

When I Feel Powerless: What Can I Still Control?

ASPIRE Impact Network Empowerment Resource

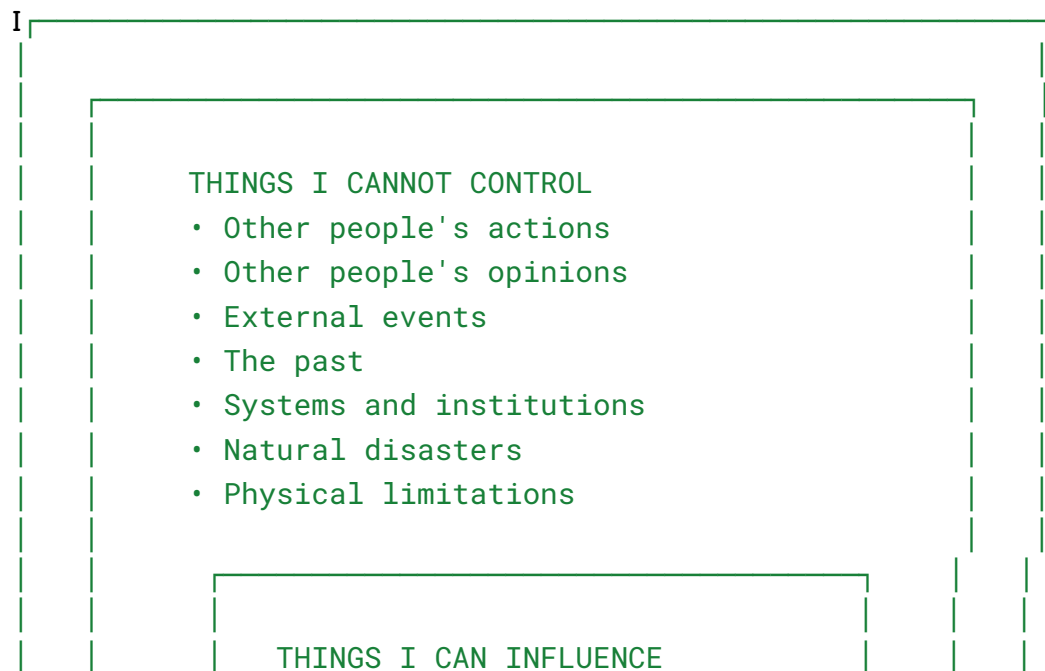
INTRODUCTION

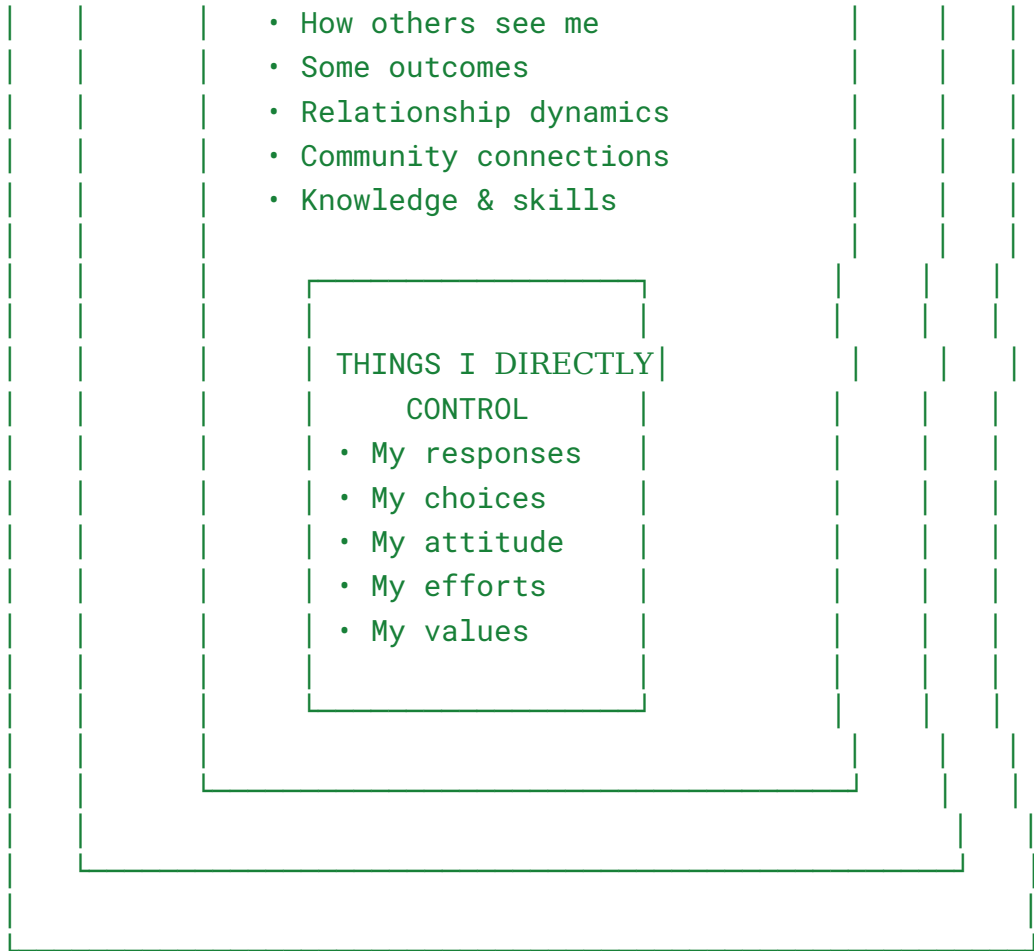
Feeling powerless is one of the most difficult emotional experiences we can face. Whether due to external circumstances, systems, relationships, or internal struggles, the sense that we have no control can lead to hopelessness, anxiety, and giving up. Yet even in the most challenging situations, there are always areas where we retain some degree of choice and influence.

This worksheet will help you identify what you can and cannot control, focus your energy on your areas of influence, and develop practical strategies for regaining a sense of personal power—even when facing difficult circumstances. By recognizing the choices that remain available to you, you can move from feeling helpless to taking meaningful action.

THE CIRCLES OF CONTROL

A helpful way to understand control is to visualize three concentric circles:





□**The key insight:** When we focus on what we cannot control, we feel powerless. When we focus on what we can control and influence, we regain our sense of agency and power.

MY CURRENT SITUATION

Instructions: Think about a situation where you currently feel powerless or lacking control.

The situation I'm facing:

How it makes me feel:

What I've tried so far:

SORTING WHAT I CAN AND CANNOT CONTROL

Instructions: For your current situation, sort different aspects into the appropriate categories.

Things I cannot control in this situation:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Things I might be able to influence:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Things I can directly control:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Reflection: What do you notice about this sorting exercise? Were there more things in your control than you initially thought?

ENERGY AUDIT

Instructions: Consider where your mental and emotional energy is currently going.

Where My Energy Goes	Percent of My Focus	Is This in My Control?
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Percentage of my energy focused on things I cannot control: _____%

Percentage of my energy focused on things I can influence: _____%

Percentage of my energy focused on things I directly control: _____%

Reflection: How might redirecting your energy affect how you feel about your situation?

DOMAINS OF CONTROL

Even in the most challenging circumstances, we retain control in several key domains. Examine each domain to identify areas where you can exercise choice:

1. Physical Domain

Things I can control about my physical self:

- How I care for my body
- What I eat and drink
- How much I move and exercise
- How much sleep I prioritize
- How I breathe (depth, pace)
- My posture and body language
- Physical boundaries I set
- Other: _____

2. Mental Domain

Things I can control about my thinking:

- What information I consume
- When I recognize unhelpful thoughts
- Whether I challenge negative beliefs
- How I talk to myself
- What I choose to focus on
- How I interpret situations
- What I learn and develop
- Other: _____

3. Emotional Domain

Things I can control about my emotions:

- How I identify my feelings
- How I express emotions
- What coping strategies I use
- When I seek support
- How I practice self-compassion
- What boundaries I set for emotional wellbeing
- Activities that influence my mood
- Other: _____

4. Behavioral Domain

Things I can control about my actions:

- How I respond to triggers
- Daily routines and habits
- How I communicate with others
- Small choices throughout my day
- How I spend my time
- Steps toward my goals
- When to take breaks
- Other: _____

5. Social Domain

Things I can control in relationships:

- Who I spend time with
- How I communicate my needs
- Boundaries I establish
- How I respond to others
- When I ask for help
- Who I trust with what information
- How I contribute to relationships
- Other: _____

6. Environmental Domain

Things I can control about my environment:

- How I organize my personal space
- What objects I keep around me
- Sensory aspects (light, sound, scent)
- Digital environment and notifications
- Where I spend my time when possible
- How I create moments of peace
- What I display in my space
- Other: _____

7. Spiritual/Values Domain

Things I can control about meaning and purpose:

- Values I choose to live by
- How I connect with something larger
- Practices that ground me
- What I find meaningful
- How I find purpose in difficulty
- What I'm grateful for
- How I create meaning
- Other: _____

Reflection: Which domain offers you the most potential for increasing your sense of control right now?

ACCEPTANCE PRACTICE

Accepting what we cannot control is essential for redirecting our energy toward what we can control.

Instructions: For one aspect of your situation that you cannot control, practice writing an acceptance statement.

What I cannot control:

My acceptance statement: "I acknowledge that I cannot control _____ . This is difficult because _____ . Instead of fighting this reality, I can focus on _____ ."

How accepting this might change my experience:

SMALL ACTIONS WITH BIG IMPACT

Instructions: Identify small, concrete actions within your control that could positively impact your situation.

Remember the criteria for effective actions:

- Specific and concrete
- Entirely within your control
- Can be done soon
- Requires minimal resources
- Connects to what matters to you

Action I Can Take	When I'll Do It	How This Helps
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The smallest step I can take today is:

EXPANDING MY INFLUENCE

The middle circle—what we can influence—often has more potential than we realize.

Instructions: Explore ways to potentially expand your circle of influence.

People who might be able to help:

Resources I haven't yet explored:

Information that might give me more options:

Skills I could develop that might help:

Connections I could make:

One step I'll take to expand my influence:

SHIFTING PERSPECTIVE

How we view our situation affects our sense of control and power.

Instructions: Explore different perspectives on your current challenge.

Current perspective:

Alternative perspective 1:

Alternative perspective 2:

How these different perspectives change my sense of control:

FINDING CONTROL IN PAST CHALLENGES

Instructions: Recall a previous difficult situation where you initially felt powerless but found ways to exercise control.

The situation:

What felt out of my control:

What I found I could control:

Actions I took that made a difference:

What this experience taught me:

RECOGNIZING PROGRESS AND POWER

Even small exercises of control deserve recognition.

Instructions: At the end of each day for one week, note one way you exercised control or choice in your challenging situation.

Day 1: _____

Day 2: _____

Day 3: _____

Day 4: _____

Day 5: _____

Day 6: _____

Day 7: _____

What I notice about my capacity for control after tracking for a week:

MY CONTROL ACTION PLAN

Instructions: Create a personal plan for focusing on what you can control in your current situation.

When I start feeling powerless, I will:

1. _____

2.

3.

Daily practices to maintain focus on what I can control:

How I'll remind myself of my areas of control:

What I'll say to myself when facing things I cannot control:

How I'll celebrate exercises of choice and control:

REMEMBER

- The goal isn't to control everything—it's to focus on what you can control
- Acceptance of what you cannot control isn't giving up—it's redirecting energy
- Even in the most difficult circumstances, some choices remain
- Small actions within your control can create momentum
- Your response to circumstances is always your choice
- Control exists on a spectrum—focus on influence where direct control isn't possible
- Your sense of control can grow with practice and awareness
