



## WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

Your story is made up of emotions, feelings, and perceptions. It is formed by your experience and how you interpret it. Your story is very personal to you and how you view the world. It is part of your unconscious operating system.

To live pain-free, you need to understand that story.

The story may be a combination of stories – the mini story and the mega story. The mega story is the overall conclusion; the worldview or Truth that the story supports. It could be something like, “I will be in constant pain until I die.” The mini stories add support for the mega story. “The nurse hates me,” or “My family doesn’t care about me.”

Your stories have purpose. The purpose may not be helpful to you in the long term, but initially you gain something from the stories. They may support unhealthy or unhelpful decisions, or rationalize the hurtful behavior of others.

Because our stories can become so deeply embedded in our unconscious, they may no longer seem like stories, but basic facts of existence. They become our Truth. We forget that they are just stories - the story becomes our identity.

No matter how negative our stories are, they are still comfortable, because they are familiar. They define who we are. Even if we don’t like who we are, we gain comfort from at least knowing who, or what, we are. Our stories keep us from changing, and that is part of their appeal. Because change can be terrifying.

Change can be scary, but so is the feeling of being trapped in a life of pain. Nothing is permanent, though. The fear of change and the feeling of being stuck are only temporary, if you understand and change your story.

The first step of understanding the story is to re-discover it, to bring it back from the unconscious to the conscious. Once you are aware of your story, you can begin to understand how it determines your view of yourself, your world, and your pain.



There are many ways to re-discover your story, so you need to figure out which ones work best for you.

## Methods to Learn and Understand Your Story

**Talk to trusted friends.** It can be therapeutic to talk about your struggles. This will often bring up the underlying story. If you are sharing your story with somebody for the first time, take some time to think about why you are doing it. Is it for support or understanding? For sympathy? For therapy? Sharing can be very emotional, so if needed, hold onto your comfort item.

**Pay attention to your words.** Stories often begin with “I should”, “I never”, “I always” or “I wish”. When you hear yourself using these phrases, consider the belief behind them. Why do you feel that you “should” be a certain way, or “always” think or act the same?

**Imagine your life as a literal story.** If you were reading a book about your life, what would today’s chapter be titled? Write down the title, and then write a short chapter of 7 to 12 sentences.

**Role-play with yourself.** Have a discussion with yourself as a doctor or healer, or an inner figure encountered in a dream. Make it a true dialogue, with statements and questions and answers back and forth.

**Focus on meaning.** In conversations with others, try to focus on what meanings they attach to information. This can be difficult, because most of us focus on what the words mean to ourselves, not what they mean to the person saying them. But this change of focus can reveal deeper meanings that we ourselves attach to information.

**Focus on your body.** When reporting to a healthcare professional, caregiver, friend, or family member, focus on how your body feels. Notice what emotions, thoughts and feelings you have as you talk. This can tell you how your body is reacting to your story. If your story is creating tension or pain as you tell it, it is a sign that your story needs to change.



**Storyboard your Pain Story.** Start with a specific life event. Then write out:

- What happened, and how. What was the sequence of events?
- What you thought and felt about it. What was your main emotion?
- What you believed. What did the event mean for your future?
- If people wanted to help you, what did they tell you?

**Connect with the wider world.** Walking, gardening, or just sitting in the park and observing can help ground you. If you are house or bed-bound, pets and houseplants can help connect you. When you feel connected to the world, it can help you recognize your story about how you fit into it.

**Engage in creative activity.** Artistic expression such as drawing, painting, writing, and music can bring out hidden meanings in your story.

**Keep a journal.** Writing daily about your thoughts and observations will help you understand what is important to you. What you view as important plays a very big part in your story. It will also help you see how you view the world. Is your point of view generally positive or negative? Do you do things, or do things happen to you?

**Use expanded-awareness practices.** Deep rhythmic breathing meditation, alternate nostril breathing (Nadi Shodhana), bilateral movement, bilateral eye movement therapy, and vowel sound chanting are all popular. There are hundreds of practices, both ancient and new, which can help make you more aware of your story. Try a few different ones, and see what works for you.

**Learn or study something new.** If a subject you see or hear makes you curious, do some research and learn more about it. Learning new things helps with brain elasticity, which makes changing your story, and your life, easier.

**Make some lists.** Write down places you'd like to visit, things you'd like to see, and experiences you'd like to have if there were nothing in your way. This can help you visualize new possibilities and different ways of being.



# Pain Processing Practice

**WRITE YOUR NEW STORY.** After trying some of these exercises, write your new pain story. Using what you've learned, change your story to one without pain cycles and suffering. If writing or reading it creates upset or tension, stop. Rip it up, and after some time, start again.

When you are happy to read your new pain story, integrate it into your larger health story. Begin living according to your new, happier, pain-free story.