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# **Family Tree of Healing: A Journey** **Inspired by *After All***

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## **An Invitation to Begin**

This activity is a quiet invitation to look within — to trace the threads of your own story through the generations that came before you. Just like in the film *After All*, where forgiveness and family healing slowly unfold after years of estrangement and pain, this process asks you to approach your family history with honesty, gentleness, and courage.

As you draw your family tree, you may begin to notice patterns or places where illness, addiction, or emotional wounds left marks that rippled through time. You may also see resilience, love, and strength that carried your family forward despite the pain. Take your time. There's no right or wrong way to see your story.

Through moments of mindfulness and compassion, you'll begin to soften the harsh edges of judgment, toward yourself and toward those who could not love or protect you the way you needed. This isn't about excusing harm; it's about freeing yourself from the weight of it. You'll have the chance to send empathy to those in your lineage who struggled, to release the grip of their pain, and to make space for healing, for you, and for those who came before and after.

Like the characters in *After All*, you may find that forgiveness doesn't erase the past, but it transforms your relationship to it. It helps you see that you can honor your story without being defined by it. By the end of this reflection, you'll have mapped not only the hardships your family carried, but also the conditions that can help you heal: safety, time, compassion, and the freedom to choose peace.

Take this process slowly, breathe deeply, and remember: healing doesn't mean forgetting; it means finally allowing your heart to rest. This is a space just for you, a quiet place to explore the patterns, pain, and strength that live within your family story. This activity invites you to look at your lineage through new eyes: not with blame, but with curiosity and compassion.

You don't need to have all the answers or know every detail of your family's history. You just need a willingness to look, to feel, and to let healing begin.

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# Gather What You Need

You'll want a few simple materials:

- A sheet of paper or poster board
- Pens or markers (you might use different colors for generations or emotions)
- A quiet place to reflect
- Possibly a journal if you like to write down reflections

You'll be creating two family trees: one for your family of origin (the family you came from) and one for your current or chosen family (the family you've built or are connected to now).

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## Step 1: The Family of Origin

Begin by drawing yourself at the bottom of the page.  
From there, add your parents, siblings, grandparents, and anyone else who has shaped your story.

Draw **males as squares** (□) and **females as circles** (○).  
You might choose to add other people who feel like family, those who were mentors, caregivers, or anyone whose energy has touched your life.

Now, create a simple **symbol key** to represent experiences that have rippled through your family:

### Symbol Meaning

X	Trauma or major loss
A	Addiction (You may want to specify what kind, such as A/D=drug addiction)
M	Mental illness or emotional struggle
H	Health issue or chronic illness
E	Historical or life-changing event (war, migration, displacement)
N	Neglect or abuse
R	Recovery, resilience, or healing

Next to each person, mark any of these symbols that apply.  
You may not know every detail, and that's okay. Oftentimes, things are not openly discussed within families. Trust what you do know, and honor what feels true in your heart.

As you map, notice what emerges.  
Do certain struggles repeat through generations?  
Are there places where love, creativity, or resilience seem to shine through?

This map isn't meant to judge or label. It's meant to help you **see**.  
To see what has been carried, what has been survived, and what still calls for healing.

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## Step 2: A Meditation on Forgiveness

(Directions: Record this part of the activity on your phone so you can close your eyes and listen to yourself reading the words. Then you can listen, follow the direction, and repeat the Loving Kindness Meditation that is a part of the activity. Read the directions slowly and clearly.)

“Take a few deep breaths.”

“Close your eyes and imagine your family tree glowing softly in front of you: the names, the faces, the symbols.”

“Picture the people who carried pain: those who struggled with illness, those who turned their suffering outward through harm or distance, those who loved imperfectly.  
And then, imagine sending them compassion.”

“While you picture these people in your mind's eye, silently repeat these words:

*May I be free from the suffering that isn't mine to carry.*

*May those who came before me find peace.*

*May love and understanding soften the pain that has traveled through our family.*

*May healing begin with me.”*

(Directions: End the recording with the above Loving Kindness Meditation.)

If this has been helpful, you may want to use your recording to repeat this part of the activity in the future.

Like in the film *After All*, forgiveness here isn't about forgetting or excusing what happened.

It's about **releasing your heart from the weight of it**.

You don't need to reconcile with anyone to heal. Sometimes forgiveness simply means saying, “I choose peace now.”

You might want to write a few words in a journal about what you felt.

You might write to an ancestor, to a parent, or to yourself as a child.

You might simply write, “I see you. I understand now.”

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## Step 3: Taking Inventory

Now, take some time to reflect on the patterns that showed up on your map. You can note those patterns by writing them down, color-coding them, or connecting them with lines on your family tree, whichever feels comfortable to you.

Write down or connect what you notice under each category:

Area	Reflections
<b>Emotional Patterns</b>	(e.g., anger, fear, silence, guilt, control)
<b>Behavioral Patterns</b>	(e.g., addiction, secrecy, over-responsibility)
<b>Health</b>	(e.g., chronic illness, depression, anxiety)
<b>Relationships</b>	(e.g., codependency, boundaries, estrangement)
<b>Strengths</b>	(e.g., creativity, humor, perseverance, spirituality)

As you connect the patterns, remind yourself:

Every pattern tells a story, not of failure, but of survival.

You are the one who gets to decide what continues and what ends with you.

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At this point, you may have done some emotional heavy lifting as you unpacked your family's history and began mapping your family tree. You might have uncovered painful memories, complex relationships, or patterns that are difficult to face. Or perhaps you've realized that your family's story carries more harmony than hardship, that the roots you've explored are mostly steady and kind. Wherever you find yourself, take a moment to pause and breathe. You may decide to stop here or simply to take a break before moving forward.

When you're ready, the next part of this journey invites you to look closer at your **current family and chosen relationships** — the people who surround you today. This next step is about connecting what you've learned from your past to how you relate, communicate, and care in the present. It's an opportunity to recognize growth, make new choices, and continue writing your family story with awareness and compassion.

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## Part Two: TAKING A DEEPER DIVE

### Step 1: Your Current or Chosen Family

Now, draw your **current family system**. These are the people who are part of your life today. This might include a partner, children, friends, chosen family, or community connections. It may also include people you're estranged from.

Use the same shapes and symbols or color-coding as you did when constructing your family tree. See how patterns have carried forward, and where you've already begun to change them. Maybe you've built new ways of communicating. Maybe you're learning boundaries or rediscovering joy. Reflect on the similarities or differences that appear to you.

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## Step 2: A Meditation on Self-Forgiveness

(Directions: Record this part of the activity on your phone so you can close your eyes and listen to yourself reading the words. Then you can listen, follow the direction, and repeat the Loving Kindness Meditation that is a part of the activity. Read the directions slowly and clearly.)

“Sit quietly again and take a few deep breaths.  
Bring to mind your current family — or the people who matter most to you now.”

“Say softly to yourself:

*May I forgive myself for the ways I've been shaped by pain.  
May I forgive myself for what I didn't know then.  
May I forgive others, not because they deserve it, but because I deserve peace.  
May love flow through me and into my family, in whatever form it can.”*

(Directions: End the recording with the above Loving Kindness Meditation.)

If tears come, let them.  
If peace comes, rest there for a moment.  
This is the heart of the healing. Forgiveness opens space for something new.

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## Step 3: Creating the Conditions for Healing

Healing isn't a single act, it's a way of living that invites safety and compassion into your daily life. You can begin to nurture it by remembering these four essential conditions:

<b>Condition</b>	<b>What It Means</b>	<b>How You Can Practice It</b>
<b>Physical Safety</b>	Feeling safe in your body and surroundings.	Create calm spaces, avoid environments or relationships that trigger fear or harm.
<b>Emotional Safety</b>	Being able to express your truth without judgment.	Surround yourself with people who listen, respect your story, and honor your boundaries.

Condition	What It Means	How You Can Practice It
<b>Time &amp; Space</b>	Allowing healing to unfold naturally.	Give yourself permission to rest, reflect, and move slowly. Healing isn't a race.
<b>Resources</b>	Having access to support and tools for wellness.	Seek therapy, read, meditate, or find community groups that uplift and guide you.

Healing is what happens when you give yourself what was missing: safety, time, compassion, and care.

## Step 4: Understanding the Wounds

### Complex PTSD (C-PTSD)

Sometimes the pain we carry doesn't come from a single event but from **years of instability, fear, or neglect**. Complex PTSD is a response to ongoing trauma, emotional, physical, or relational. You might recognize it as hypervigilance, chronic guilt, or feeling like you're "stuck" in survival mode.

Remember, you are not broken. You learned to survive.

Healing from C-PTSD begins with creating safety, trusting your body again, and learning that you are worthy of care and rest.

### Gaslighting

Gaslighting happens when someone makes you question your own memories, feelings, or truth. It's a form of emotional manipulation that can leave you feeling confused or doubting yourself. Domination and control are the goals when someone is gaslighting you. It is a long-term and insidious form of manipulation. If you've experienced this, remind yourself: **Your memories are valid. Your feelings are real. Your truth matters.**

Healing from gaslighting involves trusting your inner voice again, setting boundaries, and surrounding yourself with people who respect your reality.

## Step 5: Reflection & Renewal

Take a moment now to reflect on what you've uncovered. You might write or say aloud:

*The pain in my family does not define me.  
I see where it began, and I see where it ends.  
I choose healing, kindness, and peace for myself and for those who came before me.*

Like in the film *After All*, you may find that reconciliation means **returning to yourself**.

Through this activity you have walked through memory and meaning, and now you stand in a place of awareness and choice.

You are the bridge between what was and what can be.

You are the beginning of a new story, one that is built on love, compassion, and forgiveness.

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