

A Letter to You

When You Feel Like Giving Up

Dear you,

If you have opened this because you feel like giving up, I want to meet you where you actually are rather than rush you towards where somebody thinks you should be. You may be exhausted. You may have reached the point where one more demand, one more disappointment, one more decision or one more person telling you to “keep going” feels almost unbearable. Sometimes giving up is not about wanting life to end. Sometimes it is about desperately wanting the pressure, the responsibility, the pain, the pretending or the constant effort to stop.

When you have been carrying too much for too long, your world can become very small. Tomorrow feels too far away. Problems that might once have felt manageable begin to join together until they look like one enormous wall. You may stop being able to see choices because your mind is using everything it has simply to get you through the moment. That is why I am not going to ask you to solve your life while you are reading this letter. You do not have to work everything out tonight. You do not need a plan for the next year, month or even week.

For now, make the distance smaller. What do you need to get through the next ten minutes? Perhaps you need to sit down. Perhaps you need quiet. Perhaps you need to cry without explaining why. Perhaps you need somebody beside you, a drink, something familiar to eat, a blanket, fresh air, a shower, your medication, your dog, music, silence, or simply permission to stop performing for everybody else. When we are overwhelmed, basic needs can begin to look insignificant. They are not insignificant. They are the ground underneath us.

There is a difference between giving up on something and giving up on yourself. Sometimes stopping is exactly what is needed. You are allowed to leave a situation that is harming you. You are allowed to change direction. You are allowed to decide that a goal no longer fits. You are allowed to rest from something that has consumed you. You are allowed to say, “I cannot carry this in the same way anymore.” None of those things automatically mean you have failed. Sometimes the bravest decision is not to push harder but to recognise that the way you have been surviving cannot continue unchanged.

You may have become very good at looking as though you are coping. Other people may see you working, answering messages, looking after people, turning up, making jokes, remembering birthdays or doing the school run and assume that you are fine.

They cannot always see the cost. They may not see the recovery time after a conversation, the tears behind a closed door, the thoughts racing at three in the morning, the sensory overload, the dread before work, the fear about money, the loneliness, or the effort it takes simply to appear ordinary.

Please do not use the fact that you have managed until now as evidence that you should be able to manage indefinitely. Human beings have limits. Reaching yours is information. It may be telling you that something needs to reduce, something needs to change, somebody else needs to help, or that you need support that goes beyond what friends and family can provide. You do not have to earn support by becoming completely unable to function first.

And if you are angry with yourself for being here again, please remember that recovery and coping are rarely straight lines. A difficult day does not erase every better day that came before it. Returning to an old feeling does not mean you have returned to the beginning. You arrive here with everything you have learned since the last time. You know more about yourself now, even if you cannot feel that knowledge clearly while you are overwhelmed.

There are times when hope is too big a word. I understand that. So do not force hope. Look instead for something smaller: curiosity. What if tomorrow feels five per cent different? What if there is one conversation you have not had yet? What if one piece of the problem can change even when the whole problem cannot? What if the version of the future your exhausted mind is showing you is not the only version available? You do not have to believe that everything will be wonderful. You only need to leave a little room for the possibility that this moment is not permanent.

If your mind is telling you that everybody would be better without you, that you are a burden, or that there is no way through, please do not sit alone with those thoughts. Tell somebody plainly that you are not okay. You do not have to make it sound neat or reasonable. If you feel you may act on thoughts of harming yourself or you cannot keep yourself safe, seek urgent help now: in the UK you can call 999 or go to A&E; you can also contact Samaritans on 116 123. Reaching for immediate help is not making a fuss. It is responding to an emergency with the seriousness it deserves.

For the moments that are not an immediate emergency but still feel impossibly heavy, let somebody share the weight. You might say, "I don't need you to fix this. I need you to stay with me." You might ask someone to make the phone call with you, sit in the waiting room, help with the children, cancel an appointment, make some food, or simply listen. Support does not have to be dramatic to make a difference. Sometimes another person's calm presence gives our nervous system enough space to begin settling.

I also want to remind you that exhaustion tells convincing stories. It can tell you that nothing has ever changed, nobody cares, you always get it wrong, and there is no point trying. Exhaustion speaks in absolutes. Life usually does not. There have been moments you did not think you would get through, and yet somehow time moved. Circumstances changed. You changed. Somebody appeared. An answer arrived. You adapted. That does not minimise what you are experiencing now. It simply means that today's certainty about tomorrow deserves to be questioned.

You are not required to be inspirational while you are hurting. You do not need to turn pain into a lesson. You do not need to find gratitude in the middle of distress. You can simply acknowledge: this is hard, I am tired, and I need care. That is enough truth for today.

Perhaps the thing you need to give up is not yourself. Perhaps it is the expectation that you must manage everything alone. Perhaps it is the belief that rest has to be earned. Perhaps it is the role you have been playing for everybody else. Perhaps it is perfection. Perhaps it is pretending. Perhaps it is the timetable you thought your life had to follow. Perhaps it is somebody else's definition of success.

Stay with yourself a little longer. Make no permanent decision from the middle of an unbearable hour. Let the hour pass. Then let the next one pass. Reduce the day to pieces small enough to hold. There is no shame in surviving before you start rebuilding.

And when you have a little more space, ask yourself gently: what is making life feel impossible right now, and what would make it even slightly more possible? That question is different from asking what is wrong with you. It moves the attention from blame towards need. Your needs matter, even when they are inconvenient. Your limits matter, even when other people do not understand them.

If all you can do today is remain here, then remain. Let that be enough. Tomorrow can ask something different of you when it arrives.

With warmth,

Maggie

Space to Breathe Therapy