**Perfectly**

**Chill and Normal**

A-Typical Guide to

Lifeskills and Stress Mastery

for Extraordinary Mindsets

**M. Yeo TrueOrigin™**

**Perfectly Chill and Normal**

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**First Edition**

**Printed in the United States**

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# 1

# Introduction / Embracing the Change

**“**

**We but mirror the world. If we could change ourselves, the (...) world would also change,**” A man named Mahatma Gandhi once penned, “**As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him.**”[[1]](#endnote-1)

Change is hard. There’s no denying it. It’s in your face, everywhere you turn. It's all around us, from the news we hear every day to the little changes we face in our daily lives.

Let’s talk about the little changes. The ones that stick around long after you’ve gone home and logged off. I’m talking about the buildup of tiny changes you’ve to live with daily, like that transition from your comfy bed to waking up and going to your destination early in the morning. You get up, go to the bathroom, get dressed, and put in some effort. Then you rock up to the front door, only to find that it’s raining cats and dogs outside. *Nice.*

Seems small? We’ve all got to start somewhere. If there’s something even more stressful already happening in your life, read on; there are some useful answers for you, pinky promise. But before we get to specifics, we’ll cover the overarching transitions that everybody goes through.

There are tides of greater change where you have to go from childhood to teenhood and then into young adulthood. Now, that can be as rude an awakening as the sudden ring of your alarm clock. You reach out from under the sheets with one arm, and your hand fails to hit the snooze button. You just miss it, clean, again and again. *Where is that clock?!* The endless blare is driving you up the wall. Someone out there calls your name and tries to have a conversation. You yell a reply, but the alarm drowns your voice out. Your phone rings, but *where is it?*

That’s how it can feel. The days and tasks add up. Time seems to fly, or perhaps there’s too much time, and you’re just waiting. You’re looking for something, but you haven’t figured out what exactly. You’re doing well by all accounts, but there’s starting to be a disconnect. Out of the blue, everything starts happening at the same time. Or so it seems. Your body is changing, even if you’re not talking about it. The social dynamics all around you are changing, too. You get that you’re not a kid anymore, and maybe there’s something to look forward to in that. Then again, while you're a new adult or about to become one, there's still a part of you that's a kid. It’s not bad, you think, but things might just have started to become that much more confusing and uncomfortable. There seem to be mixed messages from everywhere, including your own body. Who and what are you supposed to listen to? How do you make sense of it? What are you meant to do about it? You’ve probably just had some new privileges added to your life, which is good, but a few more responsibilities got thrown into the mix, too, most likely without much explanation. Is "more" better?

Well, before you can even figure that part out, there's this growing pressure that you're feeling from your parents and friends. You know that it's called “peer pressure, but there never seems to be an explanation of how to deal with it in a way that makes complete sense and ***works***. They say it's part of growing up, of being young. There are things “you should know by now,” most things “you'll figure out,” other things “you'll understand when you're older.” These statements might all be true, but you could sure use some power-assist right now. An actual map and toolkit, maybe.

All this while, your hormones are kicking in and taking it up a notch, making everything just that much more intense. It can be embarrassing in your teens, and in your early 20s, you have to pretend it doesn’t happen anymore because you’re “supposed to be” an adult. So now, in addition to what's being put on you from the outside, you’re also putting extra pressure on yourself. Day by day, it all starts to stack up. It comes at you and keeps coming at you, like annoying phone notifications that just won’t go away. You don't know why. You’re “supposed to be” fairly grown up now. The whole world is shifting, and you can’t seem to get a break. Something has got to give.

Or perhaps this is you: you used to be a pretty happy kid, as far as you can remember. But something happened in your life or your family, and you don’t know why. The love, the comfort, the private moments where you felt safe, carefree, and cocooned. All these things seem to have gone away or all over the place and just haven’t come back. The adults tell you everything is fine, that they’re handling it, but it’s been a year or more and nothing’s returned to normal. No one’s telling you anything that helps you change the way you feel inside. You might have tried to talk to an adult, but their answers left you feeling more frustrated. Their actions, or lack thereof, may have broken your trust. Suddenly, you’re not just stressed. You’re starting to question the importance and reality of those cherished childhood moments. Maybe you start hanging out around peers who seem to understand, but they’re there for you as long as you’re down, too. Round and round it goes, year by year. Everything seems to become less real or interesting. Are people just fake-happy? Why don’t they see you or what’s happening to you? How do you find a way out of this cycle?

To a handful of people, it might even feel like the world is conspiring to drive you crazy. Or, you might do pretty good but get upset when you see a friend going through this. Whether you’re the person in need or the person who sees a friend in need, we all have days when we might feel completely overwhelmed as witnesses to a barrage of events that seem out of our control. In some cases, it can feel as though we could just snap.

In the midst of it all, you try to play it cool while figuring out who you are or who you could come to be to your friends and family, maybe even to the world at large. You're learning about what’s going on with yourself, how you’re supposed to feel about everything and deal with it too. Why do these things happen, and how do you get on top of them? What does life have in store for you? And when can you stop worrying about all this stuff because you want to get to the fun part, right? You want to have a cool and meaningful life in the way *you* are going to define the words “cool” and "meaning" for yourself. Maybe some of you want to build stuff, you like adventures and discovery, and others among you want knowledge and wisdom. And perhaps in all of it, you’ll find some love! There are some things in this world that you feel strongly about, and it invites you to make a difference. How will you get there? Some will say: Aim for the stars, and you might fall on the moon. Others will say no! You aim for the moon, and then you fall amongst the stars. You know what? Either way, you’re going to get there. Moon, or stars. But here’s the deal: You’ve got to do a few things, put in a bit of work, and keep at it.

You might be asking: There’s so much information out there. What’s the right thing to do, and what's the *first* thing I should do? Where do I start looking? How do I begin?

What if we told you that it’s all easier than it looks and that we’ve got the guidance for that here? And how would you feel if we told you that you can stop worrying now because here is where we’ll guide you on what to focus on? What’s important and useful to *you*? You are going to get some help to find your track and stay on it. You are about to be given something you can use right now to start feeling great about yourself and where you're going, or you can choose to do the things that will lead to that.

Right now, in this very moment, this Guidebook that has come to be in front of you will help you navigate these stages of life smoothly. It is here to aid in your breakthrough to the other side, victorious, as a powerful adult ready to take on the world, make quality friends, and start to live a good and meaningful life according to your blueprint. You might even manage to give yourself and the people you care about something to be proud of along the way.

We’re talking about harnessing essential Life Skills that will take you to that next level. It will serve as a support system for you when you’re down or could use the extra bandwidth. So, what are the essential Life Skills for someone like yourself? Someone who is probably full of hopes and dreams and desires a bright future but is also somewhat cautious and anxious about the unknown. Inside and outside of yourself, you’re constantly overloaded with information.

Right off the bat, there are two things that you need to know: one, what is happening in the first place, and two, what’s ultimately the best way to develop a good kind of inner toughness. For you to know this, you’re going to begin by learning how to listen to yourself. You’ll start by asking yourself questions and giving yourself the answers, which you can then use to find out what you need and figure out how to get it.

You are going to be the Change that you want to see in your Life. How does that sound? Are you ready? Awesome, let’s go!

## Stress Awareness and Self-Awareness

Here’s a simple analogy: When you go to a healthcare professional, the professional does a few things to try and find out what you are suffering from. They apply a method that leads them to an answer or gets them close to one. From that data, they can give you a solution that might suit you. Generally, they start by asking you a series of questions, for example, about how you feel, what you’ve been doing recently, whether you’ve been through something significant in the past, and so on. They may also use tools to take measurements that allow them to narrow things down to reach a more accurate answer.

Well, we’re not doctors. At least, not yet. But you don’t have to be one right now, or at all, to learn how to ask yourself the right questions, which will lead to good answers that you can then use to make better choices. That is Self-Awareness in a nutshell. When you are aware of what’s going on inside and outside of you, you can see everything sooner. This gives you more time to respond and make the best choices for yourself. You’ll also be able to communicate your needs and figure out if what’s been placed in front of you is really *for* *you*. And if it’s not, you can change your mind. This means you stay in charge of protecting your highest interests and deciding what is good for your own body and life plan. You have this one body for the rest of your life, and you want to be able to care for it. Health is wealth, after all. When you are also aware of your options, you can start to live the way you like and feel the way you want.

Whenever we seem to be physically okay but we're just not feeling good about things, we can apply this method of reasoning. By paying attention to how and what you're feeling inside and taking a snapshot of everything around you in that moment and the longer-term things that make you feel stressed, you can start to find healthy ways to get a firm grip and achieve your goals.

By goals, we're not talking about the candy, the short-term things you want right now. We're talking about how you can get ready to step into your future. You might even run the candy shop one day if that’s what you want. It’s not just any future. It’s your future, One that you'll get up for and stay excited about, at least most of the time, even when it’s raining. The last thing you want is to be happy for just five years and then fall into a rut all of a sudden without knowing why or how to get out of it. While there is no single recipe for happiness that will work for every person, you can get a hold of things and have a say on what results you're going to get. And in the event you find out it’s not what you want, you can change your mind and your life!

A good place to start is to first know yourself.

“Know Thyself - " is a timeless maxim that is spread across multiple human civilizations across the globe. It's been carved into the Temple of Apollo and attributed to a Greek god, echoed in Hinduist texts. It was embraced by philosophers like Plato and later Kant, Goethe, and Hegel. Even the military strategist Sun Tzi integrated it into his book on Military Method.

When you know yourself, you can handle anything and make friends anywhere. You can be in control of yourself in any situation. When you’re well-aligned inside, you can go far in anything you apply yourself to. You can stay cool on the outside but have hot coals of slow-burning passion on the inside. Ha, you say, you’ve already got the passion. Good! So, how do you protect it from getting prematurely extinguished?

## Resilience

Back in reality, as you’re living your life, your loved ones will push you one way, and your mates will push you another way. How do you stick to *your* way without causing problems? Some people will tell you, oh, it’s easy. Just stop wanting to be liked in general. But hang on a minute. Is it really about you wanting to be liked? Or do people give you a hard time whenever you stand your ground or stand out? Even if you wanted to change things, wouldn’t you have to get in the right setup to assert yourself or benefit from standing out? If you are also someone like us who suddenly had to find their way in the real world and start from ground Zero, you’re going to need to build up resilience and confidence so that you can create choices and options in your life. No one else is going to do that for you. Although some might open doors along the way, it’s not a given. So, let’s talk about resilience in this context and how it will allow you to position yourself for success and results.

Suppose you show up at a house party that’s in full swing. The people’s vibes are off-the-charts, the music’s epic. Next thing you know, the host saunters up to you and offers you a rolled-up cigarette. It gives you pause. Sometimes, the problem isn’t what’s factually in it but how it looks and what it’s going to cost you later. Word travels. You’re possibly confident and a go-getter, but you have some integrity, too; you want to protect yourself and the people who support you. In that moment, you fear that your friends will think you are a bad sport or a total prude for turning it down. But you know your loved ones disapprove of such things. The house also belongs to a supportive senior or mentor you’ve just made a good impression on. The chances of them getting wind of it are high; you respect them, and you know they’d be disappointed. Just to up the stakes, from the corner of your eye, you can see your crush watching you. Everybody likes them. Your rival is also close by, watching her. It sends your adrenaline skyrocketing. You want to impress them, to come across as that person who should be taken seriously but knows how to let loose and have fun, too. What will you do?

Let’s assume you have a rough idea of what puts the pressure on you and how to deal with it. You more or less know the kind of life you want to have, but it just gets tough at times. It’s too easy to give in to all the pressure, especially when it closes in on you like that, and it’s hard to make the right decision in the middle of the chaos. What are your options? How can you remain calm and consistent with your values as you move toward your goals and dreams?

The answer lies in Resilience. It’s the key to handling life’s changes in uncontrolled environments. This trait is your ability to bounce back from adversity, especially when you have to be seen to disagree or be disagreeable and hold your ground to advance yourself. Resilience counters stress, simply put. It’s essential for recovering from any kind of challenge and moving forward with a full bar of health and stamina. To develop the inner and outer strength to say no to what ultimately hurts you and yes to the things that take you closer to becoming who you want to be. This is not about being rigid and unyielding or playing life like a quarterback all the time.

When you’re too rigid, you can break. When you put yourself out there too much without considering whether that suits your play type, you can break. It’s about developing the right kind of flexibility so that you can play both offense and defense and bounce back instead of being stuck and suffering the consequences of playing the game. Additionally, your consistency matters. You develop resilience by being clear about your values and staying independent of other people’s opinions and problems while also managing your emotions and staying focused on your goals. Easier said than done.

This is what we’re here for - To help you accomplish just that. In the next chapter, you’ll discover a gauge that identifies and measures your response to challenges from both inside and outside. You will be shown how to take a snapshot of your inner state and outer environment at any given point. We can then chart the sum of moving parts. Once we get you aware of what these moving parts are, you can catch and deal with them the right way before they snowball. You’re going to want to stick around for the later chapters, too, where we’ll double your takeaway by exploring the concept of resilience in-depth, sharing resources and practical applications for personal growth and well-being. This practical experience and self-learning is what will exponentially accelerate whatever you can pick up in a book or at school. It can be applied to anything you’ve learned before or after.

Up next, we’ll be digging deep into the science behind all of this and provide the charts that you can use to get the lowdown on exactly why you feel this way when you’re feeling it, what to do about it, and why putting off dealing with it can come back to bite you real hard. Let’s go!

# 2

# The Stress-Teen Connection

S

tress is a part of life that affects us all, and it can be especially tough on young adults and adolescents. A superb way to get a handle on that is to first understand the science behind stress, including its physiological and psychological dimensions. We’ve dedicated this chapter to exploring common stressors and their long-term consequences on mental health. Once you realize how it affects your life, you can take on the right skills or seek out appropriate support. These will get you through challenging times. Our goal here is to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and real-world experience so that you have a robust foundation to draw on as you do the later activities.

## Unraveling the Science of Stress

To truly grasp stress in its entirety, it's important to explore both its physical and emotional roots. By understanding these stages, youth can gain insight into their body's reactions and the delicate balance required for optimal health.

## Physiological Underpinnings

Stress isn't just a mental experience; it's deeply ingrained in our biology. On your journey of self-discovery, it's essential to accurately measure your body's response to stressors.

The stress syndrome is the body's natural response to any demand. It manifests in three primary reactions: the adrenal cortex expands, which impacts blood pressure and hormones; the thymus and lymphatic tissues shrink, leading to a weakened immunity; and the duodenum and stomach are affected, often resulting in digestive problems or pain.

In Science, Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) explains the three stages involved [[2]](#endnote-2) :

### 1) The Phase of Alarm,

This stage is your body's first trigger response, also known as the fight-or-flight syndrome. It's a natural phase that puts you on high alert, helping you instinctively jump away from danger even before you process anything visually. Your body's innate wiring takes over, aided by a quick release of adrenaline and other chemicals, allowing you to react quickly to your immediate surroundings. These chemicals awaken your nervous system, which signals the adrenal glands to release specific hormones like cortisol and epinephrine. Consequently, these hormones send signals to your heart to pump harder, lungs to open up for more air and accommodate faster breaths, and the vessels in your intestine and skin to contract so that the heart can pump more blood into your muscles and so on. You may experience trembling, dilated pupils, flushed or pale skin, and a heady feeling.[[3]](#endnote-3)

### 2) The Adaptation Phase

The body has a recovery mechanism, known as the Adaptation or Resistance Phase. Once the initial shock has passed, your body attempts to return to its natural rhythm after repairing any damage caused. This process works best when you've resolved the issue that caused the problem. However, if you're unable to overcome the trying situation, the body will never receive the signal to return to normal functioning. Consequently, it will continue to release fresh hormones into the body, leading to various issues. These issues can include changes in appetite, digestive problems, headaches, mood swings, and feelings of fear, sadness, or anger. On top of this, it can cause sleep disturbances, difficulty concentrating, and decision-making problems. Moreover, it can result in unexplained body pains and rashes, especially when exposed to prolonged high-stress environments.[[4]](#endnote-4)  3

If this continues, we will arrive at the final phase:

### 3) The Exhaustion Phase

If chronic stress is left unresolved, it can lead to severe consequences. At this point, your body will be drained of all its resources and unable to cope with new challenges. You might experience classic signs of burnout, such as fatigue that doesn't go away with rest or food and a general decrease in your ability to handle pressure or stay in control of your response.

By mid-adulthood, these issues can compound, leading to serious mental and physical problems. It can cost much time and resource to resolve these issues, and unfortunately, many people don't get the help they need. These issues can be passed on to the next generation if left unaddressed.

Understanding these stages can help you understand why and when your body reacts in certain ways and what you can do to mitigate these effects. In the following chapters, you will find a series of incredibly useful tools that we have specially selected to suit your busy lifestyle and inquisitive mind.

## Psychological Dimensions

The impact of stress extends beyond the physical and manifests in the mental sphere, too. While the brain reaches full maturity only after the age of 25, before that, it remains in a stage of growth, especially the prefrontal cortex, which governs our executive thinking functions.[[5]](#endnote-5) These functions include our functioning memory, inhibitory control, and flexibility of attention shifting, all of which contribute to our ability to hold information, direct our own behavior, and focus on multiple pieces of information simultaneously, even amidst chaos.

As we navigate through life, we encounter various triggers, such as academic or early career pursuits and concerns over social status. These triggers lead to high expectations, competition, and the pursuit of wealth and success, all of which can significantly contribute to our load. By carefully observing how we perceive and manage these stressors, we can gain insight into our behavioral patterns. This knowledge can serve as a powerful resource that we can apply to countless scenarios to manage the intensity and build mental resilience.[[6]](#endnote-6)

## Navigating the Stress Landscape

Striking a balance between your well-being and ambitions will put you on the track to success. However, social interactions, which are vital for healthy development and making connections, can also trigger unwanted anxiety. Peer pressure, social comparison, and the need for acceptance can be overwhelming if not handled correctly. To achieve balance, one can engage in hobbies or practices that help develop a more holistic approach to life. [[7]](#endnote-7) The tools and exercises we’ll provide in later sections can help maintain balance and achieve excellence.

Notably, Generation Z, aged 15-21, experience trauma more intensely than other age groups.[[8]](#endnote-8) They also report poor or fair mental health more often than their counterparts. As mentioned earlier, the part of the brain that modulates your experiences takes four more years to develop fully, meaning that young adults have limited inner coping resources. However, developing coping skills early on can mitigate the effects of stress. This book aims to provide information to develop these skills. Let's quickly summarize what we are trying to counter with these skills.

## The Top Stressors

* Changes in the Body
* Social Stress
* Bullying
* Performance Stress
* Family Dynamics
* Separation or Divorce of parents
* Living in Unsafe Environments
* Changing Schools, Cities, or Countries
* Worries over Career and the Future

All the topics mentioned above have one element in common - change. In addition, technology has given rise to a new phenomenon known as Digital Stress. With always-on connectivity, the distorted reality of social media, and technologically over-penetrated public spaces, it can take time to strike a balance between the real and virtual worlds. We’ll expand on the topic at a later stage, but it's worth noting that the digital lifestyle can also impact the body in various ways. For instance, exposure to artificial light can disrupt your sleep rhythm [[9]](#endnote-9), which we’ll detail in the Balancing Act Chapter.

## The Ripple Effect

If left unaddressed, the strain can throw a proverbial wrench into your mind’s development. Chronic stress can cast a long, dark shadow over one's mental health if left to do its job.[[10]](#endnote-10) The hippocampus - responsible for managing memory - is also negatively impacted by the chemicals released during difficult episodes.[[11]](#endnote-11) Over time, this translates into a reduced ability to recover, learn, and adapt, making it increasingly difficult to pick ourselves up and move forward. Ultimately, this can lead to memory loss, anxiety, and depression - all of which can be challenging to recover from.

The good news is that you can be proactive in taking steps to mitigate issues, safeguard your mental well-being, and ensure peace of mind.

## A Holistic Approach to Stress Management

Now that we’ve help you gain a solid understanding of the science behind stress, you can develop a framework to interpret and respond to any challenge. Your practice serves as a buffer against harmful effects. Throughout the book, we’ll integrate elements from positive psychology to shift your focus toward your strengths and virtues so that you fortify yourself against chronic stress and any of its corrosive effects.

When choosing habits and activities, refer back to the physiological and psychological dimensions to make more informed decisions.[[12]](#endnote-12) This knowledge will help you select the best way forward for your development so that you can bounce back from adversity and transform challenges into opportunities for growth.5 Building a network and support system of family and peers will greatly amplify the results of any personal strategies you implement.

By taking a holistic approach, balancing science and the human spirit, you'll lay the foundation for a balanced life and equip yourself to tackle the uncertainties of the future. [[13]](#endnote-13) 5 As you embrace change and seize opportunities for growth, you become part of an empowered generation that's ready to create anything they can imagine in the modern world.

On our next leg, you'll learn some epic life map-making skills that you can add to your arsenal and apply immediately to your environment and design your future.

# 3

# MAPPING YOUR STRESS LANDSCAPE

T

he term "stress" has become a ubiquitous part of our everyday language. For some of us, hearing the word can be accompanied by mild feelings of discomfort and anxiety. Don’t you at times wish that you could make it disappear with a snap of your fingers or a wave of your hand - a wand, maybe?

As much as it can be unpleasant to deal with, it also serves an important purpose. When channeled properly, it can bring out the strengths that lay dormant in everyone, regardless of age. The good news is that the younger you are, the easier it is to coax out of you simply because you’re starting on a blank canvas. The main problem is that many people - especially when relatively young - may encounter various obstacles when trying to find the appropriate resources to cope.

In the last chapter, we explained it closer to scientific terms. But how easily would you recognize it and know what to do about it in real life? In this section, with knowledge from science as a foundation, we will outline some basic concepts and practical steps to identify and tackle the root causes of stress. Have a look through and find what’s most relevant to you. Typically, it will be the areas that resonate with you the most.

## What Stress Means for Gen Z

Generation Z, as they say, was born in times of exponential change. Transitions are now occurring at a breakneck pace, faster than anyone has ever had to live through in pre-techno ages. What that means for you is that your mind and body take a huge toll when trying to adapt to the challenges well enough. Unfortunately, this subject is little understood and is still being studied. It’s also easy to overlook, especially in the case of digital stress. You’re looking at your phone and casually flipping through; the next moment, you’ve lost hours. When you turn your attention to other tasks, you feel differently but may not know how to place it, right? And as time goes by, you find that the way you feel inside has changed. You might be more prone to irritability or show less interest in your immediate surroundings, but it’s not something you talk about because it’s so normalized.

We typically get our hands on sophisticated technology from a young age, something that was inconceivable years ago. What this means is that we may only develop enough healthy distance from it much later. You’ve probably already observed many of your peers swearing off social media for this reason because they’ve found out early. But what if you don’t detect it early on? If left improperly moderated, it could do a fair bit of damage over time, which makes it hard to know where to start. And according to statistics, those from your generation are least likely to seek formal treatment or, perhaps, admit to it. This is the generation of self-help, driven by the prevailing culture of the online sphere, which is the spirit of community journalism and freedom of movement and access with minimal barriers or intrusive regulations. And that means self-education. But when there are so many things out there that want to “educate” you, what gives?

A good way to assess is by asking these questions:

a) Does this technique require your allegiance to a group belief or anyone else but yourself?

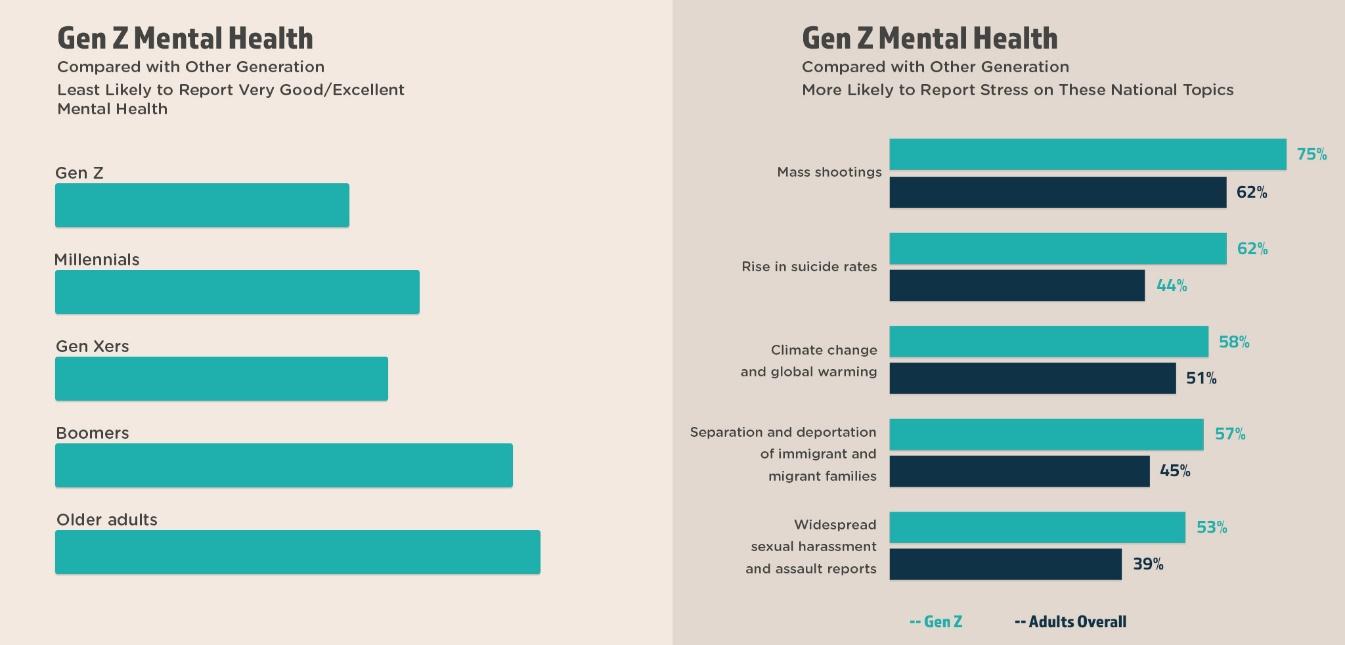
b) Does it instruct you to listen to your intuition and be the director of your own life?

c) What is the underlying message?

Are there any messages suggesting that you should feel inadequate, which lead to feelings of craving? Or does it let you feel good without poking holes and ready to give without losing your footing? This will help you understand where anything is taking you and allow you to remain neutral.

Technology’s penetration rate is still incomplete. The birth of Artificial Intelligence was only a rather recent event. This gives us some time to observe it and adopt our own strategies for co-existing with it. As time progresses, circumventing the compounded effects of stress will become an increasing concern. Your good desire to figure things out for yourself, to set things right, and to take personal responsibility is all fantastic. But you will find that the same attitude that took you far early on becomes less effective in your adult life. Without adjustments, they may start to hold you back. Normally, mid-to-late adulthood is the time people earnestly try to do something about it. If you can start doing the clearing early on or at least come into contact with the concept, you’ll have a much easier time in the future. Part of the reason is because you absorb things most quickly at this stage.

Stress-related mental health problems like anxiety and depression were already on the rise in the last decades. The confinement period of 2020 saw a recent spike in reported mental health issues, and members of Gen Z were the least likely to report being okay. [0.5][fig 1)

*Fig 1*

*Source: American Psyhological Association © 2018. Copyright*

It’s definitely not a sign that you’re not as good as other generations. In fact, there’s every bit to suggest that we improve with every new generation. So if we’re that good, why aren’t we doing better, you may ask. As illustrated in our last chapter, the physical brain reaches its full maturity around the age of 25. There’s also never been a time when a generation was required to absorb so much new information so quickly. Therefore, anyone who falls under this age group would highly benefit from cultivating the appropriate skills that act as a buffer, protecting you from damage while you’re finding your footing.

## What is Stress, in Layman's Terms?

We previously covered this using some general science-based topics.

In layman's terms, stress is a normal human response to changes in our inner and outer world, integrating the physical, emotional, and mental levels. Its presence in your life is no indicator of failure. It’s just an imbalance created by some situation or element, also known as a stressor. Any stressful reaction is by original evolutionary design to put us on track with achieving a state of well-being and fulfillment, also called *eustress*. [[14]](#endnote-14) [[15]](#endnote-15) [[16]](#endnote-16)

Despite its bad reputation and how it makes you feel, stress is not the enemy per se. Once you’re able to define it with some accuracy, you can choose ways to develop a constructive relationship with it so that it serves you - not the other way around. Once you can see it as a natural occurrence in a life lived to the fullest, it will be easier to deal with. You can keep a healthy distance from it until you find your rhythm. It’s like holding your ground and being ready while things dance around you so you know when to strike or step back. You do this instead of dancing around the many moving targets that would put you in a position to get thrown off balance. When you know that you always have access to good resources, everything feels more manageable. Keeping your own journal will help you feel on top of things.

## Types of Stress

So, what is the lowdown on stress?

Stress types can generally be sorted by severity and time taken, measured from when it begins to when it’s resolved: e.g. healthy stress versus acute stress, episodic or situational acute stress, and chronic stress 13. For ease, we’ve broken it down for you and put it in a quick chart that separates physiological (healthy) stress from harmful variations:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Physiological (Healthy) Stress** | **Unhealthy Stress** |
| Fast and complete resolution of trigger stressor (Up to 36 hours depending on stressful situation) | Slow or incomplete resolution, tension sustained over time (chronic stress) |
| Learning & knowledge-integration is achieved despite any initial tension or imbalance. | Perpetual state of tension and/or incomprehension |
| Channeled with meaningful hobbies and healthy habits | Use of vices, addictions, and other disruptive or unhealthy behaviors as outlets |
| Assertive and empathetic responses | Reactive, irritable responses |
| Promotes psychological and metabolic flexibility and adaptability | Linked to rigid thinking and frustration, Intolerance of different viewpoints |

## Dimensions of the Self and Endogenous Sources of Stress

As you can see, stress is a response that involves all aspects of the self. It can be useful to learn how it is expressed in each of them for early and accurate detection.

### Mental Dimension

When you hear the word stress, it’s likely to conjure up an image of somebody in a state of anxiety, worry and/or irritability. These are advanced manifestations of stress at the mental level, and there are several more to take into account. It’s not too fun to think about, but it’s a great feeling when you get on top of things. You just have to know what they are. The major and most common ones are 13 14:

* Constant anxiety and worry
* Difficulty concentrating
* Aggressiveness and hostility
* Mood swings
* Depression
* Hyperactivity and overthinking
* Learning and memory problems
* Procrastination
* Self-concept and low self-esteem problems

### Emotional Dimension

Emotions are our set of subjective and naturally-occurring psychological states. If processed correctly, they allow us to mobilize ourselves as we wish to reach greater heights in well-being and awareness.

All the emotions you experience can be traced back to the results of cause and effect. Further into the book, you can find simple exercises that let you journal them thoroughly. When you experience stress, it impacts your ability to manage constructively. There are 5 main emotional states which manifest as follows, when balanced or imbalanced 15:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| ROOT EMOTION | **HEALTHY EXPRESSION AND/OR TRANSMUTATION** | **WHEN OUT OF BALANCE AND/OR CONTEXT** |
| Joy | Radiance. High sociability. Positive empathy and good feelings that spread. Able to enjoy life. Invites new connections and experiences. | Blinded by euphoria, too open to suggestion. Mania. Lack of self-regulation or boundaries. Impulsiveness followed by regret. Mainly experienced as invasive by others. |
| Fear | Precaution. Swift and effective response against real threats in the present moment. Respect or gratitude for life. | Angst. Incessant worry. Degrees of paranoid thinking, imagined threats. Lack of initiative or mobility. Helplessness. |
| Love | Compassion, generosity and empathy in proportion. Self-care. Nurture and support of a community in sustainable ways, direct or indirect. Able to give and receive. | All-consuming Obsessions and Fanaticism. Martyrdom. Giving too much without taking care of oneself. Co-dependency. Comes across as smothering. |
| Anger | Courage to take action. Willpower, drive, grit. Conviction, see things through to completion. Can keep going but also let go, ready for higher states. | Rage. Conviction used to drive Violent and destructive behaviors. Inability to stop, reflect or change. Leads to depression during inactivity. |
| Sadness | Insight and introspection. Empathy and humility after hitting rock bottom. Openness to new experiences or connections. | Depression. Over-Nostalgia hinders appreciation of new experiences and connections. Living in the past, unable to be in the present or see a future. |

Make an emotional stress management checklist by asking yourself:

How balanced or imbalanced is (choose one emotion) in my life?

Tip: Use a scale from 1 to 10 for a more precise answer.

### Body Dimension

The body is wise in its way and speaks its own language. Chronic health problems, however minor, are more often than not indications of stress, especially those that emerge in specific situations (e.g., allergies). It may also be related to unmet bodily needs. These are among the most common manifestations of stress in physical health [[17]](#endnote-17):

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Muscle Tension and Pain** | **Tiredness** | **Allergies** |
| Asthma | Metabolic Syndrome | Autoimmune Diseases |
| Bruxism (Teeth Grinding) | Headache | Back Pain |
| Stomachache, Nausea, Vomiting | Loosening of Bowels & Diarrhea | Constipation |
| Phlegm, Nasal Congestion, Sinusitis | Sleep problems (lack of sleep, waking up tired, interruption) | Premenstrual Syndrome & Menstrual Disorders |

### Existential Stress

Although it may surprise some, this type of stress is common even in those who are atheist, agnostic or non-religious. It is because we all have an inner voice that makes us wonder about our true nature, purpose and place in the world around us and beyond. We seek meaning in life and wonder why we’re here. It’s exacerbated during moments of isolation. Once again, it is not a negative state per se, it can yield profound insights and desirable life-changing experiences.

Existential stress is a tension that comes from not being at peace with the unknown, and always looking outside of ourselves. It makes us second guess our own intuition and right to be here, worrying if what we are doing resonates with what we want to create for our future. At the extreme ends, we may fall into pessimism that there is a future at all. If not properly channeled, it can lead to inability to show up in life or be present, feelings of dread, a sense of doom or futility, overt fascination with death or the theoretical afterlife, unrelenting depression, strong xenophobia. In general, this is a stress that you give yourself before you’ve fully come to terms with the state of being alive in an unknown sum of moving parts.

To 'measure' the impact of stress in this dimension, you may ask yourself:

1. Do I constantly feel like I am struggling more than normal, even though I am somewhat above the basics for survival? How often do I struggle with indecision or uncertainty over my life plans?
2. How often do I need to be alone? Do I feel good being alone, or do I experience negative and heavy emotions most of the time?
3. How often do I have feelings of regret or despair? How strong are these emotions felt, and how long does an episode last on average?
4. How often do I find myself questioning reality, society at the structural level and what we have been taught? Does this lead to the creation of works, or does it go around in circles and nothing is accomplished?
5. Do I score far above average in aptitude tests, or did I used to show great promise in high school but ended up performing far below average, drifting from one thing or place to another? If so, how often and how hard do I need to force myself not to care? Be honest.
6. Is what I am doing and the future I am building authentic? How often do I experience doubt, and at what intensity?

## Non-existential related External Stressors

In our immediate surroundings, still outside of ourselves, we encounter people and events that make up the other part of our experience. Although it can be tempting to blame everything on circumstance, the real fruits of learning lie in that connection that joins what’s inside of us with what’s outside of us. No matter how strong and uncontrollable outer influences may seem, we are able to establish harmony instead of control. You can either try to break through the circumstances, improve your response to them, or realize that the answer is to arrive at both at the same time. It is the quintessential chicken or egg question: which comes first? Perhaps they both happen at the same time based on things you set in motion.

### Academics & Work

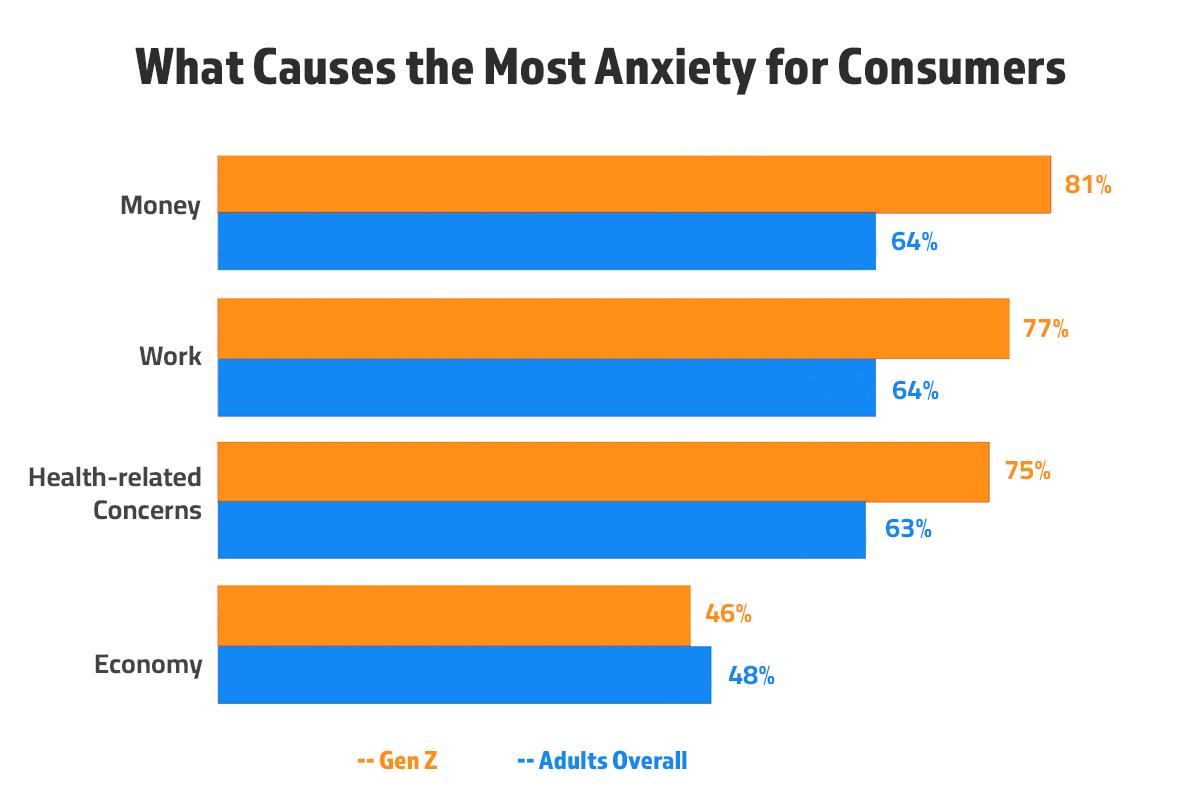
The demands of school, extra-curricular activities, or finding a job you love are leading sources of pressure. Additionally, the circumstances happening around the world may at times, make it seem selfish or unreasonable for you to want more out of life. You may feel compelled to disguise your needs by doing something that appears to primarily fulfill other people’s needs just to avoid the kind of social backlash that cancels you. Or, ironically, you may feel forced to defend yourself when your pursuits that were born out of your natural generosity and care for the world are met with suspicion and attacks. These are extreme cases that both lead to burnout, but it would be a shame if your reluctance to handle those levels of stress discourages you from showing up fully in the world. You deserve to live the kind of life you want. Granted, some things are impossible to avoid. But like we said, your attitude matters, and so do the skills you develop precisely to allow you to handle or overcome these factors any day and any way.

### Home & Family

This can come from the order and cleanliness in your room to the atmosphere of peace or conflict in your home, as well as events that impact the family. There can be added stress from lack of support or opposition to your development or autonomy.

### Finances

Unsurprisingly, wealth security is a top concern for Gen Z above any other age group studied. Exploring the world, finding your place in life, and pursuing your highest dreams to the fullest extent all require financial backing. Even the prospect of meeting the basics, such as having to put a roof over your head and pay the bills, is underlined by cost concerns. This situation can continue until you manage to implement a setup that allows independence unless you’re already there. These concerns are shared to some degree by every other person in your immediate environment and beyond, regardless of age.



*(fig 1)*

*Source: American Psychological Association © February 2019 Copyright*

### Social & Sentimental

Social relationships become more complex, particularly from one’s teens up till early adulthood. Romantic love, the need for recognition and belonging, and sexual desire all rise to the forefront around this period. Confusion and difficulty can arise from competing priorities and not knowing which is more important or what the right time or approach is. Rather than introduce concepts that try to give direct instruction with Game-based methods, our approach is to teach you how to maintain your gravity and be ready. This perspective ensures the least interference in the way you form friendships or relationships. You spend more time being in charge of assessing without being needy in ways that hurt both you and the other party. In turn, your chances of finding solutions that last and suit you increase, too. When you give yourself the confidence that you can probably meet someone you like anytime, your stress levels immediately go down.

### Food & Lifestyle

The quality and consistency of your diet, as well as your choice of physical activity, play a large part in supporting your overall health. Good nutrition helps in your ability to cope when the going gets tough. We will cover this in-depth in the later chapters.

### Environmental

Pollution present in the environment can influence your stress levels. This can encompass smog from traffic, the availability of clean, fluoride-free water, the volume of ongoing sounds that you can hear, and vibrations from nearby heavy vehicles or train lines traveling through the ground. Most of us have become so accustomed to the presence of these things that we simply don’t realize they’re there until we’ve spent some time in a quiet place. All these can affect your sleep quality, memory and cognition, the degree to which you function every day, and your capacity to be open to receiving new connections. In environments with hidden and overt noises, it becomes just that much harder to pay attention to your inner voice. Consider assessing the environment that you live in and make note of what's around. In your search, you can also find the spots that are most conducive or meaningful. Here’s a short list of modern forms of pollution you can use to tick off:

* Electromagnetic pollution (power lines, cell towers, and phones) [[18]](#endnote-18)
* Light pollution (especially at night)
* Noise pollution
* *Infoxication* or information overload

### Screen-Time & 'Techno-Stress'

Recent studies have shown that youth typically clock 7.5 hours of screen time per day. Consider that the body starts to change after only 15 minutes of exposure 17 [[19]](#endnote-19) , and the younger the user, the more pronounced the effect. Social networks and video games also pose unique challenges that deserve their own set of holistic solutions for the “always-on” culture. In Chapter 9, we will explore the broader topics in detail and present exercises to alleviate the negative effects.

## Plot Your Landscape

“What is not defined, cannot be measured. What is not measured, cannot be improved. What is not improved, always degrades.”

- William Thomson Kelvin

Now that we have covered the basics concepts surrounding stress, when you observe your reality you can now more readily identify the top stress factors in your life and how they affect you as a whole.

## Identifying Main Dimensions of Conflict

This will allow you to assess the aspects of your health which you may have to pay more attention to.

You may refer to the lists and tables in the earlier parts of this chapter as a starting point. Going through each point, apply a general scale of 1 to 10 to indicate which aspects most resonate with you, 1 being least true, and 10 being most relatable.

Once done, work out your average score for each dimension. The categories with the highest score indicate that this area may be worth looking into first. You can then set your priorities and choose the corresponding anti-stress tools contained in this book to tackle these external stress factors.

## Identifying Main External Stressors

When thinking about being in control, do you often find yourself wondering just how in control you really are of each aspect of life? We have a worry-free tool here that will help you assess where you are at. You may also find the scale system handy for this task.

You could start with scoring yourself on the types of stressors listed above (Academic & Work, Home & Family, Finances, etc.) and write down your own details in point form. That’s going to be useful for the exercises later.

## Track your Evolution

When you start working on anything, it makes sense to have a way to gauge how you’re doing in one glance. Apps are useful, but there’s something about writing things down and designing your own mindmaps that adds to your confidence. Tracking your evolution will also make it easier to keep tabs on your progress in a way that lets you start from wherever you left off, and cover more ground in the same time than using something that does most of the work for you. You can use it to set yourself in the right mode every morning or start of the week, depending on your rhythm. Ideally you’d be doing the things you want to do and getting the results you expect, and the best way to achieve this is to write your own plan. You’ll also be able to quickly notice new things as they come into your life, and see how they fit into the general scheme of things.

## Reflect On your Results

Practicing regular journaling with spontaneous entries is a great way to reflect, as it goes beyond adopting an anti-stress program. It can be a cathartic and liberating experience that gives you something to look back on in a few years time. This is more than measuring the effectiveness of what you’re doing right now. It’s also to understand how to get the most out of your experiences and learn about yourself as a person.

Beating stress is a task that requires dedication and self-honesty. In life, unless you live under a rock, challenges and situations will always rise to test your resolve. So it's up to you to decide if you’re going to get knocked down into place by adversity, or use them as a springboard for next-level personal growth. Stick around for the next segment for more anti-stress resources, we’ll run through how to pick which ones you’ll get the most out of based on your profile and needs.

Moving on!

# Chapter 3

# APPENDIX - Trackers & Reflection Guides

## Identifying & Classifying Stressors

Identifying the stressors in your life is an initial step towards an effective stress management strategy for a balanced life.

Use this table to note down as many stressors and trigger situations that spring to mind. Take as much time as you feel like. You may come back to the list and add more entries over the span of a week, it’s normal to take some time to sort out what’s on your mind. Each time, you may only spend 30 seconds or a few minutes, what matters is that you’re interested in figuring this out for yourself.

At the end of the exercise, give each entry a score of 1 to 10.

1, being the least stressful, and 10 being the most severe and strongly felt. This will help you set priorities regarding which stressors are most important to address first.

Take a look at each stressor and determine how often it appears and how strongly it’s felt. Also note specifics like situations that are pronounced or unusual (e.g., phobias and situations that are particularly upsetting to you). This will help us narrow down which kinds of de-stressors are most effective for your situation, and whether you’re best suited for more quick adjustments on-the-go or ready for practices that have a regular pace and progression. We’ll talk about them in the next chapter.

The score in the last column is to filter out longer-term situations for which, for the moment, you have no direct solutions. The best ways to manage a 1 will differ greatly from a 10.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| STRESSOR/TRIGGER | SCORE  (1 TO 10) | CONSTANT OR EPISODIC | How Much Is It Within My Control? (1 to 10) |
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## Reflection Sheet for Stress Management

Once you’ve taken the time to list the stressors in your life, reflect on them. Decide which ones are more important and feasible to address. We would suggest starting with listing 5 to 10 stress points at a time. Some exercises will work well for several of them. Answer the following questions about each point you have raised:

How am I impacted by this situation?

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When did it start to happen?

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Who and/or what caused it?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How much control do I feel over this situation? What do I wish I could do about it or achieve?

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Other reflections

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# 4

# Cool Techniques for Instant Calm

N

ow that we’ve thoroughly examined and plotted the stress factors that exist inside and outside of yourself, you hopefully have a better overview of what you are dealing with. If knowledge is power, then you have just gained some inner power with a stronger understanding of how things work.

With this newfound knowledge and awareness, you can better gauge where you stand and the scope of any problems you face. We have identified problems and causes, but we also have to take action. Looking at the map of your stress landscape that we’ve just created together, how do you decide the right action to take for yourself?

In Chapter 1, we introduced the concept of resilience and why it’s worth developing for yourself. Even as you are reading this book, life for you up to this point has probably already been rather stressful. When everything is already moving at the speed of light, and you’re unable to push the pause button, how do you find an opening to develop resilience? Would it not be akin to attempting to assemble a parachute while in freefall? Or trying to dive roll out of a car that’s still moving?

See, you can’t always directly control the movement of things around you, but you can begin to control *your* actions and responses.

We’ll have something here for you to set your mind at ease, using your innate ability. The idea is to slow it down the right way so that you can get ready to be fast on your next moves. When your mind is made to dart about so quickly from one thing to another, it can’t gain the grounding and perspective required to assess situations or distances to moving targets and goals properly. That means that when other people move or push, you also get moved and pushed. When you’re like this, you have trouble showing up the way you want, while all your inner resources get drained out by your constant repositioning.

In the following section, you will find some techniques that will help keep you firmly in the driver’s seat of your life and seize the day. What we will teach you costs you absolutely nothing and gives you everything in return. It is easy to implement but takes some practice to quell your anxiety and calm your mind using your own reasoning. The best thing is that you can start to use it right away and see results.

Before we show you the techniques, let's cover some bare basics, so you know what you are doing and why.

## Mindfulness

Whether you’ve been a relative homebody or stayed outgoing in recent years, chances are you have probably heard of this word before. You can’t be faulted for thinking of it as a fad, but it would be a shame to dismiss it too early. This practice has become so popular for good reason. It works, and there is scientific evidence to back its claims. [[20]](#endnote-20)

We have taken into account the multitude of programs available out there on the market and specially chosen the ones that offer the best results and potential for those like yourself.

If done properly with the right intention-setting, what it can do for you is this 18:

* Improve your sleep
* Improve your focus and clarity throughout the day
* Improve confidence steadily as a response to seeing results
* Reduce the effects of the aging process on the body through the body’s own chemistry.[[21]](#endnote-21)
* Increase your brain’s capacity for learning and recovery in uncontrolled environments by improving its operating conditions, which leads to improved neuroplasticity.
* Open up opportunities to increase your long-term memory.
* Decrease anxiety from unknown factors, and in turn, reduce stress

This is just the beginning of the benefits that you can harvest from the long-term practice of mindfulness. It is a process of alignment, to stop yourself from the energy loss of constantly having to reposition yourself or losing ground. It is powerful because your mind is powerful. What it does is clear away the clutter and let you do the job. It will do it for you free of charge and requires no allegiance to anything or anyone but yourself and your highest good.

Can you wager a guess on how long it takes to see initial results?

Two hours a day? One hour a day? Half an hour?

Surprisingly, even a minute done right can be enough to feel an improvement.

## The 1-minute Technique

This is a great place to start, and will do in a snap when you’re on the go.

Imagine you’ve just had a heated argument with your project mates. There’s a presentation due tomorrow that will decide the course of your life for the next few years, and right now, it’s just Murphy’s Law - everything that can go wrong is pretty much going wrong. You are ultra-stressed; you can't focus during crunchtime, and your brain is racing at full speed. Your body is tensed up and out of the zone. What can you do? You can’t even think clearly at this point.

The word is “Breathe”. You can harness the power of your breath.[[22]](#endnote-22) As you have likely already noticed, whenever you or your friends are under some pressure, you sometimes sigh. We are going to do something a little more than just heaving a sigh. We will take that same principle to the next level so that the benefits get increased exponentially in the shortest time.

Your breath and your emotions are closely interlinked. If you pay attention, you’ll notice that the way you breathe changes when the way you feel changes, and vice versa. When you're stressed, your breaths become shorter and faster. Your heart rate increases and can become irregular. This may be familiar to you in sensation, but you may not have had pause to really think about it.

Let's address this quickly with the 4-7-8 Breathing Technique and see what happens after 4 rounds. The steps are simple and as follows:

1. Find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed for at least 1 minute. Sit down and get comfortable. Close your eyes if possible. If not, look as far into the distance as you can so everything close-by looks out of focus. If you struggle with that, you can look at something green and leafy that’s not moving much.
2. Breathe in for 4 seconds using only your nose, visualizing that you are filling your lower belly with air while your chest remains still without rising. Feel your stomach area stretch and expand under your chest, filling with air.
3. Gently hold your breath for 7 seconds. Count in your head, 1-a-thousand, 2-a-thousand, 3-a-thousand, up to 7-a-thousand.
4. Breathe out steadily for 8 seconds, through only your mouth but not your nose. Pretend you're blowing a bubble that can't pop. Once again keep your chest still and use your stomach muscles to crunch out the air gradually. 1-a-thousand, 2-a-thousand, 3-a-thousand, up to 8-a-thousand.
5. Repeat the steps above up to 3 more times. (If you only have 1 minute, you can do it 2 more times.)

Straight after this exercise, you will find your state of mind has changed. Your brain is pumped with oxygen. Your body is buzzing and feels charged in a good way. This immediately brings you into the present moment. You’re sitting in your own body a little bit differently now. You are “here”; you feel more ready. This helps when done right before you have to perform on a test or do public speaking.

Did you do the exercise? See how fast that was. If you haven’t done so yet, duck away for a minute and give it a shot.

## Harness your Full Senses

This method works for people who experience panic attacks. It involves using your senses and grounding yourself by going through them one by one.

1. **Pause.** Wherever you are, step aside safely and stop for a minute.
2. **Look Around.** Notice 5 different things you can see. It could be the color of the sky, the trees or the pattern on a friend's bag.
3. **Listen.** Pick out 4 things you can hear. It could be laughter, loud footsteps, the distant barking of a dog, a clock ticking, or your breathing.
4. **Feel.** Find 3 things you can touch. The texture of your scarf or shirt, the breeze against your face, the smoothness or bumpiness on the surface of a stone or desk.
5. **Smell.** Discern 2 things using your sense of smell. Perhaps it's the freshly cut grass, warm stone under the sun, the scent of soap, or your sleeve or scarf. Draw them in steadily.
6. **Taste.** Focus on 1 thing you can taste, even if it's just the lingering flavor of your last snack. You can use your breath to do this, parting your jaws without opening your mouth and then pushing your breath out from your nose. If you have a piece of candy, you can use that too. If you’re prone to passing out, keep the candy in your hand and outside of your mouth, positioning it lower than your lips as you taste it.

## Positive Affirmations

Words have power. They can be used to instruct and set intentions. They can be used to plant seeds in you or others, which then continue to eat into you or build you up.

Positive affirmations can guide your mind to adopt a healthier and more balanced outlook.[[23]](#endnote-23) Practiced with some consistency, your attitude is also likely to improve automatically. Here are some affirmations you can use:

* "I am calm and focused in this moment."
* "I am creative and resourceful."
* “I am an individual who is worthy of love.”
* “I have a place in this world. I deserve to be here. I have a right to be here.”
* “I am powerful. I can achieve almost anything I put my mind to with time and the right effort.”
* "I am in charge of my own Life. I am the pilot of my Soul.”
* “I can choose to use my presence to make the world a better place. For myself and others.”
* “I have many inner resources that allow me to release stress and transmute any bad energy into valuable personal resources."

Think of what *you* like. Come up with your own affirmations, or use these if you prefer. Write them down with a pen and paper. Ideally, your affirmations would align with your higher values or who you imagine yourself becoming. Perhaps you would like to develop more outgoing and socially adept and wish to change that; in that case, a good affirmation could be, “My confidence increases by the day, one conversation at a time!”

Repeat these affirmations as part of your morning routine to set a positive tone for the day or during stressful moments. Studies show that positive affirmations lead to lowered stress and heightened performance under pressure22 (this will be important for chapter 7).

A word on achieving the best results through focus: There is a plethora of exercises and literature around mindfulness and meditation, enough to fill multiple libraries. In the beginning, it would be wise to decide on one or two points of focus, but no more. Ideally, you would give it enough breathing room to get the most out of your learning. For the best results, we recommend exploring the techniques as set out in this book for at least six months to a year while seeking literature most closely related to the concepts and topics introduced here. How one does one thing is how one does everything. As you will remember, in the last chapter, we made a map to illustrate the relationship between what’s inside of you and what’s outside of you. In the same vein, as you build your knowledge, you can also apply the same mapmaking techniques to ensure you can always keep track of how you arrived at where you are. This gives you the berth to make adjustments or backtrack and redo as the need arises, as opposed to starting all over again.

It must be said that we offer no magic bullets to eliminate stress for good. As long as you are alive, the responsibility of daily living will be felt by you. The question is how to stay in balance and channel that energy from a point of stress into something you can use to push yourself forward towards your goals. What we offer are tools that you can use for regular alignment so that you stay in the right place. Even if and when you do, you will remember where to find the resources to get back to where you were and continue. The more you can maintain a state of inner clarity, the more any challenges that arise from within or without become more manageable and lead to positive outcomes.

Congratulations, you have succeeded in completing some inner work. If you like how you felt immediately following the above exercises, stick around for the full meditation scripts in the later chapters for a more powerful set. In the meantime, how can we apply what we have learned to dynamic human relationships and reap the rewards? Let’s help you get you set up. Hold on to your inner compass; we’re going to dive into the next chapter and hit the ground running.

# 5

# Navigating Teen Relationships

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here is an abundance of material available out there on how to navigate relationships. However, you’ve probably noticed by now that much of this information only gives a partial view or recommends impractical methods that leave you working on the surface. When you consume bits and pieces of information from overly diverse sources, it can leave you feeling more confused and destabilized. It is vital to ensure that you are being guided to find and follow your inner compass rather than someone else's.

When looking for guidance, it's essential to seek practical wisdom that can benefit you without causing any unintended harm. Some suggestions and approaches might seem intriguing, but if they make others uncomfortable, it could lead to unpleasant consequences for both parties. The key is to strike a balance between doing what you want and respecting the boundaries of others. The last thing you want is to use meditation to support an unhealthy lifestyle instead of improving it, so it's essential to focus on cultivating a healthy and robust mindset. There are effective and easy-to-implement strategies that can help you navigate life with confidence, and they require the same amount of energy as those based on disrespect. It's crucial to learn to say no to shortcuts and prioritize activities that will bring a long-term positive return on your energy investment.

The first step to preparing for fruitful interpersonal connections is to become familiar with handling objections and resolving conflicts.

What is Objection Handling? It refers to your ability to gracefully handle situations where you receive a "no" or "not right now" response. It's possible to still feel let down even if people do not employ those words specifically. When this happens, it is important to remember that everyone experiences rejection as part of life, and it should not be taken personally. How you handle it, however, makes all the difference. You may even end up impressing others so much that they could change their mind even if they were closed off to you before.

It helps to bear in mind that people may have life circumstances that affect their initial response towards you. So, you've got to know when it's not about you and how to still show up for yourself. Maintaining an objective distance during early interactions enables you to make better decisions and increases your chances of inviting positive outcomes that last.

It is also important to remember that getting to know a person takes a lifetime. You could just happen to be there when someone is having a bad day or maybe even a bad year. Ultimately, your ability to make the best of “no” scenarios and apply empathy to transform them is what secures you opportunities for more friendships and relationship requests than you can handle.

Once you achieve this, it will become more about screening people to see whether they are good for you. It pays to hone your self-awareness precisely because it allows you to assess more quickly and accurately. You may remember that we previously discussed the fact that you have limited control over external circumstances. However, you have complete agency over your actions and decisions and can create opportunities for the outcomes you want in your life.

The key is to remain true to yourself and make the best of it. You would resist feeling pressured to adopt a completely different persona. It's essential to invest your energy in sustainable outcomes. Before you engage with others, it’s wise to ensure that you are in a positive headspace or having fun. If you have a great attitude, you will be able to share it with others without coming across as if you expect something in return. This attitude is both inviting and attractive to others while also allowing you to remain engaged in things that you are passionate about.

As we move forward in this book and our lives, we’ll have to understand our overall human tendency to learn more from negative experiences than from positive ones. We tend to have a long memory for even minor negative events; it just sinks in deeper, while positive events usually have to be significantly stronger to have the same effect. This is supported by studies that show that negative emotions are more strongly correlated with intelligence than positive ones. Unfortunately, this can lead certain individuals to choose deeply negative actions that hurt others, assuming that this is the only way they can be remembered. Therefore, it takes a lot of courage and character building to reach an agreement with yourself on what you will and won’t do for gains.

The reason why we’re covering this is because we believe most, if not all, of you have no problems creating and attracting great experiences and relationships. However, we’re concerned about those moments when you’re knocked off balance and need to recover. When you seek help, you might be confronted with infoxication of overwhelmingly positive or relentlessly negative opinions with little else in between that sticks.

So first, we’ll get you in touch with your inner compass. Then, you’ll be linked up with a universal set of tools that will enable you to recover, let go of what’s unhelpful, and move on from anything no matter where you’re at. This serves to give your growing confidence some solid backing and gives you belief in what you’re trying to tell your mind. In turn, you’ll be better able to realign with your aspirations and spirit of youth every time you bounce back. So what you learn here is not just about forming relationships for today, but about increasing your relationship potential in time.

You can only change yourself, you cannot change others. It starts with you and carries over into your relationships with others.

With this in mind, we will now give you some useful conflict management techniques that are easy to apply.

Whenever you encounter tough situations, it pays to distinguish what is “good” versus “bad” conflict. A disagreement or a difference is not necessarily bad. Likewise, an agreement or similarity is not necessarily good. In fact, your differences can make you stronger when you can agree on how to cooperate without changing or judging each other, forming strong community pillars together. Likewise, your similarities can weaken and desensitize you to shortcomings and issues that need attention to prevent a structural collapse.

Understandably, working things out can be rather stressful. Here are some useful guidelines you can use in any conversation. They will help to streamline the process and minimize incidences of conflict while ensuring your voice is expressed:

1- Preparation: To have successful conversations, it pays to develop a strong sense of timing and rhythm. You must be confident in your ability to deliver concise information in varying increments of time, ranging from 10 seconds up to 15 minutes or more. You can practice with a **set of 7 timings: 10 seconds, 30 seconds, 1 minute, 2 minutes, 5 minutes, 10 minutes, 15 minutes.** Anything longer than that is not usually required in casual conversations, but more with presentations to groups.

This is something you can practice in front of the mirror with simple topics. Additionally, it is crucial to be able to exit a conversation gracefully when necessary. Starting small and building your conversational skills over time is essential. Over-investment too soon can come across as needy, while under-investment can be interpreted as apathy. Make adjustments to the flow and pacing of your conversations on the fly, based on the response of the person you're talking to, to avoid misunderstandings and ensure that both parties are satisfied with the conversation.

2 - Explain: Let the person know how you feel and use specifics.

3 - Listen: By truly listening to others and taking the time to digest their words, we gain a deeper understanding of their thoughts and feelings. Periodically summarizing what we've heard and asking for feedback will show others that we value their perspective. Through this process, we not only build stronger connections with those around us but also gain valuable insights into our own beliefs and values.

4 - Avoid generalizations: Words like “you always”, can make statements come across as accusatory rather than informative or inviting. Using one or two generalizations for comedic effect can be entertaining and make you relatable, but you have to know how to sense the environment and convey context. The person has to understand that you’re joking. For example, if you say “Everyone’s just so zero-effort these days.” Reading that upfront without the right context, sounds incredibly negative, doesn’t it? You would also need to be ready to handle any misunderstanding or disagreement with grace or tact. You can decide whether or not you’re ready for it, it can be fun and rewarding, as long as you don’t attach expectations of any outcome and are ready to offer a sincere apology if it misfires.

In general, when looking for advice screen for practical wisdom. Even if it sounds exciting or knowledgable, in application it shouldn’t be experienced as hurtful to others or limit your potential. Basically, you maintain your gravity and hold your ground, speak your truth from a space of positively-charged abundance, and be confident enough to try things or apologize and move on. Find friends that align with your values and support your energy.

We’re all born with the need to find out who we are and what’s our Tribe. This longing keeps confronting us in many ways and points in life. One major peak occurs during the turbulent years from our teens to young adulthood. It tends to resurface during any period of growth and discovery. When it does, you’d want to be ready. And there’s no better way to achieve this than to arm yourself with a right good inner compass. Your compass.

In this chapter, we will show you how to deploy your newfound mapmaking abilties to examine all the interconnected elements. With it, we will guide you to create your very own social mini-maps on the go.

Previously you were guided to sit down and do an exercise in a place that’s quiet and without distraction. This time, we’re going to take ourselves out onto the busy field, where we’ll pull information and note them down. We’ll then use the notes to inform some plot points which we will then use to fill out our map.

Before we go into this, it’s useful to understand why we’re doing it. As human beings, each of us was born with an in-built desire for some level of integration. How we choose to do this will be different based on our personal traits and unique evolutionary journeys. To understand what is needed to fulfill us and how to form meaningful relationships with others, we have to first have to get comfortable in our own skin. Ultimately, each of us seeks meaning in connection. These concerns don’t just disappear whenever we tell ourselves that we’re grown up now, and it’s not going to happen to us. Everybody has to deal with it at every age, even if they don’t talk about it.

First, we are drawn to discover where we fit within a group identity and how we relate to it.

The second thing is the longing to discover our relationship between the individuals and the world around us at large.

Whenever we experience acceptance or rejection from others, our response to those experiences will inform and shape our subsequent choices[[24]](#endnote-24). It is important to understand that even for individuals who display anti-social traits, there is some form of desire for harmony. Because of that, it’s normal to feel pressure to fit into what’s expected, in terms of image and so on, and to be accepted by others. This is not just confined to those who enjoy group popularity but is also found among those who are not liked, even if they appear to savor their status. Ironically, even in rebel groups, there is some degree of conformity involved, such as group approval of what a rebel is “supposed” to like or look like. This wish for harmony is a lubricant and mechanism that helps people weave and maintain an overall social tapestry from wherever they stand. The ways that different groups deal with inner and outer pressure may appear to differ. Some may seem healthier than others, but everyone’s needs are different, and becoming emotionally invested in changing others adds to your stress load unnecessarily. The most important thing is that you have your needs met without closing off and limiting your future potential, or unfairly interfering with that of others.

We may harbor a deep wish to be authentic.[[25]](#endnote-25) This is true even for those who seem fake to others for looking cheerful all the time. We want to come as we are, but we also yearn for the experience of validation from our peers. While it’s important to know when to compromise so that you keep relations friendly and opportunities coming in, having to become inauthentic to achieve that may feel like too high a price to pay. Besides, even if you were willing to fork out the price, you would have paid for an impossible goal that would stay out of your reach. Regardless of which community and groups you are drawn to, how do you balance who you are or who you want to be against what others generally expect of you? This is where understanding one thing will come in handy:

## Nobody vibes with everybody

Trying to please everybody or make everyone like you is a surefire way to fail at it.

At the same time, how can anyone fault you for wanting acceptance? Experiencing rejection can make you question if there is something wrong with you. Furthermore, when you think there’s no reason for rejection, it may lead to anger that eats into you until you achieve distance and a balanced perspective. You see, you could take two perfectly good people, put them together, and they could still be incompatible with one another. They may have opposing values or ways of doing things that clash. Or perhaps they have few interests in common, and their lives take them in opposite directions. Everybody is different; their lives are unique, and the process of getting to know yourself will help you get to know other people, too.

Self-acceptance is the remedy. In this state, you are okay with who you are, and you’re okay when others show disapproval or objection towards you. You stand your ground.

If you attempted to get everyone to like you, you would basically have to wear a mask all the time and mirror others so that people only see what they want to see. This is unsustainable in the long run. You can’t be this person all the time. It will tire you until you come to accept who you are and grow from that.

The good news is that authenticity and the ability to make genuine connections can be developed at any point in life, no matter what stage in life you’re at. The more true you are to yourself and others, the deeper and the more meaningful your relationships will be.

Sure, it may mean that your number of friends starts to thin out. Some people won’t want to hang out with you anymore and might even give you a hard time with criticism. But it’s a good exchange, after all. When you’ve got a garage full of old junk, you don’t have room for a new car. In the same vein, you have to be willing to make enough room to get ready. As you embark on your journey of genuine self-discovery and dare to show the world that you care, you will start to attract people who align with you, and this is where the opportunities to develop profound connections can arise. So what if you have haters? It’s hard to get people to care; you must be doing something right. Are they talking about you behind your back? Let them talk. Let go of those who don’t vibe with you. Decline to take on their baggage or let them change your behavior. What they see in you is what they couldn’t face in themselves. They are saving you time and energy by ousting themselves from your life so you know who or what is good for you.

The more genuine you are, the more authentic your relationships and life become.

But be prepared to step up to it! Real relationships with great people have their ups and downs due to different opinions and passionate views.

## The importance of conflict resolution

No matter how close you are with your friends, there is bound to be conflict. The only way to avoid it altogether is by staying uninvolved or keeping highly superficial connections. The same goes for those of the romantic kind; even if your girlfriend or boyfriend feels like your soulmate, there will be times when you will not see eye to eye.

Evading conflict only postpones the inevitable at best or results in stalled growth and years of wasted time at worst if you choose to sink into inauthentic relationships.

Maybe your friend said something hurtful and didn’t even realize it. You could say nothing to avoid conflict, but then they will keep hurting you again and again out of ignorance. Summoning the courage to tell somebody how you feel about what they said is scary because there is always the fear that they won’t like what you have to say and end the friendship.

But you deserve people who respect your boundaries and who love who you are. If they go away when you set a boundary, that is a good thing. Another case of them saving you time and energy that you could be spending on people who respect you and who vibe with you.

Why would you want to be friends with someone who doesn’t care about how you feel or who isn’t compatible with you?

If, instead, they stay, you are more likely to have a healthy relationship where you care about them, and they care about you. It's much better than having a bunch of fake or superficial friendships.

You don’t want them to love your mask; you want them to love your true self, even if you sometimes have to deal with conflict. It’s worth it.

## How to deal with conflict

1. Set boundaries: if you don’t like to be treated in a specific way, say it. Let them know your limits.
2. Respect their boundaries: boundaries go both ways. Listen to them with attention when they express their likes and dislikes, and ask for clarification if you need to.
3. Keep your cool and don’t bring up the past : don’t let anger make you say something you will regret. If you feel like you’re not in the best state of mind, ask them for space to clear your head. The calming techniques as illustrated in the previous chapter works very well here.
4. Where possible and viable, find a compromise. It should never amount to a sacrifice.

## Conflict Handling Techniques in Conversations

* Listen to what they’re saying and try to be understanding of their feelings.
* Explain how you feel using specifics.
* Stay neutral. Don’t be pushed or pulled towards or away from the person.
* Avoid generalizations.
* Never bring up past disagreements. If they bring it up for control, take the lead and gently take them back to your original track.
* Try to say productive things and focus on a positive outcome that includes both your perspectives. Avoid being critical.
* Politely excuse yourself when necessary, and end on a sincere note, e.g. “I’m afraid I have to go off for a meeting. I like this point you made/I’m not sure about what you said. But I want to hear more about that aspect/Maybe you can explain it to me next time. Catch up with you soon.”

Above all, don’t put off talking things out. By following up in a timely manner, you give each other the chance to clarify things. We shouldn’t be expected to read other people’s minds, and vice versa. What is obvious to you may not always be obvious to others.

Having said that, how do you find the ‘right’ people and when do you draw the line?

## Look for people you feel comfortable with

When you’re comfortable with someone, it means that:

* You can be yourself around them.
* It’s safe to reveal differences in opinions, without overtly negative consequences.
* You can trust each other even when not together. There is peace of mind.
* You feel no pressure to do things you don’t want to. E.g., going places you’re not comfortable with, being made to wear things that you don’t like, unwelcome physical touch.
* You feel heard. Your permission is sought and your preferences are largely respected.
* Even if you have disagreements, nobody has problems apologizing and working things out eventually. It makes you feel confident, you don’t have to worry too much.

## Recognizing the signs of an abusive friendship or relationship

In an abusive connection, the other person may:

* Want to change you. You can’t be yourself around them.
* Constantly criticize or hurt you, do or say things that make you feel bad.
* Pressure you to do things you don’t want to do.
* Make you feel stifled like you have to walk on eggshells to avoid triggering them.
* Try to keep you isolated from your family and friends.
* Check your messages or Monitor you using social media to see who you’re talking to.
* Threaten consequences if you do not do or say what they want. Carries them out.

### Isolation

Learning to appreciate the beauty of solitude and not relying on others for validation is a vital habit to cultivate. However, as social beings, we thrive on interaction and sharing with others. While seeking self-improvement in solitude can be effective, resist using it as an excuse to avoid empathizing with others.

Stress can take various forms, including internalizing and suppressing emotions and thoughts, leading to a loss of connection with our emotional core. So, let's choose healthy solitude as a tool to reduce stress, engage in solo activities that build our character, and reflect on our choices, as opposed to stagnating alone. Remember, the key to achieving mental well-being is finding a balance between solitude and community interaction while nurturing human connection and empathy. Stress can take on various forms, including internalizing and suppressing emotions and thoughts, leading to a disconnect of empathy. Using solitary living as a crutch and escape can lead to difficulties over time.

If you enjoy being alone, try engaging in other solo activities that help reduce stress, such as coloring Mandalas, creative writing, playing music, building things or moving about in nature. Afterward, take a moment to reflect on how you feel. Try to discern whether the time spent in solitude was out of an existing habit or a way to release overwhelming emotions. Also, consider attending classes related to the activities you enjoy, as they provide a different environment for you to engage in.

## Do it now or regret it later

Your brain goes through a rapid phase of development from birth until the age of approximately 25 years. During this period, any ability you acquire will play a significant role in shaping your path for the rest of your life.

The teenage years are particularly vital to personal growth and development. It is crucial to lay the foundation for social competence and conflict resolution at this stage, as it can make things much easier in the future and open more doors. However, it’s better to take it one step at a time and not be too hard on oneself. All skills, including social ones, are honed over time but it's important to find one's alignment from the beginning.

In the next section, we will discuss the importance of treating oneself with kindness, also known as self-compassion. This skill is as important as knowing how to manage relationships. Even more so because you can always end a friendship with a toxic friend, or break up with a boyfriend or girlfriend who’s not treating you right, but you can’t block yourself out. You are “always on” with yourself.

Come with us, and let us show you what it means to treat yourself with the kindness you deserve.

# 6

# The Practical Art of Self-Compassion

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ou can run and you can hide your negative thoughts from others but when you’re alone with yourself, it’s a time of reckoning! The very thought of words is equivalent to saying it to yourself. Once you become aware of it, you can think of corrective statements and reasoning to bring yourself on track with where you want to go.

Whenever you entertain a pessimistic thought about yourself, it is like performing a self-roast. You are dragging your self-esteem through a trash compactor and stirring hard.

You might not even be aware that you do it, but let’s do a little test. When times get tough, do you catch yourself thinking or saying stuff to yourself that you would *never* think to say to a friend? Not even an *internet troll?* Well there is a term for it, and that is negative self-talk.

It can also manifest as shame, and blaming or criticizing yourself. The remedy to this is to develop self-compassion, as studies have found.[[26]](#endnote-26) This gives you more resources to handle difficulties and deal with failure so you can get up, dust yourself off and keep going.

Before we go on, try and recall all the negative things you’ve ever thought about yourself and ask, "Would I say something like that to my best friend? How would I feel if they told me something like that?" The answer might surprise you. You might think, “I live with myself every day, why *wouldn’t* I know myself?” The truth is, when it happens we aren’t always aware that we’re doing it. But once you come up with the answers, it gives you pause, doesn’t it?

As you heap constant criticism on yourself for every perceived mistake or flaw, your confidence takes a hit. You may adopt and reinforce limiting beliefs. This can be detrimental to you because, without full confidence, you can't be your best self or harness good opportunities that arrive.

It’s a slippery slope. See, why would you even try something if you are already convinced that you are destined to fail? For instance, why ask your crush out if you already believe they will reject you upfront? While this is all going on inside of you, they may not even know that you feel this way. And if you don’t address it, you may start to develop feelings of resentment. When you finally do pluck up the courage to approach the person, they may detect the underlying turbulence and choose to stay away. So it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. You have taught yourself that it’s not possible. And when the door closes you’ll say, “I knew it”. Did you, really?

And, why pursue studies or a career if you secretly believe you are going to fail? When you do this, you are rejecting yourself and turning off your potential. The inner critic does play an important role, but sometimes, the complexities of life and the intensity of experiences can make it go overboard. When in healthy balance, this proverbial voice is supposed to help you err on the side of caution for long enough to apply discernment and avoid fruitless effort. The moment it turns on you, it becomes problematic. You don’t want it shutting down good ideas that you’re perfectly capable of pulling off.

You do want to be successful, don’t you. Not other people’s definition of success, but your definition of success whatever that’s going to be. To reach your fullest potential and stay there too, you have to develop compassion for yourself. We’ll show you two techniques that will facilitate this.

Grab a pen and paper and have a go. Once you have your answers, take a couple of minutes to reflect on them. Keep them in mind as you read on.

## Self-Compassion Exercises

### Exercise 1: Mindfulness for Self-Compassion

Mindfulness applies here, too.

1. Start by noticing the sensations in your body and paying attention to your emotions. Let it fill you and observe it for a moment.
2. After reaching awareness, acknowledge the difficult moment you are going through, by telling yourself something along the lines of "This situation hurts," "This is stressful," or any other phrase that recognizes the challenge you are facing.
3. The next step is saying something like "Pain is part of life", "Others feel the same way", "I'm not alone," or any other phrase that acknowledges the suffering as a real part of life.
4. Place your palm flat on your chest and abdomen, or hug yourself as if you were comforting a dear friend. This technique can be used on its own. It can also be useful if you're short on time and need a quick way to receive self-care.
5. Finally, announce to yourself and your inner critic, "I will be kind to myself", "I forgive myself", "I give myself permission to be strong". Try a few statements of your own, and find the ones that make you feel the best.
6. When you feel down, ask yourself what you would like to hear to feel better. Say, "What would be the kindest thing anyone could say to me right now, that I could accept?"

### Exercise 2: Reframing your Self-Talk

This exercise aims to transform your internal critical judgments into something positive. Ideally, you would continue on for several weeks or months until the positive version of you is your dominant self-image. Follow these steps:

1. **Be aware of the moments when your inner critic shows up.** Whenever you feel the onset of any negative emotion, take a moment to reflect on what is going on inside of you. Observe the words that come up in your mind. You may find yourself thinking, "Not again. I am useless", or "I am such a failure." Additionally, try to identify the tone of voice that your inner critic uses. Is it angry, venomous, or cold? Does it remind you of someone in your life? It is helpful to get to know this side of your voice as much as possible and spot any repeating patterns. You can even give your inner critic a name. For instance, our favorite is Nitpick Nick or Sooky Sally.
2. **Talk to your inner critic, but do it with compassion.** "I know you are a part of my brain trying to push me to do things better, but you are being unnecessarily harsh, and you are hurting me. Please support me in saying something nice about myself.”
3. **Reframe your inner critic message for something positive**. For example, if you frequently have thoughts such as "You just ate an entire pizza! You are disgusting," change it to "I am aware that there are healthier food choices, but I'm learning bit by bit. My self-control grows every day." Then when you catch yourself about to eat more than you should, and your inner critic is about to give you some sass, say something like "I know the pizza is tasty, but I remember how my body feels afterwards. I deserve better. I deserve to feel comfortable in my own body."
4. The first three steps are enough, but you can also **hug yourself** like you did in the previous exercise.

A few more examples:

**Negative thought**: "I always mess things up."

**Reframed:** "I make mistakes sometimes, like everyone does, but I also have many successes. I learn and grow from my mistakes."

**Negative:** "I'll never be able to do this."

**Reframed:** "This is challenging, but I want to try again. I can take it one step at a time. I've overcome challenges before, and I will manage this too."

**Negative:** "I shouldn't have tried. I just embarrassed myself."

**Reframed:** "I'm proud of myself for trying. It takes courage to step out of my comfort zone, and that's how I grow!"

### Self-compassion and resilience

Developing self-compassion will make your life better in many ways, including increasing your resilience. An overactive inner critic burns a lot of precious energy; feeling useless or broken for a whole day is exhausting. Resilience requires energy, too.

By increasing your self-love, you’re also increasing your energy levels. No more beating yourself down every time you make a mistake, so the fear of the possibility doesn't paralyze you or make you hesitant to take that step.

You do your best but are open to learning from your mistakes. This is something that you can tell yourself, showing yourself some understanding but not leniency.

Everything you’ve learned at this stage will lend a really rich context to the next chapter. So, grab what you’ve just learned about self-compassion and let’s dive into to chapter 7.

Shall we?

# 7

# Building Resilience in the Teen Years

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ow do you feel when you are faced with a serious problem? Do you recall?

Try to think back on a moment when you felt particularly distressed. Close your eyes and bring yourself back into that scenario. As you step into that moment, allow yourself to recall and feel the emotions that were coursing through you at the time.

Did you feel overwhelmed? Was there a flash of anger or fear? Did you freeze up or get frustrated, not knowing how to solve the problem? Were thoughts racing through your head, or did everything suddenly go blank? How do you feel now as you do this exercise? Do the emotions feel the same to you as before, or somewhat different?

That was in the past, so we’ll let it go. Just imagine the scene drifting away from you and fading out. The old feelings are gone now.

Now, think back on those times when you were burned out and didn’t get enough sleep. Do you recall that everything seemed sluggish? You couldn’t think; you could either barely feel, or maybe you felt helpless in the face of intense emotions. Regardless, did you feel that you could’ve used more energy to deal with problems at the time? It didn’t seem as available as it should’ve been, did it?

We’re going to let go of that now, too; it’s the past.

One more mini-exercise. Recall any moment when you had to obscure your true self or keep it under wraps. Or moments when you had to do things you didn't want to do. For example, you had to pretend to enjoy something that everyone else except you seems to love. Or, you had to show your face somewhere you didn’t really want to be to please somebody who needed pleasing. Maybe you had to ditch your favorite getup for something starchy with a collar that had to be buttoned all the way up to your throat. And, you had to say hi in that.

Once again, release this scene and feel those emotions cycle out of your body. It’s time to welcome ourselves back into the present. You’re feeling lighter and refreshed, hopefully. You’re here now. Congratulations, you made it through those obstacles; now we’ll move on.

When in the face of adversity, imagine how different everything would be if :

* Instead of freezing, you were calm and present, standing there, ready to spring into action.
* Your body felt light and energized, relaxed.
* You were so confident that you could say no to things you didn’t want and yes to what you did want without second guessing yourself.

Well, that is precisely what resilience gives you. Resilience is a hallmark of maturity and one of the closest things to a superpower. Life simply gets easier to pull through. You become bigger than your problems, and you are ready to step up to greater opportunities and challenges. The question is, how can one build resilience[[27]](#endnote-27)?

We’ve already given you part of the recipe in the chapters leading up to this point:

* Knowing your stress landscape
* Stress management techniques
* Having authentic, healthy relationships
* Conflict resolution
* Developing self-compassion

Once you start applying these, you will have begun your path towards developing the semi-superpower known as resilience so that you can look forward to a smoother road now and into the future. Resilience sets you up for success.

The previous chapters contained some powerful information. You could very well close the book right now and focus on practicing what you have learned, but why settle?

Let’s take it up one notch. And later, maybe we can level up all the way.

For now, we’re going to share some techniques to put you on the fast track to a good kind of toughness26.

## Breaking big problems into smaller parts

"How do you eat a pizza? One slice at a time, and bite by bite with each slice."

This analogy applies to breaking down big problems into smaller, manageable parts. Suppose you're faced with an overwhelming situation, and you have no clue how to get started on it. The first thing you do is take a minute to pen things down. Write down a paragraph describing the problem at hand, then divide it into small steps that you can achieve gradually. If any of the steps still feel too big or vague, divide them into even smaller steps. Even if they seem trivial, it pays off when you guard against dismissing it too soon. There’s nothing too big or too small, as they say.

This approach not only helps you solve seemingly unsolvable problems, but it also reduces anxiety and clears your mind. Big problems can be incredibly overwhelming, but breaking them down into smaller pieces makes them easier to understand and manage.

## Build a support network

It’s tough to stay strong when you are isolated or alone.

However, having a caring friend can make a huge difference in managing stress. A simple gesture like a hug or lending a listening ear can help immensely.

Although you can become stronger on your own, maintaining a healthy network of friends can support you to go further in life and live healthier.[[28]](#endnote-28) If you are feeling lonely, it's important to push forward and make an effort to meet new people.

Joining a club, pursuing a hobby, or attending events related to your interests can be a great way to meet like-minded individuals.

Just like it's easier to eat a pizza one slice at a time, tackling a big problem is easier with the support of others. Remember that it's okay to reach out to your friends and lean on them when you need it.

## Move your body and Eat Better

Exercise and healthy eating have benefits that go beyond physical fitness, which we’ll thoroughly cover in Chapter 11. Some of the associated lifestyle improvements include[[29]](#endnote-29):

* Increased energy levels and vitality
* A sense of ease and confidence
* Superior sleep quality
* Heightened brain functioning (Better results! Better decisions!)
* Stronger willpower

All of the aforementioned states bring you closer to your desired destination.

## Practice! Practice! Practice!

Building resilience can be a tough nut to crack at first. Fortunately, as with most things, the more you put it into practice, the easier it becomes. With time and consistency, you’ll gradually be able to scale up on the challenges and build up your core strengths.

If the prospect of developing resilience appears daunting, break it down into small, achievable steps. Begin with little things and eventually work your way up to larger obstacles in line with your increased confidence levels. You don’t always have to push yourself to the limits. It’s perfectly fine to take it easy sometimes, not because you’re slacking off or coddling yourself, but out of self-compassion. Somewhere in between, there’s always a middle ground where you’ll find your balance.

The following chapter, "Balancing Act: Juggling School and Life," will go over the necessary abilities for juggling workloads and personal life. You can work to strike a healthy equilibrium between your work or academic endeavors and your interests, with a good dose of old-fashioned time management.

How about we flip the page and head over to the next frontier, where it’s time to figure out how to have a life - even while “life” is bombarding you with all sorts of demands.

# 8

# Balancing Act: Juggling School/Work and Life

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ow that we have learned about resilience, let's try implementing it.

Take a sheet of paper and draw a triangle with three equal sides. On one corner, write the word "sleep"; on the second corner, write "results"; and on the third corner, write "life."

Now imagine that you can only choose two of these corners and have to give up the third one.

This triangle represents the usual dilemma that young people face:

* Many have healthy social circles but suffer in their performance
* Others have top grades but lack friends
* Those with a rocking social life and great results don't get enough sleep

But you might also know individuals who seem to have it all. They post excellent results, have extraordinary social lives, and manage to squeeze in the hours for hobbies and sleep! How do they pull it off? Are they lowkey-secretly wizards?

Who knows? But the more likely answer is that they have excellent resource management, are able to delegate tasks, and have developed a trinity of skills that work for them.

When we speak of resources, you have inner resources that come under the domain of resilience and some outer ones that seem beyond your control, like the ticking of the world’s clock. That’s the first resource we'll talk about.

Studies show that time management skills improve overall performance and results [[30]](#endnote-30), but its most significant impact is on your well-being [[31]](#endnote-31). People who learn to manage their schedules are happier and better at what they do. The good news is that although time waits for no one, you can direct your hours to where it’s needed, and we're here to help you with that. Let's start with the bare basics and scale our way up.

## The Humble To-do List

The humble to-do list is the initial time management tool that most of us adopt. It's usually learned instinctively by observing our immediate environment or through interactions. What these do for you is to organize your tasks for increased clarity and reduced stress levels. It does this by consolidating everything in one place, like a small map, which helps you understand where you're at in one glance. Even if you already use it, it helps to know.

### Example 1:

A To-Do-List of someone who's still at school might look like this:

* Finish math assignment
* Study module 42 for an hour
* Buy milk at the grocer's
* Get notes back from Leon
* Research the ozone layer's importance
* Visit my friend Sam/Lily
* Call grandma

A person who works might have one that looks more like this:

* Send email to corporate
* Follow up with HR
* Lunch with co-worker
* Buy coffee tabs
* Buy milk from farmer's pop-up (Tues)
* Buy work clothes (Sale!)
* Call bank
* Call mom ♥ Set timer.

Now compare it with this:

### Example 2

A person who's still pursuing Academics:

"I have to finish up my math assignment, study module 42 for an hour, then buy milk at the grocer's, get my notes back from Leon, research the ozone layer's importance, visit Sam/Lily, and, last but not least, call grandma to say hi."

A person who's started on their Career:

"I have to send an email to corporate and follow up with HR, then meet a cute co-worker for lunch - don't stare, buy coffee tabs, then hop over to the farmer's pop-up on Tuesday to grab my fix of organic unhomogenized milk - yum, visit the sale at Kmart/Massimo/Bloomingdale's to buy work clothes, call the bank, and then call mum to say hi. Set timer."

As you can see, the bullet point presentation does a better job when you want to know where you're up to at a glance. The fewer words you use, the better. Still, even the second example is preferable to relying on memory or sifting through your papers to determine if work still needs to be completed.

The second benefit of having a To-Do List is boosting your motivation. As you make progress, you can scratch out or mark each task you complete like this:

* ~~Finish math assignment~~
* Study module 42 for an hour
* ~~Buy milk at the grocer’s~~
* ~~Get notes back from Leon~~
* Research the ozone layer's importance
* Visit my friend Sam/Lily
* Call grandma

Being able to watch your progress is experienced by the brain as highly rewarding. Our mind loves clarity and markers of progress. With each entry you scratch out, marking successful completion, a payout of happy chemicals is released.

## Advanced To-Do-List Approaches

To further advance your To-Do List game, you may organize it with incentives and tasks that give relief. It is something you can negotiate and work out with yourself. Your ability to reason and deal with who and what is outside of yourself will also improve. It's a win-win situation.

For instance, if you complete half the work or school tasks on the list, you can visit your friend or have your lunch date. If you don't, you can postpone. If it's impossible to do it within reason, keep it short. Then, an incentive for your following list could be setting up a replacement appointment as something to look forward to.

Set up tasks like shopping for work or school upgrades, such as clothes and stationery, as an incentive for the week, fortnight, month, or quarter. Evaluate what rate of progress is sustainable and sensible for you. Once you complete all the tasks for the day, reward yourself with a phone call to your favorite loved one. Achieve a perfect balance between accomplishment and reward, give and take. Remember, success is just a matter of discipline and determination.

## Preparation is King: Getting Ready for Your Next Day

Picture this:

**School:**

It's Sunday. You know the teacher will cover a new module in History Class tomorrow. Don't wait. Browse through the section today.

You don't have to study the text in its entirety. All it takes is for you to speed-read through the entire chapter. As you do this, let your eyes run over the text. Your mind will automatically zone in on the parts that stand out the most. It's perfectly fine to cover a page or two without finishing. Take a moment to sit and reflect on what you've read, then revisit the text and skim through it again to reinforce any points you want to remember. Find your own pace.

The preparation comes from establishing initial points of interest in your mind that act like saved locations on maps. You can then leverage these save locations during the class to instantly keep up during the lesson. This action frees you to do less grunt work and more creative and critical thinking as the day unfolds and points are covered.

**Work:**

You know from an internal circular that there's a launch for a new product or standard operating procedure (SOP) next week. Don't wait. Start reading up about it this week.

At break time or before you knock off, take a few minutes to glance through the bulletin again. Pick out any keywords and critical features about the product or procedure, especially from links to more information. Think, "How will this affect the ways I and my team do our jobs, and how can I ensure I do well while providing mutual support?". Formulate some good questions and sound it off to your Team Leader; they'll be impressed. Once again, you don't have to study the product or SOP right down to the bone. Speed-read through the material, let your eyes pick out the details for you, and your mind steps in naturally. Then, sit and reflect on what you've read, go back to the text, and skim through once more to reinforce points if you wish. You don't have to be too thorough.

The preparation comes from establishing initial points of interest in your mind that act like saved locations on maps or portals for the mind. When running live, you can instantly leverage these save locations to keep up at the work desk or in meetings. This action frees you to do less grunt work and more creative and critical thinking as the day unfolds and more ground is covered. It positions you to be seen and considered for better opportunities. It sounds simple. But the fact is, so few people manage to apply it that the moment you can step up and do it consistently, you will get noticed, picked for teams, and given offers. On top of this, if you've been working on your resilience, you would have what it takes to thrive in your new position and take it to higher heights.

## The Importance of Forming Good Habits.

It's not an exaggeration to say that habits are among the most powerful tools for success in any area of life that you care about. Here is why:

### Efficiency:

Habits automatically inform our behaviors. This applies regardless of whether they’re good or bad habits. They reduce the overall mental effort you need to exert on routine tasks so that the brain is freed to focus on more complex tasks.

A dirty little secret about your gray matter is that, without training, it is prone to being lazy and taking the shortest route. It might make things more manageable in the short term, but there may be better ways to secure a brighter future moving forward. Your mind will often be drawn to the path of least resistance, but cutting corners could come back and bite you. The use of good habits as guiding mechanisms serves as a bridge between your mind and the dreams it wants to carry out.

### Consistency:

The key is to build momentum. When you can fit an activity into part of your regular routine, it becomes easier to continue doing it without added effort.

**Fewer decisions = less stress**

By moderating the number of decisions one has to make daily, you can avoid stress and decision fatigue. More space to stretch and incubate also makes for better judgment.

## Focus techniques

### Pomodoro technique:

For every 25 minutes of work, take a 5-minute break. Set a timer, and that's it. Nothing fancy.

This technique helps maintain focus over long hours and prevents burnout. For many people, it's easier to do this than to stay put for two hours straight. It's a way to divide something big into smaller steps.

### Vary your focus method:

It's a good idea to vary your approach on any topic and come in from different perspectives instead of always tackling it the same way. The practice also increases your capacity for creative thinking and problem-solving. This can also be applied at work.

For example, instead of reading the same chapter about the circulatory system over and over, you can read the chapter but mix it up with the following:

* Watch a documentary or short YouTube video about the topic.
* Write a summary of what you understood from the chapter.
* You can check out heart diagrams
* Take turns with your classmates explaining what each of you understood.

Want to try something fun? Go to <https://chat.openai.com/> and use the following prompt:

"Explain [insert topic you are studying] like I'm 5."

The results can sometimes be out of whack and not entirely precise, but this can be a fun addition after some hours of studying a topic, especially if you are stuck.

Combine these methods and create new ones to keep the brain stimulated and running.

Before, we noted the tendency of the brain to be somewhat lazy. Here's another semi-lowkey-secret about the brain: You learn faster and better when your brain feels stimulated; the more mundane the topic or bored you are, the harder it is to absorb anything.

Now, there will always be long stretches where there's work to be done that could be more fun.

It's unrealistic to expect every single moment to be exhilarating and euphoric. Still, every inch of fun you can sustainably introduce to your sessions will let you perform that much better.

Returning to the triangle idea, you don't have to choose; you can have the whole triangle. All you need is the right strategy.

There is something that can ruin your strategy as much as it could help it: technology.

Technology has its uses. I'm not telling you to sell your phone and move to a lonely mountain far from civilization; as you can see with the chatGPT idea, infoxification can be very distracting. It can ruin your schedule and sleep if you are not careful.

We wrote the next chapter with this in mind. Let’s turn the page and find out how to establish healthy boundaries between you and your favorite Platforms.

# 9

# Tech Detox: Managing Screen Time Stress

T

echnology is insanely hungry for your time.

It's easy to spend hours doomscrolling on social media platforms, looking for easy dopamine.

We would have so much more time if we could escape our devices. We could've invested that time in more meaningful pursuits, like:

* Improving our performance levels
* Working on our hobbies
* Learning a new language
* Sussing out new hangouts in town
* Planning a road trip
* Making new friends
* Making fantastic new memories with existing friends
* Finding exciting events and great parties to go to

Besides, did you know that there is a link between depressive symptoms and the amount of time spent on social media? [[32]](#endnote-32) You probably guessed it, but we now have the scientific facts to back it up too.

But it's hard to resist the call when notifications come knocking. Resilience helps, but you need more than that, especially if you already have some social media dependence. It's one of the most prevalent addictions of today.31 [[33]](#endnote-33) After a while, checking your phone every time it vibrates in your pocket or when you feel the tiniest bit of boredom becomes a habit. It puts you in this state where you keep looking outside of yourself at shiny things and forget about looking within. If you are unaware it's happening or keep indulging anyway, thinking it's not a big deal, you could easily slide out of balance. Before you know it, you'll have gotten comfortable in a state of dysfunction.

Bad habits can be as powerful as good ones. But they hurt your potential and can be hard to kick if you wait until they sink in. Not only do they rob you of your time, but they can add to your stress load, too. It's ironic because we often see it as a way to take the stress off. The worst kind of stress is subtle and covert. It lingers and gets a hold of you when you let your guard down.

But what can we do about it?

## Recognizing Screen-Related Stressors

The first step is to recognize what's causing your screen-related stress. Is it the relentless pings of social media notifications? The pressure to always be available online? Or the comparison trap of seeing others' highlight reels on social media? Is it the fear of missing out (FOMO)?

There's good reason to try and understand why it happens. Once you become fully aware of how something hurts you, you will feel more motivated to curb it. One of the first steps for anyone with a mild to severe addiction is recognizing that they have an addiction in the first place.31 32 From there, they can realize how it is taking time and energy from their lives and work to fix the leak. The same applies to any habit.

Besides, understanding your patterns helps narrow down the best solutions for you.

For example, note the following familiar sequence:

You're bored. Your phone vibrates, creating the compulsion to open "The Platform." Once you're in, it's easy to keep scrolling on and on and on. Before you know it, 15 minutes have passed, up in smoke.[[34]](#endnote-34) If this happens 4 times during the day, you would have wasted an hour. You might also notice jealousy or envy being stirred up inside you whenever you see posts depicting people who are subjectively better off than you. Usually, these feelings are a normal response that can motivate you to want to do better for yourself in your sphere. But with social media, image distortion and marketing-driven content are overrepresented. Much of what you see is driven by people who have invested a lot of money to look authentic to you. It tampers with your absorption rate, much like heavily processed foods versus natural foods. It's alright to consume; like everything, it just has to be done in moderation.

The solution to this case could be turning off social media notifications and limiting the number of times you check on it and how many minutes in each instance - for example, twice daily and five minutes to ten minutes each time.[[35]](#endnote-35) You can start with more and scale it back gradually so you don't feel it. You could employ positive affirmations to turn any negative feelings around.

**- Actionable Tip:** Keep a diary and make daily entries over a week. Note the moments when you feel stressed while using technology. Through this method, you can identify patterns and specific stressors that are easy to miss in a busy life.

## Implementing a Digital Detox Plan

Once you've identified your main stressors, it's time to detox! A digital detox doesn't mean quitting technology cold turkey; it's about creating a balanced relationship with it and developing tech hygiene.

### Set Clear Boundaries:

Allocate specific times for using technology and stick to them. If you have to work with tech, try to stay task-focused. Keep your work and social separate. Set some ground rules for yourself to see these rules as a reward rather than a punishment.

*Power example: Avoid screens on the first and last hours of your day, and develop some enjoyable routines*

Create Tech-Free Zones:

Make sure areas of your home, like the dining room or bedroom, are screen-free. Keep your phone and other devices out of the bathroom or shower.

*Power example: Make your bedroom and bathroom tech-free zones.*

### Engage in Offline Activities:

Reconnect with hobbies and activities that don't involve digital screens. This can be anything from reading a book and drawing, to playing a sport other than e-sports. We are going to expand on this in the Unplugged Hobbies Chapter.

*Power example: Find offline activities you can do first thing in the morning and some hours before bed. Alternatively, do some physical sport every week. This can be team or solo sports.*

### Set goals:

Goal-setting provides the framework required to create and commit to the plan you've designed for yourself. Remember what you want to achieve whenever you're on the brink of falling back into digital distraction.

*Power example: Set a goal to improve your sleep quality.*

There are other methods to achieve this, but the ones above incorporate all 3 tips to effectively improve your quality of life. Avoiding screens first thing in the morning sets the tone for the rest of the day.34 Refraining from screens at the end of the day helps you sleep better[[36]](#endnote-36).

We go deeper into this in chapter 10.

## Establishing Healthy Tech Habits

Developing healthy tech habits is crucial for long-term well-being. This includes being mindful about how and why you're using technology.

### Mindful Scrolling:

Before opening an app, ask yourself why you're doing it. Is it out of habit, boredom, or a genuine need?

### Quality Over Quantity:

Focus on using technology for meaningful activities, like learning a new skill or staying in touch with friends and family.

### Taking breaks with Nature[[37]](#endnote-37):

Take a stroll in nature or a nearby park. Find a nice green patch with trees. Walk barefoot on clean grass during your lunch break. When indoors and unable to move much, look out of a window and observe the moving leaves on trees or something green and leafy in the distance. If there are no trees, look at clouds. Or find somewhere open in the day, throw back your head, and look up at the sky. Use the breathing techniques we introduced earlier.

Cutting your screen time will clear your schedule up like a dream, reducing stress and making time management that much easier. There is something else to consider.

Time management is not only about how much but also about when.

As it turns out, the potent light from screens confuses the part of our brain that regulates sleep3536, making it harder for you to wind down when you use your phone or a computer too close to bedtime. Studies recommend going screenless 2 hours before bed - yeah, we know. It's easier said than done. Chapter 12, Unplugged Hobbies, contains some tips on that.

But first, let's go further into the science of good sleep overleaf, where we'll examine the importance of your forty winks and how to do it smarter so that you wake up feeling brighter and happier.

# 10

# Sleep Smarts: The Foundation of Well-Being

A

strong correlation exists between sleep quality and mental health among youth.[[38]](#endnote-38) [[39]](#endnote-39) Breaking even on sleep gives you a greater chance of performing well because you start on higher ground. If you stay barely functioning, one hit, and you're under. So you might wrongly assume you're not that good when it's just that you could take care of yourself better. It's like this, in a nutshell: The better you sleep, the better you feel, and the easier it is to keep up during the day.

Similarly, the more you skimp on sleep, the worse you feel and the more difficult it is to do well during the day. Furthermore, it can be hard to shake if it becomes a habit. The domino effect can be positive or negative depending on how you set yourself up and how well-aligned you are when you start the day. This begins with the good old forty winks.

Besides screens, several other factors can impact your quality of beauty rest. This can include caffeine, alcohol, stress in general, and even your diet.

Before we expand on that, let's get the lowdown on how proper overnight rest will improve the performance of your brain and body, and support a stable mood.

## The Positives of Good Sleep

Getting some decent shuteye is so essential that the term has been coined "the science of sleep." Here are some core findings from studies conducted on the subject:

### It boosts your brain:

Sleep enhances your learning ability and improves short-term and long-term memory. In other words, you spend less time poring over boring stuff and still cover more ground than the average bear! [[40]](#endnote-40)

### Gives your body more energy:

Good rest allows you to wake up with increased energy levels and heightened body functions, including circulation. In slumber, your body runs several cycles to repair and reset you for the next day. As a result, you look better rested - in other words, more attractive! They don't call it beauty-rest for nothing. You'll also have an easier time doing activities and exercising throughout the day, with more effective results. You fall sick less often or not at all. 37 [[41]](#endnote-41)

### Elevates your mood:

The link between good rest and mental health among youth can be summarized as such: The better you sleep, the better you feel, and the easier it is to keep up during the day, the more likely you are to stay in a good mood and handle stress readily.37

## The Sleep-on-it Technique: How to Use Sleep to Ace Exams and Performance Reviews

Many things go on inside your brain while you sleep, including subconsciously digesting what you learned throughout the day and organizing that information for use in the waking world. 38 [[42]](#endnote-42) A quirk that arises from this is:

Learning new information for 1 hour daily over 7 days can yield better results than cramming 7 hours of fresh data daily. In the cramming scenario, you might achieve a less desirable outcome than studying smart for 1 hour daily. The proof is in the pudding when it's time to perform. Things just flow better, even under pressure. In fact, the pressure pushes you into your zone rather than wearing you down.

At the end of each day of learning, when you turn in for the night, your brain attempts to reorganize itself, clean up, and integrate new information harvested from your waking hours. You undergo a literal brainwash38, the only acceptable kind on the planet, using cerebral spinal fluid - a daily special order from your own body, if you sleep *daily*. In the long term, this cleansing is vital to your quality of life far into adulthood and beyond. This is why it might pay to look into maintaining complete sleep cycles if you also intend to live life to the fullest. It adds up.

However, even this can only do so much for you if you make the mistake of overloading your brain before you've understood how it works. Contrary to what you might have assumed, you only receive the sleep buff *once* when you attempt to cram everything into a day. Your brain has more information to process, unravel, and reorganize than if you chose to make small, consistent daily efforts. So it applies 1 resource unit to 1 hour in the same measure as it would for 7 hours.

This could lead to you learning less than you think, especially in the age of misinformation, where there is an exponential volume of data to sift through but with little accuracy and relevance. If you allow that to run through your mind the same way you process a textbook, you will get stuck. This means you would require more sleep cycles achieved over a vacation period. If you plan on sustaining a youthful learning rate, consider restructuring your work life around your sleep cycles to accommodate your desired rate of information processing.

## Sleep & Mental Blocks: "Sleep On It"

Read this and let us know if this is a familiar scenario:

It's a good week. Your mind is flying! You've been covering a shocking amount of ground, hitting those performance markers, and more. Sleep is decent. One day, all of a sudden, you get stuck. What was forthcoming before now needs something to flow again. You have writer's block, a sudden drought of inspiration, or your performance slumps. You try for hours to get back on track, to no avail. When this happens, you know it's time to stop for the day and move on to other things. You turn in for the night. The sleep is, once again, decent.

The next day, you wake up feeling refreshed, grab your coffee, and take a stab at things again. In less than 10 minutes, you score your goal.

How did you do it? You *slept on it*.

The most dramatic results of this phenomenon arise when applied to complex problems.[[43]](#endnote-43) But even for more straightforward tasks, you get the same boost that comes with establishing the discipline to learn in moderate and consistent doses, then rotating that with good rest.

## The Price of Poor Sleep Habits

How do the following sound:

* Higher risk of depression
* Elevated risk of heart problems
* Having to put in more effort and still failing to get the results you want
* Lack of ease navigating social situations due to lowered brain function, even if the environment is conducive. 38

Not so appealing, right? These problems mentioned above can come with poor sleep quality.37 So, what actions can you put into practice to improve and maximize your overall quality of rest?

## Developing a Sound Bedtime Routine

A regular bedtime routine can significantly enhance your recovery in sleep. This routine serves as a cue for your body and mind to prepare you for a restful night.

Elements of a Healthy Bedtime Routine:

* Do something vice-free that relaxes you and lets you wind down for the night. This can be reading, listening to soothing music, or enjoying nature from the window.
* Avoid screens at least an hour or two before bed, as blue light reportedly disrupts your sleep cycle.38 [[44]](#endnote-44) [[45]](#endnote-45)
* Practice relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing or gentle stretching, to introduce ease to your body and wind down for the night.

## Creating a Sleep-Friendly Environment

Unsurprisingly, there is a connection between your direct home environment and the quality of your rest.

A suitable environment is secure, quiet, and comfortable. It's a sanctuary that signals to your body and mind that it's the right time to relax.

## Here are some suggestions for creating a Sleep-Friendly Bedroom:

* Keep the bedroom dark, cooled, and noise-free.
* Have a quality mattress of your preferred hardness level and supportive pillows.
* An hour or two before bed, dim your lights. This tells your body that it's time to sleep.
* Develop a bedtime routine for the same reason. When you maintain consistent rest hours every day (or at least most days), your brain will "know" when to induce sleep.

If, for some reason, you're starting out in a place you're not allowed to secure, and/or is noisy with a lack of a good bed, just know that the conditions mentioned above must be eventually achieved to get you to the starting line and prevent compounded problems later on. Some of us must first create for ourselves the conditions that most others are automatically provided. A secure place to sleep is one of them. There is no shame in this; you can create almost any future you want for yourself, no matter where you are in life. The contents of this book will show you how to stay empowered and open while you work things out and achieve the life you want and deserve.

## Mind what you eat and drink.

Your diet can also have an impact on your sleep. This will be expanded on in the following chapter.

Adopting an unhealthy diet can cause sleep disruptions and slow digestion. You may oversleep and wake up feeling lethargic. It pays to be especially mindful of sugar and caffeine intake near bedtime. Even drinking coffee 6 hours before sleep can mess up your sleep schedule. And it's good to remember that "decaf is not no-caff." Most teas also contain caffeine, so consider herbal teas as a late-evening alternative.

Let's dive into the next chapter, and we'll investigate the truth behind the phrase "You are what you eat."

# 11

# Mindful Eating for Gen Z

A

s you may be learning, the underlying cause of stress is complex. It is influenced by many factors, and the effects on the body come in cascades. One thing can lead to another.

Your food choices significantly contribute to your ability to cope gracefully.

Recall the times you felt under pressure. Did you notice that you started reaching for sweets or processed carbs like chocolate, candy, and chips? Although there could be a multitude of reasons why you feel this way, the underlying reason is the stress response. When you get pulled out of a neutral stance, your emotions can slide out of alignment, too. Your body then attempts to regain balance, and food offers one of the fastest natural payouts. So, the action comes naturally, but part of the problem is that our go-to foods have become more artificial and can add to the imbalance instead. Certain foods, like those rich in sugars and fats, trigger a dopamine release into the body.[[46]](#endnote-46) This feel-good hormone can help us feel better and cope with stress.

While this may help us with stress on a short-term basis, your body can start to become dependent on this release, causing a vicious cycle. This can mean cravings for certain types of foods, leading to potential overeating and weight gain.

Consequently, there can also be a reduction in the intake of nutritious foods, which means less nutrients in your body. Vitamins and minerals are crucial in managing stress at the physical level. When there is a deficit of these, it lowers your body's ability to handle stress and maintain the immune system.

Additionally, certain foods, such as those that are high in sugar, refined carbohydrates, and caffeine, can increase feelings of instability and anxiety along with stress. Therefore, it’s essential to be mindful of the food that you ingest.

## Foods That Increase Your Coping Resources

While some foods may add to your stress load, others can indirectly counter it by helping your body replenish its reserves and stay at optimal levels. These foods include[[47]](#endnote-47):

* Fiber - as found abundantly in fresh fruit, cruciferous and dark-leafy greens like broccoli and kale, whole grains.
* Omega 3 fatty acids, especially in higher proportion to Omega 6 - are found in wild-caught, cold-water fish with fins, such as salmon or trout, sardines, and tuna. It is also present in nuts, which should ideally be activated to release phytonutrient uptake inhibitors. Seeds like flaxseeds should be milled so your body can access the nutrients.
* Fermented food products - unprocessed or minimally processed yogurt and cheese, fermented pickles, and vegetables like cabbage, sauerkraut, kimchi, kefir, and soybean miso paste in low to moderate proportion to a regular diet.
* Plenty of Mineral or Filtered drinking water and fresh juices not from concentrate. No over-caffeinated or sweetened beverages with processed derivatives.

Certain mild herbs can also support your body's ability to manage stress. Some of them include[[48]](#endnote-48):

* Lavender
* Lemon balm
* Peppermint
* chamomile
* passionflower or rooibos
* Ashwagandha

They can be most safely consumed as tea and are readily available in stores. Always check with your healthcare provider first for health supplements that come in powder or pill form, especially if you're currently on any medication.

### Food Chart

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Healthy Alternative** | **Limit or Avoid** |
| Sugars: Bee honey, cane sugar, whole fruits | Refined sugar & chemical sweeteners |
| Wholemeal or multigrain flours, gluten-free options | Refined flours with gluten |
| Sea salt or Himalayan salt | Refined salt or “table” salt |
| Goat Milk, Milk from Grass-fed cows, Unpasteurised or Lactose-free alternatives, Fermented dairy products | Dairy products from cows on low quality feed, Overprocessed over over-pasteurised milk or dairy products (filtration), milk derivatives |
| Free range or barn laid eggs with quality feed (rich and creamy yellow to orange yolk, very faint musky scent if at all) | Caged eggs or eggs from hens with improper feed (sickly or light yellow yolk that smells like waste even when fresh) |
| Grassfed butter | margarine |
| Filtered or mineral water, freshly squeezed juices not from concentrate, tea and coffee from leaves and beans | Sugary drinks, soda, caffeinated or flavored drinks, juice or drinks from concentrate, fluoridated water, instant coffee |
| Grilled, boiled, stewed, and sautéed dishes. Bone broth (filtered). | Deep fried and fried foods (okay in moderation). Broth from cube stock. |
| Oils with high smoke point - olive oil, avocado, peanut, walnut, canola, sunflower, and sesame. Ghee. Flaxseed oil. | Coconut oil (for cooking). Partly hydrogenated oil, palm oil |
| Fish with scales and fins. | Shellfish in moderation - they are filter feeders and clean up the oceans. Avoid fish without scales and/or fins as they lack a filtration system so any toxicity they consume remains in their flesh. Fine to consume today due to advances in health and technology, access to clean waters. |

## Mindful Eating

When approaching food and nutrition, attitude matters. Even with the healthiest foods or when fresh produce isn't as readily available, your habits allow you to reap the full benefits.

Mindful eating is an attitude towards food. It informs your ability to be aware of what you consume when you consume it and make decisions without judgment. Obsessing over a meal's calorie, protein, fat, and carbohydrate contents only leads to more craving. Mindful eating moves you away from a space of neediness and refocuses you on an integrated experience, drawing on the different senses of sight, scent, taste, and touch to create a balance. [[49]](#endnote-49)

## Why Should I Practice Mindful Eating?

Why wouldn’t you? It's healthy, simple, and costs you nothing in return for positive returns that keep on giving. Doing this on top of good sleep habits will let you feel better and have more energy throughout the day, without interference or extra effort. When done right, it helps to activate what we call your parasympathetic nervous system. This so-called rest and digest nervous system allows your body to bounce back from daily wear and tear. Also, it helps regulate vital functions such as digestion.[[50]](#endnote-50)

Other benefits include:

* Allowing you to connect with your body and quickly understand what it's trying to tell you. You'll start to notice everything else that happens within your body and develop a better relationship with it. This is a part of self-care and self-compassion.
* Effortless weight maintenance - never having to think about it again. Once you catch yourself, your weight sheds automatically through normal, healthy eating and a balanced mind. Can you imagine that?
* Improves digestive health and, subsequently, your uptake of nutrition with every meal. Eat less, eat better.
* Increased self-esteem and confidence through knowledge and healthy sense of control with no need for micromanaging.

## How Do I Practice It?

Mindful eating with all the different senses involved is surprisingly simple to achieve. It is an enjoyable process you give yourself instead of a punishing exercise. We'll split this into bite-sized activities so you can get acquainted with it while having fun. These can be done anytime and at any frequency. Give it a go and choose what feels best for you.

Now I want you to imagine your favorite food, cooked exactly how you love it. Maybe you had it only once, on a trip, but it blew your mind away. Do you remember that moment of discovery? Let's think back on that scene.

Your food is *served*. What was the first sense you used, do you recall? What did it look like visually? Were you talking to someone at the time and had not initially paid much attention to the visuals? Maybe you dug in, and the taste on your tongue hit you and made you go, "Wow. This is good!" Or was it the smell that reached your nose before seeing anything come out of the kitchen? What about the sensation of it in your mouth? Was the right balance of soft and chewy, like fresh mozzarella or raclette hot off the pan? Were the starch or grains very particular in quality and satisfying to bite into? Try to remember the textures and layers of feeling.

So, how does this stop me from craving? You might wonder in surprise. You're making me hungry, thinking of all these sensations!

The simple answer is this: The key is to experience all that and be able to let it go. Deep in yourself, you would *know* that it is something you can have at any time. You can have it today, tomorrow, next week, whenever. It will always be there for you. You have the choice. This is a knowing, an abundance that is available to you.

Now, you have a relationship with food where you can thoroughly enjoy yourself. You can say yes or no anytime without feeling a sense of guilt or like you’re losing out on something. You feel no need to reject what feels good, but no need to chase it either. You can have it all anytime. Once you *know* this, your cravings are neutralized and you can enjoy yourself anytime without guilt; it's the same good feeling whether you choose to have it or not.

Let's try out some fun activities to get the ball rolling!

## Activity 1: What Are My Hunger Cues?

Most of us understand it's time for food when our stomach starts rumbling or twisting. However, in our busy lives, we sometimes get so focused on completing tasks that we dismiss or overlook our body's cues. Over time, we can begin to lose touch with it. We might stop understanding what it's trying to tell us and confuse the messages. We could start feeding ourselves even when we are full, or we may not provide food when our body asks to be fed. Both can produce a sluggish feeling and gradual disconnect that can leave us more vulnerable to body or image-related issues. Or, more often than not, we could think our body is telling us to eat when it really just wants water.

Developing a dialogue with our body will help us correctly identify our hunger cues. So, what are these cues? Well, a rumbling stomach is one of them, but there are some others, including:

* Reduced steadiness of hand
* Low mood and energy reserves
* Irritability
* Anger, also nicknamed 'hanger.'

Everybody has their own hunger cues, making it essential to learn yours. For this exercise, pick a day to observe your body, how it feels, and the sounds it makes. Just as we showed you before, document this on a notepad or in a journal or diary so that you can keep track of your findings.

If you need help figuring out where to start, we've got you covered. Here are some activities that can guide you.

### Activity 1 Questions

**After waking, you can tune into your body every 2-3 hours.**

How Do I feel today?

*Awesome! / Heavy / positive/anxious / light / courageous*

Is my body making any noises?

*the body is quiet / rumbling noises at 1pm / burped a few times in a row at 5pm*

Where is it coming from?

*no noises / inside stomach / belly and windpipe*

Note this down in your journal, including anything you did shortly after and the response:

*Ate at 1:30pm. Noise stopped.*

*Drank water at 5pm. Felt better!*

## Activity 2: Finding Your Eating Zen

You may be more familiar with finding your 'zen' in the emotional or spiritual context. But you can also find your eating zen. This relates to the experience of where you choose to eat. Many of us opt to slouch in front of our television or hunch over our laptops or mobile devices. While this may be entertaining, it takes away from a positive experience of eating.

So, rather than trying to have a meal on your comfy sofa, find another location. Ideally, this is somewhere that allows you to sit upright and have a proper meal on a hard tabletop that's at an appropriate height. The surroundings should also be:

* Uncluttered
* Peaceful (hint: you should not be eating in your office or surrounded by timetables and assignments)
* Free of distractions

For some, this may be outside on a small table in the garden; for others, it may be inside at the dining table and in the kitchen. It can be anywhere; choose a place that feels right for you.

## Activity 3: Close Your Eyes and Take a Smell

This activity requires a plate of food that's either warmed up or at room temperature. It's best done at mealtimes, such as lunch or dinner.

Once you have your plate of food ready, close your eyes and take a good whiff of your meal. What does it smell like? Can you discern the different layers? How would you describe them? Are they:

* Spicy
* Aromatic
* Fishy
* Salty
* Floral
* Meaty

Can you think of more descriptive words? The mild smoky scent of warmed trout. A tang of salt on the nose, a bit too much. A buttery citrus bouquet from the hollandaise. The spicyness of fresh rocket leaves. The smell of toasted sesame on multigrain bread. Lettuce, sharing warmth from the bread, smells about a day too old.

Whether simple or complex, this is your way of experiencing the world. Get to know it, embrace it. It's possible to start with very simple words and sensations and then gradually develop an interest and zest for life over the years that will surprise everyone, even yourself. It takes a lifetime to get to know oneself. Simplicity has its beauty. Complexity is simple layers of lived experience over time. You'll get there.

During this exercise, you may detect one specific food over the others on the plate or find that all the scents combine into a different scent altogether. Sometimes they break apart, and sometimes they come back together again. You may also find yourself recalling various memories associated with the food or its ingredients. For example, it may take you back to when you ate this for the first time, or it may remind you of a holiday you took where this particular food was being served. This may draw out emotions, such as happiness or nostalgia. As and when any feelings come to the surface, acknowledge them without judgment. Accept them, and let them pass through and out of you. Journal them if you wish.

When you catch the scent of your food, your body starts to anticipate it. Your appetite wakes up, and you begin to salivate spontaneously. Additionally, inside your body, your stomach starts to produce gastric acid, which helps break down food. Your body begins to release insulin, which is the hormone produced by the pancreas that works to break down the carbohydrates in your food. By smelling your food, you give your body the cue to boot up the digestive process in anticipation of receiving a meal.[[51]](#endnote-51)

## Activity 4: Open Your Eyes And Look

Food is a visual experience in addition to being a taste experience. For this task, take a look at your meal and observe it.

How does it appear visually?

What colors are on the plate?

How many different types of foods are there?

What are the shapes of these foods?

Once again, your answers can go from simple to complex. If you're keeping a journal, you will get to observe any changes in your entries over time.

By observing what you eat, you increase your awareness of what you put into your body. It also invites feelings of gratitude as you feel fortunate to have a hot meal with fresh or varied ingredients.

## Activity 5: Touch Your Food

This activity almost seems counterintuitive, considering you've probably heard, "Don't play with your food." This one can get messy, but it only requires you to touch specific parts of your meal. Have a cloth or towel handy, just in case. The idea is to touch your food with clean hands and feel the textures and sensations on your skin.

You probably did this when you were a toddler. At some point, spoons were introduced into your repertoire, followed by knives and forks. Many of us were taught to stop touching what we eat unless it was a sandwich or pizza. Even then, we might use a napkin or blotting paper out of politeness.

Now, we're going to re-discover the experience of the skin on your fingers coming into contact with food. Briefly touch each item on your plate with your fingertips. Ask yourself the following questions as you do this:

What does it feel like? Is it:

Smooth?

Bumpy?

Gooey?

Soft?

Grainy?

Hard?

Rigid?

Hot?

Cold?

Just like in the above activities, scale the complexity of your descriptions to your preference.

## Activity 6: Taste Your Food

This may be the best part for many of you, as you now get to taste your food!

Once you place a portion in your mouth, close your jaws and taste it. Slowly run it around your mouth, chew, breathe, and think about the flavors and scents that you pick up.

Is it salty? Sweet? Tangy or spicy? Can you taste a particular spice, or does a specific flavor profile come through? Does it match how it smelled? Or are there extra layers that surprise or add to what your nose picked up?

During this exercise, you may discover certain flavors you like or dislike. This happens as you become more aware of the food you put into your body.

## Activity 7: Chew Your Food

Chewing is an integral part of eating and the digestive process. As you do so, your teeth and saliva work to break down the food. Your teeth perform the mechanical process. At the same time, two enzymes in your saliva help to chemically break down the food. This prepares the food for easier digestion in the stomach.

Wolfing down your food without properly chewing can cause indigestion, felt as heartburn or discomfort in your stomach. It can also reduce the overall nutrient uptake from the meal. In this case, your body does a lot of work without fully receiving the nutrients from the food. This can result in deficiencies in the long run.[[52]](#endnote-52)

Not only does chewing help predigest your food, it also plays a pivotal role in releasing essential hormones. One of these hormones is leptin, also known as the fullness hormone. Its job is to tell your body that the task of eating is complete. This hormone may not be released if you eat too quickly, stopping you from feeling full and contributing to overeating. Additionally, dopamine is released along with leptin, creating a general feeling of satisfaction after a meal. Taking your time during a meal aids in the proper expression of leptin and dopamine.[[53]](#endnote-53)

### The Chewing Mini-game

In this mini-game, the goal is to practice chewing your food. According to research, the optimal chewing time is between 20 and 30 chews per mouthful of food. Here's a simple breakdown :

**Game 7.1:** Can you chew 5 times before swallowing?

**Game 7.2:** Can you chew 10 times before swallowing?

**Game 7.3:** Can you chew 15 times before swallowing?

**Game 7.4:** Can you chew 20 times before swallowing?

This gives you a general impression of how long it should take to do the job. Normally, this should come naturally to you as you become more aware and learn to take your time at meals.

## Activity **8:** What Are My Fullness Cues?

Last but not least, but just as important, is understanding when our body is saying it’s had enough to eat. Many of us have become numb to our body's messages that we are full. This can cause unnecessary weight gain through overeating and subsequent feelings of guilt, which lead to more eating. Correctly tuning in to our body and listening to it is a crucial step in practicing mindful eating.

There are many ways your body can try to send you the message, and the way it does it will differ for everyone. This can make it tricky in the beginning; however, there are some general signs you can look out for:

1. During a meal, notice the first time you eat when you put your fork or spoon down. This is a sign from your body that it is starting to get full. When this happens, notice how you feel within your body. Rather than compulsively trying to finish your food, only pick up your utensils when you feel your body's hunger cues.
2. There is a belief that when you are full, your body pushes up the last bit of air from your stomach, which comes out as a burp. While scientific evidence on this is limited, it can be fun to become aware of your body this way and take note when it happens. If and when you do burp, take a pause to observe how you feel inside your body.[[54]](#endnote-54)
3. When you're finished with your plate, rather than getting up and going for seconds, sit for a few minutes, have a drink of water, and see if your body still shows any signs of hunger afterward. Assess how you feel.

It's okay to feel full without finishing what's on your plate. Some of us may have been taught as kids that we had to eat everything that was placed in front of us. You don't have to. There's no prize for doing so, and the last thing you want to end up with is a feeling of discomfort and guilt because you've overstuffed yourself. When done with awareness, self-compassion, and moderation, you will always feel satisfied after a meal.

## Practicing Mindful Eating

Now that you have done the activities and experienced what mindful eating is, you can start applying these principles to your daily life. The use of Activity 1 gives you a good headstart in observing mindful eating practices. You can check in on yourself during mealtime once a day, then gradually increase the frequency as desired.

There is no right or wrong way to start; choose what feels best to you and works with your rhythm. It is also important to remember that it's a marathon, not a race; if you have days where you are too busy to practice, that's okay. Tomorrow is a new day, and you can resume the next moment you get. Here's a secret tip: immersion is key.

Now that we have powered up on stress and nutrition, let's take a look at how the same principles of mindfulness can be used to strike a balance between technology and your busy lifestyle.

# 12

# Unplugged Hobbies: Finding Joy Offline

*"How can I put my phone away an hour before bed? What would I do instead?"*

You may have wondered about this when the importance of limiting screen time before bed popped up in Chapter 10. Then there's the challenge of staying focused all through work or study without checking your mobile device.

While technology is undoubtedly a fantastic tool that opens up new possibilities, excessive reliance can impact your mental health and take away from the time you enjoy on this planet.

The problem is that social media apps, which are ad-based, benefit from your screen time. The more you use them, the more they earn. To maximize their earnings, these apps tend to employ addictive designs or "hooks."

Trying to reduce screen time through willpower alone can be a losing battle. If you want to spend less time online, consider this simple formula:

*More time offline = Less time online*

It seems like a no-brainer but, in this age of information overload, we have to remind ourselves of some simple facts. Instead of directly fighting the urge to use screens, it's easier to find hobbies that we enjoy and focus on them. This way, we will naturally reduce screen time without even realizing it.

Cultivating a variety of hobbies can benefit us in many ways. It can help us meet new people, achieve our fitness goals, improve our mental health, or even start a passion project, which could diversify our income opportunities.

Here are some popular offline hobbies and reasons why they can be great choices.

**Reading (physical books)**

The benefits you can gain from reading a book depend on the type of book you choose. Self-help and non-fiction books can help you expand your mind without pulling you away from reality. Unlike other mediums, books can provide a very focused experience that allows for a personal connection and broadens your horizons rather than scattering your energy in different directions. A well-written self-help guide can teach you about yourself and empower you with ideas for self-improvement and good living. You can also use them to learn new skills you are interested in or just read novels that capture your imagination before bed as a way to relax.

One of the best things about physical books, or a Kindle with the backlight turned off, is that they are perfect for winding down at the end of the day especially before bed. However, it's best to give the horror novels a miss if you plan on having a good night's sleep!

## The King of Habits: Writing

If eyes are considered the portal to one's soul, then words can be seen as a gift from our collective dreams. There are many styles of writing, from poetry and haiku to prose and long-form, each with its own application and lots of fun. Additionally, they're associated with certain health benefits on both the physical and emotional levels. [[55]](#endnote-55) Here are some of them:

* + Mood improvement: Writing, especially expressive writing like journaling about personal experiences, can be cathartic. It’s been shown to elevate the mood, reduce stress, and even indirectly boost immune system functions. 45
  + Improved thinking: Regular writing can enhance memory and comprehension abilities, as well as foster superior communication skills. It helps you to organize your thoughts.
  + Self-Reflection through journaling: Journaling can be a therapeutic practice, offering a safe space for self-reflection, goal setting, and emotion processing.

Reading is an excellent pastime, but writing takes things to a whole 'nother level. You go beyond simply consuming content to create entirely novel word landscapes for yourself.

You can put pen to paper or do this on your computer, and would still reap the benefits. However, if you want to get the most out of the activity, it's best to stay offline. Or, if you use an online writing app, you can turn notifications off and keep one window open to focus on your writing.

**Move your body**

Do you want to improve your fitness levels and boost your energy levels, make more friends, live longer, and enjoy better mental health in general? If the answer's yes, pick a physical sport and sweat that stress away.

As you've probably guessed, physical sports have been proven to prevent or alleviate anxiety and depression.[[56]](#endnote-56) They also help you develop discipline and resilience. Additionally, they tire your body in a good way, which improves the quality of your sleep.55

Overall, sports offer a fantastic combination of benefits that cover several topics discussed in this book.

Besides, you'll be too absorbed to even think of checking your phone while you are chasing a ball or having a blast with your teammates.

**Yoga**

When science and ancient wisdom combine, it can greatly benefit your mental and physical health.[[57]](#endnote-57) Yoga, for example, can help you stay present in the moment, become more self-aware, and reduce your dependence on technology, allowing you to enjoy the world around you more fully. There are different variations of the practice, including those focused on physical activity, stretching, and relaxation.

**Other hobbies**

There are countless hobbies to choose from, so we've listed a few options with a brief description of their benefits below:

* **Gardening:** Teaches responsibility, patience, and encourages a connection with nature.
* **Playing a Musical Instrument:** Improves cognitive skills, concentration, and creativity.
* **Drawing and Painting:** Develops artistic skills and self-expression.
* **Cooking and Baking:** Teaches life skills, patience, and creativity.[[58]](#endnote-58) Also gives you control over your diet as you learn to create tasty, healthy dishes at a fraction of the cost of those found at restaurants.
* **Knitting or Sewing:** Develops fine motor skills and creativity.
* **Photography:** Teaches composition, patience, and a different perspective of the world.
* **Learning a New Language:** Favors cognitive abilities and expands your possibilities.
* **Pottery or Sculpting:** Develops artistic abilities and hand-eye coordination.
* **Volunteering for a Cause:** Builds empathy, social skills, and a sense of community. It also gives confidence when you’re doing things to improve lives or make the world a better place.
* **Woodworking:** Teaches craftsmanship, attention to detail, and patience.
* **Origami:** Enhances fine motor skills and concentration.
* **Martial Arts:** Teaches discipline, self-defense, and physical fitness.
* **Dance:** Improves physical fitness, rhythm, and self-expression.
* **Biking:** Promotes physical fitness and offers a sense of freedom and exploration.
* **Board Games:** Encourages strategic thinking, social interaction, and sportsmanship. This fun offline activity can help with socializing, whether you are shy and introverted or expressive and outgoing. A good mix of fun and healthy competition.[[59]](#endnote-59)

## Identifying Personal Hobbies

To embark on your offline adventure, the first step is to identify hobbies that resonate with you.

Consider what excites you, what sparks your curiosity, or what you've always wanted to try. This can range from painting, gardening, playing a musical instrument, or cooking. Then, create a list and try out a variety of activities to expand your horizons. Sometimes, the most unexpected hobbies can be the most rewarding.

As you explore the world of unplugged hobbies, keep in mind that these activities are not just a break from screens; they're an opportunity to connect with yourself and others while growing as a person. Embrace these moments of joy offline and see how they enrich all aspects of your life.

Are you ready to delve deeper into your journey of self-discovery and stress management? In the next chapter, we'll explore how to craft the best personal stress toolkit that will empower you to handle life's challenges confidently and calmly. Turn the page, and let's continue this adventure together!

# 13

# Crafting Your Personal PowerUp Toolkit

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inally, we’ve arrived at the Goodie Room! This chapter and beyond contains all you need to put together your very own Personal Stress ToolKit. By now, you’ve learned the fundamentals of stress, what it looks like, and how it affects your life, along with some great remedies for that.

Everyone is different. You would’ve noticed this by now.

What works for you is going to be different from what works for friend A or friend B.

Throughout this book, we’ve offered a range of options to put you in the driver’s seat of deciding what fits you best. Even if you end up trying everything, we recommend against doing it all at the same time. Instead, prioritize.

To sort out your priorities , you first need to understand the two main types of tools you have at hand and how to approach them. The two types are:

* + Long-Term Strategies: These are practices or approaches you incorporate into your daily or weekly routines.
  + Quick Stress Busters: Techniques used on an as-needed basis, like the 3-4-8 breathing method.

How do we include them in our routine?

## Approaching Long-Term Strategies

You can incorporate as many strategies as is comfortable for you, but be careful to avoid taking more than you can handle. Remember, it’s a marathon, not a race. Your goal isn’t rushing to finish first; it’s to reach your finish line without burning out halfway.

We recommend that you focus on one or two strategies at a time. You can do more, but make sure you consistently follow at least one long-term approach.

For example, let’s say your focus is on improving your sleep schedule. Maybe you’ve also just started going to the gym and meditating. You’re honest with yourself and admit that you aren’t always consistent with the gym, and some days you skip meditation. But sleep isn’t negotiable. You make sure to keep it at it no matter what.

Once your routine becomes more stable, you focus on meditation, gradually making it a non-negotiable item on your schedule as well. See, you don’t have to be perfect when you start. That’s how it happens - with consistency and self-compassion.

Focus on reaching the two-month mark with at least one habit.

Why two months?

A study published in the British Journal of Health Psychology observes that it takes an average of 59 days to establish a pattern.[[60]](#endnote-60) It could take longer, or it could take less, but we recommend setting your initial goal at two months before adding another routine to improve your odds. Once you’ve established your routine, your brain becomes your ally. Remember that the brain has an easier time doing things once it forms a pathway.

## What about Quick Stress Busters?

The problem with quickies is that if you don’t use them daily, you might not remember to implement them when you need to. They might also be less effective if you lack practice. The solution is simple - make them second nature.

Do so by applying these techniques, even on chill days when you don’t ‘need’ them. You could, for example, practice the grounding technique every day right after you wake up. You could even do an exercise by generating a tiny bit of stress through your body language.

To simulate stress, cross your arms, clench your fists, and tense your face and body for a few seconds. Then, release the tension from your body and assume a comfortable position. Do the 3-4-8 technique or any other technique for quick relief. This is a safe exercise that lets you practice dealing with stress.

## Options! Too many options!

You may need to figure out where to start or what will work. No problem.

Try everything.

Use your first month to try things. You can try something different each week or even get greedy and try many things at once. Now’s the time to test things. Go wild!

Take note of what works best so you can later know what to prioritize. But where will you take notes? On your stress journal.

### The Stress Journal: Document your Stress Journey

Journaling, in general, is a powerful tool that supports mental health and physical health. It’s also a great tool for planning anything.[[61]](#endnote-61) Why not harness that power with a focus on stress management?

The stress journal is a notebook (any notebook will do) where you document everything stress-related: your experiments, your successes and failures, what stressed you, and what helped.

You can use the following template:

Date: [The day’s date]

Stress event #1: [What happened that caused you stress]

Feelings: [How you felt]

Inner critic: [What your inner critic said, if it said anything and you remember it]

Solution: [Add here the method you used for stress relief]

Result: [How you felt after applying the solution, if you did anything to fight the stress]

Next time: [Here, you can write how you could do things better the next time something like this happens]

Additional notes: [Here, you can add any insights, theory, or thoughts you have about the situation.]

If nothing stresses you today, write, “Today was a great day!” and savor the gratitude.

A quick note: You don’t have to complete every entry each time, but the more you fill out, the better.

By documenting your journey, you can see your progress in real-time. As you become better at handling stress, you might notice longer stretches of days where nothing stresses you. The ‘voice’ of your inner critic might diminish or disappear altogether.

You’ll also get to understand your emotional landscape better by the day. Little by little, you become an expert at being You. Until one day, you surprise yourself by stopping any incoming projectiles in its tracks.

You sense your inner critic is about to chime in, but before they can take a stab at you, you think, “Now stop right there!” and, they stop.

By crafting your personal stress toolkit and developing a wellness plan, you're not just managing stress; you're taking an important step towards a healthier, more balanced life. Embrace this journey of self-discovery and proactive well-being with confidence and optimism.

### Trackers & Worksheets

Combine your journal with the included trackers and worksheets to maximize the benefits of your activities. The trackers will let you easily monitor your progress at a glance - brilliant! Although there are tracking apps available, there’s just something special about writing on paper. It gives you a sense of ownership and dominion in a way that technology has yet to replicate.

Once you become familiar with your core set, you'll be better prepared to deal with unexpected situations and connect with appropriate resources whenever necessary.

## Choosing a Healthy & Effective Anti-Stress Tool

We’ve formulated the following questions to help you with sorting out your activities as you try them out. In other words, you’re the expert now, and you’re going to come up with your own answers. Ready?

### Do I Enjoy It without Guilt?

Is the activity something you enjoy and can feel passionate about? Does it align with your values? Spend a bit of time reflecting on your own, listening to yourself rather than other people’s opinions. You can do an evaluation again after a month.

### Is it in My Best Interest or Positive?

In general, it works out in your best interest if your chosen activity is:

* Healthy and manageable
* Productive and/or helps you develop skills
* Non-addictive
* Neutral, does not saddle you with heavy feelings that don’t easily go away (do you find yourself staying angry or tense for longer than normal? Drained instead of invigorated?)
* Poised to benefit others, or at the very least not cause harm, while helping yourself.

### Is It Feasible and Sustainable? Can I Stick to It?

To find out, start with activities that take up little time in your schedule or involve low to no cost. This approach gives you a reasonable timeframe to assess the returns and see how they make you feel versus what you put in. It’s much healthier to do it in small, sustainable doses to allow you to change your track easily if and when you need to. Looking for solutions closer to yourself is most sustainable. It will pave the way for you to appreciate what you have. This attitude trains you to direct yourself using hope and wisdom sans guilt.

## Stress-Beating Activities (non-exhaustive)

Let’s divide our activities into three categories based on their method and required time.

### Active De-stressing Practices

This category encompasses activities that require your active participation and accountability for obtaining results. Activities such as exercising and playing sports might generate some level of stress. Still, it is a healthy and deliberate choice. These practices aim to alleviate stress overall.

* Workout
* Sports
* Dance
* Yoga, Pilates & related holistic gymnastics
* Pranayama (Conscious breathing techniques)
* Mandala coloring and/or contemplation
* Meditation & Mindfulness
* Travel
* Hiking
* Going for a walk or to the beach
* Express gratitude and give/receive hugs
* Community service & helping others
* Drawing & painting
* Read a book
* Journaling & creative writing
* Plastic arts (sculpture, ceramics)
* Therapeutic Singing & Mantras
* Play games (preferably board or non-digital options)
* Play music (string instruments like the guitar or ukelele, piano, wind instruments, drums, singing bowls)
* Cleaning or organizing your room (it may sound boring, but it helps a lot with inspiration)
* Healthy & mindful eating (eating slowly and tasting every bite)
* Martial Arts, including Internal Martial Arts like taichi (those that use meditative practices)
* Habits for sleep hygiene (e.g., turning off smartphones[[62]](#endnote-62) and lights sooner at night, having low-starch dinners before 7 pm)
* Hang out with close friends and/or family

## Developing Your ToolKit

### The Trend Setter’s Table

Here's a simple yet effective way to keep track of the healthy routines you want to introduce into your life and the negative ones you want to eliminate.

Start by creating a two-column table. In the first column, write down the good practices that you want to adopt. In the second column, list the ones that you want to shake.

Next, sort them based on how much time they take. Give them a score of 1-10, where 1 is the easiest and quickest, and 10 is the toughest and most time-consuming habit.

Now, pair an entry from the “good” column with a score-equivalent one from the “bad” column. For instance, you could pair doom-scrolling on social media (bad), with taking a 1-minute breathing and meditation break (good). In the more time-consuming column, you could pair playing video games with painting Mandalas, as they both require concentration and time.

This approach works wonders for those who feel like they need more time in the day. Give it a try and see how it goes!

### Progressive Introduction of Changes & Monthly Goals

Our minds tend to respond more favorably when change is gradual or when only a few changes get rolled out together. Moderating this allows us to assimilate these changes better and appreciate the benefits that they bring. It’s best to focus on implementing a maximum of 2 to 4 anti-stress resources at a time. For instance, in the first month, you can consider introducing:

1. 1-3 Quick Tips (example: conscious breathing, walking barefoot on the grass during breaks)
2. 1 exercise that involves some dedication (for example, starting guitar lessons).
3. An occasional or one-off relaxation activity (for example, going to the beach or investing in a retreat).

Prioritize the resources that are most feasible for your lifestyle, taking into account your schedule and needs.

### Trackers & Journals

Use trackers to monitor your progress and measure your growth. Keep your focus and motivation by making regular notes. Enclosed in this book are several trackers that you can use. Alternatively, create your own using them as a reference. We recommend that you combine these with your own journal for best results.

### Keep Your Mind Open to Greatness & Improvements

As you explore more and give things a go, you’ll find that some techniques work better for you than others. It pays to strike a balance between following the rules versus being adventurous and trying out new ideas. It will help make your journey more exciting in a way that keeps you balanced.

If you ever face any challenges that hold you back, don't hesitate to seek help early on. Remember, most people want to see you succeed, but they can only know what you need when you ask or tell them.

You may prefer to work with a acquaintance, friend or loved one who is just as invested in overcoming similar hurdles. With a trusted connection, you’ll thrive on a healthy sense of competition, while inspiring or supporting each other to overcome any obstacles.

## Conclusion

Hopefully, it’s clear now that you’ve been blessed with a wide array of resources to manage or overcome anything life throws at you. Your mind and body carry their own wisdom, which you can use to find peace and solutions whenever you feel overwhelmed.

The best kind of change is when you barely feel it at all. There’s no fanfare or miracle required, just small, achievable steps. You set yourself in the right alignment, put in the effort, adjust along the way, and life gets better. This is the kind of change that goes the distance.

If you aim to make lasting changes and step into a tomorrow that aligns with your goals, make use of the information, activities, and worksheets included in this book. Revisit what you’ve written once in a while and carefully evaluate your vision of yourself and your future.

Eager to continue exploring ways to thrive? In our next chapter, we wrap up our journey with a look at how you can carry these skills and insights into adulthood. We’ll help you clarify your goals and align your life with whatever you have envisioned for yourself as a full-grown adult.

Turn the page for our Final Chapter, Thriving into Adulthood, for a fulfilling culmination of our Adventure!

# CHAPTER 13

# APPENDIX - Tables

Feel free to jot down as many items as you want, paying special attention to those that demonstrate your ideal and preferred behaviors. Then, select a few tools to integrate into your routine, noting the contrast between these positive behaviors and any negative ones you plan to replace. You may also want to save this table and revisit it later to add more details.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Stressful / Counterproductive habits | Rebalancing Activity |
|  |  |
| Minor habits | |
|  | |
| 1. Example: Checking social media  2.  3.  4. | 1. Example: 3-minute Pranayama and meditation break, eyes closed.  2.  3.  4. |
| Active | |
| Stressful / Counterproductive habits | Rebalancing Activity |
| 1.  2.  3.  4.  5. | 1.  2.  3.  4.  5. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Passive destressors & therapies\* | |
| Stressors or problems to address | Passive destressors, therapies, or solutions |
| 1.  2.  3. | 1.  2.  3. |

\*Passive destressors & therapies are interventions that are achieved or performed by something or someone other than yourself - eg. a therapist, spa retreat, psychotherapist, masseuse, chiropractor/ osteopath

# CHAPTER 13

# Outlining the antistressors

This tool can be used for both passive and active stress management. You can replicate it as many times as you need and save the table to revisit later for adding more details.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| HABIT I WOULD LIKE TO MANAGE: | |
| Description | What resource or solution do I need? |
| Any challenges implementing or sustaining it over time? What can I do about it? |
| Expected Time Investment  Daily: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Weekly: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Months or Long-Term: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | What stressors does this resource address or help me cope with? |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| SOLUTION: | |
| Description | What resource or solution do I need? |
| Any challenges implementing or sustaining it over time? What can I do about it? |
| Expected Time Investment  Per application: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Times per day: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | What stressors does this resource help me cope with? |

# CHAPTER 13

# Performance Weekly Tracker (for regular activities)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ACTIVITY: | |
| WEEK 1 | |
| Did I follow the expected schedule?  Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_\_  Partly \_\_\_\_\_\_ | If incomplete, what happened and what can I improve on to ensure I complete it next week? |
| How effective was the activity in helping me cope with stress? What effects did I observe -  During the practice/session/application:    Right after:    During the week: | |
| Comments | |

# CHAPTER 13

# Overall Weekly Tracker

Weekly Stress Management Tracker (Give 0 - 10 score, low to high)

Overall Stress Management Score

How well did I manage during stressful situations (if any) this week?

How well did I manage in the aftermath of the stressful situation? How did it impact my health and wellness? (write down details)

How could I have responded better or managed the situation?:

What did I learn from this? What would have changed my perspective or attitude, or empowered me in the situation?

Other reflections and comments

# Chapter 13

# Conclusion/Thriving into Adulthood

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e are nearing the end of this book. But this isn’t the end—it's a beginning.

Imagine a time machine. We hop in and travel forward in time to your future.

Picture this:

You step into your office for the first time.

A spate of memories floods your mind, spanning your high school years and beyond. You rediscover fond memories but also the significant challenges you overcame. You feel grateful for those; thanks to them, you are ready for what lies ahead. You are genuinely confident and resilient.

You have come so far. Much time has passed. The best part is that your adventure has only just begun. You are still going; you are ready to grow and reach greater heights.

Thanks to your hard work in your youth, you now have an advantage you wouldn’t otherwise have. You notice the difference in your classmates; some of them haven’t changed much. They are stuck in old ways. You could have been, too, but you took matters into your own hands and chose to live otherwise.

The prospect of your future excites you. Your social life is flourishing; your performance has never been better, and you’ve secured your funding. Your loved ones couldn’t be more proud. But, most importantly, YOU are proud of what you’ve accomplished, even if it isn’t perfect.

Suddenly, a negative thought tries to wiggle its way in, but you notice it and smile. It’s Nitpick Nick (or Sooky Sally). Their presence used to be a threat; in the past, it took hold of you, but now you smile fondly and even say hi to your inner critic. You’ve made peace with yourself. ‘Nick’ or ‘Sally’ is grumpy and paranoid sometimes but mostly harmless. Their ‘voice’ is softer, doesn’t make a dent in you.

This could be yours if you so choose. Here are some final tips.

### Reflecting on Personal Growth

As you continue on your path in life, it's prudent to take time and reflect on your experiences. A good habit is to evaluate your personal growth and progress at least once a year. Meditate on the obstacles you have overcome and the techniques you used to manage stress. Analyze what has worked for you and what hasn't. Acknowledging your progress is essential to appreciating your achievements and laying the groundwork for future evolution.

### Celebrate Your Achievements:

Acknowledge your efforts and the strides you've taken in understanding and managing stress. Gratitude in itself has the power to change your life for the better. 59

You’re already familiar with the concept of stress journals. To help you further, we suggest keeping two journals - one can be for stress (e.g. a blue notebook) and the other for gratitude (e.g. a yellow notebook). Keeping a separate diary to jot down what you are grateful for and what you have achieved can be a great way to track your progress and encourage positive emotions.

### Create your personal strategies

Get creative, and instead of using this book to box yourself in or place limits, use it as a launch pad to where you want to go.

We want you to invent your own strategies, get playful, and discover things we haven’t mentioned. You have goals, and so does this book. The goal of this book is for you, the reader, to reach a point where you can feel appreciative of what you have learned while realizing, “I now have everything I need to succeed.”

More insights will emerge as you document your journey. When you’ve accumulated more content, you will get to savor eureka moments about yourself.

### Let your plan evolve

You've already crafted a plan in the previous chapter, but feel free to adjust it as needed. As you explore the various strategies, you'll pick up new skills and gain new insights that you can use to refine and improve your plan.

As new challenges arise, you will be ready for them. And as you take on each one, you will grow progressively stronger.60

Likewise, as new opportunities appear, you'll be ready to harness them with confidence and ride the waves of success.

## Reflecting on Life Stages and Personal Growth

### Adolescence

As you transition from childhood to adulthood, it's important to recognize the stage of life you're in, between the ages of 12 and 21.

During your childhood, you may have lived under the guidance of your parents and other elders. Then, as you approached puberty, you began to gain the confidence and willpower to challenge those limits and seek new experiences.

This newfound energy is meant to push you forward into self-discovery and toward adventure and learning. However, the most important exploration during this time is that of your inner self:

* Discovering your passions and emotions and learning how to manage them
* To question learned patterns
* To forge your own identity and beliefs
* Figuring out what you could come to do as an adult

As you journey through adolescence, you have a choice to make: you can either lose yourself or get crushed in the chaos, or you can use your newfound drive to discover yourself and learn to keep your focus. It's about encouraging and channeling your ambition into positive outcomes, driven by self-compassion and a desire to achieve something greater than yourself.

### Adulthood

As you mature and enter adulthood, your priorities shift significantly. While your focus during your teenage years was on dreaming big and getting your bearings right, as you grow older, things like family, health, stability, and peace of mind start to become more important to you.

A whole and happy adult also has to cultivate discernment and clarity of conscience. This means being able to reason with your set criteria and act accordingly. Self-knowledge and stress management become essential to living a happy and fulfilling life as an adult. In fact, many of the challenges adults face are a result of not questioning harmful patterns and not truly knowing themselves. So, start working on these things now to make the transition to adulthood smoother and less stressful.

### Redefining Values and Priorities in Life

To better understand personal growth from a holistic perspective and appreciate the resources at your disposal, it’s good to redefine some essential concepts about the fundamentals of life:

### Health

There is more to health than just being an absence of disease. It's about achieving a state of harmony and adaptability.5960 Chronic stress can disrupt this balance, and although your body and spirit have some capacity to handle it, they also have their limits.61 Over time, you will place increasing value on your health and vitality. You can start gathering information on how to live your youth in ways that preserve your precious health.

### Success

Your definition of success and your attitude towards it tend to change over the course of your life. It is often tempting to associate success with superficial wealth or power. However, you may come to realize that true fulfillment comes with pursuing your dreams and giving your best effort. And without trying to outdo others, only yourself. You’ll also have a chance to develop an appreciation for slow, steady progress over fast success. Ideally, you would want to do what maximizes your potential to scale upwards or at least preserve that option.

### Happiness

It is perfectly fine to have big dreams and strive to achieve them. When you are young, it is easy to detach yourself from your family and take risks in seeking happiness. However, later in life, you’ll have the opportunity to find genuine happiness in the little things: your loved ones, inner peace, and doing what you truly love. Keep sight of these things, and you may go far in life.

### Fear

Fear is a natural physiological response that helps protect and prioritize oneself. However, it is also necessary to overcome them and embrace uncertainty. From your teens to your early adulthood, you’ll have the chance to confront and conquer the fear of the unknown. Some of you may even thrive in it. With the abundance of information and news, part of your challenge will be to guard against unfounded fears and remote conflicts that do not align with your reality, focusing instead on what is closer to you and is within your control.

### Respect & Honor

While growing up, your explorations and questioning of patterns and beliefs may lead to confrontations with loved ones or friends. While these processes are necessary for personal growth, they can be done with respect to those who have guided and supported you. As you honor their legacy, you also instruct others on how you should be respected and honored. This is a habit that one forms early in life. If you manage to find your balance in this regard, people will keep opening doors for you to find your success.

### Rising Up Again After Failure

Success, as Winston Churchill once put it, involves navigating one failure to another without losing any of your enthusiasm.

Every setback or defeat presents an opportunity to learn and improve oneself. As you grow and develop, you will experience a range of emotions from any failures, but you will also discover the joy of triumph as you learn and learn to get back up again.

### Final words

“Today was made from the Building Blocks of yesterday.”

Each day matters. Every moment matters. *You* matter. So does cause and effect. What you choose now will have an impact in a few minutes to hours or more. What you do today will have an impact on what happens tomorrow or beyond. This will remain true for every day of your life, but more so during your youth.

Your brain is at its most malleable before you reach your 20s, making it that much easier to learn anything or form new habits. In brain science, there is something called neuroplasticity, which is the brain’s native capacity of establishing and restructuring neural bridges or connections. This natural ability slows as you get older, leading to more effort and time required on your part to change the equivalent habits and thought patterns.6061

In no way does this mean that change is impossible past your 20s. You can change anytime you want, and you will continue to. We all have to realign and correct our course along the way. But don’t let the ticking of the clock stress you.

Perfect execution or results is not the point; what matters is that you make the best of opportunities for growth as they appear in front of you.

Life is a marvelous experience with endless possibilities. Each phase of life comes with its own set of complexities that can impact how we perceive and manage stress. However, by simply changing our perspective, everything can become simpler. Knowing yourself and keeping your conscience clear will allow you to better discern the future you truly want and work towards it.

We wish you the very best of success. Trust in yourself, and always remember that even when the road gets lonely sometimes, you never walk alone.

# 14

# Meditation to Define Your Dream Life & Stay Focused

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o the following active visualization daily or as frequently as possible. The clearer you are about the details and purpose of your dreams, the easier it will be for you to take proper actions and overcome stress. Opportunities will keep coming down to you, thanks to the power of attraction activated by this meditation. It consists of three main stages, and the idea is to spend the same amount of time in the first two and as much as needed in the third one. Of course, the longer the practice, the better.

## First Stage: Intro & Setup

This step is open to whatever works best for you to bring your mind to a state of peace and mindful alert. Some ideas:

* Pranayama (Conscious breathing techniques)
* A brief warm-up workout
* Drinking a warm, relaxing tea

**Tip N°1**: Dynamic breathings like the Breath of Fire (also named *Kalapabhati Pranayama*) are the best options to get into this state of mindful alert.

**Tip N° 2:** Palpating your own heartbeat (on your wrist or neck) is another great resource, not only during the introduction but for the rest of the stages as well. It helps you stay grounded and listen to your intuition.

## Second Stage: Evoke a Neutral Mindset

Even after that intro stage, thoughts, and fake desires may continue popping into your mind. So, your task now is to see them come and go without attachment and annul them. No matter how positive or important that thought or feeling may look (even if it's part of your dream), take this stage to build a non-reactive mindset. They all mean nothing now.

**Tip N° 1**: Cross out or cover each thought with the number zero or meditate on that number.

**Tip N° 2:** Focusing on your breath and its sound may help you in this task. Just as the air you breathe, everything in your life comes and goes.

## Third Stage: Projecting Your Dream Like A Beam

Use the third stage anytime you want to focus on your dream and make better decisions, but first practice it with the whole meditation.

## First Part: Condense the Dream or Goal to Project

This last stage of meditation uses what's called the Third Eye. Focus on one thing only. Take your time to clearly define what you want to attract or get focused on and resume it into one word, symbol, or image.

**Tip N° 1**: The selected item may represent your whole dream or just an aspect of it you want to work on at that specific moment. Especially if you're being constant with this practice, it's okay to focus on different aspects of your dream every day and maybe turn back to the whole idea once or twice a week.

**Tip N°2:** You may want to write down or draw it to concrete the idea to po.

**Tip N°3**: The previous stages worked to clear your mind and ease your connection with the soul, so listen to your intuition only during this stage.

## Second Part: Project Your Dream & Fully Focus on It

Close your eyes and imagine projecting that dream like a beam through your Third Eye (forehead). Imagine that the beam passes through any wall or thing in front of you.

**Tip N° 1:** While closed, focus your eyes well upward, as if you wanted to see the crown of the head from the inside. You may feel a slight pressure at the beginning, but it will pass.

**Tip N° 2:** Stay aware of your breathing and feel the vital energy you breathe, giving power to your mind for this task.

**Tip N° 3:** If any other thought appears, dissolve it and let its energy feed this beam of light.

## Third Part: Journaling, Write Down Ideas & Comments

If needed, take time also to write down ideas, plans, and strategies that may have appeared during this meditation that would help you get closer to that dream or task.

**Tip:** This may be a perfect time to reflect on the efficacy of your stress management techniques so far and update your trackers.

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