

Reconnecting With the Real Me

Rediscovering what matters, what feels right and what brings you back to life

Depression can make you spend so long managing symptoms, responsibilities and other people's expectations that your own voice becomes difficult to hear. You may know what you should do, what somebody else wants, what will avoid conflict or what will make you look as though you are coping - but when somebody asks what *you* want, the answer can feel strangely inaccessible.

That does not mean there is no real you underneath. Sometimes your preferences have simply been crowded out by survival. When energy is low, choices become about what is possible. When confidence is low, it can feel safer to let somebody else decide. When you are worried about disappointing people, you may become so practised at adapting that you stop noticing where adaptation ends and you begin.

Reconnection is not about discovering one perfect, fixed identity. We change throughout life. The aim is to become more able to recognise your own signals again: what feels comfortable, what drains you, what gives you energy, what matters enough to protect, what you enjoy without needing to justify it and what you no longer want simply because other people expect it.

When you have been wearing a mask

Masking can mean many things. It can be smiling when you want to withdraw, agreeing when you want to say no, appearing calm while your body is overwhelmed, or presenting the version of yourself you believe will be easiest for other people to accept. Some masking is conscious and some becomes so automatic that you may not realise you are doing it until you are alone and exhausted.

Depression can intensify this because you may already feel like a burden. You might hide the depth of your struggle, minimise what you need or perform being better before you actually feel better. Over time, it can become difficult to distinguish between genuine recovery and becoming more skilled at looking okay.

What feels like me?

The answer may begin with very ordinary things. The music you choose when nobody else is listening. The clothes you reach for when you are not dressing for approval. Whether you prefer quiet or conversation. The subjects that make you curious. The people around whom your shoulders drop. The moments when you notice you are not monitoring yourself.

These are not trivial details. They are information. Reconnecting with yourself often happens through hundreds of small moments in which you notice a preference and allow it to matter.

A gentle question: When do I feel least like I am performing, and what is different about those moments?

A personal reflection

I think there can be a lot of pressure in the phrase 'be yourself'. It sounds simple, but if you have spent years adapting, pleasing, protecting, masking or surviving, you may genuinely not know what being yourself is supposed to feel like. I would not rush that discovery. You do not need a dramatic answer. Start with what feels a little more comfortable, a little more honest, a little less forced.

The real you is not only the confident, happy or productive version. You are also you when you are uncertain, tired, quiet or changing your mind. Reconnection is not about creating a more acceptable version of yourself. It is about developing enough safety to notice yourself without immediately correcting what you find.

Exercise: When Do I Feel Most Like Me?

Use these spaces as observations rather than answers you have to get right. Think about recent moments, however small.

I feel more like myself when...	I feel I am performing when...
Something I genuinely enjoy	Something I do mostly from expectation

Try one small act of authenticity: choose something low-risk and let your preference count. Pick the film. Say you would rather stay home. Wear what feels comfortable. Ask for quiet. Choose the meal. Say 'I don't know yet' instead of producing an answer for somebody else. Notice what happens inside you.

Reconnecting with values, not just activities

Sometimes an old activity no longer fits, but the value underneath it still does. You may not want the social life you once had, but connection still matters. You may not want the same career, but contribution matters. You may not want to return to an old hobby, but creativity matters. Values can give you continuity without forcing you back into an old version of your life.

Try asking: what did this activity give me? Freedom? Belonging? Challenge? Calm? Expression? Learning? If you can identify the need underneath, there may be many new ways to meet it.

Books chosen for this piece

Brené Brown - *The Gifts of Imperfection*

I have chosen this book here because it explores authenticity, vulnerability and the pressure to live according to expectations. For somebody who has become accustomed to presenting the version of themselves that feels most acceptable, its questions about belonging and self-acceptance can be useful. It is reflective rather than a depression treatment manual, so take the ideas that resonate and leave those that do not.

Glennon Doyle - *Untamed*

This is a personal, strongly voiced book about questioning expectations and listening more closely to your own inner responses. I have included it because Reconnecting With the Real Me is partly about noticing where your life is being shaped by automatic compliance. Doyle's style is distinctive and will not suit everybody, but it can provoke useful questions about whose rules you are following.

Rick Hanson - *Resilient*

Hanson combines psychological ideas with practical exercises aimed at strengthening inner resources. I have chosen it because reconnecting with yourself is easier when you have some sense of internal steadiness rather than relying entirely on other people's approval. Readers who prefer practical exercises may find this the most accessible of the three.

There is no final version of you

You are allowed to continue changing. Reconnection is not a project with a finishing point where you finally become your 'real self'. You can discover a preference today and change it later. You can become more confident and still need reassurance. You can value connection and also need solitude. Being real does not require being completely consistent.

When support may help

If depression remains persistent, is worsening or continues to significantly affect everyday life, consider speaking with a GP or mental-health professional. Therapy can also provide a useful space for exploring identity, masking, boundaries and patterns that feel difficult to understand alone. 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 know exactly who the 'real you' is before you begin. Start by noticing where you feel less guarded. Notice what makes your body soften, what interests you, what you miss, what you no longer want to pretend to enjoy and who allows you to be quiet without asking you to perform. There is still so much of you to explore. Reconnection can happen one honest little choice at a time.