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a personal message

Dear Reader,

Welcome to recovery. By opening this book, you are opening yourself up to a happier and more peaceful life. You don't have to be completely convinced of this, and you don't have to be completely ready to change. As long as you are willing to consider the ideas you read about here, you are on the path to freedom.

Bulimia is a difficult opponent to face. It is sly, sneaky, and strong. But as you learn new ways to think and act, you'll find that you are even smarter and stronger. And as you are ready, you will begin to win the battles you fight, and eventually you will win a better life—one without bulimia.

This book is designed to help you become aware of and begin to change the false core beliefs that cause you to use bingeing and purging as coping skills. Right now, those behaviors might be all you have. But reading and completing the activities in this book will teach you healthier ways to cope, and you will begin to trust those ways. This trust will give you the confidence you need to recover and heal.

Each activity is introduced by an **Affirmation**. This is a positive statement about yourself and your abilities. It is likely to be in direct opposition to what you believe now. Typical bulimic thoughts are negative and foster self-hatred. Positive affirmations give you the power of truth and self-confidence, tools you can use to heal.

These six sections follow each affirmation:

Think

This section lets you consider how the affirmation applies to your own life. You will discover the thoughts and behaviors that keep you in a relationship with bulimia, and you'll practice creating new thoughts that will help you get out when you are ready.

Speak

Saying your thoughts and feelings out loud both relieves anxiety and helps you hear who you are. Sharing or discussing them with another person helps you understand yourself better and learn new information. Speaking positive affirmations and goals helps bring them to life and is a first step in making them real.

Imagine

Research has shown that your brain can't tell the difference between what's actually happening now and a memory or fantasy that you visualize. Picturing change gives you a

chance to get comfortable with it, practice it, and actually shift the brain patterns that are keeping you stuck. Visualization (paired with relaxation) lets you learn to feel comfortable with behaviors that might normally raise your anxiety. These exercises are meant to be done slowly and peacefully. Take as much time as you need to relax before, during, and after them.

Act

This section will give you the chance to bring your thoughts of change into reality. The suggested actions might mean trying real shifts in your behaviors or taking actions that are symbolic in nature. Either of these steps will help you move forward and become more comfortable in releasing bulimia.

Create

Using art materials to express your thoughts, feelings, dreams, and desires will help you release those that are holding you back and bring into reality those that will help you heal. This is not art class; you cannot do these activities incorrectly. The focus is not on creating a beautiful work of art, but on doing what feels right and good to you and on being peaceful as you work.

Transcend

The word “transcend” means “to rise above,” “to triumph over,” and “to overcome.” These activities will help you think and act from a bigger perspective. Working with nature, music, writing, love, compassion, prayer, gratitude, or just the “bigger picture,” you will connect to your inner wisdom and rise above bulimia.

Writing in a journal is a big part of these activities and of your recovery process. Your journal will be the place you record the thoughts, feelings, ideas, and observations that are a reflection of your inner self—the most valuable part of you. Your journal will help you to face and manage thoughts and feelings, and in doing so, learn how to live without using bulimic behaviors. Be prepared to find a true friend in your journal.

As you go through this book, be patient and gentle with yourself. Take your time. You can't rush recovery any more than you can force a bud to open sooner than it is ready. This book is one tool in your journey to peace. There will be other books, people, and experiences that help you as well. Be open to healing and you will find it.

My very best to you,

Lisa M. Schab, LCSW

to the helping professional

Bulimia is a complex and confounding disorder that most cannot battle and beat on their own. The purpose of this book is to provide tools and guidance to teens seeking recovery and to the professionals working with them.

The helping professional should be aware that the multifaceted etiology of bulimia and its tendency to evolve from an unhealthy dieting method to a universal coping mechanism can cause it to take on the role of an emotional lifeline for the client, making the thought of change very frightening. Activities in this book are designed to both address the fear and bring the bulimic lifeline into awareness so that it can be consciously dismantled and a healthy lifeline created to take its place.

The activities are built on the premises of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and neuroscience, which both contend that thought patterns create behavior. When thoughts change—and with them the neural pathways in the brain—behavior can change. Each time we either observe or alter an ingrained thought pattern, we loosen the chemical connection in the brain that pairs the thought and the behavior. So the more we repeat an affirmation, apply a concept, or visualize a change, the more we are physiologically creating real change.

It has been said that we retain 10 percent of what we read, 20 percent of what we hear, 30 percent of what we see, 50 percent of what we see and hear, 70 percent of what we discuss with others, 80 percent of what we experience personally, and 95 percent of what we teach to someone else. The activities in this book have been constructed to allow for each of these experiences, helping the reader to better integrate each concept. They lend themselves well to group settings as well as individual sessions.

The activities are designed to introduce and address the false core beliefs that underlie bulimic behavior, raising readers' awareness of their thinking processes, teaching them healthier coping skills to replace bulimic behaviors, and providing them with opportunities to practice change.

Each activity begins with an initial **Affirmation**, which introduces a new thought that refutes the false core belief, and an explanation that describes the relation of the concept to bulimic behaviors. Six sections follow, allowing for integration of the information repeatedly and on different levels.

The first activity section, **Think**, helps readers to personalize the information by asking them to reflect on and record their own thoughts and behaviors related to the concept.

The **Speak** section promotes integration of the material through verbalization and discussion.

The third section, **Imagine**, helps readers to lower anxiety related to change and rehearse new behaviors in a relaxed state through visualization.

The **Act** section encourages readers to choose and act out new behaviors, whether symbolically or in real-life situations.

Create uses expressive art techniques to practice self-soothing, release affect, experience a sense of mastery, and symbolically create change and separation from bulimia.

Transcend exercises help readers see themselves and their behaviors from a bigger perspective.

Readers will experience each activity differently, according to their needs and the severity of their bulimic history. Helping professionals need to be tremendously patient, sensitive to the enormity of their client's challenge, and flexible in working with the materials herein. Be aware that the job you have taken on in helping a teen to battle bulimia can be formidable. And for that very reason, your task is vitally important. During the journey of treatment, it will be important for you to care for yourself and your own needs as well as your client's, especially if you are recovered from, or in stages of recovery from, an eating disorder yourself.

Thank you for your energy and commitment to assisting teens along the path to recovery from bulimia.

Lisa M. Schab, LCSW

notes for use of this workbook

- Each activity herein is an introduction, a beginning step, a first chance to try out a new thought or behavior. Lasting change takes time, and the reader may need to work and rework concepts many times.
- When the word “purge” is used in this book, it refers to any method of eliminating the food or calories acquired during a binge: for example, self-induced vomiting, fasting, laxatives, diuretics, or excessive exercise.
- While bulimia is diagnosed in both men and women, the incidence among women is significantly higher. This workbook may be used successfully for both genders, and an effort was made to keep the activities from being gender biased. However, as the reader will typically be a teenage girl, the workbook has been written with that in mind.
- Activities are based on general characteristics of those with bulimia. As there are always exceptions, not every activity will apply to every reader.
- The journal is an integral part of the recovery process, providing a safe holding place for all internal processes and assisting in the development of self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-trust. Readers are encouraged to journal their responses to any activities or any part of their recovery process, even when not directly asked to do so in this book.
- Each activity’s **Affirmation** states a healthy core belief that can contribute significantly to recovery. The more an affirmation is repeated, the more it will become part of the subconscious mind and the more it can help to create positive behavioral change. Therefore, even when not stated explicitly, readers are encouraged to make each affirmation part of their daily thought patterns, repeating it as often as possible, silently or out loud, to themselves or to others, until it becomes as natural and automatic as their current negative beliefs.
- The **Imagine** section is best used when the person doing the imagining is deeply relaxed, and when a second person speaks the text out loud to her. The exercise should be done slowly, taking as much time as necessary to achieve relaxation before beginning the story line. The printed text may only take one minute to read through, but the visualization is best done more slowly, taking up to ten or more minutes to complete, depending on the individual’s anxiety level. (Ideas may be repeated, paraphrased, or appropriately expanded.) Those imagining should

always be advised that they can stop the visualization process at any time should they begin to feel overwhelmed or frightened.

- The **Create** section suggests art activities that often require three-dimensional work or a variety of materials. If the suggested materials are not available, an appropriate drawing may substitute.
- Always remain aware of emotional safety, monitoring the reader's ability to manage feelings of being overwhelmed. Readers should be encouraged to cope with the tension that may come when attempting new tasks and skills yet not be pushed beyond a limit of safety.

bulimia is a false friend

1

affirmation

Bulimia pretends to be a friend—but then it violates my body, mind, and spirit.

At first it may seem like bulimia is the perfect friend: when we're down, it's there; when we're upset, it's there; when we need to escape, it's there; when we need anything, it's there. But soon we start to feel the guilt, the shame, the frustration, and the trap—and we realize the truth: bulimia gives the illusion of being a friend, and then it turns around and stabs us in the back.

In reality, bulimia is the worst friend of all. It lures us in with a smile and a promise—"Try me. I'll help you! I'll make you thin and take away your discomfort and make you feel good about yourself!" And then, once we've started trusting it, we learn the truth. Instead of helping, it's made our lives worse. Even if we are thinner, our faces are bloated or our binges are bigger or we feel less in control than ever. Instead of feeling better about ourselves, we're feeling worse. We not only don't like our bodies, we don't like our behaviors either. We do things we're ashamed of or hate ourselves for. And it gets harder and harder to stop.

The truth is that bulimia violates our bodies. It forces food into us when we're not physically hungry, stretching our stomachs beyond their capacity. Then after we're so full that we hurt, bulimia rips it back out through purging. Whatever type of purging we use, it's a violation to our bodies: vomiting, laxatives, diuretics, excessive exercise, self-induced starving—none of these is normal or healthy. The medical effects of these behaviors can cause dehydration, stomach ulcers, heart attacks, and more.

Bulimia violates our minds by taking them over. Our thoughts about eating and getting rid of food become all-encompassing. They intrude on us when we're with friends, at home, in school, in the car, and at work. We are constantly planning our next binge or purge, or regretting our last. We plan what we will eat and where we will get it. We think about the next time we can be home alone or how we will get to the bathroom at the

activity 1 * bulimia is a false friend

restaurant. We go to bed at night and wake up in the morning thinking about what we are going to do or not do with food. We can't stop the obsessive thoughts.

Bulimia violates our spirit. It sucks the energy, joy, peace, and personality right out of us. It takes away our strength and makes us dependent. It stops us from growing into the unique individuals that we've been created to become. It shoves us into a hole and doesn't let us out. Bulimia changes us from vital, energetic, amazing beings into rag dolls. It destroys our lives and our potential, our present and our future.

think

Write your story. Describe in your own words how your relationship with bulimia started and how it developed to where it is now. When you're done, go through your writing and underline in red the sentences that illustrate your former belief that bulimia was a friend. Then circle in green the sentences that illustrate the truth—that bulimia has, and will continue to, betray you.

Make a list of the ways that bulimia has violated your body, mind, and spirit.

speak

Read your story out loud to a trusted friend, counselor, or group. Or, read your story out loud to yourself.

Say today's affirmation out loud: "Bulimia pretends to be a friend, but then it violates my body, mind, and spirit." Say it repeatedly over the course of the day.

Explain to someone in your own words how you have learned that bulimia cannot be trusted. Share real examples of how it has hurt or betrayed you.

imagine

Sit comfortably and quietly and close your eyes. Let your muscles relax and your breath slow and deepen. Picture yourself in an amazingly beautiful place. Know that you are safe there. Feel the peacefulness of this place as it moves around and through you. Feel the

deep peace in your body and soul. Now picture yourself looking up and seeing something in the distance. You recognize that this is a physical representation of bulimia. Picture bulimia in whatever way your imagination creates it. See what color, shape, size, and texture it is. See it in the distance, and see it coming toward you. Know that you are safe and strong. Know that you have realized that bulimia is not a true friend. Know that you are going to end your relationship with it. Picture bulimia coming closer but stopping a safe distance away from you. Picture yourself telling bulimia that you are through with it, in whatever words you choose. Picture it trying to apologize and convince you that it really is your friend. Picture yourself not giving in, telling it “No!”, and finally convincing it to leave you. Picture it moving away from you, farther and farther, until it is completely out of sight. Feel how strong and peaceful you feel. Know that your life is going to get better and better.

Journal about how it felt to do this.

act

Look through your personal possessions—in closets, purses, your room, your home. Find something that you no longer need, something that at one time you liked but you don’t want anymore. It can be anything—a picture, a piece of jewelry, a notebook, a sweatshirt, an old toy. Make a decision to get rid of it, to release it from your life. Write or tape the word “bulimia” on this object. Take it out to the garbage and throw it in. Let this action represent your readiness to let go of bulimia in your life.

Write a good-bye letter to bulimia. Tell it that you’ve learned the truth and that you don’t want or need friends that hurt and abuse you. Tell it you’re through. Sign your name. Put the letter up somewhere where you can see it to remind you that you’re ready to end this relationship.

create

Separate yourself from bulimia—put it outside of yourself—by creating a physical representation of this false friend. How did you picture it in your visualization? A devil with horns? A seductive being? A black cloud? Using whatever materials you wish, create a three-dimensional representation of bulimia. You might use clay, old boxes or

activity 1 * bulimia is a false friend

other containers, cardboard, rocks—whatever you have available that feels right for you. Decorate this “sculpture” by adding colors or textures that express its characteristics.

When you are finished, set your sculpture in front of you. Notice that you are separate from it. Notice that it is outside of you, not a part of you. Notice how this feels. Reach out your hand and move it farther away from you. Notice how this feels. Speak to your sculpture and tell it that you no longer want it in your life. Journal about what this exercise was like for you. Keep your sculpture somewhere you can see it regularly. Whenever you see it, notice that it is separate from you.

transcend

Think of the kind of friend you want to be to others and the kind of friends you want to have in your life. List the qualities that you think are important in friendship. If you had a human friend who treated you like bulimia did, would you want to continue that friendship? Someone once said, “If you want to learn something about a person, look at the friends they keep company with.” What does keeping company with bulimia do for you?

I am a miracle 2

affirmation

I am a miracle. I deserve better than bulimia.

We were born innocent, deserving unconditional love and care. But somewhere along the way we got the idea that we weren't worthy—that we would be good enough only if we got to a certain weight or size. Bulimia reinforces this lie over and over again. It tells us that we can't trust ourselves or our bodies. It tells us that we have to lose more and more in order to be happy. It keeps us thinking that there is something wrong with us and only losing weight will fix it.

The truth is, there is no inherent goodness in a weight or size. And achieving it still won't make us feel good enough. The truth is that we are good enough right now. We are each incredible combinations of physical, mental, and spiritual gifts. Complex systems work inside us at every moment, processing solid, liquid, and chemical substances set up in perfect coordination to keep us alive and healthy. Our minds are amazing entities that not even scientists completely understand. Our souls carry the spirit of life as we move in and through the world around us. Our existence has purpose and meaning just as does every other part of nature. We are all miracles, and no size or behavior or number on the scale can change that. We still carry the innocence we were born with. We are still deserving of unconditional love and care, respect, and the chance to heal and grow and become ourselves. We all deserve better than bulimia.

think

Make a list of the ways that you think you are not good enough. Make a conscious decision to consider changing your mind about these ideas. Write a statement to yourself, declaring that you deserve better than this self-abusive, bulimic thinking, that you are a miracle and deserve to be loved.

Put your list of "not good enoughs" through a shredder.