

Untangling: How You Can Transform What's Impossibly Stuck

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Untangling is a comforting and supportive self-help guide that illuminates an empathetic process of self-transformation.

Barbara McGavin and Ann Weiser Cornell's transformative self-help guide *Untangling* cuts to the heart of life's most complex problems, providing concrete directions for addressing the internal knots that stop people from living their most authentic and expansive lives.

Defining tangles as multifaceted problems that seem impossible to solve and that contain multiple "parts" locked in struggle, the book suggests a paradigm shift when it comes to feeling stuck. Stuckness, it suggests, can be the jumping-off point for transformation if one can develop empathetic understanding of the different parts of one's being. It suggests a process that involves developing "self-in-presence," or an unbiased and mindful state. From here, the book suggests, it is possible to develop a "felt-sense" of the parts of a problem and to meet them with empathy, support, and understanding, making way for a freer and happier life.

There's a testimonial element to the book as well, with McGavin and Cornell contributing vulnerable personal stories to strengthen the book's messages; their tales are concrete examples of the multiple ways that the untangling process can play out in the real world. Both grappled with deep problems that they had not managed to transform through other therapeutic practices: Cornell was locked in a struggle with alcohol, and McGavin often felt worthless and undeserving. However, by tapping into the "powers of presence," they were both able to transform and live more impassioned and meaningful lives. The untangling process is further illustrated with examples from the lives of McGavin's and Cornell's clients—as with Grace, who grew up feeling marginalized and who felt that she "had to keep submissively quiet and stay small, no matter how much she achieved," but who learned how to listen to the different parts of herself with radical empathy.

The book's accessible, nonjudgmental instructions urge connecting with one's inner world and dark places with intentional empathy and love. Throughout, the prose and structure of the guide mirror its flexible, personalized message. The sections chart a clear step-by-step path through the process. Each section and subsection is well labeled and focused, making it easy to find and return to important passages while moving through the process. Chapter-ending summaries revisit the most important aspects of each section with memorable bullet points, supporting the book's compelling suggestions for working through even extreme difficulties.

The illuminating self-help guide *Untangling* is about working through one's problems with honesty and empathy to secure a renewed sense of freedom, autonomy, and joy.

BELLA MOSES (July 27, 2024)

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