



My First Aid Kit

Daily well-being
at your fingertips

Vivre à coup de cœur
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« My First Aid Kit » Is YOUR first aid kit!

In case we haven't had the pleasure of meeting in person or online yet, let me introduce myself: my name is Stephanie and I have been a certified social service worker since 1997 and I have accompanied people through times of change and questioning. Personally, like many of you, I also experienced what I call the Dark Night Of The Soul and I traveled through its depths before discovering tools, techniques, and useful information to 1) get up and 2) prevent falls.

I am offering this first aid kit in order to support you in maintaining your feeling of well-being on a daily basis, to better get through difficult times when they arise and above all, to help you prevent moments of distress in the future.

Vivre à coup de cœur is a social vocation enterprise that I founded in 2018, after more than 20 years of working as a social service worker in various non-profit organizations. The mission of Vivre à coup de cœur is to promote well-being, mental health and the power to choose so people can build a life that suits them. It is in this sense that I offer training, conferences, workshops, support groups and individual consultations, always with kindness and competence. I also offer these services to work teams, paid workers and volunteers.

Why do I need a first aid kit?

Because sometimes we need a kind and effective reminder in order to hang on in difficult times when we feel adrift. It is before the storm, acting in prevention, that we prepare our toolbox in order to better face the difficult moments ahead.

What is it?



The first aid kit is a concrete and useful tool that refers to useful tips, techniques, information, and experiences that quickly bring back a sense of well-being that we will use when hardships come to hinder our journey. It is when things are going relatively well that the first aid kit is built, when the mind is calm and able to think without the influence of intense emotions or the barrier of perception of serious consequences. It is in its simplicity and its nature of being adapted to the unique reality of each person that this tool becomes a real first aid kit for difficult times.

Here are the discoveries you will make and be able to apply today

What will I find here?

- ♥ 8 pillars to prepare your first aid kit for difficult times.
- ♥ An impeccable contingency plan in order to take care of yourself without guilt.
- ♥ Regain self-confidence in your capacity for resilience and in your ability to assert yourself.
- ♥ Break isolation and choose the right person to talk to.
- ♥ Recognize and react to people who are trying to manipulate you.

How to build your kit?

Pick a time when you won't be disturbed, then settle into a room that's conducive to relaxation. Allow at least 30 minutes to do the 8 pillars exercise. Relax. Read each question, then close your eyes and repeat the question to yourself while breathing gently. See images, faces, memories, emotions emerge. These will be your answers. Take note that your answers will not always come from your rational brain. Don't put pressure on yourself. This exercise is not only intellectual, but also above all else, experiential.

The questions relating to the 8 pillars will guide you in the search and discovery of the elements relating to your first aid kit. The elements you find will be personal and adapted to your personality, your philosophy of life, your core values, and your reality. You can use the examples provided to stimulate the exploration and find your own answers.

After finding your initial discoveries regarding the 8 pillars, you will find 3 designs to solidify your capacity for resilience in all spheres of your life. We will discuss how to regain confidence in yourself, in your capacity for resilience and in your ability to assert yourself. Next, we'll discuss how to break the feeling of isolation and choose the right person to talk to when you feel the need. Finally, we will look at how we can learn to recognize and react to psychological manipulation in our relationships.

All these elements make this e-Book an excellent tool for self-knowledge AND concrete, relevant and important information that will be useful to you in all your relationships and in all the situations you may experience in the future. Why? Because your foundation, your base will be built on **solid ground**.



I hope you make great discoveries!
(And I'm always interested to know what this e-Book has meant to you! Write to me!)

PART ONE: THE 8 PILLARS

1. What are critical moments for me?

Critical moments are the moments when I recognize that I am vulnerable, fragile, sensitive and when I tend to lose my bearings and feel overwhelmed. These are the times when I know emotions take over and thinking and reasoning are more difficult. These are the times when I am affected, and I know that I will not be able to step back; Instead, I will obey automatic reflexes. The critical moments are the times when I am most vulnerable and when I will need help.

I look back, in the past, and I see those times when I had difficulty overcoming hardships. I try to see patterns, moments when anxiety, fear or doubt paralyze me. Without judging myself, I name the moments that I know are critical.

Examples:

When I am with _____.
When I'm hungry.
When I feel judged.
When I am tired.

2. What is draining my energy?

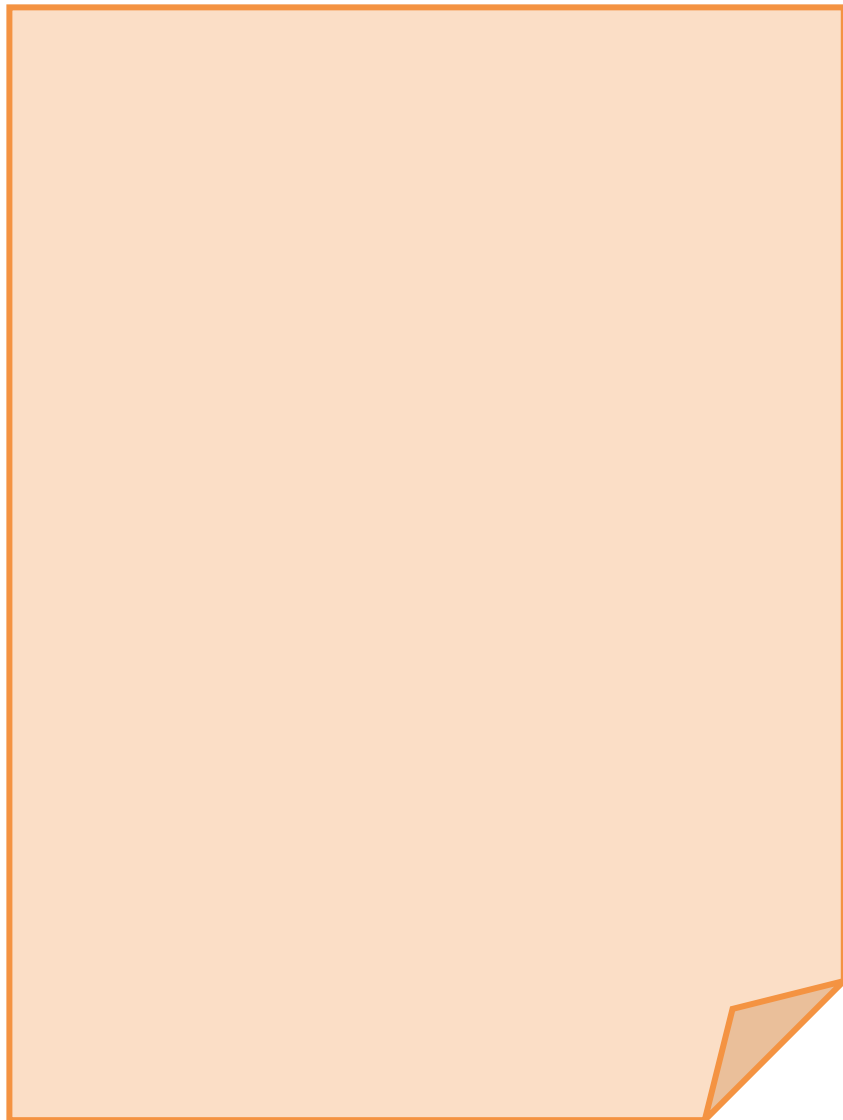
What drains my energy are the situations, emotions, thoughts and people that wear me down. They are the things, situations, and people that eat away at my life energy, and I get tired whenever I am around them. Each time, I feel exhausted when in contact with things and people that consume my energy (energy vampires).

WARNING: My energy guzzlers are not necessarily energy guzzlers for others. We are all unique and things and people have different influences on everyone.

In response to this question, I see the fluctuation of my level of energy regarding certain people/things. I try to see if there are recurring scenarios and I am able to name everything and everyone that pulls me down.

Examples:

When I am with _____.
When I have to assert myself.
When I feel guilty.
When I'm busy.



3. What are my rejuvenating moments?

These are the moments when I feel good, safe and relaxed. These are the situations, activities and times of the day where I know I can recharge, re-energize and recover. It can be the time of day when I recognize that I am the most fit, or it can be a time of day when I recognize that I am more able to indulge in a calming activity. It can be at different moments, too. For example, when my grandchildren visit me or when I meet a friend at a café. It can also be a place: when I find myself on the bank of the river or even with my nose in a book.

I look back, in the past, and I try to perceive the habits and reflexes of well-being, happiness and serenity that help me relax and recharge, every time.

Examples:

When I am with _____.

When I am reading.

When I'm driving my car.

When I'm at the spa.

4. What gives me energy?

What pulls me up are the situations, emotions, thoughts and people that revitalize me. They fill me with vital energy. I become motivated and happy whenever I am near them. I feel good, I feel invigorated in contact with things and people who pull me up.

ATTENTION: These things and these people who pull me up do not necessarily have this effect on others. We are all unique and things and people have different influences on us.

In response to this question, I think of my level of energy in regards to certain people/things. I try to see if there are patterns and I name everything that pulls me up.

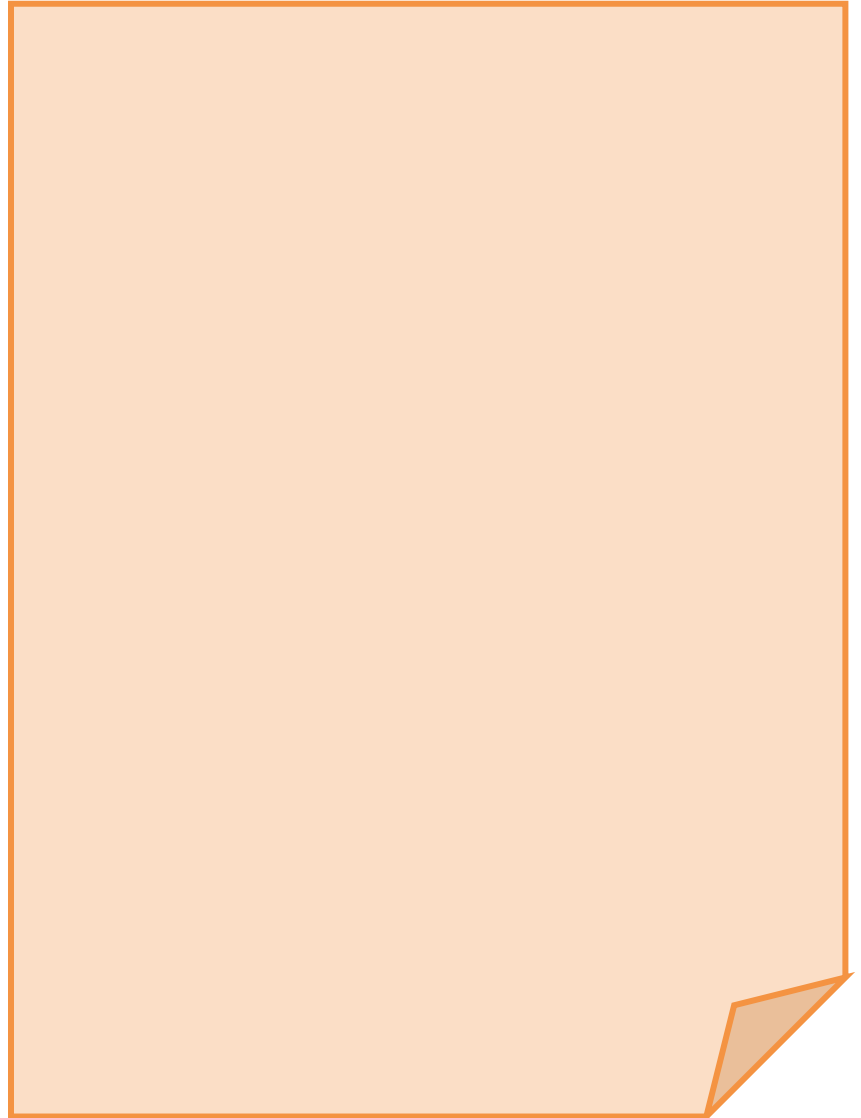
Examples:

When I am with _____.

When I'm listening to music.

When I feel appreciated.

When I'm in the woods.



5. What are my warning signs and symptoms?

Often, these signs and symptoms are unpleasant to feel. However, I sometimes forget that these symptoms have an important and essential role in maintaining my well-being. These signs, when present, need to be taken seriously. These are the warning signs that tell me that a limit has been exceeded. These are signs that tell me that something or someone has violated my core values. These are the symptoms that tell me something is wrong. The signals and symptoms will be different for each person.

I learn to know myself and to recognize the signals that tell me that I have to take care of myself, to face a situation and to ensure my well-being, my safety and my mental health. Signals noted below:

Examples:

When I'm with _____.
When I can't sleep anymore.
When I feel stuck or like a prisoner of a person or situation.
When I'm irritable.

6. What are my factors for protection?

Protective factors are the resource elements that I already have within me and that help me better overcome difficult situations. They are assets, tools in my toolbox that facilitate my journey through the trials of life.

These are the knowledge, abilities, strengths, qualities, and skills that I have within me. These have been acquired over time and experience. It is important that I can recognize them in myself and amplify them. These are the skills that I have and that I can count on to lean on and support me in the most difficult times.

I look at myself as if for the first time and I name my protection factors here in order to maintain them, amplify them and remind me of their existence when I need them.

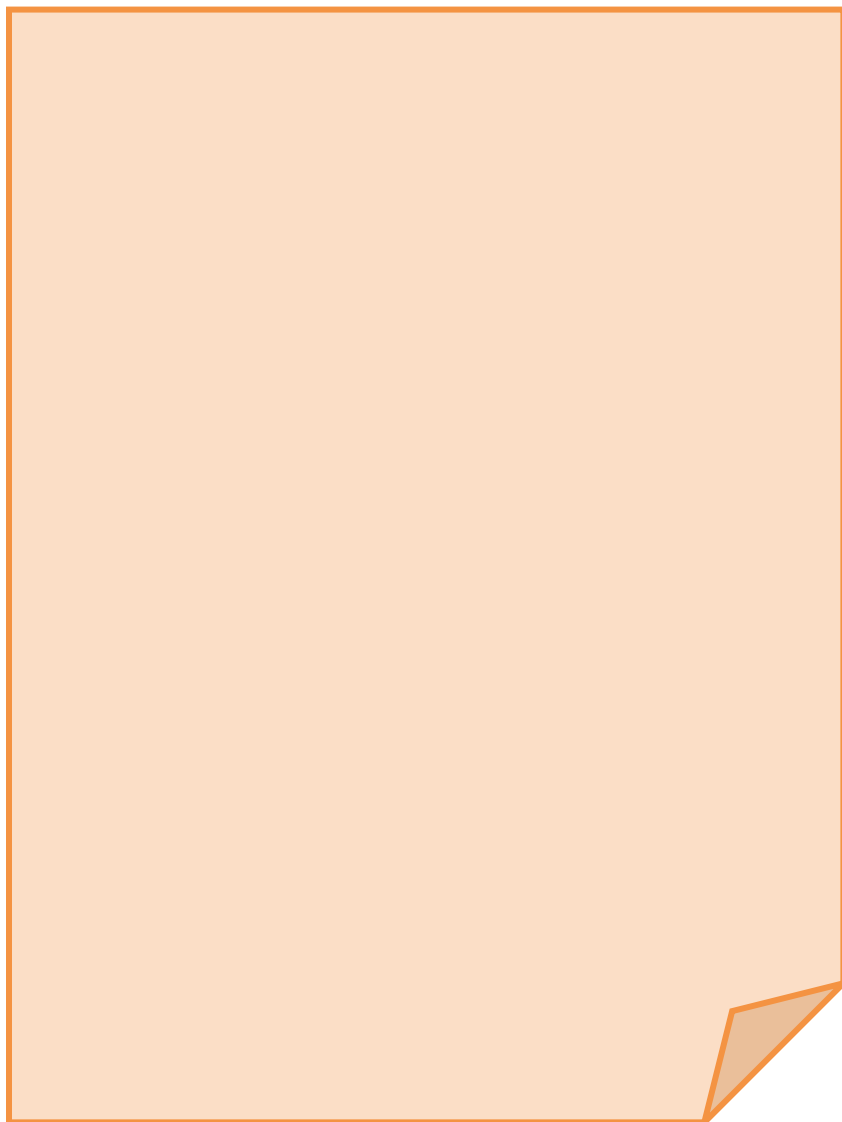
Examples:

When I'm with _____.

When I take time off to do some colouring.

When I feel well surrounded.

When I am well rested.



7. Who are my allies?

I look back, in my past, and I see who was always there for me when I needed them. It is not just the presence, but the quality of the presence that is important here. I notice the faces passing through my memories. I see the people who are or have been there for me. They are the people who support me without judging me and in a way that suits me and comforts me. They are sincere people who want my well-being, my happiness. I'm sure of it. They are the people who remind me of the best of myself when I forget it. These are the people who know how to listen to me without dictating my actions, and without judging me. My allies are the people who are available when I need them.

I write the names of my allies in response to this question, because when I feel alone, I will know who to contact.

8. What is my personal affirmation?

I close my eyes and wait for MY affirmation to emerge, the one that gives me a moment of well-being and peace. Maybe it's a phrase I've heard before, a quote, an excerpt from a song, a melody, a poem or listening to an inspiring person. Or it can be words that come spontaneously and that make me feel good. It's an inspiring phrase that motivates me, encourages me, and gives me courage when I need it. This is what I repeat to myself to activate myself, recharge my batteries and remind myself that I am on my way to better times. This inspiration reminds me of the reason for my presence, and my destiny on this Earth.

It may be a reminder of my mission and is very important in my life. I will write it below, so I don't forget it.

The exercise of the 8 pillars is complete. You have spent an important moment which served to discover the tools and the baggage that are within you. You have drawn on the resources that will be the basis of your first aid kit. You will then be able to support yourself in difficult times. You may need additional outside support or accompaniment. In this case, do not stay alone. We'll cover how to break isolation and choose the right person to talk to in Part 3 of this e-Book. Also, know that you can contact me via the coordinates at the bottom of the page or my private and confidential Facebook group which has a **small community of a few hundred people** who share your goal of learning to take care of yourself without guilt. These like-minded people appreciate exchanging in kindness about their successes and their challenges!



PART TWO: ASSERT YOURSELF TO GAIN SELF-CONFIDENCE AND BELIEVE IN YOUR CAPACITY FOR RESILIENCE

The ability to assert oneself in a clear and kind way is essential to regaining self-confidence and to truly believe in one's capacity for resilience. The assertive person knows how to express and defend their opinion, feelings, thoughts, rights and needs while respecting those of others. This ability also implies recognizing in others the rights that are identical to those that we attribute to ourselves. Being assertive is expressing what we feel and think in a way that is 1) direct, 2) honest, and 3) appropriate. Assertiveness is speaking honestly and clearly about what you need, in the right way and at the right time.

The benefits of self-affirmation

- ♥ More coherence with oneself.
- ♥ More honest and authentic.
- ♥ Better self-respect.
- ♥ Increased self-confidence.
- ♥ At the same time, we are more likely to obtain the respect of others.
- ♥ We get what we want in a more transparent manner.
- ♥ We reinforce our sense of self-efficiency and of self-control.

Tips to help you assert yourself

1. Write your own list of rights

If you want, read the declaration of [Human Rights](#) on the internet. Then it's time to write your own. On a blank page, answer the statement "I have the right to ..." with all the answers that come to mind. If you don't have many ideas, think about what you would say to another person you like and see if you can apply these rights to yourself. Once you've done that (the longer the list, the better), read it every day. Remember that you have these rights and can exercise them.

I have a right to _____.

I have a right to _____.

I have a right to _____.

I have a right to _____.

I have a right to _____.

I have a right to _____.

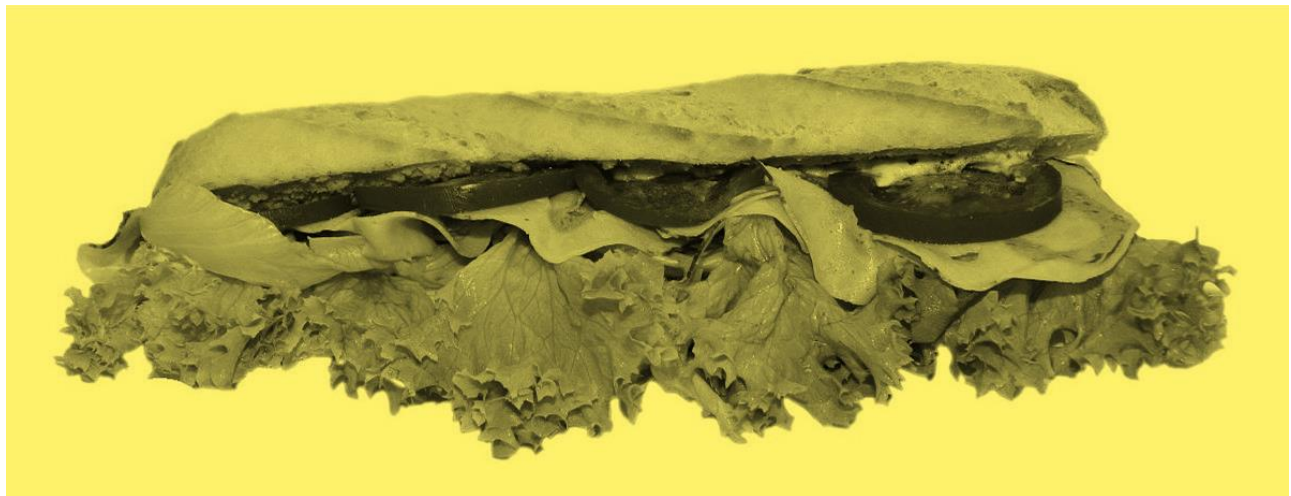
I have a right to _____.

I have a right to _____.

2. The sandwich method

This method involves first saying something you like about another person or situation, then saying something you don't like, and ending on a new positive note. That way, you're not criticizing, you're making a well-balanced comment to the person. Beware, it is not a question of lying, but of underlining the real positive.

For example, imagine that you must tell a friend that you find him or her distant. One way to do this could be: "I really like it when we spend time together, we get on well and I like you a lot. Lately I find you distant, like you can never stay. I would like to find my friend again, you're very important to me."



3. I want, I need, I feel

Not all discussions are bad. We must come to agreements with others, and for that, it is necessary to discuss (which does not necessarily mean quarreling or disrespect). Start your sentences with things like, "I want, I need, I feel, I would love to". This helps other people put themselves in your shoes, so you can give your point of view.

For example: "Today, I would like to choose the restaurant for dinner because I really want to eat nachos and I have been waiting to eat them at this place for a long time."

4. Messages in "I"

The use of "I" rather than "you" allows you to express unpleasant thoughts, emotions or opinions (disapproval, irritation, anger) in a respectful way, while avoiding blaming the other person. This message may include the following steps:

♥ The expression of the behaviour that bothers you from the other person.

♥ The expression of the feeling experienced.

♥ The expression of the consequence, the concrete effect of this behaviour on oneself.

This requires to be in touch with what we are experiencing:

* Able to name our emotions.

* Able to express ourselves from our feelings.

In this example, the situation is approached appropriately from a positive feeling.

WHEN	I FEEL	BECAUSE
When you put your clothes in your closet	I feel really happy	Because I really like a tidy room.

You could also add a step:

In this example, the situation is approached appropriately from a negative feeling.

WHEN	I FEEL	BECAUSE	I WOULD PREFER
When you don't put your clothes in the closet	I'm really disappointed and I don't feel respected	Because I like a tidy room	I'd prefer you put away your clothes in the closet now.

5. Learn to say NO

First, take out your list of rights and read it. We all have the right to decline something we don't like. You can also use the sandwich technique to refuse something you don't want.

For example, imagine you're at a party and everyone is drinking alcohol, but you don't want any despite your friends' offers. Rather than using the classic "I'm taking antibiotics" or "I'm driving afterwards", assert yourself and say, "I'm having a great time, I don't want to drink alcohol; I am happy with a soda, thank you for the offer."

6. Learn to say YES

When you say yes, it is a COMMITMENT to yourself and to others. It is important to think carefully before responding to a question or request. With the answer well thought out, there is less chance that you will find yourself being resentful in your relationship and that your yes will be a real yes and your no will be a real no.



7. Save time

When you are asked a question or asked for something, there may be times when you feel a sense of urgency. It can be an unfounded perception or real pressure from the other person. In both cases, it is possible to not answer the question immediately. Saving time (answering later, tomorrow, Monday or in a month depending on the issue) is a valid option and will allow you to think carefully before giving your answer.



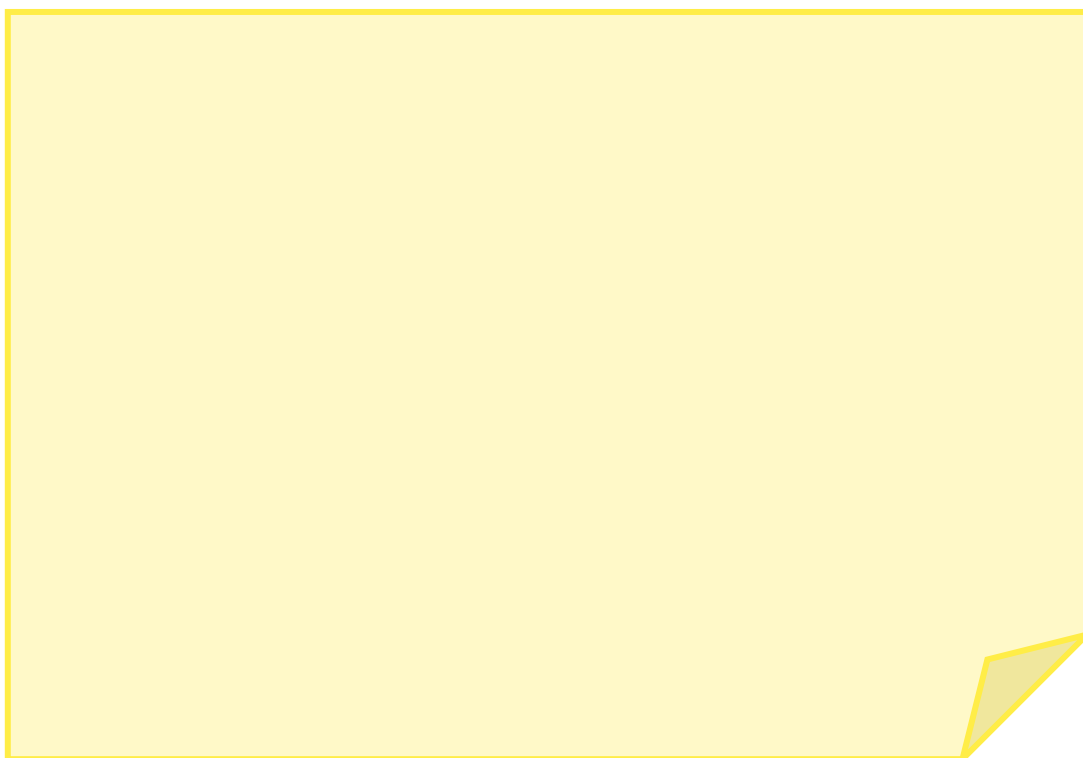
8. You can't please everyone

When you get on a plane, you are told via a screen what to do in an emergency. The instruction is to first put the oxygen mask on yourself before applying it to others, even if it is a child. It's not about being selfish, it's about protecting and taking care of yourself, and it's good to do the same in everyday life. Helping others without harming them is indeed important, especially remembering that it also means not harming yourself.

Here are some obstacles that may imply a difficulty in practising assertiveness:

- ♥ Fear of hurting the other person: "If I tell him this, it will hurt him. He will be sad, and I'm afraid he'll cry."
- ♥ Fear of conflict: "She always gets angry and yells at me, it's not worth it."
- ♥ Fear of looking ridiculous: "I'm pretty sure they'll laugh at me if I tell them how I feel."
- ♥ Fear of doing the wrong thing: "Every time, I stutter and end up saying something else that is totally irrelevant."
- ♥ Fear of being different: "If I say this, I think others will look at me strangely."
- ♥ Fear of judgment: "My boss will think of me as being weak, again."
- ♥ Fear of not being loved: "If I tell my mother this, it will break her heart and I'm afraid of losing her affection."

Take note of which of these fears affect you most often. These are your areas of vulnerability. Recognizing what these areas are, you will be able to prepare yourself and prevent difficult situations in the future.





Summary: How to Practise Assertiveness

Listen to your needs and be convinced that you have the right to respect yourself: this is the first step. Without it, you will not know when to assert yourself. It is much easier to assert yourself when you are connected to your needs and when you give yourself the right to respect them.

Express (one step at a time) your emotions, your needs and your desires: this is, for most of us, a real learning process. Expressing yourself on your real needs and emotions is giving others the opportunity to take these into account and to hear you. This helps to build quality relationships.

Having acquired the two previous steps, it is important to be able to formulate very clear requests. Release yourself from the result: it is not because you make the request that the other must accept it. That said, the more comfortable you are with your needs, the more clearly you will be able to communicate them.

Practise by starting with small affirmations without too much at stake. Choose an opinion, an idea, a feeling - start talking about it calmly without choosing topics that are more challenging.

Be consistent in your efforts and be patient. Real changes will slowly integrate.

PART THREE: BREAKING ISOLATION AND CHOOSING THE RIGHT PERSON TO TALK TO

First, it is relevant to distinguish between solitude and isolation, which are two completely different states.

Solitude is a CHOSEN moment when you allow yourself the right to take time for yourself, to do an activity you love or to do nothing. These moments alone are appreciated and sought after, and they are REFRESHING moments. These moments of solitude are essential to varying degrees depending on the needs of each person, to promote good mental health. Solitude is a positive thing.

Isolation is a moment alone that we have NOT CHOSEN and that we SUFFER through. It is the suffering of being alone when we would rather be accompanied, it is a PAINFUL moment. This feeling of isolation can occur even when there are people around, such as feeling left out, pushed aside, misunderstood. This feeling of isolation is an important mental health issue. Isolation is a negative thing.

In times when you feel alone, it will be important to find someone to talk to.

A first aid kit would be incomplete without the mention of trusted people who support you in difficult times. We discussed this earlier in Part One of this e-Book (pillar #7).

Oftentimes, all around you, you will hear people saying that it is important not to be alone when things are not going well, that you have to talk to someone. Not being alone does not mean talking to just anyone. I suggest that you remember to CHOOSE the person in whom you will confide.



Choosing who to talk to

It can be a person in your entourage, whom you already know, and it can also be a worker in a community organization, your therapist, a psychologist, your social worker, your counsellor. There are different people available in your immediate surroundings, but the choice of this person is up to you and this choice is decisive in terms of the support you will feel in contact with this person. We will discuss “how to choose your counsellor” later.

A few things to consider include choosing someone in your life who demonstrates a balance of empathy and the ability to step back from the distress you are experiencing. It will be a person who does not necessarily need to understand everything, who is not going to question you, and who is simply going to say, “I see that you are not well now, and I am here for you”. It should be someone who is not going to drown in the same emotions as you, who is not going to carry your burden and who is not going to tell you what to do. This is a person who understands that at the start, what you need when you are not well is to be welcomed without judgment and to be listened to with empathy.

This person should also have the ability to help you remember that you are much more than the stress, anxiety, grief, or difficult emotions and states you are experiencing right now.

Think about the people you know. Do you know someone who has these abilities?

It will also be important to choose a person who knows how to set their limits and who will not take your experience on their shoulders. It should be a person who will dare to tell you, eventually and if necessary, that it may be time to consult a professional who can better support you. This person can be an undeniable support until then and they are comfortable enough and humble enough to know where their limit is and how far they can accompany you in your difficult moment. This is a person who recognizes not wanting to go beyond their abilities or the energy they have to give.

The person you choose to confide in must be comfortable saying "I understand, I hear you, I'm with you AND I think it might be interesting for you to meet someone who could help you, to explore the subject further".

Finally, when looking for the right person to talk to, try to choose someone who is sincerely interested in what you are going through and who sincerely wants your well-being and happiness. For example, a person who asks you "how are you?" and who starts doing other things when you haven't even finished answering, may not be the best person to talk to.

This is not the person who can best welcome what is happening within you and listen to you when you need to talk.

Try to choose someone who has an eye for seeing progress, to see what you've done and how you've changed. This will remind you of your evolution and that while you may not have reached your goal, you have taken steps towards it. The person who reminds you of this is precious in your entourage because it brings a safe and motivating element. It will help you celebrate the small steps and milestones on your journey.

This person should not have exaggerated expectations of you while you are having a hard time. You may not be at your peak of productivity. In those moments, you don't need to be told "get up, roll up your sleeves and go." It could put pressure on you, make you feel guilty. That's not what you need. Rather, you need to be listened to. Some people are too invested in the relationship to have the ability to step back and be able to make sense of things.

Target a person who will not put pressure on you, but who will welcome you in what you are going through here and now knowing very well that tomorrow may bring something else. Look for someone who is known for their flexibility, who accepts that there are less good days and who will not be on a mission to convince you that "it's going to be fine" or worse, that everything is fine. The person listening to you should welcome what you have to say; it will calm you and help you see the situation more clearly. This type of listening will make you want to see this person again and they will also want to see you again, because they know that they will not go beyond their limits.

Humility is essential in the person you choose to confide in. This person should be comfortable saying "I don't know what to tell you...I feel really helpless in the situation you are telling me about. I have no idea what to do. I can accompany you to go see someone who can support you more than I can in this situation because I don't see what I can do". It's not abandonment, it's not a lack of love, it's not a lack of interest, it's not a lack of caring, it's just knowing our own limits. and knowing when to affirm them.

If this person needs your support one day too, and you reach your limit, you will be able to tell them this too. This is a sign of openness and freedom in a relationship. That's how you build a solid, trusting relationship where, together, you can each get what you need.



Watch out for saviours!

"I'm here!" Just because someone wants to help you doesn't mean they're the right person to do so.

Be careful if you have people around you who say they want to help you, because it's not necessarily good for you. With this saviour-person, it rarely goes well. They may be people who make you feel worse off after seeing them... It's important to trust yourself and follow your instincts. It may be someone who says they want to help you,

but who tends to blame you, to make you feel guilty, to tell you that you have not done well, to question your reasoning or to say to you "Let's see ... It is not like that! What were you thinking?!..." The person who criticizes the way you make decisions, or manage your difficulties, will not help you regain control over your own life.

The fact that you are trying to find solutions, that you have put things in place is already very good. You may try many things over time to solve a problem: you will not need, at the very beginning, to be told that what you are doing does not look right.

If a person offers to help you but always minimizes and trivializes your difficulties, you should know that they are not doing this to be mean; often it is because this person is uncomfortable, and the situation is beyond their limits. Sometimes we can feel awkward in front of someone else's suffering. In this case, not knowing what to say, we end up saying nonsense or things that are not helpful.

If the person you've chosen to talk to demands that you do things you don't have the energy to do or urges you to completely run away from a situation and forget about it all with a drink or twelve, for example, these are not the best approaches to help you. There is also the person who wants to tell you what to do to solve your difficulties or the one who wants to save you and who will take away all the opportunities for you to discover your strengths. Recognizing the saviours around you is a good way to protect yourself from a rescue mission that you have not requested and to protect the saviour who does not set limits.

The people you choose not to talk to when things are going badly can still be your friends. They are not bad people. It can be simply because there are unhealthy behaviors or attitudes, a loss of energy in their midst or because they are too close and too invested in the relationship. Be friends, talk about other things and do other things with these people.

In conclusion, when you feel that talking to someone would do you good, think carefully about who you are going to ask. You know your surroundings; you can recognize who might be a good listening candidate and who isn't right now (but who might be at another time).

It is important to remember that, to break isolation, it is not suggested to talk to just anyone, but rather to a caring person whom you trust and who is part of the healthy relationships in your life.

How to choose your counsellor

If you need more than a friend, how do you choose a social worker, psychologist, therapist, social counsellor? How to choose the right person to accompany you?

Something to think about

If something is going on with your physical health, and you need surgery or an operation, and you have some discomfort and a diagnosis needs to be made, are you going to choose Peter, John or Jack who says he can help you or you will choose a doctor, a surgeon, a specialist? A professional who is trained, who has practical experience and who has been doing this every day in his life for several years? In terms of your physical health, you often opt for a professional.

We are solicited by offers from people everywhere. It would be naive to believe that we can automatically trust anyone who says they can help us.

A gap exists when we have difficulties or questions related to our experience, our emotions, our way of thinking and our way of living life. All of this has significant impacts on our daily lives, on our physical health, on our emotions, on our relationships and on mental health.

So how do you choose your counsellor? In the same way that we choose our doctor:

1. Has this person studied in the field and have a diploma?

Has this person taken a path to be able to know from top to bottom what mental health is? Do they know the different techniques, the different approaches, and the theory necessary to be able to accompany people on a daily basis? It is important to have a wide range of knowledge at the academic level to be able to adapt the right technique and the right approach in the right situation and for the right person. It is not possible to have ONE method, a recipe, a technique that will be applied to everyone uniformly because each person is unique and will need a personalized approach in their particular situation.

The person you are going to choose as a counsellor should have certified studies in the field for which you are seeking support. We live in a society that constantly repeats "if we want it, we can do it" and to create our own reality. That's fine in general, but when other people's well-being is at stake, a concrete base and solid foundation are needed. If you want to consult a coach, for example, know that it is a non-regulated title that everyone can use. Some coaches have a certification with more than 3,000 hours of training including internships and assignments. Others enjoy helping people and have successfully completed 120-hour trainings on a topic and claim to be experts. Remember that if a person goes to the Google search engine and takes in all the information on a subject, reads books, watches videos, and does one-day trainings and conferences on this subject, it does not mean this person is an expert.

2. Does this person have the necessary skills?

Nobody can do everything. For example, I am a social service worker and I specialize in well-being and mental health. If you come to see me for a drug addiction problem, I will not improvise as an expert because it is not my area of expertise. I will refer you to another professional instead. Ask yourself the question: "Of all the people referred to me, who has expertise in this area?" If a person does not consider that they have this expertise and they refer you to someone else, that's a good sign – that's what a responsible and ethical worker will do: they won't improvise for everything you need. This person works in their field of expertise.

Skills also imply an ability to provide support. And this accompaniment can take different forms depending on the type of support you are looking for. A consultant, a certified coach, a psychologist, a counsellor each has a different approach. An experienced counsellor is not going to advise or tell you what to do. They are not an advisor or a coach (although a social service worker can take on the posture of coach if necessary and on request at specific times). A good counsellor will walk beside you and explore different options with you.

3. What is their therapeutic approach?

If you are interested in an approach that offers to explore your past, what you have experienced before and how it still affects you today, it will be important for you to find someone who has an approach consistent with what you want. If you are a person who does not want to know anything about the past and wants to explore here and now what is happening to improve daily life and the future, you may choose a person who favors this approach. Your preference must be well matched with the approach of the person who will accompany you so that you can find the accompaniment that suits you best.

4. Is their availability coherent with your needs?

You feel the need to see the person 3 times a week for a while they are only available once every two weeks? If it is not easy in terms of organizing your time, you will quit. You are entitled to your availability, your preferences (online, on the phone, in person) and to have access to your counsellor when you need them. That said, if you are looking to have access to a worker day and night 7 days

a week, a good worker will say no. To continue to accompany and support people for a long time, a good worker will recognize and know how to enforce their limits and set boundaries.

5. Are the sessions affordable?

If you are going through difficulties and on top of that, you add financial stress to be able to get support, that does not help you, it adds a problem. Sticking to your budget is important. Which does not mean choosing the person who charges the least, because we also want to make sure to answer to the 4 other points we talked about above. If the person is approachable, works with an approach that suits you, has skills in the area you need, and has been educated in that area and has been accompanying people for a long time, there is a cost attached to all this. It is important to make these allowances and at the same time, the price must suit you.

6. Do you both get along well together?

The personality of the worker you choose to work with is also important in your choice. You will find it difficult to confide in someone you don't trust, or if there is something about them that bothers you. It is important that you feel safe with this person and that you like their way of being, their welcome, their respect, their kindness. It is important that you do not feel pushed, pulled or rushed. A bond of trust must be built.

The approach, the personality, the knowledge, the experience and the capacity to inspire and teach are important in the choice of a counsellor so that your accompaniment can be a positive experience for you and that the journey leads to beneficial changes in your daily life.

LAST PART: RECOGNIZING AND REACTING TO PSYCHOLOGICAL MANIPULATION

Some people haven't learned to be assertive, to communicate openly, and to cultivate healthy relationships. They may have learned that manipulating the truth, emotions, or thoughts of others is the only way to get their way. These people can be part of our entourage and it is important to recognize them and know how to react to them.

Here is a duo of behaviors that prevents healthy communication:

Submissive behaviour

The person who exhibits submissive behavior is characterized by an inability to express their thoughts, emotions and opinions, or if they express them, they do so indirectly, inappropriately or to the detriment of their own rights.

Some causes for submissive behaviour

1. Fear of displeasing and fear of rejection.
2. Desire to avoid conflict at all costs.
3. Misunderstanding of actual responsibilities.
4. Lack of information on human rights.
5. Reluctance to lose some secondary benefits.
6. Limited social skills.
7. Positive reinforcement of prior submissive behaviors.

Consequences of submissive behaviour

At the time, the submissive person benefits from secondary benefits associated with submission: they avoid conflicts, tensions, and confrontations. We appreciate the submissive person because they are helpful, accommodating and ready to help. These advantages encourage the repetition of this behavior but are short-lived: resentment is quickly felt. The submissive person is chronically dissatisfied and may become aggressive and anxious because they feel taken advantage of. There is a decrease in their quality of life and sometimes somatizations occur.

Manipulative behaviour

The person who adopts manipulative behaviour is characterized by the expression of their thoughts, emotions, and opinions in order to defend their rights and satisfy their needs, but always indirectly and dishonestly. It is to the frequent detriment of the rights of others. Manipulative behaviour is full of detours, tricks, seduction, intimidation.

Some causes for manipulative behaviour

1. Desire to achieve one's ends at all costs, even when misappropriating and to the detriment of the rights of others.
2. Search for secondary benefits linked to manipulation.
3. Feeling of vulnerability.
4. Desire to avoid conflict.

Consequences of manipulative behaviour

The manipulator gets what they want without confrontation. In the medium term, this person may develop anxiety, either out of guilt or fear that their game will be discovered by others. They may also fear possible reprisals because sooner or later people will end up realizing that they are being cheated. Their entourage will develop aggressiveness and resentment toward the person who uses manipulation. It is then that people become suspicious and can even come to avoid or reject the manipulative person. The manipulator has difficulty establishing lasting and stable interpersonal relationships because they are unable to have frank and honest conversations.

5 signs that someone is manipulating you

1. Faking kindness to better create doubt

The person who manipulates will be nice, interested in your way of thinking, your life and your moods. They will be caring and charming and will get to know you. They will then use what they have learned about you against you: to make you doubt the validity of your emotions or your reactions, to sting you where you have a weakness. They will note all your vulnerabilities over the course of the discussions and will use them without scruple when they need something from you.

2. Playing on perceptions

The manipulative person will make you feel competent, capable of anything and of admirable strength and then they will make you feel guilty, shabby, incapable, and weak. They will try to awaken your fears, they will play on your affections, your hopes and will give you varied and creative reasons to deny your instincts. They will also blame you for your greatest qualities, as if they were faults. It will immerse you in questioning the talents and skills that you have which the manipulative person turns into a problem, a weakness. To sow doubt, they will tell you that they do not understand you, do not understand your way of thinking; they will tell you that they are worried about you and without having time to think about it, you will agree and try to reassure them. This person will manipulate information to create confusion; they will constantly change their mind, telling you “I never said that” then “I told you 100 times” depending on their needs and their mood. They are an expert at the level of rhetorical simplification: “You know very well that it never works”, “Remember, this always happens, when you do this”, “What did you expect, really?”



3. Abusing the effect of surprise

The manipulator will change their attitude and behavior for no reason. They will be sweet, offer you a smile, do you a favor, then they will tell you that it is not your fault that you are incapable, you are made that way. They are emotionally impulsive, and you never know how they will react from one moment to the next. They are discreet, then arrive at your door without warning, assailing you with questions, vague reproaches, requests. They surprise you and seem openly proud to see you destabilized...

4. Using reward and punishment systems

The manipulator will be kind, shower you with praise, give you a gift when you say or do as they wish. If your opinion differs or if you do not act as they would have liked, you are belittled, ridiculed, sometimes even ignored. This is always done with the aim of bringing you back to their way of seeing, doing and living.

5. Exerting physical, emotional and mental pressure

The manipulator will not let go. Every time you deviate from what they want, they will come back, in all the ways listed above. In the long run, this invasive person will be the main actor in your now toxic environment. You are emotional, stressed, you have difficulty concentrating, you sleep or eat more (or less), you lack energy for the activities you enjoy. The pressure you will feel will always increase. Exhaustion on the horizon and some visible symptoms used against you, they will call you weak. Exhaustion present and maintained in this relationship, you might believe them.

Underlying the 5 signs mentioned above, we find the repetition and accumulation of behaviours and attitudes resulting from manipulation as well as increasingly intense feeling over overwhelm. It is clear that submissive and manipulative behaviors do not allow for a healthy and balanced relationship.

How to react

Don't fall in the trap

The person who takes pleasure in playing with the feelings of others and who uses various means to get what they want has no scruples. If you feel guilty, ask yourself why you would be guilty and listen carefully to the answer that comes to mind. If the answer sounds like something that person has told you before, that guilt is not yours: it was concocted and planted there by someone who is manipulating you.

Write down what the person manipulating you says during your conversations

Use drastic measures when you suspect someone is manipulating you and changing the facts. Maybe this person has a habit of making you look like "the bad guy" or "the silly one" when they change the story to suit them? They will tell you "I never said that" or "you misunderstood" and they will make you believe that you did not understand or that you acted in bad faith. If you wrote down what they said after the fact, it wouldn't be necessary to show them the notes. The important thing is for yourself to know that you are not crazy and this will remind you to distance yourself from them in the future.

Tell them you know: I see what you did!

These people become really gifted and master manipulation well, over time. They are too rarely confronted on their behaviour. Surprise this person and make it clear that you feel manipulated and don't like it. There is certainly a good chance that the person will deny any manipulation. They might even go so far as to accuse you of manipulating them! In any case, they may back off in the future and you will have taken an excellent step forward in the direction of assertiveness.

Don't bond with them

This is not always easy to do, because people do not always show us who they are when we first meet them. As soon as you see someone using your emotions to get you to agree with them, step back slowly and make your boundaries clear. If they hear you and are still manipulating you, end the relationship. It's never easy to leave a manipulative person in our life, but it's easier when there are no strong attachments to the person. Early is better than later. And it's never too late.

Be inspiring

Try, as much as possible, not to manipulate the people around you. Accept the decisions of your loved ones, be a follower of "Live and let live" when possible. Show that you can have a discussion without resorting to emotional or psychological manipulation. By acting in this way, you demonstrate to those around you a possibility of communicating differently, you reveal an option in relationships. You show by your behaviour that we can be with people, that we can discuss and even disagree without manipulating.

Save your time

The person who manipulates you needs time to appease you, and they need the element of surprise to shake you up. If they pressure you to answer right away, say no. You can say: "If you put pressure on me, my answer is no. If I take the time to think about it and answer on Thursday afternoon, the answer may be different." Usually, people will let you think about it, and you won't have to respond under pressure. If the person continues to pressure you and you are particularly tired, you can step on your pride and tell the person trying to manipulate you "Yes, okay" or "Yes, you're right". They will give up, believing they've won, and then you'll have peace to do as you please! The person may then tell you that they are disappointed (more manipulation) and you can tell them that you have changed your mind. Everyone has the right to change their mind. Even you!

Take care of your inner dialogue

Work on your self-esteem and recognize your strengths, your talents, your qualities. Remember your values, what drives you, and what makes you a good person. Remember your good actions and speak kindly to others. Nurture fertile ground for all that is positive, beautiful, and good in life within you. This way, the words, and accusations from someone trying to manipulate you will find it harder to get a hold on you.

**If you think
someone is
manipulating you**

- ♥ Don't stay alone, surround yourself with positive people who love you.
- ♥ Recognize signs of manipulation and your own signs of distress and exhaustion.
- ♥ Assert yourself, do not accept manipulation.
- ♥ Leave the toxic relationship or at least put some distance between the manipulator and you.
- ♥ Remember your value; you deserve to be treated with consideration and respect.
- ♥ Take care of yourself.

Together is better!

You are now equipped to face the difficult times that may arise in the future. To learn more about the topics covered in this e-Book, I suggest you visit the following:

- Website (www.vivreacoupdecœur.ca), where you will find, among other things, the catalogue of offered services, including, and not limited to training on Conscious communication for healthy relationships, Overcoming the feeling of powerlessness, Recognizing, and reacting to psychological manipulation and A moment for yourself.
- Facebook page (www.facebook.com/VivreACoupDeCœur), where you will find a French language community of several thousand people who have their well-being and mental health at heart, and where, every day, I share tools, techniques, approaches and posts to move towards more freedom and more personal empowerment in your own life.
- Private, confidential, and bilingual Facebook group (www.facebook.com/groups/SelfCarePrendreSoinDeSoi), where we exchange in kindness in this group focused on mutual aid concerning our challenges and our objectives to grant ourselves the right to take care of ourselves and to take time for ourselves, without guilt.
- If you would like an appointment for an individual consultation or find out about the different support options (from free to paid), contact me via the contact details at the bottom of the page or via the "contacts" tab on my website. It will be my pleasure to discuss the various support options available at this time.

Don't forget to tell me how you found this e-Book and what it brought you, it's important for me to know that what I offer is useful! Looking forward to talking to you soon!

Stephanie 🦋



Roxanne Lafond, original layout
Paulette Cake, English proof-reading

Thank you so much!! :)