

Emotion Regulation

A Brief Introduction

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Regional Eating Disorder Unit

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Section 1: Introduction. So, what are emotions and why do they hurt?

Everyone has emotions. Emotions give us important information about what is happening to

us and can also tell others something important about what is going on. Think about crying – we cry because something hurts, and it also alerts others to the fact we are hurt. Or smiling when we are happy, which also tells others that we are safe to approach. The common emotions are happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise and shame, though there are literally thousands of words to describe emotions.



Emotions are powerful and can be painful. We often develop ways of avoiding the pain. In the same way that we would usually avoid something which will cause physical pain (e.g. a fire), we learn to avoid things that will cause us emotional pain. While this works in the short term, the emotional pain usually doesn't go away and will keep coming back until we do something with it (process it).

If you think about it, we often use words which describe physical things to express emotional experiences (e.g. "Hurt feelings", "Heartbroken", "gut-wrenching", "butterflies in the stomach", etc). This is because we experience emotions not just in our minds but in our bodies too. In fact, the parts of our brain which largely process physical pain also process emotional pain (the Insula and Anterior Cingulate Cortex). When we feel physical pain, we can usually point



to where it hurts, but with emotional pain it is harder to pinpoint exactly where the pain sits – it usually "hurts" in a more general way, though there are often specific body experiences we can learn to identify in relation to different emotions. We'll look at that later.

Emotions are normal and healthy. Mostly we learn as children how to manage and tolerate emotions, but that doesn't always happen. There are four main reasons why people have difficulty with emotions:

- 1. Some people have avoided, or shut down, painful emotions for so long that they have great difficulty experiencing and naming emotions.
- 2. Some people didn't get the chance to learn and talk about their emotions as children.
- 3. Some people were punished, or humiliated, for showing any emotions.
- 4. Some people have had experiences which are so traumatic that the pain remains intense even many years later.

Of course, many people have had a mixture of these reasons. Do any of them resonate with you? If so, make a note of them. The key point is this: **There is a reason you are having problems with emotion regulation, and you can learn to do something different to improve it.** Please do remember that you are *already* pretty good at emotion regulation. That may be surprising to hear, but the likelihood is that you are suppressing lots of emotions, so

they don't hurt you or others. What might be more helpful is to learn to control and tolerate them in a healthier way.

It is really important to remember that we experience emotions which make us feel good too. Love, joy, happiness, friendship, excitement and many others make us feel alive, connected and safe. However, our brains tend to focus on the more difficult emotions until we feel safe enough to explore the good stuff.

Think about a kitten in a new house. It is usually timid and scared, easily startled and will hide until it feels safe. It has to learn that the environment is safe before it can begin to explore and play.

Or meerkats scanning the environment for threats, ready to run underground and hide whenever a threat appears.

We humans are not so different.



This workbook will help you understand what you are feeling and give you some suggestions about what to do with that.

Section 2: How to make this workbook work.

There are some important points to make about using this (or any) workbook:

1. Do something, not nothing.

It can be hard to get started on changing how you feel. It can seem impossible, or you might have tried in the past without success. The principle here is to try. It's like having a headache and not using the paracetamol in the cupboard – unless you take the paracetamol it's not going to cure your headache! Doing something means that the control is in **your** hands.

2. Practice does not make perfect, but it does make better.

While it would be great to have an instant answer, a quick fix, there really isn't one. It has taken a long time for you to get to this point. Your ways of thinking and feeling have developed over time. Changing those also takes time and effort - **but it does work!** It will work better and faster if you are able to practice the techniques in this workbook. Practicing every day is important. Appendix A has a training programme you can print and fill in.

3. "Simple" isn't the same as "easy".

Some of the explanations and exercises in this workbook might seem simple, and in principle they are. However, that's not the same as being easy to put into practice. If it was that easy you would already be doing it and wouldn't need this workbook! Don't worry if it doesn't work at first – see point 2 above!

4. Doing it alone is possible. Doing it together is easier.

While this workbook is designed to be useful to any individual, it can feel like an enormous task. It is not easy to change the patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving that you have developed. It will take a lot of effort. Feeling supported and encouraged in working on this can be invaluable. If there are friends, family members, staff or anyone else whom you feel you can trust enough to help you with this journey, then share it with them. It will make it easier.

Section 3: What am I feeling?

3.1 "What are you feeling?"



This seems like an obvious question. We are often asked "how are you?" or "how does that make you feel?" and will usually answer "I'm ok" or "fine" or "overwhelmed". Does this really describe the emotions you are experiencing? Does it give good information about what is a happening inside, or how you are actually reacting to people or things? Compare that to being able to say, "I'm feeling a bit afraid, a bit worried, a bit sad, a bit frustrated and a bit furious". This is a much better

reflection of what is going on for you. This is called "**emotion granularity**". It's a bit like the difference between a beach and the grains of sand that make up the beach. If we can understand *all* of the emotions, we are experiencing at any one time it helps make sure we don't miss something important because we are too focussed on just one thing. It also helps us move from "overwhelmed", which is difficult to manage, to a range of emotions we can do something with.

Being able to say what you are really feeling relies on two things:

- 1. Recognising the emotion
- 2. Naming the emotion

3.2 Why don't I know what I am feeling?

People often find naming emotions to be difficult. As we noted in section 1, this is sometimes because:

- a. You were not taught them (because your parents or the environment you grew up in had limited emotional expression)
- b. Expressing emotions was dangerous (for example, if you are bullied for crying you tend to learn not to cry, at least in front of others; or sometimes parents aren't able to cope with emotions in their children)
- c. You experienced something (or many things) traumatic and the pain of that is too much to experience fully.
- d. You got so used to suppressing emotions that you just never got to be familiar with them (often due to a combination of the above, your emotions were too much, too painful to experience safely, and the only thing to do was shut them down).

If any (or many) of the above are true, **it makes sense** that you have had difficulty learning how to cope with your emotions. However, **emotion recognition and regulation are** skills that can be learned.

3.3 The "What" and the "Where"

a. The "What"

As we mentioned earlier, there are literally thousands of words about emotions (a rough estimate is around 3000 different words) and each of those words can be experienced at different levels of intensity (more on that is explained later in the workbook). No one is expected to recognise them all, but being able to tell the difference between some of the main ones will be helpful.

Have a look at the Emotions Matrix table below:

Emotion	0-4		AGUSTA	Ashamed	Harris	
Intensity	Sad	Angry	Angry Afraid		Нарру	
High	Hopeless	Raging	Terrified	Worthless	Ecstatic	
	Miserable	Furious	Overwhelmed	Disgraced	Overjoyed	
	Depressed	Seething	Panicked	Alone	Thrilled	
Medium	Lonely	Frustrated	Anxious	Embarrassed	Cheerful	
	Dejected	Irritated	Frightened	Guilty	Satisfied	
	Sorrow	Hostile	Worried	Remorseful	Content	
Low	Unhappy	Annoyed	Unsure	Uncomfortable	Pleased	
	Upset	Tense	Concerned	Sorry	Glad	
	Down	Touchy	Cautious	Sheepish	Pleasant	

You can see that the top row has some of the "big" emotions, and underneath each are levels of intensity (High, medium and low), with some emotions that might fit into those categories. You might disagree and want to put different words at different levels or feel that different emotions have different intensities at different times. That is fine! We all have our own emotional responses, and they can be different at different times. The point of the table is to help you begin to identify what you are experiencing in a way that helps you to understand what is going on for you.

Appendix A has a worksheet for you to begin to record the different emotions you experience, along with where you experience them (see below)

b. The "Where"

Another part of this process is recognising **where** we feel the emotion in the body. We talk about "feelings" because we "feel" them in our bodies.

The image below shows how different emotions affect different parts of our body. Everyone is different and we will experience feelings in a different way, but this image shows how many people experience common emotions.

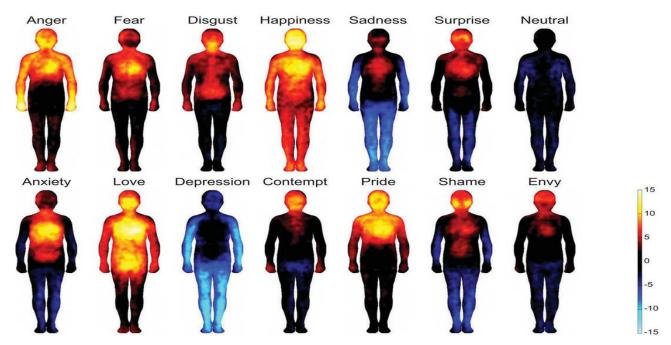


Image: Nummenmaa L, Glerean E, Hari R, Hietanen JK. Bodily maps of emotions. Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A. 2014 Jan 14;111(2):646-51. doi: 10.1073/pnas.1321664111. Epub 2013 Dec 30. PMID: 24379370; PMCID: PMC3896150. https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Think about yourself: where do you experience these emotions? As mentioned earlier, if we haven't had the chance to learn where we "feel" emotions then the link between our body and brain can be weakened. Being aware of our body can be challenging of course, but we are referring here to our *internal* body, or **interoception**, rather than how our body looks to us. The stronger we can make the connections between our body and our mind, the more accurately we can identify emotions (and we also improve the accuracy of our body image). **This is a skill you can learn through practice.**

Use the worksheet in **Appendix A** to write down how your body experiences different emotions.

3.4 So, what am I feeling?

The worksheet in Appendix B will get you started on recognising the range of emotions you experience as well as where you normally feel them. Once you can do that, you can start to use this knowledge **when you are actually experiencing an emotion**. This will allow you to start the process of emotion regulation.

Try this when you are experiencing an emotion:

- 1. Ask yourself: "What word is closest to what I am feeling?"
- 2. Say the word out loud or write it down

- 3. If you can't identify a word, try first choosing a level of intensity which reflects how you feel, then choose a word from that row.
- 4. Now try to focus on how your body feels. Where are you feeling that emotion? Write down what you notice about your body.
- 5. Next, ask "And what else am I feeling?". Repeat Step 4.
- 6. Keep doing this until you cannot identify any other words.
- 7. When you are finished doing this, ask yourself "Do I feel any different now?"

There is an example below:

What am I feeling now?	Where am I feeling it
Worried	Jaw is tight, fluttery feeling in chest, sick feeling in gut
Guilty	Sick feeling, tense shoulders, curled up
Frustrated	Tight jaw, feel hot in the face, tense all over
Lonely	Empty in chest, heavy arms, head drooped
Angry	Tight jaw, tense shoulders, tense chest

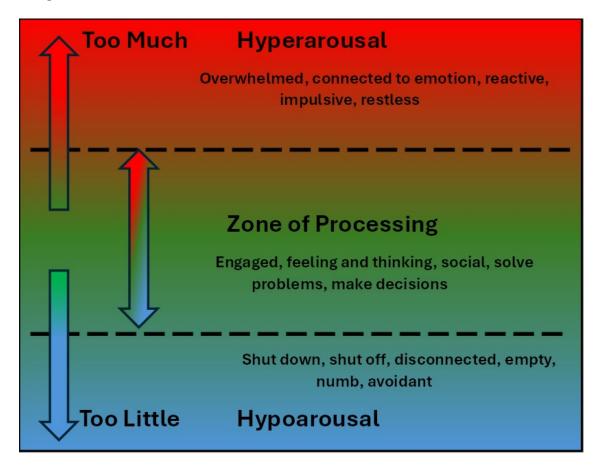
This is just an example, but you can see how we can move from "I'm feeling rubbish and overwhelmed!" to something that could be helpful and useful. By going through this process, you are likely to reduce the level of intensity of the feelings, you will engage the brain's prefrontal cortex in problem-solving and will hopefully feel better at the end of the process.

There are blank worksheets in **Appendix A** – try them out!

3.5 Emotion Intensity: The 'Zone of Processing'

Intense emotions often lead us to do something to make them go away, or to change how they feel. We usually do this without thinking about it, as though we are on "automatic pilot". Shutting ourselves away if we feel sad, getting angry if we feel upset, or avoiding people if we feel scared or "anxious" are common ways of managing how we feel. **Some people find that eating disorder behaviours and thoughts can help to drown out the underlying emotions**. It is recognised that both food restriction and overeating can reduce the intensity of difficult emotions. In the short term this helps, but in the long term it inevitably damages you further.

Emotion regulation is about recognising when we are experiencing too much or too little emotion and then doing something to bring us back to our "zone of processing". Have a look at the diagram below:



As you can see, we have three possible zones, or "windows". In the 'Hyperarousal' zone we are highly connected to the emotions, feeling them intensely and likely to be very reactive and distressed. In the 'Hypoarousal' zone we are shut down and shut off from the world. Emotions might still feel intense, or we might feel very little. We tend to avoid people and want to hide or be alone. In the 'Zone of Processing' we are more likely to be able to engage with other people, to feel warmth and connection, and to be able to use a rational, balanced approach to making decisions. We are also much more likely to be able to enjoy our experience.

Most people go between these zones during a typical day but usually stay roughly in the 'Zone of Processing'. They might occasionally go to the 'Hyperarousal' zone (spilling my morning coffee onto my lap!) or the 'Hypoarousal' zone (feeling left out of the crowd during a conversation) but mostly will stay in the middle zone.

Other people stay mostly in either the Hyperarousal or the Hypoarousal zone for a long time, and this causes problems. Others feel they move quickly between the zones, or that specific "triggers" cause them to suddenly shoot right up or down the zones.



- 1. Use the diagram in Appendix B. Can you point to where on the chart you feel you are?
- 2. Go back to the "Emotions Matrix" on page 6. What emotion word or words describes what you are feeling?
- 3. Go through the process in **Appendix A** to identify all of the words and where you feel them in your body

By practicing this technique, you will improve your ability to recognise what you are feeling, where you can feel it in your body and the type of feeling you are having (hyperarousal or hypoarousal). Just doing this is already helping you to regulate these emotions, but you can learn more techniques in the next section. Note too, that extreme emotions are usually more difficult to manage, and it's usually much harder to think about what to do when we are in those extreme zones. Having a plan of action prepared in advance can be really helpful.

Planning for intense emotions

Not every strategy works for both hyper- and hypoarousal. Different states of arousal require different strategies. So, we need to find ways of moving from the Red Zone or the Blue Zone back into the Green Zone (look back at the "Zone of Processing" section). It is also true that when we are in extreme zones of hyper- or hypoarousal, it is very difficult to think about things that work. Our brain is usually either very focussed on the immediate problem rather than the solution, or it is shut down and not able to generate solutions. At these times it is very useful to have a plan written down, so we don't have to think about it at exactly the time it is most difficult to think! The grid below gives an example of a plan:

ZONE	What works
RED	Soothing Box, Attention Switching 2; Sensory Grounding
RED/GREEN	Controlled breathing, Attention Switching 1, Distract
GREEN	Stress Bucket
BLUE/GREEN	Distract, Attention Switching 1
BLUE	Sensory Grounding, Soothing Box

This example uses technique found in Section 5, but you can, of course, use whatever works for you (but please **don't** use eating disorder behaviours or self-harm!). There is a blank grid in Appendix I. Update it whenever you fond something new that works.

Section 4: The "Big Three" in Eating Disorders

4.1 Anxiety



Anxiety is very common in people with eating disorders. Almost 50% of people with Anorexia Nervosa and over 80% of people with Bulimia Nervosa also have an anxiety disorder. Anxiety is a common feature for many people across the world and is, in fact, an **entirely normal experience**. The problems happen when anxiety is too intense for too long, and where it is caused by things which get in the way of a normal life. For example, it's entirely reasonable to be anxious about a ferocious dog which barks at you every time you pass - it makes sense that you would want to avoid that as it is a direct threat to your safety. It makes less sense to avoid a muffin...

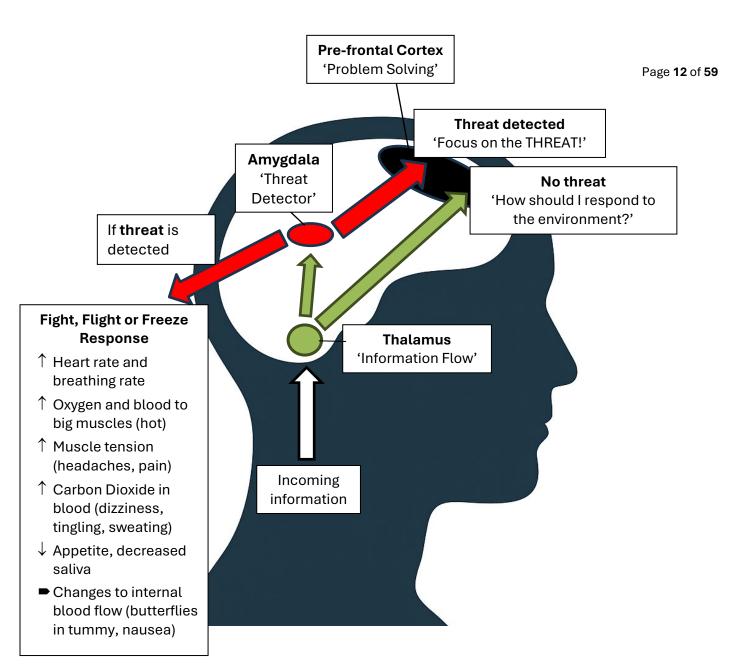
Although actually, it *does* make sense to be anxious about a muffin (or any other food). Here's why...

Anxiety is all about how we deal with threats. From an evolutionary perspective, our brain evolved to respond quickly to threats to our safety, things that would eat us (one of early human's biggest predators was the leopard, along with bears and wolves), bite or sting us (which is why we are often afraid of spiders, though they are



mostly harmless). However, although the world we live in contains very few direct physical threats now, the brain structures that managed that type of threat have not evolved much further and still respond to *any* type of threat in the same way. So, if a muffin represents weight gain, and weight gain feels like a threat to our survival, our brain responds to the muffin *as if* it is a threat.

The diagram on the next page shows you what is happening in your brain when you perceive something to be threatening. The main point here is to see that our brain is *just responding to perceived threats*. It is a normal neurobiological process responding to something which is not an *actual* threat. And because we can understand this, we can do something about it. **Anxiety can be reduced!**



How it works

- The **Thalamus** receives incoming information from the external environment (what we see, hear, touch, taste or smell) and from our internal environment (blood gasses, muscle tension, fluid balance, hunger, thirst and so on). It packages up the information and sends it on to other parts of the brain for further processing.
- It sends some of that information on for further processing to the **Prefrontal Cortex** which decides how to solve any immediate problems. If there is no immediate threat, then the pre-frontal cortex will weigh up the information and decide how you should act. This takes roughly 0.5 seconds.
- Information about the environment is also sent to the **Amygdala**, which is the brain's "threat detector"
- If a threat is detected then the amygdala tells the **Hypothalamus** to activate the **Sympathetic Nervous System**, which in turn tells the **Adrenal Glands** to release **Adrenaline** to prepare for "Fight or Flight"

- Our body prepares for the threat by increasing oxygenated blood to the big muscles while shutting down digestion and appetite (we don't want to eat when running away from a leopard!)
- At the same time, the Vagal Nerve is suppressed, releasing the "brake" on heart rate and breathing rate
- The **Amygdala** also sends a powerful signal to the **Prefrontal Cortex** instructing it to **stay focussed on the threat**, and to solve the problem of the threat.
- The "threat" response takes around 0.08 seconds, which is around 6 times faster than the non-threat response. This is so much faster because it is about immediate survival.
- Once we are focussed on the threat
 - We are not feeling anything else
 - It's very hard to think about anything else
 - Our senses can amplify the size of the threat (the thing that is threatening actually looks bigger)
 - The Sympathetic system keeps us in a state of high alert

You can see from the "Fight, Flight or Freeze" box that the perception of threat has direct impacts on our body. These prepare the body to run away from the threat, fight the threat or freeze (so the threat cannot see us). Remember, these systems evolved to respond to physical threats, and they work pretty well. But what happens when the threat is *food*? Three things often happen:

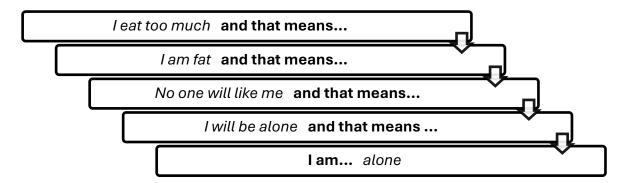
- 1. We run away from the food (avoid it)
- 2. We fight the food (become even more determined that it will not beat us)
- 3. We become unable to make decisions (we are focussed on the threat while our bodies cannot move)

Ask yourself – which of these sounds like me? Possibly all three of these. The point is that you are responding to food as if it is a threat. Your body and mind respond to the food in exactly the same way they respond to a leopard.

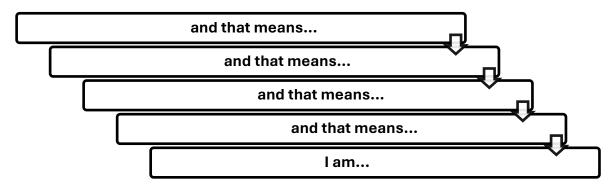
But a muffin, or any other **food, is not a threat**. In the same way, the calories that are in the muffin cannot cause you harm. So, what is the threat?



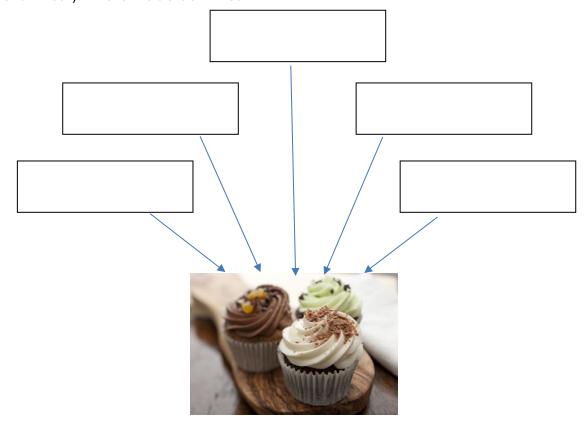
The exercise below can help you to understand the actual threats which your brain is trying to protect you from. It's a technique called **Downward Arrowing**. Start with the perceived threat to yourself (e.g. "I eat too much") and ask, "**and what does that mean about me?**" Be honest with your answer and write it in the next box. Then ask the same question and write your answer in the next box. Keep going until you can't answer it anymore. Your last answer is usually the actual threat. There is an example below:



Be careful with this exercise, as the answers you give might feel very painful. It is a very revealing exercise though, and worth doing of you can tolerate it. Try it a few times and see if you produce different conclusions. Here's a blank one to try. There are more in **Appendix C**



Understanding what the *actual* threat is can help us to solve the problem of the threat rather than getting stuck in mortal combat with a piece of bakery. Look at the diagram below. Try to fill in the boxes with everything that the muffin represents (or whatever food you wish to consider a threat). This is the **actual threat**.



You can hopefully see now that the muffin is probably representing a lot of threat.

However, the muffin is not itself the threat. It will not hurt you. As you look at the food in front of you, try to hold that in mind while using one of the techniques in **Section 5**.

By **reducing the perception of threat and reducing the body's response to threat** you can train yourself to feel less threatened, which in turn will increase your appetite and reduce the fear of food.



Try this exercise:

- 1. Ten minutes before you are due to have food, get yourself in a comfortable position.
- 2. Do one of the exercises in **Section 5** (controlled breathing or safe place imagery work well)
- 3. As you do this your mind will try to make you think about the threat (food). Say this to yourself: "Thank you brain for reminding me of the threat. However, the food is not the threat. I am going to complete my breathing (or imagery exercise)".
- 4. After eating, again find somewhere comfortable and repeat Step 2 and Step 3.

By doing this you will begin to train your brain and your body to recognise food as safe and not threatening.

Taking this one step further, can you imagine *why* the things you have written down in the boxes above are threats? There will be a reason. These are what we sometimes call the "core beliefs" or "underlying reasons" for the fear of the food. These are often (but not always) related to things from our childhood. This is usually one of, or a combination of, these:

- 1. Physical (being hit)
- 2. **Emotional** (being insulted, excluded or humiliated)
- 3. **Sexual** (as happens in childhood sexual abuse)
- 4. **Neglect** (not feeling cared for, wanted or protected by our parents)

These experiences mean that the whole world often (or always) feels threatening, and we stay in a state of high arousal, always anticipating danger and ready to respond to it very quickly. This is, of course, exhausting. It can also cause us to respond to things that aren't actually threatening, as we are much more likely to see something as threatening **if we already feel** the world is a threatening place.

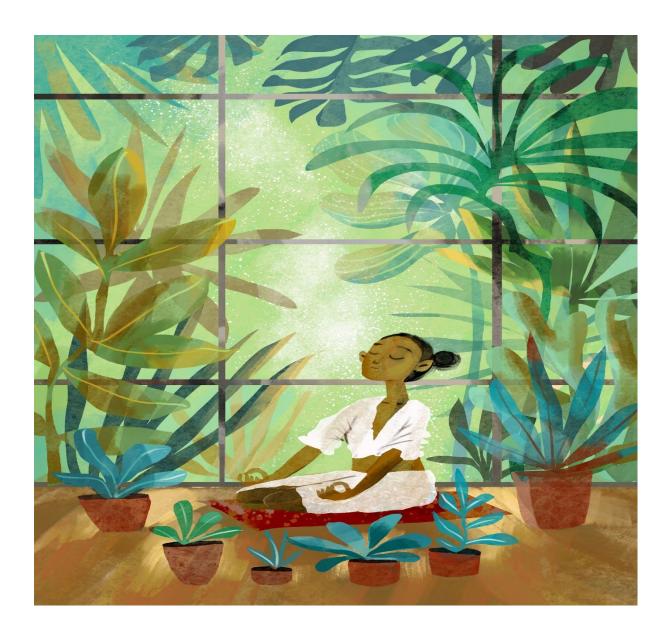
Think about this: imagine you are sitting at home watching a nature documentary with a friend. You are calm and relaxed. Then there is a sudden loud knock on the door. You might be surprised but quickly think "who might that be?". Now imagine the same situation but this time it's late at night; you're on your own and watching a horror movie. Then there's a loud knock on the door. How would you feel then? The knock on



the door is exactly the same, you are still at home and safe, but your response might be very different **because you already feel scared**.

This is why some people feel constantly anxious, and why they feel they "overreact" to even small things. Looking ahead to **Section 5**, the "Stress Bucket" exercise (Skill 8, pg. 35) can help you to see that constant anxiety is one of the taps which pours water into your bucket, and that can lead to even more stress (overflow).

Learning how to understand and work with your anxiety is vitally important so that you can manage both the immediate and the long-term threats. How to do this is covered in **Section 5**. Feel free to skip ahead to that now to get some ideas of how to manage anxiety.



4.2 Guilt and Shame

The other two very common emotions which cause distress in Eating Disorders (and many other mental health conditions) are **guilt** and **shame**. These are two of the most powerful emotions we experience. They are often considered to be the same thing (and indeed some languages around the world do not have different words for them), and they very commonly occur together, but they are not the same thing.

Guilt

The feeling we get when we have done something wrong, when we have broken a rule or failed to meet a standard. The rule or standard can be:

- Societal (this is what everyone does);
- Legal (this is what the law says is right or wrong);
- Peer (this is what my friends say is right or wrong);
- Parental (this is what my parents taught me is right or wrong);
- Personal (this is what I think is right or wrong), or;
- Abusive (can apply to any of the above as well as what an abuser tells you is right or wrong).

Guilt is a social emotion, and when we break the rule, it usually makes us want to **do something** to put it right. This is often experienced as anxiety or restlessness, an urge to move, because our brain and body is telling us to **do** something to make things better. Usually once we have done this the feeling of guilt settles. This might be an apology or a change in behaviour.

Guilt is when I have done something which is against "the rules" (I have done something "bad") and I feel I need to do something to make up for it.

Think about it: in eating disorders, if the rule is "I should not eat" and you break that rule by eating, the obvious way of making up for it is to *not eat*. This is one of the traps in eating disorders. The rule we develop inevitably leads to feelings of guilt when we break it, which in turn leads to the same behaviours continuing.

Shame

If guilt is "I have done something wrong," shame is "I am wrong." Shame is the fundamental feeling that you are damaged or worthless. And rather than making us want to do something, shame makes us want to hide, to not be seen, to avoid others being able to see us. Shame makes us want to shut down and disappear. It is one of the most powerful emotions that we experience.

Shame is "I am bad (or worthless), and I want to hide"

Shame usually develops as a child in several ways:

- 1. Being told, or believing, that you are not good enough, repeatedly. For example, trying hard to pass exams and even if you do well, never achieving what is expected of you.
- 2. Always being told that **you** are "bad", "stupid" or "naughty" rather than that your **actions or behaviours were wrong**, or due to something else (abuse, or neurodiversity, for example)
- 3. Something happening to you that feels awful (this happens when children are abused). Children tend to link the feeling of "I am feeling bad" to "I am bad," particularly if it is not explained to them that something was not their fault.
- 4. Not experiencing the emotional or physical care that you need. Children tend to assume that if no one is looking after them then they must be "bad." Again, this is usually never explained to the child.

Shame can also develop as an adult if someone is abused (made to feel worthless) or repeatedly makes mistakes ("I have done something wrong" + "I have done something wrong" (eventually) = I am wrong (shame).)

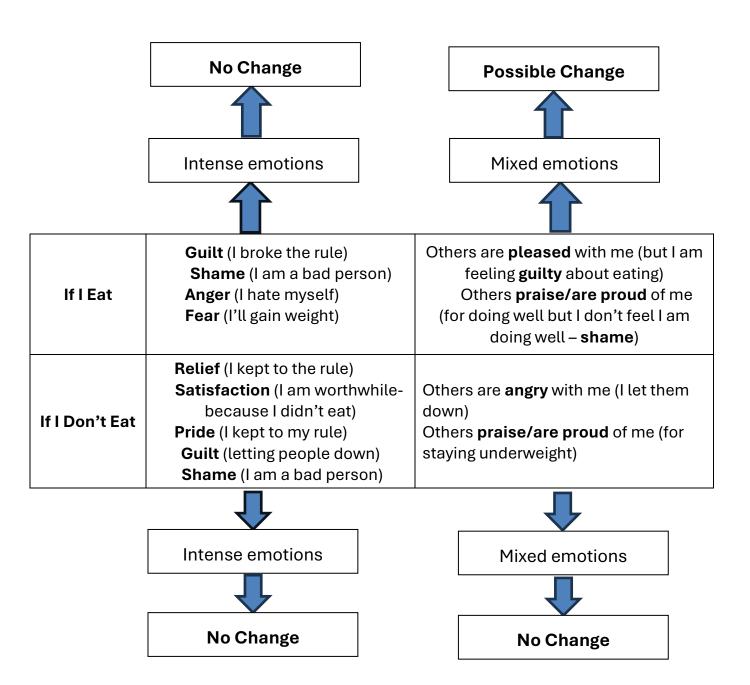
Once a person has that model of themselves as worthless or damaged, it tends to shape everything that they see and do. It is what is sometimes called a "core belief" or a "model of self." This often feels that it is absolute and will never change. The emotions are painful and sometimes intolerable. Food restriction, self-harm and avoidance are all common ways that people learn to suppress their emotions. However, with therapy and guidance, you can change, grow and develop.



The Guilt and Shame Trap

Behaviours specific to eating disorders often reinforce the feelings of guilt and shame that people carry. Have a look at the diagram below:

My rule: I will not eat (or gain weight, or look big)



As you can see, the rule "I will not eat" means that whether you eat or do not eat, you are likely to feel intense guilt and shame (and a few other things too). If you have learned to manage intense emotions by food restriction or exercise, chances are this is what you will use again. This is the **guilt and shame trap** in eating disorders.

You will have your own list of emotions and causes when you break the rule or keep the rule. This includes what you feel about yourself, and how others make you feel. Use the diagram below to name some of these, and the reasons why you feel them (like the example above):

	What I feel about Me:	What Others feel and what I feel about that:
If I Eat	Box 1	Box 2
If I Don't Eat	Box 3	Box 4

It can feel that there is no way out of this cycle, and those involved in our care, or our parents or friends, often don't understand just how hard this is. Sometimes they will say "Well, just change the rule!" of "Just choose to eat", without understanding that this makes you feel worse, which keeps you in the trap. It is also true that people do try really hard to break their core rule, but it takes huge effort that, again, others often don't fully understand or appreciate. And while the rule is still there, every time you go to eat food you have to battle it again... It is exhausting and it often feels easier to give in to the rule, relieve the anxiety, deal with the very familiar guilt and shame of failure.

There is another way.

Fully addressing the core guilt and shame that developed in childhood, and which is likely to be part of the underlying reason for your eating disorder, requires therapy. Look back at the Guilt & Shame Trap diagram. There are 4 boxes which we can work with. We'll look at each on turn.

Box 1: Guilt for Breaking the Rule (What do I feel about myself if I eat?)

Of course, you could just change the rule, but if it was that easy you would have done it already! The main challenge you have is that breaking the rule feels intolerable and only leads to these powerful, negative emotions. You can learn to tolerate these in the moment, and also to feel something else – proud of yourself for working so hard to change something, satisfied that you can achieve something just for you. We want to feel **pride in doing something difficult.**

Try this:

- 1. Keep in mind that to change something is hard and takes effort and practice.
- 2. Remember Section 2 in this workbook? If not, have a quick look at it now. You can learn to recognise the many different negative emotions. You can also learn to recognise and experience positive emotions. Use the exercise in **Section 5**, **Skill 6 Attention Switching 1** (page 38) to identify something that has made you **proud**.
- 3. Next, notice if you are feeling any anxiety. If so, use an exercise from **Section 5** to begin to reduce the physiological arousal (**Controlled Breathing** works well here see **Skill 1**, page 30).
- 4. Once you feel as calm as you are going to get (probably not 100% calm that's ok!), say this: "I am going to break my rule about not eating. It is my rule, no one else's. I can break it. The consequence of breaking it is that I will feel guilty and ashamed. I will also feel proud and satisfied in myself for doing something that I find really hard. I will be ok."
- 5. Now, try to find that feeling of pride, or satisfaction that you achieved something, and hold it for as long as you can.
- 6. Now, decide how you are going to break your rule at the next meal. That might be eating everything on your plate. It might be by having one more mouthful than yesterday. It might be by having one more pea than yesterday. It doesn't matter the point is to break your rule and know that you can tolerate it.
- 7. At the next meal, give it a go. If you succeed, recall the feeling of pride and satisfaction. You have deserved this, so enjoy it!
- 8. If you do not succeed, don't worry. Say this to yourself: I am pleased that I tried, though it was too hard this time. I will try again at the next meal. Now, try to find that feeling of pride or satisfaction that you are committing to trying something hard again next time.
- 9. Make sure you record what you intend to do and the outcome there's a record sheet in **Appendix D.**

This exercise uses elements of emotion recognition, emotion tolerance, compassion focussed therapy, CBT, mindfulness and acceptance and commitment therapy. It is a complex and challenging exercise, so if you manage to follow it through you should feel proud!

Box 2: Guilt about others (What do others feel if I break the rule, and how does that affect me?)

While we usually want to think that we are trying to please others, it is complicated. While breaking your own rule (I should not eat) will lead to guilt, if you are eating you are probably sticking to other people's rules (parents, friends, or inpatient wards). This is why they praise the effort you are making and tell you how proud they are of you. There are a few problems with this is:

You are still breaking your own rule, so you are unlikely to feel you deserve their praise.

- 2. If you are carrying shame from earlier experiences, you are unlikely to feel you deserve any praise and hearing praise can trigger shame.
- 3. The tension between what you are feeling for breaking the rule and what the people who care for you want you to be feeling can be intense and can lead to further urges to restrict (or exercise).

As we said above, this is a trap where eating generates the sort of intense negative emotions that you have always tried to avoid.

Try this:

- 1. Choose someone who you think would be proud of you for completing your meal. This might be a parent, a friend, a future version of you, a past version of you, or even a pet.
- 2. Get a clear picture of that person in your mind. Look at their face, smiling, encouraging vou.
- 3. Now search your body for that feeling of connection to that person (it usually feels like a warmth or softness in the chest see the pictures earlier on page 7)
- 4. Use the controlled breathing exercise while holding that image in your mind (see Skill 1, page 31)
- 5. Say to yourself "This person is important to me. I deserve their care, affection and praise". Try to feel that connection with the person and avoid dismissing it or listening to the voice that says, "No I don't".

Again, this exercise uses techniques from the emotion recognition and compassion focussed fields of psychology. Practice it before you are about to eat and after you have eaten.

Box 3 & Box 4: Guilt for Keeping the Rule

Many people with eating disorders report the feeling of relief, satisfaction and pride that they feel when they stick to their rule, or when they see their weight dropping or their body shape changing. Most will also admit to feeling guilt and shame for continuing to restrict or purge. As before, the strong negative emotions tend to lead to avoidance (by continuing the restriction/purging), while the strong positive emotions (pride, relief, satisfaction) lead to the eating disorder behaviours being reinforced and continued. The drive to continue the same behaviour is therefore very powerful. It can, however, be challenged.



Try this:

This technique requires thought and planning. Before starting, use one of the techniques in **Section 5** to lower your anxiety and arousal. This will allow your pre-frontal cortex to process information more clearly. Once you feel as calm and safe as possible, have a look at the table below. It shows the common emotions, thoughts, behaviours and consequences associated with **Box 3 & Box 4**.

Emotion	Thought	Behaviour	Consequences
Relief	I have kept to my rule	Continue with restriction/purging	Ongoing health and life deficits; keep emotions under control; no change overall
Satisfaction	I am pleased with myself	Continue with restriction/purging	Ongoing health and life deficits; keep emotions under control; no change overall
Pride	I have done something important	Continue with restriction/purging	Feel good about myself. Ongoing life and health deficits. No change overall.
Fear	I will never get out of this	Avoid thinking about it	Ongoing life and health deficits; keep emotions under control; no one understands me. No change overall.
Guilt	I am letting people down	Avoid thinking about it	Ongoing life and health deficits; keep emotions under control; no one understands me; No change overall
Anger	Just leave me alone	Withdrawn	Avoid people; Feel very alone; No change overall.

Try filling in this table for yourself on the next page. Really try to think about the short-term and long-term consequences of your behaviours. As you write these down, try to identify what emotions you are feeling. You might find that different things are on your mind at different times - there are more tables in **Appendix E** for you to use. This can be repeated as many times as you want.

Once you have completed the table, have a think about this: are the consequences worth the behaviours?

Often people will say that they understand the arguments, but that it doesn't change how it feels. This is entirely understandable, but **we can work to change both our thoughts and our feelings**.

Emotion	Thought	Behaviour	Consequence

Now, think about the same table, but this time let's look at the emotions you would **prefer to feel** when eating. There is an example below.

Emotion	Thought	Behaviour	Consequence
Pride	I have done something important	Want to tell people; Continue with eating	Feel good about myself. Life and Health benefits; People are pleased with me
Confidence	I will get out of this	Enjoy thinking about it; Continue with eating	Feel good about myself; address other concerns; feel powerful
Happiness	I am getting my life back	Enjoy thinking about it; continue to eat	Feel good about myself; want to feel close and connected to others; Life is manageable

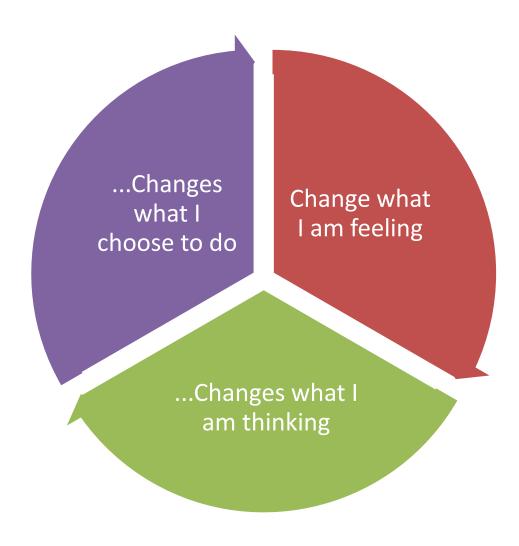
Now, have a go at filling in the blank table below (again, there are more blank tables in **Appendix E**. Fill in what emotions you would like to experience, what the associated thought would be, how that would affect your behaviour, and what the long-term and short-term consequences of that would be. Again, pay particular attention to the consequences.

Emotion	Thought	Behaviour	Consequence

While we can understand that not eating brings powerful emotions which make changing behaviour difficult, hopefully you can see that changing your behaviour (eating) can change how you feel (emotion) and can change the short-term and long-term consequences.

Take a copy of this "preferred emotion" table with you when you are about to eat. Focus on the emotions you would prefer to feel and use the thoughts and the consequences columns to help you to change your behaviour.

As with all of these exercises, don't expect this to work first time (though it might!). It is likely you will have to do this over a period of a few weeks to experience the changes to behaviour that we are hoping for.



Section 5: What can I do with my emotions?

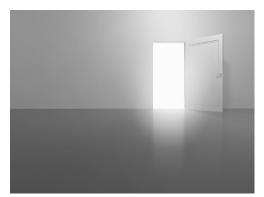
When we are feeling too much (overwhelmed, agitated) or too little (shut down, shut off) we can find it very difficult to think things through and to come up with possible solutions. The Prefrontal Cortex (the thinking, planning part of the brain) is too busy dealing with high emotion or is shut off and unable to engage. In those situations, we usually rely on things we have done in the past that work rather than generate new ways of working.

Self-harm is one strategy that people will use for both hyper- and hypo-arousal. It works by making us feel something (hypo-arousal) and also by being the dominant feeling which

distracts us from other feelings (hyper-arousal). As noted earlier, restriction of food helps by numbing intense emotions and so works in the short term. However, although you could argue that both of these strategies are successful, neither of them make the intense emotions actually go away permanently. You might also end up very ill from the eating disorder or very scarred from the self-harm. You almost certainly end up in a spiral from which you might feel there is no escape.



Learning how to manage the emotions in a healthy way is what works in the long term. It gives you a way out. There are hundreds of techniques that can help with emotion regulation. Some



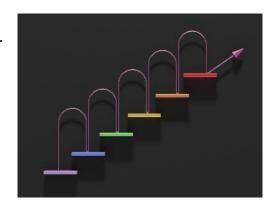
will work for you, others won't. But you won't know unless you try them and practice them!

Below are some skills that many people find useful. The techniques are chosen because they are evidence-based and directly improve the links between brain and body (which will help you strengthen **interoception** – as described earlier), which in turn makes emotion regulation more effective.

As we have mentioned before, none of these techniques will work if used in isolation. It's like training for a marathon. I could not possibly go out and run a marathon today. But I can start training and be able to run one next year. Emotion Regulation is the same. We understandably want a quick fix, to solve the problem immediately. **Emotion regulation takes time to develop**. We wouldn't expect an infant to immediately be able to control their emotions – it is something that is learned over time.

On page 29 there is an example of a Training Plan. The important thing is to **practice** regularly.

You can replace any of the techniques with others that you prefer (there are blank training plans in **Appendix F**. On the left-hand side, put the techniques you want to use. In the next column place the number of times a day you want to practice. Then, for each day, place a tick in the relevant box when you have practiced the technique. You might want to start with only one technique per week – that is absolutely fine. But remember this is a training plan, so please add in another technique the following week, and keep going until you have at least five techniques.



By practicing these you will begin to reset your physiological balance, improve the connection between body and mind and be able to use these techniques when you are most distressed.



Technique	Per day	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Controlled Breathing	5	///	///	✓✓✓	✓✓✓ ✓			
PMR	2	√ √	√ √	√ √	√ √			
Sensory Grounding (5,4,3,2,1)	3	√ √	√ √	✓	√ √			
Safe Space Imagery	1	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Attention Switching 2	1		✓	✓	✓			

PMR – Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This is just an example but demonstrates how to use the Training Plan. There are techniques in Section 5 and Section 6. There are blank training plans in **Appendix F**. Use one every week to keep a check on your progress.

Technique	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Diaphragm

relaxes

5.1 Skill 1: Controlled Breathing

Almost everyone will have heard of this technique, and you may have been shown different ways to do it.

Diaphragm

pulls down

The Technique

There are 3 rules to follow to ensure the technique works.

- 1. Use the Diaphragm
- 2. Slow in, slower out
- 3. Keep it going for 2 minutes

IN BREATHING Intercostal muscles pull up Trachea muscles relax

THE DIAPHRAGM FUNCTIONS





How it works:

Breathing has been recognised to be part of a calming system for thousands of years. Many ancient cultures and religions used breathing techniques to meditate, control stress and improve body-mind connections. It works by triggering the **autonomic nervous system parasympathetic branch** which is also called the "rest and digest" system and is opposite to the "fight or flight" system which gets activated in response to threat. You can see why it might be important in managing distress! The autonomic system is largely controlled by the **Vagus Nerve**, a long, wandering nerve which has inputs into most of the main organs in the body ("vagus" comes from the Latin word meaning "wandering", as in "vagrant"). By stimulating this nerve, we encourage the body to counteract the threat system (by putting on the Vagal Brake, as described in Section 4) and by strengthening over time the functioning of the nerve.

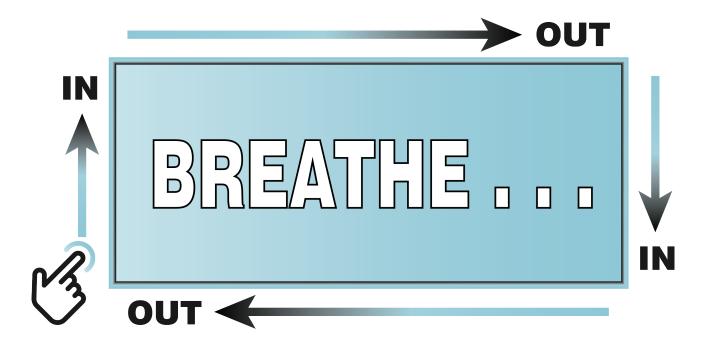
The **diaphragm** is the main muscle of respiration. It is a thin, bow-shaped muscle which sits just under the ribcage. When we inhale the muscle flattens, which pulls the lungs down allowing air to flow in. When we exhale the muscle relaxes and the lungs return to their original position. People who are anxious, either in the moment or over long periods of time, tend to use the big muscles in the neck and shoulders along with the muscles between the ribs (intercostals) to expand the chest and get air in. This works but is much less effective than the diaphragm and actually uses much more energy. This is partly why people who are frequently anxious are also frequently exhausted – it takes a lot of work! The Vagus Nerve is also stimulated by the diaphragm but not by these other muscles. Using the diaphragm helps to activate the Vagus Nerve and so helps to reduce the anxious feelings generated by the "fight or flight" system.

While there are many ways to count the in and out breaths, the rule is "**slow in, slower out**". Again, this helps to stimulate the Vagus Nerve. Think about someone breathing in a deep sleep – it tends to be a gentle, slow in breath followed by a longer, gentle out breath. This is what we are trying to replicate.

Many people will try this technique for a couple of breaths and then say, "it's not working". This is probably true – the technique needs at least a couple of minutes to effectively activate

the Vagus Nerve and to normalise levels of **oxygen** and **carbon dioxide** in the blood, which also contribute to the rapid, shallow breathing seen when people are anxious.

Another way to do this is called "box breathing". The diagram below is a rectangle. The short sides represent the "slow in" part and the longer sides represent the "slower out" part.



- i) Start at the bottom left hand corner and slowly move your finger up the side as you breath in.
- ii) Pause briefly as you get to the corner
- **iii)** Then draw your finger **at the same speed** along the top as you breath out. Pause again when you get to the corner.
- iv) Continue again down the short side as you breath in. Pause briefly again at the corner.
- v) Breathe out again as you draw your finger along the bottom line. Pause briefly at the corner.
- Vi) Repeat this process for at least 2 minutes.

It's also worth noting that controlled breathing needs to be practiced regularly to be effective. It's really hard to remember to control your breathing when you are feeling anxious! The more you practice, the more likely you are to be able to do it under pressure. Think about a sportsperson performing in a major event – the more they have practiced, the more likely they are to perform well. It is always a good idea to have this technique in your Training Plan. Practice it at least 5 times day.

5.2 Skill 2: Sensory Grounding

The Technique

This is a helpful technique for when you find your mind is overwhelmed by worries or you feel anxious about something.



1. See. Try to get yourself comfortable. Now, look around you and find something that catches your attention. Take a couple of minutes to describe it in great detail to yourself. What is it made of? What colours can you see? Are there any marks or stains on it? Describe each of these in detail. Try to describe everything you can see about it. Repeat this for another 4 objects you can see.



2. Touch. Next, do the same for **4** things you can touch. It might be the or the skin of your cheek, to really explore the texture, the temperature and the feel of the object. Describe it to yourself as you are doing this.



3. Sound. Now do the same for 3 things you can hear. You might have to work a bit harder at this one. Look out the window, notice the sound of Again, notice the sound and describe it to yourself.



4. Smell. This time find 2 things you can smell. Please be careful with this one! Strong smells are good but try to find ones which you like!

Say **ONE** thing to yourself: "I am here, in this room, and I am safe."

How it works

This whole process can take quite a while. It uses all of your senses, and people can find it really helpful in distracting them from difficult or troublesome thoughts and feelings. It also improves the connections between our body and brain, which we noted earlier is essential for effective emotion processing.

5.3 Skill 3: Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

The Technique

- 1. Sit or lie comfortably.
- 2. When you are ready, tense the muscles you are focusing on. Make sure you can feel the tension, but not so much as you feel pain. Keep the muscle tense for approximately 5 seconds.
- 3. *Relax* the muscles and keep it relaxed for approximately 10 seconds. Breathe out as you relax.

Muscle Groups: Practice PMR on the following groups of muscles

- Right hand and arm: clench your fist then bring your forearm to your shoulder to make a muscle. Relax.
- Left hand and arm: clench your fist then bring your forearm to your shoulder to make a muscle. *Relax*.
- Right Foot: curl in your toes. Relax.
- Left foot: curl in your toes. Relax.
- Right lower and upper legs: Pull your toes up towards you to stretch your calf muscle. Then tighten your right thigh. Relax.
- Left lower and upper legs: Pull your toes towards you to stretch your calf muscle. Then tighten your left thigh. *Relax*.
- Stomach and chest: Breathe in deeply, filling your chest and lungs up with air. Relax.
- Back muscles: Pull your shoulders back a little and squeeze your shoulder blades together. *Relax*.
- Neck and shoulders: Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears. Push your head back slightly. Look up towards the ceiling and to the floor. Relax.
- Face and head: Frown your forehead, as though you were angry. Raise your forehead as though you were surprised. Smile widely. Open your mouth widely, as though you were yawning. *Relax*.

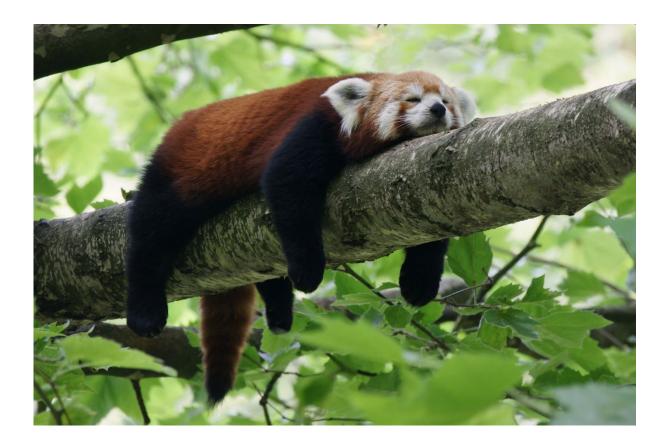
When you are finished the exercise, allow yourself to sit for a few minutes until you feel more alert.

How it works:

As noted earlier, being in a constant state of anxiety (fight or flight) can lead to our muscles being constantly ready to act. They remain tense for so long that the tension becomes normal, and the muscles stay there. This takes a huge amount of energy (doing "nothing" can be exhausting!) and will cause various aches and pains all over your body. This exercise helps



the muscles to remember what relaxed feels like and can, over time, reset the tension level. It also works to improve the connection between brain and body.



5.4 Skill 4: Safe Place Imagery

The Technique

Imagine a place that's very peaceful, and very safe. Begin by paying attention to your breathing, and let yourself take a few nice, deep, full breaths, bringing your breath all the way down into your belly, and allowing your out-breath to be a real letting-go kind of a breath. As if with that breath you are just going to take a five-minute break and go to a place that's peaceful and safe. Imagine that with every outbreath you just let go of a little bit of tension, a little bit of discomfort, a little distraction.



Begin now to imagine yourself going to a place that's very peaceful...very safe and secure — a place where you feel good. This might be a place that you've actually been to in your life, or it may be a place you've visited before in your imagination. Or it can be a new place, some combination, or some place that you've never imagined yourself going to before. It doesn't really matter. As long as the place you are imagining is very peaceful ... very safe. A nice place to be for a few minutes.

Now imagine looking around and notice what you can see in this special, quiet, peaceful place. Notice the colours and the shapes and the things that you see there. Keep breathing softly and slowly. In...and out...and in...and out...

And so, as you notice what you see, notice if you can hear any sounds in this special, peaceful, quiet place. Or whether it's just very quiet. You may even imagine a smell, or a fragrance in this place. Just notice what's around you, notice the temperature and the time of day and the season of the year. Notice the peacefulness, or relaxation, or comfort that you feel. You are safe, protected and calm in this place. Allow this to be; allow yourself to relax and to feel that relaxation, that peacefulness. There is nothing else to do right now and nowhere else to go. Simply enjoying a few quiet moments in this very safe and peaceful place. Nothing you have to do, nowhere you have to go, feeling safe and warm and relaxed.

If your mind should wander or get distracted, simply take another breath or two and refocus your mind back into this beautiful, peaceful, and quiet place.

Now just take another minute or two to begin coming back into this room, here and now. Don't rush, just gently become aware of where you are. When you're ready, open your eyes again, but try to remember the feeling of being warm, and safe and relaxed.

How it works:

This is a mindfulness exercise. It is designed to help you disengage from difficult feelings and thoughts, to give you a few minutes peace from feeling unsafe. It will also help to develop the links between body and brain and improve your ability to switch your attention away from threatening stimuli. In addition, it will help to develop your imagination, which can help when problem-solving situations in the future.

5.5 Skill 5: Narrative Connection

The Technique

- 1. Think of a friend, or a relative. Someone you care about, and who you know cares about you, even if that relationship isn't perfect. Hold the person in your mind. Try to see them smile at you or recall a hug they have given you. Really try to feel them physically close to you.
- 2. Now, with that person in mind, tell a story about them to someone you trust (this could be another friend, a therapist, even a pet). The story should be something you remember with pleasure, something that you like about that person. Tell the story out loud.
- 3. When telling the story, focus on how the person you are thinking about looked, how they acted. Don't worry too much about what they said exactly.
- 4. As you tell the story, feel yourself drawn to the person. Feel the connection you share. This will happen in your body, often as a feeling of warmth in the chest, a small relaxing of your shoulders and a softening of your jaw muscles; but you may feel it somewhere else.
- 5. Notice any new feelings that develop as you tell the story. Make a note of them they might be useful to think about later!
- 6. At the end of the story, imagine the person smiling at you again, grateful that you have remembered them in this way, happy that they know you.

How it works

The feeling of shame forces us to disconnect from others, to want to hide. In this inner world we are alone and trapped. The negative thoughts we have about ourselves get repeated and amplified without filter and without any alternative thoughts to moderate or change our opinions of ourselves. This exercise aims to help you to reconnect with others, with people that you care about. It is designed to help you feel the *opposite of ashamed*, which is connected and safe. The reason for telling the



story out loud is to share a connection with another person (or animal!), which again helps us to feel reconnected, accepted and less ashamed. Finally, the exercise is more practice in feeling the pleasant emotions, which can often be suppressed and forgotten.

5.6 Skill 6: Attention Switching 1



Fill in the grid below. You might not be able to fill in every box but have a go. When answering the question "One thing that made me...?" make sure to really think about the memory or the thing you are referring to. Look inside and try to experience that feeling, even though it might be difficult. There are blank grids in **Appendix G**.

Important: No Eating Disorder related thoughts or behaviours allowed!

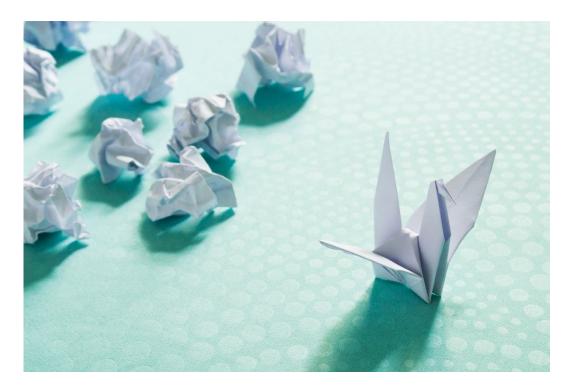
One thing that makes me	Where do I feel that feeling?
Smile	
Relaxed	
Joyful	
Proud	
Нарру	
Cheerful	
Grateful	
Hopeful	

Use this once a day and try to fill in different things each time.

How it Works

Look back at the "Emotion Chart" picture. Happiness can affect the whole body and help us feel safe and relaxed. It is so important to be able to find those things that help us to feel happy. Remember the section on Guilt and Shame? By focussing on the relationships that are healthy and caring, and by feeling an internal sense of connection and care for others and for yourself, you can begin to counteract the guilt and shame associated with eating food, drinking fluids or overexercising.

Note that when doing this you are likely to feel an internal conflict, a pull back towards the usual emotions you feel in that situation. This is entirely normal (it is called **Dissonance**) and it takes practice to be able to successfully switch the focus of your attention to something healthier and more helpful. As we said at the start of this workbook – Practice Makes Better (not perfect).



5.7 Skill 7: Attention Switching 2

The Technique:

Look at the fingernails on your right hand. Notice the shape, texture and size of them.

- 1. Now look at the nails on your left hand. Are they different to the right one?
- 2. Now look at the chair you are sitting on. Notice the colour, texture and comfort of it.
- 3. Now look out the window. Notice something specific (like a car, a tree or a cloud).
- 4. Now look at your feet. What are you wearing, what is the colour and texture of your socks/shoes/slippers/skin?
- 5. Now listen very carefully for any sounds in the room. What do you hear? Where is it coming from? What does it make you think?
- 6. Now look outside again, find the thing you were looking at earlier. Has it changed?
- 7. Now look at your fingernails again. Do they look the same as before? Do you notice anything different this time?





How it works

When we spend so long thinking about one thing, or one way of being (like thinking about weight, calories, shape, or feeling sad, lonely and ashamed) our brain can find it difficult to shift our attention away from that pattern. It's like being stuck in a dark sphere. We can't see a way out of it, and no one can really see inside.



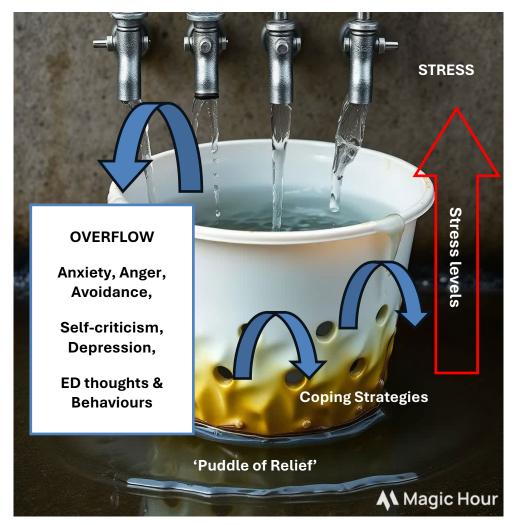
By practicing deliberately switching out attention between different types of things, different experiences, different thoughts, we can retrain our brain to be more flexible and open. This helps when we feel fixed in one way of thinking and find it difficult to imagine any other way of being.

5.8 Skill 8: The Stress Bucket

The Technique

We talk about stress all the time, but what is it? There are many "stressful" things, but what is stress itself? Not an easy question to answer...

Stress is just stuff that we have to use personal resources to manage. And we have a limited number of resources (patience, strength, emotion regulation, cognitive processing) with which to manage stress. Think about your capacity to cope with stress as being like a bucket. And think of stressful things as taps, pouring water into your bucket...



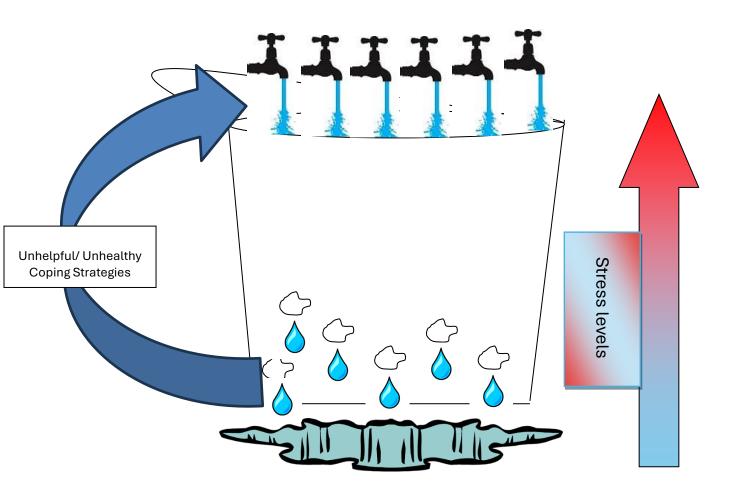
Life is full of stressful things. Some of the taps dribble away in the background (like memories, or minor problems in the present), while other taps are turned full on (like in a flashback, or a serious problem in the present). Eventually the water fills the bucket and then we go into "overflow". This is often when things feel overwhelming, and it can be difficult to say exactly what the problem is – your bucket is just full of water! Overflow is different for everybody, but it usually means people are anxious, angry, avoidant, depressed, self-critical and there is often an increase in Eating Disorder thoughts and voices. Think about what happens when you think about eating – a tap gets turned on, filling up your bucket and pushing you towards overflow.

We can also have a bucket that is full of stress right up to the brim. What happens when we add one more drop of water? Even that tiny amount can send us into overflow and make everything feel overwhelming. This is why people sometimes feel that the "smallest little thing can set me off". It's not the small thing – it's everything else that has led to your bucket being full, and then another small thing!

If this was all there was, we would all constantly be in overflow – life is stressful! However, we all learn ways of putting holes in the bucket which allow the stress to flow away safely, creating a "puddle of relief", reducing the overall level of stress. These are different for everybody, but things like talking to people, sharing our worries, walking, listening to music, reading a book and many others are safe, healthy ways of getting rid of stress.

Unfortunately, there are also unhealthy ways to reduce stress. People with Eating Disorders often use food restriction or exercise to cope with excess stress. This works in the short term, but in the long term it just creates mores stress, both physical and psychological, and so the bucket never gets emptier.

To work effectively with this, we need to indicate how stressed we are (how full is the bucket) today, name the stressful things (the taps) that we might be able to turn off (or at least down) and decide what coping strategies we are going to use to reduce the stress (the holes in the bucket). Have a look at the diagram below:



Current Stressors (Taps filling up my bucket)
-
-
-
-
-
Unhelpful Coping Techniques (Recycling Stress)
-
-
-
Helpful Coping Techniques (removing stress)
-
-
-
-
-

Try to fill one of these in at least once a week. That way you will be better able to notice when the stress is building up, when you have stopped using enough helpful coping techniques and also when you have started to use unhelpful coping techniques. There is a template in **Appendix H.**

5.9 Skill 9: Distract



Sometimes the best option is to not think about what's bothering or upsetting you for a little while. We all have things we like to do or find distracting. Try these and put a tick next to the ones that work for you. There is also space for you to write down your own ideas.

Distraction	Tried it	Works for Me
Talk to someone		
Play the A-Z game (songs, TV programmes, people)		
Sing a song		
Read a book, magazine, leaflet, anything		
Watch TV or a film		
Hug something soft		
Have a shower or bath		
Look at the CALM HARM app		
Splash cold water on your face		
Listen to music		
Do a puzzle		
Play a game on your phone or laptop		

Say out loud 10 good things about yourself	
Make a plan for tomorrow	
Punch a pillow 3 times	
Water a plant	
Draw something	
Find a smell you really like	
Find out something you didn't know	
Join in with others doing something	
Count to 1000 (seriously!)	
Change what you are wearing right now	

5.10 Skill 10: Soothing Box

The Technique

A soothing box, or a "self-soothe box" is exactly what it says – a box full of things which you find soothing! It is designed to be kept in a safe place and used when you are feeling intense or overwhelming emotions. The objects in the box will help you to reconnect to people that care about you and encourage you to use sensory grounding to help manage the intense experience you are having.

It usually contains a selection of the following:

- Visual Stimuli: Photos (of friends, family or pets), artwork, book with images.
- Auditory Items: Music playlists, nature sounds, small musical instrument.
- Tactile Objects: Fabrics, stress balls, fidget toys, soothing stone
- Olfactory Elements: Scented candles, essential oils, or potpourri.
- Memory items: Jewellery, stones from a beach, birthday cards
- Other Helpful Items: Journal and pen, affirmation cards, list of helpful people

It can contain almost anything and be as big or as small as you need, but the more meaningful a thing is to you, the more it can connect you to a different experience, the better it will be at helping you to ground and survive the intense experiences. A Soothing Box should be constantly developing and changing as you replace things which no longer work with new items that you have found work for you now.



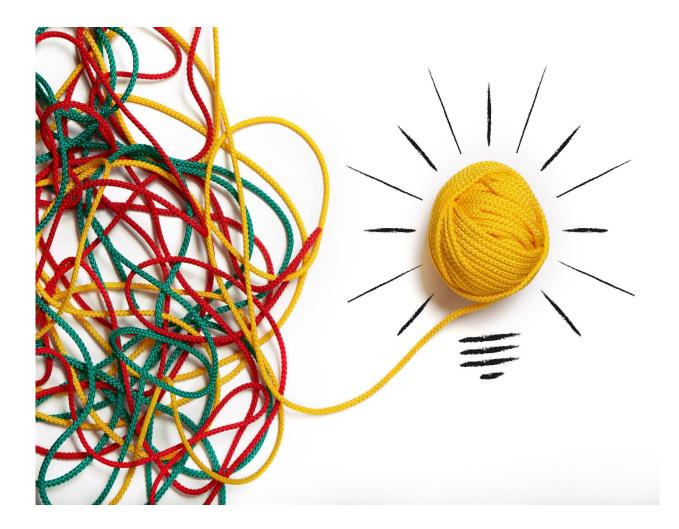


Section 6: Conclusion

Emotions are big and powerful. They can be overwhelming and threatening. They can hurt. They are also entirely normal and can be warm, safe and comforting. We need emotions to live a healthy life because they give us information about what is going on. We can be curious about them, grow and nurture them, even share and enjoy them. And we can regulate them.

This workbook is a start. It takes practice and dedication to make it work. Gather what help you can, use the workbook with friends and family. But do use it. **You can learn to regulate your emotions**, which will make everything else easier. You will feel you can cope in a wider range of situations, you will know yourself (and others) better, your life is likely to be easier.

I wish there was a simple, secret answer or technique to give you that would get you there immediately. I'm sorry. It doesn't exist. But the knowledge, tools and techniques in this workbook will help if you use them regularly. A routine takes a few weeks to establish. Using these techniques is just a routine, and the rest of your life is certainly worth the few weeks of effort it takes to introduce emotion regulation into your daily routine.



Section 7: Appendices and Worksheets

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Appendix A: What am I feeling and where am I feeling it?

Naming emotions and where you feel them in your body improves your ability to recognise and control them. The more you do this this easier it becomes, and the links between your brain and your body will improve. There is an example below:

What am I feeling now?	Where am I feeling it
Worried	Jaw is tight, fluttery feeling in chest, sick feeling in guts
Guilty	Sick feeling, tense shoulders, curled up
Frustrated	Tight jaw, feel hot in the face, tense all over
Lonely	Empty in chest, heavy arms, head drooped
Angry	Tight jaw, tense shoulders, tense chest

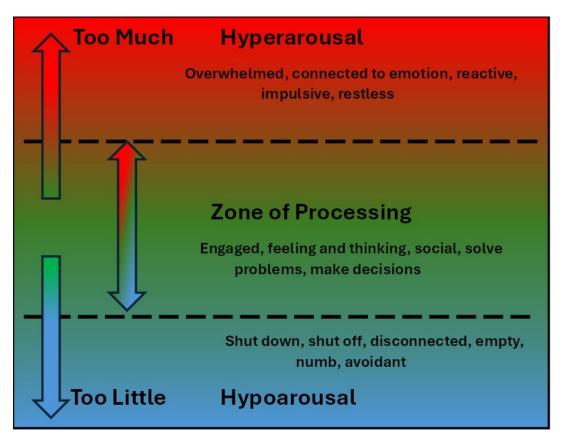
Use the blank table below to record your own experiences of emotions.

What am I feeling now?	Where am I feeling it

Appendix B: The Zone of Processing

We all experience different levels of emotional intensity. In "Hyperaroused" states we are usually too afraid and anxious to think clearly or engage with others. In "Hypoaroused" states we are usually to numb or shut down to think clearly or engage with others. Understanding where you are on the scale of hyperaroused to hypoaroused can help you to decide what you need to do to bring yourself back to the Zone of Processing, where your pre-frontal cortex and Parasympathetic Nervous System are fully engaged, allowing you to think and feel your way through difficult situations.

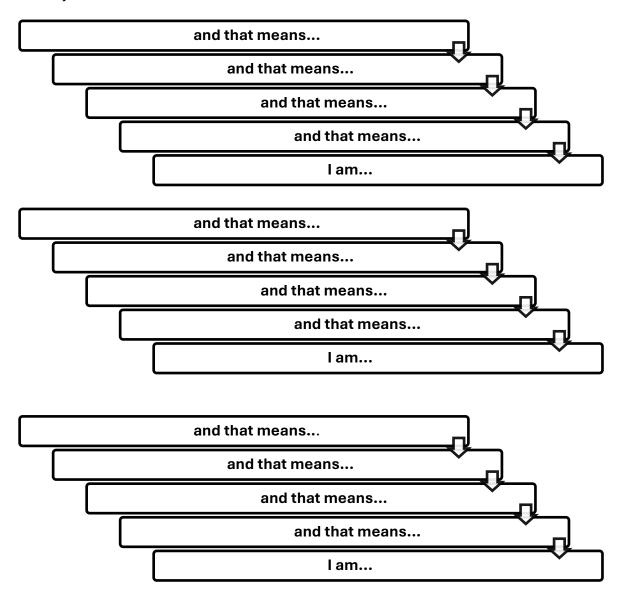
Use the diagram and table below to help you to say what emotions you are feeling and where you are on the scale.



I am feeling	Where I am feeling it is

Appendix C: The actual threat: Downward Arrowing

This exercise will help you to understand the actual threats which your brain is trying to protect you from. It's a technique called **Downward Arrowing**. Start with the perceived threat to yourself (e.g. "I eat too much") and ask, "and what does that mean about me?" Be honest with your answer and write it in the next box. Then ask the same question and write your answer in the next box. Keep going until you can't answer it anymore. Your last answer is usually the actual threat.



Be careful when doing this exercise – it can cause intense emotions. Be ready to use one of the emotion regulation techniques from this manual to help if it becomes distressing.

Appendix D: Breaking my Rule

When breaking a rule which we have set ourselves it is highly likely that we will feel guilt. This can be intense and deeply painful. One way to challenge this is to feel proud of our achievements. The exercise on pages 18-19 guides you through a process to do this. It has to be repeated frequently to be effective.

- 1. State the rule you want to challenge (this is usually something like "I will not gain weight" or something similar.)
- 2. Write down what you want to do differently and something that you are proud of (remember to try to *feel* the pride rather than just stating it).
- 3. Read the statement about how difficult this is and how resolved you are to try.
- 4. Try to break the rule.
- 5. State whether you managed or not.
- 6. Notice how you are feeling now. Then
- 7. Read either the Compassionate Statement or the Proud Statement, again remembering to really feel the words you are saying.

My Rule:	
What I want to do differently today:	
My Statement: I am going to break my rule about not eating. It is my rule, no one else's. I can break it if I want. The consequence of breaking it is that I will feel guilty and ashamed. I will also feel proud and satisfied in myself for doing something that I find really hard. I will be ok	
Did I break my rule:	
How do I feel now?	

My Compassionate Statement: I am pleased that I tried, though it was too hard this time. I will

My Proud statement: I am proud that I managed to do something today, even though it was

try again at the next meal.

very difficult.

Appendix E: Emotion-Thought-Behaviour-Consequence

Using the guidance on pages 21 onwards, fill in the table below naming the emotion, the associated thought, the behaviour that usually follows those and the consequences of doing that behaviour. Try to think carefully about the consequences, good and bad.

Emotion	Thought	Behaviour	Consequences

Once you have completed the table, answer this: are the consequences worth the behaviours?

Now, think about the same table, but this time let's look at the emotions you would **prefer to feel** when eating. It can be hard to imagine what you might think but have a go. Again, focus on the predicted consequences.

Emotion	Thought	Behaviour	Consequence

Now ask yourself: Is changing worth it?

Appendix F: My Emotion Regulation Training Plan

Technique	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Technique	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Appendix G: Attention Switching 1

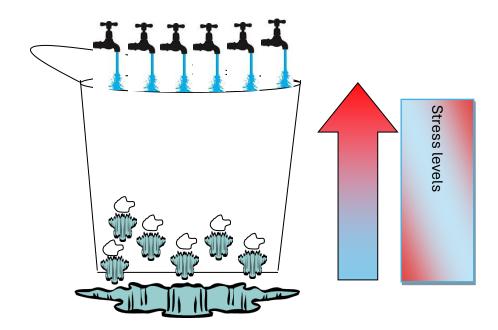
Happiness can affect the whole body and help us feel safe and relaxed. It is so important to be able to find those things that help us to feel happy. Remember the section on Guilt and Shame? By focussing on the relationships that are healthy and caring, and by feeling an internal sense of connection and care for others and for yourself, you can begin to counteract the guilt and shame associated with eating food, drinking fluids or overexercising.

Note that when doing this you are likely to feel an internal conflict, a pull back towards the usual emotions you feel in that situation. This is entirely normal (it is called **Dissonance**) and it takes practice to be able to successfully switch the focus of your attention to something healthier and more helpful. As we said at the start of this workbook – Practice Makes Better (not perfect).

Fill in the table below once a day. Try to fill in different things each time.

One thing that makes me	Where do I feel that feeling?
Smile	
Relaxed	
Joyful	
Proud	
Нарру	
Cheerful	
Grateful	
Hopeful	

Appendix H: My Stress Bucket



-			
_			
-			
_			

Unhelpful Coping Techniques (Recycling Stress)	
_	
-	
-	

Helpful Coping Techniques (removing stress)

_			
_			
-			

Current Stressors:

Appendix I: Planning for intense emotions

We all have different things that work for us at different levels of emotional arousal. It can be hard to remember what works, so writing down a plan for what works and at what level of arousal can be really useful for us and also for those around us. It can take a while to figure out what works for you so, please keep updating this table.

ZONE	What works
RED	
RED/GREEN	
GREEN	
BLUE/GREEN	
BLUE	

8. Acknowledgements

The tools and techniques in this workbook come from a variety of sources and therapeutic models. In particular there are ideas from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Compassion Focussed Therapy, Dialectical Behavioural Therapy, Interpersonal Neurobiology, Polyvagal Theory, Affect Regulation Theory and Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy. The developers and practitioners of those models and systems are an invaluable resource. I would encourage anyone reading this All tables and diagrams are original.

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