

Growing Through a Setback

Recognising what a hard experience has changed, including what it may have strengthened

Some experiences divide life into before and after: a bereavement, redundancy, serious illness, a relationship ending, a crisis at work. They can shake the beliefs we rely on without noticing, about how predictable the world is, how much we can control and who we are.

Alongside the pain, many people later notice changes they value. The psychologists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun called this post-traumatic growth. It is not the same as bouncing back. It describes coming through a struggle with something new: a different perspective, closer relationships, a clearer sense of what matters.

Growth does not make the experience good, and it is not an obligation. Struggle and growth can exist side by side. This worksheet is for reflecting once some time has passed. If the experience is recent, or still feels overwhelming, it is better to focus on getting support first.

01

What did the experience shake?

IF SOMEONE NEEDS HELP NOW

If there is an immediate risk to life, call **999**. Samaritans are available free, 24 hours a day, on **116 123**. In England, NHS 111 (option 2) connects to an urgent mental health service.

Difficult events often challenge beliefs that used to feel solid. Which of these were shaken for you?

- How fair, safe or predictable the world is.
- How much control I have over what happens.
- How much I can rely on other people.
- How capable or strong I am.
- Who I am, and what kind of person I want to be.

EXERCISE

Before and after

1. Something I believed before that I see differently now:

2. How I make sense of what happened, now that some time has passed:

02

Five areas of growth

Tedeschi and Calhoun found growth tends to appear in five areas. Not everyone notices change in all of them, and that is fine. Rate each one, then note any example that comes to mind.

Since the experience, how much have I noticed this change?

0 = not at all, 1 = a little, 2 = somewhat, 3 = a great deal

	0	1	2	3
Personal strength: I know I can handle more than I thought	☐	☐	☐	☐
Relationships: I feel closer to some people, or more able to accept help	☐	☐	☐	☐
New possibilities: new paths or priorities have opened up	☐	☐	☐	☐
Appreciation of life: I value things I used to take for granted	☐	☐	☐	☐
Meaning: my sense of what matters, or my beliefs, have deepened or shifted	☐	☐	☐	☐

AREA	AN EXAMPLE FROM MY OWN EXPERIENCE
Personal strength	
Relationships	
New possibilities	
Appreciation of life	
Meaning	

03

Taking it forward

EXERCISE

Reflect

1. Which strengths did I draw on to get through, and where else could I use them?

2. What do I want to do differently because of what I have learned?

3. Who helped me, and how could I support someone else going through something similar?
