

Inside Repeat After Me by Claudia Black

Table of Contents

A Note from the Author.....	I
Acknowledgments.....	III
Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER 1 - THE PAST REMEMBERED.....	9
Family Tree.....	11
My House.....	14
Safe Places	16
Talking.....	16
Not Talking.....	17
Denial.....	20
Picture of the Unspoken.....	24
CHAPTER 2 - FEELINGS: OLD ENEMIES & NEW FRIENDS.....	27
Losing Control	29
A Picture of Control.....	32
Awareness of Feelings	34
Feelings.....	36
Sadness.....	38
Past Sadness.....	38
Expressing Sadness with Tears.....	40
Picture of Sadness.....	42
Sadness Today	42
Past Anger.....	43
Potential Anger	44
Expressing Anger.....	46
Picture of Anger.....	47
Anger Today	48
Fear	49
Expressing Fear.....	51
Picture of Fear.....	52
Fear Today	52
Guilt	53
Childhood Guilt	53
False Guilt.....	56
Saying No to False Guilt.....	56
Adult Guilt	58
Distinguishing True and False Guilt.....	59
Picture of Guilt.....	60
Guilt Today	60
Positive Feelings.....	61
Expressing Positive Feelings	63
Picture of Happiness	64

Happiness Today.....	64
Defenses as a Mask.....	65
Saying Good-Bye to a Defense.....	66
Identifying Feelings	67
CHAPTER 3 - SELF-ESTEEM: FROM EXTERNAL RAGS TO INTERNAL RICHES	71
Self-Esteem of Family	73
Self Image	74
Accepting Compliments.....	75
Liking Yourself.....	76
Just Say Thanks.....	77
Criticism.....	77
Criticizing Others.....	78
Stilted Success	81
Great Expectations	83
Enjoying Successes.....	85
Feminine/Masculine.....	86
Being Feminine.....	86
Being Masculine	88
Roles	91
The Responsible Child.....	91
The Placating Child.....	92
The Adjusting Child.....	93
The Acting-Out Child	94
Adult Roles	95
Present Day Self-Esteem.....	97
Time Line of Accomplishment.....	98
Taking Risks	99
CHAPTER 4 - CREATING A STRONGER SENSE OF SELF	103
Needing People	105
Pets.....	110
“Needs” Letter	111
I Have Needs.....	112
Boundaries	114
“No” and “Yes”	115
“No”	116
“Yes”	118
Practicing “No” and “Yes”	123
Inappropriate Behavior	126
Intrusive Behavior.....	127
Touch	131
Picture of Touch.....	133
Touching People	134
Apologies	136
Perpetual Apologies.....	137

Difficulty Apologizing.....	140
Apology Letter.....	143
All-or-Nothing Perspective.....	145
Compulsive Behavior.....	148
Food.....	149
Eating Habits.....	149
Money.....	152
Money Today.....	154
Work.....	156
Physical Self-Care.....	158
Chemical Dependency.....	160
CHAPTER 5 - RITUALS & SPIRITUAL INFLUENCES.....	161
Rituals.....	163
Holidays.....	163
Christmas (Past).....	166
Christmas (Present).....	168
Birthdays.....	170
Gift Giving and Receiving.....	173
Bedtime.....	174
Dinner.....	176
Dinnertime Picture.....	177
Religion.....	180
Early Religious Influence.....	181
Religion Today.....	183
The Magic Shop.....	185
IN CLOSING.....	186

Note from the Author

The mid 1980's, when *Repeat After Me* was first published, was a time when adult children of alcoholic families were coming out of the closet by the thousands. Until that time these were adults who were silently making their way through adulthood not understanding why they were so unsatisfied and unhappy when "everything seemed okay," or why some one thing, person or place "was never enough." For many there was a chronic gnawing sense that something was missing. For others, it was more blatant. It was the depression, rage, addiction and compulsivities. This great number of people happily took on the identity of being an ACA or ACOA (Adult Child of Alcoholic). They were grateful to have a framework in which to understand and conceptualize their experience. They had been given a language in which to voice their experiences. Yet what was true for this particular population could be generalized to people from other types of troubled families. They were from homes where there were abuses, other addictions, compulsive behaviors or mental illness -- homes that for whatever the reasons were characterized by loss and shame. *Repeat After Me* was written in the spirit of offering all who were raised in troubled families a process of self-exploration, insight and healing that would lead to a positive change in their lives.

As adults began that process of asking how their childhood was influencing their present day life, the intent was never one of blame but of insight and understanding. It has been my contention that we repeat the life scripts of our family as a result of internalized beliefs and behaviors that were either modeled for us or were a part of our survivorship. We cannot put a painful past history behind us without first owning it. It is not enough to say I came from an alcoholic family or an abusive family. We must go beyond that acknowledgment to see how our internalized beliefs and behaviors have shaped us to be who you are today. With that in mind *Repeat After Me* was written.

Repeat After Me is not a book that explains how problems come to be as much as it is a book that takes you through a process of letting go of hurtful beliefs and behaviors. While insight is often the precursor to change, insight alone is not enough for most people to create change. People need to believe they deserve positive change and they need to develop skills that make change occur. While many of the changes in this second edition of *Repeat After Me* are subtle, it is written to support the reader's belief in their personal worth and assist them in identifying and focusing on skills.

Adults who were raised in troubled families need to walk through a four step process for their healing to occur. They need to:

1. **Explore their past**, for the purpose of owning it; to undo their denial process so they no longer continue to use the skill of denial so readily in their present day life. Exploring the past means owning the losses and grieving the pain associated with past history. The purpose in this is it facilitates putting the past behind us.

2. **Connect the past history to present day life.** You connect the past to the present by asking questions like "How does the past influence my life today?" "How does it influence me as a parent?" "How does it influence me in relationships?" "How does it influence me in my work, etc.?" Then those questions become more specific. They may be "How does the fact it was never safe for me to show anger influence me today as a parent?" "How does the fact it was never safe for me to make decisions influence my decision making in the workplace?" "How does the fact I was constantly criticized impact how I feel about myself as an adult?"

3. **Identify and challenge the internalized beliefs from your growing up years.** Ascertain which beliefs you believe to be useful and would like to maintain and those that are hurtful that you need to let go. In recognizing the ones you need to let go of, you also then need to create more constructive beliefs in their place. For example, you might toss out "No one wants to listen to what I have to say," and replace it with "My thoughts and opinions are important and of value."

4. **Learn skills.** So often the skills you need to learn are basic skills, such as learning to listen, to recognize options, to negotiate, to identify and express feelings, to set healthy limits. It is in this step you create positive change.

The knowledge that comes in owning our past and connecting it to the present is vital to developing empathy for the strength of both our defenses and skills. It also helps us to lessen our shame and not hold ourselves accountable for the pain we have carried. When we understand there are reasons for why we have lived our life as we have, and that it is not because there is

something inherently wrong with who we are or that we are not bad, that understanding fuels our ongoing healing. The change we want to create in our life is made most directly as a result of letting go of old, hurtful belief systems and learning new skills. It is my hope *Repeat After Me* guides you in this process.

This book was written with the spirit that one could explore some issues on their own. It would be my hope, however, that you have someone in your life you would share what it is you are learning about yourself. Healing cannot be done in isolation. Today, with fewer therapy resources available and limited funds available, *Repeat After Me* is an even more valuable tool. Doing these exercises outside of therapy and taking information about what you are learning about yourself into a session is a way in which to maximize therapy time.

At this time I have written six books, most notably *It Will Never Happen To Me*. I consider *Repeat After Me* to be as strong of a book from the potential within it, as my other books. What separates it from the other books is that rather than to be a bystander in your own life, *Repeat After Me* asks you to be the main participant.

Claudia Black

Excerpts

BOUNDARIES

Being raised in a troubled family, our boundaries as children were often not respected or even recognized. We may have lived with rigid, walled boundaries, offering no opportunity for any emotional or spiritual connection. Unhealthy boundaries create confusion about who is responsible for what, adding more distortion about guilt and shame. As a consequence of living in a family where boundaries are unhealthy, we are either not skilled in setting boundaries or are disrespectful and intrusive of others' boundaries.

A boundary is a limit or edge that defines you as separate from others -- a separate human being -- not someone else's possession. For each of us, our skin marks the limit of our physical self. We have other boundaries as well. We have emotional, spiritual, sexual, relationship and intellectual boundaries. Emotional boundaries define ourselves, our ideas, feelings and values. We set emotional boundaries by choosing how we let people treat us. Our spiritual development comes from our inner self. Only we know the spiritual path for ourselves. We have sexual boundaries, limits on what is safe and appropriate sexual behavior. We have choices about who we interact with sexually and the extent of that interaction. We have relationship boundaries. The roles we play define the limits of appropriate interaction with others. Our intellectual boundaries offer us the opportunity to enjoy learning and teaching. They allow us to be curious and inspired.

EXERCISE 67

Circle the words that best describe boundaries in the family in which you were raised:

- ⇒ No boundaries
- ⇒ Damaged boundaries
- ⇒ Walled boundaries -- walls of Anger, Fear, Silence, Words
- ⇒ Healthy boundaries

Describe the unhealthy boundaries you witnessed or experienced:

Describe healthy boundaries you witnessed or experienced:

“NO” AND “YES”

To be able to have healthy boundaries it is important to be able to say no and yes freely.

EXERCISE 68

Without the ability to say no, you will not be able to establish appropriate limits or boundaries. The inability to say no results in being overextended, feeling victimized and used. More importantly, saying no is a vital part of assuring that your needs are met. If you cannot say no, you’ll never know if you’re saying yes freely.

Complete the following about what happens when you say no:

Examples may be “When I say no, I am afraid that people won’t like me.” “When I say no, I sound like my mother.”

When I say no, I _____

When I say no, I _____

When I say no, I _____

Summarize what beliefs interfere with your ability to say no:

“NO”

EXERCISE 69

How did your mom say no? Did she scream, “No! You can’t!”? Or did she say yes, and then sabotage the situation so it became a “no”? Did she ever say no? Was she fair?

Write about hearing no from your mom:

Note helpful “no’s” you heard:

Note hurtful “no’s”:

EXERCISE 70

How did your dad say no? Did he scream, “No! You can’t!”? Or did he say yes and then sabotage the situation so it became a “no”? Did he ever say no? Was he fair?

Write about hearing no from your dad:

Note helpful “no’s” you heard:

Note hurtful “no’s”:

EXERCISE 71

What were other “no’s” you’ve heard in your young life, e.g. when your application to a particular school was turned down, you heard no from a prospective date or when you received a “no” when you tried out for a team but didn’t make it.

EXERCISE 72

Reflecting on all of this, how does it interfere with your life today? What beliefs are you hearing when others say no to you?

“YES”

EXERCISE 73

For people who have difficulty saying no examining what the word “yes” means is helpful as yes and no are part of the same continuum.

Some people have little or no difficulty saying no while yes causes much internal conflict. To assist you toward greater insight, complete the following sentences:

When I say yes, I

When I say yes, I

When I say yes, I

Summarize what beliefs interfere with your ability to say yes:

PRACTICING “NO” AND “YES”

Now that you have an understanding of what the words “no” and “yes” mean to you, you may discover that you’d like to be able to use either word more frequently and feel good about it. Practice saying “no” or “yes” in front of a mirror. Say it louder. Louder. Louder. For people not used to using the words, it’s important to practice saying them in order that when needed, the appropriate word comes “sliding” out. Don’t just practice it prior to knowing that you want to use it. Practice it now so that you’ll have the option to use it at any time.

View these words as a part of you, just as feelings are a part of you. They’re to be your friend, not your foe.

EXERCISE 77

If no is difficult for you to say, complete the following sentences:

It is okay to say no. When I say no I will feel better about myself because

It is okay to say no. When I say no I will feel better about myself because

It is okay to say no. When I say no I will feel better about myself because

Only after you have come to an understanding of what no has meant in your life, become comfortable with verbalizing the word, and believe in the value of the word “no,” will you begin to apply the words “yes” and “no” appropriately.

EXERCISE 78

List four situations in which you would like to say no, e.g. when you are asked to go to a restaurant you aren't fond of; when you are asked to work during your lunch time.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____

Prioritize these situations in order of difficulty: #1 being the easiest to do, #4 being the most difficult for you to do. Do this on a weekly basis, and begin saying no to the less difficult situations.

EXERCISE 79

If yes is difficult for you to say, complete the following sentences:

It is okay to say yes. When I say yes I will feel better about myself because

It is okay to say yes. When I say yes I will feel better about myself because

It is okay to say yes. When I say yes I will feel better about myself because

EXERCISE 80

List four situations in which you would like to say yes, e.g. when you are asked to go to a party; or when you are asked to join a group.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____

Prioritize these situations in order of difficulty: #1 being the easiest to do, #4 being the most difficult for you to do. Do this on a weekly basis, and begin saying yes to the less difficult situations.