

Planting Seeds of Serenity

A Guide to Mental Wellness



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Map of The Garden

Feel free to invite a mental health professional to take this journey into the Garden of Mental Wellness along with us. Take your time with each section, and be patient with yourself as you try new techniques. Remember that mental wellness is an incremental journey. Positive change is possible. Let's get started!

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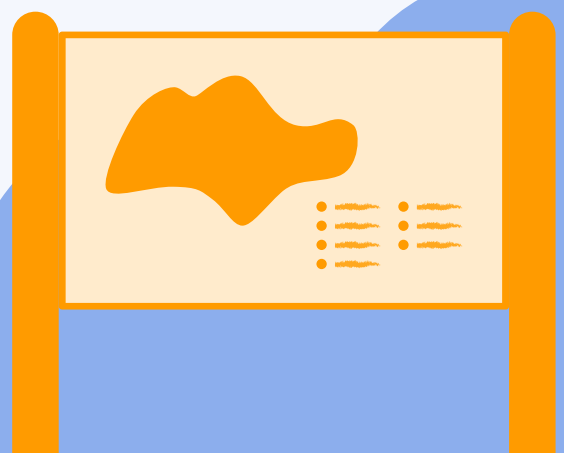
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Foreword

Mental health is an essential part of our overall well-being, yet it is often overlooked in the hustle and bustle of daily life.

In Singapore, as we strive to build a more resilient and caring society, we are also recognising the importance of looking after our mental well-being—both as individuals and as a community.

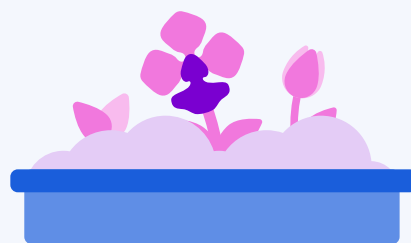
At Allkin Singapore, we see firsthand the unique challenges that different people face—whether it's young professionals juggling work pressures, parents managing family responsibilities, or seniors finding their place in a fast-changing digital world. While each experience is different, one thing remains the same: mental health support should be accessible to everyone.

This Mental Health Toolkit was created with that in mind. Designed specifically for Singapore's context, it provides practical tools and strategies to help anyone—whether you're a mental health professional working in the community or simply looking for ways to better care for yourself or a loved one.

There's no right or wrong way to use it. Like our diverse community, everyone's mental health journey is unique. You can explore and use the sections that resonate with you, at your own pace.

Our approach reflects Singapore's national mental health strategy of building a strong support network where each of us plays a role—from professionals to friends, family, and the wider community. This toolkit is a collaborative effort, inspired by the kampung spirit of looking out for one another.

We hope these resources offer you guidance, comfort, and practical steps to support your mental well-being. You are not alone in this journey.



— Dr Lim Boon Leng

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CREST, also known as the Community Outreach Team, focuses on raising public awareness of mental health conditions and dementia, promotes early recognition of at-risk individuals, provides emotional support to individuals and their caregivers, and links individuals to relevant health and social care services when necessary.

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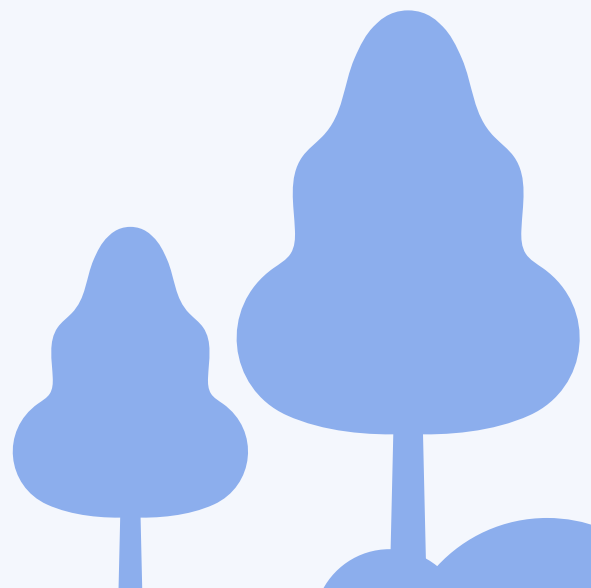
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Welcome Message

Hi there! Welcome to the Garden of Mental Wellness. I'm James, the gardener here!



You might feel that this Garden is a scary place, filled with things you don't understand. Or you might feel that you do not need to be here. Or maybe, you are just looking for answers. Let me take you through this wonderful garden and explore all the fascinating aspects of mental wellness.

At the end of this journey, you'll gain a whole new understanding of mental wellness. You'll learn how to thrive and bloom in the midst of stress and adversity in your own ways. Mental wellness is the key to having a happy and fulfilling life, so let me guide you through the process of understanding it.

Your Friend,
James



Chapter 1

Understanding Mental Wellness

*"The journey of a thousand miles
begins with a single step."*

— Lao Tzu



**What does it really mean to be
mentally well?**

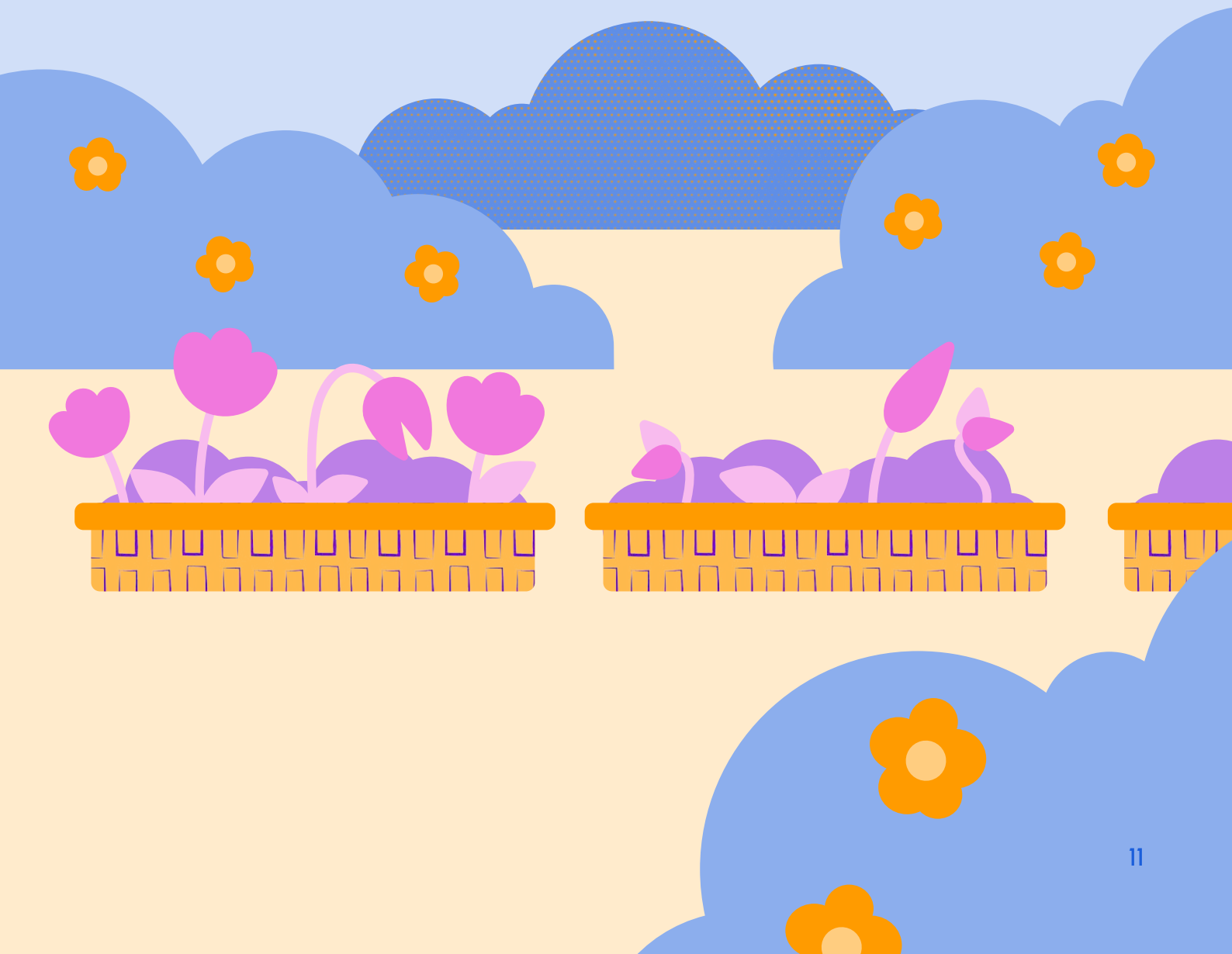
Why does it matter?



Let us begin by learning what mental wellness is.

Mental Health, Mental Illness, and Mental Wellness

Perhaps you would have come across these three terms: mental health, mental illness, and mental wellness. These terms, while related, are not interchangeable.



What is Mental Health?

Mental health is a spectrum that denotes a person's emotional, psychological and social well-being, and ability to cope with daily function.



On one end is mental illness...

In Crisis

Very Anxious
Low Mood
Absenteeism

Struggling

Anxious
Depressed
Tired
Poor Performance
Poor Sleep
Poor Appetite

Surviving

Worried
Nervous
Sad
Irritable
Trouble Sleeping
Distracted
Withdrawn

What is Mental Illness?

Mental illnesses are health conditions that affect a person's emotions, thoughts, processes, behaviours, or a combination of all four.

Having a mental illness is often associated with a dysfunction or disruption to a person's life. With proper treatment, persons with mental illness are able to cope well and function as normal.



...and on the other is mental wellness.

Thriving

Positive
Calm
Performing
Sleeping Well
Eating Normally

Excelling

Cheerful
Joyful
Energetic
High Performance
Full Potential

What is Mental Wellness?

Mental wellness is more than just the absence of mental illness. It's a state of well-being in which you can:

- Realise your potentials.
- Cope with the normal stressors of life.
- Work productively.
- Contribute meaningfully to your community.

You can have a mental health condition like anxiety disorder or depression and still have some degree of mental wellness.

It's about having the tools that suit your needs and resilience to navigate challenges.



Why is Mental Wellness Important?

Mental wellness is essential for overall well-being. Taking care of our mental health allows us to engage with life more fully and effectively.

Impact on Thoughts, Feelings, and Actions

Mental wellness affects how we think, feel, and behave. It helps us make decisions, solve problems, and cope with stress.

Relationships

When we are mentally healthy, we can form and maintain positive relationships with family, friends, and colleagues. Good mental health allows us to communicate effectively, understand and empathise with others, and build strong connections.

Work Performance

Mental wellness enhances productivity and performance at work. It helps us focus, stay motivated, and work efficiently. When we are mentally healthy, we can manage work-related stress better and contribute more effectively.

Physical Health

Mental and physical health are closely connected. Poor mental health can lead to physical problems such as fatigue, headaches, and a weakened immune system. Conversely, maintaining mental wellness can improve our overall physical health and well-being.

Common Mental Health Issues

There is no shame in experiencing mental health issues. Many people may experience mental health challenges at some point in their lives.

Here are some of the most common ones:



1 Stress

Stress is a natural response to challenging situations. While a certain amount of stress can be motivating, excessive stress can lead to physical and mental health conditions.

Common sources of stress include work pressure, financial concerns, and personal relationships.



2 Anxiety

Anxiety is a feeling of worry or fear that can be mild or severe. While it is normal to feel anxious occasionally, chronic anxiety can interfere with daily life.

Symptoms of anxiety include restlessness, rapid heartbeat, and difficulty concentrating for an extended period of time, e.g. 6 months or more.



3 Depression

Depression is a mood disorder characterised by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a lack of interest in activities. It can affect a person's ability to function in daily life.

Symptoms of depression include changes in appetite, sleep disturbances, and feelings of worthlessness over a period of 6 months or more.



Recognising When You Need Support

We all have ups and downs with stress and emotions. Sometimes, these challenges can start to feel overwhelming and interfere with our daily lives.

Here are some signs to be aware of:



Having these symptoms doesn't mean anything is "wrong" with you—it just means it may be time to prioritise mental health and seek extra support, whether that's self-care practices, talking to a counsellor, or consulting a doctor.

Addressing Mental Health Issues

Recognising and addressing mental health conditions is crucial for maintaining mental wellness. Here are some steps to manage these challenges effectively:



1

Seek Help

Don't hesitate to seek help from mental health professionals. They can provide support, guidance, and treatment options.

2

Build a Support Network

Surround yourself with supportive family members, friends, and colleagues. Talking to someone you trust can help you feel understood and less alone.



3

Practice Self-Care

Engage in activities that promote relaxation and well-being. Taking care of your physical health by eating well, getting enough sleep, and avoiding harmful substances also supports mental wellness.



4

Learn Coping Strategies

Develop healthy coping mechanisms to manage stress and difficult emotions. Techniques such as deep breathing, mindfulness, and journaling can help you stay grounded and focused.

5

Stay Informed

Educate yourself about mental health conditions and effective ways to manage them. Understanding your own mental health can empower you to take proactive steps toward wellness.





Mental Wellness Check-In

Now is a good time to take stock of your mental wellness. Here are some questions you can ask yourself right now:

- 1 On a scale of 1-10, how would I rate my overall mental wellness recently?
- 2 What thoughts and emotions have been coming up for me most often?
- 3 How is my stress level? What are my biggest stressors?
- 4 Am I feeling connected to supportive people in my life?
- 5 What is one step I can take to nurture my mental wellness today?



Remember: Mental wellness is not about perfection—it's about self-awareness, self-compassion, and taking small steps to care for your whole self.

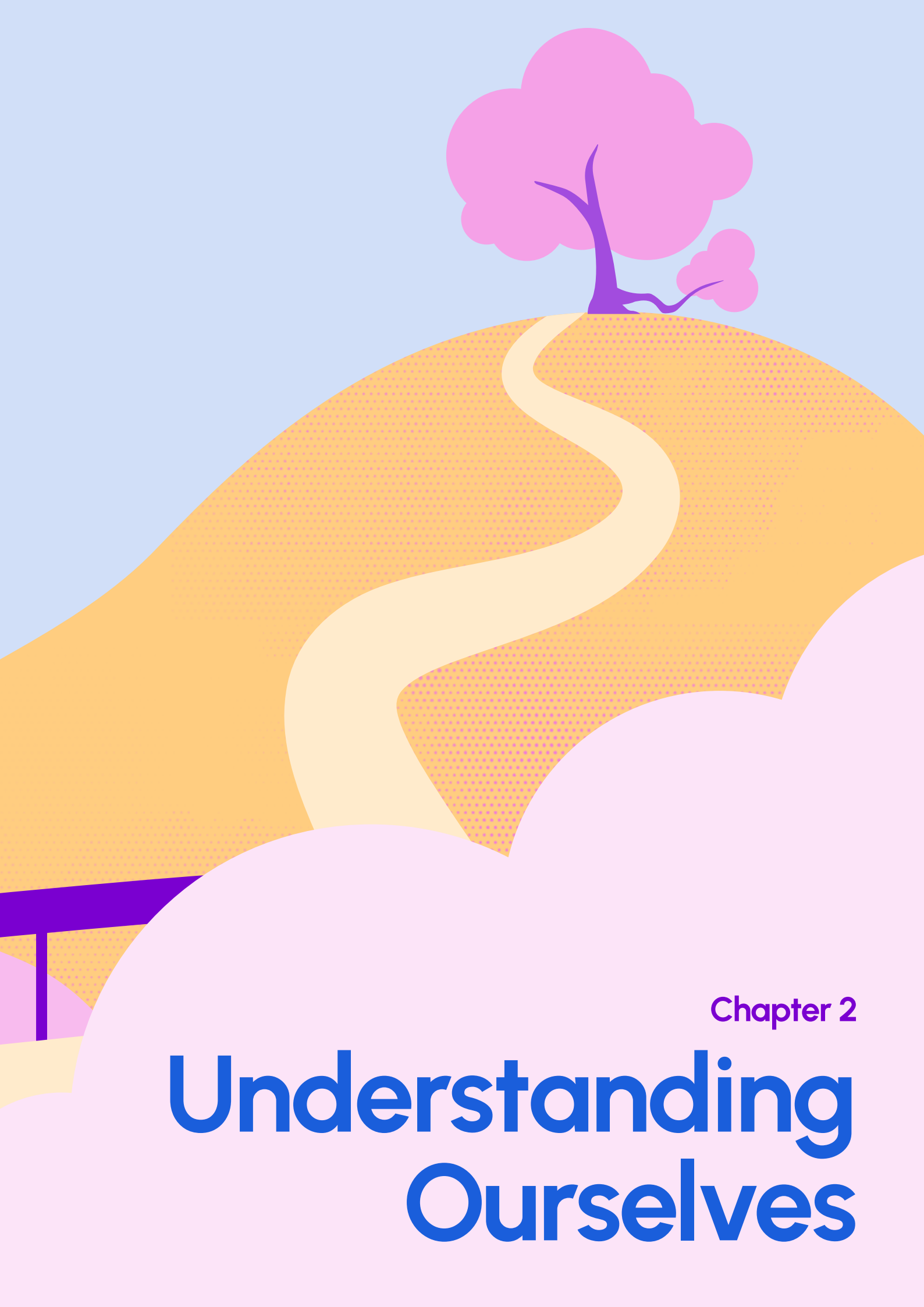
By understanding mental wellness, you have taken the first step towards achieving a balanced and fulfilling life.

As I bring you deeper into the Garden of Mental Wellness, I hope you will find this journey as meaningful and joyful as I do.



*"You can't understand the present if
you don't understand your past."*





Chapter 2

Understanding Ourselves

Building Resilience

Now that you understand what mental wellness is, we are going to build on that foundation by focusing on your strengths and supports.

It is easy to be overwhelmed by your problems, but intentionally connecting with your capabilities and resources helps build resilience.

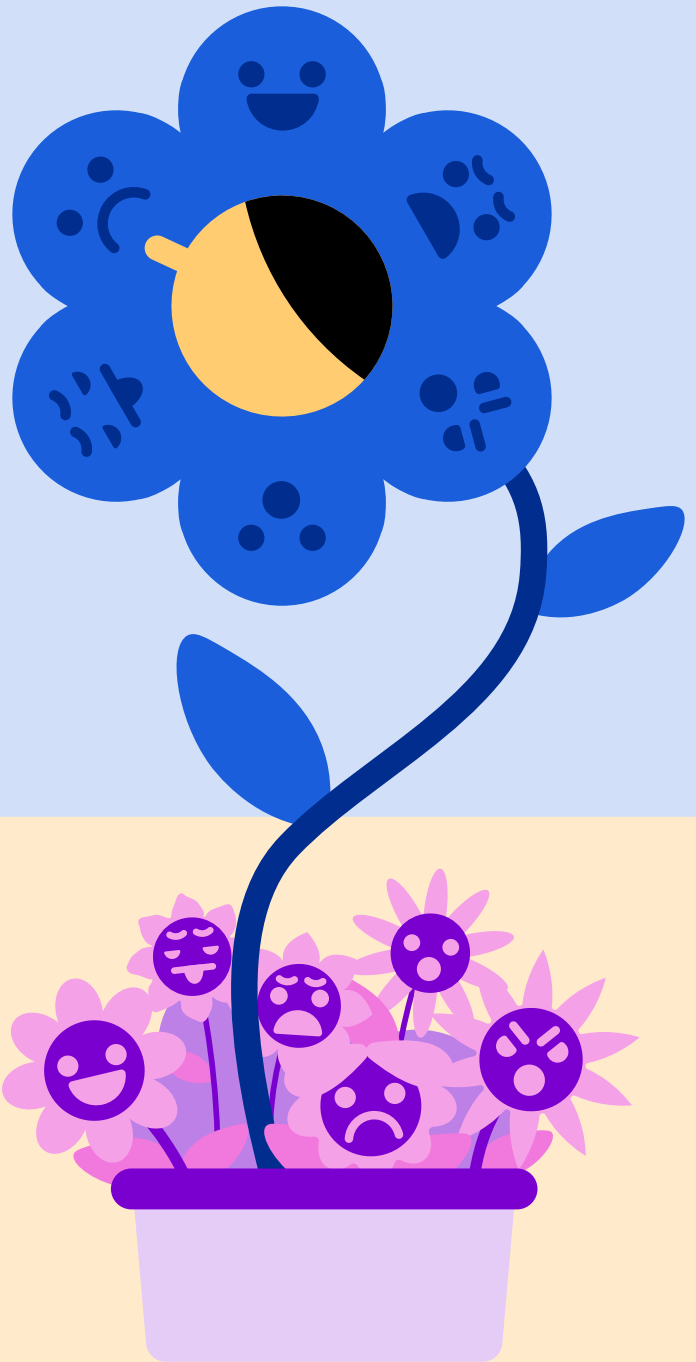
One of the ways to build resilience is through emotional awareness. When you become aware of your own emotions, you can identify the type of stressors that trigger those emotions.

Let us first start with understanding one of the key fundamentals of mental health—our emotions.

Emotions and Emotional Resilience

Emotions influence all your thoughts, actions and relationships. Learning how to manage your emotions will help you to deepen your self-awareness and enhance your interpersonal skills.

Emotions influence our decision-making processes, so managing your emotions will help you better navigate life's ups and downs.



What are Emotions?

During the 1970s, Psychologist Paul Ekman identified six basic emotions that he suggested were universally experienced in all human cultures.

The emotions he identified were:
Happiness, Sadness, Disgust, Fear, Surprise and Anger.

No specific brain area is associated with one specific emotion. Emotions activate different parts of our brain that help us deal with different situations.

These emotions manifest in bodily responses like heart rate, breathing, facial expressions, voice, and postures. We don't choose these changes; they just simply happen. Emotions are simple, yet complicated.

The Emotional Process

More often than not, we do not challenge our emotions. Instead, we seek information to confirm them. Emotions can guide us to learn more about our situations, but can also hinder our ability to recognise alternative perspectives.

To begin using our emotions effectively, we must first slow down our emotional process, and investigate our emotions from the perspective of a “mindful observer”.

Identifying and recognising our emotions requires complete honesty with ourselves. Only when we step “out” of ourselves to examine our emotions, can we be in a better position to make healthy decisions.



When faced with overwhelming emotions, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1 What happened?
- 2 What caused the situation?
- 3 How did this situation make you feel emotionally and physically?
- 4 What did you do as a result of how you felt?
- 5 How did your emotions and actions affect you after the situation?
- 6 What would you have done differently?



By becoming more attentive to what triggers your emotions, you can increase your control over what you say or do. This prevents you from acting impulsively and in ways that you might regret after.

Emotional Resilience

Resilience begins with emotional awareness— understanding and acknowledging one's emotions in response to stress or adversity. When we can better identify our emotions and regulate them effectively, we are better equipped to manage setbacks.

When we instinctively act on our emotions, we react. Reactivity is our behavioural and psychological responsiveness. On the other hand, regulation is the control over our reactivity. In novel situations, reactivity and regulation contribute to a resilience process that helps us develop social skills to manage the situation.

Here are some ways to build up our resilience:

- 1 Be flexible and adaptable in our response to situations.
- 2 Recognise that your struggles are valid.
- 3 Believe in your abilities.
- 4 Start by taking small, decisive actions.
- 5 Be optimistic. Turn setbacks into opportunities.

Emotions and resilience are intricately linked through emotional awareness, adaptive coping strategies, social support, positive emotional states, and the process of learning and growth.



Let's build our emotional resilience by understanding and harnessing the power of our emotions! One simple way we can start is by identifying our stressors.



Identifying Stressors

*"It's not the load that breaks you down,
it's the way you carry it."*

— Lou Holtz

Learning more about our emotions can help us to better identify, understand, and manage our stress. Emotions, such as fear, anxiety, or anger, can trigger the body's stress response, releasing hormones that prepare us for action.

This physiological reaction can intensify when emotions are persistent or overwhelming, leading to chronic stress. Hence, it is important to manage both our emotions and stress effectively.

Emotional Resilience

Stress is a natural response to challenging situations. It can be positive, motivating you to perform well, or negative, leading to feelings of helplessness and anxiety. Understanding stress and its impact on your life is crucial for managing it effectively.

In this section, we'll practise separating stressors from stress reactions so you can respond more skilfully. You will map out your unique stress landscape and learn to catch unhelpful thought patterns early using tools from cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

Stressors

Stressors are external situations or events that put demands on us, like:



financial pressures



conflict in relationships



deadlines, etc...

vs

Stress

Stress is our inner experience in response to those demands:



tense body



racing thoughts



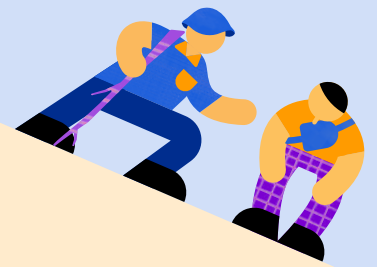
difficult emotions...

...Stressors cause stress.

While we cannot always control our stressors, we have power to shape our reactions to stress.

Noticing what triggers your stress and how it manifests in your mind and body prevents us from being overwhelmed and allows us the chance to choose new responses.

The road up the hill is tough, but let's persevere!



Stress Warning Signs

Stress can manifest itself in your mind, actions and body.

Tick the boxes if you experience any of these symptoms of rising stress:

Mind

Racing or repetitive worries

Trouble focusing or deciding

Pessimistic outlook

Irritability and impatience

Forgetfulness or clumsiness

Actions

Procrastination or extra perfectionism

Under- or over-eating, mindlessly consuming

Withdrawing from relationships

Overriding your need for rest or replenishment

Numbing out with TV, alcohol or other substances

Body

Muscle tension, especially jaw, neck, shoulders

Headaches

Stomach aches or digestive issues

Fatigue

Which stress signs do you notice most in yourself? Pause when you notice them, take a deep breath, and lay out your options to decide how to respond rather than acting on it impulsively.

When facing stressful situations, place a hand on your heart, sigh out tension, stretch, or ask "What do I need right now?"

Mapping Your Stressors

Make a list of all the stressors you're facing, big and small.

| Type | Example | My Stressor (Fill in the blanks) |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|
|  Work/School | Workload, performance pressure, team dynamics | |
|  Relationships | Conflicts, family demands, loneliness | |
|  Health | Illness, injury, navigating the medical system | |
|  Finances | Bills, debt, insecure housing or food | |
|  Life Transitions | Moves, breakups, job changes | |
|  Current Events | Natural disasters, wars and political turmoil, oppression | |
|  Daily Hassles | Heavy traffic, errands, clutter | |

Examine both your external circumstances and inner experiences. Consider work pressures, relationships, and finances, but also internal struggles like perfectionism or self-criticism.

Be honest—this isn't about what you "should" handle, but seeing your full reality clearly. Acknowledge visible challenges and hidden emotional burdens alike. This holistic view helps you understand your true capacity and needs, guiding decisions on self-care and support.

Reflecting on Our Stressors

Once you have identified your stressors, you can explore and decide what to do with them. Just follow these steps:

| Steps | Example | My Reflection (Fill in the blanks) |
|---|--|--|
| Step 1: Name the Problem Naming the problem helps you see it as an external entity. | <i>Overwhelming Workload.</i> | |
| Step 2: Map the Influence Explore how the problem affects different areas of your life: <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Mental well-being.· Physical well-being. | <i>The overwhelming workload affects my sleep, makes me feel anxious, and reduces the time I can spend with my family.</i> | |
| Step 3: Evaluate the Effects What do you hope to do about the problem? Why do you want to take these actions? | <i>I hope to talk to my boss about managing my workload so that I have more time for my family.</i> | |



4D Framework

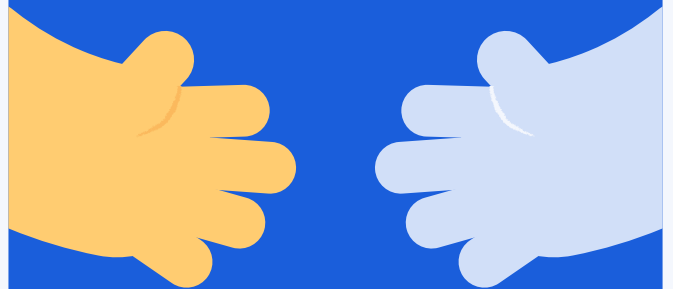
The 4D Framework is a structured approach to managing tasks and stressors. It helps you categorise and prioritise items based on their urgency and importance. Let's explore each of the 4 D's:

Dump



Discard (or release) stressors that simply are not worth your energy.

Delegate



Hand off or share stressors that others can help you with.

Defer



Make a plan to deal with stressors that need to be addressed later.

Do



Figure out a plan to deal with stressors that need immediate attention.

Catching Stress-Fuelling Thoughts

Our perception of how stressful a situation is depends largely on how we think about it.

Learning to notice unhelpful thought patterns and practise responding in more balanced ways can help us to manage stress.

All-or-Nothing

Viewing things in absolutes or extremes

Overgeneralising

Treating one bad experience as a pervasive pattern

Filtering

Focusing only on negatives, dismissing positives

Catastrophising

Jumping to worst-case scenarios

Shoulds

Rigid expectations for how you or others should act

Personalising

Blaming yourself for things outside your control

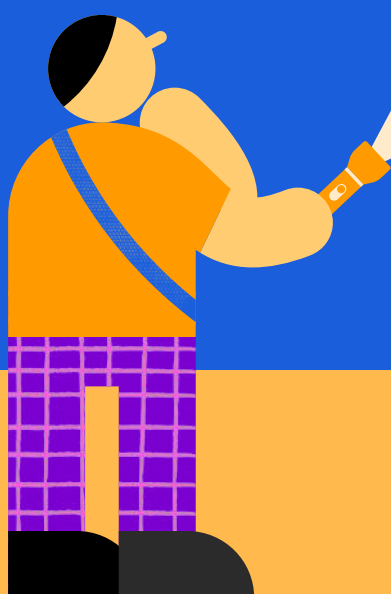
Emotional Reasoning

Treating feelings as facts

Do any of these sound familiar?

Notice which ones tend to hook you. When you catch yourself in a cognitive distortion, pause and ask:

- 1 Is this thought realistic? Is it the full story?
- 2 What would I say to a friend in this situation?
- 3 What's a more balanced way to look at this?
- 4 What can I control? Where can I focus my energy?



Challenging distorted thinking takes practice, but it's worth it. Shifting from feeling stressed and stuck to grounded and resourceful is a major upgrade in quality of life.

Stress Reframing Practice

Choose one stressor that's been on your mind lately and apply a technique called "Wise Mind", balancing the "Emotion Mind" and "Reason Mind" to find a balanced perspective.

| 1 Emotion Mind | 2 Reason Mind | 3 Wise Mind |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Acknowledge your feelings about the stressor honestly, without judging yourself.</p> <p>What's the story your emotions are telling? What's the worst-case scenario you fear might happen? Validate that your feelings, while uncomfortable, make sense.</p> | <p>Now step back and engage your wise observer.</p> <p>What are the objective facts of the situation? What's most likely to happen, based on past experience? What strengths, skills, or support could you bring to bear? What would you advise a friend in this situation?</p> | <p>Find the nugget of truth in both perspectives to arrive at a balanced, values-aligned view.</p> <p>On to the next step, how can you honour your feelings <i>and</i> remain grounded in reality? What's a reasonable, compassionate way forward?</p> |



The more you practise this kind of balanced reframing, the less daunting the stressors will feel. You will be able to develop trust in your ability to cope.

Reflection on Stress and Stressors

After completing these exercises, take some time to reflect on the process.

How did externalising the stressors and identifying unique outcomes change your perspective on them? How can you use these approaches to manage stress more effectively in the future?

Pick one insight that feels most valuable to apply.



Stress is an inevitable part of life—what matters is how we respond. With awareness of your unique stress reactions and a better understanding of cognitive distortions you are inclined to, you are grounded in what's true and possible.

You're well positioned to interrupt cycles of stress reactivity early and choose intentional action.



Starting from Strength



Tree of Life

The Tree of Life exercise is a powerful tool for self-reflection, developed by Ncazelo Ncube and David Denborough. It allows us to view our lives from a "riverbank position", offering a holistic perspective of our strengths, values, and connections. This exercise is widely used across the world.

Drawing Your Tree

You'll need: blank paper and a pen or pencil. Draw a large tree, filling the whole page. Ensure your tree includes roots, ground, trunk, branches, leaves, fruits, and flowers. Artistic skill doesn't matter—just create a tree that feels alive and resonates with you. You may also choose to write on this book.

The Roots: Our Origins

In the roots of your tree, trace your origins:

- List the countries you or your ancestors come from.
- Mention the culture, race, or dialect group you identify with.
- Write about your family name or your community's history.
- Include important figures in your family's history or those who have significantly influenced you.
- Note any clubs or associations you are connected to.



The Ground: Our Current Situation

The ground represents your present activities and roles, focusing on what you choose to do:

- Describe your current work.
- Mention where you live.
- List your daily routines and hobbies.
- Include your roles, such as being a parent, child, or grandparent.





The Trunk: Our Values and Skills

The trunk symbolises what we value and the skills we possess:

- Reflect on why you engage in your current activities and what you care about.
- Identify skills and abilities you've demonstrated, no matter how small.
- Consider what others might say about your skills and values.
- Think about the history of these values and skills, and how they connect to your ground and roots.



The Branches: Our Aspirations

The branches represent your hopes and dreams:

- Write about your personal and family aspirations, both short-term and long-term.
- Include shared hopes you have with others and hopes for other people or communities.
- Reflect on the origins and history of these dreams and who supports you in maintaining them.



The Leaves: Significant People in Our Lives

Leaves represent the important people in your life, whether alive or deceased:

- List people who are significant to you, including fictional characters or heroes, and even pets.
- Reflect on how these individuals are linked to your values, skills, and aspirations.
- If including someone who has passed away, recall good times shared and what made them significant.



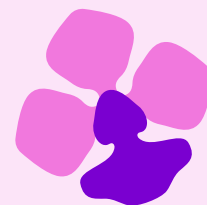


The Flowers: Legacies We Wish to Leave

Flowers represent the gifts or legacies you want to pass on to others:

- Think about the legacies you wish to leave, which might mirror the gifts you've received or things you lacked but wish to offer to others.





The Fruits: Legacies We Have Received

Fruits symbolise the gifts and contributions others have made to our lives:

- Reflect on gifts related to values or skills, such as patience or courage.
- Consider any material gifts that have been significant to you.





Reflecting on your Tree of Life

After completing the Tree of Life exercise, take some time to reflect on your strengths and assets. How do these strengths help you in your daily life? How can you use them to address challenges and achieve your goals? By starting from what's strong, you build a resilient foundation for mental wellness.

Keep your Tree of Life posted somewhere you'll see it often. Use it as a touchpoint to remind you of the many sources of strength and support you can draw on. Feel free to add to it over time.

Know Your Values

When your roots go deep, it's hard for the storms of life to uproot you. Among the deepest roots we have as humans are our values—those core principles or qualities that matter most to us, that make life feel meaningful.



Values Clarification Exercise

For each of the following areas, quickly jot down 3-5 key values. Don't overthink it, go with your gut.

Relationships

(e.g. loyalty, honest communication and laughter)



Work

(e.g. creativity, collaboration, growth)



Personal Growth

(e.g. curiosity, open-mindedness and spirituality)



Community

(e.g. social justice, compassion and environmental care)



Next Step

Look at your full list of values and highlight the top 3-5 that you identify with most. For each of your top values, write a sentence or two about why it matters to you.

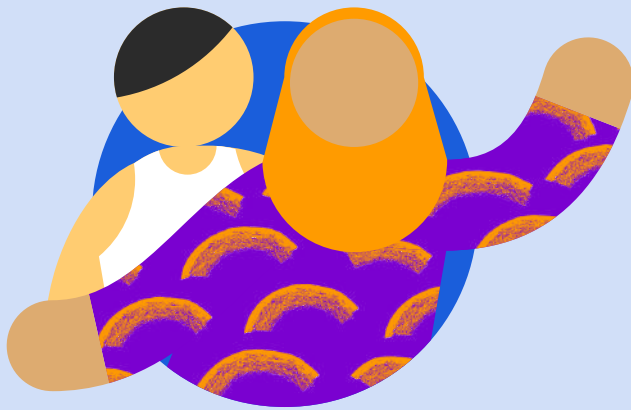
- What would it look like to truly live out this value?
- When was a time you acted in alignment with it?

Having clarity on our core values provides direction, motivation, and steadiness through life's twists and turns. We act with more confidence when we know we're being true to what matters most.

Tap Into Your Support System

No person is an island. Having supportive connections nourishes our mental wellness. Who are the people that help you feel seen, encouraged, and grounded?

Common supportive relationships include:



Close friends and family members



Mentors like teachers, coaches, spiritual leaders



Peers with shared interests or experiences (e.g. from a hobby group or support group)



Neighbours and community members



Counsellors or therapists



Reflecting on Your Support Systems

Consider the important people identified in your Tree of Life.
For each one, reflect:

- 1 What do I appreciate most about this person's presence in my life?
- 2 How do I feel after spending time with them?
- 3 When was the last time I reached out to them? What else could I do to nurture our relationship?
- 4 Are there ways they could support me that I haven't asked?

Look also for any gaps in your support system. Are there any kinds of support you're currently missing that you'd like to cultivate? Set an intention to reach out.

Weathering the Storms

Our emotions, our strengths, our values, our support systems, our practices—these are the elements that ground us and help us weather storms. They are always there for us to draw on.



Wrap up this chapter by taking another look at your Tree of Life as a whole.

This week, name:

- One way to reconnect with your roots.
- One way to engage your strengths.
- One supporter to reach out to.
- One nourishing practice to prioritise.

With this foundation of skilful stress engagement, you're ready to dive deeper into stress relief techniques. In the coming chapters, we'll explore powerful practices for both in-the-moment grounding and long-term equilibrium.

Chapter 3

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

*"The greatest weapon against stress
is our ability to choose one thought
over another."*

— William James



When we're stressed, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by worry or despair. The more we focus on what's going wrong, the more anxious and reactive we become, and the less access we have to our most skilful, creative problem-solving.

One way to break out of this spiral is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

Now that you understand yourself better, it is time to start working towards mental wellness! It is time for you to plant your seed of serenity. CBT is a good way to start!



What is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)?

For you to enhance your mental wellness, you first need to learn how to clear away overwhelming thoughts of worry and despair.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy offers practical tools to interrupt this cycle at the level of thoughts.

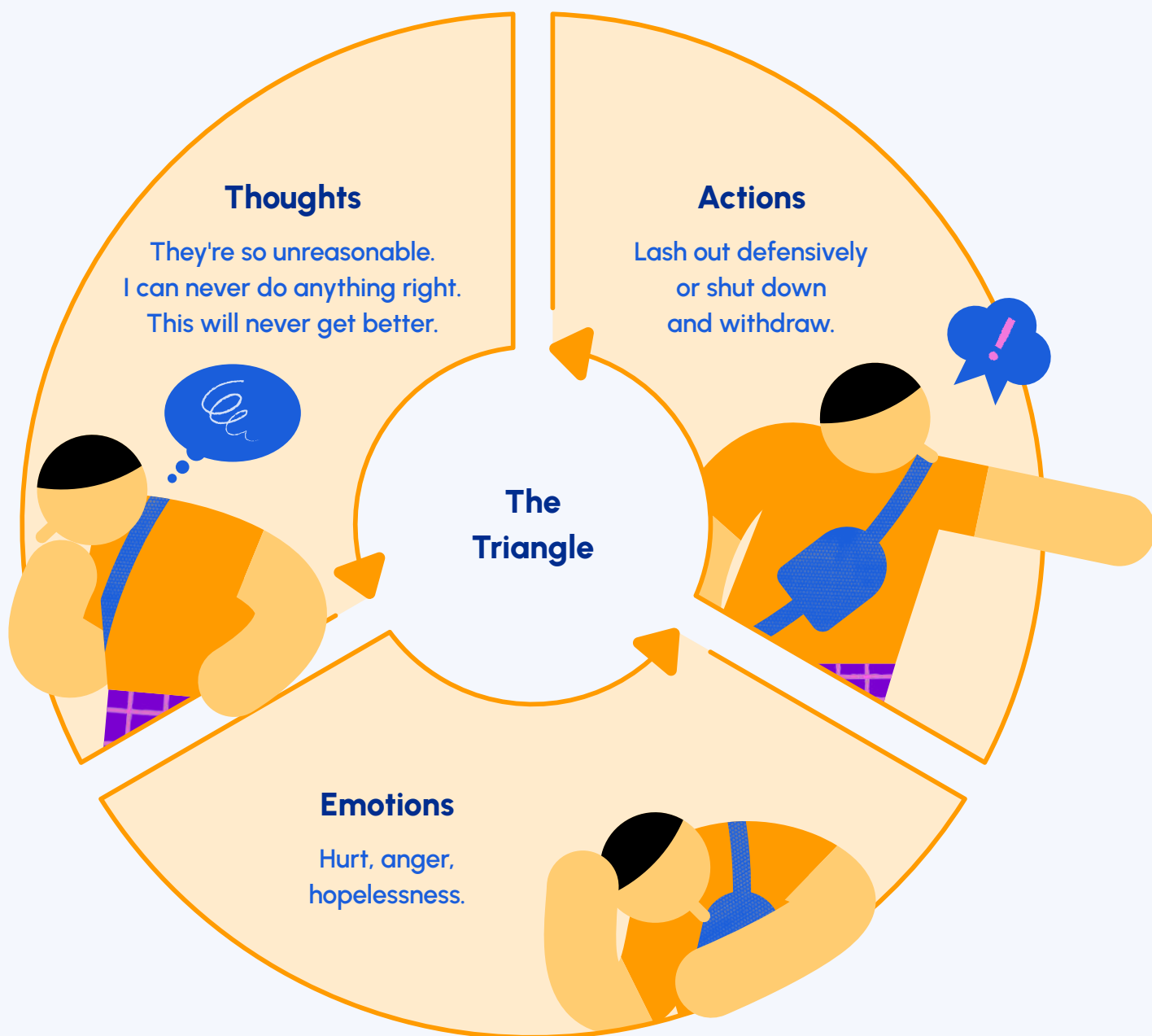
The core premise is how we think powerfully shapes how we feel and act. By learning to notice and reframe thoughts, we can transform our experience and our capacity to respond effectively to stressors.

You'll learn foundational CBT concepts and skills for catching unhelpful thoughts, putting them into perspective, and practising more balanced and motivating self-talk. Think of it as preparing a conducive flower bed for your seed of mental wellness to grow.

The Triangle: Thoughts, Emotions, and Behaviours

At the heart of CBT is the relationship between our thoughts (the stories we tell ourselves about what's happening), our emotions (how we feel in our bodies and hearts in response), and our behaviours (what we do or don't do as a result).

When we get stuck in stress, it's usually because we're caught in an unhelpful pattern in the thought-emotion-action cycle, such as:



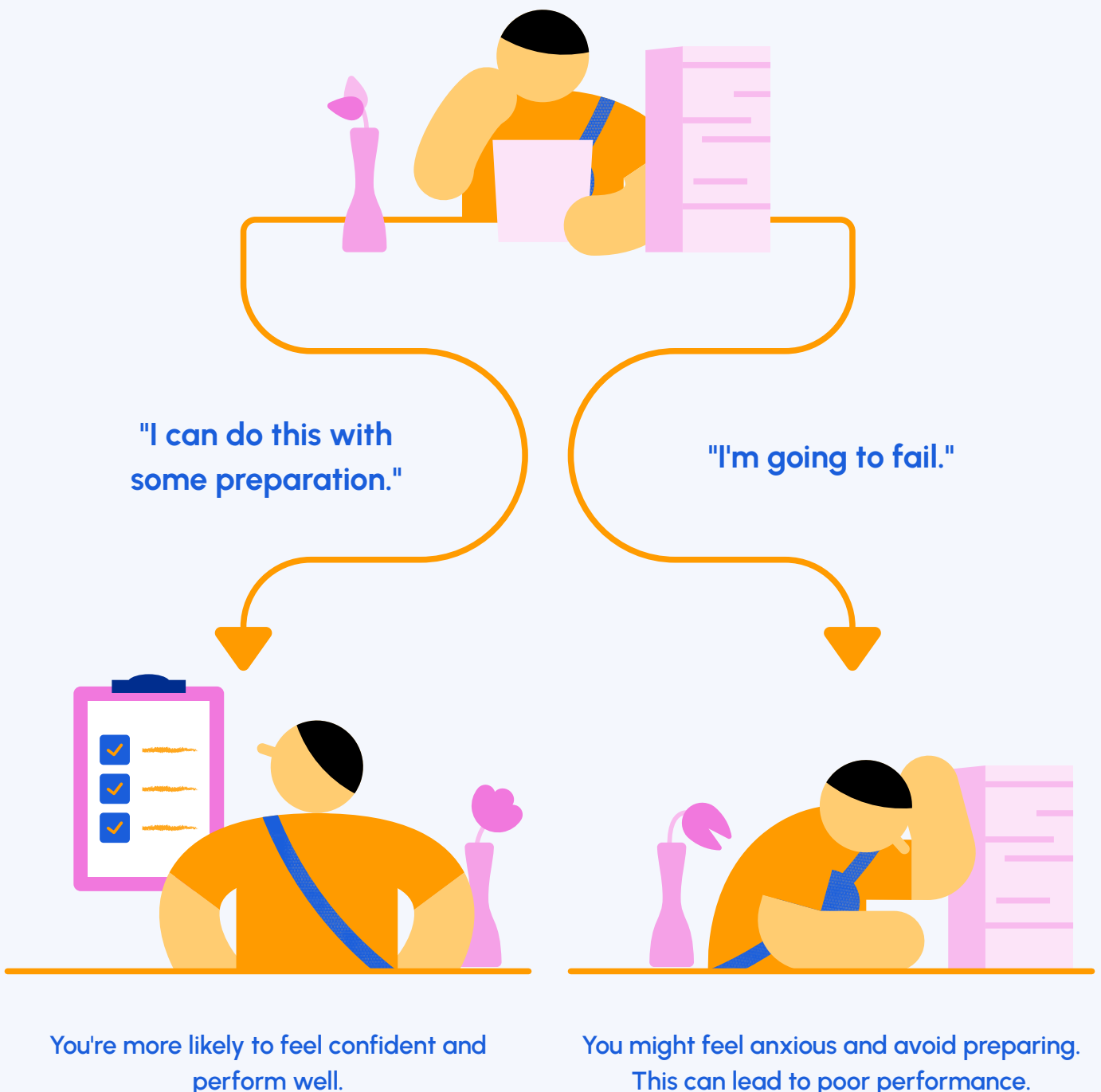
Notice how the thoughts drive emotions, that then result in unproductive actions. These actions then make situations more stressful, creating even more negative thoughts.

Getting trapped in this cycle can leave you feeling powerless and out of control.

The premise of CBT is that, by shifting any one point on the triangle, we begin to shift the whole cycle. We may not be able to change the stressful situation itself in a given moment, but we can always change how we respond.

Standing in a more balanced and compassionate perspective, we can feel our emotions fully without getting hijacked by them and choose intentional action aligned with our values.

Imagine you have a big project at work. If you think...



Identifying Negative Thoughts

The first key skill in CBT is learning to observe thoughts as thoughts, not necessarily as truth.



Our minds are meaning-making machines, constantly generating stories to make sense of our experience. Sometimes these stories are exaggerated, distorted, or just plain unhelpful, ramping up stress instead of helping with the situation, and choking the life out of our situations, just like weeds in a flower bed.

Knowing how to spot and get rid of such 'weeds' provides us the ability to grow our seed of serenity!

Thought Noting Practice

Practise paying attention to your thoughts. Become a mindful observer. When you catch yourself beginning to develop difficult feelings, pause, close your eyes, and ask "What is the story that my mind is telling me now?" Write the story down in a journal or on your phone, labelling any distortions that you may see.

Try taking these thoughts as mental events, not necessarily as instructions to follow or the whole truth of a certain situation.

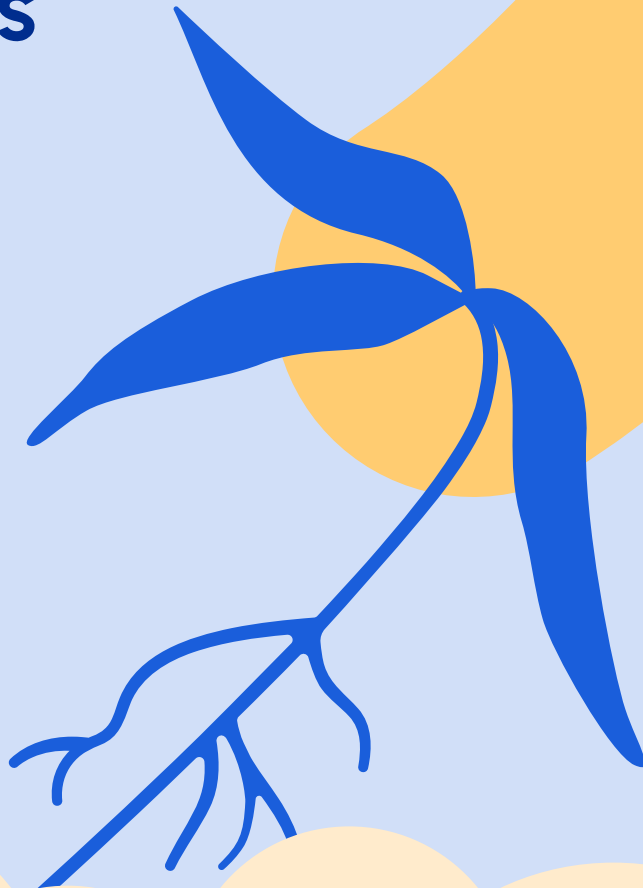
If you get tangled up in a thought stream, and find yourself fighting with it or judging yourself for it, try to zoom out and engage your wise mind.

Simply name these distortions, like "judging" or "arguing with thoughts", then gently return to observing your thoughts.

You will find that sometimes, thoughts that look like flowers are actually weeds.



Challenging Negative Thoughts



Techniques to Challenge Negative Thoughts

Once you notice negative thoughts, you can shift your perspective. The goal here is not relentless positivity, but balance—widening the frame to include a fuller picture of reality.

When you notice a stressful thought, don't fear it or spiral. Instead, be curious and ask yourself:

- 1 Is this thought factually true? Would everyone agree with it?
- 2 What's the evidence for and against it?
- 3 Is there another way to look at this situation?
- 4 What would I say to a friend in a similar situation?
- 5 Am I jumping to conclusions or focusing on the worst case scenario? What's most likely to happen?

Example

Negative Thought



"I'm always messing things up."

Challenge



"I made a mistake, but I usually do well. Everyone makes mistakes sometimes."

Thought Record

Try using a simple thought record to practise catching, checking, and shifting stressful thoughts. For example:

Situation, Thoughts, Feelings

Fill in a line whenever you notice a notably stressful thought arising. Name the situation that triggered it, the thought itself, and the feelings that came up in response.

Situation



I made a mistake at work.

Thoughts



I'm such an idiot. I can never get anything right.

Feelings



Shame, anxiety.

Reframe

Then, pause, take a breath, and see if you can find a reframe—a more balanced way to view the situation, even if your feelings are still activated. Maybe expand to the bigger picture, acknowledge a thought distortion, or find a kernel of truth to validate.

Mistakes happen. This doesn't define me. I'm generally competent even if I'm not perfect.

My boss has always been supportive. He won't fire me over one mistake.

I can focus on what I'll do differently next time.

New Feelings

Notice how this perspective shift impacts your feelings.



I still feel disappointed in myself, but I also feel determined to do better the next time.

I feel a bit more relieved, since I now notice that my mistake isn't the end of the world.

The goal isn't to deny or suppress difficult feelings, but to reconnect with your innate resilience and the larger context around an upsetting situation.



My Thought Record

| | | |
|------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| Situation | Thoughts | Feelings |
| Reframe | | New Feelings |

With practice, this process of noticing-reframing-grounding will start to come more automatically. Your mind will loosen its grip on stress-fuelling stories and fixate less on imagined threats.

Behavioral Activation

One way to make yourself feel better is to engage in enjoyable activities.



Activity and Mood

Our activity levels affect our mood. When we engage in enjoyable activities, we feel better. Avoiding activities, especially those we used to enjoy, can lead to a low mood.

Exercise: Activity Scheduling

Make a list of activities you enjoy. Schedule one or two of these activities each day. Notice how engaging in these activities affects your mood.

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Managing Stress

In order for your seed of serenity to bloom into flourishing mental wellness, you need to learn to manage your mind.



As you integrate CBT skills into your daily life, take it slow and steady. Notice any judgements that arise while doing it and see if you can let those just be. The goal is gentle redirection, not harsh thought policing.

1

Track your progress over time. When you look back on a stressful situation a few weeks from now, what do you notice?

Are you less encumbered by unhelpful thoughts? More able to step back and see the bigger picture? Quicker to self-soothe?

2

Celebrate any positive shifts, however small. This is challenging work you're doing, rerouting well-worn neurological pathways in your mind.

3

With a foundation of more helpful self-talk in place, you can bring mindful attention to your problems and how to solve them effectively.

Chapter 4

Problem-Solving Skills



"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."

— Albert Einstein



Even with a strong foundation of mental wellness practices, we will still run into stressors. Such is life—an unpredictable flow of challenge and ease, setback, and opportunity.

Though no place is free from the storms of life, we can learn to safeguard our seedling of mental wellness through skillful problem solving.

As the storms of life rain down on you, remember that protecting your mental wellness is not about having all the answers or figuring everything out on your own.

Rather, it's about approaching challenges methodically, tapping into our social support and resources, and taking intentional action forward. It's a structured process which helps shield our seedling of mental wellness from being uprooted by thunderstorms.

Problem-Solving Skills Using the PADI Framework

One method we can use to problem-solve effectively is using the PADI Framework by Anthony Yeo. The PADI Framework helps us break down problems and devise plans to tackle them.

Steps to Effective Problem-Solving

Using the PADI Framework

P

Problem Definition

To begin effective problem-solving, you need to clearly define the problem. You need to understand the nature of your issue and recognise its impact on your life.

Questions to Consider:

- What is the problem?
- How is it affecting me?
- When did it start?
- Are there specific triggers or patterns?

A

Attempted Solutions

Next, reflect on the solutions you have already tried. Understanding what has been already attempted can help you identify patterns and inform future strategies.

Questions to Consider:

- What have you already tried in order to solve this problem?
- What were the results of these attempts?
- Why do you think these solutions didn't work?

D

Desired Outcomes

Identify what you hope to achieve when solving the problem. This step involves setting clear and realistic goals.

Questions to Consider:

- What do you want to achieve by solving this problem?
- What does success look like to you?
- How will you know when the problem is solved?
- What behavioural and emotional changes would you notice in yourself when the problem is solved?

I

Intervention

Finally, plan and implement new strategies to address the problem. You should develop a concrete action plan and take steps to achieve your desired outcomes.

Questions to Consider:

- What new strategies can you try to solve the problem?
- What resources or support do you need?
- How will you monitor progress and make adjustments?

PADI Exercise

Take some time to try this exercise out for yourself!

Problem Definition

- P** · Describe the problem in detail.
- How does the problem impact your life?
- When did it start?
- Specific triggers or patterns?

Example:

You might define the problem as feeling overwhelmed at work due to an excessive workload.



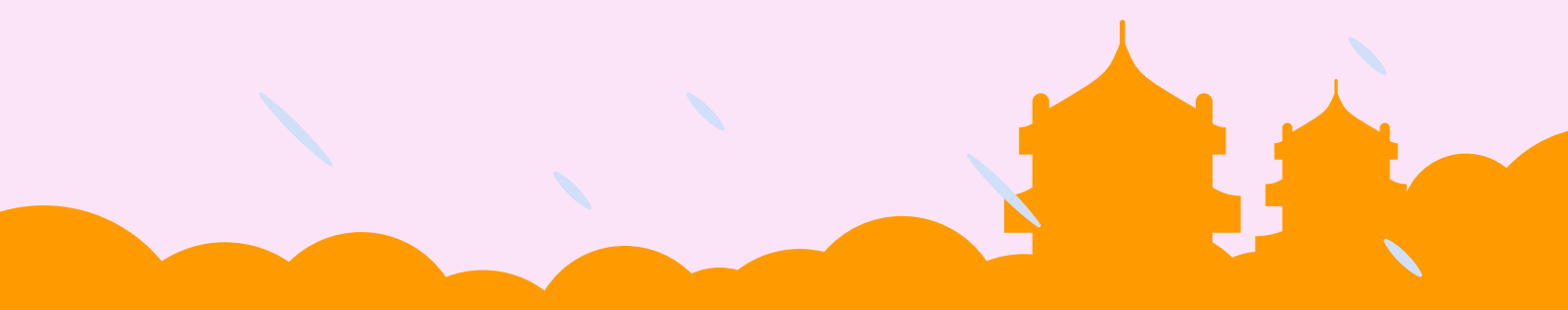
Attempted Solutions

- A** · Solutions already tried.
- Results of these attempts.
- Reasons these solutions worked or did not work.

Example:

You might have tried working longer hours or multitasking to manage the workload, but found it led to burnout without reducing the workload.





Desired Outcomes

D

- What do you want to achieve?
- How will you know the problem is solved?
- What success looks like to you?

Example:

Your desired outcome might be to have a manageable workload that allows for a healthy work-life balance. This way, you can breathe more easily, and be less stressed.



Intervention

I

- Things to continue doing.
- New strategies to try.
- Resources or support needed.
- Monitoring plan.

Example:

Your intervention might include discussing workload management with your supervisor, delegating tasks, and improving time management skills.



Reflecting on the PADI Process

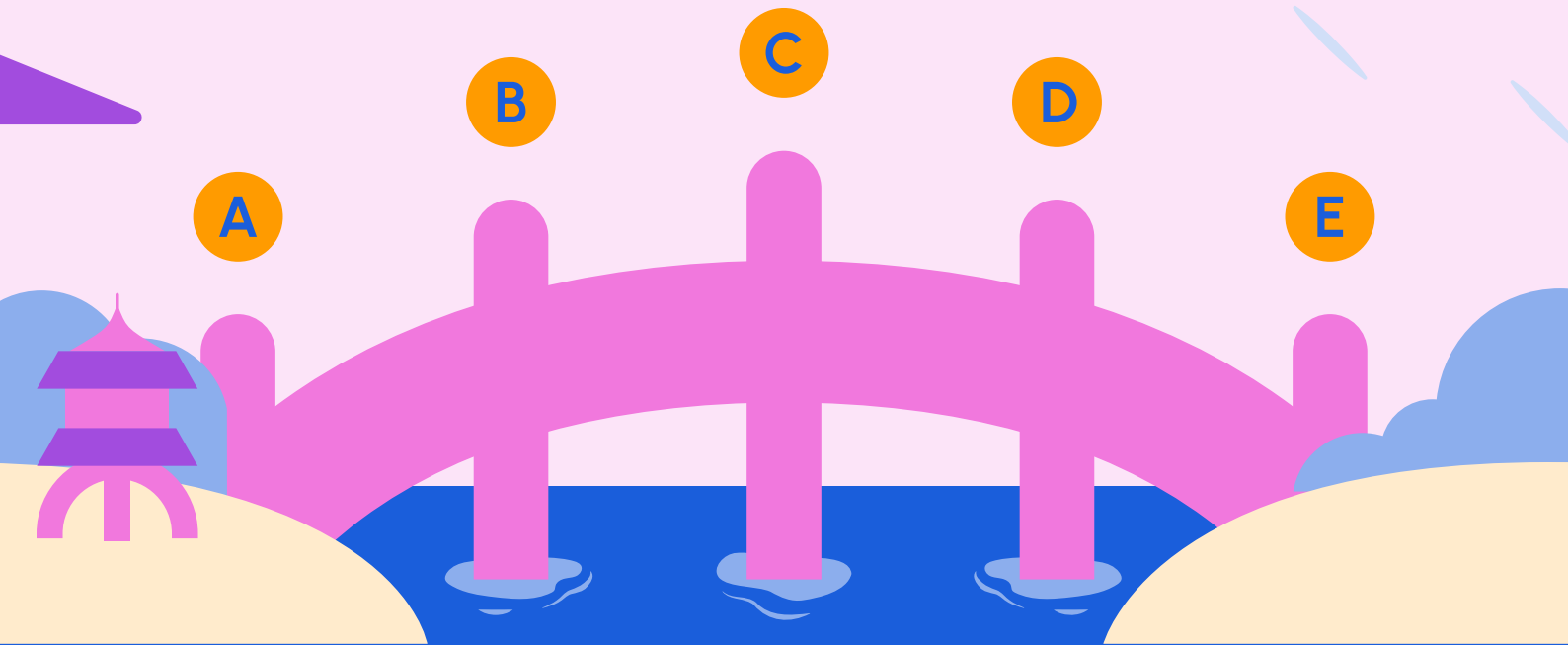
Take some time to reflect on the process. How did the PADI framework help you understand and address the issue? How can you use this framework in other areas of your life?

When we have a structured way of solving our problems, we experience less stress. Having a clear and actionable approach to dealing with challenges gives you confidence and a peace of mind to deal with life's challenges.

The ABCDE Method

The next problem solving method we can use is the ABCDE method, which was created by psychologist Martin Seligman, a pioneer in the field of positive psychology.

This method offers us a practical roadmap for navigating challenges and generating proactive solutions. The acronym stands for:



Consequences

The emotional and behavioural results of your beliefs

Beliefs

Your interpretations and assumptions about the situation

Disputation

Challenging and reframing unhelpful beliefs

Adversity

The stressful situation or setback you're facing

Energisation

The constructive actions and attitudes that arise from adaptive beliefs

Adversity

The first step is to clearly define the adversity, or stressful situation, you're facing. Be specific and objective, sticking to the facts and avoiding interpretations.

Example:

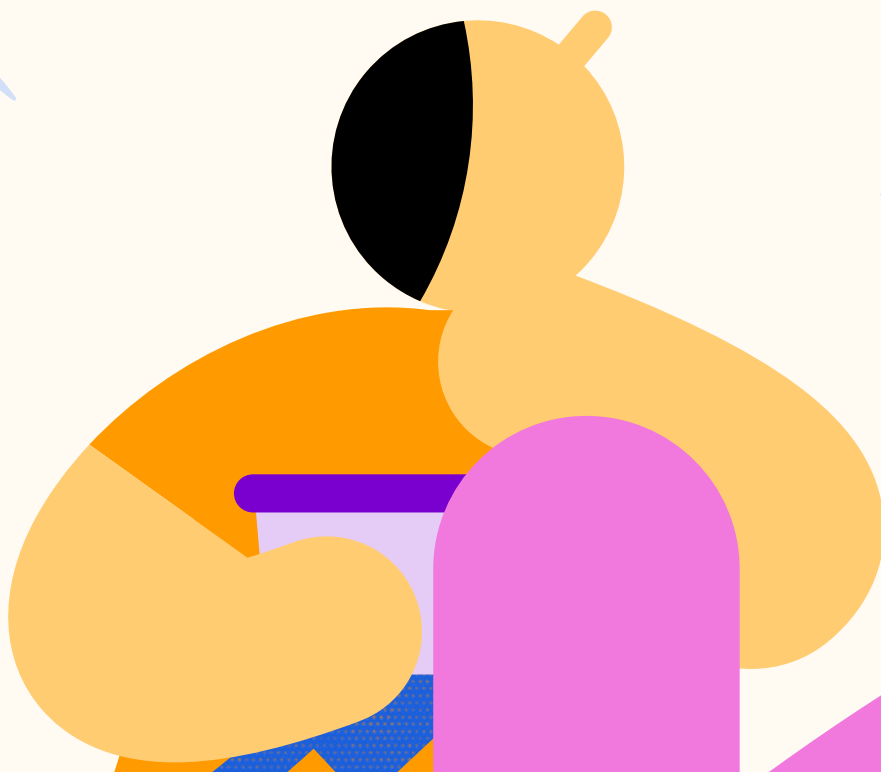
You were passed over for a promotion at work.

Ask yourself these questions to clarify the adversity:

- What exactly happened? Stick to observable facts.
- When and where did it occur?
- Who was involved? What did they say or do?
- What are the practical implications? Avoid catastrophising.



Write out a concise summary of the adversity you are facing, as if you were a neutral reporter.



Beliefs

Next, examine the beliefs and assumptions you're holding about the situation. These are the hidden lenses that colour your emotional and behavioural responses. Often, they are automatic thoughts that you have unconsciously absorbed over time.

In the example of being passed over for a promotion, beliefs might include:

- "I'm not good enough."
- "My hard work doesn't matter."
- "I'll never advance in my career."
- "My boss has it out for me."

To uncover your beliefs, ask yourself:

- What's your internal self-talk about the situation? What are you telling yourself it means?
- What worries or fears come up when you think about it?
- What assumptions are you making about yourself, others, or the future?



Write out your beliefs, however irrational they may seem. Seeing them in black and white helps separate yourself from these unhelpful beliefs.

Common stress-fuelling beliefs include:

- 1. Helplessness:**
"There's nothing I can do about this."
- 2. Hopelessness:**
"Things will never get better."
- 3. Self-Blame:**
"It's all my fault."
- 4. Other-Blame:**
"It's all their fault."
- 5. Catastrophising:**
"This is the worst thing that could happen to me."
- 6. Overgeneralisation:**
"This always happens to me."

Consequences

Now, consider how your beliefs about the situation are impacting you. What are the emotional and behavioural consequences of viewing the adversity through this lens?

In our example, beliefs like "I'm not good enough" and "I'll never advance in my career" would likely generate feelings of inadequacy, resentment, or discouragement. Behavioural consequences might include withdrawing from colleagues, slacking off on the job, or making self-deprecating remarks.

To understand the real-world impact of your beliefs, ask yourself:

- What painful emotions are your beliefs triggering?
- How are your beliefs influencing your actions? Are you withdrawing, lashing out, numbing your pain?
- What's the impact on your self-image, relationships, performance, and well-being?



Write out the emotional and behavioural impacts of your beliefs. How are they influencing your feelings and actions?

Disputation

This is where you start to loosen the grip of unhelpful beliefs and expand your view of the situation. Challenge stress-fuelling self-talk with evidence to the contrary. Dispute the negative assumptions and reframe adversity through a more balanced, empowering lens.

When we use disputation, it is not to sugarcoat the situation with positivity. We do it to adopt a wider, more constructive perspective that acknowledges the grain of truth in stress-fueling thoughts, while also highlighting our strengths, opportunities, and choices. We are not denying adversity, but we are shifting our mindset to enable us to move forward in our lives.

Ask yourself these questions to loosen the grip of unhelpful beliefs:

- Is this belief factually true? What's the evidence for and against it?
- Is there another way to interpret the situation?
- What would I tell a friend who is in this scenario?
- What are some of my strengths and past successes that argue against this negative belief?
- Even if there's some truth to this belief, what constructive action can I take?



Write out 3-4 disputations for your key negative beliefs. Aim for a believable, balanced perspective.

In the example about a job promotion, disputing beliefs might sound like:

"Missing out on this promotion doesn't mean I'm not good enough—I've contributed a lot and have areas to learn. My boss gave some specific feedback I can act on. I'm disappointed, but this setback doesn't define my worth or potential. With continued growth, future opportunities will come."



Energisation

Finally, consider how your new, adaptive perspective on the situation can energise constructive action. Grounded in your disputations, what's one small step you can take to move forward?

The key is to channel insights from your disputations into concrete, doable behaviours. Being adaptable helps you be more effective and proactive.

Importantly, constructive action doesn't just improve your external situation—it shifts your internal landscape. Taking even a small step forward builds momentum and confidence. You start to reinforce the belief that you can handle life's challenges and access your resilience. You recognise yourself as the empowered author of your story.



Write out 2-3 specific, realistic actions you will take to address your adversity in light of your new perspective.

In the job promotion example, energising actions might include:

- Scheduling a follow-up meeting with the boss to discuss growth areas and set development goals.
- Identifying a skill to build and enrolling in relevant training.
- Volunteering for a stretch project to gain new experience.
- Seeking mentorship from a colleague who has been promoted.
- Updating your resume and strategically networking for opportunities.



ABCDE Method Practice: Mapping Your Problem-Solving

Consider a stressor you're currently facing, large or small. Move through the ABCDE process step-by-step, using the prompts below. You can repeat this practice any time you feel stuck in a stress cycle and want to mobilise your problem-solving.

Adversity

Summarise the stressful situation objectively. What are the facts?



Beliefs

Write out the beliefs and assumptions you're holding about the situation. What's your internal self-talk?



Consequences

Describe the emotional and behavioural impacts of your beliefs. How are they influencing your feelings and actions?



Disputation

Challenge and reframe unhelpful beliefs. What's the evidence for and against them? What alternative perspectives could you take?



Energisation

Identify constructive actions you can take in light of your disputations. What small step would be good to take right now?





Reflect on the ABCDE Method

What was your experience using the ABCDE method? Do you find yourself more energised to go out and face your problems?



As you practise these problem-solving techniques, you'll notice that you have gotten better at protecting your seedling of mental wellness. Remember, you can't always avoid problems, but you can approach them with confidence in your ability to find solutions.

Each time you use the PADI Framework or the ABCDE Method, you're strengthening your problem-solving muscles and building your capacity to navigate life's challenges.

When to Seek Support

The PADI framework and the ABCDE Method are powerful tools for tackling everyday stressors. But sometimes, we run into challenges too complex to face alone. There's tremendous strength in knowing when to reach out for backup.

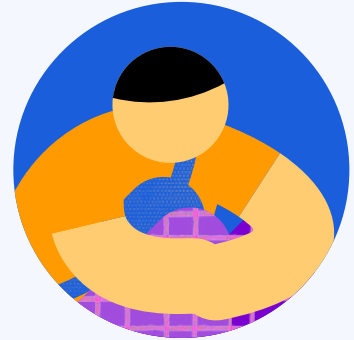
Consider seeking professional help if:



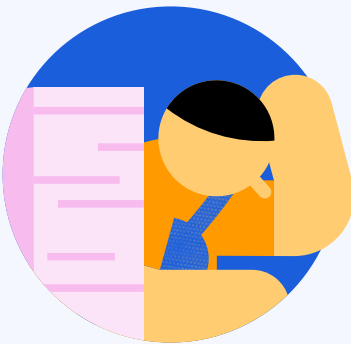
You're facing a major life event like divorce, job loss, serious illness, or death of a loved one



You've experienced trauma or abuse



You're struggling with a specific psychological disorder like clinical anxiety or depression



Stressors are significantly interfering with your daily functioning and self-care



You're using substances or other unhealthy means to cope



Your usual resilience practices aren't enough to manage distress

Reaching out to a counsellor or therapist isn't admitting defeat—it's recognising that we all need support sometimes to regain our footing and develop new coping skills. You don't have to figure it all out alone.

Even if your stressors don't rise to the level of needing professional help, consider confiding in a trusted friend, mentor, or spiritual advisor. Sometimes simply naming our challenges to an empathetic listener can lighten our burden and open up new possibilities we couldn't see on our own. Resilience is a team sport.

Building Resilience

When we face adversity, it is tempting to spiral into negative emotions and beliefs. We must strengthen our problem-solving skills with practice, and approach setbacks and challenges with growth in mind.

Remember, problem-solving isn't about having all the answers or fixing everything perfectly.

The PADI Framework and ABCDE Method is all about helping you access your own social support resources whenever you run into life's inevitable challenges. These skills help you focus on what you can control and spur you towards positive action.



Chapter 5

Mindfulness Techniques

*"Mindfulness isn't difficult.
What's difficult is to remember to
be mindful."*

— John Teasdale



Knowing problem solving techniques is only one piece of the puzzle. To put into practice what we learnt in the previous chapter, we need mental clarity. Practising the skills and techniques from the previous chapter can be hard when your mind is cluttered with all sorts of stray thoughts.

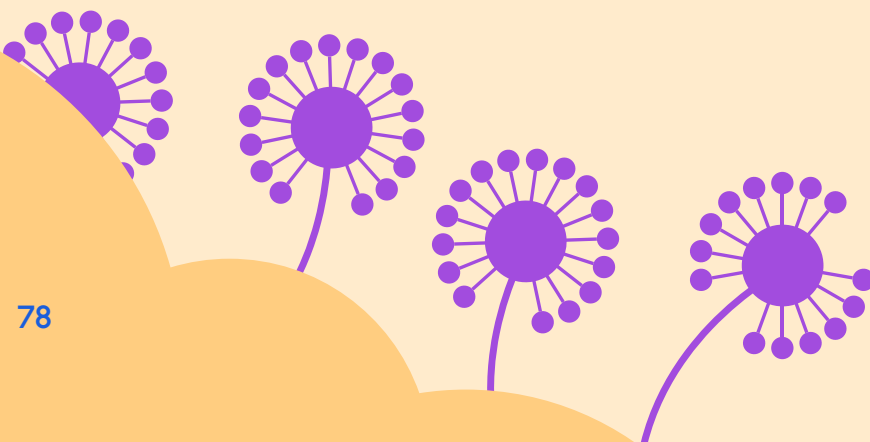
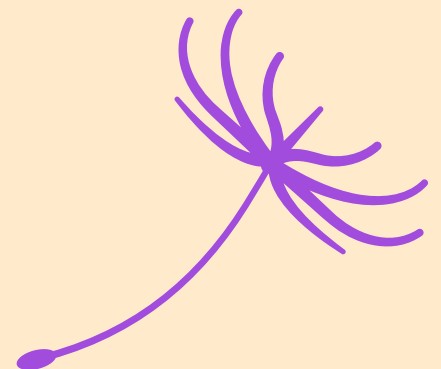
Let's go through several mindfulness practices which promote focus and open-mindedness, to help us gain the mental clarity to face life's problems and navigate complexities in our personal and professional lives.

As you become more mindful, your seedling of mental wellness will bloom into the light!

Mindfulness as a Secular Activity

Mindfulness might have roots in religious tradition, but it has been adapted and used by clinical psychologists to deal with a wide range of problems ranging from chronic pain to emotional issues.

Think of mindfulness as paying attention to the here and now, no matter what your beliefs are. As you grow more mindful of your environment and your own well-being, your seed of serenity will grow into a blooming flower of mental wellness!

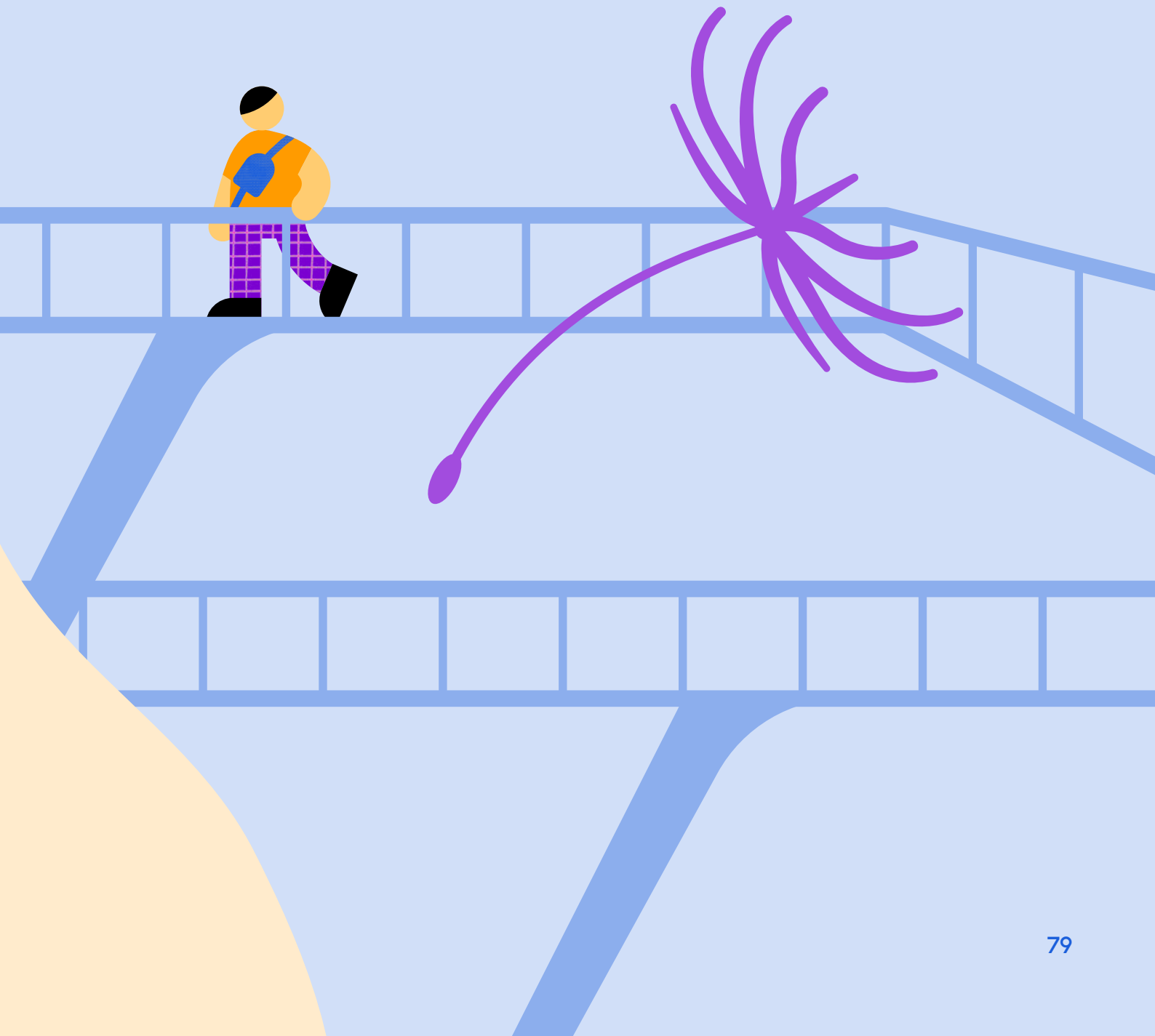


Living on Autopilot

It is easy to go through your day on 'autopilot', doing things without really being aware of them.

For example, you might be jogging but thinking about a work presentation or how to get your boss to notice your efforts. Or, when walking to work, you might be staring at your phone instead of noticing your surroundings.

When we live like this, we end up feeling numb, and miss out on the world around us. Mindfulness helps us break this habit, giving us the chance to connect to the world around us and enjoy all its beauty.



What is Mindfulness?

Different experts might define mindfulness in slightly different ways, but they agree that mindfulness includes the following:

Paying Attention

Actively tuning in to your full experience—your five senses, breath, thoughts, feelings—rather than operating on autopilot.

Being in the Present

Anchoring in what's happening now rather than dwelling in the past or future.

Being Intentional

Consciously choosing where to direct attention rather than being pulled around by every passing thought or distraction.

No Judgement

Noticing without labels of good or bad, right or wrong, fair or unfair—bringing an attitude of openness and curiosity.

Rather than being perpetually at the mercy of stressors, remember that you have space to choose your response. Mindfulness creates that space.

Instead of being riled up with each anxious thought or frustrating encounter, stop yourself from spiralling and tap into your inner wisdom instead.



"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

— Viktor Frankl, Holocaust Survivor

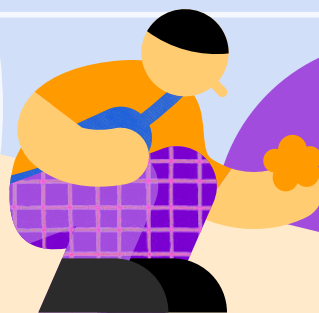
How Mindfulness Changes the Brain

Our brains are amazing and can change based on what we do and experience. Practising mindfulness can help these changes happen, leading to better emotional balance, more self-compassion, and true happiness. It can also help reduce the impact of stress and trauma.



How to Practise Mindfulness

Mindfulness means being fully aware of what's happening in the present moment. There are two main types of mindfulness practices: formal and informal.



Formal Practices

Formal Practices are specific exercises you set time aside for. Here are three you can try:

Body Scan

Focus on different parts of your body and notice how they feel

Mindfulness Meditation

Sit or lie down and concentrate on your breathing

Mindful Movements

Do slow, deliberate movements while paying full attention to them

These exercises train your mind and body to stay calm and focused, especially during stressful times.

Informal Practices

Informal Practices are simple ways to bring mindfulness into your daily life without needing extra time. Here are a few examples:

Mindful Eating

Pay full attention to the taste, texture, and smell of your food


Mindful Walking

Notice how your body moves and what you see around you as you walk

Mindful Waiting

Use times when you're waiting to focus on your surroundings and your breath

Mindfulness is about actively engaging with what you're doing and experiencing, rather than just going through the motions. It helps you be present and make the most of every moment. By adding both formal and informal mindfulness practices into your life, you can become more aware, balanced, and happier.



Treat yourself like a tender seedling, and shower yourself with intentional care and love through exercising mindfulness!

Just like any flower, care and effort is needed to make your mental wellness bloom!

Exercise: Coping Breathing Space

Let's try the Coping Breathing Space. This is a 3-minute mindfulness exercise based on the work of Segal, Williams, and Teasdale (2013). This mini-meditation is particularly useful for managing difficult emotions or experiences as they arise. Practising this exercise 2-3 times a day can help you access it more easily during challenging moments.

By regularly practising the Coping Breathing Space, you can better manage stress and difficult emotions, enhancing your overall mental wellness.

Presence

1. Start by adopting an erect and dignified posture.
2. If possible, close your eyes and turn your attention inward.

Awareness

1. Become aware of your body and the surface you are sitting or standing on.
2. Notice the sensations in your body, from your feet all the way to your head.
3. Ask yourself: "What is my experience right now in my thoughts?"



Breath

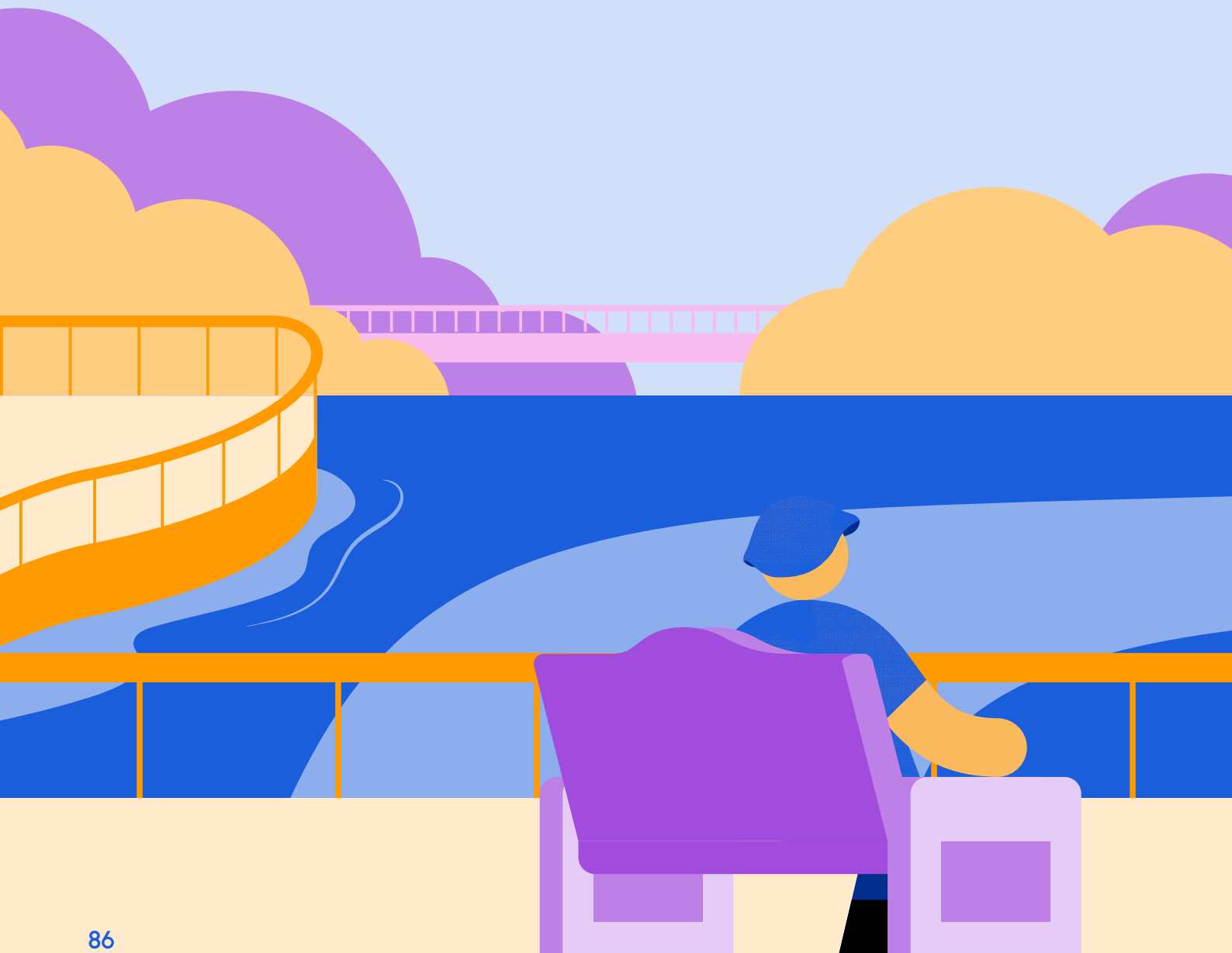
1. Gently redirect your full attention to your breathing.
2. Observe each in-breath and out-breath as they follow one another.
3. Notice the rising and falling of your belly with every breath.
4. Use your breath as an anchor to bring you into the present moment.

Consciousness

1. Expand your awareness to include the whole body, from head to feet.
2. Be aware of your breath as it moves throughout your body.
3. This expanded awareness helps you step out of difficult feelings and return to a state of calm.

Exercise: Sitting Meditation

When practising sitting meditation, it's beneficial to adopt an erect and dignified posture, where your head, neck, and back are aligned vertically (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). This posture supports mindfulness and attentiveness. Sitting meditation can be done on a chair or on the floor.

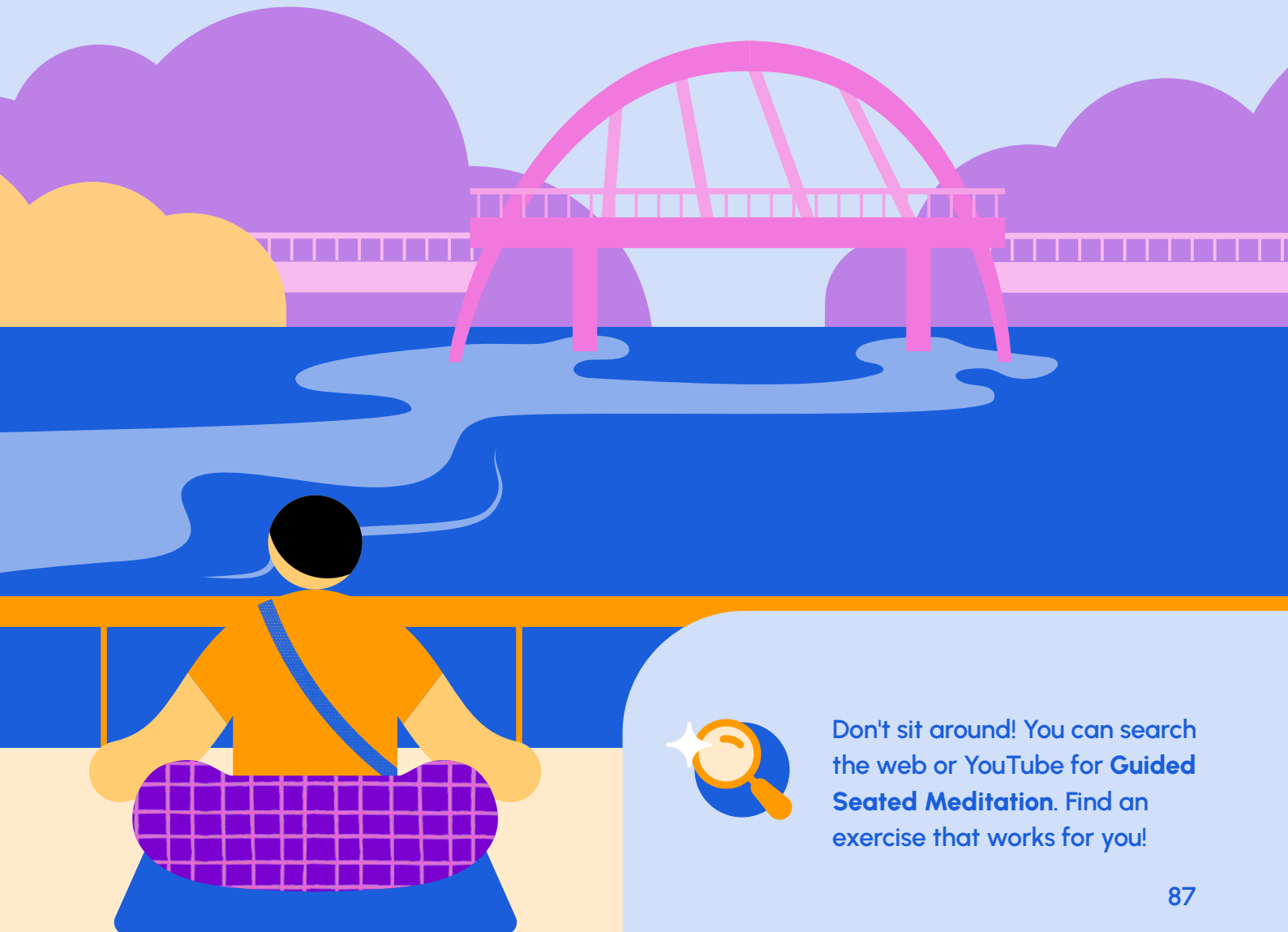


Sitting on a Chair

- 1 Sit with your back away from the chair to maintain an upright posture.
- 2 Ensure your feet are flat on the ground and your legs are at a right angle.

Sitting on the Ground

- 1 Use a cushion or yoga block to raise your buttocks about 5-10 cm off the floor. This helps in maintaining an erect posture.
- 2 Choose a comfortable sitting position. Sitting on the floor can enhance the feeling of being "rooted," but it is not mandatory.



Don't sit around! You can search the web or YouTube for **Guided Seated Meditation**. Find an exercise that works for you!

Exercise: Body Scan

Befriending Your Physical Experience

 Suggested time: 5-40mins

We often have an interesting relationship with our bodies. When we feel well, we tend not to give much thought to our physical state. It's usually only when we experience pain or discomfort that we pay attention.

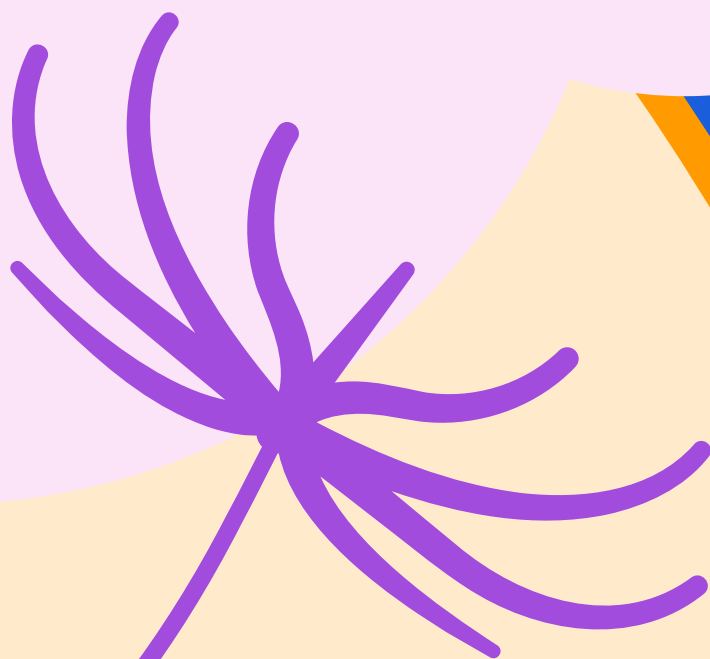
For instance, you might notice strained thighs after a weekend of exercise. Typically, we focus on the parts that hurt and ignore the rest of our bodies.

The body scan meditation helps us reconnect with our bodies and release stored emotions. This practice involves observing our bodies in contact with the environment—the clothes we wear, the furniture we sit on, or the weight of our body parts. Sometimes, you might feel numbness or lack of sensation in a body part. When this happens, remain curious and open without judgement.



During the body scan, remain present and non-judgmental. Let go of thoughts and impulses to move. By regularly practising the body scan, you can deepen your connection with your body and enhance your ability to release stored emotions, leading to greater relaxation and mental well-being.

A body scan can be anywhere from 5-40 minutes. Like mindful breathing, it's most powerful when practised daily, training you to be at home in your body amidst both comfort and discomfort. You can find many free guided body scan recordings online.



Deepen your connection to your body by scanning the web or YouTube for resources or videos on a **Guided Body Scan**.

Exercise: Mindful Walking

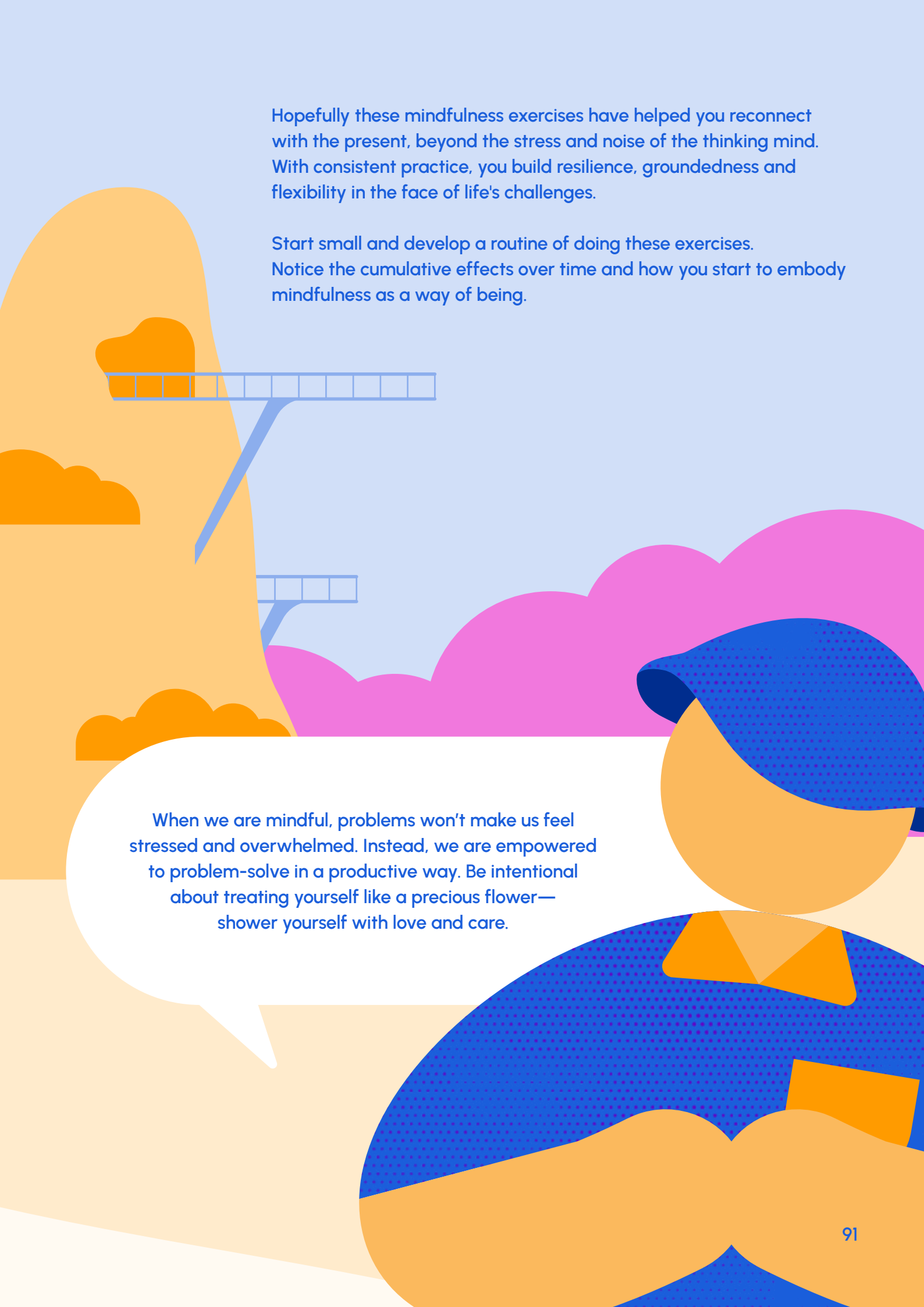
 Suggested time: 20-45mins

Mindful walking is a great alternative to sitting meditation, especially if sitting still makes you uncomfortable or anxious. The goal of this exercise is to develop awareness of the present moment. Keep your eyes open for safety. Mindful walking helps you connect with the present moment, making it a powerful practice for enhancing mindfulness and reducing stress.

Whatever movement you choose, the key is to go slowly, with full attention. Feel your feet contacting the ground, the subtle shifts of balance and gravity in the body, the flow of the breath. Notice when the mind wanders and gently bring it back to sensations in the body. Sync your breath with your movements, finding an easy, unforced rhythm.



Start your journey towards mindfulness by searching the web or YouTube for a **Guided Mindful Walk** walkthrough.



Hopefully these mindfulness exercises have helped you reconnect with the present, beyond the stress and noise of the thinking mind. With consistent practice, you build resilience, groundedness and flexibility in the face of life's challenges.

Start small and develop a routine of doing these exercises. Notice the cumulative effects over time and how you start to embody mindfulness as a way of being.

When we are mindful, problems won't make us feel stressed and overwhelmed. Instead, we are empowered to problem-solve in a productive way. Be intentional about treating yourself like a precious flower—shower yourself with love and care.

Chapter 6

Embarking on Your Mental Wellness Journey



*"We are what we repeatedly do.
Excellence, then, is not an act,
but a habit."*

— Aristotle



Developing Healthy Habits

When it comes to managing stress and promoting well-being, there is no substitute for a strong foundation rooted in healthy habits. Mindfulness is just one of the very many healthy habits we can adopt to help grow our seedling of mental wellness.

A life without supportive routines leaves you vulnerable to stress, prone to crumble at the first sign of trouble. Solid habits will provide a deep well of resources, allowing you to face challenges with balance and resilience. The small choices you make each day around sleep, nutrition, movement, and rest add up, allowing your flower of mental wellness to flourish.

Building healthy habits isn't about drastic changes or rigid perfection. It's a gradual process of incremental gains that lead to transformative results. Experimenting with small shifts, noticing what nourishes your mental health, and practising sustainable self-care all contribute to your mental wellness. It's about progress, not perfection.

Before you leave the Garden, you'll learn to upgrade your habits, through self-awareness, self-compassion, and smart systems, so that your flower of mental wellness can continue to bloom and grow.





Habit Inventory Reflection

Review the major domains of self-care and tick where you'd rank your typical habits in each area—Poor, Fair, Good or Excellent:

| Steps | Poor | Fair | Good | Excellent |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|-----------|
| Sleep | | | | |
| Duration | | | | |
| Quality | | | | |
| Consistency | | | | |
| Nutrition | | | | |
| Wholesome Foods | | | | |
| Regular Meals | | | | |
| Mindful Eating | | | | |
| Exercise | | | | |
| Frequency | | | | |
| Intensity | | | | |
| Joy | | | | |
| Stress Management | | | | |
| Relaxation Practices | | | | |
| Work-Life Balance | | | | |
| Healthy Boundaries | | | | |

| Steps | Poor | Fair | Good | Excellent |
|-----------------------------|------|------|------|-----------|
| Relationships | | | | |
| Quality Time | | | | |
| Healthy Communication | | | | |
| Support | | | | |
| Physical Environment | | | | |
| Decluttering | | | | |
| Exposure to Nature | | | | |
| Pleasing Spaces | | | | |
| Recreation and Play | | | | |
| Hobbies | | | | |
| Laughter | | | | |
| Creative Expression | | | | |
| Spiritual Connection | | | | |
| Stillness | | | | |
| Connection | | | | |
| Acts of Service | | | | |

Make note of areas ranked Poor or Fair. How are these habits holding you back or adding to your stress? Reflect on experiments you could run to shift these habits, drawing inspiration from the keystone habits above if helpful.

Also notice areas marked Good or Excellent. These are bright spots to celebrate and build on. How could you further anchor or optimise these nourishing habits? Perhaps a 20-minute jog becomes a 30-minute combo run-walk accompanied by an inspiring podcast.

My Habit Upgrade Commitment

Based on your Habit Inventory Reflection, choose one keystone habit you'll focus on shifting in the coming weeks. Frame it as a concrete, measurable action you can take most days, e.g. "Get 7-8 hours of sleep nightly" vs just "Sleep more."

My keystone habit is:



Make an implementation plan for your new habit:

- 1** How will you remember and integrate the habit into your routine?

- 2** What obstacles might arise and how will you overcome them?

- 3** How will you celebrate small wins and hold yourself accountable?

- 4** What support or resources do you need to make this change?



Just like taking care of a flower, you need to take constant care of yourself. Continue developing good habits and improving yourself. You are worth the effort!



The Science of Behavioural Change

Changing habits is challenging because the behaviour has become easy and automatic. Despite this, you can replace unhelpful habits with beneficial ones using psychological principles. Here are some steps you can use to start building new good habits.

Make It Easy

The number one reason people fail to establish new habits is friction—too many steps between them and the desired behaviour. Willpower is a finite resource.



1

Decrease steps between you and the behaviour:

Want to read more? Keep a book on your nightstand.

Want to floss regularly? Store floss with your toothbrush.

2

Increase steps between you and the temptations:

Keep junk food out of the house and avoid time-wasting websites.

3

Prep your environment:

Lay out workout clothes the night before. Stock your kitchen with healthy snacks. Create friction for unwanted behaviours and remove it for desired ones.

4

Stacking existing habits into an existing routine:

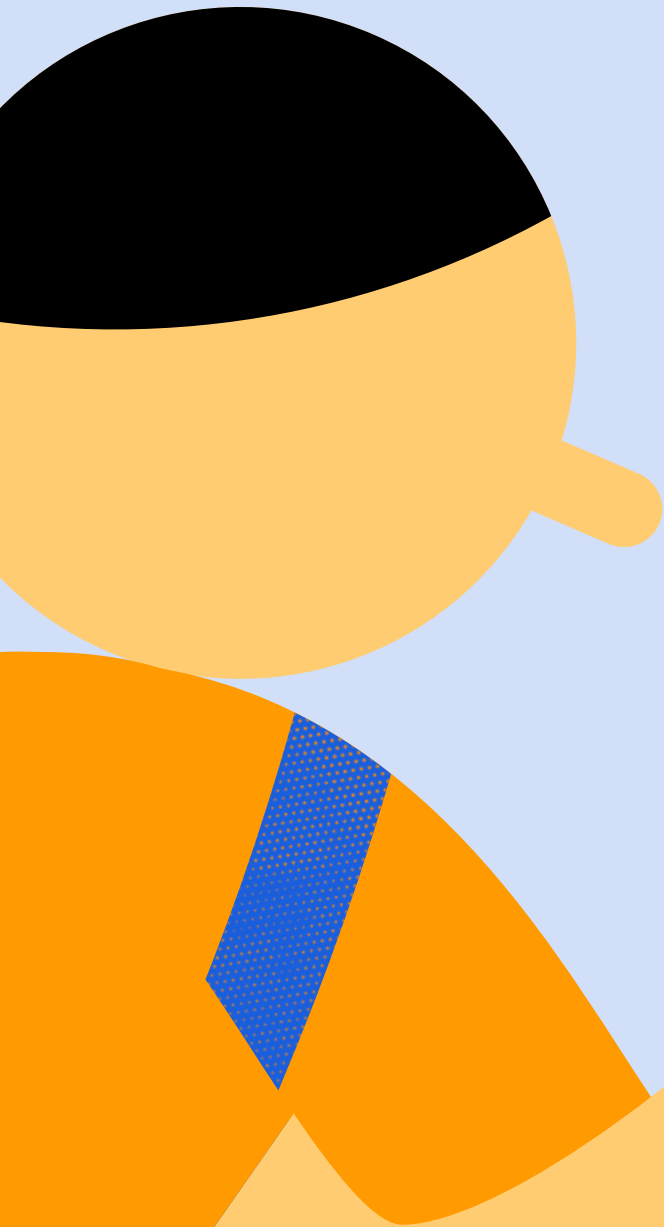
Make it more automatic by identifying a well-established habit (the anchor) and linking it with a new, small habit (the stack).

Start Small

When motivation is high, it's tempting to take on ambitious changes—exercise for an hour daily, meditate for 30 minutes, cook every meal from scratch. But small habits are more sustainable than large ones.

It's better to make micro-commitments you can realistically follow through on, than grand gestures that quickly fizzle out.

- 1 Scale down the habit to something that takes 2 minutes or less (e.g. do three pushups, read one page, take three mindful breaths).
- 2 Do the scaled-down version consistently until it feels automatic. Then gradually increase.
- 3 Focus on establishing the routine first, then optimising later. Better a small habit done consistently than a grand one done sporadically.



Celebrate Success

The habits that stick are ones that are intrinsically rewarding. If a behaviour makes you feel immediately good, you're more likely to repeat it. Yet many healthy habits (think flossing) aren't inherently enjoyable, at least at first. That's where celebration comes in.

Over time, as habits become ingrained, they'll generate their own internal rewards. The energy boost from exercise or calm from meditation will be their own incentive. But initially, intentional celebration accelerates habit formation.

- 1 Pair the habit with something you enjoy (e.g. listen to your favourite podcast while exercising).
- 2 Track your habit completion visually (e.g. mark calendar with X's, collect paper clips in a jar). Being able to see progress is motivating.
- 3 Share successes with an accountability buddy who will cheer you on.



Just like a strong tree, or a beautiful flower, growth is incremental and growth takes time. Trust in the process and slowly work towards your goals.

One day, you'll look back and be surprised by how far you have come!



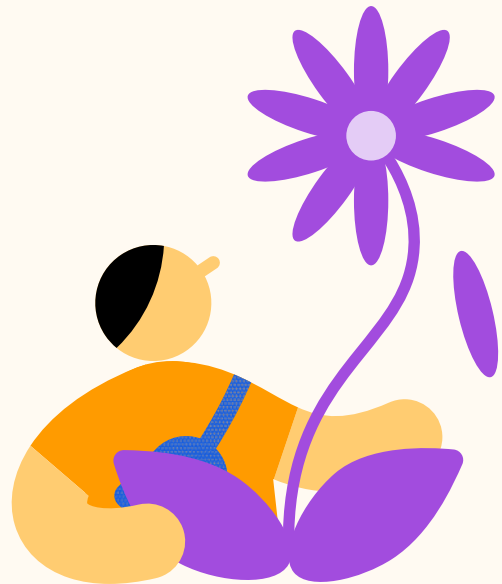
Finding Perspective and Sustaining Growth

It is easy to be demoralised when there are setbacks. Rather than fixating on the negatives, set yourself up for success. As you embark on habit change, a few key mindset shifts will serve you well:

1

Progress Over Perfection

You won't do your new habits every single day, and that's okay. Consistency matters more than perfection. If you slip up, simply notice, recommit, and carry on.



2

Journey Before Destination

Fixating on outcomes (e.g. weight loss) attaches your self-worth to external markers. Instead, focus on showing up for the daily process. Find joy and pride in honouring your commitments to yourself.

3

Self-Compassion Over Criticism

Beating yourself up over setbacks only undermines motivation. Speak to yourself like you would a good friend—with understanding and encouragement. Prioritise learning over judgement.



4

Addition Over Subtraction

Framing habits in terms of what you're getting (e.g. more energy) vs what you're giving up (e.g. less Netflix) fosters an abundance vs deprivation mindset. Look for the value-add in each habit.

Over time, as you repeat these small routines, then your daily habits will become a source of strength, forming a scaffold that will support through stress and setbacks. Habit by habit, choice by choice, you'll build the resilient foundation for mental and physical well-being.

Developing healthy habits strengthens resilience and enhances mental well-being. Start small, build on existing routines, and celebrate progress to make healthy behaviours automatic and rewarding over time.

Regular Review

Get in the habit of regularly reviewing your keystone habits and making tweaks as needed.

Notice how positive habits in one area generate positive ripple effects in others. Most importantly, approach habit formation as an act of self-care vs self-control. You're not forcing yourself into a regimented lifestyle—you're intentionally choosing routines that honour your well-being.



With strong baseline habits in place, you have a deep well to draw upon in times of stress. Small routines lead to a strong foundation for mental and physical well-being. Review and adjust habits regularly, noticing positive impacts.

It is worthwhile to also note that although habits can be intentionally formed and incorporated into routines, beginning with a routine typically offers a structured method to develop and reinforce new habits.

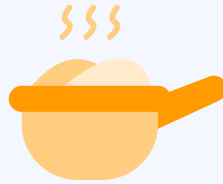
Design a Nourishing Routine

The way we spend our days significantly impacts our mental well-being over time. Which daily habits and routines make you feel stable and healthy?

Common elements of a mentally healthy lifestyle include:



Adequate sleep (~7 hours) with consistent sleep/wake times



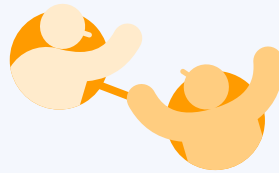
Nutritious meals, snacks, hydration



Physical movement suited to your body and preferences



Spending time in nature



Social connection



Mental stimulation and learning



Coping strategies like deep breathing or journaling



Something fun, creative, or personally meaningful



Time for reflection or spiritual engagement

Of course, every person's ideal routine will look different, and that's perfectly fine. What matters is tuning into what nourishes you.

Once a habit has been established and a routine formed, we can plan a Mental Wellness Day—a day with a structured schedule that includes activities and habits designed to enhance mental well-being.

Planning Your Mental Wellness Days

Sketch out a sample daily plan with space for the wellness-supporting activities that matter most to you.

| SUN | MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |

Include:

- What you'll do
- When you'll do it (pair with existing daily cues like meals when possible)
- Any needed supplies
- How you'll remind yourself or stay accountable

Try it out for a week, tracking your mood and making note of how you feel. Tweak as needed—it's an ongoing experiment.

Remember, nourishing routines aren't about perfection or checking boxes. They're about taking care of yourself like you would for a beloved friend—with compassion, commitment, and curiosity about what works.

Trust in the Process

There will be days when you're flowing effortlessly with your practices, sensing yourself becoming more rooted and resilient. There will be other days when you backslide into old stress patterns, wondering if you've made any progress at all. Through it all, keep coming back to self-honesty, self-acceptance, and baby steps in an intentional direction.

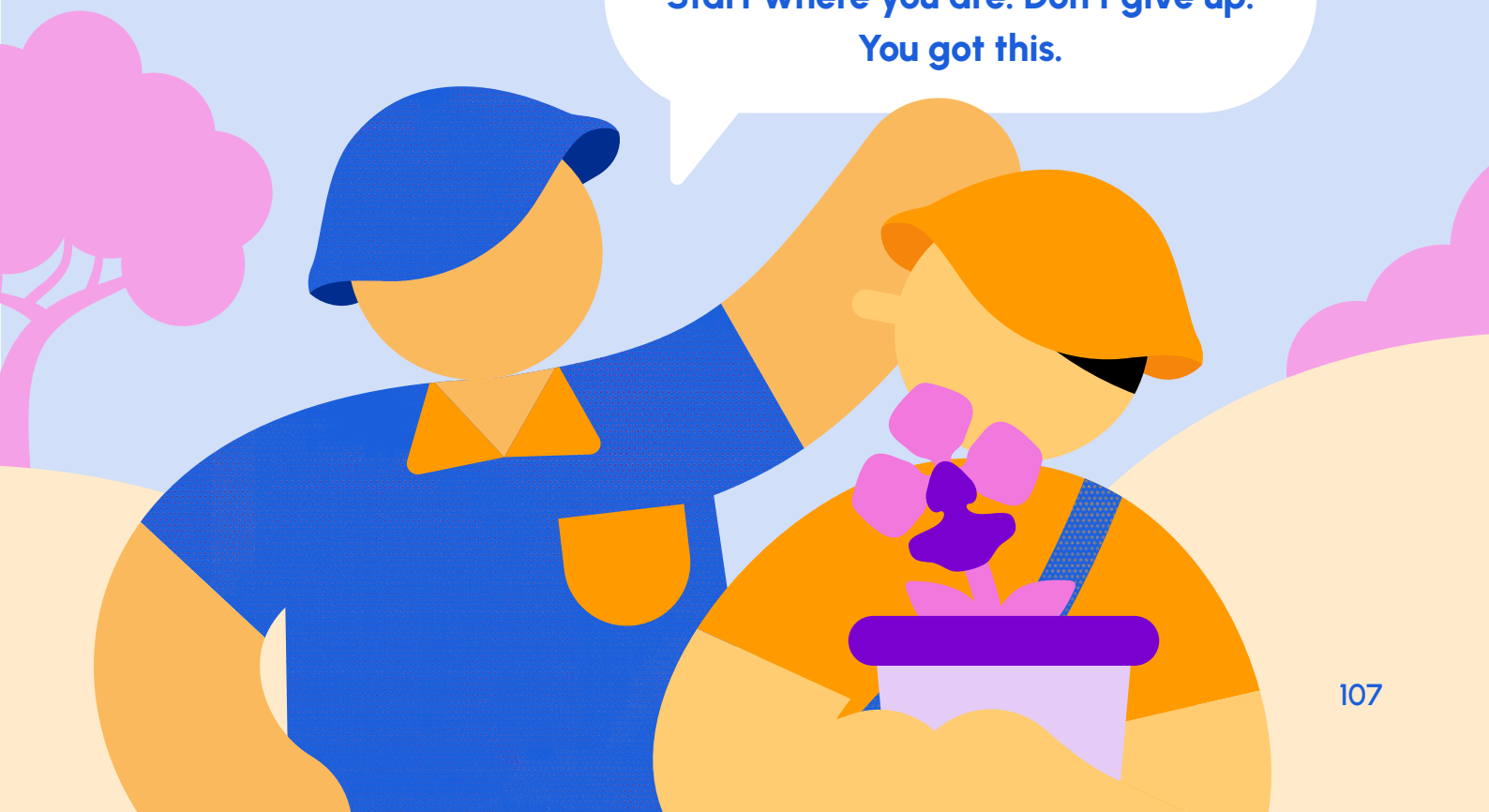
Trust that every mini effort toward wellness is moving you in a positive direction, even if the gains feel tiny. Those tiny daily choices—to pause and breathe, question an anxious story, prioritise sleep, reach out for support—are the humble building blocks of lifelong growth and well-being.

Also remember that you're not alone on this path. Your friends, your family, and even community members or professionals can all help you in your journey towards mental wellness.

This isn't about reaching some end state of perfection. It is about gradually, imperfectly cultivating your mental wellness. It is a continuous process of training to care for yourself.

Just like a flower, your seed of serenity needs constant attention and care. But at the end of it all, you will be rewarded with a happy and fulfilling life!

**Trust the process.
Start where you are. Don't give up.
You got this.**



Chapter 7

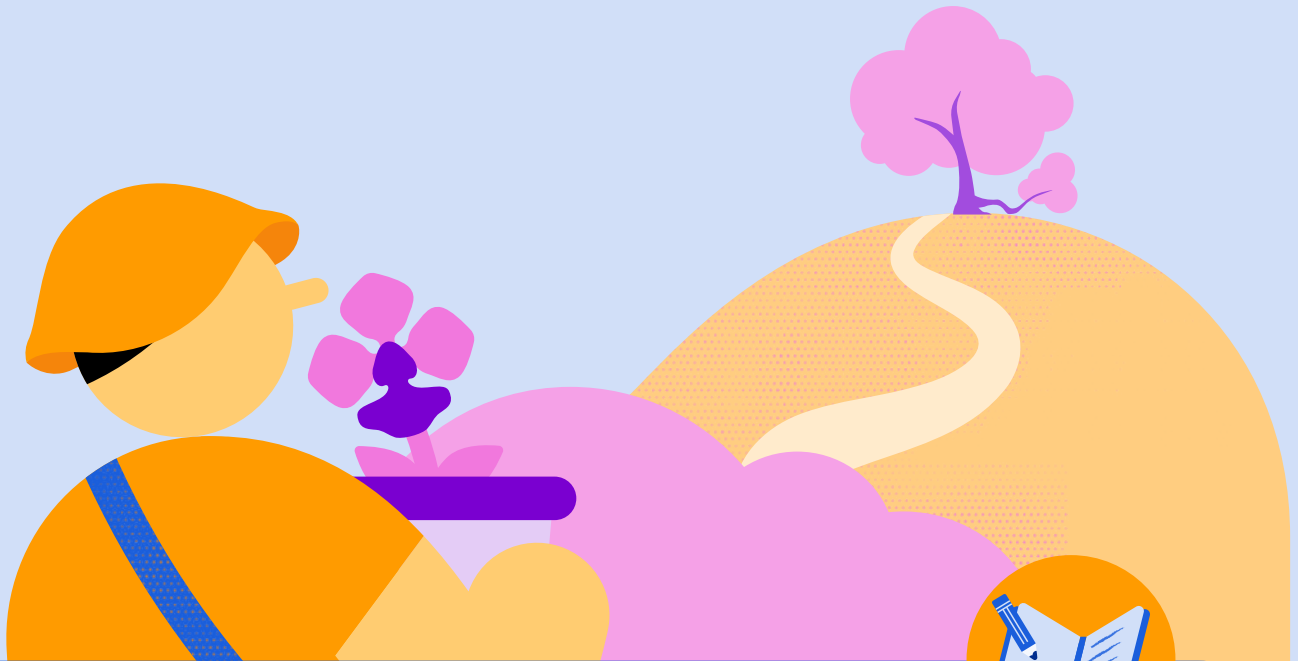
Resources for Continued Growth





The Journey Doesn't End Here

This chapter provides a curated list of resources to support your ongoing mental wellness journey. These books, workbooks, podcasts, apps, and professional services offer diverse tools and perspectives to deepen your understanding and practice. Remember, not every resource will resonate with everyone—feel free to explore and find what works best for you.



Recommended Workbooks

- 1** **The Anxiety and Worry Workbook: The Cognitive Behavioral Solution** by David A. Clark and Aaron T. Beck
- 2** **The Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Workbook** by Matthew McKay, Jeffrey C. Wood, and Jeffrey Brantley
- 3** **The Self-Compassion Workbook** by Kristin Neff
- 4** **The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety** by John P. Forsyth and Georg H. Eifert
- 5** **The Resilience Factor: 7 Keys to Finding Your Inner Strength** by Karen Reivich and Andrew Shatté



Recommended Books

- 1** **Full Catastrophe Living**
by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- 2** **Self-Compassion**
by Kristin Neff
- 3** **The Happiness Trap**
by Russ Harris
- 4** **The Power of Now**
by Eckhart Tolle
- 5** **Man's Search for Meaning**
by Viktor Frankl
- 6** **The Gifts of Imperfection**
by Brené Brown
- 7** **The Upside of Stress**
by Kelly McGonigal



Recommended Podcasts

- 1** **The Happiness Lab**
with Dr. Laurie Santos
- 2** **Ten Percent Happier**
with Dan Harris
- 3** **The One You Feed**
with Eric Zimmer
- 4** **Unlocking Us**
with Brené Brown
- 5** **The Daily Meditation Podcast**
with Mary Meckley
- 6** **The Mindset Mentor**
with Rob Dial



Websites and Apps

- 1** **Headspace:**
Guided Meditation App
- 2** **Calm:**
Meditation and Sleep App
- 3** **Insight Timer:**
Free Library of Guided Meditations
- 4** **Happify:**
Science-based Activities and Games for Mental Wellness
- 5** **Talkspace:**
Online Therapy Platform
- 6** **BetterHelp:**
Online Counselling Platform
- 7** **Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR):**
Online Courses



Seeking Professional Help

1

MINDSG:

Includes self-administered tools and more information on mental health



Scan here or visit www.healthhub.sg/programmes/mindsg/discover

2

Portal for Mental Health Services



Scan here or visit www.supportgowhere.life.gov.sg/categories/mental-health

Parting Message

The landscape of mental health and personal growth is vast and varied. I hope the tools and exercises I have introduced in this book have given you a better idea of how to navigate your way through this landscape.

Stay true to your needs and values. Follow your interests and inclinations. Experiment with different modalities and tools to discover what fits you best in different contexts.

As you engage these resources, consider how you might share your journey and learnings with others. Could you teach a friend or family member a resilience skill you've found helpful?

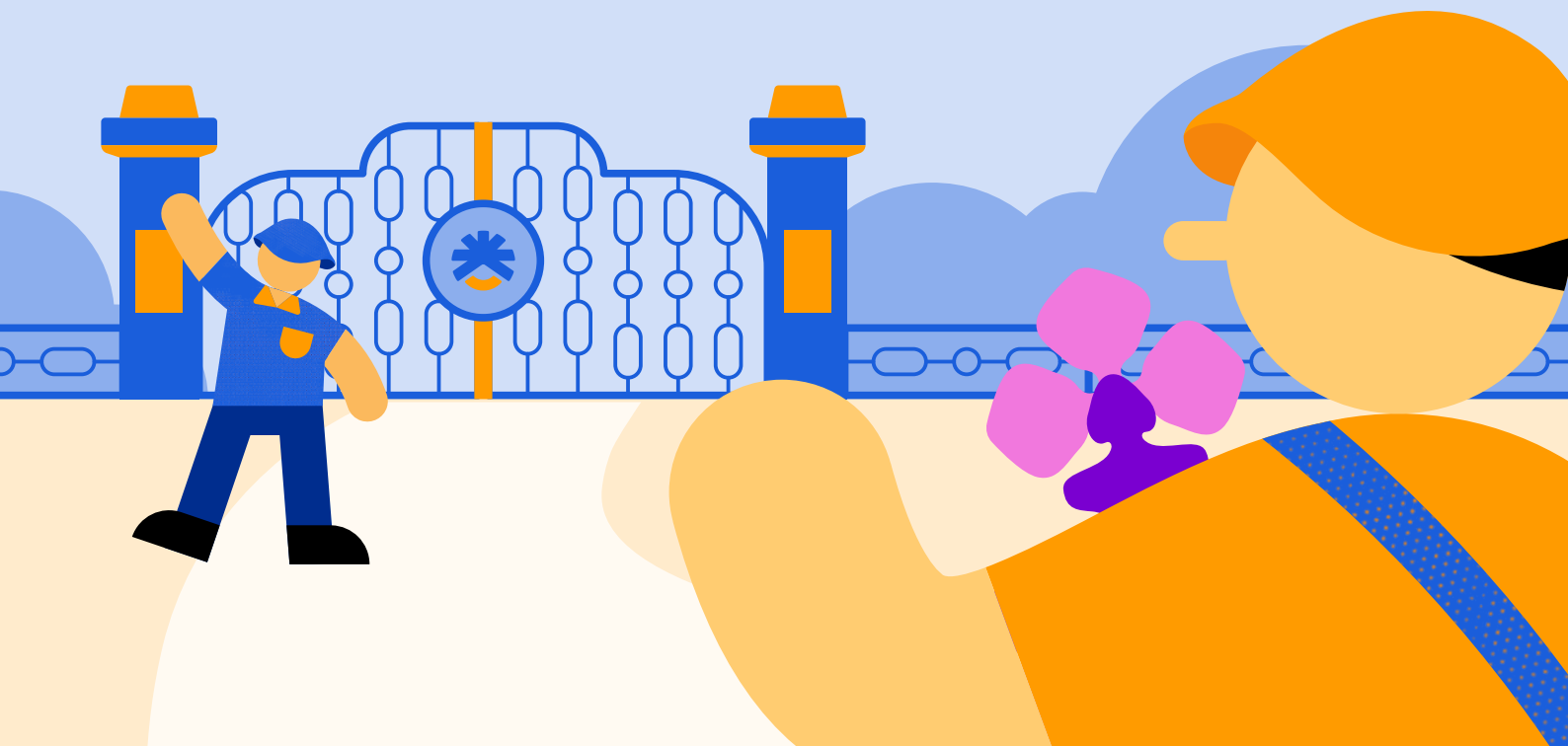
By discussing your experience and insights, you open space for authentic connection and normalise the pursuit of mental wellness. You never know what a simple sharing might spark for someone else. In this way, your individual growth helps shape our collective culture. By developing our own resilience and lifting up mental health in our communities, we co-create a world more hospitable to the full human experience.

By planting your seed of serenity and cultivating it, day after day, into a full-bloom flower of mental wellness, you're participating in the most worthwhile work there is: becoming ever more present, compassionate, and wholehearted in a world that often pushes us towards fragmentation and stress.



So, continue to begin
where you are,
with great kindness.
Keep reaching out.

With care,
James.



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About Allkin Singapore

Founded in 1978 as Singapore's first family service centre, Allkin Singapore is a community-centric social service agency that believes everyone has the potential to create positive change, regardless of age, race, or background.

Through our service offerings, strategic partnerships, and community initiatives, we unlock opportunities for vulnerable individuals and families to overcome life's challenges, build a brighter future, and inspire others to do the same.

