

Letting Go of the Pieces That No Longer Fit

It is not about losing yourself - it is about making room for who you are becoming

Not every piece of us that developed during a difficult time needs to travel with us forever. Some behaviours, beliefs and ways of coping may have helped you survive depression. Keeping people at a distance may have reduced the number of demands you had to manage. Expecting the worst may have felt safer than allowing yourself to hope. Saying no to everything may have protected the little energy you had. Criticising yourself first may even have felt like a way of protecting yourself from somebody else's judgement.

Those responses can make sense in context. The difficulty comes when circumstances begin to change but the protection remains switched on. You may have more capacity now but still automatically assume you cannot cope. Someone may offer genuine care and you find yourself mistrusting it. An opportunity may appear and the first voice you hear says, 'Don't even try.' A coping response that once reduced danger can gradually become a wall between you and the life you want to rebuild.

Letting go does not mean shaming the version of you that needed those protections. I think it is much kinder to ask, 'What was this trying to do for me?' before asking whether you still need it. A piece can have served a purpose and still no longer fit.

The pieces that once protected you

Self-doubt can protect against disappointment: if you never expect yourself to succeed, failure cannot surprise you. Withdrawal can protect against rejection. Perfectionism can create the illusion that criticism can be prevented if you get everything right. People-pleasing can reduce conflict. Emotional numbness can make unbearable feelings quieter. Constant comparison can be an attempt to work out whether you are doing life correctly.

Understanding the function of a pattern does not mean you have to keep it. It simply changes the conversation from 'What is wrong with me?' to 'What happened that made this useful?' From there you can begin deciding whether the protection still matches the life you are living now.

When an old piece becomes too small

Sometimes growth feels uncomfortable precisely because an old identity no longer fits. You may have been 'the strong one', 'the easy one', 'the person who never needs anything', or the person who always keeps everybody else happy. Depression and recovery can expose how expensive those roles have been. Letting one go can feel selfish or frightening even when continuing it is exhausting.

There can also be guilt when you change. People around you may be accustomed to the older version of you. New boundaries, different priorities or a slower pace can affect relationships. Their discomfort does not automatically mean your change is wrong. Equally, growth is not about rejecting everybody from your past. It is about becoming more able to notice what is healthy for you now.

A compassionate reframe: 'This helped me survive then. I can thank it for what it did without asking it to run my life now.'

A personal reflection

I do not think we need to hate our old coping strategies in order to change them. Sometimes the parts we dislike most were working incredibly hard to keep us safe with the tools available at the time. If we attack them, we can end up attacking ourselves. I would rather become curious about them. What were they protecting? What were they afraid would happen? What might help them loosen their grip now?

Letting go is rarely one dramatic decision. You may set a boundary and then feel guilty. Trust somebody and then want to pull away. Make a confident decision and spend the evening doubting it. That does not mean the old pattern has won. New ways of being need repetition before they begin to feel familiar.

Exercise: Does This Piece Still Fit?

Choose one pattern, belief or role that you are beginning to question. You do not need to choose the hardest one.

The piece I am noticing	What did it once protect me from?
What does it cost me now?	What could I try instead?

Try an experiment rather than a permanent change. If the old piece says 'never ask for help', ask for one small thing. If it says 'I must say yes', delay your answer. If it says 'I will fail', try something where the outcome does not define you. You are gathering evidence that another response is possible.

Making room rather than creating emptiness

Letting go can feel like losing something, even when that something was painful. Familiarity has its own kind of safety. It can help to think about what you want to place in the space the old piece occupied. If you loosen self-criticism, perhaps you practise a more neutral inner voice. If you reduce people-pleasing, perhaps you strengthen honest communication. If you stop comparing yourself constantly, perhaps you begin noticing your own values and pace.

The aim is not to become fearless, endlessly confident or completely free from old habits. It is to have more choice. A pattern can still appear without automatically becoming the instruction you follow.

Books chosen for this piece

Jeffrey Young & Janet Klosko - *Reinventing Your Life*

This book explores long-standing patterns or 'life traps' that can keep repeating even when they no longer serve us. I have chosen it because this resource is about recognising the difference between a familiar pattern and a necessary one. Some of the language is more structured and psychological than other books in this series, but it can help readers identify recurring beliefs and responses.

Tara Brach - *Radical Acceptance*

Brach's work combines psychological ideas with mindfulness and compassion. Its relevance here is the possibility of changing without first rejecting yourself. If an old coping strategy developed through fear or pain, acceptance can create enough space to understand it before deciding what you want to do differently. The meditation-based approach will suit some readers more than others.

Nedra Glover Tawwab - *Set Boundaries, Find Peace*

This is a practical book about recognising needs, communicating limits and understanding why boundaries can bring guilt or anxiety. I have chosen it because one of the pieces people may need to reconsider after depression is the role of always accommodating everybody else. It offers concrete language for readers who understand the idea of boundaries but struggle to put them into practice.

You do not have to throw pieces away

The title says letting go, but that does not have to mean rejecting or erasing parts of yourself. Sometimes letting go means placing something down more often. Sometimes it means noticing an old thought and not obeying it. Sometimes it means thanking a survival response and choosing something different today. Change can be gradual enough that you barely notice it until one day the old piece simply does not feel as powerful.

When you need more support

Some patterns are connected to trauma, long-term depression, difficult relationships or experiences that are hard to explore alone. A therapist, counsellor or other appropriate mental-health professional can help you work with these safely. If depression is worsening or you feel unable to keep yourself safe, 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

You do not have to tear pieces of yourself away to grow. Some of the things you are ready to change may once have protected you when you had very little else available. Be gentle with that version of you. Thank the piece if you need to, understand why it was there, and then ask whether it still belongs in the life you are building. Letting go can be an act of care too - making a little more room for light, choice and the person you are becoming.