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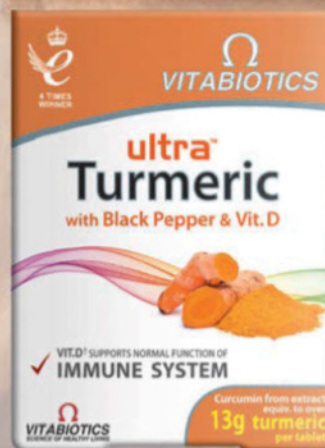
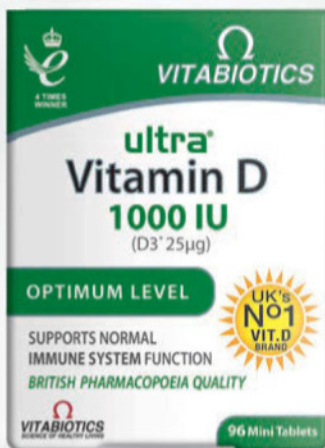
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Welcome...



Is there anything more wonderful on a winter's day than seeing the sun shine down through a bright blue sky? I've spent much of these last few weeks curled up under a blanket, cosy and warm, but this morning, I just can't wait to get outside to enjoy this crisp, clear day. That's often how I feel as we enjoy these first few weeks of the new year: after the wonderful sweetness of Christmas, with all the comforting old festive movies, the decadent mince pies and chocolate, the sentimental presents and the get-togethers, there is something beautifully palate-cleansing about the New Year, like a tall, sharp, refreshing glass of water on a hot day. I hope that this issue will feel a little like that for you: engaging your mind, stimulating your senses, refreshing your soul and inspiring you to make the most of the wonderful days we have ahead as we all get stuck in to 2025.

One of my highlights this issue was talking to the brilliant Dr Julie Smith for our cover interview. To me, she embodies everything that I hope this magazine to be: a fresh, engaging and accessible voice in an often challenging world. I love the way she faces up to real life, and was touched when she shared her personal experience of a difficult diagnosis — and the inspiring way she handled it — in our chat on page 14.

I'm also excited by our dossier from the lovely Yasmina Floyer, who examines how the boundaries we set in our family and romantic relationships can actually strengthen them (page 49). The writing is at once insightful and poetic, I love how she describes her feelings at parenthood: 'Becoming a mother myself felt like the equivalent of a pawn making it to the other side of a chessboard and being converted into a queen.'

Plus, discover how to become a more confident communicator (page 20), find out how to create change that sticks (page 46), learn how positive thinking boosts your health (page 84), identify financial red flags in relationships (page 68) and discover how the natural world can heal us (page 94). I hope it's an inspiring read and a wonderful month for you. Much love,

Sally xx

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

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DOSSIER

*With you
in mind*

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**Building happier
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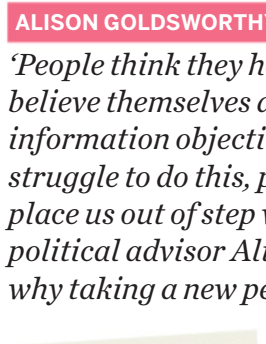
The advice starts RIGHT HERE!

CHANTAL DEMPSEY



'No matter how low your self-esteem is now, you can still rewire your brain to become the most confident person,' says Chantal Dempsey, an award-winning mindset and confidence coach. Learn how to transform your thinking, boost your self-esteem and become a more confident communicator on page 20.

ALISON GOLDSWORTHY



'People think they hold accurate views and believe themselves able to process and evaluate information objectively, but in reality we all struggle to do this, particularly if it would place us out of step with our group,' explains political advisor Alison Goldsworthy. Find out why taking a new perspective helps on page 40.

DR MONTY LYMAN



'Reduced stress and improved mental health are associated with quicker recovery from injury,' explains Dr Monty Lyman. 'I believe that optimism doesn't just make you feel better — it makes you better!' Find out more about how positive thinking can improve your health on page 84.

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



Are we all ghosting the dating apps?

Numbers of people using dating apps are declining for the first time. Ofcom figures show Tinder, Hinge and Bumble have all lost UK users, with Tinder being the worst hit, with 600,000 breaking up with the app.

Match Group — which owns the platform, along with Hinge, Plenty of Fish and OkCupid — is cutting staff and facing a lawsuit in the US, which claims its products are designed to get users addicted and generate profit, not to help them find a relationship.

The company said Gen Z was seeking 'a lower pressure, more authentic way to find connections'.



New location = new memory

Events with deep emotional resonance or that occur in a new place are more likely to be memorable.

Psychologists looked at what, where and when people remember and discovered this is shaped by emotional content, personal significance and repetition.

Location also influences the likelihood we will recall something, with new environments commanding greater attention and therefore fostering stronger memories.

The way an individual sequences events plays another critical role, as this helps with recall.

'Memory is not a one-size-fits-all phenomenon,' says study author Fernanda Morales-Calva, from Rice University in Texas.

'What's memorable for one person might be entirely forgettable for another depending on their unique background and cognitive priorities.'

Exercise excellence

Middle-aged women do more exercise than the younger generation, as the menopause prompts them to prioritise healthy ageing.

A study of 6,000 women found that those in their 40s and 50s were the most likely to be active nearly every day, while 20- and 30-somethings were more likely to say they did not exercise out of fear of being judged for their bodies or due to mental ill health.

Even the 60-79 age group did more exercise than the younger women, with 23 per cent hitting the recommended 150 minutes a week, compared to just 20 per cent of 20-39 year olds, and 27 per cent among women aged 40-59.

Lone bananas are no longer being left on the shelf thanks to a heart-tugging initiative to cut food waste. Unsold individual pieces of the fruit contribute to 131 million tonnes of waste in the retail sector each year. But University of Bath researchers found labelling them as 'sad singles' alongside a banana image with a sad facial expression helped to increase sales by more than half.





Rise in single IVF

The number of single women undergoing fertility treatment has tripled between 2012 to 2022, now accounting for six per cent of all IVF procedures, according to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.



Plastic fantastic?

A new 'environmentally friendly' plastic that dissolves in sea water could help to reduce microplastics in our oceans.

Scientists at Japan's Riken research institute say sheets of the 'strong, stable' product also began to degrade in soil within 10 days, supplying a chemical similar to fertiliser.

While many plastics are now recyclable, some can take as long as 500 years to break down, as well as turning into tiny pieces that are swallowed by wildlife.

"Run towards your fears. The more scared I am to do something, the more joy I get out of it."

TV presenter Frankie Bridge.

WATCH, LOOK, LISTEN



WATCH *Bridget Jones: Mad About The Boy.* Renee Zellweger returns as chaotic but lovable Bridget, now a widowed mum facing dating again. In cinemas 14 Feb.



LOOK *The Face Magazine: Cultural Shift* at London's National Portrait Gallery celebrates iconic images from the trailblazing fashion publication. 20 Feb to 18 May.



LISTEN *In All Honesty.* Life coach and 'Queen of Boundaries' Michelle Elman gives actionable, straight-talking advice while sharing her own ups and downs in life.



Sleeping like a baby

Sleeping when you've got a brand new baby is never simple, but nurses at one hospital have found a way to make it a little bit easier.

Royal Cornwall Hospital in Truro replaced call alarms on the post-natal ward with a digital buzzer to contact staff on special devices and enable patients to make specific requests like pain relief and refreshments.

The six-month trial found that as a result of the quieter ward, mums were better rested and needed half a day less in hospital on average.

The scheme could now be rolled out across the NHS.

Staff estimate the initiative would also save the ward £75,000 in one year.



Food for thought

Food bank users are being offered nourishment for their minds as well as their stomachs thanks to a new charity.

Bookbanks — founded by London-based writer Emily Rhodes — provides a selection of stories that people are able to browse, borrow or keep, as they wish.

Rhodes hit on the idea after volunteering at a food hub and setting up a table of books, which sparked conversation and connection with visitors.

Visit bookbanks.co.uk for more.



15%
of women feel
under pressure
from a romantic
partner to lose
weight, according
to a survey by Asda
Online Doctor.

A taste for controversy

Your political views can influence your taste in chocolate as well as who you vote for.

Researchers from Sweden's Linköping University asked 800 people to rank eight well-known chocolate brands before giving their political stance. When participants were told 'political opponents' liked the same brand, it was deemed 'significantly less appealing' in a second round of ranking. A similar trend was seen with clothes, when 600 people were asked to rate outfits on headless bodies before being shown them again on politicians. The study concluded that people see these 'neutral and apolitical consumer products' as having been 'contaminated simply by being preferred by the political out group'.



Gin and tonic has surpassed tea as Brits' favourite drink to enjoy with friends, with 44 per cent choosing the tipples over 41 per cent for a cuppa, a poll by Bacardi found

3 writerly romcoms...



1 *We All Live Here* by Jojo Moyes (£22, Michael Joseph).

A witty and touching family tale centred on bestseller relationship writer Lila, who finds out her partner is cheating.



2 *Beg, Borrow or Steal* by Sarah Adams (£9.99, Headline Eternal).

Two warring school teachers and secret novelists end up as neighbours in this rivals-to-lovers romp.



3 *Happy After All* by Maisy Yates (£6.99, Montlake).

When a romance author quits LA for small-town life running a motel, she experiences her own real-life love story with a guest.



Viewpoint

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

Celebrating nature

Your invitation to send in photos that are inspiring or make you feel happy prompted me to look back through some of the photos I've taken recently.

I'm part of an online photo-a-day community in which the intention is to share a photo on the website each day, so I tend to take quite a few photos! This one shows some thistles in various stages of dying off after their summer blooms. The reason I like it is it reminds me of the beauty of all the seasons — the vibrant green of summer, the faded purple of autumn, the dry brown of winter, before the richness of spring comes back to round out the steady cycle of life. Whatever the time of year, there's always something beautiful in nature to notice and enjoy and that makes me happy.



My 7-year-old daughter and I spotted these vibrant green leaves lying on top of a carpet of dry brown leaves after we completed a run together. We've started doing these as often as we can and this photo reminds me of how grateful I am of this opportunity to get outdoors, breathe in some fresh air, get some exercise and be close to nature. Most of all, I'm grateful for these precious moments together — even though she can run faster than I can, so she has to wait for me to catch up at the end!

Liz Gooster

Sunshine and sustenance

I regularly purchase your magazine and I have a fondness for your smaller version which is perfect stowed away in my handbag.

I've used your excellent test-like quizzes in my mentor sessions to encourage discussion. In a recent edition, you asked the key question 'What makes you flourish at work?' covering the important areas of collaboration, autonomy, challenge and balance. Some of my students struggle with group work and maintaining a healthy work(study)/life balance and your tips and advice hold a special place in opening reflectiveness and conversation. Moreover,

in your article named 'What's Stopping you?' the vital areas of procrastination and perfectionism were addressed. In an academic context, perfectionism is on the rise at universities. In some of my sessions, we look at how students can gain self-esteem and confidence whilst also setting healthier parameters with their work, focusing on the process and the journey.

I adore the content and layout of your magazines and the wonderful uplifting images and interviews.

Thank you for adding sunshine and sustenance to my world.

Lucy

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

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'Most supplements use magnesium oxide – it's the most common form, as it has a high concentration of magnesium but it's not easily released into the body,' explains Dr Miriam Ferrer PhD, head of product development at FutureYou Cambridge.

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'I started to feel much more perky'

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Nicole, 57 says, 'Within a couple of weeks. I started to feel much more perky – that's the best word to describe it.'

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Mark, 46 says, 'I first heard about taking magnesium through friends at



my running club. I used to suffer with sore muscles after long runs, since moving to Magnesium+ I've really noticed I recover quicker. I have more energy and I'm less tired than I used to be'

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You need someone to look into your eyes and say ‘It’s going to be all right’

International best-selling author and psychologist Dr Julie Smith tells Sally Saunders how she has coped with global success — and life-changing news

When she began writing her new book, *Open When*, created to help readers when they are in the thick of life’s challenges, Dr Julie Smith never guessed she would soon be taking her own advice as she faced a crisis herself.

The psychologist and star of TikTok and Instagram was riding high — her first book, *Why Has Nobody Told Me This Before?*, spent more than 100 weeks in the bestseller lists, and was placed number 49 in the Sunday Times Top 100 Bestsellers of the past 50 years.

‘The first book took on a life of its own, really,’ she says. ‘When it got into the Sunday Times bestseller list, my husband invited a few friends over for a small gathering to celebrate, and it was so nice for us all to get together. They were all saying, “Oh, let’s have a party every week it stays in the Sunday Times.” And then we had to change that to, “We’ll have one when it drops out of the list!” It was beyond anything I ever considered.’

‘The response from readers was the most satisfying, and enlightening, part, she explains.

‘I got so many messages from people telling me that they keep it with them to help them when they’re really struggling. I heard about one particular lady who didn’t have it with her one

day, felt she needed it, and got her mum to go over to her house, find the book and read bits out so that she could remember what she needed.

‘That was just a lovely story to hear, but I couldn’t help but think I didn’t write it with that in mind — I would have put different things in if I’d known that was the case.

‘And at the same time I had a lovely follower who sent me a gift. And I didn’t know this was a thing at the time, but it’s a bit of a trend where girls will send each other “open when” letters.

‘So there’s an envelope with “open when you’re feeling sad”, or when you’re feeling lonely, and you put little quotes in them. It’s a really sweet idea. And so the two sort of events collided. I thought, “Oh, that would just be great to have it all in one place.” So that’s when the idea for this book was starting to be born.’

Find your focus

It is this simplicity and humility that has made Smith such a massive success. She manages to combine psychological insights with an easy, personal and conversational style that makes her work both insightful and accessible.

‘I think there’s such a gap there, where everyday life can be more difficult than it needs to be,



because we don't necessarily have access to that sort of insight about what you can do to shift the moment,' she says. 'There are times that we all face at some point, when it's really difficult to work out which way is up and how to focus on the direction that's going to lead you through and out the other side. Sometimes you need to shift your attention, and then you can remember your values, remember your way forward, and that helps to guide you to think clearly.'

'I feel super grateful, because my husband tends to say the right things to help me through that moment. But not everyone has someone like that, and even if you do, we're not with them all the time. But that kind of help can really make a difference. It doesn't make the problem go away, but a strong foot forward feels fundamentally different to a fearful foot back.'

In the eye of the storm

Smith sums up this shift from enlightening readers about the fundamentals of psychological health to a more instant, first-aid approach, beautifully.

'In the in the days before a hurricane, it's great to give someone a hammer and nails and the tools they need to prepare for what's up ahead. But when the storm hits, someone telling you that you should have been better prepared is not what you want or need to hear at all. You need someone to put their hands on your shoulders, look in your eyes, and say: "It's going to be all right. We're in this together. I know way through, let's get to work."'

As a result of this shift, each of the chapters starts with a personal letter to the reader, from Smith, to create a connection with the reader.

'Sometimes you're not ready to look at the real-time tools,' she explains. 'Sometimes there's something that needs to happen before that. So if someone comes into the therapy room, for example, they're in distress, we don't instantly start on developing their toolkit. We look at where we're at, we develop our connection, and then, when they're ready, then we move on to the tools.'

'So I wrote those letters to allow someone to find that sense of clarity, to think "Ok, here's what I need to focus on. Here's the direction I feel like I need to go in. How do I get there?"'

Becoming her own rescuer

Smith was left asking herself that question when she faced her own challenge last summer. 'It was about six weeks before I had to hand the book in, and I found a lump,' she explains. 'I had the thought of "Everything is so busy, I'm on a deadline, shall I get this book in and then sort that out?" I mulled it over for a day or two, but then I didn't delay it any further, and I went to get seen.'



‘That led to the diagnosis, about a week before I had to hand in the book.’

Receiving a cancer diagnosis at such a young age (she is now 40, and has three young children) is every woman’s nightmare, but Smith has managed to turn even this into something to take strength from, and use it to help others.

‘I was at the point where I was reading through the manuscript and tidying it up, and I wanted to get it finished so that I could focus on everything else. And I just so happened to be reading the chapter on fear. And when I was in it myself, feeling fear, I just thought, “No, actually, this isn’t quite what I need right now.” So I pressed delete and in that moment I wrote that initial letter for myself and what I felt like I needed at the time.

‘I needed something quite hard, very straight down the line. “We are here. We’re not going to be victim to this. So we’re going to turn it on its head: rather than be the prey, we’re going to be the predator. We’re going to chase this thing down, and we’re going to do what we need to get going.”

‘It really helped me. At the time we were supposed to be waiting for things to happen, but instead I turned it into action. I started getting second opinions, making appointments.

‘It felt fundamentally different to this paralysing fear of just waiting for stuff to happen to me. I actually got to work in sort of rescuing myself.

‘I had surgery, and it was a success, and I was so lucky that didn’t have to have radiation and all the things that make you really poorly. So I’m really happy now, to be out the other side.’

Still feeling social?

Taking months out from making her massively popular video content — firstly due to writing her book and then due to her illness — has seen her come back to the medium refreshed.

‘It’s interesting: even though something is work, when it’s taken away from you, not out of choice, you feel grateful to have the chance to do what you’re good at again,’ she says. But while she is enjoying her return, and loves the way that social media allows her to reach people with her crucial messages, she is also well aware of its dangers.

‘I’ve always kind of seen social media as a bit like motorways: they’re not going anywhere, because they’re really useful and so they’re always going to be something that you can use to your advantage, but they’re not without their

risks. It’s something that you have to learn how to use carefully if it’s going to improve your life without taking away from it.

‘It’s a tool, but like many tools, it has dangers attached to it, if you’re not going to think carefully about how you’re going to use it.’

Expert or influencer?

Most people with as many online followers as Smith (4.8 million on TikTok, another two million in Instagram) are proud to be considered influencers, but that’s not a label Smith subscribes to, or something she pegs her worth to.

‘I’m really glad that it all happened to me a bit later, that none of that happened to me when I was 20,’ she says. ‘I already had a decent relationship, a decent career, a decent family, that was my absolute priority. I had my value set, and I knew what my self esteem was built around. I didn’t hang my self worth on any of it, and I think a lot of

that was helped by the fact that I was making the videos to be helpful, and I wasn’t doing it for any kind of social validation. I think that’s really dangerous for your own sense of self esteem or your estimation of yourself, to put that in the hands of people you don’t know.’

Fortunately she says she’s never really received much

abuse or trolling, and tries to let it go when she is criticised. ‘Back in the day I might get the odd comment if somebody didn’t like my outfit, or the way I looked or something, but I knew I could always get past that on my own mind, because I knew it wasn’t why I was there,’ she says.

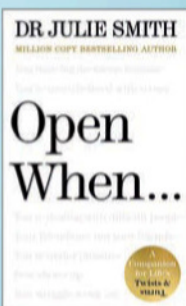
‘I wasn’t there to be a model. And just as long as one or two people found the video helpful, then it had done its job.’

And perhaps, after all her online success, writing is her most natural medium. ‘As an introvert, and a quiet person, I wouldn’t naturally reach out to other people or talk about things, I would go inwards, and read and write,’ she says.

‘I would do expressive writing, and keep diaries, and I would read lots of self help. And I think I found what I was looking for, but you have to sift through a lot of rubbish before you get to the stuff that’s really helpful! That always frustrated me. I would fill notebooks with quotes, I might have one or two from each book that I’d read, and to think of all the reading I’d had to do to get those couple of bits of learnings.

‘I like the idea that if you’ve got something valuable to say, don’t fill it out. Less is more.’

“If you’ve got something valuable to say, don’t fill it out. Less is more.”



Open When
by Julie Smith
(Penguin, £20)
is out now

Bouncing back

As the season of hearts and flowers approaches, Harriet Minter explains how someone very special has caught her eye



It's always amused me that in my twenties and thirties I somehow got a reputation as

being a cynic about romantic relationships, when in fact I deeply, truly and utterly love love. So when February rolls around and once again the only Valentine's card I'm expecting is from my dog (helpfully transcribed and posted by my mum), you might expect me to feel a bit lonely or bah-humbug about the whole affair. But in fact, this year I'm feeling more love for love than ever before.

The reason for this is because in the past few months I have become something of an expert at pouring love into myself. It turns out that the more love you give yourself, the more love you have to give to others. Plus it has the bonus effect of inoculating you against loneliness or jealousy — like most

vaccines, you're still vulnerable to them but the bounceback time is much, much quicker.

If, like me, you've spent significantly more of your life single than in a relationship, you've definitely had someone tell you that you've got to love yourself first before anyone else can love you. To this, I say, sod off. You are not single because you don't love yourself, you're single simply because you haven't met someone yet. Finding love with someone else is a lottery. Finding love with yourself, however, is far more reliable.

So how do you do it? Well, you start with the clichés. You look in the mirror and tell yourself you're valuable. You douse yourself in the 'special occasion' perfume every day because you're worth it. You take the time to make yourself a delicious dinner and you gently remind yourself

to move your body in ways that feel good, not punishing. Mostly though self-love is an act of radical acceptance.

A friend told me once of a personal development workshop she went to where everyone bounced on mini-trampolines and screamed 'I approve of my decision' as a way to honour their own choices. We spend so much time desperately running around trying to do the right thing when instead we could choose to just say, 'I approve of my decision' and do what we want instead. I approve of my decision. I approve of myself. I love myself. Even when I get it wrong. Even when I fail.

Even when I can't live up to my own expectations.

Sometimes, as I say it to myself, I visualise bouncing on a mini-trampoline, and, for whatever reason, I feel better.





Mind

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



EACH TIME
A WOMEN
STANDS UP
FOR HERSELF
SHE STANDS
UP FOR ALL
WOMEN

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK



Expert advice



Chantal Dempsey is an award-winning mindset and confidence coach, NLP expert and master hypnotherapist, known for her transformative impact in the field of confidence, communication and personal development.
chantaldempsey.com

Find your VOICE

Try these simple steps to become a more confident communicator, says Kellie Gillespie-Wright

Do you ever feel like you have the right words in your mind, but they get lost in translation when you start speaking?

Maybe you've walked out of a meeting wishing you'd been more assertive, or you've felt anxious about presenting your ideas in the first place. You're not alone — communicating with confidence is a skill many of us desire but struggle to master. The good news is that confidence isn't something we're born with; it's something we can build, step by step.

To uncover what it takes to communicate confidently, we spoke with life coach Chantal Dempsey about the nature of confidence, why so many of us wrestle with self-doubt, and how we can create lasting change in the way we think about ourselves and communicate with others.

Understanding confidence: the foundation of everything

Before we dive into techniques, it's important to understand what confidence truly means. According to Dempsey, confidence is about inner trust: 'Confidence is the belief that whatever

happens, you will be OK and you will have the resilience to deal with it,' she says. It's not about being fearless or never having doubts. It's about trusting that you can handle whatever life throws at you, even if it's outside your comfort zone.

This trust in yourself is 'the building block of everything in life', says Dempsey. She explains: 'Your level of confidence and self-esteem will dictate how you experience and interpret your own reality.' When you feel confident, you're less likely to experience chronic anxiety or fear. As Dempsey puts it: 'Anxiety is worrying about what has happened or what might happen, but if you feel confident that you will be able to handle anything with resilience, that worry doesn't come up in your mind.'

It's also helpful to distinguish confidence from self-esteem. 'Whilst confidence is the belief in yourself and your ability to handle situations, self-esteem is your inner sense of worth, it is how good you feel about yourself as a person,' she says. These two qualities often go hand-in-hand, but you can have high self-esteem in some areas and lower confidence in others, like public speaking or tackling new challenges at work.



Why we struggle with low confidence

So, why is it that so many people find themselves lacking in confidence? Dempsey believes the answer often lies in our early experiences. ‘The immense majority of struggles with low confidence and self-esteem stem from childhood,’ she explains. ‘As you start having thoughts and feelings of not being good enough as a child (often because you are told you are not good enough), these create and reinforce neural pathways of low confidence, which progressively strengthen over

time, making it a “habit of thinking” and perceiving yourself negatively.’

According to Dempsey, the brain tends to hold onto these patterns as they become familiar, even if they aren’t helpful. ‘Your mind starts to “run a programme” of low self-esteem, which will impact every thought, feeling, and decision that you make,’ she says. For many people, it only takes a single negative comment from a caregiver or teacher to start running this ‘low self-esteem programme’. Neuroscientific studies have shown that negative early-life experiences can

affect the brain’s structure, such as enlarging the amygdala, which is linked to anxiety and fear.

However, Dempsey has good news: these patterns don’t have to be permanent. ‘It can be changed completely. It can be rewired,’ she assures. Thanks to neuroplasticity — the brain’s ability to rewire itself — we can create new pathways that lead to confidence, self-assurance, and resilience. ‘No matter how low your self-esteem is now, you can still rewire your brain to become the most confident person,’ says Dempsey.



Confident communication starts with inner work

When it comes to truly confident communication, Dempsey emphasises that it must come from an authentic place. ‘Confident communication is sourced from the inside,’ she says. Often, people can look confident on the outside — delivering a polished speech or leading a meeting — while battling nerves or self-doubt internally. ‘Sustainable confident communication stems from confidence itself. It is the ability to communicate without



worrying about what others think, without fear of making a mistake,’ she explains.

This sense of calm comes from understanding that, whatever happens, you’re prepared to face it. Dempsey notes that when your mind and body are in sync, it shows in your communication: ‘The mind and body are in this together; when you are stressed and anxious, your nervous system runs the “fight or flight” response, which makes your heart beat faster, your breathing shallower, and shows signs of nervousness which can be picked up by others, even subconsciously.’ But when you’re genuinely confident, these physical responses calm down naturally. You breathe more deeply, speak more slowly, and make genuine eye contact — all signs of confidence that others pick up on, consciously or not.

Simple steps to build self-confidence

Dempsey encourages taking small, meaningful actions to build confidence over time. One of her favourite tips is to celebrate small wins each day: ‘One of the most effective steps to start building confidence is to notice and

write down three things every day that you do well, three wins, accomplishments, anything big or small that you can celebrate about yourself.’

It could be anything from completing a task at work to helping a friend or family member. Research in positive psychology supports this practice, showing that it helps shift our attention from self-criticism to self-appreciation.

‘As you notice at least three wins every single day, you very quickly start to build a habit of noticing what is good about you,’ says Dempsey.

Preparation is another major key to confidence, especially in high-stakes situations. ‘Preparation plays a key role in how confident you are going to be when the meeting/speaking/conversation is not something that you are extremely familiar with,’ she explains. By preparing thoroughly you cover your bases, easing the anxiety that comes from not knowing what to expect. Dempsey says: ‘Anxiety and lack of confidence often stem from the fear of the unknown.’

When you’re well prepared, you’re less likely to stumble, which helps you maintain your composure.



Reframing negative self-talk and quieting your inner critic

One of the biggest obstacles to confident communication is negative self-talk. Dempsey suggests a four-step process for overcoming it: Notice, acknowledge, let go, and reframe. This process is designed to bring subconscious self-criticism to the surface so it can be replaced with more empowering thoughts. 'The key to overcoming negative self-talk is to notice it,' she says.

Once you notice a negative thought, acknowledge it without judgment. Visualise it in a way that resonates with you — a cloud drifting by, a cartoon character leaving the screen — and let it go. 'Then, reframe the thought, replace it with a different, more helpful thought. "I cannot do this" can be replaced with "I can do this,"' Dempsey advises. Reframing negative self-talk is a powerful tool, and research supports its effectiveness. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), a technique that involves challenging and reframing negative thoughts, has been shown to reduce social anxiety and improve overall confidence.

Understanding body language and non-verbal communication


Did you know that more than 90% of communication happens through non-verbal cues? Dempsey shares the '7-38-55 rule': 7% of communication is words, 38% is tone, and 55% is body language. She explains: 'Whilst your conscious awareness hears the words, your subconscious mind processes the body language and other cues to understand and make sense of what is being communicated.' This is why you might instantly feel comfortable (or uncomfortable) around someone without knowing why — your subconscious has already picked up on their body language.

To project confidence, Dempsey suggests simple techniques like maintaining eye contact, using open and relaxed postures, and even trying out a 'power pose' (standing tall with your hands on your hips) before

important interactions. She recommends modelling the body language of people you view as confident: 'Observe how they stand, their tone of voice, mannerisms etc, and replicate those elements.'

Building long-term confidence

Improving confidence isn't something you do once; it's a long-term practice. Dempsey suggests setting small goals, such as speaking up in a meeting or reading a book on communication skills, each week. 'Do one thing every day that pushes you out of your comfort zone, at least a little,' she advises. Over time, these incremental actions build a



"Visualise yourself as a confident person and communicator every day."

solid foundation of self-assurance. She also recommends a daily visualisation practice, which is especially powerful first thing in the morning or right before bed (these moments are called 'power states', known to be powerful times to rewire the brain). 'Visualise yourself as a confident person and communicator every day,' she says. Visualisation strengthens positive neural connections, so your mind builds the habit of seeing yourself as a capable and confident person.

Balancing assertiveness with kindness

Many people worry about coming across as harsh or unkind when trying



to be assertive. Dempsey reassures us that kindness and assertiveness aren't mutually exclusive. 'If you are working on your confidence and asking yourself the question, the likelihood is that you will be your kind and approachable self, no matter how assertive and firm you become, I promise you!'

If it's still something you want to work on, to balance assertiveness with approachability, she recommends using 'I' statements instead of 'you' statements. For example, instead of saying 'You never meet deadlines,' try 'I feel concerned when deadlines aren't met.' This way, you're expressing your needs without sounding accusatory.

Take action: build your confidence, step by step

Confident communication is within reach for all of us. By understanding where confidence comes from, recognising our patterns, and adopting

simple, actionable habits, we can gradually become more assured in how we express ourselves. Remember, confidence isn't about perfection — it's about trusting yourself and letting that trust guide your actions and words.

▶▶ NEXT STEPS

Listen *The Mel Robbins Podcast — Communicate with Confidence: The Blueprint for Mastering Every Conversation*

Watch *How to Sound Assertive: Tips for Confident Communication* by Jefferson Fisher (YouTube)

Read *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie

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Coaching in action

“For the first time in years, I turned my head to the light.”

Award-winning coach Kim Morgan is shocked by her client's progress



Session Three

Sylvie had come for coaching because she thought she might be in a controlling relationship. Her friends had told her that there was absolutely no doubt about it! Sylvie, though, was in a state of denial and confusion; at the same time defending her partner, feeling disloyal for sharing her concerns about him and worried she had opened a can of worms.

I hadn't seen Sylvie for a couple of months. She had cancelled the next two sessions we had booked, explaining that she was taking a break but would be back. I had worried I might not see her again, wondering if I had challenged her too much during our last session. To my surprise and relief, Sylvie turned up, presenting me with a bunch of sunflowers and emanating a quiet confidence I hadn't seen in her before.

'What has been happening?' I asked.

'I can't really explain it, but I have changed. I have finally seen with my own eyes what others have been seeing. I have heard with my own ears what others have been hearing. Most importantly, I have started listening to myself, instead of letting another person's voice drown out my voice.'

'What can you see and hear for yourself now?' I asked.

'That I have been controlled and manipulated — I would go so far as to say "brainwashed and emotionally abused" to become the person Jason wanted me to be. I was a person who didn't know their own mind or their own worth. I lost all sense of myself.'

'I now know that Jason's constant criticism, twisting the truth, gaslighting me, belittling and blaming me broke down my self-esteem.'

Sylvie took a deep breath. 'I left Jason. I'm living with my mum and dad for the time being.'

I was speechless. This was an incredible turn of events. I asked, 'How did this all happen, Sylvie?'

Sylvie looked directly at me. 'I want to thank you for being the catalyst for me finding my voice. When I came to see you, the fact that you took my situation seriously was a big wake-up call — you even gave me details of helplines and support services. That was a turning point for me. I could no longer pretend that my relationship was ok.

The coaching exercises you gave me got me thinking about who I am and what I deserve in life. Thank you — that's why I bought you sunflowers. For the first time in years, I turned my head to the light.'

I thanked Sylvie and nudged her for more. 'I'm guessing it didn't stop there with our session, did it?'

Sylvie smiled at me. 'No, it didn't end there.'

I started reading and watching everything I could on coercive control in those weeks. Everything I read made sense.

'Then I booked on a retreat for recovery from narcissistic abuse. It was brilliant. I learned so much there. I was with other women in similar situations to me. We all changed together. I now feel like the person I should have become years ago. I am having regular coaching and mentoring from the amazing woman who ran the retreat, to keep me on track.'

Sylvie thanked me again for my part in her 'awakening'. She told me

that she was working with her new coach on strengthening boundaries, assertive communication, challenging her negative self-talk, building her support team and using positive affirmations.

Now, I was the one trying to keep a balanced reaction. The adult, experienced coach in me was truly delighted to see the transformation in Sylvie and to know that our coaching session had contributed to her finding a programme which had accelerated her growth and recovery.

A more vulnerable part of me — a part that sometimes craves recognition as the 'rescuer' or 'hero' — felt somewhat trumped by the 'amazing woman who ran the retreat'. I hope I didn't let any of this show as Sylvie and I said our goodbyes and I wished her everything she wished for herself.

Then I made a note to book a supervision session asap to work on my rescuer/hero tendencies — again!

*"I now
feel like
the person
I should
have
become
years ago"*

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

Wisdom from your past and future selves

This is a valuable exercise to do when you find yourself at a crossroads, or with a decision to make, or simply wondering 'is this it, then?' about life. It is also helpful if you have lost touch with your own values, needs and wants.

First, picture a younger you, with all her hopes, dreams, talents and potential. Remember what she wanted to be when she grew up and what mattered to her.

Now, thinking about your current situation, imagine your younger self looking at where you are now in your life. What do you think she feels and thinks about you today? What is she happy

about and what would she like to be different? What messages, reminders or requests might she give you?

Next, picture an older you. Someone who has lived a good long life and is wise and experienced. What do you think she feels and thinks about you today? What is she happy about and what would she like to be different? What messages, reminders or requests might she give you?

What new insights do you now have about your current situation? What changes or decisions could you consider making? Remember to thank both your past and future selves for their contributions.

Lines that define

It is important to know what matters to us, what issues we feel strongly about and what is acceptable and unacceptable to us. If we don't know the answers to these things, we may find ourselves with porous boundaries, accepting behaviours and attitudes which could be detrimental to us. Knowing what matters to us doesn't make us demanding or opinionated. It gives us boundaries and guidelines for living and dealing with other people.

Knowing our boundaries is a first step to exercising them. Set some time aside to complete the following sentences. You may want to come back to your responses over a few days, or keep this as a work in progress as you get more in touch with what really matters to you in life:

- I have strong opinions about...
- Causes I would like to support, or champion are...
- Ways I like to spend my free time...
- Ways I don't like to spend my free time...
- The qualities I admire in my friends are...
- The non-negotiables in my relationships are...
- The kind of environment I thrive in is...
- Behaviours I am unwilling to tolerate are...
- The most important values in my life are...

WORDS OF WISDOM

"Discover yourself, otherwise you have to depend on other people's opinions who don't know themselves"

Rajneesh



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'Attachment theory
is everywhere, but is
everything you've heard
about it right?'

Fearne Cotton

OUT NOW



Simple, daily habits to keep your stress levels in check

From humming to imagining yourself in the future, wellbeing experts share their favourite ways to keep calm when the world feels crazy

BY ELLA WALKER

Everybody feels stressed sometimes, it's a completely normal — some would even say vital — part of being human.

The adrenaline that comes with it is what helps power you through a job interview; sharpens your focus when you're dealing with a tricky task; and helps you spot and navigate potentially dangerous situations quickly. Take away 'flight or fight or freeze' mode — your body's natural response to stressful events — and things can unravel when you least need them to.

That said, too much stress can be a danger in itself. If you don't know how to manage it, you can end up feeling anxious and upset, sick and dizzy, and lacking in confidence. Long-term unchecked stress can leave you burnt out, overwhelmed and physically and mentally exhausted.

As with so many things, balance is key. And the good news is there's a lot we can all do to keep an eye on our stress levels, and steps we can take to make sure they don't get out of control. Not sure where to start? We asked a gaggle of experts for their ultimate stress-busting tactics that you can implement today...

STAY HYDRATED

Feeling physically healthy is a good way to feel mentally healthy. 'If it's not easy for me, I'm not going to do it — it needs to be obvious and unavoidable,' says Dr Alexandria Phillips, clinical psychologist at Soke Wimbledon. 'Drinking lots of water helps me ward off stress headaches. I put my glass on top of my phone on my bed stand, so that when I wake up in the morning, I have to pick

up the glass of water to be able to pick up my phone. First glass of water achieved before I'm even out of bed!'

BREATHE IN

Practitioner psychologist Dr Ravi Gill uses breathwork to manage her stress: 'While juggling work and two young children, taking time out for me is a rare thing. So whenever I can I try to take deep breaths to help regulate my emotions and contribute to my wellness — waiting at the traffic lights, waiting for the kettle to boil or the toaster. Deep breathing stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for promoting calmness and reducing the "fight-or-flight" response.'

LISTEN TO A BEAT

It's amazing what throwing some shapes can do to boost your mood. Charli Harrison, a counsellor at Nuffield Health, says: 'I pop my earphones in and put on some of my favourite music and either go for a walk or a run, or have a sing and dance about my house (when no one else is home — obviously!). Music always helps me when I'm feeling stressed or overwhelmed.'

USE AFFIRMATIONS

Dr Phillips swears by positive thinking via affirmations — in ways you've probably not thought of before: 'I've started to change my passwords to my affirmations. Imagine logging into your work computer and writing "TakeABreath!". It'll remind you every morning



that you have the power to slow down and take a breath, and that you deserve to look after yourself.'

Dr Gill uses the 'I AM' app: 'It sends me a new affirmation throughout the day, every 90 minutes or so. In the busyness of my day, I can still take a small minute out to reflect or certainly stop and reframe my thoughts. I commonly use affirmations while I complete my morning routine; brushing teeth, skincare etc. like: "I am strong, I am brave, I am accomplished, I am enough."

FIND THE FUN

'I was very taken by research in Scandinavia that looked at those who were so stressed they were becoming burnt out,' says Dr Richard Graham, consultant psychiatrist at Soke Wimbledon. 'They thought that people who experience burnout feel guilt and anxiety when they try to take care of themselves. So, my prescription is to make sure that you do something enjoyable, something rejuvenating. For me that might be trawling for a new recipe and really enjoying the discovery of whether it is as good as the pics!'

FIND YOUR STRENGTH

Regular exercising is a no-brainer for reducing stress – the NHS recommends 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity a week for adults, or 75 minutes vigorous intensity. Nutritionist, personal trainer and wellness coach Rachael Sacerdoti, focuses on strength training: 'This is the most effective for both my mind and body. I aim for five strength sessions a week, emphasising progressive overload (gradually increasing intensity) to continually challenge myself.'



DISCOVER WHAT SUITS YOU

'Tackling stress can be quite stressful in itself. There is no one fit for all and the key is to find what naturally works for you,' says Dr Aarthi Sinha, GP and wellbeing specialist at churchcrescent.co.uk. 'I find exercising helpful, but going to the gym a stressful experience, so I will often do a small workout at home and go for a walk.'


LOOK AHEAD

Lauran Grayston, a therapist at Nuffield Health, jumps forward in time in her head when she's feeling overwhelmed. She says: 'If there are particular things causing stress, I love the question: "Will this matter in five years, one year, a month's time?" It helps to put things into perspective of importance and how long I should spend ruminating or worrying about it.'

HIT THE HAY

Yep, you've got to get your sleep in. Adults typically need seven to nine hours of sleep a night, and if you're missing out on enough zzzzs, stress can swiftly build up. 'My sleep alarm goes off at 10pm each night to remind me it's time to prioritise rest,' says Sacerdoti. 'Adequate sleep is my non-negotiable, especially when balancing fitness goals with running a business and caring for my family.'





*Find out
more about how
your mind affects
your health on
page 84*

EMBRACE HOT STUFF

It can be hard to drift off if your stress tends to crash over you before bed. 'I have two evening rituals I swear by,' says Rebecca Dadoun, founder of Pilates Prescription. 'One is a bath and the other is a hot calming bedtime tea. I always think back to when my kids were babies and we would set up the perfect bedtime routine of a bottle, bath and bed; so why can't we have the same?'

HAVE A HUM

You can do this one wherever you might be — even on the bus. Phoebe Liebling, nutritional therapist and founder of Liebling Health, recommends a daily bout of humming. She says: 'Take an in-breath through your nose, hold it, then hum with your mouth closed, with as much intention as you can, for five to six minutes. The vibration through the head and neck stimulates the vagus nerve, which triggers the calming parasympathetic nervous system to take charge.'

MATCH AND MIRROR

For many of us, daily social situations can trigger stress. Jessen James, a former psychiatric nurse and human behaviour expert at jessenjames.com, has a nifty trick to 'diffuse

stress and tension and make interactions feel smoother'. He says: 'Matching and mirroring involves subtly aligning your body language with the person you're speaking to. By matching someone's posture, gestures, or tone, you create a sense of connection. This not only makes the conversation feel less stressful but also increases the likelihood of being heard and understood, and when you feel heard and understood, you feel more confident. The more confident you feel, stress and anxiety levels are dramatically reduced.'

PRACTISE GRATITUDE

Dadoun uses 'gratitude check-ins' as a way of building up her psychological immune system. 'Just noting three things in your head, out loud with your kids or written down, can be so uplifting and humbling,' she says. 'For instance, my body works (stretch your arms and legs), I can breathe freely (take a nice big breath with this one) and my family, who I love (hug them), reminds me that whatever stress I am feeling, I am and will be OK!'

How does stress weaken the immune system?

'Whilst stress alone cannot make us catch a cold or flu virus, it weakens the immune system's ability to respond to invaders, leaving us more vulnerable to infection,' explains life coach Marianna Kilburn from avogel.co.uk. 'Recovery is also liable to be slower since the immune system is suppressed in favour of dealing with stress.'

The body's stress-response system should be self-limiting. Once the perceived threat has passed, adrenaline and cortisol levels drop, the heart rate and blood pressure return to baseline levels, and other systems resume their regular activities.

'However, when stressors and "feeling under attack" remain constant, the fight-or-flight reaction stays turned on, over-exposing the body to cortisol and other stress hormones,' explains Kilburn. 'The cells of the immune system (and other body systems) are unable to respond normally and produce levels of inflammation which increase the risk of further health issues.'

'Stress can also have an indirect effect on the immune system as we tend to resort to unhealthy coping strategies, such as smoking or drinking too much caffeine and alcohol, eating too much sugar and processed foods, not sleeping properly and giving up on exercise and healthy social activities.'

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Helping you Reset and Refocus

Giving yourself time to reflect is the most wonderful gift, writes Jackee Holder, as she provides a transformative tool to guide your thinking

“The promise of spring always boosts my energy. As the days stay lighter a little longer, I’m drawn to early morning walks and to clearing the clutter that’s built up in my home and mind during the winter months. Spring feels like a natural time to take stock, to shed what no longer serves us, and to focus on where we’re heading.

This seasonal shift makes it the perfect time to introduce a powerful journaling tool: The Wheel of Life. Originating from the Buddhist Bhavacakra, which represents the cycles of life, death, and rebirth, the Wheel of Life as we know it today was adapted by Paul J Meyer as a self-assessment tool. It offers a visual snapshot of your life, revealing where you’re thriving, where you’re stuck, and what areas need your attention. The Wheel of Life isn’t just something I recommend to clients — it’s a cornerstone of my own journaling practice. When life feels overwhelming or I’m struggling to prioritise, this tool helps me regain clarity and control.

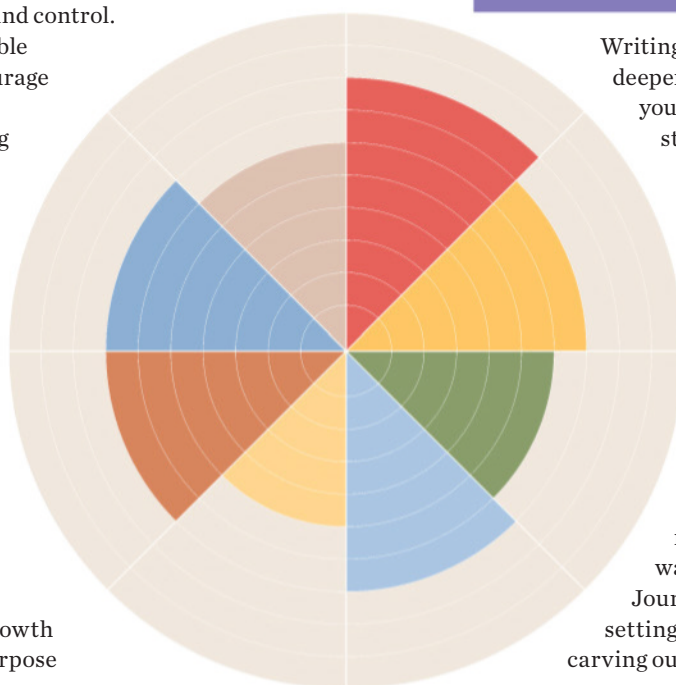
You’ll find plenty of printable templates online, but I encourage you to draw your own wheel. There’s something grounding about putting pen to paper, connecting you emotionally to the process. Start by drawing a large circle and dividing it into eight sections, like slices of pizza. Here are some suggested themes you might work with:

- Work and career
- Family and friends
- Health and wellbeing
- Money and finances
- Home and environment
- Leisure and fun
- Spirituality or personal growth
- Personal growth or life purpose

“The power of the wheel lies in the questions you ask”

Next, rate your current satisfaction in each area on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being deeply unsatisfied and 10 representing complete fulfillment. Mark your scores and connect the dots to create a shape. Now observe: Is it balanced or lopsided? Which areas feel neglected? Which areas are thriving? Which areas are middle of the road? Are there surprises? The real power of the wheel lies in the questions you ask as you reflect on it. Journaling your reflections can transform these insights into meaningful action. Use prompts like:

- *What does the shape of my wheel reveal about my life right now?*
- *What areas feel most rewarding? Where do I feel stuck or drained?*
- *What would it feel like to pause in one area and focus on another?*
- *If this area were thriving, how would it impact my daily life?*



Writing down your observations will deepen your understanding and help you identify clear, actionable steps to move forward.

Let me share two stories of how this tool has helped others: Catherine, a GP in the north of the country, came to me emotionally exhausted. Her workload had escalated, and she was juggling family caregiving responsibilities.

Completing her wheel gave her clarity in a crowded work and home life, revealing just how much she was trying to manage.

Journaling helped her see that setting boundaries at work and carving out even brief moments for

herself were priorities for her moving forward. While this didn't solve everything overnight, it gave her a starting point to regain control and shift from overwhelm to action.

Sam, a writer and entrepreneur, was stuck in a creative rut, unable to progress on a long-overdue book project. By focusing his wheel specifically on his writing and creativity, Sam identified the area where he felt most blocked. Journaling helped him uncover a fear of failure that was holding him back. Inspired by these insights, he committed to writing just 20 minutes a day. That small but significant step turned his frustration into momentum.

One way to amplify the benefits of your Wheel of Life is to combine it with habit stacking, a technique that attaches a new habit to an existing one to make it easier to sustain.

For example, you could pair your wheel audit with your morning coffee, turning it into a short daily reflection ritual. Or, if you journal in the evenings, end your session by updating or reflecting on your wheel. You could even use your weekly planning time to incorporate a quick review of your priorities, ensuring they align with your wheel insights. Habit stacking ensures that your wheel practice becomes a natural part of your routine, helping you maintain momentum and consistency over time.

To make your Wheel of Life audit more engaging, you could try these creative approaches:

Use Visuals. Add colours or symbols to represent your feelings about each area – green for growth, red for stress, or a star for areas that energise you.

Capture the Journey. Date each wheel and take photos to track how your priorities shift over time.

Create a Ritual. Pair your wheel audit with a calming activity, like lighting a candle or playing soothing music, to make the process feel like a reflective retreat.

With these creative touches, you'll not only deepen your engagement with the practice but also make it something you look forward to. Psychologist Donald Schön called this process 'reflective practice' – the ability to think critically about our experiences to improve decision-making. Research shows that self-reflection enhances emotional intelligence, builds resilience, and boosts goal achievement. Journaling, in particular, reduces stress and increases clarity, making it the perfect companion to the Wheel of Life.

After completing your wheel, choose between one and three areas to focus on. Progress doesn't require perfection. Sometimes, moving from a four to a six in one area is enough to bring meaningful change. Use questions like:



“Let this simple tool guide you into a new season of clarity”

- *What do I want more of in this area? What do I want less of?*
- *What's working, and what isn't?*
- *What's one small step I can take to improve my satisfaction?*

In a world increasingly dominated by artificial intelligence and constant external inputs, journaling offers a way to pause, reflect, and live intentionally. The Wheel of Life invites you to reconnect with yourself, take stock of where you are, and consciously design the next chapter of your journey. Spring is the perfect season to begin. So why not schedule your Wheel of Life audit today? Set aside 15 minutes, grab your journal, and let this simple yet transformative tool guide you into a new season of clarity and purpose.

jackeeholder.com; @jackeeholderinspires



Expert advice



*Alison Goldsworthy
is a political advisor
and author of Poles
Apart (Penguin
Books, 2022)*



*Aaron Bethune is an
adventurer and
author of Reality
and The Positive
Power of
Perspective (Simon
and Schuster, 2020)*

TIME FOR A NEW *perspective?*

Sometimes you need to take a step backwards to move forwards, discovers Emma Cooling

Why is the most sensible course of action often the most difficult? When we're totally consumed by a problem, frequently the healthiest thing to do is to step away, give ourselves space, and then return to the situation with a fresh perspective.

Yet disentangling ourselves from an emotive issue can feel impossible: we feel too far down the hole to climb out, so instead we ruminate.

But, according to experts, moving to a different physical or emotional landscape is key in helping us harness the power of perspective. This step back can be as simple as finding a change of scenery, or chatting an issue over with friends who are a step removed from the matter. We return to the situation with a calmer outlook and with more rational insight.

Taking a break from an issue or an individual, or muting an online chat that is verging on toxic, all allow us the headspace we need to take stock. In the peace of a willing disconnect, we might choose to listen to the views of those outside the situation whose opinions we value, or we might instead distract ourselves with something entirely different. Either way, we can gain helpful insight, increase our empathy and, consequently, feel less anxiety because we have gained a sense of perspective and the calm that accompanies it.

Learning when to step away

The first step, recognising that it would be healthy to remove ourselves from an issue,

is often the hardest. There are likely to be times in all of our lives when we lose perspective, when our view of a situation is based on fear, misunderstanding and the (well-meant but often unhelpful) influence of others. We can find ourselves in echo chambers where we hear only the voices and viewpoints that concur with our own, that serve to fuel our rage further — and that's how we fall victim to polarisation.

Political advisor Alison Goldsworthy, author of *Poles Apart*, recognises how, whether it's a dispute with a colleague or a family fall-out over politics, a loss of perspective can leave us so entrenched in our viewpoint that we are not open to hearing out alternatives.

'Polarisation distorts our perceptions of the world and influences how we interpret information,' she says. 'People think they hold accurate views, but often they do not. They believe themselves able to process and evaluate information objectively, but in reality, we all struggle to do this, particularly if an objective assessment would place us out of step with our group. And once polarisation sets in, it triggers changes in how we assess information and expertise. We downplay the role of experts and choose team members based on their political identity rather than their skill, even in the most basic of tasks.'

Goldsworthy recognises that the loss of perspective can lead to polarisation and that, as human nature leads us to seek out security and strength, we can be drawn to ally ourselves with the 'group' without seeing the

nuance of a situation or hearing another person's truth. If a friend or colleague expresses a view that seems 'out there' or behaves in a way that goes against the norm, we might find ourselves more inclined to be critical of them than to seek understanding. It is easier to side with the majority than to try and make sense of the perspective of the minority. It can be difficult to ask the questions that might open up our perspective of the issue: Why have they reacted in this way? What could be going on in the background? Could the established stance on this issue be based on misinformation?

How can we gain a wider perspective?

According to adventurer Aaron Bethune, author of *Reality and The Positive Power of Perspective*, true understanding often requires stepping back from our thoughts.

He says: 'We all experience our personal reality shaped by our beliefs, emotions, and assumptions, and whether we realise it or not, we constantly project this reality onto our interactions with others. For example, if a friend doesn't wave back at us, our minds might jump to conclusions — maybe they're upset with us. In truth, they may have simply been distracted. Yet, because we all carry our own perspectives, we interpret situations in ways that reflect our inner world more than reality. This phenomenon happens all the time and is something we all do.'

Bethune explains that we can get so caught up in our own version of events that it becomes impossible to empathise — we cannot recognise that another person can hold another truth, let alone accept and understand their reality.

'In disagreements, this dynamic often locks us into our own narrative, rarely accounting for the other person's perspective,' he says. 'When emotions are high, we typically react not to the other person directly, but to our thoughts and

“There are endless ways to see any situation: finding the most constructive perspective is key to transforming our personal reality.”





interpretations. However, they are also caught in their own perspective. This means that true understanding often requires stepping back from our thoughts. The moment we realise we are not our thoughts, we create the mental space to entertain a new perspective.'

Using perspective-taking to move forward from conflict

Bethune offers the following advice on how to practise the art of perspective-taking.

- 'The first step is acknowledging the other person's feelings, even if they don't align with ours.' He admits that this is not easy, especially when we are feeling wound up or hurt, but says it is an essential first step. 'By striving to see the situation through another's eyes, we open ourselves to empathy, which is essential for genuine understanding. But in the heat of the moment, perspective-taking can be difficult.'
- We've all been told to 'sleep on it' or that 'things will seem better in the morning', and for the most part we know these nuggets of advice to be true. Stepping away, while difficult, is key, says Bethune. 'Often, we need physical or temporal space — a literal break or a pause until a later time,' he says. 'Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh would say, "Let's talk about this on Friday night." With time and distance, we can better see things from a fresh angle. Without this mental shift, we struggle to understand the other person and, sometimes, ourselves.'
- And it is not just about paying lip-service to another person's views — it is about trying to understand their point of view, however different it may be from our own. 'Accepting another person's feelings as valid, even when we disagree, is crucial,' says Bethune. 'For example, if someone laughs during a serious conversation or cries over something that seems trivial, we must recognise that these feelings are real for them. Understanding their perspective doesn't mean agreeing with it, but it does acknowledge its validity. This shift cultivates empathy and allows us to calm our own reactions, transforming our view into one that fosters mutual understanding.'

And according to Bethune, perspective-taking is not just useful for moving forward from disagreement with others, it can also help us to get the most from any bad situation. 'The most successful people I know actively seek new perspectives,' he says. 'When they encounter failure, they accept it and then look for the viewpoint that reveals the lessons and strengths it offers. There are endless ways to see any situation; finding the most constructive perspective is key to transforming our personal reality.'



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ONE STEP AT A TIME

Have your best intentions slipped already? Elaine Iljon Foreman and Clair Pollard share some ways to create change that sticks

How many of us have set out on a 'health kick' or 'organisation drive' where we try to completely change all of our behaviours at once? And is this approach ever successful? Very rarely. The reason that so many New Year's resolutions go awry is probably that people try to change too much. It takes effort and time to change even a small habit — try changing too many things at once and the chances are you won't succeed with *any* of them.

A single step at a time can also sometimes mean breaking a habit down into smaller parts and changing each of them, one by one. However you decide to do it, think it through and write a clear plan for yourself of when you will do what. It may be helpful to start small. For example, if you want to drink more water, start with one glass a day, at the same time each day. Keep this up for several days then add in one more, and so on. Don't try drinking eight glasses a day from the start.

Be realistic

Don't try to completely reinvent yourself — the chances are you are mostly fine as you are — you just need to tweak the things you are not happy with. If you aim for 'good enough' in your habits you have every chance of succeeding. Aim for 'perfect', and you are setting yourself up for failure. It may be realistic to give up cigarettes. It may not be realistic to also never eat another chocolate bar, drink three litres of water every day, go to the gym five times a week and never shout at anyone.

Be clear about what you are changing

For some habits this will be obvious — you want to stop smoking or biting your nails or throwing your clothes on the floor. For others it may be less so — some interpersonal habits, for example, such as nagging, arguing or criticising, might take more clarifying. Be very specific about exactly what you want to be different and what you want to be doing or saying instead.

Set a date

One of the ways you can motivate yourself and get your energy levels up to tackle this habit change is to build in some anticipation. Set a date for when you will make your change and start anticipating it. Let other people know what you are planning — it can make it harder to back down then. Generate some excitement in yourself about this date. This is the day that you are going to start a process that will make you feel so much better in the long run, even if it's hard work to begin with.

Find ways to remind yourself why you are doing this. Write down all the reasons why you are trying to change your habit and keep the list somewhere you can look at it regularly. Stick it up on the back of a door, the bathroom mirror, the fridge or your computer monitor — somewhere you will be reminded of it several times a day.

Watch out for your 'danger times'

Avoid them if you can and if you can't, switch off your 'auto-pilot' — try to stay alert in order to catch yourself before

your habit kicks in. Identify the urge to engage in the habit before you start. When you feel the urge, move on to something else.

Sometimes we can't predict when the trigger situations might happen. If your habit tends to occur when you are upset, you can't always see this coming. However, you can train yourself to be more aware that when you are upset you might engage in your habit and to be on guard against slipping into it at those times.

Reward yourself

Include in your plan small ways in which you will reward yourself after you achieve each milestone. This might be with something nice to eat, (not chocolate, if your goal is losing weight!) a small gift to yourself (unless your goal is spending less!), time spent watching a film or reading a book, a hot bath — anything that will feel like a treat and that you'll look forward to. It doesn't have to be anything spectacular but it should be an indulgence — not something you do every day, or would be doing anyway. Be proud of yourself, but watch out for self-criticism. Don't tell yourself your milestone is not an achievement because you should be doing the right thing anyway.

Watch out for negative thoughts

Watch out for your mind ambushing you with these as you go along. These can be as automatic as the habit itself. Telling yourself, 'I'll never do this. It's too hard. I've always failed before,' won't help you to reach your goal. Raise your awareness of these thoughts.

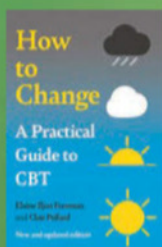
When you notice them starting to creep into your mind, let them go. Try instead to visualise yourself changing your habit. What will you look like when you have done it? Visualise the attractive, well-shaped nails you might have, or the way in which your partner will smile when noticing your perfume or aftershave, instead of the smell of smoke.

Invite support

Ask people around you (those whom you trust to be supportive) to help boost your efforts. Agree in advance with them what they will (and will not) do. Perhaps they can point something out to you when you don't notice you are doing it. Maybe they can help with rewards after an achievement. Watch out for problems here, though. There is no point in asking anyone to point out when you are picking at your skin if you are going to shout at them for doing so.

Juggle things around

Replace bad habits with better ones. Find something else to do with your hands instead of picking, scratching or pulling. Eat or drink something different. It can be much easier to replace a particular behaviour with another rather than simply doing nothing.



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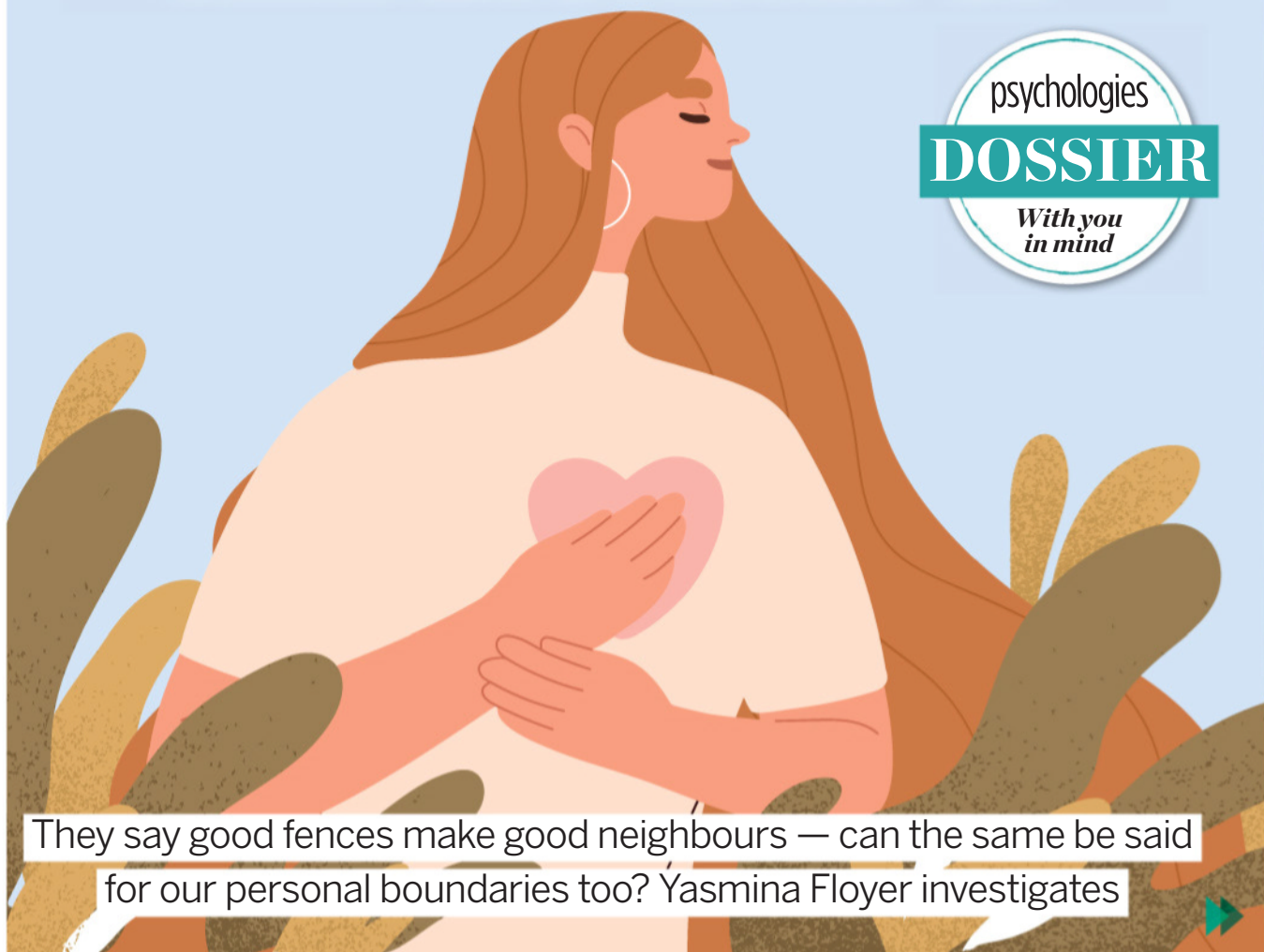


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They say good fences make good neighbours — can the same be said for our personal boundaries too? Yasmina Floyer investigates

Mythologist Joseph Campbell described a boundary as a golden circle. He explained that everything within that circle is holy and sacred. What he meant was that the act of drawing a boundary becomes a way to protect what matters to us most, whether that be our time, our pursuits, or our relationships with others. What is sacred to each of us is entirely individual, so, as the priorities in our lives shift, so too must our boundaries.

Usually when we speak about having to work on our boundaries, what we are really saying is that we need to work on how to say 'no' to things. We mean that we recognise that we may have a tendency to people please at times and would rather inconvenience ourselves than upset others or let them down. We are saying that we can feel overwhelmed by the emotional and cognitive load resulting from taking on too many commitments. Often we think we need to be firmer, that our boundaries — and by extension, our resolve — must be solid and unwavering. But how can we go about identifying what boundaries we need in the first place? And how can we adopt a more fluid idea of what boundaries are within the differing contexts of our lives to encompass something more fluid; a boundary not as a rigid wall but as an ever-changing border with space in which to let things in? We speak to two experts to find out how we can change our thinking about boundaries — and how we can use this to make our relationships and our lives happier and healthier.



*Expert
advice*



Eimear O'Mahony is a senior counsellor/psychotherapist at First Psychology Scotland, specialising in topics including boundary setting, stress and burnout.



Suzy Reading is a chartered psychologist and coach. She specialises in healthy habits. Her latest book, Self-Care For Winter, helps readers to develop a toolkit for dealing with what many consider to be the most challenging of seasons.



Understanding our family ties

It is a fact universally acknowledged that family members will manage to find a way to overstep the mark. Siblings, for example, can always be relied upon to flagrantly breach boundaries. I say this as a sibling myself, who, while growing up, was guilty of 'borrowing' my brother's sweatshirt without asking and taking another brother's CD player to university without telling him. I also remember arriving home from school on more than one occasion to find my plate of food eaten by said brother. Whether it be turning up unannounced, making negative comments about our physical appearance at the meal table, or providing unsolicited parenting advice, when it comes to family, Joseph Campbell's notion of a boundary being a sacred golden circle can feel like a mere whisper of an idea.

Psychotherapist Eimear O'Mahony speaks to me of the complexity of family dynamics, explaining that they often benefit from us not always having particularly concrete boundaries and limits, and that things are not as black and white as we may think. 'The boundaries we have with family are complex and nuanced because there are certain situations where family members may feel that they need to overstep a boundary, for example, parents with their children. There are often blurred boundaries between parents and children, and children are often aware of their parents' emotional state, which can influence the blurring and guilt.' As a parent myself, I can well appreciate the fine balance between respecting the privacy of my teen, who is verging on adulthood, whilst also wanting to





protect her and intervene should I need to because I have a duty of care for her. O'Mahony suggests that if we are worried about a situation we could try expressing our concerns without invading privacy in the first instance, by way of sense checking to see if we are overreacting or right to be concerned.

'Respecting privacy is essential to developing trust, however if you are concerned about your child/teen, clearly communicate this to them.

'Tell them why you are concerned. Ask them if they need help, support or guidance to navigate whatever it is that they are going through.

'Also, practice active listening and empathy, which means trying to understand the feelings, thoughts and perspectives of your child even if you have a different viewpoint.'

Changing roles create a challenge

But what is it exactly about the unique dynamic of families that make boundaries so challenging? Part of the answer lies in our shifting identities.

We contain multitudes, and this is never more apparent than in the identity shifts we make growing up in our immediate families. From babies, whose existence is entirely dependent on our parents and caregivers, to fully grown adults who may one day find the caregiving roles reversed, a lifetime becomes a collection of the varying identities we take on. O'Mahony reminds me of the varying intersections of identity that span beyond age and life stage. 'The boundaries and limits you hold will differ from person to person and in different situations. There are also often expectations based on societal, cultural and familial norms.'

When I think about my own childhood having been raised in London within a Mauritian family, the tension between the differing cultural and societal expectations added a further layer of complexity to the way I negotiated boundaries when it came to my parents, in particular. Sleepovers, for example, while much longed for and ubiquitous among my friends during primary school, were completely

out of the question for me since my parents who grew up in a context where sleepovers were unheard of.

Like a reverse Russian doll, who starts small and adds on layer after layer, we usually gain identities and roles as we get older, not lose them.

There is no word for who you are in relation to your parents when you become an adult, therefore you are still considered their child. I am a grown woman yet I am still a daughter.

Becoming a mother myself felt like the equivalent of a pawn making it to the other side of a chessboard and being converted into a queen. I may not have looked like it, but I was somehow the same chess piece as my mum. At the same time, I still felt the pressure and desire to be a 'good girl'. O'Mahony

says certain narratives can perpetuate these feelings. 'You may be thinking things like, "My parents did so much to support me". This can influence the feeling and expectation that as adults it is our role and responsibility to support parents financially, emotionally etc.

'The role reversal process is often experienced as we transition from children to adults, and as parents/caregivers get older. This is why it is more important than ever to be aware of our own limits and boundaries, and clearly communicate expectations.'

Thinking more about what it means to be a 'good' son or daughter, I asked



"Respecting a boundary is a demonstration of care."

O'Mahony about the relationship between people-pleasing and how this can make boundaries all the more challenging. 'As people-pleasers, we put the needs of others before our own,' she explains. 'We are conditioned to prioritise, help and support others. People-pleasing is deeply rooted in fear, insecurity, acceptance, belonging.

'Many people-pleasers seek the approval of others and try to make

other people happy. It can feel awkward and unnatural to put yourself first.'

Working on people-pleasing tendencies

She suggests that to begin working on people-pleasing tendencies, we ought to start building trust with ourselves and respecting our own boundaries.

'Follow through with the things that you say you are going to do. There is so much discomfort and guilt that comes with changing people-pleasing behaviour, so it often feels more manageable to work on it quietly before getting to the stage of setting and maintaining boundaries, for example, practice saying "no" or making decisions, instead of deferring to others.' She acknowledges, however, that implementing boundaries won't be easy at first. 'Anything that feels different or unfamiliar will initially bring up guilt.

'Conflict, guilt, and discomfort are natural feelings when we are going through change.'

Psychologist Suzy Reading agrees, and stresses that it helps to remember that boundaries are what we need in order to feel safe and healthy in relationships with others.

'Respecting a boundary is a demonstration of care. If you're trying to gain clarity on what other people need, be direct and ask. Clear communication is vital, as is listening and confirming understanding. It

involves empathising and validating other people's needs, even if they are different from our own. It is also about respecting when someone says no.'

So, how can we establish healthy boundaries with family? O'Mahony shares the following tips:

- Identify your limits — what do you want to prioritise and what drains your energy?
- Limit time with certain family members if you find it difficult to be around them.
- Give yourself permission to say no.
- Avoid certain topics of conversation ('I don't feel comfortable talking about that' or leave the situation if your boundary is not respected).
- Communicate your needs if it feels safe to do so e.g. 'I'm available on Sunday but I'll only be able to stay for an hour' or 'I'm free for a call, but...'
- Give yourself space and time. For example, if you are visiting family, is it really a good idea to stay with them, or would you be more comfortable staying in separate accommodation?
- Seek professional help if you are able to afford it, and if you're unsure how to navigate boundaries with your family.

At their best, the boundaries we share with our family members are strong enough to bend, because the shifting identities within our families as we grow and change has meant that these boundaries have always needed to be malleable in order to survive.

Once these healthy boundaries have been established, one of the benefits of allowing loved ones into our lives in a way that feels safe and respectful is that when it is needed, we can lean on them, call on them, make the big asks that we feel unable to make of anyone else, knowing that in the best of cases, our family unit can also be our very own sacred golden circle.





THE ONE AND ONLY?

The romantic landscape is changing fast — can our hearts keep up the pace? Yasmina Floyer examines how our boundaries are having to evolve and flex in real time



A betrayal. A broken promise. A broken heart. Infidelity is among one of the most painful ways in which a boundary can be crossed, when the trust that enables a couple to be vulnerable with one another becomes shattered. However, in a changing landscape there are also moments when a boundary isn't clear and we do not even realise we have crossed it until we have already done so.

For example, what exactly counts as cheating? Having sex? That's probably pretty clear for most of us. But what about kissing? And what about those special chats with a work colleague? Or an ex? Where does emotional cheating begin? Where do you draw the line?

The reality is it varies for each of us, and it may even change over time. I have a friend who is completely fine with the thought of her husband flirting with other women on a night out. 'I know

he's coming home to me, and he wouldn't take it any further.' To her, the flirting is meaningless. Numbers would not be exchanged at the end of the night, and whilst there may be a hug goodbye, there would be no other physical contact.

I, however, draw a firm line under flirting with others. It doesn't feel right to me, feeling disrespectful to both partners.

But I also appreciate that my friend views it as harmless, and there is no judgement here because she and her husband are in accord, and respect the boundary that they have mutually agreed upon.

Psychologist, coach and author of *Rest to Reset* (Octopus Publishing Group, £16.99) Suzy Reading agrees that when it comes to infidelity, things aren't always as black and white as we think.

'What constitutes betrayal in a romantic relationship is nuanced, and boundaries need to be clearly articulated and discussed to find clarity. What this looks like for one person might differ from the next so it's important that they are voiced, understood and agreed. There are many types of intimacy to consider including physical, emotional, romantic, intellectual and cyber infidelity. There is also arguably a financial aspect too where the betrayal may involve the withholding of information about money or spending, or keeping secrets about health, like hiding addictions. These are not infidelity as such but do involve a transgression of boundaries.'

What is clear here is that there is no right or wrong answer when it comes to what we personally consider to



be a betrayal. What is important is that we ensure that we're having open dialogue about our thoughts and feelings from the outset so that we can establish where the lines exist within our own relationships.

It is also a good idea to check in with each other to see if these boundaries still feel right, because behaviour that may have seemed fine during the dating stage may no longer feel appropriate, or may even feel hurtful after a few years together, or a following a significant milestone such as moving in together, marriage or having children.

What about cheating in the digital world?

Through our screens, we are now more connected than ever. One no longer needs to leave the house in order to speak to someone new, and a sexual experience can take place without the requirement of another body being physically in the room. This has given rise to a grey area when it comes to infidelity: cyber cheating. This is defined as an affair that takes place with the use of a digital device but can also encompass behaviour such as viewing sexual content in real time and sharing or engaging with explicit material. Given that cheating can also be defined in terms of an emotional connection, cyber cheating can include the use of devices to communicate romantically with someone outside of your relationship. The absence of actual physical contact may cause some to view these acts as relatively innocuous, whilst others may feel isolated and hurt that their partners are expressing or experiencing desire for someone else, leading to feelings of betrayal.

'When someone betrays our confidence, it can affect not only your trust in other people but also your trust in yourself, knocking your self-worth

and confidence,' says Reading. Given that technology and our relationship with it continues to evolve at an exponential rate, the concept of cyber cheating is not necessarily something that many of us have given much thought to. With all this in mind, it is important to not only take time to ask ourselves where we stand on things such as watching porn or downloading a dating app whilst being romantically involved with someone else, but to prioritise making these feelings known to our partners.

Infidelity can cause irrevocable damage, but we may be surprised to learn just how many couples do not breakup after cheating takes place. A five-year study conducted by the American Psychological Association found that 47% of couples who experienced infidelity stayed together.

'In some instances, where there is admission, recognition of hurt caused, ownership, communication of regret and remorse, a heart-felt and timely apology, assurance that the transgression won't be repeated, and evidence of actual change in behaviour, then healing is possible,' says Reading.

'It doesn't have to be a breaking point, it can be a turning point; where there is willingness and reciprocity it can lead to a reaffirmation and deepening of commitment, a wakeup call of some kind.'

Do we need wiggle room?

Establishing boundaries with infidelity and betrayal in mind sits very much within the space of knowing what we want to keep out of our relationships, but it is equally important to consider the importance of allowing things in.



We're all familiar with the idiom of someone 'having their walls up'. This metaphorical wall speaks to the emotional and psychological defence an individual hopes to gain by not letting people beyond this boundary.

On the other side of this wall is vulnerability. Without allowing ourselves to let our guard down and be vulnerable around others, however, we lose the potential to create deep and meaningful connections. 'Boundaries

"Boundaries are a reflection of the degree to which you know each other, so as your relationship deepens, boundaries might evolve. They might also need some flexing and renegotiation."



are a reflection of the degree to which you know each other so as your relationship deepens, boundaries might evolve,' Reading explains.

'They are also a function of available resources and what we need from one chapter of our lives to another, and can change, so boundaries might need some flexing and renegotiation. Sometimes they will need firming up; sometimes more room for wiggle is needed; sometimes the basics will need to shift, but a conversation is always required.'

As a teen and young adult during the nineties and noughties, I was instilled with the concept that your romantic partner must be The One, the nucleus around which your life is meant to revolve. Lyrics to love songs echoed the idea that our love interest ought to be the 'be all and end all', that without

them, life is rendered meaningless and barely worth living. However, adult me now realises that the reality is that a healthy relationship cannot thrive with that level of co-dependency, and that maintaining a sense of individuality can prove invaluable to maintaining a strong partnership.

Reading reinforces the idea that by being clear on our personal boundaries, we acknowledge the ways that we need to show up for ourselves, taking the pressure off our partners to be our everything.

'We don't just have boundaries with other people, we also have boundaries with ourselves,' she says. 'Our boundaries with ourselves are a recognition of what we need to feel safe and healthy in relation with ourselves — how we talk to ourselves, treat

ourselves and the kind of habits we need to commit to for us to feel energised and at peace. We need to care for other people; we need to receive care; and we also need to extend care to ourselves. Boundaries help us find clarity on what's healthy in all of these dynamics.'

When I think about boundaries within the context of a relationship, I visualise a map. Much like a map of the world, the borders may well migrate and shift over the coming years. When it comes to our relationships, not only are we travellers, using this map to guide us on our journeys together, but we are also cartographers, with the power to draw the map itself and design a landscape that suits us best, together making adjustments to the borders whenever we feel the need to.

WHAT'S YOUR PERSONAL BOUNDARY WEAK SPOT?

If areas of your life or relationships frustrate you, you may have boundary weak spots. Take our test to find out yours

Tick the answers that most closely apply to you, then add up the symbols. Read the section, or sections, you ticked most, to find out where your boundaries need attention.

1 Growing up you were

- Invited to every party ☐
- ◆ Everyone's shoulder to cry on ☐
- Known for being organised ☐
- ♥ Popular with teachers ☐

2 Sometimes you wonder whether you

- ♥ Expect too much ☐
- ◆ Ever show the real you ☐
- Can be a people-pleaser ☐
- Are prone to self-sabotage ☐

3 Life would feel easier if you could

- Be consistent about lifestyle choices ☐
- ♥ Find a better work life balance ☐
- ◆ Be more conscious about friendships ☐
- Get on top of family dynamics ☐

4 You'd most like to work on your

- Self-discipline ☐
- Assertiveness ☐
- ◆ Resilience ☐
- ♥ Self-belief ☐

5 If you did that, you'd most worry about

- ♥ Disappointing people ☐
- ◆ Losing touch with people ☐
- Upsetting people ☐
- Letting people down ☐

6 You'd have better boundaries if you could

- ♥ Care less ☐
- Rescue less ☐
- ◆ Empathise less ☐
- Procrastinate less ☐

7 On the whole, it's most important for you to feel

- ◆ Connected ☐
- Accepted ☐
- Useful ☐
- ♥ Fulfilled ☐

8 In a group, you are often the

- ♥ Motivator ☐
- ◆ Organiser ☐
- Peacemaker ☐
- Helper ☐

9 Your main motivation in strengthening boundaries is to feel

- More comfortable in your skin ☐
- ♥ Less stressed and more in control ☐
- ◆ Less hijacked by everyday worries ☐
- More authentic in all of your life ☐

10 Deep down, you know you'd thrive if you could

- ◆ Put yourself first sometimes ☐
- Keep things in perspective ☐
- Look after yourself more ☐
- ♥ Lower your standards ☐

Turn the page to find out where your boundaries are out of balance





Where do your boundaries need attention?



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♥

Work life

Weak work-life boundaries can manifest in different ways but they often show up in choices that undermine your wellbeing, don't match your values or don't help you fulfil your potential. If you're stuck in a work routine that no longer uplifts you or provides meaning or connection, it's worth taking a look at your boundaries. Sometimes weak boundaries stem from a need for validation which at times can cloud your innate instincts about whether demands on you are unrealistic. Perfectionism can also undermine work boundaries if your conscientiousness and commitment to doing your best mean you end up taking too much on, taking too much responsibility, or just letting your hours creep up. Often lack of self-belief or shaky self-confidence is at the root of weak work boundaries, as it's hard to stand up for yourself or believe you'll ever have a more fulfilling work life when you see yourself through a 'not good enough' lens. Addressing the root cause is important, but simply becoming aware of your boundaries, and when you're going against your gut instinct, will make an immediate difference. And remember, you'll be far more productive, useful and creative when your work sustains rather than drains you.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ♦

Social life

Every relationship is unique as it is created by the two individuals involved, so it's normal to have varying boundaries with different friendships. Friendship boundaries also change depending on what is going on in people's lives — most of us would tolerate lateness and cancelling in a friend going through a tough time, or occasional flakiness from a friend who makes up for it in other ways. In the end we have little control over others' behaviour and trying to change people is usually a frustrating waste of time and energy. But what we can do is work on our own self-awareness and if there are multiple elements of your social interactions and friendship dynamics that are niggling you, it's time to take a look at the patterns of your social life, and where you're ignoring your gut instincts. You might be particularly vulnerable to weak friendship boundaries if you're a super empathic person and feel emotionally impacted by other people's problems. Even if you thrive on really being there for people, you'll eventually feel burned out or used if you don't get anything in return. At the root of good friendship boundaries is love and respect — for yourself as well as others. Connecting honestly with others starts with connecting with yourself.



IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ●

Family life

Family life can present the biggest challenge to maintaining healthy boundaries because the dynamics can be complex and ever changing. We're also at risk of getting stuck in old patterns of relating that mean we accept situations that we wouldn't tolerate in other areas of our life. The result can be a disconnect between what we believe in and how we behave when we're with family. In moments of insight it can be blatantly obvious what needs to change, but putting it into action can trigger uneasy feelings and a critical voice that questions whether we deserve to put ourselves first and aim for more happiness. An underlying belief of not being good enough can also manifest as people pleasing or saying yes to things you don't want to do, especially when it comes to family. You may thrive on being at the heart of your family, the one who can be relied on to get everyone together and to take charge in a crisis. But if you feel like there's never space to share your own worries, you're risking burnout. Think about what small shift you could make that will start to change the dynamics. You might be surprised to find that being clearer about your own boundaries helps others think about theirs.

IF YOU SCORED MAINLY ■

Personal life

Although it's often overlooked, your relationship with yourself is the most important of all, as it provides the foundation of your relationships with other people. A sure sign that your boundaries with yourself need attention is feeling stuck or directionless, whether in your day-to-day routine or on a bigger-picture level. Weak personal boundaries let destructive habits sneak in and take root, even if you know from experience what you need to thrive, and may encourage and support the people you care about to take good care of themselves. Get stuck in a self-neglecting cycle for long enough and you risk losing touch with what you really need to feel your best. Another red flag that your personal boundaries need attention is setting expectations of yourself that you wouldn't expect from anyone else, then feeling like you've failed when you don't reach them. Sometimes patterns of thinking can become so ingrained that they act like a lens through which we view our experience of life, making it hard to keep sight of the boundaries we need. In essence, personal boundaries help you treat yourself with respect, and that means accepting that you won't be at your best without the right lifestyle choices. Start by simply ringfencing time and headspace to put what you need to thrive in place.



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Comprehensive training

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

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

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

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The Ollie School graduates are awarded a certified qualification in NLP, and a licence to work as an Ollie Coach. If helping children and their families to be more emotionally resilient appeals to you, contact Ollie School for a prospectus and to find out more.

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The Ollie therapeutic model has been successfully trialled with the NHS, demonstrating its commitment to improving children's emotional wellbeing across the UK.



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Heart



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



“Some people arrive and make such a beautiful impact on your life, you can barely remember what life was like without them.”

ANNA TAYLOR

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK



Coming up for air

I crave adventure, but want to know where I'm going

It's not easy to balance the lure of the new with the need to be still for those around her, reflects Caro Giles

“I spend a lot of my time trying to create certainty for my children, who can find change stressful. Parenting kids

who need familiarity can be very challenging — the planning and thinking ahead means I exist in a near-constant state of hyper vigilance. I've written before about my restless nature and how I struggle to manage my itchy feet as a full time carer — it goes against my own wild and meandering mind.

Last year I was lucky enough to gaze up at Italian frescoes and bathe in Provencal sunshine. I lost myself in hilltop villages and shadowy cloisters: every glimpse I caught of myself in

a window or mirror felt like an opportunity for reinvention. The possibilities for what I could do or who I might become felt endless, my mind expanding even as I realised how tiny I am in relation to this big beautiful world. I love new and surprising, and I'm greedy for all of the experiences yet to come. But these unexpected moments have had the effect of ripping the scales from my eyes and now it's impossible not to look longingly at the horizon and wonder what it might hold for me.

Like all of us, I am a contradiction: I crave adventure, but I want to know where I'm going. I'm currently dancing between two countries to an exhilarating new rhythm. The roads between the sea and the city are familiar now: the strip of blue as I drive up the

east coast, the view across the Firth of Forth, and the fields dropping away into the Clyde Valley. If I approach the city at night, it reveals itself as a swirl of lights. Other times it is swathed in mist, its high-rises and tenements cloaked and mysterious. I no longer need to use my satnav and the streets feel closer to home than anywhere else I've lived for over twenty years. Perhaps I am finally coming home to myself.

If I only had to think of my own needs I know where I would choose to spend my time, but there are many children to consider, so I continue to dance, dipping my toes between the Clyde and the North Sea, and I have no idea what will happen next.

I've become adept at clinging to life firmly in an attempt to hold everything/



“Becoming my own main character feels unfamiliar and selfish — I’m still learning to take up space in the world”



everyone together. At times of vulnerability, and when the world is spinning off its axis, sometimes all we can do is sit tight. This is what I have done for a long time in order to feel secure, even though I want to act on my impulses and chase new skies. Circumstances have dictated that I stay still and soak myself in the familiar.

Increasingly I find myself guided by Lucille Ball’s philosophy — ‘I’d rather regret the things I’ve done than the things I haven’t done’ — but I am still terrified of making a mistake. The financial implications of moving my family are huge, but the emotional ones feel even bigger. I am holding the lives of my kids as well as my own, and having survived a series of epic challenges, I’m frightened that another one could tip us

over the edge. As a tribe we are mighty, but we are also a fragile bundle of vulnerabilities, and I’m scared we might break. I am also unused to putting my needs first, a sentiment echoed by carers across the universe. Becoming my own main character feels unfamiliar and selfish — I’m still learning to take up space in the world.

There are some things I can be sure of, and perhaps they are what I must cling to as my world continues to ebb and flow. I know that as I sit pouring words from my head onto a screen each morning the sky will slowly lighten. Sometimes the day will arrive on the whisper of a cloud, other days the rooftops will flicker in a molten sunrise. No morning will ever look the same, but night will always turn

into day and later the moon will rise. Where regret is concerned, and in relation to my mothering, I would definitely rather take risks and demonstrate bravery than show them a small and cautious life. There are many things I can’t give my children, but I can gift them my energy and my sense of adventure, and I know that when our lives have been submerged in darkness my fire and my wild spirit have sustained us. As the tides continue to rise and fall I am aware that one day I will not be here to witness those waves, and my dreams will be just that, ephemeral wisps of wishful thinking. Perhaps it is time to dive into the unknown.



Red flags

IN YOUR FINANCES?

Worried that a loved one (or yourself) might be being controlled by a partner? The experts explain what to look out for — and what to do

As January and February roll round and we're all still counting the cost of the festive season, it's normal to be tightening our belts a little, and perhaps having discussions with our loved ones about how we might save a little here and there.

But some women are given no choice in the matter: almost one in seven women interviewed in a new study said they had recently experienced controlling, coercive behaviour around money from a current or former partner. This economic abuse often overlaps with other forms of domestic abuse, such as emotional, physical or technological.

And although this type of behaviour is little talked about and often flies under the radar, it can have serious consequences. More than 2,800 women across the UK were surveyed on the topic, with 430 saying they had experienced this in the past 12 months. Of those, more than a third (36%) experienced mental ill health,

including depression, panic attacks, or suicidal thoughts as a result.

Whether you think you might be at risk yourself, or you think someone you love could be in danger, it's worth us all understanding the signs and symptoms — and what to do about it.

'Economic abuse is a form of coercive control where someone takes over your economic resources to restrict your independence,' says Kat Mann, senior support worker at Women's Aid. 'By controlling finances, the abuser creates dependency, making it harder for the survivor to gain freedom or leave the relationship.'

'Someone perpetrating economic abuse is aiming to exert and maintain control over the survivor,' explains Mann. 'They want to make





them financially dependent, isolating them from support or any means of independence.'

Economic abuse in relationships can take many forms. Francesca Ferrier, economic empowerment partnership manager at charity Refuge, says: 'Refuge has supported survivors whose abusers have not allowed them to have access or control of their own income, bank accounts and household finances. Some survivors of economic abuse may even be pressured or manipulated into taking out loans or credit for their partner.'

However, there are also some more subtle signs. 'Economic abuse can start with behaviour that might seem caring or protective,' says Mann. 'For example, the abuser might offer to handle all the finances or suggest their partner stop working to focus on childcare. Early warning signs could also look like someone "borrowing" their partner's money and not paying it back or taking out loans or building up debt in their name.'

Survivors of economic abuse are often told by their abusers that they aren't good at managing money or can't be trusted with money.

'Financial abuse often hides in plain sight, camouflaged as practical

"Rebuilding confidence after financial abuse is a radical act of reclaiming your power"

decisions or concerns about shared goals,' says psychologist Barbara Santini. 'Does one partner control all financial decisions, dismissing the other's input? Is access to accounts limited or contingent on certain behaviours? The most telling sign is a pattern, including restrictions on work, unexplained debts in your name, or being pressured into financial commitments that feel wrong. The abuser's intent is clear: to disempower, isolate, and create dependency.'

However, while it may be difficult, it is possible to take action if you recognise these signs. 'Talking about financial abuse can feel like stepping into the unknown, and fear of judgment can be paralysing,' says Santini. 'I recommend starting by naming it since silence enables shame. Choose someone you trust and

describe specific behaviors observed. For instance, you can say to a friend "I feel uneasy because my partner controls all the accounts and questions my spending."

'Always use facts, not emotions, to create clarity for yourself. Also, acknowledge your fears but remember, financial abuse isn't just about money but also extends to become a violation of your autonomy.'

'Refuge wants survivors of economic abuse to know that they are not alone,' stresses Ferrier. 'We have a dedicated economic abuse team to support



survivors, as well as detailed information on refugetechsafety.org including how to secure your online financial accounts and how to open a new, safe bank account.’

Mann adds: ‘Services like Women’s Aid can provide guidance and emotional support for both your financial and personal wellbeing.’

‘If it feels safe, reach out to your bank for assistance in managing your accounts and finances independently,’ adds Mann. ‘Surviving Economic Abuse has a banking directory to show what support your bank can offer.’

What can we do if friends or family members could be suffering in this way? ‘Since this is a very sensitive issue, I advise that you approach this conversation with humility and care,’ says Santini. ‘Never accuse. Instead, express concern: “You seem stressed about money, can I help?”’

‘Be prepared for defensiveness as it’s

a survival mechanism. Offer a nonjudgmental ear and practical suggestions, like speaking to a counselor or accessing a financial literacy resource. Your role is not to rescue but to empower them to see their situation clearly.’

‘Supporting someone who may be experiencing abuse can be challenging, but your care can make a big difference,’ says Mann. ‘Start by listening to them without judgement and assuring them that you believe them. They may not be ready to act right away, and that’s okay, patience is key. Encourage them to connect with a domestic abuse service when they feel ready.’

‘Offering practical help, like a safe place to stay or essential items such as food, clothing, or toiletries, can also show your support and make a tangible impact,’ adds Mann.

Whether you’re a victim yourself or you are worried about someone you

love, remember there is a future after abuse. ‘Rebuilding confidence after financial abuse is a radical act of reclaiming your power,’ says Santini. ‘My advice is to start small. Open a personal account and track your own expenses. Therapy can also address deeper wounds.’

‘Financial abuse undermines self-worth, but healing it rebuilds trust in yourself. I also encourage you to celebrate small victories. Each step affirms your independence.’

Money Advice Plus support line:
0808 1968845 Monday-Friday,
9am-1pm and 2pm-5pm.

Find out how to get help online
[at refugetechsafety.org](https://refugetechsafety.org)





Hello!

We all know how important it is to take care of

ourselves, but it's easy to let that slip down your list of priorities when you're busy running around after everyone else. One way to make it easier is with this month's fantastic subscriber gift, New Wash by Hairstory. This cult product, worth £46, will clean your hair without stripping away its natural oils and leave it feeling smoother and silkier — and that's one resolution we can all get on board with! Of course, you'll also benefit from receiving your favourite magazine each month too, which is another great way to prioritise looking after yourself, as it's packed full of inspiring yet simple ways to bring about small changes in your life that make a big difference to how you feel each and every day. A subscription takes all the hassle out of tracking it down at the shops, meaning that you can just look forward to it landing on your doormat and then spend more of your time relaxing and enjoying the uplifting features and exciting new ideas. Happy reading!

Sally x

Editor-in-Chief,
Psychologies

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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.

“Why do I feel so low at this time of year?”

Q The new year seems to be a positive time for many, but I feel overwhelmed. Rather than thinking 'yay, new year new me!' I want to crawl under my duvet and hide. Why does this time of year make me feel so down?

I don't think there is anything wrong with you if this time of year brings up feelings of overwhelm or even sadness. It's a lot more common than you think. After all the twinkling lights, bright decorations, and festive ornaments have been taken down, we are left with dark, grey, cold January, a month with an extra week that often feels twice as long.

This is also a time when people typically talk about 'resolutions' like saving money, getting fit, not eating UPFs, less screen time... If you are on social media you will struggle to avoid the chat of 'manifesting' a future that brings you all your dreams and wishes and the 'fresh start' of 'New Year, New Me'. For some, these goals they can be motivating and helpful, but for others the thought of change, rules, regulations and a tendency towards restriction and limitation feels

overwhelming. A lot of the time, these resolutions are based on the expectations of others and driven by a need to conform to societal norms. And when you fail to stick to the rules you have set or keep pushing forward to meet your goal (eg you get a gym membership but then don't go for a week), it can leave you feeling disappointed, trick you into thinking you are a failure or even give you a sense that this year won't be better than the last.

The new year is not always a happy time, it can be difficult. It may remind you of what you haven't achieved and what you have lost and bring up painful and complex emotions. It may make you reminisce about those who aren't with you anymore and this might make you dread moving forward with the uncertainty of what is to come and the absence of those you love. You can't escape your feelings and it is ok if you find this time difficult.

How can you enjoy this time by being authentic to who you are and the things you want? What would you like to let go of, what do you want to hold on to?



Who can you talk about your feelings who might be able to hear you without judgment? And what would you choose to do that would bring you some joy or contentment that might help to shrink the dread you feel?

Choose to do things that make you happy even when they go against the societal norm. And be kind to yourself — it's your 2025 too, you can choose to spend it whichever way feels right.

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***“You are
more powerful
than you know;
you are beautiful
just as you are.”***

Melissa Etheridge



MINDFUL WELLNESS



Psychologies wellness director Ali Roff Farrar shares expert advice, ideas, stats and the newest research on all things wellbeing, including three surprising sleep hacks, how to boost your E.I., an easy way to boost your workouts, yoga to increase circulation and why your co-worker who brags about being stressed *really* gets on your nerves...

How to develop your emotional intelligence

'Developing your emotional intelligence (EI) is a transformative journey that can significantly enhance your personal and professional life,' says Tracey Jones, a mind management coach and global keynote speaker. 'When we consciously embrace social skill development, we become better at navigating social complexities.'

1 'Start by cultivating **self-awareness** — regularly check in with your feelings, identify triggers, and observe how your emotions influence your thoughts and actions. Journaling can be a powerful tool; it helps clarify your emotional patterns and fosters introspection. EI expert Daniel Goleman believes that only when we raise our self-awareness can we self-regulate accordingly. I totally agree with his statement: by learning to manage your emotions effectively you can then respond thoughtfully rather than react impulsively.'

2 'Use the **"stop, pause, breathe"** technique.

Stop what you're doing.

Pause the mind.

Breathe.

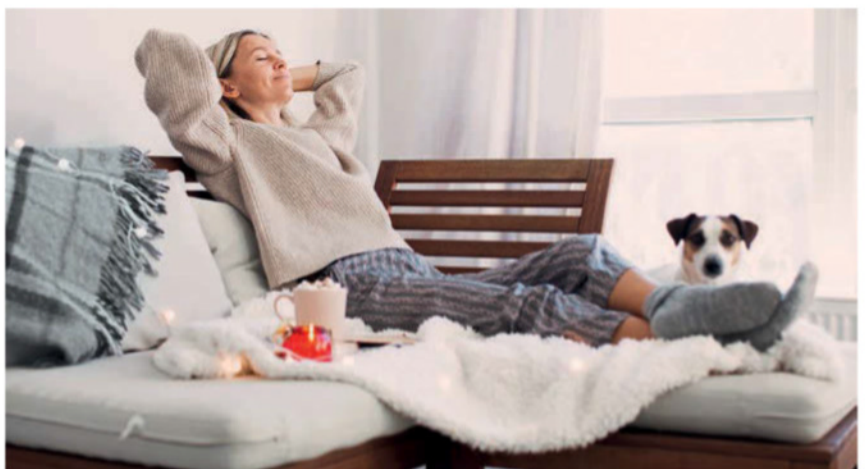
This gives time for us to rationalise information.'

3 '**Empathy** is another cornerstone of EI. By engaging actively in conversations, listening attentively, and striving to understand others' perspectives we can truly understand what is going on within our environments. Putting yourself in others' shoes not only strengthens your relationships but also enhances your ability to connect on a deeper level. Seeking feedback about your emotional interactions from trusted

friends or colleagues can highlight blind spots and provide valuable lessons for growth.

'Remember, boosting your emotional intelligence is an ongoing process that requires commitment and practice. By investing in your emotional growth you'll not only improve your well-being but also become a more effective leader, partner, and friend.'

For more from Tracey Jones on this subject, visit www.tjlife.net



IMAGES SHUTTERSTOCK



Pulled Aubergine Ragu with Hummus Mashed Potato

'The first time I thought of putting hummus in my mashed potatoes, it was a revelation. And there's nothing better to pile on to your mash than a rich, saucy ragu,' says Christina Sotiriou.

SERVES: 4

Cooking time: 1 hour 25 minutes

For the ragu

- 30g dried mushrooms (wild, oyster, porcini or a mix)
- 3 medium aubergines
- 1 carrot
- 1 onion
- 1 celery stick
- 4 garlic cloves
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 3 tbsp tomato purée
- 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 125ml red wine
- 1 vegetable stock cube (gluten-free if needed)
- 3 tbsp nutritional yeast
- 400ml passata
- salt and ground black pepper

For the hummus mash

- 1.25kg potatoes
- 350g hummus (shop-bought or homemade)

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- **For the walnut parm**
- 35g walnuts
- 1 tbsp nutritional yeast
- ¼ tsp garlic powder
- ¼–½ tsp flaky sea salt

1 In a bowl, pour 300ml boiling water over the dried mushrooms, then set aside to soak.

2 Preheat the oven to 210°C/190°C fan. Pierce the aubergines all over with a fork. Arrange on a baking tray and roast for 45–55 minutes (depending on their size). Alternatively, you can burn them on a gas hob by placing them over the flame for 15–20 minutes, turning frequently with metal tongs, until they are evenly charred. They are done when the skin is wrinkly and they are very soft, almost collapsing in on themselves.

3 When the aubergines are cooked, set them aside to cool, covered with a plate or lid. Once cool, carefully peel them (the skin should come off very easily), then use your fingers or a fork to pull the flesh into long, thick strips.

4 Meanwhile, peel and finely dice the carrot and onion. Finely dice the celery

and mince the garlic. Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat. Add the onion, carrot, garlic and celery and season with plenty of salt and pepper. Sauté for 10–15 minutes until softened but not brown.

5 Add the tomato purée, balsamic vinegar and wine, and let it cook off for a few minutes until the wine has reduced. Then add the mushrooms, along with their soaking water, taking care not to add any grit that may have gathered at the bottom of the bowl. Add the stock cube, nutritional yeast and passata, and stir to combine.

6 Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat to low and simmer, stirring occasionally, for 15–20 minutes. If it's looking dry, add a splash of water. Add the aubergines to the sauce and stir gently. Cook for another few minutes to combine the flavours, and season very well with salt and pepper.

7 Meanwhile, bring a large saucepan of well-salted water to the boil. Peel the potatoes and cut them into chunks. Once the water has come to the boil, add the potatoes and cook for 12–15 minutes or until just cooked. Drain and leave to steam dry for a few minutes in the colander. Return the potatoes to the empty saucepan. Add the hummus and use a potato masher or a fork to mash them until smooth. Season well with salt and pepper and stir in the olive oil to give it some extra creaminess.

8 To make the walnut parm, lightly toast the walnuts in a dry frying pan over a medium heat for 3–5 minutes. Add them to a small blender or finely chop by hand. Blitz or stir through the rest of the ingredients.

9 To serve, spoon a generous amount of hummus mash into a bowl, then load with the pulled aubergine ragu and top with the walnut parm. Enjoy.

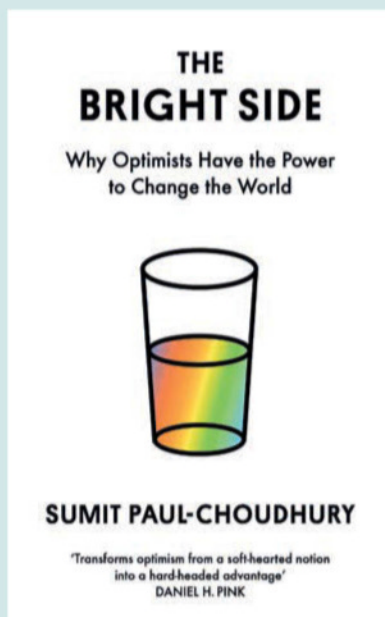
Extracted from Big Veg Energy: Plant-based just got better by Christina Sotiriou (Ebury, £26) Photography by Joe Woodhouse.



Positive living

Always look on the bright side of life...

It might not always be logical, and in fact it might seem positively irrational at times, but optimism is essential for humanity's survival and progress, according to an inspiring new book. Astrophysicist turned *New Scientist* Editor-in-Chief Sumit Paul-Choudhury draws from personal loss, historical examples and scientific research to explore how we can find strength through optimism to navigate uncertainty and adversity. Posing arguments such as 'We are naturally optimistic beings', to exploring questions like 'Is the world sliding into a pessimism trap?', it might just be the book we all need right now.



The Bright Side: Why Optimists Have The Power to Change The World
by Sumit Paul-Choudhury (Canongate, £20)

* ACTA PHYSIOLOGICA, 2023; ** AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PHYSIOLOGY-REGULATORY, INTEGRATIVE AND COMPARATIVE PHYSIOLOGY 2024; *** REDOX BIOLOGY, 2021

Beet it

Want to give your workout a boost? Studies have found that drinking beetroot juice before breaking a sweat could significantly increase your muscle force while exercising.

Dietary nitrate, found in foods like beetroot, boosts endurance and enhances high-intensity exercise*. And the effects could be even better for older people (who tend to have lower nitric oxide production), with magnified fitness results found for postmenopausal women**, and effects such as healthier blood vessels and brain function***. Not a big fan of beetroot? Other foods high in dietary nitrate include lettuce, spinach and celery.

And the winner is...

Do you wear your stress as a badge of honour, or know someone who does? New research has found that this habit of bragging about how stressed we are actually does us a disservice. The study, published in *Personnel Psychology*, found that people who boast about being over-stressed are seen as less competent and likable by their co-workers. It also found that people were less likely to help someone who boasted about stress levels, even if they were overburdened at work. However, it found that we don't feel the same when we just perceive someone as being stressed — it isn't the experience of being stressed that elicits this negative response, it's specifically the bragging and using stress as a trophy or something that makes someone seem more important.

"Make a list of what is really important to you. Embody it."

JON KABAT-ZINN



Expert advice: Yoga for circulation

By Ali Roff-Farrar, yoga teacher and mindfulness expert.

1 Legs-Up-the-Wall Pose (Viparita Karani): This lovely restorative pose reduces pressure on the veins, supporting venous return and encouraging blood flow from the legs back to the heart, enhancing circulation. It can relieve tired or swollen legs and promote relaxation. Sit sideways against a wall, then lie back and swing your legs up onto the wall. Shift your hips close to the wall, and rest your arms at your sides or on your belly. Close your eyes and breathe deeply, maybe listen to some relaxing music, staying in this position for 5-10 minutes. To release, bend your knees and roll to one side before sitting up.

2 Bellows Breath (Bhastrika Pranayama): This is an energising breathing technique to stimulate blood flow and increase oxygen intake, improving circulation and vitality. Sit in a comfortable position with your spine straight and shoulders relaxed. Take a deep breath in through your nose, filling your lungs completely. Exhale forcefully through your nose, using your diaphragm to push the air out. Continue to inhale and exhale through your nose in short, rhythmic bursts. Aim for 1 breath per second. Complete 20-30 breaths, then inhale deeply, hold your breath for a moment, and exhale slowly. Repeat for 2-3 rounds. Avoid Bhastrika if you have high blood pressure, heart issues, or respiratory problems. Always practice on an empty stomach and stop if you feel dizzy.

3 Downward-Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana): One of the most famous poses — and for good reason! It's a full-body pose which stretches and strengthens whilst encouraging blood flow to the brain and heart. Start on your hands and knees, tuck your toes and lift your hips toward the ceiling, straightening your legs (keep a slight bend in the knees if needed). Press firmly through your hands and feet, creating an inverted V-shape. Let your head hang loosely between your arms, keeping your spine long. Hold, breathing deeply, for as long as feels comfortable.



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Do you drink enough water? 'Hydration is a crucial defence mechanism against cold and flu. Dehydration disrupts the function of our mucous membranes, an important barrier against pathogens like the flu,' says neuroscientist Dr Paul Anastasiades. These 3-in-1 effervescent tablets combine hydration formula, electrolytes, and a multivitamin in one yummy glass. 'Electrolytes power everyone, not just athletes; from heartbeats to memories, movement to immunity, these powerful minerals impact hundreds of physiological functions to support your daily wellbeing,' says Dr Anastasiades.



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*NEUROSCI. 2015; **PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, 2024; ***JAMA PEDIATRICS, 2024

3 surprising scientific sleep hacks

1 Sleep on your side. This helps the brain to remove its waste products, which could reduce the chances of developing Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and other neurological diseases*.

2 Darken your nighttime hours and brighten your days. A recent study found being exposed to high levels of light at night led to a 21-34% increased risk of death, whilst being exposed to high levels of daylight led to a 17-34% reduction in risk of death**.

3 Leave it on the bedside table. Guidelines usually recommend no screen use in the hour or two before bed, however, new research found this actually had little impact on sleep. However, screen time once in bed caused sleep problems***.

Stay in the dark with a beautiful ethical silk sleep mask. Mulberry Silk Eye Mask, The Ethical Silk Company, £35.



Feel the stretch (but only in a good way!)

If you're stepping up your workout routine or have taken up a New Year's resolution to move your body more; be it walking, yoga, weight training or similar, you may find your body is feeling the 'benefits', in the form of 'Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness' (DOMS). Anti-inflammatory arnica is a wonderful natural treatment for relaxation and recovery, and Weleda has a wonderful new range of 100% certified natural shower gels, massage oils and cooling gels for direct application to tired or injured muscles.



Can you think yourself healthy?

Forget popping pills, it's time to discover your mind's power to heal you, writes Kellie Gillespie-Wright

It's that time of year, when everyone's battling a bug, recovering from one, or stocking up on vitamins to try to dodge the next round. It's all too easy to focus on the negative, feel a little down and think 'I'm bound to get ill.' But stop. Could the very act of worrying about it actually increase your likelihood of becoming unwell? What about the reverse — can your thoughts and emotions help you fight illness and recover? Or even help your immune system to protect you in the first place?

It might sound fanciful, but there is more to the idea than you might think, says Dr Monty Lyman, an expert in immunopsychiatry and author of *The Immune Mind* (Torva, £22).

'The last decade has witnessed a revolution in our understanding of how the brain and the immune system communicate,' he says. 'Study by study, it is becoming abundantly clear that the brain communicates with the immune system through many different channels, and these signals go in both directions — from body to brain and brain to body.'

In other words, your emotions, thoughts, and even stress levels are in constant communication with your immune system. Dr Lyman describes this as more than just a connection; it's a dynamic partnership.

'Your mind and your immune system are not simply linked but can be viewed as part of the same system,' he explains, referring to this as the 'defence system'.

This means the intricate network of cells and proteins that protect your body from disease and make up your immune system doesn't act in isolation. Instead, it works in

tandem with your feelings and emotions.

Dr Lyman further explains that this is a tripartite union of the mind, the immune system, and the microbiome — the collection of trillions of bacteria living in your gut. 'Each point of this triangle has a bidirectional relationship with the other two. A shock to one element reverberates around the whole system.'

This means that your mental health, immune health, and gut health are deeply interwoven, forming a foundation for your overall wellbeing. This becomes especially apparent during times of stress. Stress is something we've all experienced — whether it's a looming deadline, an argument with a loved one, or financial worries. But have you considered the toll chronic stress takes on your body? Stress activates your 'fight or flight' response, flooding your system with cortisol and adrenaline. While these stress hormones can be helpful in short bursts, chronic stress creates a state of prolonged alertness that suppresses your immune system.

'Chronic stress is like a slow burn on the immune system: it wears it down over time,' explains Dr Simon Lewis, a psychiatrist from UCL and the lead at The College of Medicine's Bodymind Faculty. 'When we are under constant stress, our bodies produce too much cortisol, which can reduce the number of immune cells that fight off infections. Over time, stress can even accelerate cellular ageing by shortening telomeres, the protective caps at the ends of our DNA. It's like fraying the ends of a rope; the cells just don't work as well any more and become "older".' You might not feel the effects immediately, but over time, ➡

Expert advice



Dr Simon Lewis is a psychiatrist at University College London and the Bodymind Faculty Lead at the College of Medicine. He is passionate about the unity of the bodymind in his work and teaching



Dr Monty Lyman is a medical doctor, researcher and author who specialises in the relationship between the mind and the immune system. He is an Academic Clinical Fellow at the University of Oxford.



chronic stress can weaken your body's defences, making you more susceptible to infections like the common cold. It can even allow dormant viruses, such as the varicella-zoster virus that causes chickenpox and shingles, to reactivate.

The good news is that the opposite is also true. While stress wears down your immune system, positive emotions can strengthen it. Optimism, gratitude, and mindfulness are not just feel-good practices; they have measurable effects on your immune resilience.

'When we're in a positive emotional state, our bodies are primed for better health,' says Dr Lewis. 'Studies have shown that people with optimistic outlooks have stronger immune systems — including having a higher activity of our natural killer cells, which help fight viruses and even cancer. There's also evidence that positive thinking can speed up recovery from illness or surgery.'

Dr Lyman echoes this sentiment: 'While we lack large, conclusive studies that demonstrate the use of optimism in reducing inflammation, it is clear that reduced stress and improved mental health are associated with lower inflammatory markers and quicker recovery from injury. I believe that optimism doesn't just make you feel better — it makes you better!'

Gratitude, in particular, is a powerful immune booster. Think about the last time you felt truly grateful. Did you notice how it calmed you, centred you, and made you feel more connected to the world around you? That's not just in your head.

'Gratitude, hope, and happiness are like good food for the immune system,' says Dr Lewis.

'They lower stress hormones, reduce inflammation, and can improve heart health. When we feel gratitude, for example, our bodies release chemicals like dopamine and oxytocin: these are the "feel-good" hormones that help us relax and heal. Simple practices like keeping a gratitude journal or taking a moment each day to reflect on what you're thankful for can create ripples of positive change in your health.'

Unprocessed negative emotions like anger or anxiety can have the polar-opposite effect, keeping your body in a constant state of high alert.

Dr Lewis explains: 'Unprocessed anxiety or anger keeps the body in a state of high alert, which over time wears down the immune system. It's a reminder that processing our emotions, whether through journaling, therapy, exercise, talking, seeing friends, or spending time with loved ones, is vital for our health.'

In fact, connection to others is one of the most powerful immune boosters available to you. 'Social connections are incredibly powerful and important,' says Dr Lewis. 'When we feel



"Any small, affirmative grateful actions we take create positive ripples, nurturing our bodyminds"

supported and connected, our bodies produce fewer stress hormones, and our immune systems function more effectively. Loneliness, on the other hand, has been linked to higher inflammation, weaker immunity, and early mortality: loneliness literally kills.'

'It's not about having lots of friends but about having meaningful connections,' he continues. 'Even small moments of kindness or a heartfelt conversation can boost our health in profound ways. And laughter really can be medicine. It



reduces stress hormones, boosts endorphins, and increases immune activity.’

Incorporating these practices doesn’t have to be overwhelming, even small actions, like deep breathing, gentle yoga, or imagining positive outcomes are useful for boosting immunity.

‘Meditation has been shown to increase antibody production, while yoga can reduce stress hormones and inflammation. Visualisation, where you imagine healing or positive outcomes, can actually increase the activity of immune cells,’ says Dr Lewis.

Another essential piece of this puzzle is your gut. You may have heard about the gut-brain connection, but did you know it also includes your immune system? Dr Lewis describes the gut-brain-immune axis as ‘an incredible communication network linking our digestive system, nervous system, and immune system — a vivid reminder that everything in our

bodyminds is interconnected.’ The microbiome in your gut plays a pivotal role in maintaining this balance. When your microbiome is healthy, it supports a balanced immune response. But stress can disrupt this delicate ecosystem, leading to chronic inflammation and weakened immunity.

‘What’s exciting about our increasingly deeper understanding of the bodymind is that it validates what many have long observed: we are one thing,’ explains Dr Lewis. ‘Practices that support mental health, such as mindfulness and stress reduction, also directly benefit gut health. Stress can disrupt the delicate balance of the gut microbiome, while mindfulness practices can help restore it. It’s like tending a garden: when we nurture our bodyminds we’re also cultivating wellbeing in our bodyminds.’

And it works in reverse too. Dr Lewis notes: ‘We have discovered that the majority of serotonin, a neurotransmitter which we know is important for regulating our moods, is produced in the gut and that the amount made is influenced by what we eat and the particular gut bacteria present. We are not humans and nature: we are nature!’

This interconnectedness of mind and body offers not only hope but also a sense of agency. It is powerful and inspiring to think that by taking action to think more positively, to try to nurture our gut and by making some simple lifestyle choices, we really do have the power to transform our health for the better.

Start small. Take a moment each day to express gratitude, practice mindfulness, or connect with a loved one. ‘Even five minutes of mindfulness, gratitude journaling, or deep breathing can make a difference,’ says Dr Lewis. ‘Any small affirmative grateful actions we take create positive ripples, nurturing our bodyminds and the wellbeing of those around us and their bodyminds.’

So take a deep breath, smile, call your best friend and embrace the power of your thoughts and emotions. Your bodymind will thank you.

▶▶ NEXT STEPS

Watch *How Kindness Can Boost Your Immune System and Make You Happier* with Dr Rangan Chatterjee and Dr David Hamilton (YouTube)

Listen *Mindfulness Exercises — Boost Immune System Positive Affirmations* (YouTube)

Read *The Immune Mind* by Dr Monty Lyman (Torva, £22)



Mary Berry to the rescue!

Take the hassle out of tea with these simple dishes. Everyone's favourite TV cook Mary Berry is back with a new book that aims to take the stress out of everyday meals. *Mary's Foolproof Dinners* includes 120 recipes alongside the 89-year-old's tips and advice for simple cooking at home.

Fast quiche

'What a cheat this is!' says Berry. 'Supper in the evening, kids popping in, don't know what to make... here we go! The word tortilla is Spanish and fajita is Mexican, but to me it's called a wrap! Buy large ones so they fit up the sides of the tin.'

SERVES: 4

Ingredients

- 1tbsp sunflower oil, plus extra for greasing
- 1 large tortilla wrap
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 150g chestnut mushrooms, sliced
- 75g mature Cheddar, grated
- 2 eggs, beaten

- 200ml pouring double cream
- 2tbsp freshly chopped parsley

Method

- 1** Preheat the oven to 200°C/180°C Fan/Gas 6. You will need a 20cm (8in) loose-bottomed sandwich tin, brushed with oil. Place a heavy baking sheet in the oven to get hot.
- 2** Lay the wrap inside the sandwich tin to cover the base and to go halfway up the sides. Press firmly to the sides of the tin.
- 3** To make the filling, place the oil in a large frying pan over a medium heat. Add the onion and fry for a few minutes, then cover with a lid and cook for 10 minutes until soft. Add the

mushrooms and fry for a few minutes. Drain off any liquid.

4 Spoon the onion and mushrooms into the wrap-lined tin and spread evenly. Sprinkle half the cheese over the top.

5 Beat the eggs and cream together in a small bowl. Season with salt and freshly ground black pepper and add the remaining cheese and the parsley to the egg mixture. Pour over the mushroom filling. Place the tin on the hot baking sheet in the preheated oven and cook for about 25 minutes, until set and lightly golden.

6 Leave for stand for 5 minutes, then serve hot in wedges with a dressed tomato salad

Tips: Best made and served. Not suitable for freezing.



Chimichurri pork

'Chimichurri is a wonderful, aromatic sauce from Latin America,' says Berry. 'It isn't cooked and will keep for up to a week in the fridge. It is delicious with this pork fillet but also works well stirred through pasta. The sauce can be made in a food processor, if liked, but keep it chunky. The flavours will infuse and become more pungent over time.'

SERVES: 4

Ingredients

- 1 large pork fillet (about 350g) trimmed
- For the marinade:
 - 2tbsp olive oil
 - Juice of ½ lemon
 - 2 garlic cloves, finely grated
 - 1tsp paprika
 - 1tsp chilli flakes
- For the chimichurri:
 - 3tbsp finely chopped fresh oregano
 - 2tbsp finely chopped fresh coriander
 - 1tbsp freshly chopped parsley
 - 1 banana shallot, finely chopped
 - Juice of ½ lemon
 - 1 large garlic clove, finely grated
 - ½tsp chilli flakes
 - 8tbsp olive oil

Method

- 1 Put all the marinade ingredients into a large bowl, season with salt and freshly ground black pepper and mix well. Add the pork to the marinade and turn to coat. Leave to marinate for 1 hour, or longer if you have time.
- 2 Preheat the oven to 220°C/200°C Fan/Gas 7.
- 3 Place a frying pan over a high heat until hot. Add the pork fillet and fry until brown on all sides. Transfer to a small roasting tin and roast in the preheated oven for about 18 minutes, or until just cooked through. Cover with foil and set aside to rest.
- 4 Measure the sauce ingredients into a small jug or bowl. Season well and mix to combine.
- 5 Carve the pork into slices and serve with the sauce on the side.

Tips: Pork can be marinated up to a day ahead. The raw pork can be frozen in the marinade.



Upside-down apricot and Cointreau pudding

'Great for family gatherings, serve this with crème fraîche for a wonderful treat. The apricot season is very short in the UK, so we use tinned for this recipe, but de-stoned fresh apricots would be delicious, too,' Berry says. The topping does not work as well in a non-stick pan, so it is best to use stainless-steel.

SERVES: -8

Ingredients

- Butter, melted, or sunflower oil
- 2 × 400g tins apricot halves in syrup, drained well and lightly dried on kitchen paper
- For the topping:
 - 125g (4½oz) granulated sugar
 - 75g (3oz) butter
 - 2tbsp Cointreau
- For the sponge:
 - 115g (4oz) self-raising flour

- 115g (4oz) baking spread, straight from the fridge
- 115g (4oz) caster sugar
- 2 eggs
- Finely grated zest of 1 small orange
- 1tbsp Cointreau

Method

- 1 Preheat the oven to 180°C/160°C Fan/Gas 4. You will need a deep, fixed-base 20cm (8in) cake tin. (There's no need to line the base.)
- 2 To make the topping, measure the granulated sugar and 4 tablespoons of water into a stainless-steel pan. Stir over a medium heat until the sugar has dissolved. Stop stirring and bring up to the boil. Boil until the sugar turns a deep caramel colour.
- 3 Quickly remove from the heat and add knobs of the butter and the Cointreau. Stir, then pour into the base of the cake tin.

4 Brush the sides of the tin with the melted butter or oil. Arrange the apricot halves on top of the caramel, whichever way up you prefer. Place any extra apricots in a neat layer over the top.

5 Measure the sponge ingredients into a bowl. Whisk for 1½–2 minutes with an electric whisk, until light and fluffy. Spoon on top of the apricots and level the surface.

6 Bake in the preheated oven for about 50–55 minutes, until lightly golden and the sponge is coming away from the sides of the tin.

7 Leave to stand for about 30 minutes, then loosen the sides and put a plate on top. Carefully turn the cake upside down and remove the tin.

8 Spoon any loose caramel sauce over the top and serve warm in wedges.

Tips: Can be made up to 12 hours ahead and gently warmed to serve.



Coming next month

- Find your spark again! 15 pages on how to find the fun
- Tired of juggling everything? Discover how to tackle overwhelm
- Can what you eat help you beat stress?
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Soul



Discover ways to make your soul sing... with creativity, nature, finding your purpose in life and at work, travel and spirituality

A large, translucent profile of a woman's head, facing right, serves as a background for the central image. A small silhouette of a person stands on the woman's forehead with their arms raised in a 'V' shape. The background of the entire page is a soft-focus image of a person's head in profile, looking down, with a small silhouette of a person standing on their forehead with arms raised.

***Giving up
doesn't always
mean you're
weak. Sometimes
you're just strong
enough to let go."***

Taylor Swift



The sacred everyday

Getting in touch with the natural world in which your ancestors lived could open your eyes to a mystical, hopeful new reality, writes ritualist Rebecca Campbell

Western civilization has indoctrinated us to regard ‘the exotic’ as superior and what’s hard to find as valuable, but if we look closely at our immediate surroundings, we may discover that what we’re seeking, what we’re hungry for, has been waiting for us there all along. We just need to open our eyes to see the sacred that’s already here.

When I began my herbalism training, my mind was blown open as I observed my own relationship with nature, the land, and the plants I consumed.

One of the herbs I worked with frequently was nettle, which is a powerful, nourishing plant. At first, I ordered nettle leaf online and had no idea where the plant came from or what it looked like. Next, I found a local herbal shop, Starchild, and a month or so later, I began seeing nettles growing in a lane on my morning walk. I’ll never forget the morning I opened my front door and saw nettles growing through the crack in a paving stone! It was an extremely humbling moment as I realised that nature was already providing but I didn’t have the eyes to see it.

I had the same experience when I was diagnosed with pelvic prolapse following my daughter’s birth. I pulled together a healing regimen that included drinking and bathing in herbal infusions made with a plant commonly known as lady’s mantle, which I hadn’t worked with before. I bought some lady’s mantle from Starchild and began drinking my infusions daily, and I also looked at pictures of the plant and connected with its spirit as I drank it.

Then one day as I was walking around our garden with my son, I saw a new plant beginning to grow and I recognized the tiny leaf of lady’s mantle. I cried out with joy that nature had offered

the very plant my body most revered and needed! Perhaps that plant had always been there, but once more, I didn’t have the eyes to see it. Or maybe when I connected with the spirit of the plant and thus to the Spirit of Life, nature did what it does best and provided!

We all have Earth-based wisdom teachings in our ancestry, most of which have been stolen, silenced, or severed through colonialism, patriarchy, and time. I’ve always felt an ache for those in my lineage and I believe this is what led me to travel to the lands of my ancestors at a young age. However, it wasn’t until I started studying herbalism and working with the plants beneath my feet that I experienced a real remembering and unlocking of this lineage lost and a deepening into proper ancestral healing.

It was as if through working with the same plants that my ancient ancestors had, I could reach back to them and mend within my cells what had been severed. It felt as though with every tea meditation, every occasion I wrote with the flowers and the trees, each time I prayed with the water or placed my hands on the stones, I could hear their whispers more and more. Every time I learned to identify and harvest a plant, every time I bent down to forage and do the repetitive movements that my ancient ancestors had done, it opened the field of connection with the lost wisdom of my lineage. The wisdom that was forbidden to be passed down.

Ask yourself: Nature and the Spirit of Life are always available to open to us and through us. Look around you right now. Can you see the sacred that’s already here — below you, around you, and within you?

What message does it have for you?





*"The sacred is in every breath, every birth,
every sunrise and sunset."*

Why do we compartmentalise spirit and matter?

I hope the day will come when words like mystic, sacred, and the divine become obsolete. No longer needed because the sacred, the unseen, the mystical is felt and known intrinsically. When heaven and Earth are woven back together. When the sacred is seen as a normal part of life. Both extraordinary and ordinary at the same time.

For the sacred is within all things, all moments, all beings. The sacred is in every breath, every birth, every sunrise and sunset. The sacred is in every flower that opens, every tree that grows, every river that flows, in every night and every day, in every I love you, and in every heartbreak, too.

When I was young, I yearned for something without being able to put words around it. As a child I'd sometimes tell my mum that I'd come here for a reason, but I couldn't remember exactly why or how I knew. Like so many of us, perhaps including you, I felt a deep, ancient soul yearning, burrowed in the chambers of my heart and the marrow of my bones, for a way of living that I innately knew but had not yet found. I'm not sure if it was something I came in remembering or something that was calling me forth.

It took four decades of living and searching for

me to discover that what I was yearning for was to exist in a world where the sacred is a normal part of life. Where we realise that we didn't get kicked out of the garden and that the sacred was and is already here.

The word 'theanthropic', derived from Greek words meaning god-man, describes the state of being fully human and fully divine at the same time.

Two equally significant parts. Not separate. Together. Whole. One. And when I reflect on my spiritual journey, I can see that while the awakening processes I experienced invited new capacities to open and my consciousness to expand, the sacred and the physical remained compartmentalised. Mind, body, and soul were not one. The sacred was unwoven from my everyday life.

Now, like you, I'm living in a time when we're largely starved of the sacred. It's been unwoven from our culture and society, and I believe this is one of the problems with the world right now. And it's why the simple act of seeing the sacred that's already here — above us, below us, around us, within us — is a revolutionary act. I believe that endeavouring to tend the Spirit of Life and the spirit within others has the power to change the world.



Reweaving the sacred thread

When I had my first awakening as a teenager, it felt like a whole new world had opened up, which was incredible. But it was as if I became disconnected from the world I was currently in, too. And when I look back on my early years as a channel and healer, when I was committed to living in alignment with my soul, following my intuition and truly living a spiritual life, I can see how disjointed they were. However, it wasn't until I began consciously working with plants through studying herbalism, and became a mother, that I saw just how much.

During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, I was on one of my daily walks in nature below the belly of Glastonbury Tor (the sacred hill above the town), when the realisation literally stopped me in my tracks as I crossed a field strewn with buttercups.

As a sleep-deprived new mum, I was feeling so torn between that new role and my soul mission/career. Until that point, I'd chosen a life of service and deep contemplation. My daily spiritual practice was non-negotiable, and it had nourished and served me so well; however, now I was unable to show up to it for as long and in the same way as I did before I had a child.



Extracted from Your Soul Had A Dream, Your Life is it: How to be held when it feels like everything is falling apart, by Rebecca Campbell (Hay House, £16.99)

Walking among the wildflowers with Sunny wrapped to my chest, I saw how even after so many years on a spiritual path, there was still a separation between my spiritual practice and my everyday life. I also saw how for so many of us our spiritual practices are devoid of nature as a gateway to the sacred, and rather than working with what's around us, our ceremonies are so particular: we feel that to get them 'right' we must buy the thing from the shop or order it from some faraway land. In that field on that day, I saw how disconnected from the sacred Spirit of Life we've become.

Then I kept hearing a phrase: 'Weave the sacred all the way back in. Weave the sacred into everyday life.' I took this to mean find ways to see the sacred that's already here. To see the sacred in every moment rather than trying to escape reality by going off to 'be spiritual' or 'do something spiritual.' To see all that happens in the messiness of our lives as an opportunity to return to the sacred.

Ask yourself: What's one simple way that you can weave the sacred more fully into your everyday life? How compartmentalised is your spiritual life from the rest of your life?

'Divorce shouldn't be seen as a negative thing'

TV presenter Laura Hamilton on why she believes happiness is in our own hands. By Lauren Taylor

She's best known for helping couples look for a dream home to live in an idyllic location — but Laura Hamilton says that marriage isn't always the best option.

The TV presenter and property expert announced her split from the father of their two children, Alex Goward, after 13 years together in 2022.

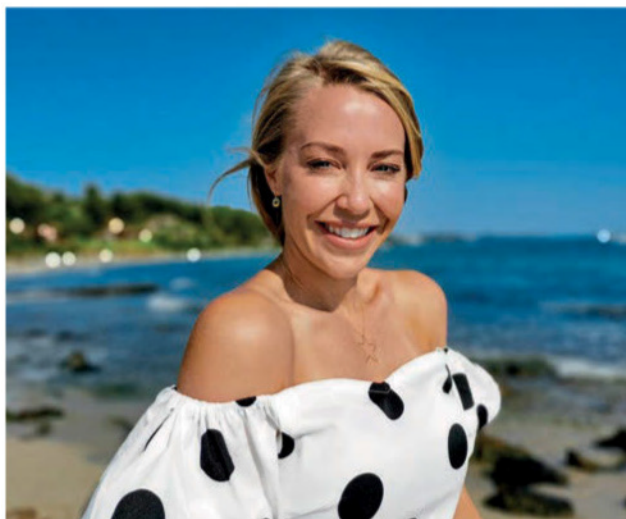
'If two people can't make it, [can't] be together, then it's the best for everyone,' says the 42-year-old. 'I'm a very strong, independent woman and I have been my entire life.'

'So, I was like, I don't need a relationship, I just want to be on my own. And it's better for everyone that way.'

The TV presenter and property expert has been part of the line-up of Channel 4's *A Place in the Sun* for 12 years — alongside Jasmine Harman, Scarlett Douglas and the late Jonnie Irwin, who died after a battle with lung cancer last February. And throughout that time presenting, along with renovating 28 properties — including her current project in Majorca — she has managed to remain optimistic.

'I have always tried to be positive, even when things have gone on in my life that I think, that's really crap,' she says. 'No one knows what's around the corner. I always try and go, "right, you know what? That's happened and that's going to make me stronger." Or "I'm going to tackle this, I'm going to achieve that".'

In 2018, she stepped in to save her local Post Office and village shop when they faced closure. 'I had no idea how to



renovate a residential property, I didn't know how to do a commercial premises. I employed 24 staff and then Covid hit, and it was like, "OK, I've got this business, how am I going to deal with this?" Some people [said] shut it down, and I was like "no, I'm not going to shut it down, we're going to get through this. We're going to make it even more of an asset in the community",' says Hamilton. 'If there's ever a negative, you know what, it just makes me stronger and I try and figure out another way.'

'Even in difficult times, I'm always a very big believer in "things happen for a reason", even through times when I'm like, that feels really tough.'

She's never been short of ambition either. This year she started a podcast, *Mile Fly Club*, sharing travel tips and stories with guests, including Bradley Walsh.

'I do believe whatever you put out, you get back. If you know you want to achieve something, you can make it happen. It might not happen immediately, but you can, you can make

things happen,' she says. 'When you work as hard as I have — and I've never been given anything from anyone, I've got pretty good work ethics because I've got that from my parents — I want to instil that into my own children.'

She has shared the joys of travel with son Rocco, 11, and daughter Tahlia, nine, since they were tiny babies.

'My children have travelled with me since they were three weeks old,' Hamilton says. She competed in the first series

of *The Jump* in 2014 in Austria, three weeks postpartum. 'That was kind of crazy, really, being a new mum,' she admits. 'It was the same with Tahlia, when she was three weeks old [we] travelled to Majorca.'

But she believes the children have both benefitted: 'They've learned so much; the experiences, the cultures, the foods, the sights, the sounds, the language... They love to ski, they're great in the water.'

'It can be stressful. But I think often, as a parent, you worry too much about what other people think, like if you're on a plane with a baby. I think in the long run, it pays off.'

Now in her 40s, Hamilton is 'just enjoying it for the now', saying, 'When you get into your late 30s, early 40s, you become a bit more comfortable in who you are. Age is just a number, and you know, every stage of your life you're learning and you're putting in the building blocks to get to where you are.'

***A Place in the Sun* is on every weekday at 6pm on Channel 4.**

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