

unstuck

**A 7-Day Expedition to
Release Resistance**



by Emma Love Arbogast

Before we start...

Choose something meaningful to work with.

This book works best if you have an example of a medium-size stuck place in your life to work with. I recommend something you have been struggling with for months-to-years, but perhaps not your whole life.

A note for go-getters:

If your usual approach to resistance is to try to force it into submission, this is going to be a very different approach. You may have some judgements come up. I encourage you to commit to the process and suspend judgement until the end.

Who am I?

I'm not a therapist, coach or any kind of spiritual guru. I'm just a person who has spent a lot of time trying to figure out how my not-so-great childhood affected me and how to become a happy, functional adult. I have studied a few different bodies of work like Hakomi, NVC, Attachment Theory, attended dozens of workshops, and read a lot of self-help books. I have been doing this work for about 20 years. This booklet is based on techniques that have worked for me.

You can find more of my writing at joyninja.com.

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This is an experiential book.

You will get the most value
if you do one section per day,
and don't look ahead.

I know, it's hard to resist.

I've added reminders to help you.

Day 1: Make Space

Being in a stuck place can be really, really hard. It can feel overwhelming, confusing, painful, depressing, and lonely.

Our first response to this kind of discomfort is to want to avoid it somehow. Or to change it right away.

No judgment here—it's normal to shy away from painful feelings and want them to go away.

Unfortunately, avoiding or pushing them away can make the stuckness worse. By avoiding the feelings, they stagnate and don't move.

On the other hand, sometimes the feelings can be so overwhelming that it always seems like too much to feel them. Who wants to wallow in pain and misery?

Sometimes it seems like there are only two alternatives: feel all the feelings, or feel none of them.

I'm going to offer an alternative: start small.

Today, just make space for the fact that you have some stuck feelings.

Without trying to change them or fix anything.

Say to yourself: "I have this stuckness. That's okay."

This simple affirmation brings some acceptance and spaciousness to your stuck place. It lets it be there, without having to change at all right now.

Sometimes we can berate ourselves for even being in a stuck place. "What's wrong with me? Haven't I learned this lesson yet? Why is this happening to me? Again?"

Do these sound familiar?

I'm going to extend an invitation to you to just let these voices go.

The truth is, everybody gets stuck sometimes. Even the cool people. The famous people. The well-adjusted people. And certainly, you and me. It doesn't mean anything, except that we are human.

By giving yourself acceptance and space to be where you are at, you create the space for movement to occur.



Imagine your stuckness as a being with a body - a mass of feelings that need to dance themselves out. Give them a little room to move.

You can add “That’s OK.” to the end of any statement of reality to instantly add acceptance. Try it:

- I’m angry. That’s OK.
- I’m disappointed. That’s OK.
- I haven’t finished X. That’s OK.
- I don't know what to do about Y. That’s OK.

If you have resistance to the idea of accepting something that you fundamentally don't want in your life, consider this: you don't have much to lose at this point. You are already stuck. If fighting with reality was going to help, it would have by now. So I encourage you to set your skepticism aside for a week, and just try it.

Giving yourself this space might bring up tender feelings. That's OK. Be good to yourself.

That’s it for Day 1!

This is a blank page.

It's here to help you with
not looking ahead.

Let yourself fully experience Day 1.

Day 2: Find a Metaphor

We talked yesterday about how it's normal to want to avoid stuck feelings or situations, and how that can prevent them from movement or release. And also how just jumping into the feelings can be overwhelming.

Today's exercise is about finding a way to think and talk about the stuckness that makes it a little more approachable—something that you can relate to.

For example, maybe your stuckness feels like a brick wall, standing there in your path. You can't get through it, and you keep banging your head against it.

It may seem that a "brick wall" is not very relatable, but bear with me.

If you are not pounding your head against it, a brick wall can be friendly. You can lean up against it. It can support you as you read a book. You can paint a mural on it. Your relationship with that wall can evolve over time.

Giving a name and a "face" to your stuckness can help you begin a relationship with it. It makes it more human.

Cause here's the secret of this whole book: this stuckness is really a part of you. What we are doing here is a form of inner conflict resolution.

You and this part are at an impasse and need some help relating to each other so you can get on the same page and move forward as an integrated whole.

What does your stuckness feel like?

Is it a rock that is heavy in your gut?

Is it a wall too big to climb over? Is it a deep well you can't climb out of?

Is it a scary creature, like a bear? Is it a monster or a demon? Is it a dark cave?



Perhaps it is a long desolate valley, or an impossibly high mountain you can't begin to climb.

You may need to sit quietly and just give it some time to form in your mind. Or it might pop right into your head right away.

Find the metaphor that fits—one that feels true.

A caveat: Try to avoid actual people or places. We want a metaphor, not a memory. If the only thing that is coming up is a memory, look for a metaphor around your feelings about what problem the memory represents for you. Focus on yourself and your relationship to your own feelings rather than the event or person itself.

Next, find a picture of it (or draw it). Look for an image that evokes the feeling—you'll get an intuitive "hit" when you find

one that matches. Try searching online photos on Instagram, Pinterest, or Google Image Search. There might also be an object around your house that feels like an energetic match.

Over the next day, take your image (whether it's in your mind's eye or you found a photo), and hang out with it.

You could print it out and put it up in a special place, like your altar (if you have one), or your mantle or other place where you'll see it.

Give it a place of honor. This is a mystery waiting to reveal itself to you.

Let yourself feel curious about it. I wonder what this wall means? I wonder what this creature wants? Is it guarding something? How does it feel about me?

Have fun with this!

And as always, take care of yourself. Working with stuckness is hard. Give yourself plenty of rest and self-care.

That's all for Day 2!

Stop.

Until Day 3.

On Day 3, you can
go to the next page.

Day 3: Open a Dialog

Today we are going to get into the nitty gritty. Are you ready?

So far we've made space for our stuckness, and we've identified a metaphor to help us relate to it.

Now we're going to talk to it, and listen to what it has to say.

We're going to have a conversation with our stuckness.

Only now it's not a "stuckness", right? It's a wall, or a bear, or a rock, or a well.

For today's exercise, you are going to need a pen and paper, or an online journal. (I like 750words.com or Google Docs.) Find a quiet space and turn off your phone.

In your journal, write, "Hello ____." (use the metaphor you found yesterday).

This is a conversation, so where it goes is up to you.

You might want to start with, "What's up?" or "Tell me about what it's like to be you."

You might want to tell it a bit about where you are at, and how you feel about it. "I know I've been avoiding you..."

Be honest with it. Honesty creates connection.

Write down the answers to your questions. You may get words unfolding in your mind, or you may get something closer to impressions.

However you start, you'll want to eventually ask the biggie: "What do you need?"



Like any other relationship, the most important part is to listen to what it has to say.

It might say: "I just want some time to myself. You are always rushing around doing so many activities. Can we just rest?"

Or it might sound like, "I want you to trust yourself. You never do. You know what you want, but you are afraid to go for it."

Or it might have some choice words for you: "I'm angry at you. You never listen." This can happen if you have a habit of ignoring yourself or trying to steamroll past resistance.

Think of this as a conversation with a friend you love and cherish, and your relationship has gotten a little rocky.

Like you would a friend, empathize and validate what your stuckness has to say.

"OK, I get what you are saying. You're right, I haven't been listening. I've just wanted you to go away."

Write as much as you need to, for as long as you need to, until you feel like you are complete, at least for now.

When you are ready to wrap up, ask your stuckness what it wants you to do to move forward. It will often have very specific advice. "Take a nap and relax already!". "I want to get out more and play!".

And give it some gratitude.

That's it for today.

This can be a lot to take in and process, so remember that you don't have to figure it all out right now. It's enough to start a conversation, and let the response percolate in your brain. Just having this kind of dialog starts the wheels turning and gets things moving.

There is nothing to fix or do right now. Just be in the sacred space of creating a connection with yourself. It's enough.

You're done with Day 3!

Yep. Another blank page.

Don't peek.

On Day 4, you can
go to the next page.

I recommend reading Day 4
in the morning.

Day 4: Take a Break

I'm guessing you had some fabulous insights yesterday when you talked with your stuckness (or wall, or rock, or monster).

It may have stirred up all sorts of things.

Or even if it doesn't feel like much is different, it's likely there is stuff bubbling under the surface.

That's why today, we are going to leave it be.

One of the key skills in dealing with stuckness is to give it enough room to breathe, in an atmosphere of support.

Stuckness happens at the level of our unconscious. It's stuff we are not fully aware of. That's why metaphor and dialog work. It really is like talking to a separate part of ourselves. Nurturing a relationship with it helps this unconscious material come to light.

But like any relationship, it needs space. If you push too hard, the connection breaks down.

The unconscious needs a lot of space.

Working with the unconscious is best done in waves. You go in, stir things around for a bit, and then leave it alone to sort itself out.

In more technical terms, this gives your neural pathways time to reconfigure themselves with the new connections you've made. This often happens in your sleep, on long walks, or while you are doing other activities like playing a game.

Another way of thinking about it is when you work out, your muscle actually grows on your rest days.

So today we are going to focus on another aspect of moving through stuckness: self-care.

You may have certain associations with the word self-care. All I mean by it is taking care of yourself: meeting your needs.

Which is another way of saying: eating well, moving your body, socializing, having some fun, and getting enough sleep. Just basic stuff that maintains your wellbeing.

So, take a quick self-care inventory.

Are you tired? Hungry? Longing for some alone time?
Needing a dose of inspiration?

What would feel really good right now?

Maybe it's taking a long walk. Or sitting out in the sun. Or going to the library and looking through cookbooks, or starting a good science fiction novel. Maybe you want to call a friend and go to a movie. Maybe you need a good snuggle-nap in your bed. Or a big, full-body stretch.

Maybe what you need is more internal—like a mental pat on the back for working this hard with your stuckness. For coming this far while dealing with so much. Or maybe you need to acknowledge, grieve, or celebrate something.

Fun is part of self-care too.

If you've been stuck for awhile, sometimes having fun can seem like a faraway dream. But having fun doesn't have to be a big production. It's more about doing something new and different and unexpected that makes you smile.



Maybe just stick out your tongue at your cat. Shrug your shoulders and make a funny face. Make a weird sound and giggle. Hum a tune.

There really are no rules here. What would lighten the mood? I can't stand on my head, but maybe you can. Play dress-up. Drive somewhere new. Buy a magazine you've never read before and take the afternoon off to read it in a coffeeshop.

You might be tempted to blow this exercise off.

"Sure, that's great, but this is just general advice. It won't really help this problem."

"Yeah, ok, I'll watch another episode of my show tonight." (that you watch every night anyway.)

“I already take care of myself.”

This “break” is actually a crucial part of the experience.

You're not ignoring the problem. You're giving it some room to breathe, and building your resilience at the same time.

Sometimes we actually get stuck purely because we are low on internal resources and can't spare any for internal work. And this work takes resources which you need to replenish.

If you resist self-care in general, or you are having a hard time thinking of something new to do, try a different framing:

- What would be the simplest way to do this exercise?
- What is one small thing would really feel great right now?
- What would I be eager to do if I let myself?
- What little fun tweak would make my normal self-care routine just a bit “extra” today?

Sometimes it helps to just start the day with an intention:

Today I intend to take extra-good care of myself.

That will prime your mind to look for little ways to show yourself that your needs matter, and it's OK to take the time to meet them well.

That's it for Day 4!

You got this.

On Day 5, you can
go to the next page.

Day 5: Evolve Your Metaphor

I hope you had a fun, nourishing, and restful break yesterday.

Today we are going to start with your old metaphor and play around with it. What might happen next with it?

For example, if it's a wall that you can't get through, maybe there is a new path heading in a new direction.

Maybe there is a green sunny patch of grass right here and there's no rush to get over the wall.

Maybe the wall is actually the wall of a house, that is your new sanctuary from an overwhelming world.

Or maybe now you've got a grappling hook, or a horse that can leap over the wall.

Here's how to find your new metaphor:

Sit with your old metaphor. Close your eyes and feel into the energy of it. Get a really good sense of the feeling. Let it fill your imagination and senses.

Now just observe the energy or feeling of it. What is it like?

Get a sense of where it lives in your body. Is it a tension in your stomach? A weight over your heart?

Is there any movement? Is it heavy? Does it get lighter or softer as you sit with it? Maybe it moves around in your body.

You may just see it in your mind's eye. If so, try to get a crisper vision of it. Fill out the scene. Is the brick new or crumbling? Is there moss on those rocks?

As you sit with the energy of your stuckness, see if there is any movement that naturally starts to occur. Let it play out for awhile, doing nothing but observing with curiosity.

Then ask, into the stillness, if there is a new or transformed metaphor that might serve you as you untangle this stuckness and move forward.

If you aren't sensing movement, see if you can access the part of you that wants to move forward. The part that doesn't want a weighty thing on your chest, or that wants to feel relief from tension. Feel into the part of you that is ready to be light and free. It might have some ideas.

This can be a slow, fluid process. Or it might come to you all at once.

Maybe your old metaphor is a scary bear, and the new one is a teddy bear, reminding you to take care of yourself.

Maybe your old metaphor is a mountain too big to climb, but in your new vision, you have the gear and the ropes and some climbing buddies. Or maybe you've grown into a giant, and you can step right over it.

Maybe your old metaphor is a heavy rock weighing you down, but now you've found a way to slip out from under it, and you can sit on it instead. Maybe it changes in shape and size, and is more like a paper-weight, reminding you to ground and center but not weighing you down. Maybe it has changed into a memento, reminding you of what you cherish.

Sometimes the metaphor changes and becomes different (the wall becomes a house). Sometimes *you* change, and have a way to approach the metaphor differently (grappling hooks, friends). Sometimes your relationship to it changes.



Let it show you. Don't impose ideas on it—follow the energy of this part of you and let it speak to you. Be loving and curious, and let it unfold.

Now find or draw a new picture for your new metaphor. Put it on your altar next to your old one.

That's all for Day 5!

You're doing great.

Remember to take care of yourself!

On Day 6, you can
go to the next page.

Day 6: Share Your Story

Today we are going to reach out.

We all need to share our stories. When we go through something particularly challenging or scary, it can be even more important to do so.

Our culture has a taboo on "over-sharing". That sometimes makes sense—the point is connection, and sometimes giving too much information doesn't help people get you—it overwhelms them instead.

So in asking you to share your story, I'm not asking you to bare your soul in some way that is uncomfortable.

I'm just asking you to let somebody a little bit more into your world.

You can share as much or as little of your process as you want. The point is just to reach out and connect.

You might call a friend and have a chat. Or a family member.

It might just be as simple as emailing a friend and saying, "Hey, I have been going through some stuff, and I just wanted to share with you. I've been struggling and feeling stuck around _____. I feel some movement with it now, but it was hard there for awhile. I just wanted to let you know what's been going on for me".

If your loved ones have been worried about you, it can be a relief for them to hear that you've found some support for working with your stuckness.

Sometimes it can help to prepare your listener.

You can say something like, "Hey, I want to share something that's been up for me, and I just want to start with saying that there's nothing you have to do (like help me fix it). I really am just wanting to share. Are you up for that?"

Here's another bit of real-world advice: pick your healthiest friend. It's easy to get burned if you ask someone who you kinda know won't really have the space to hear you. On a similar note: if you are sharing online, through email or Facebook, be aware that not everyone will see it or respond, and be prepared to not take that personally. If you can, choose a medium that lets you communicate in real-time.

And there are many ways to connect beyond conversations.

You can make a piece of art, and write as little or as much as you want about your process around it, and then show it to someone, post it on your Facebook, or send it to a few friends. It can be as simple as titling it "The Wall" - no further explanation necessary.



Or make up a song, and sing it to your partner. Make a sculpture. Or a collage. Or write a poem, or a short story.

You can share it with people you know, or even post it anonymously on sites like [reddit.com/r/confessions/](https://www.reddit.com/r/confessions/)

What form of connection would feel satisfying?

If you want a specific response, ask for it specifically. Here are some connecting requests:

- "I'm curious what comes up for you when you hear what I shared?"
- "I'm wondering how all this landed for you?"
- "Have you ever had a similar experience?"

These might feel awkward, but they can create a powerful connection.

In a small way, or a big way, reach out.

Feeling stuck can be an isolating and lonely experience. Reaching out can break that pattern and help you remember that there is a big world out there full of people who are also human and hurting.

If this task feels overwhelming, remember to ask yourself, "What is the smallest or easiest way I could do this?"

That's all for Day 6.

Last one!

On Day 7, you can
go to the next page.

Day 7: Map Your Path

Today is the last day of this mini course. We've been through a lot, and I'm glad you've hung in there with me.

Today we are going to do something new and hopefully fun.

You'll need some drawing or art materials. (Paper and pencil is fine. Colored markers and pens can make it more fun!)

Over the last week, you've created space for your stuckness, found a metaphor to relate to it, opened a dialog and listened to what your stuckness had to say, took a break and had some fun, tried on a new metaphor, and shared your story with someone.

Now it's time to zoom out and look at the big picture.

Today you are going draw a representation of your whole journey with your issue—how far you've come and where you are going.

I don't mean just what we've done in these 7 days, although that may be part of it. I mean, start with the beginning of your story around this issue, draw where you got stuck, and draw how you want it to evolve in the future.

This might look like drawing a winding road, with signs along it for each of the things you've done.

It might look like a ladder you've climbed, with a rung for each step of the way.

Or a flight of stairs. Or a board game with different squares.

This 7 day course might be a tiny blip on the path, or it might be a big chapter.

This exercise is to give you a sense of the meandering path that you are on, and that this stuckness is just a chapter on it. One that will evolve into the next chapter.

What is the overall story that this stuckness relates to? Is it a path of understanding your gifts? Of coming home to yourself? Of learning to ask for support? Of growing wings and learning to fly?

What have you gotten out of this course, and how does it relate to your overall story? Think back at each of the previous 6 days and what impacted you the most.

For example, if the "taking a break" exercise was the biggest, maybe your overall story is about learning to have more fun. If "telling your story" was huge for you, maybe your overall story is about letting people in, or showing up more in your relationships.

This can be elaborate, or it can be very simple.

It might just a timeline with dots on it representing major events. It's up to you. Take some time with it.



What you are capturing is the story arc of this issue.

Sometimes living your life, you can get caught up in the details. Getting a larger perspective can make the little roadblocks seem less daunting.

Make room for the future.

When your line goes into the future, you might draw question marks. Or a fuzzy outline of what you sense is next or where you'd like to end up.

When you've finished, put it up on your altar with your two metaphor pictures.

And that's it—you're done!

Thanks!

I hope you have enjoyed and received benefit from this course. If you have, please share it with others. You can just send them to the landing page here:

<https://joyninja.com/unstuck/>

I would love any feedback you have about it, or just a hello!

Resources

If you liked the part where you talked to the stuckness, you might enjoy Internal Family Systems (IFS). I recommend *Self-Therapy* by Jay Early as well as the short free course here:

<https://lifearchitect.com/free-ifs-online-course/>

I also recommend the book *Nonviolent Communication* by Marshall Rosenberg for understanding your needs and communicating them. You can also use the method for self-empathy.

If you liked the drawing exercises, you might like SoulCollage or the book *The Artist's Way*.

Lastly, if you are really still stuck and struggling with not being able to move forward, the book *How We Change (And Ten Reasons Why We Don't)* might speak to you.