

Case Study

Lynn's challenges of fatigue and low self esteem

Lynn first approached me having finished breast cancer treatment one year ago. She told me she thought by now she would be feeling better and back to her old self, but instead she felt very lost. Her friends and family had expected her to slot back into her pre-cancer life, but she found herself feeling like a different person to the pre-cancer Lynn. She really wanted to move forward and put breast cancer behind her but had no idea how to do that and instead felt guilty for not living up the expectations both herself and her loved ones had of her recovery.

Her self esteem had taken a real knock. Lynn used to play tennis regularly and often socialised with her friends and family but found post cancer she felt too tired to play tennis like she used to and going out socially left her feeling drained and upset.

The Wheel of Life

Our initial session began with a comprehensive pre-coaching questionnaire, using the Wheel of Life tool, which allowed Lynn to visually map out the different aspects of her life—such as career, personal growth, physical health, relationships, and emotional well-being, giving herself a score for how happy she currently feels in each area. When we reviewed her wheel together, I saw that she had scored herself low on several areas, particularly her physical health and self-confidence.

One of the first questions I asked Lynn was,

"If you could design your ideal life without any limitations, what would that look like?"

This question was intentionally open-ended, designed to help her reconnect with what she wanted from life beyond breast cancer. Lynn wanted to get back to exercising regularly as being a member of the tennis club had also been a big part of her social life. She wanted to feel some of her old self confidence return. She told me **"I just want to live a life that feels right to me"** .

Values Discovery

This led me on to using the Values discovery technique, working through a structured process to identify what truly mattered to Lynn now. This was crucial, as her cancer experience had fundamentally shifted how she viewed life. We discovered her core values now included resilience, personal growth, authentic connections, and self-compassion—quite different from her pre-cancer values, which Lynn said surprised her. Cancer often changes the way we view life and ourselves but we need to take a step back and re-examine this for us to realise what those changes are.

It's great to understand our values and priorities, but before we can start to make real change, it's important to explore what could be holding us back; our self-limiting beliefs. Lynn believed that because she now suffered with fatigue, she could no longer play tennis. After going through what fatigue is and how it affects our minds and bodies, we talked about how to adjust her expectations of what she is capable of now.

Setting goals

Rather than setting big and potentially overwhelming objectives, we crafted small, gentle, achievable steps. She may not be able to play tennis for 1 hour 3 times per week, but instead how could she build herself back up slowly. Lynn decided to start with a walk 3 times a week. After a few weeks she could turn that walk into a gentle jog, stopping as needed. Then she could work with a tennis coach who understands cancer and fatigue, to start slowly playing tennis again. As she missed the socialising elements of being a member of the tennis club, she decided to contact some of her old friends there and meet for a coffee in the club's café once a week.

When talking through building up her self esteem, Lynn noticed that by setting smaller goals based on more realistic and kind expectations, she could build up her confidence again gradually as she achieved each goal. To understand her emotions better, Lynn decided to get in touch with a close friend and be really honest with her about how she was feeling and to start a journal where she could explore her thoughts and feelings.

Throughout our sessions, we continually circled back to her support network. We identified who could provide practical and emotional support, and how she could communicate her needs effectively. Lynn learned to view asking for help not as a weakness, but as a strength.

By our final session, Lynn had transformed. Her Wheel of Life showed significant improvement, she was socialising again on her terms, her fatigue had improved and had worked on rebuilding her self-esteem. It's not about returning to who she was before cancer, but about discovering and embracing who she is becoming.

I honestly feel like I have hope again for the future after our sessions. I had got myself into a dark place and didn't even know what I wanted anymore. I thought I'd never play tennis again but just last week I had a short game with my son and although I felt tired afterwards, I loved it! I've discovered a love of walking too, something I never did before cancer (the dogs are thanking me!). I was keeping a lot of these fears to myself, trying to be strong for everyone, but getting them out in the open helped so much, I feel like I've got a plan for myself going forwards, thank you!