



Seeing Yourself More Clearly:
A Therapeutic Photography Companion

FOREWORD

"Photography is the story I fail to put into words." — often attributed to Destin Sparks.

There are moments when the world feels loud or out of reach, and then there are moments when everything slows — just long enough for you to notice a shift in light or a scene that feels familiar.

This workbook was born from those slower moments.

As a photographer and therapist, I've learned that the camera can be more than a tool for making images — it can be a way of meeting yourself. Every time you raise the camera, you're making a quiet decision about what matters, what calls you, and what you're willing to see.

The four pathways in this workbook invite you to look inward and outward at the same time. They're not about getting the "perfect" shot. They're about noticing how your inner world shapes the way you see the outer one.

There is no right way to do this. Only your way.

I hope that these exercises offer you small pockets of breathing space, a little more clarity, and a gentler way of being with whatever you're feeling.

The camera on your phone is an ideal companion.

— Billy Bones

INTRODUCTION

"We don't see things as they are; we see them as we are." — Anaïs Nin

Every photograph is shaped by the person holding the camera. Two people can stand in the same place, at the same time, and come away with entirely different images. One may notice the harshness of the light; the other, the way it gently brushes the side of a building.

That difference isn't just about taste — it's about attention, emotion, and story. We don't simply record reality with a camera; we filter it through who we are in that moment.

This is why photography can be such a powerful reflective tool. It slows the world down just enough for you to notice what your attention keeps returning to — and what you avoid.

The Theory Behind the Practice (In Plain Language)

These pathways are built on a few simple, well-established ideas:

Mindfulness — becoming present through the senses: light, texture, movement, space. Photography naturally supports this because you must notice before you can press the shutter.

Externalisation — placing an inner feeling into an image outside yourself. When you see a feeling out in the world, it becomes easier to understand and less overwhelming.

Narrative meaning-making — we make sense of our experiences through stories. Images help reveal the stories you tell yourself and offer a gentle way to reshape them.

Somatic awareness — emotions live in the body as much as the mind. Pausing to frame a shot gives a moment to notice tension, heaviness, restlessness, or spaciousness.

Think of this workbook as a series of invitations, not instructions. Take what helps. Leave what doesn't. Adjust as you go.



HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook isn't something to "complete." It's a companion.

You don't need technical skill or artistic experience. You don't have to take beautiful photographs. You just have to be willing to look — with softness rather than judgement.

Some guidelines:

- Your phone camera is good enough.
- Move at your own pace
- Let your mood choose the pathway.
- Write in sentence fragments if that's all you have.
- Look gently. You're meeting yourself, not performing for anyone.

Over time, these images become a quiet visual archive of your emotional landscape — not what you saw, but how you were carrying yourself in the world at that moment.



PATHWAY 1 – The Container and the Contained

Every emotion has a shape. Sometimes it sits quietly inside us; other times it surrounds us. This pathway lets you see a feeling from both angles — what it looks like when you hold it, and what it looks like when it holds you.

The Exercise

- Choose an emotion that's present for you right now.
- Find something that feels like it contains that emotion. Photograph it.

Insert your "container" photo here.

- Find something that feels like being contained by the emotion — as if the atmosphere around you has taken on its tone. Photograph that.

Insert your "contained" photo here.

Definitions

Container — something outside you that seems to hold or express the emotion.

Contained — the feeling of being surrounded, influenced, or shaped by the emotion.

Why It Works

Switching perspectives helps you separate yourself from the emotion without rejecting it. Seeing a feeling "outside" often softens its intensity and creates space for understanding.

Reflection

- Which image came more easily?
- How did your body respond?
- Did one feel more accurate than the other?
- What surprised you?

Micro-Story

A frayed rope on a harbour wall can represent frustration. A heavy grey sky can represent being wrapped in it. Two views. Same feeling. Both honest.

PATHWAY 2 – The Distance and the Detail

Perspective changes everything. From far away, things can look manageable. Up close, textures and tensions appear. This pathway helps you explore how emotional perspective shifts when you zoom in and out.

The Exercise

Bring to mind a situation that's been occupying you.

1. Take a distance shot — a wide view that captures the "big picture."
2. Take a detail shot — a close-up that reflects what it feels like inside the situation.

Definitions

Distance — the broad overview, the story in context.

Detail — the close-up truth, texture, or emotional fingerprint.

Why It Works

We tend to stay stuck in one perspective. Shifting between wide and close reveals what you've been missing and creates a more balanced understanding.

Reflection

- Which felt more natural?
- What changed when you stepped back?
- What appeared when you moved closer?
- Do you prefer distance or detail in life?

Micro-Story

From a distance, the scene suggests one narrative. However, closer to what are we missing?



PATHWAY 3 – Light and Shadow

Every experience has parts we show and parts we hide. Light isn't "good" and shadow isn't "bad" — they're simply different aspects of the same truth. This pathway invites both into visibility.

The Exercise

- Bring to mind a mixed emotion or nuanced situation.
- Photograph the light — what's visible, clear, understood, or hopeful.
- Photograph the shadow — what's unspoken, uncertain, or emotionally unfinished.

Definitions

Light — what you're comfortable acknowledging.

Shadow — what you're hesitant to show or name.

Why It Works

Seeing both sides together reduces the pressure to oversimplify your feelings. You're allowed to feel relief and grief at the same time.

Reflection

- Which was easier to photograph?
- What did your shadow image reveal?
- How do the two images interact?
- What sits between them?

Micro-Story

Shift your angle on a sunlit doorway and shadow becomes visible behind it — not threatening, just present. Light doesn't cancel shadow; shadow doesn't cancel light.



PATHWAY 4 – Movement and Stillness

Some emotions rush; some ask for pause. This pathway helps you notice your emotional rhythm through scenes of motion and scenes of rest.

The Exercise

- Bring to mind a feeling that's been active lately.
- Photograph movement — something dynamic, shifting, or unsettled.
- Photograph stillness — a moment of quiet or grounding.

Definitions

Movement — emotional activity or restlessness.

Stillness — grounding, pause, reflection.

Why It Works

Movement isn't always progress. Stillness isn't always stagnation. Understanding both helps you know what you truly need.

Reflection

- Which photo felt more honest?
- What did your body do during stillness?
- What does movement reveal?
- Which do you need more of right now?

Micro-Story

A gull in flight tells one story. What the gull flies over tells another. Together, they reveal a fuller truth.



NEXT STEPS & CLOSING NOTES

You haven't finished anything — you've begun something.

Return to the pathways when your emotional weather changes. Repeat exercises across seasons of your life. Each time, you'll see something new, because you'll be someone new.

If a pathway felt difficult, revisit it when you're ready.

If one felt freeing, stay with it longer.

Your images are small records of truth — reminders of how you move through your inner world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Billy Smith is a street photographer and BACP-registered therapist based in Cornwall, blending psychological insight with the quiet, observational honesty of photography. With more than 15 years of therapeutic practice, his work centres on helping people slow down, reconnect, and meet their inner world with more clarity and compassion.

Billy spent time within a multinational company, gaining first-hand experience of how pressure, identity, and everyday stress shape people's lives long before they ever seek support. This early exposure to the human side of work and uncertainty laid the foundation for his later therapeutic approach.

He went on to work in Criminal Defence, supporting people through some of the most difficult and emotionally complex moments of their lives — experiences that strengthened his belief that everyone carries stories worth listening to, and that understanding starts with paying attention.

Through Billy Smith Therapy, Billy brings together his dual practices of therapy and photography to create work that is grounded, emotionally truthful, and accessible to anyone seeking a gentler, more reflective way to understand themselves.

Explore more of his work at:

billysmiththerapy.uk

[Email Billy](#)



REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

Howarth, Sophie (2022). The Mindful Photographer. Thames & Hudson.

A slow, reflective guide to using photography as a way to pay attention, pause, and reconnect with your surroundings.

Karr, Andy & Wood, Michael (2011). The Practice of Contemplative Photography: Seeing the World with Fresh Eyes. Shambhala.

Explores "contemplative seeing" – using the camera to notice direct experience rather than chasing perfect images.

[Multi-Dimensional Anxiety-Stress-Depression Test - ProProfs Quiz.](#)

Siegel, Daniel J. (2007). The Mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being. W. W. Norton.

Brings together mindfulness, neuroscience and emotional regulation in an accessible way; it is a helpful background for why practices like this workbook can support well-being.

Van der Kolk, Bessel (2014). The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma. Viking.

Looks at how trauma affects both brain and body, and why body-based and experiential practices can matter for healing. The book is hugely popular but also debated and criticised in some academic circles, so treat it as one perspective among many rather than a definitive guide.

These books are offered as optional further reading and inspiration. The exercises in this workbook are reflective tools, not a substitute for personal therapy or medical care.

If you're feeling overwhelmed or struggling with your mental health, consider reaching out to a qualified professional or a trusted support service in your area.

DISCLAIMER

This workbook is designed to support personal reflection and emotional awareness through photography. It is not a substitute for professional mental health treatment, diagnosis, or crisis support.

If you are currently experiencing significant distress, overwhelming emotions, or thoughts of harm, please reach out to a qualified mental health professional or your local emergency services.

Using this workbook is a form of reflective practice — not therapy, counselling, or a clinical intervention. Please engage with the exercises at a pace that feels safe and appropriate for you.