

Wake up, put your feet on the floor, brush your teeth, make that mug of coffee, do that Soduko puzzle.

When our lives are in chaos (or feel like they are in chaos) it can really help to upkeep familiar, small actions to bring some sense of comfort and stability in our lives.

Shore Up Your Supports.

When a crisis happens, we may not be able to think and plan and act effectively.

Because of this, it's important that we let those who know and care about us, and/or those who may be better equipped and trained to support us, know what's going on.

This is the time to let your nearest and dearest know what's happening.

Reach out. Tell your loved ones what's happening.

If someone isn't available for you, keep turning towards other people until you find someone who can show up for you in your distress.

Ask them for support – a call, a visit, a hug, a reference or referral for someone you can talk to, ask them if they know someone who has possibly been through what you're going through.

If you don't have relational support available to you, [book a session with a therapist](#).

Stage One: The Crisis.

Attend a group meeting in your city.

Visit your local religious or spiritual center to speak to the advisors there.

Put yourself into contact with people and tell them what just happened.

Make yourself and the tough time you're going through known so you don't have to emotionally and mentally hold it all yourself.

Shore up your supports by letting people who care about you know what's going on.

Live In the Smallest Slice of Time You Can Manage.

Sometimes when tough times descend – whether the crisis is acute or otherwise – our capacity to do and think into the future is compromised by the emotional turmoil swirling inside of us.

Time seems to collapse.

Our mind races and our capacity to use our executive functioning skills can sometimes be compromised.

Because of this, it's important to try and live in the smallest slice of time possible, to come back to the moment, again and again, and again.

If five minutes is all you can think about getting through – whether it's just the actions you need to complete to change the cat's litter box, or how to set your alarm for work tomorrow and program the coffee maker, then that's good enough.

Take it five minutes at a time.

And then another five minutes.

Move through your day like this until it feels tolerable and

possible to imagine living fifteen minutes or a half-hour out. It will be possible to think more long-term again.

Extreme Comfort.

Tough times can feel incredibly overwhelming and exhausting.

They can hurt.

When a child runs and falls and skins their knee badly, what happens?

They start wailing because they are in pain and then, ideally, their parent scoops them up and comforts them while they cry and scream and, eventually, the child calms and returns to equilibrium.

When tough times happen and you are in the acuteness of the destabilization and discomfort, you are both the wailing child and you are the adult tending to the child.

So another one of your tasks in this stage is to comfort yourself as much as you possibly can to help ease your own pain.

This can look so many different ways but it includes allowing yourself permission to feel your feelings — all of them!

It might look like talking to yourself like a good-enough parent would do, acknowledging and validating how you feel — quite literally putting your hand over your heart and saying “*I see that you’re angry right now, that makes sense that you would be angry — she crossed your boundaries! It’s okay to feel angry, honey.*”

It might look like providing yourself physical comforts: wrapping yourself up in a fleece blanket and cocooning on

Stage One: The Crisis.

the couch with a mug of hot tea; sitting on the floor of your shower and letting hot water pour over you; getting on the floor and cuddling with your dog.

Whatever brings you comfort and peace and some sense of emotional, mental, physical or spiritual care, consider doing it.

**ADDITIONAL TOOLS & RESOURCES TO EXPLORE TO
SUPPORT YOUR WAITING & IDEATING**

The oft-cited “[most relaxing song in the world](#)” Note: Do not listen to when driving.

This [free guided anti-anxiety meditation](#) from Kaiser Permanente and Belleruth Knaperstack, LCSW (or literally any of Belleruth’s [other guided meditations](#)).

If you like ASMR (autonomic sensory meridian response) you may like [this video for anxiety relief](#).

[This grounding, vegan soup recipe](#).

Dig into the earth – plunge your hands into a flowerpot, scrunch your toes in the grass, lay on the ground.

[Yoga for Depression & Anxiety](#).

Visualize a blanket of earth settling over your shoulders, weighing you down, cloaking you in support.

Heating pads, water bottles, fleece socks, shearling slippers, and staring at Christmas lights.

[Mantras to focus on](#) to soothe your frazzled mind.

Picture yourself as a five-year-old and lovingly take that child into your arms, speak softly and reassure him or her that everything is going to be okay.

This 24/7 talk line staffed with trained crisis intervention counselors: 1-800-273-TALK.

[A list of essential oils](#) to help reduce anxiety.

[A guided meditation](#) with Jack Kornfield.

Soothe your inner child by watching free online episodes of vintage [Mister Rogers Neighborhood](#).

Stage One: The Crisis.

[The Ten Things To Do When Your Life Falls Apart](#) by Daphne Rose Kingma.

[Three different deep breathing exercises to practice.](#)

Build a sanctuary, a safe space in your head, and describe and visualize it in as much detail as possible.

[Go Only As Fast As Your Slowest Part Feels Safe To Go: Tales To Kindle Gentleness and Compassion For Our Exhausted Selves](#) by Robyn Posin.

Frequently engage your five senses: smell a scent you like, touch some texture that feels good, taste something delicious, listen to soothing sounds, look at something beautiful.

Karma Moffett's [hour-long Golden Bowls of Compassion](#), found on Youtube.

Stage Two: Disintegration.

This is the stage where, after the immediate acuteness and likely shock of the crisis stage has worn off, you may begin to feel a flood and range of strong emotions triggered by the tough time you're going through.

You can imagine that with any life change (whether self-directed or not) there is going to be a certain amount of grieving that happens as you lose some former identity, structure, or relationship, and move towards something different.

Whether sending your child off to college, taking on a new job, losing your grandmother, or initiating a breakup with your partner, regardless of whether the change was externally or internally-catalyzed, there is going to be a reorganization of identity and reality for you at some level, and because of this and because you're human, you're going to have a gamut of feelings about this.

That's why I think it's helpful to recall that this when famed psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, Ph.D.'s five stages of grief

Stage Two: Disintegration.

commonly take place – denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

All of these feelings are normal, natural, and appropriate responses to change and challenge (big or small) in our lives.

Like with all feelings, they will rise and crest and ebb for you and they are not linear or predictable: you may be feeling fine one moment, and then rageful the next.

You may move from anger to acceptance, back to anger and then sadness.

There is no timeline or formula for how you are “supposed” to feel during this disintegration.

You feel what you feel for as long as you need to so one of the most helpful things you can do for yourself in this stage is to safely feel your feelings when they come up, process and metabolize what emerges, and, throughout, practice radical self-care and patience with your process.

**YOUR TASKS DURING THIS TIME &
WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE:**

Feel Your Feelings.

You may have a kaleidoscope of feelings during this stage once the shock and acuity of the stressor of your tough time has worn off.

The intensity and type of these feelings may surprise you and may even feel disproportionate or unrelated to the event itself.

What is sometimes true is that, beyond the pain of the actual catalytic event, tough times in life can trigger deep, unresolved material, and the combination of the current stressor combined with past material may sometimes feel overwhelming.

What is sometimes true is that, beyond the pain of the actual catalytic event, tough times in life can trigger deep, unresolved material, and the combination of the current stressor combined with past material may sometimes feel overwhelming.

Be aware of this and support yourself in feeling your feelings as they come up in tolerable amounts.

You may want to practice titration of your feelings here.

What's titration?

Well, imagine emotions are a swimming pool and you are a young child attempting to enter these waters.

You don't have to jump into the deep end of the pool of your emotions and flail around there, and you don't have to cling to the steps unwilling to dip a toe into the pool.

You can practice being the child who titrates his or her experience by stepping in a little bit, waiting, stepping in a bit further, getting out when he or she needs to.

Emotionally, this may mean turning towards and feeling your feelings in amounts that feel tolerable and then helping yourself stabilize and ground (see stage one) when you need to feel something different.

Process, Process, Process.

Process the feelings that come up when you allow them.

For the feelings that you feel and allow, process them,

Stage Two: Disintegration.

metabolize them, move them through your physical and emotional and mental bodies.

What this might look like: Crying or screaming into your pillow if you need to release the rage or sadness; talking about the event a hundred, a thousand times if you have to (note: if you have no one to listen to you in the moment, or if you can't or don't want to talk to anyone about what's going on, talk to your dog, a stuffed toy from your childhood, a journal).

Turning towards the supports you've shored up – your [therapist](#), spiritual advisor, friends, health provider, massage therapist, whoever you trust and whoever is willing to be a compassionate, supportive witness to you in this time.

And beyond verbalization of your process, it can be incredibly helpful to find mirrors that validate your process.

Find Mirrors of Your Process.

Are there songs that mirror your feelings or help put into words what you can't?

Listen to them.

On loop. Loudly if it feels good.

Are there movies that mirror what you're going through? Watch them. Again and again.

Look for examples, stories, and biographies (even if they're fictional!) of people who have been through what you're going through.

Radical Self-Care.

As with the crisis stage, self-care, while always important

in our lives, may also be critical here to help nourish and comfort yourself while you do the sometimes hard work of feeling your feelings.

One excellent way to concretely care for yourself during this time is to pay attention to what feelings come up for you and what they need in order to be tended to.

In other words, if sadness keeps coming in waves for you, ask yourself what does your sadness needs?

Does it need a release?

Does it need someone to literally tell you that things will be okay?

Does it need comfort in the form of rocking back and forth? What can you give your sadness?

Check-in with the other feelings that come up for you and see what you can creatively give them as a form of support.

If anger is up for you, would it feel good to weight-lift?

To tear up sheets of scrap paper? To sprint around the block?

Make a habit and practice of tending to your feelings in this stage in creative ways that speak to what this part of you needs in the moment.

And finally, the most caring thing you can do for yourself during this stage is to be patient with the timeline of your process.

Allow yourself to feel what comes up for as long as it needs to and please, as much as you can, don't judge or criticize yourself for not "being over it yet" or "why you even feel this way in the first place".

The reality is, if you're going through a tough time in life, you're probably hurting.

That's okay and that makes sense.

Stage Two: Disintegration.

The last thing you need is to heap a dose of blame and shame on top of an already hard and tender time.

So be kind to yourself and let yourself feel your feelings for as long as you need to.

Patience and acceptance are incredible acts of self-care.

A LITTLE GUIDE FOR LIFE'S TOUGH TIMES

ADDITIONAL TOOLS & RESOURCES FOR SUPPORT IN FEELING, PROCESSING, TITRATING, & PRACTICING SELF-CARE

My go-to songs in times of processing sadness and overwhelm: [Both Sides Now](#), [Dante's Prayer](#), [Big Strong Girl](#).

[Transformation Soup](#) by SARK (or really, any book by SARK).

[Cinematherapy](#): An index of movies covering many moods and issues that can support the mirroring of your process.

[Radical Acceptance](#) by Tara Brach.

[At Blackwater Pond](#), Mary Oliver reading her work.

Free curated [Spotify playlists](#) for almost every mood imaginable.

Robyn Posin, Ph.D.'s [Remembering and Celebration cards](#) to help support you in taking extremely gentle care of yourself.

[10 Journaling Tips](#) if you prefer processing by writing versus speaking.

[This poem](#) by Marie Howe.

[A list of peer-staffed support lines, state-by-state](#).

[The art and quotes of Terri St. Cloud](#).

[Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes](#) by William Bridges.

Reconnect to the goodness of humanity through lists [like this one](#).

[Carry On, Warrior](#) by Glennon Melton Doyle.

[Free, online yoga classes](#) sortable by ability, style, and length.

[The Grief Recovery Handbook](#).

Attend a support group, find one here on [this list maintained by Mental Health America](#).

[Healing Through the Dark Emotions: The Wisdom of Grief, Fear, and Despair](#) by Miriam Greenspan.

Stage Two: Disintegration.

Draw, paint, sculpt, cut and paste:
make art to express how you're
feeling, even (especially!) if you're
not exactly sure how you're feeling.

Scream in the car, wail into your
pillow, pound your fists into the bed,
sprint around the block – safely and
responsibly give your body what it
needs to process and release the
emotions.

Stage Three: Waiting and Ideating.

At some point in your process, after the shock of the onset of the tough time and after moving through the intensity and waves of whatever feelings may have been triggered, you will, after an indeterminate time and in your own unique, non-linear way, arrive at a phase I call Waiting and Ideating.

This stage is both preceded and framed by the final of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief: acceptance.

It's a time where you've arrived at some level of acceptance about the circumstances you now find yourself in but the next stage and yet the next steps in your life may not feel clear.

For many, this is a fairly liminal, limbo stage where the structures and identities of your life before are gone and the new structures and identities – be they internal or external – may not yet be formed.

This is a time in which you may feel that nothing is shifting in your process, where you just want to “move past”

what you've been going through and just begin the next chapter already.

And yet, despite your desire to move forward, you feel halted almost like a racehorse at the gates, unable to sprint down the track.

This can feel terribly frustrating and uncomfortable and can actually bring up fear for many of us, especially if we believe things will always be this foggy, unclear, and sort of half-formed.

But, again, trust the process: it won't always be this way.

Because while things on the surface of your life in this stage may not be moving, underneath the surface on an emotional and spiritual level, you are unconsciously midwiving your new reality into being.

Dreams are forming, ideas are gelling.

The next steps for who you are, what you want, and how you will deal with your new reality are unconsciously being formed.

It also may be helpful in this stage to bear in mind the process a plant goes through when growing: before a seed planted in the soil can sprout above ground and unfurl its leaves, it must remain dormant or inactive until conditions are right for germination.

This is the fallow period.

Before the seed's leaves break the topsoil, the seed must gather nourishment from below so that its embryo cells can enlarge – this, of course, takes time.

Only then, after waiting and germinating, can the seed coat break open, the roots emerging to plant themselves down into the soil, and its stem emerging to grow upwards, eventually breaking the topsoil and giving evidence to the plant's growth.

You're the seed.

Just because it doesn't look like much is moving/evolving/ changing in your life right now doesn't mean that some new embryonic part of you and your life isn't forming.

Therefore, your task in the Waiting and Ideating Stage is to tolerate the waiting and help cultivate the conditions for your own inner seed to germinate.

The timeline for this process, like the timeline for the disintegration and processing you've gone through, is indeterminate.

There is no one prescriptive length of time for how long this might last and no one-size-fits-all model for what you need for your own personal, proverbial germination.

YOUR TASKS DURING THIS TIME AND WHAT THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE:

Tolerating the Waiting.

This is the time to again, practice self-care, but also to have patience, faith, and to trust the process.

This is the time where I would invite you to explore and examine your defaults in times of stress or not-knowing.

What do you know about how you handle these times and what might it look like to practice something different while you're waiting?

What do you know about how you handle these times and what might it look like to practice something different while you're waiting?

What's your relationship to not-knowing and how and

Stage Three: Waiting and Ideating.

what can you do to reassure yourself that this – like all things and stages in life – will pass?

If your default is to do one thing, how does the situation or your feelings about the situation shift if you do or try something different?

What do you know about this for yourself?

If your default is to do one thing, how does the situation or your feelings about the situation shift if you do or try something different?

What do you know about this for yourself?

This stage, in particular, can be a truly excellent opportunity to learn more about yourself and the behavioral and thought patterns you have about life, about moving forward, and about what you want.

It's also an excellent opportunity to experiment with doing something different than your defaults!

Ideating & Cultivating Small Moments.

And speaking of what you want, just because you're waiting during this stage doesn't mean that you have to be passive.

I believe that we can actually support our process in this stage by cultivating the conditions where the proverbial germination of your next steps can thrive.

What this might look like for you includes ideating (in other words, dreaming) and, in small moments, cultivating the qualities or experiences that you are longing for in your next chapter.

Concretely, what this might include could be journaling about what you're hoping for next, pinning together vision boards on Pinterest, scrolling through beautiful art books or

poetry anthologies in your local bookstore and soaking in any soulful inspiration you find there.

It could also look like giving yourself symbolic doses of what you're longing for: If what you're craving in your life now and to come is strength – what would it be like to literally lift some weights, or take a strength training course?

If you crave freedom, can you take an afternoon road trip or ride public transport to the end of the line to seek out new vistas?

If it is space you need, can you practice some yoga (side bends in particular!) to create space in your body?

Can you clear out a closet and donate it to the Goodwill and create some literal, physical space in your house?

If you crave a sister connection that's absent, can you spend time with a good girlfriend who can give you some of that energy in proxy?

Can you watch a movie like [*Fried Green Tomatoes*](#) to soak up some spirited sister energy?

What small dose of what you're seeking and craving can you give yourself now even in the tiniest amount?

I believe that when we give ourselves tastes of what we crave, we help create the conditions for germination of what's forming in this stage.

So I invite you, if it feels good and if you feel ready, to ideate, to dream, to sample creative small doses of what you're hoping for next.

**ADDITIONAL TOOLS & RESOURCES TO EXPLORE TO
SUPPORT YOUR WAITING & IDEATING**

For lots of great, free workout videos (including weight lifting, yoga, and kickboxing) to help support certain feeling states, I recommend [FitnessBlender.com](https://www.fitnessblender.com).

[Steering by Starlight: The Science and Magic of Finding Your Destiny](#) by Martha Beck.

Sometimes, nothing inspires or catalyzes as much as a good, quality quote. I've curated over 700 for you on [this Pinterest board](#).

If you can't make it to a museum but crave the inspiration of fine art, take a look through [Art Resource](#) and their incredible images.

[GaiamTV](#) – like Netflix for your soul.

Any and all [podcasts from OnBeing](#).

Any and all poems by [Rumi](#). Poetry bypasses the mind and goes straight to the soul.

[The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling](#) by James Hillman.

Take a break from any and all self-improvement, self-inquiry for a while and simply read the books that bring you joy, see the people that nourish you, do the things you love.

Say what you will, but the [Chicken Soup for the Soul](#) series has some pretty incredible stories of fellow humans who have also traveled through tough times.

Carol Adrienne's [Numerology Kit](#).

[Outrageous Openness: Letting the Divine Take the Lead](#) by Tosha Silver.

A LITTLE GUIDE FOR LIFE'S TOUGH TIMES

[Refuse to Choose!: Use All of Your Interests, Passions, and Hobbies to Create the Life and Career of Your Dreams](#) by Barbara Sher.

I recommend watching and rewatching the *Harry Potter*, *Lord of the Rings*, and *Star Wars* series to soak up the timeless stories of the Hero's Journey and the internal and external journeys the protagonists are forced to go on through their own tough times.

[Sounds True Radio's](#) inspiring interviews.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes, Ph.D.'s audiobook of [The Late Bloomer](#) (or any audiobook of hers).

[The Desire Map](#) by Danielle LaPorte for getting in touch with what your heart and soul is longing for.

Sample classes or participate in events. Great resources abound like Meetup.com, edX.org, or Lynda.com.

This [short but provoking read](#) from Mark Manson on life purpose.

[The Alchemist](#) by Paulo Coelho.

Stage Four: Moving Forward.

This section feels a bit misnamed as it seems to imply that literal, physical moves are what happen in this stage.

That may be true – maybe after your tough time in life you decide to move towns, get a new job, start a new relationship, etc – or maybe it’s something much more subtle like a shift in acceptance or understanding about the reality versus the fantasy of your family dynamics.

Whether literal or figurative, external or internal, whatever movement you now feel inspired and compelled to take comes in this stage.

It’s a time that naturally demarcates the end of one form of your life, identity, or roles, and marks the beginning of the next.

That’s why I believe your task in this time is to honor and acknowledge the passage that you’ve just gone through, and to mine and integrate the lessons you’ve learned.

**YOUR TASKS DURING THIS TIME AND WHAT
THIS MIGHT LOOK LIKE:**

Honoring & Acknowledging What You've Gone Through.

Since time immemorial, ritual and ceremony has been used by human beings to honor and acknowledge important transitional moments and chapters in the life of an individual or in a community.

While modern-day society maintains some rituals – holidays and even national sports events can be ritualistic in nature – for many of us, we don't take the time to honor and acknowledge the passages of our daily lives, a rich practice which can be all the more important in this last stage as you leave the journey you have been on through life's tough time.

The honor and acknowledgment don't have to be formally ritualized or large and elaborate by any means (though if you want to create this, terrific!).

You could imagine that honoring and acknowledging what you've been through, what you've journeyed through, could look like a conversation with your therapist, an entry in your journal, five minutes spent in contemplation at the beach mentally saying goodbye to the tough time, whatever and however feels best for you.

In this time, you could imagine paying mental and emotional attention to all that you've been through since the genesis of your journey across this tough time and validating yourself for having made it through.

Mining & Integrating the Lessons You've Learned.

Similarly, in honoring and paying attention to what you have passed through, a task at this time might be to mine and integrate the lessons that you've learned along the way.

Here are a list of prompts and inquiries to help you contemplate this further:

- What did you experience about yourself across the stages?
- What did you discover about yourself and your life that was not previously known?
- What did you learn about your capabilities?
- What did you learn about your character?
- Did you surprise yourself?
- Did you disappoint yourself in any way?
- What did you release? Emotionally, relationally, tangibly?
- What did you gain from this experience? Emotionally, relationally, tangibly?
- What could you imagine practicing again in the future if tough times were to arise again?
- What resources and supports did you cultivate and discover that could help see you through more tough times as they arise?
- What new qualities of character or sharpened and strengthened parts of you can you call on and count on moving forward?

A LITTLE GUIDE FOR LIFE'S TOUGH TIMES

- What would you like to celebrate and honor about yourself and how you have handled this tough time in life?
- If you were to tell a story about this time in your life in the way that an author might narrate the adventures of an archetypal hero or heroine, how might you talk about this time you went through?
- In what ways did you heroically show up for your own life?
- Can you praise yourself for how well you did, how much you overcame, and how bravely you navigated this time?
- What, if anything, do you need to say or do or experience in order to feel complete about this time and experience you just went through?
- Do you feel, at some level, at peace with what you've navigated? Can you close this chapter now?

Conclusion.

And so, dear reader, as we wrap up this little guide, I wanted to offer up a recap of the stages, and the tasks inherent to each:

Stage One: The Crisis.

Your tasks during this time: stabilize and ground yourself; shore up your supports as much as possible; live in the smallest slice of time you can manage and to comfort yourself as much as possible.

Stage Two: Disintegration.

Your tasks during this time: feel your feelings; process, process, process; and practice radical self-care.

Stage Three: Waiting & Ideating.

Your tasks during this time: tolerating the waiting, ideating, and cultivating microdoses of what you're craving.

Stage Four: Moving Forward.

Your tasks during this time: honoring and acknowledging what you've been through; mining and integrating the lessons you've learned.

When walking through tough times in life, you may discover resources and depths of capacity you never knew you had, you may form new identities, practice new skills, discover new resources, and build new mental, emotional and spiritual muscles for yourself.

And whatever you unearth, learn or discover in this time can, if you want it to be, become another resource, another coping mechanism for your proverbial Toolbox for Life.

Life is, in the words of one of my favorite bloggers [Glennon Melton Doyle](#), Brutiful.

Beautiful and brutal and filled with challenges big and small that can test our souls in every conceivable way.

Building up your own personal Toolbox for Life – filled with coping mechanisms, resources, people who support you, practices that support you, thoughts that support you – is, in my opinion, one of the primary tasks we all have as adults in this Brutiful world.

My hope for you, reader, that after reviewing this book you have one or two new tools or ideas or beliefs to include in your own personal Toolbox and some small kindled belief that, no matter where you find yourself in life right now, you will get through this tough time.

And now I have just a few last things to share with you.

If you would like to learn more about how to work with me wherever you live, please [visit my website](#) to explore [the many ways we can work together](#).

Conclusion.

Finally, please know you can email me directly at annie@anniewrightpsychotherapy.com.

I read and respond to each and every message I receive, and I love hearing from my readers.

You can find also me on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). I love hanging out there and getting to know my readers more!

I truly look forward to staying in touch and being of support to you in your journey.

I believe in you, and I'm rooting for you.

Warmly, Annie Wright, LMFT

About The Author.



[Annie Wright, LMFT](#) is the founder and clinical director of [Evergreen Counseling](#) – a boutique therapy center located in Berkeley, California – as well as a licensed psychotherapist who specializes in working with those who, sadly, didn't have good childhoods but who want to create wonderful adulthoods for themselves.

She's also a published writer with pieces and opinions appearing in Forbes, NBC, The Huffington Post, BuzzFeed, Reader's Digest and more.

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