

Coping with Stress Workbook



*“There are two ways of spreading light. To be the candle, or the mirror that reflects it.” –
Edith Wharton*



It's completely normal to have a strong reaction to abnormal events. A global pandemic can most definitely be considered an abnormal event. It's created a massive shift in the way we live our lives, interact with each other and on some days, our sense of personal safety in the world may be altered.

So, if you're missing your friends or family members, feel worried, frustrated, uncertain about the future, maybe even sometimes lonely and sad: **You are not alone.** These are all valid emotions and it's helpful to talk about them to trusted loved ones. Sometimes just talking about how you feel can boost your mood and lower anxiety, even if there's no immediate solution to the problem.

This booklet offers you additional information and resources to help you manage stress and any negative emotions you may be experiencing during this difficult time. Emotions experienced with low mood and anxiety tend to overlap, as do the methods which help. For this reason, the activities in the handout can be helpful for both.

Why it's Important to Manage Stress

A little bit of stress isn't that bad for us, as long as we know there's an endpoint to the stress and we have the resources and confidence in our ability to cope with it. If we feel overwhelmed by stress and we run out of coping strategies, it can lead to feelings associated with anxiety and low mood.

Physical Reactions to Extended Periods of Stress

Sometimes if we feel unable to cope with a situation, we may experience fear and a strong physical reaction. When we become very anxious our body prepares itself for some form of physical action, often called the "Flight-Fight" reaction. As the body prepares itself we may notice a number of physical changes such as:

- shortness of breath
- tight chest
- dizziness or light-headedness
- palpitations (racing heart)
- muscle pain, especially head and neck pain
- shakiness
- sweating
- dry mouth



Managing Physical Reactions to Stress

Sometimes it can be hard to think clearly if we're experiencing an intense physical reaction to stress. If you've experienced this, you may have found that your thoughts get jumbled and it's hard to concentrate. This is completely normal due to heightened cortisol levels and because your body is diverting its energy from the thinking parts of your brain to the part of your brain that's required for movement, so you can "fight or flight".

As such it can be helpful to try the following techniques to help get your body back into a more relaxed state.

5,4,3,2,1 Grounding Technique

- What are 5 things you can see in the room you're in? (e.g, plants, pet...)
- What are 4 things you can feel on your body? (e.g., the ground under your feet, ring on your hand etc.)
- What are 3 things you can hear? (e.g., traffic outside, music)
- What are 2 things you can smell? (e.g., cooking or perfume)
- What is 1 thing you can taste? (e.g., toothpaste)
(if you can't smell or taste anything, think about your favourite scents and tastes).

Breathing Exercises

Shoulder Role Breathing

Choose a comfortable sitting position. As you take a slow deep breath in through your nose raise your shoulders up towards your ears. Breathe slowly out through your mouth, lowering your shoulders as you exhale. Repeat slowly, rolling your shoulders up and down in time with your breath.

Bumblebee Breathing

Sitting comfortably, gently place the tips of your pointer fingers in your ears and close your eyes. Breathe in through your nose and then hum quietly as you slowly breathe out.

Controlled Breathing

- Close or lower your eyes and put your hand on your stomach
- Breathe in for the count of 10. As you breathe in try and raise your hand with your stomach, as though all the air is being breathed in through your stomach muscles
- Hold your breath for 2 seconds
- Purse your lips like you're blowing through a straw
- Slowly breathe out for the count of ten. Feel your hand lower on your stomach muscles. Repeat this style 3 times

Mindfulness Activities

Mindfulness is simply about where we put our attention. The goal is to shift the focus from our thoughts (e.g., from worrying about what happened yesterday or what may happen tomorrow) and focus our here and now experience. Mindfulness focuses on the senses (much like the 5,4,3,2,1 exercise).

Mindful Eating:

Next time you're eating something, ask yourself the following questions before you eat:

- What does the food look like, what colour is it?
- What's the texture? If you're eating something with your hands, take a moment to concentrate on what it feels like.
- What does it smell like?

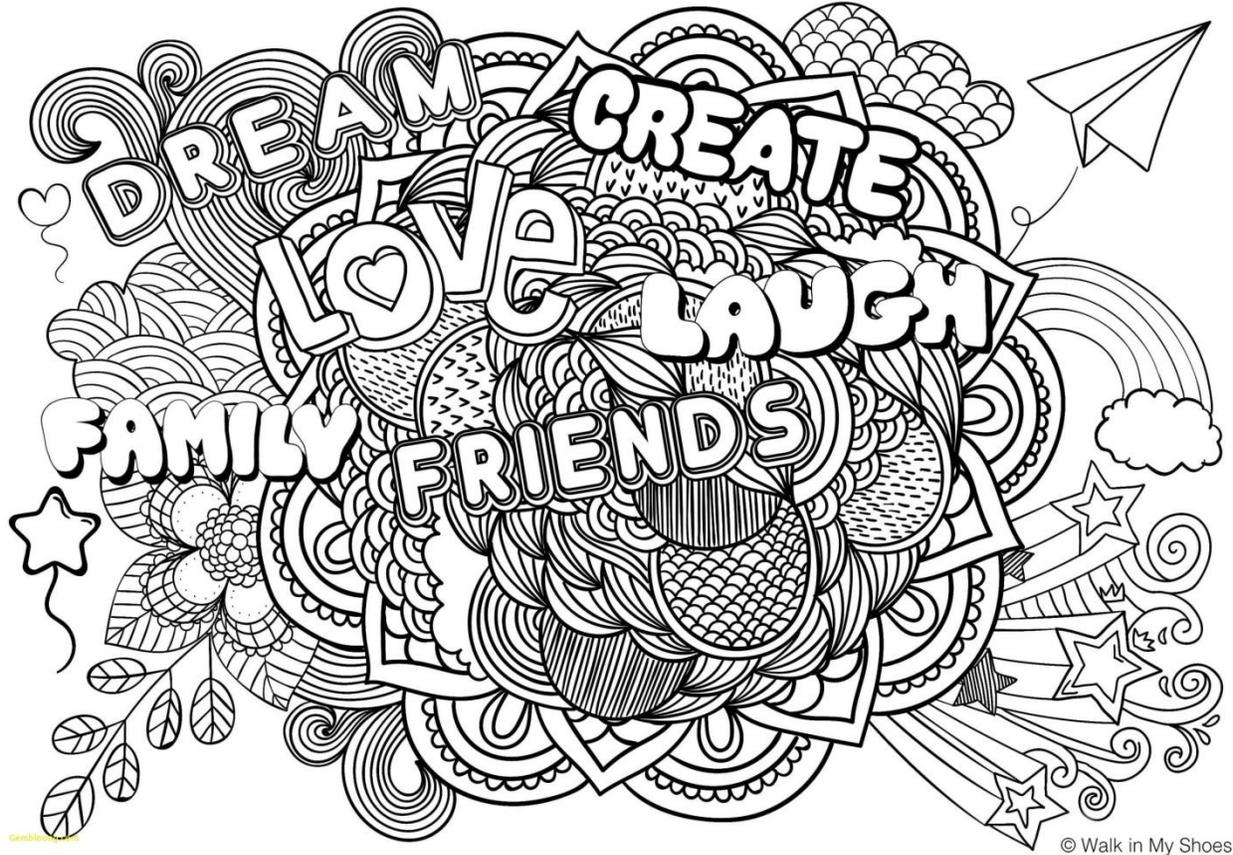
Now take your first bite:

- Chew very slowly, noticing the actual sensory experience of chewing and tasting. Remember, you don't need to think about your food to experience it. You might want to close your eyes for a moment to focus on the sensations of chewing and tasting, before continuing.
- Notice the texture of the food; the way it feels in your mouth.
- Notice if the intensity of its flavour changes, moment to moment.
- Take about 20 more seconds to *very slowly* finish this first bite of food, being aware of the simple sensations of chewing and tasting.
- Repeat these actions for your subsequent bites.

Mindful Walking

- As you are walking, pay attention to your breathing. Notice any sensations associated with breathing in and out. Pay attention to what parts of your body move as you breathe in and out.
- Now expand your awareness to the physical sensations in your body. Notice what it feels like on the bottom of your feet with every step you take. Pay attention to the feelings in your muscles as you walk.
- Bring your attention to your ears, noticing all the sounds that you hear around you as you walk. Are the sounds close or far away? What can you hear?
- Now pay attention to what you see around you. Notice any different colours that you see. Notice what the sky looks like and what you might see in the distance.
- Finally, bring awareness to what you feel. Notice if you feel a breeze on your face or hands as you walk.

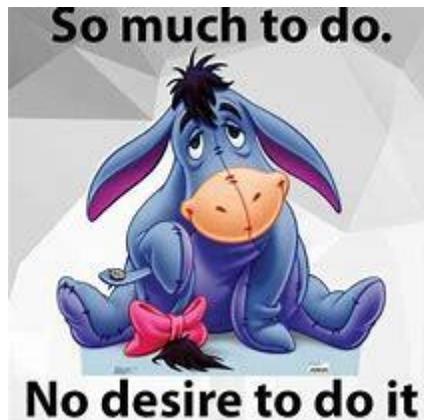
Mindful Colouring Activity



© Walk in My Shoes

Remember, with all mindfulness activities it's helpful to try and *not judge* what you're experiencing. It's normal for our thoughts to wonder, and if you notice this happening, be kind to yourself, notice the thought and shift your attention back to the sensations you're focusing on. It takes practice, so don't be hard on yourself if your thoughts take over in the beginning.

Behavioural Reactions to Stress



- Eating too much or too less
- Sleeping too much or too less
- Not wanting to talk to anyone
- Putting things off
- Nervous habits like fidgeting, hair pulling, unable to sit still
- Unable to concentrate

Sometimes we can manage stress by changing our behavioural patterns. Eating a [balanced diet](#) and doing some form of cardio for even 20 minutes a day can boost our mood and lower anxiety.

Your *Summer Wellbeing Handout* highlights the importance of maintaining a [regular sleep pattern](#) and engaging in some form of [physical activity](#), so I encourage you to take a look and try it out.

Building in Positive Activities

Right now we're all limited in what we can and can't do, which may be frustrating, but it's helpful to try to increase opportunities to do things that you enjoy in a safe way. This could be:

- Skype/Facetime/WhatsApp with friends and family
- Creative activities (drawing, painting, cooking)
- Going for a social distancing walk
- Listening to music
- Watching your favourite movies

Daydreaming:

- Daydreaming about the kind of future you want for yourself is a really useful way to boost your mood. Don't set limits on what you'd like to do or where you'd like to live or travel to. Let your imagination run wild and try not to worry about logistics. You can always figure out later how you can achieve it, but for now it's your future and your daydream, so paint it anyway you want!

Gratitude:

- Experiencing gratitude is a very powerful tool for helping to boost mood. It helps us see what we have rather than what we're missing. Try making a list or verbalising what you're grateful for each morning before you start your day.

Do something nice for someone else:

- Acts of kindness makes us all feel good. It doesn't have to be a grand gesture, even just making a cup of tea or dinner for your family can be helpful. Or you might want to make a drawing/painting and send it to a care home to brighten up their space.

Be kind to yourself:

- We all need to practice a little self-care sometimes. It's how we heal and repair our bodies and minds from daily stressors.
- Our coping resources to stress are like a battery that needs to be charged. If you're having a bad day, it's ok to withdraw for a little bit and practice some self-care. Take a bubble bath, watch Netflix in bed, snuggle up with your pet, kick a ball around, laugh at TikTok videos, whatever you enjoy doing!

When I need to recharge I find it helpful to:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Remind yourself how amazing you are!:

- Everyone is good at something. You could say that everyone has a talent, or a **gift**. For some people that gift may be sports, kindness towards others, resourcefulness, understanding school work easily or an ability to make other people feel happy
- When we're feeling a bit stressed, it can be easy to underestimate our ability to cope and we might even start to feel really negative about ourselves and downplay the best parts of ourselves. This can leave us feeling hopeless and out of control. Given this, it's important to shift focus and remind ourselves that actually, we're pretty awesome and we're capable of more than we think we are. Try this activity if you need a reminder about how brilliant and resourceful you are:

My gifts are:

- *e.g., I'm really good at making my friends laugh*

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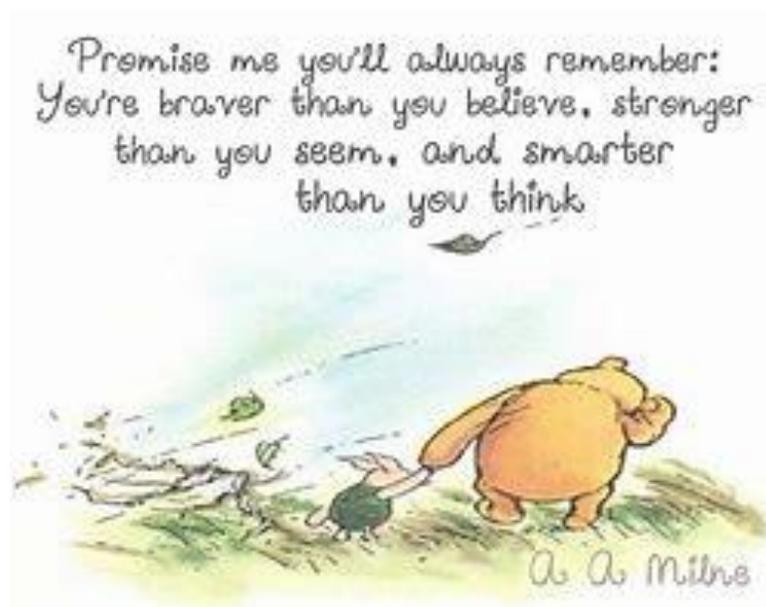
I can cope because I'm:

- *e.g., really brave at asking for help if I need it*

-
-

Remember, no gift is more valuable or important than another. Every gift is valuable.

Top Tip: It's sometimes hard to think about how brilliant we are, so it's helpful to ask trusted loved ones or friends why they think we're brilliant! You can also tell them why you think they're brilliant too!



Thinking Styles



Sometimes it's helpful to take a look at the way we think about things. How we think often affects the way we feel and vice-versa and it can become a vicious cycle. The goal is to break that cycle and examine the content of our thoughts and thinking styles.

Psychologists identified that there are a number of thinking styles which have a direct influence on our mood and anxiety levels. These are called **Cognitive Errors or Thinking Traps**:

TRAP 1: The **negative glasses** only let you see the negative things that happen.

Negative glasses find the things that went wrong or weren't quite good enough. Finding and remembering the negative things will make you think that things will always go badly, no matter what happens.

TRAP 2: Anything positive or good that happens is **rubbished** so that **positive experiences doesn't count**. Rubbishing anything positive as unimportant or lucky means that we don't acknowledge positive events or our own successes, never accepting that we can cope or believe that success is due to what we do.

TRAP 3: Negative things are **blown up** and become bigger than they really are. Blowing things up results in events becoming more frightening and scary.

TRAP 4: **Fortune telling** makes us think that we know what is going to happen. Typically, we also become **mind readers** who think we know what everyone else is thinking or feeling when we're fortune telling. This can negatively impact on how we interact with those around us and limit or increase our own sense of control over a situation.

TRAP 5: **Disaster thinking** makes us think that the worst thing we could imagine will happen. For example, expecting that if you do badly in one exam, your whole future is in jeopardy.

TRAP 6: Overgeneralising is when one experience becomes a blueprint for all experiences. For example, if you have one bad experience with a friendship, you might think all friendships are bad and will go badly in the future.

It's useful to examine our thoughts to try and see if we're experiencing thinking traps which may be negatively impacting on our mood and anxiety levels.

Thinking about Thinking

Write down some of the worrying thoughts you have. When you've written them down, see if the thoughts match with some of the thinking traps above and explore what an alternative thought might be. Rate your mood and worry level out of 10 before and after...what do you notice?

Example:

Thought	Thinking Trap(s)	Alternative Thought
<i>I had an argument with my best friend, now our friendship is over forever</i>	<i>Overgeneralising Disaster thinking Fortune Telling</i>	<i>We've had arguments before, but have made up eventually. It'll be ok if we talk to each other about what made us mad in the first place.</i>
<i>I only did well on that exam because it was easy, if the next one's hard I'll definitely fail</i>	<i>Rubbishing the positive</i>	<i>I did well because I studied really hard and asked for help when I didn't understand something in class. Most likely, the exam felt easy because I was so prepared for it.</i>

Tuning Out Negativity

During this time, it's very easy to get flooded with news and if we feel afraid it's very easy to focus on negative news. As such it's helpful to:

- Limit how much time you spend watching the news and select your news carefully. Twitter is not a trustworthy source of news!
- Limit how much time you spend talking about and responding to worrying events. It's easy to get caught in an echo chamber, which can increase false beliefs and worries surrounding them.
- Try to actively seek out and speak about the positive news stories that are happening right now all over the world. Turning our attention to happy news is a great mood booster.
- Be there for others but with caution! It's natural to want to be a comfort for others, but if you find yourself having conversations that leave you feeling drained or upset, maybe reevaluate what you can realistically offer and limit these interactions. You can always advise the other person about who they can turn to for the help that you can't provide such as their parents/guardian or pastoral support in school.

Limiting Social Media



Social scientists are figuring out that social media doesn't really make us feel good. Studies are showing that rather than help us feel connected, it's actually promoting feelings of loneliness, isolation, anxiety and low mood in teenagers. Given this, it might be helpful to limit the time you spend on social media and increase the real life interactions with your friends via skype/FaceTime/FaceTime Audio etc. Try it for a few days and see if you notice a difference.

Additional Resources:

If you need additional emotional support during this time, Reading Girls School have an onsite Mental Health Provision that is easily accessed via the Pastoral Support Team. Please contact Mrs. Jewell, Mrs. Hargreaves or Mrs. Gardner for more information.

External Resources

Childline - <https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/>

Childline Telephone Number - 0800 1111

NSPCC - <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/our-services/nspcc-helpline/>

NSPCC Telephone Number - 0808 800 5000

Young Minds - <https://youngminds.org.uk/>

MIND - <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

Internet Safety Resources

<https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/young-people/resources-11-19s>

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/?qclsrc=aw.ds>

