

The Resiliency Toolkit

73 Tools
to Help People Develop
the Skills to Overcome
All of Life's Challenges

BY ANGELA M. DOEL, MS

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**73 Tools to Help People Develop the Skills to Overcome
Life's Challenges**

By Angela M. Doel, MS

Between Sessions Resources, Inc.
Norwalk, CT, USA

Building Resiliency: 73 Tools to Help People Develop the Skills to Overcome Life's Challenges

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Introduction

Resiliency training is an important adjunct to traditional models of mental health. Traditional evidence-based treatments, like cognitive behavioral therapy, focus on helping clients alleviate symptoms and address issues that currently cause them distress. However, resiliency tools go beyond a client’s presenting problems and symptoms, laying the foundation for what some people call “mental toughness.”

While many resiliency tools can be applied to a client’s present-day concerns, they are also designed to be preventative. Hundreds of studies have shown that resiliency training raises self-esteem and self-efficacy, helps people have more fulfilling relationships, contributes to greater productivity at school or work, and even contributes to better physical health. Resiliency training has been shown to lower blood pressure, diminish chronic pain, and augment the immune system.

The most important benefits of resiliency training may be in diminishing the effects of trauma. Resiliency training has been used in a wide variety of nonclinical settings, including working with active-duty service members to reduce the hardship associated with deployment and teaching people resiliency skills after a natural disaster.

While some people seem to be born with a resilient nature, studies have shown that resiliency can be taught at any age. However, it is important to keep in mind that cognitive, emotional, and behavioral change does not come easy. The tools in this workbook are meant to be thoughtfully matched to each client. Resiliency training is most effective when it becomes a health practice much like washing your hands, brushing your teeth, or getting enough sleep. Prevention is not a “sometimes” thing,” but rather an “everyday” thing. This is an important message to convey to your clients.

How to Use this Workbook

This homework assignment workbook is organized in eight sections:

Section 1. Assessing Resiliency

Section 2. Challenging Assumptions

Section 3. Coping with Adverse Life Experiences

Section 4. Learning Emotion Regulation

Section 5. Pursuing Meaningful Goals

Section 6. Cultivating Hopefulness and Optimism

Section 7. Fostering Wellness

Section 8. Interpersonal Effectiveness

Each worksheet has three sections: What to Know, What to Do, and Reflections on This Exercise. **What to Know** offers background information about the issue(s) being addressed in the worksheet. **What to Do** features a variety of exercises, including thought-provoking questions to answer, charts to track activities, and questionnaires to complete.

In the **Reflections** section, clients are asked to provide feedback on the worksheet, including rating how much the exercise helped them, and writing about what they learned from the exercise. This is perhaps the most important part of the worksheet because it helps you and the client assess any progress or improvement that was made upon completion of the assignment.

While you may want to give this book directly to a client, it is more likely that you will give specific assignments to each client, integrating each new skill into your counseling or coaching. For this reason, we recommend using the Psychology Forms Filler, a new tool developed by Between Sessions Resources. The Psychology Forms Filler makes it easy to extract specific tools to send to clients, which they can then fill out on any computer or tablet, and either download or send back to you for review. You can learn more about the Psychology Forms Filler as well other psychological tools and software at www.BetweenSessions.com.

Section 1. Assessing Resiliency

How Resilient Are You?

What to Know

Resiliency does not eliminate stress or erase life's difficulties. If you are resilient, you understand that setbacks and challenges are part of life, and you accept that life is sometimes hard or painful. Your mental outlook allows you to work through difficulties and recover. Resiliency gives you the strength to address problems directly, successfully overcome adversity, and move on with your life.

What to Do

Read the following statements and rate them from 0 to 5, where 0 = never, and 5 = always.

- _____ I am self-disciplined.
- _____ I tend to take things one day at a time.
- _____ I maintain interest in people, activities, or things.
- _____ I consider myself to be determined.
- _____ I can juggle many things at a time.
- _____ I don't give up; even if something is difficult, I persevere.
- _____ I take things in stride and avoid getting overly upset.
- _____ I am confident I can get through difficulties or challenges.
- _____ I trust myself.
- _____ I depend on myself and can be on my own if necessary.
- _____ I enjoy learning new things.
- _____ I consider myself to be creative and I can easily think outside the box.
- _____ I have faith in something greater than myself.
- _____ I am proud of what I have accomplished in my life.
- _____ I follow through with plans I make.
- _____ I always manage in one way or another.
- _____ I am generally motivated and experience an internal drive or initiative.
- _____ I consider myself to be competent or good at doing things.
- _____ I have self-worth and value myself.
- _____ I have confidence in my abilities.
- _____ I easily adjust to change and find ways to positively cope with situations as they arise.
- _____ I have positive expectations for the future.

- _____ I am generally optimistic.
- _____ I distance myself from unhealthy people or situations.
- _____ I have and use good listening, honest communication, and healthy conflict resolution skills.
- _____ I have the training and skills I need to do well at my job or in school.
- _____ I know how to set goals and take the steps to achieve them.
- _____ I set and maintain boundaries by standing up for myself and saying no when necessary.
- _____ I can usually find something to laugh about.
- _____ I have people I can rely on.
- _____ I view situations in a number of different ways.
- _____ My life has meaning.
- _____ I have enough energy to do the things I want to do.
- _____ My belief in myself or a higher power gets me through hard times.
- _____ I volunteer to help others or a cause that is important to me.
- _____ I avoid dwelling on things I cannot do anything about.
- _____ I can accept that there are people who dislike me.
- _____ I am involved in one or more enjoyable hobbies or activities.
- _____ I participate in one or more groups or activities outside of work or school.
- _____ I sometimes make myself do unpleasant things.
- _____ I can usually find my way out of difficult situations.
- _____ I have several people in my life who offer me unconditional love and nonjudgmental listening, and I know they are there for me.
- _____ I treat myself with kindness and compassion, and care for myself by getting enough sleep, eating right, and exercising.
- _____ I believe in myself and engage in positive self-talk about my ability to overcome difficulties.
- _____ My opinions and choices are valued in my close personal relationships.
- _____ I base my decisions and choices on internal evaluations and my own judgment.
- _____ I consider myself to be insightful.
- _____ I do things even if I am fearful or anxious.
- _____ It is easy for me to forgive others.

- _____ If I am upset, I find ways to calm down or soothe myself.
- _____ I can empathize with others.
- _____ I am creative and easily express myself through artistic endeavors.
- _____ I give my time or resources to help people, organizations, or social causes.
- _____ I make friends easily and consider myself to be social and outgoing.

Now, add up your score: _____

If you scored **0–50**, you might have a hard time overcoming life’s difficulties. If you encounter a significant stressor, crisis, or tragedy, you might not naturally draw on internal or external factors to bounce back quickly or easily. You might want to identify ways to build your resiliency to cope with stress, obstacles, and other life challenges.

If you scored **51–199**, you are sometimes able to tap into internal qualities or external supports when you face difficulties or challenges. You might want to find ways to increase your resiliency so you can become more flexible and add to your toolkit to effectively cope with challenges.

If you scored **200 or more**, you probably have an easier time than many people bouncing back from tragedy or trauma because you have a number of protective conditions in your life that support your resiliency. You tend to draw on both internal and external factors to cope with life’s problems.

Was there anything that surprised you during this assessment?

What are the top three areas where you can do things to increase your resiliency?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

How Do You Deal with Emotional Pain?

What to Know

Being resilient does not mean you will not experience difficulties or distress. If you have suffered adversity or trauma in your life, you probably experienced emotional pain and stress. In fact, resiliency is often built through emotional distress.

Emotional pain is an inevitable part of life, and whether the pain is associated with trauma, loss, or disappointment, you can develop strategies to lessen and manage the struggle. By examining your emotions and taking action, you will learn to build your resiliency and cope with emotional pain.

What to Do

Over the next two weeks, use this chart to keep a record of the thoughts, feelings, sensations, and memories that cause you emotional pain. Write down what you did in response and whether your actions led to positive outcomes or outcomes that caused you to suffer more.

Date	Painful thoughts/feelings/ sensations/ memories	What you did in response	Outcome

Date	Painful thoughts/feelings/ sensations/ memories	What you did in response	Outcome

Was there anything that surprised you during this exercise?

Did your actions typically lead to positive outcomes or outcomes that caused you to suffer more? Explain.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Recognizing and Appreciating Your Resilience

What to Know

Solution-based therapy values personal resilience. This approach recognizes that everyone has some knowledge of what would make their life better, as well as the ability to problem-solve and identify solutions. Sometimes people who are in the midst of working through tough situations just need to be reminded of how strong they are!

This therapy reminds you to think of and appreciate how you cope with your difficulties by asking questions like “How have I managed to carry on?” or “How have I managed to prevent things from becoming worse?”

Resilience is the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties. It is a particular inner strength that characterizes many people who persevere under the most difficult circumstances.

What to Do

This activity will help you recognize and appreciate your resilience.

1. Using the chart that follows, write down things you have been able to accomplish or ordeals or problems you have overcome.
2. Reflect on what personal strengths were required for you to achieve each. For ideas, you can use the list of strengths that follows.
3. Include how you felt.
4. If you like, share your chart with someone. You could ask this person to think of an accomplishment you have not included, perhaps because you forgot about it or didn't even think of it as an accomplishment.
5. Make a copy of the chart, and keep it with you to look at whenever you are feeling distressed.
6. Add to the chart every chance you can.

ambitious	compassionate	empathetic
analytical	confident	energetic
appreciative	considerate	enthusiastic
artistic	courageous	fair
authentic	creative	flexible
caring	dedicated	focused
charming	determined	forceful
clever	disciplined	generous
communicative	educated	grateful

helpful

honest

hopeful

humble

humorous

idealistic

industrious

ingenious

integrity

intelligent

kind

knowledgeable

leadership

lively

modest

motivated

observant

patient

persevering

persistent

persuasive

practical

precise

problem solving

prudent

respectful

responsible

self-assured

self-controlled

serious

socially intelligent

spiritual

spontaneous

straightforward

strategic

tactful

team oriented

thoughtful

thrifty

versatile

warm

Your Resilience Record

Accomplishments	Strengths	How you felt

How did it feel to focus on what you are successful at rather than what is wrong in your life?

In what ways were you surprised to learn how resilient you actually are in the face of adversity?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Section 2. Challenging Assumptions

Understanding and Changing Your Habits

What to Know

Unhealthy habits prevent you from accomplishing your goals and can even affect your health—both mentally and physically. Many habits are simply a way to cope with stress or boredom. You can learn healthier ways to cope, replacing your unhealthy habits with good habits.

Sometimes stress or boredom is actually caused by deeper problems. Do you have certain beliefs or reasons underlying your unhealthy habits? Is there something like a fear or past event that is causing you to hold on to habits?

All your habits—good or bad—are in your life for a reason. These behaviors provide benefits to you, even if they are bad for you in other ways. Sometimes the benefit is biological, like it is with smoking or using drugs. Sometimes it is emotional, like unhealthy relationship patterns. In some cases, your habits help you cope with anxiety; for example, biting your nails.

Consider Ellen. She opens her email inbox the moment she wakes up each morning. She checks her email just before falling asleep at night. She thinks this is a great way to stay connected and on top of things, but looking at her email distracts her, affects her productivity, and often overwhelms her. She does not want to miss out, but this habit is stressing her out! Ellen believes her habit is good for her, so it might be very difficult to simply stop.

It is important to replace an unhealthy habit with a new habit that provides a similar benefit. For example, if you smoke when you are stressed, it might not be effective to just stop smoking. Instead, come up with another way to deal with stress and practice the new behavior instead of having a cigarette.

In Ellen's situation, she can turn off her notifications so she is unaware of when she receives new email. She might shut off her phone at 9:00 p.m., or decide she will do a final check of her inbox at 7:00 p.m.

What are some ways you can change unhealthy habits? Here are some suggestions:

- 1. Choose a substitute.** Plan ahead of time for how you will respond when you face the stress or boredom that prompts your bad habit.
- 2. Eliminate triggers.** Your environment might make your unhealthy habits “easier” and good habits “harder.” Make it easier to change your habits by avoiding the things that trigger them. For example, if you overeat ice cream when it is in your freezer, stop purchasing ice cream.
- 3. Find support.** Pair up with someone and work on changing your habits together. You can hold each other accountable and celebrate your victories together.

4. Surround yourself with like-minded people. You do not need to drop your friends and family, but it might be worthwhile to connect with others who are focused on changing similar unhealthy habits.

5. Visualize success. Whatever habit it is you want to change, visualize yourself engaging in a healthier alternative behavior and celebrating your success.

6. Use the word “but” to overcome negative self-talk. When you are changing an unhealthy habit, it might be easy to judge yourself. If you slip up, avoid feeling guilty or mentally beating yourself up. For example, when that happens, finish the sentence with “but...”:

“I’m out of shape and tired, but a few months from now I’ll feel energized and fit.”

“I feel like I’m going nowhere in life, but I’m working to develop valuable new skills.”

“I think I’m a failure, but everybody fails sometimes.”

What to Do

First, choose one habit you would like to change. You can repeat this exercise if there are additional habits you would like to work on.

Describe the habit.

When does this habit actually happen? _____

How many times do you do it each day? _____

Where are you? _____

Who are you with? _____

What triggers the habit?

What can you do, if anything, to avoid these triggers?

Are there negative effects or consequences when you engage in this habit? Describe, and be as honest as you can.

Next, you will track how many times per day your habit happens. Use your smartphone Notes or a simple piece of paper, and each time your habit happens, mark it down. At the end of the day, count up all the tally marks and fill in the following chart. Estimate the amount of time you spent on the habit, and include any notes (for example, triggers, stressful situations, and so forth). Fill in the chart for one week.

Date	Number of times/tally marks	Actual time spent engaging in the habit	Notes

Describe the most common triggers.

Was there anything that surprised you about this exercise? Explain.

What were the negative effects of engaging in the habit? Be specific.

Now, come up with some ways you can either replace the unhealthy habit with a healthy habit, or use alternative coping strategies or ways to distract yourself.

Are you willing to replace your habit with healthier behaviors? Why or why not?

Think about people you can pair up with to work on this habit. If possible, write down the names of at least two people.

What can you do to ensure your success?

Changing unhealthy habits takes time, effort, and perseverance. You might fail many times before you change your habit. Even if you do not succeed right away, be persistent and you will!

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Changing Faulty Assumptions

What to Know

You may occasionally make faulty assumptions, and those assumptions may originate from outside sources, like the media, your family, coworkers, or friends. You may have faulty assumptions because you have not clearly communicated your thoughts and feelings. You may assume what others are thinking or feeling. Faulty assumptions can harm your relationships, leaving people feeling undervalued and unheard.

What to Do

Review the example below. Identify any faulty assumptions you have, and change them to realistic assumptions.

Faulty assumption: *My partner should support all my ideas.*

Realistic assumption: *My partner can support me as a person, even if they disagree with some of my ideas.*

Faulty assumption:

Realistic assumption:

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Changing Negative Automatic Thoughts

What to Know

What you think influences how you feel. Repetitive thoughts like “I am a bad parent,” “I never seem to catch a break,” or “I always fail” are negative automatic thoughts (NATs). NATs are spontaneous thoughts that pop into your mind when you are feeling upset or facing challenges.

NATs are often unkind, judgmental, and self-critical, and they often reflect core beliefs about yourself and the world. Coping thoughts, by comparison, are personalized, strength-based declarations about your resiliency that shifts your attention and helps you cope with difficult emotions. Coping thoughts can help you feel different about a triggering or upsetting situation.

A *coping mantra* refers to a phrase you can repeat over and over whenever an unpleasant emotion or thought surfaces. Mantras are helpful because they focus the mind by providing counter-narratives to automatic thoughts. It is important that you believe the coping mantra to be true and realistic—otherwise, it will probably not be effective. If you are really upset, you might not remember your coping mantra, so it is helpful to write it down so you can access it easily when you need it most. You might write it on a small card you keep in your wallet, or store it on your mobile phone.

It is best to develop your own mantra. Here are some suggestions to get you started:

- 1. This too shall pass.** This reminds you that everything is passing, even unpleasant emotions, thoughts, and situations that feel permanent.
- 2. Just for today.** By reminding yourself you only have to give this day your best shot—or maybe even the next fifteen minutes—you can more easily remain present and avoid worrying about next week or a month from now.
- 3. I will get better.**
- 4. I am breathing in and I am breathing out.** When you concentrate on your breath, you generate peacefulness and calm.
- 5. Let it go.**
- 6. I am safe.**
- 7. I am...** You might say “I am enough,” “I am patient,” or “I am at peace.” Very short one-line affirmations repeated slowly are soothing.
- 8. It’s not about me.** This mantra helps when you are upset about a situation that involves other people.
- 9. All is well.** Sometimes you just need a reminder that things are going to be okay.

10. Thank you. Acknowledge the good things in your life by repeating “thank you.” Directing your thoughts toward gratitude is grounding.

11. Calm down. Sometimes telling someone else to calm down is ineffective, but repeating it to yourself while breathing deeply to counts of four to C-A-L-M [*on the in breath*] and D-O-W-N [*on the out breath*] is helpful.

12. I am lovable. This is helpful if you experience conflict with a loved one.

What to Do

Take a moment to think about one helpful thought that can become your coping mantra. Your coping mantra is highly personal and meaningful, a phrase you can call upon any time you need to. Write down your coping mantra here:

How much do you believe this coping mantra to be true on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 = completely untrue, and 10 = completely true? _____

Think about a recent situation that was unpleasant or upsetting. Write down the NATs you had.

Do you think you could have changed your NATs if you had used your coping mantra? Why or why not?

For one week, use the following chart to record any negative automatic thoughts you experience during unpleasant or stressful situations. Note the date, briefly describe the situation, and record the NATs you have. Try repeating your coping mantra three times during these situations. Record whether or not you used your mantra, and describe what happened.

How effective was the coping mantra in helping you change your NATs? Explain.

After practicing using your coping mantra for one week, how much do you believe it to be true on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 = completely untrue, and 10 = completely true? _____

Was there anything that surprised you during this exercise?

What did you find challenging about this exercise?

What did you find most helpful?

What can you do to remember your mantra when you are faced with upsetting or stressful situations?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Changing Your Perceptions About Yourself

What to Know

You may confuse your subjective interpretations of any experience with the concrete, objective reality of what actually happened. Because perceptions are often biased and can be used to justify unhealthy, inappropriate, or unproductive behavior, it is important to distinguish between how you think about an experience and what the experience actually is.

The words you use to understand and define your experiences take conscious effort to change.

What to Do

Create a list of five symptoms that negatively affect your life. Avoid listing diagnoses, like depression. Instead, identify the symptoms; for example, *lack of motivation*.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Next, identify specific and recent events you feel were caused by the symptoms you listed. Write each event next to the number that corresponds to the symptom; for example, *My lack of motivation causes me to sleep in and miss my morning meetings*.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Finally, identify and describe the factual events that correspond to the above sections; for example, *I missed my morning meeting because I chose to ignore my alarm and I overslept*.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

The above section demonstrates that a past or present problem can affect your interpretation of an experience; however, you can choose to interpret the experience objectively. When you look at

things objectively, you are giving yourself permission to make choices in a way that is meaningful to you—and not predetermined by your symptoms.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Overcoming Self-Sabotage

What to Know

Self-sabotage refers to destructive or unhealthy behaviors or habits that undermine your goals, efforts, or values. Self-sabotaging behavior is often rooted in anxiety, anger, or feelings of worthlessness. Most of us occasionally undermine our best efforts by cheating on a diet or being late for an important meeting. However, for some people, self-sabotage is a chronic pattern that leads to significant problems in their life, work, and relationships.

Self-sabotage manifests in many ways. Here are some common examples:

- “Forgetting” deadlines or failing to prepare
- Being chronically tardy, repeatedly arriving late to work or important meetings
- Abusing alcohol or drugs
- Procrastinating or putting something off, even though it might be urgent
- Overeating to deal with stress and anxiety
- Starting projects but never finishing them
- Never getting around to doing anything about goals, plans, or dreams
- Intentionally abandoning or ruining friendships or romantic partnerships
- Quitting when trying to achieve goals

Self-sabotage is often fueled by negative self-talk and low self-esteem, leading to feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness—subsequently driving repeated patterns of self-sabotaging behaviors. Self-sabotaging behaviors reinforce a sense of worthlessness and provide justification for negative thoughts. Self-sabotage damages reputations, because repeated lack of follow-through leads others to view the self-sabotaging person as unreliable, unmotivated, uncommitted, lazy, or lacking drive. Repeated failures and disappointments create guilt and frustration. Over time, this feeds shame, further supporting low self-esteem.

What to Do

Write down a goal you have had for a long time but have never accomplished.

Are there particular areas where you are delaying making a decision? Describe.

Do you lack motivation, even for important tasks? Explain.

Is there something you do (or fail to do) that consistently frustrates people around you (for example, family members or your boss)? Is there a task that causes you stress or upset because you know you could do it, or do it better? Be specific.

Describe a situation where your emotions led you to self-sabotage. For example, you might have had a bad day at work, and that evening find yourself overeating in front of the TV. Be specific.

To eliminate self-sabotaging behaviors, you might think being tough on yourself is the answer. But that is also a form of self-sabotage because you miss the most important first step: understanding what need self-sabotage fills. Before you get tough on yourself, offer yourself compassion. Suspend self-judgment and understand that self-sabotage is serving a function.

Here are a few examples: If you overeat to cope with stress, understand how stress eating “works” to make you feel better after a challenging day at work. If you constantly procrastinate, understand that procrastination helps you avoid your fear of failing. When you understand the need self-sabotage fills, you will be able to identify alternative behaviors to fill that need. When you meet that need in other ways, you will begin to reduce self-sabotaging behaviors. Describe specific ways you self-sabotage.

What need(s) do these habits or behaviors fill?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Changing Unhealthy Behaviors to Produce Positive Emotions

What to Know

Your emotions can be both the cause and the effect of your thoughts and behaviors. When you experience overwhelming emotions, your thoughts and behaviors may become self-destructive. You may self-injure, overeat, abuse drugs or alcohol, lash out at other people, or become physically aggressive. Consequently, you may feel depressed, ashamed, or guilty—which, if unmanaged, can lead to additional self-destructive behaviors.

Did you know that you receive reinforcement or benefits for your thoughts and behaviors, even when they are self-destructive? That is why it may be difficult to break out of a cycle of harmful reactions, and the longer the negative behaviors continue, the more temporary the relief can become, and the more destructive the consequences of that behavior.

Consider Jane's situation. Jane's sister was seriously injured in a car accident. Jane was supposed to have been a passenger in the car, but she decided to stay home. Following the accident, Jane felt guilty about not getting hurt or being with her sister when it happened. She started drinking to cope with her painful emotions. In the short run, Jane got positive reinforcement from her actions—she was able to tune out her feelings of guilt and self-loathing. But in the long run, her actions had dangerous consequences: she became dependent on alcohol and was fired after missing too many days of work due to hangovers.

The good news is that the opposite about behaviors and emotions is also true. When you engage in healthy behaviors and self-affirming thoughts, your emotions become more positive and fulfilling. As you receive positive reinforcement for healthy choices, it becomes easier to repeat those behaviors or identify additional positive ones.

Consider Tom's situation. Tom's office announced a Steps Challenge to encourage staff to get active. Tom wanted to lose some weight but he disliked exercising at the gym. He joined the competition and started walking a few miles a day. Although he did not win the challenge, Tom still received positive benefits that reinforced his behavior. In the short run, he could walk up stairs without getting winded, and he had more energy. He decided to continue his daily walking routine. Over the long run, he noticed his stress level was lower, he was sleeping better, and he was losing weight.

What to Do

In order to begin increasing your healthy behaviors and emotions, you first need to identify harmful behaviors that impact your thoughts and feelings.

The unhealthy or self-destructive behaviors I engage in are:

The temporary emotional benefits I receive from my unhealthy behaviors are:

The long-term risks and consequences of my unhealthy behaviors are:

Describe how harmful behaviors negatively affect your thoughts and feelings.

The next step is to identify healthy behaviors to help you manage upsetting emotions during times of distress. Here are some suggestions.

- Calling a friend or visiting a supportive chat room
- Working out or taking a walk
- Journaling or writing poetry
- Having a good cry
- Screaming or yelling in a location where others will not hear you
- Playing with a pet
- Doing deep breathing exercises or meditating

Describe other ways you can manage upsetting emotions.

Have you ever experienced overwhelming emotions and chose behaviors that were helpful instead of harmful? What happened? What behaviors did you choose instead?

Now, over the next week, keep track of situations that lead to unhealthy behaviors and distressing emotions. Using the chart below, identify the unhealthy behavior you chose (or wanted to use) to manage those emotions, and the short-term benefits you experienced. Then, write down a healthier alternative that you used (or could have used) to help manage your emotions and develop healthier ones.

Situation	Emotions you experienced	Unhealthy or destructive behavior	Short-term benefits	What you did/ could have done instead

Did this exercise help you identify healthy behaviors to help you manage upsetting emotions during times of distress? Explain why or why not.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Focusing on Solutions

What to Know

Most people think about their problems constantly, focusing on how unhappy they feel and how their problems are holding them back. What if, instead, you focused on the solutions to your problems? This worksheet will help you start thinking about how you solved problems in the past and how your life can be better today when you make even small changes. Focusing on solutions, rather than dwelling on your problems, can open up many new possibilities.

What to Do

Describe a problem you are currently experiencing.

How have you tried to address this problem?

Has anything worked for you so far? Describe.

Have there been changes for better or worse since you decided to take action?

Did anyone notice the changes? Who?

What will it be like when the problem is solved?

What will you be doing instead?

What difference will it make in your life when the problem is solved?

How will other people know things are better?

Who will notice first? _____

What else will be different?

What other changes can you make to increase the possibilities available to you? Be specific.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Improving Self-Efficacy

What to Know

Self-efficacy refers to the strong sense of trust in your abilities and competencies, and determines how you think and feel about yourself. It influences your thoughts, emotions, actions, and motivation, and it strengthens your self-control. It is a way of understanding and acknowledging what you are truly capable of. An important component of resilience, self-efficacy supports you in achieving goals and feeling accomplished, and it enhances your overall well-being.

There are four sources of self-efficacy:

Mastery experiences. Success directly impacts the way you think about yourself, boosting your confidence and increasing the likelihood you will achieve similar results again. Building self-efficacy through mastery requires resilience to manage expectations and accept inevitable failures.

Vicarious experiences. Observing others around you, especially people you can relate to, motivates you to believe that if they can do it, you can too.

Modeling experiences. Role models are the people you follow, admire, and want to replicate. Their actions, principles, and achievements teach you and motivate you, making you more likely to put in the effort and believe you can be successful.

Emotional and physical experiences. Your mental and physical well-being influences self-efficacy. Distress makes you vulnerable, while positive experiences and happiness make you feel good about yourself.

Check off any of the following statements that apply to you:

- I avoid accepting challenges because I think I will fail.
- I strongly believe I am incapable of performing complicated tasks.
- I tend to focus on my failures or shortcomings.
- I am not confident.
- I have a hard time making commitments.
- It is hard for me to recover from setbacks or failures.
- I quickly lose interest in activities, projects, or work.
- I want results without putting in the effort.
- I am very anxious about failing.
- I feel depressed thinking about past failures.
- I tend to focus more on my weaknesses and less on my strengths.
- I lose motivation and feel helpless when my efforts fail or are not appreciated.

_____ I don't trust myself.

Count how many statements you checked: _____

If you checked off more than three statements, consider working to improve your self-efficacy. People with low self-efficacy may experience more disappointment and feel less fulfilled.

Here are four ways to help you improve self-efficacy:

- 1. Set simple goals.** Goal-setting is crucial to building and sustaining self-efficacy. Set reasonable goals and break them into smaller subgoals, working on achieving them one at a time. You can celebrate small successes, avoid stressing about the results, and more easily manage your goals—one step at a time.
- 2. Stay in the “stretch zone.”** If you want to be highly productive, spend more time in the “stretch zone,” where you take reasonable risks and bounce back from failures and setbacks. Try new things outside your comfort zone, face challenges, and accept failures and criticism with grace.
- 3. View the big picture.** Look beyond short-term loss, sort your priorities, plan, stick to your goals, and focus.
- 4. Reframe obstacles.** Redefine the way you view obstacles to effectively cope with and understand life's inevitable challenges.

What to Do

These approaches will help you build and improve your self-efficacy.

The Three Things Exercise

List three things you did within the past week that went well.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

How did you feel after doing these three things successfully?

What are three things you want to accomplish within the next few weeks or months?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Are there potential obstacles? List them and try to reframe them.

How will you feel after you have accomplished them all?

Positive self-talk. Set aside ten minutes every day to talk to yourself in front of the mirror. Say whatever you would like to say! You can compliment yourself, motivate yourself, or ask yourself what is making you happy or sad. Remember to respond and note what your inner voice says. Use a journal to write about your self-talks. Refer back to the four ways to improve self-efficacy as a reminder of how to view the big picture and reframe.

Reviewing your achievements. It is easy to focus on failure, but if you have high self-efficacy you will more likely focus on your successes and achievements. Recalling achievements and past successes reignites your self-confidence and makes you feel optimistic that you can be successful in the future. Make a list of past accomplishments and successes, small or large. Refer back to the “stretch zone” way of improving self-efficacy, and see if you can come up with ways to stretch outside your comfort zone.

List your past achievements and successes here:

What can you do to stretch outside of your comfort zone? Successfully accomplishing tasks that make you slightly uncomfortable will increase self-efficacy.

Self-awareness. Gretchen Rubin, American author and blogger, writes that “self-awareness is a key to self-mastery,” and self-mastery is the direct path to self-efficacy. You can practice self-awareness in a journal by recording your thoughts and feelings each day. Include physical cues to help you understand your feelings. Refer back to the four ways to improve self-efficacy for ideas.

After completing the four exercises to improve self-efficacy, describe your experiences.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Changing Your Perspective

What to Know

Whether you tend to be an optimist or a pessimist, your feelings and experiences are affected by whether you view situations in a negative, positive, or neutral manner.

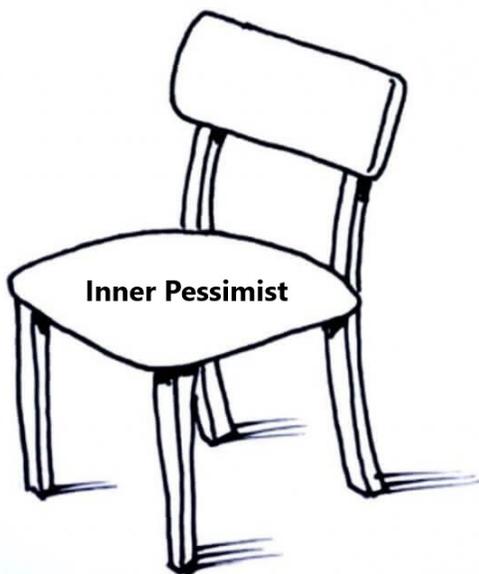
If you are an optimist, you are more likely to find meaning or experience growth in stressful situations. You may look on the bright side and rarely take things personally. Research has shown that when optimistic people are confronted with positive and negative stimuli, they pay significantly more attention to the positive stimuli. Pessimists pay more attention to negative stimuli, overlooking the positive or encouraging aspects of situations or events. They often take things personally, have a bleak outlook on life, or place blame on external forces.

This does not mean that you must always be optimistic; in fact, people who are always overly optimistic ignore potentially important information. Some people use positive thinking to avoid or control negative experiences. Sometimes pessimism actually helps you be cautious and think analytically, which is important for effective decision-making. So, the goal is not to become *only* optimistic and *never* pessimistic; it is about choosing what is most effective for a given situation.

What to Do

Imagine two chairs, each representing a different mindset: your inner optimist and your inner pessimist. Imagine yourself sitting in each chair and embodying these different mindsets as you answer the questions. As you do this exercise, tune in to what it feels like during and after tapping into your inner pessimist and your inner optimist.

Take a seat in the pessimistic mindset chair and tap into your inner pessimist.



Think about the past week from the point of view of your inner pessimist, who has a bleak, negative, possibly hopeless outlook on life. Over the past week:

What negative or unpleasant emotions did you experience?

What were some things that annoyed you?

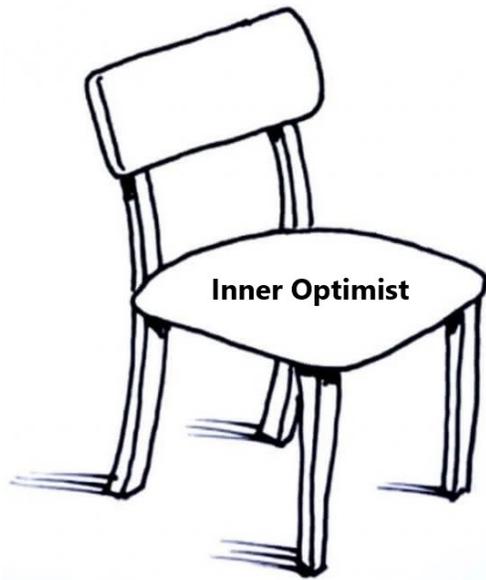
What difficulties did you face at work or at school?

What was challenging at home?

Describe a stressful situation you experienced.

Did you have an argument or conflict with a family member or friend? Describe.

Describe your feelings when you think about the past week from a pessimistic point of view.



Next, take a seat in the optimistic mindset chair and tap into your inner optimist.

This time you will respond from the point of view of your inner optimist. Compared with your inner pessimist, your inner optimist views events as less personal or permanent. Your inner optimist can find the silver lining and tends to find the good in difficult or stressful situations. Over the past week:

What pleasant emotions did you experience?

What were some things that made you feel happy, excited, or joyful?

What good things happened at work or school?

What worked well at home?

What is one thing that made you proud?

Describe a difficult or stressful situation that you handled well.

Describe your feelings when you think about the past week from an optimistic point of view.



Now take a seat in your normal chair and answer the following questions.

How did it feel when you were pessimistic? What did you notice?

How did it feel when you were optimistic?

How can you use what you learned from this exercise in your daily life?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Section 3. Coping with Adverse Life Experiences

Creating an Emotional Emergency Kit

What to Know

It is important to take care of your mental health every day. Just like with your physical health, you should practice a variety of good habits, including getting enough sleep, exercising, eating nutritious food, spending time with your family and friends, practicing relaxation techniques, and more. All of these activities affect the “feel-good” biochemicals in your brain and will help you develop a sense of calm and well-being. Sometimes, however, you may have an emotional emergency, and just like responding to a physical emergency, having the right tools can help.

This worksheet reviews tools you can use when you are feeling especially distressed, particularly if you feel you are going to do something that will cause you harm. You can create your emergency kit from the list below, assembling objects in a large plastic baggie or other small case, and/or you can create your kit digitally with tools on your smartphone or tablet. The important thing is to have these tools and techniques in easy reach when you might experience an emotional emergency.

What to Do

Begin by checking off the tools you think would be helpful to keep in your kit. Add additional ideas at the end of this list. Then go ahead and assemble the kit and make sure that you keep it with you at times when you anticipate you will be stressed or upset.

- _____ **A “grounding” object such as a small ball or stone.** Just squeezing this object, and paying attention to your physical reaction, can help calm your emotions.
- _____ **A list of people you can call.** This list can include three or four people who are emotionally supportive. If you are unable to reach them, write down what you want to say, but avoid sending them an email or text. Wait until you can actually talk to the people on this list to ask for support.
- _____ **A journal to write down your feelings or to draw and doodle.** You can do this digitally or with a notebook and pen or pencil.
- _____ **Uplifting photographs.** Have a few photographs or videos easily accessible. These could be of people, pets, or special places. Looking at these pictures should stimulate positive feelings and happy memories.
- _____ **Bottled water.** Relaxing with a drink of water can have an immediate effect on your mood. Avoid gulping it down, but rather sip, relax, and be mindful of how you are feeling.
- _____ **Inspirational reading.** Many people find comfort in reading poems, prayers, or inspirational stories.
- _____ **Funny videos.** If you can’t find something to make you smile or laugh on YouTube, there are dozens of websites that are designed to lighten up your day. No matter what your mood, your favorite video can help.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Using Your Character Strengths to Solve Problems

What to Know

When you are going through difficult times, you may forget about the personal strengths you can bring to the problems in your life. Remembering your strengths can help you be more resilient and guide you toward solutions to your problems.

What to Do

Read the list below and check off the character strengths that best describe you.

- Zest**—approaching life with excitement and energy; feeling alive and energized
- Grit**—finishing what you start; completing something despite obstacles
- Self-control**—regulating what you feel and do; being self-disciplined
- Social intelligence**—being aware of motives and feelings of other people and yourself
- Gratitude**—being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen
- Love**—valuing close relationships with others; being close to people
- Hope**—expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it
- Humor**—bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side and laughing frequently
- Creativity**—coming up with new and productive ways to think about and do things
- Curiosity**—taking an interest in experience for its own sake; finding things fascinating
- Open-mindedness**—examining things from all sides and not jumping to conclusions
- Love of learning**—mastering new skills and topics
- Wisdom**—being able to provide good advice to others
- Bravery**—not running from threat, challenge, or pain; speaking up for what is right
- Integrity**—speaking the truth and presenting yourself sincerely and genuinely
- Kindness**—doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them
- Citizenship**—working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group
- Fairness**—treating all people the same; giving everyone a fair chance
- Leadership**—encouraging a group of which you are a valued member to accomplish
- Forgiveness**—forgiving others who have wronged you; accepting people’s shortcomings
- Modesty**—letting your victories speak for themselves; not seeking the spotlight
- Prudence/discretion**—being careful about your choices; avoiding undue risks
- Appreciation of beauty**—noticing and appreciating all kinds of beauty and excellence
- Spirituality**—having beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe

Is there one strength that will help you solve a problem you are currently having? Write it down.

What problem are you currently facing?

How can your strength help you solve this problem?

How can your other strengths help you solve the problem?

What are some things you can do to build your strengths?

What else can you do to use your personal strengths to solve your problems?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Visualizing a Safe Place

What to Know

When you are feeling overwhelmed by your emotions, visualization techniques can be effective in calming your mind. Research has shown that there is a scientific basis for how and why visualization works.

Studies of the brain indicate the same areas of the brain light up when you visualize an action as when you actually perform that action. For example, when you visualize lifting your right hand, it stimulates the same part of the brain that is activated when you actually lift your right hand. Athletes have used visualization for years to practice movements in their minds, like swinging a tennis racket or making a foul shot. Just visualizing these motions helps improve athletic performance.

What does this mean for you? It means when you visualize a safe place that is soothing and calm, your brain will react as if you were actually in that place. Reacting to the sights, sounds, and even smells of your safe place can cause your brain to increase calming biochemicals like serotonin and decrease stress biochemicals like cortisol.

What to Do

During the Safe Place visualization, you will focus on a real or imaginary place where you feel relaxed, safe, and peaceful. The first step is to identify such a place; for example, it may be a beach, forest, house of worship, spa, or a fanciful setting such as a house in the clouds or your own private island.

What safe place did you choose? _____

Now find a quiet, comfortable space to sit without being disturbed or distracted. Follow these instructions:

1. Take several long, slow breaths and close your eyes.
2. Visualize entering your safe place and using all your senses to explore it.
3. Observe what the space looks like. Notice details, including colors, brightness, and the objects around you. Are you alone, or are others with you? Are there other living things, such as animals or plants? Take a few moments to enjoy your surroundings.
4. Imagine the soothing sounds around you: a soft breeze, chirping birds, ocean waves, a purring cat, or relaxing music. Focus on one sound that is especially pleasing and continue listening for a few seconds.
5. Focus on what you smell in your safe place. If your setting is outside, inhale the scent of fresh air or flowers. If your setting is inside, smell coffee brewing, incense burning, or bread baking. Notice the pleasurable aromas for several seconds.

6. Next, pay attention to your sense of touch in your safe place. If you are outside, notice the calm breeze or warm sun on your skin, grains of beach sand in your hand, or the texture of the garden vegetables you are growing. If you are inside, feel the chair or rug you are sitting on, the warmth of a roaring fireplace, or the soft fur of a dog you are petting. Take a few seconds to enjoy the sensations.
7. Finally, focus your attention on your sense of taste. What comforting food or drink are you enjoying? Is it sweet, spicy, or salty? Hot or cold? Take a moment to savor the flavors in your mouth.
8. Take a few moments to relax in your safe place, using all of your senses. Notice how calm and peaceful you feel in this place. Remember that you can return here anytime you experience distress.
9. Take a few more deep breaths and open your eyes when you are ready.

Try this exercise for two weeks. Like any new skill, visualization can take some practice. Use the chart to record your experience. In the last column, rate the effectiveness of visualization on reducing your anxiety, using a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 = not very helpful, and 10 = extremely helpful.

Date	What did you visualize?	How many minutes?	Thoughts and feelings after visualization	How helpful was visualization?

Did you visualize just one place, or did you visualize different places? List the place(s) you visualized.

In what circumstances are you most likely to use the Safe Place visualization?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Facing Your Fears

What to Know

Sometimes you might feel that paralyzing fear consumes and shapes your life, like a vicious circle or trap you cannot escape from. You might fear your own mind, which is filled with both unwelcome and disturbing thoughts. You might fear losing control of yourself and saying or doing things that are totally against your values.

Imagine you do something different, something that on the surface seems ridiculous; crazy, even! What if—instead of trying to control your reaction to a frightening image that you can't unsee, or avoid a terrible thought—you are aware of your fears, face them, speak about them aloud, and accept them as something that merely makes you human? What if you acknowledge your difficulties and the role fear has played in your life? What if you embrace your perceived weaknesses, while also acknowledging your strength and resilience?

Of course, your natural tendency when faced with overwhelming fear is to fight it by trying to control it. However, this approach only serves to increase distress, as the fear only temporarily subsides.

Drawing upon the teachings of mindfulness, acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) recognizes that suffering stems from the tendency to escape or avoid pain instead of facing it. You disconnect from the present and attach to negative thoughts that you mistakenly think define you. This dissatisfaction is intensified when you base your actions on those fears instead of acting based on your values.

One of the major principles of ACT is to accept your reactions and be present with them, no matter how disturbing they are. Practicing acceptance may at first make you feel very anxious, but being able to tolerate your anxious feelings by fully experiencing the sensations, thoughts, and emotions that accompany your fears is the first step toward decreasing the power your fears have over you.

What to Do

Place a check next to the fears that dominate your life. Use the blank lines to write down others that are unique to your experiences.

- _____ disappointment
- _____ being hurt
- _____ embarrassment
- _____ failure
- _____ feeling anxious
- _____ becoming dependent
- _____ being different
- _____ being hurt
- _____ being uncomfortable

- _____ loneliness
- _____ making a decision
- _____ making a mistake
- _____ being misunderstood
- _____ hurting others
- _____ losing control
- _____ being imperfect
- _____ pain
- _____ rejection
- _____ seeming stupid
- _____ the unknown

Other: _____

Other: _____

Other: _____

Choose at least three fears from your list and, using the prompts that follow, write about how they have impacted your life. As you write, consider the following:

- Observe what you are experiencing without reacting.
- Let your emotions or thoughts happen without giving in to your fear.
- Recognize the difficulty that experiencing these fears has made in your life without judging or criticizing yourself.
- Give yourself permission to be fearful.

My fear of _____ has stopped me from going to these places I would like to go:

My fear of _____ has made me afraid to try these things:

My fear of _____ has caused me so much distress I have resorted to these activities in order to reduce my upset:

My fear of _____ has impacted my relationships in these ways:

My fear of _____ has influenced my plans for the future in these ways:

My fear of _____ has impacted my life by:

How well were you able to observe and not react to fear or distress? Describe.

How well were you able to allow your emotions or thoughts to happen without reacting?

Explain how you avoided judging yourself when you realized how fear has affected your life.

What do you think will happen if you give yourself permission to be fearful?

How did it feel to acknowledge and accept your fear?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Taking Steps Toward Something That Scares You

What to Know

One of the most effective ways to do anything that scares you is to focus on one step at a time. If you put too much attention on things that might go wrong, you limit your effectiveness. You can plan for potential problems—just avoid allowing your fear to paralyze you.

Whatever you want to do, do not think of it as a large or overwhelming goal. Instead, imagine it as a series of steps, some simpler than others, and commit to completing a step each day.

Absorb yourself completely in each step of the process, giving each step your full attention as if nothing else matters.

The path may be challenging, and the odds may be against you. You may not make progress as quickly as someone else. All that matters is you take a step, and keep taking steps—even if you are not really sure where each step will lead you.

It is okay if you feel scared. Just know your fear does not have to control you—not if you choose to focus on where you are and on each step.

What to Do

Write down something you avoid because you are afraid.

Write down twenty small steps you can take to conquer your fear. Cross off each step once it is done.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____

12. _____
13. _____
14. _____
15. _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____

How long did it take you to complete all twenty steps? _____

Once you complete all the steps, answer the following questions.

Were you able to conquer your fear? Why or why not?

What did you find most challenging about this exercise?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

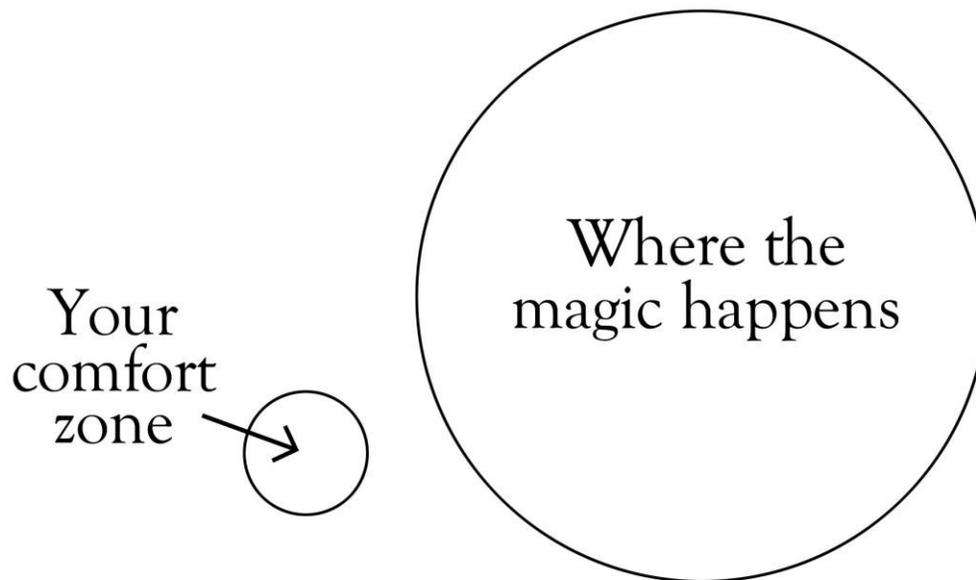
What did you learn from this exercise?

Stretching Out of Your Comfort Zone

What to Know

Sometimes the idea of creating a safe network might feel daunting. If you are someone who is shy, feels anxious in social situations, tends to isolate, or otherwise avoids people or unfamiliar situations, it can be especially challenging.

Changing habits is hard. You might have resistance to, and fear of, change. You have a comfort zone—the things and objects, people, activities, and habits that keep you feeling safe. But here's the catch. Changing habits in a big way inevitably involves some discomfort.



Isn't this a great image? First, the MAGIC circle is a lot bigger than the COMFORT ZONE circle. That's encouraging! But see that empty space between the circles? That space represents the UNKNOWN, which can be both exciting and scary.

To get from one circle to the other, you'll have to navigate some unknown territory. Have you ever heard the saying "Leap, and the net will appear"? It's the same idea. With good planning and good support, you can succeed. But there are no guarantees. As Yoda from the *Star Wars* movies said: "Do or do not. There is no try."

What to Do

In this exercise, you'll identify the components of your personal comfort zone. Next, you'll imagine "where the magic happens" for you. Then you'll identify some concrete steps to take to guide you along your journey.

What are the components of your comfort zone? What helps you feel safe but might be interfering with your moving forward? Be as detailed as you can.

Things/Objects

People

Activities

Habits

What are your thoughts and feelings about the unknown (that blank space between the circles)?
What has helped in the past when you succeeded in moving out of your comfort zone and into the unknown in your life?

What items in your list represent “where the magic happens” for you?

What steps are you willing to take to get closer to “where the magic happens” for you? Be detailed. Be optimistic while still being realistic.

Today

Tomorrow

In the next week

In the next month

In the next year

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Overcoming Fear

What to Know

It is okay to be scared—but do not let fear stop you. When you demonstrate resilience, you look past your fears and focus on your goals. By pushing through what scares you, you empower yourself and recognize your value and worth. Over time, your inner strength and self-awareness increase—and so does your resiliency.

Sometimes fear is good because it helps you recognize danger. But other types of fear get in the way because you avoid things that take you out of your comfort zone, or you may procrastinate because you are afraid, leading to missed opportunities. Fear can paralyze you and prevent you from living a fulfilling life.

Avoiding fears can lead to fear controlling your decisions. What can you do to overcome fear? Consider these three suggestions:

- 1. Face what you fear by taking small steps toward it rather than turning away and avoiding it.** Expose yourself slowly to your fear. You do not need to do it all at once—just do not quit!
- 2. When you experience fear, pay attention.** It is an indicator you are going to learn something important about yourself.
- 3. Think of a time you were afraid to do something and you did it despite your fears.** How did you feel afterward? What did you learn about yourself? What would you have missed out on if you had retreated to a place of comfort and safety?

Learning to face your fears is a powerful and essential element of resilience. When you face the things that scare you, your confidence, self-reliance, and knowledge increase. Fear no longer rules you. The more you do this, the more skilled you will become at facing and overcoming your fears. The world might not become less scary, but you will have the confidence and knowledge that you can do what you need to do to prepare for whatever happens in your life.

What to Do

First, think of a time you were afraid to do something and you did it anyway. Describe.

How did you feel afterward?

What did you learn about yourself?

What would you have missed out on if you had avoided what you feared?

Fear can be measured by a scale called the Subjective Units of Distress Scale (SUDS). This scale goes from 0 to 100: 0 = no fear, 50 = moderate fear, and 100 = the worst fear you can imagine.

Use the chart that follows to write down specific situations related to the fear you wish to avoid. List as many as you can. It will be easiest to work on your fear if you can list at least ten situations. For example, if you are afraid of flying and being in the air over an open ocean, you might also be afraid of going to the airport, waiting to board, taking off, and so on.

Next, put a SUDS number by each situation indicating how afraid each situation would make you. As you write down the things that make you fearful, you may think of more related situations as well. Write them down as you think about them, and put in your SUDS rating.

When you have filled in this form and can't think of any more situations related to your fear, recopy your information on a new worksheet, beginning with the situations that make you least fearful, ending with the situation that makes you most fearful (for example, the highest SUDS score).

Now, describe a situation or thing you fear.

Enter specific situations you avoid related to that fear. Enter one situation per line. Try to list as many as you can. Next, rate each situation in the rating box. Make another copy of this form, and reorder the situations that you fear from the lowest SUDS score to the highest.

Fear _____

	Situation	Suds Score
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		

What was it like to complete this exercise?

What did you find most challenging about this exercise?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Stop Avoiding What You Fear

What to Know

You might do things to avoid what you fear, preventing you from experiencing intense, unwanted, or painful emotions. While avoidance may lower your distress in the short run, over the long run, avoidance can make things worse. The ways in which you avoid things probably vary, and may look different depending on the circumstances (for example, declining a party invitation to avoid an anxiety-provoking social situation or failing to return a phone call from a debt collector).

Sometimes it will be obvious when you avoid something you fear, but you may also do less obvious things. Cognitive avoidance involves strategies you may do to avoid having to think about, remember, or pay attention to something you fear; these strategies include distraction, rumination, or forcing yourself to think of something other than the situation at hand.

Engaging in any kind of avoidance prevents you from recognizing that a situation is not dangerous and reinforces the idea that uncomfortable or scary experiences are overwhelming and intolerable.

What to Do

There are many ways in which you may try to avoid things you fear. For instance, you might completely avoid situations that trigger fear. You might also try to avoid your feelings when you are already in a situation you cannot physically escape.

Describe something you fear. Be specific.

Check off the following activities you engage in to avoid what you fear; be as honest as possible.

- Binge-watching television or streaming movies
- Playing video games
- Spending excessive time on social media
- Drinking alcohol, misusing prescription medication, abusing illegal drugs, or smoking cigarettes
- Turning off your phone or avoiding friends or family members
- Overexercising
- Worrying over and over again about something you cannot control
- Cutting or harming yourself
- Abruptly leaving to avoid a conversation
- Lying about how you feel
- Skipping work or school
- Sleeping too much or staying in bed

Date	Situation	Emotion(s) you experienced	What did you do?	What could you have done differently?

What was it like to complete this exercise?

Can you see any patterns in the type of avoidance strategies you use? For instance, do you commonly distract yourself by scrolling through social media feeds, or turn to food or other substances? Be specific.

What did you find most challenging about this exercise?

Did you identify ways to cope with feared situations? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Accepting Unpleasant Experiences, Thoughts, and Feelings

What to Know

Language is used to describe experiences, including those that have caused unpleasant or uncomfortable feelings. If you label experiences negatively, you might limit, avoid, or try to control situations to decrease or eliminate discomfort associated with those experiences. As a result, you may miss opportunities, encounter harm, or experience overall dissatisfaction with life. For example, if you label a party as boring because you felt left out of the conversation, you may decide that you will not go to any more parties.

Your experience of the present moment does not have to be determined by past experiences that you have identified as unpleasant or uncomfortable. Accepting unpleasant thoughts and feelings, rather than actively avoiding them, creates opportunities for positive and rewarding experiences that you might otherwise have missed.

What to Do

Identify five negative thoughts or feelings that cause you to limit, avoid, or control certain activities (for example, anxiety, worry, sadness, jealousy, fear, insecurity).

Write down situations you avoid to keep from experiencing discomfort.

Identify and describe positive thoughts and feelings you might have, if you permitted yourself to engage in these situations rather than avoiding them. Be as specific and descriptive as possible. This will help you identify the experiences you are choosing to miss out on.

Now, choose one activity you have avoided in the past: _____

Do this activity; then describe your thoughts and feelings throughout the experience.

What did you do to change your negative thoughts and feelings to create a more positive experience?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Finding the Positive in Challenging Situations

What to Know

You may tend to dwell on things that have gone wrong in your life—making mistakes at work, arguing with a loved one, or any number of unpleasant situations. You may even think about negative events or experiences so frequently that your life seems filled with mishaps and disappointments. Focusing on negative experiences too much can affect your well-being.

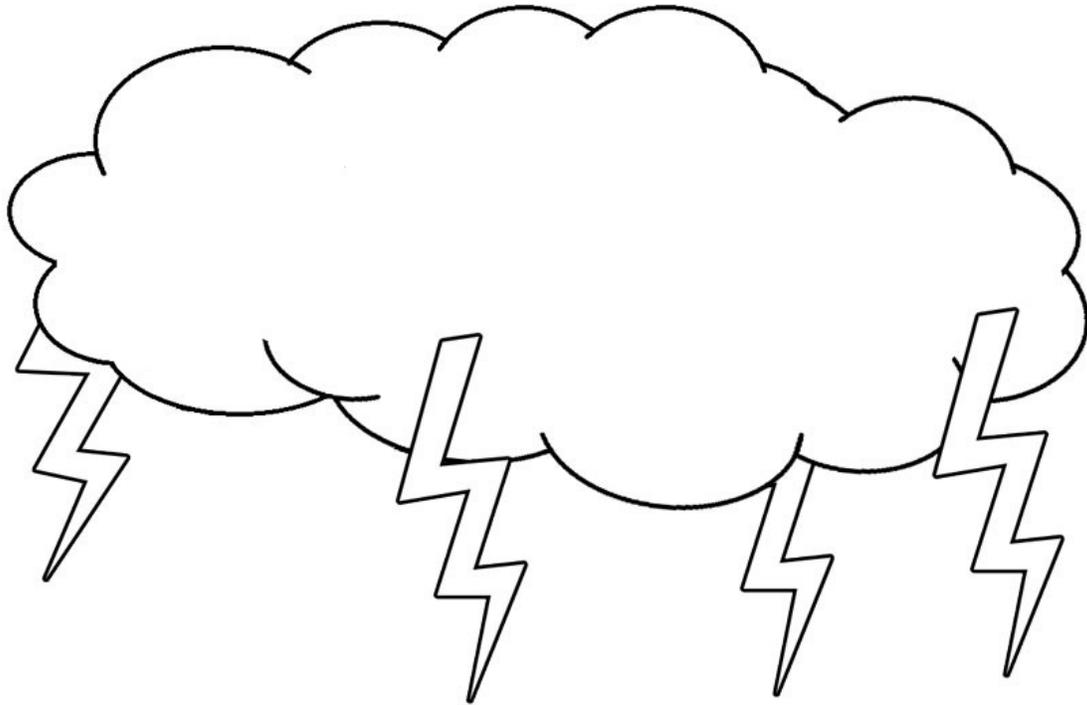
Rather than focusing on the negative, you can look at the positive or bright side of the situation. For example, imagine you made a mistake at work and received critical feedback from your boss. Instead of spending the rest of your day reviewing what you did wrong (focusing on the negative), you could look at the bright side of the situation by seeing the feedback as an opportunity for growth and learning. You could imagine what you can do differently, and perhaps better, next time. This change in mindset is commonly known as finding the silver lining.

In a 2014 study by psychologists Susan Sergeant and Myriam Mongrain that examined the effect of finding silver linings daily for three weeks, participants experienced greater engagement in life and less dysfunctional or negative thinking. Participants who tended toward pessimism prior to the study actually experienced even greater benefits!

What to Do

When things go wrong, you might get caught up in your feelings of disappointment or regret. You might even have the habit of criticizing or blaming yourself or others, focusing entirely on what you have lost and what the situation cost you. In this exercise, you are going to practice looking at the bright side (or finding the silver lining) of otherwise unpleasant situations.

First, think about think about a time when something did not go your way, or when you felt frustrated, stressed, upset, or annoyed. In the storm cloud below, briefly describe this difficulty. Feel free to use words or draw pictures.



What did this difficulty cost you? Write down the negative things that came out of it.

Now, instead of dwelling on the negative consequences of this situation, consider what you gained from it. Write down at least three positive things that came out of this difficulty.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What did you learn from the situation?

Did you develop any strengths or problem-solving strategies as a result of this situation?

Did this situation add more meaning to your life? Why or why not?

Would you go back in time and change what happened if it meant you would not be the person you are today? Explain.

For the next two weeks, practice changing your outlook to find the silver lining in unpleasant situations. Note the date, briefly describe the situation, and write down the unpleasant or negative consequences of the situation. Then shift your mindset to find the bright side or silver lining. Finally, write down what you learned from the situation.

Date	Situation	Unpleasant or negative consequences	Bright side or silver lining	What did you learn from this situation?

Date	Situation	Unpleasant or negative consequences	Bright side or silver lining	What did you learn from this situation?

Did this exercise help you find the silver linings in difficult situations? Why or why not?

Did this exercise help you develop a more balanced perspective over time? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Coping with a Crisis Using the STOP Technique

What to Know

You may think of a crisis as a sudden unexpected incident or disaster, such as a car accident, natural disaster, death in the family, or another tragic or cataclysmic event. A crisis can sometimes be obvious, such as a job loss or divorce. In other cases, a personal crisis might be less apparent but can still lead to dramatic changes in your behavior, feelings, and mood.

When you experience a crisis, you will probably have intense feelings, thoughts, and emotions. Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) can help you overcome and release negative thoughts and feelings to reduce avoidant coping strategies while still maintaining your values. If you are experiencing a crisis, whether it is emotional or situational, there are things you can do to cope and enhance your well-being. The STOP technique is one way to manage crises:

1. **S**low your breathing. Take some deep breaths and mindfully observe the breath flowing in and out. This will help anchor you in the present.
2. **T**ake note of your experience. Notice what you are thinking, feeling, and doing. Observe whether your thoughts and feelings are overwhelming you. Do not allow them to carry you away.
3. **O**pen up around your feelings and thoughts, breathing into them and making space for them without holding on to them or pushing them away. See them for what they are rather than attaching to them.
4. **P**ursue your values. Connect with your values by asking yourself “Who do I want to be in the face of this crisis? What do I stand for? How would I like to act so I can look back and feel proud of my response?”

What to Do

Describe a crisis you are currently experiencing.

Would you benefit from help, support, or advice? If so, what friends, neighbors, or family members can you contact? What professionals can you arrange to see? Include names and phone numbers.

Have you ever experienced anything similar? If so, how did you respond in a useful or helpful manner? Is there anything you learned from that experience that you can apply now?

Is there anything you can do to improve the situation in any way? Are there any small steps you can take right now? What are the smallest, simplest, easiest steps you can take:

in the next few minutes? _____

in the next few hours? _____

in the next few days? _____

Note: *The first step might be to practice mindful breathing or write an action plan.*

If there is nothing you can do to improve the situation, are you willing to practice acceptance while engaging in the present moment? Describe how you can spend your time and energy constructively.

Now, spend a few minutes practicing steps 1, 2, and 3 of the STOP technique. Describe your experience.

Next, connect with your values (step 4). How do you want to respond to this situation? What are some value-driven steps you can take? What personal strengths can you develop? How can you grow from this experience?

Remember to be compassionate with yourself. Ask, "If someone I loved was going through this experience, feeling what I am feeling, how would I treat them? What might I say or do?"

Did the STOP technique help you cope with the crisis? Why or why not?

Has the situation improved? Explain.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Practicing Radical Acceptance

What to Know

No matter how you live your life, there will always be situations and events that cause great sadness, anger, or frustration. You may wish to avoid these painful and sometimes overwhelming emotions, but avoiding them is not helpful.

What would happen if you accepted things as they are—without trying to change, escape from, or eliminate them? What would happen if you refocused your attention on what you can do *now*? This is called radical acceptance—accepting even the most difficult situations the way they are rather than trying to avoid them.

When you practice radical acceptance, you acknowledge the current or past situation without judgment, and without criticizing yourself or others.

Why should you practice radical acceptance? You may have heard the saying “The only way out is through.” This means you must go through the pain in order to get to the other side of it.

Remember:

- Rejecting things that make you uncomfortable does not make them go away.
- Pain is a signal that something is wrong.
- A refusal to accept reality can keep you trapped in sadness, shame, anger, or other painful emotions.
- In order to successfully change something in your life, you need to accept it first.

Consider Kendra, who struggled with her husband’s infidelity for years before she practiced radical acceptance. Kendra and Jon were married for sixteen years when she noticed that he seemed to be losing interest in her. Jon was always going away for weekends, and even when he was home, his mind seemed to be in another place. He was constantly on the computer and texting people, but Kendra was afraid to ask him what was going on.

Kendra told her sister and her best friend that she thought Jon was having an affair. She wondered if she should try to spy on him or even hire a private detective. She started to constantly think about Jon and what had happened to their marriage. She felt guilty, angry, and worried about what would happen to her children if they divorced. The only thing that would quiet the voices in her head was taking a few drinks, and she did this every night.

Using radical acceptance, Kendra learned to acknowledge her feelings rather than giving them power over her or trying to avoid them. She stopped blaming herself and even stopped blaming Jon. Once she could accept that this was a difficult situation (but a common one), she contacted a marriage counselor and asked Jon to go with her to a session.

What to Do

There are several steps to practicing radical acceptance:

- Stay in the present moment and pay attention to the emotions you are experiencing.
- Remind yourself that the unpleasant reality cannot be changed.
- Remind yourself that the past or present reality is shaped by numerous factors, decisions, and events that took place over time.
- Practice accepting with your mind, heart, and body. This can include relaxation techniques, mindful breathing, prayer, or visualization.
- Listen to your body's sensations (tension, tightness, etc.) as you think about what you need to accept.
- Allow disappointment, sadness, or grief to surface.
- Recognize that life, even when it is painful, can be worth living.

There are also statements you can say to yourself that may be helpful during this practice:

- "I can't change what's already happened."
- "It's impossible to change the past."
- "The present is the only moment I can control."
- "This situation is the result of countless other decisions and actions."

Now, consider radical acceptance as it relates to your own experiences. Think of a recent situation that you found distressing, and answer the following questions.

Describe the situation.

What were the past events that led to this situation?

What role did you play in causing this situation?

What role did others play?

What did you have control of in this situation?

Where did you lack control in this situation?

How did you respond to this situation?

How did this response affect your thoughts and feelings?

Did you avoid dealing with upsetting thoughts and feelings? Why or why not?

How might the events have played out differently if you had practiced radical acceptance?

Now, practice radical acceptance on a current situation that is causing you distress. Describe the situation.

What are your thoughts and feelings about this situation?

What can you do to help you accept this situation?

Did you notice any shift in your thoughts and feelings about the situation after practicing radical acceptance? Describe those changes.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Letting Go of Grudges

What to Know

Holding a grudge involves replaying a past injustice over and over in your head. If you are holding a grudge, you repeatedly get caught up in the emotions associated with the situation long after it has passed. Do you really want to stay “stuck” and keep rehashing painful situations? What will it take for you to move on and let go?

Holding grudges weighs you down. When you hold grudges, it is not possible to heal your emotional pain, and holding grudges may actually harm your health. In one study, adults who held grudges for more than a decade experienced greater cognitive decline than those who were more forgiving. Some studies even suggest that holding grudges may increase stress hormones such as cortisol, negatively impacting your immune system.

The longer you hold a grudge the more difficult it is to forgive and move on. To let go of a grudge, shift your focus off the person who “wronged” you and the story of your suffering. Making a determined and sincere effort to let go of a grudge can lead to feelings of calm and greater happiness.

Here are steps you can take to let go of a grudge:

- 1. Acknowledge the problem.** Identify the grudge and what is causing you to hold on to it.
- 2. Identify your feelings.** A grudge can form when a problem is not fully confronted or solved. Clarify your feelings on the situation.
- 3. Decide how to proceed.** Is this something you will work on yourself, or do you need to contact the person involved?
- 4. Gain understanding.** Sometimes it is helpful to put yourself in the other person’s shoes to understand their point of view and behavior. Understanding the other person does not justify their behavior or that you were wronged, but it might make it easier to let go of the grudge.
- 5. Acceptance.** Consciously choose to release the grudge—with or without an apology. The other person may never come around, and they might have forgotten about the issue or not even realize how you were affected. Even if you do not receive an apology, the other person might be remorseful. Some people are unable to apologize.
- 6. Move on and avoid dwelling on it.** Once you decide to move on and release the grudge, keep moving forward. Do not spend time thinking about the situation, or repeatedly discuss it with others. If the issue is brought up in conversation, change the subject.

7. **Consider the positive.** You can view the situation that caused your grudge as a learning experience. Trying to understand the person you were angry at can help you let go of the grudge and release lingering resentment.

8. **Forgive.** Forgiving the person does not mean forgetting about what happened; it is simply acknowledging differences and accepting that everyone makes mistakes. Forgiving is not always easy—especially if you have experienced hurt and pain—but it is an important way to have more peace in your life.

What to Do

First, reflect on grudges you are holding against other people, including family members, friends, or a spouse or partner. On the chart that follows, write down the grudges you are holding, and next to each statement, rate the intensity of your anger on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 = no anger, and 10 = extreme anger or fury.

Name of person	Grudge	How long have you held this grudge?	Intensity (1–10)

Which grudge is hardest to release?

Which grudge might be easiest to release?

Choose one grudge to work on releasing. Write it down.

How does it benefit you to hold on to this grudge?

Is this a grudge you can let go of yourself, or do you need help from a professional?

What can you do to better understand the other person and their behavior?

Are you able to accept the situation as it is, even without an apology?

What can you learn from this situation? About yourself? About the other person?

What else can you do to let go of grudges?

On a 0 to 10 scale, how successful were you at letting go of your grudges, where 0 = not at all successful, and 10 = completely successful: _____

Are you ready to let go of additional grudges? Explain.

Do you feel differently about yourself or your life now that you have completed this exercise?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Adopting a Growth Mindset

What to Know

Psychologist Carol Dweck coined the terms *fixed mindset* and *growth mindset* to describe the beliefs people have about their intelligence and abilities. If you have a fixed mindset, you assume that qualities such as intelligence, character, and ability are stable and cannot be changed. If you have a growth mindset, you believe these qualities can be improved with effort. You view challenges and obstacles as natural and part of learning.

Having a growth mindset is beneficial because you are more likely to succeed academically, you tend to be more motivated to learn, and you are less discouraged by challenges. In contrast, if you have a fixed mindset, you may avoid challenges and feel like a failure because you believe you lack the ability to succeed. Fortunately, mindset can change, and the key to changing your mindset lies in self-awareness. The following steps will help you move from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset.

- 1. Listen to your mindset “voice.”** Become aware of the internal commentary that happens when you face challenges or difficulties—including mistakes or setbacks, or when you receive criticism.
- 2. Identify whether your thoughts represent a fixed or growth mindset.** You have a fixed mindset if your internal voice tends to say things like “I can’t do this,” “I’m not good enough,” “I’m not smart enough,” or “I failed before so I’ll probably fail again.” If you have a growth mindset, your internal voice is encouraging and optimistic.
- 3. Choose to change!** When you are aware of your mindset, you can choose differently. If you notice discouraging fixed mindset commentary, you can shift to a growth mindset. You can mentally shift your perception of your abilities and the challenge you are facing. In other words, respond to your fixed mindset commentary with growth mindset commentary; for example, “I’m really having a hard time with this situation, but I have the tools to overcome it,” or “Everyone experiences failures along the way, and if I use my available resources I will likely succeed.”
- 4. Take actions that reflect a growth mindset.** Imagine what types of actions you can take that reflect a growth mindset. For example, you can approach challenges or obstacles with enthusiasm and curiosity, interpret failures as learning opportunities, learn from setbacks and try again, or receive criticism with an open mind. As with many activities, the more you practice acting in line with a growth mindset, the more natural it becomes.

What to Do

For the next two weeks, try to become aware of your internal commentary when you face difficult or challenging situations. Write down the date, briefly describe the situation, and note the thoughts you have. Identify whether you have a fixed or growth mindset, and write down growth mindset thoughts and actions. Review the example.

Date	Situation	Thoughts after setback or failure	Fixed or growth mindset ?	Growth mindset thoughts	Growth mindset actions

Did you notice patterns that triggered a fixed mindset? Explain.

Why do you think these situations cause a fixed mindset to emerge? Explain.

Were you able to replace thoughts reflecting a fixed mindset with growth mindset thoughts? Why or why not?

When you had difficulties adopting a growth mindset, what do you believe caused these difficulties? Could you have done anything differently? Describe.

What else can you do to strengthen your growth mindset?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Creating a Forgiveness Ritual

What to Know

Forgiveness is a conscious decision to let go of anger or resentment you feel toward a person who has hurt you. Forgiveness does not mean you have forgotten, minimized, or excused an offense. Instead, it means recognizing it and making a conscious decision to let go of the pain. You may believe reconciliation occurs along with forgiveness, but this is not always the case. For example, you may be able to forgive a family member who said hurtful things to you, but it could be harmful, both mentally and physically, to maintain a close relationship with that person. Forgiveness may take time, especially if the offense was serious. When someone causes serious harm, either deliberately or accidentally, true forgiveness can be challenging.

Here are some suggestions to help you forgive someone who has hurt you:

- Talk about the issue to help you understand why the other person hurt you.
- Empathize with the other person's situation.
- Avoid focusing on the feelings directed toward the person who did wrong.
- Reflect on times when you hurt someone else, and treat forgiveness of another person as forgiveness of yourself.
- Tell the other person directly they are forgiven.
- Draw from spiritual, cultural, and/or religious teachings.

Forgiveness benefits you as well as the person you choose to forgive. Studies have shown that an inability or unwillingness to forgive can have a negative impact on your mental health and well-being, contributing to depression and anxiety. If you forgive easily, you tend to experience increased happiness, better physical health, and stronger relationships. In general, you are less likely to experience the negative effects of stress. You are able to resolve conflicts more easily, repair damaged relationships, and experience higher levels of empathy. You are also likely to be more resistant to illness than those who hold grudges, as studies have shown that people who hold grudges are more likely to have compromised immune systems.

According to acceptance and commitment therapy, similar to all other thoughts and feelings, the thoughts and feelings that accompany forgiveness exist to be observed and held lightly while focusing on your personal values. Forgiveness is viewed as an action, not a feeling. If you offer forgiveness, you will likely feel a sense of relief, lightness, peace, and ease. However, these feelings will come and go. In the past, you might have forgiven someone and felt good, only to realize later your positive feelings passed and anger replaced them. What can you do? Feelings and emotions come and go, so that is why it is useful to view forgiveness as an action. You can choose to behave in a forgiving manner as your feelings come and go.

What to Do

One action you can take is creating a forgiveness ritual. You can use your creativity to adapt this exercise into something more relevant and personal to you.

First, think of a time when someone hurt you. Choose a situation that is unresolved and that you have not forgiven the person for. Describe.

Step 1. Complete these statements:

The thoughts, feelings, and memories I have been holding on to:

Holding on to these feelings and thoughts has hurt me in the following ways:

Step 2. In your own words, write a commitment statement that describes how you will let these painful thoughts and feelings come and go, no matter how many times they return, without holding on to them, getting caught up in them, or allowing them to cause additional hurt.

My commitment is to:

Step 3. Now, plan to read your answers from steps 1 and 2 aloud to a trusted family member or friend. Write down who you will read your statements to, when you will do it, and where you will do it.

Step 4. After you read your statements, do something that symbolizes starting over—for example, burn your statements and scatter the ashes. Write down what you will do.

Step 5. After completing the ritual, do something to nurture and care for yourself. Describe what you will do.

After completing the forgiveness ritual, reflect on your values. If you could respond mindfully when someone hurts you, acting on your deepest values, what would you say and do? Are you willing to forgive, let go, and move on? Are you willing to release your painful feelings and let go of unhelpful thoughts? Explain your answers.

When someone you care about hurts you, how will you ideally respond?

When you hurt someone, how will you ideally respond?

What will you say or do to make amends?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Section 4. Learning Emotion Regulation

Naming Your Emotions

What to Know

You probably go through the day experiencing a range of emotions from pleasant to unpleasant; some are in your awareness, and others are outside of your awareness. Sometimes your emotions can cause you to make poor decisions, say things you regret, or take actions that cause yourself or others harm.

You can learn specific skills to control your emotions and keep them more in balance rather than shifting between extremes. In this worksheet, you will learn about the range of emotions and then practice simply observing and naming your own.

What to Do

In order to manage an emotion, you need to know what it is. The first step in learning emotion regulation is to become familiar with the range of emotions that we can experience. Read the following list of pleasant and unpleasant emotions.

Pleasant		Unpleasant		
affectionate	mellow	aggravated	enraged	ad
amused	open	agitated	exasperated	scared
appreciative	optimistic	ambivalent	exhausted	tense
calm	passionate	self-conscious	frightened	needy
caring	peaceful	annoyed	frustrated	angry
comfortable	pleased	anxious	furios	tired
confident	relaxed	apprehensive	guarded	upset
curious	relieved	ashamed	terrified	edgy
delighted	rested	suspicious	helpless	bored
empowered	safe	confused	impatient	lonely
encouraged	satisfied	contemptuous	insecure	guilty
excited	secure	depressed	irritated	
friendly	strong	disappointed	uncomfortable	
fulfilled	surprised	disconnected	restless	
grateful	thrilled	disgusted	nervous	
hopeful	trusting	disheartened	overwhelmed	
joyful	warm	vulnerable	remorseful	
loving		embarrassed	resentful	

Are these feelings all familiar to you? Which ones are? Which are unfamiliar? Write some reflections on the lines below.

During the coming week, write down a few situations or experiences in which you notice your feelings. By labeling your feelings, you can use the power of your mind to take a step back and assess (mindfulness), and then, over time, learn how to make a good choice about what to do next.

Start with PLEASANT or UNPLEASANT. Then try to identify the general feeling you notice, such as HAPPY, SAD, ANGRY, SCARED. Then, if you feel ready, try to be more specific. Use the list of feelings as a guide, but feel free to use different words for other feelings that come to mind.

Day	Situation/ experience when you noticed a feeling	Pleasant or unpleasant?	General (happy, sad, angry, scared)	Specific
Sunday				
Monday				
Tuesday				

Day	Situation/ experience when you noticed a feeling	Pleasant or unpleasant?	General (happy, sad, angry, scared)	Specific
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				

What emotions did you become aware of that you weren't previously aware of?

What was the main obstacle you encountered in identifying your emotions?

What was easy about it?

What would you like to do to continue the practice of naming and noticing your emotions? Be specific.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Observing and Accepting Your Emotions

What to Know

When emotions are overwhelming, it can feel impossible to sit with the feelings. You may seek out ways to avoid your emotions, or numb them with unhealthy or harmful behaviors. When you begin to recognize and accept your feelings, you can identify healthier ways of managing your emotions and responding to situations that cause upset or distress, or overwhelm you. Before you can accept your overwhelming emotions, it is helpful to understand what is causing them.

What to Do

For the next week, keep track of your emotions using this chart, noting situations that trigger your emotions; the emotions you experience; and finally, your response or reaction. Make copies of this chart, as necessary. Then, review the completed chart and answer the following questions.

Date	Triggering situation	Your emotion(s)	Your coping response
<i>February 12</i>	<i>Today is the first anniversary of my divorce</i>	<i>Sad, rejected, lonely</i>	<i>Called out sick from work and slept most of the day</i>

Date	Triggering situation	Your emotion(s)	Your coping response

What emotions did you experience most often?

What coping responses did you use most often?

Did those coping responses improve how you felt about yourself and the situation? Explain.

When difficult emotions show up repeatedly, or your coping responses cause even more distress, it is time to face those feelings. The following visualization exercise will help you observe your emotions, and any accompanying physical sensations, without analyzing them or becoming preoccupied by them. When you stop trying to fight or avoid your emotions, the feelings become less intense, and it is easier to let them go.

Find a quiet, comfortable space to sit where you will not be disturbed or distracted, and set a timer for five minutes. As you become more comfortable sitting with your emotions, you can set the timer for longer periods of time. Focus on your breath and your body's sensations throughout this exercise.

- Take several deep breaths and notice how your breath feels in your body.
- Notice your body's physical sensations, including any tightness in your neck or shoulders.
- Observe your emotion as it arises. Describe the feeling to yourself, as well as the intensity of that emotion.
- Notice whether the emotion is increasing or decreasing as you continue breathing.
- Observe any new emotions that join or replace that feeling.
- If you notice a need to push away the emotion or to act on a harmful urge, that is normal. Keep observing the emotion a little longer, describing those feelings to yourself.
- Observe how it feels to be aware of your feelings, watching them come and go without acting on them.
- Remind yourself that emotions are like waves that ebb and flow, and that you have faced other emotional waves before.
- Notice any judgments you have about yourself, other people, or the emotion itself, and let them go.
- Keep watching your emotion until it changes or decreases.
- Finish with a few intentional deep breaths.

Describe any physical sensations you noticed as you observed your emotions.

Describe any urges or impulses that arose as you observed your emotions.

Describe what it was like to observe your emotions without acting on them.

Did this exercise change the way you regard your overwhelming emotions? Explain.

Did this exercise change the way you react to your overwhelming emotions? Explain.

Can you think of ways to cope with overwhelming emotions in the future?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Overcoming Emotional Avoidance

What to Know

Social norms suggest that certain feelings should be avoided. When you were a child, you might have been told “Stop crying or I’ll give you something to cry about,” “Cheer up. Everyone loses sometimes,” or “I don’t see why you just can’t be happy!” and so on. You might have learned from a very young age that expressing your emotions was not acceptable. Furthermore, threatening messages related to emotions might have contributed to anxiety or depression.

So, from a young age you may have learned that certain emotional experiences were problematic and should be avoided—this belief might have persisted into adulthood, and might manifest as psychological inflexibility. You might even find yourself saying things to make others feel better: “Don’t worry about it, everything will be okay,” “You have nothing to be depressed about—your life is great!” or “Don’t get angry at me—this isn’t my fault.” You may believe that certain feelings are negative, and your goal may be to get rid of or avoid those feelings.

According to acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), replacing the word *negative* with *natural* is helpful in experiencing your emotions and feelings in a healthy manner. When negative feelings or emotions are perceived as natural, you will relate to them differently instead of avoiding or attempting to control them. ACT discourages avoidance, as it is an attempt to mitigate or evade unwanted feelings or emotions, which can promote making unhealthy choices or acting in self-destructive ways. In addition, it is difficult to move in a values-supported direction and toward meaningful outcomes if you are constantly attempting to avoid unpleasant or uncomfortable feelings. Remember, avoiding your feelings and emotions does not ensure that these experiences will go away. In fact, research suggests avoidance exacerbates mental health problems and increases inflexibility.

What to Do

First, complete the following sentences to identify the unpleasant or uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, sensations, and memories you typically might avoid.

The thoughts I’d most like to get rid of are:

The feelings I’d most like to get rid of are:

The sensations I'd most like to get rid of are:

The memories I'd most like to get rid of are:

Next, write a list of everything you have tried to avoid unpleasant thoughts, feelings, sensations, and memories. Try to remember every strategy you have ever used. Review the following list of strategies to remind yourself.

1. Distraction. List everything you have ever done to distract yourself, zone out, or avoid painful thoughts, feelings, sensations, or memories.

2. Opting out. List activities, interests, events, people, or places you have avoided or withdrawn from, including opportunities you have missed out on, because you wanted to avoid feeling bad.

3. Thinking strategies. List different ways of thinking you have tried (deliberately or unintentionally) when unpleasant or difficult feelings arise. Check off any of the following that you have done, and write in any others:

- Worrying
- Dwelling on the past
- Fantasizing about the future
- Imagining escape scenarios (for example, leaving your job)
- Imagining revenge scenarios
- Imagining suicide scenarios
- Thinking “It’s not fair...” or “If only things had been different...”
- Blaming or judging yourself
- Blaming or judging others or the world
- Talking logically to yourself
- Using positive thinking
- Talking negatively to yourself
- Overanalyzing (trying to figure things out)
- Other: _____
- Other: _____

Of the ways of thinking you checked off, what are the top two ways you attempt to avoid thoughts, feelings, memories, or sensations?

1. _____
2. _____

4. Substances. List the substances you have ever used to feel better, including foods, drinks, cigarettes, recreational drugs, and prescription drugs.

5. Write down anything else you have tried to avoid your feelings.

Once you have completed your lists, review the strategies and ask yourself these questions.

Did using these strategies reduce unpleasant or painful thoughts and feelings in the long run? Explain.

Did the use of these strategies bring you closer to a happy and meaningful life? Explain.

What did the use of these strategies cost you in terms of time, energy, money, health, relationships, or vitality?

Keep an avoidance diary by completing the following chart at least once a day for one week. Write down unpleasant or uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, sensations, or memories that showed up that day. Next, describe what you did to avoid, get rid of, or reduce them. Then explain what the costs were, and finally, reflect on what you could do differently. The goal is to increase your awareness around the costs of trying to avoid or get rid of painful thoughts and feelings.

Date	Thoughts, feelings, sensations, or memories	What did you do to avoid them?	What did this cost you? (for example, health, relationships, feeling stuck, time, energy, etc.)	What can you do differently?

What obstacles did you encounter while completing this exercise?

After completing the avoidance diary, did you tend to avoid your unpleasant or uncomfortable feelings more or less? Did you come up with ways to manage your feelings differently (other than avoidance)? Explain.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Learning to Self-Soothe

What to Know

There are many things that can upset you to the point where you feel emotionally overwhelmed and even out of control. When you feel this way, the emotional part of your brain takes over, and the rational or thinking part of your brain takes a back seat. Calming your emotions—also called self-soothing—is an important lifelong skill everyone should learn.

There are three different factors that can make a particular activity more soothing:

Familiarity. Activities that are associated with pleasant memories from the past will be particularly helpful in soothing your feelings. For example, one woman said that sipping hot chocolate with a marshmallow on top from a large blue mug made her think of happy afternoons from her childhood.

Involvement of multiple senses. Our emotional brain responds best when activities are multisensory—that is, they involve sound, sight, taste, touch, and smell. Typically, pleasant activities that involve two or more senses are most soothing. An example of a multisensory activity might include walking in the woods, smelling the flowers, feeling the breeze, and hearing the wind rustling the trees.

Repetitive motion. Studies suggest that repetitive motion, such as chewing gum, knitting, or rocking in a chair, can produce serotonin in the brain. Our bodies are naturally inclined toward repetitive motion, like pacing, when we are agitated.

What to Do

When you perform any of the activities in this worksheet your brain will be producing serotonin, a biochemical that gives you a sense of calm. Review the list and check off the things you think might soothe your emotions. Everyone is different, and certain activities will seem more appealing to you than others.

The list is divided into three types of activities, and you can add your own ideas on the blank lines:

1. Activities you can do immediately when you are starting to feel emotionally overwhelmed:

_____ Take five cleansing breaths

_____ Self-massage

_____ Chew gum

_____ Sip a soothing warm drink (preferably one without caffeine)

_____ Wear familiar perfume or cologne

_____ Suck on hard candy

_____ Stretch

_____ Sit in the sun

_____ Take a walk

_____ Other things you can do:

2. Activities you can do when you are anticipating situations that will make you feel emotionally overwhelmed:

_____ Take a warm shower or bath

_____ Get a massage

_____ Wear your most comfortable clothes

_____ Enjoy a favorite meal

_____ Burn scented candles

_____ Exercise

_____ Arrange and smell flowers

_____ Listen to quiet music

_____ Other things you can do:

3. Activities you can do every day to develop the habit of self-soothing: (It's worth noting that when you practice self-soothing on a regular basis, preferably daily, calming yourself down when you are more upset will be much easier.)

_____ Take care of a pet

_____ Cook or bake

_____ Meditate or relax in a quiet place

_____ Rest or nap

_____ Get plenty of sleep

_____ Read a book

_____ Listen to quiet music

_____ Watch a funny movie or show

_____ Work on a hobby _____ (write in the hobby)

_____ Rock in a chair for ten minutes

_____ Exercise

_____ Garden

_____ Journal or write

_____ Other things you can do:

Write down the self-soothing activities you want to try. After you have tried each, write down the date, and then rate how successful they were in reducing your emotional distress, where 0 = not helpful at all, to 7 = very helpful. Write down any thoughts you have.

Activity	Date	Success rating (0-7)	Thoughts about this activity

Activity	Date	Success rating (0–7)	Thoughts about this activity

What activity was most helpful in reducing your distress and calming yourself down?

What activity was least helpful?

Overall, did you find that you were less distressed when you engaged in a self-soothing activity? Why or why not? Explain.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Using Opposite Action to Deal with Difficult Emotions

What to Know

When we experience a strong emotion, such as fear, anger, or sadness, our tendency is to take action in response. It is a natural instinct to do something to make it go away. Sometimes that is a good strategy. For instance, if you see a snake slithering on the sidewalk and you experience fear, it is a good strategy to run in the other direction as a response to potential danger. But sometimes we experience fear when there is no actual danger, and running away from the situation doesn't solve the problem.

Psychologist Marsha Linehan, who developed a therapeutic approach called dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT), suggests a tool for identifying and regulating our emotions, which she calls "opposite action." So what about a person who has to give a speech and feels fear? That fear may be very real but, unlike running from snake, dashing out of the room might not make sense; in reality, there is no actual danger, just a worry about something bad happening. That person might choose to face into it, take deep breaths, tell themselves that they are going to be all right. That is what Linehan means by "opposite action," that is, taking charge of the emotion and, with repeated practice, mastering it.

The skill of opposite action is not the same as suppressing our emotions. We remain present and notice the emotion, then consciously use it to take a different action. With practice, this action can actually *change the emotion* over time. With sadness or depression, for example, one habitual action is to stay in bed, hiding away. An opposite action would be to visit a friend, go to the gym, cook a nice meal. It's not that you're denying the emotion. You are working with it, challenging it by acting opposite to it, and, eventually, turning it around.

What to Do

In this worksheet, you will notice when and in what situations you experience difficult emotions, then keep track of what you typically do in response. Then you will have a chance to try out various ways of taking opposite action in response.

Typical responses to difficult emotions include:

Fear—running away or avoiding the perceived danger

Anger—fighting back or becoming defensive

Sadness—isolating, withdrawing, retreating

In the chart below, write down your experience of fear, anger, or sadness, and your typical response to that feeling. Add any thoughts you have about this.

Date/situation	Emotion experienced	Typical response	Reflections/notes

To practice opposite action, try the following.

Fear—stay in the situation; take deep breaths; tell yourself “I can do this”; stand up straight; keep your eyes up

Anger—step away from the situation or person you feel anger toward; take deep breaths; count to ten; consider the other person’s side; practice compassion; write down your feelings

Sadness—don’t avoid the situation; let yourself cry if you feel sad; don’t choose “numbing” distractions such as substances or entertainment; choose an activity that is engaging and productive, with other people; don’t isolate or retreat

Opposite action is most effective when your emotions *do not fit* the reality of the situation, as in the public speaking example above where there is no actual danger. So, your experience of

“terror” ends up not being effective in helping you overcome your fear. Doing the opposite, and doing it with all your energy and commitment, is important to this skill. You can change your thoughts, your words, even your facial expressions and physical stance.

Start with emotions that aren’t too intense so you can practice experiencing the change from “habitual/typical” to “effective.” Repeat this as often as necessary before moving on to tackling, and mastering, stronger or more intense emotional situations. Think of the process as learning and practicing a new language—it might feel awkward at first, but it will get easier over time.

Date/situation	Emotion experienced	Opposite action taken	Reflections/notes

What did you notice about your typical or habitual ways of dealing with difficult emotions?

Are your typical ways of handling emotions effective or ineffective? Explain.

Describe what happened when you tried to do “opposite action.” Was it easy? Challenging? What can you do to continue practicing this skill? Elaborate below or on a separate piece of paper.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Using Nonjudgmental Visualization to Observe Thoughts and Feelings

What to Know

When you experience distressing thoughts repeatedly, you can get stuck in that negative space. In addition to criticizing yourself and your thoughts, you may become judgmental about your overwhelming emotions. When you observe your thoughts and feelings objectively, you are better able to determine which thoughts are useful to you and which can lead to harmful behaviors.

What to Do

The following visualization exercise will help you observe your thoughts and feelings (both physical and emotional), without judgment, analysis, or rumination. The intention of this exercise is not for you to stop thinking—which is impossible to do—but to notice your thoughts as they come and go, without holding on to them.

Find a quiet, comfortable space to sit where you will not be disturbed or distracted, and set a timer for five minutes.

- Take several long, slow breaths and close your eyes.
- Imagine yourself in a calm, peaceful setting, such as at the beach or in the forest.
- Picture your thoughts as leaves floating down a stream, as clouds drifting by, or as shells on a beach that get washed away by waves. You can also create your own scenario where you watch your thoughts disappear as new ones arise.
- Observe your thoughts as they come and go, one at a time, without judgment. If your thoughts come very quickly, do your best to notice each one and let it go.
- Do not try to stop your thoughts.
- If you discover that you are criticizing yourself for what you are thinking, it might be helpful to say “This is just a thought. I am not my thoughts.” Or “Thoughts are not facts.” You can also just state “I am having a thought about X.”
- Observe any emotions or physical sensations that arise.
- Take several long, slow breaths and open your eyes.

Describe what it was like to notice your thoughts without judging them. Was it easy or difficult?

What emotions did you notice as you observed your thoughts?

What physical sensations did you notice as you observed your thoughts?

Describe any urges or impulses that arose as you observed your thoughts.

How did this exercise change the way you acknowledge your thoughts, including self-judgment or criticism? Explain.

How did this exercise help you understand the connection between your thoughts, your emotions, and your physical sensations? Explain.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Pausing During a Distressing Situation: The REST Technique

What to Know

When confronted with distressing situations, it can be challenging to remember healthy coping strategies you have learned. It might seem easier and feel more natural to return to unhealthy habits than to identify helpful techniques to manage your emotions. Taking a step back from an emotionally upsetting situation gives you the opportunity to examine the situation more objectively. As a result, you are more likely to choose healthier solutions and coping techniques.

Think of a recent situation when you experienced upsetting emotions and responded by acting impulsively or resorted to harmful urges. Then, answer the questions below.

Describe what happened during this situation.

Describe your emotions during this situation.

Describe how you reacted.

How did you feel afterward?

What to Do

The following strategy, which uses the acronym REST, lays out the steps to help you pause, clear your head, and then determine a helpful plan of action to address the situation. By encouraging you to briefly shift your attention from emotions and urges to facts and solutions, REST can be used as the first step in changing your unhealthy habits.

Relax: Take a time-out from the situation to focus on your well-being. Go for a walk, take a hot bath, call a supportive friend, or even just take some deep breaths or count to ten.

Evaluate: Identify the facts within the distressing situation. Notice how you feel physically and emotionally. Observe what other people are doing and how they are reacting. Identify any threats to your safety.

Set an intention: Create a goal or plan to address the situation. This could mean choosing a coping skill, asking someone for help, calling a family meeting, or negotiating with others.

Take action: Put your plan into action with intention and awareness. While you may not necessarily resolve the situation, this action will be more effective than the impulsive behavior you may have otherwise carried out.

You may need to repeat some or all of the REST steps during a particularly overwhelming or upsetting situation. But with practice, it can become a new habit to help you manage your emotions and cope in healthier ways.

Using the distressing situation you described on the previous page, imagine how you could have responded differently using REST.

What could you have done to relax during this situation?

If you had evaluated the facts of this situation, what could you have noticed or learned?

What set intention or plan could you have used?

If you had taken action based on that intention, what could have happened?

How would your response or reaction have been different?

The key to the REST strategy is to identify the moment when you will choose how to react to an upsetting situation: either with harmful habits or with healthier coping skills. Here are some indicators that can help you identify that moment:

- You feel an intense negative emotion that usually results in avoidance or becoming confrontational.
- You are suddenly in physical or emotional pain.
- You notice the urge to act impulsively with a harmful behavior, even if there is no obvious reason.

Now, think of a recurring situation that causes you overwhelming or distressing emotions and harmful urges (for example, a confrontational family member, an unreasonably demanding boss, an overdue mortgage). Describe the situation below.

How can you use REST to address this situation next time it happens?

R: _____

E: _____

S: _____

T: _____

During what other recurring situations could the REST technique be helpful?

Has this exercise increased your ability to identify healthier coping skills and solutions to distressing situations? Explain.

Which of the REST steps did you find easiest to do? Explain.

Which of the REST steps did you find most challenging? Explain.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Seeing the Big Picture

What to Know

When a situation triggers overwhelming emotions, it is common to pay attention only to the upsetting or painful parts of your experience. As a result, you may overreact to the situation and jump to conclusions that are not based in reality. By focusing on the negative things you experience—a type of thinking called negative filtering—you limit your ability to experience the realities of that situation.

Here are some examples of negative filtering thoughts:

- Amy accidentally deleted one page of notes before her class presentation. As she spoke, she tried to remember those missing points but became increasingly self-conscious, stammering through the rest of the presentation.

Negative filtering thought: “I can’t do anything right.”

- Mike broke his ankle after slipping on an icy sidewalk, and the break prevented him from going on an important business trip.

Negative filtering thought: “This is just my luck. Why does this stuff always happen to me?”

- Cassie’s boyfriend broke up with her after they had dated for five months. This was her second breakup in less than a year.

Negative filtering thought: “Why can’t I find the right guy? What’s wrong with me?”

What to Do

Seeing the big picture means evaluating a situation from all sides, not just the negative aspects. Seeing the big picture enables you to take a step back from a difficult situation and observe things in a more objective way. This helps you better manage the thoughts and emotions that arise.

There are several questions that can guide you to see the big picture. These sample responses are based on Amy’s situation.

1. What happened during this situation?

“I deleted a page from my presentation and got so distracted that I had a hard time focusing.”

2. How did you think and feel as a result of this situation?

Thoughts: *“I can’t do anything right.”*

Feelings: *“Embarrassed and mad at myself.”*

3. What evidence supports your thoughts and feelings?

“In spite of the hours I spent preparing, I still screwed up.”

4. What evidence opposes your thoughts and feelings?

"I'm doing well in this class and my other classes too."

5. What would be a more accurate and objective way to think and feel about this situation?

"I'm disappointed in myself. I moved too fast and deleted an important page. I'll be more careful next time."

6. How could you react to that situation in a healthier way (for example, calling a friend, using positive statements)?

"I'm human, and mistakes happen to everyone."

Now it's your turn. Think of a recent negative situation where you felt bad because you were only seeing the negative aspects of the situation. Use the following chart to help you see the big picture.

Questions about the situation	Your answers
What happened during this situation?	
How did you think and feel as a result of this situation?	Thoughts: Feelings:
What evidence supports your thoughts and feelings?	
What evidence opposes your thoughts and feelings?	
What would be a more accurate and objective way to think and feel about this situation?	
How could you react to that situation in a healthier way?	

Do you often only see the negative aspects of a situation? Give another example of a time when you have done this.

What is an area of life where it will help you most to see the big picture (for example, work, school, relationships, family, and so on)?

Think of someone else you know who has difficulty in seeing the big picture? How does negative filtering affect them?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Section 5. Pursuing Meaningful Goals

Committing to Change

What to Know

Human beings are by their very nature creatures of habit, and react with anxiety, discomfort, and uncertainty in the face of change. For example, imagine yourself getting dressed in the morning at home. You have your routine set and go through it, probably without much thought. Now imagine yourself when you are staying in someone else's home or at a hotel. You probably feel a little anxiety as you struggle to learn where things are and how they work, as well as searching through your bag to locate all the supplies you rely on to make your mornings comfortable and to prepare you for the day.

Even positive events that are welcome, like a new job, still elicit some anxiety and discomfort as you work toward acclimating yourself to the changes they will bring. No matter whether it is positive or negative, change can be frightening and it demands a lot of you.

However, acknowledging these difficult feelings and working through them by committing to doing whatever it takes to accept new possibilities in your life will be cathartic and empowering.

What to Do

In this activity, you will create commitment pledges that reflect your unique needs.

Here are several examples of commitment pledges:

- I commit to focusing on what is good and positive about myself and my life every day that I am taking on this difficult undertaking.
- I commit to doing whatever it takes to make the changes I know I need and want to make in my life.
- I commit to embracing my fears instead of trying to avoid them.
- I commit to sometimes feeling uncomfortable.
- I commit to being patient with myself as I try out new and unfamiliar strategies and interventions.
- I commit to forgiving myself for any setbacks or mistakes I may make on my journey.
- I commit to taking the time for rest and relaxation so that I have the energy necessary to complete the tasks I set for myself.
- I commit to allowing myself to receive the emotional support I need to help me throughout my journey.
- I commit to rewarding myself every day for trying to change my life.

Write your own:

I commit to

What do you stand to gain from pledging to try opening yourself up to a new way of thinking?

Think of a time when you committed to some positive change in your life, no matter how small. What was the experience like for you? What would have made it better for you?

Read, recite, record, or take a picture of your pledges as often as you think you need to remind yourself what you have to gain from making a change in your life.

How did your pledges impact your ability to commit to your goal?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Using a Contract to Commit to Change

What to Know

Behavioral contracts are not just for kids. In fact, creating a behavioral contract and sharing it with others is one of the most effective ways for adults to motivate themselves to make changes in their lives.

What to Do

Use the following contract to commit yourself to changes that will help you overcome any problem that is holding you back in your life.

I, _____ (name), commit to changing
(specific behavior you want to change) _____.

I will begin on (date) _____ and plan to reach my goal,
_____ by
(target date) _____.

In order to reach my final goal, I have devised the following schedule of subgoals:

Subgoal _____	Completion date _____

Some of the strategies I will use to change my behavior:

I sign this contract as an indication of my personal commitment to reach my goal.

(Your signature)

(Date)

I have recruited _____, a supportive person who will witness my contract and help me by:

(Witness's signature)

(Date)

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Visualizing Your Goals Using Mental Imagery

What to Know

Goal visualization, or mental imagery of future events, is a technique that can help you imagine possibilities and develop a plan for goal completion. This can be outcome focused, where you imagine the successful end result, or process focused, where you think about the steps leading up to goal completion. Outcome-focused imagery can help you envision your desired outcomes and identify specific and concrete plans; process-focused imagery guides you to visualize the steps to goal completion to create an action plan. Each type can increase your motivation.

Research has shown numerous beneficial effects of goal visualization. Your performance can be improved, and you are more likely to achieve a goal, if you consistently imagine your future success. In addition, mental imagery of future events increases the likelihood those events will occur. Mental imagery has been shown to enhance athletic performance, reduce relapse rates, and decrease the likelihood of premature termination of therapy.

What to Do

The following meditation exercise will help you visualize the completion of a goal through mental imagery. Please note it is normal for your attention to wander as you do the exercise. Avoid criticizing yourself; instead, simply notice that your focus has shifted and gently return your attention to the exercise.

- Get comfortable in your seat and gently close your eyes.
- Take a few slow deep breaths, and allow yourself to relax.
- For about thirty seconds, think about a goal you want to accomplish in the next year of your life. This might be a relationship, personal, educational, or work-related goal. Visualize it in your mind's eye.
- Now, for one to two minutes, imagine yourself going forward in time, into the future...going forward one week...two weeks...three weeks...and four weeks. It is now one month into the future, and you have started working toward achieving your goal. Think about the decisions you have made and the actions you have taken. How does it feel to be on the road to success?
- Continue going forward in time until you are six months into the future. You are significantly closer to achieving your goal. You are starting to feel the benefits of all your efforts. What is this like? How does it feel to be this much closer to your goal? Notice any feelings or emotions tied to this moment.
- Continue going forward in time until you reach one year from now. Here, you have fully accomplished your goal and you have achieved success. Visualize yourself in your mind. Where are you and what are you doing? Who are you with, if anyone? What are people saying to you? What are you saying to them? How does reaching your goal feel? What emotions are tied to this achievement? Perhaps you feel pride, joy, contentment, or satisfaction. Linger on these feelings for a few moments.

- Take a few moments to look back on your journey. Review the process of achieving this goal, and consider all your hard work and effort. Think about the step-by-step process of reaching your goal. What were the little things you did each day to achieve success? How did you manage difficult thoughts or emotional obstacles? What coping strategies did you use? Consider all the things that helped you manage the personal challenges that appeared along the way.
- Take a slow deep breath. When you are ready, open your eyes.

Describe the goal you imagined during this exercise.

Now, write down the specific steps you visualized during this exercise. What can you do to achieve your goal?

What was it like to do this visualization?

What were the challenges or obstacles you identified in achieving your goal? List them.

What are some ways you can overcome these obstacles and challenges? Be specific.

Are there any insights you can use to move closer to your goal? Why or why not? Describe.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Creating a Hope Map to Achieve Your Goals

What to Know

Hope expands your thinking and fuels your persistence. Research on hope has shown that how you think about the future determines your success in work, relationships, school, and life. For example, high levels of hope lead to an increase in positive workplace outcomes, gains in academic performance, and increased happiness. Making a direct connection between your goals and your current behaviors also positively affects effort and commitment.

Research has found that hope requires three elements:

- 1. Goals.** Develop clear goals that fill your mind with a positive vision for the future.
- 2. Pathway thinking.** Seek out and identify multiple pathways to achieve your goal.
- 3. Agency.** Motivate yourself to be persistent when you face obstacles.

Hope plays a central role in setting goals, driving persistence, remaining motivated, and practicing innovation.

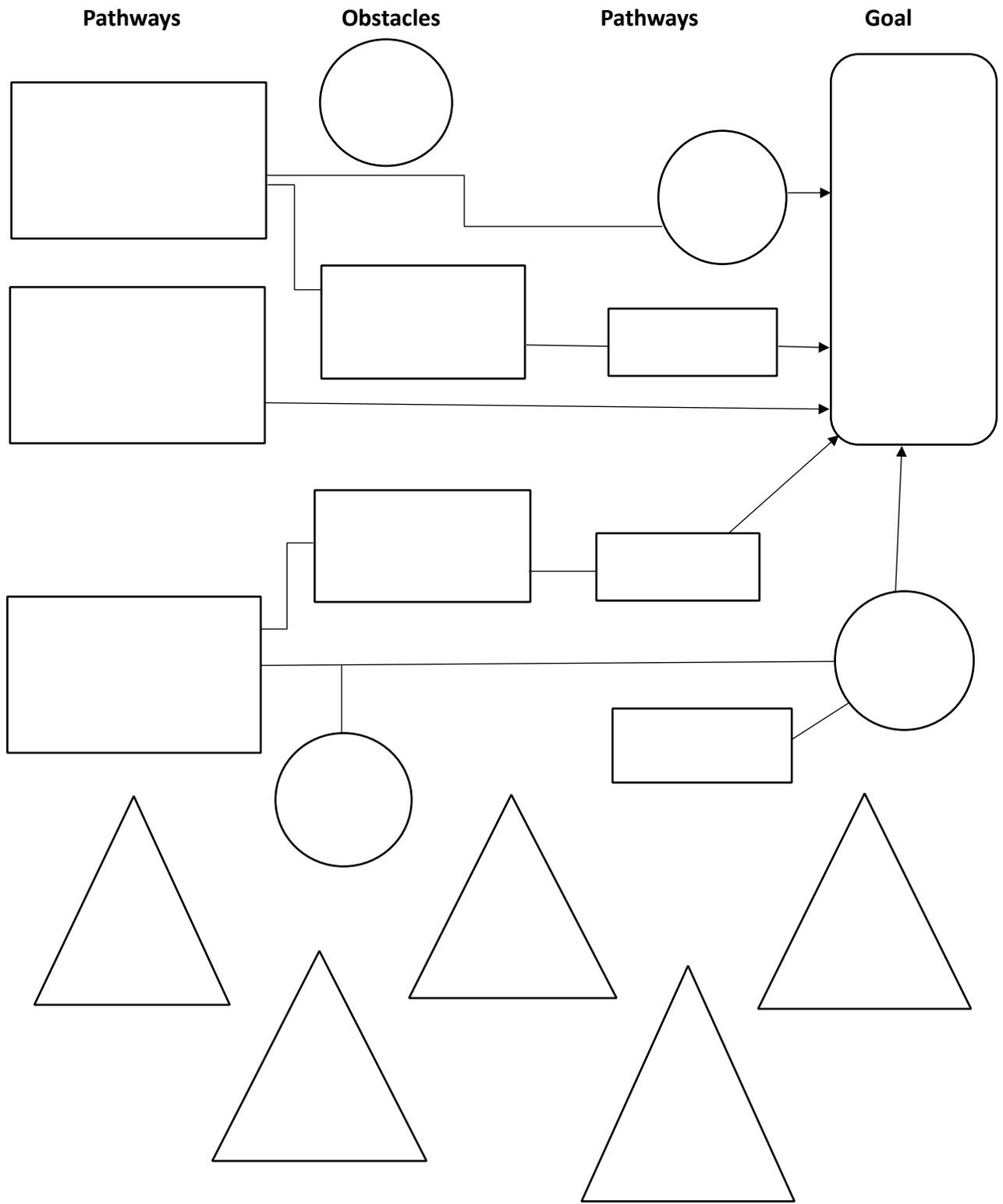
Creating a Hope Map allows you to set a goal, create pathways to the achievement of that goal, and identify potential obstacles. Your completed Hope Map can build your confidence, energy, and excitement.

What to Do

Using the Hope Map that follows, complete each of these steps.

- 1. Set a goal.** Write down a goal you would like to achieve in the large box in the last column of the Hope Map.
- 2. Set pathways.** In the first column, write down three actions or steps you will take to pursue your goal. Write down one action per box.
- 3. Identify obstacles.** In the circles, identify obstacles that might block each of the paths you have written down. You may list several obstacles per circle.
- 4. Overcome obstacles.** Review your pathways and write down some ways you can overcome each obstacle. This might include developing new pathways or adding additional steps to your existing pathways. Use the smaller boxes in the Hope Map to write down additional pathways. For any new pathways, repeat Steps 3 and 4 to come up with ideas to overcome the obstacles.
- 5. Maintain motivation.** In the triangles, write down ideas for maintaining your hope and motivation. Be mindful of the situations and obstacles that might decrease your willpower, drain you of energy, or lead to discouragement. Write down ideas for overcoming those challenges:

After you have completed your Hope Map, answer the questions that follow.



What can you do to overcome the obstacles you identified? Write down at least four ideas.

What pathway will you try first?

Did you find this exercise difficult? If yes, explain.

Imagine what it will be like to pursue and reach your goal. Once you have a vivid image in your mind, mentally rehearse all the steps you need to take to get there in real life. Write down additional ideas you come up with to achieve your goal.

Did this exercise increase your hope? Why or why not?

Did this exercise help you achieve your goal? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Aligning Your Values with Your Goals

What to Know

Your values are the basic and fundamental beliefs that determine your priorities. They shape how you live, work, and measure whether your life is turning out the way you want it to. When your goals and choices match your values, you probably feel satisfied and content. But when your choices and goals do not align with your values, you might feel unhappy, stressed, or discontented with life.

That is why making a conscious effort to define your values is important. Values motivate your attitudes, choices, and actions. Values help you identify what is important to you, and yours may be very different from other people's values. Your values influence how you interact with the world around you, and they are the foundation for purposeful action and goal creation.

Acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) is an empirically based psychological intervention that uses acceptance, mindfulness, commitment, and behavior-change strategies to increase psychological flexibility. ACT offers tools to consciously connect to the present moment, choosing to behave in a manner that is consistent with your values. Connecting and clarifying your core values is a key element, using those values to guide your actions and create specific goals. In simple terms, goal setting is guided by your values.

What to Do

Below you will find a list of the most common values. Not all of them will be relevant to you. Read through the list below and rate each value, where 10 = very important, 5 = somewhat important, and 0 = not at all important.

_____ **Acceptance.** I am open and accepting of myself, other people, and life circumstances.

_____ **Adventure.** I actively seek, create, or explore novel or stimulating experiences.

_____ **Assertiveness.** I respectfully stand up for my rights and request what I want.

_____ **Authenticity.** I strive to be genuine, real, and true to myself.

_____ **Beauty.** I appreciate, create, nurture, and cultivate beauty in myself and my surroundings.

_____ **Caring.** I am caring toward myself and others.

_____ **Challenge.** I continuously challenge myself to grow, learn, and improve my life.

_____ **Compassion.** I act with kindness toward suffering people or animals.

_____ **Connection.** I engage fully in whatever I am doing, and I am fully present with others.

_____ **Contribution.** I contribute, help, assist, or make a positive difference.

- _____ **Conformity.** I respect and obey rules and obligations.
- _____ **Cooperation.** I am cooperative and collaborative with others.
- _____ **Courage.** I am courageous or brave, and I persist in the face of fear, threat, or difficulty.
- _____ **Creativity.** I am creative and innovative.
- _____ **Curiosity.** I am curious, open-minded, and interested in exploring and discovering new things.
- _____ **Encouragement.** I encourage and reward behavior that I value in myself or others.
- _____ **Equality.** I treat others as equal to myself.
- _____ **Excitement.** I seek, create, and engage in activities that are stimulating or thrilling.
- _____ **Fairness.** I strive to be fair to myself or others.
- _____ **Fitness.** I maintain or improve my fitness and look after my physical and mental health and well-being.
- _____ **Flexibility.** I adjust and adapt readily to changing circumstances.
- _____ **Freedom.** I choose how I live and behave.
- _____ **Friendliness.** I am friendly, companionable, or agreeable toward other people.
- _____ **Forgiveness.** I am forgiving toward myself and others.
- _____ **Fun.** I am fun-loving, and I seek, create, and engage in fun-filled activities.
- _____ **Generosity.** I am generous, sharing, and giving to myself and others.
- _____ **Gratitude.** I am appreciative of the positive aspects of myself, others, and life.
- _____ **Honesty.** I am honest, truthful, and sincere with myself and others.
- _____ **Humor.** I see and appreciate the humorous side of life.
- _____ **Humility.** I am humble or modest, and I let my achievements speak for themselves.
- _____ **Industry.** I am industrious, hard-working, and dedicated.
- _____ **Independence.** I am self-supportive and choose my own way of doing things.
- _____ **Intimacy.** I open up, reveal, and share myself, emotionally or physically, in my close personal relationships.
- _____ **Justice.** I make every effort to uphold justice and fairness.
- _____ **Kindness.** I am kind, compassionate, considerate, nurturing, and caring.

- _____ **Love.** I act lovingly or affectionately toward myself and others.
- _____ **Mindfulness.** I am conscious of, open to, and curious about my present experience.
- _____ **Order.** I am orderly and organized.
- _____ **Open-mindedness.** I think things through, see things from others' points of view, and weigh evidence fairly.
- _____ **Patience.** I wait calmly for what I want.
- _____ **Persistence:** I continue resolutely despite problems or difficulties.
- _____ **Pleasure.** I create and give pleasure to myself and others.
- _____ **Power.** I strongly influence or wield authority over others by taking charge, leading, or organizing.
- _____ **Reciprocity.** I build relationships in which there is a fair balance of giving and taking.
- _____ **Respect.** I am respectful by being polite and considerate, and showing positive regard.
- _____ **Responsibility.** I am responsible and accountable for my actions.
- _____ **Romance.** I am romantic by displaying and expressing love or strong affection.
- _____ **Safety.** I secure, protect, or ensure safety of myself or others.
- _____ **Self-awareness.** I am aware of my own thoughts, feelings, and actions.
- _____ **Self-care.** I look after my health and well-being, and get my needs met.
- _____ **Self-development.** I keep growing, advancing, or improving in knowledge, skills, character, and life experience.
- _____ **Self-control.** I act in accordance with my own ideals.
- _____ **Sensuality.** I create, explore, and enjoy experiences that stimulate my five senses.
- _____ **Sexuality.** I explore or express my sexuality.
- _____ **Spirituality.** I connect with things bigger than myself.
- _____ **Skillfulness.** I practice and improve my skills, and apply myself fully when using them.
- _____ **Supportiveness.** I am supportive, helpful, encouraging, and available.

_____ **Trust.** I am trustworthy, loyal, faithful, sincere, and reliable.

_____ Other: _____

_____ Other: _____

Once you have rated each value, select the six that are most important to you. Write those six values down below in order of importance.

1. _____

4. _____

2. _____

5. _____

3. _____

6. _____

Next, begin to formulate short- and long-term goals related to these six values. Using the list above, match the values you identified with four primary life priorities: love, work/education, play, and health.

Love—Your deepest and most meaningful relationships

Related values:

Short-term goal:

Long-term goal:

Work/Education—Paid work, study/education; volunteering, domestic tasks

Related Values:

Short-term goal:

Long-term goal:

Play—Rest, relaxation, hobbies, sports; all forms of leisure, recreation, and entertainment

Related Values:

Short-term goal:

Long-term goal:

Health—Physical, psychological, emotional, or spiritual health and well-being

Related Values:

Short-term goal:

Long-term goal:

Describe what it was like defining your top six values.

Now that you are aware of your values, do you think it will be easier to set goals based on your values? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Rehearsing Values-Based Behavior

What to Know

When you encounter stressful situations, your emotions can take over and make it hard to find solutions. You may keep repeating the same arguments with a spouse or family member because you are too angry or hurt to come to a resolution. Or you may want to start dating again after a breakup, but worry about the rejection and hurt you might experience.

By reminding yourself what is important to you—your values—it can be easier to manage life’s challenges. Values are the principles, ethics, or standards that make your life meaningful. Your values are what you consider to be important or beneficial and may include things like being a good parent, practicing a religion, or serving your community. Choosing behavior that is based on values instead of emotions enables you to react to stressful situations in a way that reflects who you are, instead of what you feel.

Review this list of values, and rank the three that are most important to you.

- Having a good relationship with a spouse or partner
- Starting a new romantic relationship
- Having a close relationship with your parents or siblings
- Parenting
- Having good friends
- Living in a safe and comfortable home
- Advancing your education or training
- Having a fulfilling career or advancing your career
- Experiencing financial security (decreased debt, increased savings)
- Engaging in hobbies and interests that enrich your life
- Practicing your faith through spirituality or religion
- Engaging in community service or civic engagement to make a difference
- Being physically healthy and fit
- Being emotionally healthy and strong
- Engaging in self-care, including making time for yourself
- Other: _____

Now that you have your top three values, think of one measurable goal for each of them. For instance, if you chose education as one of your top three, your intention could be “Go back to school to complete my bachelor’s degree.”

Next, list a few realistic action steps to help you reach your goal. For example, if you want to go back to school, your steps might include “Request my transcript” and “Apply for financial aid.”

Value #1 _____

My intention: _____

My action steps:

Value #2 _____

My intention: _____

My action steps:

Value #3 _____

My intention: _____

My action steps:

It is common to feel resistance when you try to turn your values into action. You may second-guess your abilities, worry about being judged by others, or feel shame. By identifying the negative thoughts, and rehearsing solutions to overcome them, you will have more confidence to meet your goals.

Consider Ariana, who rehearsed her values-based behavior to address a stressful situation at her job.

Ariana has been very frustrated with her coworker Jack, who is a member of her project team. While Jack is a hard worker, he often leaves the office before finishing his tasks so he can pick up his child from daycare. Ariana often stays late to complete Jack’s portion of the project, which includes spreadsheets—a task she hates. She has reacted by either speaking rudely to Jack or ignoring him for hours at a time. Jack has been angry and defensive in return. Their manager has noticed the tension between them and told them to find a workable resolution.

Ariana identified advancing her career as one of her top values. Her career intentions include “being a problem-solver” and “being dependable.” She thought about how she could use her

value and intentions to improve her relationship with Jack, while reducing the stress she felt about her projects and workload. She also realized that she often feels uncomfortable confronting others and typically reacts with frustration, anger, and avoidance. She felt disappointed in herself for not acting more professionally.

Ariana rehearsed explaining her feelings of frustration to Jack and apologizing for her behavior. She practiced asking Jack what she could do to alleviate his workload while being equitable with their responsibilities. She thought about suggesting ways to help Jack prioritize his tasks so he could work on the spreadsheets himself—leaving Ariana with some of his tasks that were less demanding. She also thought about small tasks she could delegate to Jack to make her own workload more manageable. She visualized a more collaborative and pleasant office environment for both of them.

What to Do

Now it is your turn to rehearse your values-based behavior. Think of a situation where you want to act and react with your values, not your emotions.

What is the situation? Be specific: Where are you? Who you are with? What are you and others doing and saying?

Which value and intentions have you identified to respond to this situation?

What steps will you take to turn those intentions into action through your words or efforts?

Notice the thoughts and feelings that come up for you; for example, you might have a fear of failure or feel anxious. Then, choose to simply accept them. What thoughts and feelings do you feel? Can you accept them? Explain.

Imagine successfully completing your goal while rising above those emotions. How would you feel?

Visualize others reacting positively to your actions. What would that look like?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Finding Personal Meaning and Direction

What to Know

A sense of purpose provides motivation and direction in life. Identifying what you want out of life and acting on it can make you feel empowered and more complete, and give your life a greater sense of meaning. When you've determined what you value most in life, you can set your goals accordingly.

What to Do

Consider the following and rate the importance of each, where 1 = of little importance, to 5 = the most important in your life. Write down a goal for the areas that mean something to you; for example: "I am going to spend more time with my children," or "I am going to start painting again."

Family life	1	2	3	4	5
--------------------	---	---	---	---	---

Friendship	1	2	3	4	5
-------------------	---	---	---	---	---

Health	1	2	3	4	5
---------------	---	---	---	---	---

Career	1	2	3	4	5
---------------	---	---	---	---	---

Creative expression	1	2	3	4	5
----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---

Personal growth	1	2	3	4	5
------------------------	---	---	---	---	---

Spiritual awareness	1	2	3	4	5
----------------------------	---	---	---	---	---

Community service	1	2	3	4	5
--------------------------	---	---	---	---	---

Considering the goals you listed above, which would you rank as your first priority?

What do you want to accomplish in the next week, month, and year to reach this goal?

This week:

This month:

This year:

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Creating a Personal Mission Statement

What to Know

If you want to live each day to the fullest, you will need to think about what you really want out of your life and the principles and values that will guide your day-to-day decisions. A personal mission statement (sometimes called a purpose statement) can serve as a simple road map to help you live a happy and fulfilling life.

A personal mission statement provides clarity and gives you a sense of purpose. It defines who you are and how you will live. A personal mission statement is different from your goals. In fact, it is what your goals are based on. It includes your values, beliefs, and priorities in just a sentence or two. It will not only show you the path on which to make your decisions each day but also give you permission to say no to things that are distractions.

It is important to note that a personal mission statement is not written in stone, but rather will change over time as you change with your life experiences. Your personal mission statement is focused on self-discovery as well as purpose.

Here are some personal mission statements from some people you may know of:

“To be a teacher. And to be known for inspiring my students to be more than they thought they could be.”—Oprah Winfrey

“To have fun in [my] journey through life and learn from [my] mistakes.”—Sir Richard Branson

“My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style.”—Maya Angelou

What to Do

Write down the names of three people you admire:

List the traits these people have that you admire:

List five values that define you:

Think about the roles you play in the lives of others—friends, family, coworkers. Write down all the important roles you have in your life.

Write down the most important things you want to accomplish in your life.

Imagine who you want to become in this world; what you want to be known for; and how you want to be remembered. Write it down below.

Write down some things that you are really good at.

Write down your personal mission statement in a sentence or two. Incorporate your values, your aspirations, your positive abilities, and what you see as your purpose in life.

Write down three ways you will incorporate your mission statement into your daily life.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Achieving Your Goals One Step at a Time

What to Know

Big things often have small beginnings. To stop your mind from trying to figure out how to achieve a large goal, break down your big goal into small steps. Here are some examples:

- Do you want to write a book? Dedicate time each morning to writing.
- Do you want to fit in exercise? Begin waking up thirty minutes earlier.
- Do you want to improve your diet? Commit to cooking healthy dinners five evenings each week.

Your small daily habits will grow over time to create a healthy foundation to achieve your goal. The secret to long-term success is found in your daily habits.

What to Do

Think about the steps you must take to achieve a goal and to keep track of your progress. Each step is a subgoal, a smaller goal that will bring you in the direction of accomplishing your main goal. Be very specific in writing each step to help achieve your goal. Most people find success in creating small steps that can be accomplished in two weeks or less. If you are not able to achieve a specific subgoal, write down what you learned that will help you keep moving toward the main goal.

Step #1: _____

Start date: _____

Date to achieve goal: _____

Resources needed: _____

Anticipated outcome: _____

Actual outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #2: _____

Start date: _____

Date to achieve goal: _____

Resources needed: _____

Anticipated outcome: _____

Actual outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #3: _____

Start date: _____

Date to achieve goal: _____

Resources needed: _____

Anticipated outcome: _____

Actual outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #4: _____

Start date: _____

Date to achieve goal: _____

Resources needed: _____

Anticipated outcome: _____

Actual outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #5: _____

Start date: _____

Date to achieve goal: _____

Resources needed: _____

Anticipated outcome: _____

Actual outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #6: _____

Start date: _____

Date to achieve goal: _____

Resources needed: _____

Anticipated outcome: _____

Actual outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #7: _____

Start date: _____

Date to achieve goal: _____

Resources needed: _____

Anticipated outcome: _____

Actual outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #8: _____

Start date: _____

Date to achieve goal: _____

Resources needed: _____

Anticipated outcome: _____

Actual outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #9: _____

Start date: _____

Date to achieve goal: _____

Resources needed: _____

Anticipated outcome: _____

Actual outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #10: _____

Start date: _____

Date to achieve goal: _____

Resources needed: _____

Anticipated outcome: _____

Actual outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Section 6. Cultivating Hopefulness and Optimism

Relying on Your Problem-Solving Ability Even When You Feel Hopeless

What to Know

You might feel so hopeless about your current problems that you think there is nothing you can do about them. But is that really true? In fact, there are very few problems that cannot be made better. You simply have to be creative about finding solutions. Solutions may not always be simple, nor do they always address the whole problem that is causing you distress. However, even small changes can make a big difference in your life. Having a problem-solving attitude is the most important part of getting over your hopelessness.

Finding solutions to the problems that are weighing you down requires a different way of thinking. Albert Einstein once said, “We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them.” In other words, to solve your problems, you need to change the way you think.

There are many different approaches to solving problems. Cognitive psychologists tell us that there are at least sixty different problem-solving strategies. This worksheet reviews five popular ones.

What to Do

To understand how you can take different approaches to the same problem, consider this example: John described himself as being “hopelessly stuck” in his life. John was depressed because his wife had just left him, taking their two small children. He had a low-paying job and was deep in debt. He could barely afford to pay his rent and buy food. He could not see any way to make his life better, until he decided to try some new problem-solving strategies. Here are the different strategies that John used to get “unstuck.” These may help you, too.

Break your problem into small solvable steps.

John knew that there are two ways to get out of debt—make more money and spend less money. He decided to look for small ways to do both. He was able to save over \$100 each month by getting rid of his cable TV and just watching shows on Netflix. He also found that he could make money by selling things on eBay. This seemed too easy, so he began to look at other simple ways to change his finances. Can you think of two or three small things you can do that might impact your problem? Write them below.

Ask for help.

When people are depressed, they tend to isolate themselves, forgetting that there are many people who can help with their problems. John was a veteran and found free counseling advice as well as free financial advice through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Other free advice and support can be found through places of worship or community service organizations—and remember your network of friends and relatives. Write down several people or organizations that could give you help.

Try a brainstorming session.

Sometimes you have to be really creative to solve a problem. Brainstorming is best done in a group of four people or more, but it can be done with just one other person. The idea of brainstorming is to come up with as many possible solutions to a problem as you can without worrying about whether they are realistic. Make a list of all the possible solutions, no matter how far-fetched they may be. Then, review the list and find the solutions that seem most practical and most likely to succeed.

John had a brainstorming session with his brother Matt. They came up with a list of more than a hundred ways to make extra money. Eventually, John decided to borrow Matt’s lawn mower, and he began cutting his neighbors’ lawns for \$25 a lawn.

Write down a problem that you can brainstorm solutions to.

Write down the names of people who can help you brainstorm.

Try brainstorming solutions to this problem for at least thirty minutes *without censoring any solutions*. Write down all your brainstorming ideas on a separate piece of paper and then write down the two or three best solutions here.

Challenge the assumptions about the nature of your problems.

Often it is hard to see new solutions when you are viewing your problems through false assumptions. Try making a list of all the reasons your problems are unsolvable, and then sit down with a trusted friend or a professional and determine which of your reasons are not based in fact.

John assumed that he could not get a better job because he had barely finished high school and had no real skills. Over time, he realized that this assumption was not true. Through a friend, he found a job salvaging automobile parts, where he was making twice what he made at his previous job. John enrolled in a school to learn to be an auto mechanic, which he felt would be a permanent solution to his money problems.

Write down any assumptions you have about your problem and then ask someone you trust to help decide if they are true or false.

Analyze the root causes of your problems.

You might view a problem only as it exists in the present. However, serious problems usually go far back in your life. Identifying the root cause means going back to where the problem might have originated. Understanding the root cause can give you deeper insight into what is the underlying cause of a problem.

During therapy, John talked about when he started to feel hopeless and powerless. It was not when his wife left him. It was not when he left the military. He remembered having these feelings when he was just nine, and his parents were getting a divorce. He remembered that his mother was very depressed, and his father was distant and always drinking. John felt that perhaps his own divorce triggered memories about this time and made him identify with his parents. He eventually realized that he did not have to relive his parents' mistakes, but instead could make his own choices and certainly be a more active parent with his own children.

Write down your thoughts on what could be some of the root causes of your current problems.

When you practice problem solving, you are working your survival muscle and getting mentally stronger, much like working out in the gym makes you stronger. Try focusing on solutions throughout the day. Even when faced with small problems, be aware that you are always finding solutions.

What are the problem-solving strategies you think could be most helpful to you?

On the following chart, see how often you can use problem-solving strategies. Write down the date, describe the situation or problem, and note the strategy you used. Finally, describe the outcome.

What obstacles did you encounter in trying to solve problems?

Are there any problems in your life that you think are unsolvable? What are other ways to cope with these issues? Describe.

Do you know anyone who could be a mentor in helping you develop better coping skills? Is there anything preventing you from talking to this person on a regular basis?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful to 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Understanding What You Can Control in Your Life

What to Know

You might feel that you have little or no control over what happens to you. No matter how hard you work or how careful you are, sometimes things go wrong in spite of your best efforts.

However, the belief that all your experiences, both good and bad, are caused by luck or fate can lead to feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, anxiety, or depression.

What to Do

Rate the following statements, where 0 = this does not apply to me at all, to 10 = this always applies to me.

_____ I feel I have very little control over my life and what happens to me.

_____ I rarely get what I deserve.

_____ I avoid setting goals or making plans because too many bad things can happen along the way.

_____ I am often pressured into doing things or making decisions I later regret.

_____ Bad luck has caused many of the disappointments in my life.

_____ In spite of my hard work and effort, my accomplishments go unnoticed.

_____ Getting a good job depends mainly on being in the right place at the right time.

_____ I often feel hopeless and powerless about situations in my life.

_____ I just make my decisions by flipping a coin.

Review the statements you checked off and add up your total score: _____

If your score is above 50, you probably feel you have little control in your life, and you might experience depression, anxiety, or feelings of hopelessness or helplessness.

Describe any situations where your beliefs about control impacted your decision to change or improve your life.

Next, you will focus on things you *can* control. Describe a time when you accomplished a task that you set out to complete; for example, completing a home improvement or creative project. What skills and strengths did you use to accomplish this task? How did you feel about yourself afterward?

Describe an accomplishment you are proud of that required your planning, motivation, and/or problem-solving skills; for example, raising a child, quitting smoking, or planting a garden. What skills and strengths did you use? What goals and intentions did you set for yourself? How much effort did it require? How did you feel about yourself afterward?

Describe a time when your efforts made you feel valuable, effective, and successful; for example, volunteering at a food pantry or running a 5K race. What did you do? How did you feel during the activity? How did you feel afterward?

Next, identify three small, achievable goals that are important or interesting to you. Include your desired date of completion, then answer the questions that follow each goal.

For this example, Jim wants to improve his photography skills while meeting new people.

Goal #1 _____

Jim: To take an adult education class in photography by next spring.

Steps I need to take to make this happen:

Jim: (1) Search online for local photography classes; (2) Visit my local camera shop for suggestions; (3) Determine how much tuition I want to pay; (4) Register for the class.

The things I can control within those steps are:

Jim: All these things are under my control, except for the pricing of the classes and the availability of the classes, but I will select which class I register for based on those factors.

The strengths and skills I can use to address those steps are:

Jim: I will use my research skills to find a class that meets my needs. I will also use my organization skills by creating a list to track my class options and narrow down my choices.

People and resources that can support me in achieving this goal are:

Jim: In addition to asking my camera shop for recommendations, I can reach out to my social media connections for suggestions.

Goal #2 _____

Steps I need to take to make this happen:

The things I can control within those steps are:

The strengths and skills I can use to address those steps are:

People and resources that can support me in achieving this goal are:

Goal #3 _____

Steps I need to take to make this happen:

The things I can control within those steps are:

The strengths and skills I can use to address those steps are:

People and resources that can support me in achieving this goal are:

Of course, things do not always go as planned. When they don't, it is important to use self-compassion instead of beating yourself up or blaming other people or circumstances.

Using the photography class example, it turned out that the registration was full, so Jim was unable attend. Instead of saying "I'm so stupid for waiting too long to register," he can say "I'm disappointed that I'm not able to attend the class by the spring, but I will register early for the summer class and add a reminder in my calendar."

Who can you count on for support and help if you are unable to meet a goal in spite of your best efforts?

Did this exercise increased the sense of control you have in your life? Explain.

Has this exercise changed the way you see the role of luck and chance in your past successes or lack of success? Explain.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful to 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Performing Tasks with Intention

What to Know

When you experience overwhelming thoughts and feelings, you might become distracted from focusing on the task you are performing at that moment. Have you ever driven somewhere on automatic pilot—getting to your destination without noticing the ride itself? Or have you watched television without noticing what you are seeing and hearing? These are just some of the ways that people act without intention or awareness.

When you perform tasks with intention, you are aware of what you are experiencing in that moment. By observing and releasing overwhelming emotions and returning focus to your task, your mind can get quiet. You can then solve problems, make healthier decisions, and accomplish your goals.

What to Do

Describe a time when you performed an important task while distracted by your thoughts or emotions. What was the task? What were you thinking and feeling? How successful were you in completing your task?

Perform an everyday task (such as eating, showering, walking, or brushing your teeth) with intention and awareness. As you follow these steps, answer the corresponding questions.

Choose a task: _____

Notice distressing or distracting thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations you experience as you prepare for the task. Write them down.

Focus your attention on performing the task and describe what you experience. For example, if your task is brushing your teeth, describe the sensations of the toothbrush in your mouth, the taste of the toothpaste, and the way your back bends as you rinse out your mouth in the sink.

As distracting thoughts, emotions, and judgments arise, observe them and allow them to pass. Describe your experience.

Refocus your attention and awareness on your task and the present moment. Did you observe any change in the intensity of your thoughts, emotions, or judgments when you refocused on the task? Explain.

Complete your task. When you performed your task with intention and awareness, how was it different from previous times you completed that task? How was it the same? Explain.

What important tasks and actions—at home, work, in your relationships, etc.—could you perform with intention and awareness using the steps above?

What do you think would improve if you were more intentional while doing those tasks or actions?

How can becoming more intentional help you manage overwhelming or upsetting thoughts and emotions by simply observing them?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Finding Joy and Balance in Your Life: The GLAD Technique

What to Know

The GLAD technique was developed by psychotherapist Donald Altman as a particularly useful approach to developing a positive attitude toward life. It is designed to help people pay attention to positive things that are around them all the time but frequently go unnoticed.

Developing positive mindfulness is particularly important for people who are stressed and depressed, but it should also be considered a resiliency tool that can help you find daily happiness in your life.

What to Do

While some people may want to fill in the GLAD worksheet throughout the day, it is most practical to fill it out at the end of the day. Make copies of this worksheet so you can practice the technique every day for at least three weeks. After three weeks, your positive mindfulness will become a habit. After three weeks, you might want to use the worksheet just once a week, but you should still do it on a regular schedule (for example, every Sunday night).

Keep your worksheets together and look at them from time to time. You may also want to share the positive experiences you write down on your worksheet with others.

Learning to be GLAD

Today's date: _____

G: Something you were grateful for today

Think of something very basic you are grateful for, something as simple as the sunlight or the nourishing food you eat. Write it down here.

Now think of something truly important in your life, like a meaningful relationship, your children, friends, or your health. Write it down here.

L: Something you learned today

Write down something positive you learned about yourself today. It might be something you already knew that came into focus today.

Write down something you learned about another person today. Again, it might be something you were already aware of, but were more aware of today.

Write down a fact you learned today that made you curious or more aware of the world around you.

Write down how something you learned today changed your perspective on yourself or the world around you in a positive way.

A: One small accomplishment you did today

You might believe that accomplishments have to be big or important tasks, but it is the little things that make a difference in your life. Perhaps you are working on a goal like exercising more, eating healthier, or finding a new job. Small steps toward your goal are important accomplishments.

Write down something you accomplished today.

D: Something that brought you delight today

What made you laugh or smile?

What small thing of beauty did you see today?

What did you hear today that lifted your spirits? A song? A child's laughter? A joke?

Now close your eyes and think of your day and what you wrote. Breathe deeply for a few minutes, and visualize a positive image from the day. Write down something important from this exercise that you want to remember.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Developing Self-Compassion

What to Know

You might have something about yourself that you do not like, something that causes you to feel shame, to feel insecure, or to feel not “good enough.” Everyone does; even people who seem to have everything—beauty, wealth, intelligence, and more—are often living with a sense of great inadequacy.

Do you think you are self-critical? Do you often feel that you are not as good as the people around you or that something is really wrong with you? Ask yourself if you really need to suffer from your sense of not being “good enough.” Suffering is part of the human experience, and we all will have times of pain, failure, and loss. But do you really have to add to your suffering?

Kristin Neff, a psychologist who has dedicated her life to teaching the importance of self-compassion, notes that self-compassion is not self-pity. She explains:

When individuals feel self-pity, they become immersed in their own problems and forget that others have similar problems. They ignore their interconnections with others and instead feel that they are the only ones in the world who are suffering.

Self-compassion is also very different from self-indulgence. Self-indulgence is merely giving yourself short-term pleasure, which may actually get in the way of your happiness and well-being. You may indulge yourself with a big bowl of ice cream, or buying something special, or binge-watching your favorite show. These indulgences are fine once in a while, but as you can see, they have little to do with self-compassion.

This worksheet is designed to help you bring self-compassion into your life. It will help you show the same compassion to yourself that you would show to someone you care about very much.

What to Do

Write down one issue or thought that often makes you feel inadequate or bad about yourself, such as your physical appearance, your work, a relationship issue, a mistake you made, and so on. Describe that issue below by completing the sentence.

I feel bad about myself because:

What emotions come up for you when you think about this aspect of yourself? Write down as many emotions as you can.

Now take a moment to sit with these emotions even though they may make you uncomfortable. Just feel them without judging them. Some images or words may come to mind. Don't judge them or try to get rid of them. Just observe them. *They are not you, but rather only thoughts and images you have in your mind.*

Write down any images or words that come to mind.

Now that you are in touch with your self-critical thoughts and feelings, think about an imaginary friend who is unconditionally loving, accepting, kind, and compassionate. Imagine that this friend can see all your strengths and all your weaknesses, including the aspects of yourself you wish you could hide from others.

Reflect on what this friend feels toward you and how they love and accept you exactly as you are, with all your very human imperfections. This friend has a profound understanding of what it means to be human. This friend is kind and forgiving toward you. This friend loves you unconditionally in spite of what you think of as your problems and faults.

In their great wisdom, this friend understands your life history and the millions of things that have happened in your life to create you as you are in this moment.

This friend understands that the things that make you feel bad about yourself are connected to many aspects of your life you didn't choose: your genes, your family history, the place where you were born, and many other things outside your control.

Write a letter to yourself from the perspective of this imaginary friend—focusing on the perceived inadequacy you tend to judge yourself for. What would this friend say to you about your flaws from the perspective of unlimited compassion?

In the words of this friend, express the deep compassion they feel for you, especially for the pain you feel when you judge yourself so harshly.

Write down what this friend would say to alleviate some of your pain.

Write down what this friend would say to help you feel that you are only human, that all people have both strengths and weaknesses.

If you think this friend would suggest possible changes you should make, write them down. Make sure these suggestions embody feelings of unconditional understanding and compassion.

What else would your friend say to you to express acceptance, kindness, and caring for you?

What would this friend say to express the desire for your health and happiness?

Take a few minutes to feel this compassion. Feel the compassion from your imaginary friend as it soothes and comforts you. Sit back and close your eyes and feel what it is like to experience unconditional love from someone who accepts you exactly as you are without thinking for a moment even the slightest critical thought.

Hold on to this feeling for another minute or two.

Now, imagine that your friend wants to leave you with one important thought to carry with you. Just reading this one thought pours soothing compassion into you and comforts you like a cool breeze on a hot day or a warm blanket on a cold night.

Write down this one thought.

Now, write down this thought again very slowly. With each word, see if you can feel the compassion and acceptance behind this thought.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Nurturing Hope with a Hope Box

What to Know

Things happen that might disrupt your sense of stability, structure, and sense of control. Prolonged times of uncertainty can take a significant psychic toll. However, you can nurture hope—even during times of uncertainty. Hope is always important in our lives, and it can help you fight off depression. Hope can motivate you to achieve your goals. Hope can help you be more resilient.

What to Do

Take a shoe box or any similar-sized box, and write the words *Hope Box* somewhere on the top. Every day for a month, find something to put in your Hope Box. Put in objects that are associated with positive feelings and memories. Put in words that inspire you and make you think of a brighter future.

Read these suggestions of things to put in your Hope Box, and check off the ones you think might be most useful.

- A special letter, card, or printed email from someone you care about
- Special pictures that bring up positive memories (family, friends, vacations, etc.)
- Success documents (report card, diploma, certificates, awards, etc.)
- Special quotations that are important to you
- Art that you have created or that someone has made for you
- Objects from your life that are associated with good memories
- Letters or printed emails that mean a lot to you
- Photos of special times you have had or hope to have, such as photos of a vacation spot or an activity you enjoy doing
- Photos of loved ones
- Souvenirs from past trips or vacations
- Meaningful photos from magazines or newspapers

Write down other things you might put in your Hope Box:

This technique will only be helpful if you do it every day and spend some time thinking about hope. The essence of hope is that you believe you will be able to have a better future. The strength of that belief is largely based on your ability to create that future by solving the problems that are currently weighing you down. While some people seem to be better problem solvers than others, the truth is that everyone solves big and small problems every day. Answer the following questions to think about how you can solve the problems that are affecting you.

Describe the one problem that when solved will make the biggest difference in your life.

Problems are best solved one small step at a time. Write down six or more steps you can take to find a solution for this problem.

It is important to make a plan, or a road map, to solve your problem. However, every plan has some obstacles. List some obstacles you might encounter as you solve your problem.

Sometimes you may have a mental block in seeing the best steps to take in solving a problem. In this case, other viewpoints can help. Name three people who can give you other viewpoints in solving this problem.

How will you know when you have solved your problem? What will be different in your life?

A Virtual Hope Box (VHB) is available from the Apple App store, developed by the National Center for Telehealth and Technology. People can use the VHB to store a variety of rich multimedia content they find personally supportive in times of need. For example, you can include photos, videos, and recorded messages from loved ones, inspirational quotes, soothing music, and more. The VHB provides people with positive activity planning, distraction tools, and interactive relaxation exercises including guided imagery, controlled breathing, and muscle relaxation.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Compassionate Reframing

What to Know

Self-criticism is common, and people often report that their negative thoughts act as an inner critic who constantly berates and bullies them. This negative emotional process becomes automated to the point where you are unaware of how much your definition of yourself remains rooted in criticizing yourself for your perceived weakness.

Instead, commit to being self-compassionate. Self-compassion means extending kindness to yourself in the face of personal failures, problems, or other disappointments. Silence your inner critic by reframing your negative thoughts with compassion. Allow this expanded interpretation to take root, to make room for a more nuanced and balanced approach to defining yourself in ways that open you up to other possibilities.

Pledge to being just as kind and understanding to yourself regarding your own self-perceived inadequacies or mistakes as you would to someone else who was going through a difficult time or feeling bad about themselves. Realize that no one, including you, is perfect. Cherish and celebrate your imperfections; they are what make you part of the human race. Know that you will fall short of your ideals, and you will be frustrated with yourself and disappointed at times, but this is true of all of us.

Compassionate reframing can

- help you unlock new opportunities and explore other possibilities that might be advantageous;
- align you more closely to your value and belief system;
- allow your thinking to be framed with choices and hope;
- provide you with a “focus” that encourages you to be present and that will help and not hinder your progress.

What to Do

It is important to recognize what words you use when you are being critical of yourself. This could be difficult, as your inner critic may be so ingrained in your daily experience that you perceive it as normal and commonplace.

In the column on the left, circle the words you use to negatively describe yourself. For example, do you find yourself using the same phrasing repeatedly, such as “I am so clingy,” or “I am so disappointing”? In the blank spaces provided, add other words and phrases that you also find yourself using.

Self-Criticism

demanding
disappointing
clingy
embarrassed
controlling
fearful
anxious
dependent
different, weird
oversensitive
uncomfortable, intense
impulsive
indecisive
out of control
loud
perfectionist
quiet
rigid
shy

Self-Compassion

leader, organized
honest, true
loving, concerned
perceptive, self-aware
detail-oriented
profound, sensitive
eager, enthusiastic
determined, loving
unique, special
sensitive, subtle
perceptive, observant
spontaneous
careful, considerate
spontaneous
assertive, positive
precise, exact
discreet, respectful
standards, ethics
inner directed

As you read the words aloud or imagine yourself using the words you have chosen, what tone of voice are you using? Is it cold, harsh, loud, piercing, pounding? And how does that tone influence how you feel when you use the words?

In what ways do the words you use to describe yourself uplift you or bring you down?

How do the words you use to describe yourself reflect or dispute your values?

How might your feelings be different if you chose to use more positive words to describe yourself?

Using the more compassionate descriptions listed in the column on the right, reframe the words and phrases you have circled. Expanding on these negative words to include a more well-rounded and nuanced description of your behavior will allow you to be more accepting of and at peace with yourself.

Two examples have been provided to get you started.

Self-Critical: <i>perfectionist, embarrassed</i>	Self-Compassionate: Reframe: <i>careful, perceptive</i>
<i>I am perfectionist, and I am embarrassed and worry that the correspondence I write is full of mistakes that make me look stupid. I am obsessed with checking my work over and over.</i>	<i>I value the quality of my work and am very perceptive of how my work defines me. I am careful to make sure that my work reflects my respect for my personal goals and expectations.</i>

Self-Critical:	Self-Compassionate Reframe:

Self-Critical:	Self-Compassionate Reframe:

Self-Critical:	Self-Compassionate Reframe:

How did this exercise help you unlock new opportunities and explore other possibilities that might be advantageous?

In what ways did the exercise help you become more closely aligned to your values and belief system?

How did the exercise facilitate your ability to frame your thoughts in choices and hope?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Treating Yourself Like a Good Friend

What to Know

What is the first thing you do when someone you care for confides that they feel bad about themselves? For example, suppose they made a mistake at work and were reprimanded; perhaps they weren't invited to a party and were feeling lonely and unwanted. Or what if they blame themselves for hurting someone's feelings, or feel incredibly guilty because they inadvertently caused an accident? You would no doubt feel compassion for that person. The first thing you would probably do is comfort them by using soothing words. The second thing would be to assure them that they were still a good person, just one who made a mistake or experienced a temporary setback.

The question for you is, can you honestly say that you treat yourself with the same consideration and compassion that you so readily give to the people you care about? The answer is, probably not. To change this, you can learn and practice the art of self-compassion. Self-compassion means that you stop avoiding or escaping your emotional pain and instead learn to acknowledge how difficult your situation is, while thinking about how you can care for and comfort yourself during difficult times. You simply pledge to show yourself the same empathy, love, and care that you naturally feel and show toward others, and commit to practicing loving yourself, caring for yourself, and forgiving yourself.

What to Do

Draw from the deep well of goodwill and empathy that you feel and exhibit toward others to tap into a boundless source of compassion that you can then extend to yourself. Compare and contrast how you hear yourself speaking and responding to the pain of others with how you usually respond to yourself.

Visualize yourself helping a friend who needs your support.

What feelings does seeing your friend trigger in you? (For example, immediate concern?

Feelings of warmth? Disgust?)

What do you say? (Something comforting? Friendly? Angry?)

What tone do you use? (Harsh? Soft? Gentle?)

How might you reference their past? (Draw on their strengths? Point out past mistakes?)

What would you predict might happen in the future? (Learn from mistakes? Make the same mistakes again?)

Now visualize yourself going through a difficult time. What feelings does thinking of yourself going through your difficult time trigger in you?

What do you say to yourself?

What tone do you imagine yourself using?

How might you reference your past?

What would you predict might happen in your future?

What would it look like if you spoke to yourself the way you spoke to someone else who was in a crisis?

What has this activity taught you about the relationship between self-compassion, weakness, and strength?

How might your life change or remain the same if you acted with self-compassion toward yourself on a regular basis?

Imagine that you made a plan to treat yourself with kindness every day. What would that plan look like?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Developing the Habit of Gratitude

What to Know

Research suggests an “attitude of gratitude” will contribute to your happiness. Expressing gratitude encourages you to savor life’s positive experiences, instead of focusing on obstacles or negative events and emotions.

A consistent gratitude practice offers these benefits:

- Improved sleep quality
- Fewer medical visits
- Fewer depressive symptoms
- Increased ability to cope with stress and trauma
- Improved relationships and stronger social bonds
- Improved empathy toward others
- Reduced aggression and irritability
- Improved self-esteem and self-worth
- Increased mental strength and resilience
- Progress toward goals

It can be challenging to go from focusing on obstacles in your life to consistently appreciating what has helped you. This is especially true if you are depressed or anxious, have past trauma, or experience poor self-esteem. If you are stressed and focusing on the problems in your life, it might be hard to suddenly develop the habit of gratitude.

First, begin to notice less negative or even neutral circumstances in your life. For example, you may not be able to shift from “I’m a total failure,” to “I’m grateful for the opportunities I’m offered.” However, you can start small and begin to notice the positive things in the world around you.

Gratitude is a sincere and heartfelt appreciation of what you have in your life, and habitually engaging in actions that help you feel this emotion takes practice. To make your gratitude practice meaningful and less forced, try different activities to express your gratitude rather than repeatedly doing the same thing.

What to Do

Identify ten things/people/circumstances you are grateful for. Be sure to consider intangible things such as access to clean water or access to technology. Start by simply acknowledging what there is to be grateful for.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Each day, spend five minutes simply being quiet and still. Ask for guidance for the day. This is similar to a mindfulness exercise, which has been shown to have many benefits, including stress reduction, reduced rumination, improved working memory, and enhanced focus.

Send positive thoughts to three people you might not particularly like. This activity reduces unwanted emotional responses and increases positive emotions. For example, you can begin to replace an unwanted emotion (disgust or repulsion) with the opposite emotion (caring or kindness). As you begin to shift your mindset, you are more likely to maintain a positive frame of mind.

Here are some additional suggestions of things you can do:

- Write down your feelings of gratitude in a journal.
- Write a note or email someone who has gone out of their way for you.
- Make a call to someone who has made a difference in your life.
- Give a donation to a charity to honor something you appreciate.
- Meditate on something that has made you feel particularly grateful.

Add other ideas here:

Experiencing gratitude might seem simple, but you will only reap the benefits if it actually becomes a practice. This means more than just occasionally thinking grateful thoughts, but actually acknowledging your gratitude each day, followed by positive actions to affirm the people and resources you appreciate. You can do this at the end of the day to acknowledge what has gone well and to support restful sleep, or at the beginning of the day to set positive intentions and lessen anticipatory stress.

On the following chart, write down what you are grateful for, what you did, and how it affected your mood or behavior. Fill in the chart for two weeks.

What did you learn about yourself during this activity?

What else can you do to cultivate gratitude?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Acts of Kindness Lead to Happiness

What to Know

Research indicates that being kind will not only benefit the people you help but can also make you happy. Regular acts of kindness can actually lift your mood on a permanent basis. According to research by Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky, author of *The How of Happiness*, kindness can start a chain of positive social consequences, bringing you closer to others and helping you appreciate the most positive aspects of human nature. The Random Acts of Kindness movement advocates thoughtful and considerate acts as a way of life, but research has actually shown that the “happiness benefits” of acts of kindness are greatest when you consciously decide to do a kind act just one day a week. On that day, you can seek to do a significant act of kindness; for example, not just holding the door for someone but perhaps taking the time to write a note of appreciation to someone important in your life. Use this worksheet to plan and then record your weekly act of kindness.

What to Do

Rate your happiness, where 1 = very unhappy to 10 = the happiest I have ever been: _____

Think about people or organizations that could benefit from your acts of kindness. Describe things you can do or people who might benefit from your kind acts.

Decide what day of the week you will engage in your act of kindness, and schedule an activity or action each week. After you have participated for the first time, write about your experiences.

Section 7. Fostering Wellness

Developing a Self-Care Plan

What to Know

Sometimes it is easy to forget the importance of taking care of yourself. Self-care refers to the kinds of things you might do regularly to reduce stress and maintain and enhance your well-being.

Self-care is personal, and people will have different approaches to taking care of themselves. You may value some areas over others. Below are the different life areas where you may want to implement self-care activities:

- Workplace/professional
- Physical
- Mental
- Emotional
- Spiritual
- Interpersonal/relational

What to Do

For each category above, select at least one strategy or activity that you can include in your self-care plan. There may be areas of overlap between these categories. List the activities that you have identified as important to your well-being and that you can engage in daily or weekly to take care of yourself.

Identify people in your life who might be good resources for exchanging new self-care ideas and strategies, as well as provide you with support and encouragement.

List other forms of support such as support groups, religious groups, community groups, and so on.

List people you can talk to on a regular basis about your concerns.

List ways you can get regular exercise (at least thirty minutes each day).

List hobbies or other activities you enjoy on a regular basis.

List ways you can improve your sleep habits.

List ways you can improve your diet.

The final step is to implement your plan and keep track of how you are doing. Keeping track of your self-care activities for one week will help you recognize your successes and identify and address any difficulties you may not have anticipated. Remember to stick to your plan even if emotionally difficult circumstances arise.

Date	Self-care activity	Obstacles?	How did it go?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
 (1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Improving Your Sleep Habits

What to Know

When you have a bad night's sleep, it can negatively impact your body and brain. Your energy level, memory, and ability to focus and concentrate can all be affected. Lack of sleep may make it harder to control your emotions and urges or make productive decisions. It can even worsen feelings of depression and negatively affect your immune system.

The average adult needs from seven to nine hours of sleep each night. When you are experiencing worry, fear, stress, and other intense emotions, that target can seem impossible.

What to Do

How does your lack of sleep affect how you feel physically and emotionally?

Note: *If you have sleeping problems three or more times a week for at least three months, you may want to ask your doctor about medications, herbs, or supplements that might be helpful. Additionally, if you wake up multiple times a night or wake yourself up gasping for breath, these may be signs of a sleep disorder. Discuss your symptoms with your doctor.*

Here are some strategies that can help you feel more physically and emotionally relaxed at bedtime and improve your healthy sleeping habits.

- Listen to soft music, read, or take a warm shower before bed.
- Avoid using your phone, tablet, TV, or other electronic devices in bed.
- Shut off your phone at bedtime to avoid waking up from notification pings.
- Exercise regularly, but not right before bed.
- Create a to-do list for the following day to clear your head.
- Process your thoughts in a journal, sketchbook, or notebook.
- Practice deep breathing, meditation, or prayer before bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine in the evening.
- Keep your bedroom at a cool temperature (65–68 degrees).
- If you are sensitive to light and sound while sleeping, wear earplugs and a sleep mask.
 - A white noise machine may also help; if you use a white noise app on your phone, remember to turn off your notifications.
- If you have trouble falling asleep or falling back to sleep, get out of bed and do some soothing activity (like reading or listening to classical music) in another room. Return to bed when you feel drowsy.

- Try to go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
- Avoid eating heavy meals at least two to three hours before bed.
- Make sure your mattress and pillows are comfortable.
- If you take a nap during the day, limit it to no more than twenty minutes.

Write down your own ideas here:

Which of the suggested strategies are you most likely to try?

What steps do you need to take, or supplies will you need to get, to help the strategies succeed?

Next, keep track of your sleep habits using the chart that follows. When you have trouble sleeping, write down the strategy you used to fall asleep or get back to sleep, and whether it worked. Then, describe how you felt the next day. Track your progress for at least two weeks, making copies of the chart as necessary.

Date	Hours slept	Strategy used to fall asleep/ return to sleep	Successful ? (y/n)	How you felt next day (groggy, alert, cranky)

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

How Diet Affects Your Mood

What to Know

Diet, stress, and mood are all intertwined, so it is important to consider what you're putting into your body, not only for your physical health but also for your emotional well-being. It is not necessary to go to extremes in changing your diet. By simply being more mindful of what you're putting into your body, you can find small ways to improve and that can add up to big changes.

The troublemakers:

- **Caffeine**—You'll find this stimulant in coffee, tea, chocolate, soda, energy drinks, and some over-the-counter medications. The temporary boost it provides can end in fatigue, headache, and tension. Caffeine has also been identified as a potential trigger for anxiety attacks and a contributor to other health issues such as insomnia, heartburn, aggression, irritability, heart palpitations, and high blood pressure.
- **Salt**—Sodium is present in many processed foods, so check labels and look for low-sodium or salt-free alternatives. Also, be aware of how much salt you use while cooking. Sodium consumption affects fluid retention, weight, and blood pressure, all of which, in turn, can affect your mood.
- **Sugar**—Excessive intake of simple sugars (such as white or brown sugar and honey) can cause health problems such as diabetes and hypoglycemia; the latter is often accompanied by symptoms similar to those experienced during a panic attack. Also, the temporary uplifting effects come with some other serious downsides, including an increased risk of depression in those who have a sugar-heavy diet.
- **Preservatives and hormones**—These substances are present in processed foods and many types of meats. Our bodies were not built to handle these additives, and their possible side effects have been heavily debated. Swapping in some whole, unprocessed organic foods can help reduce consumption of these potentially harmful substances.
- **Nicotine and alcohol**—Introducing these substances into your system can cause a range of problems, not the least of which is aggravating anxiety. Nicotine is a stimulant, like caffeine, and alcohol a depressant. The addictive properties of both nicotine and alcohol have also been well documented.

What you don't put into your body can also be problematic. Nutrient deficiencies and dehydration can cause irritability, anxiety, and fatigue, so stop skipping meals and make sure you are drinking enough water.

What to Do

For the next week, keep track of how often you consume any of the items listed above, and write in the predominant moods you had each day.

Day	Food and drink	Your moods
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Eating a Mindful Meal

What to Know

When is the last time you noticed, really noticed, what you're eating and what you're doing while you're eating? So much stress, so many responsibilities—it's easy to end up mindlessly inhaling your food while you sneak one more peek at your phone or simply rush toward the day's finish line.

Eating good, healthful food is one of life's greatest pleasures. Bringing mindful awareness to your food can enrich your day and bring you into the present moment. And, of course, it's better for your digestion and your health than wolfing down a slice of pizza on the run.

What to Do

This week, make a date with yourself to eat a meal mindfully, using all your senses to notice what's on the list below. You don't have to be alone. If appropriate, ask your family to join in, too. (This won't work with infants and young children, of course!)

First, unplug. No phones, no TV, no music, no devices. Take a deep breath or two. Notice the silence. Notice what's happening in your body and your mind.

Before you even put anything into your mouth, notice the whole meal on the plate; notice the table, the room, the present moment in your home. Then take yourself through these steps.

- What does the food look like (appealing, not appealing, color, size)?
- How does it taste (hot, cold, salty, sweet, sour, spicy, bitter)?
- What is its texture (crunchy, smooth, creamy, hard)?
- How does it smell (pungent, mild, pleasant, unpleasant)?
- What sounds do you notice (fork clanking, apple crunching)?

If eating an entire meal feels like a stretch, start slowly. Just take a few mindful bites of your food. The purpose is to experience your food mindfully. Record your experience below.

What did you eat?

What did it look like?

What did it taste like?

What was its texture?

What did it smell like?

What sounds did you notice?

What did you discover about your relationship to food or to your mealtime habits?

How did you feel doing this exercise? What was positive about it? What was challenging?

What goal(s) would you like to set in the coming weeks to experience more mindful eating? Be specific; for example, "Twice a week, I will eat my lunch mindfully," or "I will eat the first three bites of any meal with mindful awareness."

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Improving Your Mental Health with Exercise

What to Know

Not only is regular exercise good for the body, but it is also one of the most effective ways to improve your mental health. Regular exercise can have a positive impact on depression, anxiety, and more. It also relieves stress, improves memory, helps you sleep better, and boosts your mood. And you don't have to exercise hours each day to reap the benefits. Research suggests that even modest amounts of exercise makes a difference. Exercise can be a powerful tool to help you feel better and improve your life.

During exercise, your brain increases the production of chemicals that can lift your mood and regulate your emotions. With regular exercise, you will feel stronger and more confident and be more likely to feel that you can make positive changes in your life. Exercise will also increase the oxygen flow to your brain, which may help you think more clearly, rationally, and positively.

What to Do

This list presents activities that may support you in improving your mental health. Circle the types of exercise you can do on a regular basis:

- | | | | |
|----------------|---------------|----------|--------------|
| bike riding | baseball | football | handball |
| jogging | hiking | soccer | martial arts |
| walking | skateboarding | surfing | Pilates |
| weight lifting | basketball | skiing | yoga |
| tennis | swimming | dancing | ice skating |

Write down any other exercises you think you can do.

Now choose three of these exercises you would like to do over the next week.

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

Decide how much time you need for each exercise. Fifteen minutes? A half-hour? An hour?

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

For each of the exercises, write down how often you can realistically do them in a week.

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

For each of the exercises, write down which days and what time of day is most realistic.

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

Did you experience any obstacles to exercise? If so, list them.

Use this chart to record how many times you actually exercised and the effect that exercise has on your mood.

Day	Type of exercise	Amount of time	Mood before	Mood after
Sunday				
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Welcoming Mindfulness into Your Life

What to Know

Have you ever driven your car along a familiar route, going to school or work or to drop your children at day care, only to arrive not remembering how you got there? Have you ever promised yourself just a few pretzels only to suddenly realize that somehow you have eaten the whole bag? This is what it means to be mindless, to travel through life on autopilot, never stopping to recognize what is really important to you. You find yourself being inattentive to the beauty, usefulness, and positive nature of your surroundings.

Mindfulness means being attentive to and aware of the thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations that are happening in your immediate environment. It means accepting all this information without judging it as right or wrong, bad or good. Being mindful allows you to function and grow along with the moment instead of flailing about in a past you cannot change or a future you cannot predict. People who are mindful take their time and allow themselves to appreciate every present moment.

Practicing mindfulness meditations will help when you

- need to turn your attention away from worrisome fears and what-ifs and instead become attuned to the sensations, sights, sounds, and smells of what is taking place right in front of you;
- find yourself criticizing your past mistakes and transgressions;
- find yourself agonizing over a future calamity that you believe only you can prevent;
- find yourself desperately trying to stop yourself from engaging in an unhealthy or destructive behavior.

To introduce mindfulness meditation into your life:

Understand that your breath is important. The focus is often on the breath because the physical sensation of breathing is universal and natural to everyone. It is the center of life. Always come back to focusing on your breath, no matter what else your thoughts, emotions, and physical sensations tell you to do.

Know that the goal is not relaxation. Mindfulness meditation does not equal relaxation. The goal is not to escape or avoid your pain but to observe it without attaching any meaning to it and move on from it by turning your attention to the present moment.

Return and repeat. It is natural for your mind to wander at first, but simply recognize what is happening and return to your practice until you can focus for a longer period of time.

Be nice to yourself. Don't criticize your abilities. This is not a contest, and you don't win or lose by being the best or the worst. You win by becoming one with yourself and leaning in to your world as it currently is.

What to Do

Review these different mindfulness practices, and think about which ones you would like to try.

The 4-7-8 Method

This method of meditation will help you focus on what is taking place around you instead of mindlessly rushing through life. It can help you better cope with the difficult thoughts and feelings that cause you stress and anxiety in your everyday life. You can either sit in a chair or lie down.

Sit restfully. Sit in a comfortable but firm chair that supports your arms and legs.

Observe your legs. Rest the bottoms of your feet on the floor. Feel the pressure of the floor pressing first against your heels, and then your toes.

Straighten your upper body. Sit straight but naturally. Don't force yourself.

Observe your arms. Rest your hands and arms where they feel the most comfortable and stretch your hands out, feeling the stretch in each finger.

Rest your eyes. You can close your eyes, or if you don't feel comfortable doing that, simply allow them to wander where they want to without force.

Begin to breathe in and out.

- Exhale through your mouth.
- Close your mouth and inhale for four seconds through your nose.
- Hold your breath for seven seconds.
- Exhale through your mouth for eight seconds.
- Repeat least four times in a row.

When you are finished, slowly relax your focus and take a moment to notice your thoughts, your emotions, and any sounds in your environment,.

The following activities represent a variety of ways to integrate mindfulness into your everyday life. Experiment with them to find the ones that appeal to you the most.

Mindful Observation

Take the time to become aware of your surroundings, to notice and appreciate the simple beauty of what is in plain sight, in a way you might not usually do. This exercise is particularly helpful when you find yourself worrying about the future.

- Choose a natural object from your present environment (for example, a flower, rock, or puddle) and focus on it for a minute or two.

- Look at the object as if it were completely unknown to you, as if you were a young child seeing it for the first time. Be completely still and simply notice the details that make up the object. Watch for at least five minutes, or longer if your concentration allows. Try to increase the length of time each time you do the exercise.

Mindful Immersion

Choose a thoughtless, mundane, even tedious task that you complete regularly, and take the time to observe it carefully and with purpose. This practice is designed to promote an increased awareness and appreciation of simple daily tasks and the results they achieve.

- Select a task you do daily (for example, opening or locking doors, shutting off lights, turning off a faucet) or frequently (for example, laundry, washing dishes, washing the car).
- At the very moment you engage in this task—putting your hands in the dishwasher or folding one towel—take the time to be mindful of each individual step and to consider where and how the task will eventually end.
- Notice your surroundings, the feel of the object in your hands, and your emotional state.

Mindful Appreciation

Commit to noticing five things in your day that usually go unappreciated; for example, a coffee pot, a teakettle, a washing machine, the mail delivery, a bird outside your window. Notice its process, the way it looks, the sounds it makes, and its role in making your life easier.

Now, choose one or more of the methods described above and commit to including mindfulness into your day for at least two weeks. Use the chart to record your experience. Include the date, the method, the amount of time you practiced, how you felt before your practice, how you felt after, and any obstacles you encountered.

Date	Method used	Amount of time	How did you feel before?	How did you feel after?	Obstacles to mindfulness practice

Date	Method used	Amount of time	How did you feel before?	How did you feel after?	Obstacles to mindfulness practice

How did it feel to include mindfulness into your daily life?

Which practice did you like the best, and why?

Which practice did you like the least, and why?

What can you do to bring more mindfulness into your life?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Coping with Loneliness

What to Know

Everyone feels lonely from time to time. But loneliness can become a problem when your need for rewarding social contact and relationships is not met. Loneliness is not always the same as being alone, because you might choose to be alone and feel content without much contact with others. On the other hand, you might have lots of social contact, or be in a relationship or part of a family, and still feel lonely—especially if you feel misunderstood by or disconnected from the people around you.

Loneliness can have a negative impact on your mental health, particularly if you have felt lonely for a long time. Research suggests that loneliness is associated with an increased risk for certain mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, sleep problems, and increased stress levels.

This worksheet will help you identify if your loneliness is affecting your mental health, and show you ways to cope with it.

What to Do

Check off any of the following statements that apply to you.

- I often feel lonely.
- I feel drained of energy and unmotivated to socialize.
- My aloneness means no one wants to spend time with me.
- I lack daily companionship and this is upsetting to me.
- I am not successful at maintaining relationships (friendships, family connections, or romantic partnerships).
- I dread vacations or time off work because I am always alone.
- I have an empty void to fill on weekends or when I am not at work or school.
- I feel isolated and blue on holidays.
- I feel awkward at social events because I am single in a “couple’s world.”
- I feel alone even when I am in a group of people.
- I need people more than they need me.
- I feel rejected.

Now, review the list and write down the top two statements that are most distressing to you:

1. _____
2. _____

Here are some suggestions to coping with your loneliness.

1. **Take it slow.** If you have felt lonely for a long time, it can be scary to think about meeting and connecting with new people. You do not have to rush into socializing! Start off by going to a park or outdoor café—somewhere you can be around people but do not have to talk to them. You might discover simply being around other people is enough.

2. **Make new connections.** If you feel lonely because you lack satisfying social contact, you can meet people by joining a class or group based on your hobbies or interests. Volunteering is also a great way to meet people. Helping others can also help improve your well-being. For example, if you find holidays unbearably lonely, you might volunteer at a soup kitchen.

3. **Try peer support.** There are many types of peer support services, providing you with a space to use your experiences to help and support others. You might look into online or virtual communities, like Peer Support Solutions or Support Groups Central. These communities provide a place to listen and share with others who have similar experiences. Many online groups are available 24/7, most are free, and you can access them wherever you are.

4. **Open up to others.** You may know plenty of people but not feel close to them, or they may not offer the care and attention you need. It might help to open up about how you feel to friends and family. If you do not feel comfortable opening up, try speaking with a therapist or a using a peer support service.

5. **Avoid comparing yourself to others.** It might be hard to stop comparing yourself to others, but remember, things are not always what they seem from the outside. For example, on social media, you see only what others want to share about their lives, and this can make you believe you are the only lonely person! You do not know how others feel when they are alone, or when they are not posting on social media. If you are concerned that social media is affecting your mental health, take a break from it.

6. **Care for yourself.** Feeling lonely can be stressful and impact your general well-being, which may make it harder to take steps to feel better. Think about how the following areas are affecting how you feel; consider if you can make changes.

- Sleep. Getting too little or too much sleep can impact how you feel.
- Diet. Eating a nutritious diet on a regular schedule makes a difference to your mood and energy levels.
- Exercise. Physical activity is helpful for your mental well-being, and it might even improve your self-esteem. This can also be a great way to meet new people.
- Spending time outside.
- Spending time with animals. Whether you own a pet or have access to one, your mood can improve simply by spending time with furry companions.
- Avoiding drugs, alcohol, or overeating. While you might want to cope with difficult feelings using comforting substances, over time they will make you feel worse—even increasing your feelings of isolation.

Did practicing any of the activities decrease your feelings of loneliness? Explain.

What was your favorite activity? Will you continue this activity? Why or why not?

Did you meet new people and create new connections with others? Describe your experiences.

After completing this exercise, did you find your feelings of loneliness were reduced? Why or why not?

What else can you do to decrease your feelings of loneliness?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Getting Control of Your Finances

What to Know

Finances can be a difficult problem for many people and can contribute to common mental health problems like depression and anxiety. Did you know that, according to a Federal Reserve report, about half of all American don't have enough money to cover a \$400 emergency? If you're one of those people, this is a good time to evaluate your finances, figure out your goals, and set about achieving those goals—bit by bit.

Money problems can be emotionally overwhelming; it is not uncommon to avoid the subject altogether and hope that everything will be okay. Perhaps you're someone who puts your hopes and dreams into buying lottery tickets or other forms of gambling that have a low probability of paying off. Part of being a healthy, mature, responsible adult is facing your financial situation with clarity. Knowing the truth will give you more knowledge and power to make wise decisions going forward, without shame or guilt. And, even if you fear you've dug too deep a hole to get out of, think about it this way: it's never too late to start! And remember, many communities have free credit and financial counseling services for those in need. Check out your local listings, or ask at the reference desk of your local library.

What to Do

The first step in getting control of your finances is to assess income versus expenses, and tally your savings versus debt. Makes sense, right? You can't put together a jigsaw puzzle unless you have all the pieces facing upward, ready to be fit together.

Gather all your paperwork—bills, credit-card statements, bank statements, checkbooks, any other financial records you have. On the lines that follow, enter the information as best you can.

1. Income

Include your paycheck, a second job, alimony, child support, miscellaneous cash, etc.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Total income (calculate weekly or monthly for easier budgeting later): _____

2. Expenses

Tallying expenses can be hard and may take time. Be patient and collect the information as best you can. You might want to keep track of every expenditure over one or two weeks before doing this step. (That daily latte adds up, without your even knowing it!)

Fixed Expenses

Rent	_____
Mortgage	_____
Car payment	_____
Child care costs	_____
Car insurance	_____
Life insurance	_____
Health insurance	_____
Other insurance	_____
Utilities	_____
Cable/phone/internet	_____
Subscriptions	_____
Student loans	_____
Other: _____	_____

Variable Expenses

Food	_____
Gas	_____
Credit card payments	_____
Public transportation	_____
Entertainment	_____
Taxes	_____
Car maintenance	_____
Travel	_____
Gifts	_____
Pet care	_____
Other: _____	_____

3. What is the value of your current savings and investments? List each item below and total.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

4. Do you have an emergency fund? If so, how much is in it?

Some experts advise having at least the equivalent of six months' income stashed away in your emergency fund. If you don't, think about how much you would need to put aside each month to begin building that fund.

5. Creating a Budget

Once you have a clear idea of how much you are earning and how much you are spending, and what your savings and investments look like, it's time to plan your budget. Sit down with your family and review all the above information. Discuss what areas you'd like to improve on—that is, spend less and save more.

Then, get the family to commit to keeping track of income and expenses for at least two weeks. You can make a game of it or set up some affordable reward at the end. There are numerous apps that will help you set up a template, or you can buy a budget planner at your local office-supply store or create your own.

6. Needs/Wants/Would Be Nice

You may find it helpful to divide the information into the following categories. This will help you cut back on things that are not absolutely essential and set goals for saving money for the "wants." You can get started here and continue on your own.

Needs	Wants	Would Be Nice
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Add other ideas here:

Do you need to learn the basics about how money is managed (bank accounts, savings, investments, loans, debt, etc.)? What can you do to be more financially literate (read a book, see a financial advisor, take a class)?

Fill in the blank: "If I could change one thing about the way I handle money, it would be..."

What are your hopes and dreams about money? How can you make a plan to work as a couple toward achieving them? Be creative.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Maintaining a Sense of Humor to Deal with Stress

What to Know

Using coping techniques, eliminating stressors from your life, and surrounding yourself with social support are all great ways to build resilience, deal with stress, and improve your physical and emotional health. But sometimes you probably feel stressed despite your best efforts!

Developing and maintaining a sense of humor can be an effective way to reduce stress and strengthen resiliency. According to the journal *Therapeutic Humor*, a sense of humor strengthens both your physical and psychological immune systems. When you laugh, your body experiences an increase in immunoglobulin A, which strengthens your body's immunity—promoting healing, lowering blood pressure, and increasing pain tolerance. Aside from the health benefits of laughter, having a sense of humor provides a way to connect with other people, perceive things in a different way, normalize your experiences, and keep things from becoming overwhelming or scary, allowing you to better manage the ups and downs of life.

What to Do

Describe a time when you were able to find the humor in a problem or stressful situation. What happened? Was your stress reduced when you were able to find humor in the situation? Describe.

These suggestions can help you add humor into your daily life:

- 1. Smile.** Studies indicate smiling releases endorphins, which make you feel better and actually lead to feeling happy. If you put a smile on your face, laughter comes more easily and stress melts more readily.
- 2. See your situation as an observer.** If you are distressed and dealing with challenging experiences, it can seem overwhelming or scary. If you step back and view your experience as an observer, it is sometimes easier to recognize the humor in the situation. Seeing your situation through a new lens is known as reframing, and it works. You might imagine yourself as a character in a sitcom to find humor in a situation.
- 3. Look to the extreme.** If a situation is extremely stressful, recognize the potential humor in just how frustrating and annoying it is. Imagine the most ridiculous outcome until you are amused. For example, if you are on the phone with a debt collector and you are placed on a lengthy hold, imagine that hours pass, then days. Visualize yourself eating meals, getting dressed, and conducting your life—all while you are waiting on hold!

4. Have funny buddies. Think of friends you can laugh with, and spend time with them. Share your frustrations with each other and find humor in stressful situations. If you are in the middle of an upsetting situation, imagine the retelling and laughing with a friend.

5. Play a game. Make everyday annoyances amusing by finding humor in unavoidable or repetitive stressors. This works well for predictable, annoying situations you can't control.

6. Watch funny movies, TV shows, or standup comedy routines. Watching a show or movie that involves situations many people find stressful may make you recognize that some universally stressful situations are actually funny.

7. Watch a brief online video. If you have very little time to shift your mood, watch a short humorous video online.

8. Read funny books. Reading humorous essays or books that include amusing interpretations of life can help you find your own style of managing and coping with stress.

9. Join "funny" clubs. Take part in laughter yoga, for example.

Your own ideas:

Next, refer back to the list and select several activities that you will do for the next two weeks. Complete the chart that follows. Plan one activity daily to add humor to your life. Rate your stress level from 0 to 10, where 0 = completely calm and stress-free, to 10 = extreme distress. Track your stress level before and after engaging in the humorous activity. Include notes, if relevant.

Day	Stress level before (0-10)	Activity	Stress level after (0-10)	Notes
<i>Example: Monday</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>Went to a comedy club with friends.</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>Had so much fun and laughed for hours.</i>

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Adding Laughter to Your Daily Life

What to Know

Humor is a powerful way to bring more laughter, lightness, and joy into your life. Researchers have found that humor is an important way to create connection with others. You are thirty times more likely to laugh with other people than when you are alone. Laughter has positive effects on your body by acting as a signal that you are relaxed and safe. When you laugh, your brain “decides” that everything is good and there is no need to be in survival mode.

This worksheet will help you reflect on funny things that happen throughout your day to add playfulness and laughter to your daily routine. Doing this activity daily for just one week has been shown to increase resilience and reduce depression.

What to Do

For one week, take ten minutes each day to complete the following activity. You will need a notebook or journal and pen, or you may use the Notes function on your smartphone.

1. At the end of each day, write down or type three funny things you experienced, witnessed, or heard, and describe how they made you feel. If you have a hard time remembering anything funny, watch a funny video online.
2. Next, write down why you found each thing funny. Also note who you were with: were you with friends, coworkers, or family? Were you alone? Be as detailed as possible.
3. Use the following chart to track your progress. Include the date, check off whether you completed the activity, and note how you felt before and after writing about three funny things.

Date	Check if completed	How did you feel before journal activity?	How did you feel after?

After completing this activity for one week, do you notice a difference in your mood? Why or why not?

Do you find yourself laughing or finding humor in situations more frequently,? Explain.

Did you find yourself connecting with others through laughter? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Creating Your Tree of Life

What to Know

The Tree of Life represents who you are. On the drawing on the next page, write some words that answer the questions about each part of the tree. Feel free to add your own touches, some color, or even to draw your own tree on a fresh piece of paper. You can use this drawing to help tell your story.



Fruits

What are the gifts you have been given in life?
What do you have to offer others?
What can you make with these fruits?



Leaves

Who are the people (living or dead) that mean the most to you?



Branches

What are your hopes and dreams?
What do you want for yourself in the future?



Trunk

What are your skills and abilities? What are your strengths?



Ground

Where do you live now?
What does your everyday life look like?

Roots



What is important to you about your family history and culture? What is a treasured memory or object from the past?



My Tree of Life

Notes:

What is needed to make your tree grow tall and strong?

What surprised you about this exercise? Be specific.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Increasing Your Self-Esteem

What to Know

There are lots of reasons why people have low self-esteem, but most of the time the roots go back to childhood and the view that you might have internalized as a result of criticism or negative messages you heard and, perhaps, believed (and still believe). Maybe you feel that you are not attractive enough or not smart enough, or that you haven't accomplished as much as other people. Sometimes people dwell on their faults as adults or measure themselves against an unrealistic ideal of the way think they "should" be.

Does this sound familiar? Do you have a running narrative in your mind about how you are just not good enough? What would it be like to embrace yourself fully, warts and all? Wouldn't your day be a little easier, a little more pleasant?

You can develop a better self-image through various strategies—some involve inner reflection; some involve outward action. Don't give up—keep trying and experimenting until you are able to bust through some of the old, negative messages and experience a newfound view of yourself.

What to Do

Here are eleven ways to improve your self-image. Review them and commit yourself to working on at least four or five in the coming week or so. Keep this list handy to work on the others over the coming weeks and months.

1. Challenge your negative thoughts. Listen closely to what your inner critic says. Ask yourself, is that actually true? Challenge those ingrained beliefs that bring down your self-esteem. Write some statements to counter them here; for example, instead of "I am not good enough," try "I am a worthy and capable human being with strengths and weaknesses." Repeat as needed. Write down some positive affirmations below.

2. Develop a kind inner voice. When you hear your critical inner voice rear its familiar head, imagine that you're listening to someone you care about. Write down what you would want to say to them to help them feel better about themselves. Use those words and that kind tone with yourself too, and keep practicing making that shift for as long as you need.

3. Celebrate your accomplishments and strengths. People with a poor self-image often focus too much on what they haven't done or accomplished versus what they have. Write down all the accomplishments you can think of, even from when you were little. They can be big or small, public ones or private ones. Then write down words that describe your strengths, such as reliable, caring, curious, strong, etc. Use extra paper if you need to. Go for it!

4. **Avoid “compare despair.”** It’s easy to feel down about yourself if you’re always comparing yourself to others. This happens a lot on social media, where other people always *seem* to have everything that you want—whether it’s relationships or vacations or “perfect” children or professional success. Remember, those posts are just a selected reality, not real life itself. Refocus on your own strengths and work on not measuring yourself against others. Does this happen to you? Explain.

5. **Notice what’s in your control and what isn’t.** If your poor self-image is related to things you can’t control (“If only I were taller, I’d be happier,” “If only I looked like Beyoncé, I’d be sexy,” etc.), then you are setting yourself up for continued misery. Focus your energy on identifying things in your life that you can do something about and begin to act on those. Write them here.

6. **Do something you love to do!** Are you passionate about cooking? Reading? Singing? Sports? Computers? Animals? What are you currently doing or not doing to invest time and energy into your passions? What would you like to do more of? Note any excuses or rationalizations you might think of that keep you from pursuing these activities.

7. **Be grateful.** Current research shows the establishing a “gratitude practice” every day can help boost your mood and your self-esteem. List some things you are grateful for. They can be small, like the pleasure of chewing a tasty piece of cheese, or big, like your health or your family or having a warm bed at night.

8. **Give back/pay it forward.** If you suffer from low self-esteem, it’s often hard to think about anything but your flaws and limitations. You may have trouble seeing other people’s needs. Consider volunteering some time or money to a cause that has meaning for you, such as a food bank or an animal shelter. You might also consider what skills and talents you have that you could pass along to someone else—look into being a mentor or volunteer who helps others discover their own strengths. What goes around comes around, as they say. Studies show that the happiest people are the ones who are involved in serving others.

9. **Find positive people in your life.** Maybe you feel down a lot and avoid hanging out with others whose lives might seem “better” than yours. Identify the people in your life whom you feel comfortable with, who bolster your self-esteem, who see your wonderful qualities and accept your flaws and mistakes. Make an effort to spend more time with them and less time with people who bring you down. What would you like to do toward meeting that goal?

10. **Exercise!** Sure, you've probably heard this a million times but it's true. Exercise has been proven to be a natural antidepressant and can help people with a poor self-image feel better about themselves. Set small, realistic goals (for example, walking for a few minutes a day) and build up to more if you wish. Releasing positive hormones such as endorphins can be a great side effect of increased movement. As they say, just do it!

11. **Step out of your bubble.** Are you stuck in a routine? Do you feel like a stick-in-the-mud as a result? Make a plan to do something different—whether it's driving a different route to work or visiting a place you've never been or reconnecting with an old friend or going to an event where you are likely to meet new people. It can feel challenging at first, but moving out of your comfort zone can give you a boost of energy and a new perspective on the possibilities for your life.

How was it to reflect on the above suggestions? Which ones do you feel excited about? Which ones do you feel some resistance to?

For those you feel some resistance to, what encouraging words would you like to offer that part of yourself in order to boost your motivation?

Who do you know that loves you unconditionally? Try to connect with that person regularly to remind yourself of your worth and your positive qualities. Then remember to tell yourself the things they tell you.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Section 8. Interpersonal Effectiveness

Building a Support System to Overcome Your Problems

What to Know

Sometimes you may find yourself isolated from others. You may be embarrassed about your problems and find it easier to just be alone rather than explain yourself to other people. But avoiding people will cause you to miss many opportunities to enjoy your life that can only happen in the company of others. It will be much easier to overcome your problems with the support of others. Some people feel that one person, like a spouse or significant other, should provide all the support they need, but developing a support network is preferred.

If you have difficulty thinking of people, think of people who could possibly fill this role, and then work toward making this happen. Often, you'll find you can get the support you need by just asking for it.

What to Do

Write down at least one person you know who fits into each category.

Someone I can discuss a personal problem with:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who enjoys similar activities:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can help me with a task:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can cheer me up when I am down:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who builds my self-confidence:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can give me helpful feedback:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who is a good listener and who is understanding:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can be honest with me when I'm making a mistake:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can keep me accountable for my decisions and goals:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can help me conquer bad habits:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can help me solve serious problems:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone I can count on to make me laugh:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can comfort me in a time of loss:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can care for me when I'm ill:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who will be proud of my achievements and let me know it:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Developing Healthy Personal Boundaries

What to Know

Personal boundaries are defined by the physical and emotional limits you establish with other people. They are the unspoken rules you have about personal closeness in every relationship, whether it is with your boss, your friends, or your loved ones. Boundaries exist to define how you are separate from others so you can be in healthy contact with other people without becoming enmeshed or disconnected. You can have meaningful relationships without taking on others' distress and problems—and without being isolated and alone.

Boundaries vary based on family, culture, personality, situation, values, and priorities, among other factors. When you do not have clear personal boundaries, you may feel that you are controlled by another person. When your personal boundaries are too rigid, you may feel isolated, lonely, and misunderstood. When you have healthy personal boundaries, you recognize that each individual is unique, with distinct emotions, needs, and values. You are able to communicate what you need from other people, while respecting their own point of view.

As you develop insight about your personal boundaries, you will better able to develop healthy and mutually rewarding relationships.

What to Do

The following are statements that reflect healthy approaches to personal boundaries. Rate each statement from 0 to 3, where 0 = never, 1 = rarely, 2 = sometimes, and 3 = always.

_____ My behavior appropriately fits situations and my relationships with others.

_____ I look to myself first to fulfill my personal needs.

_____ I reveal my personal thoughts and feelings to people I trust.

_____ I seek physical and/or emotional intimacy with people who care about me.

_____ Others share with me in healthy and respectful ways.

_____ I make my own decisions.

_____ I focus on my needs and goals without being influenced by others.

_____ I consider the consequences of my decisions and how they affect others.

_____ I do not allow people to take advantage of me.

_____ I maintain my integrity no matter what other people say or believe.

_____ I am able to take care of myself when I feel emotionally vulnerable.

_____ I am aware when someone infringes on my rights.

_____ I am able to say no if I feel that someone is asking for something I do not wish to give.

_____ I am aware of the personal boundaries of others and respect them.

- _____ I avoid taking advantage of others.
- _____ When appropriate, I am flexible with my limits.
- _____ My boundaries are grounded in my priorities, goals, and values.
- _____ I avoid situations that can harm me emotionally, physically, psychologically, or in other ways.
- _____ I don't change my opinions or do something against my values in order to get someone to like me.
- _____ I don't allow people to take advantage of my time or money.
- _____ I trust myself and the decisions I make about my relationships.
- _____ When in doubt, I seek advice from people I trust, but I still make up my own mind.
- _____ I have a clear idea about who I am and what I want from life.
- _____ I recognize that people are not "mind readers" and I clearly communicate my needs, desires, and feelings.
- _____ I am assertive and still consider the rights and needs of others.

Total score: _____

If you scored 0–25 points, you have established clear healthy personal boundaries.

If you scored 26–50 points, you may have to address some issues with personal boundaries.

If you scored 51 or more points, you have significant challenges around establishing healthy personal boundaries.

Review your answers and choose an area where you experience challenges. Describe an incident that illustrates a problem you have experienced.

How will your life be different if you establish and maintain healthy boundaries?

Describe what boundaries may be flexible or negotiable in some situations.

Describe what boundaries are nonnegotiable.

Describe how establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries can build your self-respect.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Improving Your Ability to Say No

What to Know

Saying no is a necessary component in asserting yourself, setting limits, and respecting your own opinions and emotions. Although saying no is essential in all kinds of relationships, you may feel uncomfortable asserting yourself, or worry about making the other person angry or upset.

There are physical consequences when you submit to others' demands while ignoring your own needs and feelings. It can weaken your body's immune system, increasing your chance of infection or developing ulcers, or placing you at greater risk for heart disease. Saying yes when you mean no can also make you feel helpless, which can contribute to depression and anxiety.

What to Do

When you consider saying no to a request from another person, first examine how the request affects you: your emotions, values, needs, and desires. Think of a current situation where you are being asked to do something you prefer not to do, or do not feel comfortable doing. Answer the following questions, and provide explanations, where possible.

Am I emotionally and physically able to give the person what they want? Yes or No _____

Am I willing to give the person what they want? Yes or No _____

Will I feel bad about myself for saying no? Yes or No _____

Am I saying yes because I am afraid to say no? Yes or No _____

Am I being asked to do something that compromises my rights or values? Yes or No _____

Will I regret saying no in the long run? Yes or No _____

Do I fully understand what I am being asked? Yes or No _____

Do I need more time to think about it before making a decision? Yes or No _____

There are two simple steps for saying no. These steps are respectful both to your feelings and to the person making the request.

1. Validate the other person's request. Show that you are paying attention to what they are saying, and repeat back what you heard. This helps you focus on the substance of the request, instead of making assumptions about its context.

2. State your preference for *not* doing what the person has asked, or state your discomfort in doing what was asked. For example: "I agree that the neighbor's dog barks too much, but I don't feel comfortable confronting them in a way that would hurt our friendship." Or "I know that you'd like us to go out together with your friends tonight, but I'm tired. I'd prefer that you join them while I stay home and rest."

Can you think of a recent situation where it would have been helpful to use these two steps to say no? Describe the situation.

What do you think would have been different in that situation if you had used those steps?

Next, think of some recent situations where you wanted to say no but felt unable to do so. Consider the statements you would have used to say no if you had used the two steps. Complete the following chart.

Request that was made	How you felt about the request <i>(uncomfortable, disrespected, unwilling, angry)</i>	The statement you would have used to say no

Request that was made	How you felt about the request (<i>uncomfortable, disrespected, unwilling, angry</i>)	The statement you would have used to say no

Now, return to the *current* situation you identified. Practice using the two steps in your response to this person.

What can you say to validate the person’s request?

What can you say to explain your preference for *not* doing what the person has asked, or to describe your discomfort in doing what was asked?

Can you think of any upcoming situations at home, work, or with friends or partners, where using the two steps will be helpful? Explain.

Is there anyone who can help you practice the two steps to prepare for those situations?

After you have practiced using the two steps to say “no,” describe your experience. Include information such as how you felt, the other person’s response, and the outcome.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Using “I” Statements to Communicate Effectively

What to Know

You may have trouble communicating what you want and need to those who are important to you. If you are not communicating clearly, you might blame the person you are talking to for the problem, saying things like:

“You never pay attention to me when I talk.”

“You just don’t understand me.”

These “you” statements blame the communication problem on the other person. Unfortunately, “you” statements likely make the listener feel defensive, and your communication breaks down further. You can take responsibility for your communication by making “I” statements.

What to Do

It is possible to express yourself, resolve conflicts, and get what you want in your relationships by using “I” statements. When you use “I” statements, you are speaking assertively from your own experience and taking responsibility for your own thoughts and feelings.

When you revise your “you” statements into “I” statements, you can accurately describe what you want, or how the other person’s behavior affects you.

For example:

Instead of: “You’re always yelling at me!”

You could say: “I feel upset when you yell at me. Can we talk calmly, please?”

Instead of: “You’re always spending time with your friends. Don’t you care about me?”

You could say: “I’m concerned that we don’t spend any time together anymore. I miss you.”

Instead of: “You make me so mad!”

You could say: “I’m frustrated that you won’t take the doctor’s advice. I want you to be healthy.”

Write down some “you” statements that you frequently make when talking to others.

Now, change these into “I” statements.

Next, keep track of situations or conflicts where you normally use a “you” statement to express yourself or ask for what you need. Instead, use an “I” statement, and then record the outcomes. Pay particular attention to how the other person responded.

Situation/with whom?	What were your thoughts and feelings?	What “I” statement did you use?	What was the outcome? (How did the other person respond?)

Did you find that your communication improved when you shifted from “you” statements to “I” statements? Give an example.

Did anyone notice that you were communicating in a different way? What did they say or do?

What can you do to remind yourself to use “I” statements instead of “you” statements?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Understanding Your Social Circles

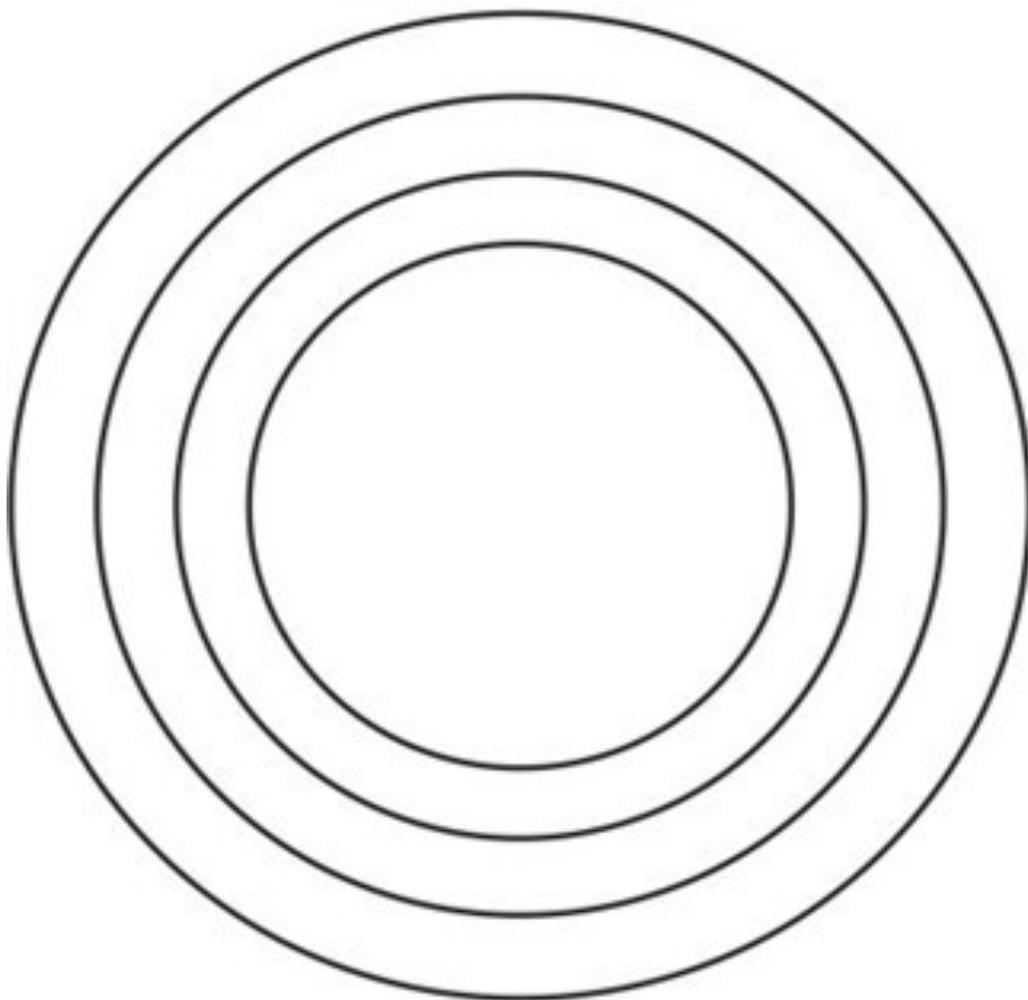
What to Know

You may have a hard time maintaining relationships. If you experience intense emotions, you might feel you desperately need relationships, but find that relationships are fleeting or filled with upset. You might tend to develop relationships very quickly, and trust or become intimate with people before you actually know them well. You might frequently get hurt, and maybe you have been hurt so many times that it is hard for you to trust others.

Establishing stable, healthy relationships takes time, and you may need to evaluate the people in your social circles so you can identify who you can trust, who you can reach out to when you need support, and so forth.

What to Do

First, take a few minutes to think about your relationships. Place yourself in the middle, and then write the other peoples' names in the circles that show how close you consider them to be. Include everyone you can think of—family members, friends, coworkers, classmates, counselors, and so forth. For example, in the circle closest to “you,” you might include your closest friends or family members. The outer circle might include acquaintances or coworkers. Think about the roles each of these people play in your life, and how stable each relationship is. Also think about changes you might want to make to your circles.



Which relationships are the most stable? Write down the names, roles they play in your life, and contact information:

Name

Role

Phone/Email

Do you have enough supportive people in your circles? Why or why not?

Do you trust the people in your circles? Why or why not?

What changes would you like to make to your circles?

Who are the people you would like to include closer to you? Further from you?

Would you like to add people to your circles who currently are not there?

What type of people would you like to add? Explain.

Where might you meet these people?

What can you do to bring people closer?

What is one step you can make today to make changes to your social circles? Be specific.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Finding People with Common Interests

What to Know

How resilient you are may have as much or more to do with your circle of support as it does with your personal strengths. Social support not only positively impacts your physical and mental health but also helps you cope and experience less distress when you face challenges. Although you may think it is easier to change yourself when you are facing adversity, research suggests that healthy relationships and supportive environments play a key role. Lack of social connections is as strong a risk factor for death as obesity and smoking.

Even thinking about your social connections lessens stress reactions. Positive connections with others are also linked to feeling a sense of purpose and meaning—also great sources of resilience. What can you do to make social connections? Spend time out in the world with others, engaging in meaningful activities.

So when you are going through a difficult time, turn to the people around you. If you currently feel isolated and want to increase your social connections, try participating in groups of people who share common interests.

Resiliency is not simply focusing on your personal strengths and overcoming life's challenges. It is also critical to find ways to build and strengthen your support systems.

What to Do

Write down your interests and find groups that you could become involved with based on your interests.

Interest:

Groups based on this interest:

Interest:

Groups based on this interest:

Interest:

Groups based on this interest:

Interest:

Groups based on this interest:

Interest:

Groups based on this interest:

Interest:

Groups based on this interest:

Now, choose one of the groups you identified above, and write down details of how you can join or participate in activities.

Over the next month, plan to attend one activity, group meeting, or event each week. Use the following chart to record your experiences. Write down the date, the group, and describe the activity, event or meeting you attended. Record whether you met new people, and what you did to make a connection. You might have set up a coffee date, asked for someone’s contact information, or followed up by email after the activity.

Date	Group	Activity, event, or meeting?	Did you meet new people? Y/N	What did you do to make a connection?

Was there anything that surprised you during this exercise?

What did you find most challenging about this exercise?

What was your favorite activity that you participated in? Why?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
