

Finding Myself Again

Rebuilding my identity after depression

When you have spent a long time simply getting through the day, finding yourself again can feel surprisingly unfamiliar. You may have imagined that feeling better would mean waking up one morning and recognising the old you. Instead, you might have a little more energy but no idea what you want to do with it. You may begin noticing how much has changed - relationships, confidence, routines, priorities, tolerance, hopes and even the way you think about yourself.

This stage can be confusing because other people may be waiting for you to 'get back to normal'. They may be relieved when you laugh, go out, return to work or seem more like yourself. Their relief can be understandable, but it can also create pressure. A good day can suddenly feel like a promise you are expected to keep. If tomorrow is difficult again, you may worry that you have disappointed everyone or somehow failed at recovery.

You do not owe anybody a performance of wellness. Recovery can be uneven. Energy may return before confidence. Interest may return before concentration. You may want connection but still become exhausted by company. You might feel hopeful in the morning and frightened by evening. None of those contradictions mean the progress was false.

Not going backwards - meeting yourself now

There are parts of your old self you may desperately want back, and there is nothing wrong with that. But there may also be parts of your old life that were exhausting you long before depression became visible. Perhaps you always said yes. Perhaps you measured your worth through productivity. Perhaps you hid your needs, tolerated relationships that hurt, or kept going because stopping felt impossible. Finding yourself again can include asking whether every old piece really needs to return.

Sometimes the question changes from 'How do I get back?' to 'What do I want to carry forward?' That is a gentler question. It gives you permission to keep your humour, kindness, creativity, ambition or independence while also developing boundaries, rest, self-understanding or a different pace.

Learning your own preferences again

Depression can reduce life to necessity: what must be done, what cannot be avoided, what other people need. Your own preferences can become very quiet. Reconnecting may begin with ordinary questions. Do I actually want company today? What music do I want? Which clothes feel like me? What pace feels manageable? What do I miss because I loved it, and what do I miss simply because it represented the person I thought I should be?

Hold onto this: Finding yourself again is not about proving that depression has gone. It is about becoming curious about the person who is here now.

A personal reflection

I think we sometimes imagine recovery as somebody walking out of darkness and straight back into their old life. But when we have been through something that has changed us, why would we expect to emerge completely untouched? There can be sadness in that, but there can also be freedom. We can look at what we carried before and decide what still belongs.

Small signs of yourself returning are easy to miss. You laugh before remembering you have been depressed. You become irritated about something because you care again. You choose one thing over another. You notice a song. You want to rearrange a room. You disagree with somebody. You imagine something happening next month. These moments may not look like recovery from the outside, but sometimes they are fragments of identity becoming reachable again.

Exercise: What Do I Carry Forward?

Do not complete this as a test. Sit with each box and notice what comes. You may find that some answers change over time.

Something from the old me I still value	Something depression made me notice
Something I am ready to leave behind	Something new I want to explore

One experiment, not one commitment: Choose something from the final box and try the smallest version of it. You are gathering information about yourself, not signing a contract with your future.

When confidence has not caught up yet

You may know intellectually that you are capable and still feel frightened of making decisions. Depression can shrink confidence because you have spent so long doubting your energy, memory, motivation or judgement. Start with choices that are safe to change. Choose where to sit, what to listen to, what to decline, what to wear, or how you want to spend ten minutes. Each preference you notice is information about you.

And when you make a choice you do not like, that is information too. You have not failed. You have discovered something. Identity is not a finished picture you have to uncover; it is also something you continue to shape.

Books chosen for Finding Myself Again

Edith Eger - *The Choice*

Eger's memoir and psychological reflections explore survival, freedom and the choices we can make in relation to what has happened to us. I have chosen it here because Finding Myself Again is not about pretending painful experiences did not happen. It is about recognising that an experience can become part of your story without being allowed to write every page that follows. Some material is emotionally intense, so read at your own pace.

Julia Samuel - *This Too Shall Pass*

Samuel writes about change and the transitions that can unsettle identity, drawing on therapeutic experience and individual stories. It fits this piece because recovering from depression can itself be a transition: the old life may not fit perfectly, while the new one has not yet taken shape. The book can help normalise the uncertainty that accompanies change rather than treating uncertainty as failure.

James Hollis - *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life*

This is a more reflective, psychologically oriented book about identity, meaning and the assumptions we inherit about who we are supposed to be. I have chosen it for readers who want to go deeper than symptom management and ask what kind of life now feels meaningful. It will not suit everyone, and it does not need to: this is the more contemplative option in this particular reading section.

You do not have to reinvent yourself

Finding yourself again does not require a dramatic new life, new career, new relationship or new personality. It can be quieter than that. It may mean knowing your limits sooner, recognising when you need rest, returning to something you loved, saying no without explaining yourself, or feeling a little more present in your own decisions.

When you need more support

If depression remains persistent, is worsening or continues to significantly affect everyday life, consider speaking with a GP or mental-health professional. 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

You do not have to find the old you waiting somewhere at the end of recovery. Take the pieces you still love. Be curious about the pieces that have changed. Leave some of the things that became too heavy. There is no deadline for knowing exactly who you are now. Sometimes finding yourself begins with something much smaller: noticing what feels like you today and allowing yourself to follow it towards a little more light.