

Fragments of Me

When life feels broken and it is hard to recognise yourself

Sometimes depression does not feel like sadness. It feels like losing access to yourself. You can remember being able to laugh without thinking about it, answer a message without rehearsing it, make a decision without becoming overwhelmed, or wake up with some sense of what the day was for. Then, gradually or suddenly, those ordinary pieces of you seem harder to find. You are still here, but you may not feel like the person living your life.

That can be incredibly lonely because other people may still recognise you. They see your face, hear your voice and perhaps watch you continue working, parenting, caring, shopping or doing the things that have to be done. They may say, 'But you seem okay.' What they cannot necessarily see is the effort required to produce that version of okay, or what happens when you close the door and no longer have to hold yourself together.

You may start collecting evidence against yourself. The washing you have not done. The people you have not replied to. The hobby you no longer touch. The work that takes twice as long. The invitation you cancelled. The fact that you cannot remember what somebody told you yesterday. Each thing can begin to feel like another fragment that has fallen away, until the story becomes: 'I am disappearing.'

I want this resource to interrupt that story. Difficulty accessing a part of yourself is not the same as that part no longer existing. Depression can affect concentration, motivation, energy, sleep, pleasure, confidence and connection. When several of these change at once, it makes sense that your sense of identity can feel shaken too.

The pieces nobody sees

Some fragments are very private. You might miss being affectionate. You may no longer recognise your own reflection or feel connected to your body. You might avoid people because you cannot find the energy to explain yourself, while simultaneously feeling hurt that nobody seems to notice how much you are struggling. You might feel irritable rather than tearful, numb rather than obviously distressed, or guilty because people you love are not enough to make you feel better.

None of those experiences make you uncaring. Depression can make access to feeling difficult. Knowing that you love somebody and being able to feel that love vividly in every moment are not the same thing. The same can be true of enjoyment, hope and motivation. Their quietness does not automatically mean they have gone.

Grieving the person you remember

There can be genuine grief in looking backwards. 'I used to...' can become one of the most painful phrases in depression. I used to cope. I used to go out. I used to be confident. I used to enjoy this. Those memories matter, but they can become a standard that today's exhausted self is repeatedly failing to meet. You are allowed to miss who you were without using that person as a weapon against who you are now.

Something to hold onto: You do not have to feel whole before you deserve kindness. You do not have to recover a particular fragment before you are still you.

A personal reflection

When somebody tells me they do not feel like themselves anymore, I do not hear failure. I hear that they remember themselves. Somewhere underneath the exhaustion and disconnection, there is still an awareness of what matters, what is missing and what they long to feel again. I think we can begin there - not by demanding that every piece returns, but by sitting alongside what is here without judging it.

Sometimes we are so focused on the missing fragments that we stop noticing the pieces that stayed. Perhaps you still care deeply even though you cannot show it in the same way. Perhaps you still get up for somebody who needs you. Perhaps you still notice beauty for three seconds before the heaviness returns. Perhaps you reached this page because some part of you is still looking for understanding. Those pieces count.

Exercise: My Fragments

There is no requirement to fill every box. A word is enough. A scribble is enough. You can return another day. This is about noticing, not performing recovery.

A part of me I really miss	A part of me that has stayed
A part of me that feels hidden	A part of me I want to meet again

Now choose only one. If the fragment you miss is music, listen to one song. If it is connection, sit near someone safe. If it is creativity, make one mark. If it is independence, make one small choice for yourself. Do not ask the fragment to prove anything. Just make a little space for it.

When the dark starts changing

Recovery is rarely a clean movement from darkness into light. There can be lighter moments inside very difficult days and difficult moments after weeks that seemed better. Try not to use a hard day as evidence that every previous step was false. Change can be uneven and still be change.

The aim is not to glue yourself back into exactly the same shape. Some parts may return. Some may need rest. Some may have changed. You may also discover boundaries, values, strengths or needs that you did not recognise before. Becoming more connected to yourself can include remembering who you were and discovering who you are becoming.

Books chosen for this piece

Andrew Solomon - *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression*

This is a substantial exploration of depression combining personal experience, interviews and wider discussion. I have chosen it for Fragments of Me because it gives language to the complexity of depression rather than reducing it to simply feeling sad. It is a long book, so I would not approach it as something you must finish. Dip into it when you have the concentration and leave it when you do not.

Sally Brampton - *Shoot the Damn Dog: A Memoir of Depression*

Brampton writes personally about severe depression and the experience of trying to live inside it. For this resource, the value is recognition: the sense that an articulate, capable person can still experience profound disconnection and struggle. Memoirs can be emotionally intense, so this is one to read at your own pace and put down if it becomes too much.

Kristin Neff - *Self-Compassion*

I have included this because Fragments of Me can easily become a story of self-criticism: everything you used to do becomes evidence of what you cannot do now. Neff's work offers another direction - learning to respond to suffering with less hostility towards yourself. You do not have to agree with every exercise for the central question to be useful: would I speak to somebody else in the way I am speaking to myself?

If reading feels impossible

Please do not make these recommendations another job. Depression can affect attention, processing and memory. You can read two pages, use an audiobook, return to the same section several times or decide that none of these books are right for you. A resource is supposed to meet you where you are.

When you need more than a resource

There are times when a PDF, exercise or book is not enough. If depression is persistent, worsening or making everyday life difficult, speaking with a GP or mental-health professional can help you consider appropriate support. If you feel unable to keep yourself safe or think you may act on thoughts of harming yourself, seek urgent help. In the UK, NHS 111 can advise on urgent care; in an immediate emergency call 999 or go to A&E.;

Message from Maggie

If you feel as though you are in pieces, I do not want you to read this and immediately start trying to put yourself back together. I want you to know that you can be tired, disconnected, unsure and still worthy of being met with care. Start with the fragment that is here today. We do not have to force the darkness away. Sometimes we begin by noticing where even a little light is already getting through.

Space to Breathe Therapy
Support Hub - Depression