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Welcome...



Are you in full Christmas mode yet? Here at *Psychologies* we're sprinkling a little bit of glitter here and there, but this year we've decided to practice what we preach about Christmas, and be a little bit more relaxed when it comes to all things festive. So you can find out about what your gift giving says about you (page 20), discover easy ways to improve your Christmas small talk (page 30) and learn about the benefits of gold, frankincense and myrrh (page 80). But most of the rest of the mag is purposely designed to help you continue to live a life you love every day of the year, not just for Christmas. We don't want to pile on the pressure for you, to give you more things that you feel like you must do, achieve, and live up to.

In fact, our attitude is just the opposite: we think you're already doing an amazing job, and more than anything this is a time to rest and relax with the ones you love, take a break when and where you can, and just enjoy the happy feelings the twinkly lights and glitter give you.

If you need an extra nudge to make some time for yourself this month, turn to our dossier (page 47), which is especially designed to help you take time out. It's your opportunity to reflect on what this last year has meant to you, and to fortify your emotional and mental health as you do it. Because it's all too easy to career straight from one year to the next without really taking a moment, and then we can find ourselves in January feeling a little bit adrift. But if you take the time to compassionately reflect on the last year now you will be building up stores of resilience and confidence for whatever the new year may bring.

We've also got some lovely ideas to romance yourself this winter (page 92), Kim Morgan helps a client who is dating a narcissist (page 26), we learn how to help people with ADHD unmask (page 38) and get ideas to manage friendships where there is a 'wage-gap'. I hope it inspires, relaxes and entertains you in equal measure. Have a wonderful Christmas!

Sally xx

**Sally Saunders,
Editor-in-Chief**

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Give the gift that lasts all year and subscribe to *Psychologies* – or treat yourself, instead!

Subscribe to *Psychologies* or give a gift subscription and commit to happiness and joy. You'll benefit from life-changing tools and advice, to help you live your best life. See page 70.



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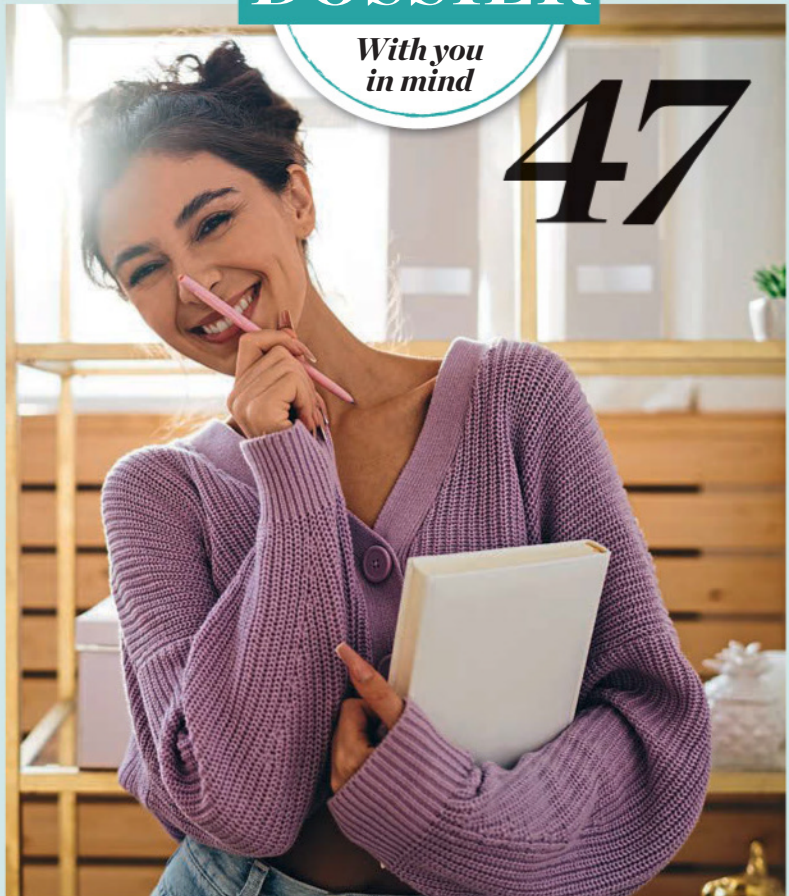
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in mind*

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The advice starts RIGHT HERE!



RACHEL MORGAN-TRIMMER

'People with ADHD receive so many negative messages about the traits we can't help... that we start to try to conceal them by attempts to suppress them, explaining them away or over-apologising,' says neurodiversity consultant Rachel Morgan-Trimmer. Learn how to help people with ADHD 'unmask' on page 38.



GEORGINA STURMER

'Looking back can help us to challenge any anxiety or fear that we have felt in the past,' says counsellor Georgina Sturmer, 'this can bolster our confidence and our ability to challenge negative thoughts.' Discover how to reflect compassionately to help yourself flourish going forward on page 47.

SUZY READING

Struggling to buy something for a hard-to-please or 'controlling giver' this Christmas? 'It's not selfish to raise a gentle conversation about the nature of gift giving and seek greater reciprocity,' says chartered psychologist Suzy Reading. Find out more about the power dynamics and what your giving says about you on page 20.



Our mission

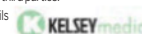
Psychologies' mission is to provide you with inspiration and advice to support you to improve your emotional wellbeing. We aim to help you boost your happiness and resilience and lower your stress and anxiety. We do this by providing simple, achievable steps to make small changes that can add up to a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



Reviewing the reviews

They say that if you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all.

And it seems women are more likely to follow that maxim than men, with a new study finding they are less likely to share negative experiences in online reviews than men.

Their average ratings are about 0.1 stars higher on a five-point scale, but when satisfied, both sexes submit reviews at similar rates.

The gender rating gap holds across many contexts, platforms and geographies.

Hebrew University of Jerusalem researchers say the differences may distort perceptions of products and services unless conditions change to make women feel more comfortable publicly expressing their attitudes without fear.



Time for a stocking take

The festive season brings plenty of good cheer – but also debt, waste and clutter for some of us too.

That's why money-saving expert Martin Lewis is recommending we all carry out a pre-Christmas 'stocktake'.

Simply review what 'stock' you have at home, from toys, books and clothes to electronics, decorations and food. Next, clear out broken or excess items to make extra space – and extra funds. Finally, only invest in new gifts and supplies you truly need, now that you know what you have already got.

Lewis says anything you've not used in a year should be considered for sale, and says we should also consider a Pre-NUPP with loved ones – a No Unnecessary Present Pact.

Top 40 for Band Aid

Do they know it's 40 years since Band Aid went to Christmas number one – and raised millions for the famine effort in Ethiopia?

Bob Geldof and Midge Ure's star-studded 1984 charity song paved the way for the iconic Live Aid concerts the following year and remains the UK's second best-selling single of all time, based on physical and download sales.

The anniversary will be marked by a two-part documentary on Virgin Radio this December.

Geldof has also hinted there may be a Band Aid 40 using vocals from the original song as well as three follow-up versions in 1989, 2004 and 2014.

"Older people, we pretend that we've led model lives to our children and grandchildren. I think it's about time we remembered that actually we did flatten the glass with a lot of unsuitable people... There's no point in pretending we were angels."

Fern Britton

WATCH, LOOK, LISTEN



WATCH *Rumours.* Cate Blanchett stars as one of seven world leaders in this dark satire about a G7 conference gone badly wrong. In cinemas December 6.



LOOK *The World of Tim Burton at Design Museum, London.* Delve into four decades of the fantastical director's archive of art, set design and moving images. Until April 21.



LISTEN *Origins with Cush Jumbo.* Celebrity guests like Anna Wintour and David Schwimmer tell the actress where they started in their life and careers.



72%
of people spend
Christmas Day
with guests beyond
their immediate
family, with their
partners' siblings,
in-laws, and
colleagues joining
them, according to
a One4All survey.



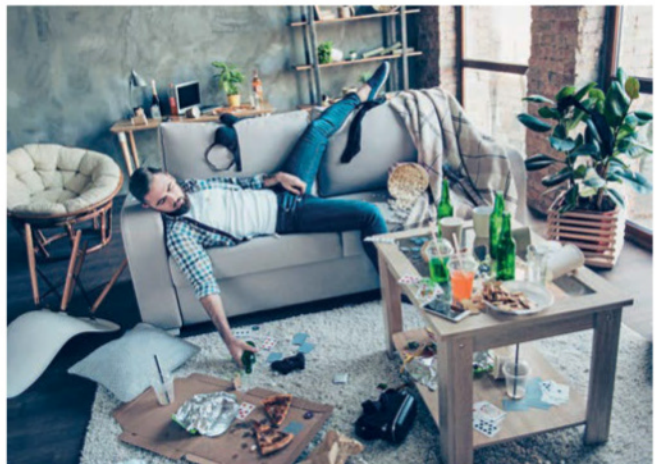
Sharing the joy

Want to add magic to the Christmas countdown while helping others?

Sign up for an NSPCC Letter From Santa for a child in your life.

For a £3 fee plus a donation on top, you can generate a personalised note sent straight to their address.

There's a choice of eight layouts and prompts to add specific details about the recipient too. Sign up at letterfromsanta.nspcc.org.uk



**One in six adults has
considered breaking up with
someone because of how
messy they are, a study by
Olio found.**



Tipping the balance

It's good news for serving staff: the average amount given in tips in pubs, bars and clubs has risen 54 percent in the last year.

Customers also gave staff in cafes and restaurants 13 per cent extra, according to payment technology provider SumUp.

While our 'post-cash' world means people are no longer limited to what change they have in their pocket, the rise might not be solely down to generosity. Experts also think the rise of card machines with suggested tip amounts might be 'shaming' people to add on more.

However, the lack of physical cash has been bad for hotel staff, with guest tips for chambermaids down 21 per cent.



40%
of Brits feel
pressure to go out
in the run-up to
Christmas, even
when they don't
want to, a poll by
Candy Crush
Saga found.



Merry Kitschmas!

Forget the perfect, colour-coordinated tree in traditional red, white and green.

'Kitschmas' is the lighthearted Christmas decorating trend that's leading the way in 2024.

This means embracing frivolity and nostalgia, bold colours and patterns, and decorations as humorous and quirky as you dare.

Want to put pink flamingos and disco balls on your tree? Go for it.

The message is to get playful, because the season is supposed to be fun.

Custody questions

The Government is pledging to cut the female prison population because incarceration isn't working for them. Reoffending rates are higher for women who have been jailed than those who get a non-custodial sentence. Alternatives could be residential centres where their children can live with them, or community rehabilitation programmes. There are 3,453 women in jail in England and Wales, a number which has almost doubled in 30 years. Two-thirds are inside for non-violent crimes and more than half are victims of domestic violence.



(Not so) great expectations

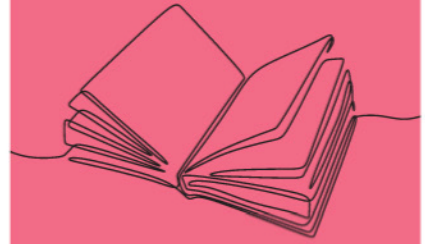
Putting ourselves under too much pressure to be healthy may in fact be making us ill.

A survey of more than 15,000 adults by Lululemon found that nearly two-thirds of us are struggling with growing societal

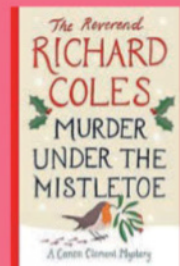
expectations to appear well – and almost half experience 'wellbeing burnout'.

Those in their 20s are more than twice as likely to feel physical, mental and social pressure compared to those over the age of 60.

3 festive highlights...



1 *Murder Under The Mistletoe* by the Reverend Richard Coles (£9.99, W&N). When a guest falls dead after a festive kiss, Canon Daniel Clement sets out to find the killer.



2 *A Poem for Every Day of Christmas*, edited by Allie Esiri (£10, Macmillan). This pocket-sized anthology features 31 seasonal verses by the likes of T.S. Eliot and Dylan Thomas.



3 *The Get-Ahead Christmas Cook* by Jane Lovett (£28, Headline Home). Take the stress out of entertaining with meals to make in advance and tricks for reusing leftovers.



Viewpoint

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

Beginnings and endings

I have been a subscriber to *Psychologies* for a while, and genuinely love it when it lands on my doorstep, giving me the perfect excuse to hit life's pause button and enjoy the fabulous articles each edition has to offer.

I felt compelled to write in after reading the dossier in the September issue, *Never Too Late To Start Again*. The article completely resonated with me. I am in my early fifties working in a job which does not satisfy me, but pays the bills. After lockdown and the heartache that went with it, between the news and working on the frontline, I decided to take time out for myself regularly and started to journal. This helped to process what was happening to us all and kept me grounded.

I then enrolled onto a creative writing distance learning program with a local university, which gave me so much confidence and desire to just write and write!

Now that my children have flown the nest, I have continued my studies with a degree in English Literature and Creative Writing, as well as working on my first novel.



I just felt that I must write in and congratulate you for highlighting that it doesn't matter our age, we have so much life experience to offer, tell and write about, and life is all about the end of one phase and the beginnings of another. Bring it on! Thank you!

Julia

Mother Earth

From the perspective of a trail runner:

As my feet pound into the ground I feel her instant embrace. Softening the blow of my footsteps as I run. Each step graces me with a new feeling underfoot and I must adjust. A sudden gust of wind, a fallen branch, a

tree root. She gently nudges me to stay aware, to not default and expect or assume. The wet moss emitting an earthy scent that calms my soul.

Autumn's vibrant colours reminding me that death is part of the process. Shedding my layers will allow me to grow bigger, wider and take up more space. Her ability to unapologetically balance the scales of life gives me hope and makes me feel alive. Just 20 minutes ago I was in a dark funk, but while I'm moving my body and breathing in the fresh air, I'm reminded that every breath is a new beginning.

Becky Wilde



We'd love to know what you think

Read an article in *Psychologies* that rings true? Get in touch and share your thoughts at letters@psychologies.co.uk!

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

Could 2025 be your year of transformation?

Evoke Psychotherapeutic Retreats for women offer a safe space for deep reflection, self-discovery and connection



Discover Who You Are

e v o k e
Psychotherapeutic Retreats

**Find out more and book your free 30-minute assessment at
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Your retreat programme

From Friday lunchtime through to Sunday evening, every Evoke Retreat follows a programme of tailored group sessions, which includes guided exercises, facilitated discussion, and individual reflection time, plus a one-to-one therapy session with Jill or Hayley.

‘We use established psychotherapeutic models and tools to help you understand yourself better and how you interact with the world around you, at work, in your friendships, and within your family,’ explains Hayley, who specialises in helping people through depression and low mood, anxiety, addiction, grief and trauma. ‘We help you to see what holds you back, what stops you from being authentically you, and enable you to make active choices in the future.’

Have you spent your life trying to fit someone else’s mould? Do you put everyone’s needs before your own? Do you even know who you are anymore?

These feelings are more common than you might think, but that doesn’t mean you should just accept them. It’s never too late to rediscover yourself, turn the page and start a new chapter in your life. If you want to take back control of your story and set your sights on a different path, the first step is to press pause and take time just for you.

Evoke Retreats for women provide the perfect environment for reflecting on all the relationships that matter: with yourself, with others, and with the wider world. Over three days at a luxury spa hotel in Buckinghamshire, qualified therapists will guide you through making sense of your past, assessing your present and embarking on the future on your terms.

About Evoke Retreats

Jill Threadgold and Hayley Anselm started Evoke Retreats to provide a safe and supportive environment for women, that encourages participants to deepen their self-awareness, learning more about who they are and how they relate to others. Through group therapy with up to 12 women, supported by one-to-one sessions, participants can share their experiences, hopes and fears in a confidential, empathetic space.

‘We encourage you to break out of your comfort zone but respect that everyone will work at their own pace,’ says Jill, who has particular expertise in supporting people through life transitions and periods of change. ‘We find that group therapy is a wonderful place to learn from each other’s experiences, and for individuals to see themselves and the world from different perspectives. It’s also reassuring to know that you are not alone in how you feel.’

COME AND JOIN US! NEXT RETREAT:

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There will be downtime between therapy sessions, with the opportunity to make use of the hotel’s extensive facilities, including the spa, and to explore its beautiful surroundings. Delicious seasonal meals included.





I found getting divorced young painfully embarrassing

Opening up and sharing the moments that we feel most shame over can be hugely freeing, Vogue Williams explains to Abi Jackson

A trouble shared is a trouble halved, so they say, and it's a motto Vogue Williams lives by. The model, podcaster and media star has become best known for her humour-filled podcasts, built around finding the funny side of life, but now she's shining a light on the things some of us find difficult to tell others: our most embarrassing moments – and she's making sure she's got plenty to share going forwards, too.

'There's no way I'm finished doing all the embarrassing stuff,' she says. 'I've just turned 39 and I have so much more

embarrassing s*** to give! You just continue on and it's about being able to look back and laugh at it – and share it with other people, so others aren't as embarrassed of their embarrassing moments.'

Williams – who shares daughter Gigi, four, and sons Theodore, six, and two-year-old Otto with her husband, former *Made In Chelsea* star Spencer Matthews – has already got podcast hits on her hands in the form of *Spencer & Vogue*, in which she and Matthews bicker about married life, and *My Therapist Ghosted Me* which she co-hosts with comedian and



writer Joanne McNally – winner of the ‘champion’ gong at the 2023 British Podcast Awards and the Spotlight Award at the 2023 Irish Podcast Awards.

She has now launched *Never Live It Down*, in which she interviews celebrities about times they’ve wished the ground would open up and swallow them. ‘I really wanted people to have something to listen to that’s going to cheer them up,’ she says, ‘with people who are really funny, and conversations where they’re getting asked questions they don’t always get asked.’

And she believes there’s something quite powerful about sharing our embarrassing stories, as it takes the edge off the angst and shame we often carry.

Epic failure

‘I’ve done loads of embarrassing things in my life, we all have. And do you know what – who cares? It doesn’t matter, no one got hurt, and we all do it,’ she says. Like most of us however, Williams used to agonise over feeling embarrassed when she was

younger. ‘A lot of things would embarrass me [growing up], and I felt quite uncomfortable within my body until I got a little bit older – I’m so tall and I used to hate being the tall girl (Williams is 5ft 11).

‘I got married and divorced really young and I found that painfully embarrassing, because it was just like such an epic failure and it was so public,’ adds Williams, who was married to Westlife singer Brian McFadden for three years in her 20s (they divorced in 2015).

‘I thought, “Oh God, this is painfully embarrassing” – and now I look back and I’m like, “do you know what, no it’s not!”

‘It was a learning curve, but again, no one died, who cares?

‘It’s nice to be able to look back and have that feeling about even that situation, and I just can’t imagine anything would embarrass me so much now.’

Firing off all cylinders

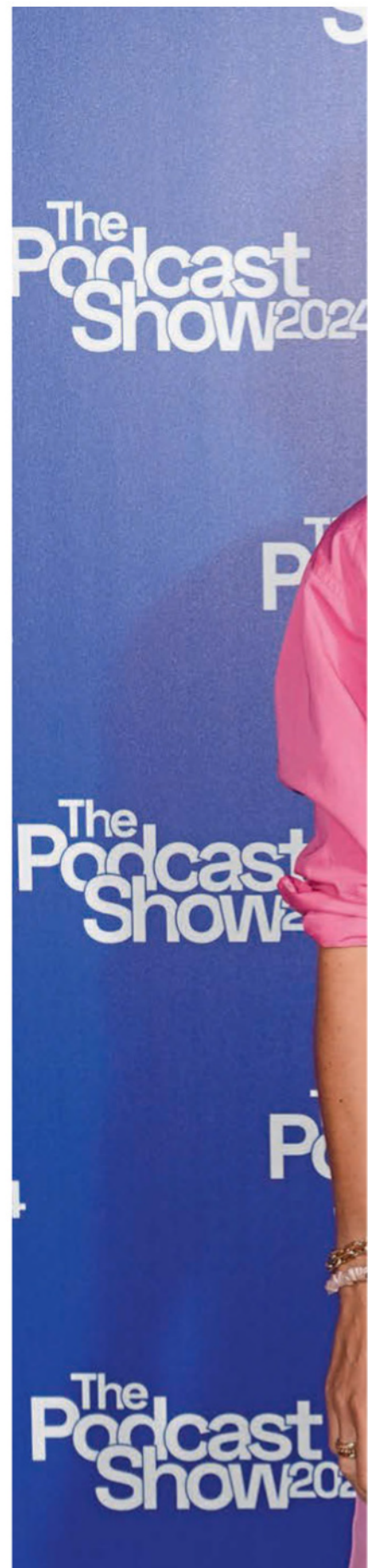
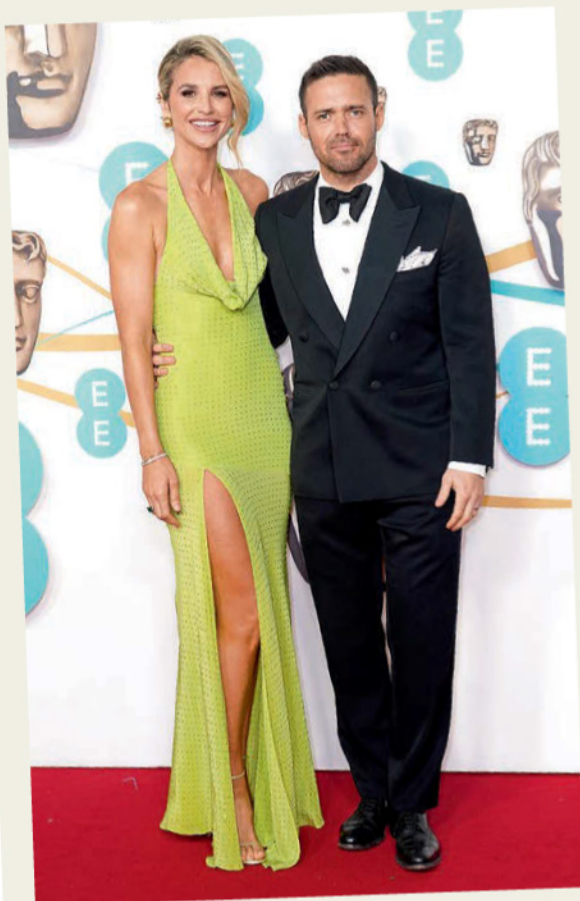
Aside from looking on the funny side of life, Williams cherishes her self-care and wellbeing regimes. As she often mentions in her podcasts, she’s not a big drinker. ‘I drink probably once every two weeks, but every time I drink, I’m like, “I’m not drinking for ages!” I just hate the way it makes me feel.

‘I think that’s always my approach to wellness, because I know when I’m not having any alcohol at all, I feel amazing – my training is really good, I sleep really well, and I’m firing off all cylinders.

‘And I think if you’re really focused on your health and fitness and sleep and all those things, the difference you feel in yourself and your mental health and your happiness, everything just changes. So I always have a little bit of focus on that.

‘As soon as my alarm goes off, I’m like – boop! – straight up. Mornings are my favourite time. And if I’m still awake at 10pm at night, I’m like – Jesus, I need to turn the light off.

‘Because I love to get all my work done by the afternoon, I’d rather get up and do everything





“It’s a great thing to grow up and just be comfortable with yourself”

and be finished by around 4pm, so I can have dinner, bath-time and all that stuff with the kids. So, I’m always up at about 6.15am, certainly during the week.’

We’re having our moment

But while she is full on workwise, she’s learnt to take it easier emotionally as she’s grown older, and care less about what others think.

‘My son Theodore said to me the other day, “I don’t want to grow up, I don’t want to be your age.” And I was like: “You know what Theodore, I never thought I’d want to be this age either, but it is the best age to be – because you know exactly what you want to do, you’re going to feel really comfortable, you’re going to be so happy.”

‘I was just trying to explain to him how it’s a great thing to grow up and to just be comfortable with yourself.’

She’s thrilled conversations around ageing have started to change, especially for women working in the media and entertainment industries. ‘Like having a career within this industry until you’re much older – of course it shouldn’t be any different for women than it is for men,’ she says, drawing a comparison to previous years when women’s careers would hit a sudden dead-end at a certain age.

‘I think women are just seen differently now, and I feel like women are really empowered, we’re having our moment, we’re owning it. I love all the chatter around menopause and things we would have never really discussed before – Davina McCall has been amazing for that.

‘I love the openness and the honesty of women [I’m hearing] all the time, there’s so many people I look up to and admire, who I think are doing a great job.’

Never Live It Down with Vogue Williams is available to listen to now on Global Player or wherever you get your podcasts.

I'll tell you what I want...

Knowing what you truly desire is only half the battle, it's finding the courage to ask for it that can be the problem, discovers Harriet Minter



Is there anything more stressful than someone asking you what you want? At

this time of year I get the double-whammy of what do I want for Christmas and what do I want for my birthday, coming at me from all directions and the pressure of having to name those desires can feel overwhelming. And yes, I absolutely should keep a list on my phone which I just add to as things occur to me and I promise I will remember to do that next year. Maybe. Hopefully.

For me, the problem with naming what I want is that so often it comes with a side of fear that I'm asking for too much. For example, this year I would really like to book a flight somewhere sunny and

spend Christmas Day on the beach. But that would require both ditching my family over the festive period while also requiring them to look after my dog, which doesn't feel like something Jesus would do. Likewise, my ideal birthday present would be a facial at the super-spenny spa that I adore but absolutely cannot afford myself. But if I can't afford it, surely I can't ask someone else to spend that sort of money?

A few years ago, my coach had me do an exercise where at the start of each day I would ask myself, 'What do I really desire today?' and then spend the rest of the day trying to get it. Some days it was easy. If I really wanted a rest, I could remember that I was self-employed

so if I wanted to take a nap at 2pm I could. Other days it was harder. The day when I really wanted a hug but I was single and didn't feel I could ask a friend to traverse the entire width of London just for a hug. Or when I desperately wanted a holiday but my bank balance was too scary to look at, never mind dip into.

Whether I got what I wanted or not, this exercise taught me to listen to my inner desire. It forced me to take the time and space to ask myself what I really wanted, and then to own that desire, rather than deny it.

It's a lesson I always remind myself of at this time of year; there is nothing wrong in asking. And one day you will ask for something huge... and a friend will get on the Tube for an hour, just to come and give you a hug.



IMAGE: MARK HARRISON/HAIR AND MAKE-UP: CAROLINE PIASECKI/STYLIST: KATE ANTA BARBOUR



Mind

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



***“If you’re
having fun,
that’s when the
best memories
are built.”***

SIMONE BILES

What kind of gift giver are you?

A well-timed, carefully chosen gift can bring joy to the recipient and the giver. But it's often not that simple. Greta Solomon explores the power dynamics at play





Expert advice



Suzy Reading is a chartered psychologist, coach, and the author of nine books, including Self-Care for Winter (Aster, 2024). To join her Instagram community, visit @suzyreading



Dr Dele Kehn-Alafun is an author and the CEO and founder of Peace Lily Gifts, which offers artisanal, eco-friendly, award-winning gifts and hampers made in the UK. She is passionate about how we show appreciation in our personal and working lives. peacelilygifts.com

In his award-winning novel, *The Coming Storm*, Paul Russell wrote: 'Was there anything quite so painful, so fraught with the possibilities of hurt, as gift giving within a family?' But it's not just family gift giving that can be icky and tricky.

When 58-year-old Fiona Scott met a woman who lived nearby her in Wiltshire, they struck up a promising friendship. After a dinner with their respective husbands, Fiona decided to say thanks with a gift. 'We'd had a lovely evening, and she commented on my handbag – a Cambridge Satchel in a bright colour,' says Fiona. 'Afterwards, I happened to be browsing on Vinted and saw a great Cambridge Satchel in a more muted colour in fab condition. I wrapped it up and dropped around to her house – she seemed surprised and grateful.'

But a few days later, her friend dropped round to return the bag, stating that she didn't really like it. 'I was offended, and after that, I didn't pursue the friendship further. I didn't want a friend who would do that,' explains Fiona.

Studies have shown that gift giving activates regions of the brain associated with trust, social connection and pleasure. But if people co-opt the process to make it about power, control, and status, it can instead create fear, shame, and doubt.

What's more, it's impossible to have a great relationship with everyone you need to gift to. What if your recipient is a colleague you clash with, a difficult parent, or a controlling sibling? What if they give back your gift (as Fiona's former friend did), or openly re-gift it? Or what if you feel unable to offer a heartfelt, festive gift to your child's teacher because a clipboard-wielding fellow parent insists on pooling money to buy a luxury hamper?

The good news is that recognising your own gifting behaviour (and that of others) can help you to feel more empowered – so that you can give and receive with grace.

What kind of gift giver are you?

Joyful giver

They use empathy to determine what the recipient wants and needs. They warmly express thanks when they receive gifts.

According to Dr Dele Kehn-Alafun, CEO and founder of Peace Lily Gifts, joyful givers tend to ask themselves the following questions:

- What kind of personality does the recipient have?
- What do they most value – time, tangible items, words of affirmation, or acts of service?
- What do they need – now, and in the future?
- Do they need to spend quality time with you?
- What kinds of causes do they care about?

The right gift fits like a puzzle piece, such as the group of friends who chipped in to buy author coaching sessions for a friend, from book editor Kirsten Rees. 'It reminded me of the story of Harper Lee, who wrote *To Kill a Mockingbird* when her friends gave her a one-year salary, so that she could write,' says Rees.

'If you receive a gift that wholeheartedly matches who you are, don't be afraid to express your thanks for a second time when you start using the gift,' says Kehn-Alafun. 'If you received a lovely bracelet, for instance, you could send the giver a picture of you wearing it. This shows that their gift has given you multiple instances of joy.'



Anxious giver

They worry about broaching financial constraints with others. They'd love to choose heartfelt presents but worry about getting things wrong.

Anxious givers are preoccupied with getting things right, but that's just a sign that they care, says Suzy Reading, a chartered psychologist, and author of nine books about self-care. 'Try asking for confirmation that you're on the right track with what you had in mind. Alternatively, ask for a gift receipt and encourage them to swap it if it's not spot-on,' she says.

If you can't afford to put a certain amount of money into a group gift pot at your child's school, for example, or want to opt-out of it, be matter of fact about it. 'It's more than OK to prioritise your financial wellbeing. Where possible, you can see if there's a different way of contributing on your own terms, such as a gift of skills or time,' says Reading.

Controlling giver

They thrive on being in charge of the gift giving process. They may make a list and only accept gifts on their list, while randomly choosing what they give others.

Bad experiences with gifts can make anyone want to only receive what they've asked for. But if you start to feel like your personality isn't welcome in a gifting situation, it's best to tackle it head-on. 'It's not selfish to raise a gentle conversation about the nature of gift giving and seek greater reciprocity. Being direct is the best approach,' says Reading. 'You could say something like, "I appreciate that you let me know in advance what you would like to receive, so that I can gift you something meaningful. I'd like to establish the same arrangement for my gifts. Would that be OK?"' Speaking-up isn't easy but it can help to establish respect and good boundaries.



Dissatisfied giver

They see gifts as interchangeable and don't view what they give as meaningful or significant. They routinely feel dissatisfied, no matter what they're given.

London-based Polly Arrowsmith found that no matter what she bought her ex-partner for Christmas, he would always go out on Boxing Day to buy himself more gifts. 'One year he asked for the *It's a Knockout* DVD and a very specific model car to build, both of which were tough to track down. He was totally dismissive of them, and said they were rubbish,' she says.

If you find yourself in a situation like this, think about the motive behind their dissatisfaction. 'You could have a gentle conversation, inviting feedback on why they responded as they did. Perhaps there is some information that you're not privy to,' says Reading.

Remember too that sometimes people re-gift presents, with no ill-will intended. Their value system sees it as perfectly fine to pass on something that's not quite right.

Self-sacrificing giver

They enjoy giving gifts, but tend to give too much, or spend money they don't have. They find it difficult to receive what others give them and may worry that they're in debt to the other person.

'Healthy relationships are characterised by both giving and receiving, so finding balance here is a way of nurturing your relationships,' says Reading. 'You deserve to be treated, but if you have a history of gift giving being complex, where there was some kind of manipulation or guilt involved, be gentle with yourself. You have every right to have needs, every right to have desires, and every right to receive. But for some people this can take some real getting used to.'

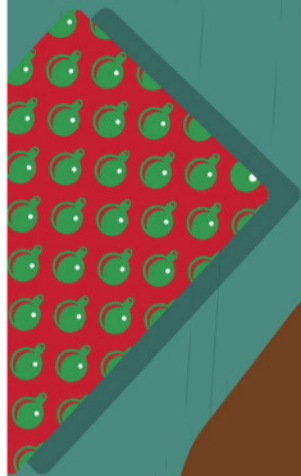
When you give (or receive) a gift that misses the mark, it can reveal bad intentions lurking just beneath the surface. But remember that there are lots of variables at play. Don't expect praise from a critical sibling, or appreciation from a difficult colleague. And ask yourself what boundaries you can set, so that you're not routinely wrong footed in gift-giving situations.

However, sometimes you'll have to brush your shoulders off and accept that there will be cringeworthy interactions – especially when it comes to joke presents and Secret Santas. Use your time and energy wisely; you can't be an open-hearted, joyful giver with those who trample on your efforts.

Connect and Make Memories **TOGETHER THIS HOLIDAY SEASON**

At Barefoot Coaching, we believe in the power of meaningful connections. This holiday season, let's slow down, share stories, and build memories with the people who matter most.

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Coaching in action

“*Is my partner a narcissist?*”

Award-winning coach Kim Morgan meets new client Sylvie*, who is growing tired of spending her life walking on eggshells...



Session One

Sylvie arrived for her first coaching session with me and immediately handed me a big bunch of flowers. We hadn't met before, and my clients don't usually come bearing gifts. 'Thank you – they're lovely,' I said. 'What have I done to deserve these?'

Sylvie beamed 'A thank you for agreeing to see me at short notice.'

Often the first and last things a client says or does in a coaching session can give an insight into their character. I did wonder whether Sylvie might be someone who needed to please others.

We settled down to the coaching session. 'What brings you here?' I asked.

Sylvie smiled. 'I feel a bit silly coming here now. When I contacted you, I was in a bad place with my partner but it's getting better now.'

I suggested that Sylvie could start by telling me what was happening when she first contacted me.

'We were at my best friend's birthday party and halfway through the evening

I noticed that my partner had left the party. He didn't tell me he was leaving, and he drove home.

'I phoned him but he wouldn't come back to collect me, so I stayed the night at my friend's house.

'As we sat around talking, my friends said they were worried that I was being emotionally abused.

'They said my partner demonstrates narcissistic behaviours: unkindness, bullying, putting people down, exploiting people, lack of empathy, laughing at others' misfortunes, grandiosity. They also said they didn't want to see him again,' Sylvie stopped.

'How did you feel when you heard that?' I asked
'I felt sorry for him. I told them they don't know how lovely he can be.'

'How lovely can he be?' I asked.

There was a long silence.

Eventually I asked: 'What is lurking unsaid behind this silence?'

Sylvie looked upset. 'I don't know. I feel I have lost my sense of judgement. I know he is difficult, and I have spent years trying to help him overcome his insecurities. He can be lovely when we are on our own together. I thought I could love him out of it but if anything, he has got worse. I can't abandon him. I don't know what would become of him.'

Sylvie sighed. 'The truth is, I am constantly scouring social media for articles about narcissism, and he ticks every box... but my situation is not as bad as some I read about.'

'It may be not as bad, Sylvie, but it can still be considered a problem, can't it?'

'I am a shadow of the person I was when I met him. I spend my life walking on eggshells. Everything I do is wrong in his eyes. Being with him has worn down my self-esteem. I fear his cruel put-downs and criticisms of me. I spend my life making excuses for his behaviour, but he has only got me, so I feel trapped and responsible for him.'

Sylvie was lost in thought for a while, then looked me in the eye and said: 'So, yes, putting on my big girl pants, I say that it can be considered a problem!'

Sylvie and I agreed to meet again soon. Until then, I suggested that Sylvie should start treating herself with the same generosity she shows to others.

For homework, I asked Sylvie to write down a list of all the things her partner had said were wrong with her, either directly or by insinuation. Then for each item on the list, Sylvie should ask herself if it is true or not. Next, she should go back through the list and ask herself if the items on the list were true of her partner. Sometimes it is surprising to find out how many of the put-downs we receive are projections of the person who is putting us down.

Finally, I asked Sylvie to write a list of all the wonderful characteristics she has, and I encouraged her to ask her friends to help her with this list.

As she left my office, Sylvie announced that, having arrived with a bunch of flowers for me, she was now going to buy herself a bunch of flowers on her way home to reward herself for her having the courage to ask for help.

*"Everything
I do is
wrong in
his eyes"*

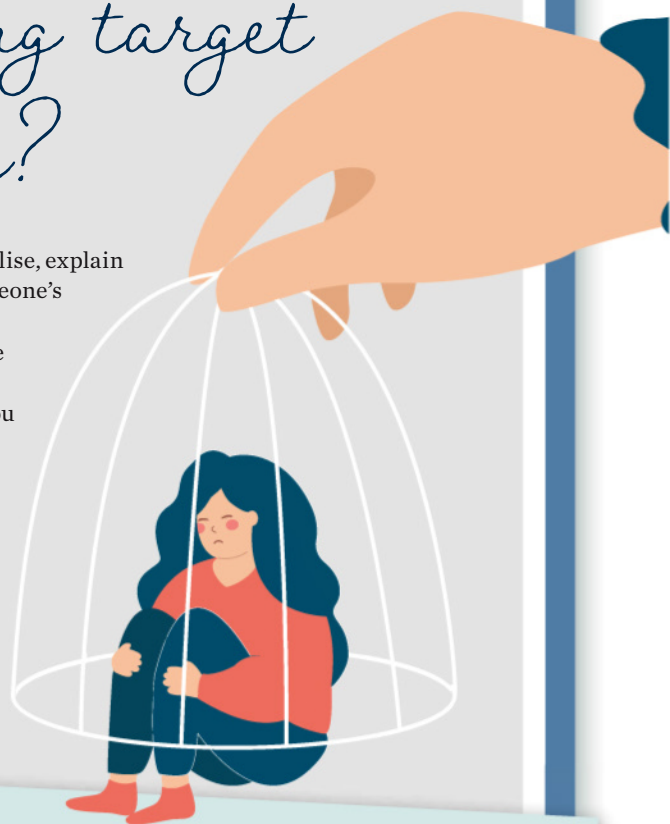
*Does this sound like you?
Turn the page for Kim's
coaching exercises*

Are you a sitting target for manipulators?

People with strong boundaries are not easily manipulated. If you often find yourself pushed around by others, you probably don't have strong boundaries and have an overdone desire to accommodate others and to tolerate unacceptable behaviour. Complete this checklist to see how many of the following traits you recognise in yourself:

- Take care of others but not yourself
- Difficulty saying 'no' to any requests
- Difficulty accessing feelings of anger
- Quick to overlook or forget having been treated badly by someone
- Easily made to feel guilty and immediately think 'it must be my fault'
- Highly empathetic and able to put yourself in others' shoes

- Capacity to rationalise, explain away and forgive someone's bad treatment of you
- Capacity to tolerate and contain bad behaviour towards you
- Easily impressed by people
- Find it difficult to be critical or discerning about other people
- Need to be liked and strong need for approval



WORDS OF WISDOM

'Love yourself enough to set boundaries. Your time and energy are precious. You get to choose how you use it. You teach people how to treat you by deciding what you will and won't accept.'

Anna Taylor

Becoming assertive

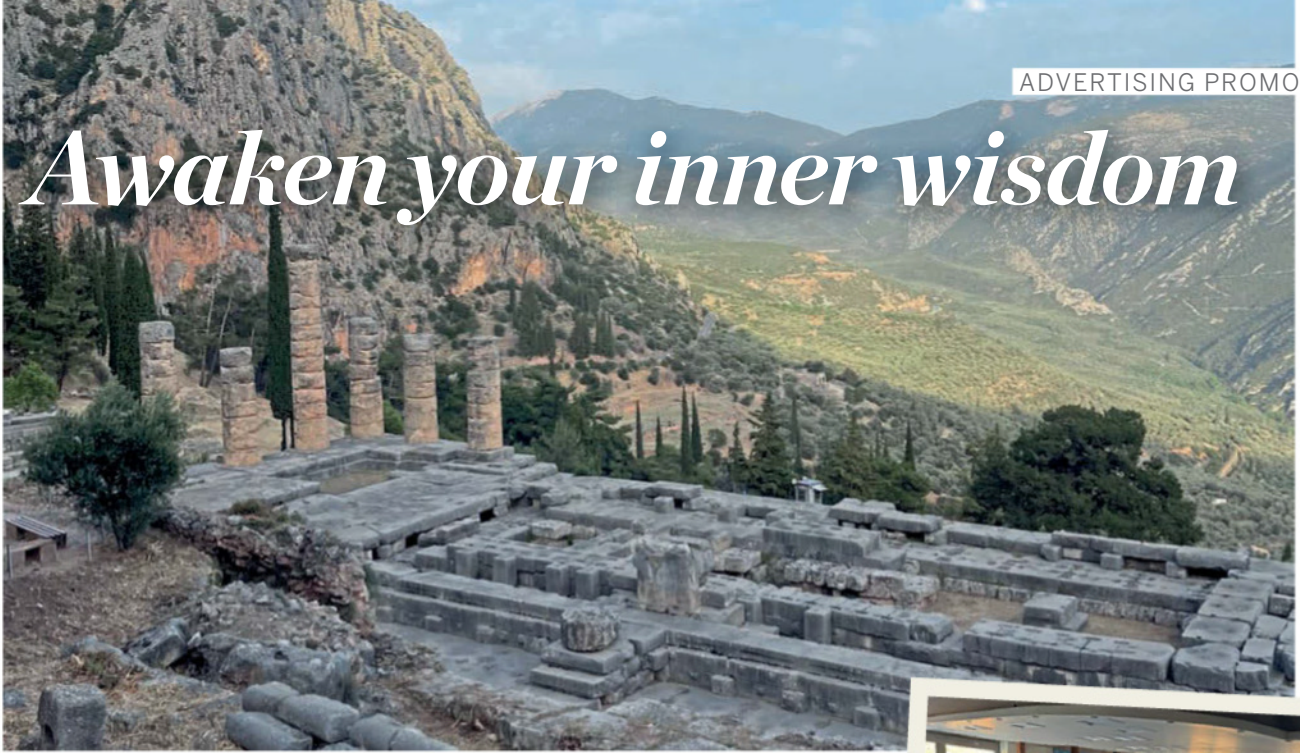
If you have difficulty asserting yourself – keep this Assertiveness Bill of Rights with you. Read it every morning and last thing at night before you go to sleep. Keep it on your phone or print it out and stick it on the wall at work and at home so you keep looking at it!

Each day commit to practicing at least one of these rights:

- I have the right to state my own needs and set my own priorities as a person independent of any roles that I may assume in my life.
- I have the right to be treated with respect as an intelligent, capable and equal human being.
- I have the right to express my feelings.
- I have the right to say 'yes' or 'no' for myself.
- I have the right to make mistakes.
- I have the right to change my mind.
- I have the right to say, 'I don't understand'.
- I have the right to ask for what I want.
- I have the right to decline responsibility for other people's problems.
- I have the right to deal with others without being dependent on them for approval.
- I have the right to say 'no' without feeling guilty.

(Bill of Assertiveness Rights from 'A Woman in Your Own Right' by Anne Dickson, 1982)

Awaken your inner wisdom



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a place of introspection and insight. During this retreat, you’ll experience a **holistic blend of activities that include nature hiking, pilates, sound healing, mind and body psychologically informed workshops, and mindfulness practices**. Together, we will delve into the realms of symbols, archetypes, and the innate **wisdom of the body and dreams**, unlocking insights that can illuminate the path to a more purposeful and meaningful life.

This unique journey will help you:

● Reawaken inner clarity:

Gain new perspectives on your life’s direction and discover practical ways to live with intention.

● Generate mind-body harmony:

Engage in practices like pilates, mindfulness and creative dance movement sessions that energize and bring balance, complemented by sound healing to soothe the soul.

● Experience natural beauty:

Enjoy guided nature hikes in Delphi’s serene environment, allowing the natural surroundings, the mountains, the caves and the ancient temples to nourish your spirit.

● Unlock the power of dreams and symbols:

Let your dreams inspire you, guide you and reveal new paths in life.

The retreat starts from £2,650, designed for individuals who seek to enrich their lives, nurture their well-being, develop self knowledge; and find harmony in mind and body. Join us for this life-changing experience and leave feeling refreshed, empowered, and ready to embrace a life filled with energy and contentment.



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Spaces are limited. Secure your place now to awaken your true potential.



*Expert
advice*



*Debra Fine is a
keynote speaker,
trainer and author of
The Fine Art of
Small Talk
(Hachette Books
2005)
Debrafine.com*



THE ART OF *festive* SMALL TALK

Love them or hate them, 'tis the season for Christmas conversations, so how do we embrace them happily even if we naturally shy away, asks Kellie Gillespie-Wright

The holiday season is here and calendars are filling up with festive functions, family gatherings, and office parties. Along with those events comes a seemingly endless stream of opportunities (or requirement, depending on your point of view) for small talk. Whether it's catching up with distant relatives, mingling with colleagues you don't often see, or meeting new people at a party, one thing is certain: you'll be making conversation.

For some, small talk is as easy as sipping hot cocoa by the fire. But others would rather walk through hot coals. That's where Debra Fine, author of *The Fine Art of Small Talk*, comes in. According to Fine, small talk isn't just meaningless fluff, it's a vital skill that helps build deeper connections in all aspects of life.

'Small talk serves as the appetiser for relationships,' Fine explains. 'Whether in business, social, or romantic settings, it opens the door to deeper connections, allowing relationships to evolve from casual interactions into meaningful bonds.' So while you may think of small talk as trivial, it's actually the gateway to richer, more engaging conversations. And the best part? It's a skill anyone can master.

But still, small talk often gets a bad rap. We dismiss it as superficial or awkward, but Fine defends it: 'Small talk is seen as the lowly stepchild of real conversation,' she says. 'Yet it serves an extremely important function. Without it, you rarely get to the real conversation.' Think of it as the first step in a dance, you can't jump straight into the meaningful stuff without first easing into the rhythm.

And casual conversation happens everywhere:

in the lift at the office, at the checkout queue at the supermarket, while picking up your kids from football practice. 'For some of us these constant demands for small talk don't make it any easier,' admits Fine. But the good news is that small talk is a skill you can practice and refine. 'The first step is to let go of the idea that we are all somehow supposed to know how to converse with strangers and acquaintances,' Fine explains. 'We are not taught how to do it, nor is there some biological mechanism that instinctively takes over when we find ourselves in a conversational quandary.'

The trick, according to Fine, is recognising the value of small talk and embracing it as a tool for connection. 'Small talk is no small thing,' she says. 'It's a valuable personal and professional thread that connects people.' Once you appreciate its power, you'll find it easier to dive into conversations with confidence.

And for good reason: Research shows that even brief social interactions, like chatting with a stranger, can boost your mood and make you feel more connected. According to Methot et al. (2021), small talk not only lifts your spirits but it also encourages cooperation. And while many people dread small talk, studies suggest it generally has a positive effect on how we feel.

Gillian Sandstrom, a psychology lecturer at the University of Sussex, notes that casual chats with strangers can increase happiness, energy levels, and feelings of inclusion. 'They often promote learning, expand people's worldviews, and contribute to a sense of belonging,' she says. These interactions benefit both parties and are often

seen as acts of kindness, fostering a sense of connection. Even more fascinating is the phenomenon of ‘neural coupling,’ where our brains sync up during conversations. Research shows that speech patterns, gestures, and even breathing can align, creating a deeper connection. Small talk sets the stage for this, making ‘big talk’ more likely. Engaging in small talk shows openness, which builds familiarity and trust. This process, called ‘interpersonal synchronisation,’ helps us feel like we know someone after just a few words, setting the foundation for more substantial conversations.

The hardest part of small talk, however, is often starting it. Fortunately, the festive season gives you plenty of built-in conversation starters. Think about it: with festive lights, decorations, and holiday traditions all around, you’re never short of topics. ‘What matters is taking the plunge and starting the conversation,’ says Fine.

Try these light, festive icebreakers to kick things off if you’re struggling: ‘Have you decorated your home yet? What’s your theme this year?’, ‘What’s your favourite holiday drink, eggnog, hot chocolate, or something else?’ or ‘Do you have any Christmas traditions you always look forward to?’

These light-hearted questions are perfect for setting a warm tone. And because they’re tied to the season, they feel natural and timely. Fine also suggests keeping an eye on your surroundings. ‘Take advantage of “free information,”’ she says. This means using details around you to spark conversation, whether it’s a compliment on someone’s festive sweater or a comment about the Christmas décor.

Once the ice is broken, the goal is to keep the conversation flowing. According to Fine, the key is to show genuine interest in the other person. ‘The more interest you show in others, the more interesting you become,’ she says. And the easiest way to do this? Ask open-ended questions that invite more thoughtful responses. Instead of ‘Where are you from?’ try ‘What do you love most about where you grew up?’ This small shift encourages the other person to share stories and details that lead to more engaging conversations.

Fine emphasises the importance of follow-up



questions, too. If someone shares that they’re planning a big festive dinner, dig a little deeper: ‘What’s your favourite dish to make for Christmas?’ These follow-ups signal that you’re truly invested in what they have to say, which keeps the conversation from fizzling out.

Try developing a good conversation formula. Start by sharing something about yourself or commenting on your surroundings. Keep it light to create a sense of common ground. Then, ask an easy, open-ended question. When the other person responds, listen closely, put away distractions like your phone and give them your full attention.

Show real interest by actively listening and responding naturally. If you share something in common, acknowledge it with a simple ‘Me too!’ If your experience is different, share that positively to keep the conversation friendly. Ask follow-up questions to keep things moving, making the exchange feel natural and balanced.

And, always be curious, this keeps the conversation engaging and helps you learn more, strengthening your connection. If things get awkward, embrace

“The more interest you show in others, the more interesting you become”



it; it's all an important part of expanding your comfort zone. But being a great conversationalist isn't just about talking, it's also about listening. In fact, Fine argues that good listening is at the heart of meaningful conversation. 'Attentive listening has three parts: visual, verbal, and mental. Combine these elements, and powerful listening results,' she explains.

This means you should make eye contact, nod, and use verbal cues like 'That's fascinating,' or 'Tell me more!' These small actions let the other person know you're fully engaged. And here's a pro tip: people love talking about themselves. So, the more you listen, the more they'll enjoy the conversation.

Fine offers a valuable reminder: 'We become better conversationalists when we employ two primary objectives. Number one: Take the risk. It is up to us to take the risk of starting a conversation with a stranger. Number two: Assume the burden. It is up to each and every one of us to assume the burden of conversation.' In other words, be proactive, and don't wait for someone else to make the first move.

Finding common ground is always a good way to start. Try approaching it like a treasure hunt. Ask yourself questions like, 'What makes this person interesting?' or 'How quickly can I connect with them?' Shifting your mindset this way makes small talk more engaging, as you become eager to uncover something unique about the person you're speaking with.

Move beyond small talk by introducing more personalised questions. For instance, if a colleague mentions attending a concert, ask them what their favourite part was. This allows the conversation to transition from basic chatter to something deeper and more meaningful.

For individuals who feel anxious or awkward in social settings, Fine recommends breaking down social interaction into smaller chunks. 'Turn interacting with fellow guests into a manageable task,' she says. 'Challenge yourself to connect with a specific number of people, whether it's one, three, or four, whatever feels doable for you.' By setting realistic goals, people can reduce their anxiety and find small talk less overwhelming. Unfortunately



festive gatherings can sometimes take a sharp left turn into some tricky territory, whether that's politics, family tension, or other sensitive subjects. Fine has a simple solution: acknowledge the other person's point of view without diving too deep. 'I can see where you're coming from,' you might say, before shifting the conversation with something like, 'Have you noticed how early the Christmas decorations went up this year?'

Humour can also work wonders. Fine recommends lightening the mood with a personal story or funny holiday mishap: 'This reminds me of the time we almost burned the turkey on Christmas Eve!' By keeping things light and festive, you can usually steer the conversation back to more comfortable ground for both of you.

Of course, eventually, every conversation reaches a natural end. Knowing how to exit gracefully is just as important as starting strong. Fine offers some simple, effective strategies for bowing out of a conversation without awkwardness. 'Done properly, an authentic farewell will actually enhance your relationship,' she says.

A couple of polite ways to wrap things up could be, 'It was great talking with you! I'm going to grab another drink, but I hope we can chat again later,' or 'I need to catch up with the host, but it was lovely chatting with you!'

It's also important to recognise when the other person is ready to end the conversation. If they're giving shorter responses or seem distracted, offer

them an easy out with something like, 'I won't keep you any longer, but it was wonderful talking to you!'

So, this holiday season, don't shy away from small talk, embrace it. Whether you're breaking the ice with a fun question or gracefully exiting a conversation, small talk is an invaluable tool for connection. As Fine puts it: 'Small talk is the verbal equivalent of that first domino: It starts a chain reaction with all kinds of implications for your life.'

And as she reminds us: 'The more interest you show in others, the more interesting you become.' So go ahead, start that conversation — you never know where it might lead!

▶▶ NEXT STEPS

Read *Better Small Talk: Talk to Anyone, Avoid Awkwardness, Generate Deep Conversations, and Make Real Friends* by Patrick King

Listen Nobody Panic Podcast - How to Be Good at Small Talk, Ep. 65

Watch Breaking the Habit of Small Talk, Omid Scheybani, TEDTalks

Get involved The Small Talk Saves Lives Campaign, The Samaritans

BOOST YOUR ENERGY THIS *Christmas*

Stay energised, focused, and healthy this Christmas with just one capsule a day of **Doctor Seaweed's** natural supplements.

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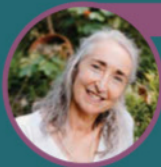
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Behind the MASK

We're becoming ever more aware of conditions such as ADHD and autism, so how have they stayed hidden in plain sight for so long? Rachel Morgan-Trimmer explains

I rushed into the room, sweaty from running, hair all over the place and blurted out one of the myriad excuses I use when I'm late (which is often).

'I'm so sorry, the traffic was terrible.'

'... I got held up.'

'... there was an emergency.'

Why do I say these things? Because it's easier than saying 'I'm late because I have ADHD which means I have a very poor concept of time, am unable to prioritise, and while I knew I should be getting ready, I sat on my bed for half an hour, scrolling through Facebook reels.'

This is an example of ADHD masking. And anyone who has ADHD will be familiar with a scenario like the one above, even if they've never even heard of masking.

What is masking?

Masking is when you adapt your behaviours to fit in. It's not exclusive to people with ADHD – you'll have done it yourself if you've ever been to a job interview, met up with family you're not close to, or wanted to impress on a date.

But masking is something people with ADHD do to an extent that it becomes harmful. It goes way beyond putting your best face on – it involves camouflaging your natural self, resisting your impulses, and rehearsing what you're going to say.

Some people with ADHD even spend time studying behaviours of others, so they know how they're 'supposed' to act.

We use the term 'masking' when we talk about autistic people a lot, but it affects those with ADHD too. The similarities are that we often do it subconsciously or unconsciously, and it comes from a need to be psychologically safe. People with ADHD receive so many negative messages about the traits we can't help, like being disorganised, lack of time management, or distractability, that we start to try to conceal these traits by attempts to suppress them, explaining them away, or over-apologising.

Priscilla Eyles, who is mixed race and gender queer, recognises the intersection of ADHD masking with their other identities. 'My experience of masking is often trying to meet socio-cultural expectations, for example, behaving in a way that is seen as "professional", or trying not to come off as too "intense" or "inappropriate".'

The damage that masking causes is underestimated. Those who mask report the exhaustion that comes from pretending to be someone you're not (even when masking is unconscious) – and there is a knock-on effect on both your physical and mental health. This is acknowledged by coach Kim To. 'Masking



Expert
advice



*Rachel
Morgan-Trimmer is a
neurodiversity
consultant, founder of
FireBird and author of
How to Be Autistic*



my ADHD takes energy. It's tiring to suppress your feelings and thoughts and conform to what's considered "normal".

That use of energy to fit in can make us lose focus and become less productive, which impacts on our workplaces and homes as well as ourselves. ADHD UK ambassador Kathleen Helm recalls masking in order to elicit praise. 'I would focus so much on eye contact that that was literally all I was focused on. I wasn't even really taking in what was being said. My mind and inner narrative were focused on controlling every part of my body to look like I was paying attention.'

One aspect of masking is that it doesn't allow for deep connections with each other; emotional and social connections which are vital to our wellbeing. We don't show our true selves because we're embarrassed and ashamed of who we are. And how can you really get to know a person when they're too afraid to show you their true self?

Neurodiversity expert Amanda Riley explains how it felt to her: 'When you mask, you hide your true self. You hide the ADHD parts of you, due to fear or stigma, and you mirror others to fit in.'

The outcome of exhaustion and the lack of social connection can be unhealthy or even harmful behaviours. People with ADHD are more likely to have problems with issues such as addiction, obesity and mental health, and often have trouble with relationships, sometimes becoming enmeshed in unhealthy partnerships; or engaging in risky behaviour.

How to recognise masking

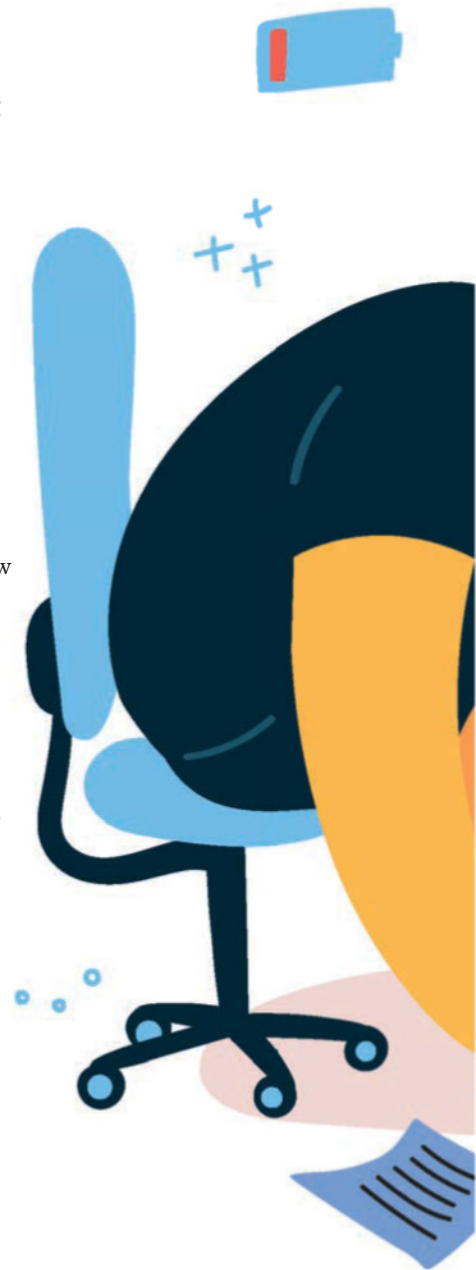
ADHD masking is often so ingrained that those of us who are masking often don't even recognise it ourselves. This is particularly true of Gen X women, who were

frequently brought up to put others first, at a cost to themselves. Riley explains: 'I hid my true self for so long that even six years post-diagnosis I struggle to understand what is the mask and what is the real me.'

So if we can't recognise it ourselves, how can we see it in others? There are certain things people with ADHD will do which can give you a clue, although this list is not exhaustive, and of course, people without ADHD might do some of these things too.

- Over-delivering
- Over-apologising
- Over-explaining
- Toe tapping (because it's less visible)
- Socially acceptable fidgets, like doodling
- Disguised fidgets, such as taking notes or finding excuses to get up
- Being a 'good listener' (zoning out can look like this)
- Feeling the need to make excuses
- Using timers, clocks, schedules and reminders more than most people (and again, excusing this)
- Not doing anything fun in our free time (because we're exhausted and/or overwhelmed)
- Being early (it's over-compensating or to avoid anxiety about being late)
- Signs of unhealthy behaviours which we may well try to hide, but which still show signs, like too much phone use, alcohol or over-eating
- Unusually difficult social or romantic relationships, which could be shown as falling out with or ghosting people, being in toxic or co-dependent relationships, complaining about a partner, etc
- Looking blank or walking off when faced with emotive information or events – this is an attempt to regulate our emotions so we don't lose our temper or cry in front of people

"When you mask, you hide your true self. You have to hide the ADHD parts of you, due to fear or stigma, and you mirror others to fit in"





How to create a safe space for people to be themselves?

We need to break down the barriers that the mask has created. Being positive about the benefits of ADHD can be a really good start – for example, if someone says sorry for being late (again), try responding by sharing how their time blindness creates a more relaxed vibe when you're together. Or if they interrupt, acknowledge their ability to make connections, or come up with great ideas. People with ADHD frequently only hear about the deficits of their condition, and talking about the strengths can help reframe it. Seeing it as a positive (or neutral) can help someone unmask.

Humour is also an under-utilised but effective tool to create a safe space. It must be used with caution as ADHD people can be sensitive to perceived criticism, even when it's meant as a joke (as can anyone), but using humour around ADHD (especially if you have it yourself) can help people feel more relaxed and comfortable.

Eyles says it's important for people with ADHD to be with 'people who support you and value you for who you are, who are patient and understanding and who won't take your challenges personally'.

This is key to creating a safe space.

Unmasking isn't a one-off event, it's a gradual process that can take a long time.

When you empower people with ADHD to

unmask it not only gives them some much-needed psychological safety, but it makes the world a more inclusive place. For all of us.



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Sally x

Editor-in-Chief,
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Sowing seeds for the future

Nature offers the perfect prompts to help us find inspiration at the close of one year and the beginning of the next, writes Jackee Holder

“ I feel a strong sense of nostalgia around the winter solstice. The energy of this time always brings back memories of Christmas growing up — the anticipation building as we prepared for the holidays. We'd make paper rings to hang from the ceiling, a

decorating tip I learned from school. From as early as June or July, Mum would soak currants in Sanatogen ruby red wine, letting them steep in preparation for the dark rum cake she'd bake in December. As the eldest girl, I had my own duties, cleaning the skirting boards, taking down and replacing curtains, and getting the house ready ahead of Christmas Day.

As we prepared our home for Christmas, nature too was quietly preparing in the background for new beginnings. Even in winter, when trees appear dormant, there's hidden activity beneath the surface. It reminds me that January 1 isn't the only opportunity for new beginnings. In fact, nature's cycles offer perfect moments to pause, reflect, and plant new seeds — both literally and figuratively.

This December is particularly special, with the rare event of us having two new moons during the month, astrologers calling the second new moon a Black Moon. This amplifies the symbolism of new beginnings that we can take into our journal writing practice, and if you miss the first new moon on December 1, there's another on December 30, giving us a second chance to set intentions before the year ends. It's a reminder from the universe that it's never too late to start again. And paired with the winter solstice — the shortest day of the year — this is a time when we are invited us to look inward, to slow down, and to reflect deeply.

So let's create an intentional space for our end-of-year journaling. Find a comfortable, quiet spot, perhaps light a candle to illuminate not only the space you're in but to bring to light hidden beliefs and desired intentions. Just like the new moon, hidden from view but still present, think about the unseen parts of your life. What areas need a reset? Where are you holding onto things you can no longer see or need? What have you not said this year that needs to be expressed before moving onto 2025?

I think of this as my way of cleaning my emotional and psychological house. It sets up a healthier space for turning your attention to what you want to welcome in. It is very common to think about what we want in our heads but not commit it to paper. Try this activity originating from the



work of Dr Daniel Amen: The One Page Miracle. On a single sheet of paper write down all the things you want in these four areas: Relationships, Work, Money and Self. Research shows that when goal setting it's best to focus on what you do want rather than what you don't want. If you want to take this practice deeper, write your intentions in the present tense using phrases like, 'I want ...' or 'I am ...' When you've finished, put your list somewhere where you can see it, and refer back to it, tracking your progress.

And finally, a tool I have introduced regularly into this year's columns, let's finish off with a future-focused letter: If I were to write a letter to my future self, standing one year from now, what wisdom would I share with myself? By posing these questions, you unlock a powerful process of transformation.

As we wrap up this year I feel so hopeful that the cycles of nature are offering much guidance if we take the time to listen. Just as winter is the season of rest and renewal for the earth, it can be the same for us. An opportunity to let go of what no longer serves us and to intentionally prepare for what's next to come. And as I also remind myself, these rituals of reflection and planting intentions aren't just about the end of one year and the start of another. They are part of an ongoing rhythm that we will take into our journaling practice for the coming year. Give yourself the gift of taking your written intentions into the new year. When you put pen to paper, you're not just writing words, you're planting the seeds of your future. Each intention you commit to the page holds the potential for growth. Through intentional journaling you are already writing the next chapter of your life. Let's carry this sense of renewal and new beginnings into 2025, ready to nurture the seeds planted on the page.

jackeeholder.com; @jackeeholderinspires

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REFLECT AND BOOST YOUR RESILIENCE

Caught up in the Christmas chaos? Give yourself time to switch off and think about all you've achieved this year, writes Caroline Butterwick

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

W*hat do I need to get done before the end of the year? What presents are left to buy? Who am I visiting, and when?* This time of year really can be a whirlwind. I often find myself fretting over festive plans, alongside what I need to get wrapped up workwise over the next few weeks. My mind also starts to look onwards to January and what I hope the next year will bring. But, despite the hectic air that many of us experience in December, it's worth taking some time to pause.

'What are your new year's resolutions?' I inevitably ask my husband each year while we're out for a brisk walk around the park or decorating the tree, and he asks me the same. We usually each have a long list – some realistic, some rather ambitious. While many of us take part in this annual ritual of thinking ahead and setting resolutions for the year to come, it can also be helpful to spend some time reflecting on the year that's just been, by doing a personal 'end-of-year review'.

'Reflective thinking can be a powerful tool for understanding ourselves better, for our personal growth, for self-compassion, and for setting goals,' says counsellor Georgina Sturmer. 'So when we review our year, we have the opportunity to acknowledge what's happened: how we have behaved, what has gone well, what hasn't gone so well, and what we might have done differently. A lot can happen in the space of a year, and our busy daily lives don't always give us much chance for this long-term sense of perspective.'

As the ground sparkles with frost and we spend more time indoors, there is something introspective about the start of winter, for all the busyness the early days of the season can bring. It's an ideal time for taking stock, looking inwards and reflecting on what really matters to us. And for those of us who tend to set new year's resolutions, doing an

end-of-year review can help make these goals more personally meaningful.

This type of reflection can support our wellbeing, too. 'Looking back can help us to challenge any anxiety or fear that we have felt in the past,' explains Sturmer. 'When we review our year, we might remember events or interactions that caused us concern or anxiety or worry. And often when we look back, we can challenge these negative thought patterns. We can see that – hopefully – any catastrophic fears didn't come true. And this can bolster our confidence and our ability to challenge negative thoughts.'

Curl up under your favourite cosy blanket on the sofa, or sit in a café with a steaming mug of something delicious, and take some time to reflect on just what 2024 meant to you.

How to review your year

Firstly, there's no one set way to review your year. For some, journalling is a brilliant way of getting in touch with your thoughts and feelings, letting the words flow. Or maybe you'd rather go for a walk, or think it through while cooking dinner.

'Think about what you need to do in order to start off the trip down memory lane – this might be about listening to music or looking at photos,' Sturmer says. For me, scrolling back through my social media posts and my phone's

camera roll helps me remember some of the key moments of the year. I smile at the pictures of me and friends laughing together after getting soaking wet on a log flume at a theme park, and my heart swells at the (many, many) photos of the former stray cat that I adopted in the spring and has become part of the family.

Sturmer suggests creating a timeline for yourself. On a piece of paper, draw a line. One end of the line is the start of the year, and one end represents where you are now. Start marking down significant events or markers within the year. You can use the timeline creatively to capture memories or feelings that happened along the way.





Expert advice



Georgina Sturmer (MBACP) is an online counsellor who works with women, helping them to become happier, more confident and resilient.
georginasturmer.co.uk



Zoé Carroll is a performance and wellbeing specialist who supports people to perform at their best in ways that enhance their confidence and wellbeing.
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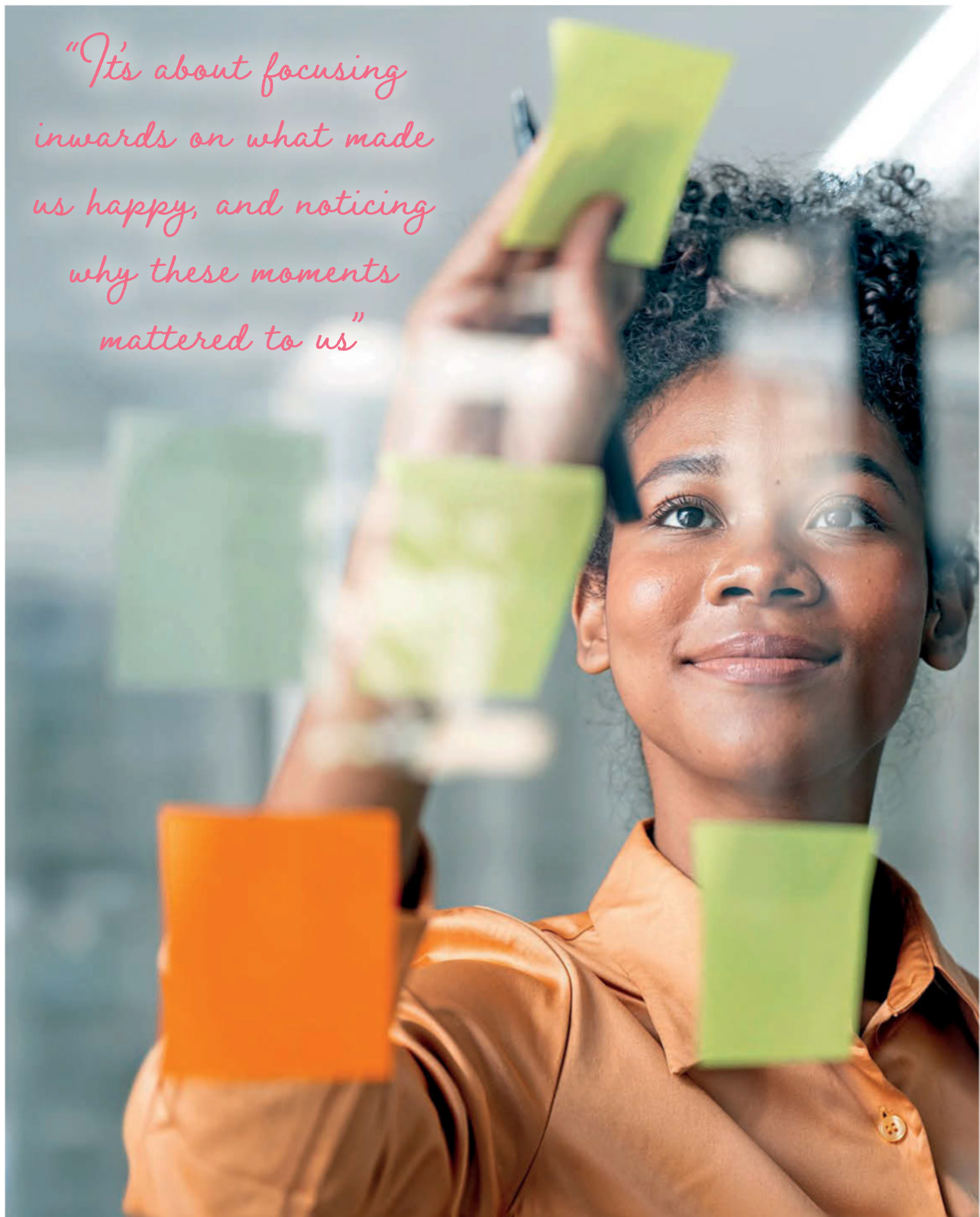
Dr Tara Quinn-Cirillo is a chartered psychologist, and author of Mental Health Microgains: 50 small actions that will make a big difference to your wellbeing (Trigger, £14.99).
drtara.co.uk

Questions to help you review your year:

Try answering – whether jotting in a notebook or simply contemplating as you read – the following questions about your 2024. There are no right or wrong answers here, and you don't have to share these with anyone. Try not to censor yourself – let yourself be surprised.

- What one word or phrase would you use to sum up your 2024?
- When did you feel most yourself?
- What are your proudest achievements?
- When did you feel most connected with loved ones, and what helped that happen?
- Is there a place you've been this year that really meant something to you? Can you pinpoint what it was about it?
- What has sparked joy?
- When have you felt calm and content this year?
- What has been frustrating about your year?
- What challenges have you overcome this year, and what helped you do this?
- How have you grown in the past year?
- What have you learnt about yourself this year?
- What would you like to leave behind in 2024?
- What would you like to carry forward into 2025?

*"It's about focusing
inwards on what made
us happy, and noticing
why these moments
mattered to us"*



What has 2024 meant to you?

What feelings do you experience when you think of 2024? Be honest with yourself – and it's perfectly normal if you find it's a mix of emotions. And it's also understandable to find it hard to reflect, or if you start second guessing your instincts.

Key to really digging into what 2024 meant for you is getting in touch with your values. 'The purpose of reviewing our year is to take the learning forwards by being in alignment with what's important to us, rather than looking sideways and thinking about what other people have achieved,' says coach Zoé Carroll. 'Our achievements don't need to be important to other people – they need to be important to us. So, it's about focusing inwards on what we're most proud of, what we learnt the most from, what made us excited, what made us happy, and noticing why these moments mattered to us.'

You might find some things leap out at you from this, but getting in touch with our values can be tricky. Carroll shares the following activity that she uses with clients as a great way of understanding what matters to you: Think of what matters to you in your life, which could include things like your career or your family. Now, using sticky notes or pieces of paper, write down the values relating to each of these.

'I like people to get to think about what it is that matters about each one,' says Carroll. 'So, what is it about your job? Is it the financial freedom it gives you? Is it the sense of satisfaction? Is it making a difference? It's not the activity, but the value in it.'

Once you've got around seven to ten answers, place the pieces of paper in a line, either top to bottom or left to right, and then put them in order of which matters most to you. As you

do so, consider how it feels to move them around and to trust your instincts. 'You have to check in with yourself and really feel what it feels like to put "financial freedom", for example, above "friends and family", but actually you know, intuitively, that's the right thing for you,' says Carroll. It can also help you understand the links between them – that the financial security that comes with your job, for example, makes it easier to then spend time with loved ones or to travel. Carroll recommends leaning into what your heart tells you rather than your head, particularly with any you may feel torn over.

This will have helped you identify some of your values. Next, Carroll suggests looking at your top values. Reflecting on your past year, notice all of the experiences that you had where you actually felt you were doing that value. 'If family time is a high value to you, think back over the year: when were the standout family-time moments?' she says. 'When did I really feel I was living this value?' These could be big events, like a wedding or a holiday, but it could also be when you went for a walk around the local park together, or sitting with each other in the lounge watching a favourite film on a rainy afternoon.

Let's say you identified that 'self-care' is a key value to you. 'Reflect on all the times you chose self-care over competing activities,' says Carroll. 'So, this could be each time you chose to run yourself a lovely bath, or turned down an invitation for an event you were too tired to attend and chose your own care over pleasing others.' Even seemingly small moments matter.

'If the value is important to you, but you can't actually remember any times that you took action towards it, then that can help you to rededicate yourself to making this a stronger practice in the coming year,' adds Carroll.

*Celebrate your
successes!*



When reflecting on your year, as well as thinking about your values, it can also help to think about your memories of the past 12 months. 'Identify which things in the year gave you the best memories, the best sense of satisfaction or the most pride,' says Zoé Carroll. 'Actually focusing on the feelings of each of those best memories can give you a whole other layer of information, and also recognising that it might not be the achievement itself, but what you had to overcome to get there. So often, we forget the distance travelled in order to achieve something.'

Counsellor Georgina Sturmer echoes Carroll's advice in taking pride in what you've done. 'When we acknowledge what we are capable of, it helps us to feel more confident and resilient,' Sturmer tells me. 'These might be big successes in our home life or work life, or they might be the smaller or more unexpected successes. And when we feel more confident, we are able to push ourselves further. We can contemplate taking risks or setting new and exciting goals for ourselves. We are better able to cope when life throws difficult challenges at us.'

All too often though, we're used to minimising our achievements. How many times have you said, 'Oh, it's not a big deal!' or felt uncomfortable at a compliment about something you've done well? In a world that tells us to be modest, celebrating our successes can seem at odds with that narrative.

'It's not always easy to feel proud

of ourselves, especially if we struggle with our self-esteem,' says Sturmer. 'But an honest evaluation of the past year can help us to build a layer of "evidence" that can prove to ourselves that we are capable of achievement.'

When you come to reflect on your year, make sure to acknowledge your accomplishments. 'Consider the different categories of success that might feel meaningful – it's not all about achievements in the workplace or in education,' emphasises Sturmer. 'Success can also be about building new relationships, taking risks, trying new things, even if the outcome didn't quite turn out as we had expected. Sometimes the greatest successes come when we don't quite achieve our goal, and we need to learn and adapt.'

Speaking with Sturmer, I realise this is a year that I've pushed myself out of my comfort zone. I have been to events that made me shake with nerves beforehand, but that I really got a lot from and had a good time. I'm proud of myself for doing this, and it's also taught me that I'm capable of not only doing these things but of enjoying them too.

As you reflect, it's okay if this activity feels a little tricky – it can help to mull it over for a while if you feel stuck. 'If we struggle with our self-esteem, it might feel hard to look back on our year and attribute successes to ourselves,' Sturmer says. 'If that's the case, consider how you might describe someone else in your situation. When we make it less personal, it can feel easier to offer words of praise or pride.'

"Consider different categories of success that might feel meaningful"

What if 2024 was a DIFFICULT YEAR?

Maybe you're reading this and feeling a little frustrated because you've had a tough year, and talking about sparking joy or celebrating success might seem miles away from what you've been through. Whether you've lost someone dear, faced illness, divorce, redundancy, or any other difficult challenges, it's understandable if the idea of reviewing your year seems tough.

'Take a compassionate stance – be kind to yourself when reflecting,' says chartered psychologist Dr Tara Quinn-Cirillo. 'And be objective: what would a friend say about your year? Often we speak to ourselves more kindly when we look at our experiences from the viewpoint of a third person.' Maybe the friend would tell you that you've done well to get through the year, that it's unfair that you've suffered, and that you deserve to be happy.

They might also be able to highlight some of the good days that may be woven through, despite the difficulties. 'Don't forget, our brain loves the negative stuff,' Dr Quinn-Cirillo says. 'It's what keeps us safe! It can therefore be harder to recollect the positives, and this is exactly why we need to spend time doing it.'

Of course, thinking back to your year might be hard. But there can be value in doing so, and it can help you process what you've been through. 'We can naturally want to avoid thinking about difficult experiences,' Dr Quinn-Cirillo says.

'The way an experience is represented in our minds can therefore stay more rigid and negative. Leaning in and exploring how we feel about experiences can add new meaning and create a new narrative or stance. We can then make room to access and explore more positive memories. By making time to observe and sit with our experiences we can make room for difficult or powerful emotions, thoughts and physical sensations.'

Take some time to reflect in a way that feels safe

for you. 'You may want to set a time to think or more regular small chunks of time,' Dr Quinn-Cirillo says. 'Think about whether you want to sit and think or maybe even write down your reflections – journalling can be an effective way of doing this. And have more conversations with friends and loved ones about your experiences, as we can grow and learn together. You may want to think of some specific questions you use as a guide for regular reflection, and this will help you monitor your goals and wellbeing too.'

As you reflect, think about how you have managed challenges this year – what has got you through to now? Consider what you've done to get to the end of 2024, and if there is anything else that has supported you: maybe the kindness of a good friend, or the self-care you've shown yourself.

Thinking back a way, for me, 2017 was, well, a shit year. I really struggled with my mental health, and even the things that should have been good – a weekend in Rome, dinner with friends – just fell flat. My mind seemed almost incapable of experiencing joy. Now, with a good few years between me and 2017, I still find it hard to see a good side to that year. But I'm proud of myself for getting through, and can identify some of what made 2018 a better year and helped me get to the point I'm at today.

When I think of other tough years, there were still good times laced between the difficult days. These don't have to be big things. It could be the loved one who made you laugh in the waiting room at a hospital appointment, or how you've enjoyed a walk through the countryside, or the fun you had going to a gig. These good things don't diminish what you've been through, but sometimes it helps you to hold onto what has gone well, and what could help you going forwards.

If the last year has been hard, I hope that 2025 treats you better.





Looking to 2025

So, you've thought about the last year, and its meaning to you. Now we can use our review of 2024 to think ahead to 2025 in a way that's individual and powerful.

Think back to the memories that have mattered to you over 2024.

'We can use memory-making events as milestones for the year,' says Zoé Carroll. 'So how will I create amazing memories? How will I make myself proud throughout the year? How will I feel a warm glow of satisfaction? Looking back can really help you focus on which are the standout memories that you really want to take with you.'

Let's say you realised that your highlights of 2024 were spending time with friends, but you didn't get to do this as much as you would have liked. What can you do to weave more of this into 2025? Or if you enjoyed the evening you went to the theatre, pinpoint what it was about that you loved so much, and then consider how to sprinkle more events like this into the coming year. It can help to identify if there is anything that's made it tricky to do these things, and then to consider solutions to these issues.

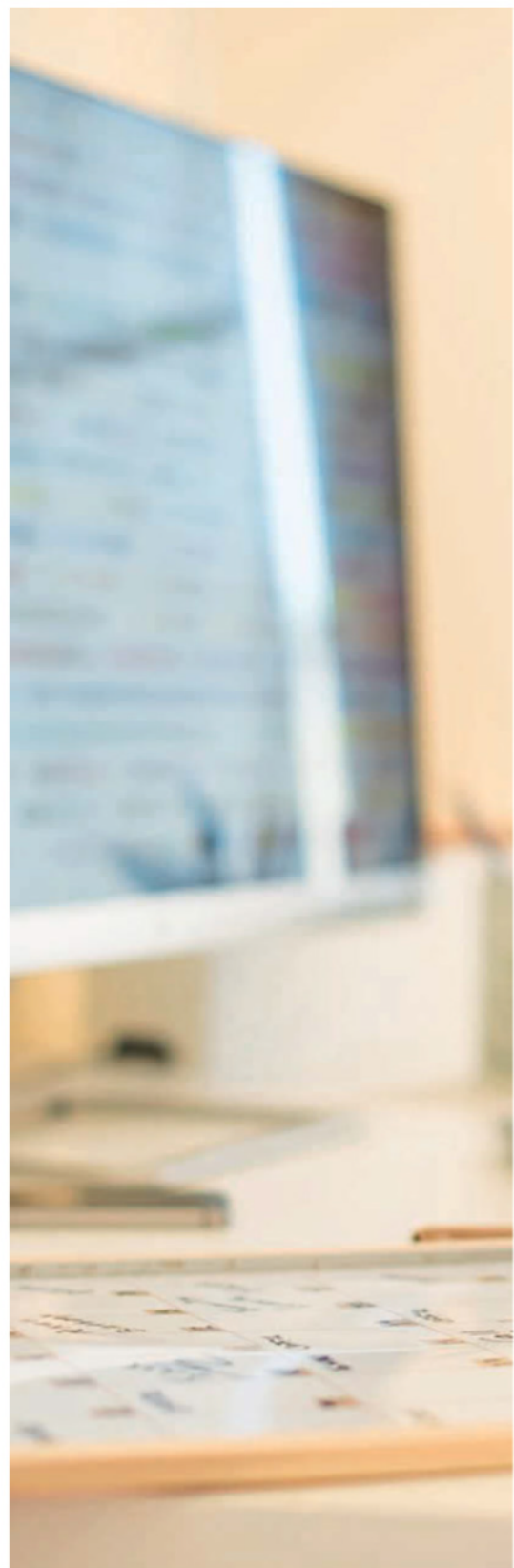
Naturally, this is the time of year where many of us tend to start thinking about new year's resolutions. Our review of the year can help with setting goals or intentions that actually mean something to us.

'If, for example, fitness has been a source of pride for you and it's something you now want to prioritise, you could enter some events that give you tangible targets to work towards throughout the year, rather than just focusing on one big goal,' says Carroll. She recommends breaking things down into smaller goals throughout the year.

We all know what it's like to reach February realising that we've abandoned some of those big targets we set ourselves as fireworks filled the sky on January 1. Making goals values-based and realistic can help us make sure we're setting ones that actually matter to us, and are manageable.

The resolutions you set yourself don't just have to be about goals. My end of year reflection has highlighted how I need to make more time to rest and recharge – when I think about the last year my word is 'intense'! And while some of that has been brilliant, I've also found it hard to make time to breathe and to savour the moment. I decide that trying my best to keep free time in my diary is important, and to prioritise the things I find nourishing.

Hopefully, thinking through the past year has helped you recognise what you've valued, what you've achieved, and any challenges you've overcome. Take what you've learnt about yourself over 2024 to inspire the next, and to make 2025 a year that's meaningful to you.





WHAT DO YOU NEED MOST FROM A PERSONAL REVIEW?

Take our test to find out how your review of the last 12 months can help you flourish in the year ahead

Circle the answers that most closely apply to you, then add up the symbols. Read the section, or sections, you circled most, to find your year review focus

1 You often use a year review to work out

- ♥ Where the time went.....☐
- ♦ What to do next.....☐
- What made a difference.....☐
- What people thought of you.....☐

2 You'd like more clarity on

- ♥ What's going on for you inside.....☐
- ♦ What you'd like to bring into your life.....☐
- What's going on in your personal life.....☐
- What's going on around you.....☐

3 Your core values revolve around

- ♥ Reaching your full potential.....☐
- ♦ Doing the right thing.....☐
- Kindness and compassion.....☐
- Being your best self.....☐

4 You'd most benefit from more

- ♥ Self-acceptance.....☐
- ♦ Self-confidence.....☐
- Self-belief.....☐
- Self-compassion.....☐

5 You can find it hard to make time for

- ♥ New things.....☐
- ♦ Yourself.....☐
- Fun.....☐
- Relaxation.....☐

6 You're most worried by

- ♥ What people really think of you.....☐
- ♦ Whether a decision is the right one.....☐
- How you can get everything done.....☐
- Why you feel so unmotivated.....☐

7 Your ideal future self will be

- ♥ Focused.....☐
- ♦ Successful.....☐
- Grounded.....☐
- Content.....☐

8 Deep down, you know you're

- ♥ A good person.....☐
- ♦ Good at many things.....☐
- Good hearted.....☐
- Good enough.....☐

9 Next year you'd like to feel less

- ♥ Stuck.....☐
- ♦ Lost.....☐
- Anxious.....☐
- Low.....☐

10 Next year you'd like more

- ♥ Adventures.....☐
- ♦ Connections.....☐
- Direction.....☐
- Fun.....☐

Turn the page to find out what you need from your personal annual review



What's your most important self-reflection focus?



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♥

What did I learn?

If you've felt like you've been treading water or even swimming against the tide this year, you may be looking for progress in the wrong places. Big life changes that bring acknowledgement from others aren't the only way to assess your personal growth. A year-end review is the ideal opportunity to reflect on the less tangible changes that may be happening unacknowledged while you get on with daily life. Celebrating how you've grown as a person can also be an antidote to feelings of restlessness or stuckness. When you're self-aware and curious about life, you're learning all the time, even when you're not consciously seeking new knowledge through formal teaching. But even significant shifts in self-knowledge or self-awareness can sometimes feel intangible so it's good to invest some time in acknowledging progress in your own personal growth, however small. Journaling is the ideal way to reflect on what you've learned about yourself, other people and life in general. Is there anything you have accepted about yourself and let go of trying to change this year? Did you discover something that brings you joy, or commit to something that improves your quality of life? You may find the signs that you're not the same person you were 12 months ago if you help yourself to notice them.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♦

What am I proud of?

When your core values include making a difference, you may be keen to start planning for what you want to achieve in the year ahead. But if you want your efforts to truly bring a sense of meaning this year, then hold off until you've taken a deep dive into the year that's just past. This is the ideal time to quietly acknowledge those everyday efforts that might go overlooked to others, or even yourself. It's good to savour significant achievements, laying them down as mood-boosting memories that you can call on when you need confidence or courage. But consciously reflecting on smaller wins is just as important to create a foundation of self-belief for the year ahead. Start your review by thinking about times when you stepped up, made a difference to others, acted with courage or kindness, or just made a change that brought your daily life more in line with your values. If you're struggling, try some journal prompts – what challenges did you overcome? When did your support make a difference to someone in need? Did you take a leap, or listen to your inner wisdom and let something go that was making you unhappy? Your aim is to capture what this year has shown you that you are capable of achieving.



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ●

What went well?

There's a fine balance between self-reflection and self-criticism – does your annual review tend to morph into a run-through of goals that weren't achieved, plans that didn't work out or times you let yourself or others down? Honest self-reflection is key to developing self-awareness, giving us the insight we need to grow and make better choices in the future. But an overly critical personal review can undermine your sense of self and leave you feeling helpless. There is far more to be gained from reflecting on what went well, what you can feel proud of and what you'd like to do more of.

If you struggle to look at yourself and your life through an objective lens, ask a trusted close friend or family member for input, perhaps offering to do the same for them. Alternatively, try writing a list of what you have to be grateful for or good things that have happened to you and those around you over the past year. Then take time to go through the list and write down any part you played in making those things happen, however small. Acknowledging and mentally connecting with times when you were kind, brave, honest, wise, creative, authentic, loving or conscientious will help you approach the coming year with those qualities front of mind.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ■

What brought joy?

Even the most naturally buoyant types will have times when they feel flat and struggle to connect with their usual enthusiasm and curiosity for new people, places and projects. You thrive when you feel like you're making the most of life but there are times when routine, responsibilities and commitments make choices feel out of your control. It can become a vicious circle, as the lens through which you view the world when your mood is low can filter out new opportunities and tiny moments of joy. A review of the year can be the ideal way to change that lens to one that seeks out the wonders of your world and approaches life with curiosity and resilience. But rather than feeling under pressure to work out what needs to change and how your life should look in the year ahead, take some time to pause and really savour what's already good. Let go of the list of things you tell yourself you 'should' be doing and instead, use a daily gratitude habit to tune your mind to notice the good that is already there. By looking back and honestly assessing what brought you happiness over the past 12 months, you have a starting point to work out what you need to give yourself more of in your daily life in the year ahead.



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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.

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Heart



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

***“There is
no better
compass than
compassion.”***

AMANDA GORMAN



IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Coming up for air

Making way for the new

Caro Giles gets ready for the festive season, looking forward to blending traditions and defying convention



How do you feel about the prospect of Christmas? I sit somewhere between anxious and hopeful, a fairly normal state

for me. For years, Christmas was traditional and family-orientated: firstly as a child, then as a young adult, when I would return home to my parents and siblings, and later as a parent and wife.

It is true that building a beautiful Christmas is a big ask for a single parent. There are constraints on finances, time and energy, and it is never possible to

fully compensate for the absent parent. Even in 2024, society still likes to present an idealised image of what a family should look like when it sits around the dinner table.

When my marriage ended and I had four sweet daughters aged between three and 11, I had to dig deep to find ways to conjure magic. Some of those ways were a desperate form of over-compensation, an attempt to bridge the gap that filled our house. But most of them stuck, and we all grew to love the new traditions we developed as a tribe of five, despite the lingering sadness. Even after several years, and now with two

teenagers in the house, the girls all still want to watch the BBC series of *Little Women* in front of the fire on Christmas Eve. They still want to hang homemade decorations on the knackered plastic tree I bought in a charity shop for five pounds. And, most of all, they still want to clamber onto my bed with bulging stockings so I can watch them open presents on Christmas morning as I sip tea with a cat on my knee.

One of the joys of having a family that looks a bit different to the norm is that it offers an opportunity to be creative and try new things. Last year one of my best friends drove north to see us on



Christmas Day, with her daughter and her mother. Between us, we have built a new family that defies convention, and this year she will drive up once more, arriving at the door weighed down with homemade biscuits and clotted cream.

This has been a wild year for me – the year when I decided to dip my toe once more into the terrifying waters of the dating world, and the year when I fell hard for a man who lives too many miles away. It has been difficult to navigate a new romantic relationship for a million reasons, the main one being that I don't think I knew until now what it really means to properly love and be loved.

I have been alone for so long and I have found allowing myself to be vulnerable with someone one of the most terrifying emotional experiences of my life. I had learned to become so tightly coiled and defensive, fiercely guarding my children and so determined not to fall apart, that

letting go has been surprisingly difficult. For a long time I have made Christmas Day one that focuses on my daughters, just like so many days over the last seven years. As I edge into a new era and try to drag myself into the foreground, I wonder how we can blend our family traditions with newer ones. I have spent such a long time worrying about my children's needs and trying to preserve a childhood that resembles the one we see in the movies, that I have neglected my own. After preparing stockings for four children and cooking a roast dinner, my Christmas treat is usually a glass of wine in front of the fire reading a book that I have bought myself in case no one else buys me one.

But it is a delicate operation, this stepping out of the mother and allowing myself to inhabit the woman a little more. My daughters' tiny hearts are fragile and need holding carefully, but I have learned this year that I also have a fragile heart. Fierce too, and working hard to make up for precious lost time.

When I talk to my children about what our Christmas will look like this year, it seems that the blend of traditions will not be seamless. They are scared that they will not be able to climb into a bed on Christmas morning with their mummy and a small grey tabby cat. I have told them that some traditions are sacred, but I have also told them that I would like some small changes that make my life easier and brighter.

This year we will still hang strands of fairy lights around the bannisters and leave the shutters open so the reflection of moonlight on frosty rooftops can shine in. But I hope that a combination of old and new will also bring us all a new lightness of heart.

"I have spent such a long time worrying about my children's needs, I have neglected my own"



Expert advice



Victoria Jeffries is a BACP accredited therapist and member of Counselling Directory who has a private practice online and in North London.

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Mind the WAGE GAP

Whether you're the one feeling flush or the one counting the pennies, spending differences can be hard to navigate, writes Caroline Butterwick

Are we splitting the bill down the middle, or just paying for what we ordered on our Christmas meet up? Am I expected to buy presents for your children, as well as you? And *how much* is that festive afternoon tea? This time of year brings with it some awkward conversations around money for friends and family, and never is that more the case than if you're part of a 'wage-gap' friendship.

Often, friendships are built on shared experiences you've built up over time. It might be laughing together at a theme park years ago, or setting the world to rights over a coffee with newer friends. But many activities come with a price tag, and whether you're the friend who's still feeling the pinch of the cost-of-living crisis, or the one who has more to spend but worries about others missing out, it can be hard to know how to navigate this.

According to the Mental Health Foundation, money worries are the most common cause of anxiety in the UK, with 32 percent of British adults saying being able to afford to pay the bills had made them feel anxious in the last two weeks. So you're very much not alone if you're experiencing this.

There can also be an emotional toll when there are income differences in a friendship, says Victoria Jeffries, a BACP accredited therapist and member of the Counselling Directory. 'If you are the friend who is less well-off or experiencing financial struggles, this can be quite the knock to self-esteem,' says Jeffries. 'Declining invites due to money concerns may induce feelings of inferiority, resulting in feeling "less than" a wealthier friend. Having to miss out on costly occasions can also result in feeling "left out" of things within your social circle, which may lead to loneliness.'

Comparison culture can have an impact too.

"You shouldn't have to get into debt to keep up with friends"

'This can result in the less "well off" friend feeling as though they have achieved less in life, which may result in painful feelings of failure,' says Jeffries. You may feel like you're not doing as well as other people, or worry about being judged.

'Difficult feelings may also arise for the friend who has more money,' says Jeffries. 'For example, there may be a sense of guilt for being able to attain a more lavish lifestyle and they may feel some pressure to pick up the bill and treat their friend. This can add quite a significant emotional weight to socialising and may result in a loss of desire to see friends.'

Financial differences in friendships go beyond what we earn or how much we have in savings. Our money mindset can influence our feelings and actions towards spending, and it's common for friends to have different approaches.

'Beliefs around money are usually planted – like everything else! – in childhood,' Jeffries explains. 'It could be that your parents were very frugal so one adopts this mindset, or it could be that you witnessed your parent struggling financially, and you now take every advantage of living a more lavish lifestyle, treating yourself to the type of things or events that you missed out on when you were younger.'

Money mindsets also influence what we spend our money on. 'For some, spending on others can be a way of showing affection. These people may feel offended or even uncared for if they are asked to split the bill down to every penny,' says Jeffries. 'Similarly, it can be irking for some to see their friends throwing money around, especially if you are a person who witnessed your family struggling to make ends meet when you were younger.'

'Difficult feelings from the past can re-emerge which can be quite emotionally triggering. Simply being mindful that different friends have different attitudes towards money is a good start to navigating this. Remind yourself that, while you may not agree with a friend's attitude towards money, it most likely stems from somewhere, and it is not your place to challenge this. Focus on the common ground you share and try to leave finances to one side.'

Try reflecting on your attitude towards money, and how this may have been influenced by your childhood and experiences as an adult. Do you feel anxious when you think about finances? How do you approach disposable income – would you rather save it, spend it on items like clothes or books, or use it for experiences like days out or holidays? What feelings come up when you think about

finances and your friendship group? Getting in touch with your feelings and beliefs around money can help you understand how this affects your approach to financial differences in friendships, and realise that this can go beyond what's in our bank accounts.

However, there are also practical sides to dealing with financial differences in friendships.

'For the friend low on money, I would strongly suggest to not give into the pressure to do expensive things,' says Jeffries. 'While it may be difficult, try and get comfortable with saying no. You shouldn't have to get into debt to keep up



with your friends.' Jeffries recommends suggesting low-cost activities instead, such as picnics in the park during the warmer months, hosting a dinner party at home, or visiting free museums and galleries.

And what if you're the friend who's financially more secure? 'I would say that, if you are the friend with more money, there are certain things to be aware of,' Jeffries says. 'For example, while it's generous to offer to cover the cost of a dinner, be sensitive and aware that your

friend may feel patronised at your offer to pay. Not everyone would simply view this as a welcome treat. Also, be aware that the offer of treating may become expected, and you could start to feel the friendship is one-sided and lead to resentment.'

There is also the tricky subject of lending money to friends, whether they get in touch asking for help to tide them till their next payday, or to cover the cost of a group activity. 'I would suggest that you should be very clear about what you are agreeing to,' stresses Jeffries.

'For example, if you are expecting the money back, you should both agree on a specific date that you want the money back by. While this may seem very formal and uncomfortable, you may also

want to consider having an agreement in writing. If your friend ever contested the repayment or refused to pay you back in the future, without having the agreement in writing, it would be incredibly difficult to take any action. It may be easier to gift money and that way, there is no confusion about getting it back.'

Naturally, communication is key. Your friends might not realise that that weekend away is going to plunge you into your overdraft, and may feel confused or hurt at you not joining them. We live in a society where talking about money can be difficult or awkward, and so it can feel challenging to admit that you may be struggling.

'If your friendship group really doesn't seem to understand, it may be helpful to be transparent and let them know that you simply don't have the money. This may be uncomfortable, but you shouldn't feel embarrassed about this,' Jeffries says. You may well find that some of the others admit that they would prefer to do something that costs less too.

If you're the friend who has more money, it doesn't have to mean ruling out all activities that have a price tag. But if you're aware that some of your friends may not have the same disposable income, it could be a case of prioritising and not suggesting lots of expensive activities, but being a little bit more inventive about what you do. At this time of year why not wrap up warm and enjoy a beautiful winter walk then head home together for hot chocolate and marshmallows, or try social giftwrapping evenings or decorating the tree together. There are a whole host of ways to enjoy spending quality time with people you care about this Christmas without either counting the pennies or breaking the bank. Now, homemade mulled wine, anyone?





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Q&A

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



*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.

“Is it real or is his ‘man-flu’ all in his head?”

Q My husband says ‘man flu’ is a thing and that he read somewhere that a study proves men get worse cold symptoms than women. Is this true?

I wish I could give you a straight answer to this but it's complex! There was a study in the 1990s that showed men tend to report ‘worse’ symptoms when hit with a cold than women, but the cold symptoms themselves were not found to be different or worse for men. So this may suggest that when men get sick, they may feel more distressed than women do, but that doesn't mean the illness itself is worse.

More recently in 2020, male mice showed more symptoms of the flu than female mice, including more fluctuations in body temperature, fever, and signs of inflammation, and they took longer to recover. Studies done with lab animals don't necessarily apply to humans so we cannot generalise this data, but it may suggest that there is a difference in immune response between males and females. The reasons for this are unknown but some suggest this is due to women

building up more natural defences through child rearing and developing a higher pain threshold due to bodily changes during puberty and beyond.

Other things are likely to also play a role in how men and women get sick and how they feel when they are unwell. Studies show men are significantly less likely to go to the doctor when they have physical symptoms and some studies report men are less likely to wash their hands regularly and are therefore more susceptible to illness such as the flu.

At the core of the ‘man flu’ debate is making sense of why men are more likely to rest and do less when they feel sick, while women often carry on with work, housechores, and childcare. Rather than make light of this perhaps we should be thinking about the differing expectations society places on men and women and how, if we don't align with this, we can as individuals and couples redress the balance. When your husband is unwell it may be the appropriate and caring thing to



validate his feelings and take care of him, but the same can and should be true when you are unwell. As women we may need to drop the guilt and the expectation that we can just carry on, and instead give ourselves and our bodies a break. It might be the remedy you need to lose the resentment when your man gets the flu.

“Am I making her anxious with ‘Hurried child syndrome’?”

Q I heard about ‘hurried child syndrome’ online and I am now feeling guilty that I am creating a life-long anxiety problem for my child. I don’t like being late and I know I can get shouty and use bribes to get my child out of the house. What can I do instead?

‘Hurried child syndrome’ has become a big topic of discussion recently and because of the label it has, it has understandably created confusion.

It has nothing to do with rushing your child out of the door or putting pressure on them to get dressed or tidy up. It refers to society pushing children to take on responsibilities beyond their developmental age. There are three contexts where this can happen:

AT HOME: Seeing children as ‘mini adults’ and pushing them to achieve skills that are beyond their developmental needs (e.g. pushing a child to read above their target) and/or overscheduling their time in a way that impacts on their free time for play. Some have referred to this as ‘miseducation’, pushing kids to grow up

faster than is necessary to alleviate adult anxiety and guilt (i.e. a parents’ constant worry of not doing ‘enough’ if their child isn’t occupied or busy).

AT SCHOOL: Many argue that the outcome-oriented and ‘work-centric’ school system feeds into ‘hurried child syndrome’ where individual skills and needs are ignored in favour of exam results.

THE MEDIA: TV, smartphones, and the internet have been suggested to ‘hurry’ children by exposing them to information and content that is beyond their developmental needs and understanding and overloading them emotionally with images they cannot process.

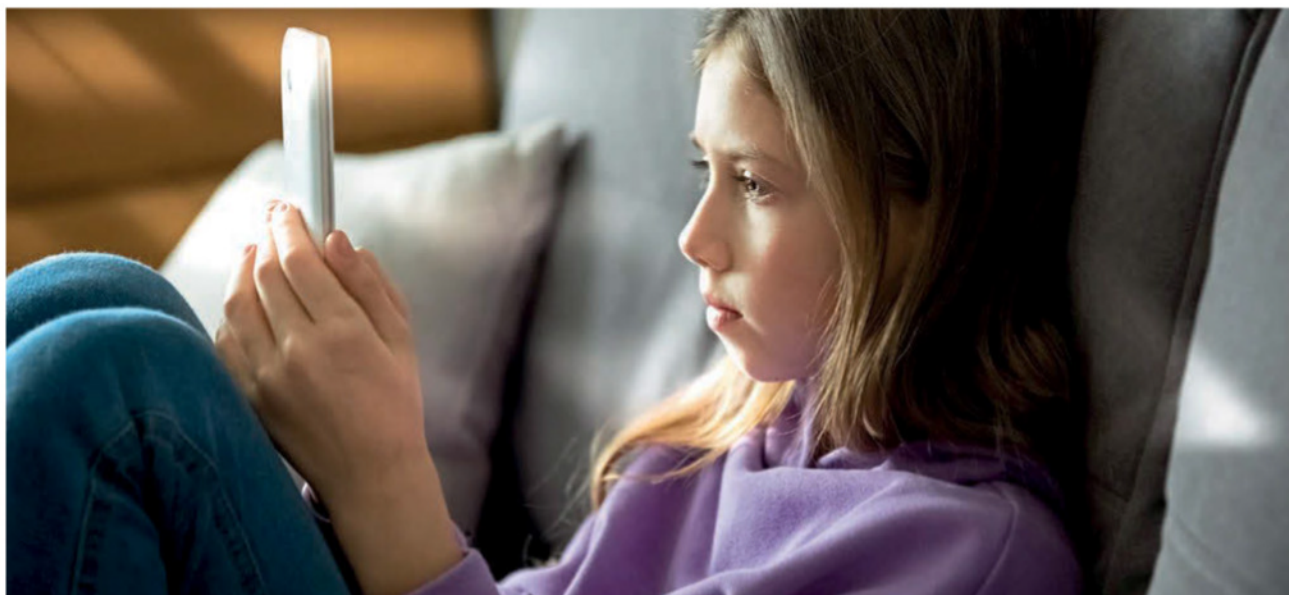
‘Hurried child syndrome’ typically leads to children experiencing heightened stress that can lead to anxiety and fear of not meeting others’ expectations. Although rushing your child out of the door in the morning might feel stressful (and for those children who are neurodivergent, ‘rushing’ may be experienced as distressing), this is not the same as ‘hurried child syndrome’.

If you wish to prevent it, try:

- Protecting time for unstructured play and down time
- Setting boundaries around screen use and ensure there are times when you engage with your child when they are watching a screen so you are building connection, understanding what they enjoy, and supporting them when they see something that worries them.
- Following your child’s lead when it comes to academic skills and extra-curricular activities. Children don’t have to learn to do everything in childhood, they have a lifetime of learning ahead of them.

And if you want to make mornings a little easier, my best tip for you is to try and plan as much as possible the night before so you are not rushing around as much (e.g. get breakfast ready the night before, lay out the clothes your child will wear and get them to pack their bags and leave by the front door).

It can also help to remember that time will pass no matter what you do and that when you choose to approach mornings with a bit more lightness, it is less stressful for everyone.



IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

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“Winter is the time for comfort, for good food and warmth, for the touch of a friendly hand and for a talk beside the fire: it is time for home.”

EDITH SITWELL



IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK



MINDFUL WELLNESS



Psychologies Wellness Director, Ali Roff Farrar shares expert advice, ideas, stats and the newest research on all things wellbeing this festive season, including ways to find meaning in the winter solstice, a simple hack to feel like you're flourishing and a few ways to dial up the Christmas sparkle...

Bringing hygge home: easy changes for a happier home

'After a decade of living Danishly, I'm coming home, but I'm determined to bring Denmark's best habits with me,' says Helen Russell, bestselling author of *The Year of Living Danishly*. 'It's things like hygge – the concept of cosy togetherness dating back to the 19th century. Hygge isn't just about aesthetics – it's rooted in principles that enhance well-being and mental health. So here are four science-backed ways to make a home hygge – wherever we are.'

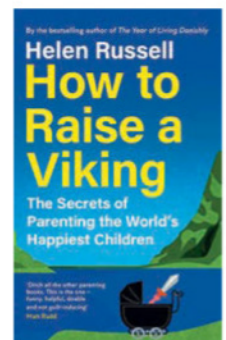
1 Get your lighting right: Danes have a 'no big light' rule, eschewing harsh overheads for softer pools of light from lamps and candles (Danes burn the highest number of candles per head in Europe). Everyone looks better bathed in a warm, soft glow – and we feel better, too. A study published by the University of North Carolina showed that softer lighting can reduce stress and promote relaxation.

2 Embrace natural materials: Tactile materials like wool, wood and sheepskin are staples of hygge homes and researchers at the University of British Columbia found that natural materials can reduce stress and make us calm. Danes prioritise cosiness in their wardrobe, too. Think soft knits, scarves, cosy socks and well-loved items – clothes that are comforting in a world that may not be.

3 Eat together around a table: In the UK, we're as likely to eat dinner on the sofa as at a dining table but research commissioned by Oxford University found that dining together improves well-being. Danish homes are centered around a dining table and having hygge meals together is an important part of life in Denmark – something else that makes Danes happier. So, clear the decks and invite loved ones around.

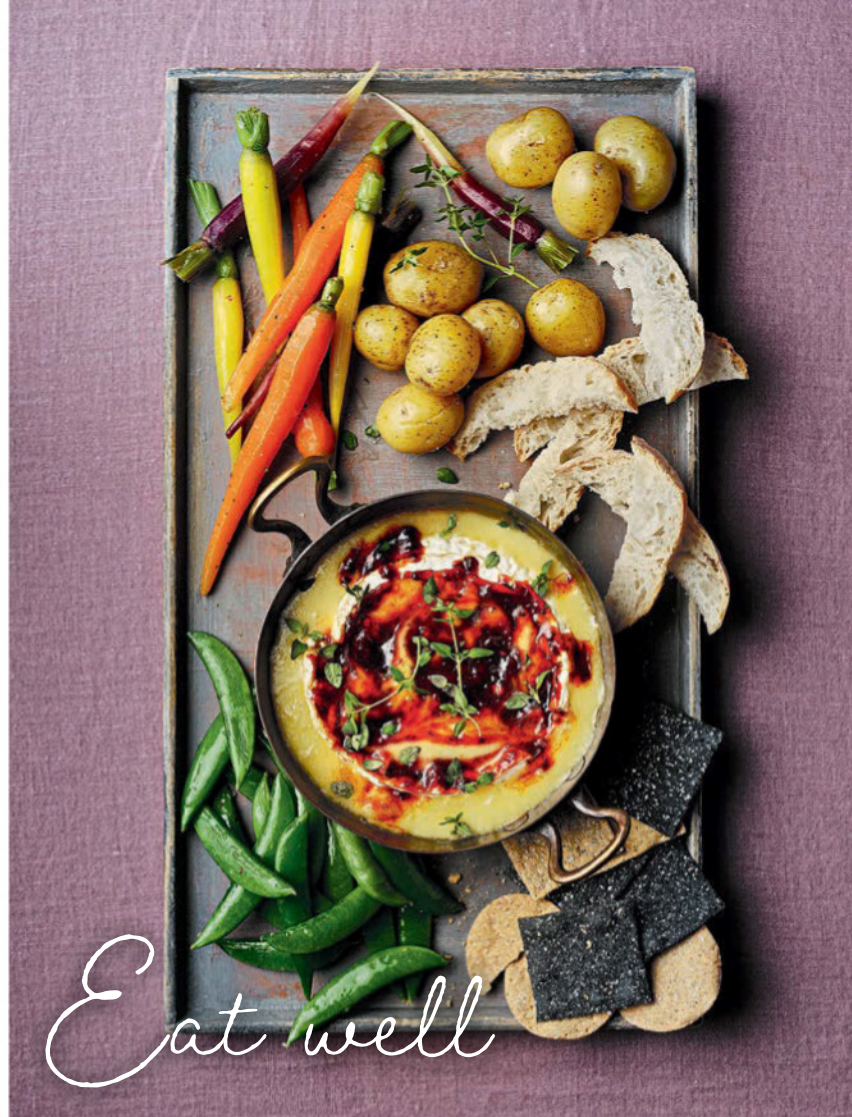
4 Think 'experiences', not 'stuff': Research from San Francisco State University shows that focusing on experiences, rather than material goods, leads to greater happiness, while studies from Harvard show that the relationships are the biggest contributor to long-term well-being. Hygge emphasises quality time with loved ones, prioritising shared activities and being present: turning off your smartphone, single tasking, savouring the moment and really enjoying life. Here's to simple pleasures!

*Helen's new book, **How to Raise a Viking** (how Nordic children grow up happier, healthier and more resilient plus what we can steal from them) is out now, published by 4th Estate.*



"Oh, Christmas isn't just a day; it's a frame of mind."

MIRACLE ON 34TH STREET



Harissa-Baked Camembert

Harissa adds heat and fragrant spice to the gooey pungency of the camembert in this recipe. Sweetness comes from the honey and herbiness from the thyme. The results are so moreish you'll be grateful and relieved at how quick the dish is to pull together.

SERVES 2

- 2 tbsp rose harissa paste
- 2 tbsp runny honey
- 5 thyme sprigs, leaves picked and finely chopped, plus extra leaves to garnish
- 1 whole camembert
- savoury crackers, crusty bread or a few cooked veg, to serve

Method

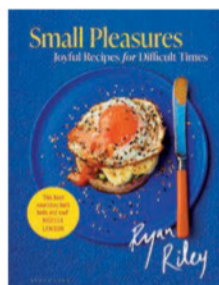
- 1 Preheat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan.
- 2 In a bowl, mix together the harissa, honey and chopped thyme leaves until the mixture has the consistency of a loose paste.
- 3 Place the camembert into an ovenproof dish just bigger than the

round itself and slather the paste over the top of the cheese.

4 Bake the camembert for 30 minutes, until golden, oozing and bubbling.

5 Serve with crackers, bread or cooked veg for dunking.

Extract taken from Small Pleasures by Ryan Riley (Bloomsbury, £22 Hardback). Photography © Craig Robertson.



A brighter outlook

Winter weather can lead skin to look dull and dry due to reduced humidity in the air, and the stark contrast between cold temperatures and dry indoor heating. These conditions impair the skin barrier's function, stripping the skin of natural moisture. To keep my complexion looking bright in the winter months, I really like the Dull Faace Creamy Cleanser which not only feels moisturising whilst cleansing – it also works to exfoliate and hydrate your skin using fruit enzymes and antioxidants, leaving it soft, refreshed, and glowing without damaging skin with rough products.

Dull Faace Creamy Cleanser, £27 (100ml), wearefaace.com

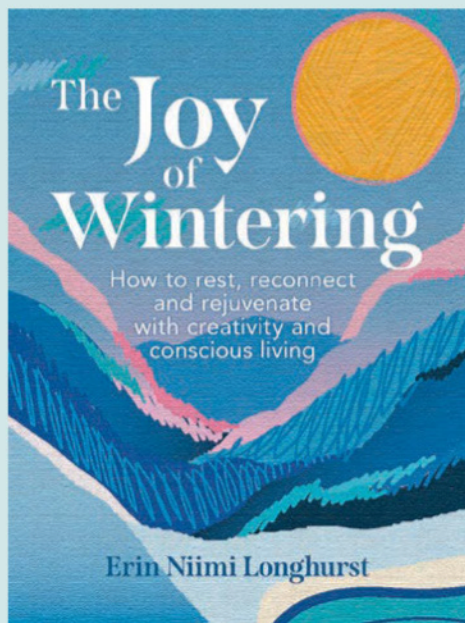


Seasonal living

Wonderful wintering

Whether a gift for yourself or a loved one, *The Joy of Wintering* is a beautiful book to adorn your Christmas coffee table and dip in and out of over a hot chocolate here and there (try Ten PM's The Night Drink for a healthy choice!). It's a warm hug of a book, filled with beautiful images, inspiring thoughts and ideas to embrace the winter season, with lovely mindful indoor activities to encourage states of flow, connection to our winter environment, and ways to welcome the slowness and stillness of winter within our own busy lives.

The Joy of Wintering: How to rest, reconnect and rejuvenate with creativity and conscious living, by Erin Niimi Longhurst, (HarperCollins, £12.99)



Winter Solstice Cranberry Orange And Cinnamon Candle, Tenovus Cancer Care, £7.99, 100% of the net profits made from every sale go towards providing care and support to those affected by cancer. www.shop.tenovuscancercare.org.uk.

Careering towards Christmas?

Feel like Christmas comes quicker every year? New research has found that certain people do experience the passing of time up to Christmas and other annual events including Ramadan, more quickly than others. Those who repeatedly think about how much time there is leading up to the big event, and interestingly, if they are also prone to prospective memory errors – such as forgetting to do a planned task – are more likely to experience a feeling of accelerated time passing up to the big day's arrival!

Are you a weekend warrior?

If you find yourself too busy to get your exercise sessions in during the week (especially with a busy Christmas social calendar!), but hit the gym or sports at the weekend instead, don't beat yourself up. Research has found that compared to inactivity, both weekend warriors and those of us who spread our physical activity across the week, gain similar benefits in reducing the risk of 16 different health conditions, from heart and digestive issues to mental and neurological disorders. It's a reminder that when it comes to movement, it's not just about frequency, but the overall commitment to staying active.

60% less

The impact a 7-foot cut tree has on the climate versus a 7-foot artificial tree used for six years. Lifespan research found that an artificial tree would need to be used for 20 years before its greenhouse gas effects would be less than those of having a natural tree each year.

Gratitude hack

A new study has found some inspiring results when it comes to getting more sleep... Feelings of sleepiness and mood imbalance unsurprisingly improved with earlier bedtimes, with an average of 46 minutes extra sleep per night pinpointed as the magic number for the participants in the study. But the participants who slept longer each night also reported increased feelings of resilience, gratitude and a sense of 'flourishing' in life. Participants who had later bedtimes, reducing sleep by an average of 37 minutes, experienced the opposite effect – significantly reducing feelings of flourishing, resilience and gratitude. One clear example of the impact was seen in the participants' gratitude lists – those who had earlier bedtimes wrote twice as much on their list as the participants who slept less, and those who slept their regular hours. Early night, anyone?

Christmas sparkle

Why choose between makeup and skincare, when you can have both? I love a hybrid makeup product, and Terry's do them well – infusing their makeup range with skincare goodies, like hyaluronic acid to this glowy colour correction serum to moisturise as well as add a touch of that festive sparkle to your cheeks!

Terry's Starlight Glow Brightening CC Serum Tree Decoration, £22, available at Look Fantastic, Space NK, Cult Beauty



A better breakfast

Women are often underrepresented as both researchers and subjects in scientific studies, leading to gaps in gender-specific findings. So, it's exciting to find research which begins to bridge that gap – like the recent study which found that the usual breakfast advice given to start the day with healthy grains and carbohydrates such as oats, may not be right for women's bodies. The study found that while high carb breakfasts work for males, breakfasts high in fats may provide a healthier start for a female metabolism. 'Since women have more body fat on average than men, you would think that they would burn less fat for energy, but they don't,' said researcher Anita Layton. 'The results suggest that women store more fat immediately after a meal but also burn more fat during a fast.'

A Christmas cocktail

Christmas is a time to celebrate, and it can be good for the soul to indulge a little, so for those of us who want the joy of gin without the headache, I love this clever alternative from Cotswolds Distillery – a Dry Gin Essence designed to reduce the amount of alcohol required in gin-based cocktails, whilst retaining the intensity of the gin flavour. It uses ten times the botanical concentration of their award-winning Cotswolds Dry Gin, with just a fraction of the alcohol, or 0.23 units per serving. Just drop 5ml into your tonic, or try the cocktail below!



**Cotswolds Dry
Gin Essence,
£18.50 for 100ml
(20 serves).
ABV: 46%.
Available from
Cotswolds Distillery**

Christmas Cocktail recipe: When Doves Cry

Ingredients

- 5ml Cotswolds Dry Gin Essence
- 60ml pink grapefruit juice
- 25ml lime juice
- 15ml agave syrup
- Pinch of sea salt
- Soda water

Method:

Place the first four ingredients into an ice-filled shaker, shake and pour over crushed ice. Add a splash of soda and the Cotswolds Dry Gin Essence. Stir and serve. Garnish with a wedge of pink grapefruit.

The gifts that keep on giving

Gold, frankincense and myrrh play a special role as part of the Christmas Story, but what other significance do they have today? Kellie Gillespie-Wright rediscovers ancient wisdom for holistic wellness

Few substances carry as much mystique and historical significance as gold, frankincense, and myrrh. These three legendary treasures have captivated human imagination for millennia. However, beyond their symbolic and cultural value, modern research has revealed that they also each possess unique physical and psychological benefits that make them as relevant now as they were in ancient times. Today, holistic health experts and scientific researchers alike are uncovering what ancient civilisations intuitively knew: these natural wonders possess extraordinary properties that soothe the body, uplift the mind and nourish the soul.

We spoke to Shereen Al-Mulla and Mahdiah El Jed, master herbalists and co-founders of hikma rituals (hikmarituals.com) to find out more.

‘Gold has an incredible ability to penetrate the skin at a cellular level,’ says Al-Mulla. ‘It stimulates collagen production, which is vital for maintaining skin elasticity and firmness.’ The therapeutic potential of gold extends beyond beauty; it is increasingly recognised for its medical benefits, particularly in targeting cancer cells with precision. ‘Gold nanoparticles are also being researched for their potential in drug delivery and cancer

treatment,’ says Al-Mulla, ‘though this is still in experimental stages.’ Gold has also played a pivotal role in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis and for decades gold salts have been used to reduce inflammation and alleviate pain. ‘Gold compounds modulate the immune response by suppressing inflammatory processes in rheumatoid arthritis,’ Al-Mulla explains. ‘They inhibit the activity of certain immune cells that contribute to inflammation, thereby reducing joint pain and swelling.’ This ability to calm inflammation makes gold an essential part of holistic approaches to treating chronic conditions, offering relief without the harsh side effects of synthetic drugs.

While gold is celebrated for its anti-inflammatory and skin-renewing properties, frankincense — extracted from the *Boswellia* tree — has been cherished for its aromatic and medicinal properties for thousands of years. Prized for its use in religious ceremonies, frankincense symbolised divinity and was often burned as incense in temples to purify the air and create a sacred space. Yet frankincense’s powers extend far beyond symbolism and its physiological effects are as potent today as they were in ancient times.





Expert advice



Shereen Al-Mulla is a Master Herbalist and co-founder of hikma, receiving her qualification with distinction from the College of Naturopathic Medicine. Born and raised in London to Iraqi parents, she embraced herbalism to reconnect with the earth and her Iraqi and Kurdish ancestry.



Mahdiah El Jed is a certified herbalist and co-founder of hikma, deeply influenced by her indigenous roots from Canada and North Africa. Raised in Canadian nature, she also embraced the Islamic Sufi tradition, which instilled in her a reverence for balance and nature's wisdom. hikmarituals.com

Its soothing properties help reduce symptoms of asthma, bronchitis, and congestion. Inhaling frankincense vapours or using it in essential oil form can open up the airways, reduce inflammation in the lungs, and promote easier breathing.

It is also celebrated for its ability to boost the immune system. Research has indicated that compounds in frankincense can increase the production of white blood cells, the body's primary defence against illness. It may even inhibit the spread of certain cancer cells.

But in addition to its physical benefits, frankincense has an important role to play when it comes to mental health. Its scent has long been used in meditation and prayer, promoting feelings of peace, clarity, and emotional stability. Scientific studies now support these traditional uses, showing that frankincense can reduce anxiety and improve focus. 'The aroma of frankincense has been found to have calming effects on the nervous system,' says El Jed. 'And it may help reduce stress and anxiety by activating certain ion channels in the brain.'

A 2008 study published in the Journal of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology found that a component of frankincense activates channels in the brain, creating an

antidepressant effect. These findings lend scientific credence to the long-held belief that frankincense can aid emotional and spiritual wellbeing. Emerging research suggests that it may enhance cognitive function and memory, while some studies even indicate that frankincense may protect neurons from damage, which could be beneficial in preventing diseases like Alzheimer's.

Quality is essential when using frankincense to maximise its healing properties. Choosing high-grade frankincense ensures that its full range of benefits are delivered without introducing harmful impurities into the body.

Myrrh, like frankincense, has a rich history as both a sacred substance and a powerful healer. Derived from the resin of the Commiphora tree, myrrh has been used in ancient cultures for everything from embalming to wound care. In terms of its medicinal properties, myrrh is renowned for its antibacterial, antifungal, and anti-inflammatory effects and has been used for centuries to treat wounds, prevent infection, and promote faster healing.

And like frankincense, myrrh is often used in spiritual rituals and meditation practices to enhance focus and spiritual awareness.

'The Egyptians used it as incense in temples, believing that its smoke would carry



“These substances offer a wealth of benefits to help you towards achieving a more balanced and harmonious life”

their prayers to the gods,’ explains resin importer Oli Fifield. Its earthy, grounding scent creates a sense of inner peace and connection, making it a valuable tool for mindfulness practices. ‘Myrrh is known for its grounding scent; it’s believed to promote emotional balance and reduce stress,’ Al-Mulla notes. ‘While scientific studies are limited, traditional use suggests it may aid in alleviating mild anxiety and enhancing mental clarity.’ A study published in the *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* even indicates that compounds in myrrh might have neuroprotective effects, hinting at potential benefits for cognitive function and mood regulation.

As with frankincense, purity is crucial. ‘Somalian myrrh is very popular, but myrrh from Yemen is regarded as the best,’ says Fifield. Look for a dark honeyed colour with little to no transparency and hints of amber, as this quality indicates the purest and most beneficial myrrh.

If you’re considering incorporating these timeless substances into your wellness routine, El Jed suggests starting with aromatherapy: ‘Use frankincense essential oil in a diffuser to promote relaxation and reduce stress,’ she advises.

Similarly, myrrh can be used in its purest form as incense or the resin can be turned

into a tincture or powdered to add to lotions, creams, balms and soaps for the skin, and can help minor wounds to heal. As a tincture, myrrh can be added to dental products to help heal mouth ulcers and sore gums.

For safe and effective use, El Jed emphasises the importance of proper dilution. ‘Always dilute frankincense and myrrh essential oils with a carrier oil (like jojoba or almond oil) before topical application to prevent skin irritation,’ she advises. Al-Mulla adds: ‘Always perform a patch test to check for allergic reactions before widespread use. Avoid sensitive areas, and do not apply essential oils near the eyes, ears, or broken skin unless directed by a professional.’ Given their potency, proper guidance ensures the full benefits of these ancient treasures.

Finally, as gold, frankincense, and myrrh regain their place in modern wellness practices, ethical sourcing and sustainability are essential. They are often harvested from delicate ecosystems in the Arabian Peninsula, Somalia, and India. Sustainable harvesting practices not only protect these environments but also support the communities that rely on these resources. By choosing products from ethical sources, you support both environmental health and the communities that cultivate these resources, ensuring that future generations can cherish these gifts.

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh may have their roots in ancient traditions, but their physical and psychological benefits are timeless. From gold’s collagen-stimulating and anti-inflammatory properties to frankincense’s stress-relieving and immune-boosting qualities and myrrh’s ability to heal wounds and soothe the mind, these substances offer a wealth of health benefits to help you towards achieving a more balanced and harmonious life.

▶▶ NEXT STEPS

Read *The Complete Book of Essential Oils and Aromatherapy* by Valerie Ann Worwood

Watch Exploring the Medicinal Legacy of Myrrh and Frankincense with Dr Julia Martins YouTube

Listen Frankincense and Myrrh Podcast at chemistryworld.com



Your alternative Christmas dinner

Tired of turkey? Sick of stuffing? We've got something altogether lighter and, dare we say it, a little more elegant, thanks to Sarah Rossi

Orange & honey glazed salmon

This recipe is a show-stopping fish centrepiece for Christmas Day, or a buffet meal. A whole side of salmon is coated in a simple but festive glaze, which adds colour and flavour. I like to lay the orange pieces along the middle of the fish as decoration, in slightly kitsch 80s fashion, a throwback to the Christmases of my childhood.

PREP TIME: 40 minutes
SERVES: 6

- 1 orange, zested
- 2 tbsp runny honey, plus an extra 1 tbsp to finish
- 2 tsp ground ginger
- 2 tsp garlic granules
- 1kg side of salmon
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

- 1 Preheat the oven to 180°C fan/200°C/Gas Mark 6.
- 2 Mix the orange zest (save the fruit for later), 2 tablespoons of honey, ginger, garlic granules and plenty of salt and pepper into a paste.
- 3 Sit the salmon skin side down onto

two sheets of overlapping foil (you need to be able to fold them up to make a sealed parcel all around the fish). Pat the fish dry with kitchen paper. Smear the paste onto the top of the salmon (try to keep most of it in the middle so it doesn't run down the edges as it cooks).

- 4 Cut the zested orange into thin slices and sit on top of the salmon. Seal the foil around the fish and bake in the oven for 30–40 minutes, or until the fish is cooked through.
- 5 Before serving, drizzle the honey over the orange slices.

To make ahead

Prepare the paste and set aside. Only smear it onto the fish just before baking or the citrus can start to 'cook' the salmon.



Smashed pea crostini

We've all heard of avocado on toast, but have you heard of peas on toast?! This vibrant green topping is very handy to make with peas from the freezer (no waiting for avocado to ripen!). If you don't need these to be vegan, top with some shaved Parmesan or crumbled feta.

PREP TIME: 15 minutes

SERVES: 6 (as a nibble)

YOU WILL NEED: A food processor or mini chopper

- 150g frozen peas
- 2 lemons
- 10g fresh mint
- 100g unsalted cashew nuts
- 4 tbsp olive oil (extra virgin if you have it)
- French bread or sourdough baguette, cut into about 18 x 5mm-thick slices
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 Put the peas in a large heatproof bowl, pour over enough boiling water to cover and leave for 5–10 minutes until defrosted.

2 Grate the zest of one of the lemons into a small dish and set aside (for garnishing).

3 Drain the peas and add them to your food processor or mini chopper along with the mint, cashew nuts, olive oil and plenty of salt and pepper. Add the grated zest of the second lemon, along with the juice of both lemons (avoid the pips!). Blend until it forms a chunky paste – you may need to scrape down the sides of the chopper/food processor as you go.

4 Lightly toast the bread slices on both sides.

5 Spread a dollop of the pea purée on each piece of bread and top with reserved lemon zest.

To make ahead

Up to 24 hours before serving, toast the bread and store in an airtight container. Make the topping, cover and store in the fridge. Assemble just before serving.



Vegan black forest tart

Whether you're vegan or not, this rich and decadent tart is a totally delicious end to any meal. If your flan tin is smaller than the one I use here, you may end up with leftover filling. If you do, spoon this into small glasses and serve it as mousse!

PREP TIME: 35 minutes, plus

chilling time

SERVES: 12

YOU WILL NEED: A 25cm round, loose-bottomed flan tin (ideally at least 5.5cm deep)

For the base

- 400g Oreos, crushed
- 75g plant-based spread, melted

For the filling

- 480g bag frozen cherries
- 400g dark chocolate (70% cocoa solids and suitable for vegans), finely chopped
- 50g soft light brown sugar

- 1 x 400ml tin coconut milk (NOT reduced fat)
- 1 tsp vanilla extract

To decorate

- 220ml plant-based whipping cream alternative
- 200g fresh cherries
- Dark chocolate, grated

1 Remove the cherries from the freezer and set aside to defrost while you make the tart base.

2 Line the base of the flan tin with baking paper. Combine the crushed biscuits with the melted plant-based spread and press into the tin, then chill in the fridge for 1 hour.

3 Put the chopped chocolate in a large heatproof bowl.

4 Warm the coconut milk and sugar in a pan, scraping down the sides of the tin to get all of the thickened cream out.

5 It may look lumpy, but whisk and cook for 5 minutes until bubbling and it

will become smooth. Pour the coconut milk over the chopped chocolate and leave to stand for 5 minutes, then mix well to ensure all of the chocolate has melted. Stir in the vanilla extract.

6 Use a sieve to strain the defrosted cherries, gently pressing to remove any excess juice, and discard the liquid. Spread the cherries evenly over the chilled biscuit base.

7 Pour the chocolate and cream mixture over the cherries and chill in the fridge for at least 4 hours (or overnight if you can).

8 Whip the cream in a bowl until it forms soft peaks, then pour over the middle of the chocolate tart. Decorate with the fresh cherries and some of the grated dark chocolate, and serve.

To make ahead

This tart can be made and refrigerated for up to 2 days before adding the cream. Add the cream and fresh cherries just before serving.



124-PAGE BUMPER NEW YEAR ISSUE!

Coming next month

- Have a calm, happy new year!
- Make your home a mindful haven
- Reset your health this month
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- Ideas to recharge on dark winter evenings
- Learn to let go and get closure on past heartbreak
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Are you ready to glow from the inside out? Enter our exciting competition to win one of 10 **Radiance Wellness Bundles** from **Doctor Seaweed**, the expert brand that brings the pure power of organic Scottish seaweed straight to your health and beauty routine. Each bundle is worth £113 and includes three incredible products designed to nourish your body, rejuvenate your skin, and boost your natural radiance.

What's in the Radiance Wellness Bundle?

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energy levels and overall vitality. Feel good on the inside and shine on the outside with the power of seaweed.

Doctor Seaweed Collagen+ (RRP £44)

This premium marine collagen gives your skin the ultimate nourishment. Collagen helps improve skin elasticity, reduce the appearance of fine lines, and keep your skin feeling firm and youthful. Combined with the nutrient-rich benefits of Beauty+ seaweed capsules, this powerful duo promotes a radiant complexion by supporting skin structure and moisture retention.

ishga Seaweed Bath (RRP £37)

Transform your bath into a luxurious spa experience with the ishga Seaweed Bath. Known for its detoxifying and skin-soothing properties, this seaweed bath helps to rehydrate dry skin, soothe muscle tension, and leave you feeling relaxed and rejuvenated. It's the perfect way to unwind after a long day, while letting your skin soak up the goodness of the ocean.

About Doctor Seaweed

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Visit doctorseaweed.com.

WIN!

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Rachel Gardner is a writer, podcaster and community activist, and part of the teams at Youthscape and St Luke's Church in Blackburn. She is author of The Sex Thing (SPCK) and The Girl De-Construction Project (Hodder Faith).

Soul-full

Let the LIGHT IN

Even dirty windows are not enough to keep the sun's rays away if we are prepared to let them enter, discovers Rachel Gardner

Yesterday a friend sent me a photo from a year ago of us laughing, bundled up against the cold at a BBQ in her garden. 'Winter Queens rocking middle age, filter-free,' she wrote. The image is golden and grainy – and we look amazing! Such a contrast with the greyness I've felt over the past few months as we've slid under the clouds of winter. I look up from the screen and notice that the sun is out today – it's beautiful in a subtle, understated way. During winter, the Northern Hemisphere tilts away from the Sun, allowing its rays to glide low and gentle across the sky. I love how this diffused light reveals the deep undertones of nature's colours, casting quiet, long shadows. There are times when the soul craves this kind of light – deep and soft, symbolising hope. Not the flashy, noisy, neon-positivity that pierces the darkness, but the steady, constant glow that emerges from the shadows, unafraid.

I've spent a couple of nights in the hospital recently, and I found the experience to be disorientating and lonely. I anticipated this loneliness, but what I hadn't expected was how strange the light would be, or rather, the lack of control I had over it. At the flick of a switch, harsh, shadowless lighting flooded the ward during the day before a murky darkness enveloped it at night when the lights were switched off, broken only by the isolated spots of light at the nurses' station. It's striking how light can sometimes provoke discomfort.

One of the challenges of spending the day at home is how sunlight exposes dust that often goes unnoticed. I'm not one for obsessing over tidiness – if you drop by for a

brew, get ready to make it yourself (and maybe give the mug a quick rinse!). Still, I can't shake the annoyance of my grimy windows. It's a trivial fix, really. I could just close the curtains. Some things are tough to face, especially when we're not ready to confront them in the light of day.

Alternatively, I could clean the windows. I'd need to borrow a ladder from someone, but that's manageable. As I consider this, I realise the light is already streaming in. It's uncomfortable seeing things I'd rather ignore, but I crave that light more than spotless windows. Maybe cleaning them is my way of

welcoming the light – of saying I'm okay with what's exposed. As Charles Dickens put it, 'Moths and all sorts of ugly creatures hover about a lighted candle. Can the candle help it?'

I wonder if the soul intuitively understands that light brings life. We instinctively see light as more than just a natural phenomenon – it's supernatural, perhaps. It's that comforting feeling of safety when walking home after a late night with friends. It's the clarity that pierces through days of feeling stuck. It's the weight lifted from our minds. It's the reassurance that no matter how dark it gets before dawn, the sun is always ready to rise.

Is it possible to welcome more light into your life? I believe so. Whether you have the time to clean the entire window or just a small corner, you'll be surprised at how much light comes in when you allow it. Mindfulness, deep breathing, gratitude, whispered prayers, reaching out to friends – what practices help you invite more light into your life?

If your fear is keeping you in the dark, let the light in.

If your frustration is pushing someone away, let the light in.

If you're resisting growth to avoid pain, let the light in.

If you dread being seen for who you truly are, let the light in.

If you're wondering how dark things might get, let the light in.

May you emerge from the shadows, unafraid.

"We instinctively see light as more than just a natural phenomenon – it's supernatural, perhaps"

Fall in love WITH LIFE

If you're suffering festive burnout, or just feeling blue as the year draws to a close, here's your chance to make time for you in your busy schedule and fill your cup with a little romance, writes Sophie Golding

Building a more romantic life for yourself starts by taking your own thoughts into consideration: nothing is more romantic than actually being heard. Before you do anything else, take a moment to think about what you need rather than always putting others first. Wear comfy clothes if that's what makes you feel good, eat healthy food to give your body what it needs, and understand the difference between the urgent and the important, replacing 'I don't have time' with 'Why don't I take the time?' Make yourself your first priority.

Then, try to be someone *you'd* like to spend time with: smile more, be more positive, more patient with yourself, find your sense of humour and fun. Whatever it is that you enjoy, you are the one who decides who you are and what things will make you feel good. Own your successes and your failures, and admire yourself for all of them: once you love yourself, you won't feel so dependent on the love of others!

Once you've got this far, you can start adding other touches to your daily routine that will bring a sense of romance and joy – every day is your day!

Romancing yourself

Making your everyday routine a little less, well, 'everyday', will help you fall back in love with life again, with the added bonus of massively contributing towards your overall well-being. Take care of yourself the way you would like to be taken care of by others, considering everything, from running yourself a candlelit bath to making yourself a special meal, getting out into the fresh air and treating yourself to the occasional lie-in. Be kind, always. The most important relationship you'll ever have is the one you have with yourself.



Be the star of your own show

You might not believe it, but your life is every bit as worth writing about as a celebrity's. Start writing the first chapter of your autobiography and see what bubbles up to the surface. Not only will you have an opportunity to realize how fascinating your life has been until now, but you'll have something lovely to read again in a few years, too. Your life is a novel, you just don't know it yet.

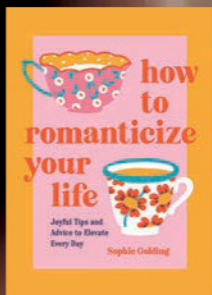
Make yourself a muse

When you look in the mirror, do you tend to focus on your best qualities, or the little imperfections that you'd like to change?

Zoom in on your best assets by drawing a self-portrait: if you're good with a brush it could be in the form of a painting, but you could also try making a collage of what you like most about yourself, or writing down a list of your qualities that starts with each of the letters that make up your name. You deserve to be a muse, even if just your own.

Just for you

We spend so much time doing things for others, and worrying about what other people might think or feel about our actions. When was the last time you did something just for yourself and no one else? Do something completely alone today: go to the cinema without telling anyone, treat yourself to an ice-cream sundae even if you don't have anyone to share it with, write something you've never told anyone on a piece of paper and then throw it away or burn it. Be your own best company.



**How to Romanticize
Your Life by Sophie
Golding is published by
Summersdale, £8.99**

Perfectly imperfect

A life less perfect is so much more interesting than something fresh out of the pages of a magazine. Embrace the beauty of the asymmetry of life by picking up a piece of pottery from a local artist: sure, that mug might not have the clean, round lines that would qualify it for the shelves of a big-brand shop, but that's its real beauty! The bumps and curves are proof of the love that was put into its creation. Each irregularity is a reminder of the human touch that made it. There is real perfection in imperfection.

Lights, camera, action!

Ever felt like you were starring in a movie that also happened to be your life? You should: every moment of every day has the potential to become the scene of a movie. It doesn't have to be extraordinary, either; even the duller chores are interesting with the right lighting and background music. Put your phone or camera somewhere with a good view and just let life unfold. And if you aren't satisfied with the result, no problem: you can just rewrite the scene and film again! If you don't fancy staging a whole movie, why not choose a single moment in your day to record; it could be a whole event, or simply just one single instant. If you commit to filming just a few seconds of your life every single day, at the end of the month or the year you can collate them to get a beautiful snapshot of everything that you felt counted. Time to look at your life through the lens of your own camera. And... action!

Magic of make-believe

Remember when you used to play dress-up? When make-believe was part of every single day? You can recreate that joyous feeling every time you apply your moisturizer or make-up, or even just take a shower and wash your hair: imagine that the soaps and creams in your bathroom are the magic potions that will transform you! Or, you could start making time to reconnect with your favourite childhood pastimes, such as baking cakes or playing frisbee in the park. Life is more fun when you embrace your inner child and get your imagination flowing.

Daydream believer

Sometimes creativity doesn't come to you, you need to go on a quest to find it, and nothing is better for that than a good old daydream. The Japanese language has a word that fits perfectly: boketto, or 'gazing into the distance without thinking of anything specific'. It's a great way to let unexpected thoughts bubble up to the surface. Find somewhere quiet to sit and get your boketto on, preferably with a huge, open view (the beach, a hill, the top floor of the building) and let the immensity of the world inspire you.



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SING WITH PSYCHOLOGIES!

A TO Z OF REASONS TO SING (THE FINALE!)

Musician and choir leader James Sills summarises the ways in which how singing can help us to lead happier, healthier and more fulfilling lives



‘collective effervescence’. An example of this is at a big sports game, where thousands of fans raise their voice together to get behind their team and to celebrate their successes together. In that moment, the crowd are one – unified through collective voice. As composer Eric Whitacre said: ‘I know of nothing else in the human experience that can unify a group of people faster than that first breath... and then starting to sing.’

V is for Vagus nerve

The vagus nerve is the longest nerve in the body, running from the brain to the gut, passing directly behind our vocal cords. When we hum or sing, the vagus nerve is stimulated, activating our ‘rest and digest’ system, which helps make us feel more present and alleviate feelings of stress. Indeed, there is a long history of using humming and vocalisation across a number of traditions to improve focus and promote feelings

This month, I’m sharing the last installment of my A to Z of reasons to sing, explaining how singing supports our physical, social and mental health.

U is for Unifying

We know from countless studies that synchronous activities – such as dancing, moving, singing and laughing together – have a powerful bonding effect. When we sing together, there are many levels of synchronisation happening simultaneously: breathing, vocalising, heartbeats (yes, heartbeats!), which help create deep and lasting social connections within a group. Individuals become part of a bigger whole and, for a while at least, give themselves over to the feeling and may experience what sociologist Emile Durkheim calls



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

of inner calm, such as the yogic practice of 'bee breathing' and chanting on the 'OM' sound. Hum along to the introduction of *Lean On Me* by Bill Withers and see for yourself!

W is for WELLBEING

In my book, *Do Sing: Reclaim Your Voice. Find Your Singing Tribe*, (Do Book Co) I identified how singing supports individual wellbeing using the NHS's Five Steps To Wellbeing framework. Here is a brief summary:

- 1. Connect** – singing helps us to connect to ourselves and others in our communities
- 2. Be active** – singing is an aerobic activity that improves posture and circulation
- 3. Keep learning** – singing lights up the brain, forming new neural pathways
- 4. Give to others** – when we sing, we are sharing our voice and our energy

5. Be mindful – singing helps us feel more present and helps us access the flow state

X is for (E)XPRESSIVE

There's a Swedish proverb that states 'those who wish to sing, always find a song'. Indeed, songs help us to express the whole spectrum of human emotions, providing the soundtrack to our lives, from the cradle to the grave. We don't just sing for joy or for sing for sorrow, but for a multitude of other reasons. In his brilliant book *The World In Six Songs*, psychologist and musician Daniel Levitin summarises six categories of songs that are found in different cultures across the world. These are

- 1.** Friendship
- 2.** Comfort
- 3.** Knowledge
- 4.** Joy
- 5.** Religion
- 6.** Love

Experience the joy of singing by joining me for the next Sing With Psychologies session. It's a free thirty-minute feel-good singing session taking place on Friday December 13, when we'll be singing 'Driving Home For Christmas'. Book your free place by scanning the QR code or by using the following link: <https://bit.ly/3Nftkdu> You would be most welcome!



Y is for YOU

Because each and every voice is unique, it forms an important part of our identity: it is our auditory DNA. Therefore, if our voice is quietened or silenced – literally or metaphorically – then part of our sense of self becomes limited too. It is true that no two voices are the same and I would encourage you to embrace yours. As singer Christina Aguilera says: 'Your voice is your identity. Never be afraid to express yourself.'

Z is for ZZZ

Singing makes us feel more present and energised, but it can also help us to sleep better (and more quietly) too. A trial at the University of Exeter found that daily singing exercises can help strengthen the throat muscles, which had a positive effect on sleep and snoring. Researcher Malcolm Hilton said: 'The conclusion we came to was that the three-month programme of daily singing exercises reduced the frequency and severity of snoring, and improved overall quality of sleep. The exercises were easy to perform and two thirds of people were able to complete the three month programme doing exercises most days.'



“If you’re happy with what you have, then you’re winning!”

TV presenter Konnie Huq hasn’t bought any new clothes for 20 years, and she’d like nothing better than everyone else to follow suit

BY LISA SALMON

I am essentially a bit anti-consumerist, so I don’t buy things,’ declares Konnie Huq, author of the *Cookie!* children’s book series, and the longest-serving female *Blue Peter* presenter.

She buys food, of course, and items that might need replacing such as leaking wellies, but stresses: ‘I haven’t bought clothes in, say, the last 20 years – all those years I did on *Blue Peter*, you get clothes for the job anyway.

‘The older I get, the more comfy I feel in my own skin. So now, I’d rather be really unfashionable, but know people like me for me, rather than the clothes I wear. I’m much happier opting out.

‘Most of the stuff in our house is furniture that’s come from my mum’s house, a bit of a set they were chucking away, and so on. My kids will be in hand-me-downs often – I don’t really do shopping as such.’

And the mum-of-two’s eco-friendly stance is one she wants to share with the future generation, so she’s teamed up with around 80 other children’s book authors, illustrators, environmentalists, campaigners and experts to produce the new e-book *Children For Change*, to inspire kids through its collection of stories, poems, illustrations and advice to take action against climate change.

The free anthology, which was edited by Huq, contains everything from love letters to Planet Earth and passionate appeals on behalf of endangered species, to stories and illustrations inspiring day-to-day action on energy consumption and features on fast fashion, sustainability and rewilding.

‘It’s all to do with saving the planet



and empowering children to feel positive and hopeful about climate change and what we can do to solve it,’ explains Huq.

‘It’s so important to get kids with the right values and mindset. So it’s less about lecturing them, and it’s more empowering them and giving them the right beliefs, thoughts and morals.’

Huq, 49, who’s married to the writer and TV presenter Charlie Brooker, points out that if something strikes you when you’re young, you’ll often take that through life, and continues: ‘So if you’re going to use a bag for life, or take a bag with you when you go shopping, that will be an ingrained thing. And similarly, if you’re always going to look for a more carbon positive way of doing things, maybe walking on journeys, eating more responsibly, locally-sourced products, or less meat or whatever it is, the younger you’re conditioned or exposed to doing that, the longer that stays with you.

‘And in most cases, that’s something

you take with you for life, a subtle behavioural change, a shift that’s needed in society. And young people, they are the future.’

Ultimately, Huq says the message behind the book is to not be wasteful. ‘Even if we didn’t have climate chaos, even if there wasn’t this dying environment, it’s really good anyway to not be wasteful.

‘That’s what it’s all about – not being wasteful, greedy, too frivolous or extravagant, because the minute you think your happiness comes through external validation, then that’s when it’s like a drug you’re chasing – so you get your happiness through buying trendy clothes or having the bigger house, all these very superficial factors.’

Huq says her sons Covey, 12, and Huxley, 10, aren’t particularly into fashion yet – although she admits it ‘destroyed my soul a bit’ when one of the boys needed new trainers and her husband bought him branded ones.

‘At the moment, touch wood, they’re not too bad,’ she says, ‘but I’m just waiting for those hormones to kick in at puberty and it could be very different. Obviously I can’t enforce my stuff on other people, so whereas I don’t buy things, I can’t say that my husband is the same. So it’s something I have to tread carefully with.

‘I do like to practise what I preach, but it’s not always perfect.’

But she adds: ‘If you could just be happy with what you have rather than what you don’t have, then you’re winning, aren’t you?’

Schools can apply for a free Children for Change book at pop-up.org.uk/childrenforchange now.

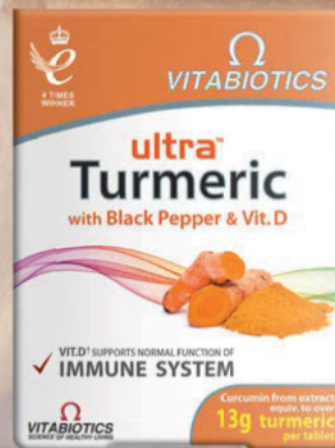
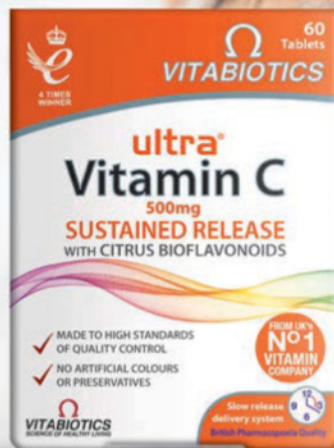
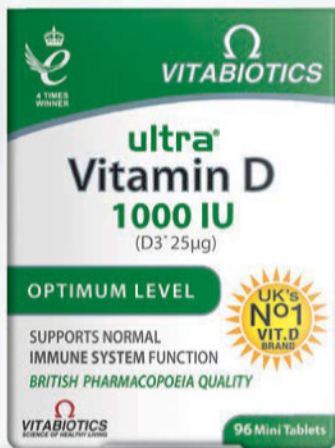
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