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Roxie Nafousi

'The secret of manifesting? We attract what we think we are worthy of receiving'

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- The three big questions to ask yourself

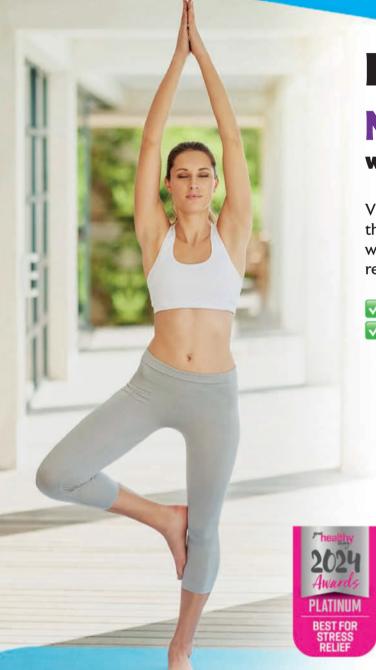
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About six years ago, I experienced what I now know to be manifesting, but what my friends and I refer to as 'wishes from the magic shower!' There was one week in August 2017 when every time I had my morning shower, I would visualise receiving something – from trying a specific brand of plant-based milk, treating myself to my favourite face cream, to even winning a competition I'd entered. The first day, I received the entire range of the plant-based product I wanted to try; the second, I was sent the whole collection of beauty essentials from the brand I'd thought about; finally, I ended the week with an email informing me I'd won a holiday to Mykonos! After that magical week, however, my shower had lost it's superpowers – but speaking to our wonderful cover star, Roxie Nafousi, I now realise that you can only attract what you believe you are worthy of. Over on page 14, Roxie tells us how manifesting changed her life in every way possible, and how it helped

her discover her purpose. If you're wondering what your own true north looks like, our brilliant dossier (page 35) looks into why we do what we do, and the questions we need to ask to help get us there. If you need a helping hand finding your why, don't forget to take our quiz – my biggest driver is creativity, but what struck me was when asked how often I make time for it. The answer? Not at all, right now. But this has helped to focus me for the year ahead – where could you be dedicating more time to your passions and values in 2024?

Finally, flick to page 84 to discover why you shouldn't put off happiness and celebration until spring. Book in something to look forward to this month and

embrace the joy of the present moment.

> Holly Treacy, Acting editor

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Subscribe to Psychologies or give a gift subscription and commit to a happier life. You'll benefit from life-changing tools and advice to help you live your best life, plus receive free membership to our Subscriber Club. See page 80.



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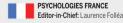
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The advice starts RIGHT HERE!



EMMA GANNON

It's still taboo to say, "I have more than enough – and yet I'm still not happy",' says author and podcaster Emma Gannon, on challenging traditional ideas of what it means to be 'successful', on page 22. 'When something doesn't line up with what you want, then that's not really your version of success.'

EMMA CAMERON

Don't try to fight with your inner critic,' says integrative arts psychotherapist Emma Cameron. 'When you try to tame, silence, or master it, you may just make it stronger. Instead, try thinking in terms of befriending it, guiding it, calming it, and gently transforming it.' Find out more on page 30.



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OLIVIA FOX CABANE

'Contrary to popular belief, people are not simply born charismatic,' says coach and author Olivia Fox Cabane. Charisma is a learned skill, and by refining our body language and improving our emotional intelligence, over time, we can all cultivate more charisma. Discover how on page 54.

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.

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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





Manchester has been named the UK's most generous city, with residents making more than £43,000 worth of donations to GoFundMe in 2023, ahead of Liverpool, Brighton and Lisburn.



Dearly departing?

Having a funeral ceremony is falling out of favour, and less than half of us say we want one.

A survey of 2,500 adults by religious think tank Theos found only 47 per cent were in favour of a service, while 24 per cent said no, and the rest were unsure.

Women were slightly more in favour than men, while nearly one in six under-35s were pro-funerals – higher than people over 35.

Financial pressures and a lack of religious belief were among the reasons given.



"I think, in retrospect, rejection has made me stronger... It's made me more humble. I used to have more of a problem of feeling like I didn't deserve any success that I had, and now I am happy to be grateful for it, because I've also had the flip side"

Actress Rosamund Pike



Socially acceptable

Turning down a social invitation could be easier than you think, after a study found we tend to overestimate how negatively people will react to a 'no'. Even partners and close friends tend to be understanding if the invitee explains their reasons for declining, be it that they simply want to relax at home. More than three quarters of people told West Virginia University researchers that they've attended an event they didn't want to, for fear of causing offence.

3 reads... for family drama



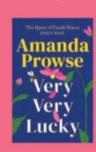
The House Of Broken
Bricks by Fiona Williams
(Faber & Faber, £14.99).

Charting a family coping with loss, and viewed through overlapping perspectives, this is a tender, poetic read.



Very Very Lucky by Amanda Prowse (Lake Union, £8.99).

Mum Emma is struggling under the weight of responsibility when she unexpectedly strikes up an unlikely friendship.



Hard By A Great Forest by Leo Vardiashvili (Bloomsbury, £16.99).

A hopeful tale about the fortunes of three relatives returning to Georgia two decades after fleeing war.







Walk the walk

Imagining yourself in another person's shoes is a key way to evoke empathy, say experts. The more vividly we use our minds to step into the situation, the more willing we are to help.

A new study, led by McGill and Albany universities, found doing this makes us feel another's pain more, and motivates us to lend a helping hand.

Empathy is the ability to understand the situation of other people, and is vital for voluntary behaviour to aid others.



WATCH, LOOK, LISTEN



WATCH The Color Purple. Halle Bailey and Taraji P Henson star in this remake of

the acclaimed 1985 coming-of-age film about abused teen Celie Harris. Out 26 January.



LOOK Found Cities, Lost Objects at Leeds Art Gallery. Turner Prize winner Lubaina

Himid curates female works on safety, belonging and navigation. Runs 26 January to 21 April.



LISTEN The Therapy Crouch. Model Abbey Clancy and her footballer

husband Peter Crouch share the ups and downs of married life with honesty and hilarity.



Viewpoint

Send your letters of gratitude and tell us what you loved reading in the magazine to letters@psychologies.co.uk

Fresh coffee and new customs

I've been reading Psychologies magazine since its inception many years ago, and I still love it. It is so unique



- there really is no other magazine like it, so thank you for producing it. During lockdown, my husband and I started a routine of making a pot of fresh coffee every lunchtime and then, later, once a month, answering the questions in the *Psychologies* test. This has now become an established custom. We always do it together, and it has led to some interesting discussions and revelations. Whenever possible, I also complete it with my daughter, sister, and niece.

I use the little blue journal that came free with the magazine in 2009 as a present book – I record all the gifts I buy for people there (mainly to ensure I spend the same amounts on children and grandchildren!). However, it's also an opportunity to reread the words of wisdom contained therein.

Thank you again, *Psychologies* – if I had to compose a, 'These I have loved...', list, your magazine would most definitely be on it.

Kate

Setting healthy boundaries

It was so timely reading the article 'Knowing when to quit' (December 2023). As a Gen X marketing manager – working for Boomers and leading a predominantly Millennial and Gen Z team – it's the younger generations I see have the healthiest work/life balance. Saying no to jobs on lunch breaks, not



responding to emails out of hours, and working the hours paid for is how it should be, at no expense to career progression or pay increases – they still work exceptionally hard during their contracted hours. Having myself been more used to 'the more you put in the more you get out' school of thought, I'm learning that this should never be at the expense of your family, friends, or mental health. On the cusp of real burnout, I'll now be working to rule. And my motto going into 2024 is 'know your worth', because there are those out there who will. **Sarah**

Shared values

Dr Martha's response to a reader's question about lightening the gift-buying load reminded me of all the resentment I felt a few years ago when a close relative announced, just before Christmas, that our families would no longer be exchanging presents. That she had made this decision unilaterally was annoying enough, but it was made even more so by the fact that I had already put a great deal of thought into what to buy for each member of her family, paid for it all, and then spent time

wrapping it as attractively as I could. In the end, everything went to charity – so at least it wasn't wasted.

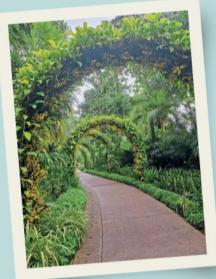
I spared the feelings of the person in question by never telling her how annoyed I was, and I did get over it, but I'd urge anyone thinking of going down the no-present route to make sure that it is a mutual decision. Although money can be very tight, emotions are precious too, and the giving and receiving of gifts, however small, is still one of life's great pleasures.

Maggie

PHOTO FAVOURITES

Soothing the soul

I wanted to share some pictures of my Christmas spent in Singapore. After my two-and-a-half-year relationship came to an end in October, I escaped to help me get through it. The natural beauty of the botanical gardens and orchid gardens restored my soul and helped heal a broken heart. Andrea





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, and we'll print our favourite. Share your photograph with us and explain its inspiration on Instagram @psychologiesmagazine with the hashtag #PsychologiesPhoto, or email it to letters@psychologies.co.uk

A vision for the future

Last year, at the age of 29, I was diagnosed with breast cancer, and my life has been turned upside down ever since. But not long after my diagnosis, I was gifted my first copy of *Psychologies* – and I've been hooked since that moment.

My aim each day has been to use my positive mindset as my superpower, and it's carried me through the most traumatic moments. Reading *Psychologies*, I've found that there's always something that

resonates with how I'm feeling, from prioritising self-care to setting boundaries.

I couldn't bear to throw out my old issues, so when I began an art therapy course with Weston Park Cancer Charity in Sheffield, where I live, and was introduced to vision boards, the images and quotes within *Psychologies* were perfect for expressing my thoughts and feelings.

I'm due to finish treatment soon, and I have hopes for the future to host my own



podcast and mindset

programme, which will include creativity and vision boards to help others during the darkest times – and I'm

sure that Psychologies will be part of the strategy. Thank you for all you do! Here is a photo of my latest creation. Jodie



Roxie Nafousi talks to *Psychologies* about building self-worth and breaking down limiting beliefs, rolling with the highs and lows, and seeking out life's little pockets of joy

WORDS: HOLLY TREACY

efore she discovered the magic of manifesting, self-development coach, manifesting expert and bestselling author Roxie Nafousi was living a far from happy life. 'I'd suffered from depression my whole life, but I didn't know that was what it was, because people weren't talking about mental health in the same way that they are now. I think if someone had told me I was suffering from depression then, I would probably have rejected the idea and felt very embarrassed.'

Nafousi admits she went through lots of rockbottoms in that time, the last one being in May 2018: 'I'd been on a yoga teacher training course, because I thought that was the answer and would change my life, but within 24 hours of being back, I was out partying, and woke up feeling helpless. I called a friend and told her I didn't know what to do, and she recommended a podcast on manifesting.' Nafousi had never heard of manifesting and her only reference was Rhonda Byrne's law of attraction book, *The Secret* (Simon & Schuster, £16.99). 'I listened to the podcast and something in me just clicked. I realised that manifestation was rooted in self-worth, and of course I had none, so I probably was manifesting – but in the wrong direction.'

Nafousi went straight home and started researching manifestation, and, within weeks, her life began to change. 'The first thing I wanted to manifest was unconditional love, and I started using different techniques. I began listening to affirmation playlists to fall asleep to, because I'd understood that you could feed the subconscious part of your brain positive messaging. I was listening to mantras about being worthy of true love, and I made a vision board of my perfect partner. Two weeks later, I was contacted by Wade



[Briggs] on a dating app, and exactly one year later, to the day, our baby boy, Wolfe, was born.

More than making a wish

'Manifesting for me, is a self-development practice - it's a way of living - so it's not something I dip in and out of,' Nafousi says. She explains that the seven steps that she developed in her first book, Manifest (Penguin, £16.99), guide and govern her everyday life. 'I have to account for the fact that this is real life and there will be ebbs and flows; challenging times and great times. I didn't just discover manifesting and all of a sudden my life has been magically perfect for the past five years - in fact, in January 2023, I had a lot going on personally; I was having panic attacks every day and was at breaking point. But I had manifesting as a way of living. That gave me a toolbox of all these amazing techniques that could help me day-to-day to recover and regain my strength, but it's also about inner healing, and I was determined to do the work on the root cause of the pain coming up.'

Is there a step from her book that personally resonates? 'I would say that the greatest gift for me is step four, which is overcoming tests from the universe,' Nafousi tells me. 'On your way to your dreams, the universe is testing you by asking how worthy do you think you are of having this thing that you desire? It allows you this perspective where you can look at challenges as an opportunity for growth, resilience and strength. In my second book, *Manifest: Dive Deeper* (Penguin, £16.99), I go on to talk about levelling up, so when I have these tough times, instead of feeling hopeless like I used to, I now feel excited because on the other end there's a reward.'

Finding your flow

So, what does it feel like to manifest in the right direction? 'There seems to be a sense of flow. Things seem to come to you easily, your paths unblock, and that to me is when you're in alignment. Let's say you notice lots of little coincidences are happening – like you think about reaching out to someone and they call you.'

In her own words, Nafousi says manifesting has changed her life 'in every way possible'. 'I've never had a time in my life since I was born where I've felt happy or confident in who I was, and now I finally have those things. I am genuinely grateful every day to manifestation, because to be able to enjoy and love life is an incredible gift. We have this personal power that, when we tap into manifesting, life becomes amazing.'

And, if you're wondering if there's a secret to manifesting, Nafousi reveals that 'we attract

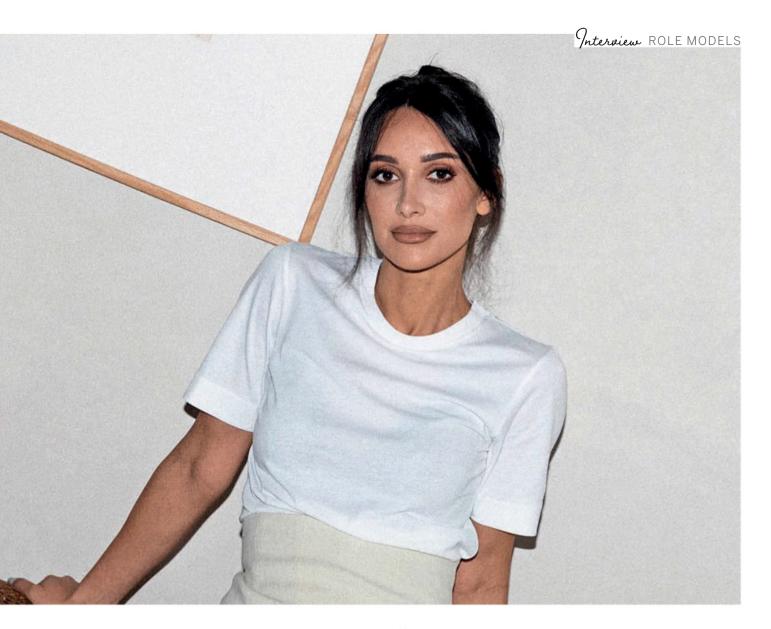


"On the way to your dreams, the universe is testing you"

what we believe we are worthy of receiving. This means that we need to remove any blocks or limiting beliefs we might be holding onto that are preventing us from living our dream life. If I want a certain life, I know I need to heal first. If I hadn't had discovered manifestation, I wouldn't have committed to the journey of getting to know myself better. I'm constantly asking, why do I behave that way? What patterns do I have, and how can I change them? How can I offer myself compassion and self-love? Manifesting has reconnected me to my purpose and given me a career I love, which feeds into improved confidence and worth.'

Grounding in gratitude

When it comes to a daily wellness practice, Nafousi's a fan of keeping a positivity journal. 'Before I go to bed, I write down every positive thing that has happened to me that day, from the minute I wake up, to the moment I go to sleep.



It might be things such as the sun was shining; my coffee smelt great; someone smiled at me on the way to work... what happens is your subconscious starts to look for these moments of joy. When we do something such as a positivity journal, we pay attention to them and that improves our overall feeling of wellbeing and satisfaction. Manifesting isn't just about reaching goals; it's about making the life you already have feel as good as possible.'

But Nafousi is clear to state that manifesting doesn't mean that you must be happy all the time: 'I think that is toxic positivity, and there's no place for that in manifesting. It's about how quickly you can rebound from the days you don't feel so good. I still have tough times, but my bounce back is phenomenal, because I now have the tools. It's not about feeling good all the time, it's about knowing what to do when you don't.'

Nafousi's most recent book, *Manifest For Kids* (Penguin, £16.99), is aimed at a different audience: children. 'When I speak to adults

"It's about making the life you already have feel as good as possible" about where they struggle, it usually starts in childhood,' she says. 'I had a terrible childhood, and if I'd have had the tools to better understand my emotions, the whole trajectory of my life would have played out differently. Children are so mailable and impressionable, so why not feed them with nourishing thoughts and give them tools that will last them a lifetime?'

Surprisingly, Nafousi has found that adults are more resistant than kids to saying affirmations. 'Children are more comfortable and open saying a mantra out loud than adults. Children have so many big emotions, their days are rollercoasters of intense feelings without understanding fully what they are. I feel very compassionate towards children, and want to support them any way I can.'

So, what does 2024 have in store for the queen of manifestation? 'I would love to have completed and written my new book,' she confesses. 'It's going to be a little bit different from what I've done before, but I'm ready for something new.'

Model behaviour

Harriet Minter reconnects with her body and views it through a new lens



Just as we go through seasons of the year, so, too, I think we go through

seasons with our bodies. There are times when we revel in them, and times when we poke and prod them, desperate for them to change in some way.

At the end of last year, I was feeling very disconnected from my body. I knew that at some point in the past I'd felt sexy and desirable, but at that precise moment, I couldn't remember the last time I'd shaved my armpits. And I was beginning to suspect that only owning underwear with holes in wasn't quite the done thing; I had been in a season of winter and discontent for too long, and I needed something to shove me into spring.

Which was how I found myself in a hotel room in Stratford, London, while a beautiful American woman prowled around the room with a camera in hand, as I tried to pose my body in a way that felt both natural and appealing.

Boudoir photo shoots had a moment in the early 2000s, with most of them tending towards the black-silk-sheets and pink-feather-boa school of thought. But, in the past few years, they've transformed into something a bit edgier and cooler - an antithesis to badly lit selfies or your ex's terrible photo skills. I was shooting with Stormy from Rebel and Romance Boudoir Photography, and from the moment I booked, the whole thing felt like a brilliant day out with a best friend. We bonded over home renovation stories and shared concerns about cellulite, and had a frank discussion about the stranger peccadillos of men. If I'd feared that I would feel uncomfortable prancing around in my underwear in front of

strangers, the hour of hair and make-up beforehand reassured me. This wasn't about me being perfect – it was about having a giggle and enjoying myself.

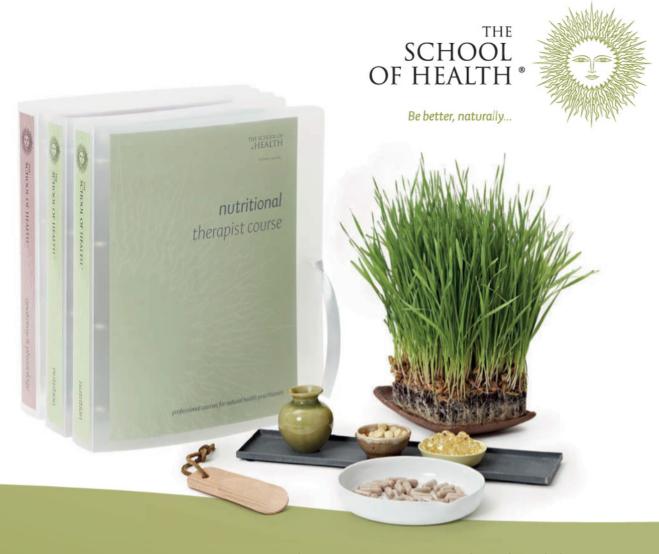
Rather than pushing myself into loving my body again, it turned out that all I needed was a reminder of how good it feels to appreciate it. I needed to dress up and pamper it, to play at being a model, and pretend I was the most desirable thing the world had ever seen – until I started to feel it for real.

When the photos arrived a few days later, I was nervous. What if all I could see were the rolls of fat or mottled skin where my body should be smooth and radiant? But, instead, what shone out was my body being celebrated and loved. Spring was finally here.

Follow Harriet Minter's writing journey by signing up for her newsletter at harrietminter.com



IMAGE: MARK HARRISON HAIR AND MAKE-UP; CAROLINE PIASECKI STYLIST; KATE ANYA BARBOUR



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



HOUSE TO LO



Is success amyth?

Yasmina Floyer speaks to author Emma Gannon about rewriting the rules of 'achievement', and what it *really* means

uthor and podcaster Emma Gannon has published six bestselling books to date, including *The Sunday Times* bestseller *The Multi-Hyphen Method* (Hodder & Stoughton, £9.99). Her debut novel Olive (HarperCollins, £9.99) was nominated for the Dublin Literary Award in 2022. She has been called 'one of the most influential thinkers on how we can work smarter' by Penguin Books, and a 'terrific interviewer' by the Financial Times. In 2018, Gannon also made the Forbes 30 Under 30 for Media & Marketing. By all accounts, she is an out-and-out success - but it is this very The Success Myth: Letting Go Of Having It All (Torva, £16.99). In it, she dissects the idea of crafting success on your own terms (something she is doing with her Substack, The Hyphen). I asked Gannon a few questions, to find out more...

As somebody who is objectively successful, what inspired you to write a book where you interrogate the very idea of success?

'I feel like I interrogate everything! As a writer, a thinker, a journalist, I ask a lot of questions, so

I wanted to pick apart success as a topic. It could have been quite difficult to get people on board, because I'm unpacking something that, on the surface – both socially and culturally – appears to be working very well.'

That's right; success is seen as something unequivocally positive that we should all aim for, because then we'll be happy and have all the answers, right?

'Well, after interviewing nearly 400 people on the topic, it became clear that no one has the answers! And I was seeing these strange links between extremities. At one extreme, people who can't pay their bills are suffering with their mental health, but people I spoke to on the opposite end of the scale – people with everything at their fingertips – were *also* suffering with their mental health. I couldn't shy away from the data, the research, the anecdotes. I wanted to write this book because it's still taboo to say, "I have more than enough – and yet I'm still not happy".'



We're both millennials, and I think that growing up we were presented with very specific external metrics of what success looked like. Why do you think that is?

'Most millennials have baby boomer parents who grew up post-war. *Their* parents had grown up knowing what it was like to have rations, but the baby boomer generation had grown up with quite a lot of wealth – for example, now, they own more than 50 per cent of all property in the UK. They're also a big consumer generation and, in general terms, really bought into culture and music and TV and celebrity. And we're the offspring of these people who really cared about those shiny things, so, growing up, this has impacted our definition of what success looks like.'

Exactly this! As a teenager, I grew up with the message that I could have it all. But we're only now beginning to question if we even want those things...

'Yes, and it is such a personal thing, too. For example, I don't want to have children. On paper, I think of having a child as a hugely successful moment, but, for me, it doesn't feel right. When something doesn't line up with what you want, then that's not really your version of success. It's less about what something is and more about how it feels.

But if we're talking about how something feels, I admit, it makes me feel good to be recognised for what I do.

'The fact is that we have evolved from social animals who needed

status to survive. Being in a tribal environment, having status in the group meant you were going to live longer. So, of course, we can't shy away from the fact that we *do* need status. I also love feeling like people think that my work matters!'

I feel as though social media has exacerbated the external validation element of what success means. I wonder what your thoughts are on this?

'Well, I think there are two things to look at here. Something I learned from Martha Beck, an amazing life coach, is that there is your human nature and then there's a culture around you, and I think that although you can have success in both, it's good to be aware that they're slightly different. For



example, I can post a picture of myself and look really successful and get some likes, but I think that the really successful moments can also be private, and I think we've forgotten how to do that. I had to do this by taking three months off, having been completely burned out, unable to do anything. If that hadn't happened to me, I think I would still be on that hamster wheel.'

When I joined social media, I made a vow to myself to keep most of my 'best bits' offline, and this has really helped me navigate that boundary between our public and private selves.

'Yes, I now love those moments when I've had a really good day

and I don't have to tell anyone about it. But there's two prongs to it, because you can't just live in silo, not talking to anyone, either.'

I'm really enjoying your podcast mini-series, where you interview people and ask them what their success myths are. Can you share a success myth that feels most pertinent to you right now?

'It's one that I learned from speaking to spiritual teacher Fiona Arrigo. A success myth that she believes in is that of being a lone wolf, the attitude of 'I can make it on my own, I don't need anyone'. This can sometimes be a trauma response – it may be because you have been neglected, or you don't feel like you can trust people, and feel

you have to do everything on your own. In the book, I talk about another side of this, the people who love to think they've done everything themselves, when this isn't entirely the case. Politicians, and society in general. love to make us think that we live in a meritocracy, where we all start at the same point on the starting line, and everything that we do is solely down to us. Writing this book as someone who does have privileges - from growing up in a very understanding environment, to personal freedoms - it got me thinking: what about the full spectrum of life experience, and those who aren't benefiting from these privileges? What does success mean then?'

What do you hope that readers will take away from the book?

'I feel like the overarching question of the book is asking the reader to basically tell the truth, because when you're actually truthful about what you want, that's when you start becoming really successful on your own terms. You're no longer hiding from the truth, which may be that the thing you're doing doesn't make you feel good, or perhaps there needs to be a massive change in your life.'

What is your relationship with success like these days? Has it changed?

'A friend who's a psychologist told me that most people on their deathbeds say they wish they'd been more successful on their own terms, not other people's. If you'd asked me that years ago, when I was doing a TED Talk and events and running myself right into the ground, I'd have said I looked successful - but I don't think that's the same as being successful. Being honest and changing your life and doing the things that serve you and your version of success is countercultural, which is why some people can struggle with it. Nowadays, I feel I am more successful, as I've really had to realign with what that means for me; today, I've done some work to pay my bills – and I also went for a swim and had time to speak to my nephew on the phone.'



Neet in action Neet in action In act

In their second session together, the award-winning coach Kim Morgan helps ease her client Marsha's* internal conflict, and reach a place of compromise



arsha was newly retired and had been making plans for an exciting and adventurous future when her daughter asked if she could provide regular childcare for the grandchildren.

In our first session, Marsha and I had explored her reactions to this request and considered her options. However, in a 'mic drop' moment, as she left the coaching session, Marsha's parting words to me were that she didn't think she had the courage to put herself first.

This statement had left a lasting impact on me, and so I decided to mention it at our second session. I asked whether Marsha was still feeling the same way, or whether she had had any further thoughts or feelings.

Marsha looked troubled. 'I still feel the same way! I feel obliged to say yes to my daughter, but in my heart, I really don't want to. It's as if there are two parts of me, fighting with one another and not able to come to an agreement.'

I asked Marsha to bring those two parts of herself to life. Who are they? What do they look like? What would she call each of them?

Marsha laughed out loud. 'I should have guessed you would do something wacky like this!'

She sat back and thought.

'Okay, got it! One of them is the Self-Sacrificing Parent – neglecting her own needs and feelings because it is the right thing to do. She struggles to stop seeing her adult child as a dependent baby. She feels it is her duty to support her child, but she is resentful and angry about it. Oh, my goodness! She looks tired and old. She feels taken for granted. She has given up on her dreams. She watches daytime TV!'

Marsha looked at me in astonishment: 'Where did that all come from?'

I asked Marsha to turn her attention to the other part of herself.

'Oh, this is better! This one is a radiant "Yold" – a "young old". This is a new term I have learned recently to describe people of my age. She is living

life to the fullest: travelling, learning, developing new skills, making new friends. She is doing yoga and is dancing. These are her golden years. She has the courage and self-respect to speak to her daughter honestly, adult to adult, and explain that she has worked hard and now wants to make the most of however many years she has left.'

Marsha sighed: 'They are so different. It's like they are each judging me and playing tug of war with me, and I can't decide which one to listen to.'

I explained to Marsha that at any one time we can hold two opposing beliefs, which leaves us in a state of internal conflict, and means we end up doing nothing. The key is to find out where these two 'parts' of us agree, what they have

in common, and what positive intentions they have.

Marsha thought for a while. 'Well, I know they both want the best for me and my family... really, I don't know what you have done to me... because now I am wondering whether we should let them talk to one another and find a solution that works for both of them!'

'Be my guest,' I said. 'Let's see what they have to say.'

'I think they need to move closer together. Sometimes the 'Yold' can take a break from partying,

and watch daytime TV instead, and sometimes the Self-Sacrificing Parent can let her hair down and be more selfish. There is a middle ground.'

'What is that middle ground in practice, with regards to you providing childcare for your grandchildren?' I asked.

'I'm still not 100 per cent sure, but I think it will begin with an honest, adult conversation with my daughter. It may end with a compromise. Maybe I pay for some childcare for her and provide some myself. I don't have all the answers, but I do feel confident to have the conversation with my daughter, and I will let you know what all three of us agree next time I see you!'

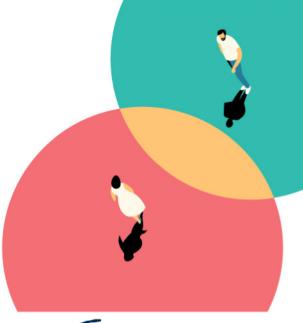
"Unity is strength... when there is collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved"

MATTIE STEPANEK

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







Work it out

Walk a mile in my shoes

Sometimes we get stuck in relationship difficulties because we are only able to see things from our point of view and can't appreciate how the other person might be feeling.

Sometimes (if we are prone to people-pleasing!), we can *only* see things from the other person's point of view, and fail to acknowledge our own feelings.

This is a brilliant exercise that takes you into the shoes of three different people – yourself, the other person, and a detached observer who is not involved in the relationship.

 Find a position in the room and stand in your own shoes looking at and thinking about the other person in the relationship. Allow yourself to feel, say, and think exactly what it is like from your perspective. Don't see things from the other person's point of view – just your own!

- Now move across the room to stand in the other person's shoes, looking back at yourself as if you were the other person. Stay in that 'role' and allow yourself to say, feel, and think what it is like from their perspective.
- Now move to stand in the shoes of a detached, objective observer. Think about what you have seen and heard from the other two people. How do you respond to that? What advice do you have for these two people?
- Now walk back into your own shoes. What has changed? What have you learned? What action will you take?

Write your own epitaph

Thinking about how you would like to be remembered is a great way of discovering what is important to you.

What would you like people to say about you when you are no longer here? What is the thing they would remember you for, above all else?

You may want to do this exercise with a close friend to keep it joyful and inspirational. This exercise will act as a guide and an inspiration for you to live your life well.

Take pen and paper and write your name at the top of the page. Then write your answers to the following questions:

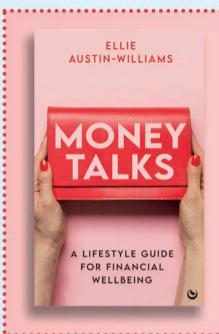
- How will people best remember you?
- What was your greatest achievement?
- What things did you say 'yes' to?
- What things did you say 'no' to?
- What was your greatest love?
- What was your biggest adventure?
- What legacy (or words of wisdom) did you leave to the world?

WORDS OF WISDOM

"Tell me, what else should I have done? Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon? Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"

Mary Oliver

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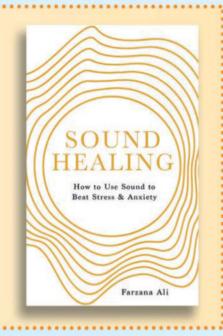


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Befriend your inner critic

Is the negative voice inside your head holding you back in life by filling you with self-doubt? If so, making friends with it might just be the most useful thing you ever do, writes Kellie Gillespie-Wright

he most important conversations we have each day are the ones we have with ourself. Each one of us has an inner voice that runs through our head during every waking hour; it's part of 'the verbal working memory system', and it's a crucial element of cognitive tasks such as language processing and reasoning.

Most of the time, it's useful, supportive, and concerned for your safety. Sometimes it behaves like a personal assistant, organising your thoughts, solving problems, or reminding you to do things. Other times, it can act as your own personal cheerleader, providing you with the support and confidence to make bold and dramatic moves. It can even be an ever-present nurturing parent, protecting you from danger.

But, sometimes, it becomes critical, fixating on painful emotions and reliving moments of embarrassment. And, unfortunately, that's when you hear it the loudest; it can be hard to turn off, filling you with self-doubt, eating away at your confidence, and preventing you from reaching your full potential. When it gets out of control, it can cause havoc with your performance, decisionmaking, relationships, happiness, and health.

Jess Baker, psychologist and author of *The Super-Helper Syndrome: A Survival Guide For Compassionate People* (The History Press, £18.99), explains further: 'Everyone has an inner critic, but some are more sensitive to theirs than others,' she says. 'And when there is more risk of failure, such as starting a new job or a new relationship,





"Stepping back from your mental echo chamber allows you to gain a more objective perspective"





Jess Baker is a psychologist, and is the author of the award-winning book The Super-Helper Syndrome: A Survival Guide For Compassionate People (The History Press, £18.99). More than 1000 people have been through her online Tame Your Inner Critic programme, and she often speaks at conferences and festivals. jessbaker.co.uk



Emma Cameron is an integrative arts psychotherapist who works online with creative, sensitive and thoughtful women who feel like their anxiety has been tripping them up. She is on the staff team at the Matrix College of Counselling and Psychotherapy, Norfolk, and The Institute for Arts in Therapy & Education (IATE) in London. emmacameron.com

and how we control them once they are activated. Instead of trying to silence your chatter, you can educate it, motivate it, and reason with it.

'Don't try to fight with your inner critic,' says integrative arts psychotherapist Emma Cameron. 'Yes, it limits you. Yes, it hurts you and makes you feel terrible. But when you try to tame, silence, squash or master it, you may be just making it stronger. Instead, try thinking in terms of befriending it, guiding it, calming it, and gently transforming it.'

or master it, you may be just making it stronger. Instead, try thinking in terms of befriending it, guiding it, calming it, and gently transforming it.' The good news is that there are lots of ways to do that, from creating a more compassionate mindset, to stepping back and thinking about your situation more objectively. The first step is to get curious, and it all starts with understanding where the voice is coming from. Next time you feel like your inner critic might be in operation, try tuning into some of the things that it says to you. What sorts of things does your inner critic tell you that you can't do? Or shouldn't do? Or aren't capable of?

Or don't deserve? What sort of person does your inner critic say you are? What does your inner critic have to say about how other people see you?

What's the tone of your inner critic like? Is it cold, sarcastic, nagging, belittling, mean or demanding? How about the volume? Do you feel as if you have someone inside your head shouting demands at you?

With all this going on, it can easily become overwhelming, making it hard for us to concentrate and make rational decisions. When this happens, we need to find ways to distance ourselves from the heat and snippiness of the inner critic,' says Cameron.

Stepping back from your mental echo chamber allows you to gain a broader, calmer, and more objective perspective, and when you distance yourself, you are able to be less emotionally triggered, less stressed mentally and physically, and you make better judgments and decisions.

One widely successful technique is speaking to yourself in the third person. This flips

> a switch in your head and creates an immediate emotional distance by altering your perspective. We are often better at giving guidance to other people struggling with

something emotional than we are at giving it to ourselves, so this puts you in a better position to start offering yourself much wiser advice. To make this easier, Cameron recommends giving your inner critic a name, which allows you to move the chatter from 'inner monologue' to 'inner dialogue' and you can begin to have conversations with your critic that counter its negativity.

'When you imagine the voice is no longer in your head but belongs to a persona you've created, it's easier to question what it's saying,' adds Baker. 'Learning to interrupt your inner critic is essential. It's the only way you are going to be able to regain any control over it and reclaim your headspace.'

So when you hear your inner critic saying things like 'You're such a failure' or 'No one loves you', ask for evidence that this is true. Often, there is little proof to support this negative self-talk, and by questioning it, you can begin to break the cycle by hitting back with facts. You could even try hoarding evidence of your successes: list the things you're good at and keep them close to hand for the times you need to counter your inner critic with positivity.

Baker also suggests turning your inner critic on its head. 'Try swapping the negative words for self-confident affirmations,' she says. 'Change "I don't feel successful" to "I deserve to feel successful", or even "I am successful". It might feel icky to say this at first, but try it anyway, because there's magic (backed by science) in hearing yourself say positive feedback out loud in this way. As the brain begins to believe it, you will begin to feel it.'

But it's not just what your inner critic says - how it says it matters, too. Most of us are guilty of being harder on ourselves than we are on others, and we wouldn't dream of saying the things we let our inner critic get away with to a friend.

'It's really important to work on building self-compassion,' says Cameron. 'Change your relationship with failure. Instead of seeing it as

a terrible thing to have made a mistake, work on being more realistic, and recognise that failure is a common, normal experience that happens to us all from time to time. Don't pin your self-worth on "only succeeding"; instead, allow yourself to be what you actually are - a wonderful, flawed human who is worthy of love and respect even when you mess up.'

For most of us, our inner critic will be around in some shape or form for the rest of our lives. It's a part of who we are, and although there doesn't seem to be a magic bullet for switching it off, with the techniques you now have in your toolbox - and a little practice - you'll soon move beyond the negative chatter in your head.

₩ NEXT STEPS

Listen to the *Dethroning* Read Chatter: The Voice In

Meditate

Searching for answers

Probe the soul and connect with the big questions through the power of the pen, urges Jackee Holder



The previous year ended on a sad note for me, when my oldest sister tragically died. More recently, I was also impacted by the death of the poet and activist Benjamin Zephaniah. Both had me reflecting on how we deal with the reality

of death, and the life still ahead of us, through writing.

At first glance, it might appear that writing about death is a morbid subject to take to the pages of journals or notebooks. But what if writing and journalling with the theme of death in mind is also a way of connecting with what your life would look like if you really lived? Prompted by all of this at the end of last year, I took a deep breath and stepped out on a date for the first time in over eight years. From breakfast right through to dinner, I experienced seven hours of deep connection with someone I barely knew. There was excitement, lots of laughter (lots), curiosity, and vulnerability. It far exceeded my expectations. I was so proud of myself for allowing myself to roll with the experience without an attachment to any expectations. A past Jackee would have easily balked at the opportunity.

So, this month, I urge you to dive into a set of really provocative yet life-affirming questions I came across in Oliver Burkeman's book, *Four Thousand Weeks* (Vintage, £10.99). Journalling is very much a skills-based practice. Questions are a generative way to explore difficult subjects like dying and living in your journal. Questions provide focus and provocation, and are an excellent tool for getting into deeper forms of journalling. In her book, *A Beautiful Way To Coach* (Taylor & Francis, £26.99), author and coach Fiona Parashar suggests that, 'Questions become "power questions" when their construction creates a sense of energy, excitement and liberation for the client.'

When I first heard Burkeman speaking about the questions on a podcast, I immediately knew these were a set of 'power questions' that I needed for myself. We also know from a 2018 study that 'prospective writing' – when we write optimistically about the future – is more likely to encourage post-traumatic growth.

Facing our own mortality is a courageous and bold step towards living the time you have left well. So here's

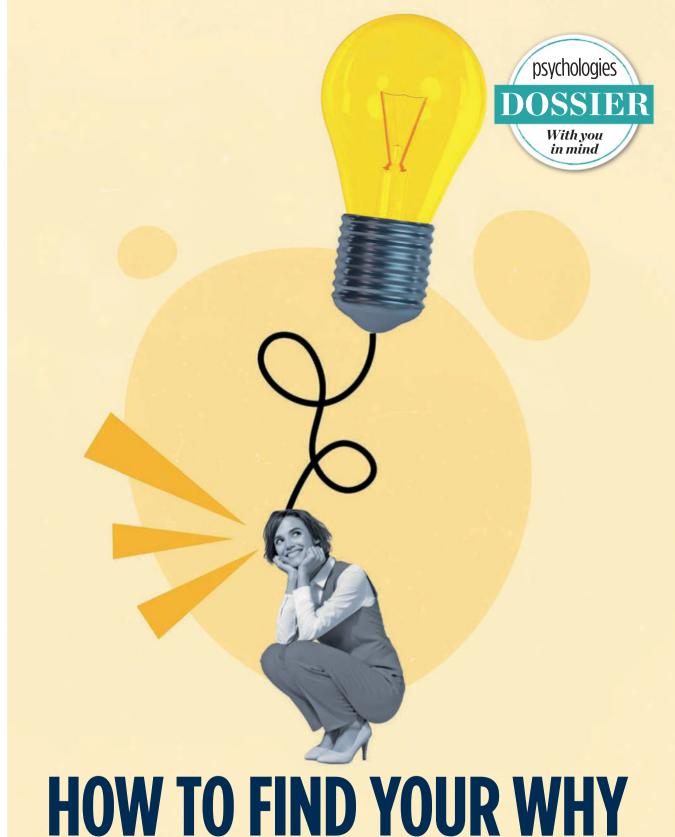


a suggestion for how you might work with these questions in your notebook. Write each one at the top of a new page. Decide which question is speaking to you most and start there. These are big life questions, so give them the space and time they deserve – answer them over the course of a day, a week, or a set period of time, rather than in one sitting. Or why not take a question for a walk, or focus on one question for an entire day? So now for the questions:

- Where in your life or work are you currently pursuing comfort when what's called for is a little discomfort?
- Are you holding yourself to, and judging yourself by, standards of productivity or performance that are impossible to meet?
- In what ways have you yet to accept the fact that you are who you are, not the person you think you ought to be?
- In what areas of your life are you still holding back until you feel like you know what you're doing?
- How would you spend your days differently if you didn't care so much about seeing your actions reach fruition?

Question three really stood out for me. What question stood out for you? A deep-dive into them reminded me that when we give ourselves time and space to enter into an intimate relationship with ourselves, we are telling ourselves that we matter. Our words, ideas, and thoughts matter.

When I faced the questions head on, I returned to the world more hopeful, peaceful, and accepting of where I am in my life. If you long for your life to be different, I urge you to choose one of these questions to respond to in writing. Consider it the seeds of your legacy, which we will return to over the coming months. And if you have time, do check out Burkeman's book. *jackeeholder.com; @jackeeholderinspires*



Let your passions and values signpost your sense of purpose, and be the catalyst for lasting change. Heidi Scrimgeour explores...



ave you ever tried to adopt a new habit by force of will, only to feel like a failure when you later accept that you haven't followed through? It's an all-too-familiar pattern to me, and one that often follows a declaration of intention to create change in our lives. It's why costly gym memberships often go unused, and why so many New Year's resolutions fade before January is even over. But a process commonly called 'finding your why' can reportedly help to turn resolutions into habits, and turn habits into life transformation.

Finding your why is essentially about connecting your actions and choices with your limbic system, according to life design strategist Georgie Shears. That's the part of the brain that helps to regulate emotion and memory. 'It's the emotional centre of your brain, and the part that stirs us to act from a place that means something to us on a deep level,' Shears explains. 'This connection goes way beyond inspiration, motivation, and sheer determination. It is the most powerful catalyst we have as humans for creating sustained, meaningful action.'

Tuning into your why, Shears continues, is about 'channelling your deepest passions and values into a powerful current of purposeful behaviour that you love', rather than just setting your intention with the kind of steely resolve that gets many of us joining the gym in January, or signing up for Sober October. 'Think of it like the powerful energy centre that sits behind your willpower, ensuring that you make your dreams and desires turn into your reality,' she says. 'When you pin a goal firmly to your why, it becomes bigger than something that you can respond to with "I can't be bothered now"; it becomes "I have no choice".

Take going for a run as an example. It's an action that we can go about in several different ways. But connecting the decision to go running to your wider sense of why you're going to run is a powerful way of making it about much more than just moving your body. Anchoring your actions to your why activates a powerful drive within the emotional part of your brain, which is fuelled by a profound sense of significance and purpose,' says Shears. This deep connection provides you with a resilient, enduring commitment to your goals, helping you to stay focused, persistent and consistent, and moving you steadily towards your goals and all the things you've set your heart on even when challenges come your way.'

It's perhaps easier to think about this in the context of people you know in your own life who have achieved





remarkable feats. The friend who transformed her health and fitness, or the work colleague who learned a new language. We all know of people who have smashed their goals, seeming to have tapped into a secret source of motivation that many of us just don't feel we possess. In fact, it's likely that they just found their why and, in doing so, took possession of the key to lasting change.

'Consider the goal of getting fit,'
Shears advises. 'You might think you
want to exercise to get toned, to feel
more energetic, or maybe even to lose
weight. But this is a surface-level
motivation, and it often fades over
time. Your why goes far deeper. It might
be wanting to live a long, healthy life,

and being able to enjoy it with
energy and vitality.
Or to play with your
children, or to be able
to travel the world right
into your older years. To
really experience everything
this life has to offer, and to not
be hampered by ill health.'
In other words, your why is the

foundation upon which your habits and patterns of behaviour are built. 'When the initial excitement of your new gym membership fades, or the routine of a gratitude practice feels repetitive, your why forms your underlying reason that will help maintain your commitment and propel you forward, despite any difficulties that may arise.'

Put simply, finding your why means pinpointing the real reasons why you do the things you do. 'Identifying your why allows you to tap into the core motivations that don't just initiate temporary action, but sustain your journey.' Shears concludes. 'Find your why, hold onto it, and let it fuel every step you take. That's how to harness true motivation and turn the life you dream of into the life you live.'

Georgie Shears is a life

Georgie Shears is a life design strategist and founder of the SHIFT[™] Life Transformation System, which provides women with the tools to create lives they love. shiftlife transformation.com



Nova Cobban
is a psychologist,
psychotherapist and
coach with more than
20 years' experience.
She specialises in
helping businesses and
individuals to explore
and understand
their identity.
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Find your fuel

The concept of 'finding your why' has seeped from the world of wellness into daily vernacular, losing a little of its potency in the process. To understand how to find your why, it's helpful to first delve a little deeper into what the phrase really means...



our why is basically the reason you do what you do – why you get up in the morning, why you work to earn money, why you keep trying when things look hopeless,' explains psychologist Nova Cobban. 'Your why is your internal motivation, and it is tied to your values and your identity.'

Your why makes your world better

Perhaps you're studying psychology with the intention of becoming a practitioner, for example. That's your goal. But your why might be finding answers for your child's anxiety. Or maybe you're working in a role you don't love but it pays well, and your life's aim is to buy the house of your dreams

- that's your why for the work you do.

'Your why could also be the desire to prevent other people from going through something you've been through, or to support them through a similar experience,' Cobban adds. 'It's the way that you make your world a little better. It gives you a reason to persevere, to be resilient, to grow and improve – to take action even when things are tough.'

Your why keeps your fires burning

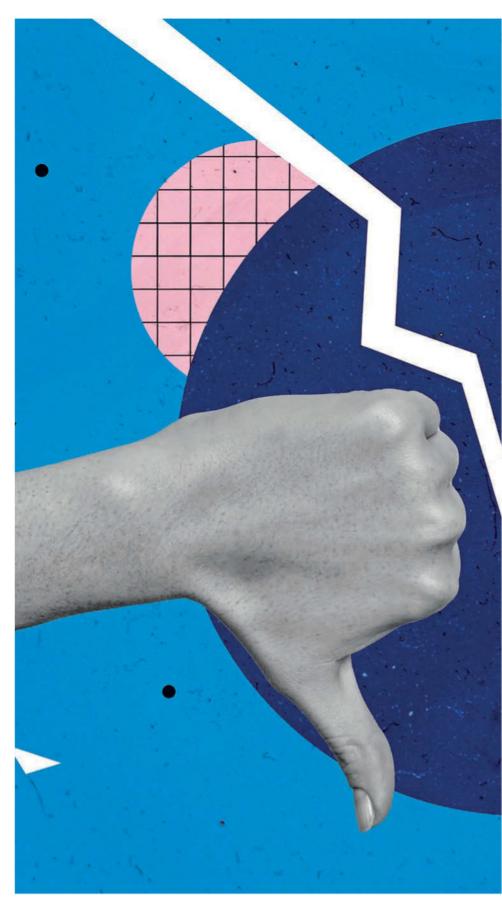
According to Cobban, it's natural to get defensive around the word why, because we subconsciously feel like we are being accused of something that we need to justify. 'I use "find your fuel" instead – the thing that keeps your engines firing, even if you don't really know what that destination is yet,' she explains. 'Fires go out and need fuel to keep them burning. Your why is often touted as the spark, but, actually, your why is more like the long-term fuel that keeps the fires going. It is the thing that allows you to persevere even when you're down to the final embers.'

Your why is a two-way relationship

Cobban also shares the idea that your why is a two-way relationship with the world. I love this concept, because the idea of finding your why can seem, at first, self-indulgent. 'Your why is not just a static internal compass, but an evolving interaction between your inner values and the world,' she says.

Stripping back your actions to identify the drivers that motivate you can provide clarity, energy, and focus. But it's important not to stand still while you search for it, warns Cobban. 'I think we often get hung up on the idea of needing to discover our why before we can move forwards - but often our why unfolds in the process of just living our lives,' she says. 'Many of us don't really have something tangible that we see as an underlying purpose for the things we do. We just do them - and then look back later and see the golden thread that tied them all together. If you find yourself getting delayed by the idea of needing to discover your why, then it may have become counterproductive to spend time and energy on it.'

Establishing the driving force behind your actions isn't navel-gazing, I've realised. It's about bringing clarity to how you want to feel or who you want to be. 'Why gives you something to align to,' says Cobban. 'It's a map that informs you whether the things you think, do and feel are taking you closer to, or further away from, where you want to go.'





3 questions to ask yourself

The work of finding your why isn't easily condensed into a 'tips' box or checklist, but if you're curious about tapping into a deeper sense of motivation, try asking yourself these questions. Note down your answers and make time to follow up on any interesting thoughts or reflections that emerge.

What or who is so important to you that you are willing to stretch yourself beyond what is comfortable? I'm on a health kick, and writing this article has helped me to recognise that what's fuelling it is a deep desire to nurture and protect my health – perhaps triggered by the sudden death of my dad from a cardiac arrest a couple of years ago. That's the 'why' that motivates me to leave the wine unopened and to instead reach for a ginger tea after a long day. Usually, a sense of entitlement kicks in, chummily persuading me that I've earned a stressbusting treat. Today, my why nurtures my resolve and keeps me on the path towards longer term stress-relief and wellbeing. Who or what springs to mind for you?

What do you want to express or provide that will allow you to experience something that you care about? 'Let's say your why – the fuel that fires your action – is building a better life for your children,' Nova Cobban explains. 'You want to provide a financially secure future for them so that they can experience more in their lives, and you can share in the joy and satisfaction that brings.' Consider what you feel compelled to offer the world or to provide for people, and why.

What gives you energy? 'Take note of the things that you always have the energy to do – the things that bring you the most joy and vitality,' recommends Georgie Shears. 'Is it when you're in a creative flow, solving a problem, or deep in a work project? The things that give you energy give you a good clue of where your real passions lie. (And the stuff that drains your energy? That's not your thing!)'

8 ways to discover your why

With any goal, keep asking the question 'why' until you can go no further, advises Georgie Shears. 'This technique can help break through surface-level motivations and get right to the heart of why you really want to achieve that goal'

1. NOTICE WHAT YOU'RE NATURALLY GOOD AT

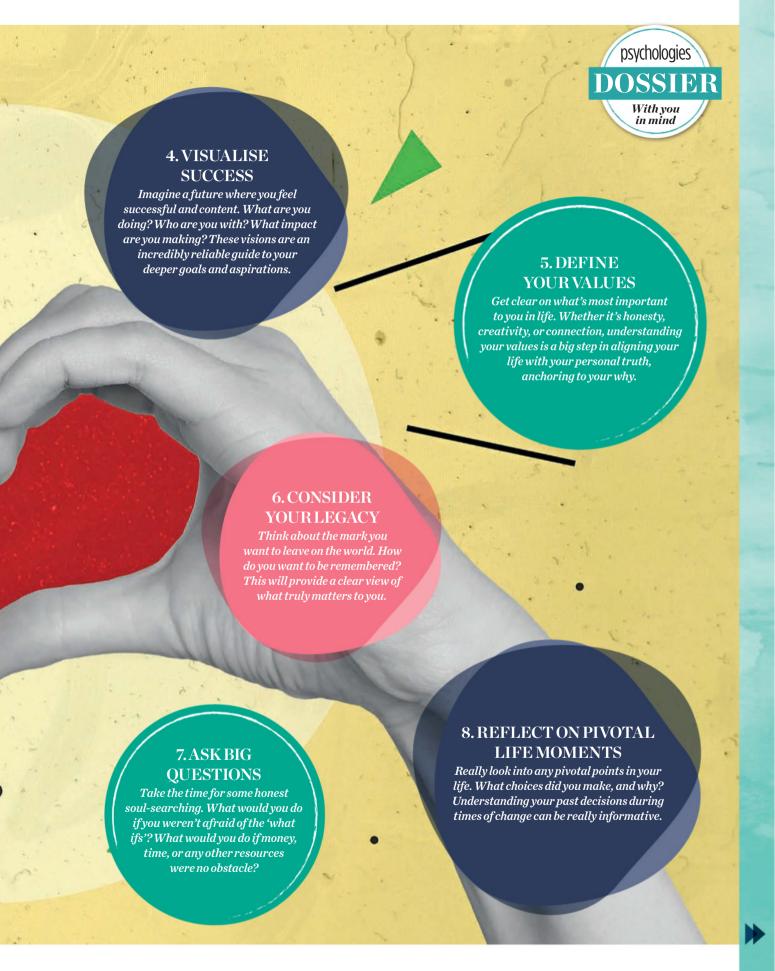
Everyone has something they seem to be great at without even trying. Recognising these things is a great guide to what you easily flow with. Not only will this give you a lovely confidence boost, but it will also guide you in a direction that could lead to really fulfilling work and a meaningful life.

2. GET OUTSIDE

Go for walks, runs, dog walks or bike rides. Moving our bodies in the calm and quiet can be surprisingly revealing. Being out in nature helps you to shift stale, stagnant energy and shed daily stressors, helping you to reconnect with your inner self and making it much easier to tap into your why.

3. RECALL TIMES OF JOY

Think back to some of your most joyful memories. What were you doing? Why was it so joyful? These are the activities and experiences that obviously resonate with your inner self, and they can really help point you toward your why.









When finding your why seems impossible

hat about when your why feels utterly beyond reach? Life events such as divorce, redundancy and bereavement can disrupt our sense of why, but the first step, according to Georgie Shears, is to take some time to get to know yourself under your new circumstances. 'When you feel stuck, and unsure of what your why is, take time to really get to know yourself - and I mean really get to know yourself, deep down,' she says. 'Think about what brings you genuine fulfilment, satisfaction, and joy. Is it when you're creating something, solving a problem, or helping others? These things can give you important clues about your underlying motivations.'

Another helpful tip for unlocking your why is to recognise what you're naturally good at. Consider the things that come easily to you or that you're often complimented on. 'You'll notice a significant sense of fulfilment when you do stuff that aligns with your strengths,' Shears explains. 'If you're someone who finds people naturally come to you for advice, your why might be to guide or teach people in some way. If you're great at organising or making complicated processes and information easier to digest, your why could involve helping others to find clarity. Learning how to tune into your intuition and pay attention to it is another huge factor in finding your why.'

When life throws you a curveball, your sense of identity may shift, creating a sense of being lost or at sea. But rediscovering your why can also play a vital part in helping you to find yourself again. 'Our why can be revealed to us in our most painful experiences – sometimes the hurt you experience can become part of your why,' Cobban

says. 'It can be the thing that heals you and motivates you again. You may find within you a desire to help others who are going through the same thing, or you might come across a particular problem and find a solution, and then want to inform others or work with them so they can move over the hurdles without falling down.'

If life has changed unexpectedly and finding your why feels impossible in your new reality, this is where the two-way relationship with your why becomes helpful, according to Cobban. 'You might not feel much like expressing your why at these times. You might feel like work has lost its meaning or that what used to excite you no longer does, and that's probably because your why is in transition, waiting for you to choose a new direction. So, at these times, instead of focusing on what you want to 'express', instead focus on the other part of it: what you wish to experience,' she says.

'What do you want to experience most at the moment? Love, time, space, friendship, community, peace? Take that as your starting point and then find some small way to express out in the world the same thing that you wish to experience. In other words, create an opportunity for it. If you wish to feel loved, how might you bring that experience to others? Can you leave someone a note to say you care about them? Can you invite some people you know are going through a hard time around for dinner? Can you start a newsletter that gives people a roadmap through the same thing you've been through?'

Looking at your circumstances like this can help you find your why for the next season of your life, Cobban concludes. 'But, more importantly, it also keeps life going, moving, and expressing itself – and helps you to avoid becoming stuck.'



psychologies.co.uk test

WHAT REALLY DRIVES YOU?

If you're craving more meaning in life but don't know where to devote your energy, take our test to find out what really drives you

Tick the answers that most closely apply to you, then add up the symbols. Read the section, or sections, you ticked most, to find out what will bring you purpose

1 If you could, you'd dedicate	● Effective	8 You usually feel most drawn
this year to	■ Understood	to people who
■ Exploring your spirituality	♥ Grounded	● Thrive on ideas and debate
♥ Really being there for people□		■ Don't follow conventional paths□
◆ Developing your creativity	5 Life feels most rewarding	▼ Take responsibility and
Making change happen	when you feel	get involved
	◆ Inspired and stimulated	◆ Live a life less ordinary
2 You tend to stick at things	Useful and needed	
if you feel	■ Like you're growing	9 Your go-to mood booster is
◆ Engaged	♥ Wanted and accepted	◆ Time doing something creative□
■ Inspired		Inspirational reading or listening
♥ Appreciated	6 Your core values include	A walk somewhere green
Needed	◆ Curiosity and openness	♥ A catch-up with a good friend
	$lacktriangle$ Motivation and determination \Box	
3 You would most appreciate	▼ Empathy and	10 By the end of the year,
certainty about	conscientiousness	you'd like to think
♥ What's most worth your efforts□	■ Courage and humour□	◆ You stretched yourself
♦ Where your true talents lie		You stepped up when it counted
● What's really achievable	7 Your thinking time is often	■ You paid attention
■ Which path you're meant to take □	taken up by	♥ You brought people together
	♥ What other people are up to	2.32
4 This year, you'd like to feel	♦ What you can do next	Turn the page to find
a bit more	● Frustration at injustice	out what matters
◆ Challenged	■ Worries about the world	most to you



What's your strongest driving force?



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♥

Connecting

Relationships have always been your driving force, so you may have already worked out that life feels most meaningful when you lean in and get involved. If you come into contact with an initiative in your community or at work that interests you, you often find yourself drawn in and getting involved, and at times that may mean you take on too much. You can be a people magnet and find yourself in an unofficial mentoring role, or the go-to support in a crisis. But it's not a one-way street – you know how to ask for help, too, and also like to learn from others.

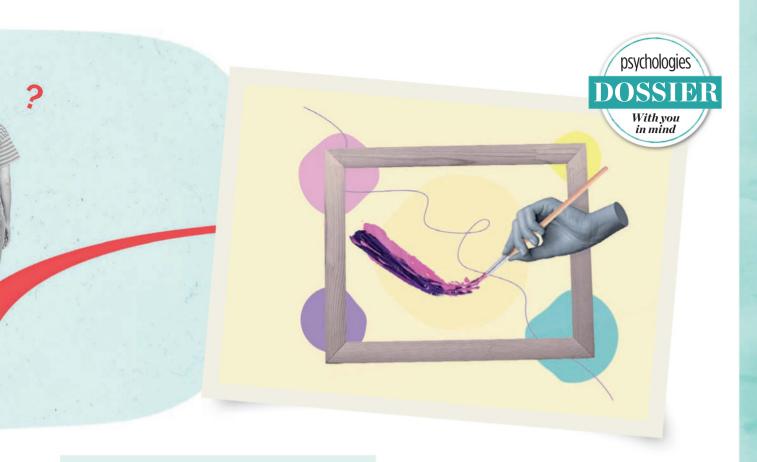
You don't have to be super-sociable or an extrovert to thrive on being connected – for some, it takes time to find the right friends, colleagues, and communities. It's always the quality not the quantity of your relationships that matters, so while social media can be a source of inspiration and wider connections, too much scrolling can chip away at your sense of meaning, leaving you feeling isolated. When you're thinking ahead and making plans, pause and consider which goals are likely to bring new connections or deepen existing ones – if new passions or activities don't tick either box, they're unlikely to last long or bring you the sense of purpose you are seeking.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY •

Creativity

Your biggest barrier to finding a sense of purpose is getting stuck in routine. You're most energised by new ideas and experiences, and your core values may revolve around personal growth, lifelong learning, or reaching your full potential. You may instinctively know that you're at your best when you're focused and engaged in what you're doing, and that life feels most balanced when you have an outlet for your creativity. When you thrive off new ideas, you can start to feel low if you don't step outside your comfort zone or just have new experiences.

At times, life can get fragmented, as initiating and creating will always feel more appealing than seeing something through. But you also need consistency to feel purposeful and enable you to develop and build on your existing experience, skills and talents. Your quest for creativity may mean you are drawn to new possibilities, and at times, you can feel a bit overwhelmed. If you're serious about seeking a deeper sense of purpose this year, it may mean stepping back and thinking about what you can let go off. Start simple – can you identify which elements of your life really stretch and stimulate you creatively right now? Now think about how much time your daily routine allows for them, and where you can make some space.



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY

Contributing

People whose core values revolve around making a difference are no strangers to reflecting on what living a meaningful life really means. You may have worked out that you thrive when some element of life is devoted to a cause you care about, whether it's your local community or the wider world. You may like to give things careful consideration to ensure you use your time and energy wisely. But when you are conscientious and care about making a difference, at times you can lose sight of your own needs, putting you at risk of burnout or compassion fatigue.

You cherish time on your own, but you also need to feel part of a tribe, and you know that spending time with the right people is vital for keeping your motivation and energy levels up. When you're thinking about future plans or what kind of projects or passions to get involved with, remember that you thrive when you have small wins in your life, especially if you're involved in long-term or bigger challenges. Regular journalling to keep track of what you've tried and what you've learned can help sustain you when you feel like you're not getting anywhere. And simply taking time to pause and reflect every day about what you're grateful for can help ensure everyday life also feels meaningful.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY

Consciousness

The key to finding more meaning for you is daily life that allows enough time and space to focus on your personal or spiritual growth. You may have always been drawn to a life less ordinary, with others admiring your courage to take a leap or follow unconventional paths. But, to you, conscious living may not feel like a choice, as going through the motions or living inauthentically has always been too soul-crushing.

Feeling fully engaged and awake is central to life feeling purposeful for you. Who you surround yourself with is also key – you feel crushed if you spend too long with others who try to make you stick to the rules, or don't appreciate your curiosity and willingness to engage in conversation that goes beyond small talk. But, as a naturally empathic person, unfairness and injustice can also drain you, so the right environment is important.

Curating a more conscious life can feel like an overwhelming task, so keep it simple and start by paying attention to your holistic wellbeing – it's hard to stay present and be open to experiencing if your resilience is low or you're under stress. Now, think about who you spend the most time with – you thrive among people who bring joy and lightness into your life.

Manage your daily challenges in a more relaxed way

ife is full of opportunities and challenges, but time is precious. So, we try to fit as much into our days as possible. But sometimes life can become too demanding – it's hard to juggle it all, and it can start to weigh us down. When this happens, we can feel overloaded and stressed, which in return is simply exhausting – physically, as well as mentally.

Our nervous system reacts to stressful times by releasing stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol, as part of the body's flight or fight response, to help us cope better. When we sense a threat or danger, our body rises to the challenge by releasing these stress hormones, which tighten the muscles, making our blood pressure rise and our heart and lungs work harder, and releasing a surge of fat and sugar to give us energy. In normal situations, when the pressure or danger has passed, our body should get back to normal. However, if our daily life's challenges give no time for recuperation, then the nervous system triggers an ongoing stress response, and our body doesn't

use up the chemicals it makes to protect us. Continuous strain can lead to numerous symptoms, such as nervous restlessness, memory and concentration problems, headaches, and chest pain, which in the long-term can be damaging to our health.

There are lots of ways that experts suggest we can help to minimise life's daily challenges and try to protect ourselves from stress, including:

- Eating healthily.
- Reducing smoking and alcohol intake.
- Finding time for regular exercise and relaxation.
- Practising mindfulness even if it's just a short walk quietly in the park or amongst trees.
- Getting a good night's sleep.

Unfortunately, sleeping problems are common when we are suffering from stress. Daytime restlessness impacts on nighttime sleeplessness, causing a knock-on stress-cycle effect. Without a good night's sleep, the following day is often an uphill struggle, leading to even more tension and stress.

Neurexan® is a 100 per cent natural remedy, designed to help break the

stress cycle by reducing nervous tension and anxiety during the day, and improving the quality of sleep during the night. In the daytime, it can help us regain our inner balance, to feel more relaxed and be able to handle stressful situations more calmly. Concentration and performance are retained without any risk of addiction or drowsiness, and sleep is better at night.

Neurexan's four ingredients are derived naturally, so you can be sure it only contains plant and mineral compounds. Passionflower, oat, valerian zinc salt, and coffee plant all work within the central nervous system, where key signalling processes occur when stress and tension rise. Scientific evidence confirming their effectiveness in alleviating symptoms such as nervousness, restlessness, daytime fatigue, and insomnia are well documented.

Neurexan® is a well-tolerated, non-drowsy and non-addictive formulation with a fast onset of action, suitable for adults. Neurexan® comes in a handy 'carry anywhere' 50-tablet pot (RRP £9.99 including VAT) and is widely available from all good pharmacies and health-food shops in the UK. It can also be bought online from neurexan.biz

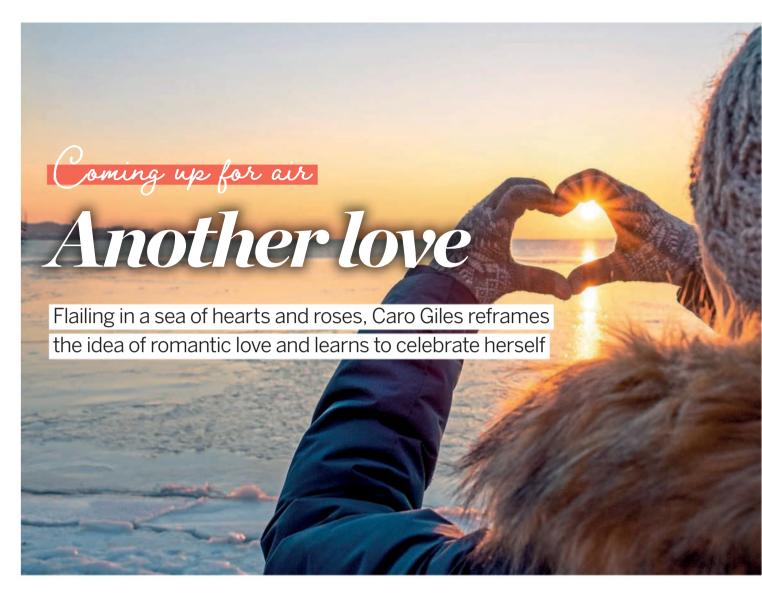




How to connect more meaningfully and enjoy loving relationships with our partners, children, parents and friends



OTGENITE IN STORY



For me, February
is inextricably
linked to
Valentine's
Day, and the
loss, many years
ago, of someone

I loved. It is a bittersweet day that reminds me of an absence, coloured with red hearts that adorn shop windows and supermarket aisles, and it has the ability to exclude those of us who are alone. The person I lost on Valentine's Day was not a partner, it was someone I grew up with. Someone whose face I see in pictures of my childhood. Someone who left far

too soon. I have never really viewed Valentine's Day in the same way since.

It is fair to say that I am mainly happier, and certainly healthier, on my own than I have ever been with a partner. That is not to say that I don't wish to meet someone kind and funny who makes my heart leap – I haven't sworn off love for good. But it is to recognise that the ultimate goal, as promoted by the modern, commercial Valentine's Day, shouldn't be romance. I come at this topic from the very specific angle of someone who has experienced a difficult and painful divorce, and you might think this makes me a poor person to muse on

the value of love – but it has been important for me to find value in another way of life.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows that the number of women not living in a couple, who have never married, is rising in every age range under 70, and the average divorce rate in the UK is hovering around 42 per cent. It is no longer the norm to find a partner for life – though I would be lying if I didn't admit to feeling wistful about this concept. Is it time to reframe how we view 14 February?

Valentine's Day was first linked to romantic love in the 14th century, and by the early 19th century it had become

"I am mainly happier, and certainly healthier, on my own than I have ever been with a partner"



fashionable to send cards. But it is also linked to the arrival of spring. In Slovenia, Saint Valentine or Zdravko, was a saint of spring and good health, as well as a patron of beekeepers and pilgrims. During this post-Christmas fug, when the nights stretch stubbornly long and sun on skin is a rare delight, it feels hopeful to repurpose Valentine's Day as we wait for the light to return.

Traditionally, it is not until the equinox towards the end of March that the prospect of spring feels realistic. But at the moment, when the world feels like such a dark place – politically as well as literally – I am clinging to every opportunity to shine a light. My love of candles is well recorded, and this winter I have lit more than ever. Every morning, I sit at my desk and watch a flame flicker while I write. I have decorated jam jars with my littlest daughters, who cut out the

letters for 'peace' and stuck them onto the glass, which now glows blue while we eat breakfast each morning. I love the emptiness that accompanies the dismantling of Christmas decorations, but this year it has felt more important than ever to retain some of the magic. Stars we have folded from paper and hung from doorways will remain, and of course the candles will burn.

For those of you who are in romantic relationships, Valentine's Day is an opportunity to celebrate that love, but perhaps it is also a chance to celebrate yourself. If I have learned anything from the grimness of divorce, it is that I must hold on to who I am, not lose sight of myself and what I am capable of. And if we consider another purpose of this day, the one that tells us spring is on its way, it is also an opportunity to think about fresh starts. If the concept of New Year's resolutions leaves you

cold, here is another chance to reset and look towards the light.

On Valentine's Day, I'll probably head to the beach. The sky might be heavy with cloud, or if I'm lucky it will be bleached out with the glow of a low wintery sun. Shards of shell underfoot will remind me how fragile it all is - our broken world, my heart, this precious life. It is a time to remember. To remember the person I loved, but also to remember who I am, and how far I have come. The act of becoming single came at a huge cost; it felt like my world was breaking into a million pieces, shattering into something irrevocable, but the glue of time has shown me that those pieces can be stuck back together to create something messy but authentic. Perhaps I needed to break in order to mend.





How to turn on the

Learn to communicate with presence, power and warmth, and tap into the magic of your own innate magnetism, writes Kellie Gillespie-Wright

"Charisma is

the ability to

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you – and it's

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skill to have"

e all have that friend who lights up a room – the one that seems blessed with that mystical je ne sais quoi that sets some people apart. There's an indescribable quality about them that makes them stand out, and they have a magnetism that draws people towards them, because it feels good just to be in their company.

We call it charisma, but what exactly is it? It's ambiguous and undefinable, yet we recognise its spell easily. We believe it to be a natural gift bestowed upon a lucky few; that it helps if you're attractive; that only extroverts can be charismatic; and that you either have it or you don't. But is that really the whole truth of it?

Olivia Fox Cabane, a charisma coach and author of The Charisma Myth (Penguin, £10.99), believes that it's a trait that is, in fact, a skill honed through specific behaviours, rather than an elusive, mythical quality. One of

Cabane's central tenets is that charisma is not an inherent trait but a learned skill that has a set of practical strategies, and by working on our self-confidence, refining our body language, and improving our emotional intelligence, over time, we can all cultivate a more charismatic persona.

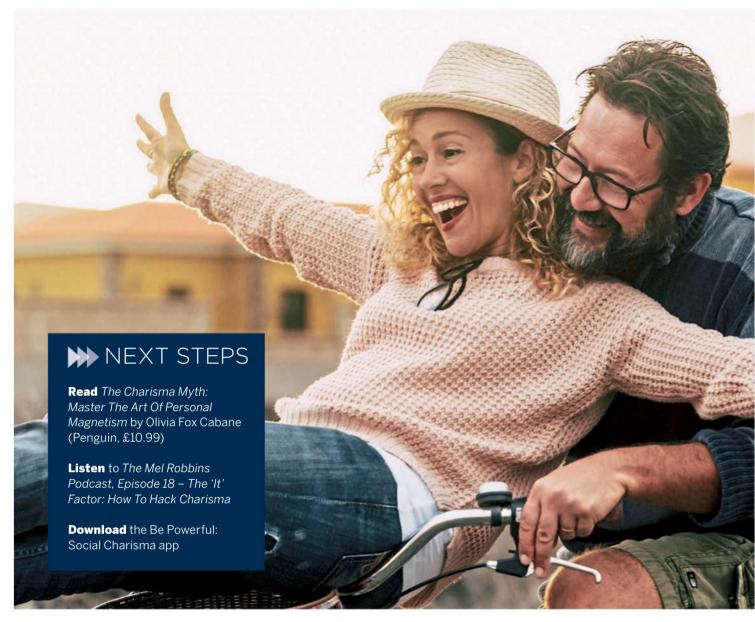
'Contrary to popular belief, people are not simply born charismatic, and extensive research has shown that charisma is the result of specific non-verbal behaviours,' she says. In fact, in recent years, psychologists and neuroscientists have taken charisma apart, figured it out, and turned

> it into an applied science. In controlled laboratory experiments, researchers were able to raise and lower people's levels of charisma as if they were turning a dial, just by asking them to adopt specific (charismatic) behaviours, such as maintaining eye contact and slowing down their speech.

At its core, charisma is the ability to attract, charm, and influence the people around you - and whether it's in our personal or professional lives, it's an invaluable skill to have. It can open doors to fruitful relationships, successful

networking, and satisfying social interactions.

'Charismatic people seem to live charmed lives: they have more romantic options, they make more money, and they experience less stress,' says Cabane. But charisma is not merely about being successful or sociable. It's about cultivating



genuine connections, inspiring trust, and creating an environment where relationships can thrive – not just in the initial stages, but as ongoing elements that contribute to a dynamic and fulfilling partnership through a blend of confidence, empathy, and the ability to engage with people on a deeper level.

And engaging with others in a positive and meaningful way can enhance your mental and emotional health, too, by fostering a sense of belonging, increasing your self-esteem, and providing you with more positive emotional experiences that contribute to a happier, more fulfilling life.

So, how can you increase your charisma and become a magnet for the relationships and opportunities around you? Cabane breaks charisma down into three core components: presence, power, and warmth; and each element plays a critical role in how charismatic a person appears.

Presence is the foundation of charisma and when you are truly present, emotional connections are made, the person you are engaging with feels seen and heard, and bonds of trust are formed. But one recent study found that nearly 50 per cent of our time is spent 'mind-wandering', distracted by background noises, our phones or our thoughts. To counteract this, Cabane suggests that in your next conversation, you keep checking whether your mind is fully engaged or whether it's wandering. Aim to bring yourself back to the present moment by focusing on your breath,

and then get back to focusing on the other person. Listen actively, ask questions, and make people feel valued. When you show that you care about what they have to say, you'll naturally become more appealing.

'The good news is that even a minor increase in your presence can have a major effect on those around you,' says Cabane. 'Because so few of us are ever fully in the moment, if you can manage even a few moments of complete presence from time to time, you'll make quite an impact.'

Warmth is your ability to convey kindness and interest in others. A bona fide smile and a friendly tone of voice are sure-fire ways to demonstrate warmth, but it also involves empathy, kindness, and genuine interest in others.



'To communicate warmth, aim to make people feel comfortable: respect personal space, mirror body language, and keep your eyes relaxed,' says Cabane.

The concepts of power and warmth can present a bit of a double bind but, luckily, power is not about strength and dominance – it's about being perceived as capable and assured. It's the confidence you exude that makes people think they're in safe hands, and projecting a sense of power can be as easy as standing tall, looking well put together, slowing down your speech patterns, and having confidence in what you say.

'Projecting presence, power and warmth through your body language is often all you need to be perceived as charismatic,' says Cabane, but it has to be seen as authentic, and when it comes to charisma, it isn't what we say but how we say it that is important; your body language matters far more than your words do, so it's really important to get it right.

'Non-verbal communication is hardwired into our brains much more deeply than the more recent language-processing abilities,' says Cabane, 'and this is why non-verbal communication has a far greater impact.'

Amazingly, up to 93 per cent of our day-to-day communication is non-verbal, and whether we're aware of it or not, when we interact with others, we're continuously giving out hundreds of micro-expressions a minute, from slight changes in voice to minute eye flickers, often subconsciously, and it's impossible to consciously control all of them.

These messages don't stop when you cease speaking either. Even when you're silent, you're still communicating non-verbally, and because the human mind can read facial expressions in as little as 17 milliseconds, when you try to fake presence, warmth or power, the person you're talking to can tell. And the harder you try, the more unnatural your signals are likely to come across.

'When verbal and non-verbal messages contradict, we tend to trust what we see in the other person's body language more than what we hear them say,' says Cabane. 'It can also be perceived as inauthentic, which

has even worse consequences. When you're perceived as disingenuous, it's virtually impossible to generate trust, rapport, or loyalty. And it's impossible to be charismatic.'

That means if you're feeling nervous, lacking in confidence, or suffering from imposter syndrome, it will show and scupper any chance of appearing charismatic. Luckily, Cabane has a useful hack to overcome this, and it means going straight to the root of the problem.

'Creating an optimal mental state is crucial to unleashing your full charisma potential. and because whatever is in our head will show up in our body language, we need to direct our subconscious appropriately,' she says. 'Get the internal state right, and the right charismatic behaviours and body language will pour forth automatically.'

To achieve this, and to build your confidence, Cabane suggests using the visualisation technique below. 'Because of its powerful mental and physiological effects, visualisation is one of the most charisma-boosting tools available,' she says, 'and the right visualisation will increase your internal feelings of confidence as well as your ability to project it.'

She recommends closing your eyes and remembering an experience when you felt triumphant. 'To make visualisation more effective, vividly engage all the senses in your imagination,' she says. 'And above all, experience your feelings and the warm glow of confidence rising within you.'

It may seem a lot, but little tweaks to your body language, the way you speak, or how you listen – if practised regularly – can soon become habitual and greatly improve your perceived charisma.

Much like learning any other skill, sometimes it will go well and often it won't, especially at first, but each new interaction offers a chance to practise.

Finally, the most charismatic quality you can possess is authenticity. Be unapologetically you. Genuine interactions are deeply attractive and form the strongest connections. When you are true to yourself, you invite others to be true in return, setting the stage for relationships rooted in sincerity.

Our agony aunt, Dr Martha, offers a different perspective on your problems

Is it time to let go of our friendship?

I think I am losing my best friend from university. She had children about ten years ago, and I took great care to stay in touch, travelling to see her as often as I could. Now, I have a one-year-old child, but she hasn't made the same effort. It's been a few years since we stopped regularly texting or chatting; nowadays, it's just a one-off message on birthdays or at Christmas. And when we do see each other, it feels superficial. It's as if we are acquaintances more than friends. We are both attending a wedding in spring and I am starting to dread seeing her – it's going to be so awkward. How can I manage the situation?

We rarely talk about friendship struggles, despite the important role that friends play in our lives, and how painful it can feel when we begin to lose one. It often happens that friendships made at key transitions in life, such as starting university, stick around for a while due to familiarity. There's often an unconscious pressure to hold onto these friendships, despite the fact that they are made solely due to circumstance – be it what school you attended, or where you worked. But just as life circumstances change over time, so too do friendships.

A healthy friendship is reciprocal, which means you both give and take. Sometimes, to be a good friend, you may have to put in more effort than you get back, just as you did when your friend had children. But, over time, the balance should be restored, and a good

friendship is one that makes you feel excited to be in each others' company, not one that makes you feel dread. If you notice that you are the one making the effort, and you're not getting anything back, it's okay to choose to stop. It's also okay to be curious about what may have happened to your friendship, and think about whether your friend is struggling with mental health or something else in her life that is making it hard for her to reach out and be a good friend to you. There is no right or wrong, just what feels good to do about your friendship in this moment.

It can help to remember that some friendships last a lifetime, but others only last a season, and no one is to blame – it's just that the friendship may have run its course. That doesn't mean you should be mean or ghost your friend, or even that you need to

Dr Martha
Deiros Collado
is a psychologist
with more than
20 years of clinical
and academic
experience. She is
the author of How
To Be The Grown-Up
(Transworld, £16.99).

Got a question for Dr Martha? Email letters@psychologies. co.uk, with 'Martha life' in the subject line.

explicitly talk about your friendship being over. It can be helpful just to see your friend in a different light – one that allows you to remember that you were once very close and have many shared memories, but that you are now different people with separate lives – and to accept that, while you are no longer close, you can still enjoy each others' company whenever your paths cross.

It is healthy to question your friendships and to treat them with the same conscious care and thought with which you might choose a romantic partner. So, how will you know if a friendship will last a lifetime? You won't, until you get there! Friendships tend to find their own rhythm within the course of your life. The people who are meant to stick around you will do so without you having to do anything more than be a good friend back.



How can we gently broach our heartbreaking news of loss?

My mother had been unwell for a while, and we had been protecting our children from this. We told them she'd gone on holiday with some friends, when in reality she'd been admitted to hospital. A few days later, however, she passed away. We now have no clue how to tell our children that she has died.

My most sincere condolences to you and your family for the death of your mother. It sounds like you did what you thought was best to protect your children from seeing their grandparent sick and unwell, and you should not feel bad about this. Wanting to protect your children from pain is healthy and normal, and you can talk about death now with honesty and openness.

Talking about death is still taboo. We prefer to use euphemisms such as 'passed away' or 'gone to sleep', or may even say someone has 'left us' instead of calling it what it is. When someone you love dies it can bring in lots of pain and

sadness. But calling death by a different name doesn't make it easier and, in my view, it fails to honour a person's death with the seriousness it deserves.

When it comes to talking to children. it can help to do a few things:

- Be honest and keep it simple. Briefly explain what has happened in real and concrete terms - for example, 'Grandma has been sick for a while. Her body got worse on Tuesday and she had to be taken to hospital. The doctors did what they could to help her, but she was too poorly and she died.'
- Children below the age of eight struggle to understand that death is final, so you might need to explain this - for example, 'When someone dies, it means we cannot talk to them or have a cuddle with them. We won't be able to go and see Grandma again, but we can remember her and look at photos of the fun times we had together.'
- Remember that you are human. It's okay to feel sad and find this conversation hard. It's also okay for your children to see you upset over

the death of someone you loved. Try to name what is happening and reassure your child - for example, 'I am sad because I miss Grandma. I loved her very much. But you don't have to worry about me; I have your daddy and Auntie Stacey looking after me.'

 For many people following death, it is not about 'getting over it', but about maintaining a relationship with the one you have lost. Involve your child in starting a new family tradition, such as planting a flower, visiting a special place, or lighting a candle.

Be willing to accept whatever feelings come up for your children when you have this conversation. Some children feel sad, others angry, while others seem not to care at all and just want to go back to playing. Anything they feel is normal, and likely to change as they process what their grandma's death means to them. There will be many more occasions to talk about her. Be open to answering questions as they show up. I'm sending you and your family all my love.







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anna Williamson

Roses are red...

t's February, the official month of love, affection, and connection! Valentine's Day often polarises opinions – it's fair to say, people typically love it or hate it. But regardless of whether you go giddy for the globally celebrated event, or prefer to put it into Room 101, there is certainly something positive that we can all get from embracing and sharing the love in our lives.

And whether you're attached or single, it matters not – why not view Valentine's month as a chance to show your love and appreciation for the special people in your life? In recent years, we've seen alternatives to the tradition: why not make this a *Pal*entine's, instead, and let your mates know how much you care? Or how about a *Gal*entine's Day, for making memories with your best girlies?

Or maybe you skip the sentimentality altogether? Valentine's Day isn't just about romance; why not embrace this month as a celebration of love in all its forms, in whichever way you'd like to express it? Take this chance to reconnect with friends, family, and, most importantly, with yourself. Share heartfelt messages, spend quality time, and express gratitude for the love that surrounds you, which perhaps you haven't prioritised for a while.

If you are entering this month in a relationship – whether a long-term one, or one just in its infancy – attitudes and expectations around Valentine's can often be steeped in awkwardness. I can well remember countless cringey moments, over my years of dating and in relationships, once 14 February hovered into view. Here's how you can navigate similar scenarios that might arise this year, to ensure Valentine's Day is productive for your relationship:

- Communicate and manage expectations. Effective communication is the cornerstone of a healthy relationship. In the lead-up to Valentine's Day, have an open and honest conversation with your partner about what your views and expectations are, and in turn, listen to theirs. Discuss whether you want to celebrate with a grand gesture, or prefer a cosy night in. This will help prevent misunderstandings.
- Plan thoughtful gestures. It's the little things that truly do count, trust me. Have a think about how you can show your appreciation and love. How about breakfast in bed, a handwritten love letter, or a simple act of thoughtfulness and kindness? Remember, it's not about the price tag thought and effort will carry you an awfully long way towards making your loved one feel special!

• Create lasting memories. Time is the one thing we can all give (and it's free!), yet is often the thing that's most lacking in relationships. Rather than focusing on material things, prioritise experiences that create lasting memories. Whether it's a romantic weekend away, cooking a meal together, or a simple picnic in the park, shared experiences strengthen the bond between partners.

Don't forget to embrace some self-love, too. Valentine's Day is not reserved solely for those loved-up in romantic relationships. Take this opportunity to indulge in some self-kindness and self-care. Treat yourself to something special that brings you joy, maybe (a personal favourite of mine) a solo spa day to rest and relax, or a favourite meal, or just anything you want to do but have been waiting for a 'reason' to do so. Here's your permission to go for it - you deserve it! A healthy relationship with yourself is the foundation for fulfilling connections with others.

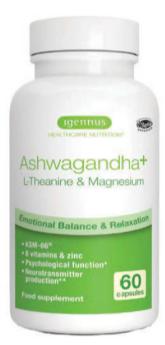
As February unfolds, let's redefine and then embrace the essence of Valentine's Day. Utilise this time to cultivate and celebrate love in all it's wonderful forms – it's a much more productive mindset to be in than declaring it a load of old rubbish! Love is a beautiful feeling, and a journey that deserves celebrating each and every day of the year – but this month is the perfect opportunity to amplify that joy of connection.

Here's to a month filled with love, laughter, and cherished moments!



Relax and unwind

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Unicorn Theatre London

Following a hugely successful run, Stiles and Drewe's joyful hit musical *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* returns to the Unicorn Theatre in London from 20 January to 18 February. This magical, fairytale show is the perfect first musical for young families. For more information, visit unicorntheatre.com



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Formulated by nutritionists, Bee Calm supplement blends therapeutic amounts of the highest quality ingredients shown to help ease anxiety, stress, agitation and low moods, including lemon balm, passion flower, royal jelly, rhodiola, lion's mane mushroom and more. Available for £13.99 from Holland & Barrett.

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According to a recent study, one in eight Brits admit they're tired 'all the time', but struggle to get to sleep due to stress. Based on long-standing use as traditional herbal remedies, Kalms Day is used for the temporary relief of symptoms associated with stress, whilst Kalms Night One-A-Night is used for the temporary relief of sleep disturbances. Both contain valerian root. Always read the label. Available to buy from amazon.co.uk







FOULTH I TO VE



MINDFUL WELLNESS



Psychologies wellness director – mindfulness expert and yoga teacher Ali Roff Farrar – shares inspiring advice and ideas to increase your holistic wellbeing

Power up your plate

Dr Gabrielle Lyon, author of Forever Strong (Little, Brown, £16.99), explains why protein such as nuts, legumes, fish and meat - could be the answer to increasing your energy levels...

It may not be your body's primary energy source, but protein plays a crucial role in boosting your overall energy and wellbeing. It offers several benefits that contribute to a heightened sense of vitality. 1 First, protein is slow to digest, promoting satiety and prolonging the feeling of fullness, preventing those energy-sapping hunger pangs.

It facilitates the transportation of oxygen and essential nutrients throughout your body, ensuring that you remain alert and energised. 2 Protein also plays a key role in

regulating blood

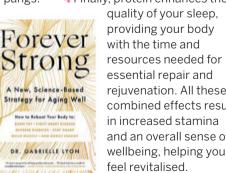
sugar levels, preventing the rollercoaster of energy crashes that often follow consuming sugary or refined carbohydrateladen foods. It provides a steadier, longer-lasting rise in blood sugar, especially when combined with dietary fibre, such as vegetables and whole grains. This stability keeps your energy levels up, averting the dreaded slump and brain fog.

3 Protein manages your body's iron stores, a critical factor in preventing fatigue. It's also involved in muscle and hormone production, directly impacting your metabolism a significant factor in sustaining high energy levels.

4 Finally, protein enhances the quality of your sleep, providing your body with the time and resources needed for essential repair and rejuvenation. All these combined effects result in increased stamina and an overall sense of

Heart-healthy sleep

A new study has found that, for women, delaying your bedtime could put heart health at risk. Researchers* discovered that consistently going to bed later as those who work long hours or have children to look after so often do - can compromise female cardiovascular health more than it does for men. In women who experienced what the researchers call 'chronic mild sleep deprivation' for six weeks (six-and-a-half hours' sleep or less), cells that line the blood vessels are flooded by damaging oxidants. The sleep-deprived cells then fail to activate antioxidant responses to remove the oxidants, leaving the cells inflamed and dysfunctional, which is an early step towards the development of cardiovascular disease. 'Many problems could be solved if people sleep at least seven to eight hours per night,' Sanja Jelic, one of the researchers, advises.





Baked protein oats

Baked oats take a little longer to prepare than regular oats – but they're so worth the wait. This is super-simple and once in the oven will give you plenty of time for a cuppa – or the washing up!

MAKES 300-400G

- 1 tbsp peanut butter
- 20g rolled oats
- 20g vanilla protein powder
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp vanilla extract
- 50g fat-free Greek-style yoghurt
- ½ ripe banana
- 2 tbsp unsweetened almond milk
- 1 tbsp zero-calorie syrup or light agave nectar
- 8-10 sprays light cooking oil

- 10 chocolate chips
- 10 mini marshmallows

I Preheat the oven to 200°C/ 180°C fan/gas mark 6. Put all the ingredients – except the cooking oil, chocolate chips and marshmallows – into a blender, and blitz until smooth.

2 Lightly spray a baking dish with oil then pour in the mixture.

3 Bake for 15–20 minutes. To test if it's cooked, insert a thin knife; it should come out clean.

4 Scatter the chocolate chips and marshmallows on top.
Serve immediately.

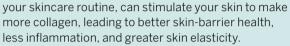
Extracted from Tasty High Protein by Fraser Reynolds (Ebury Press, £22). Photography by Dan Jones





What's the deal with... peptides?

Also called polypeptides, peptides are short chains of amino acids that occur naturally in our bodies, including skin and muscle, and they make up proteins needed by our skin. Collagen (which is too large of a molecule to be absorbed by the skin) is made of three polypeptide chains, so the theory is that adding peptides (which can permeate the skin) to



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Q+A Peptide Facial Serum, £9, contains peptide, magnesium and moisture-boosting hyaluronic acid. It's 99 per cent natural, and fragrance- and alcohol-free; gandaskin.com

"Life isn't as serious as the mind makes it out to be"

Eckhart Tolle

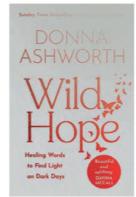
Yoga therapy

A clinical trial of adults with moderate-to-severe depression took heated yoga sessions in a recent study*. Amazingly, researchers discovered that after attending one to two sessions of yoga a week for eight weeks, in a 40.5 Celsius room, participants experienced a significant reduction in depressive symptoms – 59 per cent of participants had a 50 per cent or greater decrease in symptoms, and 44 per cent achieved such a reduction in symptoms that they were considered in remission after just eight weeks of warm yoga.

- that's the number of flights of stairs to walk up each day (at least 50 steps) if you want to reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease by a whopping 20 per cent, according to a new study by Tulane University.

Wild Hope by Donna Ashworth

For lovers of Elizabeth Gilbert and Cheryl Strayed, Sunday Times bestselling poet Donna Ashworth is here to comfort and inspire with her new book Wild Hope



(Bonnier Books, £12.99), a beautiful collection of poetry to last a lifetime. Perfect to dip in and out of, and to return to as a place of comfort on turbulent days – or as somewhere to simply lift your soul, with thoughts on everything from letting others' opinions go, grief, and motherhood. Literary bliss.

Winter wellness boost

'Embrace the cold by incorporating natural health practices that can turn those winter blues into sunny moments,' says Mani Norland from The School of Health. 'Catching some rays, even on cloudy days, works wonders for mood-boosting - step outside for a refreshing stroll, or indulge in outdoor activities to get those endorphins flowing. Fuel up with vitamin D-rich foods or supplements. And try some homeopathy: phosphorus helps with the effects of lack of light for those of us who love bright sunlight and having social times with friends; rhus tox helps the effects of cold and damp, which produce painful joints and lack of mobility; and sepia helps when cold, damp, wet and windy weather just makes everything seem sad and miserable. Stay well this winter.'

schoolofhealth.com





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If you're inspired by Ayurveda and want to elevate your daily rituals, look no further than new artisan brand Blends. The soothing Ayurvedic Moon Milk is handcrafted in Yorkshire and combines the balancing benefits of ashwagandha, lavender and nutmeg. Simply add a tsp to a hot milk of your choice and enjoy the sleep-boosting benefits of this calming bedtime blend.





3 yoga poses for happiness

BY ALI ROFF FARRAR

Happy baby (Ananda balasana)

Perfect for any time of day when you need to stretch and reset your body and mind. Lay on your back and gently bring your knees to your chest. Let your knees widen and come closer to the ground by your shoulders, as you reach up and grab the outside of your feet with your hands. Let your knees and hips widen more and pull your lower back down to the ground. Rock side to side and up and down to massage your back – and smile!

Provided (Uttanasana)Get your head lower than your heart with this easy, calming pose to improve mood and concentration. Standing tall

with your feet just wider than your hips, engage (squeeze) your tummy muscles, legs, back muscles and bottom. Reach your arms up and then forward as you fold over. Hold onto your elbows and sway gently side to side, if it feels good.

Reclined bound angle pose (Supta baddha konasana)

A wonderfully restorative pose for a busy mind. I like to lift my back up onto a pillow or bolster to open my heart and relieve shoulder tension. Lay down on the floor or bolster and draw your soles together to touch with your hips open and knees wide. Let your shoulders drop down and place palms face-up, or rest them on your tummy.

Spread the joy

Karen Ruimy created Kalmar with a mission to guide individuals in attuning to the powerful energies of joy, calm, peace and love through the profound medium of scent. For Ruimy, Kalmar is a vessel for self-love. providing an avenue to nurture oneself and curate the desired energy within the sanctuary of one's home. Whether lighting the Calm candle after a busy day or indulging in the Joy body lotion, each product is designed to intertwine the soul with the senses, creating a morning-to-night ritual capable of instantly shifting one's energy.

Joy Energise Body Lotion, £35, kalmarlifestyle.com





Bit of a stretch

CULTIVATE CONFIDENCE

Hollywood child actress Rachel Hurd-Wood swapped the red carpet for a yoga mat in her new life as a Pilates teacher and mum of two



66

After years of attempting a 'fake it to make it' attitude, recently I've been trying to cultivate genuine confidence. It's the difference between flourishing and flailing in everything from social settings to job interviews, informing 'I can'

self-talk rather than 'send help'. While I envy those with the gift of the blag, it's not my bag, so I must rely on other tactics.

Self-belief might be innate to some, but many of us are riddled with doubt. The good news is you don't have to be stuck like that. Firstly, we're often more capable than we think, and secondly, feeling capable is something that can be developed and honed. For example, I've always been daunted by anything remotely technical, but it turns out there's this thing called YouTube on

which endless free tutorials exist. After watching just one video, I now know my HTMLs from my Pythons, my front end from my back end (sorry). I appreciate that the concept of research is not news to you, but it can be an easy thing to overlook in the face of overwhelm.

Another technique for building a sense of 'I can' is moving your body. During your workouts, you can be in control, set your own targets and goals. You can also reevaluate them, if needs be. It's up to you. I've taught many Pilates clients who began my sessions terrified of push-ups, or convinced they'd never touch their toes.

All it takes is time, patience and repetition.

No matter where you're at, there's
always something you can do to
increase your confidence – your
best self is always within reach.



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SOU/NI)S From soothing music to nature noises, we all know

the power of sound to promote calm. Here, Farzana Ali shows you how to harness its healing benefits...

Make vourself comfortable

Sound healing is about ease, comfort and rest. The first thing to do is set an intention. Sit for a moment and think about what you want from this sound bath. How do you want to feel at the end of it? What is calling you? What feeling or energy do you want to call in? Once your mind is in the correct zone, it is time to set your physical space.

Get comfortable, whatever that means to you. If you want to be seated and remain in a more engaged posture, that's fine. Personally, I'm all about maximising comfort, so if you can and want to lie down, then do. If you're lying on the floor on a mat, you could try some yogic asana poses. I like to incorporate these into my sound meditation practice.

By using positive body language, you can trick your brain into thinking you are happier or more rested than you actually are. Consciously tweaking your body language to add positive adjustments can be so powerful that it can reduce your cortisol levels and increase your happy hormones, to boost your mood and fight off anxiety.

The mood-boosting effects of positive body language are all down to the facial-feedback hypothesis. Smiling engages certain muscles in your face, not only telling the world that you are happy, but also telling you that you are happy even if you are not. This is a real case of 'fake it 'til vou make it'.

To incorporate the facial-feedback hypothesis into your sound meditation, when you begin to ease yourself into a place of rest and comfort, follow these steps:

- 1 Allow your face to relax.
- 2 Soften your jaw.
- 3 Unfurl the space between your eyebrows.
- **4** Slowly lift the corners of your mouth.

You don't need to be grinning like The Joker for this to work: subtle is fine for a gentle mood lift.

Deep pressure therapy

When you are in deep meditation, your body temperature drops, and you may start to feel cold. I always recommend doing any sound meditation work under a warm blanket. But there is another option - a weighted blanket. This mimics the feeling of being hugged and, in doing so, triggers your body to produce the love hormone, oxytocin. When this hormone floods into your body, it encourages your nervous system to relax.

By using positive body language, you can trick your brain"





Weighted blankets can be particularly helpful for people suffering from significant anxiety. When choosing a blanket, keep in mind that it should weigh only 10 per cent of your body weight.

Notice your breath

At the core of sound healing is regaining the ability to regulate your emotions and return to a parasympathetic rest and digest state of being as your default. And you simply can't do that without also considering how you breathe.

This is why, at the start of every session, I tell my clients to breathe in – and, more importantly, to breathe out – through their noses. However, you can't change habits of a lifetime with one instruction in one session, which is why in group sessions I can immediately spot the mouth-breathers – they snore.

To start to retrain your resting tongue position, you need to relax your tongue before suctioning it up against the roof of your mouth. This does not mean that your tongue touches the back of your

front teeth - it should be pulled back a tiny bit and lie flat against your palate. If you have a high palate due to years of mouth breathing, you will not be able to achieve this fully, but rest your tongue as much as you can against the roof of your mouth and make sure the back of your tongue touches the soft palate. This may feel weird or uncomfortable at first, but with enough practice, you will soon get used to it. Sealing your tongue to the roof of your mouth also does something else: it signals to your brain via the essential vagus nerve that you are in a resting mode, priming you for the start of a sound bath.

Feel scentsational

Another good way to engage your nose for a better sound healing experience is through scent. Smell is a powerful, highly emotive sense that can instantly boost your efforts to induce a feeling of calm and peace. This is why spas tend to smell a certain way. Particular notes of vanilla, lavender or ylang-ylang

will pop up again and again in spaces designed to help you relax.

Scent has a way of transporting you to a different place. Have you ever walked past someone on the street and their fragrance reminded you of someone or somewhere else? When it comes to scent, noses are pretty spectacular. Not only can they detect over a trillion different smells, but aromas can impact on behaviours, too. Certain scents will help de-stress you. This is to do with how smell interacts with your brain and how your olfactory system (the sensory network that is responsible for smell) has an impact on your nervous system.

When you sniff scents that please you, your nose tells your brain to release the happy hormone serotonin, and even the reward hormone dopamine. This means you feel calmer when you are enjoying certain essential oils, and it's why I love combining relaxing fragrances with therapeutic sound. Engaging more than one sense helps to take a client to a place where they can let their worries go.





Lavender, vetiver and camomile, bergamot, sandalwood and clary sage are just some of the fragrance notes you can look for when choosing something to meditate with. Once you have chosen something, try and use that exclusively every time you listen to a sound bath or meditate using sound at home. This helps to create a memory - an association with your chosen fragrance. Because your olfactory nerve connects to the part of your brain linked with memory and emotion, the more often you use one particular scent each time you enjoy a sound bath, the stronger the link becomes. It makes the process almost ritualistic.

Associating a particular fragrance with relaxation means that getting a whiff of that scent when you want to relax will also have a positive impact on your body. The scent highway works both ways. A spritz of a fragrance that makes you think of being calm and happy will signal to your brain that it is time to unwind, even if you are super stressed when you use it.

Let there be low light

Setting your space before a sound bath or any meditation is crucial, and while you can forgo some things, lighting is a non-negotiable one for me – it has a huge impact on our entire physical body. By now, most of us know that we should not look at a phone in the evenings before bedtime. The phone's blue light messes up our circadian rhythms and our sleep quality and quantity. But did you know that blue light is also found in LED lights and overhead halogen bulbs?

We all love the warm reds, oranges and rich pinks the skies can turn during a sunset. We may not understand why this is so relaxing, but we just inherently feel that it is. Bright artificial lights (especially white light) signal activity – that it is time to engage, move, act and do. Warmer lights on the shorter end of the light spectrum tell your body that it is time to relax and just be – to slow down and become still, and to surrender to a more peaceful state. These lights signal to your brain that it is okay to down tools, rest and recover.

For this reason, lighting is so important when it comes to preparing your space for a sound bath. You can have the warm glow of candles, real or battery-operated, but all types of soft lighting will work. A well-positioned lamp can give your space an inviting glow, while fairy lights can add a touch of magic. If you want to add colour, try a Himalayan salt lamp.

Ditch the phone

Imagine the scene... You have set the perfect environment, played beautifully, and seen the client fall into a deeply meditative state. When you bring them back from the serene meditation they have experienced they look rested and have been able to successfully turn off. Just as you let them know they can leave, their face is illuminated by the blue glow of their phone. And it feels as though your hard work has been undone.

Blue light from your phone not only messes up your sleep when you are scrolling before bedtime, but in recent years there has been more chatter about not looking at your phone first thing in the morning, either. Just before you wake up, your brain slowly starts to

move into a theta brainwave state from its nighttime delta brainwave state. Theta is when you are in a deep dreamy state. From there, your brain slowly moves into a relaxed alpha brain state. This is when you are awake but not concentrating, so your mind and therefore your body is still relaxed.

Imagine it like this: you are at the bottom of a staircase and have steep steps to climb before you can start your day. You slowly climb each step to reach the top. Your brain is the same: it moves through each phase to set you up for the day. Now imagine you are being chased up the stairs with someone snapping at your heels. Your sense of urgency may either cause you to trip up the stairs or make you feel stressed and scramble up.

Chased or not, the end result may initially appear the same: you have made it to the top of the staircase. But it is important to remember that those who are chased up the stairs will not be at the top feeling calm and steady. Instead, they will be anxious, unsettled, and maybe even sport a scrape on their knee or a stubbed toe.

The same goes for your brain. Scrambling or skipping through the brainwave stages that should happen leaves you unsettled, and that feeling of being chased (anxiety) may even stay with you for the rest of the day.

The same principle applies when you 'come to' from a sound bath experience: you need to slowly move though the different brainwave states. In the same way you experience REM sleep, a sound bath can take you to the theta brainwave state. Grabbing your phone immediately and checking your emails or notifications forces your body to skip these important stages – hurtling you immediately back to the most awake, alert (beta brainwave) state.

Instead of reaching for your device, give yourself a few minutes to continue resting. Stare into space, curl up on your side, sip a warming cup of herbal tea, and just be. There is no correct amount of time you should ditch your phone for – this is dependent on what else you are doing and at what time of day you are having your sound bath. But if you can gift yourself (at least) 30 minutes without your phone, then do so.







Serve up a bowlful of joy and warm up from within with these hearty, healthy soups, packed with plant goodness

Dan dan cauliflower soup

This dan dan noodle soup is a flavour explosion in a bowl. It's also a very healthy meal that you can have on the table in no time at all. Use whatever accompanying vegetables are in season.

Serves 4

- 400g rice noodles
- 300g caulifower, cut into florets
- 1 carrot, peeled and thinly sliced diagonally with a peeler
- 2 courgettes, spiralised
- 100g frozen edamame beans

FOR THE STOCK

- 1 litre good-quality vegetable stock
- 3 garlic cloves, crushed
- 4cm piece of fresh ginger, grated
- 3 tsp palm sugar

FOR THE STOCK SAUCE

- 3 tbsp light soy sauce
- 2 tbsp tahini
- 4 tbsp black vinegar (not balsamic)
- 2 tsp dark soy sauce

- 1 tsp kecap manis
- 1 tsp chilli oil, plus extra to garnish
- 2 tsp sesame oil

TO GARNISH

- Sliced spring onions
- Fresh coriander leaves
- Toasted sesame seeds

1 Combine all the stock ingredients in a large saucepan and bring to the boil. Meanwhile, mix the stock sauce ingredients together in a small bowl.

2 When the stock comes to the boil, place the rice noodles in the stock, then 1 minute later, add the cauliflower and carrot. After another minute, remove the pot from the heat and add the rest of the veg and the stock sauce. Mix well, taste, and adjust the seasoning, if required, with extra splashes of ingredients from the stock sauce.

3 Divide the noodles and vegetables between four bowls. Ladle the soup into the bowls over the vegetables and noodles, and garnish with some sliced spring onions, coriander leaves and toasted sesame seeds – plus some extra chilli oil, if you can handle the heat!



Sunshine soup

This is a happy soup – the colour is vibrant yellow, and it's sprinkled with dried petals. The soup is also light and healthy, and good for the soul. If you want to make the soup thicker, add two potatoes when you add the stock, simmer until the potatoes are soft, and then blend.

Serves 4

- 2 whole corn cobs
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 3 yellow peppers, deseeded and cut into chunks
- 1 litre vegetable stock
- Freshly squeezed juice of 1 lemon
- Marigold and cornflower petals, to garnish
- Pangrattato (see right), to serve (optional)

I Using a sharp knife, on a chopping board, slice the kernels from the corn cobs. Add these to a saucepan with the olive oil and onion, and cook over a low heat until the onion is soft and translucent. Add the peppers and cook until they are soft. Add the stock and lemon juice, and simmer for 15–20 minutes.

2 Blitz with a blender or food processor, or use a stick blender, then pass through a fine-mesh sieve to remove the corn and pepper skins and to make the soup smooth. Put the soup back in the saucepan and heat through again.

3 Pour the soup into four bowls and garnish with dried marigold and cornflower petals. Serve with pangrattato, if you like.

Pangrattato

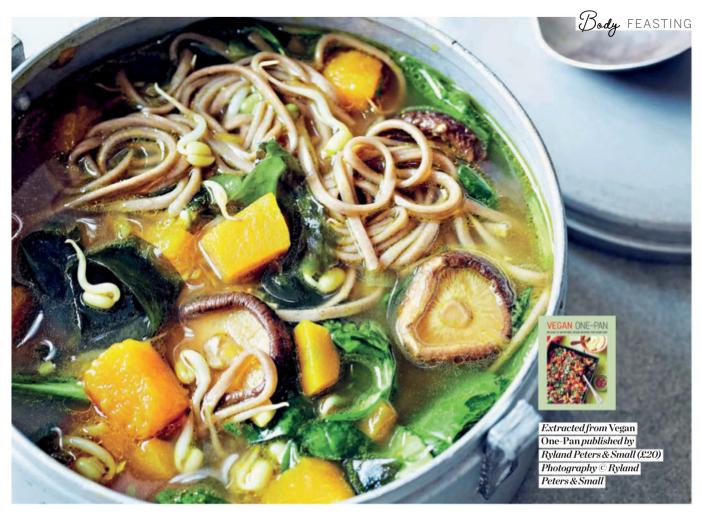
Makes about 50g

- 1 slice of dried bread
- Olive oil, for drizzling
- Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

I Blitz the bread to fine crumbs in a food processor. Heat a little olive oil in a frying pan and add the crumbs. Season with salt and pepper, and toast until the breadcrumbs are crisp. Stir continuously to make sure that the crumbs don't burn.

Tip: You can vary this recipe by adding a garlic clove or some lemon zest to the blender when processing the crumbs.





One-pot miso noodle soup

A big bowl of this soup makes a great lunch, especially when you feel tired and your energy is low. It's also a great late-night dinner option, because it nourishes you but doesn't put too much strain on the already sleepy digestive system. Also, dried shiitake mushrooms have a relaxing effect on the body.

Serves 3

- 100g dried soba noodles
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tbsp tamari
- 2½ tbsp dark sesame oil
- 3 dried shiitake mushrooms
- 1 strip of wakame seaweed (optional)
- 1 tbsp chopped garlic
- 2 tbsp chopped fresh ginger
- 1 small onion, diced
- 2 carrots, diced (around 100g total weight)
- 120g cubed pumpkin
- ¼ tsp ground turmeric

- Freshly ground black pepper
- A pinch of chilli powder
- 100g mung bean sprouts
- 2 tbsp rice or barley miso
- 130g spinach leaves, chopped

I In a large saucepan or pot, boil the noodles in 1.25 litres of salted water until al dente. Strain, reserving the cooking water. Run the noodles through running cold water, drain, put in a bowl and sprinkle with the tamari and ½ tablespoon of dark sesame oil. Mix well and set aside. 2 In a small bowl, cover the shiitake and wakame, if using, with hot water, and leave to soak. 3 Rinse the saucepan or pot in which you cooked the noodles and add the remaining dark sesame oil. Over a medium heat, sauté the garlic and ginger for 2-3 minutes, then add the onion, carrots, pumpkin cubes and a pinch of salt. Mix well and sauté for 2-3 minutes.

4 Add the turmeric, pepper and chilli powder and stir. Once the spices and vegetables start sizzling, add the reserved cooking water and another 500ml hot water. Cover and bring to the boil over a medium heat. Meanwhile, drain the shiitake and wakame and chop finely, discarding the mushroom stems.

5 Once the soup has started to boil, add the mung beans, shiitake and wakame, lower the heat and cook, covered, for 10 minutes. Put the miso in a small bowl and pour over a ladle of hot soup. Dilute completely with the help of a small whisk or fork. Remove the soup from the heat and add the diluted miso and chopped spinach. Taste and adjust seasoning. Stir, cover, and allow to rest for 1 minute.

6 Divide the noodles among bowls and pour over the soup, making sure that each portion gets lots of veggies and sprouts. Serve immediately.

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Hello!

With spring still some way off, it can feel as though you're limping through the last leg of winter – but the perfect way to sprinkle a little joy

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TANCE CULTITEDS





he start of the year can feel a little, well, bleak. Once the tinsel has been packed away and the last of the mince pies polished off, feelings of festive cheer can fizzle out quicker than a firework on New Year's Eve.

Whilst warming our hands around mugs of coffee, my colleague Annabel and I were discussing the usual winter struggles (dark nights, cold mornings) when, with a sigh of resignation, Annabel said, 'Oh well, it'll be Easter soon'. This might have been reassuring – except it was January; Easter was more than

three months away, and winter had barely begun. I realised from our chat that there was nothing in the calendar for her to get excited about, and it got me thinking: do we neglect connection and celebration at the beginning of the year? Do we risk feeling a little lonely, isolated, and just a bit blah through winter, simply because we don't have enough to look forward to? Perhaps the emptiness in our calendars is being reflected in our mood. Isn't it time we started to bring the celebration of other parts of the year into our winter diaries, in order to connect and feel glimmers of warmth in the coldest of months?





Summer is often associated with high-energy socialising; barbecues, parties and impromptu late-night chats sat in the garden are all linked in our mind with group gatherings and a sense of togetherness. For our ancestors, summer was a time for clans to travel long distances and gather in large numbers, in the same way we might hit a music festival today. It seems our brains are primed to handle these higher energy, larger gatherings in summer – but not exclusively so.

Our brains still crave celebration and connection in winter, only with a different level of zeal. Instead of packed-out venues and parties, we need close personal connections. Historically, winter conditions would have made travelling far too treacherous, but tribes would gather locally. Winter has long been a time for eating together, storytelling, and celebration on a gentler scale. And the same is true of today.

It can be very tempting when the weather is less than appealing to write winter off and think, 'Let's get together in a few months', but that would be to postpone happiness. Often, we can feel burnt out and in need of rest from January to March, but celebrations don't need to take a toll on your liver, wallet, or mood. In fact, gatherings can bring a burst of feelgood energy that provides its own sparkle and light, even on the darkest days.

There is so much love and joy to be found in the first part of the year, but we need to actively engage in it to boost our social connection. The early months are not to be endured, but enjoyed. We can create magical moments that work for us and our winter energy.

Last year, I celebrated the Lunar New Year by baking and decorating cookies and dropping off small boxes with a note wishing good fortune for the year ahead to my neighbours. It was a spectacularly grey and drizzly day, and delivering these biscuits felt as though I was dropping off a little box of sunshine. One of my neighbours popped over with hers and we had a cuppa and a cookie together. I will





be doing the same this year, and have already planned it into my diary so that I can look forward to the festivities.

Next up came Valentine's Day. I know, for some, this is a commercially-driven nightmare, but we can choose how to recognise a day of love. One of my closest friends was in the middle of a divorce and I messaged her asking if she'd like a *Gal*entine's Day alternative. We sat, ate, and belly-laughed together. It was a gorgeous evening, revelling in our friendship and our love for each other that had nothing to do with chocolate hearts or petrol-station carnations.

How you decide to celebrate in these early months of the year is up to you – but it's crucial that you do so. It's these regular milestones that prevent winter from feeling endless and soulless.

If you're new to celebrating in winter, then I recommend building in at least one activity every month so that you have something to look forward to. It isn't about noisy or expensive nights out (unless you want it to be!). It's about giving your brain the connection it craves by spending time with your people. If there's nothing in the conventional calendar that appeals to you, then make something up! Recently, my friend Gail discovered a 'book club cake' recipe and we got together to eat and connect. There was little discussion of books, but, together, we celebrated our connection and friendship - and, of course, cake!

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

- 19 January National Popcorn Day. Grab your bestie, pop some kernels, and spend the day on the sofa watching films. Bliss!
- 21 January National Hug Day. A good excuse (if ever one was needed) to meet up with someone you are grateful for and give them a squeeze. Connection, oxytocin, and a case of the feelgood fuzzies. Perfect.
- 24 January National Peanut Butter Day. One jar. One spoon. Need I say more?
- 14 February International Book Giving Day. A brilliant alternative to Valentine's Day. Celebrate by gifting a book to a friend or family member, your local school or reading initiative, or even by treating yourself to a book you've been waiting for.
- 17 February Random Acts of Kindness Day. Acts of kindness boost our mental health and that of those around us. Celebrate kindness today and sprinkle a little happy glitter.
- 1 March National Employee Appreciation Day. Is there a colleague you simply wouldn't be without? Whether it's your work bestie or a colleague who keeps the whole team together, take time to celebrate them and show your appreciation. It'll make their day.
- 20 March The last day of winter. Get together for a cosy gathering and recognise the joy that you've woven into your calendar over winter.

SING FOR YOUR LIFE!

THE SINGING PRESCRIPTION

In this month's column, musician James Sills encourages you to sing for five minutes a day to boost your physical and mental health.



s the old adage goes, we are creatures of habit. In fact, it could be argued that we are our habits. And many of us, for various reasons, have got out of the habit of singing regularly. Perhaps you were put off singing by a negative comment in your childhood. Or you don't have enough time in an already-packed schedule to commit to a new hobby. Or maybe you simply don't know where to start.

In his 2019 book Feel Better In 5 (Penguin, £16.99), Dr Rangan Chatterjee explains that small changes in your lifestyle can make a big difference to your health. And that engaging in an activity for just five minutes a day, such as breathwork, yoga or gratitude, can reap real rewards for your health and wellbeing. He says these habits are 'just like toothbrushing; their secret is that they don't take much effort or time. They work because they're done little and often. It's the repetition that makes them powerful.'

But how might this work for singing? A study by the British Academy of Sound Therapy in 2020 found that singing for just five minutes a day can have a positive effect on your mood, reducing stress and releasing feelgood endorphins. It concluded that songs with driving rhythms and positive lyrics have the greatest effect. For more information about the study, visit britishacademyof soundtherapy.com/research/ singing-for-health/

But I realise it can feel daunting when embarking on a new hobby, especially with something like singing, where we may feel inhibited or fear getting it 'wrong.' So, as writer Seth Godin says, 'Start small, start now.'

Scan the QR code to access the playlist, to get you started!



Listen to the 'Sing' episode of the *Just One Thing – With Michael Mosley* podcast, which explores the health benefits of singing. Listen now via BBC Sounds or any other podcast provider.

James Sills is the author of *Do Sing* (The Do Book Co, £8.99), and founder of The Sofa Singers; thesofasingers.com. Find out more about James at james-sills.com, or follow him on social media @jsillsmusic

Here are a few guidelines to really get you going:

- Build singing into your daily routine and consider 'habit-stacking', which is attaching a new habit to an existing one (for example, singing each morning in the shower, or at the end of your lunch break).
- Find somewhere where you feel comfortable and won't be disturbed.
- Before you start singing, take a few deep breaths and do some gentle humming to warm up your voice.
- Choose a song from the Spotify playlist that I've created (see the QR code, left), as these are great songs to

start with to help build confidence. Try a few out and find one that is a good fit for your vocal range and your energy.

- Remember, it is impossible for you to sound like the original singer, so own your own voice.
- Sing safely keep hydrated, don't push or strain your voice, and rest your voice if you have a cold.

Remember, this is about harnessing the power of singing for wellbeing; it's not about becoming a 'better' singer (though this may well be a side effect!), so don't put too much pressure on yourself. Keep it light and playful. You could keep a journal to track your mood and energy before or after the session, to chart your progress. This is something that comedian Sindhu Vee did as part of a singing experiment for Dr Michael Mosley's podcast Just One Thing. She reflects, 'It always makes me feel better after I've sung. I think it's nice as an energy-lifter in the middle of the day. Just pick a nice song and sing it out loud.'

And if you want to build on your five minutes a day, you would be most welcome to join me for this month's online singing session, Sing With *Psychologies* – find the full details in the box below.

the power of habits and habit-stacking in James Clear's book

Join James
for Sing With
Psychologies to
help you harness
the power of
singing. This
month's song is High by the
Lighthouse Family, and the
session takes place at 1pm
on Friday 23 February. Sign
up by scanning the QR code
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Join Ollie's army

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

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 Ollie School for a

contact Ollie School for prospectus and to talk about getting with the programme.

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Get in touch

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hen it comes to my career path, I am a self-proclaimed queen of reinvention.

In my meandering working life, I have morphed several times: teaching French and English, working in advertising, design and fundraising, training as a nutritionist, and writing freelance.

As women, we are biologically evolved for change – adapting our bodies and ourselves as we go through life. Last year, when I hit 57, I sensed I was ripe for a change. A certain restlessness and dissatisfaction had set in; I felt demotivated and had started to lose confidence in my abilities. After much deliberation and anxiety, I signed on the dotted line for a three-year course in nutritional therapy. I offered myself words of encouragement: 'If it doesn't work out, that's fine – at least you will have tried'. But, inside, I was a wobbly mess

- scared of failure, of letting myself and others down, fearful that my tired, midlife brain wouldn't be able to retain new information, and worried that I was about to give up my freelance freedom to study for several hours a day – not to mention the dreaded exams! But a voice rang out to feel the fear and do it anyway.

One month in, however, I was a nervous wreck. Waking at five in the morning to study and keep up with the schedule. The level of biology was far









above my very distant O-level standard. I felt despondent, and asked myself, 'Why am I doing this? To whom am I trying to prove my worth? From whom am I seeking validation and praise? Will my friends and family love and respect me more if I plough on and qualify as a nutritionist?'

During a recent heart-to-heart talk with my wise, 21-year-old son, he questioned with frustration why I was still searching and striving for achievement, moving my personal goalposts and, consequently, feeling unworthy if I wasn't 'productive'. As far as he was concerned, I had 'done enough' and should 'relax and enjoy myself'. Such a novel thought!

Was it finally time to stop the negative self-talk and feel 'good enough'? And how does one do that? How was I to disengage from the cultural narrative of what success looks like? I felt like a bird in a cage; the door was open, but I'd forgotten how to fly.

'Ask yourself why you are in crisis,' suggests psychologist Caron Barruw. 'Your partner and friends aren't expecting you to strive and achieve. It's your internal voice telling you, "Who am I if I don't have a career? What is my identity as a person if I am just a mother/wife/partner/friend?" For the generation of women now in their 50s, 60s and 70s, this has been the conditioning they have received.'

Barruw explains that this internal stress is typical of a perfectionist personality type, whereas others are more able to accept who they are at any given time. Paradoxically, it is this very acceptance that can be a driver for change. 'Who is measuring what is "worthy"?' asks Barruw. 'It's an internal judgment. When you analyse your own voice and see how critical it is – when you can question whether you need to buy into the equation "achievement equals worth" – then you are on your positive self-esteem journey.'

Being kind to ourselves without guilt takes training, 'Disarm the critic,' says Barruw. 'Reframe the argument: allow yourself to lie on the sofa, because lying on the sofa is good for your mental health! It's hard to argue with that kind of logic.'

Making changes can be stalled by financial worries, not knowing where to start, and a sense of overwhelm and fear – as well as having lost sight of who you really are, and how to identify what is important to you.

'I have a full page of acronyms for fear,' says Caroline Humphries of Third Dimension Coaching. 'My favourite is False Evidence Appearing Real. Challenge yourself – what are you assuming to be true. What evidence do you have? And is that *really* true?'

'Ask, how do I see myself?' says Barruw. 'How do others see me? If I could be what I want/need to be, what would that look like? Remind yourself that new ventures do not have to be big, scary



mega careers. Maybe a minor tweaking of where you are is enough. Seek out support systems – at home, or with friends or different communities. There is some peace-making to be done with the idea of getting older in a young person's world. Find ways to stave off isolation and loneliness in a disconnected post-pandemic earth.'

Humphries suggests bringing to mind six times when you felt fully alive and so engrossed in an activity that you didn't feel time passing. 'With each situation, take time to explore what was going on. What were you doing? Who else was there? What was important about the occasion? Look for themes that run through each of these situations. Talk to a friend, share your experiences, and then ask them to articulate your skills and impact. Allow yourself to receive. Know that this is part of who you are.'

In this era of self-care, we are encouraged to align our actions with our values, which may help us find our 'why' and our purpose. 'Coaching is not just knowing ourselves, looking back, or finding a new job,' explains Humphries. 'It is also about going out and exploring. Be super-curious. Take small steps. Being in charge of your own destiny can bring renewed zest for life.'

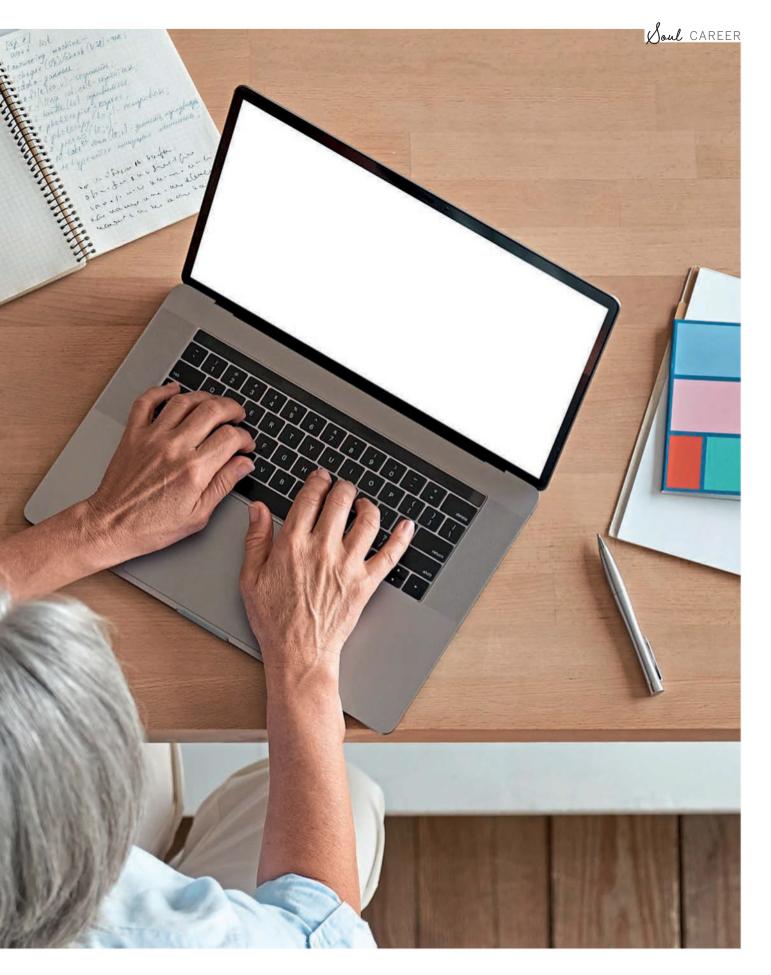
Humphries suggests I try the 'wheel of life' exercise to help identify my values and to challenge my assumptions. I draw a pie-chart of the different aspects of my life – friends, family, work, leisure, finances, etc. I then grade my current level of satisfaction in each area, and ask myself where, ideally, I would like that level to be.

'The magic comes when the client reflects on how having a higher level of satisfaction "might" impact the other areas of their life,' says Humphries. 'For example, one client had been offered a more senior role, which they felt would improve their work satisfaction. However, they predicted the impact would be a lower satisfaction with family and friends. What were they assuming to be true? The reality of the new role was that it was not only more enjoyable but also gave them more time to spend with their family and friends. Becoming aware of the assumptions we are making opens up new possibilities to explore.'

Through my recent experiment with making a midlife career change, I have realised that my challenge is now to find who I am again after years of juggling parenting, work, and relationships. Accepting the parts of me and my life that I thought weren't good enough, enjoying my writing, and learning to have more fun!

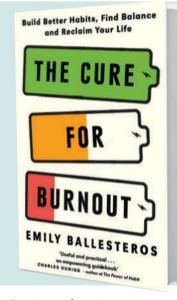
'When you can get to grips with the idea that you can define your happiness by who you "are" rather that what you "do",' says Barruw, 'then it's truly an epiphany moment.'





The words

We're with CS Lewis, who said, You can never get a cup of tea large enough or a book long enough to suit me.' Alex Lloyd provides the inspiration...





The Cure For Burnout by Emily Ballesteros (Bonnier Books, £14.99)

Modern life breeds burnout - but it doesn't have to be that way. And Emily Ballesteros is proof. After experiencing a time that she describes

as living life 'like a frog in tepid water that was slowly turned up to boiling point', she developed the tools to regain her love of life.

This accessible guide takes you through the varied reasons for burnout, the mindsets most prone to it, and the surprising symptoms, such as compulsive shopping when stressed.

This deep-dive into the topic is compassionate, honest, and also empowering, helping you to shake off afflictions such as 'resting guilt', and learn to embrace 'bare-minimum days' when vou most need them.

The Emotion Trap by Siri Helle

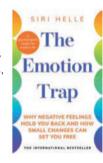
(Bonnier Books, £14.99)

Human beings might seem advanced, but our brains remain driven by largely primitive responses. These can lead to behaviours we know are harmful yet we just can't seem to break free from.

Now, psychologist Siri Helle has developed a CBT-influenced method to help you escape what she calls 'the emotion trap', showing readers how it is perfectly possible to change behaviours, in turn reprogramming the 'psychological triangle' that leads

to low self-esteem. lack of motivation, and anxiety.

Thanks to Helle's user-friendly terms, what could seem complex feels achievable and potentially life-changing.



Find Love by Paul C Brunson

(Ebury, £16.99)

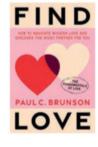
We live in the age of the dating app, but it seems like finding lasting love has never been harder.

Top matchmaker Paul C Brunson says it's little wonder, when our expectations of the perfect partner are so unbelievably high.

But he believes it can be done - and draws on personal and professional experience, along with science, to show you exactly how.

His analysis of communication methods and how trauma affects

mating are truly fascinating, while his advice - from the 'green' flags to look for, to strengthening your friendship ties to widen your social pool – are positive and practical.



Spread The Joy by Gaby Roslin

(HarperCollins, £18.99)

Life can be difficult, and there are days when joy might be in short supply. Yet broadcaster Gaby Roslin believes we all have the power within to boost our happiness – and share it with others.

Her upbeat approach to looking and living on the bright side of life is infectious; a state of mind that shines through in her writing.

The book combines relatable anecdotes with achievable tips such as dressing in bright colours,

and utilising your sense of smell for a quick mood-boost.

Best of all is Gaby's advice to rip up the rule book. connect with your inner child, and commit to having fun while you can.





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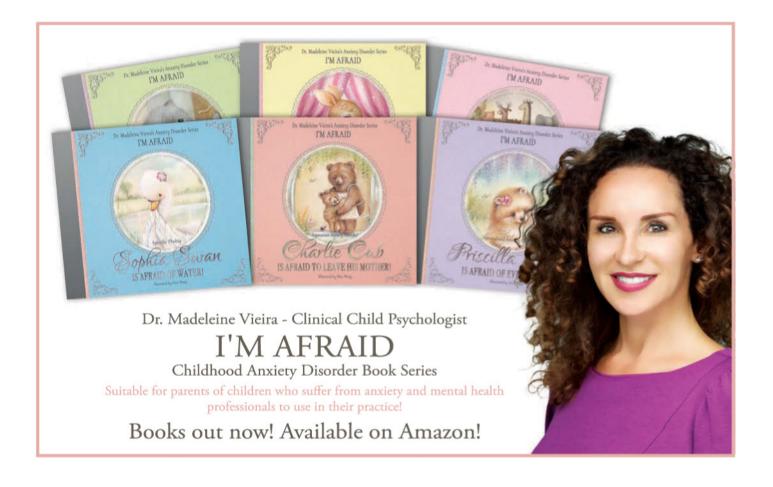
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How to be have

Emma Hepburn, aka The Psychology Mum, shares how to bring more bliss into your life

A Toolkit For Your Emotions: 45 Ways To Feel Better by Dr EmmaHepburn (Greenfinch, £14.99) is out now



ow does anger show up on your rollercoaster? Is it a giant volcano that emerges rapidly, wreaking destruction, derailing your cart, or stopping you in your tracks? Is it a frustration that gets pushed down and bubbles under the surface until it bursts out, sometimes at random over something that wouldn't normally bother you? Does it arise in a wave of overwhelm in a work meeting? Is it the dominant way you express other emotions, such as disappointment, hurt and embarrassment? Does it come out only behind a screen, either in your car or when online? Maybe you've been told anger is something to be ashamed of, so you've tucked it so far away you feel its distant echo at times but don't really know what you are feeling. The feeling might even be similar to other emotions, such as anxiety, as often similar physiological mechanisms underlie them, but we tend to label and understand anger differently. Of course, it could be all of these things, because anger is not a catch-all term; it includes multiple possible reactions and sensations with a variety of possible causes and consequences. Now think about what causes anger. It can often arise as a response to unfairness - on your rollercoaster ride, you feel you are being disrespected or undermined, and suddenly a sharp trajectory appears ahead, and you accelerate up this unexpected anger rise at Lewis Hamilton pace.

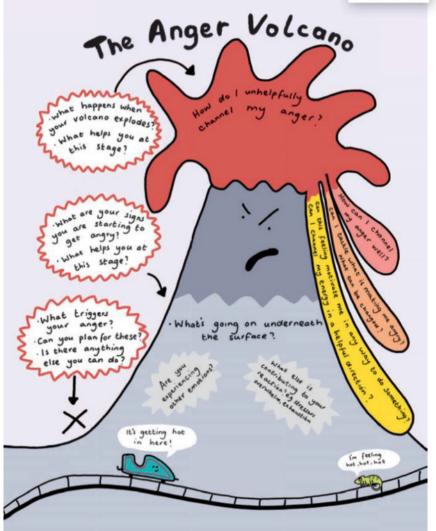
You might feel at risk, or that someone or something you care about is at risk and requires protection. Maybe it's caused by observing a strongly held value being transgressed. In many instances of anger, your brain is predicting that you need energy to deal with whatever injustice, or risk, is

It's getting hot coming your way. Anger may also be the feeling and reaction that comes out when we are experiencing other emotions, particularly if we are trying to keep them contained or don't have ways to express them. It may be that hurt, disappointment, shame or embarrassment underlie your reaction. If we are going through tough times,

feeling big emotions, or experiencing

too much pressure, we might erupt even at a tiny thing.

Use the image above to help you think about what sets off your volcano. Knowing what triggers your anger can help you to plan for situations. Note down the signs that you are starting to get angry and think about strategies that might help - even shout and scream somewhere safe if it helps!



MAGE: EMMA HEPBURN, FROM*A TOOLKIT FOR YOUR EMOTIONS*

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