Thoughts & Mind

Trusting Yourself Again

Rebuilding confidence in your thoughts, feelings and decisions

Trauma can change the way you relate to your own judgement. You may question whether your feelings are reasonable, repeatedly ask other people what they think, struggle to make even small decisions or worry that trusting yourself will lead to danger. If your perceptions were dismissed, manipulated or repeatedly challenged, self-doubt can become even stronger.

Key idea: Self-trust does not mean always being certain or always making the perfect decision. It means learning that you can notice information, make choices, respond to mistakes and adjust when new information appears.

Why trauma can damage self-trust

After frightening or controlling experiences, the mind may become highly focused on avoiding another mistake. You might replay decisions, seek reassurance, ignore your instincts, defer to other people or feel that every choice carries enormous consequences. If someone used gaslighting, coercion or blame, you may also have learned to distrust your memory, feelings or interpretation of events.

Feelings are information - not instructions

A feeling can tell you that something matters without automatically telling you exactly what is happening. Anxiety may signal danger, a trauma reminder, uncertainty or overload. Anger may signal a boundary, hurt or injustice. Rebuilding trust involves listening to feelings while also checking context and current evidence.

Intuition and trauma alarm can overlap

You do not have to decide that every instinct is correct or that every instinct is trauma. Slow the process: notice the signal, gather information, consider your values and decide what level of action is proportionate. You can take a concern seriously without needing absolute certainty.

Signs that self-doubt is taking over

Repeatedly asking others to decide, changing your answer after reassurance, checking messages or memories, apologising automatically, avoiding choices, feeling unable to say no, assuming other people know better, or believing that one imperfect decision proves you cannot trust yourself.

The situations where I doubt myself most:

A self-trust decision check

Use this for everyday decisions or boundaries. It is not a substitute for specialist advice where legal, medical, financial or safeguarding expertise is needed.

1. What am I thinking or noticing?

Describe the concern or decision in one or two sentences. Try to separate what you observed from what you fear it might mean.

My thought or observation:

2. What evidence do I have right now?

Include information that supports your concern and information that points another way. Notice whether you are relying on a present fact, a prediction, another person's opinion or a trauma memory.

Current evidence:

3. What matters to me?

Consider safety, respect, honesty, rest, connection, independence, fairness, health, family, work or another value that you want your decision to reflect.

My values or priorities:

4. What is the smallest reasonable choice?

You may not need a permanent decision. Could you pause, ask one question, set a temporary boundary, gather information, try something once or choose a reversible next step?

My next choice:

5. What can I learn afterwards?

Self-trust grows when decisions become information rather than examinations you must pass. Ask what worked, what you would change and what you know now.

What I can learn:

Building self-trust through small experiences

Confidence often returns through repetition rather than one dramatic breakthrough. Start with decisions that are meaningful but manageable enough to practise choice without overwhelming pressure.

Practice	What it develops
Make one small choice without polling everyone.	Experience of making a decision and tolerating uncertainty.
Notice a preference before explaining it.	Connection with your own wants and needs.
Use a temporary boundary.	Permission to protect space while you gather more information.
Keep a decision record.	Evidence that many choices are workable even when they are not perfect.
Review mistakes without attacking yourself.	Confidence that you can repair, learn and adjust.
Ask for advice deliberately.	Using support as information rather than handing over authority.
Notice when you were right.	Correcting a bias that records every mistake but forgets sound judgement.

When other people damaged your confidence

If your reality was repeatedly denied, mocked or rewritten, rebuilding self-trust may include recognising those patterns. Gaslighting is not simply disagreement; it involves manipulative behaviour that causes someone to question their perception or reality. Support can help you distinguish ordinary differences of opinion from coercive or abusive dynamics.

You can use support without surrendering your judgement

Healthy support does not require doing everything alone. A trusted person or professional can help you consider information, identify blind spots and think through consequences. The difference is that advice becomes one source of information rather than proof that your own view has no value.

My small self-trust experiments:

When professional support may help

Consider support if self-doubt is severely restricting daily life, relationships or decision-making, or if it is linked with trauma symptoms, coercive control, persistent shame, dissociation or intense anxiety. Trauma-focused CBT and EMDR are evidence-based PTSD treatments recommended by NICE in appropriate circumstances following assessment.

My interactive Self-Trust Plan

Complete this while you feel relatively settled. The aim is not to promise yourself that every decision will be right. It is to create a fair process you can return to.

NOTICE - How do I know self-doubt has taken over?

CHECK - What present-day information can I use?

CHOOSE - What is one proportionate next decision or boundary?

REFLECT - How can I review the outcome without attacking myself?

BUILD - What repeated experiences could strengthen self-trust?

A message from Maggie

> *After trauma, it can feel safer to believe that somebody else must know better than you. Rebuilding trust in yourself does not mean never asking for help or never getting something wrong. It means beginning to hear your own thoughts, feelings and preferences again, checking them against what is happening now and giving yourself permission to make a choice. You can learn from a decision without using it as evidence against yourself. Self-trust can return one small choice at a time.*

Books, resources & clinical sources

NICE NG116: Post-traumatic stress disorder. NHS information on PTSD. Ehlers & Clark's cognitive model of PTSD. Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*. Janina Fisher, *Healing the Fragmented Selves of Trauma Survivors*. Trauma-focused CBT and EMDR are evidence-based PTSD treatments recommended in appropriate circumstances following assessment.

This resource is educational and does not replace individual assessment, safeguarding advice, diagnosis or treatment.