

Understand My Inner Life

The Self-Worth Reset

A psychoeducational worksheet from Understand My Inner Life — for when your worth feels like something you have to keep earning.

Free, yours to keep — print it or fill it in digitally. A complete, self-contained tool: the science, a worked example, the root worksheet, an evidence audit, and a daily practice.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

A couple of things to know first

This file is for you. The notice below sets out your licence to use it, and there's an important word on what this is — and what it isn't.

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How to use this file

Print it, or fill it in on any device — it's yours to keep and return to as often as you need. There's no right pace, and no need to finish in one sitting. Work through it in order, or open straight to the part you need today. Take what helps, leave what doesn't, and be as patient with yourself here as you would be with someone you love.

START HERE

You learned your worth was conditional. You can unlearn it.

For a lot of capable, kind, exhausted people, self-worth got wired to performance somewhere early: love arrived when you achieved, when you behaved, when you were useful, when you didn't make waves. So you became excellent at *earning* — and you never quite learned that you were allowed to simply *be* worth something, on the days you produced nothing at all.

The cost is a quiet, constant audition. Praise doesn't fill you because the bar just moves. Rest feels unsafe because worth has to be re-earned daily. Criticism cuts straight to the core because, underneath, you half-suspect it's telling the truth. This worksheet is about going to the root of that wiring and beginning, deliberately, to lay down a different one.

How to use this

Read the two science pages once — seeing that conditional worth was *installed*, not *true*, is the first loosening. Then work the three steps: find the root, audit the evidence the inner critic hides, and start the daily practice of receiving without earning. This one is slow work. It changes by repetition, not by insight — the body believes what you practise, not what you decide once.

Who it's for

The high-achievers who feel like impostors. The carers who can't receive. The ones who feel guilty resting, who collapse at criticism, who keep proving themselves to people who already love them. If that's you, you are not arrogant for wanting to feel worthy, and you are not broken for not. You were taught a rule. Rules can be rewritten.

A NOTE BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Why this exists

Why I made this — and who it's for.

For eight years I have worked in mental health, most of them in acute psychiatry — the ward people come to on the hardest nights of their lives. I started young; I was nineteen when I began, the youngest person hired onto my unit. I say that so you know this did not come from a textbook — it came from the room, from years of sitting beside people while they found their way through.

And I kept seeing the same thing. People were seen by the system, given a diagnosis, and sent home without the tools to actually live with it. The waitlist that never moved. The therapy that didn't quite land. The lonely sense that something is wrong, and no words for what. I have stood in that gap through years of listening to people in mental health services. I have also stood in it myself.

A word on who I am: I am in clinical psychology training, not a licensed psychologist, and I work on the floor, in the room. What you are holding is psychoeducation — not treatment, and not a substitute for it.

So this is not here to sell you a transformation or a quick fix. It is here to give you language for what you feel, and a way to meet it that doesn't ask you to have it all together first.

I have never wanted to stand above the people I meet. There is far less distance between the person who asks for help and the person who offers it than we like to pretend — a different year, a different loss, and any of us could be the one on the other side. The thing I believe most, I learned from Irvin Yalom: that the real change happens in the encounter itself, two people being honest in the same room. A workbook can't be that room. But it can be honest with you, and it can put something real in your hands to do.

That is what this is. Take what helps. Leave what doesn't. And be as patient with yourself as you would be with someone you love.

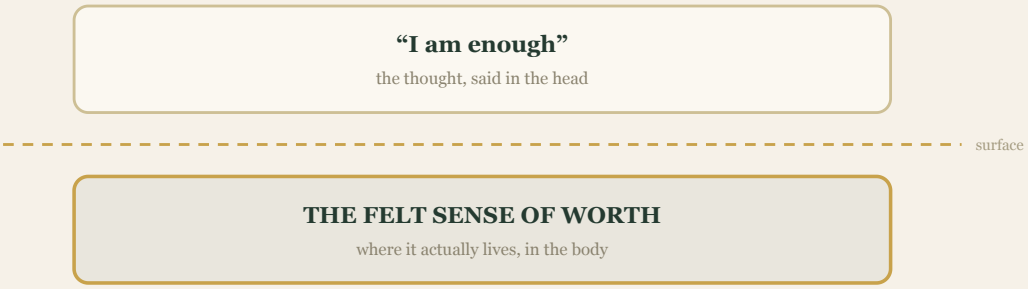
"You don't need to be ready. You don't need to have it together. You just need to be willing to try."

— from the person who built Understand My Inner Life

THE SCIENCE · 1

Where conditional worth comes from

It was taught, not born. That's the whole reason it can change.



you can’t reach a body-level belief with a head-level tool

Contingent self-worth — Psychologist Jennifer Crocker's research describes staking your value on a domain — achievement, appearance, others' approval. When worth is *contingent*, every outcome becomes a referendum on whether you're okay as a person. A win lifts you briefly; a setback doesn't just disappoint — it indicts you.

Conditional regard — Carl Rogers observed that when a child receives love and approval only for meeting conditions, they learn to abandon parts of themselves to stay acceptable. The mind concludes: *I am lovable when…* That ‘when’ becomes the lifelong price of admission to your own self-acceptance.

Internal working models — Attachment research (Bowlby) shows we build an inner template of whether we're worthy of love and care, based on early experience. If care felt conditional or unreliable, the template reads ‘I have to earn this.’ It runs automatically — but, like any model, it can be updated by new, repeated, contradicting experience.

Self-esteem vs. self-worth: self-esteem is comparative and conditional — it rises and falls with success, looks, others' opinions, so it can never be a stable floor. What you're building here is closer to what Kristin Neff calls self-compassion: worth that doesn't depend on being better than anyone, or on today going well. A floor, not a scoreboard.

Sources: Crocker & Wolfe on contingencies of self-worth; Rogers on conditional positive regard; Bowlby on internal working models; Neff on self-compassion vs. global self-esteem.

THE SCIENCE · 2

Why it persists — and what changes it

The audition is self-sealing. Here's the loop, and the way out of it.

The maintenance loop

Conditional worth → you over-perform to earn it → you achieve → but the win can't land, because the rule says worth must be *re-earned*, so the bar moves → relief is brief, emptiness returns → you conclude you need to do *more*. Meanwhile criticism, or simply resting, feels like proof of unworthiness. There is no outcome in which you're allowed to feel enough — the loop is built to never pay out.

The inner critic is a one-sided prosecutor

That harsh internal voice is usually an internalised echo of early conditional messages. It's not the truth, and it's not neutral — it files only the evidence against you and discards everything else: every steadiness, every kindness, every time you showed up. Part of this work is simply entering the missing evidence into the record.

What actually rebuilds worth

Not affirmations you don't believe, and not one more achievement. Three things, repeated: **corrective experience** — deliberately receiving care, rest, and acceptance *without* earning them, and surviving the discomfort; **self-compassion** — meeting your own failures as you'd meet a friend's; and **time** — because what you practise repeatedly is what becomes automatic, not what you conclude once. You are not lying to yourself. You're outvoting an old wiring with a new one, rep by rep.

Sources: the internalised inner-critic in schema/compassion-focused therapy (Gilbert); the corrective emotional experience (Alexander & French, 1946); Neff & Germer (2018) on self-compassion practice.

WHY THIS IS SO HARD

Why you can't just ‘decide’ you're enough

If affirmations have never reached the place that doubts you — here's why.

‘Just believe in yourself’ fails because worth isn't stored where words can reach. Here's why telling yourself you're enough hasn't landed — and what does.

Beliefs about worth were laid down early — Core beliefs (‘I'm too much,’ ‘I'm not enough’) usually formed before language, from how you were responded to. They feel like facts, not opinions — because they became the ground you stood on.

The body, not the mind, holds it — Worth lives as a felt sense, not a sentence. So a thought (‘I am enough’) rarely overwrites a feeling — the two seem to run on different tracks, which is one reason affirmations can feel hollow.

The critic feels like safety — A harsh inner voice often formed to keep you acceptable and pre-empt rejection. Letting it go can feel dangerous, even when it's the thing hurting you.

So if knowing hasn’t been enough: if ‘I am enough’ has never stuck, that's not because you're broken or not trying. You're trying to update a body-level belief with a head-level tool.

And here’s the hope — this is the part that matters: the body updates on *repeated experience*, not on belief. Each small act of treating yourself as worthy — especially unearned — is a corrective experience that slowly rewires the felt sense. That's what the daily reps on the next pages build.

SEE IT DONE

A worked example

Before you fill it in, watch the reset work on a familiar kind of bind.

Tom, 38 (a composite, not a real person), is successful and quietly hollow. He got a promotion last month and felt nothing for two days, then started worrying he'd be exposed as not good enough. A single critical comment from his boss ruined the week. Here's the reset, walked through.

THE ROOT

"I felt most loved as a kid when I brought home top marks; the house went warm. When I struggled, it went cold and disappointed." The rule he absorbed: *I'm only okay if I'm achieving and not disappointing anyone*. Seeing it written down, he recognises it as a survival strategy from a specific home — not a fact about his value.

THE EVIDENCE AUDIT

His critic insists the promotion was luck and the criticism was the 'real' truth. The missing evidence: he mentored two juniors this year, stayed steady through a crisis, and is the friend everyone calls. A colleague would say his worth rests on his steadiness and decency — things that have nothing to do with output.

THE PRACTICE

One thing he'll give himself this week without earning it: a real weekend off, phone away, no guilt. The discomfort line he'll use when the guilt rises: *'Resting doesn't make me worth less. I'm allowed to exist without producing.'* It feels untrue at first. He does it anyway — that's the rep.

Nothing about Tom's CV changed. What changed is that he saw his worth was never the thing in question — only the bar was — and began, deliberately, to practise a worth that doesn't move when the day does.

THE RESET · 1

Find the root

Conditional worth is taught. Tracing it loosens its claim on you. This isn't blame — it's clarity.

You weren't born believing you had to earn your place. Somewhere, you learned it — usually from what got rewarded and what got withdrawn. Naming it isn't about condemning anyone; it's about seeing that the belief was *installed*, not *true* — which means it can be revised.

When I was young, I felt most loved / safe / approved of when I…

…and least loved, safe, or approved of when I…

The rule I absorbed about my worth — finish it honestly: "I'm only okay if I…"

Where do I see that exact rule still running my life today? (at work, in rest, in relationships, in how I take criticism)

The reframe: that rule kept a child safe in the world they were actually in. It is not a law of nature, and it is not the world you live in now. The person who had to earn their place then is allowed to write a new rule now.

THE RESET · 2

Audit the evidence, then practise

Enter what the critic hides — then start the daily rep that rewires it.

The conditional voice is a ruthless prosecutor: it remembers every flaw and discards every kindness, every bit of steadiness, every time you showed up. Your job is to enter the missing evidence — not flattery, just the facts it skips.

Three times I showed up well recently — that had nothing to do with achieving or proving myself

A quality I have that isn't about being useful (kind, honest, curious, steady, funny, loyal…)

Someone who genuinely values me — what would they say my worth actually rests on?

Now begin the practice (this is where it changes)

One kind thing I'll give myself this week without earning it — and the sentence I'll meet the discomfort with (in the voice you'd use for someone you love)

rest · a real break · an honest no · receiving help · a slow morning · my own forgiveness

"Your worth was never the thing in question. The bar was."

IN THE MOMENT

When your worth wobbles

For the wave of 'not enough' after criticism, a setback, or a quiet rest day.

Worth doesn't collapse on schedule; it wobbles in moments — a critical email, a comparison, a day you achieved nothing. The reset isn't a belief you install once; it's a response you practise in exactly these moments. Here's the sequence.

1 · Catch the verdict

Notice the leap from a fact ("I made a mistake" / "I rested today") to a verdict ("…so I'm not enough"). Name it: "That's the old rule talking — a feeling, not a fact about my value."

2 · Separate doing from being

Say it plainly: "My performance went up or down. My worth did not move. One is a scoreboard; the other is a floor." You are practising holding the floor steady while the scoreboard does whatever it does.

3 · Offer the friend's voice

"What would I say to someone I love who felt this way right now?" Then say it to yourself, out loud if you can. The nervous system believes the tone before it believes the words.

Write your steadying line now — the one true sentence to reach for when your worth wobbles:

If it feels untrue at first, that's expected — and it isn't a problem. You're not lying to yourself; you're practising a new wiring against an old, well-worn one. The old voice has had decades of reps. Give the new one a real chance — weeks of small reps, not one attempt. Keep going.

WORTH HOLDING ONTO

What's true, even when it doesn't feel true

Read these slowly — not as slogans, but as the evidence the conditional voice has been hiding from you.

When worth feels conditional, the mind keeps only the evidence against you and quietly deletes the rest. Here is the rest of the file — things that stay true whether or not today went well. You don't have to believe them yet. Just let them in, and notice which one your body reacts to.

Your worth was never the question — only the bar was. — You were measuring a fixed thing (your value) with a moving ruler (the standard). The ruler kept rising, so you felt you kept failing. The value was never the problem.

Rest isn't earned. It's needed. — You don't earn the right to sleep, to pause, to be cared for. A body needs rest the way it needs water — not as a reward for output, but as a condition of being alive.

Being useful is not the same as being loved. — If you were only ever praised for what you produced, you learned to perform for connection. But the people who truly love you would still want you on the day you achieve nothing at all.

You're allowed to have needs, take up space, and disappoint people sometimes. — None of those make you 'too much.' They make you a person. The fear of being too much is usually a memory, not a fact about now.

Struggling to believe this isn't proof it's false. — It's proof of how early, and how often, you were taught the opposite. A belief practised for decades feels like truth — but it's still just a belief, and beliefs can be re-practised.

You don't have to be exceptional to be worthy. Ordinary is allowed. — The pressure to be impressive is exhausting and endless. You are allowed to be average at most things and still completely worth loving. Most loved people are.

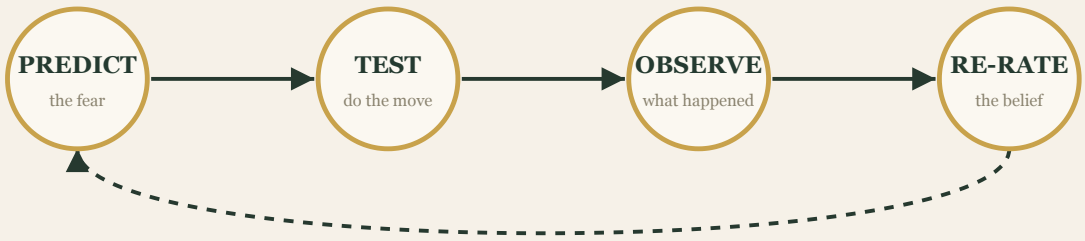
How to receive this: notice the line that made something flinch — or soften. That's usually the one you most need. Write it where you'll see it, and read it on the hard days. The nervous system believes what it hears *repeatedly*, gently, over time — not what it decides once. You're not lying to yourself; you're slowly outvoting an old, loud voice with a truer, quieter one.

PRACTISE IT · 14 DAYS

Fourteen days of the new rep

Worth isn't argued into place — it's built by repeated, corrective experience.

You can't talk yourself into worth; the body updates on repetition, not belief. For two weeks, do one small act a day that treats you as someone who matters — especially when the critic says you haven't earned it. This is a **behavioural experiment** — one of the core methods CBT uses to change a belief: you don't argue with the fear, you *test* it in real life and let the evidence update it.



each round, the belief updates — then you run it again

Before · Set it up

The belief I'm putting to the test. What does the critic predict if you treat yourself as worthy without 'earning' it? ('I'll get lazy / arrogant / it's fake')

How strongly I believe that *right now*: _____ / 100

The move I'll make. The specific, doable thing I'll do to test it:

e.g. speak to yourself as you would a friend · meet one need without earning it · accept a kindness · do the thing the critic forbids

When & how often: **14 times over the next two weeks** — aim for one a day.

What I expect will happen. Exactly what do I predict when I do it?

My best guess at how I'll feel afterwards (0 = awful, 10 = fine): _____ / 10

DURING & AFTER · THE DAILY LOG

Run it — and watch the evidence build

One honest line a day. The belief score falling, day by day, is your change made visible.

Each day, three small steps: (1) do the move — even a tiny version counts; **(2)** write one honest line on what *actually* happened (not what you feared — what real life did); **(3)** re-rate how strongly you still believe the original fear, 0–100. Jot the days it felt hardest — what did you do anyway, and how did it land?

You don't need a perfect run — miss a day, just pick it up the next. Even four honest entries will show you something real. Watch the last number, not your mood: that score drifting down, day by day, *is* your change, in your own handwriting. Keep going — you're doing the part most people only read about.

Day	What I did — and what *actually* happened	Believe the fear now /100
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		

When the 14 are done — the verdict

What actually happened, across the reps. After two weeks — what shifted in how you treat yourself, and was the critic's prediction actually true?

What the evidence actually says — my updated belief, in my own words:

Believe the *original* fear now: _____ / 100 — compare it to your starting score. That gap is the proof, in your own handwriting.

However far it moved — even a little — you just tested a fear instead of obeying it. That is the whole skill, and it compounds every time you use it. Be proud of this page, and keep it.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Common traps — and the truth

The mistakes almost everyone makes rebuilding worth, and what's true instead.

“I'll feel worthy once I achieve the next thing.” — This is the loop itself. The bar always moves, so the feeling never arrives. Worth built on achievement is rented, never owned. The only way off the treadmill is to step off — to practise worth that doesn't depend on the next win.

“Accepting myself means I'll lose my drive.” — The opposite is better supported: self-compassion *lowers* the fear of failure, which frees you to take risks and recover from setbacks faster. You don't need self-attack to stay motivated — you only think you do because it's all you've known.

“If I rest / receive, I'm being lazy or selfish.” — That's the conditional rule defending itself. Receiving care and rest without earning them isn't indulgence — it's the exact corrective experience that rewires the belief. The guilt is the wiring; the practice is doing it anyway.

“The affirmations feel fake, so it's not working.” — Of course they feel fake at first — you're contradicting decades of practice. ‘Feeling fake’ is what early rewiring feels like from the inside. Keep going; the body updates on repetition, not on belief.

“I should be over this already.” — ‘Should’ is the old rule wearing a new mask. This is some of the slowest, deepest work there is. Months and years, not days. Be as patient with yourself as you'd be with anyone else doing something this hard.

The one to remember: you are not trying to think yourself worthy. You are practising — in rest, in receiving, in how you meet your own failures — a worth that was always there underneath the bar.

KEEP THIS

The pocket version

Photograph this page. The whole reset, for the next time your worth wobbles.

The truth under it

Your worth was taught to feel conditional — *I'm okay only if I perform / please / don't disappoint*. That rule was installed, not true, and it can be rewritten by practice.

When 'not enough' hits, do this:

1. **Catch the verdict:** "That's the old rule — a feeling, not a fact about my value."
2. **Separate:** "My performance moved. My worth didn't. Floor, not scoreboard."
3. **Friend's voice:** say what you'd say to someone you love.
4. **Receive one thing** this week without earning it — and sit with the discomfort.

And hold onto this:

"You don't have to earn the right to exist.
You never did. The bar was the lie — not you."

Every time you let yourself be worth something without earning it, the old rule loses a little ground — and the floor underneath you grows a little more solid.

REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

Where this comes from

Real, published work — so you can read further, and check it for yourself.

The ideas here draw on published research and established psychological theory; the key sources are below, with enough detail to find them. Some framings (the images and metaphors) are my own, built from that work; a few practical heuristics (noted as such) come from books or everyday practice rather than single studies.

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How to go deeper: To find any of these: copy the *title* (in quotation marks) into Google Scholar (**scholar.google.com**) — journal articles often show a free PDF link on the right, and books are available from any library or bookshop. For the frameworks used here: self-compassion (**self-compassion.org**, Kristin Neff), Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (**contextualscience.org**), Metacognitive Therapy (Adrian Wells), and CBT (the **Beck Institute**, beckinstitute.org).

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You don't have to earn the right to exist.

You never did. One worksheet won't undo years of conditional wiring — but every time you let yourself be worth something without earning it, the old rule loses ground. If this landed, the deeper work is where this becomes daily practice — a real, slow rebuild of how you hold yourself, with the same care and depth and a steady hand.

> *"The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change."*
>
> CARL ROGERS

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CONTINUE YOUR WORK

Where to go from here

More tools, and the deeper work — for whenever you're ready.

If this helped, here's where it continues. The free tools are yours to keep; the deeper programs are where this work goes much further, with the same care and depth.

Go deeper

The Emotion Regulation Course — the full method, step by step

Perfectionism & Burnout — for the quietly exhausted

The Secrets of the Brain — how your mind actually works

The Limerence Workbook — when a person becomes the thing you can't put down

The Saturday Morning Protocol — a weekly 90-minute ritual

The Relapse Prevention Toolkit — keep the gains you've made

The Accountability System — close the gap between knowing and doing

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