

50
ACTIVITIES
THAT CAN
CHANGE YOUR LIFE

DEVELOP MENTAL
HEALTH HABITS THAT
CAN LAST A LIFETIME

BY LAWRENCE E. SHAPIRO, PH.D.

50 Activities That Can Change Your Life

A Workbook of Psychological Assignments

By Lawrence E. Shapiro, PhD

Between Sessions Resources

50 Activities That Can Change Your Life: A Workbook of Psychological Assignments

by Lawrence E. Shapiro, PhD

Cover and interior design by Mike Canavan

© 2021 Between Sessions Resources

Permission is granted for the purchaser to copy these worksheets for personal or professional use, but not for resale. All other rights are reserved.

Disclaimer: This book is intended to be used as an adjunct to psychotherapy. If you are experiencing serious symptoms or problems in your life, seek the help of an experienced mental health professional.

Published by
Between Sessions Resources
Suite 467
1825 Ponce DeLeon Blvd
Coral Gables, Florida 11134

About the Author

Lawrence E. Shapiro, PhD, is a prolific author of self-help books and the inventor of more than 100 therapeutic games. Dr. Shapiro is known for his practical approach to helping others. He has written workbooks, storybooks, card games, board games, and smartphone apps. His work has been translated into twenty-seven languages.

Introduction

When most people think about seeing a psychotherapist or counselor, they think about meeting once or twice a week, talking about the things that bother them, and gradually developing an understanding of what they need to do to solve their problems and change their lives.

However, the process of change is not quite that simple.

Through decades of research, we know that the best way for people to address their psychological problems is by learning new ways to think, new ways to regulate their emotions, and new ways change their behaviors. This type of psychotherapy is called cognitive behavior therapy (CBT), and it is considered the most effective way to address problems like depression, anxiety, addictions, and more.

CBT works by teaching you new psychological skills through research-based techniques, and we have included the 50 most-prescribed CBT techniques in this workbook and in our *Therapist in Your Pocket* card deck. The cards describe each technique and give you an idea of how to use them. The worksheets will help you explore the technique more fully so that you can apply them to your daily life.

There is no right or wrong way to use the card deck and workbook. If you are seeing a therapist or counselor, they may prescribe certain cards and worksheets. This is a great way to learn psychological skills “between sessions.”

If you are not seeing a mental health professional, you can still derive a great deal of benefit from any of the 50 techniques. We encourage you to look through the cards, find a technique that seems to apply to your life, and then use the corresponding worksheet to further explore the technique and apply it to your individual situation.

I know that you will find many of the techniques useful, but I want to emphasize that if you are experiencing serious symptoms or problems in your life, you should seek the help of a mental health professional. Change is rarely easy, and you will want to get all the support you can if you or someone you care about is affected by emotional problems. If you are based in the USA, and you or someone you know needs mental health assistance right now, call the National Suicide Prevention Helpline on 1-800-273-TALK (8255). This free, confidential crisis helpline is available to everyone 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If you are in another country, you can go to www.befrienders.org to find a helpline near you.

I hope that you will find our card deck and workbook important tools in your journey toward a happy and fulfilling life.

Sincerely yours,

Lawrence E. Shapiro, PhD

Introduction	
Accept Your Distressing Thoughts	2
Act Opposite to Your Impulses	5
Ask for What You Want and Need	8
Build a Support System	11
Calm Yourself with Your Imagination	14
Control Your Urges	17
Create a Better Day	19
Develop Empathy	22
Develop Flexible and Compassionate Thinking	25
Develop a Growth Mindset	27
Develop Healthy Personal Boundaries	31
Develop a Self-Care Plan	34
Do One Thing Differently	38
Face Your Fears	43
Find Hope	46
Find Your Flow	51
Focus on Solutions	54
Ground Yourself When You Feel Disconnected	57
Identify Things That Trigger Your Problems	60
Identify Your Character Strengths	63
Imagine Your Best Possible Self	65
Improve Your Ability to Say No	68
Improve Your Self-Efficacy	72
Laugh	76
Learn Realistic Optimism	79
Learn to Interpret Nonverbal Communication	82
Learn to Negotiate	84
Let Go of Limiting Beliefs	89
Make Time to Move	95
Motivate Yourself to Change	97
Overcome Your Loneliness	100
Overcome Your Self-Sabotaging Behavior	104
Practice Active Listening	111
Practice Belly Breathing	115
Practice Daily Acts of Kindness	136
Practice Forgiveness	120
Practice the Habit of Gratitude	123
Practice Loving-Kindness Meditation	124
Practice Progressive Muscle Relaxation	129
Practice Radical Acceptance	131
Reduce Your All-or-Nothing Thinking	135
Reframe Your Negative Thinking	138
Regulate Your Moods with a Better Diet	141
Seek Awe	143
Setting your Goals	145
Stop Your Catastrophic Thinking	150
Take a Mindful Walk	154
Treat Yourself Like a Good Friend	156
Understand the Messages You Received as a Child	159
Use a Journal to Manage Emotions	164

Accept Your Distressing Thoughts

What to Know

Many people spend a lot of time and energy trying to get rid of their upsetting thoughts and worries. Not so long ago, psychologists encouraged people to change their thoughts by making them more rational and reality oriented or to just suppress them entirely with techniques like snapping a rubber band on their wrist and saying “Stop” in a loud voice. Although these techniques worked for some people, they tended to have only a temporary effect, and many found that their intrusive thoughts and worries would come back, often worse than before.

The newest research in helping people who are overwhelmed by their worries and intrusive thoughts is to encourage people to stop trying to get rid of them at all! This may seem strange, because it is probably the opposite of what you feel like doing, and that is why therapists call this the anxiety paradox. Therapists have discovered that the more you try to get rid of your thoughts, the harder it is to get rid of them. When you learn to accept them and detach from your thoughts, they will no longer have power over you.

For example, suppose someone told you to stop thinking about a pink elephant. Immediately you would probably get a visual image of a pink elephant, even though you were told not to do this. The more you try not to think of a pink elephant, the more it comes to mind. This is the paradox in action: the more you try to get rid of specific thoughts, images, and memories, the more they will take control of your mind and even your actions.

So stop struggling with your worries! Just accept them. Don't try to distract yourself. Don't try to change your thoughts. Certainly, don't try to dull your thoughts with drugs or alcohol. And don't pretend that your anxieties and worries don't exist.

Instead, as difficult as this sounds, just accept your worries, detach from them, and observe them without reacting to them in an emotional way. Try to objectify your worries, remembering that your thoughts are just thoughts, and they have no special powers.

This worksheet includes four metaphors that can help you understand and practice the principle of detaching from your worries by objectifying your thoughts and just observing them. After you read the different metaphors, you should practice using them several times a day. *Even if you are not worrying at the time, you should still practice using these visual metaphors.*

What to Do

Do the following exercises and then answer the questions.

Don't Struggle in Quicksand

When you struggle to get out of quicksand, you sink in deeper. When you relax and float, you will eventually find that you are able to swim or walk out of the quicksand. Contrary to popular

movies, quicksand does not suck you down. Quicksand is usually shallow, and when you stop struggling it is easy to get out.

Try using this metaphor to stop resisting your worries. Imagine that your worries are a pool of quicksand. Struggling will make it harder for you to get out. Accepting your worries as just thoughts and not real dangers will rob them of their power. When you stop struggling, your worries lose their power over you. Just walk away.

After you do this exercise, rate your anxiety from 1 to 10, where 1 = very anxious and 10 = very calm and disengaged from your worries: _____

Ignore Annoying Passengers in Your Car

You've probably had the experience of driving a car with annoying passengers. Maybe it is the kids making too much noise in the back seat. Maybe it is a complaining friend or coworker sitting next to you. What do you do? You just consciously tune out the noise from the passengers in the car, letting the sound fade into the background, and you keep on driving. You don't stop the car and you don't go in the wrong direction. You are aware of the annoyance, but you tune it out.

Now sit back and visualize yourself driving your car with your worries as the passengers. They are clamoring to get your attention, but you just tune them out. They are just background noise, as you keep on going about your daily routine.

After you do this exercise, rate your anxiety from 1 to 10, where 1 = very anxious and 10 = very calm and disengaged from your worries: _____

Watch the Worry Train

Imagine that your worries are on a train. Each car contains a different worry. Visualize each car of the train and then think for a moment about the worry that is in it. Now sit back and visualize this train pulling out of the station. Watch it as it rounds the bend and then continues on a journey out of sight. Relax and visualize this metaphor.

After you do this exercise, rate your anxiety from 1 to 10, where 1 = very anxious and 10 = very calm and disengaged from your worries: _____

Clouds Floating By

Think of something you are worried about. Say this worry out loud and visualize the worst thing that could happen. Now take a photo in your mind of that worry. Imagine that photo is resting on a cloud. Don't do anything to make the cloud go away, but just let it go where it wants. Watch it from the ground and see what happens to it.

After you do this exercise, rate your anxiety from 1 to 10, where 1 = very anxious and 10 = very calm and disengaged from your worries: _____

After you have practiced using visual metaphors every day for one week answer the questions that follow.

Have you noticed that you feel less anxious after a visualization exercise? Describe your feelings.

How would you describe any changes in your moods during this week?

Were there any changes in your behavior during this week?

Rate this technique from 1 to 10, where 1 = not at all helpful and 10 = extremely helpful: _____

Do you think you will use it again? _____ Yes _____ No _____ Maybe

Comment on the usefulness of this technique.

What did you learn from this exercise?

Act Opposite to Your Impulses

What to Know

Sometimes your emotions dictate how you behave. Perhaps you feel depressed, so you eat a pint of ice cream or another comfort food even though you are on a diet. Perhaps you have a frustrating day, so you lash out at a loved one even though you know they are not the cause of your frustration. Or maybe you worry that people judge you, so you stay at home rather than going out with friends.

If you find your emotions are causing you to behave in ways that are self-defeating, use this worksheet to track what happens if you do the opposite of what you would normally do.

What to Do

Write down the date, describe the situation, your primary emotion, and note what you would normally do. Write down the opposite of what you would normally do and note what happened.

Date	Situation	Primary emotion	What would you normally do?	Opposite of what you would normally do	What actually happened?
	<i>Example: You were criticized at work.</i>	<i>Sadness</i>	<i>Eat junk food</i>	<i>Go for a 45-minute walk</i>	<i>Your mood improved and you felt good about your choice.</i>

Date	Situation	Primary emotion	What would you normally do?	Opposite of what you would normally do	What actually happened?

Did this exercise help you do the opposite of what you would normally do to avoid self-defeating behaviors? Why or why not?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Ask For What You Want and Need

What to Know

Many people have a difficult time effectively communicating their wants and needs. Some people are shy about asking for what they want, while others feel they do not deserve to get what they want—even though it may be important to them. Some people have a hard time deciding how to be assertive without making someone angry.

This worksheet is designed to help you think about how you typically ask for what you want and to consider how you might want to change your behaviors in certain situations.

What to Do

Put a check by each statement that describes what you did at a specific time when you wanted something from someone. For each statement you checked, describe what happened.

_____ I didn't ask for what I wanted, even though it was important.

What happened?

_____ I hinted at what I wanted, but I didn't expect to get it.

What happened?

_____ I asked tentatively for what I wanted, but I didn't expect to get it.

What happened?

_____ I asked gracefully for what I wanted, but I didn't expect to get it.

What happened?

_____ I asked confidently for what I wanted, while accepting the fact that I might get no for an answer.

What happened?

_____ I asked confidently for what I wanted and pursued getting it, even though I knew I might get no for an answer.

What happened?

_____ I asked firmly for what I wanted, conveying that I would not take no for an answer.

What happened?

_____ I asked firmly for what I wanted, negotiated with the person I was talking to, and eventually got something close to what I was asking for.

What happened?

_____ I wouldn't take no for an answer, and I got what I wanted.

What happened?

Write about a time you asked for what you wanted but didn't get it. What could you have done or said differently? Be specific.

What did you learn from this exercise?

Build a Support System

What to Know

Perhaps you isolate yourself from others. Maybe you are embarrassed about your problems and find it easier to be alone rather than talking about what you are going through.

However, avoiding people can keep you from getting support that could help you with your difficulties. We all need other people in our lives, and even if the people you know cannot help you with your immediate problems, just being around others can contribute immeasurably to your happiness.

This worksheet can help you think about people who can support you in various areas of your life. Often, you will find you can get the support you need just by asking for it.

What to Do

Write down at least one person you know who fits into each category.

Someone I can discuss a personal problem with:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who enjoys similar activities:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can help me with a task:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can cheer me up when I am down:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who builds my self-confidence:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can give me helpful feedback:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who is understanding and a good listener:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can be honest with me when I'm making a mistake:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can keep me accountable for my decisions and goals:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can help me conquer bad habits:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can help me solve serious problems:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone I can count on to make me laugh:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can comfort me in a time of loss:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who can care for me when I'm ill:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone who will be proud of my achievements and let me know it:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Someone else who can give me support:

Phone: _____ Email: _____

What are some other resources where you can receive support?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Calm Yourself with Your Imagination

What to Know

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

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

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

What to Do

During this visualization exercise, you will focus on a real or imaginary place where you feel relaxed, safe, and peaceful. The first step is to identify such a place. It can be a beach, forest, house of worship, spa, or a fanciful setting such as a house in the clouds or your own private island.

What safe place did you choose? _____

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

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

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

Like any new skill, visualization can take some practice. Try this exercise at least five times. Use the chart below to record your experience. In the last column, rate the effectiveness of visualization on reducing your anxiety or stress from 1 to 10, where 1 = not very helpful and 10 = extremely helpful.

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

Was this exercise easy or hard for you? Why?

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

In what circumstances are you most likely to use this visualization?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Control Your Urges

What to Know

Controlling your urges can be difficult. Whether you are trying to control your eating, alcohol use, gambling, or other self-defeating behaviors, you already know it is much more than just a matter of willpower.

When you have an urge to do something, even if it is something you know is self-destructive, the pleasure centers in your brain take a shortcut past the thinking part of your brain (the neocortex) and send a “do it now” signal to the parts of your brain that control your actions. All this happens in a split second.

You can help control your urges and resist temptations by activating the thinking part of your brain. When you do this repeatedly it becomes a habit, and eventually you will find you are able to resist the temptation to do things that are self-defeating or harmful.

A little preparation will help:

- Stay away from situations or things that trigger your cravings.
- When you feel you are going to be overwhelmed by your urges, call someone you know who will be straightforward and honest with you, and talk it out.
- Remove temptations from your home.
- Get enough sleep.
- Exercise at least 30 minutes every day.
- Eat a balanced and nutritious diet.
- Use deep breathing and relaxation techniques when you have an urge.

This worksheet can also help.

What to Do

Make copies of this worksheet and keep them handy so you can fill one out each time you feel yourself losing self-control. Fill in this worksheet when you feel the urge to do something that you know is self-defeating or harmful.

Date: _____ Time: _____

Describe your urge.

What triggered this urge?

What are the negative consequences of giving in to this urge?

What are the positive consequences of controlling your urges?

What can you do instead of giving in to your urges?

Who can you call or contact to give you support?

After completing this activity, rate the strength of your urge from 1 to 10, where 1 = my urge is gone and 10 = my urge is still very strong: _____

What did you learn from this exercise?

Create a Better Day

What to Know

When you are feeling depressed, you may not feel like doing anything at all. You might not even feel like getting out of bed in the morning.

Planning your day so it includes meaningful activities can help motivate you to spend more time doing things that will lift your mood and bring purpose to your life.

What to Do

Begin by writing down activities that will make any day more meaningful.

An activity that expresses my values: _____

An activity that always makes me smile: _____

An activity that relaxes me: _____

An activity that connects me with people I care about: _____

An activity that makes me think: _____

An activity I enjoy but almost never have time for: _____

An activity that brings back wonderful memories: _____

A spiritual activity that makes me feel connected to a higher power:

An activity that is always fun: _____

Other meaningful activities:

On the following chart, fill in the time slots where you have scheduled obligations. Then schedule at least two meaningful activities. Choose activities that you know are logistically possible, and write them in the appropriate time slots. Try to schedule one activity at the start of the day and another at the end of the day. Make copies of this chart and fill one chart in every day for at least a week.

Date: _____

7:00 a.m.	
8:00 a.m.	
9:00 a.m.	
10:00 a.m.	
11:00 a.m.	
Noon	
1:00 p.m.	
2:00 p.m.	
3:00 p.m.	
4:00 p.m.	
5:00 p.m.	
6:00 p.m.	
7:00 p.m.	
8:00 p.m.	
9:00 p.m.	
10:00 p.m.	

How many days did you complete the chart? _____

Did including meaningful activities help you create a better day? Why or why not?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Develop Empathy

What to Know

Do people often tell you that you do not understand them? Do people often refer to you as uncaring?

Empathy is the ability to not only see another person's point of view, but also to understand their feelings. Most people assume that everyone is born with the same capacity for empathy, but that is not really the case. Some people have a high degree of empathy, and some people do not seem to have a great deal of empathy at all. Most scientists think that the degree of empathy a person has is a combination of their genetic makeup and their experience.

As adults, people brought up in a home where there was physical or emotional abuse, or where their parents had mental health problems like drug or alcohol abuse, may have more difficulty in feeling empathy for others.

Whether or not you naturally feel empathy for others, it is still important to note that understanding the point of view of other people is important to having good relationships, whether they are with family, friends, or colleagues at work. Empathy is essential to developing any kind of intimate relationship with a spouse or partner.

This worksheet is designed to help you pay more attention to the needs of others by observing at least five people and performing an act that helps them without being asked to.

What to Do

In the next week, look for opportunities to help others. Perform at least five acts for five different people that reflect your understanding of what each person needs. It could be as simple as holding a door for someone with an armful of groceries. Or it could be a more elaborate and thoughtful act, like cooking or buying a surprise dinner for someone you care about who is busy and stressed.

Record what you saw that triggered your desire to help each person, what you actually did, and how they reacted.

You might want to make copies of this worksheet and increase your empathic behavior on an ongoing basis. If you practice this, you will likely find that you will have closer and more positive relationships with the people in your life.

Date	What triggered your empathy?	How did you express your empathy?	How did the person react to your good deed?

Did you find it difficult to pay more attention to the needs of others? How did you remind yourself to do this?

What was the most surprising reaction you got from the people you helped?

Was there anything you would have done differently?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Develop Flexible and Compassionate Thinking

What to Know

Do you have rigid and set ideas about others? Do you categorize people as “good” or “bad”? Do you have an unchanging negative view of many people? Inflexible views about others typically lead to unhappiness and social isolation. An inflexible attitude toward those around you can lead to unneeded suffering in your life.

On the other hand, flexible thinking can make you more open-minded and compassionate toward others as well as toward yourself. When you develop the habit of flexible thinking, you will likely find yourself feeling more in control of your emotions. You will feel calmer and happier with a greater sense of satisfaction about your life. A flexible and compassionate attitude toward others can greatly improve your relationships with family, friends, and coworkers.

This worksheet can help you think about whether you have a flexible and compassionate attitude toward others.

What to Do

Read each statement and rate it from 1 to 5, where 1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree. Be honest about how you rate yourself. There are 100 possible points. If you score under 75 points, consider finding ways to think and act with more flexibility and compassion.

_____ I am willing to see different sides of an argument.

_____ I consider how my behaviors affect others.

_____ I consider the consequences of my actions on the people around me.

_____ When making a choice, I think about how it will affect the people I care about.

_____ I consider the feelings of others when I'm talking.

_____ When making choices, I look ahead to what might happen.

_____ I learn from my mistakes.

_____ I try to be nonjudgmental, even when I disagree with someone.

_____ When I'm in a social situation, I consider the needs of others.

_____ Even when I am upset with people, I try to see their point of view.

_____ I am open to having several ideas at once and comparing them, even when they seem contradictory.

_____ I am willing to change my mind when evidence supports another point of view.

_____ If I do something that upsets someone, I try to understand what happened.

_____ I apologize if I have hurt someone's feelings.

_____ If people are upset, I ask questions to understand how they feel.

_____ I try to make people feel better about themselves.

_____ I look for good things about people, even when I don't always like what they say or do.

_____ I am willing to compromise when I disagree with someone.

_____ I don't feel like I must always win an argument.

_____ I am willing to keep my thoughts to myself when I feel they may hurt others.

_____ Total points

What are some ways you can act with more flexibility and compassion?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Develop a Growth Mindset

What to Know

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

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

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

What to Do

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

Date	Situation	Thoughts after setback or failure	Fixed or growth mindset?	Growth mindset thoughts	Growth mindset actions
12/5	<i>I didn't receive a pay increase at work.</i>	<i>My boss doesn't like me. I don't do my job well enough to deserve a pay increase.</i>	<i>Fixed</i>	<i>I do my best, and I actually DO deserve a raise. My boss likes me, but revenues are down—no one received a raise.</i>	<i>I'll ask for feedback from my boss. I won't take this personally.</i>

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

What did you learn from this exercise? Did you notice patterns that triggered a fixed mindset? Explain.

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

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

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

What else can you do to strengthen your growth mindset?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Develop Healthy Personal Boundaries

What to Know

Personal boundaries are defined by the physical and emotional limits you establish with other people. They are the unspoken rules you have about personal closeness in every relationship, whether it is with your boss, your friends, or your loved ones.

When you do not have clear personal boundaries, you may feel that you are controlled by another person. When your personal boundaries are too rigid, you may feel isolated, lonely, and misunderstood. When you have healthy personal boundaries, you recognize that everyone is unique, with distinct emotions, needs, and values. You can communicate what you need from other people, while respecting their points of view.

As you develop insight about your personal boundaries, you will develop healthy and mutually rewarding relationships. You can use this worksheet to help you think about your personal boundaries and the things you can do differently in your relationships.

What to Do

The following are statements that reflect a positive approach to personal values. Rate each statement from 1 to 3, where 1 = never, 2 = sometimes, and 3 = always. If you feel a statement does not apply to you, write in "NA."

- ___ I trust others by observing their behavior over time.
- ___ I look to myself first to fulfill my personal needs.
- ___ I reveal my personal thoughts and feelings to people I trust.
- ___ I seek emotional intimacy with the people who care about me.
- ___ I seek physical intimacy in trusting and caring relationships.
- ___ I make my own decisions about my relationships.
- ___ I focus on my own needs and goals without being influenced by others.
- ___ I consider the consequences of my decisions and how they affect others.
- ___ I do not allow people to take advantage of me.
- ___ I maintain my personal values no matter what other people say or believe.
- ___ I can take care of myself when I feel emotionally vulnerable.
- ___ I am aware when someone infringes on my rights.
- ___ I can say no if I feel someone is asking for something I do not wish to give.

___ I am aware of the personal boundaries of others and respect them.

___ I do not take advantage of others.

___ I do not change my opinions or do something against my values to get someone to like me.

___ I do not allow people to take advantage of my time or money.

___ I trust the decisions I make about my relationships.

___ When in doubt, I seek advice from people I trust, but I still make up my own mind.

___ I have a clear idea about who I am and what I want from life.

___ I recognize that people are not "mind readers," and I am able to communicate my needs and feelings.

___ I can be assertive and still consider the rights and needs of others.

Review your answers and pick one area of your personal boundaries you would like to work on. In the space below, describe an incident that illustrates this problem.

Now describe how you would behave differently in this situation to reflect healthier personal boundaries.

What did you learn from this exercise?

Develop a Self-Care Plan

What to Know

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

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

- Workplace/Professional
- Physical
- Mental
- Emotional
- Spiritual
- Interpersonal/Relational

This worksheet will help you identify the areas of your life where you can implement self-care activities.

What to Do

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

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

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

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

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

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

List ways you can improve your sleep habits.

List ways you can improve your diet.

List ways you can have fun!

List anything else you can do to take good care of yourself.

Create a daily or weekly plan incorporating all the information above.

My Self-Care Plan

Once you have created your self-care plan, ask yourself what might get in the way of successfully implementing this plan. What can you do to remove these barriers? If you can't remove them, you might want to adjust your plan. It is useful to identify potential barriers or obstacles that might get in the way of implementing and/or maintaining your self-care activities. List at least three obstacles or barriers and how you can address them.

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

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

Did this activity help you develop a self-care plan? Why or why not?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Do One Thing Differently

What to Know

The founders of solution-oriented therapy noticed that most of their clients were engaged in patterns of behavior that were the opposite of what they said they desired. They prescribed a technique called “do one thing differently,” in which people agreed to do just one thing differently related to their problem. The eight steps that follow will help you do one thing differently.

What to Do

Review the eight steps and answer the questions.

Step 1. Think about the things you usually do when you have a problem. Think of a time when things did not go well for you, or when you had a problem that seemed impossible to solve.

How did you solve the problem? Was the solution effective? Why or why not?

What would you do differently now?

Step 2. Think of other peoples’ solutions. Think of what others do when they are solving problems. Write these solutions down.

Step 3. Be aware of your feelings. Understand your feelings, but do not allow them to determine your actions. Feelings are a great source of information—if they do not control you!

Think of feelings you have experienced related to a problem. What are some feelings that have been unproductive or harmful (for example, lashing out in anger)? Describe what happened.

What are some ways you can cope with these feelings?

What information did you get from those feelings?

Step 4. Change what you focus on. Sometimes what you pay attention to becomes bigger—and you will increasingly notice it. To solve a problem, try changing your focus or your perspective. Think of something you are focusing on too much. Describe.

What happens when you focus on it?

What can you focus on instead?

Step 5. Imagine a future time when you are not having the problem you are having right now.

What can you do now to make that future come true?

Think of what will be different for you in the future when things are going better. How will things be different?

Think of one thing you can do differently before things get better in the future. Describe.

Step 6. Change your story. Instead of focusing on your current problem, talk about a time when the problem did not exist. Control what you can control and change what you can. Think of a time when you were not having the problem that is bothering you. Write about that time.

Step 7. If you believe in God or a higher power, focus on that. When you focus on God or a higher power, things often go better. Do you believe in God or a higher power? If so, describe ways this will help you with your problem.

Step 8. Stick to the facts. Focus on what is in front of you. Avoid worrying about what you believe others are thinking or feeling.

Are you worrying about things that might not be true? Are you assuming what other are thinking or feeling? Describe.

Now describe the current problem you have in detail.

How is that problem affecting your happiness?

Consider the eight steps described above, and your answers to the questions. What is one thing you can do differently in responding to this problem? Choose to change one thing, such as what you say or the order you do things in. Be specific.

How do you feel about trying something different?

If you are uncomfortable, that may indicate doing something different will lead to meaningful change. What can you do to cope with any discomfort or obstacles you might face?

After you do the one thing differently, describe what happened.

What did you learn from this exercise?

Face Your Fears

What to Know

You might feel that paralyzing fear consumes and shapes your life, like a vicious circle or trap you can't escape from. It's often the most difficult aspect of anxiety to overcome. You fear your own mind, which is filled with both unwelcome and disturbing thoughts. You fear losing control of yourself and saying or doing things that are totally against your values.

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

Your natural tendency when faced with overwhelming fear might be to fight it by trying to control it. However, this approach only serves to increase anxiety, as the fear only temporarily subsides.

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

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

What to Do

Place a check by the fears in the list below that dominate your life and add fears you have that are not listed here.

_____ being disappointed

_____ being hurt

_____ feeling embarrassed

_____ feeling like a failure

_____ feeling anxious

_____ becoming dependent

_____ being different

_____ appearing crazy

_____ being uncomfortable

_____ being lonely

_____ making a decision

_____ making a mistake

_____ being misunderstood

_____ hurting others

_____ losing control

_____ being imperfect

_____ experiencing pain

_____ feeling rejected

_____ seeming stupid

_____ facing the unknown

Other: _____

Other: _____

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

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

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

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

My fear of _____ has caused me so much anxiety that I have resorted to the following activities to reduce my anxiety:

My fear of _____ has impacted my relationships in the following ways:

My fear of _____ has influenced my plans in the following ways:

My fear of _____ has impacted my life by:

How well were you able to observe and not react to fears and anxiety? Describe.

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

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

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

How did it feel to acknowledge and accept your feelings of anxiety?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Find Hope

What to Know

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

Research has found that hope requires three elements:

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

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

Creating a Hope Map allows you to set a goal, create pathways to the achievement of that goal, and identify potential obstacles. Your completed Hope Map can build your confidence, energy, and excitement, allowing you to tap into motivation and identify obstacles you will need to overcome to achieve your goal.

What to Do

Use the Hope Map and complete each of the following steps.

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

drain you of energy, or lead to discouragement. Write down ideas for overcoming those challenges:

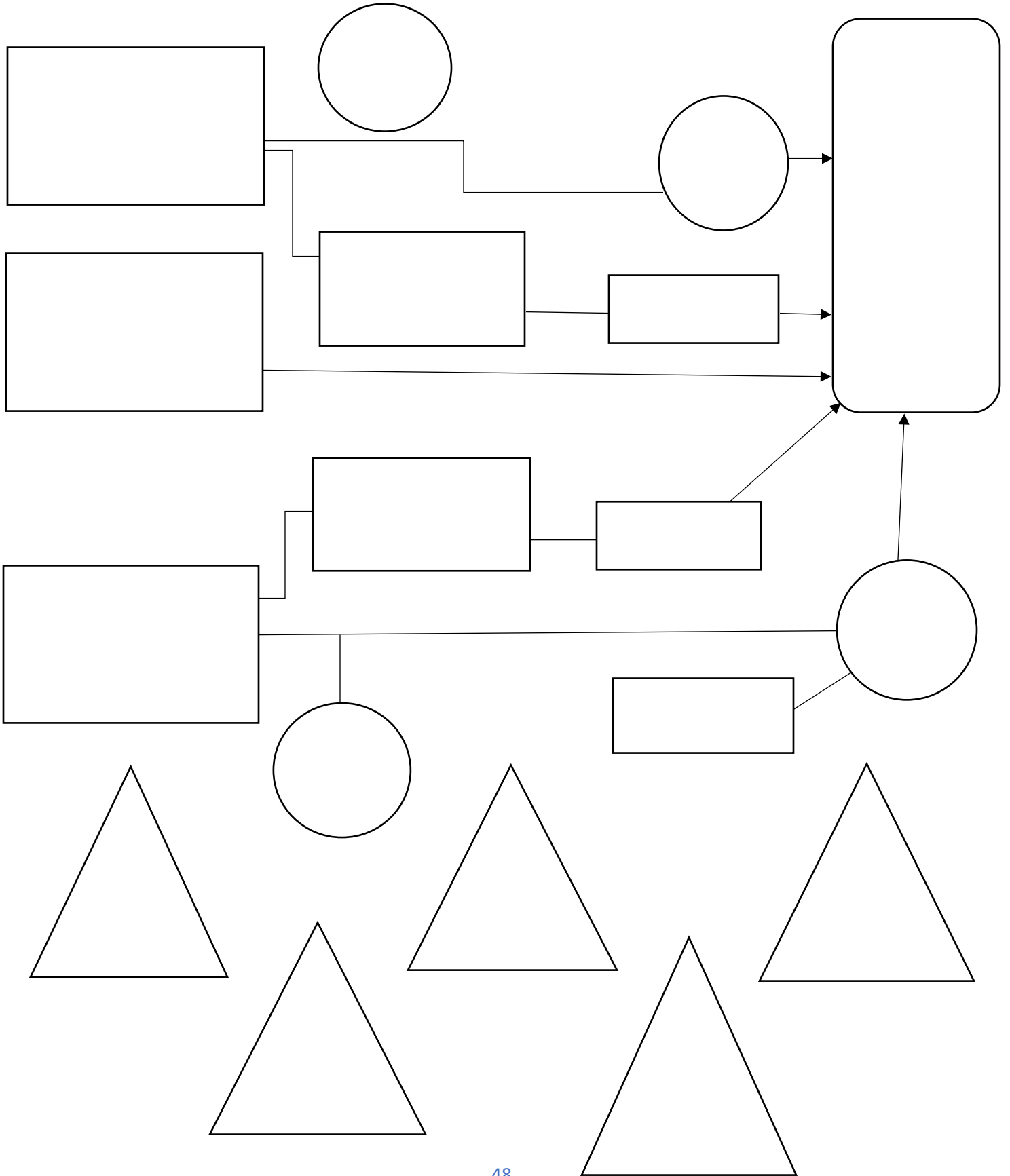
Hope helps you remain committed to your goals and motivated to act. Complete the Hope Map on the following page, and then answer the questions that follow.

Pathways

Obstacles

Pathways

Goal



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

What pathway will you try first?

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

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

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

What did you learn from this exercise?

Find Your Flow

What to Know

In psychological terms, flow is a mental state in which a person is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus while performing a challenging activity. People more commonly call this “being in the zone.” Many psychologists feel that when people have frequent experiences of flow” preferably several times a day, they experience more positive emotions, as well as a sense of well-being and purpose.

Flow is a feeling in which even difficult tasks become easy. You lose track of time because you are so involved in the activity. Runners often talk about a runner’s high, when running even long distances becomes almost effortless. Some people experience flow while doing a hobby, like gardening or restoring their car. Some people are lucky enough to experience flow doing their work.

Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky, in her book *The How of Happiness*, writes, “The experience of flow leads us to be involved in life (rather than be alienated from it), to enjoy activities (rather than to find them dreary), to have a sense of control (rather than helplessness), and to feel a strong sense of self (rather than unworthiness). All these factors imbue life with meaning and lend it a richness and intensity. And happiness.”

You will know you are experiencing a flow activity when:

1. You are completely involved in and focused on what you are doing.
2. There is a sense of great pleasure as you perform a flow task; you feel outside of everyday reality.
3. There is a sense of inner clarity; you know what needs to be done and you get immediate feedback on how well you are doing.
4. You know the activity is doable, even though it may be difficult; you are confident that you have the necessary skills to complete the task successfully.
5. You lose your sense of self, and your worries and concerns drift away.
6. You lose track of time, and you are completely focused on the present moment.
7. There is an intrinsic motivation; whatever you are doing to produce flow becomes its own reward.

What to Do

List hobbies that you feel produce a sense of flow for you.

List challenging activities that produce flow, such as crossword puzzles or building a shed.

List exercise or other physical activities that produce flow.

List cleaning and organizing activities that produce flow.

List other activities that produce flow.

Over the next month, record activities where you experience flow. Use the chart on the next page and record the date, the activity, and how you felt after the experience.

Date	Flow activity	Mood after experience

What did you learn from this exercise?

What activity most commonly produced flow? Explain.

What did you learn from this exercise?

Focus on Solutions

What to Know

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

What to Do

Describe your problem.

How have you tried to address this problem?

What has worked, even a little bit?

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

Who else has noticed this?

What will it be like when the problem is solved?

What will you be doing instead?

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

How will other people know that things are better?

Who will notice first? _____

And then who? _____

What else will be different?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Ground Yourself When You Feel Disconnected

What to Know

When you experience difficult situations, your distressing thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations may be the only things you notice. It might be challenging to focus your attention on what others are saying, or to concentrate on a task. However, the physical or mental distress you feel can be quite different from what is taking place externally, in the world around you.

By focusing on what you perceive through your senses, you can become more aware of what is happening outside of your feelings in that moment. This view helps to ground you, enabling you see the situation more fully and become present.

The following meditation exercise shows you how to shift your attention between your internal and external experiences to increase your awareness of your senses.

What to Do

Find a quiet, comfortable space to sit where you will not be disturbed or distracted and set your timer for ten minutes. Focus on breathing and relaxing throughout this exercise.

- Take several deep breaths and notice how your breath feels in your body.
- Using your sense of sight, focus your attention on one object in your surroundings.
- Notice how the object looks, including size, shape, color, and other visible details. If you find your attention wandering, return your focus to the object without judging yourself.
- Shift your attention to your body, noticing any physical sensations, while you continue taking deep breaths.
- Now focus your attention to your sense of hearing, noticing any sounds you hear. This can be a clock ticking, birds tweeting outside, or a car honking nearby. If you become distracted by your thoughts, return your focus to listening.
- Once again, shift your attention to your body, noticing any physical sensations, while you continue taking deep breaths. Notice the sensation of your body sitting in the chair, of your feet on the floor, and of your chest expanding with each breath.
- Next, focus on your sense of smell. If you do not notice any pleasant or unpleasant smells, focus on the air flowing through your nose and mouth as you inhale and exhale.
- If you become distracted by your thoughts, return your attention to your nose.
- Return to physical sensations, scanning your body from your head to your toes and notice any tension, tingling, or pain. If you become distracted by your thoughts, return your focus to your body.
- Finally, focus your attention on your sense of touch. Reach out with your hand to touch something in your reach, or the chair you are sitting on, or your arm or leg. Notice if it is hard or soft, smooth, tough, solid, or hollow. Notice how your fingertips feel as you

touch the object. If you become distracted by your thoughts, return your attention to your fingertips and the object.

- Take three to five long slow breaths and refocus on yourself and your surroundings.

How easy or difficult was it to sit quietly and focus on your senses? Explain.

Describe any physical sensations you noticed during this exercise.

Describe any changes in your thoughts or emotions you noticed during this exercise.

Describe a situation where this exercise might have been helpful in allowing you to see the situation more fully. Had you used this technique, would you have reacted differently? Explain.

How could you use this technique to help ground you the next time you experience upsetting or overwhelming emotions?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Identify Things That Trigger Your Problems

What to Know

Overcoming your problems usually takes a lot of work and you may experience setbacks for a variety of reasons.

Setbacks most commonly occur when you stop practicing the psychological skills you learned to overcome your problems. They can also occur when you are under a lot of stress. At other times, a setback can be triggered by a certain event. Sometimes a setback can occur because of a change in your lifestyle (sleeping, eating, exercise) or because you have made some unhealthy choices like drinking too much or taking drugs.

Try not to be upset if you have a setback with your problems, even if unwanted symptoms reoccur. Setbacks are common because stress and change are constant.

Remember, you are not back to where you started. Setbacks are temporary, and just a sign you need to pay attention to the kind of life you want to live every day.

The easiest way to avoid setbacks is to prepare for them. Filling out this worksheet will help you think about the kinds of things that can cause a setback and recognize the early signs that your problems may be recurring.

What to Do

Write down the most likely situations that could cause a setback.

What are some specific triggers, including people, places, thoughts, and behaviors, that might cause a setback?

What are some early signs that might mean you are having a setback?

Write down two or three people you can ask to tell you if they see early signs of a setback.

Have you started doing anything to avoid situations that caused your problems?

Have you started doing anything to mask your problems (for example, drinking, taking drugs, or other escapist behavior)?

Have you had any changes in medication that might be affecting your mood and behavior?

Are you having negative thoughts about yourself that you know are not really true? _____

If yes, what are they?

What are the most effective skills you used before to deal with your original problems?

What is the most important thing you can do if you see an early sign that your problems are coming back?

Makes a list of at least five things you can do avoid having a setback:

What did you learn from this exercise?

Identify Your Character Strengths

What to Know

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

What to Do

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

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

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

What problem are you currently facing?

How can your strength help you solve this problem?

How can your other strengths help you solve the problem?

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

What did you learn from this exercise?

Imagine Your Best Possible Self

What to Know

This exercise has been used in many studies to show how visualizing and writing about a positive future can improve your mood. There are five activities to be done on five successive days.

Before you begin each activity, sit back and relax, and take a few deep breaths. Clear your mind of all the things that have bothered you or worried you during the day.

Take about ten minutes each day to write on each worksheet. Don't worry about your grammar or your spelling; just write about whatever comes to mind. Be positive but also realistic. For example, rather than imagining that you won the lottery, and you are living in a luxurious mansion on a private island, you could imagine that you have been successful in your career, and you have a life where you can enjoy the things you like to do without worry.

What to Do

Day One. Imagine the best possible **family life** you could have in five years. Think about your actual relatives, but also friends who are as close as family. Perhaps you live close to your parents. Perhaps your children are grown and yet are still close to you. Perhaps you spend a great deal of time with people you care about. Be realistic, but imagine all the possible ways you could enjoy your family and close friends.

Day Two. Write about the best possible **career or job** you will have five years from now. Where are you working? Who are you working with? What are the benefits of the job/career?

Day Three. Write about your vision of the best possible **physical and mental health** you will experience in the next five years. How do you look? How do you feel? What are the things you are doing that contribute to your ongoing state of good health?

Day Four. Write about your **best possible romantic life** as it could be in five years. If you have a spouse or significant other, what kind of fulfilling relationship do you have? If you don't have a romantic partner in your life right now, what do you imagine your romantic life will be like?

Day Five. Write about the best possible **lifestyle** you could have in five years. Do you have hobbies or other activities that are meaningful? What is happening in your community and social life? What are the things you do that make your life fulfilling?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Improve Your Ability to Say No

What to Know

Saying no is a necessary component in asserting yourself, setting limits, and respecting your own opinions and emotions. Although saying no is essential in all kinds of relationships, you may feel uncomfortable asserting yourself, or worry about making the other person angry or upset.

There are physical consequences when you submit to others' demands while ignoring your own needs and feelings. It can reduce your body's immune system, increasing your chance of infection, developing ulcers, or placing you at greater risk for heart disease. Saying yes when you mean no can also make you feel helpless, which can contribute to depression and anxiety.

The exercise below can help you develop the skills and confidence to say no to reflect and honor your needs and values.

What to Do

When you consider saying no to a request from another person, first examine how the request affects you: your emotions, values, needs, and desires. Think of a current situation where you are being asked to do something you prefer not to do, or do not feel comfortable doing. Answer the following questions, and provide explanations, where possible.

Am I emotionally and physically able to give the person what they want? Yes or no? _____

Am I willing to give the person what they want? Yes or no? _____

Will I feel bad about myself for saying no? Yes or no? _____

Am I saying yes because I am afraid to say no? Yes or no? _____

Am I being asked to do something that compromises my rights or values? Yes or no? _____

Will I regret saying no in the long term? Yes or no? _____

Do I fully understand what I am being asked? Yes or no? _____

Do I need more time to think about it before making a decision? Yes or no? _____

How to Say No

There are two simple steps for saying no. They are respectful to both your feelings and the person making the request.

1. Validate the other person's request. Show that you are paying attention to what they are saying and repeat back what you heard. This helps you focus on the substance of the request, instead of making assumptions about its context.

2. State your preference for *not* doing what the person has asked or state your discomfort in doing what was asked. For example: “I agree that the neighbor’s dog barks too much, but I don’t feel comfortable confronting them in a way that would hurt our friendship.” Or “I know that you’d like us to go out together with your friends tonight, but I’m tired. I’d prefer that you join them while I stay home and rest.”

Can you think of a recent situation where it would have been helpful to use these two steps to say no? Describe the situation.

What do you think would have been different in that situation if you had used those steps?

Next, think of some recent situations where you wanted to say no but felt unable to do so. Consider the statements you would have used to say no if you had used the two steps. Complete the chart below.

Request that was made	How you felt about the request (<i>uncomfortable, disrespected, unwilling, angry</i>)	The statement you would have used to say no

Now, return to the *current* situation you identified above. Practice using the two steps in your response to this person.

What can you say to validate the person's request?

What can you say to explain your preference for *not* doing what the person has asked, or to describe your discomfort in doing what was asked?

Can you think of any upcoming situations at home, work, or with friends or partners, where using the two steps will be helpful? Explain.

Is there anyone who can help you practice the two steps to prepare for those situations?

After you have practiced using the two steps to say no, describe your experience. Include information such as how you felt, the other person's response, and the outcome.

What did you learn from this exercise?

Improve Your Self-Efficacy

What to Know

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

There are four sources of self-efficacy:

- 1. Mastery experiences.** Success directly impacts the way you think about yourself, boosting your confidence and increasing the likelihood you will succeed at similar tasks again. Building self-efficacy through mastery requires resilience to manage expectations and accept inevitable failures.
- 2. Vicarious experiences.** Observing others around you, especially people you can relate to, motivates you to believe that if they can do it, you can too.
- 3. Modeling experiences.** Role models are the people you follow, admire, and want to be like. Their actions, principles, and achievements teach you and motivate you. You are more likely to put in the effort and believe you can be successful.
- 4. Emotional and physical experiences.** Your mental and physical well-being influences self-efficacy. Distress makes you vulnerable, while positive experiences and happiness make you feel good about yourself.

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

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

___ I tend to focus more on my weaknesses and less on my strengths.

___ I lose motivation and feel helpless when my efforts fail or are not appreciated.

___ I don't trust myself.

___ Total checked

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

Here are four ways to improve self-efficacy:

1. Set simple goals. Goal setting is crucial to building and sustaining self-efficacy. Set reasonable goals and break them into smaller subgoals, working on achieving them one at a time. You can celebrate small successes, avoid stressing about the results, and more easily manage your goals—one step at a time.

2. Stay in the stretch zone. If you want to be highly productive, spend more time in the stretch zone, where you take reasonable risks and bounce back from failures and setbacks. Try new things outside your comfort zone, face challenges, and accept failures and criticism with grace.

3. View the big picture. Look beyond short-term loss, sort your priorities, plan, stick to your goals, and focus.

4. Reframe obstacles. Identify obstacles and reframe or replace them. Redefine the way you view obstacles to effectively cope with and understand life's inevitable challenges.

There are things you can do to build and improve your self-efficacy. This worksheet includes four exercises that will help you do just that!

What to Do

1. The Three-Things Exercise. This activity allows you to track daily activities and how they make you feel.

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

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

How did you feel after doing these three things successfully?

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

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

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

How will you feel after you have accomplished them all?

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

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

List your past achievements and successes here:

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

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

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

What did you learn from this exercise?

Laugh

What to Know

Humor is a powerful way to bring more laughter, lightness, and joy into your life. Researchers have found that humor is a critical way to create a connection with others. You are thirty times more likely to laugh with other people than when you are alone. Laughter has positive effects on your body by acting as a signal that you are relaxed and safe. When you laugh, your brain “decides” that everything is good and there is no need to be in survival mode.

This worksheet will help you reflect on funny things that happen throughout your day to add playfulness and laughter to your daily routine. Doing this activity daily for just one week has been shown to increase resilience and reduce depression.

What to Do

For one week, take ten minutes each day to complete the following activity. You will need a notebook or journal and pen, or you may use the Notes app on your smartphone.

1. At the end of each day, write down or type three funny things you experienced, witnessed, or heard, and describe how they made you feel. If you have a hard time remembering anything funny, search for “funny videos” on the internet or watch a light comedy.
2. Next, write down why you found each thing funny. Also, note who you were with: were you with friends, coworkers, or family? Were you alone? Be as detailed as possible.
3. Use the following chart to track your progress. Include the date, check off if you completed the activity, and note how you felt before and after writing about three funny things.

Date	Check if completed	How did you feel before journal activity?	How did you feel after?

After completing this activity for one week, describe any difference you notice in your overall mood.

Do you find yourself laughing more frequently or finding humor in situations? Explain.

Did you find yourself connecting with others through laughter? Why or why not?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Learn Realistic Optimism

What to Know

If you are feeling depressed or anxious, you might be tangled up in negative thinking. Negative thinking can lead to feelings that are knots of sadness, hopelessness, or worry. If you can untie your negative thoughts, you can feel less depressed, calmer, and more confident.

The first thing you will want to do is catch your thoughts before they tie your emotions into knots. If your mind is swirling with thoughts that bring you down, don't get overwhelmed—just work on one thought at a time, replacing negative thoughts with realistic and positive ones.

What to Do

In each example below, write down what is keeping you tied up in knots. For each one, come up with positive, realistic, helpful ways to untie the negative knot.

Knot: _____



What thoughts, beliefs, or situations are keeping me in knots?

How can I untie this knot?

Knot: _____



What thoughts, beliefs, or situations are keeping me in knots?

How can I untie this knot?

Knot: _____



What thoughts, beliefs, or situations are keeping me in knots?

How can I untie this knot?

Did this worksheet help you untie your knots, replacing them with alternative, realistic, positive thoughts? Why or why not?

What was the one thing that helped you the most as you untied your negativity knots?

What was the most challenging part of this activity?

What was the easiest part?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Learn to Interpret Nonverbal Communication

What to Know

Although strong communication skills involve expressing yourself clearly and listening attentively, sometimes what you say does not always indicate what you actually mean or feel. It is the nonverbal communication of body language that often provides the most accurate information about thoughts and emotions.

Facial expressions, posture, and tone of voice offer important clues. The signals you send with your body language can help others understand your mood and intentions. When you pay attention to physical signals, you are less likely to project your own emotions onto your partner, or to misinterpret their feelings. This is especially helpful during conflict or challenging interactions when you might experience overwhelming thoughts and emotions.

By understanding body language—both your own and others’—you will be able to communicate more clearly and respond appropriately to difficult conversations and interactions. Here are some common physical cues and the emotions they convey.

Physical cues	Emotions
Eye contact or gazing into the eyes	Attention, caring, affection
Smiling, clapping hands, singing, jumping up and down or dancing, laughing	Joy, excitement, happiness
Flushed face and neck, clenched hands, pursed lips, crossed arms, hands on hips, looking down or away, clenched teeth, frowning, staring	Anger, dislike, annoyance, aggression
Frowning, looking down or away, slumped posture; low, quiet, or monotone voice	Sadness, hurt
Talking quickly and nervously, inability to sit still, shaking, pacing, speechlessness, crossed arms, freezing in place, sweating	Anxiety, nervousness, fear
Covering face, hiding, slumping, looking down or away	Shame, embarrassment, guilt

What to Do

Write down any other expressions of body language you can think of and what emotions they convey.

Think of a time you realized a loved one was angry, sad, happy, or anxious, based on their facial expressions, posture, or gestures. Describe the physical signals you noticed.

Think of a time you realized your loved one was not paying attention as you spoke to them, based on their facial expressions, posture, or gestures. Describe the physical signals you noticed.

When a person's nonverbal communication seems confusing or is difficult to interpret, there are some questions you can ask to get more clarity:

- "You look upset. Is everything all right?"
- "I notice that you seem nervous. Am I correct?"
- "How are you feeling?"
- "Are things okay between us?"

Can you think of other clarifying questions? List them here.

Now focus on your own body language and what it conveys about your moods and feelings. Has a loved one ever told you that your words did not match your body language? Explain.

Think of a time when another person seemed to understand that you were mad (or sad, anxious, and so on), despite what you said or did not say. Explain.

Next, think of a recent challenging interaction you had with someone. What happened? What was said?

Describe your emotions.

Describe any physical sensations you experienced.

Describe any facial expressions, posture, and movements you remember expressing.

Describe the other person's facial expressions, posture, and movements.

Describe how you interpreted the other person's emotions.

Did the other person's body language make it easier to understand what they were thinking and feeling? Explain.

Did their body language impact the way you responded? Explain.

Think of an upcoming situation where increasing your awareness of body language will be helpful in communicating effectively. Describe.

What body language would you most like to increase or improve, for future interactions? Why?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Learn to Negotiate

What to Know

If you ask for something and the other person disagrees, you might have to negotiate to get what you want. Negotiation refers to people finding an acceptable solution to a shared problem.

Do you have a hard time getting what you want? If this is true, you might tell yourself, “If I don’t get exactly what I want, I don’t want anything at all!” This way of thinking, often referred to as black-and-white thinking, will frequently lead to disappointment, anger, and resentment.

If you can effectively negotiate, you might not get everything you want, but you will likely get some of what you want. Just as important, you can also leave the door open for future negotiations and discussions. Anger, resentment, and hurt feelings have no place in a positive negotiation.

What are the skills you need to negotiate effectively? You can use the VASE technique as a guide for productive negotiating:

Validate that you see where the other person is coming from—and then explain where you are coming from.

Ask for a compromise. Is there a way for both of you to get what you want?

Suggest alternatives. What are you willing to give up? Giving in is not losing; remember, getting part of what you want is better than getting nothing!

Express yourself. Use a kind tone rather than approaching the other person in an angry or aggressive manner.

Here is an example:

Validate: “I understand you need the shifts to be covered because you are short-staffed.”

Ask for compromise: “I agree to cover the shifts if you agree to let me have specific days off next month.”

Suggest alternatives: “If you are unable to provide me those days off, I am willing to provide other acceptable dates.”

Express yourself: Pay attention to wording and tone of voice. State the case clearly and without emotion.

What to Do

Describe a situation from the past where you had to negotiate with someone. Describe what you wanted and any challenges you had. What was the outcome? Be specific.

Describe a situation where you think you might need to negotiate with another person.

Describe your strategies for negotiation using the VASE technique.

V _____

A _____

S _____

E _____

Now, think of someone to role-play with you. Who can you ask? _____

Now, practice negotiating the situation described above with your role-play partner. Describe what happened.

Did you find the VASE technique helpful? Why or why not?

If not, what could you have done differently?

What are some potential problems or obstacles you may encounter when you negotiate for real?

What else can you do to sharpen your negotiation skills? Explain.

What did you learn from this exercise?

Let Go of Limiting Beliefs

What to Know

Limiting beliefs are opinions of yourself and others that hold you back in some way. The stronger the belief, the more evidence you find to support it, even though many limiting beliefs are untrue! These beliefs are formed unconsciously and are based on your life experiences. Sometimes they are misinterpretations of past events. You solidify these beliefs in your mind through repeated thoughts after you've decided the opinions must be true.

Having limiting beliefs prevents you from acting, and releasing them can have a positive impact on your self-worth, confidence, and personal empowerment. Unless you address limiting beliefs, they will continue to hold you back. This worksheet will help you identify a belief that's holding you back and answer a series of questions to uncover the truth, release the belief, and replace it with a more positive belief.

What to Do

Use this process to uncover a limiting belief you can release. First, check off the limiting beliefs you have. Add your own beliefs or stories in the space provided.

I'm too old/ too young/not educated/not attractive enough.

I need to make others happy, so I won't feel rejected.

I can't be happy until _____ changes.

I must earn other people's approval to feel good about myself.

It's easier to run away or shut down when things get tough.

I must stay in a relationship because I can't make it on my own.

If I'm happy when others are suffering, it means I don't care.

I can't be happy until my relationship/career/health/life is different.

If they really loved me, they would _____.

I'm selfish if I want more out of life.

I've suffered so I'm entitled to have people help me without doing anything in return.

I should be further along than I am—what's the use in trying to get ahead now?

I'd better not be so happy, or I'll just have further to fall.

Things will never work out for me.

I can't rely on others to support me—I must do everything myself.

- ___ I'll never make enough money.
- ___ I'll always have to struggle while others have it easy.
- ___ I must be perfect in everything I do.
- ___ Health problems will always keep me from happiness and success.
- ___ I need to suffer before I can be happy.
- ___ I must have money to make money.
- ___ I'm responsible for other people's happiness, and they're responsible for mine.
- ___ I don't deserve love/ success/money/fame.
- ___ Everything is harder for me because of _____.
- ___ I never have support—everything is always harder for me.
- ___ I can't make decisions without other people's approval.
- ___ I have to say yes to everyone; otherwise they will be disappointed.
- ___ Belief: _____
- ___ Belief: _____
- ___ Belief: _____

Now answer the following questions.

What limiting beliefs do you have about being successful in life?

What doubts and fears do you have?

What "shoulds" do you tend to come back to?

Of the limiting beliefs you checked or wrote down, choose one you want to release.

How do you react when you think about this limiting belief?

How does it make you feel? What emotions do you experience?

How do you treat yourself and others when you think of it?

What other fears arise? Are they true? Can you absolutely know for sure? Explain.

Where did this belief come from? Is the source an expert or a valid source? Is it from your personal experience? Explain.

What are the benefits to holding on to this belief? How does it serve you? Be specific.

What is the cost to having this belief? How does it affect your behavior or attitude?

What are the reasons you might want to hold on to this belief?

Can you think of reasons to release this belief?

What do you think might happen if you release this belief?

Are you ready to release this belief? Why or why not?

When you're ready, you will release the limiting belief.

1. Take a piece of paper and write down the limiting belief.
2. Write down three reasons why this limiting belief is untrue.
3. Say aloud, "I choose not to believe this anymore. It's not true because of (*your reasons*)."
4. If it is safe, burn the paper, or rip it into pieces and dispose of it.

Next, you'll transform the belief into a positive and empowering thought. What can you replace the limiting belief with? Write it down.

Is this new belief as true or truer than the original belief? Explain.

As you replace your limiting belief with this new empowering thought each day, what will you do differently? Describe behaviors, actions, and so forth that will change.

After two weeks of thinking the new, empowering thought, how do you feel about your new belief?

How do you feel about your old belief?

Are your behaviors and thought patterns changing? Why or why not?

Now repeat the process with other limiting beliefs.

Did this activity help you successfully identify and release a limiting belief and replace it with an empowering thought? Why or why not?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Make Time to Move

What to Know

When you are feeling depressed, exercise can improve your mood in several ways. During exercise, your brain increases the production of chemicals that can lift your mood and regulate your emotions. With regular exercise you will feel stronger and more confident, and more likely to feel that you can make positive changes in your life. Exercise will also increase the oxygen flow to your brain, which may help you think more clearly, rationally, and positively.

What to Do

Circle the types of exercise you can do on a regular basis:

bike riding	baseball	football	handball
jogging	hiking	soccer	karate
walking	skateboarding	surfing	Pilates
weightlifting	kickboxing	skiing	yoga
tennis	swimming	dancing	basketball

Write down any other exercises you think you can do that aren't listed above:

Now choose three of these exercises that you would like to do over the next week.

Exercise 1 _____

Exercise 2 _____

Exercise 3 _____

Decide how much time you need for each exercise. Fifteen minutes? A half-hour? An hour?

Exercise 1 _____

Exercise 2 _____

Exercise 3 _____

For each of the exercises, write down how often you can realistically do them in a week.

Exercise 1 _____

Exercise 2 _____

Exercise 3 _____

For each of the exercises, write down which days are best (early in the week, on weekends, etc.), and what time of day is most realistic (before school, at night, etc.).

Exercise 1 _____

Exercise 2 _____

Exercise 3 _____

Keep a journal to record how many times you do each exercise and the effect that exercise has on your mood.

Motivate Yourself to Change

What to Know

Some of the most debilitating symptoms of depression are lethargy, hopelessness, and a sense that things will never get better. So how are you going to motivate yourself to change? Let's face it, change is not easy. But research on motivation tells us that there are many techniques that can help.

What to Do

Read through the ten motivation tips below and then go back and rate each as to whether you think it would be helpful for you to use to make changes to overcome your depression. Rate each technique on a seven-point scale, where 1 = I don't think this would be helpful and 7 = I think this would be very helpful. Choose at least three motivational techniques to help you focus on overcoming your depression and remind yourself of these techniques at the start of each day.

_____ 1. Schedule your assignments.

Pick a time each day to work on a therapy assignment. Write it down, just like you would any important appointment and do your best to do this work at the appointed time. Try to work on overcoming your depression every day!

_____ 2. Reward yourself when you are done with an assignment.

You already know that people (or animals) will be more likely to do something new or difficult when they experience a reward immediately afterward. Think of some ways you can reward yourself after you do something that helps you overcome your depression.

_____ 3. Sign a contract and commit to it.

Contracts are surprisingly helpful when it comes to making changes in your life.

_____ 4. Share what you are doing with people you know.

One of the most effective motivators for change is to tell a select group of friends and family about what you are trying to do. You don't have to confide everything about your problem if you don't want to, but just let these people know that you are working on a specific aspect of your life and ask for their support. Ask for support only from people who can give it to you.

_____ 5. Set a goal.

Set a tangible behavior goal for yourself. You might also wish to identify the subgoals or steps you need to take to achieve your main goal.

_____ 6. Track your progress.

Recording your progress every day is essential to keeping you motivated, even when change seems difficult to achieve.

____7. Set your intention.

Many coaches and therapists encourage people to set an intention at the beginning of each day, preferably before meditating. Deepak Chopra, best-selling spiritual writer, notes: “The sages of India observed thousands of years ago that our destiny is ultimately shaped by our deepest intentions and desires. An intention is a directed impulse of consciousness that contains the seed form of that which you aim to create.”

____8. Adopt a compassionate attitude toward your efforts.

Being self-critical and perfectionistic will likely get in the way of your efforts to change. You will have setbacks and even reversals, for that is only human. You can learn to be a good “parent” to yourself as you change. A good parent guides and encourages a child toward a goal, always believing that the goal can be achieved, but also being compassionate and loving.

____9. Act like your heroes.

Inspiration is an important aspect of motivation. Think about someone who has inspired you by overcoming an almost insurmountable problem. Take a moment during the day to imagine what that person would say to you to encourage your efforts to conquer your problem.

____10. Look for progress each day.

Focus on the small positive changes that you make in your life each day, rather than on the things that are causing you problems. Even when times are difficult, you can do things each day that will help you lead a happier and fulfilling life.

What was the hardest part about doing this exercise?

What was the easiest part?

What are your feelings about practicing these skills in a real-life situation?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Overcome Your Loneliness

What to Know

Everyone feels lonely from time to time. But loneliness can become a problem when your need for rewarding social contact and relationships is not met. Loneliness is not always the same as being alone, because you might choose to be alone and feel content without much contact with others. On the other hand, you might have lots of social contact, or be in a relationship or part of a family, and still feel lonely—especially if you feel misunderstood by or disconnected from the people around you.

Loneliness can have a negative impact on your mental health, especially if you have felt lonely for a long time. Research suggests that loneliness is associated with an increased risk for certain mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, sleep difficulties, and increased stress levels.

This worksheet will help you see whether your loneliness is affecting your mental health and show you ways to cope with it.

What to Do

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

- I often feel lonely.
- I feel drained of energy and unmotivated to socialize.
- My aloneness means no one wants to spend time with me.
- I lack daily companionship, and this is upsetting to me.
- I am not successful at maintaining relationships (friendships, family connections, or romantic partnerships).
- I dread vacations or time off work because I am always alone.
- I have an empty void to fill on weekends or when I am not at work or school.
- I feel isolated and blue on holidays.
- I feel awkward at social events because I am single in a “couple’s world.”
- Even when I am in a group of people I feel alone.
- I need people more than they need me.
- I feel rejected.

Review the list and write down the top two statements that are most distressing to you:

1. _____

2. _____

Here are some suggestions to coping with your loneliness.

Take it slow. If you have felt lonely for a long time, it can be scary to think about meeting and connecting with new people. You do not have to rush into socializing! Start off by going to a park or outdoor café—somewhere you can be around people but do not have to talk to them. You might discover simply being around other people is enough.

Make new connections. If you feel lonely because you lack satisfying social contact, you can meet people by joining a class or group based on your hobbies or interests. Volunteering is also a great way to meet people. Helping others can also help improve your well-being. For example, if you find holidays unbearably lonely, you might volunteer at a soup kitchen.

Try peer support. There are many types of peer support services, providing you with a space to use your experiences to help and support others. You might investigate online or virtual communities, like Peer Support Solutions, Support Groups Central, or Beyond My Battle (which is a pandemic-specific social distance support group). These communities provide a place to listen and share with others who have similar experiences. Many online groups are available 24/7, most are free, and you can access them wherever you are.

Open up to others. You might know plenty of people, but not feel close to them, or perhaps they do not offer the care and attention you need. It might help to open up about how you feel to friends and family. If you do not feel comfortable opening up, try speaking with a therapist or a using a peer support service.

Avoid comparing yourself to others. It might be hard to stop comparing yourself to others, but remember, things are not always what they seem from the outside. For example, on social media, you see only what others want to share about their lives, and this can make you believe you are the only lonely person! You do not know how others feel when they are alone, or when they are not posting on social media. If you are concerned that social media is affecting your mental health, take a break.

Care for yourself. Feeling lonely can be stressful and impact your general well-being, which might make it harder to take steps to feel better. Think about how the following areas are affecting how you feel; consider whether you can make changes.

- **Sleep.** Getting too little or too much sleep can impact how you feel.
- **Diet.** Eating a nutritious diet on a regular schedule makes a difference to your mood and energy levels.
- **Exercise.** Physical activity is helpful for your mental well-being, and it might even improve your self-esteem. This can also be a great way to meet new people.
- **Spend time outside.** Research has shown that time spent out in nature is beneficial to your mental health.

What was your favorite activity? Will you continue this activity? Why or why not?

Did you meet new people and create new connections with others? Describe your experiences.

After completing this exercise, did you find your feelings of loneliness were reduced? Why or why not?

What else can you do to decrease your feelings of loneliness?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Overcome Your Self-Sabotaging Behavior

What to Know

Self-sabotage refers to destructive or unhealthy behaviors or habits that undermine your goals, efforts, or values. Self-sabotaging behavior is often rooted in anxiety, anger, or feelings of worthlessness.

Most of us occasionally undermine our best efforts by cheating on a diet or being late for an important meeting. However, for some people, self-sabotage is a chronic pattern that leads to significant problems in their life, work, and relationships.

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

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

Self-sabotage is often fueled by negative self-talk and low self-esteem, leading to feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness—subsequently driving repeated patterns of self-sabotaging behaviors. Self-sabotaging behaviors reinforce a sense of worthlessness and provide justification for negative thoughts.

Self-sabotage damages reputations, because repeated lack of follow-through leads others to view the self-sabotaging person as unreliable, unmotivated, uncommitted, lazy, or lacking drive. Repeated failures and disappointments create guilt and frustration. Over time, this feeds shame—further supporting low self-esteem.

What to Do

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

Describe any areas where you are delaying making a decision.

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

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

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

Now review the following information.

Understand the need your self-sabotage fills. To eliminate self-sabotaging behaviors, you might think being tough on yourself is the answer. But that is also a form of self-sabotage because you miss the most important first step: understanding what *need* self-sabotage fills.

Before you get tough on yourself, offer yourself compassion. Suspend self-judgment and understand that your self-sabotage is serving a function. Here are a few examples:

If you overeat to cope with stress, understand how stress eating “works” to make you feel better after a challenging day at work.

If you constantly procrastinate, understand that procrastination helps you avoid your fear of failing.

When you understand the need self-sabotage fills, you will be able to identify alternative behaviors to fill that need. When you meet that need in other ways, you will begin to reduce self-sabotaging behaviors.

Describe specific ways you self-sabotage.

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

Next, think of three alternative behaviors that address the need in a healthier way.

1.

2.

3.

Plan for obstacles. After you have identified the underlying need and healthier alternative behaviors, there will probably be obstacles. For example, if your alternative behavior to overeating after work is to have a small healthy snack instead of bingeing on junk food in front of the TV, what might get in the way? It is easy to have good intentions when the conditions are right, but if you want to eliminate self-sabotage, you need to plan for when you are stressed, overwhelmed, or upset.

Using the overeating example, here is a way to anticipate obstacles and plan for addressing them:

If you want to choose healthy snacks instead of junk food, ensure that you always have some healthy snacks at home, and prepare them the night before (you can even do this weekly). Using small containers or plastic baggies, portion out snacks you can carry with you in your car, purse, or desk, or have available when you arrive home from work.

Tolerate emotional discomfort. The best way to practice building emotional tolerance is to start small:

Identify emotion(s) you experience when you stop self-sabotaging habits and choose healthier alternatives. *For example: irritability, fear, frustration, sadness.* List them.

Next, look for other places in your life where that emotion comes up. *For example: you get frustrated when you are waiting in line and the person ahead of you is moving slowly.* Describe.

Instead of immediately trying to get rid of the feeling or distracting yourself, practice tolerating it. *For example: instead of immediately pulling out your phone and checking your email while waiting in line, practice doing nothing and letting yourself feel frustrated for twenty seconds.*

Over time, you will gradually increase your tolerance for that emotion in other areas of your life. You can then practice doing the same when you choose alternative healthy behaviors over self-sabotaging behaviors.

Clarify your values. When you clarify the things that matter most to you—and then connect your healthier new behaviors to them—it is much easier for those behaviors to take root and replace the old self-sabotaging behaviors.

Using the example from above: You want to give up overeating junk food get in shape. The healthier alternative behaviors might include eating healthy snacks and going for walks each evening. “Getting into better shape” is a value, but it is vague and not very compelling. If you want your values to motivate you toward your new behaviors, they must be specific and compelling. So, instead of “getting into better shape,” you might instead say, “losing ten pounds and feeling energetic.” This statement is more specific and compelling, but you can do better! What can you do if you have more energy and lose weight? What excites you and lights you up? Maybe you have always dreamed of running a 10K. That is a clarified value, and it will help pull you toward your goal and new behaviors so you can resist your old self-sabotaging behaviors.

Write down three specific, compelling values.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now, complete the following chart for one week. Describe self-sabotaging behaviors and alternative, healthier behaviors you choose instead. Describe how you feel before and after engaging in the alternative behavior.

Date	Self-sabotaging behavior	Alternative behavior	How did you feel before practicing the alternative behavior?	How did you feel after?

Researchers have found people are unlikely to defeat self-sabotage if behavior is the only element that changes. Thoughts and emotions must also change for long-term success. As you become more aware of the emotions, behaviors, and thoughts that trigger self-sabotage, you can begin to challenge them.

Negative self-talk supports self-sabotage. The next time you notice yourself engaging in self-sabotaging behavior, notice your thoughts. Write down all your negative self-talk (even if they seem silly or unrealistic).

Now that you are aware of your negative self-talk, ask yourself what deeper beliefs underlie these thoughts. Are these beliefs rational? Are they based on any clear facts? Explain.

To challenge negative thinking, turn those negative thoughts into powerful affirmations. What can you say to yourself that is positive or encouraging? On the lines below, write down a negative thought, and write a positive affirmation to replace it. *For example, "I am so lazy! I sat in front of the TV for three hours and mindlessly ate chips," becomes "I realize I am being unkind to myself; I am not lazy, I was stressed and exhausted. I am working hard to defeat my self-sabotaging habits."*

Negative thought: _____.

Positive affirmation: _____.

Negative thought: _____.

Positive affirmation: _____.

Negative thought: _____.

Positive affirmation: _____.

Negative thought: _____.

Positive affirmation: _____.

Negative thought: _____.

Positive affirmation: _____.

Negative thought: _____.

Positive affirmation: _____.

Now connect the positive self-talk to what you can accomplish and what you want to achieve. When your emotions, beliefs, skills, and behaviors are aligned, you can create the mental, emotional, and physical space necessary to do whatever you set your mind to.

What would you like to achieve? Be specific.

Can you begin by setting and achieving smaller goals on your way to achieving the bigger ones? Brainstorm ways you can do this.

Use your answers to come up with a message that inspires you to move in a positive direction. *For example, "Even though I might not finish the 10K, I know I have the resources and skills I need to complete it. I've worked hard to eat healthier, avoid mindless snacking, and exercise each day. I feel energized and less stressed."*

Your message: _____
_____.

What surprised you as you completed this exercise?

What did you find challenging about completing this exercise?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Practice Active Listening

What to Know

Active listening is a useful way to improve conflictual relationships. It requires each person to fully concentrate, understand, respond, and then remember what is being said by the other person. These six techniques are the fundamentals of active listening, but they take some practice. If you are having difficulty communicating with someone and you are trying to improve your relationship, a counselor or mediator can be helpful in encouraging each person to actively listen to the other.

Technique	Purpose	To do this	Example
Encouraging	To convey interest To encourage the other person to keep talking	Don't argue or disagree. Use neutral words. Use varying voice intonations	"Can you tell me more?"
Clarifying	To help you clarify what is said To get more information To help the speaker see other views	Ask questions. Restate wrong interpretations to encourage the speaker to explain further.	"When did this happen?"
Restating	To show you are listening and understanding To check your meaning and interpretation	Restate basic ideas and facts.	"So you would like your parents to trust you more, is that right?"
Reflecting	To show you understand how the person feels To help the person evaluate their own feelings	Reflect the speaker's basic feelings.	"You seem very upset."
Summarizing	To review progress To pull together important ideas and facts To establish a basis for further discussion.	Restate major ideas expressed, including feelings.	"These seem to be the key ideas you've expressed..."
Validating	To acknowledge the value of the other person's issues and feelings	Show appreciation for their efforts and actions.	"I appreciate your willingness to resolve this matter."

What to Do

It is possible to express yourself, resolve conflicts, and get what you want in your relationships by using active listening. When you use active listening techniques, you speak assertively from your own experience and take responsibility for your own thoughts and feelings. In addition, you can accurately describe what you want, or how the other person's behavior affects you. For example: Instead of: "You're always yelling at me!" you could say: "I feel upset when you yell at me. Can we talk calmly, please?" Instead of: "You're always spending time with your friends. Don't you care about me?" you could say: "I'm concerned that we don't spend any time together anymore. I miss you." Instead of: "You make me so mad!" you could say: "I'm frustrated that you won't take the doctor's advice. I want you to be healthy."

Write down five examples of when you have not used active listening techniques.

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

Now rewrite the above sentences to show effective use of active listening techniques.

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

Next, keep track of situations or conflicts where you normally have difficulty communicating. Instead, use active listening techniques, and then record the outcomes. Pay particular attention to how the other person responded.

Situation/ With whom?	What were your thoughts and feelings?	What did you say?	What was the outcome? (How did the other person respond?)

Did you find your communication improved when used active listening techniques? Explain.

Did anyone notice that you were communicating in a different way? What did they say or do?

What can you do to remind yourself to use active listening techniques?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Practice Belly Breathing

What to Know

It is often hard for people to be comfortable in their bodies. People often cite the desire to be numb, check out, relieve anxiety, treat depression, experience a buzz, expand their consciousness, avoid emotional pain, treat physical pain, and so on.

As challenging as it might be, learning to pay attention to your breathing is a wonderful beginning mindfulness skill that can go a long way to prevent you from reacting to stress or triggers. These exercises are designed to bring awareness to your breath and your mind-body connection. Learning to be in your body comfortably can take time. Be patient.

What to Do

Here are the steps for belly breathing as well as two more simple breathing exercises you can try this week. Choose which one(s) might be a good fit for you.

For each exercise, eliminate any distractions. Sit in a comfortable position in a chair or on a meditation cushion or lie down on a mat or soft carpet; avoid the bed, as you might fall asleep. Avoid slouching. In each case, if your mind starts generating a lot of thoughts, which it inevitably will, gently return to your breath.

Belly Breathing. Put one hand on your belly and the other hand on your chest. Close your mouth and breathe in through your nose, deeply inhaling but not straining. Notice your belly rising but keep your chest still. Exhale the air through your mouth, noticing your belly contracting slightly. Repeat up to ten times.

In and Out Breathing. Set a timer for two minutes at first, then gradually work up to four or five minutes per sitting. Quiet your mind as best as you can and simply notice your breath going in and out. Don't push or strain or try to control your breathing in any way. Notice: Does the air enter through your nose? Your mouth? Just notice. Inhale. Exhale. Slow. Easy. No effort. Notice your chest or your belly rising and falling as you discover the rhythm and pace of your breathing.

Counting Breaths. Inhale slowly, counting to five. One, two, three, four, five. Exhale slowly, counting down from five. Five, four, three, two, one. You may wish to hold for one or two counts before exhaling. Whatever counting pattern you choose, be sure not to strain or force your breathing. Easy, steady, in and out.

Keep track of your progress on the chart below, noting which exercise, when and where you practiced, and for how long you practiced. Note how it made you feel. For other breathing exercises, do a search on YouTube for "mindful breathing."

Type of breathing	When and where you practiced	For how long?	How did it feel?

Did this activity help you relax? Why or why not?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Practice Daily Acts of Kindness

What to Know

Researchers tell us that being kind will not just benefit people you help but can also make you happy too, lifting lift your mood on a permanent basis. According to the research of Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky, author of *The How of Happiness*, kindness can start a chain of positive social consequences, bringing you closer to others, and helping you appreciate the most positive aspects of human nature.

The Random Acts of Kindness movement advocates thoughtful and considerate acts as a way of life, but research shows that the “happiness benefits” of acts of kindness are greatest when you consciously decide to do a kind act every week. Choose a day to do a *significant* act of kindness; for example, not just holding the door for someone but perhaps taking the time to write a note of appreciation to someone important in your life.

What to Do

Use this worksheet to plan and then record your acts of kindness.

Kind act	When will you do it?	Who will benefit?

At the end of each day, use a journal and write down any thoughts about what you did and what happened.

After practicing daily acts of kindness for one month, describe how this exercise impacted you.

What did you learn from this exercise?

Practice Forgiveness

What to Know

Sometimes someone does something in a relationship that feels like the “last straw.” Asking and giving forgiveness may be the only way to heal and restore the relationship. Forgiveness means giving up thoughts of vengeance and retribution to be free of anger and resentment. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting or condoning wrong behavior. Asking and giving forgiveness are processes that can take time.

What to Do

Answer the following questions to identify ways to seek forgiveness. Then answer the questions regarding how to grant forgiveness.

Six Steps for Seeking Forgiveness

1. Can you admit that what you did was wrong or hurtful? Try writing down exactly what you did.

2. Can you understand the pain you have caused the other person? Write down how the other person is feeling.

3. Have you taken responsibility for your actions? Write down how you have done that.

4. Have you assured the other person that you will not do it again? How did you do that?

5. Have you apologized and ask for forgiveness? What happened?

6. Have you forgiven yourself? How has this helped you?

Six Steps for Granting Forgiveness

1. Have you truly acknowledged your pain and anger? Write down what you are feeling.

2. Were you specific with the other person about your future expectations? What are they?

3. Have you given up your right to get even? How do you know?

4. Have you let go of blame and resentment toward the other person?

5. Have you told the other person that you forgive him/her? What did you say?

6. Are you working toward reconciliation? How?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Practice the Habit of Gratitude

What to Know

There is a great deal of research that suggests an “attitude of gratitude” will contribute to your happiness. As Dr. Sonya Lyubomirsky notes in her book *The How of Happiness*, “It is important to understand why and how expressing gratitude works to make you happier.” She explains that expressing gratitude encourages you to savor life’s positive experiences, bolsters your self-worth, helps you cope with stress and trauma, and helps you build social bonds with others. Dr. Lyubomirsky also notes that “the practice of gratitude is incompatible with negative emotions and may actually diminish or deter such feelings as anger, bitterness, and greed.”

Expressing your gratitude in a rote and unthinking way, however, won’t really add much to your emotional health or your feelings of well-being. For example, Karen decided to write on her Facebook page about what she was grateful for every day for a month. By the second week, she was writing about being grateful for a fresh donut and that she found her favorite lipstick on sale. That’s *not* what we mean by a habit of gratitude. Gratitude is a sincere and heartfelt appreciation of what we have in our lives and an action that helps us truly feel this emotion.

To keep your gratitude meaningful, it is recommended that you try different activities to express your gratitude rather than doing the same thing repeatedly. You don’t have to do something every day. Completing a gratitude activity just once or twice a week will help you integrate these feelings into your everyday life.

What to Do

Here are some suggestions of things you can do.

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

Add other ideas:

Use this chart once or twice a week to keep track of your gratitude practice. Write down what you were grateful for, what you did, and how it affected your mood or behavior.

Date	What you were grateful for	What you did	How it affected you

What did you learn from this exercise?

Practice Loving-Kindness Meditation

What to Know

The loving-kindness meditation is a simple exercise where you recite positive thoughts about yourself and others. Practicing this meditation can immediately improve your mood because it allows you to focus on the positive things in your life and your sense of purpose.

This meditation has five simple steps. You begin by expressing positive thoughts for yourself, followed by positive thoughts for someone you care about. Then, you send out positive thoughts toward someone you feel neutral about, followed by positive thoughts toward someone you dislike. Finally, you direct your positive thoughts out to the universe.

This meditation takes just a few minutes, but it goes a long way toward opening up your positive emotions and letting go of your negative judgments.

What to Do

Close your eyes. Sit comfortably with your feet flat on the floor and your spine straight. Relax your whole body. Keep your eyes closed throughout the whole visualization and bring your awareness inward. Without straining or concentrating, relax. Take a deep breath in, then breathe out.

Imagine yourself in a place where you feel complete satisfaction and have an all-encompassing sense of well-being. Perhaps you are sitting on a beach at sunset with the warm glow of the sun on your skin. Perhaps you are in your own living room, surrounded by people who love you. Think of a place that makes you very happy.

Say the following phrases out loud:

I wish for happiness, calm, and peace for myself.

Now visualize someone you care about and say: **I wish for happiness, calm, and peace for you.**

Now visualize someone you feel neutral about—someone you neither like nor dislike, and say: **I wish for happiness, calm, and peace for you.**

Now think of someone you dislike, and say: **I wish you happiness, calm, and peace.**

Finally, direct your loving-kindness to the universe, and say: **May all beings everywhere find happiness and peace.**

Now, practice this meditation daily for the next week, and record your practice on the following chart.

Day	How did you feel before meditating?	How did you feel after?	Notes
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			

What did you find challenging about practicing this exercise? Describe.

Did this exercise change how you feel about yourself? Explain.

Did this exercise improve your ability to extend loving-kindness to others? Explain.

What did you learn from this exercise?

Practice Progressive Muscle Relaxation

What to Know

Progressive muscle relaxation is a tool to help you be more aware of your body and release stress and tension.

You'll be scanning through your body and tensing and releasing muscles as you go. By doing so, you not only get the physical benefit of relaxing your muscles but also increase your awareness of your body, which is an important element of the mind-body connection.

Tensing and releasing your muscles is great for stress reduction. You consciously create the stress (tension) and then take charge of letting it go (release). Tense. Release. *Ahh!*

Becoming more aware of what is happening in your body can enhance your well-being. "I can notice and make choices about what's happening in my body, even if it isn't always pleasant," is a very different statement from "I can't stand feeling these sensations; I'm helpless to control what's happening to me."

What to Do

In this exercise, you'll lie down or sit comfortably in a chair. Set aside about fifteen minutes for the full exercise described below. You can also do a shorter version with just the upper or lower body.

Start with your feet, noticing any tension. Create more tension by tightening the muscles in your feet and ankles, scrunching your toes. Squeeze hard, as hard as you can, and hold for a few moments, then release. Notice the change in your experience from the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones. Feel the difference.

Progress slowly up through your body, from the feet to the ankles, calves, thighs, hips, buttocks, pelvis, abdomen, chest, hands, lower arms, upper arms, shoulders, back, neck, jaw, and face. Each time, tense, hold, and release.

Be sure to breathe as slowly and steadily as you can, noticing the difference between tension and relaxation.

When you are ready, slowly come back to the present moment. Wake up your feet and hands, shaking them out if you wish. Before you resume regular activity, take a few moments just to rest and breathe.

You might also want to search YouTube to find other video or audio progressive muscle relaxation exercises.

Record when you do the progressive muscle relaxation exercise and what it was like:

When and where you practiced	For how long?	How did it feel?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Practice Radical Acceptance

What to Know

No matter how you live your life, there will always be situations and events that cause great sadness, anger, or frustration. You may wish to avoid these painful and sometimes overwhelming emotions but avoiding them is not helpful. You may have heard the saying “The only way out is through.” This means you must go through the pain to get to the other side of it.

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

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

What to Do

There are several steps to practicing radical acceptance:

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

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

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

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

Describe the situation.

What were the past events that led to this situation?

What role did you play in causing this situation?

What role did others play?

What did you have control of in this situation?

Where did you lack control in this situation?

How did you respond to this situation?

How did this response affect your thoughts and feelings?

Did you avoid dealing with upsetting thoughts and feelings?

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

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

What are your thoughts and feelings about this situation?

What can you do to help you accept this situation?

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

What did you learn from this exercise?

Reduce Your All-or-Nothing Thinking

What to Know

If you make assumptions without considering the evidence, you might be engaging in all-or-nothing thinking—one of the most common cognitive distortions that prevents you from seeing things in “shades of gray.” The more you rely on all-or-nothing thinking to make decisions or interpret events, the worse you tend to feel because you rarely experience middle-ground mood states. To feel better and understand the world around you, it is important to recognize when you think in extremes. Think about a room with an on/off light switch compared to a room with a dimmer switch. If you do not have a “dimmer switch,” you might frequently negatively evaluate yourself or others—you are either a success or a failure, your performance was awesome or terrible, if something is not perfect it is a failure, and so on. It is easy to see how this can lead to harsh negative judgments, reducing self-esteem in the process.

In addition, this way of thinking disrupts behavior change or forming new habits, such as committing to a daily exercise routine or eating a healthy diet. If you think in all-or-nothing terms, it is likely one missed day will derail your efforts. All-or-nothing thinking will lead you to believe you have failed, and that you may as well give up.

So what can you do? You can begin thinking in “shades of gray.” When you consider the middle ground and think in “shades of gray,” you will avoid thinking in extreme terms—decreasing self-judgment and harsh criticism of others.

The following are phrases you might think or say when you use all-or-nothing thinking. Check off any you commonly use:

____ “This is the best...”

____ “I / you always...”

____ “I hate...”

____ “I / you never...”

____ “This is the worst...”

____ “Everything is...”

____ “This is totally...”

____ “Everyone / no one...”

A cognitive continuum is a helpful tool you can use if you engage in all-or-nothing thinking. When you catch yourself having extreme beliefs, try using the continuum. This worksheet will help you first identify the two opposite ends of the spectrum so you can find some points in between—the “shades of gray.”

What to Do

Review the example below, and when you find yourself using all-or-nothing thinking, write down the thought you have, and then see if you can discover the middle ground.

Example: *I hate my boss. She is the worst person in the world!*

Mother Teresa My grandmother My mom My friend Julia My neighbor My boss Hitler

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|

*Best Person
in the World*

*Worst Person
in the World*

Alternative: *I am upset with my boss, and I understand why she criticized my work.*

Now, try this when you find yourself in all-or-nothing thinking. Try to find some points representing the middle ground for each of your all-or-nothing thoughts. Then rewrite your thought once you have completed the continuum.

Thought: _____

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|

Alternative: _____

Thought: _____

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|

Alternative: _____

Thought: _____

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|

Alternative: _____

Thought: _____

|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|

Alternative: _____

What were the most common all-or-nothing phrases you found yourself using? Explain.

How did this exercise help you see the middle ground? Explain.

After you completed this exercise, was it easier to catch yourself in all-or-nothing thinking?

Why or why not?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Reframe Your Negative Thinking

What to Know

Are you always seeing just the negative side of things? When you hear about something good do you find yourself immediately saying “Yes, but...” to discount or invalidate the positive thing you just heard.

One way you can develop a more positive outlook is by using the cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) tool “add a but,” described by Dr. Aaron Beck. Using this tool, your “negative but” is followed by a “positive but.” The “positive but” will help you

- prevent always seeing the worst-case scenario;
- become more solution-focused, rather than just dwelling on problems;
- shift your habit of believing the worst about people or situation;
- get out of rigid thinking or feeling you must always prove your point of view.

What to Do

The first step is becoming aware of negative or discounting “buts” when you are presented with a positive situation or information. In the following chart, write down a positive statement, event, or situation and your automatic or habitual negative response or thought. Then, add a positive “but” to counter the negative “but.” Fill in the following chart for two weeks.

Positive situation, statement, or event	Negative "but"	Positive "but"
<i>Our family adopted a new puppy.</i>	<i>But this only means more work for me: training, vet visits, and cleaning up messes.</i>	<i>But the puppy will bring my family a lot of joy, and I'll get daily exercise taking the puppy on walks.</i>

What are the most common situations that trigger your negative thinking?

How difficult was it to see the positive side of a situation? How did you manage to do this?

After completing this exercise do you feel that you are more positive? What difference does this make in your life?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Regulate Your Moods with a Better Diet

What to Know

Diet, stress, and mood are all intertwined, so it is important to consider what you're putting in your body, not only for your physical health but also for your emotional well-being. It is not necessary to go to extremes in changing your diet. By simply being more mindful of what you're putting in your body, you can find small ways to improve and that can add up to big changes.

The troublemakers:

- **Caffeine**—You'll find this stimulant in coffee, tea, chocolate, soda, energy drinks, and some over-the-counter medications. The temporary boost it provides can end in fatigue, headache, and tension. Caffeine has also been identified as a potential trigger for anxiety attacks and a contributor to other health issues such as insomnia, heartburn, aggression, irritability, heart palpitations, and high blood pressure.
- **Salt**—Sodium is present in many processed foods, so check labels and look for low-sodium or salt-free alternatives. Also, be aware of how much salt you use while cooking. Sodium consumption affects fluid retention, weight, and blood pressure, all of which can, in turn, affect your mood.
- **Sugar**—Excessive intake of simple sugars (such as white or brown sugar and honey) can cause health problems such as diabetes and hypoglycemia; the latter is often accompanied by symptoms like those experienced during a panic attack. Also, the temporary uplifting effects come with some other serious downsides, including an increased risk of depression in those who have a sugar-heavy diet.
- **Preservatives and hormones**—These substances are present in processed foods and many types of meats. Our bodies were not built to handle these additives, and their possible side effects have been heavily debated. Swapping in some whole, unprocessed, organic foods can help reduce consumption of these potentially harmful substances.
- **Nicotine and alcohol**—Introducing these substances into your system can cause a range of problems, not the least of which is aggravating anxiety. Nicotine is a stimulant, like caffeine, and alcohol a depressant. The addictive properties of both nicotine and alcohol have also been well documented.

It should also be mentioned that what you don't put in your body can also be problematic. Nutrient deficiencies and dehydration can cause irritability, anxiety, and fatigue. So, stop skipping meals and make sure you are drinking enough water.

What to Do

For the next week, keep track of your consumption of any of the above-listed items, and write in the predominant moods you had each day.

Day	Food and drink	Your moods
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

What did you learn from this exercise?

Seek Awe

What to Know

Awe is the feeling of being in the presence of something vast that transcends our understanding of the world. Scientists tell us that awe, even more than other positive emotions, increases our sense of happiness and fulfillment by making us feel that we are connected to others around us. Some research even suggests that a daily dose of awe will make us more resilient and boost our immune system.

What to Do

Name three things in nature that always bring you a sense of awe.

Name three things in the arts (visual arts, music, dance, writing, and so forth) that always bring you a feeling of awe.

Name three things you experience with friends and family that bring you a sense of awe.

Name three places you go to experience awe.

Setting Your Goals

What to Know

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

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

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

What to Do

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

What is your goal? _____

Step #1: _____

Start Date: _____

Date to Achieve Goal: _____

Resources Needed: _____

Anticipated Outcome: _____

Actual Outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #2: _____

Start Date: _____

Date to Achieve Goal: _____

Resources Needed: _____

Anticipated Outcome: _____

Actual Outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #3: _____

Start Date: _____

Date to Achieve Goal: _____

Resources Needed: _____

Anticipated Outcome: _____

Actual Outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #4: _____

Start Date: _____

Date to Achieve Goal: _____

Resources Needed: _____

Anticipated Outcome: _____

Actual Outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #5: _____

Start Date: _____

Date to Achieve Goal: _____

Resources Needed: _____

Anticipated Outcome: _____

Actual Outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #6: _____

Start Date: _____

Date to Achieve Goal: _____

Resources Needed: _____

Anticipated Outcome: _____

Actual Outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #7: _____

Start Date: _____

Date to Achieve Goal: _____

Resources Needed: _____

Anticipated Outcome: _____

Actual Outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #8: _____

Start Date: _____

Date to Achieve Goal: _____

Resources Needed: _____

Anticipated Outcome: _____

Actual Outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #9: _____

Start Date: _____

Date to Achieve Goal: _____

Resources Needed: _____

Anticipated Outcome: _____

Actual Outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

Step #10:

Start Date: _____

Date to Achieve Goal: _____

Resources Needed: _____

Anticipated Outcome: _____

Actual Outcome: _____

What did you learn? _____

What did you learn from this exercise?

Stop Your Catastrophic Thinking

What to Know

Catastrophic thinking refers to overthinking about irrational worst-case outcomes. It can increase anxiety, prevent you from acting, or cause you to avoid situations entirely. When you fear the worst possible outcome, your choices, behaviors, emotions, and relationships can be negatively affected. You might constantly worry that something terrible will happen, and you might frequently experience what-if thinking.

Fear can be a helpful reaction to situations where there are proven threats or dangers. It's important to know the difference between fear that's justified and based on evidence, and fear that's based on catastrophic thinking or unjustified worries.

Catastrophic thinking often causes people to avoid situations out of fear. Unfortunately, avoidance tends to reinforce this type of thinking; the more you avoid the fearful situations, the more power you give them. The best way to conquer your feelings of anxiety and worry is to examine the situations and determine the likelihood of that scenario happening.

What to Do

Describe some examples of justified fears from your own life.

Describe some examples of catastrophic thinking and unproven fears.

Describe a recent situation that you avoided because you were afraid something terrible would happen.

What were you afraid would happen?

Has that feared situation ever actually happened to you before? Describe.

Describe a time when your fears stopped you from taking action.

Describe a time that your fears negatively impacted your choices, emotions, or relationships. What happened?

To overcome catastrophic thinking, it is important to dispute the thoughts.

You can:

1. Identify the thought for what it is—an irrational, worst-case scenario.
2. Identify best-case possibilities—the best possible outcomes you wish to see.
3. Look at these best-case possibilities and identify whether they are the most likely outcomes.
4. Weigh the evidence and facts available to you, so that you can develop a realistic contingency plan for coping with the situation.

Using the chart below, identify your feared situations and rank your level of fear from 1 to 10, where 1 = no distress or discomfort and 10 = extreme upset or anxiety. Next, list the evidence that the situation will happen and evidence that it won't happen. Then, describe a best-case possibility. Finally, estimate the odds of that situation actually happening.

Feared situation	Level of fear (1-10)	Evidence it will happen	Evidence it won't happen	Best-case possibility	Estimated odds of fear happening (%)

Did you notice any changes in your level of fear because of this exercise? Explain.

Did this exercise change the way you see your feared situations? Why or why not?

What other steps can you take to cope with feared situations in the future?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Take a Mindful Walk

What to Know

One key component of mindfulness is being aware not just of what's going on inside you (thoughts, feelings) but also what's going on outside your body and mind.

These days, more and more people are walking around outdoors while looking down at their phones, whether it's at the beach, the lake, the mountains, or just around the neighborhood. We're wired up all the time. Studies even show that looking at our phones constantly is changing our brains to be more active, seeking the next exciting stimulus, scrolling from thing to thing to thing, never really stopping to notice.

Mindful walking in a beautiful environment is ideal for waking up the senses and noticing what's around us. We don't always have access to a beautiful environment, though, so taking a mindful walk in a noisy city environment can be a good exercise as well. The idea is to give yourself the experience of shifting your perspective outward, while remaining connected to your body, your thoughts, and your feelings.

What to Do

Go for a walk outside by yourself for a minimum of fifteen to twenty minutes. (In cold weather, you might choose a museum or library.) Turn your phone off. Notice any sounds, really tuning in to everything you can hear—sounds up close, sounds at a medium distance, sounds far away. Take it all in. Notice what you feel in your body when you do this, without judgment and with acceptance.

As an alternative to a "listening" walk, you might choose to notice the smells in your environment. How many different smells can you notice? What smells pleasant (for example, a flower)? What smells unpleasant (for example, car exhaust, a skunk)? Notice what you feel in your body when you do this.

Noticing what you see is another type of mindful walk. Notice colors, shapes, sizes, and contrasts. Look up to the sky. Look down to the ground. Take it all in, consciously. Notice what you feel in your body when you do this.

If you experience some anxiety at being outdoors and opening your senses, reassure yourself that nothing bad is happening. You could do a simple exercise that will help focus your mind and calm your body, such as identifying everything in your environment that is red, or green, or another color. Tell yourself everything will be okay. Or repeat some self-compassionate statements as you walk. Congratulate yourself for trying.

When you get home, record the sounds, smells, and sights in as much detail as you can remember, and what it was like for you. Be creative. Do what feels good for you.

When and where you practiced	For how long?	What did you notice?	How did it feel?

What did you learn from this exercise?

Treat Yourself Like a Good Friend

What to Know

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

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

What to Do

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

Visualize yourself helping a friend who needs your support.

What feelings does seeing your friend trigger in you? (Immediate concern? Feelings of warmth? Disgust?)

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

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

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

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

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

What do you say to yourself?

What tone do you imagine yourself using?

How might you reference your past?

What would you predict might happen in your future?

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

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

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

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

What did you learn from this exercise?

Understand the Messages You Received As a Child

What to Know

Some of the messages you received from adults in your childhood were directly stated, but it's likely that many more were implied. The explicit and implicit messages you received from your parents, other family members, teachers and coaches, as well as other important adults, undoubtedly played a significant role in shaping your self-image. These messages also played an important role in the choices you have made throughout your life.

What to Do

Use this worksheet to think about both the explicit and the implicit messages from your childhood and how they affect your current thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and relationships.

Name three rules that were particularly important in your home. How do you think these affected you?

What messages did you receive about your body, both explicit and implicit? How do you think these affected you?

What messages did you receive about your career choice? How do you think you were affected?

What messages did you receive about intimate relationships? How do you think these affected you?

What messages did you receive about the importance of friendships? How do you think these affected you?

What messages did you receive about sex? How do you think these affected you?

What messages did you receive about your personal values? How do you think these affected you?

What messages did you receive about money? How do you think these affected you?

What messages did you receive about what you could or could not do? How do you think these affected you?

Describe an incident from your childhood that you think sent you the “wrong” message.

What did you learn from this exercise?

Use a Journal to Manage Emotions

What to Know

Experts tell us that if you are troubled by worries, negative thinking, or intrusive thoughts, you need to accept these thoughts rather than fighting them or avoiding them. In other words, you need to learn to tolerate these thoughts and understand that they are just thoughts and cannot hurt you.

There is a three-step procedure to deal with these distressing thoughts: recognize and label them; learn to observe them rather than react to them; let time pass. Although this may sound easy, it does take some practice.

Although therapists don't recommend fighting your distressing thoughts, there is evidence that paying attention to positive thoughts may have many benefits, and continued practice may even help rewire your brain. The Mayo Clinic <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/indepth/positive-thinking/art-20043950> notes that positive thinking may help you cope better with stress, reduce your anxiety, and even improve your health.

This worksheet is designed to help you determine if focusing on positive thoughts can help reduce your anxiety and improve your overall sense of well-being. It requires you to write down positive thought assignments in a journal for one week and then reflect on whether this activity helps you focus less on your anxious thoughts.

What to Do

Get a journal or notebook and pick out an assignment to do each day from the list below. Use one page for each assignment. Do at least one assignment a day for a two-week period, and check it off when it is done. At the end of the two weeks, answer questions about the usefulness of this activity.

Week of: _____

Assignment	Check when done
Write down five of your best qualities.	
Describe a favorite memory.	
Describe in detail the best day of your life.	
Make a list of your five most precious possessions.	
Make a bucket list of five things you would like to do in the next few years.	
Write down five positive adjectives that describe you.	
Write down a list of five favorite people you have known in your life.	
Write down five things you would like to do with your family.	
Write down five things you would like to do with your friends.	
Write down five people who inspire you.	
Write down five things you are grateful for.	
Write about a dream place you would like to live.	
Write about a favorite sports hero and what you admire about them.	
Write down something you did that you are proud of.	
Describe a memorable happy birthday.	
Describe a favorite holiday and what you like about it.	
Describe a favorite place in nature.	
Write down a favorite dream you can remember.	
Write down a favorite memory from your childhood.	
Write down five things you are good at.	
Find and write down three inspirational quotes.	
Describe what you would do if you won \$10 million dollars in the lottery.	
Write down the names of five people you love.	
Write down five people who have influenced you in your lifetime.	
Write down five things you have accomplished in your life.	
Write down five things you did that made you proud.	
Write down three vacations you would like to take in the next few years.	
Write down a list of the five funniest movies or TV shows you enjoy.	

Describe a favorite character from a book.	
Describe a favorite character from a movie.	
Write down any positive thoughts you are having today.	

At the end of the two weeks answer these questions.

Did you notice any change in your mood over the last two weeks? When did this happen?

Ask someone who knows you well whether they noticed anything different about you in the last two weeks. Write down what they said.

Did you notice any decrease in your worrying over the last two weeks? What did you notice?

What did you learn from this exercise?
