NOVAH
RETHINK PAIN

A RESILIENCE TOOL FROM DR. TRUNG NGO

The Weave

A simple way to look at your life and see what's helping you cope — and what might quietly be making it harder.

When you're living with long-term pain — or any hard season — the thing that helps most is a steady sense that you're going to be okay, no matter what happens. That steadiness comes from two things: the people, places and activities you engage with, and what you've built inside yourself to meet them with.

The Weave is a picture you draw of your own life. It shows where your strength is coming from, where something might be draining you, and — the part most tools miss — where the two don't line up. From there, you can make small changes that leave you better held.

What we look for

You don't need to memorize this — it's simply what we help you notice when we draw your Weave together. People tend to cope better with pain when their life gives them enough of these. We've grouped them four ways.

In your body

- Physical ease — movement, comfort, a body that isn't always tense
- Energy — enough to do what matters to you, and to rest

In who you are

- A sense of identity — being part of something that gives you pride and belonging
- Purpose and meaning — a sense that your life matters
- Having a voice in how you live your life — real choices, real control

In what you have

- Time — enough of it, and some choice over how it's spent
- The basics — food, a safe and calm place to be, money, medical care, chances to learn or work
- Understanding — knowing what's happening to you, and why

In the world around you

- Supportive relationships — people who are there for you
- Being believed — a sense that your experience is real and taken seriously
- Fair treatment — being treated as an equal, with a real chance to be involved in something
- Routine and rhythm — predictable days, regular gatherings, practices that matter to you (including ways of worship)

The more of these you're getting, the more you have to draw on. The Weave helps you find where they're strong and where they're thin.

Start here — find your anchor

Before you begin, choose an anchor: someone who steadies you and whose judgment you trust. You can ask them to sit with you while you work, and to be there as you make changes.

No such person right now? Use something that steadies you instead — a pet, a place, the memory of someone from your past, a song, a film, a hero of yours real or imagined, or your faith. Come back to your anchor often as you go.

> **One important thing.** Your Weave only helps if you can be honest on it. You should feel completely free to draw the truth about everyone and everything in your life. If the person who most affects you is also someone you wouldn't feel safe drawing honestly in front of, do this on your own — many people prefer to anyway, at least the first time — and bring it to us. Your Weave is yours. No one else needs to see it until you decide they can.

How the Weave works

There are three simple movements:

1. **List** the people, places and activities that really shape your life.
2. **Notice** two things about each one — how it makes you feel, and what it's doing to your life over time.
3. **Adjust** — lean into what steadies and builds you, and ease what's costing you, so you have more to draw on overall.

The second movement is where the Weave does something unusual, so we've broken it into two quick passes below. For most things, how they make you feel and what they do to your life over time line up. A few don't — and those few are worth their weight in gold.

Drawing your Weave

You'll need the template on the last page (or a blank sheet), and a blue, a red and a grey pen or pencil. If you don't have these, use any 3 different colours, or use different types of lines (for example, a straight line, a wavy line and a dashed line). Take your time. There's no rush and no right answer.

1 Put yourself in the centre

Write your name in the middle. Everything else revolves around this — because everything in your life, good and hard, lands on you.

2 Add the things that matter

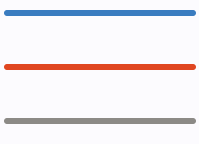
Around your name, write down:

- People you have important relationships with
- Groups that are part of who you are — work, cultural, faith, lifestyle
- People, places or groups that give you what you need — work gives income; an exercise class gives movement and calm
- Places you spend a lot of time — home, work, school, the gym
- Things you do regularly — sports, hobbies, habits (including ones like smoking or snacking)
- Qualities you identify with — being kind, strong-willed, creative
- Your pain itself, if it also gives you something — meaning, inspiration, or a way of connecting with others

Some things fit in more than one place. That's completely fine.

3 First pass — how each one feels

Go on feeling alone here. Don't think about whether something is good for you — just notice what it does to you in the moment, as a single, instinctive sense. For each thing, draw **one** line connecting it to you:



A **blue** line if it tends to leave you feeling **calm or light**

A **red** line if it tends to leave you feeling **tense or heavy**

A **grey** line if you feel **neutral, mixed, or you can't tell**

Just one line per thing. Go with your first, overall sense — that instinct is the honest answer, and it's what the next pass works from.

This pass is pure gut. Trust it. Your body already knows.

4 Second pass — what each one does over time

Now look again, with a longer view. For each thing, ask:

> **Looking at the year ahead — is this adding to your life, or taking from it?**

Then draw a **circle** around two kinds of thing:

- **Every grey line.** These are the things you go through without much feeling, or without knowing how you truly feel about them — and precisely because of this lack of awareness, it's easy not to think about them. Some are quietly steadying you; others are quietly eating at your capacity. Either way, they're worth a look.
- **Anything where the feeling and the year ahead don't match** — something that feels **calm or light now but is quietly costing you** (the easy habit, the relationship that keeps you small), or something that feels **tense or heavy now but is building you** (the exercise that aches, the hard conversation, the class where you don't know anyone yet).

You'll usually circle only a handful of things. **Those circles are the most useful marks on the whole page.** They're where what feels one way and what does another have come apart — and that's exactly where a small change makes the biggest difference.

5 See how things connect

Now look at everything together. Do any of them affect each other?

- Do some make it easier to reach others? (Going to the gym regularly makes it easier to see friends.)
- Do some get in the way of others? (Caring for a parent gives you purpose, but leaves less room for the work that gives you identity.)
- Do some cancel each other out, or strengthen each other?

6 Look for small changes

Finally, think about how you might shift things so you're better held overall. Start with your circles.

- If something feels good but is costing you, you don't have to give it up. Ask instead: **what is it giving me, and where else could I get that?** Find the other source first, then the costly thing loosens its hold on its own.
- If something feels hard but is building you, how could you take it in smaller, steadier doses — enough to grow, not so much that you're overwhelmed?
- If a grey thing is quietly adding to your life, you might lean into it a little more. If it's quietly taking, you might ease off.
- If something simply drains you with no upside, can you change how you meet it? (Seeing a difficult friend less often; reading the news instead of watching it, if the footage disturbs you.)
- Look back at the four groups on the first page. Do you have a good spread, or are some thin? Is there support in your life you're not using — and someone who could help you reach it?

> #### A gentle reminder
>
> You're not judging anyone here — you're honestly noticing how things affect you. If a relationship tenses you more than it steadies you, that doesn't make the other person bad. It's simply what's true for you right now.
>
> And your Weave keeps changing through your life. Something that costs you today may strengthen you later, and the other way round. Come back to it whenever things shift.

When you're done

Bring your Weave to your next visit at Novah, or talk it through with your anchor. You don't have to make sense of it alone — seeing it on paper is often the first step to feeling steadier, and working through the circles together is where a lot of the good work happens.

Sample Weave

Here is one person's finished Weave, to give you the idea. The colour of each line is how something *feels* — calm or light, tense or heavy, or neutral. The circles mark what is worth a closer look: every grey (neutral) line, and anything where the feeling and the year ahead don't match. Yours will look different, and there is no right answer.

HOW IT FEELS NOW

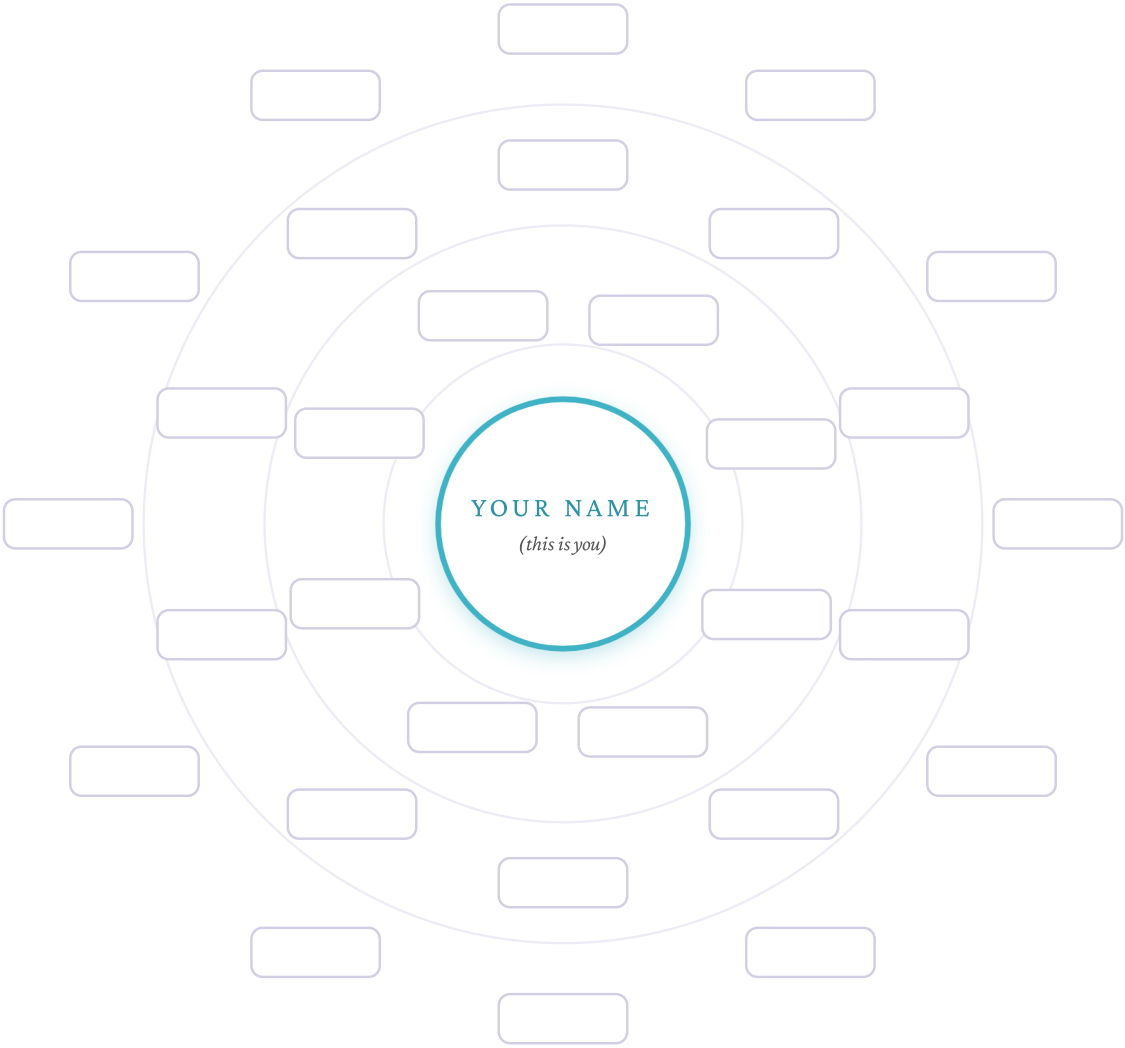
- Calm or light **(blue)**
- Neutral, mixed, or can't tell **(grey)**
- Tense or heavy **(red)**

CIRCLED — WORTH A CLOSER LOOK

- Every grey line, and anything where the feeling and the year ahead don't match.

Your Weave

Write your name in the centre. Fill the boxes around you with the people, places and activities in your life — add your own if you need more — then draw one line from each to you. Come back for a second pass and circle what to look at again.



FIRST PASS — HOW IT FEELS NOW

- Calm or light **(blue)**
- Neutral, mixed, or can't tell **(grey)**
- Tense or heavy **(red)**

SECOND PASS — OVER THE YEAR AHEAD

Circle every grey line, and anything where the feeling and the year ahead don't match.

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