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# Welcome...

I love a good dusting of snow. The seven-year-old child who still lives inside my heart can't help but squeal with delight when the first flakes start to fall, and I'll gaze in raptures if we're lucky enough to get a few inches, rejoicing at the sight of the garden with a fresh covering of the white stuff, as yet unsullied by footprints or snowmen or whatever else. And I get the same feeling at the beginning of the year – snowy or not – as a fresh start beckons. I love the feeling that anything is possible, that we can make this year just what we want it to be.

But this year has been more challenging than many we've faced. The world around us is changing – and fast. In the few short weeks between me writing this letter and you reading it, things will have changed again, giving us new things to deal with. And that is exactly why, as we head into 2022, we are not bringing out those same old 'new year, new you' messages. We are not going to provide you with 537 ways you can change yourself, and we won't be adding to your list of New Year's resolutions, because we think you're wonderful, just as you are.

Instead, we've packed the magazine full of ways to help you enter the new year feeling a little more hopeful about what it might bring. Our Dossier features ways that you can take simple, positive actions to bring more hope and joy into your life, even when that feels difficult (page 51). Plus we have brilliant, easy ways to take charge if you feel anxiety rising (page 34), and ways to shore up your relationships with those you love (page 74) and even with yourself (page 82). Our 'happiness diet' (page 96) shares the latest research on what to eat to boost your mood. Finally, we've got heartfelt words from two very different women. The legendary Brené Brown shares piercing insight into why we need to stop comparing ourselves with others for the sake of our sanity and wellbeing (page 24), words we all need to take to heart as we step into a new year. And the singer and presenter Kimberley Walsh opens up for the first time about her grief over the loss of Sarah Harding, and how it propelled her to seize the day and make the most of her life (page 14). Inspiring words. I hope *Psychologies* helps you get 2022 off to a wonderful start.

Sally x **Sally Saunders, Editor**

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in mind*



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# The advice starts RIGHT HERE!



## BRENÉ BROWN

*'Significant parts of our lives, including our future, are shaped by comparing ourselves with others,' says world-renowned author and researcher Brené Brown. But it's possible to choose how we're going to let it affect us, and escape the comparison trap. Discover how on page 24.*

## SOPHIE MORT

*'Trying to block troubling emotions can be like blocking a wave; it doesn't stop the wave or disperse its power – it sends it back temporarily, ensuring its return,' explains Sophie Mort, a clinical psychologist. Lean in and soothe anxiety with six techniques that truly work on page 34.*



## KARIN PEETERS

*Challenging life events can shake our sense of identity, explains Karin Peeters, a coach and psychotherapist. 'We can never fully go back to the old version of ourselves, but we can use the opportunity to evolve into someone better.' Take steps towards finding yourself again on page 40.*

## Our mission

Psychologies' mission is to provide you with inspiration and advice to support you to improve your emotional wellbeing. We aim to help you boost your happiness and resilience and lower your stress and anxiety. We do this by providing simple, achievable steps to make small changes that can add up to a real difference.

Embracing the four pillars of your life, from mind and body to heart and soul, *Psychologies* engages with the world around us as well as the world within to help you discover inspiring ways to make every day better and create a life you love.



# In the mood

Thought-provoking culture, insightful science and inspirational snippets to bring you up to date on all things uplifting, hopeful and happy-making

COMPILED BY ALEX LLOYD



## ***Game on!***

Board games are often at the centre of family fun over the holidays – but don't leave them collecting dust once the celebrations end. Gathering together around the table with loved ones to play Monopoly, Articulate or Pictionary has a host of health benefits, especially in the darker winter weeks.

The obvious one, of course, is connection and communication, especially between generations, and it's a great way to boost the social skills of children and encourage them to step away from their screens.

Games are also brain boosting, particularly if you tackle Trivial Pursuit or Scrabble, while laughter is a known stress reducer.

Just try not to let your competitive side send your blood pressure soaring!





## Set goals and achieve them

By Katie Piper



I don't like to put a time stamp on achievements. Setting a date of 1 January implies that I will only implement change on that date, when I could be doing it now. Instead, this year,

I will set realistic goals that have longevity. New Year's resolutions tend to be broad and unachievable, whereas goals are specific. It's easy to lose focus when the goal feels too large, which is why many people fall at the first hurdle.

For example, if you want to be more active, break it down into manageable and measurable pieces. Last year, I set myself the target of running a 10K for the Katie Piper Foundation. I made working on this a habit – part of my natural routine. That meant training several times a week and considering my nutrition. Before I knew it, I was crossing the finishing line!

Think about replacing resolutions with healthy habits. Aiming to improve your morning routine means repeating habits until they are automatic: brush your teeth, work out and make your bed. This behaviour continues even after your goal has been achieved. The key is consistency and finding something that works for you.

Goals and habits become more relevant if you attach a reason. Find your 'why', set a realistic road map to getting there and open yourself up to profound and positive change for 2022.

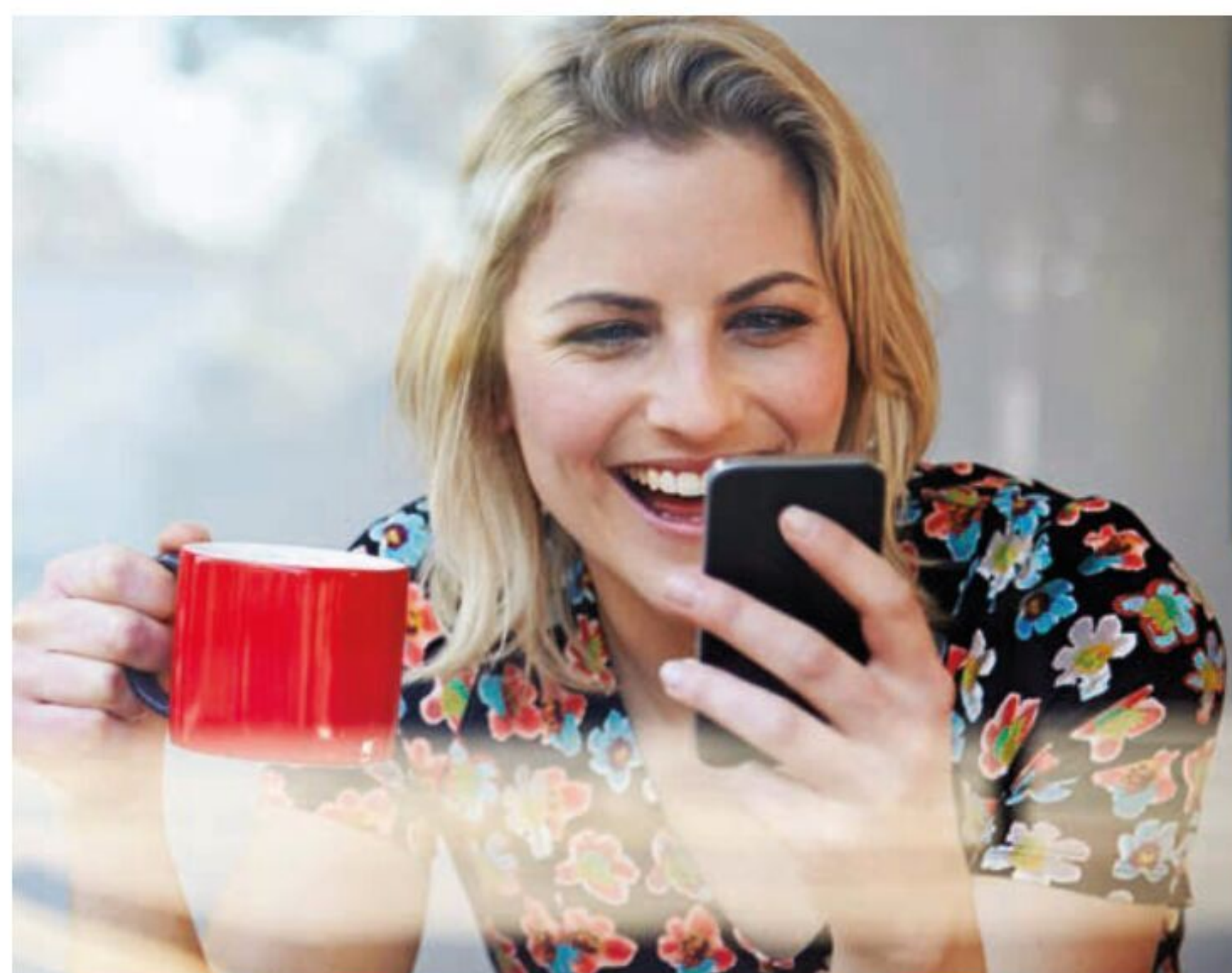
*Yoga is the most desired new skill we hope to acquire, according to YouTube searches, as reported by The Knowledge Academy. Drawing tutorials and piano lessons came in second and third.*



### Check mate

Social media has changed the way our brains assess others and how we connect with them, according to Bu Zhong, the author of *Social Media Communication: Trends And Theories* (John Wiley & Sons, £29.99). The three traditional ways of 'reducing uncertainty' about an acquaintance – interacting directly, asking others and observing their interactions – are now aided by a fourth component of a 'background check', using online accounts. Zhong, a Penn State professor of communications, says: 'Platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are particularly abundant in uncertainty-reducing information, such as personal beliefs, friends and photographs.'

Zhong says this adaptation is no bad thing, and is ultimately driven by our fundamental human motivation to form and maintain interpersonal attachments.







## World foods

Want to eat to help the planet? Favour a climatarian diet, which focuses on carbon footprint in what you consume and how you shop.

Beef and lamb are off the menu due to their large CO2 impact, but sustainable fish, chicken and pork can be enjoyed in moderation.

Fruit, veg and grains should be seasonal and local, with air-flown and greenhouse-grown produce avoided. Goodbye avocados!

Climatarians avoid pre-packaged food, compost their leftovers, cut back on food waste, grow their own and eat out minimally, drinking draught rather than bottled beer.

All things considered, it's a way of eating that sounds good for the environment, as well as your health and purse!

*Being friendly and trustworthy are favoured over competency when picking team members, a study has found. Researchers from Binghamton University discovered people were willing to sacrifice performance for a positive human experience – although people who could demonstrate competency and trustworthiness were chosen first!*

## WATCH, LOOK, LISTEN



**WATCH** – *Cow* is a surprisingly moving documentary, taking a close-up look at the life of two residents of a British dairy farm. From Oscar and Cannes-winning director Angela Arnold. Out 14 January.



**LOOK** – *Amy: Beyond The Stage* at The Design Museum, London, celebrates the creativity and legacy of the iconic singer Amy Winehouse, with handwritten lyrics, outfits and her guitar on display. Open now.



**LISTEN** – Podcast *The Line-Up*, with Shaun Keaveny, sees the former Radio 6 DJ challenge musicians and famous names to pick their fantasy festival line-up. Available to download now.





## SMEAR CAMPAIGN

There are likely few dates in the diary you dread more than a smear test – but, fingers crossed, those days might soon be gone. The World Health Organisation has recommended that a DNA-based test for HPV should be the first-choice screening for cervical cancer over the invasive smear test.

This method is more accurate and, crucially, a swab can be taken at home rather than by a medic, if preferred.

HPV, a group of 100 viruses transmitted by sexual contact, is the cause of 99 per cent of cervical cancers, with the disease killing more than two women in Britain every day.

But encouragingly, the NHS programme to vaccinate teenage girls against HPV has cut cervical cancer cases by 90 per cent since it started in 2008.

Cervical Cancer Prevention Week takes place 17-23 January. Find out more at [jostrust.org.uk](http://jostrust.org.uk)

***Zinc supplements can stave off colds and other mild respiratory tract infections, clearing up symptoms two days earlier, say scientists.***

## Take the write approach

*New Year's resolutions can be hard to keep, but here's a simple one to try: writing in your diary every day of 2022. Putting pen to paper helps clear your head before bed, as well as giving an opportunity to reflect and remember.*

*You don't need to aspire to the literary diary entries of Virginia Woolf, however; Rangan Chatterjee, a GP and presenter of the podcast 'Feel Better, Live More', suggests answering just two questions: What went well today? What can I do better tomorrow?*



*"There has been a stigma around women and the menopause... But women in their 40s, 50s, 60s and beyond have things to say and want to be heard"*

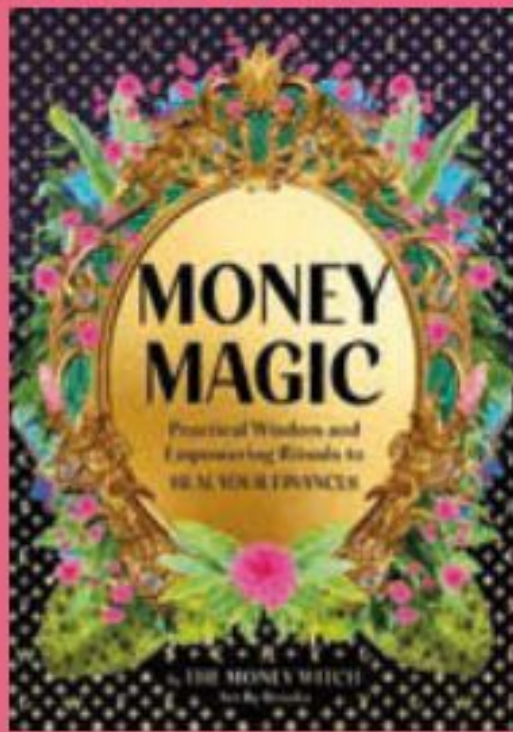
*Lorraine Kelly*



## 3 inspiring reads... **TO FULFIL YOUR GOALS**



**1** *Money Magic* by The Money Witch (Chronicle, £14.99) uses a seven-step system that combines practical advice and mystical rituals to help you manifest your financial ideals.



**2** *List Yourself Happy* by Jess Indeedy (Quadrille, £12) explains how to use list-making as a therapeutic tool and a way to have a more upbeat outlook on life.



**3** *Rise And Shine: How To Transform Your Life, Morning By Morning* by Kate Oliver and Toby Oliver (Little, Brown, £9.99) teaches you how to use the 'silence, happiness, intention, nourishment' exercise to build positive daily habits.



## Spice things... down

Adding herbs and spices to your food not only adds flavour – research now shows that it lowers your blood pressure. A trial by Penn State University saw participants follow a low, medium or high-spice regime paired with an 'average American diet' for four weeks. Those who supplemented their daily meals with a dose of seasoning – a 6.5g blend of 24 different herbs and spices – showed the best blood pressure reduction by the end of the trial.



**73%** of youngsters aged six to 16 aspire to a career where they can use their celebrity to help people, like Michelle Obama, rather than having fame for the sake of it, reveals a survey by the Little People, Big Dreams biography series.





# Viewpoint

Send your letters of gratitude and tell us what you loved reading in the magazine to [letters@psychologies.co.uk](mailto:letters@psychologies.co.uk)



**Star  
letter**

## ***Sleep solution***

I read 'Too stressed to sleep?' (December edition) with a mixture of curiosity and cynicism. Anxiety

often hijacks my slumber, and I've even had a panic attack in my sleep. As a result, I'm well versed in sleep hygiene and the importance of a bedtime routine, but I was intrigued by the potential of a new technique for improving sleep.

I'm thrilled to report that not only does coherent breathing guarantee that I fall asleep within 20 minutes, it improves my quality of sleep. Usually I need eight to nine hours of shut-eye to feel refreshed, but since using this simple breathwork technique before bed, I've felt well-rested after just seven hours. Thank you, *Psychologies*, for helping me soothe my nervous system to sleep.

*Karen Bryony Rose*

## **Shared happiness**

I couldn't agree more with your article 'The best gifts don't come with a bow' (January edition). If you don't have a clear view of yourself and are used to suppressing your needs, expectations and wishes by being passive, you can often find yourself in situations where your needs aren't met and you're in conflict with your values.

For far too long I have neglected to reflect on my own values and ended up lacking the self-awareness to opt into situations that would benefit me.

The advice given in this article was

so reassuring. I am a parent and a busy person, so it's understandable that it can be hard to fit in looking after myself with so many other commitments, but caring for children can be stressful, so it's important not to neglect myself.

Taking care of someone else's happiness is a beautiful thing, but I need to remember that I shouldn't neglect my own happiness in the process. I'm going to be making myself more of a priority in future. Thank you for prompting this change.

*Poppy Aitchlee*



PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY IMAGES; SHUTTERSTOCK  
LETTERS ARE EDITED FOR STYLE AND LENGTH





### PHOTO COMPETITION

I recently underwent surgery for breast cancer. During a 'winter wonderland' trip to a holiday park for my birthday, I looked up and captured this amazing picture of the trees. It brought a moment of joy to my recent weeks of sadness.

**Julie Read**

**Would you like** to showcase your photographic talent in 'Psychologies'? What moment has made you feel inspired, grateful or moved this month? Capture it and tell us why. We'll print the winner, plus you'll receive a free copy of our bookazine, 'Find Your Calm', worth £6.99. Share your photograph with us and explain its inspiration on Instagram @psychologiesmagazine with the hashtag #PsychologiesPhoto, or email it to [letters@psychologies.co.uk](mailto:letters@psychologies.co.uk)

***Your December Dossier came at the perfect time for me, as I start dreading winter as soon as summer is over. Now, however, I feel ready to embrace winter and enjoy the outdoors, while planning projects to keep me busy inside.***

Lorraine Streuli

### LETTER OF GRATITUDE

*I'd like to thank...*

My wonderful midwives, Tina and Juliette,

You were there by our side when my husband and I lost our darling daughter, Pip, who was stillborn in July.

Giving birth to Pip could have been such a terrifying time, but you were both a constant source of support, and this gave us strength.

Thank you for the respect and warmth you showed our baby girl as you delivered, handled and cared for her. Thank you for helping us find our way when we first met her and for being there to hold our hand when it all felt overwhelming. Thank you for the visits you paid us afterwards to check that we were doing OK; for the tree you planted in Pip's memory; and for being there on the day of her funeral.

The days, weeks and months that followed Pip's death have been – and still are – the hardest of our lives, but among the pain there are happy memories of love, kindness and even humour that we shared with you that we will always remember and hold close.

Pip never got the chance to walk this earth, but we are so happy that you were part of her journey.

*All my love, Lucy x*

### Positive change

As a regular reader of *Psychologies*, I have often read about the benefits of keeping a gratitude journal. But while your magazine has inspired me to make positive changes in many areas of my life, this particular idea felt self-indulgent.

My change of heart came a few months ago following an unresolved misunderstanding with a former friend that left me feeling like a bad person. While browsing in my local bookshop, I spotted a gratitude journal and, after flicking through it and seeing that it was divided into manageable sections, I decided it was something I could commit to.

The prompts in the journal guide me to meditate on the day ahead, then reflect on it in the evening. For me, a key prompt is how I made a difference

during the day. This has been a revelation because often, without actively trying, I realised that every day I do something to make a difference to others, no matter how small, which I wouldn't have registered had I not started writing the journal.

Through journalling, I have discovered that I am not such a bad person after all, but someone who is considerate and treats others as I would wish to be treated myself. Time spent with my journal at the beginning and end of each day is something I actively look forward to and reading through my positive comments is like a hug in a book.

Thank you, *Psychologies*, for introducing me to this practice – it has been life-changing. I am only sorry that I didn't take your advice sooner!

**Roz Spencer**





*Sarah was a  
fiery ball of  
energy and joy.  
Grieving her is a  
daily challenge*

Kimberley Walsh was devastated when her Girls Aloud bandmate, Sarah Harding, died of breast cancer at the age of 39. In this exclusive interview with *Psychologies*, she talks about coping with grief, becoming a mother for the third time, and why losing Sarah made her determined to mark her 40th birthday with gratitude, hope and positivity

WORDS: BETH NEIL

PHOTOGRAPHS: SHUTTERSTOCK, GETTY IMAGES





**W**hen Kimberley Walsh looks back on 2021 it will be with conflicting emotions. Little Nate, her third son with her husband, Justin Scott, is now six months old and, with his big smiles and easy-going nature, has slotted into their busy family like a dream. 'We got so lucky with this one,' she says, her West Yorkshire brogue still strong despite 20 years of living in London.

'Obviously, I adore all my kids, but Nate has been the easiest – which was a relief, with him being the third. Even the breastfeeding, which I've struggled with in the past and has put a dampener on those first few weeks, has been brilliant. He came out of the womb, latched on and fed for an hour, and I was more excited by that than anything else!'

She adds: 'Friends of mine who had totally hung up their heels when it came to having more babies have said Nate's seriously made them reconsider. He's so





content and a proper little chiller, just like his dad.'

Walsh is also mum to Bobby, seven, and Cole, who has just turned five, and knowing that Nate is her last – she says adamantly that she is 'definitely done' – has given her a different mindset this time around. The sleepless nights haven't felt quite as much of a bind and any notion of implementing a routine has been chucked out the window.

'A big part of me wants to savour those night feeds, because I know I'm not having any more babies and I'm so aware of how quickly the time goes. They get so attached to you with breastfeeding, and Nate loves the cuddles that come with it.

'If I thought I was doing all this again, maybe I'd be more practically minded, but he's my last baby and I just can't bring myself to be hard on him. So I've ruined him, instead!'

She laughs – but intertwined with this time of happiness has been immense sadness and grief. Walsh is still coming to terms with the loss of her friend and former bandmate, Sarah Harding, who died in September at the age of 39, just over a year after being diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer.

As she speaks about Harding's death publicly for the first time, it's clear the pain is still raw, and Walsh admits she struggles to make sense of it.

'I can't lie, it absolutely knocked us all for six and the grieving is a daily challenge. Until you're actually experiencing something like this with somebody who was close to you, it's impossible to imagine what it's going to feel like. And I honestly

still can't work out how you ever truly accept it,' she says. 'I deal with it day to day and, for me, that's about checking in with everyone, especially Sarah's mum, and making sure that they're OK too. It's going to take time, and it's very, very tough.'

Apart from a post on Instagram shortly after her diagnosis, and a bestselling book, *Hear Me Out* (Ebury, £20), Harding bore her illness privately and away from the spotlight in which she used to revel. Only those closest to her knew the end was coming and Walsh takes some comfort from the fact she had time to tell her friend how much she meant to her and was able to introduce her to all three of her boys.

'Thankfully we did get to spend some lovely quality time together as a group. I really wanted Sarah to meet my boys because, for one reason or another, it had never happened apart from on video call. So being able to do that meant a lot to me.

'The last time Sarah was at mine, she spent some time holding the baby and it was heartbreaking, because obviously we knew at some point the unthinkable was going to happen. But I'm so glad that we got that because she was such a big part of my life, and if the boys had never met her, that would have been unbelievably strange to me.

'That time together was incredibly special, but it didn't make it any easier, not when somebody so young has their life just taken from them like that.'

Did it open up some conversations with the boys about death? 'It did. I had to tell them, and we managed it in the best way that we possibly could.

'They said "she's with the angels now" and sometimes it's kind of nice to see it through their eyes. They aren't at an age where they can fully comprehend it, which is a good thing, I guess.'

A week after Harding's death, Walsh posted an old video of her in full flow, belting out a rendition of *Footloose* to a packed-out and bouncing arena. It's almost impossible to reconcile those images of Harding so full of life and utterly in her element with the fact that she's no longer here.

'I couldn't watch that clip at first because it was like: "How is this happening? How is this person that was always the life and soul just... gone?" I couldn't let myself go to that place. But sometimes you have to keep watching the videos and keep them alive in your head,' she says.

'I remember her with so much joy. The energy that girl brought into a room was just insane. Nicola [Roberts, another Girls Aloud bandmate] called her our electric girl and she couldn't have put it any better than that.

'I mean, we were polar opposites. I'm so chilled I'm almost lying down, and then there was Sarah who was this ball of fiery energy lighting up the room!

'She had two sides to her though, and her vulnerability was something a lot of people would never have seen – but it was one of the best things



Along with new addition Nate, Walsh says her family with Justin Scott is complete





*“I want to savour  
the night feeds with  
Nate because I’m  
so aware of how quickly  
the time goes”*



*Walsh looks back  
on the past year with  
mixed emotions*



about her. She didn't have a bad bone in her body. And I think, in the group, we all felt a genuine need to look after her. When I think of her now, she's on stage doing what she did best, riling up the crowd and just being that absolute force of nature.'

Next year will mark Girls Aloud's 20th anniversary – two decades since Walsh, Harding, Roberts, Cheryl Tweedy [later Cole], and Nadine Coyle were brought together on *Popstars: The Rivals*, an ITV talent show, and went on to become one of the biggest-selling girl bands that the UK has ever produced.

They were a tight-knit gang in a well-oiled machine, each of them playing a vital role, when they split for good in 2013, and there was never a question of the group carrying on without any one of the others. 'I think we're a rare breed when it comes to bands,' says Walsh. 'We stayed the same five members the whole way through, we never

switched or lost a member. It's quite nice that we were all on the same page with that.

'My stepdaughter, Chloe, [from Scott's previous relationship] is 22 and she can't believe that's the age I was when I was doing all that. It's mad! But it honestly feels like forever ago – those early days, especially, are almost like another world.'

In the years since Girls Aloud, Walsh has gone on to enjoy a hugely varied career (she jokingly describes herself as the Del Boy of the entertainment world), which has included musical theatre in the West End, acting, presenting, solo performances and her own children's clothing company.

Most recently, she's been co-hosting the magazine show *Morning Live* on BBC1 and she's hoping the coming year will open up more presenting opportunities. 'Every day I pinch myself at how fortunate I've been – I'm literally working my way through my checklist! But it's not been easy; there

"It honestly feels like forever ago – those early days, especially, are almost like another world"



With Girls Aloud  
bandmates Nadine  
Coyle, Nicola Roberts,  
Sarah Harding and  
Cheryl Cole



are so many of us out there trying to keep working and keep that juggle going – it doesn't happen by accident. I work hard and take everything I do seriously, and hopefully that's why things pay off. But, yes, it's been very colourful, especially in the past few years.'

She mentions the juggle and the juggle is real. There's no celeb-style live-in nanny in the Walsh-Scott household – she and her former-boyband-star-turned-property-developer husband manage the childcare between schedules. Walsh recently shot a TV ad campaign for Avon and brought Nate along for regular breastfeeding pitstops.

'It was full-on because we had the advert to shoot and loads of social stuff to do but I'd never left him for more than an hour and they were fine with him being there. They said: "Just bring him along, we'll work it all out!" And that's the way it should be.

'I want to work, and I need to work but I also want to make sure that I'm everything I can be for my kids as well. There has to be a recognition that women are trying to do everything now, and that means we need flexibility.

'*Morning Live* agreed to me doing three mornings rather than the whole week, which was such a big deal for me. It felt like a gift from above and it works so well for us as a family. I think times are changing.'

But not everywhere, unfortunately. Walsh's first love remains musical theatre, but the gruelling, intractable and antisocial hours are simply not conducive to family life. 'The only way I could do musical theatre with the kids so young is to do a job-share with another woman, because three nights a week might be doable. Seven or eight shows a week is just not realistic. Leaving the baby at bedtime would kill me and the other two need me too. It's not happened yet but I'm going to put it out there now just in case someone somewhere is listening,' she laughs.

She bats away compliments with her typical modesty, but Walsh is blessed with a youthful vitality, despite the demands of motherhood and work. She hasn't had any nips or tucks and, instead, swears by Avon's Renewal Power Serum for her healthy-looking skin.

'It is what it is, isn't it?' she says of ageing. 'I haven't had anything done. I'm too terrified! I haven't ever really spent a lot of money on skincare, which is why I feel as if Avon is a great fit for me, because it has brilliant products at such a good price.'

Walsh turned 40 in November, three days after Harding would have celebrated the same milestone. For Walsh, that was all the more reason to mark the occasion in a meaningful and upbeat way.

'It felt weird to begin thinking of calling myself a 40-something but, as it got nearer, I started to feel differently about it – and that's because of Sarah. We were both going to turn 40 at that time and we



Walsh juggles being a mother of three with her varied roles in entertainment

***"There has to be a recognition that women are trying to do everything now, and that means we need flexibility"***

were always birthday twins, so it felt as if I needed to truly celebrate this one. She would have wanted me to party. Too right!

Walsh pauses for a moment as she remembers the friend she has lost. 'I'm going into my 40s feeling incredibly grateful for everything that I have,' she says. And, as for ageing and what that means for women, she adds laughingly: 'I'm going to embrace it because, really, it's the new 30, isn't it?'

*Avon's Anew Renewal Power Serum with Protinol, £22, is available now at [avon.uk.com](http://avon.uk.com) or through your local independent Avon representative*



LIFE AS I KNOW IT

# Milestone moments

*Harriet Minter finds herself older, but not necessarily wiser, as she steps into the new frontier of her 40s. But she's learned a thing or two...*



With my birthday falling on 31 December, New Year's resolutions have always felt extra portentous. And this year more so than ever, as I turn 40. The big 4-0. It's the number I put on a list I wrote aged 18 entitled 'Things I will have achieved by...' I still don't have that Porsche.

I thought I'd use this column as a chance to look back on the things I learned in my 30s. There is so much I thought would happen that didn't – and so much I could never have expected. I wanted to write one of those oh-so-wise articles about the past 10 years but, the truth is, the older I get, the more I realise I don't know much at all.

There was a strange period in my late 30s when I spent a lot of time on breakfast television arguing with men who felt very certain of their beliefs (hi, Piers). When I was on set, I would find myself fired up by their certainty,

my belief in my own point of view growing until I was as convinced that I was right as they were. I'd leave high on righteousness, until a few hours later, when I'd think back over what I'd said and wonder how right I really was and what had happened to the nuance of it all.

I feel a bit like that now when I look back at my 30s. There were decisions made, beliefs held and people loved that now seem fuzzy to me; not so completely wrong that I can dismiss them altogether but lacking the clarity they had at the time.

The more I talk to my friends who've passed the 40 milestone, the more I think seeing all sides of the story is one of the benefits that comes with ageing. Some call this 'life experience', others 'not giving a fuck'. Me? I don't mind what it's called, I just know I want more of it.

There are a few things, however, that I feel certain about taking from my 30s into my 40s. For a start, I will be taking my friends. This decade

has seen the biggest shifts in my friendships. Those that I've grown up with have had to reformulate themselves around marriages and babies, the strength of them being shown in their ability to morph without fracturing. And there have been new friendships made in all sorts of places: across social media, in the loos at bars. I am so grateful for every one of them.

I will be taking the knowledge that I can reinvent myself as often and wildly as I like. Last year alone I was an author, a consultant, a girlfriend, a diabetic, a mess and a goddess, all labels that stuck for as long as they were needed, then peeled off once I was done. I spent a lot of my 20s and early 30s trying to 'find myself', when the truth is that I am exactly who I decide to be each day. I find that so liberating.

And, finally, I will be taking my dog. Because if there is one thing I have learned and know to be true, it is this: a single woman in search of a partner really just needs a dog.

**Follow Harriet Minter's writing journey by signing up for her newsletter at [harrietminter.com](http://harrietminter.com)**



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# Mind

Inspiration to boost your happiness and confidence,  
plus simple steps to overcome anxiety and stress

*“I was always looking  
outside myself for  
strength and  
confidence, but it  
comes from within. It  
is there all the time”*

**Anna Freud**

PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES



# THE NEED TO FIT IN AND *the will to win*



It's the curse of modern life: the crush between conformity and competition. The world-renowned author and researcher Brené Brown explores the comparison trap... and how to avoid it



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDAL FORD/GETTY IMAGES



Swimming is the trifecta for me – exercise, meditation and alone time. When I’m swimming laps you can’t call me or talk to me, it’s just me and the black stripe. The only thing that can ruin a swim is when I shift my attention from my lane to what’s happening in the lanes next to me. It’s embarrassing, but if I’m not paying attention, I can catch myself racing the person next to me, or comparing our strokes, or figuring out who has the best workout set. When I go into comparison, I completely lose the meditation and alone time I need. And I once hurt my shoulder trying to race a twenty-something triathlete in the next lane.

I have a picture hanging in my study as a reminder to focus on my journey and to stop checking the lanes next to me. It applies to my time in the pool and everything else – how I parent, my work, my relationships – everything! Researching comparison helped me understand that, like it or not, I’m probably going to check the lanes next to me. But what I do next is up to me. Let’s dive in. (Sorry, I had to.)

Comparison is actually not an emotion, but it drives all sorts of big feelings that can affect our relationships and our self-worth. More often than not, social comparison falls outside of our awareness – we don’t even know we’re doing it. This lack of awareness can lead to us showing up in ways that are hurtful to ourselves and

others. Researchers Jerry Suls, René Martin and Ladd Wheeler explain that ‘comparing the self with others, either intentionally or unintentionally, is a pervasive social phenomenon’, and how we perceive our standings or rankings with these comparisons can affect our self-concept, our level of aspiration, and our feelings of wellbeing. They describe how we use comparison not only to evaluate past and current outcomes, but to predict future prospects. This means significant parts of our lives, including our future, are shaped by comparing ourselves to others.

I’ve collected data on comparison for years, starting with the research that informed my book *The Gifts Of Imperfection* (Hazelden, £14.99). Guidepost #6 in the list of guideposts for wholehearted living is ‘cultivating creativity and letting go of comparison’. Comparison is a creativity killer, among other things.

Here is my definition of comparison: Comparison is the crush of conformity from one side and competition from the other – it’s trying to simultaneously fit in and stand out. Comparison says, ‘Be like everyone else, but better.’

At first it might seem that conforming and competing are mutually exclusive, but they’re not. When we compare ourselves with others, we are ranking around a specific collection of ‘alike things’. We may compare things like how we parent with families who have totally different values or traditions from ours, but the comparisons that get





us really riled up are the ones we make with the folks living next door, or on our child's football team, or at our school. We don't compare our house to the mansions across town; we compare our garden to the gardens on our street. I'm not swimming against Katie Ledecky's times, I'm just interested in the stranger in the lane next to me.

When we compare, we want to be the best or have the best of our group. The comparison mandate becomes this crushing paradox of 'fit in and stand out!' It's not be yourself and respect others for being authentic, it's 'fit in, but win'. I want to swim the same workout as you, and beat you at it.

Many researchers talk in terms of upward and downward comparisons. Specifically, Alicia Nortje writes, 'When we engage in upward social comparison, we compare ourselves to someone who is (perceived to be or performing) better than we are. In contrast, when we engage in downward social comparison, we compare ourselves to someone who is (perceived to be or performing) worse than we are. The direction of the comparison doesn't guarantee the direction of the outcome. Both types of social comparison can result in negative and positive effects.'

Most of us assume that upward comparisons always leave us feeling 'not enough' and downward comparisons make us feel 'better than'. But researcher Frank Fujita writes, 'Social comparisons can make us happy or unhappy. Upward comparisons can inspire or demoralise us, whereas downward comparisons can make us feel superior or depress us. In general, however, frequent social comparisons are not associated with life satisfaction or the positive emotions of love and joy but are associated with the negative emotions of fear, anger, shame and sadness.' These are important findings because, regardless of the different outcomes, in the end, comparing ourselves to others leads us to fear, anger, shame and sadness.

Here's what makes all of this really tough: Many social psychologists consider social comparison something that happens to us.

Fujita writes, 'From this perspective, when we are presented with another person who is obviously better or worse off, we have no choice but to make a social comparison. It can be hard to hear an extremely intelligent person on the radio, or see an extremely handsome one in the grocery store, or participate on a panel with an expert without engaging in social comparison no matter how much we would like not to (Goethals, 1986, p272). Even if we do not choose whether or not to make a comparison, we can choose whether or not to let that comparison affect our mood or self-perceptions.'

Whenever I find myself in comparison mode, I think back to an *Unlocking Us* podcast conversation



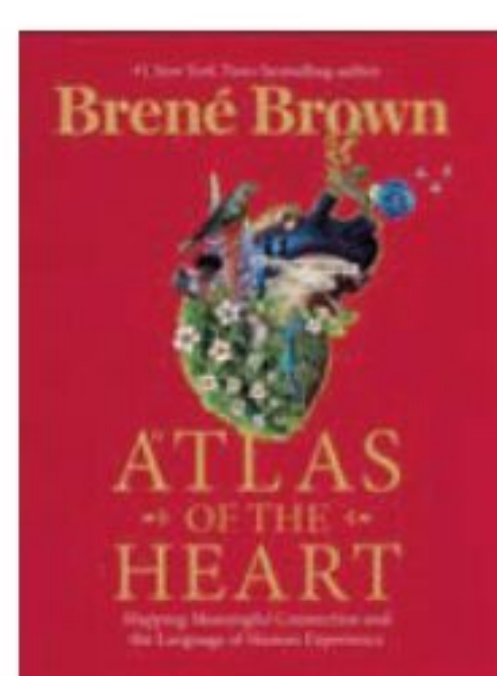
*"Even if we do not choose whether or not to make a comparison, we can choose whether or not to let that comparison affect our mood or self-perceptions"*





that I had with my friend, Scott Sonenshein, about his wonderful book *Stretch* (HarperCollins, £20). Sonenshein is an organisational psychologist, a researcher and a professor at Rice University. In the book and on the podcast, he talks about the popular comparison cliché ‘the grass is always greener on the other side’ and the idea that people spend a lot of time and money trying to get their grass pristine because they want to outdo their neighbours.

As someone who can fall prey to comparing myself and my life to edited and curated Instagram feeds, I laughed so hard when he told me that due to the physics of how grass grows, when we peer over our fence at our neighbour’s grass, it actually does look greener, even if it is truly the same lushness as our own grass. I mean, does it get better than that? The grass actually does look greener on the other



*This is an extract from 'Atlas Of The Heart: Mapping Meaningful Connection And The Language Of Human Experience' by Brené Brown (Vermillion, £20)*

side, but that means nothing comparatively because it’s all perspective.

So the bad news is that our hardwiring makes us default to comparison – it seems to happen to us rather than be our choice.

The good news is that we get to choose how we’re going to let it affect us. If we don’t want this constant automatic ranking to negatively shape our lives, our relationships and our future, we need to stay aware enough to know when it’s happening and what emotions it’s driving. My new strategy is to look at the person in the lane next to me, and say to myself, as if I’m talking to them, ‘Have a great swim.’ That way, I acknowledge the inevitable and make a conscious decision to wish them well, and return to my swim. So far, it’s working pretty well.



Coaching in action

# “How do I begin to change the habits of a lifetime?”

Last month, we met Maria,\* who sought help from Kim Morgan, the award-winning coach, after realising that people pleasing had stolen her voice in her extended family. We catch up with her at her second session





## Session two...

**M**aria arrived for our second session in a solemn mood. 'I've been reading the books and resources that you recommended about people pleasing, and I've recognised myself on every page. I'm starting to realise that I've been taken advantage of and pushed around all my life,' she said. 'I always believed that if I was reasonable, caring and helpful, people would reciprocate. I thought kindness conquered everything. But it doesn't work like that with my overbearing in-laws. The more I give, the more they take, and the more they take, the more I give, in the hope that they will eventually reciprocate – but they never do. I completely misunderstood that they just want what they want, regardless of

the impact on me. It's hard to comprehend.'

As I listened to Maria, I remembered a phrase used by a therapist I know who specialises in manipulative relationships: 'You think you are in a relationship but, actually, you are in a game.'

'How do I change my ingrained habit of people pleasing and what will be the cost of standing up to my in-laws? What will it do to my marriage if I don't go to their house over the holidays as they demand? Part of me wishes I hadn't come to see you. I feel it has opened a can of worms.'

Maria was overwhelmed. I didn't want her to feel as though I was another person who was pushing her to do something that she didn't want to do. I reminded Maria that in our coaching sessions she had full control, and she didn't need to please me – this time was just for her. I asked her what she wanted, although I knew that this was a difficult question for Maria to answer.

She took a deep breath. 'This isn't just about holiday visits or celebrations now. It's bigger than that. I would like to find out how to stand up for myself, but I want to take it slowly because all these realisations are hard to take in.'

I asked Maria how I would know if she was feeling overwhelmed. For the first time in the session, Maria smiled at me: 'Can we have a "safe word" if it gets too much?' She chose Vera, her mother-in-law's name, which made us both laugh.

I agreed: 'Let's take it slowly and step by step. The smallest changes can make the biggest difference.'

I explained to Maria that the first step would be for her to regain her confidence and sense of self. When you are pushed around and manipulated by other people, your sense of self becomes eroded. Manipulative people often use the following tactics:

- **Pushing you to agree to their rules or share their behaviour, views and values**
- **Questioning and baiting you or making fun of you**
- **Twisting the truth – saying you said things that you didn't say**
- **Discarding you, sidelining you or giving you the silent treatment**
- **Guilt-tripping you**
- **Endless criticism, often**

***"The more I give,  
the more they  
take, and the  
more they take,  
the more I give"***

**positioned as a joke, which can leave you not knowing who you are any more, not being able to express yourself, lacking confidence, feeling fearful of saying or doing the wrong thing, and being overwhelmed by the impossibility of pleasing your emotional manipulator.**

As I was speaking, Maria suddenly shouted 'Vera! That's enough about manipulators! Can we look at how I regain my confidence, please?'

I asked Maria to tell me when and with whom she felt most relaxed and able to be herself. She came alive as she talked about a group of girlfriends she had known for years, who were all nurturing of one another. Maria decided that she was going to ask them if they would be her 'cheerleaders for change', holding her to account, picking up the pieces if things went wrong for her, and reminding her what was great about her.

As we booked the date for our next session, I found myself feeling hopeful that Maria was going to be OK. The biggest sign of progress was that Maria was asking for what she wanted, and I was reminded that one of the most valuable (and under-acknowledged) aspects of a coaching session is that it acts as a safe place for clients to rehearse new behaviour and try out new ways of being, in preparation for use in the outside world.

**Find out how Kim helped Maria recover her confidence and learn to assert herself in the next issue**

***Does this sound like you?  
Turn the page for Kim's  
coaching exercises***





# Work it out

*Grab a pen and complete the exercise below to understand where you set the bar for acceptable behaviour, and how to recover your sense of self-respect*

## Strengthen your boundaries

Boundaries are important because they protect us, keep us safe in relationships and give signals to other people about behaviour that is unacceptable to us. Having clear boundaries demonstrates that we have self-respect. Think about the following list and complete the sentences:

I have the right to... (examples might be: change my mind, say no without feeling guilty, make mistakes)

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---

I will no longer allow...

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I do not choose to spend time with people who...

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If my boundaries are violated, I will...

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If I am asked to do something I don't want to do, I will...

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Under no circumstances, will I...

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Having clear boundaries will enable me to...

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Without boundaries you are like a house with all the doors open: anyone can walk in and take what they want.

## Build an evidence wall

Use flip charts or sticky notes, or create an online document that captures all the evidence you have that you are a good person:

- **Positive words your friends and family (or other people you trust) use to describe you**
- **Positive feedback you have received at work, school or in any other context**
- **All the life experiences you have had and learning you have done**
- **Your strengths**
- **Your values**
- **Your skills**
- **Your hobbies and interests**
- **Your unique qualities**

Step back and look with fresh eyes at all that you are and all that you have to offer.



## SPEAK TO YOURSELF LIKE YOU SPEAK TO YOUR BEST FRIEND

Think about how you talk to yourself. Do you talk to yourself like you talk to your best friend? The chances are (particularly if you are a people pleaser) that you lavish praise on others, give them compliments and forgive them if they make a mistake. How well do you do the same for yourself? Or do you criticise yourself, call yourself names and beat yourself up? Do you focus on your negatives, rather than your positives?

What many of us don't realise is that it doesn't matter who is using these words to us – you or someone else – the effect on our self-esteem is the same.

Start checking your inner voice and speak to yourself like you would speak to your best friend. Congratulate yourself when you have done something well. Praise yourself for being brave. Forgive yourself for small mistakes. Encourage yourself when trying something new.



# A moment of calm

## ASHWAGANDHA

*Replenish, relax and reinvigorate with this most ancient of healing herbs*



**R**eady to put the spring back in your step, fire up your motivation and rejuvenate mind, body and soul? Then this month's herbal hero is a real gem!

Hailing from the nightshade family, ashwagandha has been a steadfast favourite in Indian medicine for centuries, revered by generations of herbalists and renowned for its medicinal prowess. One of the most important herbs in Ayurvedic medicine, this leafy evergreen shrub, with its pops of yellow, orange and red berries, has historically been used to fight fatigue, lower stress, increase energy levels and bolster brainpower.

Chris Etheridge, a medical herbalist and chair of the British Herbal Medicine Association, tells us why ashwagandha is a perfect winter tonic...

### The energiser

'Modern herbalists consider ashwagandha to be an adaptogen,' says Etheridge, 'which describes a herb that helps the body deal with stress. Adaptogens work on a molecular level to restore the status quo in the hypothalamic, adrenal and pituitary glands – which are all involved in stress-management. They're thought to help your body cope with stress by improving your physical and mental resilience. What's more, this

ability to cope with the strains of everyday life reduces anxiety levels and boosts your energy stores, leaving you feeling revived and ready to go. In a world where stress is pretty much unavoidable, it's lovely to have a natural remedy at your fingertips.'

### The memory booster

'As well as its abilities in the stress and anxiety department, ashwagandha's high antioxidant content is thought to stave off free-radical damage, protecting and preserving brain cells,' says Etheridge. 'Some studies show that ashwagandha may even promote the regeneration of nerve cells throughout the brain. This leads to better cognitive health, including concentration and memory recall – something we all need a helping hand with from time to time.' *bhma.info*



*The name ashwagandha is derived from the Sanskrit words for horse and smell, alluding to the root's strong scent and the belief that it gives the strength of a horse to all who consume it.*

## PICK OF THE PRODUCTS

With so many amazing benefits, it's no wonder ashwagandha's popularity is soaring. 'Thankfully, it's readily available, safe and well tolerated by most,' says Etheridge. 'Purchase it in dried form (roots or leaves) to brew, in capsule form or even as a tincture. Due to its unique scent, ashwagandha is rarely used in aromatherapy or any topical creams, ointments or candles.'

For overall wellbeing, try East Meets West Ashwagandha Complex capsules, £18.99, [hollandandbarrett.com](http://hollandandbarrett.com)



For a rejuvenating drink, try Pukka's Peace tea with camomile, lavender, ashwagandha and hemp, £2.99, [pukkaherbs.com](http://pukkaherbs.com)



To give water or smoothies a boost, add Organic Traditions ashwagandha root powder, £9.99, [planetorganic.com](http://planetorganic.com)







PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES



psychologies inspiration

*“I wonder if the snow  
loves the trees and  
fields, that it kisses  
them so gently?”*

*Lewis Carroll*







# 6 SURPRISING WAYS TO *soothe* *anxiety*

Could a new year herald a new  
perspective on your mental health?  
When you can feel the panic rising,  
getting creative with your coping  
skills may be the way forward



## Expert advice



Sophie Mort is a clinical psychologist and author of 'A Manual For Being Human' (Simon & Schuster, £14.99). [drsoph.com](http://drsoph.com)



Ivana Franeckova is a cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) therapist and anxiety coach. [anxietycurse.com](http://anxietycurse.com)

**T**here's something about this time of year that encourages a rethink – of bad habits, fitness levels and cluttered rooms...

You cut back on alcohol or sugar, join a gym or start running and prune your wardrobe and bookshelves – but why limit this burst of energy and re-evaluation to the traditional resolution areas? The way in which you deal with anxiety is probably just as much in need of reassessment.

When you are worried, it can be easy to fall into familiar but unhelpful thinking styles. Perhaps you intentionally avoid the source of your tension, or maybe you repeatedly tell yourself to stop being so irrational. How's that working out for you? More than likely, the negative chatter and sleepless nights have slowly but surely ramped up. 'When we try to block troubling emotions, it can be like blocking a wave. This doesn't stop the wave or disperse its power. It sends it back temporarily, ensuring its return,' explains Sophie Mort, a clinical psychologist.

'It's hard to rationalise your way out of these feelings because, when you are anxious, your frontal lobes – the part of the brain responsible for control and being in the moment – are not fully engaged. Your automatic pilot has

control,' adds Dr Mort. 'That's why it's so hard to "snap out of it", as people often suggest to others who are tense.'

While anxiety is a condition to which we are often genetically predisposed and have likely been suffering from for decades, the past two years won't have helped. A study by the University of Queensland in Australia estimates that cases of anxiety have increased by 26 per cent globally during the pandemic, with women particularly prone to it due to the burden of caregiving responsibilities. Life may slowly be returning to some kind of normal, but that's exactly when your nerves can take a hit, says Dr Mort.

'In a stressful situation, it's just about surviving. The brain is in fight-flight mode, battling for its life. It would be detrimental for it to allow those emotions in,' she explains, 'but when you're emerging from that high stress, the reality of what you've been living through floods in and that's when anxiety hits. I'm seeing it right now with so many people, not just in my clinic, but family, friends and myself.'

Trying to calm those jitters can take a counterintuitive approach. With this in mind, we turned to therapy and the latest science to bring you fresh insight into the calming techniques that truly work:

## Postpone your worry

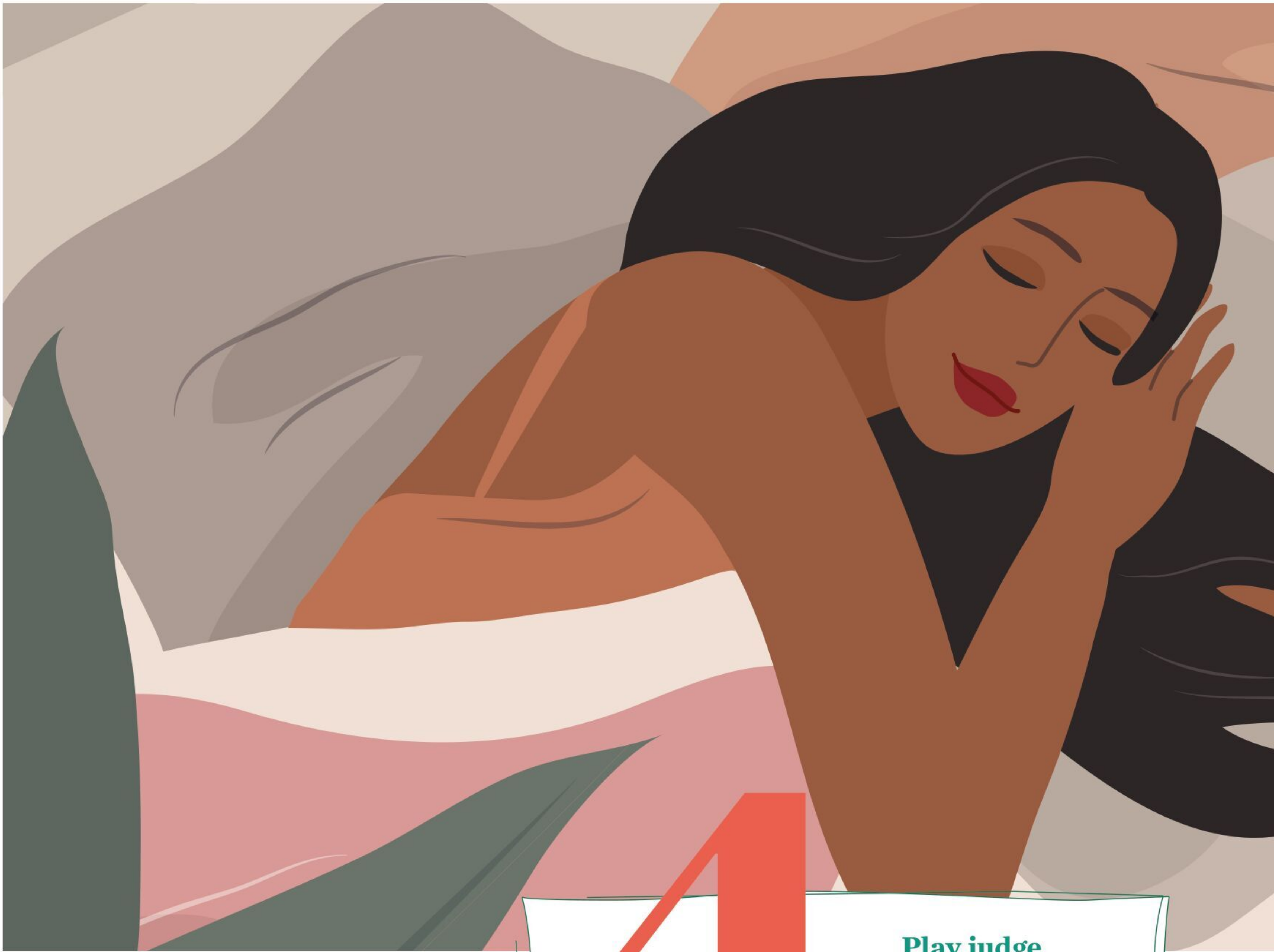
**I**t started as a niggles – your boss questioned your recent absence – but soon it's playing on a loop and pushing your insecurity buttons. 'The negative internal chatterbox is a classic symptom of generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), where a person worries uncontrollably and constantly. It's incredibly draining,' says Ivana Franeckova, a psychotherapist and coach.

Rather than trying to ignore or deny the thought, she suggests a CBT technique where you delay it. 'Setting a daily time specifically for worrying gives you more control over it. When an intrusive thought pops up, note it briefly on paper or voice memo, then save it for later.' And when your 'worry period' arrives? 'Sit in an area that you don't habitually go, away from your desk or bedroom. Often people find worries have lessened or resolved themselves, but if not, take the set time – up to 20 minutes – to process them. Write down the thought, ask yourself if it is factual and can you make a plan to solve it. This practice takes perseverance and you need to set a similar worry time each day, but it's very freeing.'

## 2 Take a chill swill

Dunking your face in icy water may be the last thing you feel like doing when anxiety hits, but it's one of the fastest ways to ground yourself, says Dr Mort. 'The sudden change in temperature and the contact between your nostrils and water activates the mammalian dive reflex. This ancient reflex is a survival strategy that does the opposite of fight-flight. When triggered, your breathing slows, your heart rate drops by 10-25 per cent, a deeply relaxing shift, and blood is sent back from the limbs to the heart, so muscle tension and shakiness drops. It stops a panic attack in its tracks.' Fill a bowl with water and add ice (keep the water above 10°C). Hold your breath and submerge your face for 20-60 seconds. Repeat if necessary.





# 3

## Go for an 'awe walk'

We all know the mood-boosting effects of exercise and nature, but a new study recommends we go one step further by instilling a sense of wonder into our wanderings.

Researchers at the University of California in the US recruited 52 people to go on one 15-minute walk a week. Half were given no parameters, the rest were encouraged to experience awe. This is often felt in a new place or by appreciating mundane details you might normally overlook, starlings overhead or towering skyscrapers, for example. While those in the latter group thought about seeing family, the awe group noticed leaves crunching underfoot. They also reported more positive moods that grew over the eight-week study, suggesting that awe increases with practice. 'Shifting our energy and attention outward instead of inward can lead to significant improvements in wellbeing,' say researchers.

# 4

## Play judge and jury

Your partner has been a bit distant lately and you can't shake the feeling that they have lost interest in you...

It's all too easy to second-guess, mind-read and

catastrophise with no solid proof, which is why a technique used in CBT, 'the court case' or 'thought challenging', can be useful.

'Taking your thought to court helps you realise that thoughts are not facts,' explains Franeckova. 'It encourages you to look for concrete proof of your intrusive thought, rather than simply going on assumptions.' First identify the 'hot thought' that is causing you distress. Then, in your head or on paper, look for factual evidence to support your hot thought (he rarely compliments you; he's always on his phone). Next, look for evidence against it (he treated you to dinner out last weekend). Finally, consider alternative thoughts, perhaps imagining what a friend would say about it (he's been stressed at work; maybe you've also been distant). This kind of reasoned thinking helps you pause and challenge your anxiety.



## 5 **Flunk your way through**

Worriers have a tendency towards perfectionism, which can lead to procrastination, and yet more anxiety. A study by the University of Cambridge has an unlikely solution: give yourself permission to do something badly. The author of the study, Olivia Remes, even gave a TED talk about it. 'You could spend hours deciding how you should do something or what you should do, which can be time-consuming and stressful,' says Dr Remes. 'Instead, just start by doing it badly, without worrying about how it's going to turn out. This will not only make it easier to begin, but you'll find you're completing tasks more quickly. More often than not, you'll find that you're not doing it that badly after all – and if you are, you can fine-tune it.'

## 6

### **Lean in to your anxious feeling**

You need to buy food, but the last time you went to the supermarket, you had a panic attack, so you book a delivery. But avoidance is short-term coping behaviour that feeds anxiety. 'When you avoid something, you are not teaching your brain that you can do it

and survive,' says Dr Mort. She recommends graded exposure, a technique of tolerating anxious feelings that works for social anxiety and panic attacks.

'Imagine you are experiencing the scenario, whether it's the supermarket or a difficult conversation. While thinking it through in detail, do breathing exercises (inhale through your nose for a count of four, exhale through your mouth for six). Watch your anxiety go up like a wave before crashing down, because what goes up must come down, including emotions.'

Amazingly, your brain doesn't differentiate between real and imagined scenarios when triggering the stress response. 'If you imagine something in detail, your brain will think you've done it before, so is better able to tolerate anxiety.' You can increase your tolerance with gradual exposure in a process called habituation. 'If you're scared of the supermarket, sit outside in your car for five minutes, do your breathing exercise, then leave. Next, stand outside the door for five minutes, then leave. Next, go down the first aisle for five minutes, then leave. It's about building up slowly, so your brain doesn't activate the stress response so quickly.'



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Sally x  
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# *Find yourself again*

Navigate the storm of mental ill health and journey towards wellness with greater self-awareness and the belief in a brighter future, writes Caroline Butterwick





Expert  
advice

Marianne Trent is a clinical psychologist and author of *'The Grief Collective: Stories Of Life, Loss & Learning To Heal'* (£10.99).  
goodthinking  
psychology.co.uk



Karin Peeters is a life and career coach and psychotherapist, inspired by Eastern philosophy and Buddhism.  
innerpilgrim.com

**A**m I still me? How can I get over what happened? For a while, I found myself constantly pondering questions such as these, struggling to sleep as my worries plagued me.

Five years ago, I experienced serious mental health issues, and rediscovering and accepting myself has been a challenge. From the pain of realising how my illness had disrupted my life to my need for daily medication, it's taken me time to acknowledge its impact. I feel irrevocably changed by what I've been through, and I'm still making sense of the dissonant parts of myself as someone who's mostly recovered – but still feels the shadows of illness lurking.

Whether, like me, you've experienced a period of mental ill health or been through another difficult life change, such as divorce or redundancy, finding yourself again can be a long road. But many of us can reach a stage of acceptance, and even begin to embrace and find new joy and meaning in our lives in the aftermath of adversity.

***"It's possible to reach a stage of acceptance, and begin to find new joy and meaning in our lives in the aftermath of adversity"***

## The emotional impact

A challenging life event can bring a range of emotions in its wake. 'It's helpful to think about four parts of ourselves,' explains Marianne Trent, a psychologist. 'We've got an angry part, we've got an anxious part, we've got a sad part, and then we've got a more compassionate and balanced part. All these parts are going to have something to say,' she says.

Trent gives the example of how these four parts speak to us after an event such as losing a job: 'The angry part may say, "How dare they make me redundant?", while on the anxious side may be fears around how you'll pay the bills or find a new role. There can be sad thoughts, such as "I thought they liked me at work". But the compassionate part recognises that, actually, "Perhaps the company wasn't

doing very well and it isn't my fault there has been a restructure.'"

Acknowledging these parts of ourselves and our responses is an important part of accepting what has happened in our life and moving forward. Trent uses the word 'assimilate' to describe how we can do this. 'I think in any kind of personal difficulty, you need to give yourself the compassionate permission to lean in to it,' she advises.

Increasingly, I've given myself licence to feel these four parts of myself and the emotions they carry, and to nurture compassionate thoughts about what

I've experienced.

There's grief too, which is a common response to going through a difficult life change. Counselling gave me the space to speak it and recognise the sadness and frustration I felt about what I sometimes thought of as 'the lost years'. My husband is another source of support. He reminds me that 'the lost years' weren't all lost and that there were good things laced through them. That's not to diminish my depression, but to give me context – the fuller picture that hard

times can often hide from us.

Karin Peeters, a life coach and psychotherapist, tells me about the Buddhist parable of 'the second arrow', which is helpful in understanding our reactions to challenging life events. The story goes that life throws something really difficult at us – a job loss or the end of a relationship – and causes us pain, which is the first arrow. But then we shoot ourselves with a second arrow, which brings additional emotions.

'So, for example,' says Peeters, 'if we have suffered in a difficult breakup, we might start thinking, "Oh, it's all my fault," or "I will always be alone". And then on top of being sad about the breakup, we feel completely and utterly shattered in our confidence, and may be full of despair.' If something agonising





happens to us, Peeters explains, we can come to the conclusion in our minds that it means something about ourselves. This is us shooting ourselves with the second arrow.

## Edge forward

So how do we go about easing out the second arrow? Self-compassion is an important part of it. This can involve letting go of self-blame for what's happened, and accepting our emotional responses as an important part of processing the situation.

Trent talks to me about the idea of 'scaffolding' in our lives. A difficult event can shake our foundations, and make us feel as if we have lost our roots and supportive scaffolding.

To start to rebuild our scaffolding, Trent recommends we think about our values and what makes us happy. For me, writing is hugely important. I've also realised that I care about making things better for those who have been through similar challenges.

Challenging life events can shake our sense of identity. 'There is the loss of an old identity,' explains Peeters. She says that we can find ourselves in a space between, where the old no longer applies, but there is nothing yet to replace it. 'And then at some point, there is the new identity. We can never fully go back to that old version of ourselves because we will always be changed, so we can use the opportunity to evolve into a better version of ourselves.'

Finding our new identity and sense of self links back to the idea of connecting with our values. To do this, set aside time to make a list of what matters to you, as well as writing down your goals and dreams in your journal. Perhaps it's spending more time with those you love or getting a job that gives you purpose.

Once you've identified what matters to you, it's time to think about or research how to make these important things happen. Trent cites how some people who lose a job ask what truly matters to them, then start their own successful business. This is a way of taking control of the situation and seeing what we've been through as part of our lives.

Finding yourself again can also mean reflecting on what brings you joy. For me, that was reintroducing socialising,

creativity and learning. These were activities that I struggled with when I was unwell, and finding myself again meant reinstating them, often with a newfound appreciation. How wonderful it can be to have dinner with friends, go hiking with my husband or stay snuggled up in bed with a good book! When we go through a challenging experience, we often lose much of what matters to us in our day-to-day lives. Ask yourself if there's anything you can start to bring back into your present – or if there's something new you'd like to try.

## Reclaim your power

My experience of mental illness weaves itself into so many areas of my life in a positive way these days. I took a major step towards rediscovering and accepting myself when I started working as an 'expert by experience' for a mental health social work charity. In this role, I speak to student social workers about what it's like to live with a mental health condition, and how they can best support their clients who are struggling.

At first, I found it tough to share in this way. But I soon discovered that it helped me make sense of what I've been through, and gave me a feeling of ownership over what at times had been a disempowering period in my life. Suddenly, the traumatic challenges I'd experienced took on a fresh meaning and a new significance.

This can be part of what's called post-traumatic growth, Trent explains. There's this sense that I'm taking something difficult and turning it into a positive part of who I am today. That's

"We can never return to the old version of ourselves, but we can use the opportunity to change for the better"

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not to undermine the suffering that can come with mental illness – and it's important to acknowledge that I'm fortunate to be in a position where I can do this work. But through it, I've come to feel that what I've been through is a part of who I am. It's helped me assimilate a difficult time into my present self in a way that connects with my values and acknowledges what I've endured.

## United we stand

For me, connecting with others who have experienced mental ill health and other psychological conditions helps me accept myself. There's solidarity in sharing our stories and realising that there are like-minded people who understand. Reaching out has brought me treasured friendships and our discussions have inspired practical ideas on how to steer your way through illness.

You may find that it helps to be part of a support group. The internet is a useful space for making connections, from discussion forums to social media. Or maybe an acquaintance who has faced similar pain could help. And, as you reach out, you may find yourself giving others advice, realising what you have learned on your path to recovery.

Whether you reconnect with your values or speak to others, you are worthy of happiness. 'It's learning to give yourself permission to know that you can be happy again in the future,' says Trent. 'You can give yourself permission to live a full life, however that looks for you. And that's not disloyal – it doesn't mean that what you lost didn't matter to you. It's just that, actually, you don't deserve to suffer for ever. You deserve to have a rich, full and enjoyable life.'

Without a doubt, my illness has changed me. At the time, I believed that things would never get better and I was stuck in a tempest that would never pass. But I've gradually come back to myself. My experience of mental ill health is a part of me – one that has shaped so much – and, nowadays, I can take strength from that. Finding myself again has meant recognising the grief and seeing the impact that my illness has had on my life. I'll never forget how I've struggled, but I can celebrate how I've rebuilt a life that I'm proud of, and that brings me great purpose and happiness.



# *Trust is a beautiful thing*



The universe has your back, say modern mystics, although we all have our doubts when neck-deep in troubled waters. Whatever your divine truth, Vee Sey reflects on choosing to believe that all will be well



George Michael said we gotta have it, others say we've got to keep it... We should take a leap of it and others call it blind... Faith. I am not talking about hope and optimism, faith's

wispier sisters, but the unshakeable confidence that there is something more to this merry dance that we call life. Faith is the unquestioning certainty that a higher power is the benevolent creator and we are part of a grand and, yes, completely secret, scheme. I want some of that, because such conviction means our earthly trials are merely stepping stones to the pearly gates of our choosing, before a blissful eternity with our dearly departed and a host of harp-playing angels.

Studies reveal that religious people are happier, and others find that atheists are more intelligent, which is hardly Revelations. The peace of mind that comes with faith in our gods, our ancestors, the universe or even the power of Grayskull creates a vast expanse for joy where worry has left the building, yet the scientific improbability of it all resonates with the doubting Thomases. Scoff at my woo-woo if you like, but I'd go for acceptance every time: to know that everything will be OK in the end, which isn't really the end – amen to that.

When I was a churchgoer, aged 13, I would skip down to the Lord's house in my hand-me-down best to listen to a sermon that I did not understand, delivered by an imposing reverend with a pompadour befitting The King himself. It felt wonderful to be part of a community and sing a few rousing songs, while stifling my giggles at congregants with their blinking eyes closed, waving their hands in praise as their bellies popped out of their trousers. The exceptional home bakes and tea, served by kind ladies in floral frocks and Lady Di shoes, were nice too. So convinced was I, so warmed by the welcome, that I

begged my mother to let me further my ecclesiastical wisdom at Bible study, but it was on a Wednesday night, with wine, and I don't mean sacramental. Youth club on Friday evenings was more appropriate – a PG film followed by French kissing boys who graced us with their presence on 50cc motorbikes.

I outgrew my devotion to the beliefs of my childhood, but the quest for answers, spiritual fulfilment and comfort remains. Oprah Winfrey is one of my heroes and she speaks convincingly of her unfailing trust in God. I think, like any of us, she knows that hope is a precursor to faith and both are guiding lights to peace. I love her rich stories of growing up in Mississippi in the Baptist church, and what I wouldn't give to have that kind of faith again – but I also know my pious days were more about belonging, filling time and hormones. My mind is open, however, and if it's good enough for Oprah, who are we to judge where people find the strength to keep putting one foot in front of the other?

A hallowed sense of spirituality can be found in diverse places. I feel it when I light votive candles of remembrance in every church that lets them flicker, and the majesty of the architecture and art also speak to my soul. I feel it when the awesomeness of nature pierces like a bolt of undeniable truth through my cool scepticism: I had the privilege of seeing the Grand Canyon once, and stood dumbstruck, infinitesimal and humbled in the face of its magnificence. Whoever threw that wonder together has my vote. It left me in no doubt that there is might, mysticism and mystery that I do not comprehend and, sometimes, I don't need to join the dots with proof.

If implicit trust in the big sacred picture is too much to ask as we enter another year of the unknown, perhaps the words of Martin Luther King Jr will help you, as they do me: 'Faith is taking the first step, even when you don't see the whole staircase.' @VeeJaneSey







# Recognise Seasonal Affective Disorder

We're debunking the myths, challenging the taboos and offering the tools we need to deal with some of the most misunderstood mental health issues affecting us, our families and friends

**W**inter is in its full snow-booted stride and, for many, the crisp chill of this most dramatic of seasons can bring genuine happiness. However, for others, the cold weather and darkness can have a profound impact on mental health, making it a time to be endured rather than enjoyed.

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a type of depression characterised by the fact that it comes and goes in a seasonal pattern. This month, Radha Modgil, a medical doctor, and experts from the Mental Health Foundation, explain more about SAD. They offer reassurance, discuss its causes and symptoms, and share tips on how we can help ourselves and others.

## What is SAD?

'SAD affects around six per cent of the population, with women most likely to feel its effects,' says Dr Modgil. 'Many people ask what makes SAD different from other types of depression and the main distinction is the seasonal element. SAD has many similar symptoms to other forms of depression, making it difficult to diagnose at times, but your GP will probably see if they can spot a pattern – whereby the depression appears at the same time of year – and note if you experience periods without depression. For some people, the

symptoms can be mild, while for others day-to-day life is severely affected.'

## What causes SAD?

'The exact cause of SAD is not fully understood, with many people attributing it to something as simple as "the winter blues", but it can be rather more complex than that,' explains Dr Radha. 'The main theory is that a lack of sunlight during the dark winter months may throw a part of your brain, the hypothalamus, out of kilter.

'The hypothalamus is responsible for the production of melatonin, which makes you feel sleepy. It is believed that those who experience SAD produce too much melatonin, causing them to feeling excessively tired. At the same time, serotonin levels in the body may decrease due to the lack of light. Serotonin is responsible for your mood, appetite and sleep, and a lack of it can put your whole system out of rhythm. Finally, your internal body clock – also known as your circadian rhythm – relies on sunlight to regulate itself and perform its many important functions, which means that low-level winter light can cause problems.

'However, it's worth noting that SAD, while predominantly seen in winter, can be felt by people during other seasons and times of the year,' adds Dr Modgil.

## REACH OUT

'If you're experiencing the symptoms of SAD, as well as taking the simple steps mentioned opposite, you should visit your GP,' says Dr Radha. 'They will be able to offer advice and refer you for different kinds of therapy, if necessary. They may discuss lifestyle tweaks, medication, talking therapies such as CBT or even light therapy, where a special lamp called a light box is used to simulate exposure to sunlight. Light boxes are not usually available on the NHS, but your doctor will be able to discuss whether using one might be appropriate for you.'

## IDENTIFY THE SIGNS

### The main symptoms of SAD include:

- A persistent low mood
- Irritability
- A loss of pleasure or interest in normal activities
- Feelings of despair or guilt
- Feeling frequently tired or lethargic during the day
- Sleeping for longer
- Craving carbs and sugar, and gaining weight





*“Throw open the curtains and blinds and move your chair closer to the window to reap the benefits of natural light, even on the dullest winter days”*

## HOW TO HELP YOURSELF AND OTHERS

**‘Thankfully, there are a number of simple things you can try at home that may help improve symptoms of SAD,’ says Dr Radha...**

● **Go outside.** ‘You don’t need blazing sunshine to reap the benefits of natural light. Get out and about as much as possible, even on dull days – think morning and lunchtime walks or even a spell in the garden. Even 15 to 20 minutes outdoors can make all the difference.’

● **Revamp your living space.** ‘A few moderations to your living space can let in more light. Open your curtains that bit wider and roll blinds all the way up to the top of the window. Dig out the glass cleaner and give your windows a good polish, and move your favourite reading chair closer to them. Getting as much natural light as you can is essential.’

● **Talk it over.** ‘Finally, help manage your symptoms and keep your spirits up by speaking to friends and family about how you feel. Talking is a fantastic comfort and enlisting the advice and support of loved ones will help you keep on top of things.’



## Lightbulb moments

# Persistence pays

*When the going gets tough and your new year motivation wanes, just keep trucking, encourages Kimberley Wilson, a psychologist and author of 'How To Build A Healthy Brain'*

**H**appy new year! Sure, on the face of it 1 January is just another winter's day but, imbued with all our hopes for the coming year, the sky seems to be that little bit brighter, and I can't help but be swept along on the wave of optimism that a fresh start brings.

Of course, we all know the stats: most resolutions will be abandoned by mid-February but, from where I sit, that isn't due to a lack of desire. The majority of people just don't know quite how much their brains dislike change. So, to help you put your best foot forward, here are my resolution fundamentals:

First up: Motivation is a false idol. Motivation is great for getting you started, but it won't keep you going once the enthusiasm and novelty wear off. This is where consistency comes in. You don't earn a qualification just by rocking up at the final exam and hoping for the best – it takes turning up to lessons and doing the homework repeatedly over time.

Consistency. Is. Everything. The problem with consistency? It's terribly boring. So your first take-home is to keep going – but don't expect it to be fun. If you can tolerate boredom you'll significantly increase your chances of success.

Secondly, your brain will resist change. Essentially, your brain uses up an inordinate amount of energy just doing its basic functions, that is, keeping you alive. Every conscious decision you make on top of this takes additional energy. This is why, whenever possible, your brain automates your behaviour and creates habits. Habits are energy-efficient,



whereas new skills or behaviour require the creation of neural pathways in your brain. There are two takeaways here:

**1** Your brain will resist investing energy in these new pathways, so falling back into your old ways doesn't necessarily mean you don't want it enough or that you lack willpower – it's just your brain trying to save energy.

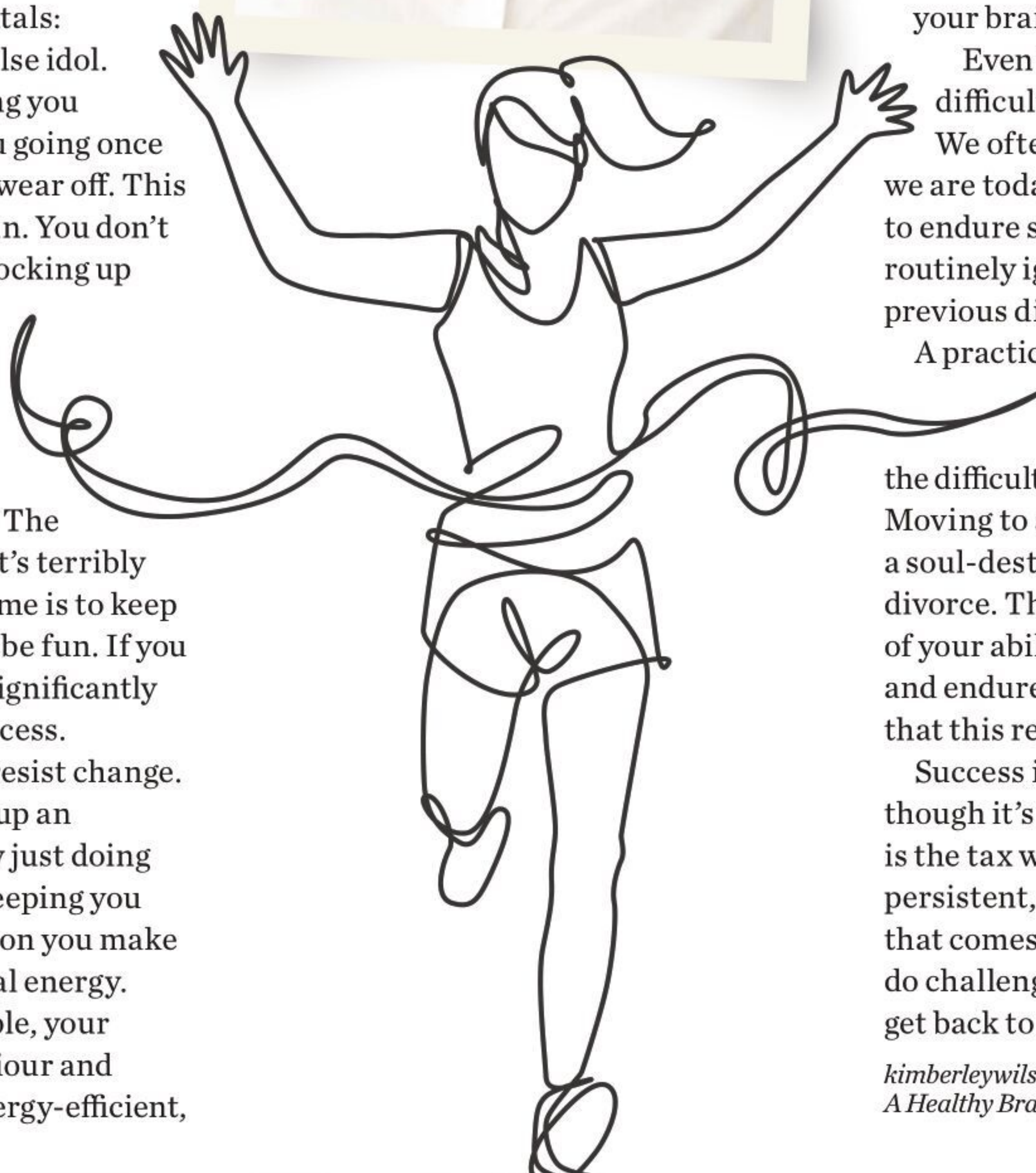
**2** The energy it takes to build new behaviour is what is perceived psychologically as 'effort'. This means that the point at which you start to feel that you are having to try with that Italian revision is the point at which your brain is changing.

Even though change is boring and difficult, you can do difficult things. We often forget that to be where we are today, we have typically had to endure some kind of hardship. We routinely ignore or underplay our previous displays of courage and tenacity.

A practice that I have found incredibly effective to counter this is to have clients write a list of all the difficult things they have come through: Moving to a new school, a tough degree, a soul-destroying job, an acrimonious divorce. There are examples in your life of your ability to engage with difficulty and endure. Up against that, chances are that this resolution is within your grasp.

Success is about turning up even though it's boring, accepting that effort is the tax we pay for change, and being persistent, all fuelled by the self-belief that comes from knowing that you *can* do challenging things. And now, I must get back to my Italian revision...

*kimberleywilson.co; @foodandpsych; 'How To Build A Healthy Brain' (Hodder & Stoughton, £16.99)*





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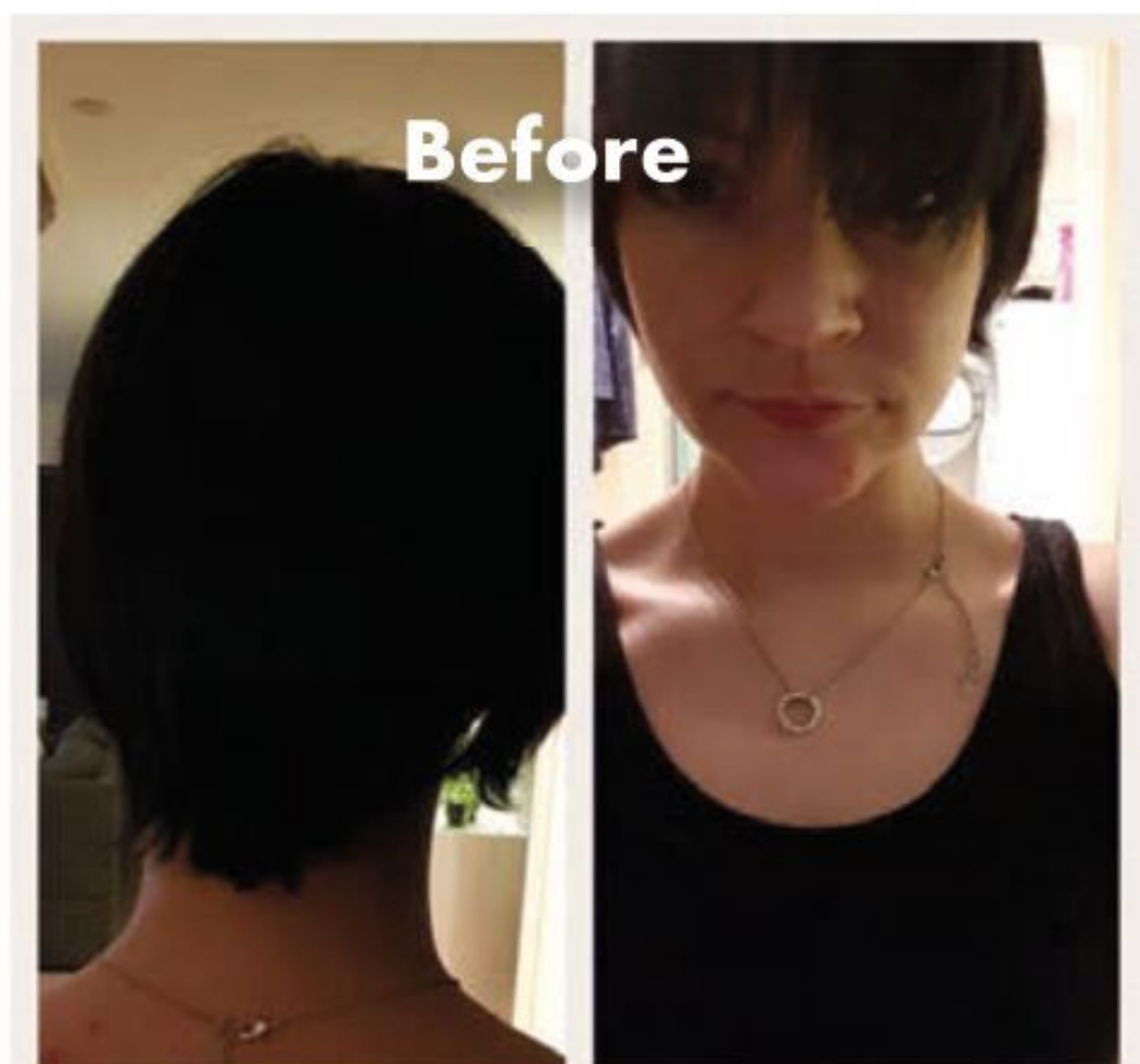
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**Mia is 31 years old and works within the beauty industry. She knows everything about beauty and health both inside and out – “I’ve tried a little of each, but I have to say that I’m really impressed with what Hair Gro™ has done for my hair.”**

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– Around half a year ago I went to the hairdressers and unfortunately my hair got cut too short. My hair in general grows very slowly and I just wanted a ‘tidy up’ trim, but she cut too much off, I didn’t look like me, I was really upset.

### I want long hair back!

– I really wanted long hair again, and I started to think that was never going to happen! But then I saw Hair Gro™ so I thought I would give it a try, I certainly haven’t regretted it.

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### See my amazing results

– I have now used Hair Gro™ for only 2 months and

I’m super impressed and can really see a difference from the first pictures till now. My hair has never grown so much in such a short amount of time, so I recommend it to everyone. I just bought one more box and I hope it continues to grow at the same pace.

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# HOW TO HAVE A *hopeful* NEW YEAR

‘Let us believe in a long year that is given to us new, untouched, full of things that have never been,’ writes the poet Rainer Maria Rilke of the intangible promise of a new year. We can all embrace that power of positivity, says Anita Chaudhuri



**T**hat sense of a blank slate is what has always excited me most about saying goodbye to the old year and ushering in the new. And yet, though I'm a lifelong Hogmanay fan, even I can't help feeling daunted by this one. Everything we've lived through over the past two years has left us bothered and bewildered. I yearn to feel that familiar sense of delicious anticipation but, at the same time, my mind is now a whirling sea of negative what ifs? What will happen with the new Covid variant? What if there are more lockdowns? What if the HGV driver crisis has an impact on supplies of my beloved Tunnock's Caramel Wafers? The daily bombardment of negative news headlines doesn't exactly help.

So how might we generate a sense of optimism to carry us through 2022 and beyond? Is it foolish even to try? According to Bernadette Russell, author of *How To Be Hopeful* (Elliott & Thompson, £9.99), the first step is to make a conscious decision to work on a mindset shift.

'In order to survive, humans have a natural negativity bias that causes us to pay attention to perceived dangers or threats. There's no blame or shame attached to that – it's just the way we're made. But that's why we have to actively choose to feel more hopeful, and make it a daily habit,' says Russell.

The idea was a new one to me, perhaps because I have always associated the experience of feeling hopeful with positive external events. Someone tells you of a potential new work opportunity or an attractive person asks you on a date, ergo the future looks brighter. I'm not sure that I understand how to conjure hope out of thin air. But Russell observes that from her research, far from living a happy life, it is actually going through difficult times that helps others, herself included, to become more hopeful.

'Most people I interviewed for the book had found hope through the experience of living through despair and sadness – hope

became something they learned to reach for during dark times,' she explains. By her own admission, Russell had a 'fairly traumatic childhood' and taught herself early on how to use hope as a shield against the problems of the world. 'From a young age, I taught myself to look for the light and find the good in people and circumstances,' she says. 'Hope can be fuel to move forward with your life.'

There is great power in acceptance and pushing through difficulty, believes the therapist Shomit Mitter. 'Building tolerance for the hard stuff in the world makes us stronger. We struggle to lift a heavy weight in the gym or study for a difficult exam, and by accepting that we need to go through it to build physical or mental strength, we come out the other side.' Ironically, if we can learn to accept life's difficulties, he believes that we are more able to take action to change the situation. 'Acceptance isn't about being resigned to a situation that you don't like – far from it,' says Mitter. 'It just means that we can approach life from a place of peace rather than a place of pain. If you can acknowledge, "OK I'm going through challenging times: How can I learn to benefit from what's going on?" that's a far more helpful attitude.'

***“Work on a mindset shift... we have to actively choose to feel more hopeful”***







## *The challenge of change*

In his work, Mitter meets many clients who are struggling to make meaningful changes in their lives. Why is change so hard? 'The short answer is that we are creatures of habit,' says Mitter, 'and however uncomfortable our life circumstances might be in the here and now, we often choose to stick with what we know rather than face the uncertainty of something new – even if it could be a change for the better. It's the one thing I find hardest to get my clients to overcome: their reluctance to change.'

What's behind this unwillingness is how we see ourselves in the world. 'The single biggest motivator that impels us is identity. We look in the mirror and tell ourselves, this is who I am, this is how I find meaning in life, and we get attached to that,' says Mitter. 'If we make a change, even for the better, our bearings change. Who will my friends be? Will they still like me? Will I even have friends any more?'

This block to change certainly rings true for me. For years, I longed to make a career switch into photography. I fobbed myself off with the usual excuses – no time, no money, fear of failure. But the truth was that so much of my identity was bound up with being a journalist that I found it destabilising to comprehend doing anything else. Not to mention that, as an extrovert, I derived great validation and meaning from my professional peer group, many of whom had become long-established friends.

Ironically, when I did take the leap to successfully apply to art school last year, I discovered an energised sense of self and, as well as creating many new friendships, I have had lots of meaningful conversations with old colleagues who are thinking about making similar pivots in their personal or professional lives.





## Focus on the future


In order to feel more hopeful about the future, a good place to start is to establish a visualisation practice. This is different from idle daydreaming in that it involves creating a daily ritual, ideally as part of your morning routine, as popularised by Hal Elrod in the bestselling book *The Miracle Morning* (John Murray, £10.99).

'There is something revolutionary about the proposal that we consciously try to imagine an ideal future,' says Bernadette Russell. 'Culturally, it's at odds with how we're trained to think. I'm interested in science fiction and I find it fascinating that the genre is awash only with dystopian visions. Given that right now we are experiencing climate disasters and being bombarded with negativity, it takes great courage to think about a brighter world.'

It's what inspired Russell to work with a group of artists in Hackney, east London, on the Tomorrowland project, where participants created a vision of London in 2050. 'It was a lovely exercise to try and imagine a better future in a non-dystopian way; to show that there are other, positive stories to tell, not just tales of disaster.'

Shomit Mitter believes there is another reason that many of us struggle to spend much time visualising an ideal future. 'We are fixated on the past because we have memory. The past is fixed – if it contains anything traumatic, those will override the many happy events.' Our innate tendency to pay attention to danger can keep us transfixed only on what might go wrong with our plans to create a better future.

'The challenge is to keep reminding yourself that the past does not exist anywhere but in your mind,' says Mitter. And the future does not exist anywhere either, except in your imagination. But it does offer something the past does not – choices. That is a huge gift. Focus on that and suddenly you will see: I could do X, Y or Z – and you can have fun with it,' he adds.



"There is something revolutionary about the proposal that we consciously try to imagine an ideal future"









## Make a vision board

Terry Bowen is a coach who regularly runs 'Cut and Paste Your Future' vision board workshops. 'Visualisation is important because when dreams only exist in your mind, they tend to fizzle out. If you have a visual representation of what you want to achieve,' he says, 'it gives you an incentive to remember what it is you really want, and that can inform your daily priorities.'

By making a vision board, a mood board of your future, you focus all your senses and creativity on what you want your future to look like. 'A vision board gives you something to look forward to, especially if you're having a bad day,' says Bowen.

An advocate of making a physical board with paper, magazines and glue, Bowen believes that although you can make such

boards on Pinterest or other digital platforms, having a physical object to look at is more powerful. Indeed, he used this technique to attract a new partner, now his husband, into his life a few months after following the process.

'Think of how many photos you have on the camera roll of your phone. How often do you look at any of them, as opposed to a photo that you put on the wall? Making it by hand, you take your time searching through magazines and printing out images from the internet of things that you want to have in your life. You are priming your brain to pay attention. Also, you're more likely to keep something you've made by hand and can look back on it in years to come to see how many things you have manifested.'

***"By making a vision board, a mood board of your future, you focus all your senses and creativity on what you want your future to look like"***



## Commit to action

All this dreaming and scheming is all very well, but it's unlikely to get you very far unless you take action – something the bestselling book *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne (Simon & Schuster, £16.99) failed to address. 'The trouble is that people are often very cagey about taking any action unless they can see the whole way ahead,' observes Shomit Mitter. 'In reality, that's rarely possible. It's only by taking the first step, and being open to opportunities that things start to change. You go from A to B, and when you reach B, something surprising happens that you could never have predicted, and that takes you further towards your goal. If you want to succeed, you need to take bold action, even though you can't see how you are going to achieve what you want.'

Obviously, if you want to, say, run a marathon, it is logical that you must move your body in some way to get started. But there is another reason why taking action is important. 'Actions signal to the deep unconscious mind that you are really serious about changing,' says Mitter. 'If I merely announce I want to give up smoking every day, that's not going to have an effect. But if I throw away my cigarettes and lighter, my subconscious sits up and pays attention: "Ooh, she is really serious about this, I'd better help her out," it says.'

If the path to achieving our goal is less linear, or if we are feeling dispirited, knowing what action to take in the first place can feel overwhelming. 'When I decided I wanted to meet a new partner, I wasn't sure what action to take. So, the first thing I did was focus on how I wanted to feel in this new relationship,' says Bowen. The words that came to him were space, peace and contentment. This gave him clarity about what he needed to do.

Taking an inventory of his life, he realised that he needed to make changes to his frenetic, overbooked life and cluttered home. 'I needed to make space in all areas. I started saying no to things I didn't absolutely love doing, and I freed up my overbooked diary. I made time for myself to have fun and enjoy myself, which changed the energy I was putting out into the world. Very quickly, I started dating again and, a few months later, I met the right guy.'

**[shomitmitter.com](http://shomitmitter.com); [bernadetterussell.com](http://bernadetterussell.com);  
[terrybowen.co.uk](http://terrybowen.co.uk)**



A photograph of a person's arm reaching out horizontally over a body of water, with a hilly coastline in the background under a soft sky. The arm is wearing a dark green knitted sleeve and a striped wristband. The hand is open, palm down, reaching towards the horizon.

# 3 STEPS TO HOPE

*by Bernadette Russell*

## **1. Set a goal:**

If you're feeling hopeless and overwhelmed by a seemingly insurmountable problem, finding a purpose can help you by providing another focus. Think of something you've always wanted to do – it doesn't have to be something epic such as climbing Everest, and it doesn't have to cost much (or indeed any) money. It could be finishing that half-read book or running a 5K, filling your balcony with herbs or putting up some shelving. Choose something that excites or interests you, something that you can look forward to doing.



## 2. Go story hunting:

What interests you about where you live? Start with a building, a street or a name that intrigues you. Follow that lead and look into its history. Maybe you're wondering who Tom Smith Close was named after... Or why that local park was never built upon... Or what that old place on the corner was originally conceived as... The way things look around us now has so often been shaped by local people stepping in and making things happen. It shows us positive change in living colour.

## 3. Find something to look forward to:

If you've had a difficult day, give yourself one thing to anticipate tomorrow, and think about it before you go to sleep. It needn't be much: a cup of hot chocolate, a catch-up with a friend or a long bath. Sometimes having even a small treat planned can deliver us through difficult days and give us hope: 'Tomorrow will be better; I have this to look forward to.' *How To Be Hopeful* by Bernadette Russell (Elliott & Thompson, £9.99)



# I PUT ON MY PARTY DRESS TO SPREAD POSITIVITY

**Alex Lloyd, 40, a married journalist from York and mother of two sons, shifted her gloomy mindset by dressing up for joy, and charity...**



No matter how positive you are as a person, there will be times when you succumb to pessimism.

Mine came in January last year, as I endured another Groundhog Day of freezing walks through muddy parks with my two sons, Ralph and Max, then aged four and 18 months. Pandemic fatigue had set in and we were all miserable.

The mental load of lockdown, homeschooling, running my own business and a cancelled Christmas reunion with my family meant the miserable January weather was a challenge too far. Instead of my usual can-do attitude, my mood was defeatist and low – a state reflected in my joyless daily uniform of thermals, jumpers and snow boots. I'd become trapped in a cycle of negativity.

But as I scrolled through Instagram one evening, I saw a picture of a friend's toddler in a party outfit. Her mother said that she was dressing Isobel in her fancy clothes because she hadn't had a chance to wear them due to lockdown. If she didn't enjoy them now, she said, she would outgrow them and they'd go to waste.

Seeing that little girl in her finery made me smile. The pandemic had demonstrated clearly that life was unpredictable and



*Alex and her boys spread some positivity on the first Party Dress Day*



you had to seize chances for enjoyment when they came – why save favourite clothes for best when you could take pleasure from them every day?

I didn't have party dresses to put on my boys – but I had my own. They had been hanging unloved in the wardrobe for too long, thanks to pregnancies, maternity leave and a lack of special events. So, that Saturday, I swapped my usual jeans for a zebra-print dress I had yet to wear.

My mood changed with my clothes. As I put on make-up and blow-dried my hair, I felt attractive and hopeful. I'm not one for selfies, but I shared a picture of the outfit on social media and explained why I was wearing it. Friends confessed that they were feeling down and dowdy too.

It gave me an idea: 'We should have a dedicated day to dress up,' I suggested. It was a small thing but it seemed to capture imaginations – so I set out to make it happen.

Having a positive project to attack was transformational. I could feel my mojo returning as I hastily set up social media accounts for the event, took promotional pictures and spread the word in between teaching phonics and making the kids' tea.

Less than a week later, on 6 February 2021, I put on a yellow frock and we celebrated the very first Party Dress Day.

I kept it simple. Anyone who wanted to join in could be part of this socially distanced celebration. They just had to wear a fun, feelgood outfit on the designated day, whether they were cleaning the bathroom, walking the dog or having a kitchen disco. Participants could share photos using our hashtag #partydressday.

Alongside encouraging self-care and togetherness, I used Party Dress Day as an opportunity to help those who had been bereaved during the pandemic. We'd just passed the awful milestone of 100,000 lives lost to Covid, and families were grieving in the cruellest circumstances, unable to have hugs or proper funerals.



Fundraising in her wedding frock



The dress that started it all



Encouraging others to ditch the jeans and jumpers!

So I asked for donations to The Good Grief Trust, a charity dedicated to making sure people who are bereaved are not alone. Given that it was organised so quickly, I set a fundraising target of £100 to start with, and expected it would just be me and a few loved ones taking part.

But positivity breeds positivity, and my enthusiasm spread. In the end, we had neighbours, friends of friends, Instagram influencers and complete strangers – from Edinburgh to Dorset – involved.

I made a Spotify playlist to soundtrack the day, wore three different outfits and celebrated with champagne when we raised £1,710. It was exhausting, hectic and the most fun I'd had in ages.

Knowing that everyone was united in a shared cause and enjoying themselves was uplifting. We couldn't be together physically, but we could be in spirit.

Within days, people were asking if we could do it again, so on Easter Saturday, I donned a different dress, put my lads in new shirts and bow ties, and held a second one. The success of the first event gave me the confidence to promote it far and wide. I was interviewed on BBC Radio York and BBC Look North, and chosen to select my *Desert Island Disco* tracks for Lauren Laverne's breakfast show on Radio 6. I even pledged to put on my wedding dress for the first time in 10 years if we raised another £1,000 – which we did!

It was a fantastic feeling when The Good Grief Trust said our fundraising would mean 100 hospital trusts would be supplied with condolence and signposting cards to ensure bereaved families knew where to find support.

Taking a chance on starting Party Dress Day and regaining my positive mindset was a valuable reminder that giving ideas a chance is good for the soul, and infectious to those around you.

If you can overcome negativity and give things a shot, who knows what you might achieve.

Party Dress Day 2022, in aid of The Good Grief Trust, takes place on Friday, 28 January. Find out more at [justgiving.com/fundraising/partydressday](https://justgiving.com/fundraising/partydressday) and on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter @partydressday



# WHAT DO YOU NEED FOR HOPE TO FLOURISH?

If you're struggling to feel energised about the year ahead, take our test to find out what's blocking your natural optimism, and how to make hope spring eternal!

Circle the answers that most closely apply to you, then add up the symbols. Read the section, or sections, you circled most to find out what you need for a hopeful new year

## 1 Hope for you is tied up with

- ♥ Making a difference .....
- ♦ A sense of certainty .....
- Knowing you belong .....
- Being your best self .....

## 2 Your biggest barrier to change right now is

- Finding headspace for it .....
- ♥ Knowing what to do .....
- ♦ Confidence it will go OK .....
- Having the right support .....

## 3 On low days, you can often feel

- ♥ Trapped .....
- Alone .....
- ♦ Panicky .....
- Overwhelmed .....

## 4 Right now, you'd get a boost from

- Having a break .....
- Connecting with new people .....
- ♦ Something going well .....

- ♥ Doing something different .....

## 5 You're often described as

- ♥ Conscientious .....
- ♦ A worrier .....
- Caring .....
- A perfectionist .....

## 6 If you could, you'd dedicate next year to

- Looking after yourself .....
- ♥ Finding your purpose .....
- ♦ Developing your confidence .....
- Meeting new people .....

## 7 You admire people who seem to

- ♥ Be open to taking risks .....
- ♦ Live in the moment .....
- Always find their tribe .....
- Settle for good enough .....

## 8 When people ask you how you are, the honest answer would be

- Lonely .....
- Stressed .....
- ♥ Lost .....
- ♦ Anxious .....

## 9 You're at your most hopeful when you

- ♥ Step out of your routine .....
- ♦ Overcome a big challenge .....
- Are with the right people .....
- Have had some time to relax .....

## 10 Next year, you'd like to feel a bit more

- ♦ Carefree .....
- Understood .....
- In control .....
- ♥ Alive .....

Turn the page to find out  
what you need to increase  
your hopefulness









# What will boost your optimism?



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♥

## *Inspiration*

It's not surprising that you find it hard to feel hopeful about the year ahead if all it seems to hold is more of the same. Knowing in your heart of hearts that you've been coasting, or that your routine is well overdue a shake-up, doesn't always mean you'll be any clearer about what changes to make.

You might put it down to a lack of motivation, but the reasons we stay in stuck mode are usually far more complex. For some, it's about unravelling others' expectations for ourselves from our own passions, or getting a perspective on a drive to do the 'right thing' and always be responsible. And sometimes the most productive thing to do is to do nothing. Give yourself permission to be in information-gathering mode, with no immediate pressure to come up with any answers; it's amazing what we notice when we quiet a busy, planning mind and really pay attention to what's going on around us.

There is much to be learned by simply noticing what piques your interest, or what triggers moments of feeling energised. You might find yourself saying yes to things you normally say no to, or feeling drawn to new experiences – even small shifts can help you feel more inspired about the future.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♦

## *Permission*

For you, feeling more hopeful starts with letting go of your doubts about whether you will cope if things don't go exactly to plan. You might rely on your analytical mind to think through every possible scenario to help you feel prepared for what is to come – but when the focus is what might go wrong, catastrophising can become a default mode of thinking, generating feelings of hopelessness that undermine your mood and motivation, as well as dampen your joy.

It's not surprising then that feeling energised or even hopeful about the future makes you feel uneasy. Overthinkers are often hard on themselves, reacting to new possibilities with thoughts about how they'll mess up, or won't be able to cope. But the irony is that by protecting yourself from uncertainty, you're denying yourself the chance to grow and learn from difficult situations. And in your determination to prepare yourself for future pain and disappointment, are you missing out on fully experiencing the joy of the present moment?

It's time to give yourself permission to be hopeful, and to nurture the brave part of you that seeks a life less ordinary – with all the uncertainty that may bring. Treat it as an experiment – can you swap microplanning and second-guessing for curiosity and acceptance about what lies ahead?





IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ●

## Connection

When relationships feel limiting, your outlook on life can be affected. It's also hard to feel optimistic when you're feeling isolated or lonely. It may be time to think about your key relationships. Other people's approaches to the future can stifle our own hope and optimism, so think about who supports you and who puts the brakes on your dreams when you share them. Sometimes the people who care about us the most can seem the least supportive of our plans and dreams, especially if they involve change or taking a leap. They may be convinced they have your best interests at heart, but often they are responding from a place of anxiety or fear.

Although the root of optimism is our own mindset, it's also hard to generate hope in a vacuum. Sometimes we just need new energy in our lives to feel inspired about the future, and confident that it will bring new opportunities. Start by thinking about what's missing from your existing relationships – are you looking for support from people who truly get you? Or is it about connecting at a deeper level with people you care about? Make forging connections your priority, and hope may flourish, along with your relationships.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ■

## Space

When your default mode is super-busy, the future can look like a long to-do list of tasks. And feeling like there won't be enough time to achieve what you want can stifle hope and optimism because it depletes your confidence in embracing anything new in your life. You may be struck by a sense that time is whizzing by and yet you feel as if you never make any progress. A sign that you have become used to existing in overwhelm mode is constantly feeling tired and, because stress is a massive drain on your energy, it's hard to feel hopeful when your energy levels are depleted.

Mental energy is closely linked to physical resilience, and a lifestyle upgrade may be long overdue: Has your busyness squeezed out precious time for those daily habits that keep you feeling physically and mentally well, such as eating healthily, staying active and making time to unwind and relax? The trouble is that when your mind feels noisy and cluttered, it's not always easy to see what needs to change, and what you can let go of to feel better. Start small – can you find 10 minutes in your day to journal and think about where in your life you can create more space? When you feel yourself resisting the process, remember that streamlining frees up time and headspace for the more hopeful life that you are craving.



# Curate a list of moments to cherish

This is a beautiful exercise from coach Shannah Kennedy's book *The Life Plan* (Lantern, £13.24). Make a list of memories to treasure as they unfold in your life. These are snapshots for you to take daily and are to be held dear and archived in your mind for ever. There is gold around you all the time if you choose to look for it, engage with it and be present. It is what gives depth to our lives.

This simple act of mindfulness, of tuning in and being truly appreciative of the small wonders happening around you, while calmly acknowledging and accepting your thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations, is an oasis you can tap into anywhere, at any time. Look for, and savour, the golden moments occurring in your life each and every day. Collect these cherished moments and use them to guide your vision of success.

Your list might include:

- **Noticing the first blossom on a tree.**
- **Walking out of an interview or meeting knowing you've nailed it.**
- **Gazing at the stars at night.**
- **Feeling the sand between your toes on the beach.**
- **The shape of water as it drips down a window.**
- **Catching a glimpse of your partner daydreaming.**
- **Seeing a perfectly formed daisy.**
- **Hearing your child have a belly laugh.**
- **Stopping to listen to a busker playing beautiful music.**
- **Being promoted or offered a new job.**
- **The smell of really good coffee.**
- **Passing a test or exam with flying colours.**







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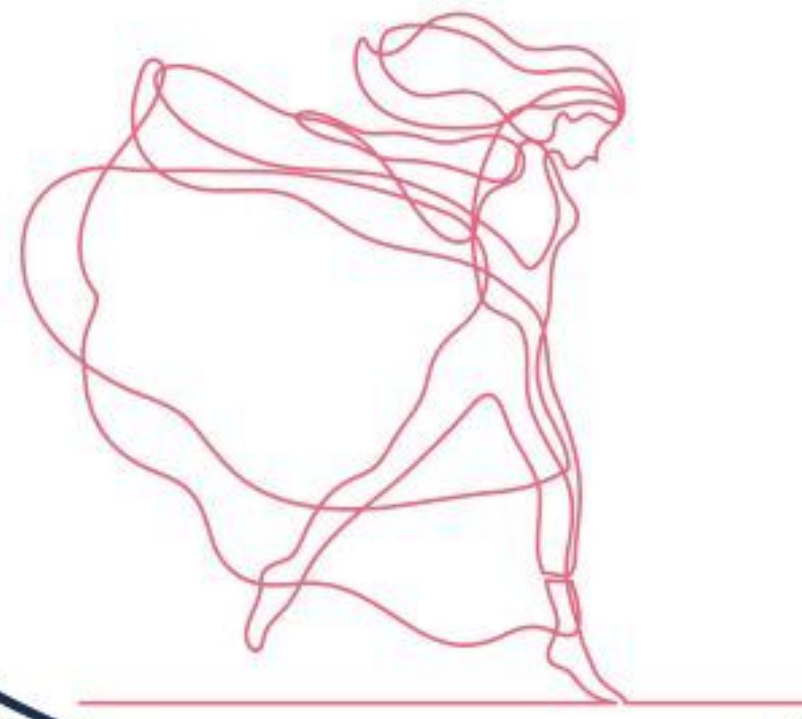
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WORDS: HEIDI SCRIMGEOUR



## DRINK UP! Raise a glass to vitality and happiness



**OHMG sparkling magnesium water, £23.40 for 12 cans, [ohmgwater.com](http://ohmgwater.com)**

Ditch fizzy drinks in favour of these delicious flavoured sparkling waters – they contain magnesium, in which many of us are deficient, along with fruit extracts and botanicals.

**London Nootropics Mojo coffee, £15 for 12 sachets, [londonnootropics.com](http://londonnootropics.com)**

Swap your caffeine fix for this adaptogenic mushroom coffee blend. Perfect for a mid-morning pick-me-up, it's made with cordyceps and Siberian ginseng for a boost of long-lasting energy and strength.



**Sea Change organic wine, £13.99 a bottle, [seachangewine.com](http://seachangewine.com)**

Keen to clean up your act but don't fancy Dry January? Swap your usual tippie for this tasty organic wine with no plastic in the labels or on the bottle neck. For each bottle sold, the company donates to marine conservation charities fighting plastic pollution.



# Soothe your skin

Commit to showing your expressive face some love this year



## Keys Soulcare skincare, from £10, [keyssoulcare.com](http://keyssoulcare.com)

Created with singer Alicia Keys and developed by dermatologists, this range of cruelty-free products is all about practising intention and honouring ritual in your daily life. Try the Mind-Clearing Body Polish, £25, the Energizing Dry Body Brush, £22, with biodegradable vegan bristles, or the sumptuous nourishing Melting Body Balm, £30.



## Antipodes Glow Ritual vitamin C serum, £35, [uk.antipodesnature.com](http://uk.antipodesnature.com)

This nourishing face gel contains kakadu plum, kiwi and the antioxidant compound Vinanza grape to help brighten dull winter skin and protect it from the elements.



## Delo Rx Radiance & Rejuvenation hybrid cleanser, £85, [delorx.com](http://delorx.com)

Combat spots and fine lines simultaneously with the world's first hybrid cleanser, designed for more mature breakout-prone skin and formulated by the dermatologist Stefanie Williams. It's suitable for sensitive skin too.



## 3 saviours for TRANQUIL WELLNESS

Switch the focus to relaxation

### 1 Flow headset, £399, [flowneuroscience.com](http://flowneuroscience.com)

Living with depression? This headset uses transcranial current stimulation to deliver a constant, low, direct current to the left frontal lobe of the brain – the area that controls expression. Use it alongside Flow's depression app, based on behavioural therapy.



### 2 BON Mat & Pillow, £90, [bedofnails.org](http://bedofnails.org)

The bed of nails has been used in the practice of healing for hundreds of years. This acupressure mat is said to provide the same transformative effects. Use daily to ease neck and back pain, sore muscles and headaches, and relieve stress and insomnia.



### 3 Gr-Attitude Daily Mood oil, £31, [moodoils.co.uk](http://moodoils.co.uk)

Rub a pipette full of this grounding mix of rose, frankincense and patchouli into your palms and inhale for an uplifting moment. Carefully blended with coconut oil and vitamin E, Mood's versatile essential oils can be used in diffusers and on your body.





# Nourish your body

Refuelling foods to replenish and restore



## Apres Food Co ready meals, from £5, apresfood.com

Take the hassle out of healthy eating and get restaurant-quality, pre-prepared meals with organic accreditation delivered to your door. The home-delivery menu includes nourishing brunches, main meals, puddings and snacks.



## Eaten Alive fermented foods subscription box, £35, eatenalive.co.uk

This bimonthly subscription box contains a feast of truly delicious gut-healthy foods, including kimchi and fermented pickles – everything you need for a health-boosting snack.

## Cake or Death vegan brownies, from £17, cakeordeath.co.uk

Rail against the January diet with these unbelievably yum handmade vegan brownies, delivered to your door. Choose from a one-off box or a monthly subscription, plus membership of the Brownie Club for special offers. They're truly one of the tastiest treats we've ever devoured!



# STAY ON COURSE

Tackle any challenge the year throws your way



## Bach Rescue Dream balm, £22.99, boots.com

Release tension and soothe the mind with this active fusion of CBD, botanical oils and plant extracts. It contains flower essences, along with a moisturising blend of shea butter, apricot kernel oil, hemp seed oil and vitamin E.

## Natural Spa Factory relaxation set, £50, naturalspafactory.com

Ease away stress with this calming set packed full of botanically sourced products, including shower oil, body scrubs and a mini candle. The box itself is grown in seven days using mushroom technology and agricultural waste, such as hemp stalks! And it's 100 per cent compostable.



## Energy Cleansing meditation box, £38, ayshabell.com

Containing sticks of sage and palo santo, along with a candle, affirmation card and a wooden affirmation memory card, this thoughtfully curated box by Aysha Bell contains all you need for a mindful fresh start to the year.



# SET YOUR INTENTIONS

Manifest your dreams and make them a reality



## Mål Paper daily goal-setter planner, £23, [malpaper.com](http://malpaper.com)

Identify your goals and mindfully structure your time around achieving them with this beautiful six-month planner. The faux leather softback cover and embossed gold foil detail make it look much more expensive than it is!



## *The Queendom Within* by Heidi Hauer and Marie-Therese Czapka (Whitefox, £12.99)

Like the idea of creating your own happily ever after? This book is for you. Via a series of inspiring stories and practical exercises, it takes you on a journey to identify your hopes and dreams, and help you discover your true self.



## Goodbye 2021, Hello 2022, £11.99, [thegoodbyehellojournal.com](http://thegoodbyehellojournal.com)

'Design a life you love' is the subhead of this bright and engaging journal, which encourages you to reflect with gratitude on the year that has past before helping you create a wonderful future.



## MODERN MOVEMENT

Take care of your body the 21st-century way

### VAHA, from £70 per month, [uk.vaha.com](http://uk.vaha.com)

Miss the gym but can't bear to drag yourself back? This looks like a full-length mirror but is actually an interactive fitness screen that delivers live and on-demand classes, personal training and other workouts straight to your home.



### Lumen, from £249, [lumen.me](http://lumen.me)

Ditch the diet and try this smart device that's scientifically proven to measure your metabolic fuel usage accurately when you breathe into it. Using the data generated, it builds a personalised nutrition and exercise plan to help you achieve your health goals.



### Echelon Connect Sport exercise bike, from £799.99, [echelonfit.uk](http://echelonfit.uk)

Making time for exercise is never easy, but a smart bike brings the gym to you. With a silent magnetic flywheel and 32 levels of resistance, this one monitors your speed, cadence, calories burned, heart rate and more. Monthly membership starts from £24.99.







# Join Ollie's army

**NOW  
ONLINE!**

**Ever wanted to make a difference and train to become a coach?  
With the Ollie School, you could be changing lives before you know it**

**D**espite the very best efforts of our education system, it is struggling to cope with fully supporting the emotional wellbeing of our children within the curriculum. Have you ever felt that you would love to help, but were powerless to act? Well, here's your opportunity to do something positive.

The Ollie School plans to build an army of coaches who can make the world a better place, one child at a time. Ollie Coaching is a holistic approach that leads all our youngsters to a place where they can thrive in the chaos of modern living.

So many schools are battling to provide an appropriate mental health environment and busy parents are up against it in our fast-paced lives ruled by social media. That's why Alison Knowles, who was challenged throughout her life with undiagnosed dyslexia, decided to set up the Ollie

School. The Ollie methodology is all about empowering children to seek solutions and take control of their emotions, rather than be controlled by them. The Ollie School trains coaches in a blend of methodologies that brings together NLP, CBT, EFT and play therapy to make sure they cover all the bases. The Ollie methodology is all about personalisation and identifying which technique will work with each individual child – no one-size-fits-all approach here.

## ***Licence to help***

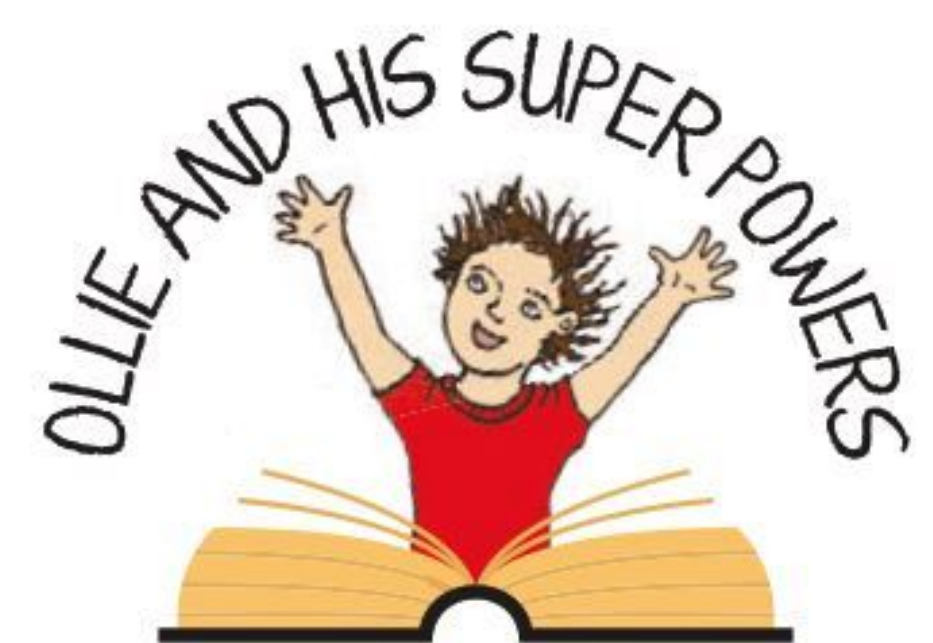
The Ollie School graduates are awarded a certified qualification in NLP and a licence to work as an Ollie coach. If helping children and their families to be more emotionally resilient appeals to you, contact us for a prospectus and let's talk about getting you with the programme.

***Courses are now online and in the classroom, combining the best of both worlds with a limited number of trainees, maximising learning potential. See [ollieandhissuperpowers.com](http://ollieandhissuperpowers.com)***



## ***Get in touch***

To train to become an Ollie coach, find a coach in your area or book an event, visit [ollieandhissuperpowers.com](http://ollieandhissuperpowers.com), or contact us via email at [info@ollieandhissuperpowers.com](mailto:info@ollieandhissuperpowers.com). We would love to hear from you!



PHOTOGRAPHS: SHUTTERSTOCK



# I Heart



How to connect more meaningfully and enjoy loving relationships with our partners, children, parents and friends



*“To love well  
is the task in  
all meaningful  
relationships,  
not just  
romantic  
bonds”*

**Bell Hooks**

PHOTOGRAPH: GETTY IMAGES



# Check your connection

As 2022 beckons with open arms, reflect, reach out and rekindle attachments with yourself and those you love, writes the relationship expert Jan Day

**T**he new year is a powerful window in the midst of winter to take stock of your life. It's a natural pause, a time of slowness as the changing year symbolises new beginnings. No matter what you find when you look back, cultivating an attitude of learning from experience makes transformation and growth possible. It's not about what happened so much as how you understand and work with it, how you give it meaning and how you integrate it into your being.

So what does that look like in practical terms? The aim is to open yourself to connection on all the following levels:

- 1 Your body and the sensations and energies that flow in it**
- 2 Your gut and heart – the feeling and emotional life within you**
- 3 Your mind – the ideas, beliefs, and narratives you carry, conscious and unconscious**
- 4 Your soul – your connection beyond your physical body**

One of the most important ways people connect with each other is through touch. It is crucial to our relationships and our sense of wellbeing, a point brought painfully home to us during the pandemic. Recent research shows that small everyday touch, such as a tap on the shoulder, can positively affect the way we feel and act – and even robots can provide this nourishment!

This physical contact can have an impact on our care and compassion for others too. Many people reported that

they felt far less connected with other people when they were instructed to keep a strict distance from them, and when so many normal, everyday conversations suddenly took place behind screens – either plastic ones in the real world or electronic ones online.

Now that restrictions are happily much eased, it's worth spending time reconnecting with the physical world and getting back in touch, quite literally,

*“Spend time with the physical world and get back in touch”*

with ourselves and the people we love.

You can develop this state of presence by balancing the energies of body, heart and mind, developing sensitivity by listening to them. Whether you are making love, choosing fruits and vegetables at the market, gazing into your pet's eyes or walking in the woods, you can tune into your body and feel the flow of simply being alive. This is a way of life for every day, which gives us access to joy and the beauty of life in each moment.

Start by focusing on your relationship with your physical body and notice what happens when you touch your body in a nurturing way. What happens when you bring focused attention to each area of your body? This is a good moment to give the exercise below a go...

## EXERCISE: *Connect with yourself*

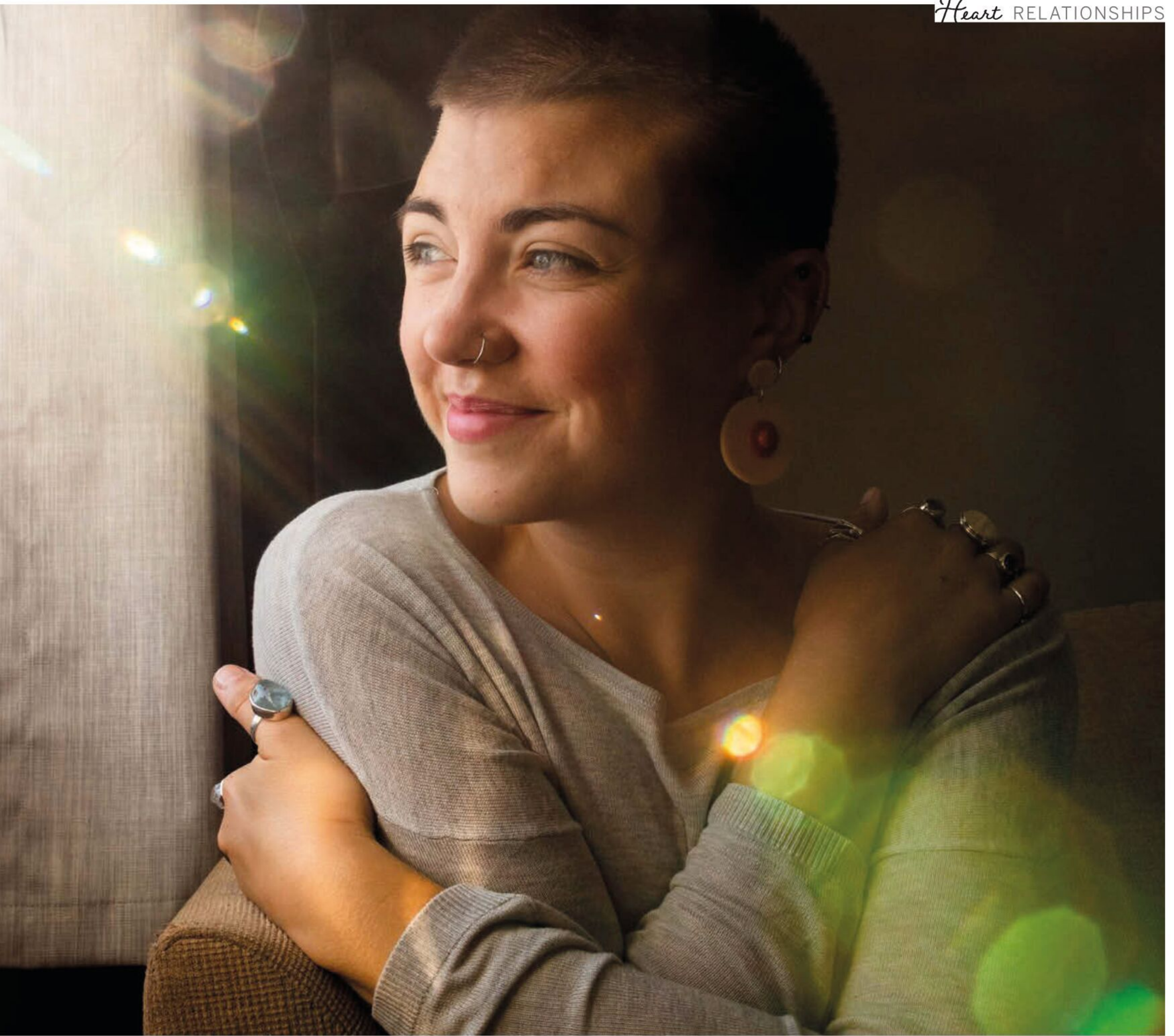
Lie or sit comfortably and put your arms around yourself. Hold yourself as if you were cradling a small child who is in pain. Use your hands to soothe and stroke yourself. Breathe slowly and imagine directing your breath under your hands.

Gradually allow your hands to move over your body, sensing what feels good. You may find yourself stroking your face or putting your hands on your heart, running your fingers through your hair or exploring your hand as if you had

never seen one before. Give yourself the fullest attention you can. Notice what you are feeling, moment by moment, using your breath to bring focus to the different areas of your body. Open and close your eyes. Notice if you can be more present with eyes open or closed. Notice any thoughts that arise. End as you began by holding yourself, and find some encouraging words for yourself.

Make notes about the experience. How did you feel about doing it? How did you feel afterwards?





## Connect with others

When you feel like moving on from how you hold yourself, it's worth thinking about how touch plays a part in our relationships. In a romantic relationship, whether you have been together five months or 30 years, exploring physical touch is always a way to develop your bond.

It is easier initially to take turns to give or receive touch, rather than trying to do both at the same time. Agreeing to voice a simple yes or no to whatever touch you are receiving

is a way of learning and becoming more embodied together. You'll discover renewed trust in yourself and your partner as you realise that you can simply say yes or no to touch. You will also be rewriting any narrative that says that no means you are bad, won't be liked or are unworthy, or that you have to endure touch that you don't enjoy.

When this safety of communication is in place, you'll discover deepening pleasure and sensuality in touch.

### CASE STUDY

Peter, a 50-year-old creative professional, had cut himself off from the joy of touch because he felt a division between body and soul in his Christian faith.

He feared that his sexual self was inherently harmful or dangerous, and that he could be led into sin. Through slowly exploring touch, boundaries and consent, allowing sensual pleasure and learning to fully inhabit his body and natural energies, he discovered an inherent trust in his wholeness.





# Connect with your mind

We run all kinds of narratives to make sense of our lives. Some involve a sense of entitlement or holding on to a grievance about how unfair life is. You can connect with the power of your mind to explore different outcomes using this exercise...

## EXERCISE:

### *Connect with the past*

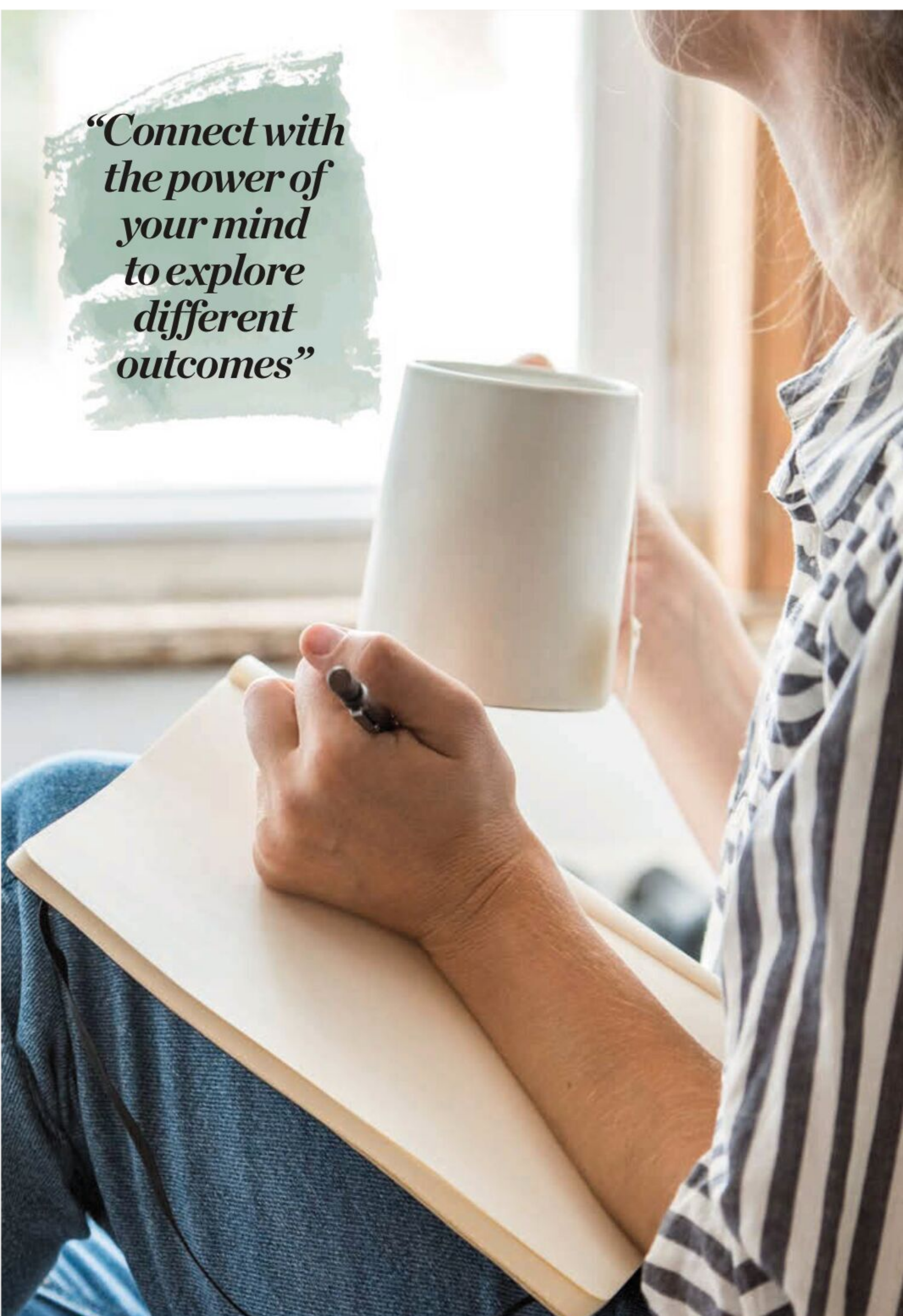
Choose one situation where you are not getting the outcome you want. Run through it in your mind or write it down in a notebook in the present tense so you are reliving what actually happened (in your perception).

Don't get caught up in truth or not truth. If you think it happened, it will be affecting you whether it actually happened that way or not. When you have explored your perceived reality, imagine that you can change it so that it happened just the way you would have liked – you get as many attempts to rewrite history as you want.

It can be helpful to imagine that a fairy godmother sprinkled fairy dust on the whole scene, because it gives you permission to allow yourself a different experience in your imagination. Make sure that you stay connected with your body and your feelings as you recreate the experience the way you want it.

At the end, notice what resources you got from reliving that experience differently. You may have realisations about yourself or your beliefs. Be curious. Notice in the following days if you approach life differently.

In connecting with your body, your sexual centre, the feelings in your gut and heart, and the stories and meaning you create with your mind – and allowing all those threads to weave together – your capacity for joy, pleasure and sensuality will expand and happiness will arise naturally, rather than simply being a goal.



*“Connect with the power of your mind to explore different outcomes”*



## NEXT STEPS

**Read** *Living Tantra: A Journey Into Sex, Spirit And Relationship* by Jan Day (Watkins, £12.99) explores how the ancient spiritual practice of Tantra can be applied in our modern world.

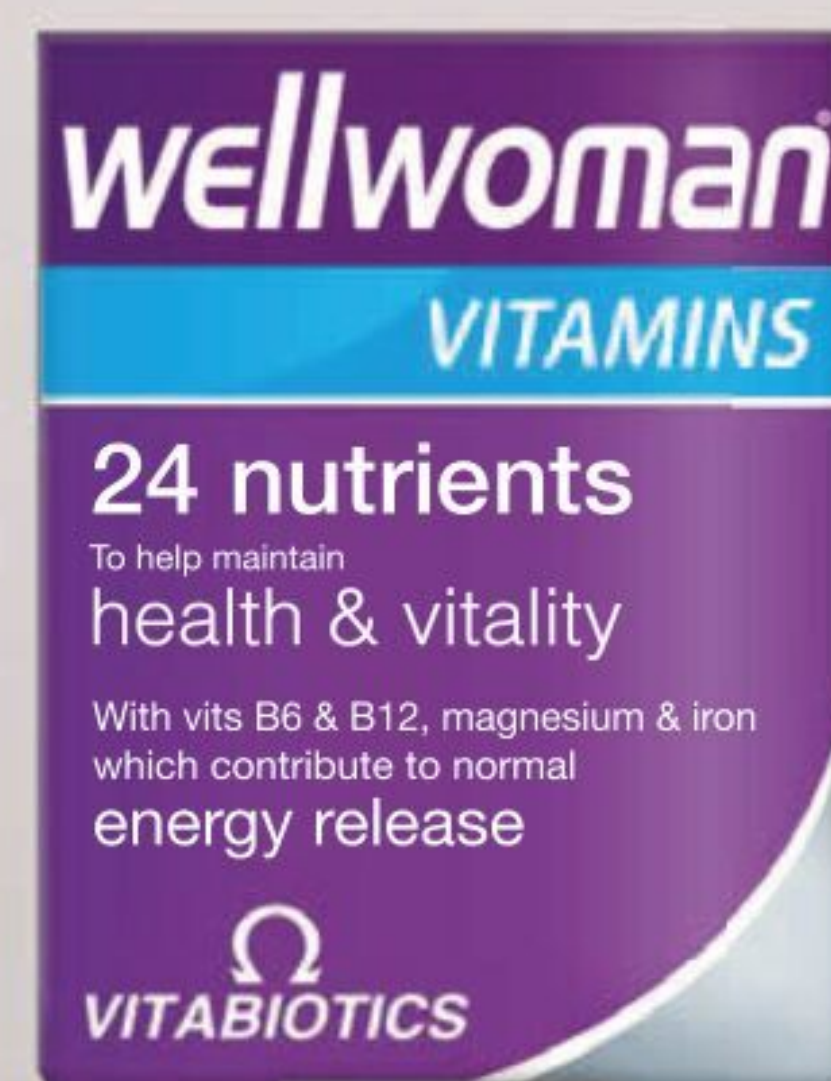


# wellwoman<sup>®</sup>

## VITAMINS

*"My day doesn't  
begin until I've taken  
my Wellwoman."*

**Tess Daly**



Original



50+

From *Boots*, Superdrug, ☆, Holland & Barrett,  
supermarkets, health stores, pharmacies  
& [wellwoman.com](http://wellwoman.com)

\*Nielsen GB ScanTrack Total Coverage Value & Unit  
Retail Sales 52 w/e 09/10/21. To verify contact Vitabiotics Ltd,  
1 Apsley Way, London, NW2 7HF.



Wellwoman  
supports



QUEEN'S AWARD



**VITABIOTICS**





psychologies inspiration

*“If the world is  
cold, make it  
your business  
to build fires”*

*Horace Traubel*







# Time to start something new

Do you want fresh purpose and satisfaction in your work and life? Training to be a coach could bring the change you seek – and allow you to help others. But where do you begin, and what does it entail?



*After 25 years at the forefront of coaching and coach*

*training in the UK, I remain fascinated by the psychology of human experience and behaviour.*

*As pioneers of coaching to the highest standards, our focus is to inspire personal growth and make the world a brighter place through exceptional coaching. More than 4,000 people have completed our International Coach Federation (ICF) ACTP-accredited training and students leave as confident coaches ready to make a difference.*

*Kim*

Kim Morgan MCC, CEO  
Barefoot Coaching Ltd

## HOW COACHING CHANGED MY LIFE

**Hannah Smith worked with Barefoot-trained coach Rosie Ranganathan to find her way forward at work. ‘I’d been with my firm since graduating five years ago and had two diverse roles, but was not getting promoted,’ says Hannah. ‘I did not put myself forward because impostor syndrome was holding me back.’**

**1** We started by looking back at my career, creating a timeline to identify highlights that made me proud. This helped me realise what I had achieved, rather than believing that I hadn’t done anything of value. I was able to reframe my career when we reassessed my experience. Rosie helped me see that having two distinct jobs was an unusual super-strength!

**2** During coaching, Rosie noticed my energy when I spoke about my previous role and how I was able to articulate the value, enjoyment and purpose of the work as opposed to my current role.

This helped me determine the direction I wanted for my career and how I could link my work to my purpose and values in life.

**3** Working with Rosie was energising and supportive. Coaching gave me the space to rethink my career and acknowledge my successes, which increased my self-belief.

I feel more confident because I have plenty of evidence to quieten my impostor syndrome. The hesitation I might have had previously about asking to be involved has significantly reduced – so much so that I have been invited to key planning meetings!

**[rosieranganathan@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:rosieranganathan@hotmail.co.uk)**

*“I feel more confident because I have plenty of evidence to quieten my impostor syndrome”*





## FIND A COACH OR TRAIN TO BE ONE

*Do you want to hire a coach, or help transform someone else's life by becoming a coach? Barefoot Coaching is here to help...*

### FIND

Psychologies' partnership with Barefoot Coaching gives you the tools to find a coach who meets your needs. Barefoot Coaching has been at the forefront of coaching and coach training for 25 years. It has a proven track record as a provider of high-level coaching and coach training to organisations and senior executives, both nationally and internationally.

### TRAIN

The Barefoot Coaching ICF ACTP-accredited PG Certificate in Business and Personal Coaching is one of the most well-established coach training courses in the UK. Barefoot Coaching runs regular, free introductions to coach training throughout the year. Book now for a taster morning.



**BAREFOOT  
COACHING**

## HOW I BECAME A COACH

### ROSIE RANGANATHAN

As a director of human resources, I was having daily conversations with business leaders about their challenges. What quickly became obvious was how our discussions centred around them personally – how they were thinking and feeling and, as a result, behaving at work.

Training as a coach gave me the tools to navigate these conversations and empower my clients to move forward with a different perspective.

I studied with Barefoot Coaching and, once I started learning, I didn't want to stop. I wanted to find out more about how our brain works and how our behaviour is driven by our thoughts and feelings.

Two years ago, I was feeling burnt out and exhausted by my job in HR. I used the coaching tools that I had attained to define the lifestyle and job I wanted in order to give me fulfilment and balance in my life. Developing and supporting individuals was always the part of my work that I gravitated towards, so I took the bold step to focus my career on coaching.

These days, I work with a range of clients, from businesses to individuals, and it is such a great privilege to learn their stories and help them write the next chapter in their lives. I love the expression 'dancing in the moment' and, as a coach, it is about focusing on what your client needs and wants in order to help them get where they want to go.



**BOOK  
NOW!**  
VISIT

[Barefootcoaching.co.uk/  
taster-mornings](https://Barefootcoaching.co.uk/taster-mornings)



A close-up, soft-focus photograph of a person's hands holding an open book. The person is wearing a blue long-sleeved top. A blue cloth is draped over their lap. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a home interior with a lamp and framed pictures.

# *All by myself*

With four young daughters, Caro Fentiman knows better than most how busy life can be, and discovers why we all need to give ourselves a little alone time





**T**o paraphrase Aristotle, humans are social creatures, a point that has been painfully illustrated over the past couple of years. We have been forced to reflect upon how we interact with others – and, at the same time, on our relationship with ourselves. Whether you have been running in circles around your garden, making your own sourdough or learning a new language, the way you spend your downtime might well look a little different now to how it did as we entered 2020. And as 2022 beckons, perhaps it's time to consider the benefits of that time we spend all on our own.

Recent times have certainly demonstrated Aristotle's point: social contact with others is woven into our lives. As an extrovert, I felt this absence keenly, used as I am to sourcing a lot of my energy from interaction with others. But my relationship with myself had already begun to change two years

earlier, when my marriage spectacularly imploded. Living in a remote part of the country with four young children, I have certainly experienced loneliness at times – yet I have rarely been alone. After my marriage ended, time spent completely on my own suddenly took on a rare and intangible quality, like a forbidden fruit. I found myself dreaming, not of weekends away with friends or dancing in fields – although those options would also have been welcome – but of sitting in a room where the only sound was my own breathing... Of running along a beach without looking over my shoulder to see how many children were trailing behind me... Or walking through a city unencumbered by sticker books and breadsticks, eyes floating to the top of buildings instead of anxiously trained on four little heads.

The reality of modern life for many of us is a little like a domino rally. We plan meticulously in order to be able to





make a work phone call or attend a yoga class, but if one domino is knocked, the best-laid plans will collapse. In my family, with one adult and four children, including one who is autistic and unable to attend school, this inevitably creates a lot of dominos and many opportunities for them to go skittering on to the floor.

A little while ago, I managed to arrange childcare for all of my daughters for 36 precious hours, with the intention of travelling south for a brief city break. I was dreaming of gazing at paintings in galleries with no small fingers tugging at my skirt. I needed to remember how it felt to wake up on my terms, not because of an alarm clock or a request for cereal. I wanted cotton sheets stretched tight across a firm mattress and a crisp duvet. Uninterrupted reading, freedom to lean against a bridge and stare at new faces, studying a skyline different to the one at home. These things I craved.

There will be many of you who, like me, struggle to find space to breathe. My challenges stem from huge childcare responsibilities, and this might be your reality too. Or maybe you care for an elderly relative and have a demanding job. Perhaps your children recently left home and you are wondering who you are now that your family looks different, or you might be single with no children and a busy life. Whatever our circumstances, we can all benefit from spending quality time with ourselves. Stolen moments to stand and reflect in an environment outside the home can be invaluable. I was heading to the city to remember who I am beyond being a mother and carer, to get back in touch with my own needs that are so often lost among those of my children.

For many of us, financial and time pressures might mean that solitary self-care is sometimes more achievable than time spent socialising with others. I was lucky to escape to a hotel for a rare night away, but the reality is that we might only be able to snatch a few minutes here and there. Half an hour with a cup of tea and a book or a walk on the beach before the school run are just

two ways I might take time out of my busy caring schedule to recharge my batteries.

I asked Michaela Thomas, a clinical psychologist, about the benefits of spending time alone: 'You may really value the peace and quiet of self-care on your own. It might help reset you for the next day,' she says. But what about the value of spending time with friends and family? 'Social connection is meaningful,' Thomas tells me, 'but there is nothing wrong with wanting a quiet evening to yourself in the bath or with a good book. It is helpful to find your own balance between solitude and socialising, knowing that it will vary from week to week, depending on what is going on in your life. Try not to get caught up in comparison because balancing acts may not look the same to everyone,' she adds.

When I tell one friend about my solo trip she wonders why I can't find someone to take with me. This makes me wobble – why am I doing this alone? But other people are envious of this precious time I have created, and understand my joy in focusing entirely on my own needs.

Even the train journey is a tonic. No one is asking me to pass them a wet wipe or play UNO. I almost finish my book, uninterrupted by little voices calling 'Mummy'. A work problem that has been nagging at me begins to unravel in my brain as the countryside rushes past. And I am wearing clothes that feel more like me, or the me I want to project as a single woman with dreams. Before the train arrives I am beginning to feel more grounded, more confident in my ability to navigate life alone.

The air is warm as I step off the train, clinging to me as I read my book on the Underground, enveloping me on the street towards my hotel. I am cloaked in something different and exciting, far from the wide empty beaches at home. I can lose myself in crowds, allow my brain to slow down and shed the hypervigilance that can accompany parenting four young children all on my own. I only have to think about myself.

[thethomasconnection.co.uk](http://thethomasconnection.co.uk)

***"I am beginning to feel more grounded, more confident in my ability to navigate life alone"***







## INDEPENDENT THINKING

In addition to the way we can lose ourselves in the everyday demands of life, for those of us who are single as a result of the end of a relationship, or perhaps even the death of a partner, we are navigating a grief that can be overwhelming. When I climbed on to the train clutching a coffee and a novel, my divorce was only days old. I needed time just for me, when I could begin to put myself back together and reassess what my future might look like. After years of untangling myself from a difficult marriage, I wanted to acknowledge the pain and move forward.

It is surprising to me that it is still possible to encounter negativity around the concept of divorce and single-parenting. As a society we still cling to the notion of a family unit that has two parents in the same house. There is also a stigma attached to divorce that does not acknowledge that life is often better for people outside of difficult relationships, despite the emotional and financial pressures we must confront. I wanted to drown out the negativity and focus on the benefits of being on my own.

Julie Hawkins set up the Single Mums Business Network partly to challenge public perceptions of single mothers. She is inspirational in the way she speaks so positively about single mothers and the lives we can create for ourselves. 'You're not waiting for someone, you're just learning to treat yourself like gold,' she tells me. 'It's about learning to replace the feeling (of being loved), rather than the person.' Hawkins understands only too well the value of spending time alone, describing to me the importance of releasing emotion that we often repress, not wanting to drop the mask in public. This is the case for all of us, whether we are looking for respite from care or work responsibilities, or whether we simply need to release emotion and reflect.

Thomas reassures me that, although the pressure to be in a loving relationship is real, I am enough on my own: 'You don't need another person to complete you. Yes, a deep and meaningful connection to a romantic partner can enhance your life, but so can meaningful friendships and family ties, and a healthy attitude to being on your own. Being alone is not the same as being lonely.'

**[singlemumsbusinessnetwork.com](http://singlemumsbusinessnetwork.com)**



# Q&A

Our agony aunt, Mary Fenwick, offers a new perspective on whatever is troubling you



**MARY FENWICK** is a writer, speaker and executive coach. She is also a mother, divorcee and widow.

**GOT A QUESTION FOR MARY?** Email [mary@psychologies.co.uk](mailto:mary@psychologies.co.uk), with 'Mary' in the subject line.

**FOR MORE** about Mary's work in leadership and team coaching, her 'Writing back to happiness' programme and free resources, go to [maryfenwick.com](http://maryfenwick.com)

## “My husband has given up on sex and I feel neglected”

**Q** My husband has switched off sexually. He sleeps in the spare bedroom and, rather than addressing the issue, we spend more time arguing, being angry at each other and stressing over silly things. I feel like a plant without water, starved emotionally and physically. I've read endless books about desire and asked him to go to counselling with me multiple times, but he refuses. What more can I do?

You don't use the word lonely, but I imagine it's occurred to you. And that feeling is a real danger sign in a relationship. The good news is that the world of therapy has become much more accessible online, and most couples counsellors would see you individually. You might discuss how to involve your husband, but initially use the chance to explore your own perspective.

In heterosexual relationships it can feel uncomfortable, even 'unfeminine' to have a higher level of desire than your male partner, and in turn he might feel less manly. I spoke to the therapist John Shanahan to get a male view. He wanted to know more about the context: what sex was like when you first met, when things started to change and how you resolve other conflicts. He also queried whether your husband masturbates or watches porn and whether he can maintain an erection. In any case it is worth checking with a GP, as sexual

problems can be linked with conditions such as low testosterone, diabetes or heart disease.

Shanahan recommended *Not Always In The Mood* by Sarah Hunter Murray (Rowman & Littlefield, £25), which explores the reality of men's sexual desire. The male stereotypes of preferring to be the pursuer, 'always up for it', and being more interested in physical than emotional connection can be just as constraining as female myths ('nice girls don't').

Perhaps you and your husband have more overlap in your views on sex than it first appears. Could you explore what intimacy means to each of you? The word is often used as interchangeable with sex, but can you think of times when you felt close to your husband in a non-sexual way?

Shanahan adds: 'Rather than fixating on sex, what if the relationship is the plant? What are you doing to feed and water it?'

[smrelationshipandsextherapy.com](http://smrelationshipandsextherapy.com)

**“Male stereotypes can be just as constraining as female myths”**







## *I am not happy living with my son after he dropped out of university*

**Q** My 21-year-old son has abandoned his studies and returned home to live with me. Part of me wants it to be this way – I’m a single parent and he needs to know that he can always rely on me. But I also feel fed up and frustrated about having to think about another person again – making his meals and changing his bed, even helping him run his love life, leaving little time for my own! I have faith that he’ll be OK in the end, but have little motivation to sort things out for him. This was supposed to be my time, so how can I get that feeling back?

You’re not alone in feeling this way, and it’s not your fault – many of us have expectations that are out of sync with reality. Even before the pandemic, two thirds of single people in their 20s were living with their parents. It’s always been the norm in certain communities, but the public conversation rarely reflects those facts. Those in their first year at university in 2020 have been particularly hard hit, so it’s highly likely that you are both struggling with confusion and dashed expectations, and are doing your best nonetheless.

Unfortunately, two people in emotional turmoil at the same time can mean multiplying the effect, rather than dividing it. On the other hand, one of you feeling a bit more hopeful can also be

infectious. A key element of hope is regaining your sense of agency, which means your ability to make a difference through your own actions. The evidence suggests that there are three main areas on which to focus: the financial implications, practical help around the house and the quality of your relationship.

It’s worth taking the financial side seriously – one study (see below, for further reading) found that parents with a young adult at home have 23 per cent less in savings than when the adult child lives elsewhere. As a lone parent, you are potentially in a double bind because you are statistically likely to be worse off to begin with. Again, not your fault!

Even the academics know that talking about this is ‘particularly problematic

because it involves combining financial transactions with close personal relationships’. You don’t want to feel like his landlord, his maid or his banker. And he doesn’t want to feel like he has to ask permission to live his life.

Could it work to share some of this research with him, and ask for his thoughts on how it might apply? Like any difficult conversation, it’s best to signpost it: ‘I’d like to have a chat about how we can make this time good for us both’ and then choose a neutral venue (not your home). The mindset is that both of you are on the same side of the table with the problem in front of you, rather sitting on opposite sides with it between you.

**Standard Life Foundation: Home Truths (Loughborough University, 2020)**





# Thinking of switching to wool?

You're on the verge of making a wise change for a better night's sleep, but now you have some digging to do. If you are choosing your forever duvet, here are five important questions to ask a supplier...

## 1 Do you supply a swatch sample?

If a supplier is not prepared to show you the filling, beware! Once you get your sample, the most important examination is the smell test. If the wool smells like sheep or a barnyard, avoid it because the scent tends to linger. A good wool duvet should smell fresh, with no trace of a lanolin or anything 'sheepy'.

## 2 What is your returns policy?

If there are limitations imposed, for example, it must be returned within a short period of time, unopened and in the original sealed packaging, or only with proof of fault – ask yourself how on earth you are expected to know whether wool suits you or if the duvet is the right weight if you cannot put it on your bed and try it out?

The more flexible and accommodating the returns, swap and refund policy of the supplier, the better the customer service you can expect after your purchase. What would you prefer? The company that takes your money, then says 'sorry, can't help you' when

*"If there is anything blended into the cover, the duvet might rustle every time you move"*

there is a problem, or the company that says 'we will work with you to ensure you find your forever duvet'?

## 3 What is the outer covering and is it silent?

A good wool duvet should have a 100 per cent cotton covering, preferably percale. If there is anything blended into the cover, the duvet might be noisy and that means rustling and crackling all night, every time you move...

## 4 What wool is used in the duvet and is it fully traceable?

Wool from different breeds of sheep have different physical characteristics that will affect the final product. In general, the longer the fibres, the heavier and denser the duvet. Wools with short fibres make a superior and

lighter yet equally warm duvet. A good duvet supplier will ideally be a licensee of British Wool with proven provenance and sourcing of the wool.

## 5 Is your company environmentally conscious?

A conscious company will be looking for ways to reduce its contribution to the climate crisis. Does the company ensure that your courier delivery will be carbon neutral and, if they use plastic in their packaging, is it recyclable?

**Call Southdown on 0140 486 1117 to see how we answer the big five!**

**10% OFF**  
Claim 10 per cent off any Southdown bedding until 31 March, using the code 'KEEPCOOL' at checkout



# Body



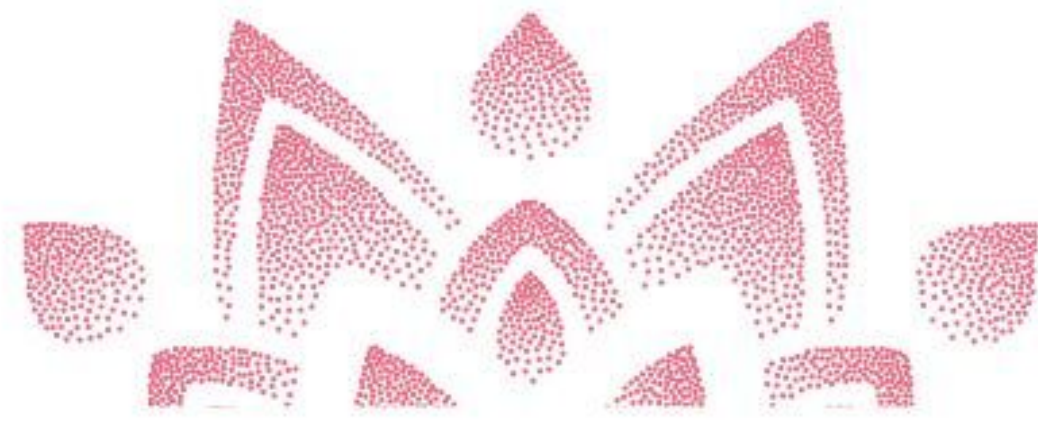
Improve your physical wellbeing with gentle activity, better sleep, optimum nutrition and natural beauty

***“Life is so much  
more beautiful  
and complex  
than a number  
on a scale”***

**Tess Munster**







# MINDFUL WELLNESS



Our Acting Wellness Director, Elizabeth Bennett, shares new research, strategies and wisdom on all aspects of wellbeing, from activity and nourishment to meditation and conscious beauty

## Move well



### We love...

The new hemp collection from yoga experts Yoga Matters. The age-old material is not only eco-friendly but wears in well, getting softer every time you use it. The bolster, cushion and eye pillow are available in a lovely selection of colours: moss green, sunset orange and a lovely berry red. *Yoga Matters hemp buckwheat bolster, £40, hemp buckwheat zafu meditation cushion, £38, hemp small rectangular buckwheat bolster, £28, and hemp eye pillow, £12, [yogamatters.com](http://yogamatters.com)*

**72%**  
*of the difference in outcome between people after a specific exercise is down to genetics, say researchers at Anglia Ruskin University, confirming our thoughts that how we respond to exercise is in the genes. This is yet more evidence that sticking to the exercise you're drawn to means it's probably the best one for you!*





## How to ease winter aches and pains

**1 Keep moving.** Spending more time indoors naturally results in moving less. Try swimming in a warm pool, stretching with yoga or Pilates, brisk walking or gentle weight training to keep your body active.

**2 Warm up.** Some experts believe that completing a warm-up over the winter months is more important than the exercise itself. If you're cold, there's a high chance that when you exert yourself you might give yourself an injury.

**3 Drink water.** During cold weather, people often neglect their water intake, but dry, cold air can make you dehydrated, tired and achy, all of which can be reduced by staying hydrated.

**4 Stretch out.** Tension can easily build up in your neck and shoulders due to being hunched or shivering. Remember to dedicate time to stretching this area.

**5 Breathe.** Deep breaths in and out mobilise the thoracic spine and release your diaphragm, enabling your body to continue working effectively.

**6 Seek help.** Pain can be psychologically damaging and exacerbate a low mood. If you feel that you're not coping – with pain or your mood – see your GP for advice.

Kemmy Gichaba, osteopath and creator of Holistic Impact

## 3 yoga poses for: **FEELING CALM**

Try these relaxing moves from Basma Gale, a yoga teacher and wellbeing coach. [basmagale.com](http://basmagale.com); @SimplyBasma

### Tree pose (*vrksasana*):

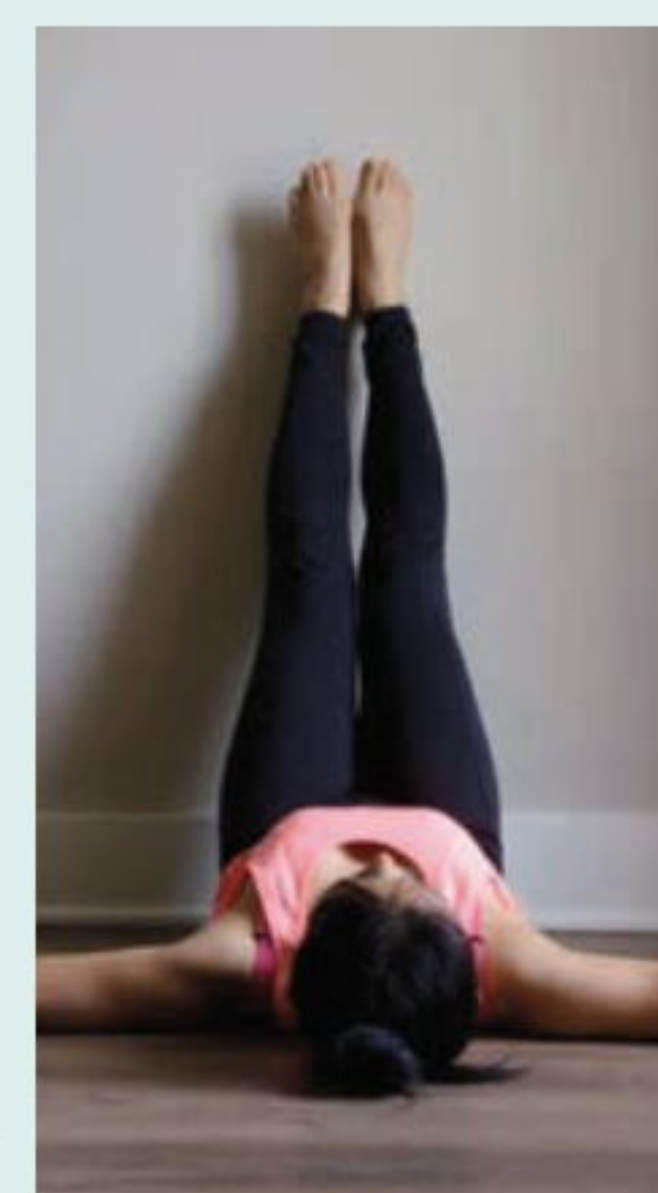
This pose is a standing balance that tones the legs, stretches the groin and strengthens the arches of the feet. Balancing poses encourage us to be present by zoning in on a dristi (a single point of focus), diverting the mind's attention from repetitive thoughts.



**Child's pose (*balasana*):** This pose encourages the body to release tension, facilitates deeper breathing and aids digestion. With the forehead pressed against the floor for support, awareness shifts from the emotional limbic system to the more rational prefrontal cortex, calming the mind.

### Legs up the wall (*viparita karani*):

This gentle, cooling inversion aids blood and lymphatic circulation, soothes tired legs and eases back pain. With the legs elevated and supported, the body's rest and digest mode is activated, which settles a restless mind. Try before bedtime.





# Sleep well

## Power up!

Darker days can make you feel sleepy, but giving in to tiredness and taking a short sleep can be good for your health. 'Naps are a smart way of quickly reaping the benefits of sleep. Research indicates they can improve memory, reaction time, creativity, happiness and mental health, alongside boosting heart health and lowering blood pressure,' says Guy Meadows, a sleep physiologist and co-founder and clinical director at Sleep School. Here's how to maximise an afternoon reboot:

**Stick to 10-20 minutes** This amount of time prevents you falling into deep sleep, which can cause you to wake up feeling groggy.

**Embrace the noon to 3pm slot** Although commonly referred to as the 'post-lunch dip', it's actually the result of a natural slump in the 'waking' signal emitted from our internal body clock that occurs at this time each day. The perfect time for you to nap is dependent on when you woke up – early risers should be closer to midday, with those who lie in feeling the call later in the day.

**Set an alarm** New to napping? Set an alarm to ensure that you wake up after your designated time and to stop you slipping into a deep sleep. With regular practice, you'll notice that you start waking naturally.

**Practice makes perfect** Napping is a skill and if you want to become better at it, it's recommended that you practise every day.

**Don't pile on the pressure** If you feel wide awake, acknowledge this thought and accept it. Understanding that you don't have to fall asleep in order to rest is vital for getting the most from your naps.

*This Works Sleep Power Nap Spray, £28, [thisworks.com](https://thisworks.com)*



## SNOOZE SWEET SPOT

*There is much debate about the amount of time we should spend asleep, and now research from Washington University School of Medicine has shed light on the optimum amount of slumber for better brain health. Scientists found a U-shaped relationship between sleep and cognitive decline. Essentially this means that under or oversleeping can have a negative impact on your brain. The ideal window they pinpointed? Between 5.5 and 7.5 hours.*



## Gut reaction

Do you find yourself resisting sleep to watch yet another episode of your favourite box set? Consider this before you reach for the remote: Depriving yourself of sleep can negatively impact the communication between your gut and your brain.

'Sufficient sleep is something everyone needs,' says Jo Travers, a registered dietitian at Love Your Gut. 'Bacteria in the gut communicate with the central nervous system, but when sleep is disrupted it can adversely affect the levels of bacteria in the gut.'



# Meditation + mindfulness

## Fresh air really does clear the head

The link between nature and mental health is undisputed, but research from the University of Southern California has revealed that clean air may improve brain health: Its new study indicates that cleaner air lowers the risk of Alzheimer's and other dementias. Time for a trot around the block?



## Scent of success?

*Looking for a perfume that works harder? The Nue Co's fragrance supplement invigorates mental energy and boosts focus using patented olfactory technology. In fact, 86 per cent of people felt they had more focus after using Mind Energy for 30 days*



The Nue Co Mind Energy fragrance, £85 for 50ml, [thenueco.com](http://thenueco.com)

## THE THREE DIAMONDS TECHNIQUE

'Based on a Japanese energetic system – earth ki, heart ki and heaven ki – this technique allows us to ground into our bodies, centre to our hearts and tune into our intuition via breathwork, reiki, visualisation, affirmations and touch,' says Jasmin Harsono, author of *Self Reiki* (DK, £9.99). Use it to build micro-moments of mindfulness into your day:

**Morning** Close your eyes and rest your right hand on your belly and left hand on your heart. Bring awareness to your breath, visualise and experience breathing deeply and softly into your belly. Ask: How does my body feel? This is a chance to check in with yourself physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Enquire: What do I need to do for myself today? Set any intentions and imagine the day ahead.

**Lunchtime** Place your right hand on your left shoulder. Inhale through your nose and make a swift diagonal stroke across your body to your right hip. Without exhaling, take another inhalation and sweep your left hand from right shoulder to left hip. Inhale again and repeat the first action. Hold your left arm out. Without exhaling, draw your right hand down your arm. Inhale again and sweep your right arm with your left hand. Taking one last breath through your nose, sweep your left arm again with your right hand. Exhale fully to finish.

**Evening** While seated or lying down, close your eyes and wrap your arms around yourself. Take a moment to receive that hug of love. Lengthen your exhalation and release any tension in your body. Say the words, 'I am here' (grounding), 'I am home' (heart-centred), and 'I am supported' (connecting to intuition, guides and the universe). Extend this by sending love to all living things.



The Three Diamonds Retreat runs 30 April to 4 May in Crete. [emeraldandtiger.com/the-three-diamonds-retreat](http://emeraldandtiger.com/the-three-diamonds-retreat)



# Eat well



## Smoked Mushroom and Celeriac Tacos

Mushrooms are good for body and mind. Eat your fill with this hearty dish

SERVES 4

- 1 celeriac, peeled and sliced into 2.5mm rounds (offcuts reserved)
  - 2 tbsp olive oil
  - Pinch of salt
- For the cacao beans:
- 2 tbsp olive oil
  - 1 white onion, chopped
  - ½ tsp salt
  - 1 clove of garlic, peeled and crushed
  - 1 x 400g tin black beans
  - 30g dark chocolate
- For the celeriac salsa:
- Celeriac offcuts
  - 1 tbsp chopped parsley
  - 1 tsp dried chilli flakes
  - ¼ tsp salt
  - 1 tbsp olive oil
  - Zest and juice of 1 lemon
- For the garlic mushrooms:
- 1 tbsp olive oil
  - Selection of mushrooms, chopped into bite-sized pieces
  - 2 tbsp plant-based butter
  - 1 garlic clove, crushed
  - 1 rosemary sprig, leaves stripped and finely chopped

1 Preheat the oven to 200°C, 180°C fan,

gas mark 6 and line a baking tray with baking paper. Place the celeriac on to the lined baking tray and drizzle with oil, salt and 2 tbsp of water. Bake for about 20 minutes, until soft. Make sure they don't overcook, since each 'taco' should be soft and slightly golden, but not hard.

2 Heat the oil in a small saucepan and, when hot, add the chopped onion and salt and cook on a low heat for 10 minutes, until soft and translucent. Add the garlic and cook for one more minute, then add the beans and chocolate, cooking through until the chocolate is melted and the beans are hot.

3 Make the celeriac salsa by chopping the celeriac offcuts into small squares. Mix with the rest of the salsa ingredients, then leave to marinate.

4 Heat a large frying pan with a splash of oil and, when hot, add the mushrooms and cook for about 5 minutes until golden. Add the butter, garlic and rosemary and cook for a further minute, until the aroma of the garlic is released.

5 Load each celeriac taco with cacao beans, mushrooms and salsa, and serve with kale.

Extract from 'Mind Food: Plant-Based Recipes For Positive Mental Health' by Lauren Lovatt (The Ivy Press, £20)

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Make mindful eating one of your 2022 resolutions and avoid these common pitfalls, says Rhiannon Lambert, a nutritionist and author of *The Science Of Nutrition: Debunk The Diet Myths And Learn How To Eat Well For Health And Happiness* (DK, £20), out 30 December:

**Snacking throughout the day.** This will more than likely lead to energy spikes followed by blood-sugar crashes. Eat substantial meals with complex carbohydrates for a slower release of energy.

**Not chewing.** Shovelling down food makes it harder for the body to digest, and will leave you feeling unsatisfied and likely to overeat. Allow time to enjoy your food.

**Skipping breakfast.** This can seem like a quick fix if you're in a hurry or cutting down, but taking time for a healthy breakfast will set you up for the day and stop you overeating later on.

**No portion control.** Piling your plate high when you're hungry is easy to do. Weigh ingredients before you cook and stick to sensible sizes.

**Night-time munching.** Avoid skipping meals and make sure you eat enough during the day to avoid hunger pangs that interrupt your sleep.

**Eating on the sofa.** Eating at the table will encourage a better posture for eating and digesting your food.





Certification mark

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# THE HAPPINESS DIET



It's a breakthrough that's been described as 'gold dust' by scientists: a study that reveals the foods that not only help you glow with good health and vitality, but actually make you joyful!

WORDS: ELIZABETH BENNETT



**A**re you hoping to make 2022 the year that you truly feel better in body, mind and soul? The chances are that you probably don't need us to tell you that piling your plate with fruit and vegetables and getting regular exercise will improve your wellbeing; supporting your sleep, making your skin brighter and helping your favourite skirt feel less snug. However, while it's easier to eat well in summer, if you're not feeling your best and brightest on colder, darker January days, we know very well that it can feel like a challenge to reach for the fruit bowl instead of the biscuit tin – there's a reason they call sweet sticky puddings and chocolate bars comfort foods, after all!

But now we can share exciting evidence that might make you look differently at that plate of salad or steaming bowl of soup, because findings show they may actually be the best way to make you feel not just healthier, but happier.

### What the science says

For a long time we've been advised to increase our intake of fruit and vegetables and get more exercise. It's good for our heart, our gut and – as we've been told more recently – our brain. Multiple studies have revealed that people who eat more fruit and veg are often more content. But these studies rarely tell us *why*, and it's long been assumed that people who eat more fresh foods are probably higher up the social ladder, better off financially and more educated and, in fact, it's these factors, rather than what they put on their plate, that leads to increased happiness.

But now research jointly conducted by the University of Kent and the University of Reading, which looked at data from a long-term survey of thousands of Britons, has proven that it's the eating of the fruit and vegetables and the exercise that have a physical impact on happiness levels, and *not* the societal conditions that lead to making these lifestyle choices. It's a step-change in what we've always been led to believe, so let's say that again: eating fruit and vegetables and exercising are the things that make you happier – and there are no strings attached!

'In economics, it's important to establish cause and link, not just correlation,' says Adelina Gschwandtner



***“Knowing that this behaviour improves happiness is a strong motivator for a healthier lifestyle”***

from the University of Kent's School of Economics. 'There are lots of studies already showing correlation, but finding a causation is much harder,' she adds.

The research was conducted using a framework that tries to find a link between healthy lifestyle behaviour and happiness to show that they aren't just connected, but that one causes the other. Finding this link was like 'a search for gold dust' says Dr Gschwandtner.

But, after seven years, it's a search that have proven, er, fruitful. 'We were able to establish a causal link between a healthy lifestyle and happiness, not the other way around,' Dr Gschwandtner clarifies. 'If people get the message that healthy behaviour will improve happiness, this is a stronger motivator in encouraging people to take them up.' After all, who can argue with a lifestyle change that promises to make you happier?

Read on to discover some simple switches and handy hacks to help you embrace this groundbreaking advice and make 2022 the year you really do feel happier, as well as healthier...





# BLOSSOM WITH PLANTS

## Count your colours

'Concentrate not just on getting your five-a-day but on how many colours you are having,' says Pete Williams, a functional medicine practitioner. 'Try sticking an A4 rainbow colour sheet on your fridge so you can tick off how many colours you have had in the day,' he suggests. Not only will this system encourage you to increase your intake, but variety is also important when it comes to good gut health. Research indicates that a diet consisting of different food types can lead to a more diverse microbiome, which in turn results in a healthier gut.

## Say bye-bye to beige

We're not obsessing with colour or anything, but if your plate is looking too, well, beige, shake it up. Traditional carbs, such as pasta, rice, bread and potatoes, are all very well, but you can easily up your veg intake – and increase your meal's nutritional punch – by switching your boring beige staples for a veggie alternative. Try a side of roasted Mediterranean veg to go with your roast chicken instead of your usual jacket spud. Or why not try courgette, beetroot or sweet potato noodles (either home-made with a spiraliser or from the supermarket) to give your

bolognese a boost. Try using aubergine sheets or leek slices instead of layers of pasta in a lasagne, or roast cauliflower to make a delicious side for your curry. You'll never want plain old boiled rice again!

## Spice it up

Don't forget your store cupboard; herbs and spices are a particularly effective way of getting your plant food numbers up. 'Pound for pound, herbs and spices contain some of the most powerful and helpful compounds to humans,' Williams explains. 'For example, cardamom not only reduces blood pressure and lowers the risk of heart disease, it also helps with reducing depression and anxiety,' he adds. Add a little to your cauliflower (above) to maximise your nutrition.

## Rethink animal products

A vegan diet is one of the best ways to increase your fruit and veg intake. But if this isn't for you just yet, reducing your meat and fish consumption for part of the time still helps, and it's also an exercise in being more creative and inspiring you to mix up your go-to meals. Start with one or two days a week – for example, the classic meat-free Monday – and move up to more days as you build confidence in the kitchen. And on nights you're

still eating meat, try the new 'meat and veg' options available from many of the supermarkets. Meals such as mince with butternut squash or sausages packed with butter beans and onions mean you're increasing your vegetable (and reducing your meat) intake with minimum effort.

## Batch-cook

Meal prep is an excellent way to save time, stop food waste and ensure you always have something nutritious on standby. And packing freezable meals with fruit and veg is an excellent way to ensure you hit those targets. Cook a big pot of veggie-packed curry, soup or stew for cold winter nights, or make a batch of tomato pasta sauce with peppers, carrots, leek and celery for a speedy midweek dinner. Stew fruits such as apple, pear or winter berries to top porridge or yoghurt, or have as a warming mid-afternoon snack.







# EUPHORIC MOVEMENT

## Exercise incidentally

Incidental exercise means moving whenever you get the opportunity. 'No special clothes or equipment are required. Simply put a reminder in your phone to move at least once every hour,' says David Wiener, a training specialist for the fitness app Freeletics. This could be running up the stairs, mopping the kitchen or playing with your kids. If you're still working from home, make the most of the multitasking opportunities. You can take calls while walking around to raise your step count, or sit on an exercise ball as you work at your laptop. 'Use the ball to perform some quick exercises throughout the day – search online for how to do seated marches or stability ball wall climbers, which can easily help you work up a sweat,' Wiener adds.

## Get your groove on

Music is a powerful mood booster and mode of encouragement to get you moving. One study found that music can increase endurance during a workout by up to 15 per cent.\* 'Upbeat, fast-paced music and songs with inspiring lyrics can help motivate you. Frequently updating your playlist and adding new songs can also help,' Wiener recommends.

Even putting on your kit can drastically change your motivation, mindset and mood. If you're tempted to miss a workout, pack your gym bag the night before or, if possible, put your gym clothes on first thing. If you look and feel the part, there's less reason not to exercise.

## Be accountable

Find a friend to exercise with and you're less likely to flake. Research indicates that having a specific

accountability partner increases your chance of success to 95 per cent.\*\* Combining socialising with exercising is also a great way to tick two boxes: seeing friends and staying healthy. If you prefer to work out alone, try signing up for specific classes in advance. You're more likely to attend something you've officially scheduled in your calendar. In the longer term, signing up to events – whether it's a half-marathon, an organised walk or a tennis tournament – is likely to encourage you to stick to your regime.

## Go outside

While it might be harder to leave the comfort of the warm sofa in the winter months, it's more than worth the effort. Exercising outdoors is a double win when it comes to happiness. It has been proven that regular physical activity outdoors leads to greater long-term happiness compared to working out inside. Remember the old adage: there's no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing. Wrap up warm and take your walk, jog or cycle in the park, brave the heated lido or join a game of outdoor sport.

## HIIT it

With workouts ranging from 10-30 minutes, High-Intensity Interval Training, known most commonly as HIIT, is one of the easiest ways to schedule exercise when you're short on time. The concept is simple: intense bursts of exercise followed by short, sometimes active, recovery periods. The intense nature of the workout means you burn high levels of calories both while you're working out and, more importantly, in the hours afterwards.



# THE JOY OF FOOD

Power up your plate with fresh fruit and veg – and eat yourself happy! These good-for-you dishes from health gurus Alana and Lisa Macfarlane of The Gut Stuff will give you a wellbeing boost in body and mind

## *Aubergine and Sweet Potato Katsu Curry*

**'Anything with Katsu Curry in the title... sold!' says Alana**

Serves 4

- 100g ground almonds
- 1 egg or 4 tsp almond milk
- 1 aubergine, cut into 1cm pieces
- 1 medium sweet potato (skin on), cubed
- 2 tbsp groundnut oil or light olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 3 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2.5cm piece of ginger, peeled and grated
- 1 tbsp medium curry powder
- 1 tsp garam masala
- ½ tsp ground turmeric
- 2 carrots (skin on), grated
- 1 apple (skin on), grated
- 2 tbsp light soya sauce or tamari
- 1-2 tbsp tomato puree
- 500ml vegetable stock

### **To serve:**

- 240g wholegrain rice
- Handful fresh coriander
- 4 tbsp milk kefir yoghurt

**1** Preheat the oven to 200°C, 180°C fan, gas mark 6 and line two medium baking trays

with baking paper. Put the ground almonds in a shallow bowl and season with salt and pepper. In another shallow bowl, whisk the egg or add the almond milk.

**2** Coat the aubergine and sweet potato in the beaten egg or almond milk, then the almond mixture. Transfer to the lined baking trays and cook for 25-30 minutes until the vegetables are tender and the almond coating is golden.

**3** Meanwhile, cook the rice as per the packet instructions and set aside.

**4** Heat the oil in a pan over a medium-high heat. Add the onion and cook for 5-7 minutes until softened. Reduce the heat, add the garlic and ginger and cook for 2 minutes. Add the spices and stir through. Add the carrot and apple and stir to combine. Add the soya sauce or tamari, tomato puree and stock. Increase the heat and bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 20 minutes. Remove from the heat and blend to a smooth sauce. Season to taste.

**5** Divide the rice between four plates, add the sauce and top with the roast vegetables, fresh coriander and a dollop of milk kefir yoghurt.

**Store the sauce and veg in the fridge for up to three days. Rice should be stored for one day only and reheated until piping hot.**



PHOTOGRAPH BY HAARALA HAMILTON





*'The Gut-Loving Cookbook' by  
Alana and Lisa Macfarlane of  
The Gut Stuff (Pavilion Books, £16.99)*







## Beetroot Burgers with Root Vegetable Chips

**'A wonderfully bright and light plant-based alternative,' says Alana**

Serves 4+

### For the burgers:

- 1 tbsp olive oil, plus extra for brushing the burgers
- 1 red onion, finely chopped
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 1 slice day-old sourdough bread
- 400g raw beetroot, coarsely grated
- 2 x 400g cans of chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 2 heaped tbsp flaxseed
- 2 tbsp milk kefir yoghurt
- 1 egg
- 1 tbsp tahini
- 1 tbsp rice flour, plus extra if needed

### For the root vegetable chips:

- 1 large sweet potato (skin on), sliced into chips
- ½ celeriac, peeled and sliced into chips
- Olive oil

### To serve (optional):

- Wholegrain buns
- Rocket
- Onion (any variety), sliced
- Ferments, such as kimchi or sauerkraut

**1** Preheat the oven to 220°C, 200°C fan, gas mark 7 and line two medium baking trays with baking paper. Put the sweet potato and celeriac on one of the baking trays, drizzle with olive oil, season and set aside.

**2** In a frying pan, heat 1 tbsp of olive oil and fry the onion for 3-5 minutes until softened. Add the cumin and cook together for 1 minute.

**3** Put the sourdough bread in a food processor and pulse to breadcrumbs, then add the onion mixture along with the grated beetroot, chickpeas, flaxseed, milk kefir yoghurt, egg, tahini and rice flour. Mix to a rough paste, then scrape into a bowl and season well. If the mixture is sticky, add a little more flour.

**4** With damp hands, shape the mixture into about six burgers and space apart on the remaining baking tray. Brush the burgers with a little olive oil and bake in the oven alongside the root vegetable chips for 35-40 minutes until crisp and hot through.

**5** Serve the burgers in wholegrain buns with rocket, onion and ferments, as you wish.

**Leftover beetroot burgers can be stored in an airtight container in the fridge for up to four days.**

## Fruit Crumble

**'The perfect end to a Sunday roast,' says Alana**

Serves 4-6

- 4 apples (skin on), roughly chopped
- 1 pear (skin on), roughly chopped
- 100ml water
- 100g rolled oats
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tbsp maple syrup
- 1 tbsp coconut oil, melted
- Milk kefir yoghurt or dairy-free alternative, to serve

**1** Preheat the oven to 200°C, 180°C fan, gas mark 6.

**2** Place the apples, pear and water in a deep, heavy-based pan over a low-medium heat. Cook gently for 15 minutes until the fruit has softened.

**3** Add the oats, cinnamon, maple syrup and coconut oil to a mixing bowl and stir to combine.

**4** Spread the fruit mixture over the base of a baking dish. Top with the oat mix and bake for 15-20 minutes until the oats are golden. To serve, top the crumble with a spoonful of milk kefir yoghurt.

**Leftover crumble can be stored in the fridge for up to three days and reheated before serving.**





## Good mood food

# NO STING IN THE TAIL!

*Their spiky reputation may precede them, but don't turn your back on nettles – these leafy little numbers are fantastic for your health and perfect for a new year detox*

**W**hen it comes to foraging, there are few foods easier to get hold of than nettles. It might be famous for its sting, but this feisty shrub has been consumed by humans for centuries, and is packed with nourishing goodness.

Historically, nettles were used as a food source in the early spring, before other vegetables appeared, and the tender young leaves provided valuable and much-needed nutrients after a long winter. Young nettles are extremely nutritious and full of chlorophyll, silica, calcium, potassium, iron, manganese and vitamins A and C, which means they are brilliant for our brains and our bodies.

### An anxiety hero

'Nettles' high nutrient content and cleansing components work wonders for your whole body but particularly the nervous system,' says Alison Cullen, a nutritionist. 'They protect it from damage and help keep feelings of stress at bay. Nettle root is also believed to be beneficial for keeping levels of testosterone and oestrogen on an even keel, so you feel brighter and breezier.'

### The perfect balance

'Nettles are not only thought to keep your blood sugar at the optimum level, thanks to a clever compound called urticin, they may also help inhibit the effects of alpha-glucosidase, an enzyme responsible for breaking down carbohydrates and often the cause of dramatic blood-sugar spikes,' adds Cullen. 'This is great news, as we all know that balanced blood sugar means a calmer, happier and more balanced you.'

**BOTTOMS UP!** For a simple solution, add 20 drops of A.Vogel's Stinging Nettle Urtica drops, £10.85, to a glass of water for a daily dose of nettle goodness.



*Although they can sting undamaged skin, when nettles come into contact with a painful area of the body, they're believed to alleviate pain, a process known as urtication.*

### SIMPLE SWAPS

Pass on the peppermint! 'While nettle tea might not be bursting with flavour,' says Cullen, 'it's certainly pleasant and has a wider spectrum of benefits, so makes a good alternative to peppermint tea if you fancy a change. Nettles are widely available in bags or loose, or you can pick and dry your own, or use them fresh in the spring.'



## WARMING WINTER WONDER

Nettles aren't as tasty as spinach, but they have a similar texture, so work wonders alongside it in this Thai spinach and nettle soup:

- Fry 1 medium onion, 1 medium potato, 1 garlic clove and 1 tsp ground cumin.
- Add 1 litre vegetable stock.

- Cover, bring to the boil and simmer for 15 minutes.
- Stir in 50g creamed coconut and 250g chopped nettles.
- Cool, liquidise, reheat and stir in 2 tbsp fresh chopped coriander.
- Add a squeeze of lemon and a pinch of salt and pepper to taste.





# ONE TOO MANY



Does alcohol bring you more pain than pleasure? It can be hard to admit that we have a problem but, as the sober curious movement gains momentum, people are coming out of the shadows to speak openly about the benefits of an alcohol-free life. Vee Sey shares her story...



## Expert advice



Ruari Fairbairns is co-founder of One Year No Beer and co-author of 'The 28 Day Alcohol-Free Challenge: Sleep Better, Lose Weight, Boost Energy, Beat Anxiety' (Pan MacMillan, £12.99). [oneyearnobeer.com](http://oneyearnobeer.com)



Michaela Weaver is a coach, speaker and author of 'The Alcohol Con' (Parker Press, £6.19). She enables women to embrace their authentic and alcohol-free selves. [thealcoholcoach.com](http://thealcoholcoach.com)



Twenty-eight days. I have given myself 28 days to change my relationship with alcohol, because

I can no longer hide from the fact that my frenemy, Chardonnay, is stabbing me in the back with a rusty blade. I feel grubby inside, jaded and diminished, and sadly accustomed to a sluggish mind and aching body too many mornings a week. The words 'Dry January' are falling from the lips of millions of resolute people around the world who want to drink less, so I can do this undetected as a person who worries about her drinking and hide in plain sight. For 28 days.

Wine o'clock gets ever earlier – my time to unwind after a demanding day. 'Mummy's juice!' my friends raise their glasses as we

connect over our social lubricant, which makes me feel vivacious for one or two, before judgment is clouded, emotions run high and I am firing off regrettable texts. Before the hazy decline and ensuing depression, I see myself as the convivial bon viveur, a party girl... 'Anything can happen when you're around!' my friends congratulate me. Until the entertainment goes too far, says something inappropriate, canoodles with the wrong person or becomes the barefoot fool at a work do. Intoxicated, with the emphasis on toxic. Ethanol – yes, the poison in car fuel – dumps embarrassment and melancholy at my door, and it no longer feels like an enjoyable, relaxing choice. Once I start, it can be a bottomless chalice. It makes me laugh, and then it always makes me cry.

I drink alone at home too, anaesthetising myself from the disillusionment of yet

another break-up with a person who was more drinking buddy than partner, from work stress, from the pressures of parenthood and life. No one cares, I mutter self-pityingly, before I fall asleep downstairs, listening to mournful music and wondering why all my relationships fail, before waking zombie-like at 1am, misery and illness descending that will last all day.

Ruari Fairbairns, co-founder of One Year No Beer, a community for people who are questioning their relationship with alcohol, explains more about the indisputable link between alcohol and low mood: 'Alcohol is kryptonite to mental health. There are people who are desperately trying to feel better by taking antidepressants who are making it ten times worse by drinking alcohol.' He believes that taking a break from alcohol



should be the first intervention for people with mental health issues. 'I didn't realise that I was using alcohol to numb out my ADHD brain,' he shares, 'and it was good at helping me silence the noise but, ultimately, although the highs were high, the lows were so low.'

## Is it in my blood?

I am terrified that I might be an alcoholic. I am the daughter of an alcoholic who made my childhood hell and I have always nursed an iron determination not to follow their selfish and damaging path, so how did I end up here? Because alcohol is a highly addictive substance, second only to heroin, and tumbling into misuse is a slippery slope on which I no longer have traction. Mental health aside, my passion for the job I love is dregs. I am overweight because I am unmotivated to make healthy choices and no amount of stodge fills the hollowness that alcohol leaves. My children are disappointed in me. The older one is drinking too much, continuing the pattern.

Was I always destined to be like my parent, then watch my offspring helplessly do the same? Michaela Weaver, The Alcohol Coach, wishes there was a 'shake-up' around the word alcoholic. She sees that the classification is a personal issue for me and one around which I have built a narrative. 'We were all brought up thinking a person is either an alcoholic or they are not,' says Weaver. 'At one end is the "rock bottom" image of the person on the park bench drinking methylated spirits out of a brown paper bag, which stops us from addressing the problem. That is not real life. Real life is the individual leading a stressful life who finds themselves drinking at the end of the day to relieve stress, and that creeps up over time.'

Weaver explains that watching your parents drink is a familial peer group pressure. 'This is role-modelling that you will either follow or rebuff,' she says. 'In families of non-drinkers, a person might become a heavy drinker and in families of heavy drinkers, a person may decide they never want a drink in their life.'

'I don't believe in the term alcoholic,' agrees Fairbairns. 'The reality is that we all always question our relationship with alcohol. We wake up on a Sunday and think: "Why did I drink so much? What did I do? What did I say?" A huge number of people who might be labelled an addict



***"I have fallen into the trap of believing that alcohol will ease my pain, when it does the opposite"***

for life switch off from the idea of transformation because they are told: "Sorry, you messed up, go and sit on the naughty step." He believes that focusing on the benefits of taking a break make people feel good about themselves again. 'It's about creating a positive mindset that lets you take back control and make clear-sighted decisions,' he says.

I see that I am mimicking my parent, but not because I was born with a ruinous disease. I also see that I have fallen into the trap of believing that alcohol will ease my emotional pain when it does the opposite. Feeling this way is not my fate, and I am empowered to make change. Twenty-eight days.

## The journey begins

I have tackled a period of abstinence before with all the grit of a broken soul on New Year's Day, until the weekend comes and I think sod it, I *deserve* a glass of

wine. One Year No Beer sounds like a lifetime, so I opt for the shortest challenge. The Challengers' group is on Facebook, which is otherwise awash with triggering images of glassy-eyed people drinking, but I ignore my feed and find joint purpose and solidarity in the closed network. There are women like me who have flown too long with 'the wine witch' while their lives fell apart, partners who have drunk away families and jobs, forlorn people for whom alcohol is the gateway to other drugs. There are people embracing fitness – sweaty luminous-eyed selfies at the top of hills are de rigueur – and delighting in psychedelic sunrises they have not seen for years. The atmosphere is uplifting and sincere, and supportive when someone admits they drank. They call it an accountability post, so that they can accept what happened and move forward. I like it here.

I download an app called EasyQuit that counts the minutes, hours and days since I last drank. It logs how my health is improving with every teeny milestone. It tells me how much money I am saving day by day and there are tips to beat the urge to drink. After 24 hours, my blood is free of alcohol and my glucose levels are normalising. That's enough for now and, still suffering from the night before, I collapse into bed, reading posts on OYNB until I fall into an exhausted, yet tentatively hopeful, sleep.

'Quit lit' is the talk of the town on OYNB, so I fill my inner world with reading material and podcasts that bring revelations and give encouragement. With every day that passes, my mind and body feel lighter and I am sleeping better. I share online and am heartened by wise comments and congratulations on three days, five, a week... then two... It isn't easy, white-knuckle cravings are real and there is no rosy tint on my spectacles, but I am not crossing off the days like a prisoner in a cell. I have been warned about profuse night sweats as the body detoxifies but, after a week or so, I find the opposite, and what I assumed to be the menopause disappears! Deep, restorative sleep is a priceless balm for my emotional state and I feel myself rallying.

I used to drink a stomach-curdling bottle of wine for dinner, declaring: 'You can't drink *and* eat without gaining weight,' as if I had valuable insider



knowledge, and my appetite returns to normal, if hungry, although I try to choose wisely because I feel clean and do not want to sully myself with junk. I read that others are struggling with sugar cravings, but the communal thinking is: As long as you don't drink. Be kind to yourself. Eat all the cake. I allow myself treats, guilt-free, and consider the liquid calories I used to consume, which gives me licence to nourish myself to fullness. I am not hopping on the scale daily, but I struggle with emotional eating, so it pleases me to feel less bloated.

One evening, I am on autopilot stirring a puttanesca sauce after a demon of a day, and Keith Floyd's chuckling face pops into my head, gulping down a glass of red in four sips, jolly about Italy with his hair dancing in the breeze. The urge to join him and be that girl – Patsy or Eddie! – is overwhelming, so I open a bottle of alcohol-free prosecco. It's like grape juice, pleasant and fizzy, and I have it in my pretty, coloured flute. I drink half the bottle while cooking and take the rest for

bath time, where I rest, read and top up my glass until it's all gone. My younger child eyes my drink sadly, but I assure her it's alcohol-free. I see a flicker of respect, admiration even, on her face. 'You are doing so well, Mum,' she smiles, and perches on the edge of the bath for a chat. 'Thank you,' I reply, welling up. We are proud of me.

I wake refreshed, energised enough to exercise. I rise early and go to bed early now – sometimes, to make the day end and, sometimes, because sleep calls me insistently, beckoning me to heal in her arms. This day becomes the template for my weeks, although I don't drink bubbles every day. Naughty Wednesday, which meant I gave myself permission to drink midweek, is still naughty, but with something fudgy, caramelly, or chocolatey...

The month is quiet socially, which eases

the pressure and averts any questions about my not drinking. On the last Friday evening after work, my young copycat nips to the shop for beers. I ask him to bring me a bottle of zero so I can have a lager with him. I hear that familiar clink as he steps through the front door and he looks excited. He has four bottles of nought per cent. 'I thought I'd try one of these babies with you,' he grins. We drink our drinks, catch up on our days, then watch a family film, which I will remember from beginning to credits. We three cuddle each other as we say goodnight and decide to take a walk in the morning to the little stone coffee shop that we like at the lock. I did it. My 28 days are done. But I do not want it to be over. This does not feel like an ending. This feels like a beginning...

***“Naughty Wednesdays are still naughty, but now with something fudgy or chocolatey...”***





# 3 STEPS TO ALCOHOL-FREE SUCCESS

Ruari Fairbairns' stay-on-track hacks

## 1 RIDE IT OUT

A craving comes in a wave, then dissipates, so treat yourself like a toddler and use distraction: exercise or meditation.

Sometimes, we want to press the eff-it button and exercise and meditation are at the bottom of the list... The fastest way to change your mental state is to change your physical state, so have a cold shower, which releases dopamine and fills the gap that you're trying to fill, which is dopamine! Or try box breathing: Four seconds in, four seconds hold, four seconds out, four seconds hold. The craving will pass.

## 2 HAVE A PLACEBO AND REWIRE YOUR BRAIN

Most of your drinking is about what you think alcohol gives you and social cues. An alcohol-free alternative delivers the same things. It's that time of the day, so you go to the fridge and open the door... There's what looks like a bottle of beer, you open it like a bottle of beer, it smells like a bottle of beer, it tastes like beer, but there's no alcohol in it. With an alcohol-free alternative, you are soothing 95 per cent of your psychological need without consuming alcohol. You are keeping that part of your brain satiated and you are teaching it, step by step: Ha! There was no alcohol in that and yet I feel relaxed, socially included and, yes, I've released dopamine. The brain wakes up the following day, feels good and makes the connection: no alcohol was involved.

## 3 FIND A TRIBE

Society created our relationship with alcohol. We were watching it when we were in nappies and it was primed into our brain over decades: Celebrate, commiserate and congratulate with alcohol. Because of those expectations, you need a community if you are going to change. If you do it on your own, the instinctive brain says: 'Wait a minute! You are leaving the tribe. Do you know how dangerous that is? Get back to the tribe and have a drink now!' Your brain is trying to keep you safe. If you stay home, avoid your friends and don't connect with people on the same journey as you, you will find it so much harder, consciously and subconsciously.

### Reader offer

Get 25% off One Year No Beer challenges by using the code 'Psych25' at checkout. Offer valid until 28 February. Find out more at [oneyearnobeer.com](http://oneyearnobeer.com)



### ▶▶ NEXT STEPS

**Read** *The Unexpected Joy Of Being Sober* by Catherine Gray (Octopus, £9.99) is a witty, non-preachy and honest account of the author's misadventures with alcohol and her discoveries about life without it. This is an enjoyable read, whether you are a devoted drinker, sober curious or suspect that you might have a problem.

**Listen** The *Alcohol Free Life* podcast with Janey Lee Grace, the founder of The Sober Club, offers tips, advice and motivation in a non-judgmental and inspiring way, with the focus on self-care in sobriety. [thesoberclub.com](http://thesoberclub.com)

**Download** The I Am Sober app is a free sobriety tracker that asks you to make a morning pledge, with daily notifications for support. There is space for notes, plus a timer rolling over on your phone so you can monitor your progress. [iamsobber.com](http://iamsobber.com)





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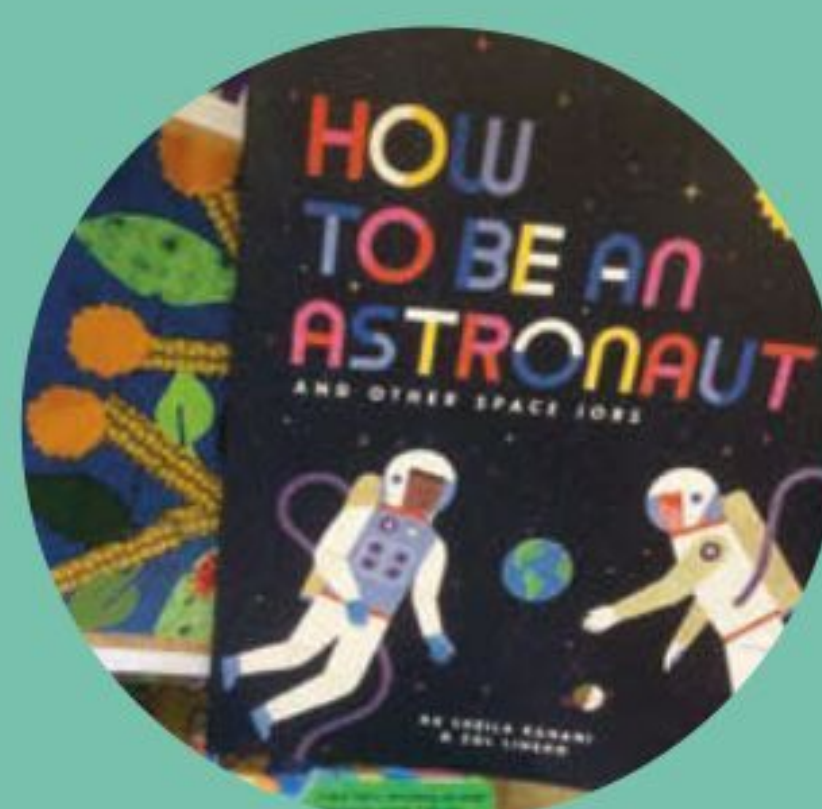
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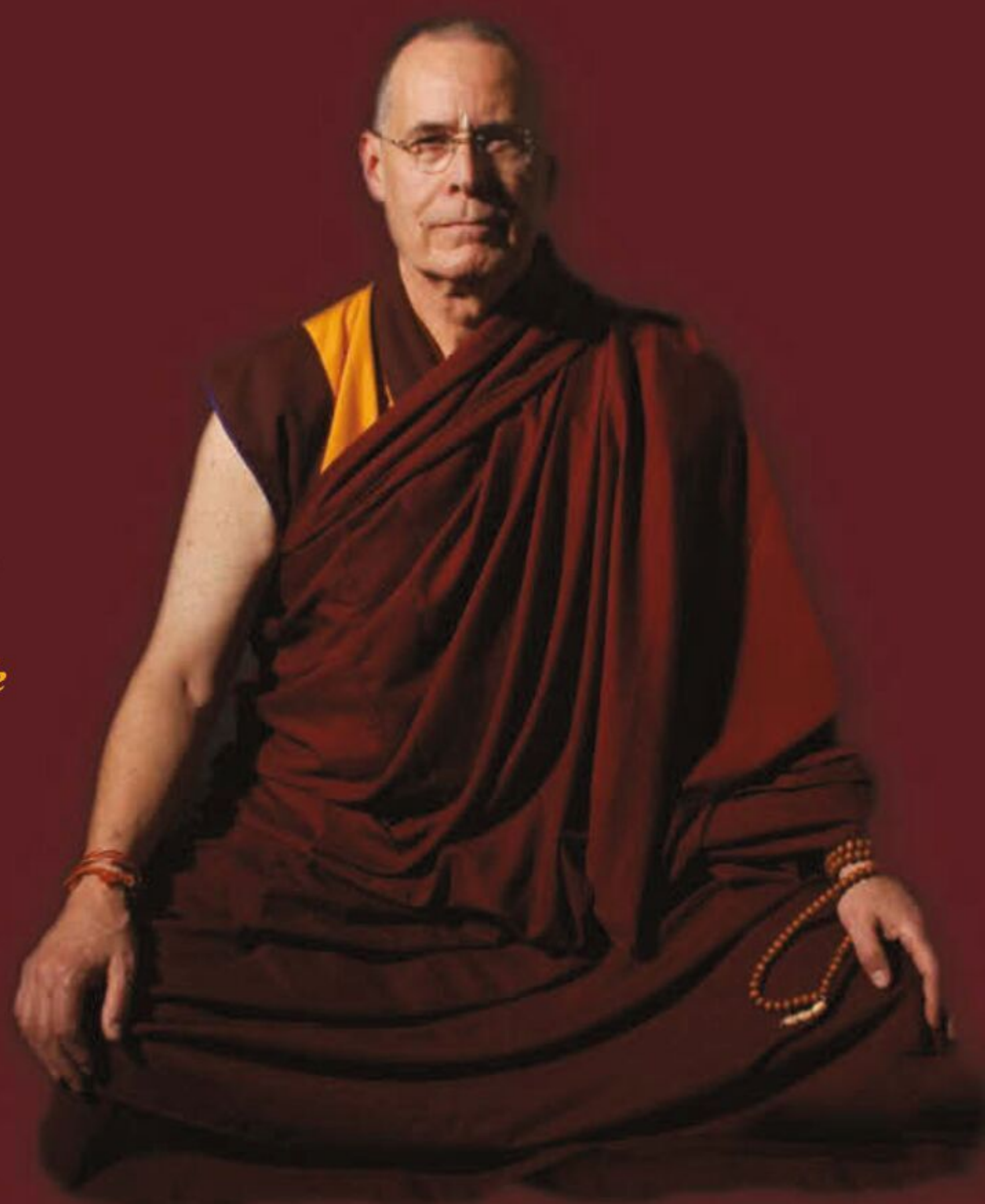
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# RETREAT INTO *creativity*

Surrendering to imagination and inventiveness on an artful getaway is a passageway to being present, as Caroline Sylger Jones discovers

**I**t's dawn, and I'm doing yoga by the open window in my attic room, relishing the view of a pink sun coming up over the Shropshire Hills while listening to birdsong. Between asanas, I dash to a notepad lying on my desk to scribble something down. I'm in the middle of giving birth to a poem, and the lines won't stop coming.

I'm on a five-night Arvon poetry retreat at The Hurst, the former home of the late playwright John Osborne, and we have a daily schedule that's getting me up early and keeping me inspired. After my practice, I sit to complete a first draft of the poem at my desk, which a tiny gold plaque tells me is The Emily Dickinson Desk, alongside a quote from one of her poems: *'Tell all the truth but tell it slant'*. A little thrill goes through me, and also a feeling of relief – that the retreat is actually working, because I'm writing.

Led by the poets Tamar Yoseloff and Hannah Lowe, with a guest-reading halfway through the week from Rishi Dastidar, the course features morning group workshops, afternoons in private sessions or for time out to write, and evenings for poetry readings and relaxation. The set-up is ideal for creativity: there are long walks to be had with no one around for miles, the warm house is small enough if you want company and big enough if you don't, and the tutors are clever, committed and kind.

Kindness is important because going on a creative retreat – whatever its subject – is an act of bravery. Not only are you being courageous by



entering a roomful of strangers to create and then reveal your creations, you are standing up and saying to yourself that you are a creative person, with the right to create and learn how to create better.

There are 13 poets on my course, all at different stages – some, like me, are already published and committed to a creative path and others are keen to pursue creativity for the sheer joy of it. Arvon calls every guest a writer – whether they're prolific or just starting out – from the moment they arrive, because its ethos is to treat everyone equally.

All the best creative retreats will



do the same – whether the focus is on pottery or furniture making, life drawing or photography, sewing or singing. That's because they recognise that this is a brilliant chance for their guests to silence all the voices in their lives that might have told them that they weren't creative, from the parent who said being a musician wouldn't earn them enough money to the art teacher who laughed at their paintings. As it goes, all of us are creative beings in some form or another.

Creative retreats can help you connect with yourself and whatever is going on in your life at that moment, as well as enable you to engage with your chosen artform. You don't have to have had a traumatic childhood or be particularly 'good at art' to attend such escapes – living in our mid-pandemic world gives you reason enough. Creativity refers to both imagination and inventiveness – and nurturing both can help you shape the life you want, whether you want to finish a novel, kickstart a new career or simply find a creative solution to an issue.

My top tip? Set an intention before you arrive, so you are not too swayed by what everyone else is doing. It took self-discipline, for example, for me to steer clear of the wine and get to bed on time so that I could make the most of the precious time I had carved out for myself away from my usual routine. This is doubly important during an Arvon week, because everyone contributes at some point to the cooking and washing up. I managed it – while still having time to connect with lovely people. A month afterwards, I continue to write daily.

## Hone your craft

Arvon runs retreats, workshops and one-to-one writing courses covering fiction, poetry, non-fiction, writing for children and young adults, screenwriting and playwriting. Courses run online and at three historic houses – The Hurst in Shropshire, Tottleigh Barton in Devon and Lumb Bank in Yorkshire. Arvon is a charity and provides grants to those on low incomes. Prices from £540 for three days. [arvon.org](http://arvon.org)

# 10 MORE CREATIVE RETREATS FOR 2022

## Curious House, East Sussex

Painting Bloomsbury-style lampshades, willow weaving and even iPhone photography are just a taste of what's on the menu at the inspired Curious House, which runs many of its courses from the boutique pub The Bell, in Ticehurst, East Sussex. On 18 January, join Melissa White to learn decorative painting and ageing and distressing techniques to create your own heirloom painted treasure box. From £130pp. [curioushouse.net](http://curioushouse.net)

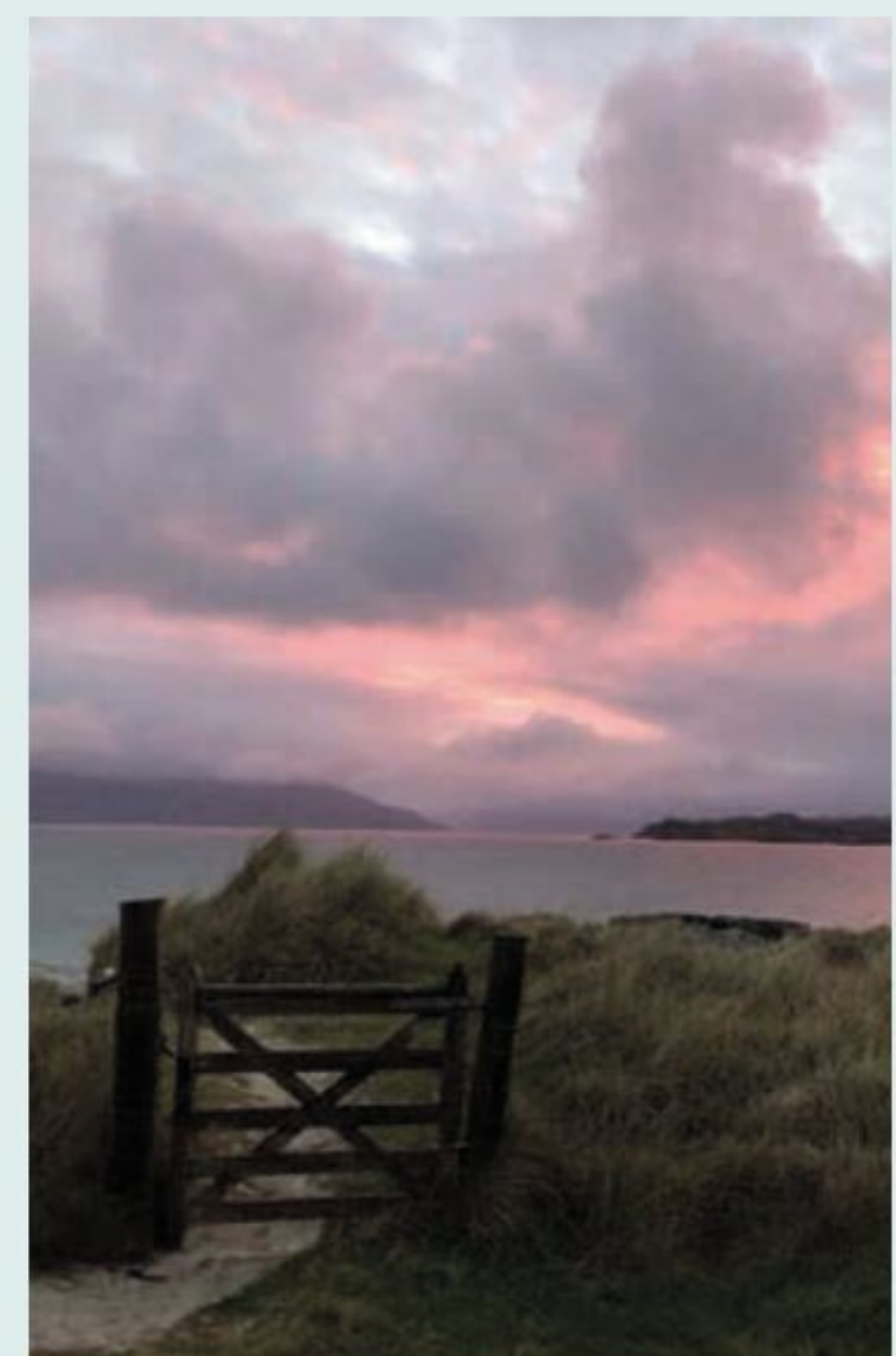


## The Travelling Bookbinder, Iona

Run by the author and artist Rachel Hazell, a Driftwood Binding Retreat break on the spiritual isle of Iona, off the coast of Scotland, will teach you the art of folding, stitching and binding books. Through step-by-step exercises, you'll make your own book with wooden covers. The next course is 29 March to 2 April. From £1,495pp for four nights. [thetravellingbookbinder.com](http://thetravellingbookbinder.com)

## The Writing Room, locations worldwide

The personable and talented coach Kate Emmerson and the literary agent Sarah Bullen are experts at helping you find your writing voice. They host group retreats in Greece, Italy and South Africa, mainly focused on non-fiction and memoir writing. This year, the creative pair also launch a supported, private writing space in an idyllic house on Iona in Scotland. Book a Greek retreat from 2 to 9 or 10 to 20 June. From £2,384pp for seven nights. [thewritingroom.co.za](http://thewritingroom.co.za)







### THE SONG HOUSE, IRELAND

Choir director Candy Verney offers singing holidays at her sustainable retreat centre (complete with its own organic gardens), set on the Wild Atlantic Way in Donegal. The next retreat is *Spring Songs and Seaweed* from 22 to 24 April.

Priced from £187pp. [thesonghouseireland.com](http://thesonghouseireland.com)

### Textile Holidays, Italy

These self-catering holidays, set on an olive grove just outside Castiglione del Lago in Umbria, are run by the textiles teacher and artist Bronwen Shepherd. Learn sewing, dressmaking, how to patchwork and more on this relaxing break. The first retreat of 2022 runs 23 to 30 April, four days of which will be in the studio learning how to make a Bargello lap quilt. From £700pp. [textileholidaysitaly.com](http://textileholidaysitaly.com)



### Schumacher College, Devon

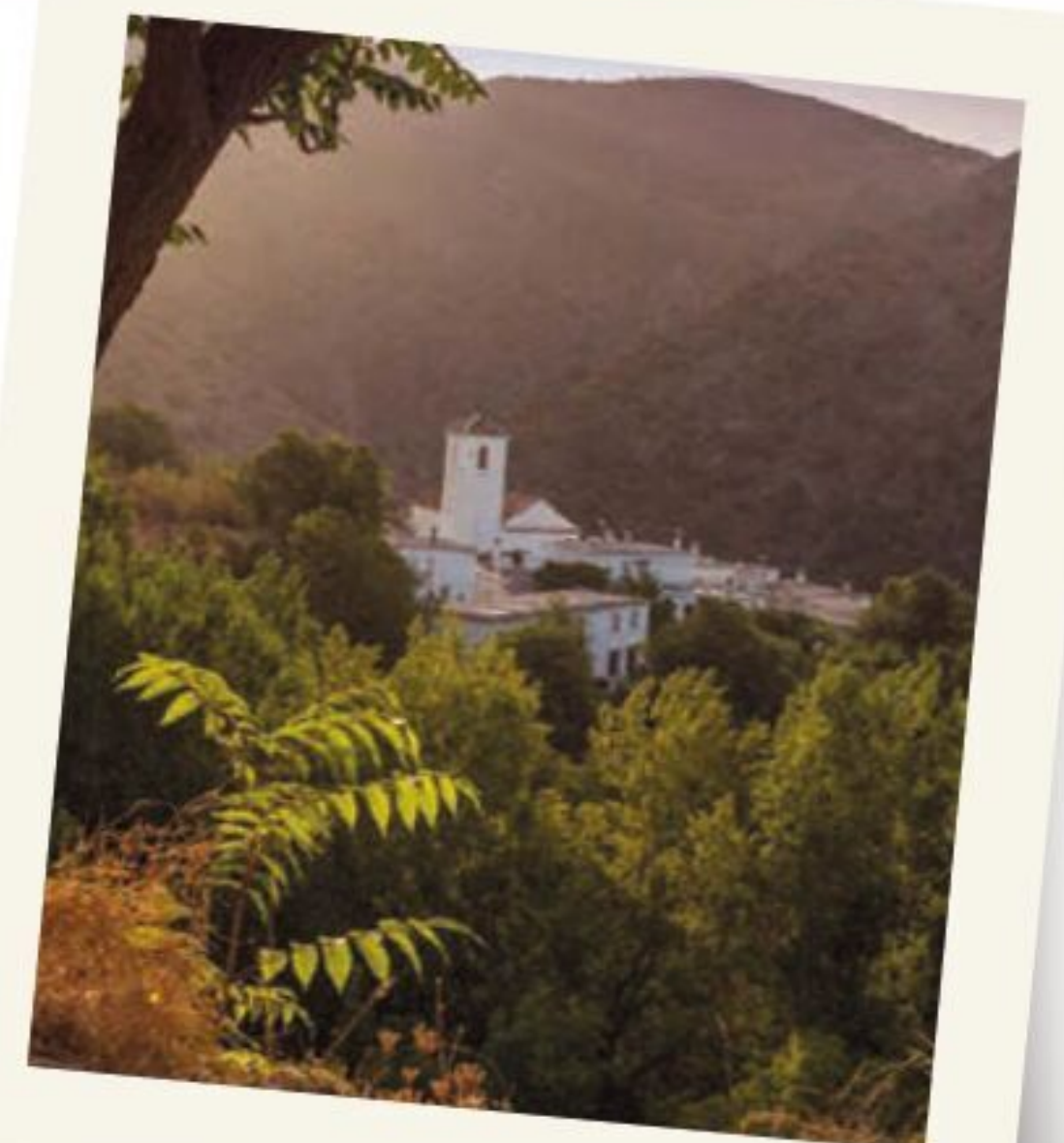
These creative getaways on a beautiful 1,200-acre estate in the South Hams include gardening, sculpting, charcoal drawing, ceramics and basketry courses. Join a one-day session, *The Art of Basketry*, on 5 March and weave your own bread-proving basket (£195pp), or from 12 to 13 March you can make your own foraging basket. Priced £390pp for two days.

[campus.dartington.org/schumacher-college](http://campus.dartington.org/schumacher-college)

### Casa Ana, Spain

Among the writing and painting courses on offer at this gem in the Alpujarra mountains in southern Spain is *Improvisation on Paper*, where the writer and radio director Mandy Wheeler will show you how to unblock your self-expression. The next course is 14 to 20 May. From £893pp for seven nights.

[casa-ana.com](http://casa-ana.com)







## West Dean College, Sussex

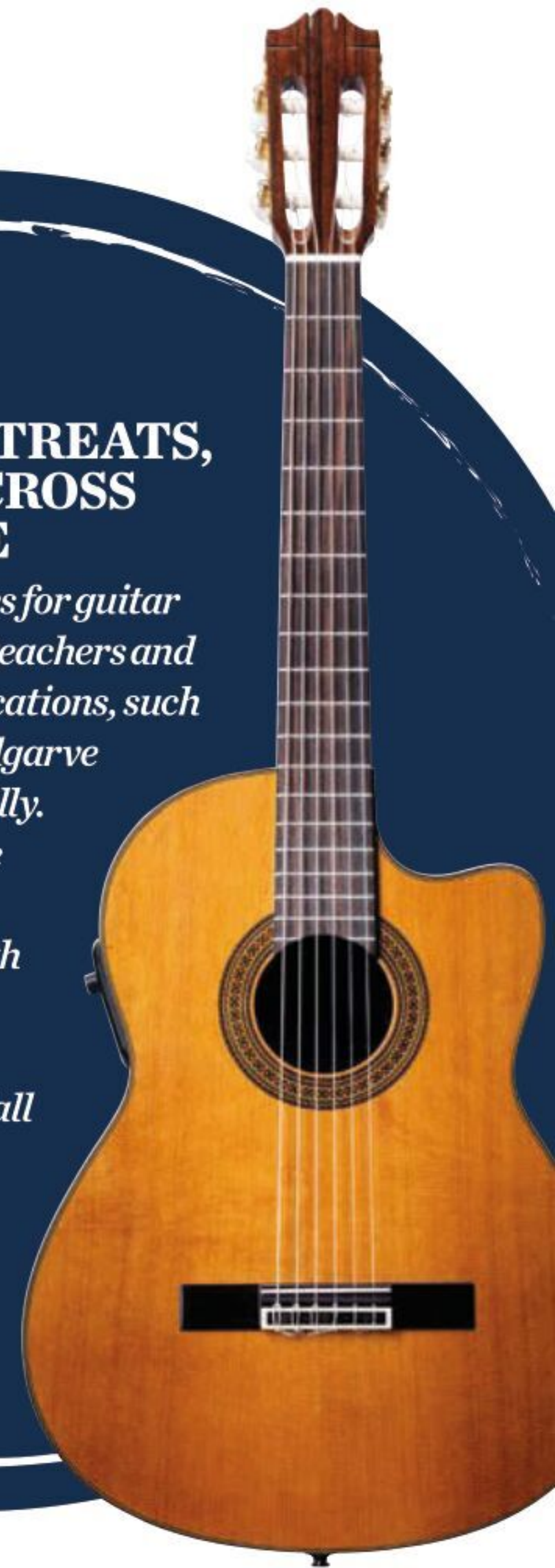
There are more than 300 creative short courses to choose from at the stunning West Dean College of Arts and Conservation, including life drawing, silk-screen printing, jewellery making and calligraphy. Accommodation options include the grade II-listed house the Old Vicarage or a cottage on the beautiful 6,400-acre estate near Chichester. The next course is Painterly Silk-Screen Printing from 3 to 6 February, from £416pp.

[westdean.org.uk](http://westdean.org.uk)

## GUITAR RETREATS, UK AND ACROSS EUROPE

*These light-hearted escapes for guitar enthusiasts are led by expert teachers and take place in carefully chosen locations, such as the Dordogne in France, the Algarve in Portugal and on the Isles of Scilly.*

*Open to everyone, they offer the chance to learn new styles and techniques, and jam and sing with like-minded people. The next retreat runs 30 January to 2 February at Dumbleton Hall in the Cotswolds. From £380pp. [guitar-retreats.co.uk](http://guitar-retreats.co.uk)*



## Artful Retreats, Crete

Head to the heritage village of Gavalochori on the Greek island of Crete and discover how to make art therapy fun. You'll stay on an olive grove estate and mix art therapy with yoga, walking, gourmet food and visits to local artists. The next Reset art retreat runs 28 May to 2 June. From £1,174pp for six nights.

[artfulretreats.com](http://artfulretreats.com)







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# Three lines is all it takes

*Live in the moment with writing that takes a small window of your time, encourages Jackee Holder. Raise an inspired pen to the art of haiku!*



Journalling and  
expressive writing  
can be playful as well  
as resourcing, so this  
month let's focus on

the poetic Japanese practice of haiku. Traditional haikus are short poems originally designed to reference nature or the seasons, blending in an element of surprise between lines two and three. Haikus are composed of three lines made up of five, then seven, then five syllables. Here's an example by one of Japan's great haiku masters Hasegawa Kanajo:

***The autumn drizzling rain  
In a flash  
The pine trees get wet***

Short and sweet but speaking volumes is how I think of haikus. The idea of writing three lines is appealing for those with busy lives, and it's a way of practising mindfulness. Haikus are a perfect format for writing in the moment.

Break from the formality of writing at a desk. Get nimble, lean in to that ordinary moment of taking the clothes out of the washing machine or sitting on the upper deck of a bus looking down at the world. I once watched a woman pluck vivid purple, crimson and white tulips from the middle of a small roundabout while I was travelling on a bus. The scene made me grin and it's a great example of a moment that could be transported into a haiku.

The deliberate pause of noticing when crafting a haiku facilitates a creative and mindful way of absorbing and savouring ordinary moments. It is this living into the fabric of your day that the writer Annie Dillard refers to when she says: 'How you live your days is how you live your life.'

Give yourself permission to experiment.



Escape from digital spaces and write haikus on everyday surfaces: The back of an envelope, a shopping receipt, a napkin...

Feeling inspired? Set a goal of writing one haiku a day for the next seven days. Set a timer for five minutes, then take four deep breaths. Haikus soften to the long form craft of handwriting with pen on paper. If you want to make it even more fun, tear sheets of paper into squares and pop them in your purse. Pull them out in a given moment and off you go!

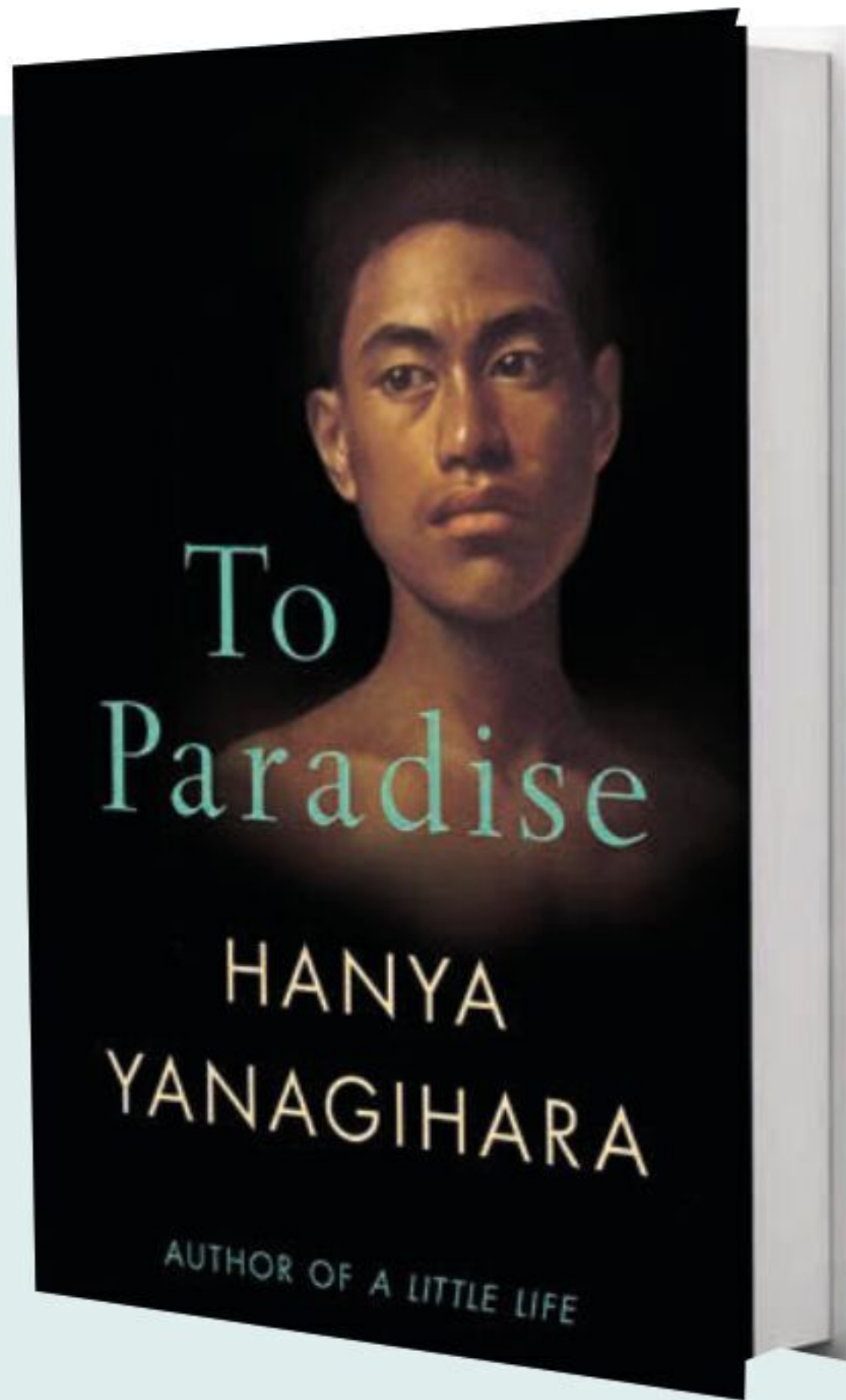
I hope that this column is growing your confidence with expressive writing. As Sharon Blackie reminds us in *The Enchanted Life: Reclaiming The Magic And Wisdom Of The Natural World* (September, £9.99): 'Enchantment does not require magic, it requires attention.'

**[jackeeholder.com](http://jackeeholder.com); @jackeeholderinspires**



# The words

*Snuggle up by the fireside and escape into the rich tapestry of storytelling, with Eithne Farry's roundup of the month's most absorbing reads*



*Book  
of the  
month*

## To Paradise

By Hanya Yanagihara, Pan Macmillan, £20

**Hanya Yanagihara's unforgettable second novel, *A Little Life*, was a word-of-mouth sensation – a compelling sob fest of pleasure and pain. Her latest novel returns to the tricky territory of relationships – who we fall in love with and why, and how a tangled skein of contradictory emotions can enhance or erode a life.**

**Told as a trio of stories – each a hundred years apart – and with a cast of characters who share names but are entirely different in each section, it's set in an America that is at once familiar yet entirely fictional. There's love, loss, shame and desire, plus a futuristic world that slowly seems to be descending into chaos as pandemics change how lives are lived. It's a powerful, emotionally potent read that puts the bonds between partners and children, family and friends at its expansive, empathetic heart.**

## A Terrible Kindness

By Jo Browning Wroe  
Faber & Faber, £14.99

Jo Browning Wroe's delicate, elegant debut will break your heart into pieces and then gently put it back together as hope, compassion and the power of community carefully repair the hurt.

Talented singer and newly qualified embalmer William Lavery, just 19, heads to Wales to help with the terrible aftermath of a landslide at a school. Estranged from his mother and his best friend, and with a promising music career left behind him, William faces an uncertain future which, over the course of this moving book, settles into something generous and ultimately forgiving.

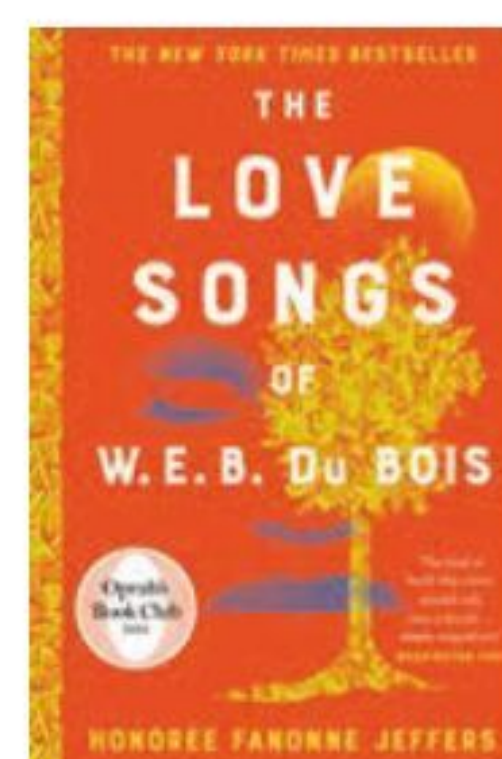


## The Love Songs Of W. E. B. Du Bois

By Honorée Fanonne Jeffers  
4th Estate, £20

Ailey Pearl Garfield is smart, scathing and volatile, and the perfect narrator for this astonishing and ambitious novel. It's a grand sweep of a book, which still manages to be up close and intimate as Ailey explores her complicated family history – her ancestors were enslaved and exploited, and her immediate family were involved in the civil rights movement.

Her personal history is fraught with heartbreak and bad boyfriends, marked by a damaged childhood and the anguish of her addicted sister, but it's also funny, lyrical and full of tenderness, as Ailey lays claim to her heritage.



## The Maid

By Nita Prose  
HarperCollins, £14.99

Molly is a young woman with an old soul. Socially inept, abandoned by her mother when she was a 'wee biscuit', and bereft by the recent death of her beloved grandmother, she's feeling a little lost. Her job as a maid in the glamorous Regency Grand Hotel, cleaning up after guests who hardly notice she's there, is perfect for a person who abhors mess of all kinds.

But then she discovers the dead body of an extremely wealthy man in one of the rooms. Pitched into the middle of a murder mystery, Molly's mettle is tested in more ways than she can imagine in this endearing and intriguing whodunnit.





A photograph of three women sitting on the floor in front of a large window. The woman on the left has tattoos on her arms and is holding a large sheet of paper. The woman in the middle is holding a tablet. The woman on the right is wearing a light blue blazer and dark trousers. They are all smiling and looking at the tablet. The background shows a brick wall and a view of a city through the window.

WORK IN PROGRESS

# “*How can I find the motivation to bounce back?*”

Our brilliant agony aunt, Mary Fenwick, turns her gaze to the world of work, helping sort out the problems you are struggling with day-to-day

*“Despair is often premature: it’s a form of impatience, as well as of certainty”*

**Rebecca Solnit**



**Q** My work has changed a lot since my firm merged with another business. Throughout the pandemic, I've been one of the people saying, 'Let's make this work,' even though things were also challenging for me in my home life. Now I've run out of steam. The changes implemented are making my job even harder, and I feel as if things are being hidden from us. I just don't like the new vibe. How can I rediscover the old resilient me?

Resilience is one of my specialist subjects – with a few words of caution first. Commonly, we think of resilience as the ability to bounce back, and much of the language surrounding resilience comes from engineering: how do materials react to pressure? As one LinkedIn post says, a resilient substance 'returns unscathed to its original shape having absorbed severe stress, rather than becoming deformed'. But is this really what we expect of ourselves?

For the past couple of years, I've been working a lot with healthcare leaders. Together, we talk about three key factors: nobody feels bouncy after this long; we can't go back to how things were; and our capacity to be resilient depends on our environment. In essence, if the demands are unreasonable, there's a limit to what we can absorb.

In your case, there are even more factors in the mix. It sounds as if you've lost trust in your bosses. Although trust might be difficult to define, we all feel the difference when it's not there. In the machine analogy, it is like oil – without it, nothing runs smoothly.

The other foundation of a good workplace is even more intangible: Google conducted research into what makes a great team and, along with the Harvard psychologist

Amy Edmondson, identified the essential oxygen of the workplace as 'psychological safety'. That means having the confidence to say when things are going wrong, whether it's your mistake or someone else's.

So, before placing the entire burden on your own resilience, consider whether you have legitimate reasons to question any further changes. Perhaps the business needs to hear from you.

If you've stopped believing that speaking up can make a difference, that's another warning signal. Both you and your employer need to be aware, in case you are on the road to exhaustion and burnout. The Yerkes-Dodson stress curve (below right) has been known for more than 100 years. It demonstrates that a certain level of pressure is good for us, but when that stress is either too much or goes on for too long (sound familiar?), we start going down the other side of the curve and need help to pull ourselves back up.

Tips on resilience are worth trying if you've still got any bounce to build on. Is there an employee assistance programme, with counselling? Could you ask one or two people who love and admire you outside work for their perspective? If a good friend were in this position, what would you advise?

## Build your resilience

Try these evidence-based strategies to improve resilience in all areas of your life:

### CONNECTION

- **One to one** Prioritise those relationships where you can talk about what matters to you. In the words of Bill Withers: 'No one can fill those of your needs that you won't let show.'
- **In a group** The need for community is hardwired into us. It might be faith-based, signing up for group lessons in a new skill or joining a walking club. Finding something in common with other people reminds us that we are not alone in our challenges.

### THE BODY

- **Physical** Carrying stress in our bodies is both a reflection and cause of mental distress. It's easy to let the basics slip when we're under pressure. Remember when an hour's walk outside felt like a gift? Or try five minutes of stretching.
- **Look up** The people who built cathedrals recognised that it can be a good thing to feel small in a big universe. The shift in perspective – awe – that we feel when we're near the ocean, or looking up at the stars or a centuries-old tree can be an antidote if stress is grinding us down.

### THE HOPEFUL MIND

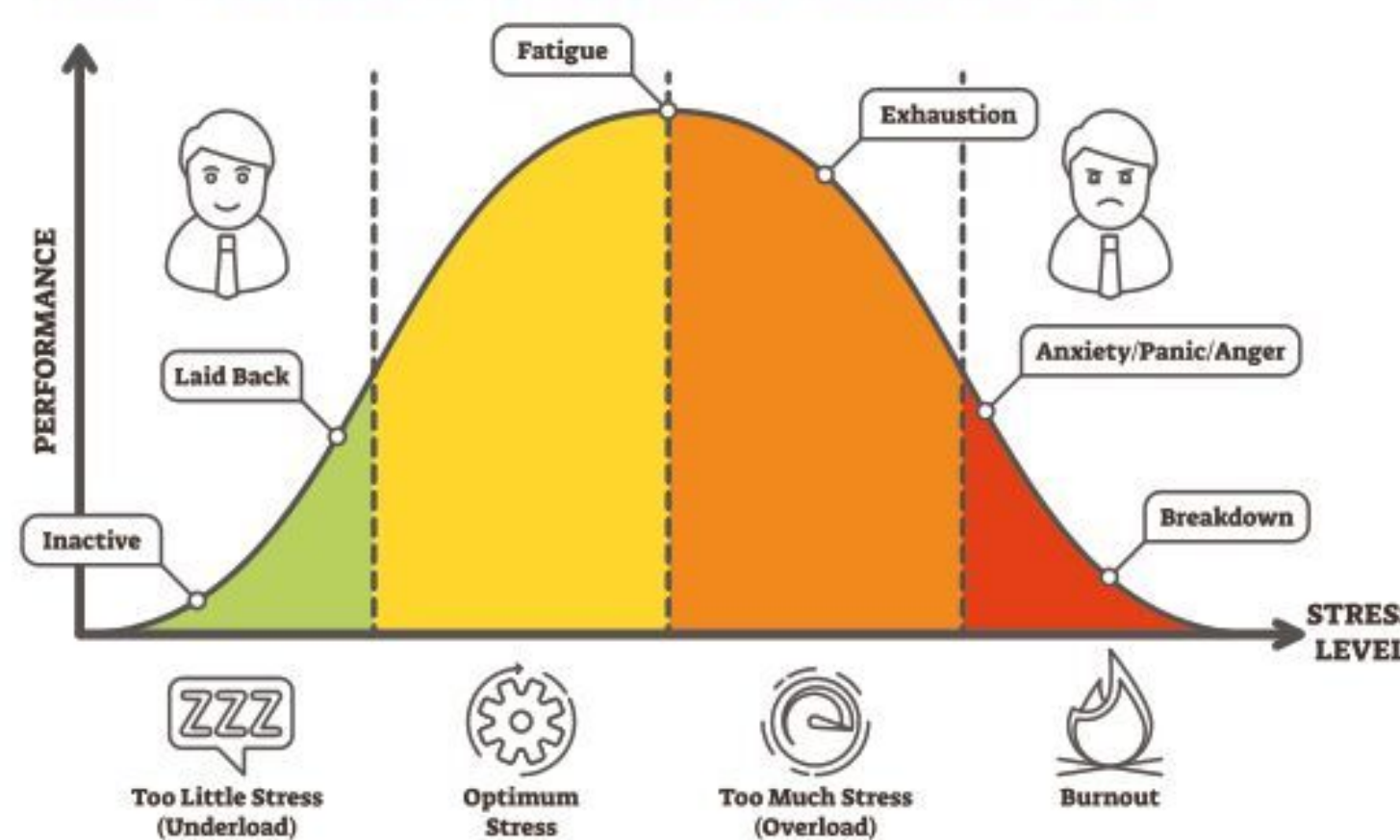
Ask yourself: 'What can I do right now?' We have control over our smallest actions. You can choose where to direct your eyes, whether to pick up a glass of wine, a magazine or your partner's hand. Now ask, 'What more could I do?' Research shows that we feel better when we can see more than one pathway to the future. Ask one or two trusted people for their advice – it will help them feel good too.

Mary Fenwick is a writer and director of coaching at [teamsandleadership.com](http://teamsandleadership.com). She's also a mother, divorcee and widow. Connect with her on LinkedIn or Twitter @MJFenwick

**Got a question for Mary?**  
Email [mary@psychologies.co.uk](mailto:mary@psychologies.co.uk) with 'Mary life' or 'Mary work' in the subject line



The Yerkes-Dodson stress curve





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**Mindfulmeschool is a place to notice the self more.**

Jenny is an emotional coach and mindfulness specialist working with children and adults helping clients to unblock unhelpful behaviours and alleviate self doubt.

Jenny works with all ages on all topics... Self Esteem/Dealing with difficulty/Managing change.

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- [contact@apac.org.uk](mailto:contact@apac.org.uk)
- 01825 761 143



## CAREER SOS?

### Help is at hand so you can stop accepting:

- Workload Overwhelm
- Loss of work-life balance
- Feeling unheard
- Being stuck in a job you hate
- Thinking you're not good enough
- A difficult boss or colleague
- Imposter Syndrome



These are just some examples of the situations the 100's of UK managers and professionals I have worked with, have found themselves in.

Say goodbye to that "this is just how it is" mentality. Get clear on what to do, build your confidence and develop the skills and know-how you need to make the changes you want, happen. I'd love to help you.

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wingwave® Trainer and NLP Coach Caroline Rushforth is holding trainings during January and March 2022. Check website for further dates and info.

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# PSYCHOLOGIES

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## *Your Questions in Mind... to help and inspire*

**Q** My friend is going through a really difficult time, how can I show her that I really care even though I am far away?

**A)** Friendinabox offers thoughtfully curated gifts for both difficult and happy occasions. The gifts are carefully packaged in an eye-catching blue box which fits through most letterboxes. You can write a letter of unlimited length to show care and support rather than being limited to a short message. They are ideal gifts to send for bereavement,

illness, hospital stays but also for birthdays, thank yous and friendship appreciation. Popular boxes include Be Kind to Yourself, Sleep & Sympathy, Pick-Me-Up, Friendship, Pamper, Gin & Chocolate, Happy Birthday, and A Nice Cup of Tea. We offer vegan options for most of our boxes. If you don't find what you are looking for, owner Jane will help you to create a bespoke box. Prices start from just £12.

**friendinabox.co.uk jane@friendinabox.co.uk**



**Q** I am looking for a unique birthday present for my best friend. Any ideas?

**A)** Potter and Mooch is a small, family run business offering a range of beautifully handmade gifts, jewellery and homeware. If you are looking for something special and a little different from the 'norm' then look no further. Delivery is just £2.95 and arrives within

1-2 days in the UK. Head over to their website where you can browse the stock, order online or even over the phone.

**www.potterandmooch.co.uk**

**01903 331744**

**Use code PSYCHOLOGIES for 10% off your first order**

Featured product is 925 sterling silver with Cream pearls £24



**Q** Since starting back to work after furlough I've been suffering from really bad anxiety. I was wondering if there was anything natural I could take to help me manage rather than having to go to the doctors?

**A)** Flower Essences can really help in these sorts of situations and are very safe and easy to use and incredibly effective.

Lots of people have been finding Saskia's Calm and Confident blend very useful to help

with the anxiety they are suffering since after lockdown as it is designed to help you feel safe and able to manage whilst giving your confidence a boost.

I would suggest taking it twice a day for a good week or two, and as your anxiety subsides, take it as and when needed.

It is available directly from **www.saskiasfloweressences.com** and costs **£12+£3.70 P&P**



**Q** 'I enjoy taking a bath for some 'me time', but how can I make it more relaxing?'

**A)** Bathing is one of the best ways to wind down from whatever stresses you've faced that day; candles, music & aromatics all create a tranquil atmosphere, but a bath pillow is the finale.

The Spa Essentials bath pillow has a removable cover made from skin and

earth friendly natural bamboo fibres; with suction cups for a secure grip.

Small but perfectly formed to rest beneath your head and cradle your neck so you can switch off, soak in complete comfort and enjoy perfect bath time bliss.

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OR EMAIL [HANNAH.LEES@KELSEY.CO.UK](mailto:HANNAH.LEES@KELSEY.CO.UK)



# How to be happier

Emma Hepburn, aka The Psychology Mum, shares how to bring more bliss into your life

All of us have a version of an inner negative ninja that is generally critical, making harsh judgments about us and what we do from deep inside the inner workings of our brain. Fuelled by negative bias, the ninja's critical judgments affect our thoughts, our body's stress response, our emotions, our behaviour and how we interact with the world.

I'm not going to suggest that you dismiss your ninja outright – this would make it angry and fight back stronger, and you really don't want to fight with a ninja, do you? Instead, I'm going to argue that you treat it with compassion, be gentle on it and understand it, because this helps calm your ninja and helps it start to see another point of view.

Compassion is a far more powerful response to difficult thoughts, feelings and beliefs than fighting against them. Self-compassion is about being non-judgmental and respectful towards ourselves, and is a tool we can use with our beliefs, emotions and behaviour. It helps us understand them, respond usefully to them and navigate them. Compassion allows us to see our flaws and failings not as personal indicators of our worth but as part of being human. It shifts our pursuit for perfection, allowing us to see that it's impossible, and that imperfection is normal and inevitable. It allows us to fully experience our emotions without shaming ourselves. It shifts our thoughts from harsh judgment and self-criticism to understanding of ourselves and kindness. And we all need more of that.

Follow Emma Hepburn on Instagram @thepsychologymum for more inspiration





# Why have a stairlift when you could have a real lift?

**A Stiltz Homelift will help you continue living in the home you love.**

## **Stairlift? No Thanks**

A Stiltz Homelift is an ideal and affordable alternative to a stairlift. You can now safely travel between the floors in your home while keeping your stairs the way they have always been.

## **Neat & Discreet**

A Stiltz Homelift can be installed into almost any room in your home. A Stiltz is uniquely compact with the smallest model taking up just over half a square metre – now that IS discreet. The homelift plugs directly into a standard domestic socket and uses less power than boiling a kettle. The homelifts run on self-supporting rails so there is no need to drill into walls and the motor is fully self-contained within the lift car. Neat.

## **Your Forever Home**

While some Stiltz customers have an immediate need for a homelift, others are looking to future-proof their existing home for when the stairs do eventually become a challenge. Don't go through the unnecessary expense

and emotional upheaval of moving house or the disruption of adapting your home for downstairs living. Save money instead; live comfortably and independently in the home you love for as long as you want, with a Stiltz Homelift.

***"We've had our lift for 2 years and were so impressed with how it was fitted from our hallway to our landing in what at first appeared to be an impossible space. And in such a short time."***

Mr. Eames

## **Peace Of Mind**

Stiltz are proud to be rated 'Excellent' by their customers on Trustpilot. They use their own teams of expert installers, so you can choose a Stiltz Homelift with complete peace of mind, knowing you and your home are in a safe pair of hands.

***"Excellent product installed by polite and very competent tradesmen. Fits perfectly into my home. Made a huge difference to my ability to live independently"***

Mark via Trustpilot



**"The through floor lift fits neatly into the house and was quickly and neatly installed. It has been reliable and has enabled us to live a 'normal' home life using the first and ground floors. A stairlift would not have done so."**

Mrs Goddard via Trustpilot - Jan 2021

## **Free, No Obligation Survey**

A Stiltz Homelifts Consultant can visit your property to help you plan the best location for your homelift.

They can also answer any questions you might have, as can any of the friendly, UK-based phone team.

**So, why not give your lifestyle a lift with Stiltz. Call FREE today.**



## **The UK's No.1 Homelift**

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- Cost-effective
- Small footprint
- Freestanding design - no wall needed
- Wheelchair model available
- Manufactured, installed and fully guaranteed by Stiltz
- 3-floor travel available

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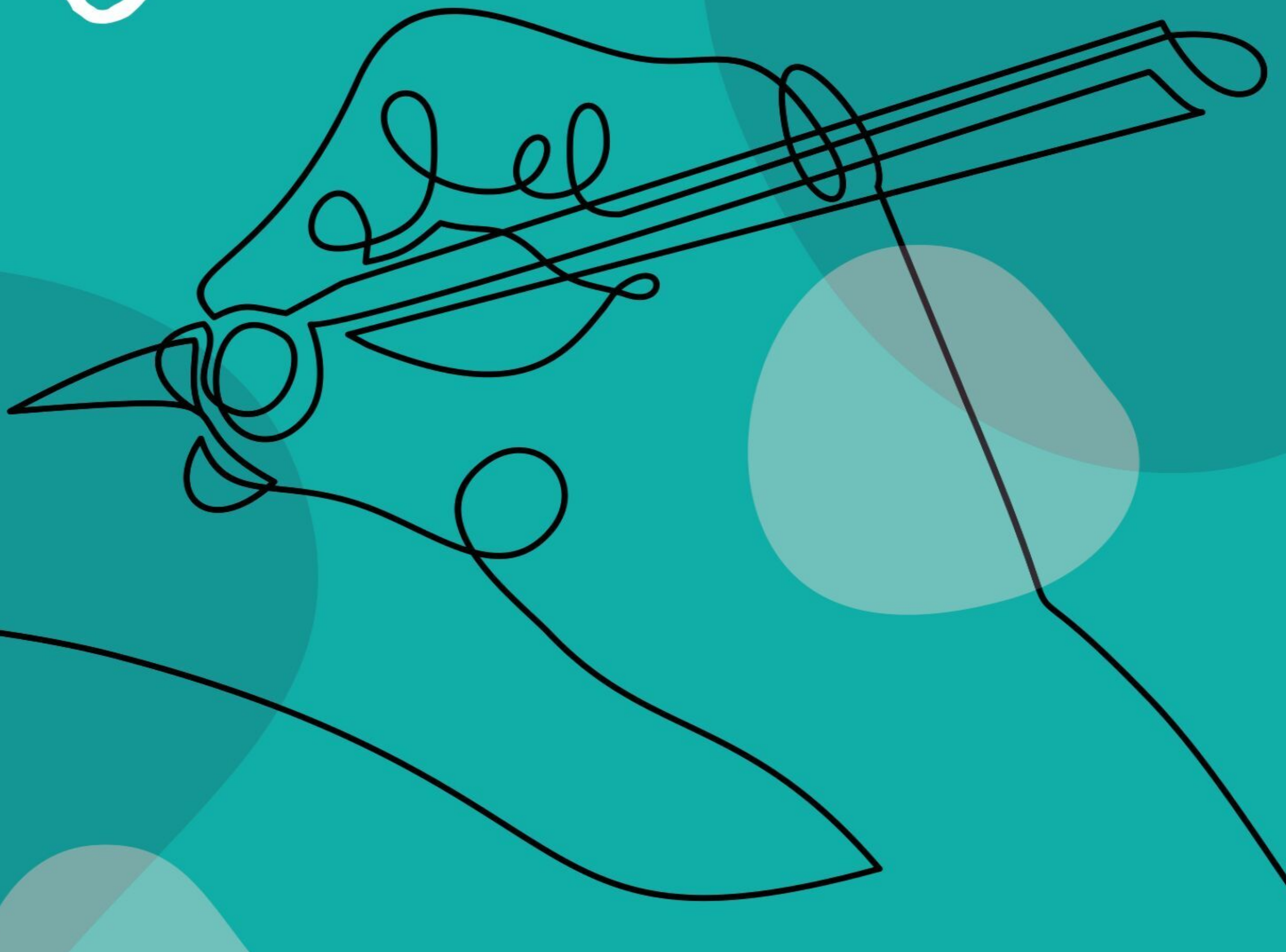


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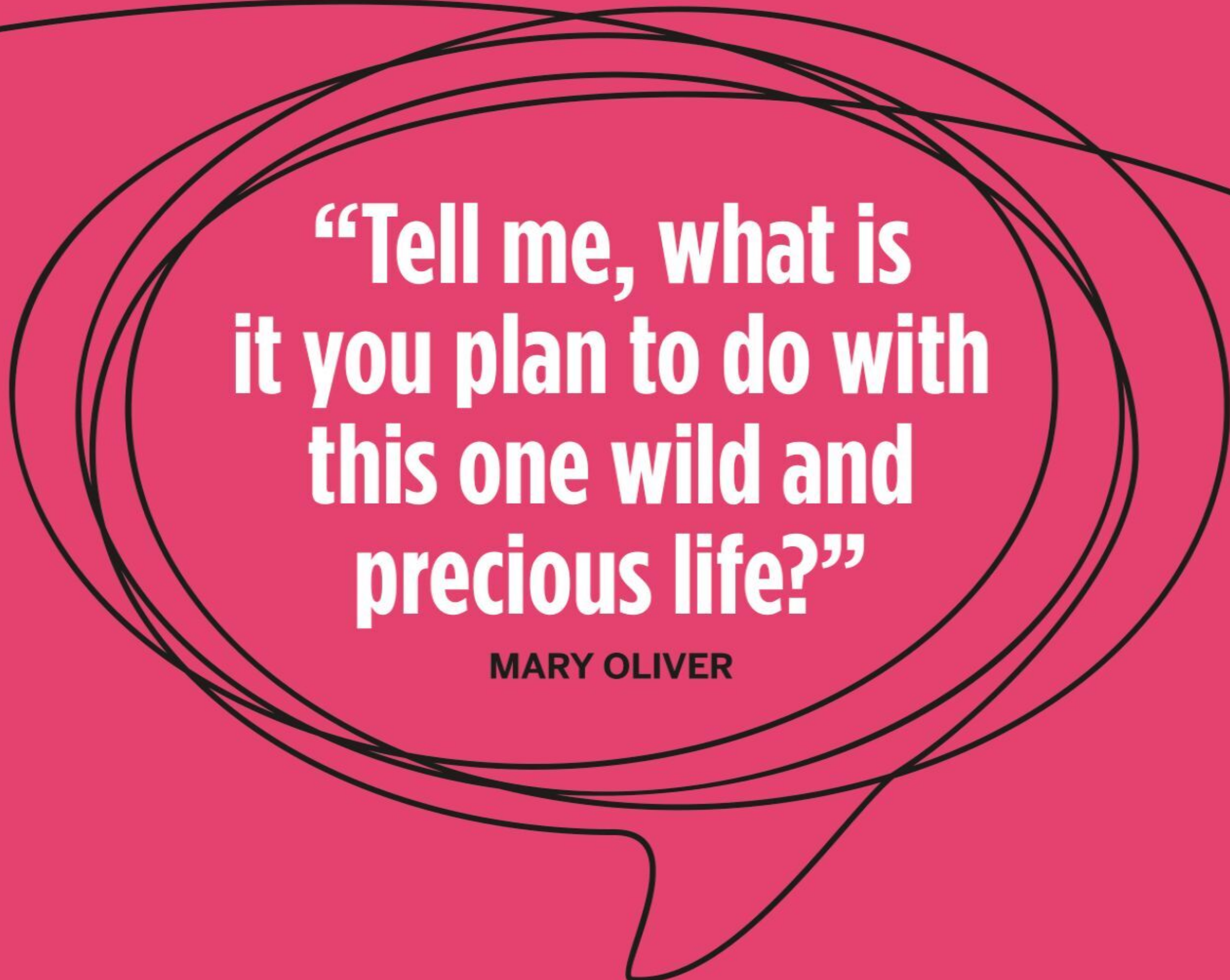


# CREATE A LIFE YOU LOVE *journal*



psychologies





**“Tell me, what is  
it you plan to do with  
this one wild and  
precious life?”**

**MARY OLIVER**



# Welcome...

Amid the hurly-burly of everyday life, it is easy to get stuck in a rut of working, worrying, helping everyone else, and completely losing connection with your true self. Particularly over the past couple of years, many of us have found that it has been a real challenge to tap into our inner wisdom and free up space to allow us to live as we really want. And that's what this little journal is all about: it is filled with thought-provoking prompts and questions to help you get back in touch with your inner voice and turn the volume up to 10! We hope it will help you remember what you used to love doing, think about the things you enjoy now, and dream about what you hope for the future. This way, you can start to take steps towards really creating a life you love, in which you feel joyful and fulfilled. So grab a pen and a big cup of something hot, put your phone on silent and curl up to enjoy some uninterrupted me time as you get back in touch with what really matters to you. Have fun!

*Sally x* **Sally Saunders, Editor**

ILLUSTRATIONS: SHUTTERSTOCK

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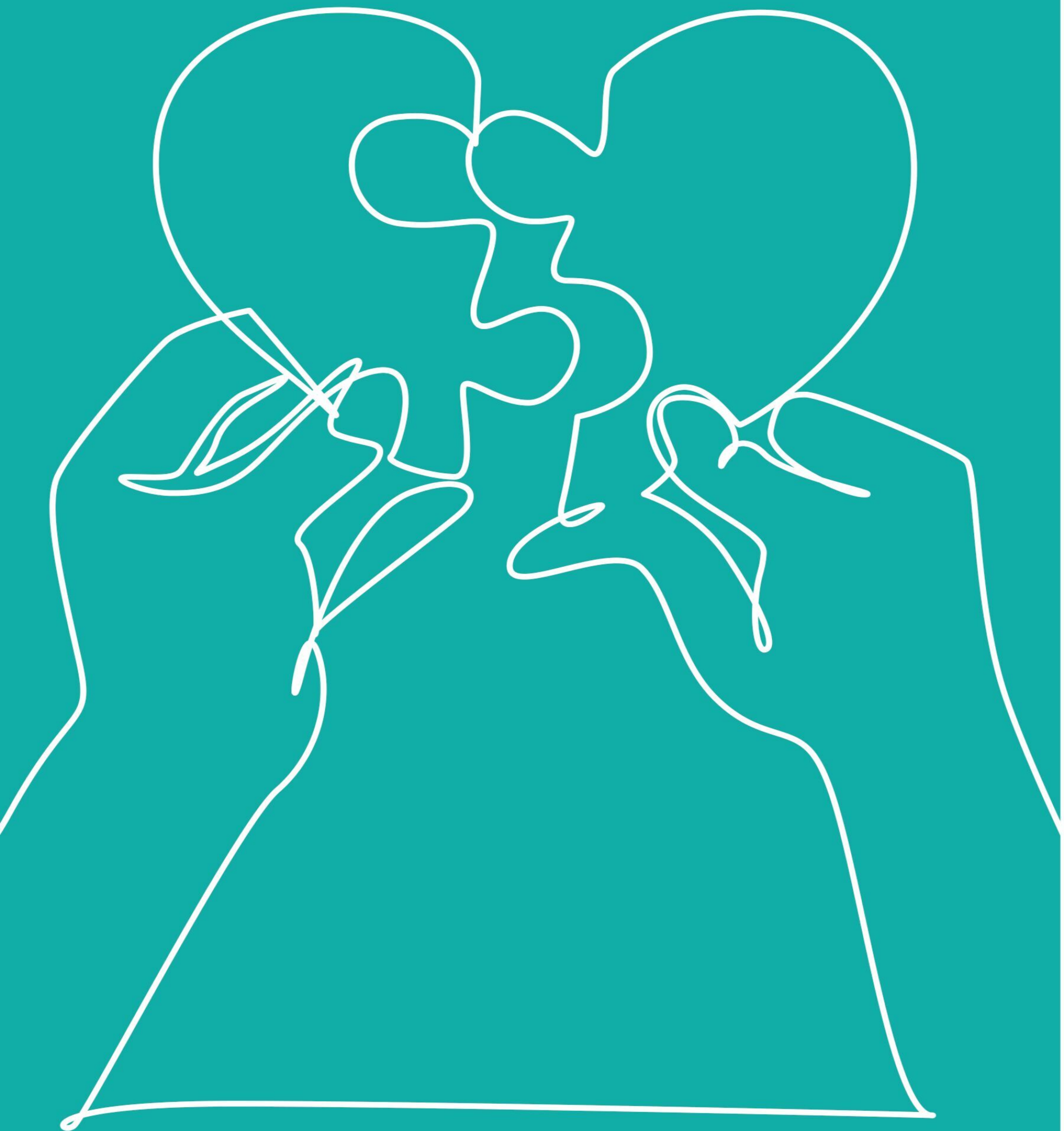
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# TIME TO TREASURE

What do you love doing that gives you a feeling of satisfaction afterwards?

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What activity engrosses you so much that, when you look up, several hours have gone by?

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What do you love to focus on?

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What do you long to get back to?

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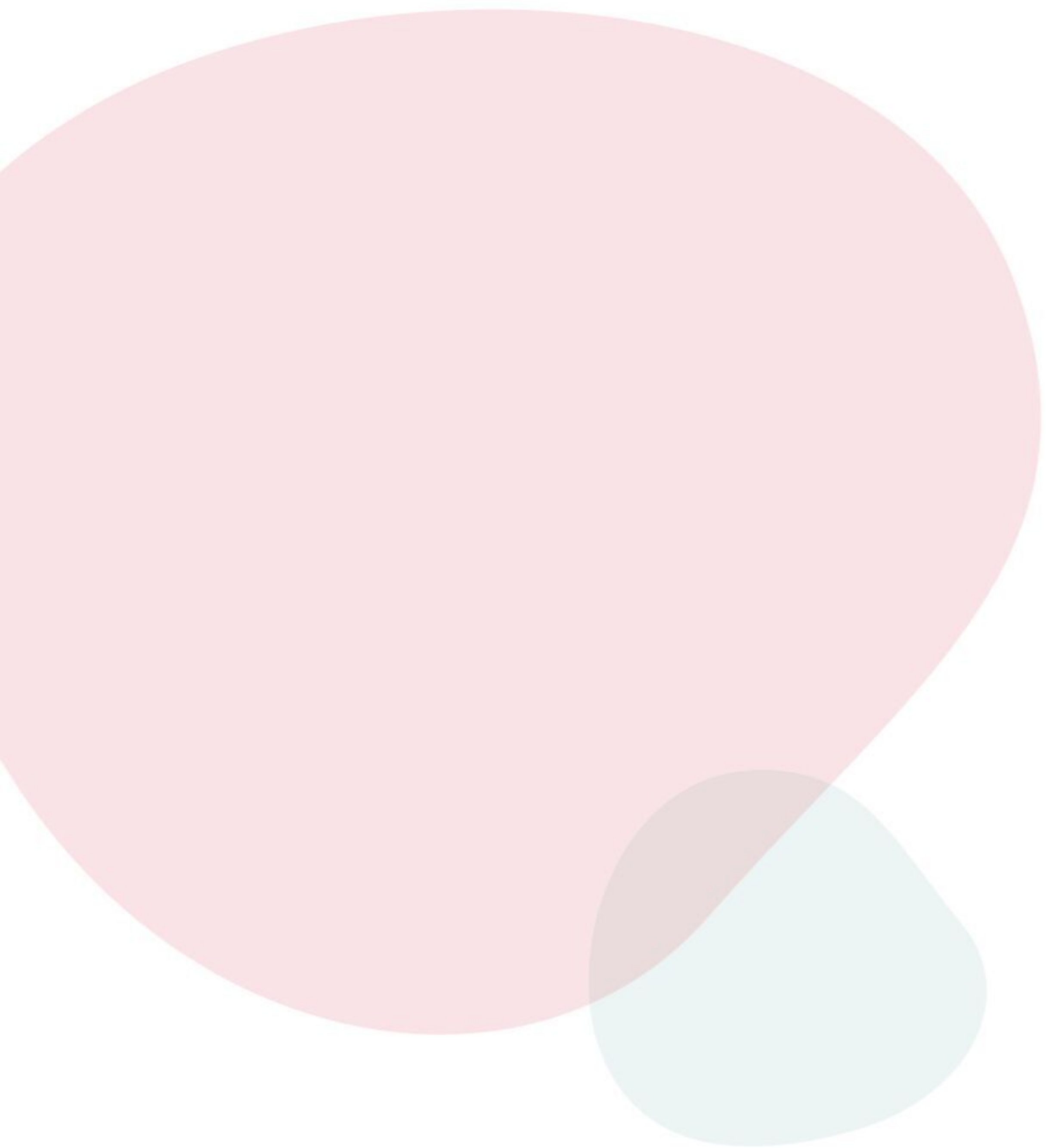
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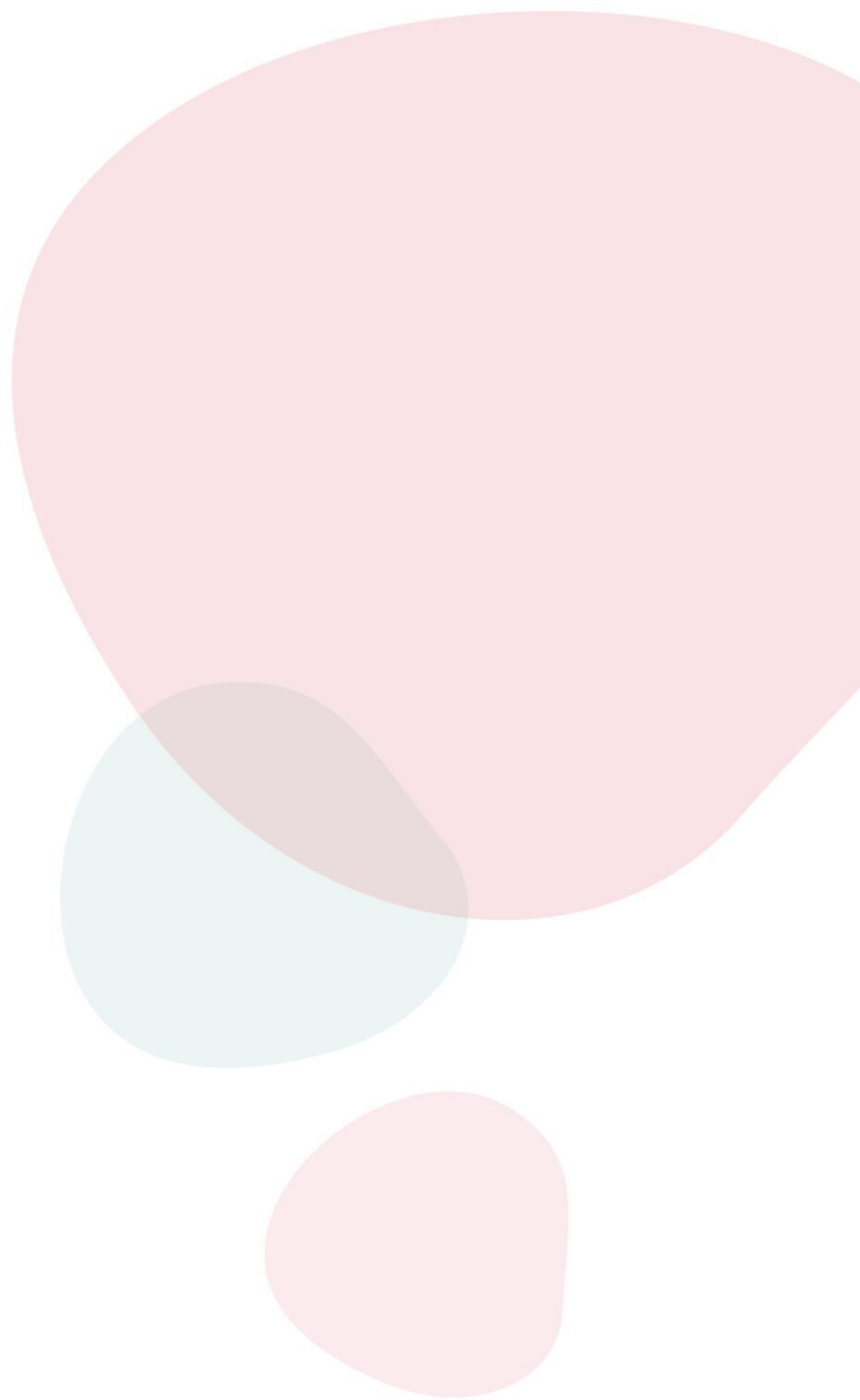
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# **DRAW A MIND MAP OF THINGS YOU ARE NATURALLY GOOD AT...**









# WHO ARE THE PEOPLE WHO SUPPORT AND LOVE YOU?





Who are the people who inspire you?

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Who are the people who drain you?

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How can you spend more time with those who leave you feeling inspired and less with those who leave you feeling drained?

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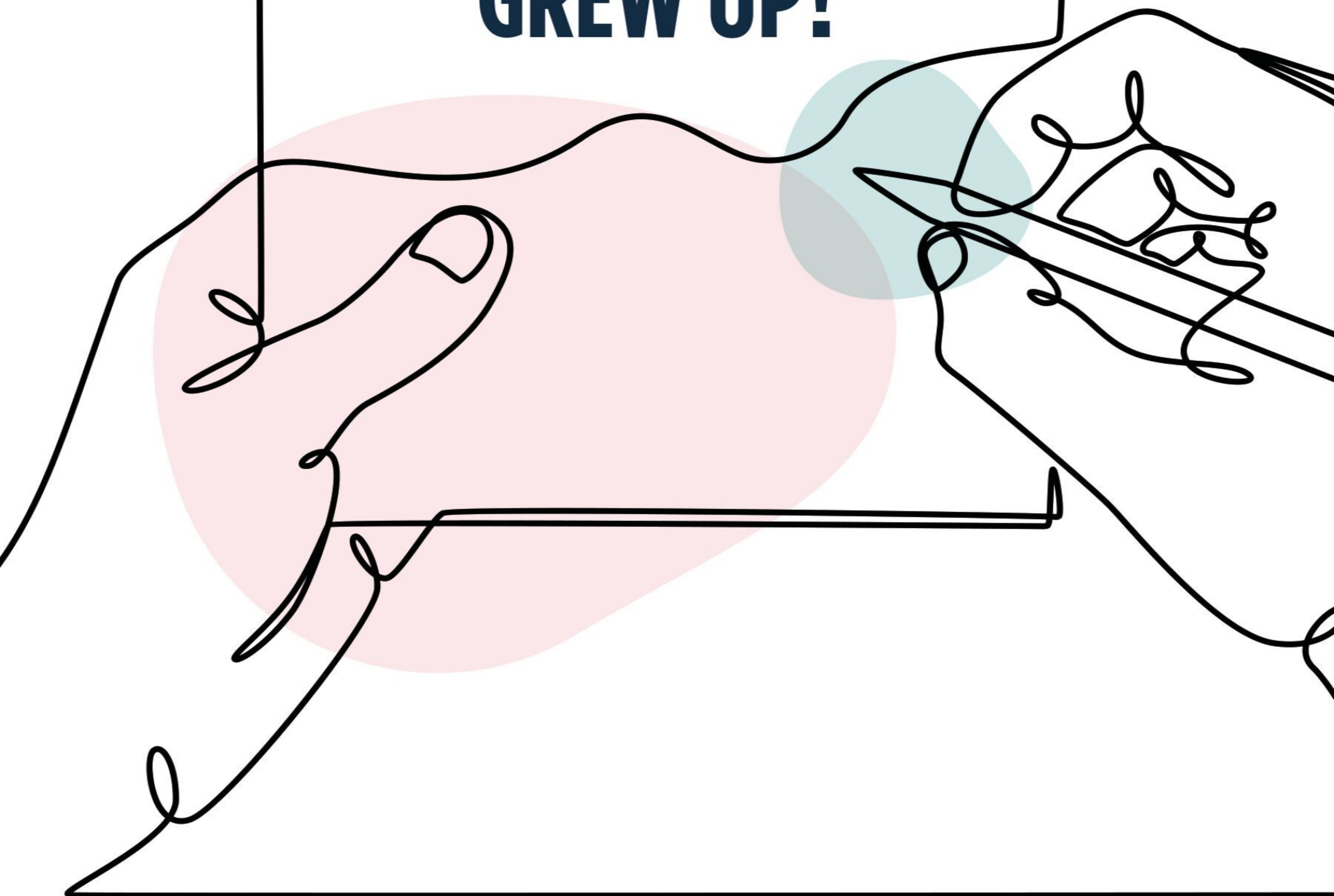
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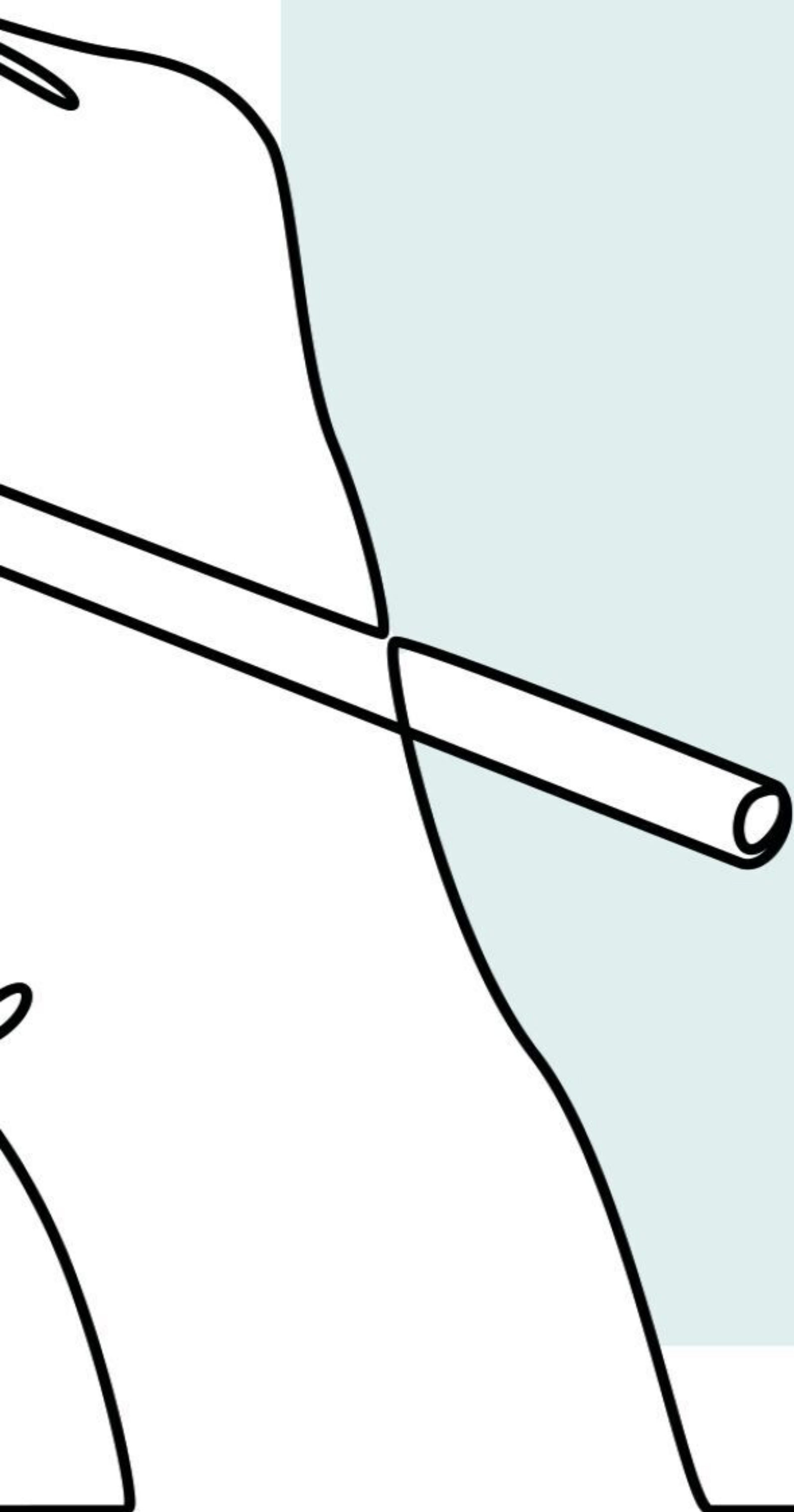


**WHEN YOU WERE  
LITTLE, WHAT  
DID YOU WANT TO  
BE WHEN YOU  
GREW UP?**





*Draw a picture your childhood  
self would be proud of...*





*"It's never too late  
to be what you  
might have been"*

**GEORGE ELIOT**



What advice would you give your childhood self now about following her dreams?

1

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2

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3

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4

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5

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# BEAT BAD HABITS

What three habits have you developed over the years that may be holding you back?

1

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2

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3

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How do these habits serve you?

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What do these habits cost you?

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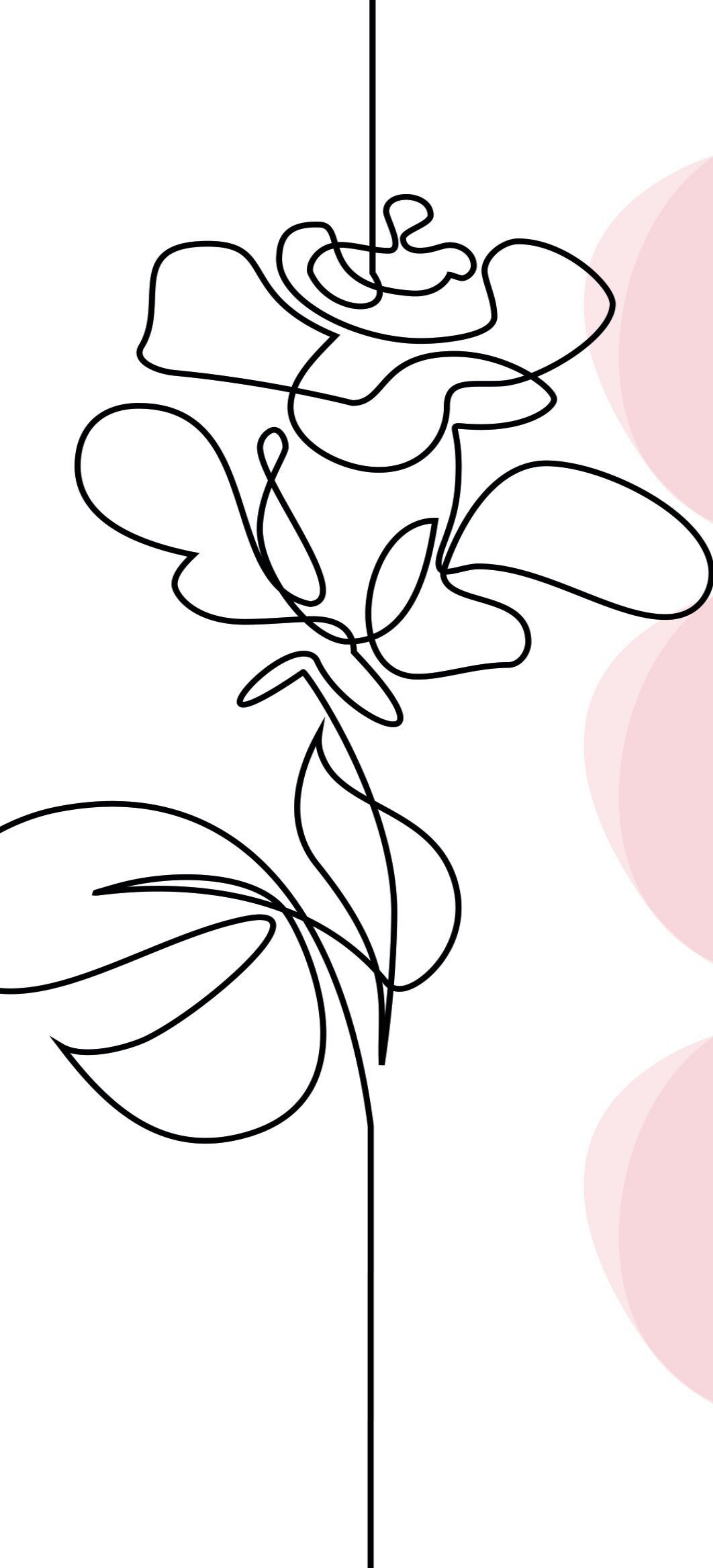
# WHAT ARE SOME OF THE SMALL THINGS IN LIFE THAT BRING YOU THE BIGGEST JOY?

Fill in all the circles!

One...

Two...





*Three...*

*Four...*

*Five...*



What new small, easy habits could you develop now to feel more positive about the future?

1

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2

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3

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4

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5

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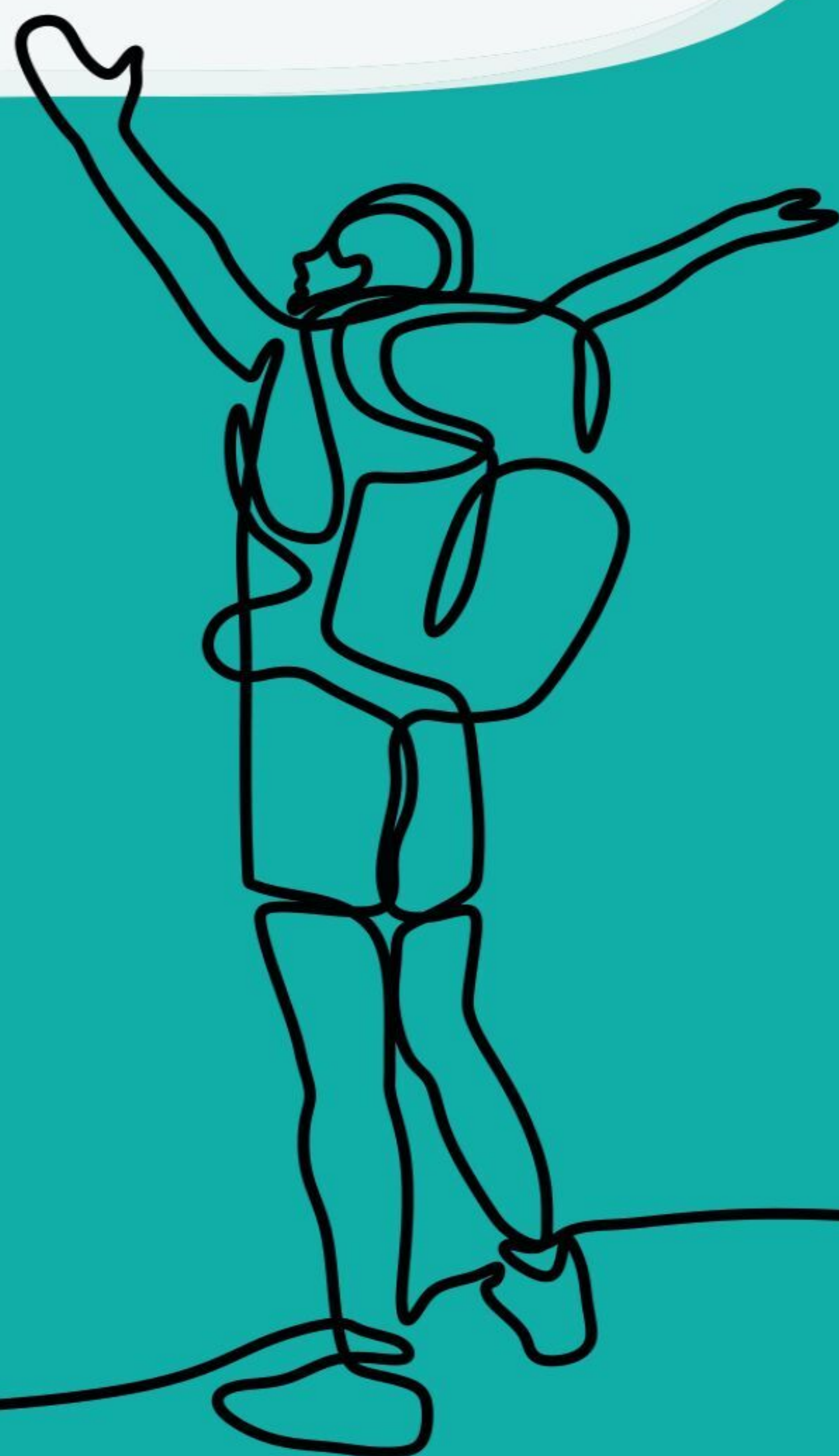
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*"Everything you  
want is on the other  
side of fear"*

**JACK CANFIELD**





What three decisions would make the biggest positive impact this week?

1

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2

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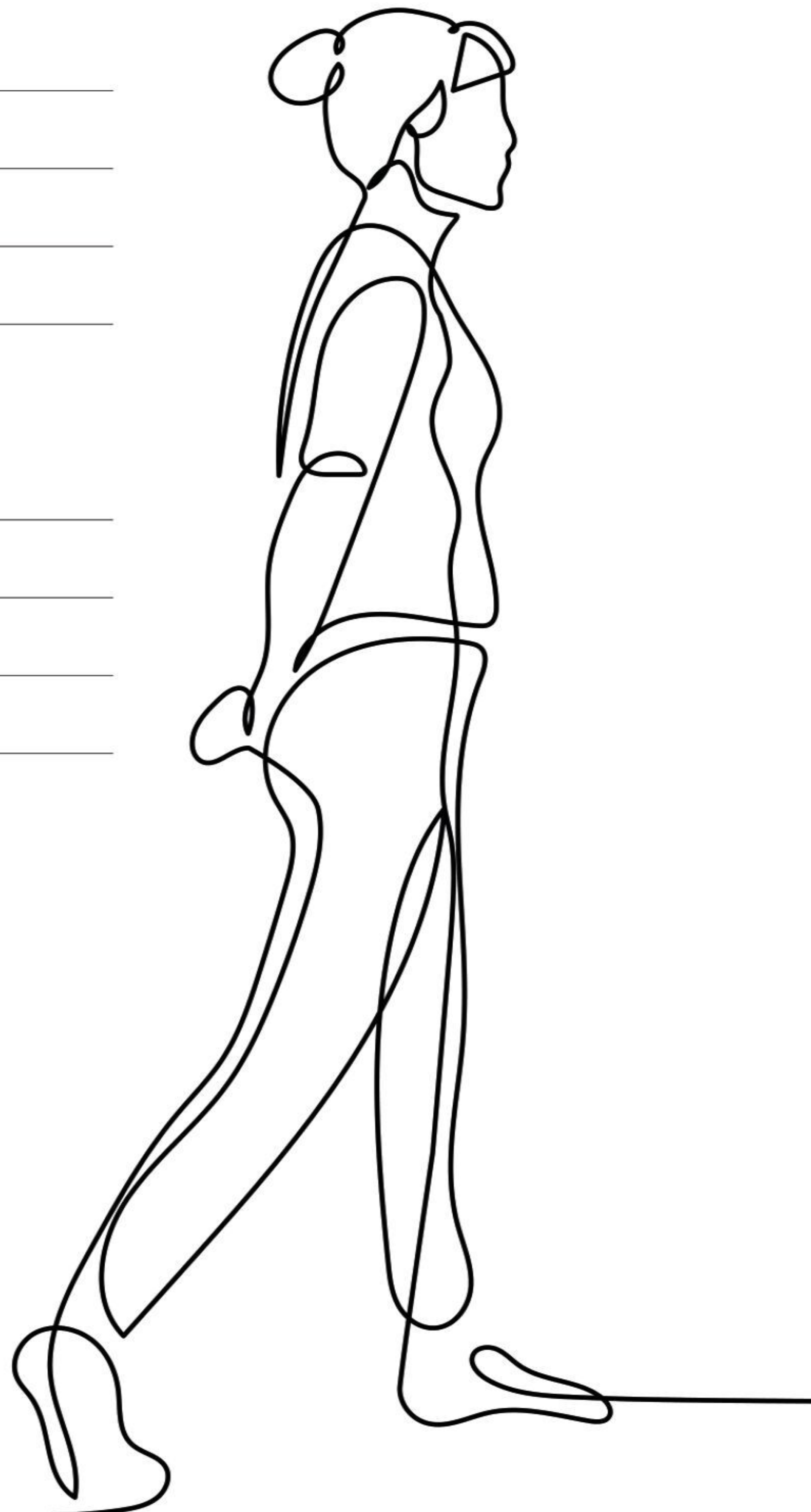
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What three actions could you take that would make you feel motivated?

1

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2

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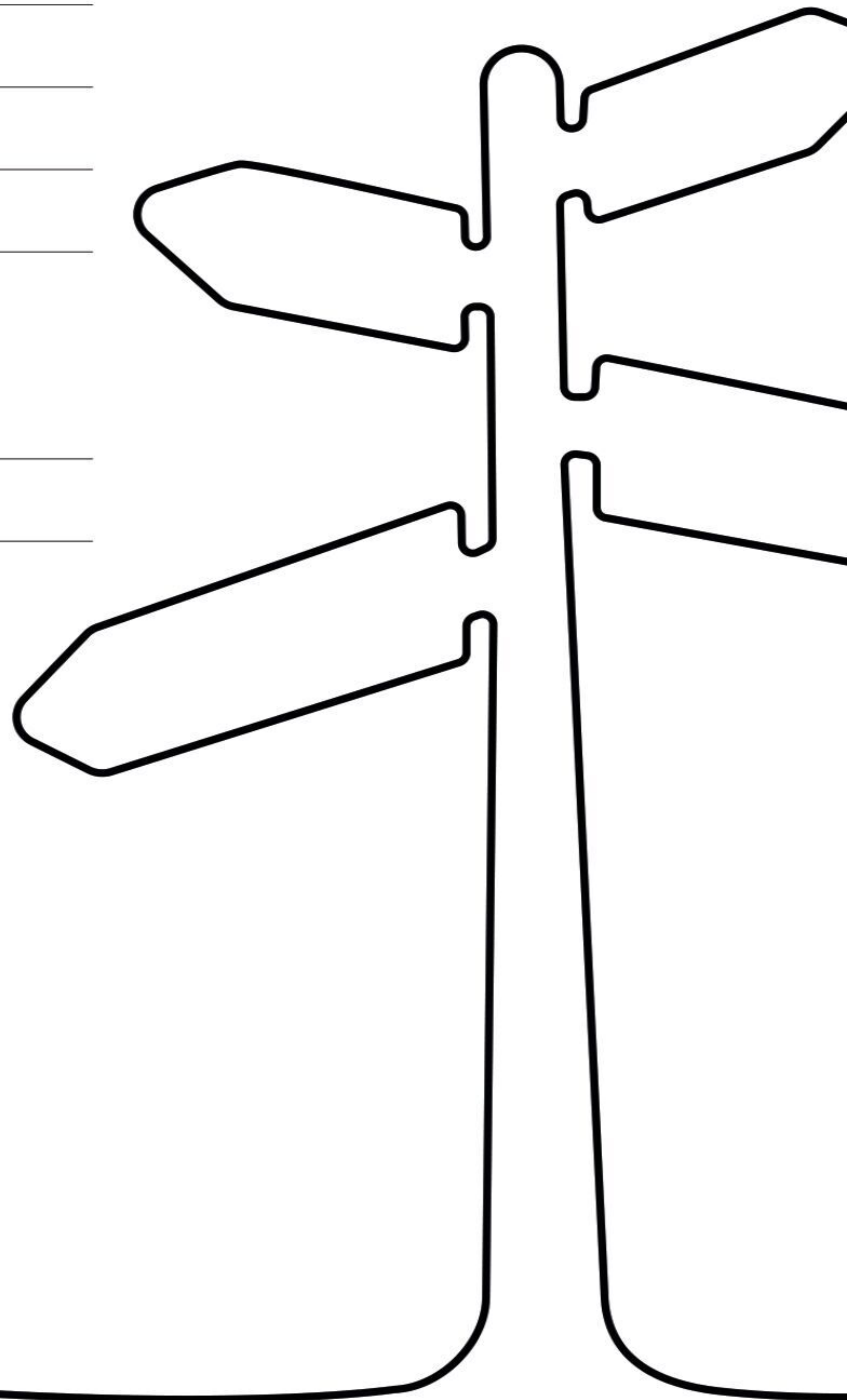
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**WHAT THREE  
THINGS ARE  
YOU MOST  
EXCITED  
ABOUT FOR  
THE FUTURE,  
AFTER FILLING  
IN THIS  
JOURNAL?**



*One...*

*Two...*

*Three...*



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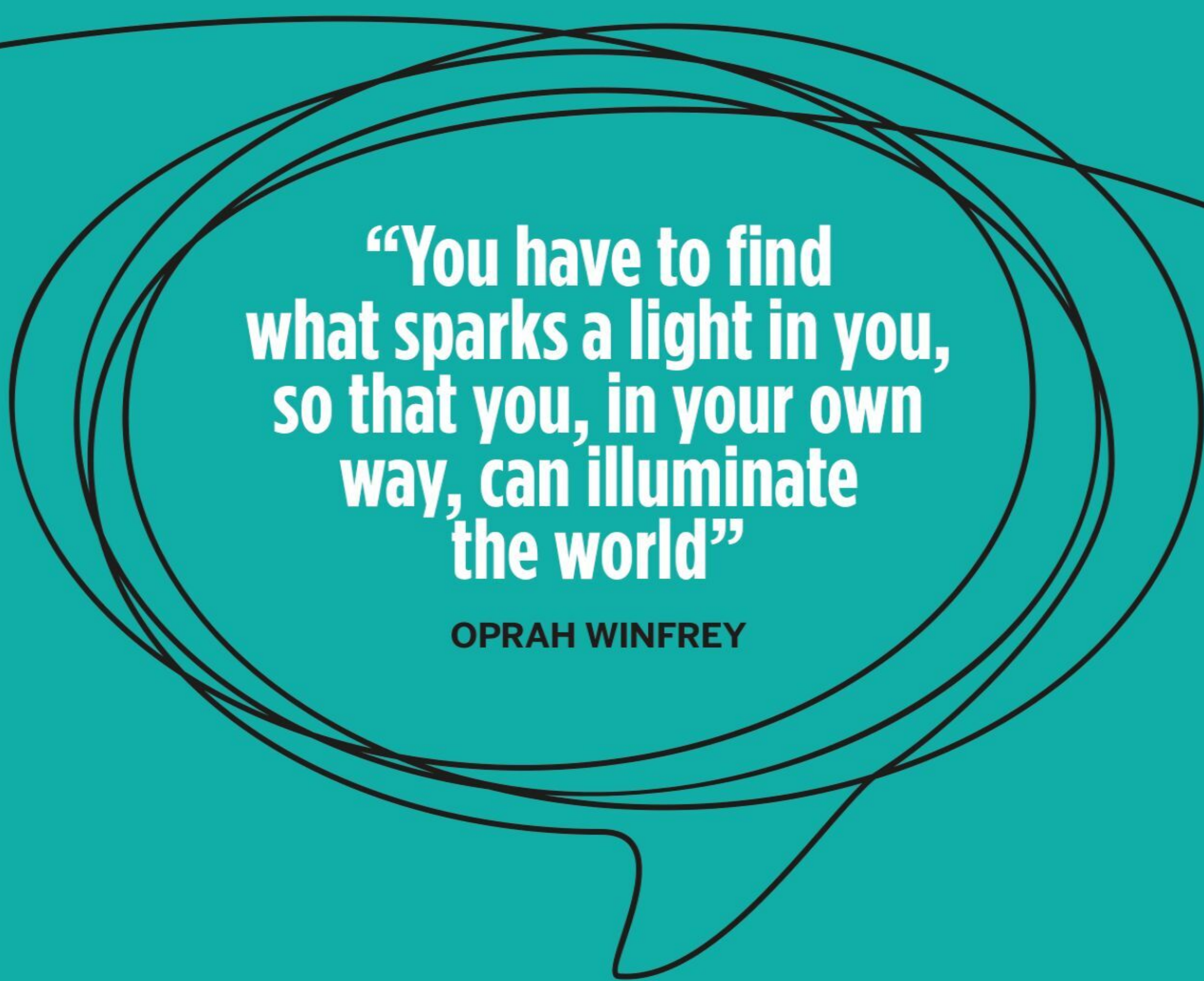
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what sparks a light in you,  
so that you, in your own  
way, can illuminate  
the world”**

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