



Breaking Free

Jan/Feb 2019

From the Editor

In this combined January/February issue we reflect on the pressure we often feel to set goals and New Year resolutions... And we speak about self-care, nurture, mindfulness and gentle goals.

In our Self Care section we share some free online resources that give you an opportunity to try out yoga in the privacy of your own home, or find a teacher who is trauma sensitive.

We publish a guest article by UK psychologist Lucy Johnstone, one of the lead authors of the Power Threat Meaning Framework, being presented by Lucy and Prof John Cromby in workshops in Australia later this month and early March.

You may like to contribute to the research that the University of NSW is conducting. They want to talk with survivors who have experienced shame or related emotions. Their aim is to increase understanding of the ways people manage shame. You can read all the details inside this issue.

In My Story this month Cameron shares his insightful story of emotional abuse and its long lasting impacts on his wellbeing. As always if you have comments about what you have read in this issue, contributions for the My Story section or suggestions for future issues, please contact the editor at newsletter@blueknot.org.au.

This will be my last edition of Breaking Free. After this issue I will be handing over to the new editor. It has been a pleasure being the editor of Breaking Free and I wish you all the very best.

Warm regards
Jane Macnaught

Eating Elephants

Desmond Tutu profoundly stated, “There is only one way to eat an elephant: one bite at a time”. This has inspired us all to try to take small meaningful steps towards an achievable purpose. This is something that is important to remember at this time of the year when we reflect on the year past and try to set goals for the year ahead. New Year’s resolutions can be daunting and overwhelming if you put pressure on yourself to do things differently. But maybe it’s not about doing them so differently, but doing them gently.



Caring for yourself can often be challenging for people who have experienced child abuse or childhood trauma, so try to think of yourself as someone who deserves care. And think about what care you can find for yourself.

Be gentle with yourself. There is no need to try to eat the elephant all at once. If setting goals is something that works for you, just remember to set small goals which are realistic and which are gentle. Goals that don't leave you feeling like you have stretched yourself thin or pushed yourself too far. Have a day off if you need it, and then get back onto the path to your small goals again if and when you are ready.

Setting goals can be helpful but it can also be daunting. Approach your goals in a way which practices self-love and self-care. If you decide to set some goals this year, why not make some that are self-compassionate so that no matter the result, you feel satisfied with the path you are on? Ensure they are created by you and for you. Take everything at your own pace. . You might want to use the SMART guidelines for setting goals if you'd like - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound. Or if not, see how you can care for yourself along a pathway that provides comfort for you, and does not add anxiety to your life.

Many survivors find it hard to manage the distress they often feel. It can be helpful to practice self-soothing tactics such as wrapping yourself up in a soft blanket, cuddling something soft, hugging someone or having a bath and these too can be goals that you set yourself. These targets of self-care and self-love can help ground you and help you regain control over difficult emotions, such as anger, shame or distress.

Coping with mental distress can feel lonely, so see if you can reach out, to someone you trust, someone who can be there alongside you. Reaching out can be hard but finding support when you do, can mean that you aren't doing it all alone. Some goals benefit from support from others, whether

it is with a counsellor, friend, colleague or family member. Find the care you need – maybe working towards that can be a goal for this year.



There will be times in the year that will be tough as they can bring up feelings of grief and loss. Days such as Valentine's Day and Easter can be overwhelming for survivors as many survivors have been hurt in intimate relationships, in families, and in institutions. Past betrayals can come to the surface showing why it can be so hard to trust, and to feel safe again. In these times if you can reach deep inside to find that strength that has sustained you and look outside to see what can help nurture you. It might be cuddling up to your pet, taking a walk outside, feeling the sun on your back – whatever you have found helps carry you through the tough times.

Perhaps you don't want to set goals - perhaps you have refused to create any, as they don't work for you. Perhaps you like to practice mindfulness and try to live in the present instead. Mindfulness might help you to look beyond goals as they say, 'There is no goal, no place to get to'. This requires accepting that what you have and what you are is enough so you are not looking to improve, change or fix yourself.

If you want to set goals but can't think of any, don't worry - they will develop and evolve over time. Trust that you will find the path with or without goals by being kind to yourself. In the words of prolific author Joseph Campbell "If you can see your path laid out in front of you step by step, you know it's not your path. Your own path you make with every step you take. That's why it's your path." If you decide to set goals, aim to set goals that are gentle and manageable, and take small steps. Try to balance being mindful, present, and self-caring. And if you decide not to make any goals - that's great too!



The Sad Poem

My Family From My Perspective

My Family was a catastrophe
And too many are to say
My Mum's first love was a Sicilian, but
Marry a wog in the fifties? No way

So she sought out a chap at the bank where she worked
A guy everyone wanted to know
The life of the party, good at all sports
But he turned out a right so-and-so

My Father you see was a weak man
Who his bad side he never overcame.
You know the things you think you might do
On your worst days? Well that was him.

His new wife soon discovered that a thief
And a liar she'd invited into her life.
Defrauding insurance. Kicked out of his golf club,
For stealing a bottle of their wine.

Now these are not assets if you work in a bank.
They may be petty but they are still a crime.
Mum knew that if a bank managers role he secured
He'd end up doing time

But just like a teacher, a bank manager's first post
Would be a small place way out in the sticks
So to the country she steadfastly refused to move,

To not be a homeless mum with kids

So my father took out his frustrations on her
And his three oldest kids – ‘specially me.
His first born son, perhaps he thought I might
Get somewhere. Well not if he

could help it. He needed some people
on whom he could look down.
Three people whose lives he would try to destroy
So us he constantly put down:

“You’re stupid. You’re useless, You’re hopeless.
You’re no good at anything. You’re nothing.”
And the crown of them all, the one he really meant:
“You’ll never amount to anything”

I was a happy and placid child, so good
My grandmother thought it perverse.
And I followed a rebellious sister, so
I tried not to make things worse

A peace making role I took for myself,
I felt I could do no other.
This was a mistake. To my father I should have
Stood up, not silently suffered

Yet for nearly ten years I sat there in silence
Enduring his verbal abuse
Nearly two thousand time he said that to me.
So my siblings attest.

I have no memory. I’ve repressed it completely
But my subconscious remembers full well
And it had little choice but to agree with dad,
So useless and worthless I feel

My father was handed some chances to
Repent from his crimes against our family
My brother got somewhere. My sister didn’t care.
But because I had no memory,

I was just perplexed when they spoke about it, I
Couldn’t relate it to them or to me.
‘Till my father was given just six months to live
then some of the fear he engendered could leave

So before he died I got to tell him
I knew what it was that he’d done.
Not remembered. Oh no. That’s too much to bear:
Likewise the imploring of his son.

And now he is dead. But not gone,
He’s inside my head, destroying my life
from within. But I’m inching out, little by little
Before I die I hope to be free.

And as I live I take strength from my lovely mum,
A good woman who made a bad choice
Who, before Murphy’s other law, was pretty stuck

where she was since her husband refused divorce

She got rid of him after twenty seven years
His second wife took half that time.
He died as he lived, alone and unloved
And I hope not to do the same

My goal in life now is to be the adult that
That happy child would have become
Free from the stain of unforgivable abuse
From a foolish and self centred man

So if I'm sometime aloof, or say something a bit odd
It's not you, it's my dad in my head.
So please be patient, and please let me know
I'm trying not to be ruled by my head

By Cameron R

SELF CARE RESOURCES

In this section, we will review self care/help resources our Blue Knot Helpline counselling team collects to share with people who call the Helpline. We are delighted to share these ideas with our Breaking Free readers. What is helpful for one person may not be right for someone else so please experiment, explore and find what suits you.

Yoga for Self Care

By Jane Macnaught, Breaking Free Editor



Are you one of the many people who has thought about learning yoga? Maybe you have been to a class and left feeling discouraged or felt you didn't fit in. In this article we offer a few resources that may make it more possible for you to try out yoga.

After many stop-start yoga experiences I found a six week beginners course that allowed me to attend a class every day if I could. The course taught the foundations of yoga SLOWLY, and as I learnt the poses I noticed what felt stiff and awkward in my body. Some poses were impossible until the teacher explained an adjustment, or a different technique. I learnt that it was okay to move towards comfort and away from pain. Now I feel more confident in my abilities and I am able to attend a variety of classes.

Bessel van der Kolk in his research found that yoga may be very beneficial for survivors of childhood abuse and trauma.

Van der Kolk found yoga a safe and gentle means of becoming reacquainted with the body. "Yoga re-establishes the sense of time," he says. "You notice how things change and flow inside your body." Learning relaxation and

breathing techniques can help people who have experienced trauma calm themselves when they sense a flashback or panic attack starting. Adapted from [source](#)

However the yoga teacher needs to be attuned to a trauma sensitive therapeutic practice. The idea of teaching gentle yoga is expanding as are the number of yoga therapists, slow yoga, and [restorative yoga](#) classes. You can find lists of local practitioners and yoga teachers that have trained in trauma sensitive yoga [here](#).

*I have also found a series of [FREE yoga videos](#) by a teacher called Adriene: she is playful, encouraging and prolific. If you are curious to have a go in the privacy of your own home then you could make your way through foundation poses – here are some of the ones that may be easy to start with which can be calming.
Legs up the wall pose. Can be calming and help with getting to sleep*

<https://yogawithadriene.com/legs-up-the-wall-viparita-karani/>

Bridge Pose, can help reduce anxiety, fatigue, and insomnia

<https://yogawithadriene.com/bridge-pose/>

Warrior two pose – increases stamina, centering and helps develop a sense of strength.

<https://yogawithadriene.com/warrior-ii-pose/>

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Invitation to Participate in Research



UNSW
SYDNEY

Surfacing Shame: the lived experiences of shame reported by adults who have experienced sexual abuse in childhood

Researchers at UNSW Sydney (The University of New South Wales) are seeking volunteer research participants to help us learn about the meanings, perceptions, and experiences of shame for adults who have experienced childhood sexual abuse.

Adult survivors of child sexual abuse frequently report experiencing shame or related emotions. The researchers would like to hear from survivors who identify as having experienced shame or related emotions. Your contribution to the research will help us understand survivors' journeys in managing shame. The research findings will inform better responses and support for survivors of child sexual abuse.

Would the research study be a good fit for me?

The study might be a good fit for you if you:

- Are over 18 years of age and are in NSW/ACT.
- Experienced sexual abuse in childhood.
- Identify as having experienced shame or related emotions (e.g. guilt, embarrassment).
- Would like to share your meanings, perceptions and experiences of shame and related emotions and how you have managed them at different points in your life.
- Have disclosed the abuse and received support at least 1 year ago.
- Currently have a safe place to live free of violence and abuse.
- Have access to support from friends, family, a community group, or counsellor.
- Are not experiencing current severe distress, crisis or current danger.

What would happen if I took part in the research study?

If you decide to take part you would:

- Take part in one interview of about 90 minutes either face-to-face, by phone or skype, whichever suits you.
- Have the option to review the typed transcript of the interview, edit and make corrections
- Have the option to get feedback about the findings sent to you from the research team.

- Get the choice to stop participating in the study whenever you choose.

Will I be paid to take part in the research study?

The study is voluntary. There are no costs to participate in this study, nor will you be paid.

Who do I contact if I want more information or want to take part in the study?

If you would like more information or are interested in being part of the study, please contact:

Name: Maureen MacGinley Doctoral Research Candidate

Email: maureen.macginley@unsw.edu.au

Phone: 02 9385 8998

Ethics Approval Number: HC 180550 Version 2 dated: 11/09/2018

IN THE NEWS

CHRISSIE FOSTER, PETER MCCLELLAN AWARDED TOP HUMAN RIGHTS MEDAL

Chrissie Foster and Justice Peter McClellan were awarded the 2018 Human Rights Medal on Friday for their "enormous contribution" to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. [Read More](#)

PETER DUTTON IS PUSHING THE STATES TO SIGN UP TO A NATIONAL CHILD-SEX OFFENDER REGISTER

Families would be safer if Australian child sex offenders were publicly listed online, Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton says. [Read More](#)

CHILDREN ARE THE FORGOTTEN VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

As the world grapples with the need to eliminate violence against women, there are oft-forgotten victims whose needs must also be addressed – the children, including girls, who are caught in the middle and are, at times, directly targeted. [Read More](#)