

# the modern domestic woman



## ANGEL IANAKIEV

Our March cover profile features Angel Ianakiev, whose personal journey through postpartum challenges and her innovative work with equine-assisted therapy are helping women better understand their nervous systems, heal without shame, and remember they are not alone.

MARCH 2026

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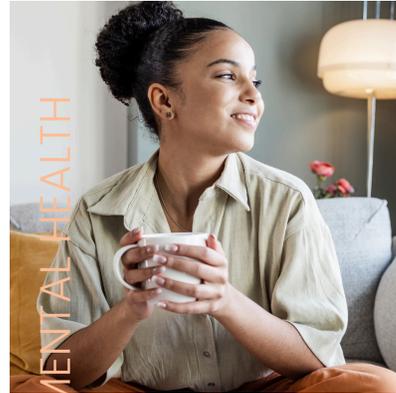
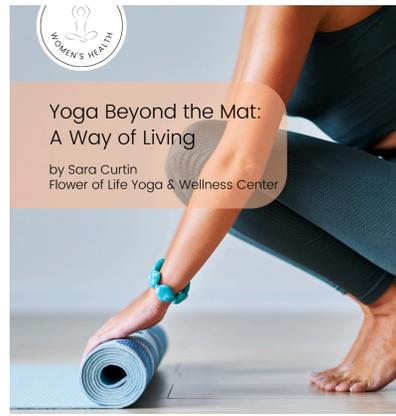
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This is why we care about where your coffee comes from.  
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Elizabeth Rago

## **Columnists**

Katie McCall

Zoe Sherwin

## **Contributors**

Angel Ianakiev

Victoria Mahoney

Dr. Jana Richardson

Andrea “Andy” Drott

## **Cover Photo**

Taylor Daugherty

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While we make thoughtful efforts to highlight trusted resources and experiences, inclusion in MDW Magazine does not constitute an endorsement, guarantee, or certification of any product, service, or provider. Readers are encouraged to conduct their own research and use their own judgment when engaging with businesses, professionals, or products featured in our publication.

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March 2026

# MDW MAG

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



## Dear MDW Community,

Unless you've lived somewhere with a true winter, it's hard to explain the joy that comes with the first signs of the spring season thaw. The way the sun feels really warm on your face. The tiny green shoots pushing their way through the soil, reminding me that life was quietly preparing itself all along.

I immediately throw open the windows and get the stale air out of our home, inviting in the sounds and scents of nature.

For me, March is a month of small awakenings, where my body seems to move in more of a fluid state than clenched in the jaws of the winter months.

My hope is that this issue warms you up in that same way. That within these pages you'll find ideas that spark something new, information that empowers you, and stories that remind you that growth is always possible, even after the longest winters.

Our profile this month features Angel Ianakiev, and if there were ever a human embodiment of warmth, compassion, and deep kindness, it would be Angel. Through her work supporting women and families, she creates the kind of space where people feel seen, safe, and understood in their own unique way. Her story and the wisdom she shares in this issue is a powerful reminder that healing doesn't have to happen alone.

If you're emerging from a hard season, let the thaw of March fuel you. Let this month remind you that nothing stays frozen forever. Not the ground, not our energy, not our hope. Open a window. Move a chair toward the light. Say yes to one small shift. And as the days lengthen, may you feel that same return of warmth within yourself.

I'm so grateful you're here, turning these pages with me.

Elizabeth Rago  
MDW Founder & Editor

*MDW Magazine is a community-centered lifestyle publication created by Elizabeth Rago and a variety of contributors. Through thoughtful storytelling, expert insights, and curated recommendations, MDW highlights local makers, wellness professionals, and ideas that support women in living full, connected lives. Each issue blends practical resources, mental health awareness, and everyday inspiration. All rooted in the belief that community care, creativity, and conversation help women navigate life's many seasons.*



Tap on the cute icons or QR codes to shop instantly or learn more about the product featured.



# the modern domestic woman

## MARCH SPONSOR

Our March profile features Angel Ianakiev, and we're honored to share her story, her wisdom, and the creative ways she's supporting our community with a variety of mental health modalities through her practice, Anchor Counseling.

Throughout this issue, Angel reminds us that we're not alone in our healing and provides hope and tangible tools for women experiencing anxiety and moms struggling with intrusive thoughts during their postpartum season.

In her article about equine therapy, Angel shares how horses reflect what's happening in our nervous systems, reminding us that healing begins with paying attention to our body's signals. And, like horses in a herd, we find true steadiness through safe, connected relationships.

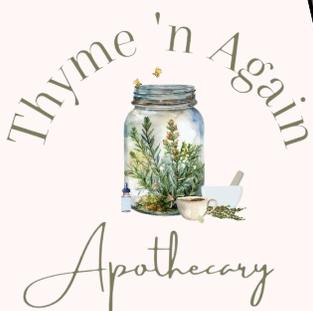


## Subscriber Gift

This month's print subscribers are receiving a custom essential oil blend from Thyme 'N Again Apothecary in DeKalb, Illinois. A thoughtful mix of bergamot, lavender, lemon, and vetiver designed to support calm, clarity, and emotional balance.

Handcrafted in small batches, this blend reflects Thyme 'N Again's deep respect for herbal tradition and intentional daily ritual.

Bright citrus notes gently lift, lavender softens the edges of a long day, and vetiver grounds it all, creating a scent that invites you to pause, breathe deeply, and return to yourself.



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## — Profile

Before there was Anchor Counseling, before the horses, before the private practice and nonprofit work, a young woman was learning how survival, healing, and hope work.

Angel Ianakiev did not enter the mental health field from the outside looking in. Her path was forged through lived experience.

“Like many teenagers, I faced challenges that shaped who I was becoming,” she shares. “When I started college, I didn’t yet know my path, but I began to see how my own journey of growth and recovery could become meaningful in helping others.”

That realization, subtle but steady, became the anchor point. Not a dramatic calling, but a growing understanding that what she had lived through could one day become something useful, even meaningful, for someone else. Early in her career, Angel found herself working at an alternative school, where she met a mentor who would help shape her philosophy of care.

“Donna was a counselor there,” Angel recalls. “She taught me what it was to be a social worker, but also how to step out of the box of ‘traditional’ work with clients.”



Donna didn’t stop at sessions or paperwork. She made sure the kids had food. She helped them find safe places to go. She showed up in ways that weren’t always outlined in job descriptions but mattered deeply.

“Donna was always helping youth beyond the typical role,” Angel says. “I knew I wanted to be able to do that.”

That belief, that healing happens in the margins, in the human moments, in the spaces where people feel cared for rather than managed, has followed Angel through every chapter of her work.



# Building Something of Her Own

When Angel founded Anchor Counseling in 2016, it wasn't sparked by a business plan or a vision board. It was sparked by motherhood.

At the time, Angel was working full-time at an agency, logging long hours and evenings that left her feeling disconnected from her family. Starting her own practice became a way to reclaim time, presence, and flexibility. Not just for herself, but for the life she wanted to be present for.

Anchor Counseling was born out of that desire: to build something sustainable, human, and rooted in real life.



## Rethinking What Healing Looks Like

With more than two decades of experience, Angel's understanding of healing has shifted in important ways.

"Healing is not linear," she explains. "There isn't a straight line that works for everyone."

With her expertise and wisdom of the team she's built at Anchor Counseling, Angel has intentionally expanded beyond traditional therapy models, incorporating modalities like EMDR, Gottman work for couples, Geek and Video Game Therapy, sound healing, animal-assisted therapy, and telehealth. Each one widening access and honoring the different ways people process, move, and heal.

"There's only so much you can learn from textbooks," Angel explains. "To really understand this work, you have to be with people in the messy, real-life moments, listening to their stories and walking through it with them."

That humility, knowing that presence matters as much as credentials, shapes the way Angel shows up with clients today.

## Being Seen (Sometimes Years Later)

Early in her career, Angel helped start an after-school program for at-risk youth through a local church.



“It was so great to be with these young people and engage them with activities rather than drugs after school. I put my heart into it and found volunteers to help them learn to cook, do art projects, go bowling, have snacks, and give back to the community themselves. It was so powerful.”

But after a year, grant funding ended. The program closed. And like so much work in mental health, the ending felt unfinished.

“As therapists, especially with troubled youth, we often don’t get to see or hear the positives of our work after our interaction with young people.”

Then, ten years later, Angel was standing at a gas station.

*A young man approached her and said, “Are you Angel?”*

“He told me that he had gone to our after school program, and it really made a difference in his life. He told me that he had been able to attend a trade program after school, had a good job, and was doing really well.”

That update meant so much to Angel. “I am grateful if all of the work that I did helped even one person.”

## Women’s Mental Health, From the Inside Out

Angel’s focus on women’s mental health, particularly perinatal mood disorders, infertility, and domestic violence, is deeply personal.

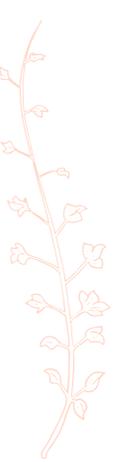
*“Having my first child was life-changing,” she shares. “Nothing prepared me for how difficult it would be.”*

She felt intense pressure to breastfeed. She carried guilt when she couldn’t. She experienced postpartum depression and deep feelings she had never known before. “I was scared to tell anyone what I was feeling,” she says.

Like many new moms, her body reached a breaking point. Sleep deprivation and stress led to a seizure. It was only then that Angel received medical support and began attending a support group.

That experience reshaped her purpose.

*“I wanted to help other women let go of the guilt and expectations,” she says. “And know they are not alone. Because becoming a mother is such a hard season of life on a variety of levels.”*



# Healing Beyond

## Words

Equine-assisted psychotherapy is one of the most distinctive parts of Angel's work, but it didn't begin as a clinical offering. It began personally, with her own return to the barn.

After two decades away from riding, Angel leased a retired camp horse named Lee for the summer. Stepping back into that space - dusty aisles, familiar sounds, the steady presence of a horse - brought something she hadn't realized she'd been missing. Time at the barn became a place of calm, a rare pocket of stillness where her nervous system could settle and her mind could slow.

The peace she felt there wasn't fleeting; it stayed with her.

It didn't take long for Angel to recognize that what she was experiencing might be meaningful for others, too. Horses offer something therapy rooms often can't: an immediate, embodied sense of regulation. Their presence is grounding without being demanding. Their responses are honest and unfiltered. They notice what we don't - subtle shifts in breath, tension held in the body, emotions that haven't yet reached language.



In sessions, horses often reflect what a client is carrying internally. Anxiety shows up in their movements. Calm invites calm.

This mirroring creates opportunities for insight and problem-solving in real time, without the pressure to explain or perform. Healing happens not through words alone, but through relationship, awareness, and connection.

Something horses seem to understand instinctively.

# Removing Barriers to Care

As Angel's equine-assisted work grew, so did her awareness of who was being left out.

At Anchor Counseling, a significant portion of clients rely on Medicaid. Angel began noticing a painful pattern: many were deeply interested in working with the horses, yet unable to afford the additional barn fees that came with equine-assisted sessions. The very people who could benefit most from this kind of grounding, nervous-system-based work were being excluded by cost.

For Angel, that didn't sit right.

Her response was Stable Path, a nonprofit created to ensure that finances would not determine who gets access to care.

Through this work, she is actively removing barriers so clients can engage in equine-assisted therapy regardless of income.

That commitment to accessibility extends across her entire practice. Angel accepts Medicaid and Medicare, offers telehealth and flexible scheduling, provides sliding-scale options, and works intentionally to meet clients where they are. It's a values-driven approach rooted in the belief that healing should never be a privilege.

And that quality mental health care should be available to anyone who seeks it.



## STABLE PATH



Founded in October 2025, Stable Path is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization developed to remove financial barriers to equine-assisted psychotherapy in two ways. The mission is to provide scholarships to clients in order to reduce financial burden, while also supplying vital care of the therapy horses and facility. The goal is to promote healing, connection, and personal growth.

A woman with long, wavy brown hair, wearing a maroon jacket, is smiling and standing next to a dark-colored horse in a stable. The horse has a white blaze on its face. The background shows wooden stalls and a red bucket on the floor.

When Angel looks toward the future of her clients and of mental health care itself, she is guided by the same truth that first set her on this path: people are not problems to be solved, but individuals to be understood.

Her earliest experiences navigating her own mental health as a teenager, learning by diving into the trenches supporting clients' hard seasons, and watching a mentor step beyond traditional roles to meet kids where they were, taught Angel that healing doesn't happen inside rigid systems. It happens when someone feels genuinely seen. That belief has only deepened over time.

Today, Angel envisions care that allows for difference and dignity. A system where healing isn't forced into a single model, but shaped around the person. Honoring their history, their nervous system, their pace, and their own unique way of relating to the world.

This perspective shapes how Angel practices every day. She prioritizes fit over formality, collaboration over control, and care over ownership. Whether she's sitting with a client, standing beside a horse, or referring someone to another provider, her approach remains the same: meet people where they are, without judgment, and trust that healing looks different for everyone.

Learn more about Anchor Counseling  
and Stable Path at  
[anchorcounseling.org](https://www.anchorcounseling.org)



## MDW Cares

MDW Cares is a mutual aid network for women navigating life's many transitions, from motherhood to career shifts to divorce and beyond. We connect you with trusted local resources and community support so you don't have to walk the journey alone.

The following pages highlight events, support groups and therapists with immediate openings to help you find care when you need it most.

# MDW March Support Groups



## COME AS YOU ARE COFFEE: SUPPORT GROUP FOR ALL WOMEN

Every Saturday 8:00 AM  
Storybook Cafe in Geneva, IL

Text 630-946-9102 to RSVP



## MOMS SUPPORT GROUP

MARCH 11 & 25, 2026 7:15 PM  
Batavia Library, Batavia, IL

Text 630-946-9102 to RSVP

## DIVORCED MOMS SUPPORT GROUP

MARCH 12, 2026 8:00 AM  
Virtual Bi-Weekly Meet Up

Text 630-474-5275 to RSVP



# MICRO HABITS WORKSHOP

THE ART OF MAKING YOUR GOALS DELIGHTFULLY DOABLE

In this two hour workshop, we'll break down how to create bite-sized actions that fit into your everyday life—no stress, no overwhelm, just results. Forget the complicated routines and lofty promises. This is about making tiny shifts that stick.

## Event Details:



SATURDAY,  
MARCH 21, 2026



2:00 PM - 4:00 PM



ST. CHARLES PUBLIC LIBRARY  
Huntley Community Room  
1 S 6th Ave, St. Charles, IL

Free event  
but please register!



CARRIE SUMMERS, LCSW  
NOREILA HEALING & WELLNESS

## What to Expect:



A game plan for turning your biggest goals into easy, repeatable habits



Tricks to sneak those habits into your day so they don't feel like a chore.



Real, actionable steps that won't leave you wondering if you're doing it right.



Plus, a little accountability to keep you on track when life tries to throw you off course.

# REBUILDING YOUR LIFE

*after divorce*

6:00 PM –  
8:00 PM

Wednesday,  
March 25

Geneva Winery,  
Batavia

Free event,  
but please  
register



[mdwcares.com](http://mdwcares.com)

# Meet the Speakers

Divorce can feel like a tidal wave of change, and when you're trying to hold everything together, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. That's why we've brought together a powerhouse panel of women who aren't just professionals in their fields; they're compassionate guides who understand what you're going through.

From financial planning and legal support to housing guidance and mental health support, these industry experts are here to offer clarity, answer your questions, and help you move forward with confidence. Whether you're newly divorced or still navigating the process, their insights will help you reclaim your footing and begin to rebuild your life.



Alexis Benson  
Edward Jones  
Geneva, IL

Alexis Benson is passionate about helping women and divorcees confidently navigate financial transitions. With a clear, compassionate approach, she partners with individuals to demystify financial planning and build a secure foundation for their next chapter.

Her mission is to create a judgment-free space where no question is too small and every decision is made with clarity and confidence.



Anique Drouin  
Drouin Family Law  
Naperville and St. Charles, IL

With nearly 20 years of experience, Anique Drouin focuses on family law with a strong emphasis on out-of-court resolutions. Her work is grounded in reducing conflict and guiding families through divorce with dignity and practical problem-solving.

Anique helps clients understand their options and avoid unnecessary drama by navigating post-divorce life with clear communication and thoughtful planning.



Carrie Summers  
Norella Healing and Wellness  
Wheaton, IL

Carrie Summers is a licensed therapist and certified divorce coach who helps individuals navigate life's toughest transitions—especially the emotional challenges of divorce. She provides a supportive space to process emotions, manage stress, and gain clarity.

Carrie's work empowers people to reconnect with themselves, build resilience, and move forward with confidence, balance, and a renewed sense of purpose.



Katy Winans &  
Linda Callaghan  
Guild Mortgage  
Aurora, IL

Katy and Linda of the Callaghan-Winans Team at Guild Mortgage bring a unique, deeply personal perspective to home financing after divorce. As a divorced mom and a child of divorce, they understand the emotional and logistical weight of housing decisions during transition.

Their mission is to provide guidance, education, and tailored lending solutions to help you make empowered housing decisions.

This event is  
free but please  
register here



# MDW PROVIDERS

At MDW Cares, we don't recommend people willy-nilly. Every professional we refer you to is thoughtfully vetted, because when you're seeking support, quality, trust, and alignment matter. We want you to know that anyone you find here is someone we would confidently recommend to a friend, a sister, or ourselves.

Our referrals must align with our core values of compassion, empowerment, and inclusivity. They must approach their work with empathy, honoring each person's lived experience, and creating spaces where all women and families feel welcomed, respected, and supported. That's why we're proud to feature three trusted professionals below, each of whom reflects these values in both their work and impact.

If you need additional resources, visit [mdwcares.com](http://mdwcares.com)



Nicole Seitzinger, LPC  
St. Charles, IL

With experience working with individuals of all ages, from children to adults, Nicole supports clients facing anxiety, ADHD, OCD, depression, relationship challenges, self-esteem concerns, and major life transitions. Her approach blends evidence-based modalities while also weaving in creativity and art-based techniques when helpful.

At the core of Nicole's work is partnership. Treatment goals are set collaboratively, ensuring each client feels heard, respected, and supported every step of the way.

 [nicole@bepresenttw.com](mailto:nicole@bepresenttw.com)

 [bepresenttw.com](http://bepresenttw.com)

 [@be\\_present\\_therapy](https://www.instagram.com/be_present_therapy)



Betsy Gilpin, LCPC,  
LCMHC  
Virtual in Illinois

Betsy Gilpin is affirming of all identities, cultures, abilities, and neurodiverse ways of thinking, she proudly supports the LGBTQIA+ community and creates a space where every part of you feels seen, safe, and valued.

Drawing from her own healing journey, Betsy helps clients break free from anxiety, people-pleasing, and old patterns so they can reconnect with their authentic selves and build lives rooted in confidence, peace, and freedom.

 [betsy@liveyourliberatedlife.com](mailto:betsy@liveyourliberatedlife.com)

 [liveyourliberatedlife.com](http://liveyourliberatedlife.com)

 [@liberatedlifecounseling](https://www.instagram.com/liberatedlifecounseling)



Claudia Skowron, MS,  
LCPC/LPC, CADC, CIMHP  
Hoffman Estates, IL

Claudia Skowron has extensive experience supporting clients in hospitals, intensive outpatient programs, community clinics, and private practice. She works with teens, young adults, couples, and adults, using practical, research-backed tools to help people better understand their thoughts, manage big emotions, and navigate stress in healthier ways.

Claudia is especially passionate about guiding young adults through major life transitions like college, career changes, and work/life balance.

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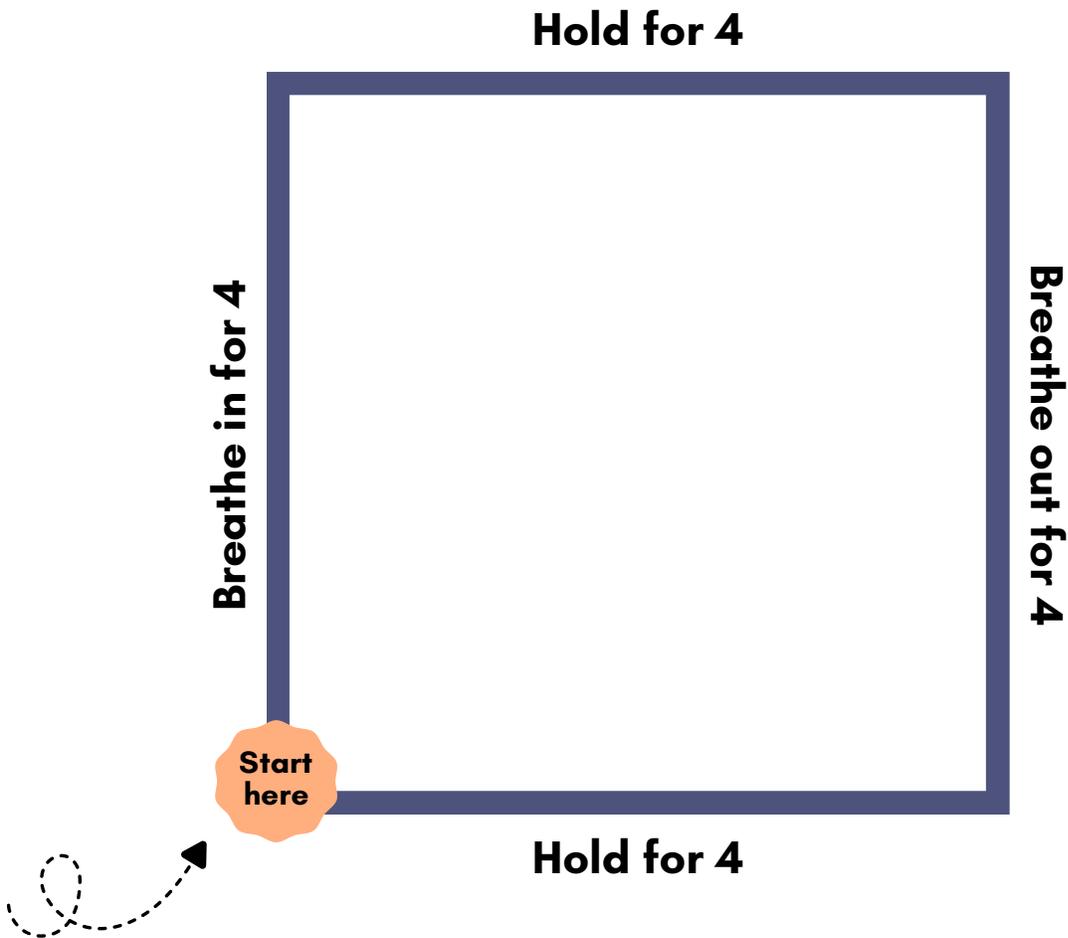
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# RESOURCE

Stress doesn't just live in our thoughts, it shows up in our bodies. Somatic strategies help us respond to those physical signals and gently guide the nervous system back toward calm. If your chest feels tight, box breathing - inhaling, holding, exhaling, and holding again for four counts - can help slow your system down. Jaw tension can ease when you soften your mouth, rest your tongue behind your teeth, or hum quietly, while a knotted stomach often responds to belly breathing, especially when your exhale is longer than your inhale.

To make this practice easier, we've created a simple box breathing tool you can use whenever stress starts to rise. You can download and print it for yourself at [mdwcares.com](http://mdwcares.com) as a quick visual reminder to pause, breathe, and reset.



MDW FREE DOWNLOAD  
on [mdwcares.com](http://mdwcares.com)



# SLOW LIVING GNIMILMOTS



# PAINTING

Artist Danielle Driscoll makes watercolor feel approachable and joyful with this beautifully designed workbook. With pre-drawn outlines on high-quality watercolor paper, step-by-step instructions, and real-time video tutorials, you can skip the sketching and dive straight into painting ten charming coastal scenes. It's a thoughtful exercise for anyone who wants to explore watercolor while learning new techniques along the way.



Coastal Watercolor Workbook

FINDING SILVER PENNIES





# Healing Isn't Linear

by Angel Ianakiev, LCSW

# ROUND & ROUND THE MOUNTAIN OF HEALING



Before I ever became a therapist, I was a teenager trying to understand my own mental health. Like many adolescents, I struggled internally in ways that didn't always have clear names at the time, like big emotions, stress, uncertainty, and the feeling that something wasn't quite settled yet.

Those early experiences didn't come with a roadmap, but they did help shape how I understand healing today: not as a straight line, but as a process that unfolds in its own time.

If there's one thing I wish more people knew, it's this: healing isn't tidy.

Many of us expect healing to feel like steady progress. You start therapy, learn some tools, and gradually feel better. Fewer bad days. More clarity. A sense that you're "past it."

But real healing rarely works that way. More often, it looks like feeling grounded for a while and then suddenly feeling shaken again. Old emotions pop up and triggers you thought were resolved make a return.

But that doesn't mean you're failing in some way; it means your system is responding to life.

And it's important to remember that healing moves in cycles because life does.

## When It Feels Like You're Going Backward

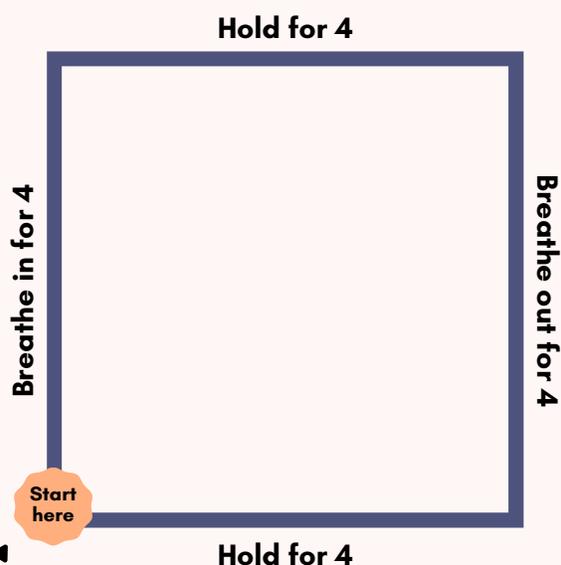
What people often call regression is usually your nervous system asking for support.

Instead of asking, 'Why am I back here again?' it can be more helpful to ask, 'What does my body need right now?'

If your chest feels tight, box breathing - inhaling, holding, exhaling, and holding again for four counts - can help your system slow down.

Jaw tension can ease when you soften your mouth, rest your tongue gently behind your teeth, or hum quietly. A knotted stomach often responds to belly breathing, especially when your exhale is longer than your inhale.

These seemingly "small" strategies aren't small at all. They're powerful tools that tell your body that you're safe enough to recognize safety. And that safety is the foundation of healing.



## Healing Isn't One-Size-Fits-All

Not everyone heals best through talking alone. Over the years, I've seen how different approaches support different people, especially when healing doesn't move in a straight line.



**EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)** - EMDR helps the brain reprocess experiences that still feel "stuck." Instead of reliving a memory over and over, the brain learns to store it in a way that feels more distant and less intense. For many people, this means they can remember what happened without their body reacting as if it's happening all over again. EMDR can be especially helpful when insight alone hasn't been enough.



**Sound Healing** - Sound healing works through rhythm, vibration, and frequency. Certain sounds can help slow the nervous system, creating a sense of calm and grounding that's felt physically, not just mentally. For people who feel overwhelmed, anxious, or disconnected from their bodies, sound can gently support regulation when words feel out of reach.



**Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy** - Horses are incredibly attuned to what's happening in the present moment. They respond to our breath, our posture, and our emotional state without judgment or expectation. Many clients feel calmer simply being near them. As people shift internally, horses respond in real time, offering feedback that's felt rather than explained. This embodied experience can be powerful, especially for those who struggle with traditional talk therapy or feel disconnected from their bodies.

## If You're in the Messy Middle

Remember that healing doesn't move forward in a straight line. It revisits old places with new awareness. It slows down when life asks more of us. The messy middle isn't a sign that something is wrong; it's often a sign that something is changing.

Sometimes healing is simply staying with yourself through the ups and downs and trusting that even when progress isn't obvious, it's still happening.

### *About the Author*

Angel Ianakiev  
LCSW, CADCR, PMH-C

When Angel Hernandez Ianakiev founded Anchor Counseling Inc in 2016, her vision was simple but powerful: create a space where people feel safe enough to tell the truth about their lives.

A Licensed Clinical Social Worker with over 20 years of experience, Angel brings deep clinical training, including certifications in Perinatal Mental Health, EMDR, Drug and Alcohol Counseling, and Equine-Assisted Psychotherapy, alongside lived compassion and grounded wisdom.

She works with teens and adults experiencing anxiety, depression, trauma, and life transitions, and she specializes in women's mental health, with advanced training in domestic violence, infertility, and perinatal mood disorders.

At the heart of her work is a belief that healing doesn't happen through judgment or quick fixes. It happens in spaces where you feel seen, heard, and respected. Angel helps her clients reconnect with their strengths, regulate their nervous systems, and move forward with clarity, not pressure.

She is a trusted member of the MDW community of providers, known for her warmth, integrity, and deep commitment to walking alongside women through every season.



# What's your sign?



## CAPRICORN (DEC. 22 – JAN. 19)

You've been quietly building something through the winter months. March is when the foundation you've been laying begins to feel meaningful again. Progress may still be slow, but the direction is becoming clearer. **Spruce your space:** Replace or upgrade one practical item you use daily - a lamp, planner, or desk organizer. Small improvements compound over time.

## CANCER (JUNE 21 – JULY 22)

The thaw of March reaches you emotionally before it reaches the ground. You may feel a subtle lifting, a reminder that heaviness doesn't last forever. This is a month for tending to your inner world and reconnecting with the people who feel like home. **Spruce your space:** Rearrange a living room chair or reading nook so it faces natural light. Your nervous system will thank you.

## AQUARIUS (JAN. 20 – FEB. 18)

Ideas are moving through you quickly this month, especially as the collective energy shifts toward new beginnings. You may feel inspired to rethink routines or experiment with a new approach to something familiar. **Spruce your space:** Add a small unexpected detail like a quirky object, unusual plant, or art piece that sparks conversation.

## LEO (JULY 23 – AUG. 22)

You're beginning to feel the warmth again, and with it comes the desire to express yourself more boldly. March reminds you that leadership doesn't always look like a spotlight, sometimes it looks like showing up with warmth and generosity. **Spruce your space:** Add one dramatic element. A bold candle, colorful pillow, or gold-toned tray. A little flair goes a long way.

## PISCES (FEB. 19 – MAR. 20)

This is your final stretch of birthday season, and the world feels especially reflective right now. You're standing at the shoreline between winter and spring, where dreams begin to take shape. Trust the transitional insights arriving this month. **Spruce your space:** Place something meaningful near your bedside. How about a journal, crystal, photo, or candle to anchor your inner world?

## VIRGO (AUG. 23 – SEPT. 22)

While others are still waking up, you're already noticing what could be improved. March offers a beautiful balance between reflection and action. Instead of overhauling everything at once, focus on small, satisfying adjustments that make daily life smoother. **Spruce your space:** Tackle one drawer or cabinet. The quiet satisfaction of order will ripple through the rest of your week.

## ARIES (MAR. 21 – APR. 19)

March is your warm-up lap before the real sprint begins. The early part of the month asks you to slow down just enough to listen to your intuition before the equinox flips the switch and your natural fire roars back to life. You may feel the urge to start ten new things at once, but the magic this month lies in choosing the one spark that truly excites you and letting it grow. **Spruce your space:** Clear one flat surface completely, a desk, table, or counter, and leave it intentionally open. Aries thrives when there's room to move.

## LIBRA (SEPT. 23 – OCT. 22)

As the light returns, so does your sense of harmony. March brings opportunities to restore balance, in relationships, routines, and your physical environment. You may feel drawn to beauty again after a long winter of practicality. **Spruce your space:** Refresh a wall or corner with something visual. A new print, a mirror, or even rearranging a gallery wall.

## TAURUS (APR. 20 – MAY 20)

You are deeply attuned to the quiet shifts of the seasons. As the world slowly wakes up, you may find yourself craving beauty in small, tactile ways, fresh flowers, sunlight through the window, the scent of something warm in the kitchen. **Spruce your space:** Swap out one cozy element for spring, a lighter throw blanket, fresh linens, or a bowl of citrus on the counter.

## SCORPIO (OCT. 23 – NOV. 21)

March stirs something beneath the surface. You're shedding old emotional layers the way snow melts quietly into the soil. This month asks you to trust the transformation happening within you, even if it isn't visible yet. **Spruce your space:** Remove one object that carries heavy or outdated energy. Make room for what's next.

## GEMINI (MAY 21 – JUNE 20)

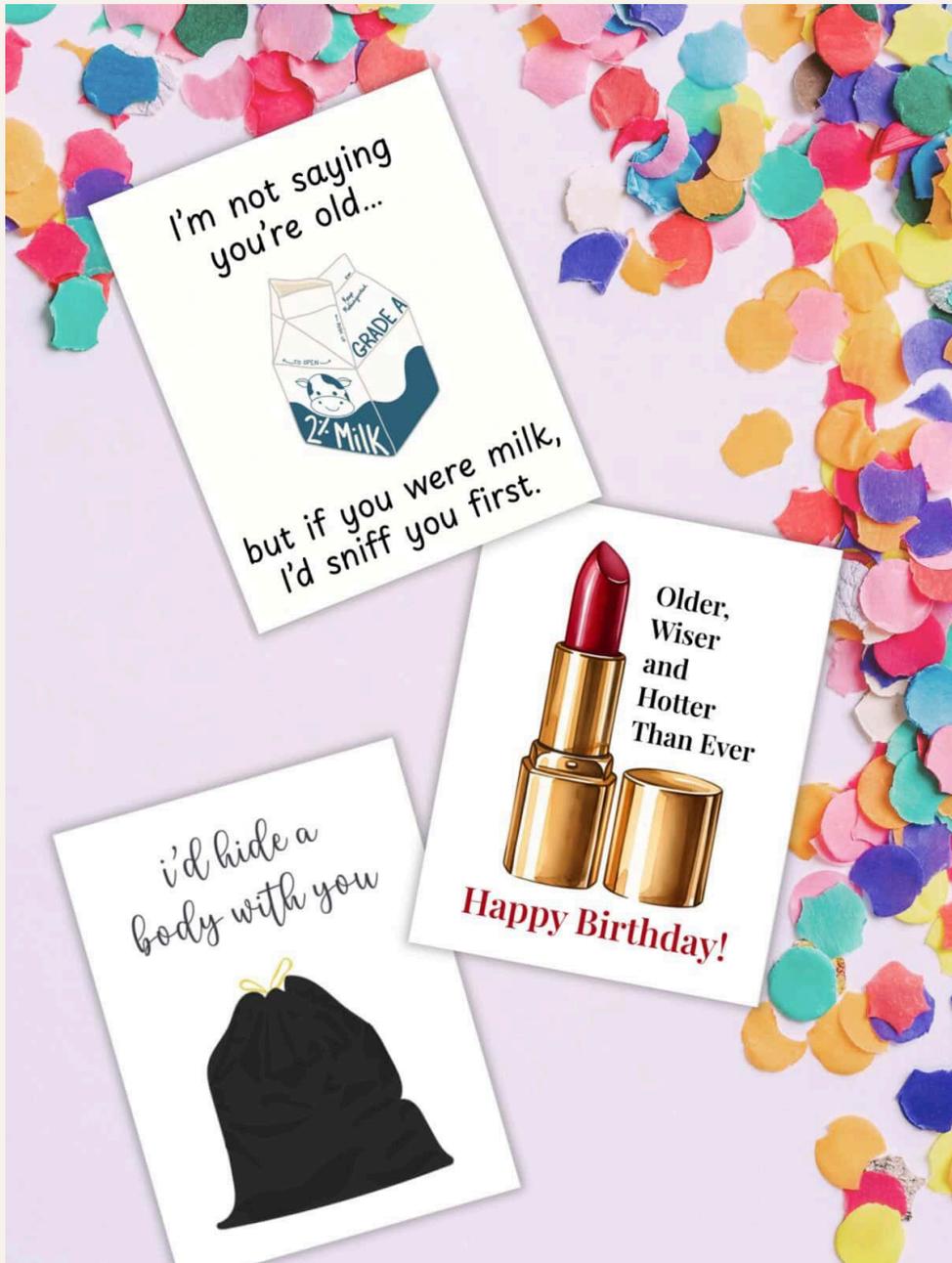
Your mind is buzzing again after winter's slower rhythm. Ideas are returning like birds in early spring, darting in and out faster than you can write them down. March invites you to follow your curiosity without needing to organize it immediately. **Spruce your space:** Create a "curiosity corner" - a small spot for books, notebooks, or clippings that spark ideas. Let it be a little messy.

## SAGITTARIUS (NOV. 22 – DEC. 21)

Your restless spirit is stretching its legs again. The promise of spring feels like an open road calling your name. March encourages exploration, even in small forms - a new neighborhood walk, a different café, a spontaneous idea. **Spruce your space:** Bring in something that reminds you of adventure. A map, travel photo, or artifact that sparks your sense of possibility.

# GREETINGS

For all your paper product needs, head over to Pretty Pages in Bartlett. Shop owner and designer Meli has a gorgeous assortment of stationery, books, candles, decor, gifts, and whimsical cards for every occasion.

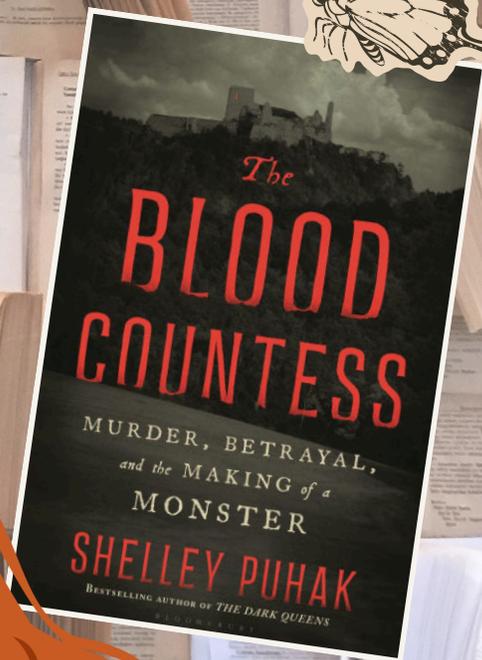
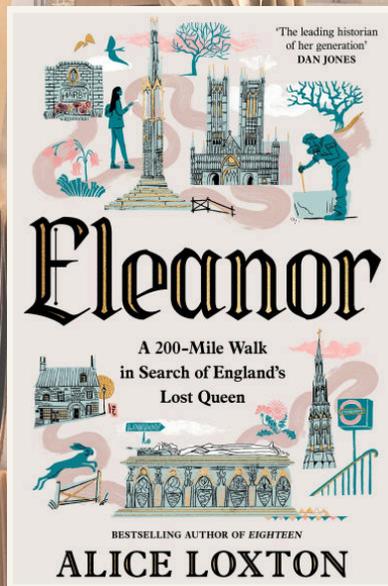
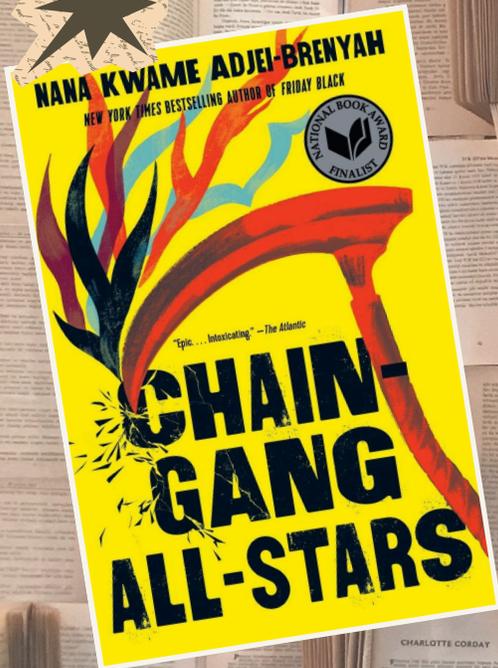


Greeting Cards

PRETTY PAGES in BARTLETT

*Discover in store at 138 S. Oak Ave., 1st floor in Bartlett, Illinois*

Treat yo' shelf.





# GLUTEN-FREE SHORTBREAD RECIPE

By Katie McCall

# A Lovely St. Patrick's Day Treat

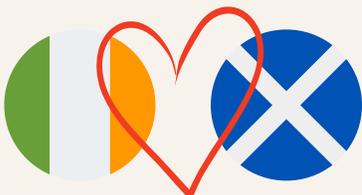
Shortbread originates from Scotland, but it's traditionally prepared throughout the entire UK – and for good reason: it's absolutely delicious! Enjoyed as is or alongside a hot cup of coffee or tea, this buttery, sweet, salty, chewy yet crumbly, melt-in-your-mouth pastry is the epitome of simplicity at its best.

With just five main ingredients, it's a no-fail recipe and true crowd pleaser. I make this every year around St. Patrick's Day to honor my family's Irish and Scottish heritage, and I honestly don't think I've ever met someone who doesn't love shortbread.

The caraway seed isn't traditional but adds a lovely layer of flavor and a little crunch on top. If you're not a fan of caraway, simply omit or play around with other additions like vanilla bean, a touch of lavender extract or orange zest. Standard all-purpose flour can also be used if you do not follow a gluten-free diet.

Enjoy!

- *Katie*



*Add ins to give a traditional shortbread a flavorful boost:*



## METHOD

Step 1 - Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Line a 9x9 baking pan with parchment paper. Set aside.

Step 2 - In a large mixing bowl (or stand mixer), cream together the sugar, butter, and vanilla. Scrape down the sides and then add the salt and flour, 1 cup at a time, until well-combined.

Step 3 - Add the dough into the pan and spread out evenly, using a little water on your fingertips to help the process - gluten-free dough is a bit more sticky! \*TIP: I also like using a piece of parchment paper to press and smooth the dough into the pan evenly ... just peel it off before baking!

Step 4 - In a small bowl, combine the crushed caraway seed and 1-2 tablespoons of sugar. Prick the dough all over with a fork, sprinkle with the sugar-caraway mixture on top, and bake for about 30 minutes or until golden.

Step 5 - Cool at least 10 minutes at room temperature prior to slicing and serving.

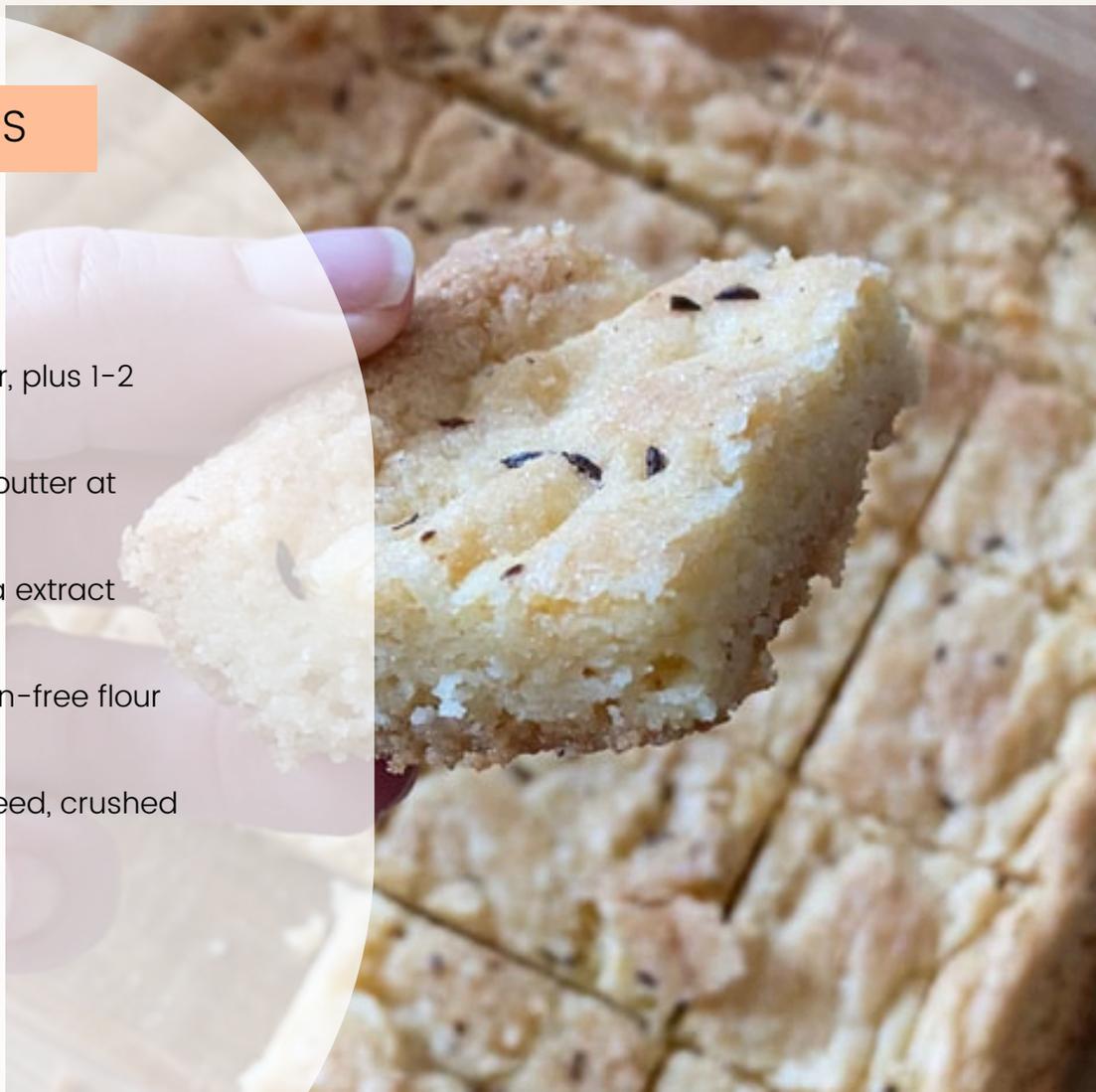
Step 6 - Shortbread can be stored in an airtight container at room temperature up to a week, refrigerated for 10 days, or kept in the freezer for up to 3 months.

This recipe makes a lovely gift! Simply cut into smaller squares and stack neatly (to avoid breakage) in a pastry box or cellophane baggie tied with a festive ribbon.

## INGREDIENTS

(Yields 1 9x9 pan)

- 1/2 cup granulated sugar, plus 1-2 tablespoons for topping
- 1 and 1/4 cups unsalted butter at room temperature
- 1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon Kosher salt
- 2 cups all-purpose gluten-free flour blend (I used Cup4Cup)
- 1/4 teaspoon caraway seed, crushed



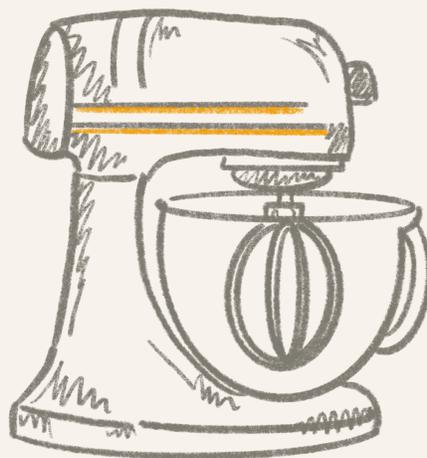
## About the Author:

Katie McCall is a Midwestern writer, cook, and community builder with a deep-rooted love for nature, food, and family. Raised in the rural suburbs of Chicago, she spent her childhood foraging for morel mushrooms, picking green beans, and learning early on that nourishment is about far more than what's on the plate.

She holds a B.S. in Journalism from the University of Illinois and later honed her culinary skills at Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts. Katie went on to co-found Two Wild Seeds, a gluten-free bakery she ran alongside her mother in St. Charles, Illinois. Though the bakery closed in 2021, her relationship with food—as storytelling, care, and connection—continues through her writing and creative work.

Katie currently serves as President of MDW Cares, where she helps guide the organization's mission to create accessible, supportive resources for women navigating life transitions. Her leadership is grounded in the belief that community care, honest conversation, and small daily acts of nourishment can change lives.

When she's not writing or cooking, Katie can be found tending her garden, restoring her 1905 farmhouse, wandering farmers' markets and antique shops, or experimenting with new ways to live thoughtfully and creatively. She is endlessly curious, deeply grounded, and always searching for what makes life feel both meaningful and delicious.



# sustainable living

## starter kit:

Chipko Market in St. Charles is a sanctuary for eco-conscious individuals, a thoughtfully curated space that embodies sustainability and stewardship for our planet, making low-waste living feel both approachable and community-centered. If you're looking to swap a few everyday staples, we've compiled some great starter finds below.



Deodorant Stick in Lavender Bergamot



Coconut Cutlery



Refillable Lavender and Rosemary Handsoap



Thick As Fir - Nettle, Rosemary & Horsetail Infused ACV Shampoo Bar



Northwoods Blend Mushrooms



**Chipko Market**

WHERE SUSTAINABILITY TAKES ROOT  
902 South Randall Road, Suite E  
St. Charles, IL



# Unplugging the Addiction: Navigating the Social Media Abyss

by Victoria Mahoney, LMFT  
Solid Foundations Therapy



Do you find yourself mindlessly scrolling through social media when you are bored?

Does your partner ever point out how you are glued to your phone rather than spending quality time with them?

Have you ever felt the need to compare yourself to those on social media as a way to validate your self-worth? Or maybe your recent social media post didn't generate as many "likes" as you had wanted, and now you are left feeling upset and angry.

These are all common things that happen when we prioritize social media in our daily lives. In an era dominated by technology, the lure of social media has become an irresistible force shaping our daily lives. Recent studies have delved into the intricate relationship between our brains and social media, revealing that the dopamine rush triggered by likes, shares, and comments on these platforms is akin to the euphoria induced by substances like cocaine.

Dopamine, often hailed as the brain's pleasure messenger, plays a pivotal role in regulating various bodily functions and emotions. When levels dip, a cascade of symptoms ranging from fatigue to moodiness prompts many to seek solace in the virtual realms of Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram.

Among the newest additions to this virtual pantheon, TikTok stands out as the most addictive, offering bite-sized nuggets of entertainment in the form of 15-second video bursts. Dubbed "Micro-Entertainment," TikTok provides a quick fix for pleasure-seekers, further cementing the addictive nature of social media.

Yet, this addiction comes at a cost. The repercussions of social media dependency extend beyond the virtual realm, seeping into our physical and mental well-being. Increased isolation, anxiety, depression, decreased physical activity, and poor academic or work performance are among the real-world consequences.

As our reliance on technology becomes an integral part of daily life, the quest to curb social media addiction becomes increasingly urgent. The seamless integration of platforms into our routines, perfected by the likes of Facebook, TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram, ensures that users of all ages remain captivated for longer durations with each login.

So, how do we break free from the shackles of social media addiction?

It's an excellent question as these old habits are often hard for people to break.



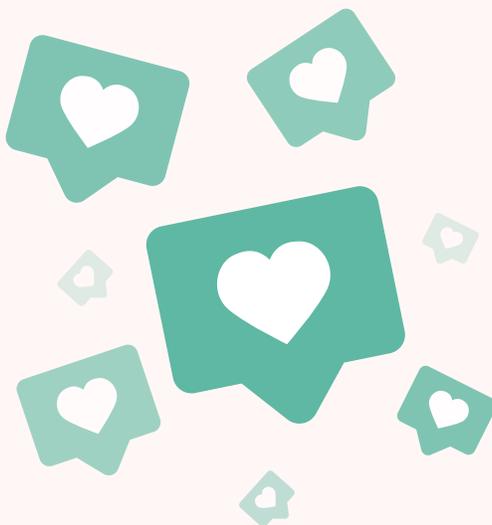
# HERE ARE 5 WAYS TO BREAK FREE FROM THE ADDICTION TO SOCIAL MEDIA:



## DISABLE PUSH NOTIFICATIONS

Have you ever been out to dinner and all of a sudden your phone starts pinging with social notifications? Not only is this distracting to you but also to the people you are sharing a nice meal with. Break the cycle of constant distraction by turning off push notifications.

This small adjustment can help you focus on the world around you, rather than being constantly drawn into the digital realm.



## DESIGNATE TIME PERIODS FOR SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Healthy couples create healthy boundaries and one of those could be putting away the phone after 8 PM to enable you to spend uninterrupted time with your partner as a way to end the day together.

Engage in healthy alternatives such as reading, exercising, or spending time with others to reduce dependency on social media as a coping mechanism.



## SEEK SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS AND FAMILY

Enlist the support of those closest to you. Friends and family can play a crucial role in holding you accountable and encouraging healthier habits.

Let your friends and/or family know about this goal you have set for yourself and encourage them to call you out when you aren't following it.



## PARTICIPATE IN A SOCIAL MEDIA FAST

Take a break from social media for a few days or even a week to reset your behavioral patterns.

It may feel difficult to initially break away from social media if you are used to using it daily but the freeing feeling you may experience will make it totally worth it after you have a chance to see what it's like to not need to rely on social media within your daily life.



## SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP IF NEEDED

There is nothing wrong with asking for help to be the best version of yourself. If social media addiction feels overwhelming, don't hesitate to seek professional guidance.

Counselors can provide valuable insights and support in navigating behavioral changes.

As we continue to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of social media, striking a balance between virtual and real-world interactions becomes paramount. By adopting these strategies, we can reclaim control over our relationship with social media, fostering a healthier and more fulfilling life offline.

If you continue to find yourself struggling with how to break free from your social media habits, you don't have to do it alone! Visit our website at [www.solidfoundationstherapy.com](http://www.solidfoundationstherapy.com) or give us a call at 630-633-8532.

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## About the Author:

Victoria Mahoney, LMFT  
Solid Foundations Therapy  
Downers Grove, Illinois

Victoria brings a warm, thoughtful presence to her work while also offering the kind of honest guidance that helps clients face difficult truths with compassion. She believes our relationships with ourselves, with others, and with the world around us shape nearly every part of our lives.

Through therapy, she helps individuals and couples better understand their inner world so they can build healthier, more fulfilling connections. Victoria takes a collaborative approach, working alongside clients to identify their goals, explore underlying patterns, and stay accountable as they move toward meaningful change.

Her areas of special interest include supporting clients navigating LGBTQ+ experiences, grief, trauma, affair recovery, sexual intimacy, and the complexities of modern dating.

[Info@SolidFoundationstherapy.com](mailto:Info@SolidFoundationstherapy.com)  
630-633-8532



**Solid Foundations Therapy**

*Building Healthy Relationships*

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WELLNESS





Column:  
Asking for a Friend

by Katie McCall

Hi A.M.! I couldn't have written this question better myself. I will be turning 40 later this year, and needless to say, my skin simply isn't what it was even just a few years ago. The fine lines and wrinkles are slowly creeping in, and I, too, find that every three months or so my go-to skincare routine doesn't bring the same oomph it once did.

Despite what society tells us, our skin ages naturally – no matter what we think we can do to prevent it! As the body ages, cell turnover decreases, collagen production slows down, and the epidermis (the outermost layer of our skin) thins. And let's not forget about our lovely hormones; as we approach and experience menopause, estrogen levels drastically decline, inherently reducing the skin's elasticity and thickness.

But, rest assured – there are many outside factors that can indeed be controlled in an effort to keep our skin healthy and radiant. Stress, pollution, diet, smoking, and chronic sun exposure are just a few of these factors that contribute to the breakdown of elastin fibers and collagen, causing wrinkles, thinning, drying, age spots, and sagging skin.

Aside from implementing healthy lifestyle habits (wear SPF, avoid smoking, eat a nutritious, antioxidant-rich diet, stay hydrated, exercise daily, and get your beauty rest) – the products you choose to put on your skin are equally important.

Though not a skincare professional myself, I have spent the better part of my adulthood researching, following advice from estheticians and dermatologists, as well as testing dozens of products on the market, ranging anywhere from DIY to high-end lines. And while I appreciate the strength of clinical formulas, I inherently (and non-apologetically) lean toward natural, cruelty-free brands that not only care about their customer's well-being, but also the Earth.



### Question

I'm in my late 40s and my skin feels dry, looks dull and is (naturally) aging.

I want to celebrate my maturing skin rather than cover it up, but it seems like my current products aren't doing much these days – and I can't afford expensive skincare treatments.

I would love some suggestions for natural, at-home products. Thank you!

A.M. – St. Charles, IL



*Have a question  
you'd like to ask Katie?*

Life, relationships, style, home decor, food, feelings – we're talking about it!

Send your question to Katie at  
[katie.mdwcares@gmail.com](mailto:katie.mdwcares@gmail.com)

And don't forget to follow her on IG

@katiemccall



With these parameters in mind, I've rounded up eight of my favorite products below, all boasting active botanicals straight from nature. The best part? Everything is under \$50 and can easily be integrated into your current routine. Whether you're looking to overhaul your entire cabinet, or simply want to explore a new product or two – there's surely something here for all ages and skin types.



Dive into why I love these products on the following pages.



# katie's faves

## Luma & Leaf - Hydraglow Cleanser

A friend recently recommended this brand - and I'm already obsessed! The potent enzyme blend of pineapple, lemon, and grape act as natural AHAs (alpha hydroxy acids), making this a powerful gel cleanser that gently removes dead skin cells and impurities, unclogs pores, brightens dark spots, and ultimately, leaves your skin looking smooth and refreshed. The addition of hyaluronic acid delivers deep hydration to combat dryness and yield more youthful-looking skin.

\$20



## RE+NU Naturals - Brightening & Resurfacing Toner

If you're looking to minimize the appearance of pores, balance pH, and protect the skin at the cellular level, this plant-powered toner is perfect. Fruit extracts (papaya, orange, lemon) and glycolic acid dissolve dead skin and deep clean to remove oil, trace impurities, and debris. Just a few sprays of this refreshing, earthy-meets-herby, lightly carrot-scented toner resurfaces and revitalizes skin instantly.

\$28



## Mion Artisan Soap - Face Serum

If you're local and haven't stopped by one of Mion Artisan Soap's four locations (St. Charles, Wheaton, Downers Grove, La Grange), run - don't walk - to check it out. Every product is handcrafted in small batches, using high-quality, all-natural ingredients, fresh herbs, and essential oils. This face serum is a lightweight blend of hemp seed and rosehip oil, used to balance, hydrate, brighten, and smooth. Golden jojoba oil nourishes and protects, while red raspberry seed oil adds antioxidant defense. Made with frankincense, rose absolute, and tea tree essential oils, it calms, rejuvenates, and refines your complexion.

\$25



## 100% Pure - Coffee Bean Caffeine Eye Cream

This has been my go-to, tried-and-true eye cream for years. It instantly wakes up tired under eyes, and as a busy mom of two young children, I am always on the hunt for something that refreshes my look. This formula harnesses the power of caffeine from coffee and green tea to visibly reduce puffiness, brighten dark circles, and boost circulation for a well-rested appearance. Infused with anti-aging vitamins and rosehip oil, it naturally hydrates delicate skin and helps smooth fine lines.

\$35



## Earth Harbor - Mermaid Milk Nutrient Glow Moisturizer

I discovered this product about six months ago, and though other moisturizers have periodically crept in, I continuously return to this. Its lightweight, airy, almost cloud-like texture absorbs quickly and melts beautifully into the skin, infusing it with superfoods like matcha, spirulina, seaweed, aloe juice, and turmeric. The addition of blue tansy (a Mediterranean plant primarily sourced from Morocco) further helps reduce inflammation, soothes irritation, and calms blemishes.

\$24



# katie's faves



## AbbyRose - Restoring Face Oil

This is a gentle, lightweight, fragrance-free blend for sensitive, stressed, or maturing skin. Created with luxurious Squalane (a plant-derived emollient oil) and antioxidant-rich elderberry extract, this fast-absorbing formula delivers deep hydration and essential lipids to support the skin barrier. Personal stamp of approval by MDW Founder Elizabeth Rago, who loves and uses this product daily!

\$28



## Mad Hippie - SPF 30+ Daily Protective Serum

Perhaps the most critical step of any skincare routine is sunscreen. UV ray exposure causes immediate skin damage by destroying collagen and cellular DNA, as well as triggering melanin production - causing dark liver spots and uneven skin tone. This product made its way into my circulation last summer during a trip to Hawaii, withstanding endless humid days at the beach and pool (80 minutes water-resistant), as well as hours of hiking and sightseeing. The best part? Its lightweight formula hydrates, nourishes, and blends into your skin beautifully without leaving a white film or overpowering SPF scent.

\$23



## Lauren's Original All-Purpose Salve

As a professional chef, former bakery owner, dancer, avid gardener, and busy mama - it's safe to say my body has taken quite a beating over the years. Cuts, scrapes, burns, scars, blisters, you name it, I've had it. Often described as skinfood - filled with 100% organic ingredients like coconut oil, shea butter, hemp seed oil and essential oils - this salve has been part of my daily regime for the past 10 years. From split ends and chapped lips to minor cuts and cracked heels, it can be used head to toe to restore, protect, and heal. Perhaps my favorite part is the addicting combination of peppermint, lavender, and patchouli oils, resulting in the most harmonious scent that is equally uplifting, calming, and grounding.

\$36



If you're feeling overwhelmed - don't be! Perhaps your lifestyle allows space for a multi-step skincare routine such as this, but if you're anything like me and need something that's simple yet effective, estheticians and dermatologists typically recommend just four products: a cleanser, a serum, a face cream and always SPF.

No matter what you do, remember to always let your natural beauty shine through.



*Disclaimer: The information provided on MDW is not intended to diagnose, prevent, or treat any medical condition. Content is based on personal research and experiences and is meant for inspirational purposes only. We are not licensed nutritionists, estheticians, or medical professionals, and you should always consult with your doctor, particularly if you are pregnant or breastfeeding.*

# ACUPRESSURE

These tiny acupressure rings may look simple, but they pack a surprisingly satisfying little zing.

Roll one up and down your finger and the gentle points stimulate pressure spots, helping release tension and bring a small moment of calm to your day.

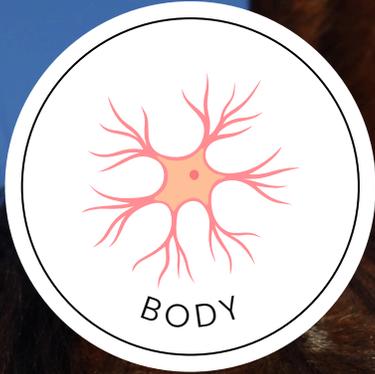
Think of it as a tiny pocket-sized reset button for busy hands and minds.



Accupressure Ring

SAGE HEALING COLLECTIVE in ST. CHARLES





# What Horses Teach Us About Our Nervous System

by Angel Ianakiev, LCSW

There is a particular kind of reverence and honesty that exists in the presence of a horse. It is quiet, strong, and impossible to negotiate with. You can enter an arena or pasture believing you are calm, composed, and fully in control, and within moments, a horse may reveal something different.

Not through words, but through distance or closeness, movement or stillness.

As prey animals, a horse's survival depends on reading subtle, nonverbal cues in their environment. They notice changes in breath, muscle tension, posture, and intention long before we are consciously aware of them ourselves. When we step into their space, they are not evaluating our stories; they are attuning to our state of being. That attunement is what makes equine-assisted therapy such a powerful teacher.

## *Beginning from the Bottom Up*

Much of traditional self-reflection begins with thoughts:

Why did I react that way? What does this mean about me?  
How do I fix it?

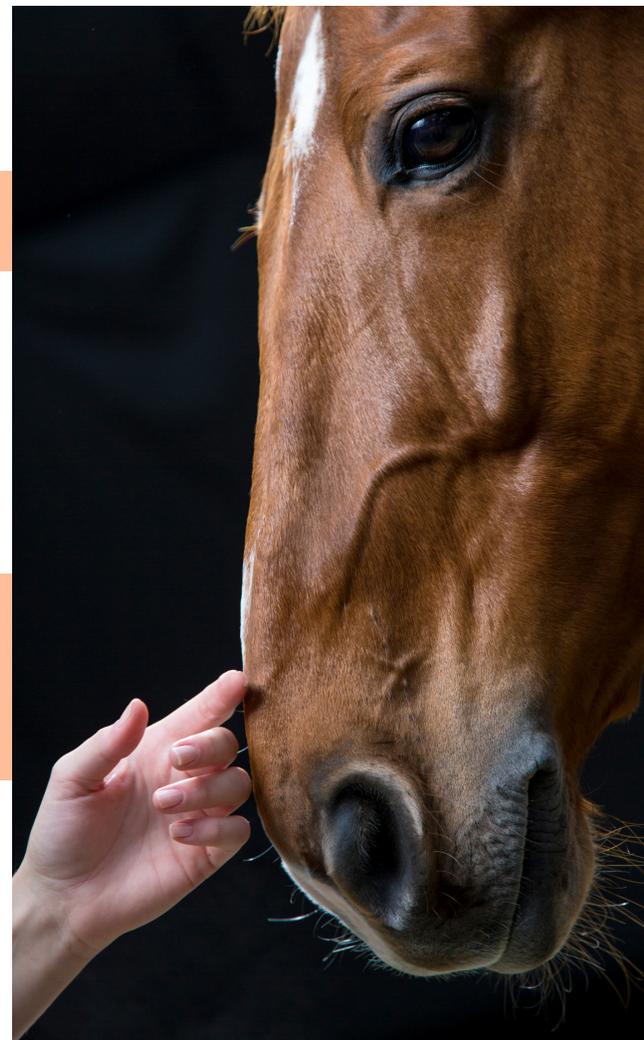
But trauma and chronic stress are not primarily cognitive experiences. They are physiological ones. The body reacts first, and the story follows.

Equine work approaches healing from the bottom up. Instead of starting with analysis, it begins with sensation.

What is happening in your chest as the horse approaches?  
Where do you feel tightness when the horse turns away?  
What shifts when you stop trying to perform calmness and simply breathe?

Because horses are highly sensitive to regulation and dysregulation, they often act as co-regulators. A horse that feels grounded presents a steady breath, a relaxed stance, and rhythmic movement, and can influence the human nervous system in subtle yet meaningful ways.

Clients frequently describe feeling unexpectedly peaceful in the presence of a horse, even when anxiety has followed them everywhere else. That peace is not imaginary; it is relational. The body senses safety and begins to recalibrate.



## *Horses as Emotional Mirrors*

One of the most profound aspects of equine-assisted sessions is the way horses reflect emotional states without criticism or bias. If a person approaches with guarded energy, the horse may hesitate. If that same person softens even slightly, the horse often responds.

The feedback is immediate and embodied in a beautiful relationship between this regal animal and a human companion.

Nothing is being diagnosed or judged in those moments. Instead, the horse's response becomes information. It offers insight into what is happening beneath conscious awareness and invites curiosity rather than shame. The relationship shifts as the person shifts. And that lived experience can be far more transformative than intellectual understanding alone.



## *Herd Energy and Human Connection*

Horses are herd animals, which means their survival depends on connection and attunement. In a healthy herd, members remain aware of one another's needs. When one is injured or distressed, others adjust their behavior. Safety is collective.

This dynamic offers a powerful metaphor for human nervous systems. We are wired for co-regulation, even if cultural messages have encouraged hyper-independence. Many of us have learned to function like isolated pack members, self-reliant, guarded, and responsible only for ourselves. Yet our physiology tells a different story. We regulate best in the presence of a steady, responsive connection.

Observing herd behavior can challenge the belief that healing must be solitary. Horses remind us that regulation and resilience are strengthened in relationships. Then, in the arena, stillness carries powerful meaning. A horse that pauses is not necessarily resisting; they may be assessing. A horse listens to its environment before moving forward. That pause is the animal collecting data.

For humans who equate stillness with avoidance or failure, this can be a profound reframe. When working with horses, clients often discover that slowing down reveals more than pushing ahead. A moment of quiet beside a horse can illuminate tension patterns, emotional habits, or protective strategies that were previously invisible. Stillness becomes an invitation to listen rather than a sign that something is wrong.

# Movement, Curiosity, and Beginning Again

Horses are naturally curious. They approach, retreat, and circle back. Their movement is responsive rather than forced. This quality aligns beautifully with the symbolism associated with the Year of the Horse: forward motion, fresh starts, and the energy of a new chapter.

But horses teach us that forward movement is most sustainable when it emerges from regulation. It is not frantic or performative, rather aligned where curiosity replaces urgency, and presence replaces pressure. In this way, beginning again is not about dramatic reinvention. It is about moving from a steadier place within.



## Sound, Resonance, and the Body

Some equine practices, like the events we host at Stable Minds, incorporate sound healing alongside horse work, recognizing that vibration and rhythm also speak directly to the nervous system. Sound bypasses analysis in much the same way horses do. When steady equine presence and resonant sound converge, clients often experience a deepened sense of grounding. The body softens before the mind fully understands why.

This is not mystical as much as it is physiological. Regulation can be facilitated through relationship, rhythm, and safe sensory input.

## Carrying the Lessons Forward

Even for those who may never participate in equine-assisted therapy, the lessons horses offer are accessible in daily life.

- Notice your breath before you respond in conflict.
- Pay attention to muscle tension before you explain it away.
- Seek relationships and environments that help your body soften rather than brace.
- Allow pauses to inform you rather than alarm you.

Horses teach us that our nervous systems are always communicating. Healing does not begin with perfectly chosen words; it begins with awareness of what is happening beneath them. When we learn to read our own bodies with the same sensitivity that horses use to read us, we move through the world with greater steadiness.

And from that steadiness, genuine forward movement becomes possible.

## About the Author

Angel Ianakiev  
LCSW, CADAC, PMH-C

After two decades away from riding, Angel leased a retired camp horse named Lee for a summer. What she expected to be a familiar pastime became something powerfully restorative. The dusty aisles combined with the rhythmic sound of hooves shifting in the stall gave Angel a grounded presence that allowed her nervous system to soothe and settle.

"It became this pocket of stillness," explained Angel. "A place where my mind could slow down."

Over time, Angel began to recognize that what she was experiencing wasn't just personal; it was therapeutic. Horses offer something traditional therapy rooms sometimes cannot: embodied feedback. They respond to breath, posture, tension, and emotion before those experiences ever reach language. Horses mirror what we carry internally, without judgment or agenda.

Today, equine-assisted psychotherapy is one of the most distinctive offerings at Angel's practice, Anchor Counseling. In the arena, healing unfolds through relationship and awareness. Clients don't have to explain everything. The work happens in real time, through connection and regulation with subtle shifts the body understands before the mind does.

For more information about therapy with Angel and Stable Minds, visit [anchorcounseling.org](http://anchorcounseling.org)



# TEA

This nourishing herbal blend is thoughtfully crafted to support women's wellness with ingredients like red raspberry leaf, nettle, hibiscus, and red clover. Naturally caffeine-free, it offers a balance of minerals, antioxidants, and calming botanicals with a softly sweet flavor from honeybush and apple. It's the kind of tea that feels like a quiet moment of care in the middle of a busy day.



Women's Wellness Blend

THE IRIE CUP in HUNTLEY



# STRUGGLING TO ACHIEVE ORGASM? CAUSES, SIGNS, AND SOLUTIONS WITH PELVIC FLOOR PT

by Dr. Jana Richardson, Dual Board Certified Pelvic Floor Therapist and Owner of Chicago Pelvic Health

Experiencing difficulty achieving orgasm is a common issue for both men and women. This can be a source of significant frustration and distress, affecting overall quality of life and intimate relationships.

While many factors contribute to orgasmic difficulties, one often overlooked area is the health and function of the pelvic floor muscles. In this blog, we'll explore the causes of orgasmic challenges, signs to watch out for, and how Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy (PT) can provide effective treatment options.

## Factors Contributing to Difficulty Achieving Orgasm

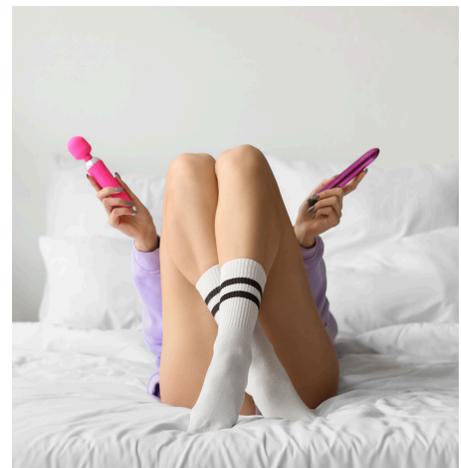
**Physical Factors** - For both men and women, physical factors can play a significant role in achieving orgasm. These can include medical conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, hormonal imbalances, and chronic pain conditions like endometriosis or prostatitis. Additionally, pelvic floor dysfunction, which includes muscle tightness, weakness, or lack of coordination, can significantly impact sexual function.

**Psychological Factors** - Mental health is deeply connected to sexual function. Stress, anxiety, depression, and past trauma can all contribute to difficulties in achieving orgasm. Performance anxiety and negative body image also play a role in sexual dissatisfaction.

**Medications** - Certain medications, particularly antidepressants, antihypertensives, hair loss, and medications for chronic pain, can interfere with sexual function. These drugs may reduce libido, alter hormone levels, or directly affect the nerves responsible for sexual arousal and orgasm.

**Lifestyle Factors** - Lifestyle choices such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, and lack of physical activity can also affect sexual health. Poor diet and lack of sleep further exacerbate these issues, contributing to reduced sexual satisfaction.

## Top 10 Signs You Might Be Struggling to Achieve Orgasm



#1 - Prolonged Time to Reach Orgasm

#2 - Inability to Achieve Orgasm

#3 - Decreased Sexual Satisfaction

#4 - Reduced Libido

#5 - Pain During Sex

#6 - Tension in Pelvic Area

#7 - Erectile Dysfunction

#8 - Lack of Vaginal Lubrication

#9 - Emotional Distress

#10 - Avoidance of Sexual Activity

# The Role of Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy

Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy (PT) is a specialized form of therapy focused on the muscles, ligaments, and tissues of the pelvic floor. These muscles support the bladder, bowel, and reproductive organs, playing a crucial role in sexual function.

A pelvic floor PT begins with a thorough pelvic assessment to identify issues related to muscle strength, flexibility, and coordination. This assessment helps in creating a personalized treatment plan aimed at addressing specific dysfunctions that may be contributing to orgasmic difficulties.

## Treatment Techniques

1

**Pelvic Floor Exercises** - Kegel exercises and other strengthening techniques help improve muscle tone and control, enhancing sexual function.

2

**Manual Therapy** - Hands-on techniques to release tension, improve blood flow, and enhance muscle function. This can include internal and external muscle manipulation.

3

**Biofeedback** - Using sensors and manual techniques to provide real-time feedback on pelvic floor muscle activity, helping patients learn to control these muscles more effectively.

4

**Education** - Providing information about anatomy, function, and techniques to improve sexual health and function.

5

**Relaxation Techniques** - Teaching relaxation exercises to reduce pelvic floor tension and anxiety related to sexual activity.

## Benefits of Pelvic Floor PT

Pelvic floor physical therapy can have a powerful ripple effect on your overall well-being, including your intimate health. By improving muscle strength and coordination, many people experience more satisfying sexual connection and an easier time reaching orgasm, while also reducing pelvic pain that may have made intimacy uncomfortable in the past. As you gain a better understanding of how your pelvic floor muscles work, confidence often grows and anxiety around sexual performance can decrease. Beyond the bedroom, stronger pelvic floor function also supports bladder and bowel health, contributing to greater comfort, control, and everyday quality of life.

## Moving Forward with Support

If you struggle to achieve orgasm, it's essential to understand that you're not alone and that help is available. Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy offers a comprehensive approach to addressing the physical aspects of sexual dysfunction, providing effective and lasting solutions. By focusing on the health and function of the pelvic floor muscles, you can enhance your sexual satisfaction and overall quality of life.

Don't hesitate to seek help from a board certified pelvic floor physical therapist. They can provide personalized care and support to help you overcome difficulties and achieve a more fulfilling sexual experience. Remember, addressing the issue early can prevent long-term problems and improve your overall health and well-being.

For more information or to schedule an appointment with a pelvic floor physical therapist, visit Chicago Pelvic Health. Let's work together to ensure you enjoy a healthy and satisfying sex life.

Reach out directly at [help@chicagopelvic.com](mailto:help@chicagopelvic.com)  
773-219-2749

### *About the Author*

#### Dr. Jana Richardson, PT, DPT, WCS, PRPC, CIDN

Dr. Jana Richardson is the founder of Chicago Pelvic Health, where she helps people navigate pelvic floor issues with both deep expertise and genuine compassion.

With a Doctorate in Physical Therapy and dual board certifications in Women's Health and Pelvic Rehabilitation, she specializes in treating complex pelvic floor conditions, and she's also certified in Integrative Dry Needling, allowing her to create truly comprehensive, personalized treatment plans.

What sets Dr. Richardson apart isn't just her credentials, but her commitment to patient-centered care and her belief that everyone deserves to feel strong, confident, and at home in their body.

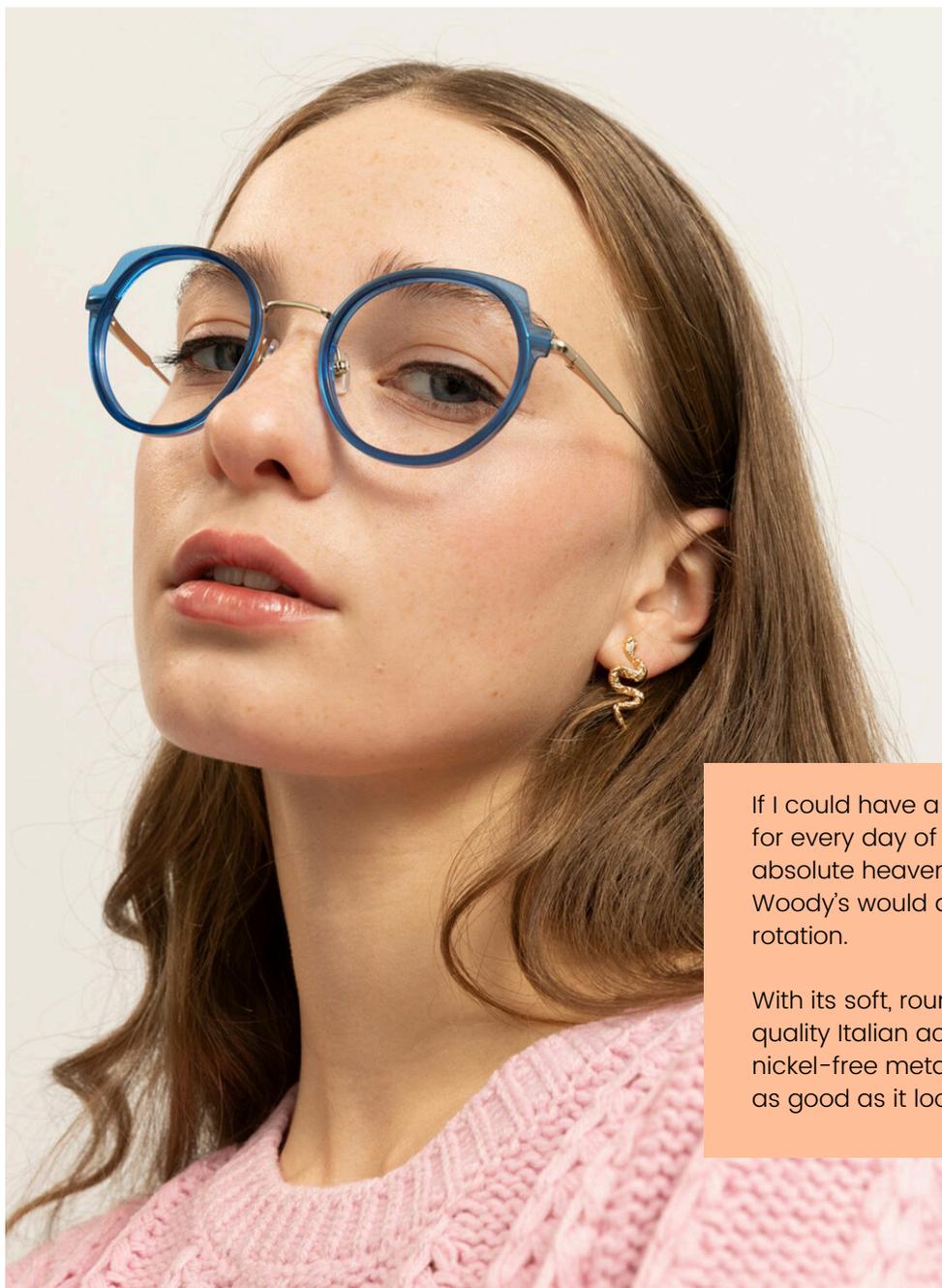
Learn more about Dr. Richardson and Chicago Pelvic Health and Wellness at [chicagopelvic.com](http://chicagopelvic.com) or reach out directly at [help@chicagopelvic.com](mailto:help@chicagopelvic.com) (773) 219-2749



STYLE



# SPECS



If I could have a different set of frames for every day of the week, I'd be in absolute heaven, and the Milena by Woody's would definitely be in heavy rotation.

With its soft, round silhouette, high-quality Italian acetate, and lightweight nickel-free metal for balance, it feels as good as it looks.



*Elizabeth*

Milena Frames by Woody's  
BLINKA OPTICAL in GENEVA



# JOGGERS



Shannon at The Pep Line has brought in a selection of clothing to her shop, and we're obsessed.

Like something you'd wear while wandering through a farmer's market or curling up with a good book on a slow Sunday, these 100% woven cotton pants are all breathable softness and whimsical charm.

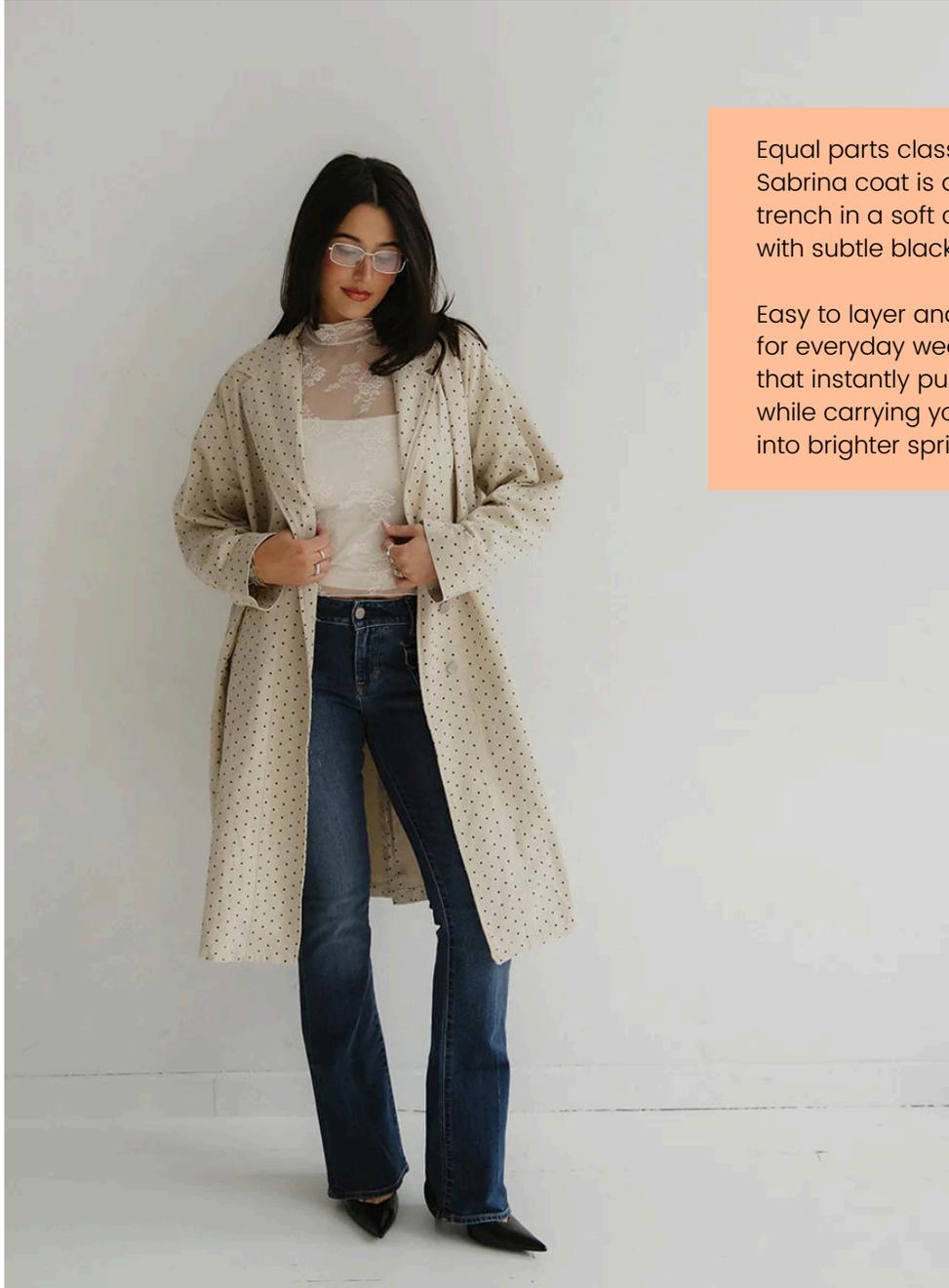
The boho patchwork brings just the right amount of personality, and the adjustable drawstring waist lets you settle into your perfect, made-for-you fit.

Pink Patchwork Jogger Pant

THE PEP LINE in ST. CHARLES



# COAT



Equal parts classic and playful, the Sabrina coat is a lightweight denim trench in a soft cream shade sprinkled with subtle black polka dots.

Easy to layer and comfortable enough for everyday wear, it's the kind of piece that instantly pulls an outfit together while carrying you from chilly mornings into brighter spring days.

Sabrina Coat

MAKOMA HOUSE in ST. CHARLES



# TOPS

We couldn't help but feature The Pep Line again, because this top is fabulous and has us excited for spring. This cheerful cotton poplin blouse is just the pick-me-up your wardrobe needs for the tail end of winter. With playful patchwork flower details, soft puff sleeves, and a flattering peplum waist, it brings a little hint of spring wherever you go.



Flower Color-Block Poplin Top

THE PEP LINE in ST. CHARLES



HOME





# Small Change, Big Impact. 5 Ways to Refresh Your Home & Your Mind

by Zoe Sherwin

For many of us, the years seem to pass a lot faster than hours, and by the time we notice it, clutter is staring back at us.

Spring always feels like the perfect opportunity to refresh your space and spruce up your surroundings by tweaking (or removing) what's in your everyday environment.

Selling a home shouldn't be the only reason to declutter or change something for the better. You deserve a peaceful space, layered with intention. Research shows that even small acts of decluttering can lower stress hormones and create a calmer mental environment.

So, let's start there.



# #1

Decluttering your space can create immediate emotional rewards, such as a positive outlook and a sense of accomplishment. Refreshing your home isn't just about aesthetics; it's a proven way to support emotional well-being.

Intentional styling can also help our spaces feel new. In my experience with designers, I notice they frequently remove half of what's in a space and rebuild with height, texture, and something personal. Start with one room or even one surface to minimize overwhelm. Remember, it's about progress, not perfection.



## #2

Painting is one of the simplest ways to transform a space, whether your budget is \$50 or \$5,000. With a clear vision, a room can feel completely refreshed in just a short amount of time. If you're looking for a small change with a big impact, consider focusing on a single wall.



A feature wall offers one of the highest-impact, lowest-effort updates you can make in a room. Start by choosing a space you spend a lot of time in or naturally gravitate toward. Painting one wall creates an instant focal point, giving the room a sense of structure and intention. Designers often use feature walls to anchor the eye, define a specific zone (like a dining nook) or introduce personality without overwhelming the entire space.

Because you're only working with one wall, it's also a great opportunity to experiment with bolder colors or subtle textures you might not choose for a whole room. You can even add extra detail with a stencil pattern or soft stripes, creating an elegant design moment without a major commitment.

## #3

Rugs and pillows are an easy, affordable way to shift the color palette of a room. Whether you purchase new or secondhand, choosing pieces that echo the colors in your sofa or throw pillows helps everything feel intentional rather than accidental. When a few elements share the same palette, the whole space begins to feel thoughtfully curated, like it was always meant to be yours.



## #4

Sometimes what a room needs most is something alive. A single leafy plant, a few mid-size beauties on a shelf, or even fresh stems in a vase can soften a space and instantly lift the mood.

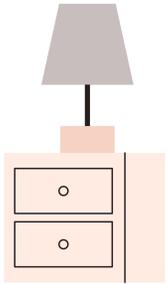


Houseplants don't just add beauty; they support the air around you. Snake plants, spider plants, and peace lilies are popular for their ability to help filter common indoor pollutants like formaldehyde and benzene. Snake plants even release oxygen at night, spider plants are hardy and pet-friendly, and peace lilies can add a bit of gentle humidity to a room.

Research like NASA's Clean Air Study suggests that certain houseplants can help improve indoor air quality when paired with good ventilation. In other words, a little greenery doesn't just brighten a room; it helps the whole space breathe.

# #5

Few things transform a space as quickly or as beautifully as lighting. Creating an environment where your mind and body can relax often starts with the glow around you. Updating fixtures or adding a few thoughtfully placed lamps can instantly make a room feel warmer, calmer, and more welcoming.



In 2026, designers are moving away from relying on a single overhead light and instead embracing layered lighting – think ceiling fixtures, sconces, table lamps, and small accent lights working together. This softer approach brings rooms to life: paint colors appear richer, textures feel more dimensional, and the entire space takes on a cozy, lived-in atmosphere.

And perhaps best of all, warm, gentle lighting is replacing harsh, bright LEDs, helping our homes feel less like offices and more like places to truly unwind.

A home begins to feel like a true sanctuary when it reflects intention, clarity, and the personality of the people who live there. Often, the simplest way to create that feeling is by taking ownership of the spaces you can control. Refreshing a room, through color, lighting, plants, or small thoughtful updates, becomes more than a design choice. It's an act of care that supports your well-being.

Clearing clutter quiets the mind and makes room for calm, creativity, and a deeper enjoyment of everyday life. Choosing colors, textures, and pieces that genuinely resonate with you reinforces a sense of identity and belonging, reminding you that your home isn't just a place you maintain, it's a space that can actively support and inspire you.

In a world that often feels fast and unpredictable, being intentional at home is a simple but powerful way to ground yourself, celebrate your individuality, and take joy in the parts of life that are within your control.

## *Bonus Tip:*

Engaging the senses can deepen that feeling of comfort. In addition to these ideas, consider lighting a phthalate-free candle. Many candles made with essential-oil-based fragrances gently activate the limbic system, the part of the brain connected to memory, emotion, and mood, adding another layer of calm to the atmosphere you're creating.



# zoe's faves

Whether new or pre-loved items are on your list, I've got you covered with recommendations featuring some local businesses that deliver on quality, integrity and heart, every single time with every single product.



## The Pep Line

Every corner of this thoughtfully curated boutique feels like a spark of inspiration. The space blends style, comfort, and everyday practicality in a way that makes you immediately start imagining new possibilities for your own home.

Beyond the beautiful pieces you'll find throughout the shop, designer Shannon Peppard brings more than 20 years of experience helping clients create unique spaces. She offers design services ranging from full-home projects to simple room refreshes, helping you pull together furniture, décor, and color in a way that truly brings a space to life.

Learn more about design services and shop at [thepepline.com](http://thepepline.com) or in person at 201 Cedar Ave. in St. Charles, Illinois.



## Giron Apparel + Home

Shop apparel, Guatemalan-made home goods, candles, coffee, and more at this truly family-owned and operated business. Valeska and Manny pour so much care into what they create, leading with heart and a deep commitment to their roots.

They work closely with families in Guatemala, ensuring fair wages for the people producing their coffee and apparel. It's the kind of business that reflects hard work, pride, and heritage, and you can feel that intention in everything from the candles and coffee to the beautifully made clothing.

Discover more at [gironapparelandhome.com](http://gironapparelandhome.com) or shop in person at Red Hive Market in Batavia or Workshop 4200 at 4200 West Diversey in Chicago, Illinois.

## Industrial Treasures



Housed in a 1920s factory building, this 8,000+ square foot shop is a treasure trove of vintage, industrial, and artistic finds. The space is filled with character.

Furniture, lighting, paintings, glassware, dishes, books, toys, and one-of-a-kind pieces that feel like they each carry their own story.

Every time I visit, I discover something new that seems to speak directly to me. Diane and her team have done an incredible job curating a space that celebrates history, craftsmanship, and creativity. Wandering through the shop feels a bit like stepping into a living collection of memories, where every corner offers a little spark of nostalgia and joy.

Learn more at [industrialtreasures.com](http://industrialtreasures.com) or visit in person at 1501 Indiana Avenue #1A in St. Charles, Illinois.



## About the Author

Zoe Sherwin  
Realtor with Keller Williams Inspire  
Geneva, IL

Zoe is a Kane County-based realtor who supports both buyers and sellers through some of life's biggest transitions with empathy, clarity, and a calm, steady presence.

Known for her ability to balance strategy with heart, Zoe helps clients navigate not just the logistics of a move but the emotional weight that often comes with it. She believes a home is more than a property; it's a place layered with memories, meaning, and possibility, and she approaches every client relationship with that truth at the center.



Need support for buying or selling? Reach out to Zoe at 331-425-1181 or email her [zoe.sherwin@kw.com](mailto:zoe.sherwin@kw.com)





PARENTING

# TRICITY FAMILY SERVICES' WILDERNESS CHALLENGE PROGRAM

It's more than just a camping trip—it's a life-changing experience.



If you've been in the TriCities area for a while, you probably know someone who has been touched by the Wilderness Challenge Program (WCP). The trip began in 1990, when founders headed north to Minnesota's Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Over the past 35 years, many logistics have evolved, but the heart of the experience remains the same: a group of teens (along with a couple of adults) head into the wilderness to learn about themselves, each other, and the world around them.

# Trip Basics

Each year, the agency recruits graduating 8th, 9th, and 10th graders for the week-long summer adventure. Peer leaders who have previously participated give a brief informational presentation and help interview potential participants to ensure a good fit.

In May, before heading north, the group gathers for a team-building day that includes a swim test, paddling instruction, and fun activities. This event allows participants and leaders to get to know each other, form groups, and begin building trust.

As departure approaches, participants prepare for five nights in the wilderness. A packing list and meetings help ensure everyone has what they need to stay safe and comfortable. The agency provides tents, packs, and much of the specialized gear, so most items are things teens already have at home.



On departure day, everyone gathers early at the agency and boards the bus for the day-long trip north. The first night is spent in cabins at the outfitter, preparing to launch the next morning. Each wilderness permit allows up to nine people per group, traveling in four canoes. Days are filled with paddling across pristine lakes and portaging between them. Each evening, groups locate their own campsite, set up tents, cook dinner, enjoy a campfire (when permitted), and settle in for the night.

Participants experience nature in unforgettable ways: moose, eagles, loons, frogs, shooting stars, the Milky Way, and so much more. Everyone arrives with personal challenges and faces new ones together. Groups bond over inside jokes, trail names, bad weather, good weather, mud, lost gear, found gear, and the many unexpected moments that make the trip memorable.

On the final day, groups paddle back to their pick-up point and shuttle to the outfitter. Packs are cleaned, tents aired out, trash disposed of, and everyone enjoys a well-earned shower and meal. The cabins are once again home for the night before returning to Illinois the next morning.



# The Story Continues



The trip is just the beginning.

For some participants, the summer trip is their full WCP experience. But for others, the journey continues through the Wilderness Challenge Program “Survivors” group, which meets throughout the year.

Each month includes two types of gatherings. Activity-based events—such as a barbecue, Funway Entertainment Center, meals out, or bowling—provide fun opportunities to stay connected and build friendships close to home. Additionally, survivors meet monthly for peer leadership development, preparing to serve as next year’s peer leaders.

Peer leadership is integral to WCP’s success. Adult leaders and peer leaders collaborate throughout the planning process to create a meaningful and successful trip. Peer leaders offer guidance at packing meetings, calm anxieties on the bus, provide encouragement in the wilderness, and celebrate accomplishments along the way. Many former peer leaders eventually become some of the program’s most treasured adult leaders.

## Not Sure If This Is Right for You or Your Teen?

This experience is designed for teens ready to challenge themselves physically and mentally through the demands of nature. Participants gain skills that support their transition into high school and young adulthood. No prior camping or wilderness experience is required.

The program has proven especially impactful for teens who have struggled academically, socially, or behaviorally, or who have experienced family challenges such as divorce or loss.

For questions, please reach out to [Wilderness@tricityfamilyservices.org](mailto:Wilderness@tricityfamilyservices.org).

To register, visit our website: [www.tricityfamilyservices.org/wilderness-challenge-program/](http://www.tricityfamilyservices.org/wilderness-challenge-program/) or scan the QR code



### Upcoming Dates

Application Deadline: April 10

Information/Interview Night:  
April 15

Teams Course Day: May 3

Packing Meetings: June 8, 9, 10

Trip Dates: June 11–18

# MEMORABLE *moments*

Local business owner Jake Wolfe of Howling Wolfe Canoe & Kayak participated in TriCity Family Services' Wilderness Challenge Program as a young teen. He credits the adventure as one of the inspirations behind starting his own outdoor tour company on the Fox River.

Of the trip, Wolfe has said:



It is an awesome time. You are going to learn a lot, you're going to have a lot of fun, but you're also going to challenge yourself.

You're going to find yourself in new situations you haven't been in before that are going to make you feel uncomfortable. They're going to force you to grow a little bit, but it's all great.

## About the Author



Andrea "Andy" Drott  
Program Supervisor  
TriCity Family Services



Andrea "Andy" Drott (they/them) joined TriCity Family Services as Wilderness Challenge Program Supervisor and Therapist in January 2024. Andy earned their Master of Science in Education in Counseling from Northern Illinois University in 2007. They spent over a decade with Youth Outlook, an LGBTQIA+ youth organization, as Youth Leadership Coordinator, and also worked at NIU as a health educator supporting students in making healthy decisions while navigating academic life.

Andy approaches their work through a lens of holistic well-being, seeking balance across life domains. They center clients' strengths, values, and emotions to empower growth through challenges.

With a deep passion for the outdoors, Andy has hiked more than 650 miles of the Appalachian Trail and visited over 25 national parks. These experiences shape their belief that nature has the power to heal and support. In their free time, you can find them hiking, camping, crafting, or playing roller derby.



Learn more about the Wilderness Challenge Program and other support initiatives at TriCity Family Services at [tricityfamilyservices.org](https://tricityfamilyservices.org)



# GIFTS

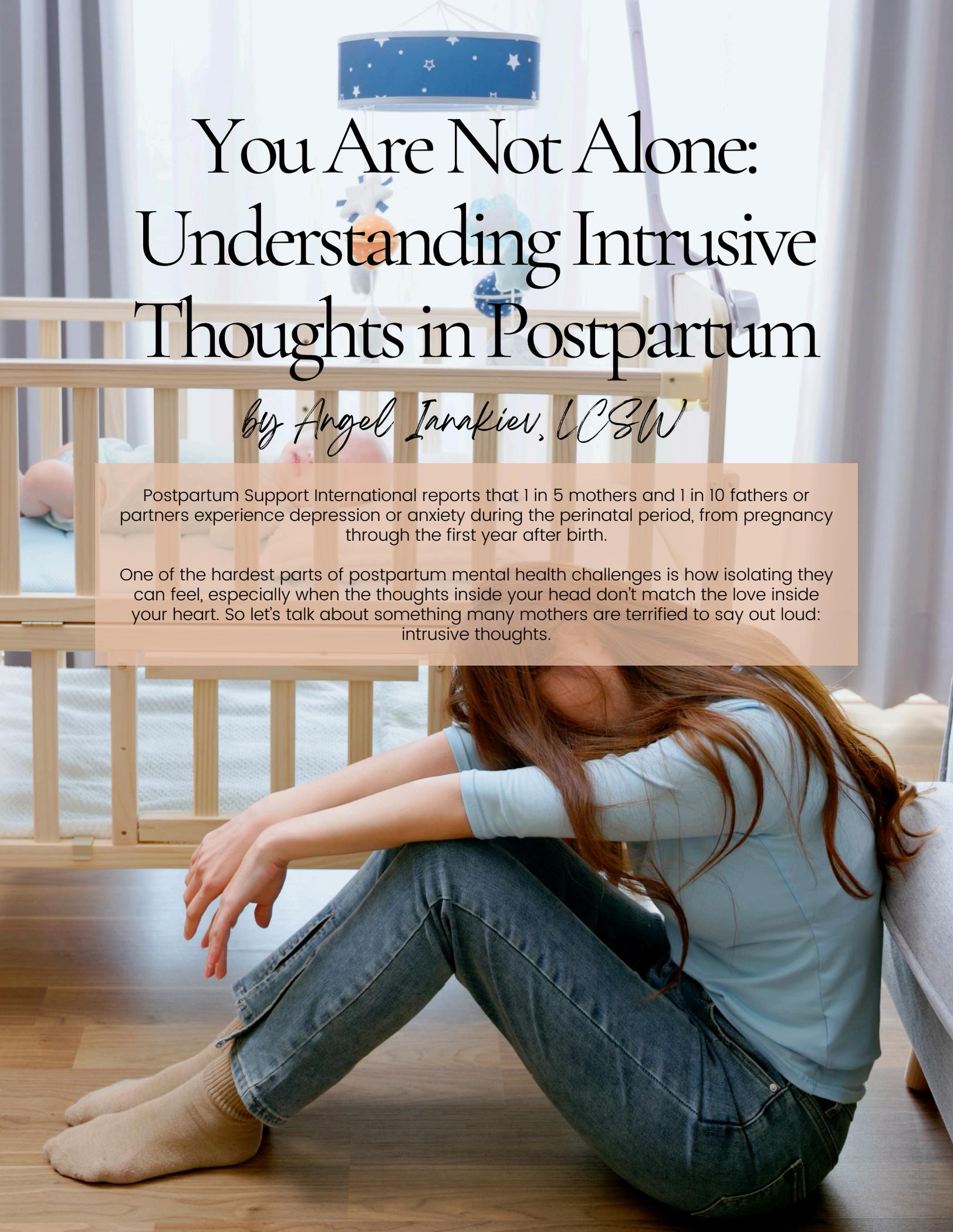


Tucked inside a beautifully patterned metal egg tied with a soft bow, a tiny plush rabbit waits to be discovered.

Dressed in a sweet dotted suit, this little bunny has magnets in its hands so it can hug the egg or a new friend, making it a charming keepsake gift for little ones.

Easter Egg with Micro Rabbit  
LITTLE BARN BABY in GENEVA





# You Are Not Alone: Understanding Intrusive Thoughts in Postpartum

*by Angel Iankiev, LCSW*

Postpartum Support International reports that 1 in 5 mothers and 1 in 10 fathers or partners experience depression or anxiety during the perinatal period, from pregnancy through the first year after birth.

One of the hardest parts of postpartum mental health challenges is how isolating they can feel, especially when the thoughts inside your head don't match the love inside your heart. So let's talk about something many mothers are terrified to say out loud: intrusive thoughts.

# What Are Intrusive Thoughts?

Intrusive thoughts are unwanted, repetitive thoughts or mental images that feel disturbing, alarming, or completely out of character. They often center around safety:

- What if something horrible happens to my baby?
- What if I drop her?
- What if I hurt him?

For some mothers, they can take on taboo or deeply distressing themes, including fears of accidental harm, contamination, or even sexual harm. These thoughts feel shocking precisely because they are the opposite of who you are.

They replay on a loop, and make you question yourself.

And the more you try to push them away, the louder they seem to get. But here is something important to remember:

**Intrusive thoughts are symptoms, not intentions. They are not predictions or confessions, and they are not your character.**

In fact, they often show up in parents who care deeply.

## When It's More Than "New Mom Worry"

Some mothers experience a specific condition called Perinatal or Postpartum OCD (PP-OCD). This involves intrusive thoughts (obsessions) paired with behaviors meant to reduce anxiety (compulsions).

It can look like:

- Repeatedly checking if the baby is breathing
- Excessive cleaning or sterilizing
- Avoiding holding or bathing your baby for fear of harm
- Removing sharp objects from the house
- Constant reassurance-seeking
- Avoiding news stories or social settings that trigger fears

These behaviors are attempts to feel safe. But over time, they can trap a mother in cycles of anxiety and shame. And shame is what keeps women silent.



Many mothers fear:

“If I say this out loud, will someone think I’m dangerous?”

“Will they hospitalize me?”

“Will they take my baby away?”

The truth is this: having intrusive thoughts does not mean you want to act on them. In PP-OCD, these thoughts are ego-dystonic, meaning they go against your values and identity. That distress is actually a sign that they are not aligned with who you are.

Reaching out for help is a sign of protection, not risk.

If you seek support, look for providers certified or trained through reputable organizations like Postpartum Support International (PSI), who understand the difference between intrusive thoughts and intent.



## Naming the Thought Changes Your Relationship With It

One of the most powerful first steps is awareness.

Instead of: Why am I thinking this? What is wrong with me?

Try: This is an intrusive thought.

Naming it creates space between you and it. When we avoid or fight the thought, we accidentally feed it. When we label it, we regain a little power.

It may not disappear overnight. It often takes repetition to build this habit. But gently saying,

“That’s an intrusive thought. I don’t have to engage with it,” can begin to loosen its grip.

# Come back to the present

Intrusive thoughts pull you into a terrifying imaginary future, while grounding pulls you back to now. Try this when you are feeling calm enough to practice. Hold your baby and notice:

- The smell of their skin
- The fuzziness of their hair
- The texture of their pajamas
- The weight of their body against yours

You are here, and your baby is here. This moment is safe.



5 things you can see.



4 things you can feel.

(Ex: the sun is shining on my skin and it feels warm, my socks are tight on my feet.)



3 things you can hear.

(Ex: the sound of people talking around you in a coffee shop, the hum of your laptop, a car muffler rumbling by outside.)



2 things you can smell.



1 thing you can taste.

## Try a grounding exercise.

Even five intentional minutes can interrupt the loop.

It may feel awkward at first, and it may take weeks to become a reflex, but that's okay.

You are building a new pathway.

## Small Rituals, Small Anchors

Creating rituals throughout your day can help your nervous system reset. For example, bath time becomes:

- Noticing the temperature of the water
- Feeling the weight of the washcloth in your hand
- Looking at your baby's tiny eyelashes when they blink
- Listening to the sound your voice makes when you sing

You might also carry a small grounding object throughout the day:

- A bracelet you can touch
- A smooth stone in your pocket
- A reflexology ring to gently roll on your finger
- A tiny bottle of essential oils to softly inhale



When the loop starts, hold this item and say: "I am here. I am in this moment." Using these objects will help remind you that you are not fulfilling your intrusive thought and bring you back to your body.

If intrusive thoughts are part of your postpartum experience, it does not mean something is wrong with you. It means your brain is on high alert, your love is fierce, and your nervous system needs extra support.

And support exists.

You deserve care that is informed, compassionate, and grounded in a real understanding of postpartum mental health. You deserve to mother without carrying a secret fear alone. If you are reading this and feel comfort because someone finally said the hard thing out loud, please know:

You are not the only one.  
 You are not dangerous.  
 You are not failing.  
 You are a mother navigating an enormous transition.

And you do not have to do it in silence.

## About the Author

Angel Ianakiev  
 LCSW, CADAC, PMH-C

Angel's work in women's mental health is more than clinical; it's personal. After the birth of her first child, she found herself navigating postpartum depression, overwhelming guilt around breastfeeding, and intrusive thoughts she felt too afraid to share.

"Nothing prepared me for how difficult it would be," she says. Sleep deprivation and stress eventually led to a seizure, a turning point that pushed her toward the medical care and support group she needed. That season reshaped her purpose.

Today, Angel specializes in perinatal mood disorders, infertility, and supporting women impacted by domestic violence, offering the kind of reliable, shame-free space she once needed herself.

"I want women to let go of the guilt and expectations," she says, "and know they are not alone, because becoming a mother is such a hard season of life on so many levels."



ANCHOR  
 COUNSELING 



anchorcounseling.org  
 angel@anchorcounseling.org  
 630-765-3214

# about **the modern domestic woman**

Supporting women from all walks of life.

At The Modern Domestic Woman (MDW), we are committed to addressing the holistic needs of women and recognizing the challenges they face in various aspects of life. Our vision is to create a nurturing environment where every woman feels supported and encouraged to thrive, regardless of their circumstances. Through our workshops and resource-sharing initiatives, MDW equips women with the tools and knowledge they need to overcome challenges and pursue their goals with confidence. We believe in providing practical resources tailored to women's needs, ensuring that they have access to essential support services.

MDW focuses on 3 pillars of living:

**MENTAL HEALTH** - MDW Cares is our support community of women rooted in making mental health a priority instead of an afterthought. Because nobody can pour from an empty cup.

**LIFESTYLE** - MDW loves creating safe spaces; at home and in the body you call home. We encourage a healthy lifestyle that meets you where you're at. Not where someone else wants you to be. We also love pretty things at MDW and celebrate style and the artistry of creatives.

**ADVOCACY** - At MDW, we go out into our communities and support women in crisis. We actively partner with organizations that support the rights, recovery, and well-being of women.

Beyond referrals, MDW has free support groups and community education workshops, and an informative and fun blog with free downloadable resources.

For more information, visit [mdwcares.com](http://mdwcares.com) or follow MDW on your favorite social platform @[themoderndomesticwoman](https://www.instagram.com/themoderndomesticwoman)

Have a question or need a referral? Email us at [themoderndomesticwoman@gmail.com](mailto:themoderndomesticwoman@gmail.com)





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