

Opposite Experiments

A Guide for Gently Testing Old Trauma Rules

How This Helps You Heal

Trauma often teaches rules that once kept you safe — like don't rest, don't ask for help, or don't make mistakes. Those rules protected you once, but they may now keep your life smaller or more stressful.

This worksheet helps you gently test whether those rules are still needed through small, safe opposite experiments. Each tiny step gives your system new evidence: that safety, rest, and permission might be possible now.

You're not breaking rules — you're gathering proof that the world isn't as dangerous as it used to be.

Common Trauma Rules

Circle or highlight any that feel familiar, or write your own below. Then choose one rule to gently test first — something small, not overwhelming or unsafe.

- Don't rest until everything is done.
- Don't make mistakes.
- Don't ask for help.
- Don't show anger.
- Don't say no
- Don't relax around others
- Don't trust anyone.
- Don't need anything
- Don't share feelings
- Don't stand out
- Don't take up space
- Don't let people see you struggle
- Don't speak up for yourself
- Don't rely on anyone
- Don't rest before others are okay

Other rules my system learned:

Design Your Gentle Opposite Experiment - Example

What does your rule say you must or must not do?

Don't rest until everything is done.

How did it protect you? What danger or reaction did this rule help you avoid?

Being scolded or rejected.

What does this rule cost you now? How does following this rule affect your life today?

I'm exhausted and resentful.

What's a very small, safe version of doing the opposite?

Pause halfway through chores for 5 minutes.

How will you let protective parts know this is safe enough to try?

Remind them this is short and reversible.

Design Your Gentle Opposite Experiment

What does your rule say you must or must not do?

How did it protect you? What danger or reaction did this rule help you avoid?

What does this rule cost you now? How does following this rule affect your life today?

What's a very small, safe version of doing the opposite?

How will you let protective parts know this is safe enough to try?

Track the Results

Each experiment gives your system a chance to notice something new. You can repeat the same experiment or try different ones for the same rule over time.

Date:

What I tried:

What I expected:

What happened:

How my body felt:

What I learned:

Date:

What I tried:

What I expected:

What happened:

How my body felt:

What I learned:

Gentle Reminders

Each small test gives your nervous system proof that safety can exist now.

If your system didn't feel safe yet, that's okay — you can try again later, with more support or a smaller step.

Healing happens through repetition, curiosity, and gentleness.

Ideas for Gentle Opposite Experiments

1. Don't rest until everything is done.

- Pause halfway through a task and rest for 5 minutes.
- Sit down and breathe before cleaning up after dinner.
- Leave one small item unfinished overnight and notice what happens.

2. Don't make mistakes.

- Intentionally leave a small typo in a casual message.
- Try a new recipe or craft without researching it first.
- Tell someone, "I might get this wrong, but I want to try."

3. Don't ask for help.

- Ask someone for a small, low-stakes favor (e.g., "Can you hand me that?").
- Let a friend carry part of the grocery bag load.
- Ask for clarification instead of pretending to understand.

4. Don't show anger.

- Acknowledge irritation privately: "I notice I'm frustrated."
- Scribble or tear scrap paper when tension builds.
- Tell a trusted person, "That upset me," without explaining it away.

5. Don't say no.

- Decline one small request today ("Not tonight, maybe later").
- Pause before agreeing — even if you still say yes.
- Practice saying "No, thank you" to something neutral, like a sample at a store.

6. Don't relax around others.

- Uncross your arms or shoulders in a safe person's presence.
- Breathe slowly for 30 seconds while chatting with a friend.
- Let yourself smile or laugh without analyzing it.

7. Don't trust anyone.

- Notice one small thing a person does reliably and name it.
- Accept a kind gesture without returning it immediately.
- Let someone hold a door open for you.

8. Don't need anything.

- Identify one small need (water, warmth, quiet) and meet it right away.
- Tell yourself, "It's okay to need things."
- Ask for something minor — "Could we open a window?"

9. Don't share feelings.

- Write one feeling word in your journal.
- Share, "I've felt off today," without explaining why.
- Text a friend a small truth: "I'm tired," or "That meant a lot."

10. Don't stand out.

- Wear a color you like but usually avoid.
- Share one idea in a meeting or online space.
- Compliment someone sincerely, letting them notice you for a moment.

11. Don't take up space.

- Sit with your back supported and feet on the ground.
- Stretch your arms wide for 10 seconds.
- Speak at your normal volume instead of whispering.

12. Don't let people see you struggle.

- Admit, "I'm having a hard day" to someone safe.
- Leave one imperfect thing visible (a messy desk, a typo).
- Ask for emotional support without apologizing.

13. Don't speak up for yourself.

- Practice saying, "Actually, I'd prefer..." in a small situation.
- Send back an incorrect order politely.
- Express a mild preference with a trusted person.

14. Don't rely on anyone.

- Let someone else drive, cook, or decide for once.
- Accept help offered without minimizing it.
- Allow a friend to check in on you instead of doing all the checking in.

15. Don't rest before others are okay.

- Take five quiet minutes for yourself even if others are upset.
- Remind yourself, "They can have their feelings; I can still rest."
- Let someone else comfort another person while you stay seated.

You're Not Alone.

Healing isn't easy, and there are no shortcuts. But you've already made it through the hardest parts—and that strength is still with you. This resource was created to support you on your path. Take what helps. Leave what doesn't. Keep going.

◆ More Support Is Available

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that's gentle, grounded, and real.

Your voice matters.

If this resource was helpful, confusing, or brought something up for you — I'd love to know. I'm always working to make these tools more useful and more supportive. You can share feedback (even anonymously) here:

<https://www.communiDID/feedback>

☀️ This document is more heartfelt than fancy—made to support you, not impress anyone.

