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MANAGING

IN

LOCKDOWN

Mental Wellbeing

Survival Kit

Dr Jenn Cooper

Chartered Counselling
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Introduction

Hi there, and first of all thank you so much for purchasing the “Managing in Lockdown, Your Mental Wellbeing Survival Kit”.

We are in uncertain and unprecedented times with Covid-19 sweeping through the world, bringing with it a wave of panic and anxiety that the world has never seen before. We are faced with quarantine, illness, isolation and worry for those more vulnerable around us. We are facing a life so different from the one we were living only a few short weeks ago; no work, no school, no activities, less freedom. It is only natural that this is creating a huge amount of worry for people.

This self help programme aims to give you some practical, and immediately implementable strategies to help you manage life in isolation and social distancing and whatever anxiety or distress our current environment may be causing.

I hope this programme gives you back some control in a time where so much is out of our control.

About the Author:

Dr Jenn Cooper is a Chartered Counselling Psychologist with over 10 years experience, who runs her own independent psychological therapy practice.

Renfrewshire Psychology is a service that provides psychological therapy to those struggling with a variety of mental health problems within the Renfrewshire area and online.

Mummy Matters is an online psychological therapy and coaching service, committed to improving the wellbeing and mental health of mums across the country.



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What's In Store

Module 1 - Managing Worry

Module 2 - Information Management

Module 3 - Communication

Module 4 - Shifting Your Perspective

Module 5 - Isolation

Module 6 - Maintaining Healthy Relationships

Module 7 - Self Care

Module 8 - Keeping The Children Happy



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Managing Worry

It is only natural that we are worrying in these uncertain times. As humans, we thrive on routine, predictability and control. The world today, is the antithesis of this, and so if you were not worrying, I'd probably be more concerned!

The thing with worry is that there is a huge difference between worry that helps us, and worry that disables us. The problem is, we don't always know the difference, and even if we do, unhelpful worry is seductive, addictive and most of the time insidious...sneaking up on us without us even realising.

Helpful Worry

Worrying in times like this is completely normal and very understandable. And in fact, worry, on some level, is helpful. 'Helpful Worry' allows us to take necessary precautions, remain vigilant and aware and engage in behaviours that keep us safe. 'Helpful Worry' right now will be keeping you up to date with the relevant guidance; taking appropriate precautions by self-isolating if necessary, working from home a little more, using hand sanitiser and washing your hands more regularly; avoiding people who are either unwell or vulnerable and checking in on those who may be more vulnerable.

These 'Helpful Worries' are not something that we need to dismiss or get rid of...BUT we do need to stay alert to them remaining helpful and not slipping into the 'Unhelpful' domain.



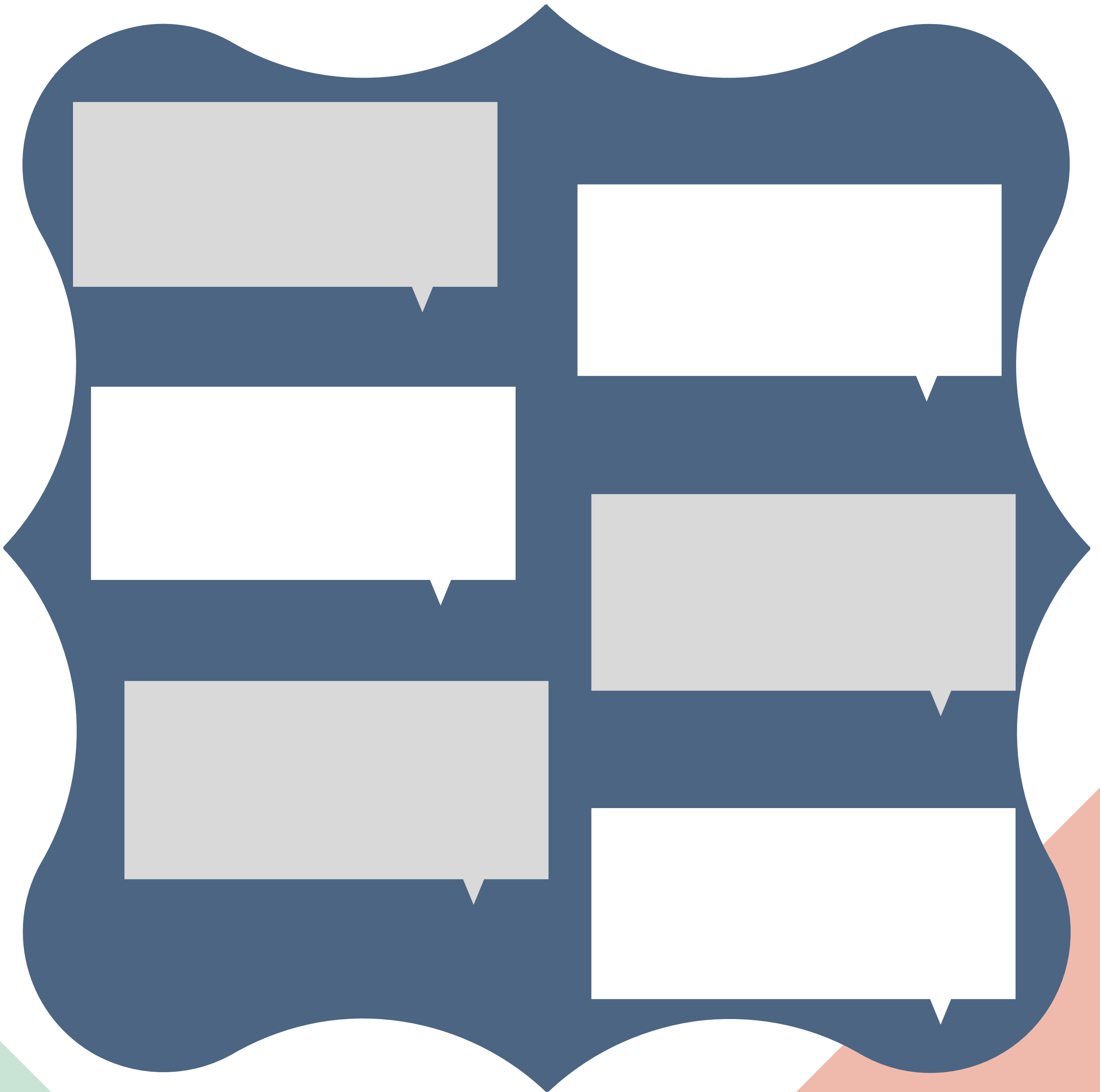
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Managing Worry

List some of your 'Helpful Worries' around the current situation with Covid-19:



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Managing Worry

Unhelpful Worry

‘Unhelpful worry’ relates to the kind of worry that keeps us awake at night; it stops us from being able to engage in our normal life; it affects our wellbeing and mood along with our behaviour.

- ▶ ‘Unhelpful Worry’ is the sort of thing that is currently responsible for the stockpiling situation we are seeing with people buying excessive food and toilet roll and people behaving in ways that they otherwise wouldn’t – like fighting over chicken in a supermarket or pushing children out of the way to get to the toilet roll.
- ▶ ‘Unhelpful Worry’ is responsible for people catastrophising and ruminating over the worst case scenario.
- ▶ ‘Unhelpful Worry’ is responsible for people feeling panicked and overwhelmed.
- ▶ ‘Unhelpful Worry’ is responsible for people not being able to think or talk about anything else.
- ▶ ‘Unhelpful Worry’ is responsible for people feeling unable to relax or take enjoyment out of their lives.
- ▶ ‘Unhelpful Worry’ is responsible for those intrusive thoughts that feel uncontrollable.
- ▶ ‘Unhelpful Worry’ is responsible for sleepless nights and restlessness.
- ▶ Take a second to think about where your worry is on the scale below:

No Worry

Helpful Worry

Unhelpful Worry

The good news is that there is plenty that we can do to take back a little control over these ‘Unhelpful Worries’ and shift them back into the ‘Helpful’ domain.



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Distraction

If you feel that your worry is becoming overwhelming and you're inching towards panic, distraction techniques are an excellent way to shift your attention away from the worry. Some really simple ways to do this in the moment are:

▶ Count back from 3000 in 6's

▶ Pull up a Wikipedia page on your phone and count all of the 'i's' on the page

▶ Look at a picture or painting nearby and count all of the colours; patterns; textures

▶ Focus your attention on the carpet and try to identify each tiny fibre or colour

▶ Recite the alphabet backwards

Don't be fooled or misled by how simple and silly these might seem. Our brains, whilst being very clever, really aren't great at multitasking, so if you are tuned into the worry, try changing the channel. Focus ALL of your attention onto a mundane, but challenging task, and your focus will shift away from the worry. It doesn't solve everything, but it does create a little distance from the overwhelming panic that you can then engage in some more helpful activities.

Distraction can also help in a less immediate way. If you are finding that particular times of the day seem to be worse than others, set up tasks or activities that will take your mind away from it:

Read a REALLY interesting book

Watch a hilarious film

Do some puzzles or crosswords

▶ Cook a complicated recipe

▶ Exercise



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Thought Challenging

Once you've created a little distance for yourself, a helpful skill to develop is Thought Challenging.

Our thoughts have a dramatic impact on our emotions, that learning to have a little more control over them can be very powerful. Here are some of the techniques that I find most effective:

▶ Evidence Analysis– Identify the anxious thought and look for the evidence for and against the thought.

Imagine you are in a court of law, would your evidence for the thought stand up in court?

Can you challenge the evidence you identify as 'for' the thought?

▶ Alternative Thinking– Identify the anxious thoughts, what feelings and behaviour does it elicit?

Rate the feeling out of 10 (with 10 being the highest)

What would an alternative thought be?

Is there a flip side?

Is there a more helpful way to think about it?

If you engage in the helpful thought, what feelings are elicited?

Rate these out of 10.



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Thought Challenging

Anxious Thought: e.g. "I'm going to catch Covid-19 and die"

Evidence For

e.g. "People have died from it"; "It's spreading quickly"

Evidence Against

e.g. "It is mostly elderly people who die"; "Most people who have died have had underlying health problems - I'm quite healthy"; "More people have recovered from Covid-19 than have died"; "Most people who catch Covid-19 are only mildly unwell"



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Thought Challenging

Anxious Thoughts, Behaviour & Feelings (rate 0-10) <i>e.g. "I might die; avoid places/people & check news throughout the day; anxious (10/10)</i>	Alternative Thoughts, Behaviour & Feelings (rate 0-10) <i>e.g. based on the evidence I'll probably be ok; check less & go out when need to; anxious (5/10) and calm (5/10)</i>



Worry Time

This might sound a little counter-intuitive, but sometimes a really helpful thing to do for worry is write it all down!

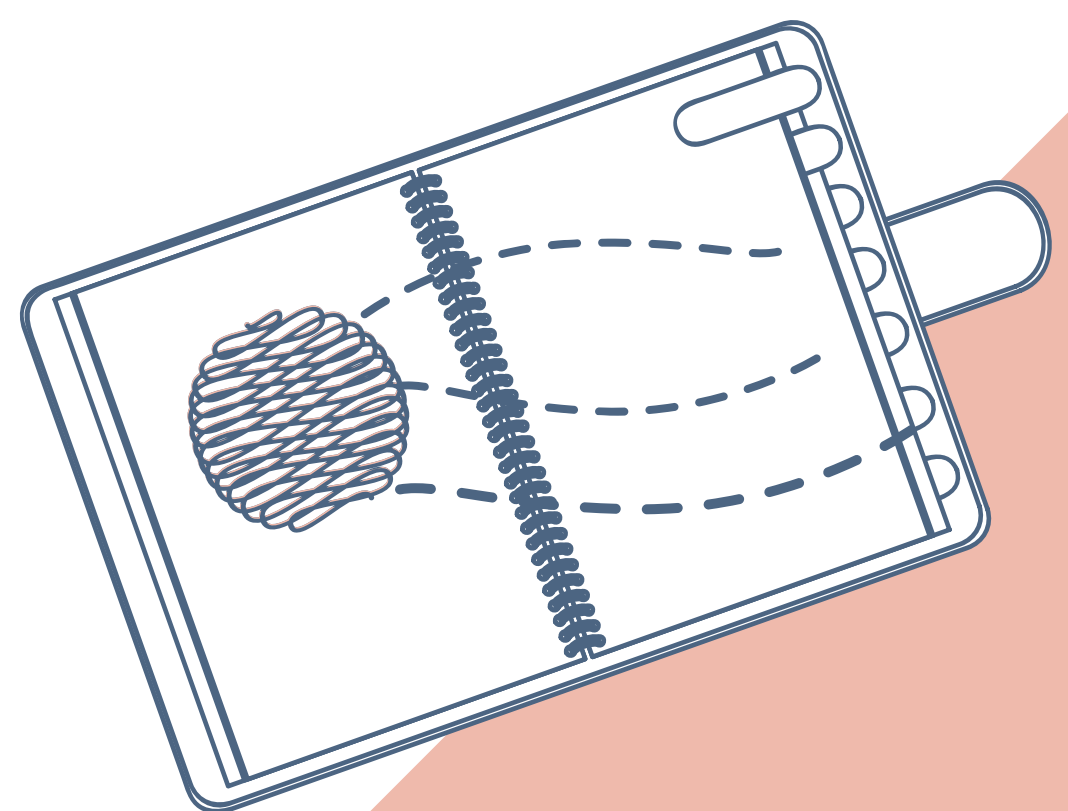
Worry time is about setting some time aside (before bed is a good time), where you give yourself unlimited permission to think of all of those worries and write them down.

It's allowing ourselves to unconditionally think about the worries without the internal criticism we can often give ourselves for worrying in the first place.

One of the difficulties with worry, is that when they are all in our head they become a big tangled mess, they grow arms and legs and we can start worrying about the worries.

Writing them down gets them out of your head and can create some space to be a bit more objective and engage in problem solving which is impossible with that tangled mess in your head.

Set aside 10 minutes to allow yourself to create a little space for yourself whilst acknowledging the worries that you are carrying about with you.



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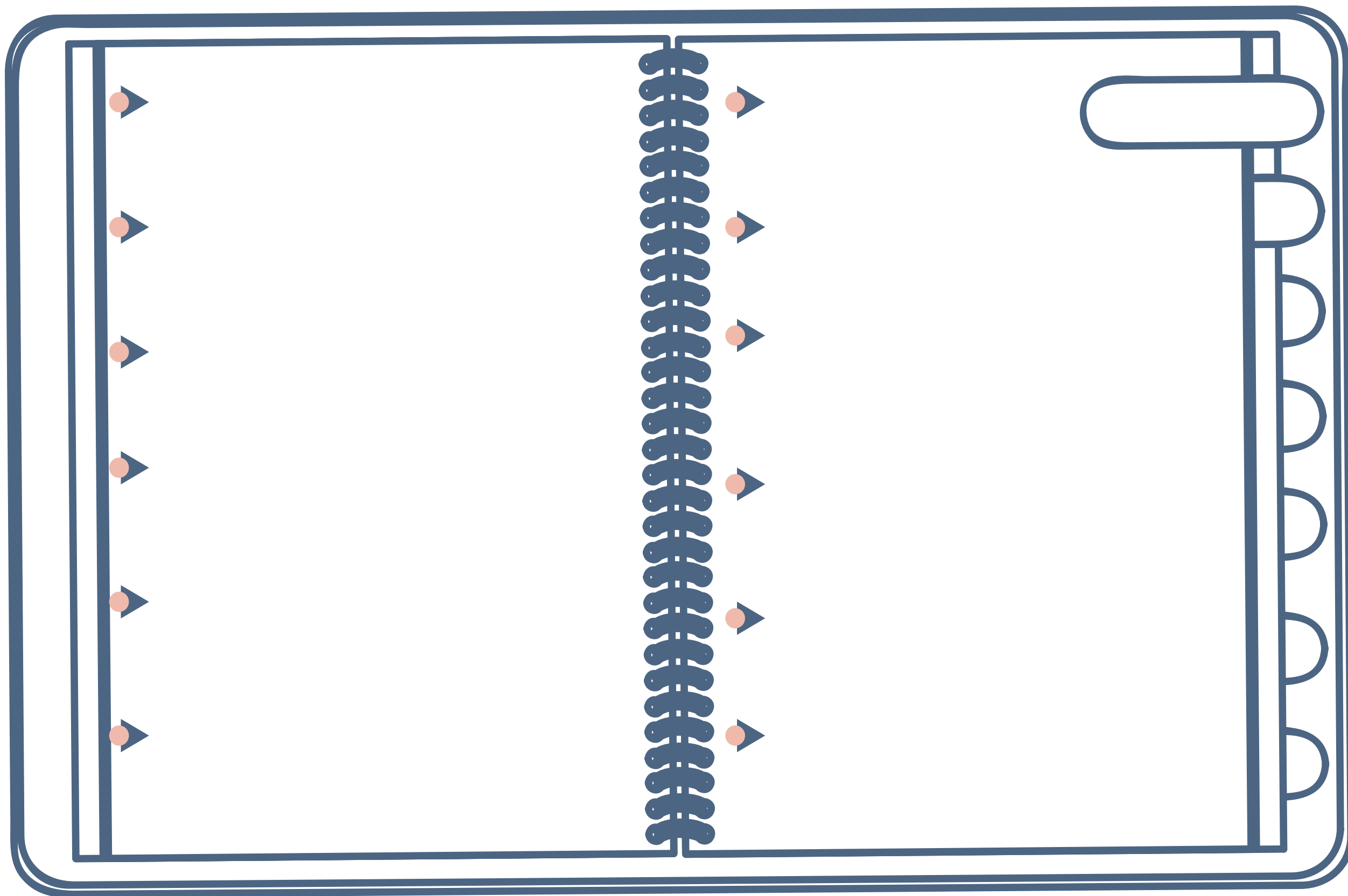
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Worry Time



My Worry Time Journal



Breathing

Follow your worry time with some nice deep breathing exercises. Breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth for counts of 6 and out for counts of 6. Let the air fill your lungs, all the way down to your belly. Imagine your belly is like a balloon, inflating with the in breath and deflating on the out breath. Do this for a couple of minutes until you feel relaxed



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Sleep

Related to worry time, ensuring you manage your sleep can be crucial for helping you keep that 'Unhelpful Worry' at bay. Good sleep hygiene is essential for us all, all of the time. When we are well rested, we are happier, more rational and more in control individuals. Worry can be a real hurdle for this so try out some of these strategies for improving your sleep:

➤ Worry time – you can reassure yourself that you've written the worries down when they creep in at bedtime. You can tell yourself that you can come back to them in the morning because they are written down. Keep your notepad nearby so you can add any more as they pop into your head.

➤ Set a bedtime and stick to it. As humans we LOVE routine. So set a regular bedtime and wakening time. This can be hard, especially when our routines are out of whack, but maintaining a sleep routine this is crucial for good sleep.

➤ Create an environment that is good for your sleep. Limit screens in your room. Do not look at your phone at least 30 minutes (preferably an hour) before your bedtime. Keep your phone in a separate room or at the other side of the room. Ensure your room is cool and dark.

➤ Wind down – start introducing a bedtime routine. We do it for our children – bath, story, bed; yet don't do it for ourselves. Start implementing a routine that will help you wind down (not tv, social media, news etc). Create a sense of calm and relaxation. Dim the lights, have a shower, read a book... do anything that will promote a sense of soothing and calmness.

Avoid caffeine or nicotine too close to bedtime; don't exercise too close to bedtime either.

➤ Write it down – write down your bedtime routine. Start with the time you want to be going to sleep at, then work backwards so that you give yourself plenty of time.



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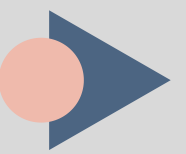
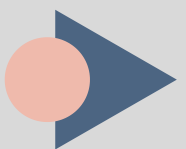
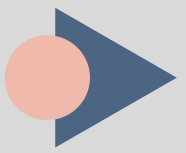
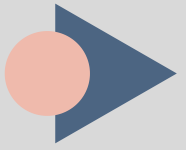
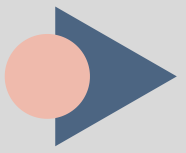
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Sleep

Choose some of the strategies above and begin to develop a great routine for a great nights sleep:

My Good Night's Sleep Plan



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Information

We are in time where information is so readily available, but with that, there is lots of conflicting information, fake news and downright inaccurate and scaremongering information. We consume information so rapidly, yet often only in snippets. We only see the headlines, and are so bombarded with it all that we tend to just believe what we read.

On top of that, if we are anxious, we use information as a safety behaviour. We get caught in the trap of thinking that the more information we have the safer and more prepared we are. Unfortunately, we then get sucked into constant information checking :-

➤ How many times have you googled “coronavirus symptoms” today?

➤ How many hours have you spent reading all kinds of information or watching the news?

➤ When your deep into the news, do you feel better?

➤ As you read one website and follow a link to another, does it make you feel less anxious?

The chances are that it doesn't. When we get caught up in using information 'checking' as a safety behaviour, we are constantly seeking something that will make us feel better, and yet are drawn to all of the things that make us feel worse.



Information

It is so important, especially right now, that we are choosing our information sources wisely. Make sure that you are using reliable, research based and objective sources such as:

➤ WHO – <https://www.who.int>

➤ NHS – <https://www.nhs.uk>

➤ Gov.uk – <https://www.gov.uk>

➤ Health Protection Scotland – <https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk>

As well as choosing the correct sources, try to avoid bombarding yourself with information. While it is crucial that we are all remaining up to date and informed, it would do us all good to regain some control over this. I'd recommend choosing a specific time that you are going to check (the correct) sources and give yourself a time limit.

Information Management Commitment

Sources

At (Time)

For How Long (Time Limit)



Communication

It is so important that we maintain communication during this time, especially when there is increasing isolation on the horizon. However, it is also a really important time for people to set boundaries around their communication.

It is so easy to get caught up in talking about covid-19 and the fear it generates; but do these conversations help you? Do they make you feel better?

The chances are that they increase your anxiety, so a really important step in managing your anxiety, is exerting control over the conversations you are having.

Here's some simple strategies for taking charge of your communication

How does this conversation make me feel?

Have you noticed how particular conversations or communication with particular people makes you feel? A really straight forward tool is to rate those conversations. Take a moment to check in with yourself about the conversations you're having and where they place on this scale:

Conversations about _ _ _ _ _		
with _ _ _ _ _ make me feel:		
Great	Ok	Worse
Happy	Neutral	Highly Anxious
Distracted	Manageable	Uncomfortable



Communication

Assert yourself

This is a time to not worry about offending people or upsetting others. If a conversation is making you feel worse or anxious or uncomfortable, perhaps generate a particular statement you can use to stop the conversation e.g. “I’m sorry but I would prefer to not talk about this as it makes me feel very anxious” or “would you mind if we talked about something else as this topic doesn’t make me feel great”.

If others don’t respect this, then it is time to move away from them. Leave the situation or begin a conversation with someone else who will respect your needs.

Alternatively, you can try distracting the conversation away from the topic, perhaps generate some topics that you can use to move the conversation on; perhaps talking about a TV programme you’ve watched or a book you recently read.

Take a moment to make these concrete and tangible by writing them down:

Conversation Strategies

Assertive Statement

Distraction Topics

Strategies for Moving Away



Communication

Social Media

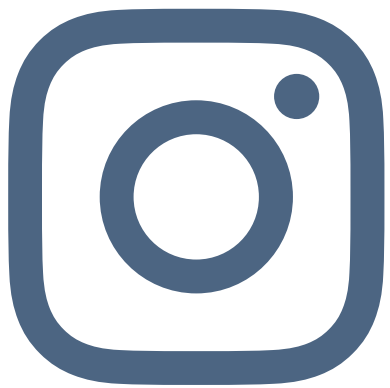
More than ever, your use of social media will be critical. Not only will it provide a life line to the outside world, it is also crucial to control your news feed.

Maintaining a healthy relationship with your social media accounts will be important for them to be a good source of support for you. Don't allow yourself to be infected by negativity or anxiety of people you do not want to see.

Take some time to look through your feed and unfollow people who do not add something valuable to your wellbeing. We are in control of what we see on social media, albeit it doesn't always feel that way.

Mute people so that you can't see their posts rather than unfollow if that feels better. Limit your use of social media to times where it will help you, rather than contribute to your distress – i.e. not right before bedtime.

Some of my favourite go to accounts on instagram are:



@annamathur
@mumologist
@_drsoph
@the.holistic.psychologist
@myeasytherapy
@the_mindful_psychologist



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Communication

Write a list of the social media accounts/friends who add value to your wellbeing and who you can seek out when you are feeling overwhelmed:

My Go To Accounts



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Communication

Talk it Through

Whilst important to moderate the conversations you are having, it is equally important that you have people who you trust and can talk through some of your worries and concerns with. Be that a good friend, your partner, mum, a professional; or helpline identifying the people who you can talk to will make it easier to approach them when you feel the need to.

You can always speak to someone at:

The Samaritans – 116 123

Mind – 0300 123 3393

Breathing Space – 0800 83 85 87 (Scotland)

My Go To People



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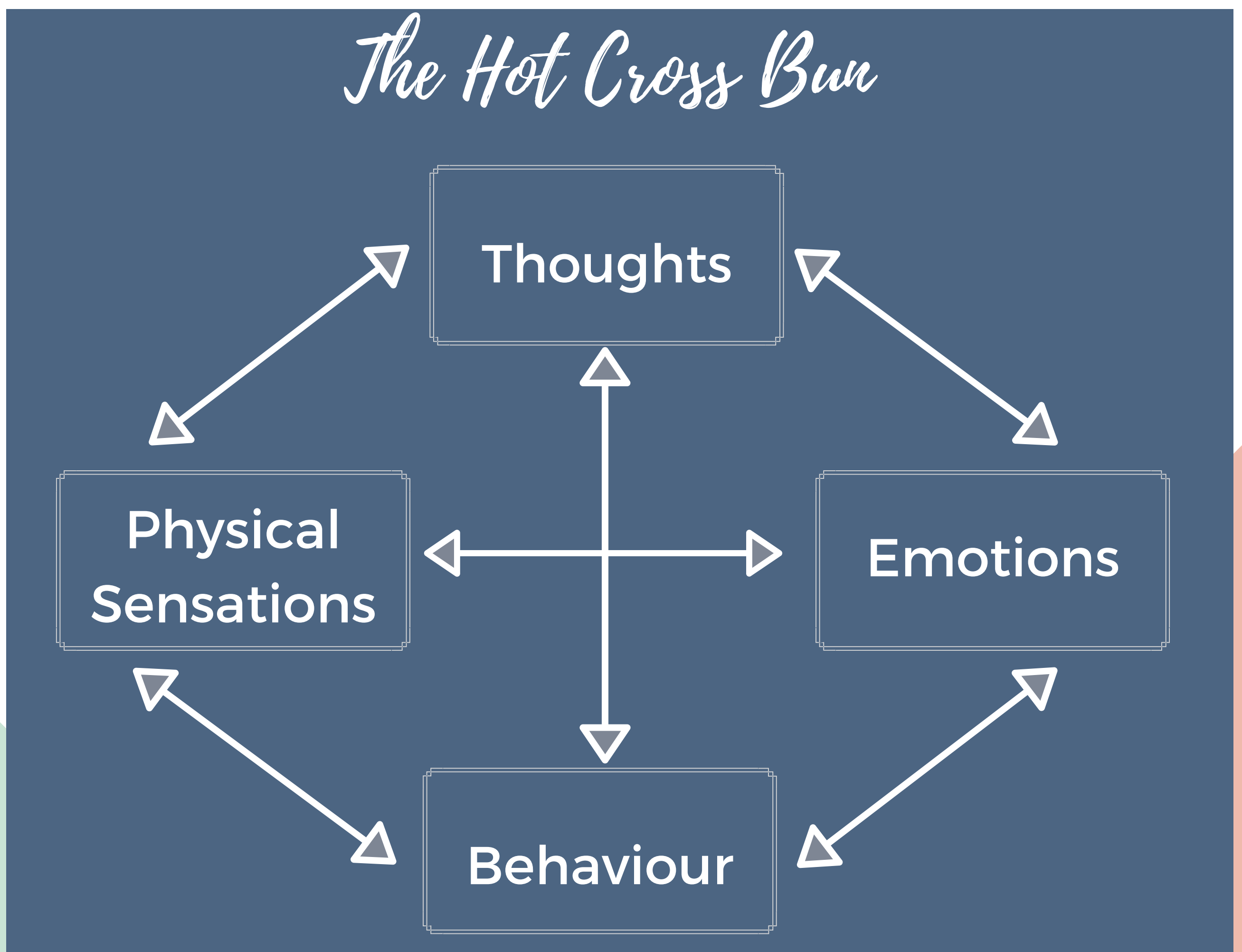
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Perspective

The way in which we think has a significant impact on how we feel both emotionally and physically, and how we behave. If we have persistent negative thoughts e.g. "everything is terrible, this will never get any better, I can't cope"; then this impacts on our emotions.

We're unlikely to be feeling happy and upbeat with thoughts like that running through our head. We're also unlikely to be feeling motivated to maintain our routine, seek joy and fun; and are more likely to be engaging in behaviours that aren't all that helpful – continually checking the media; talking about it; reduce your activity; lose routine etc.

These all then have a knock on effect to how we are thinking, and therefore how we are feeling which creates this nasty, vicious cycle we can see below.



Perspective

Undoubtedly, you will be having numerous thoughts about what is going on, and very few of these will be positive. When we get bogged down in the negative thoughts, however we get caught in some common thinking traps:

Catastrophising – "everything is going to be terrible forever"

▶ All or Nothing Thinking – "everything is perfect or everything is terrible"

▶ Biased Thinking – "there is only terrible things happening"

▶ Gaining some perspective on these thinking traps can be a really helpful tool, not only to see the 'whole picture' but also to shift this cycle. Some questions to ask yourself to help shift your perspective a little are:

Asking yourself and others what the best part of the day was?

What one good thing happened today?

What 3 things have you got to feel grateful for today?

▶ What went well today?

▶ What has improved today?

▶ What was the funniest part of the day?

▶ What did you enjoy today?

Engaging in these questions will instantly shift your emotions into a more positive sphere where you can then offset this vicious cycle. It doesn't take the scary stuff that's going away, but it does give you some space, even just for a moment, where you are focused on something real and tangible that was good.



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Shift Your Perspective

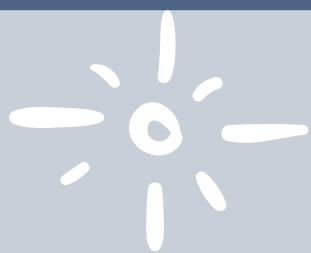
Something Funny 

One Good Thing 

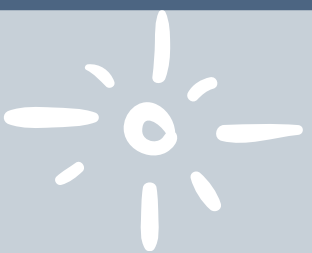
Gratitude Attitude 



What Went Well? 




The Best Part Of The Day



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Isolation

There is no denying that isolation is going to bring its own, very unique set of challenges. Being stuck at home for long periods of time can result in the development of unhelpful behaviours and patterns, which can have a significant impact on our mental wellbeing.

On top of that, the social isolation from your family and friends and the obstacles being placed in the way of engaging in your normal daily activities means having robust strategies and mechanisms for managing this isolation becomes crucial.

Some of the most problematic traps we can fall into when it comes to isolation is losing routine and structure; developing poor eating and drinking habits; inconsistent sleep patterns and disengagement from daily activities. For example, I know that if I am in the house a lot, rather than getting things done, I procrastinate, knowing that I'll have tomorrow to do it which often means it never gets done. Another example is that when I have a lot of 'down time' I get quickly bored and when I get bored I EAT...like all the food!

For others, it might be that they start going to bed later, getting up later, napping through the day and having a sleep pattern that is all over the place. Poor sleep is a sure fire way of your mood taking a hit. The more you sleep, the more sluggish you feel. Alternatively, you might actually end up sleeping less, with nothing to 'get up for' the next day yet forgetting that the kids still get up at 6.30am!

If we add in an increase in alcohol intake when we have nothing to wake up for, we can create a perfect storm of poor sleep and low mood. Another area that can cause problems is the lack of movement that isolation might result in. Not walking to the train station before work; not wandering around the shops; gyms being closed combined with watching more TV (and poor sleep) means that our activity levels are in for a dramatic reduction.



Isolation

Take a moment to have a think and identify some of your potential traps during isolation – try and be as specific as you can:

My Isolation Traps



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Isolation

So now that we've identified some of the potential traps you might fall into during isolation, let's think about some of the strategies that can help.

Routine

While routine as you knew it is out of the window, that does not mean that routine cannot be established. This is especially important if you have children at home. As humans, we THRIVE on routine, and children are particularly sensitive to this.

Think about the routine that you have had prior to the isolation and think about how you can break your days down to establish some normality and predictability for you all. Make sure to include waking times, meal times, 'school' times, chores and activities along with bedtime.

Use the activity schedule below as a template. My preference is to anchor the regular and necessary activities first – waking time and bed time, then meal times, along with children's schedules (naps, feeds, snack time, bath times, any home learning activities etc).

From there, identify any points in the day that might be problem times (4pm anyone?!?) and pre-empt these by scheduling in activities – screen time, chores, hobbies, games etc. Make sure to include not only necessary activities but think about activities that bring a sense of joy, happiness, fun or accomplishment. Ensure that you include some time for exercise and relaxation. This is perhaps a time to really consider your own needs throughout the day and schedule in time for them.

Following from this, it can then be helpful to plan ahead in your week. You've identified your meal times, write a meal plan, a shopping list, and schedule in your meal prep time; you've identified time to exercise, write down a plan for yourself; plan any educational activities for the children too and have this outlined clearly for everyone to follow.



Activity Schedule

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			



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Isolation

Movement

The importance of moving our body is one that is often overlooked. Not only is movement important for your physical health, the impact it can have on our mental health is unmatched.

Think about a time where you have spent the whole day or weekend on the sofa...how did you feel physically? Did you feel energised and joyful? Or did you feel lethargic and 'can't be arsed'?

Take a moment to think about how moving or not moving makes you feel:

Movement encourages the body to release a surge of endorphins around our body, and is often referred to as a 'natural anti-depressant'. Those endorphins are responsible for uplifting our mood and increasing our energy levels...even if we feel totally done in after a tough workout.

During any period of isolation, we will naturally be moving less. We're in the house and not walking to and from the school or work. We're probably sitting down most of the day, only moving between rooms to make meals, and do a bit of tidying.



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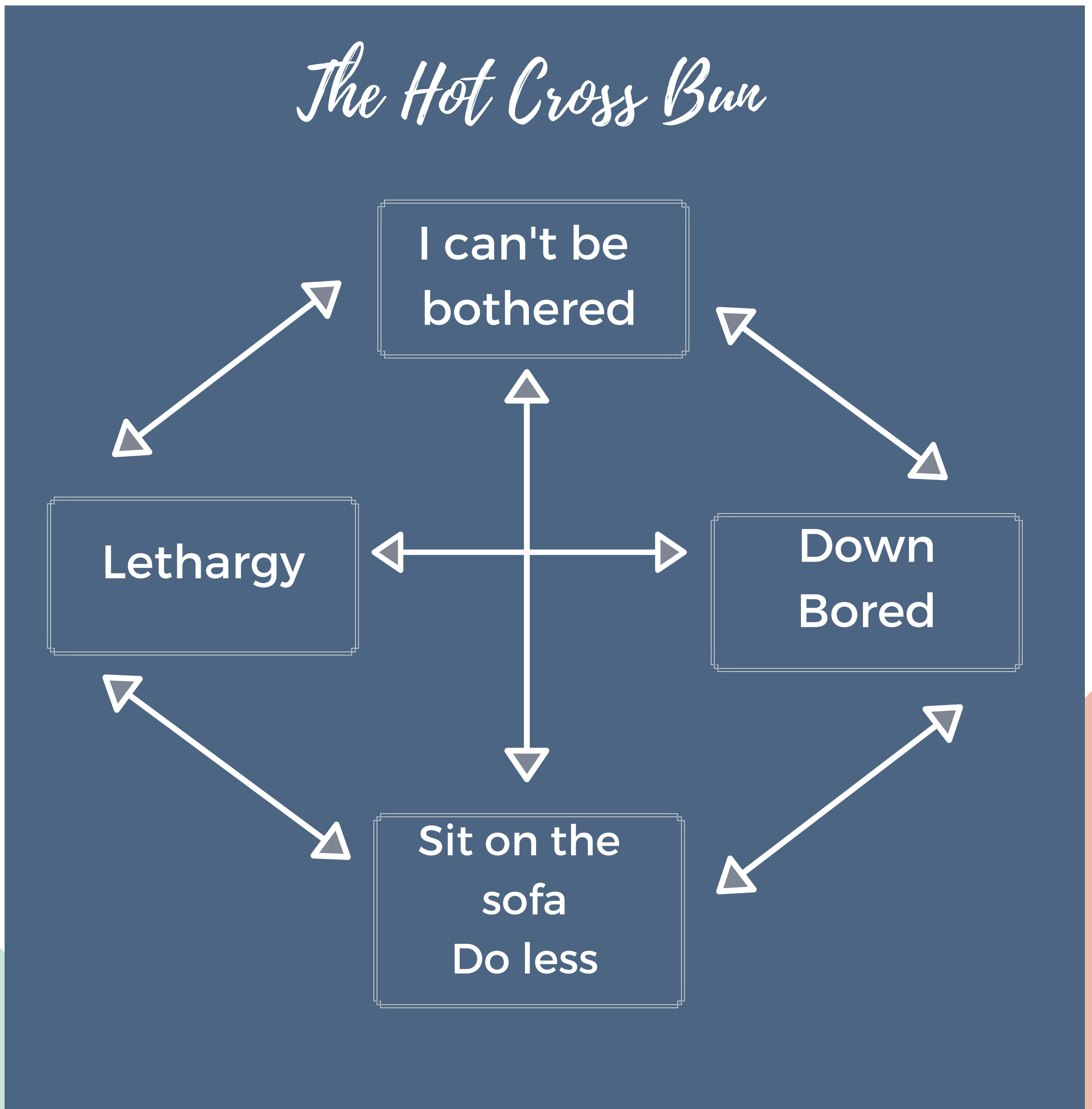
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Isolation

There is real danger here of us slipping into a static existence. Remember the Hot Cross Bun from earlier?

That little box on the left hand side can often get neglected and overlooked, but going by this cycle, each component is equally important, as you can see from the example below:



Isolation

Here's some ideas on how to build up your movement, increase those endorphines and fight of the "I can't be arsed-ness":

N.E.A.T

(or Non-exercise activity thermogenesis if you're fancy)

This is perhaps the easiest way to build up your movement throughout the day – doing what you already do, but perhaps with a little more intention. N.E.A.T exercises are those every day tasks that keep us moving – hoovering, mopping the floors, scrubbing the bath, cutting the grass, redecorating a room, washing the car, decluttering the house, cleaning the kitchen cupboards. All of these activities expend energy and increase our movement. It's amazing wearing a step-counter or activity watch and seeing just how much we move in a day when we are incorporating more of these activities into our day.

Set yourself a schedule or a goal each day to incorporate some specific N.E.A.T in your day. Spread it out across the day so that you are breaking up any longer periods of time being static.

PLAY

Get fully involved in the game of football your kids are playing in the garden, or play a game of 'What's the time Mr Wolf ' and chase the kids about till they are exhausted. It's easy sometimes just to watch these games, especially if we are feeling the "I can't be arsed-ness" So join in and participate! If you're really adventurous, get Twister out – even if you don't have kids!

HOME WORKOUTS

These don't have to be fancy and there is an ABUNDANCE of free resources online for you to get a workout done from the comfort of your own living room. My favourite is the Body Coach homework outs on YouTube!

It can be hard to find the motivation for this, so schedule in a time where you'll be most likely to do it and commit to it!

I find doing a workout first thing in the morning or right after I've put the kids to bed the easiest time but mostly because I use these times as anchor points to get into my gym gear. Either first thing in the morning (and I've looked them out the night before) so I just get up and get them on; or when the kids are getting ready for bed – instead of getting into my jammies I get into my workout gear. If I'm dressed the part, I'm far more likely to engage.

Set yourself some goals, identify what you are going to do and choose a time!



Isolation

Make a Movement Commitment to yourself on a daily basis

My Movement Commitment

My N.E.A.T Goals For Today (What & When):

My WorkOut Plan

When:

What:

My Anchor for Motivation:



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Isolation

Social Connection in Social Distancing

It is going to be a tough and lonely time during isolation, even if you're isolated with your family. Not being able to pop round to your friends for a cup of tea; not having other children around for play dates to distract your kids; not going to work for some office gossip, is going to make it feel very lonely and very disconnected.


But we are truly living in an age of digital wizardry. Our ability to achieve connection and communication even in isolation is truly a miracle. We just need to harness this technology in a positive, creative and effective way.

We've already covered the pitfalls and opportunities of social media, but let's not forget our real life connections too. Just because we cannot be near our friends and family, does not mean we cannot be 'with' them.


Unfortunately, while we live in an awesome digital age, we can be pretty rubbish at actually talking to people. In isolation, picking up the phone and making a call or FaceTime rather than a text can make a huge difference.







What if you and your friends had a coffee date? Schedule a time to video call each other (look for the House Party App!), with a hot cuppa and have those laughs you would do if you were all in Costa together. Sunday Lunches, whilst a little odd, could still be done together with the right technology and a bit of humour!

Social Distancing does not need to mean social isolation...we just need to get a little creative!



My Social Connection Ideas





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Isolation

Opportunity in Challenges

Finally, whilst we all know that the isolation is going to be difficult, let's not forget to use some of the earlier strategies we've learnt, and shift our perspective.

Isolation comes with a number of potential opportunities which if we can see them and take control of them, then we have a real chance at using this time to our advantage.

When was the last time that you've had so much time at home? When was the last time you didn't spend your weeks rushing from one thing to another? When was the last time you were able to take things slow, with no pressures on your time.

Perhaps this time could be used to set some goals. To get things done around the house that have been on your 'to do list' for weeks or months. Perhaps you can re-engage in a hobby that you've long not had time for, or practice recipes that you never got round to.

Setting some goals for your period of isolation can give you a sense of focus and purpose during a time that feels like limbo. Don't be afraid to set the goals high, but don't put pressure on yourself to them all at once; you'll have plenty of time to work towards them!



My Goals For Isolation





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Relationships

I think perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of all the uncertainty and increased social distancing, is the potential impact this is going to have on our relationships. I know for sure, that my husband (who I love dearly) and I are not designed to be in closed confinement for prolonged periods of time; and particualry not when we are under stress and pressure and having to deal with unsettled children.

It is only a matter of time before we start bickering and getting on each others nerves. Sure, its a great time to work on our team work, but it is also a time filled with minefields of potential conflict and frustration.

For me, being proactive about these kinds of scenarios is crucial if we are going to survive this path together. We both know that difficulties are inevitable, and in being able to acknowledge this together, we can plan for this together.

I would really encourage you to sit down with your partner (or flatmates or parents...whoever you live with) and think about what your triggers might be and how you might manage these together. It is not possible for you to do this alone; by definition a relationship is a way in which two (or more people) are connected; so you all have equal responsibilty over the relationship

Potential Triggers and Conflict



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Relationships

Having identified the potential areas of conflict, now is the time to be proactive and think about how you might manage these, but it is not the time to pussyfoot around your needs. It's time to be bold and assertive!

While each relationship is going to be different, all relationships benefit from healthy boundaries and communication. Healthy boundaries in a relationship put under pressure by quarantine are going to need creative and explicit management.

It is really important that you can both (or all) consider what your boundaries and needs are, and how they are likely to be throughout any social distancing or isolation. Working together to be able to meet each others needs is going to be hard but very worth it.

For me, I NEED space! I need time away from being a mum and a wife. I need space to decompress after long days and I need time to be on my own. These needs are going to be very difficult to meet during this time and so I have made a plan with my husband to be able to communicate this in the moment, and for us to know exactly what each other needs (as much as we can anticipate it).

Identify separate areas of the house that you can retreat to when you need space,

▶ Plan around managing childcare and work pressures. Engaging in a 'Divide and Conquer' mentality can help so that you each get your needs for space and time away met.

▶ Being able to quickly express your need for space is also crucial, so perhaps come up with a phrase that you can both use to communicate this when things are feeling too much.

▶ Remember too, that just because you are with each other all of the time, it does not mean you are 'being with' each other any of the time. It is important to still make time to look after your relationship, engage and connect. Schedule this time in.

▶ When the inevitable arguments do happen, create a crisis resolution plan with each other for how you might resolve this quicker – e.g. stopping what you are doing; having space away from each other; making contact (holding hands); having a phrase that can diffuse the situation.



Relationships

Our Relationship Action Plan

Needs	Needs
<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>

Our Plan to Meet Those Needs



Relationships

Our Crisis Resolution Plan

Our Plan to Manage Conflict



Keeping The Children Happy

Undoubtedly the children are going to be finding this whole situation difficult too. They are no longer attending school or nursery, their extracurricular activities have been cancelled, they are no longer allowed to go on playdates or play with other children at the park, they are being isolated in their homes away from their extended family, all whilst experiencing the same anxiety and uncertainty as the rest of us along with a hefty side dish of BOREDOM.

For many parents, keeping the children entertained and happy during this time will be an added source of stress and worry. So here are some ideas for helping both your childrens and your own emotions and sanity during this trying time!

Routine

We talked about the importance of routine for ourselves, but for children, routine is paramount. Children thrive in certainty and predictability, and when they have a some sense of control; everything they are being stripped of in amongst Covid-19.

Children feel happy and safe when they know what is expected of them and they know the boundaries and rules in their environment. All of those have been turned on their heads, and whilst it may initially feel like a holiday for them, establishing a good routine for them at home is going to be really important.



Keeping The Children Happy

When thinking about what to put into any kind of routine, it is important to make it all balanced.

As we seen previously in your own activity schedule, it can be helpful to create anchor points around the set activities of the day (wake time, bed time, meals); that way your child has routine predictability which helps contain their day.

Other things to consider in a routine for children who are going to be in the house all day are:

- ▶ Exercise and Movement

- ▶ Outside Time

- ▶ Quiet Time

- ▶ Screen Time

(perhaps now is the time to not get too hung up on this)

- ▶ Chores

- ▶ Free Play

- ▶ Learning activities

(but don't put too much pressure on yourself with this one!)

- ▶ One to One Time

- ▶ Games

Every family and every child will have different needs, and so it is important to go with what works for your family. I didn't want to be too prescriptive with the routine template but I would recommend sitting down with your children and completing this together. Not only will it help them to buy in and have a good understanding of what to expect; it will also give them a bit of that much needed sense of control!



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Keeping The Children Happy

NAME:

ROUTINE

TIME:

ACTIVITY:

Wake up, get dressed, brush teeth, breakfast

Lunch Time

Dinner Time

Bedtime - bath, pj's, brush teeth, story, cuddles, sleep



Keeping The Children Happy

OCCUPY THEM

I don't know about your children, but my children get very bored very quickly! And when they are bored, they act out, demand my attention and generally just misbehave.

Finding things that can occupy them is going to be your key to sanity. Again, it is really going to depend on your child, their age and their interests with regards to what really gets them interested and engaged.

It could be getting the playdoh out, or it could be a colouring book; it could be a game or app, or it could be building something. Sit down with your child to compile a list of things that they REALLY love doing – so that there's a better chance of them actually being engaged, but again to give them that sense of control.

Some great resources that I get a load of ideas from are:

- ▶ The Five Minute Mum (@thefiveminutemum) who creates games that take 5 minutes to set up and that keep kids entertained for ages – theres also lots of sneaky learning opportunities hidden in them she's also recently released a book which is a god send and has made me a significantly better parent overnight!!
- ▶ The Reading Eggs App is great to continue some learning, but is so interactive and fun that kids can spend hours engaging in the app.
- ▶ Comic Kids Yoga/ The Body Coach (both on YouTube) offer fantastic, child friendly exercise routines.



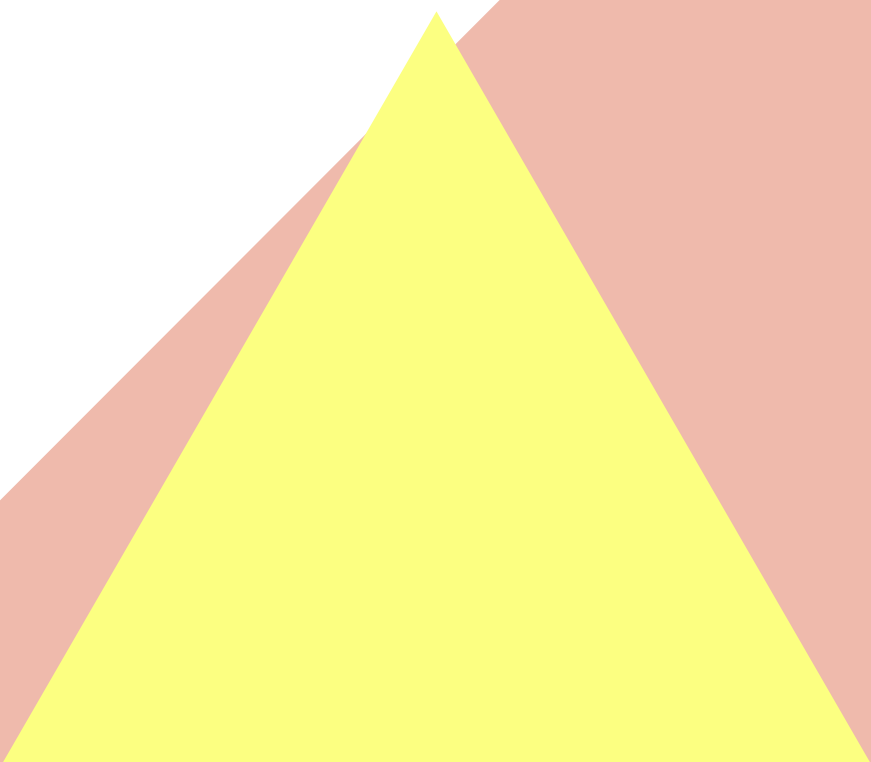
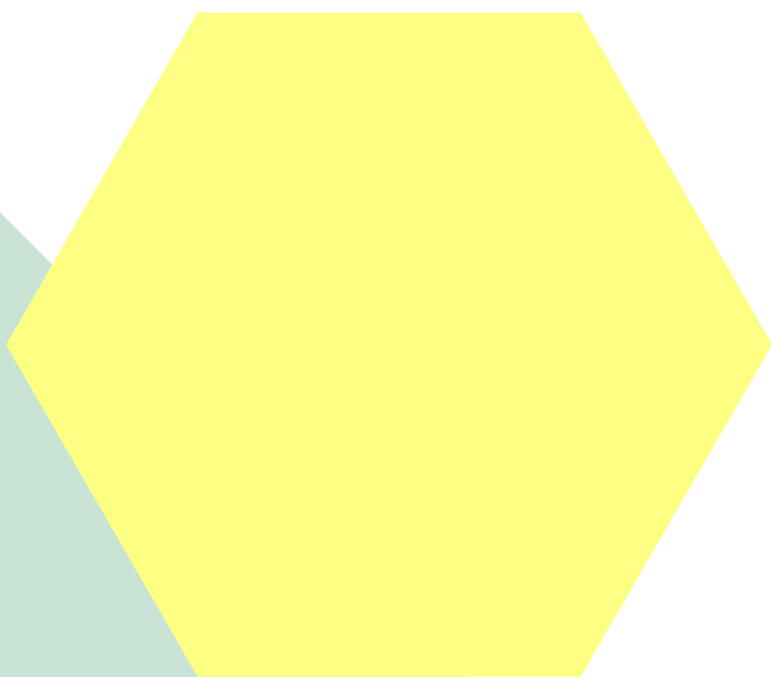
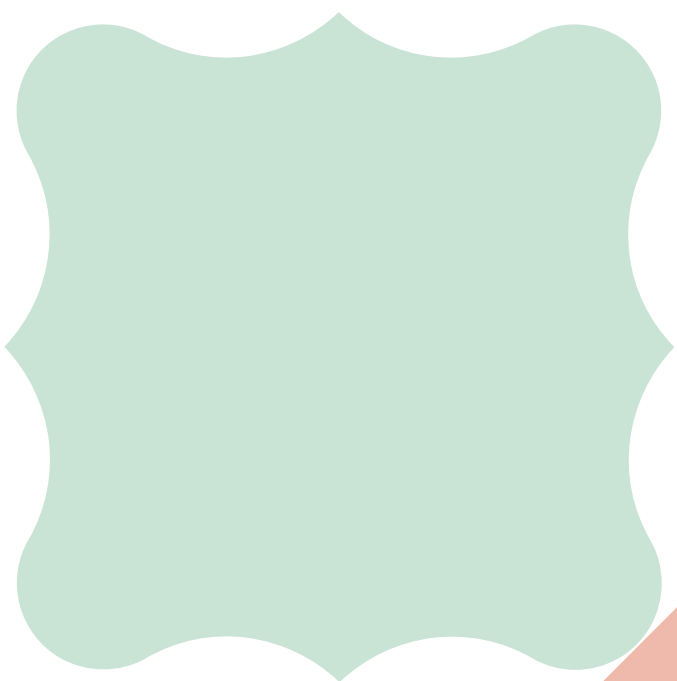
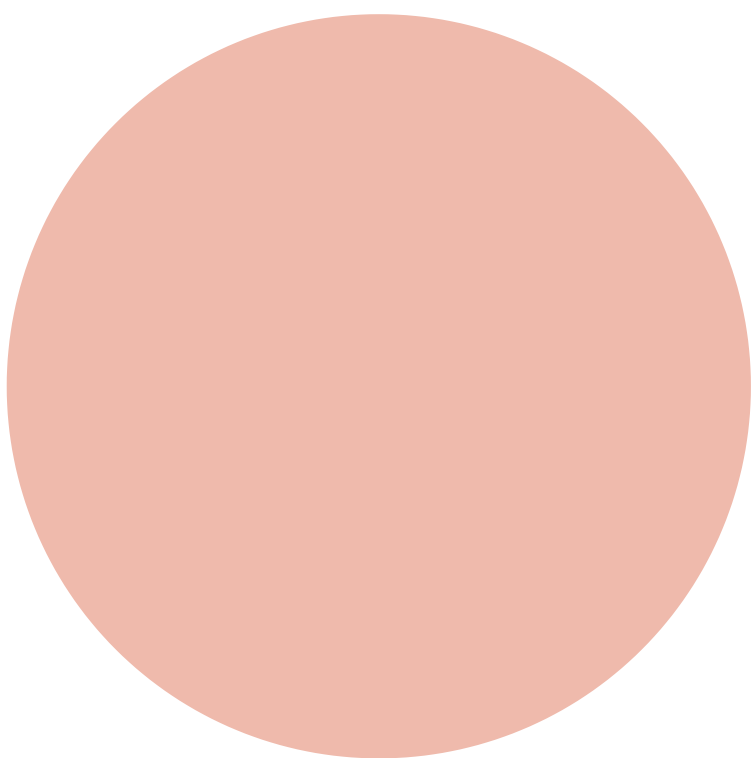
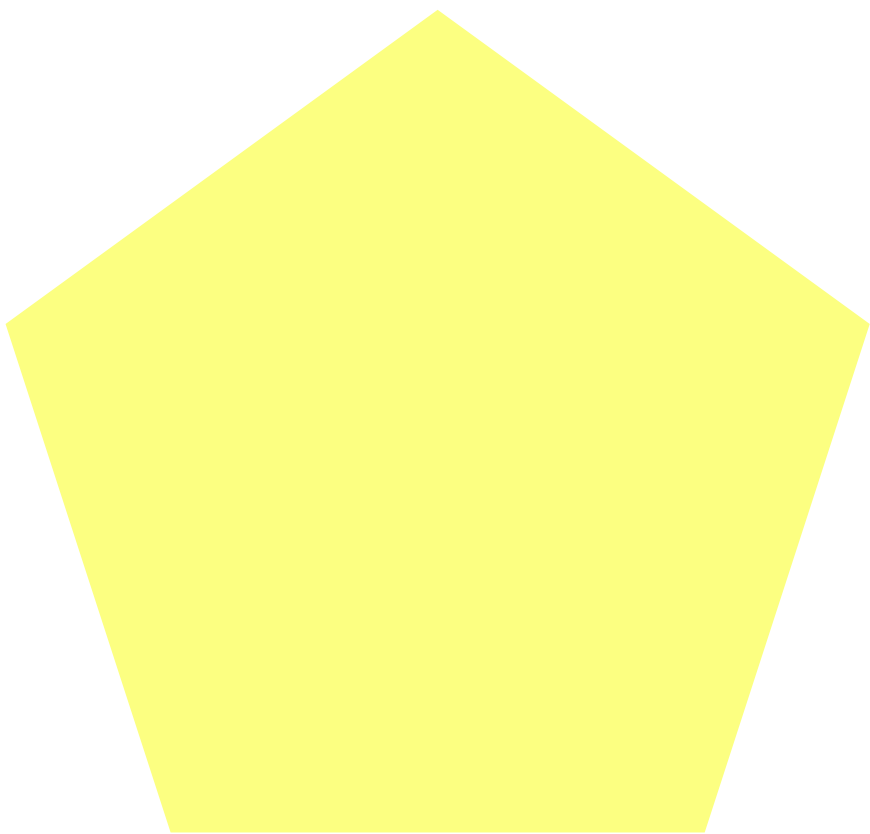
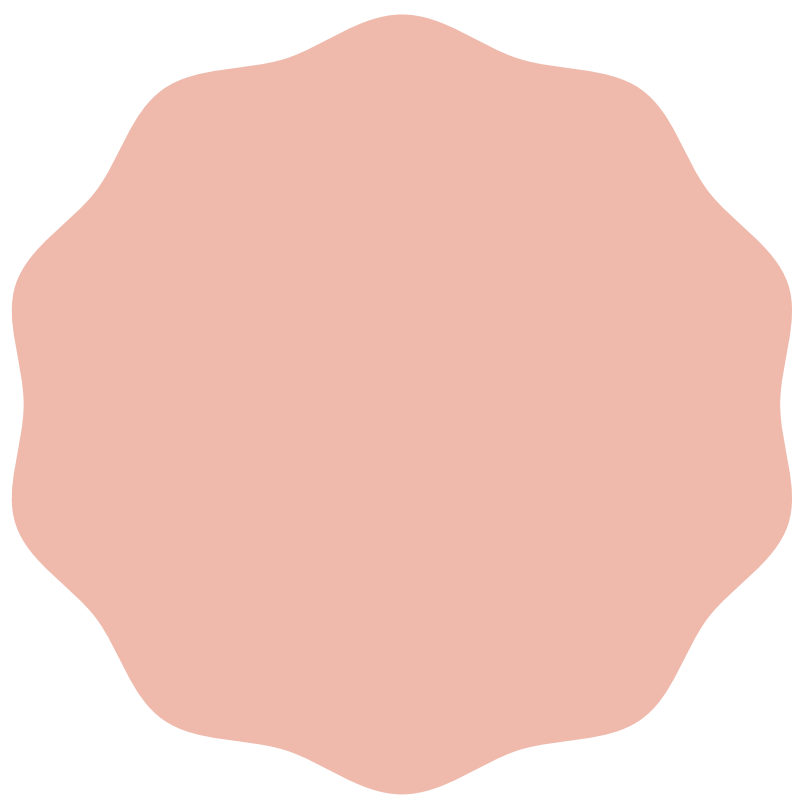
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My Favourite Things to Keep Me Busy

NAME:



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Keeping The Children Happy

OCCUPY THEM

As well as encouraging your children to identify activities that they really want to engage in, this is also an opportunity to encourage them to take some more responsibility within the house.

You are all going to be spending A LOT of time in the house, and if yours are anything like mine, they are going to make a mess! Now is a time to give them some responsibility (and therefore some control) over their part in the household chores.

Of course, each chore will need to be age appropriate, but with more time in the house, perhaps dinners don't need to be so rushed, so your 4 year old can help to prepare the meal. With more time in the mornings, perhaps your children can take responsibility for making their own beds and tidying their rooms. Given that you are not rushing from one place to another, maybe having your toddler help you sort out the washing will be something you can both enjoy.

As with all of the ideas in 'Keeping the Children Happy', it is about encouraging them to have control and responsibility over these lists. Sit with your child and explain the importance of contributing and helping in the home and think about what chores they would like to help with – you could even turn it into a game – tidying toys is a race; or making lunch and washing the dishes is like running your own cafe.



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My Chores

NAME:

What?

When?

What?

When?

What?

When?

What?

When?

What?

When?

What?

When?

What?

When?

What?

When?



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Keeping The Children Happy

Goal Setting

You might even let your child set some goals for themselves. Is there something they really want to learn or achieve? Like tying their shoe laces or learning to handstand? Letting them set goals, as with yourself, will help them feel focused and motivated. Encourage them to be ambitious – do they want to finish a Harry Potter book or write their own book? If they set an ambitious but realistic goal, they are more likely to direct themselves towards that task and stay engaged.

My Goals For This Week:

MY GOAL IS:

HOW WILL I DO IT?

WHEN WILL I DO IT BY?

MY GOAL IS:

HOW WILL I DO IT?

WHEN WILL I DO IT BY?



Keeping The Children Happy

Talk To Them

Children are like little sponges, and so while you might think that they are none the wiser about the events of the world, they are picking up on all sorts and filling the gaps with their little imaginations. Problem is, they often imagine the scariest and more awful thing they can imagine, yet lack the capacity to tell us this most of the time.

It is important to talk openly and frankly with our children in times like this. Don't leave space for their imaginations to make things up.

Explain to them what Covid-19 is – a nasty virus that makes some people really sick. That Covid-19 is a new virus that we don't know how to stop yet, but that it spreads very quickly. That Covid-19 is a bug that we can pass on to people if we are too close, and why it is so important that we wash our hands. That Covid-19 means that it is not safe to visit gran and grampa or go to nursery. That while we stay at home the Doctors and scientists work out how to stop it.

Once you have explained Covid-19 to them, it is then important to give them lots of space to ask questions. You might even prompt them using some helpful questions listed by Dr Chloe Bell (@the.running.psychologist)

- ▶ Why are you worried about coronavirus?
- ▶ What about it is frightening you?
- ▶ What do you think is going to happen if we catch coronavirus?
- ▶ What is it about coronavirus that is making you worried?

The most important thing is to make sure you don't shield them too much, which is often our natural response as parents. We don't actually shield them, we just leave them with their own imaginations making up scary stories.



Keep The Children Happy

Help Them Relax

Unfortunately their fears are not as easily dismissed as a 'monster under the bed'. It is real and it is uncertain. We cannot necessarily reassure our children that everything will be fine, but we can help them sit with their safety in the here and now.

Mindfulness is an excellent tool to teach our children. Help them focus on this very moment, either through observation, breathing or touch. Focus their attention on the moment, reassuring them that right here, right now, they are safe and well.

There are lots of resources to help you with this including:

- ▶ Mindful Monsters
- ▶ Headspace – Meditation for Kids
- ▶ Dreamy Kid App
- ▶ Along with lots of YouTube videos

Teach Them About Community

Finally, give your children a sense of control and meaning by encouraging them to contribute and help others. It might be helping to take some groceries to their elderly neighbours, writing cards or drawing pictures for family members in isolation or donating to the food bank when you are in the supermarket.

Giving them this sense of contribution will leave them feeling empowered and in control, along with a little boost of endorphins triggered by doing a good deed!



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Self Care

Validate
Self Soothe
Self Care
One Commitment
Realistic self care



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Validate

As we wrap this self help guide up, it is important to recognise that while you have developed various action plans and goals for managing your corona-anxiety; the fear and uncertainty that you are experiencing is REAL.

There is so much of the world that is out of our control and so however you are feeling is totally valid. I hope that this self help guide helps you manage your anxiety a little more, however it will not take it away completely; it can't.

And so, finding ways to sit with these emotions, validate them and acknowledge them is going to be crucial over the next few months.

You are not "being silly" or "overdramatic" in your experience. You are not "weak" for feeling fear. You are human, having a very NORMAL experience to ABNORMAL events.

Try not to give yourself a hard time, and recognise that the next while will be like a rollercoaster. There will be times where you will experience joy and happiness and there will be times where you experience overwhelming fear. Just know that that is ok. It is all ok.

Now more than ever is the time to show yourself compassion, empathy and kindness. Meet your emotional experiencing with the love and consideration you would your child's or loved ones'. Allow yourself to feel, whilst reassuring yourself that you CAN cope.



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Validate

Self soothing is a way to create a sense of safety when you are feeling overwhelmed and unsafe. It is a set of tools that doesn't take the feelings away, but rather helps you reduce your arousal level, turning down threat mode and exerting a little control over those overwhelming .

Developing a soothing box can be helpful so that when you are feeling overwhelmed, your coping strategies are easily to hand. Actively collect these items and put them in a special box; even this is an act of kindness. When you are feeling overwhelmed, engaging in soothing can help us validate our experience whilst also helping us reduce our anxiety.

You can break this down by the 5 senses into:

- Sight: What images make you feel safe and calm? Photographs of someone you love? A favourite place? Your favourite painting?
- Sound: What music makes you feel calm and relaxed? Does the sound of waves calm you? Can you record your children or loved ones sending you a message?
- Smell: What smell takes you back to a time of peace and calmness? Is there a scent that reminds you of someone who made you feel safe, or a particular smell that felt like 'home'? Is there a particular candle or incense that you feel calmed by?
- Taste: Is there a food that brings back fond memories? Perhaps a meal your gran made; or your favourite chocolate bar that feels truly indulgent. Or perhaps its a packet of sweeties like you used to buy with your pocket money at the weekend as a child.
- Touch: Is there a particular sensation that is soothing for you? A particular material that you enjoy being on your skin? A favourite blanket that you can rub between your fingers? A rock that is smooth and jagged at the same time? An old teddy bear you loved? Or perhaps its seeking out a cuddle, getting your hair brushed or brushing your daughters hair?



My Soothing Box

SIGHT

SOUND

SMELL

TASTE

TOUCH



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Final Thoughts

We don't know what the future holds, however I do know that right now, you deserve to take time to look after yourself during these anxious and uncertain times.

I hope that this self help guide will give you strategies and tools to equip you to regain some sense of control over the situation. However, there is an emphasis on SELF help...you will get out of it what you put in.

But if you do not feel like you are coping. If you feel that it is all just too much, that is ok too. We don't have an instruction manual for this, and so it is ok if you are not ok.

Seek help, talk to others, use your strategies, but please do not give yourself a hard time for finding this hard.

I truly hope this has been helpful and I'd love to receive any feedback you might have.

You can contact me at:
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OR
hello@mummymatters.co.uk

You can also follow me for daily tips and advice at
[@mummy_matters_](https://www.instagram.com/mummy_matters_)



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CORONA-ANXIETY
GUIDED SELF HELP

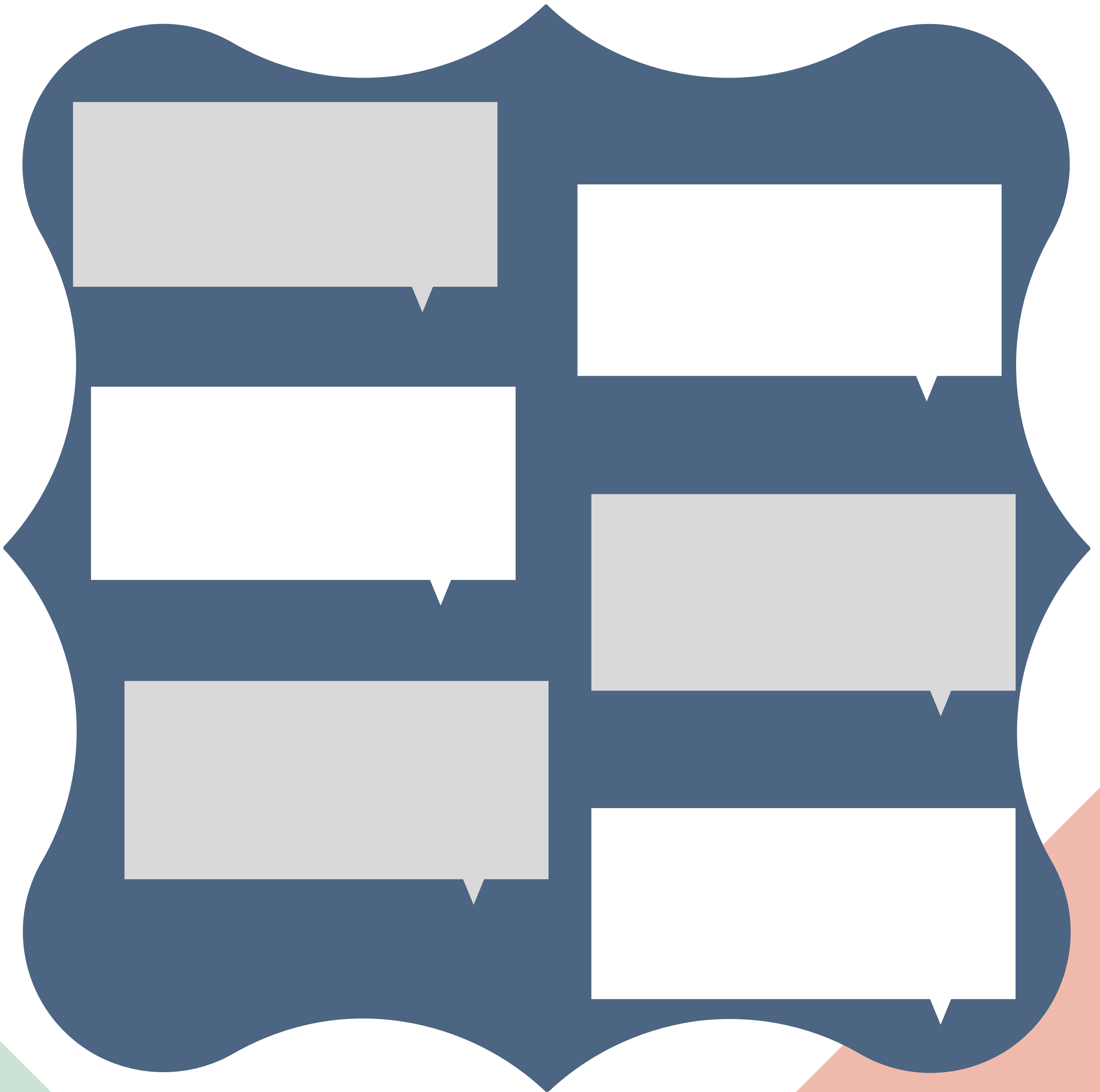
Survival Kit
Resource Pack

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Chartered Counselling
Psychologist

Managing Worry

List some of your 'Helpful Worries' around the current situation with Covid-19:



Thought Challenging

Anxious Thought: e.g. "I'm going to catch Covid-19 and die"

Evidence For

e.g. "People have died from it"; "It's spreading quickly"

Evidence Against

e.g. "It is mostly elderly people who die"; "Most people who have died have had underlying health problems - I'm quite healthy"; "More people have recovered from Covid-19 than have died"; "Most people who catch Covid-19 are only mildly unwell"



Thought Challenging

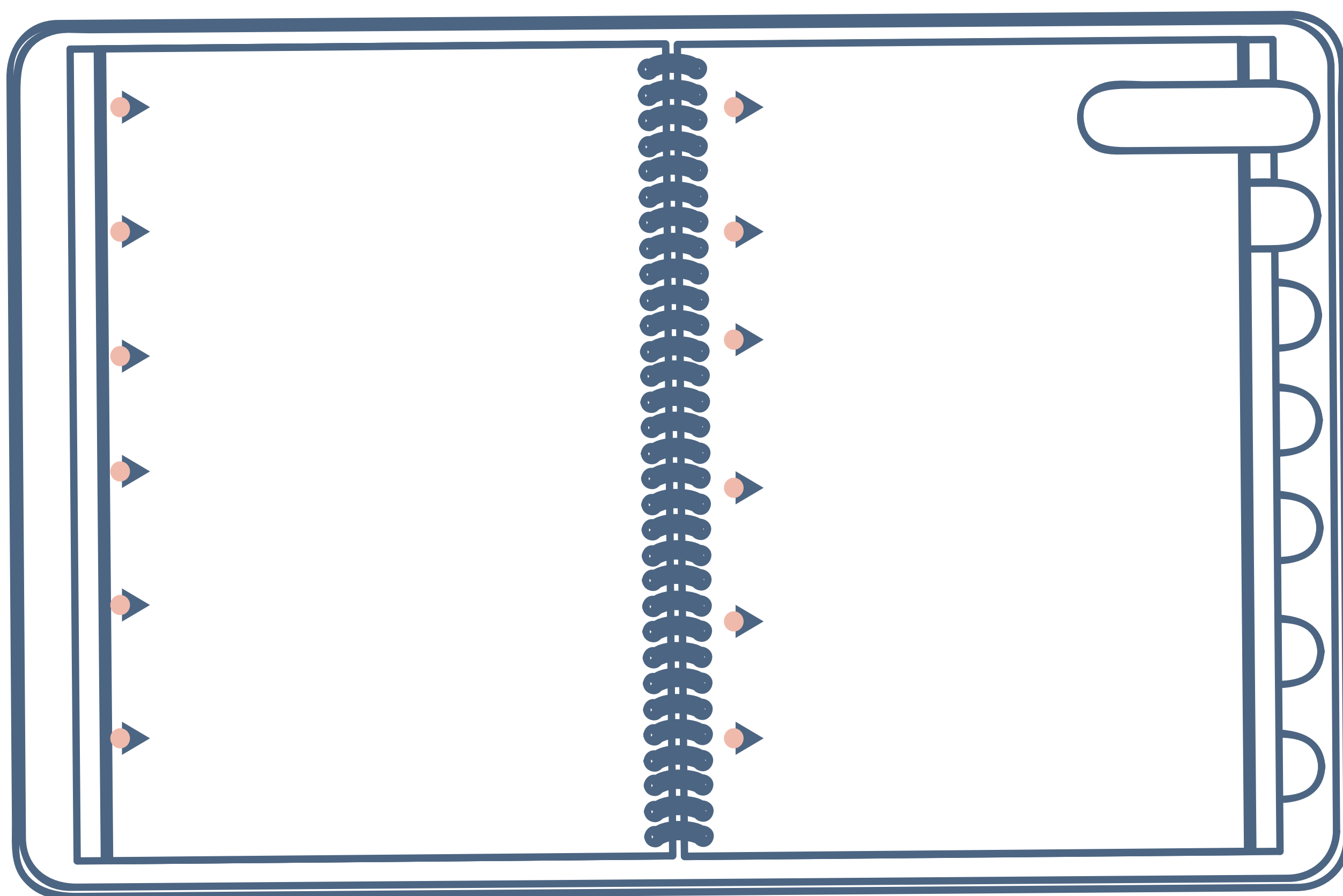
Anxious Thoughts, Behaviour & Feelings (rate 0-10) <i>e.g. "I might die; avoid places/people & check news throughout the day; anxious (10/10)</i>	Alternative Thoughts, Behaviour & Feelings (rate 0-10) <i>e.g. based on the evidence I'll probably be ok; check less & go out when need to; anxious (5/10) and calm (5/10)</i>



Worry Time



My Worry Time Journal



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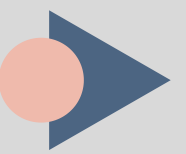
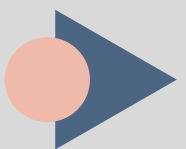
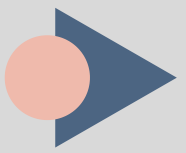
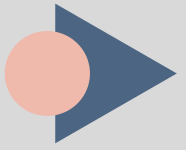
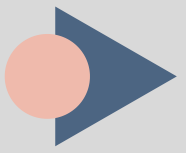
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Sleep

Choose some of the strategies above and begin to develop a great routine for a great nights sleep:

My Good Night's Sleep Plan



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Information

Information Management Commitment

Sources

At (Time)

For How Long (Time Limit)



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Communication

How does this conversation make me feel?

Have you noticed how particular conversations or communication with particular people makes you feel? A really straight forward tool is to rate those conversations. Take a moment to check in with yourself about the conversations you're having and where they place on this scale:

Conversations about _ _ _ _ _

with _ _ _ _ _ make me feel:



Communication

Conversation Strategies

Assertive Statement

Distraction Topics

Strategies for Moving Away



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Communication

Write a list of the social media accounts/friends who add value to your wellbeing and who you can seek out when you are feeling overwhelmed:

My Go To Accounts



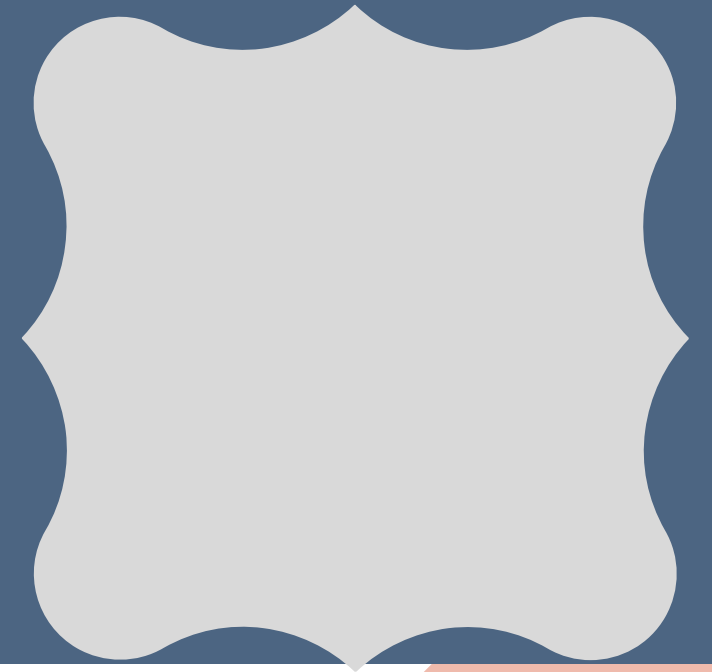
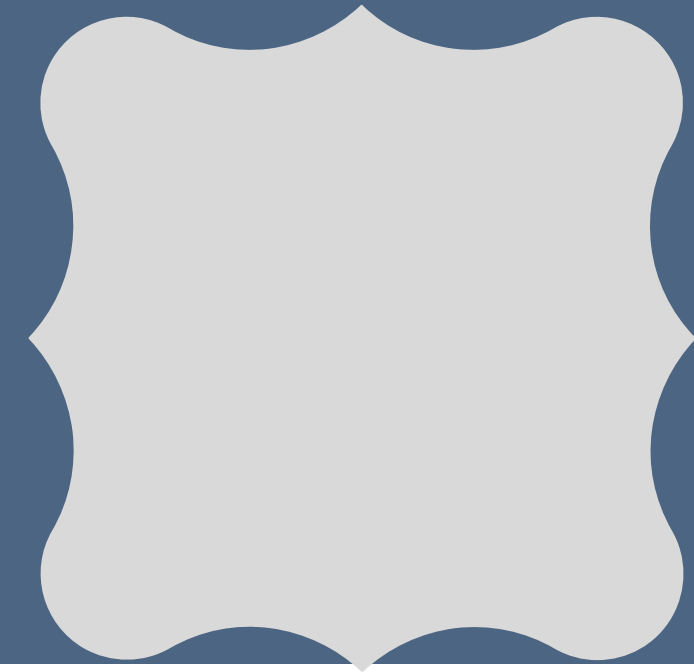
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Communication

My Go To People



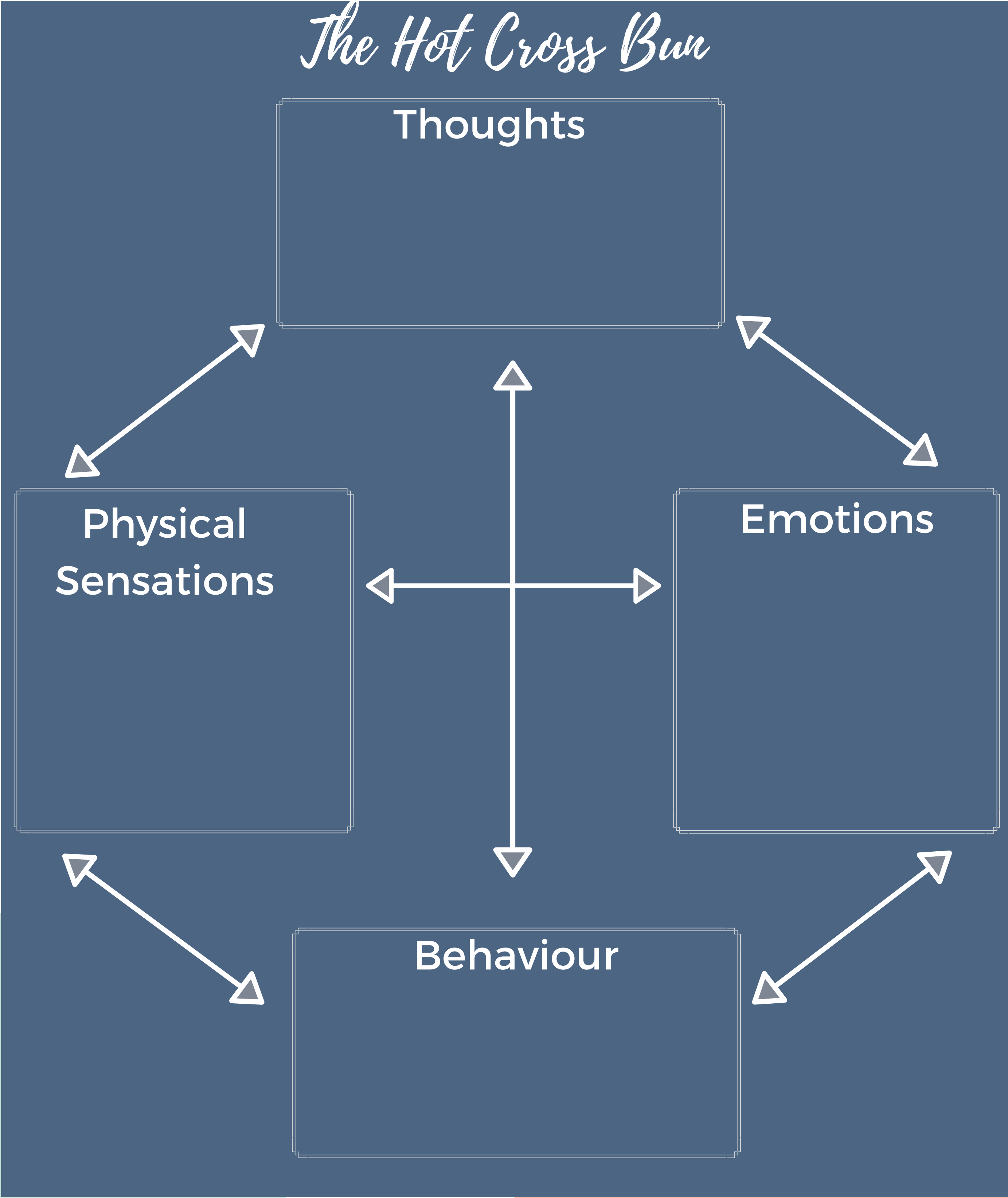
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Perspective

You can use this model to help your figure out the thoughts, feelings and behaviours that are maintaining your anxiety.



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Shift Your Perspective

Something Funny



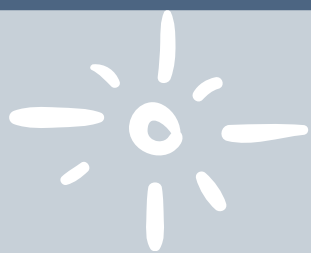
One Good Thing



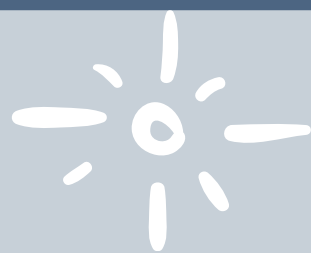
Gratitude Attitude



What Went Well?




The Best Part Of The Day



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Isolation

Take a moment to have a think and identify some of your potential traps during isolation – try and be as specific as you can:

My Isolation Traps



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Activity Schedule

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			



Isolation

Make a Movement Commitment to yourself on a daily basis

My Movement Commitment

My N.E.A.T Goals For Today (What & When):

My WorkOut Plan

When:

What:

My Anchor for Motivation:




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Isolation

Social Connection in Social Distancing



My Social Connection Ideas






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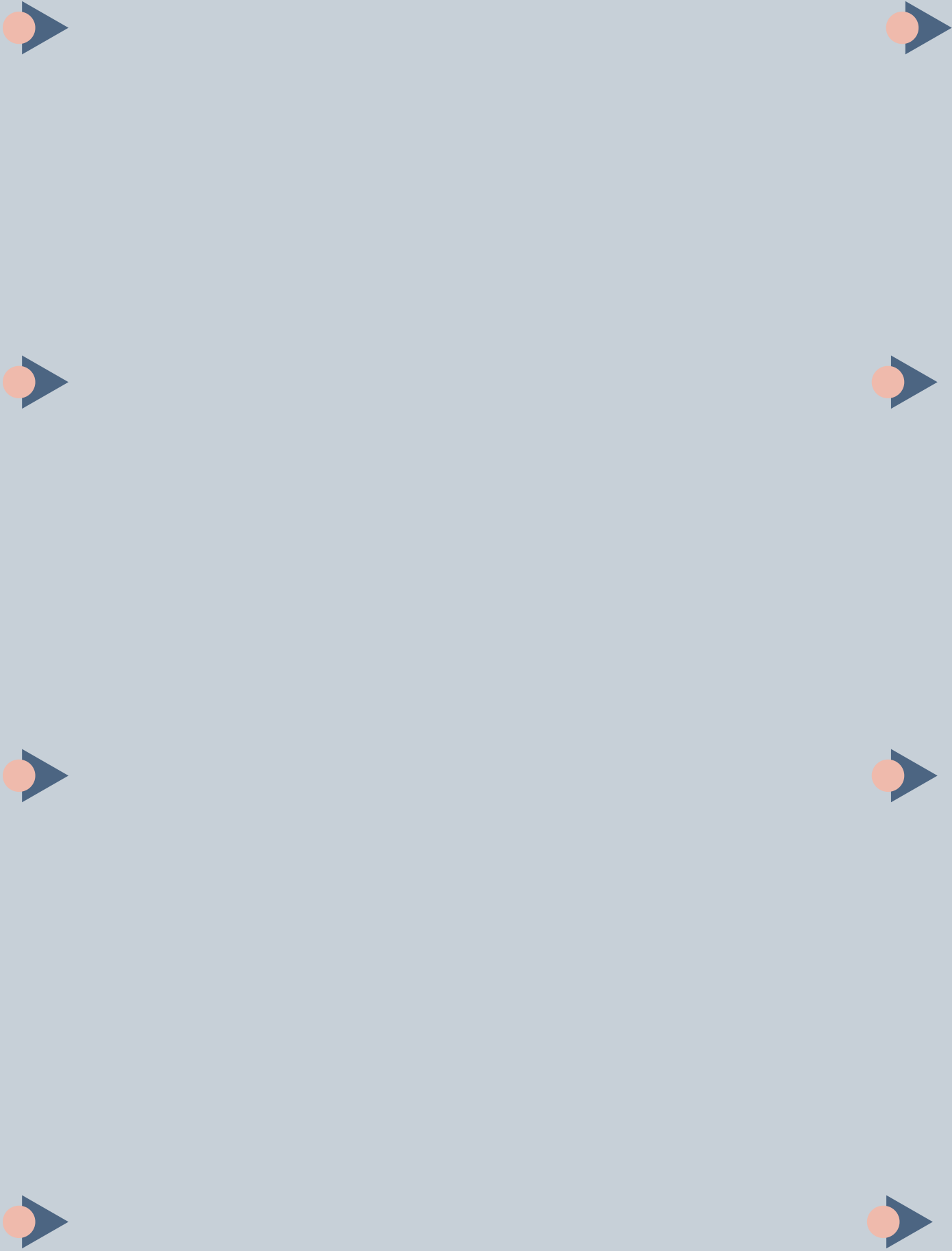
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Relationships

Sit down with your partner (or flatmates or parents...whoever you live with) and think about what your triggers might be and how you might manage these together. It is not possible for you to do this alone; by definition a relationship is a way in which two (or more people) are connected; so you all have equal responsibility over the relationship

Potential Triggers and Conflict



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Relationships

Our Relationship Action Plan

Needs	Needs
<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
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Our Plan to Meet Those Needs



Relationships

Our Crisis Resolution Plan

Our Plan to Manage Conflict



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Keeping The Children Happy

NAME:

ROUTINE

TIME:

ACTIVITY:

Wake up, get dressed, brush teeth, breakfast

Lunch Time

Dinner Time

Bedtime - bath, pj's, brush teeth, story, cuddles, sleep



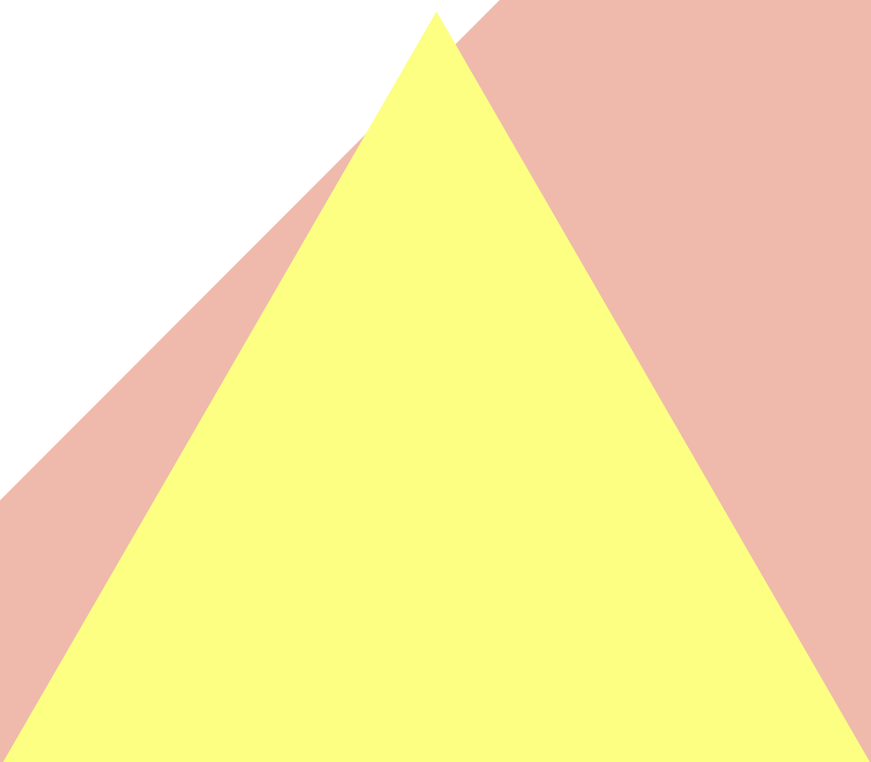
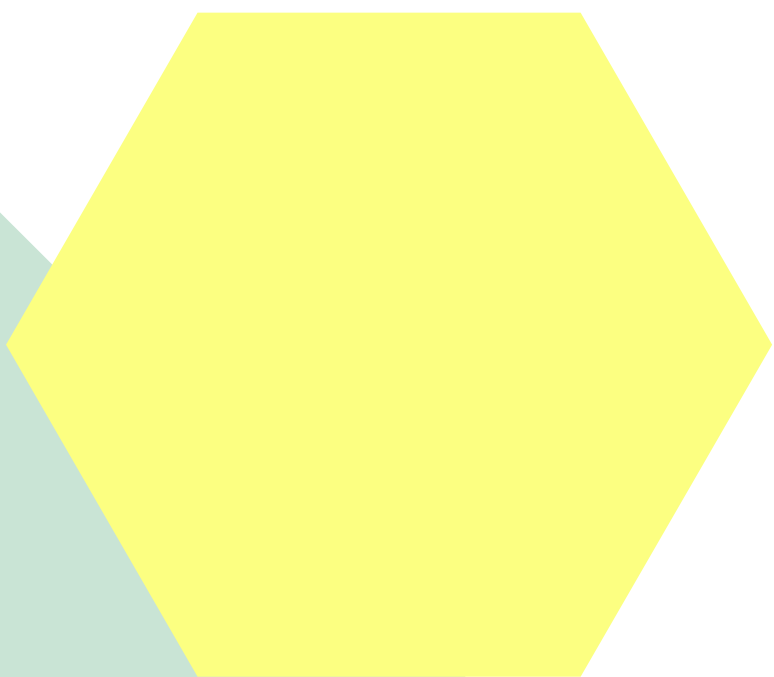
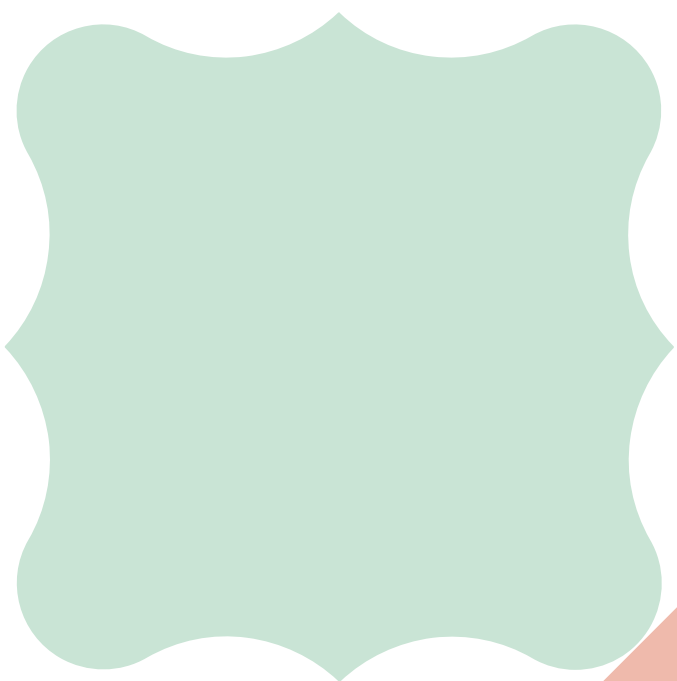
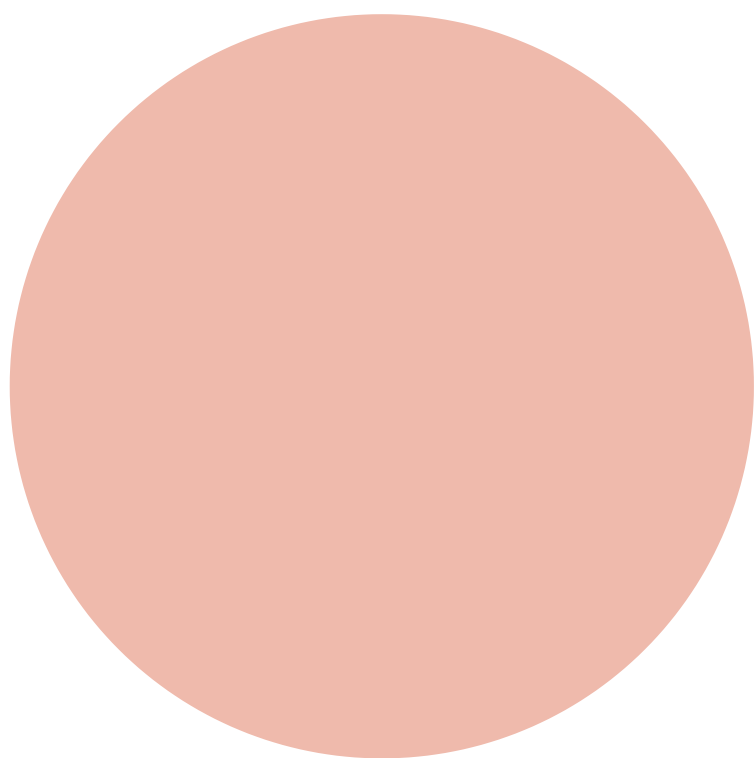
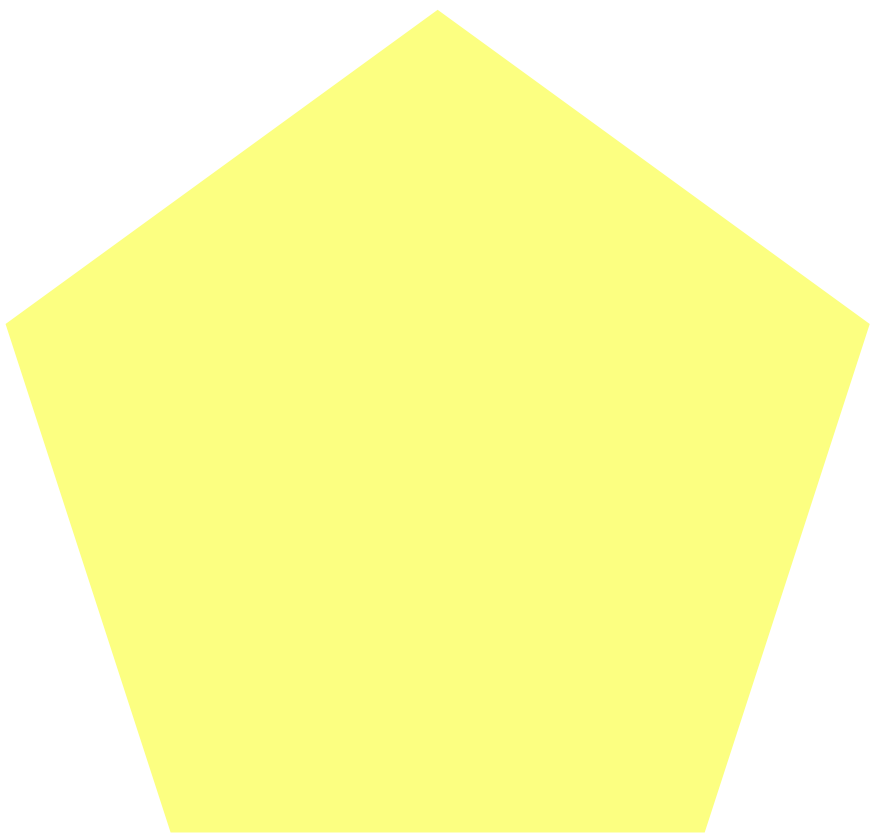
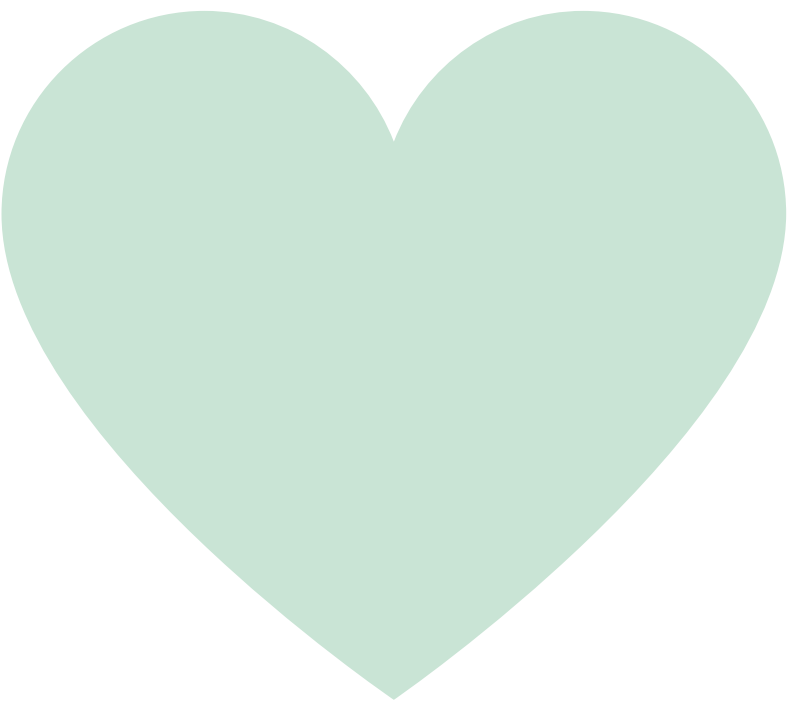
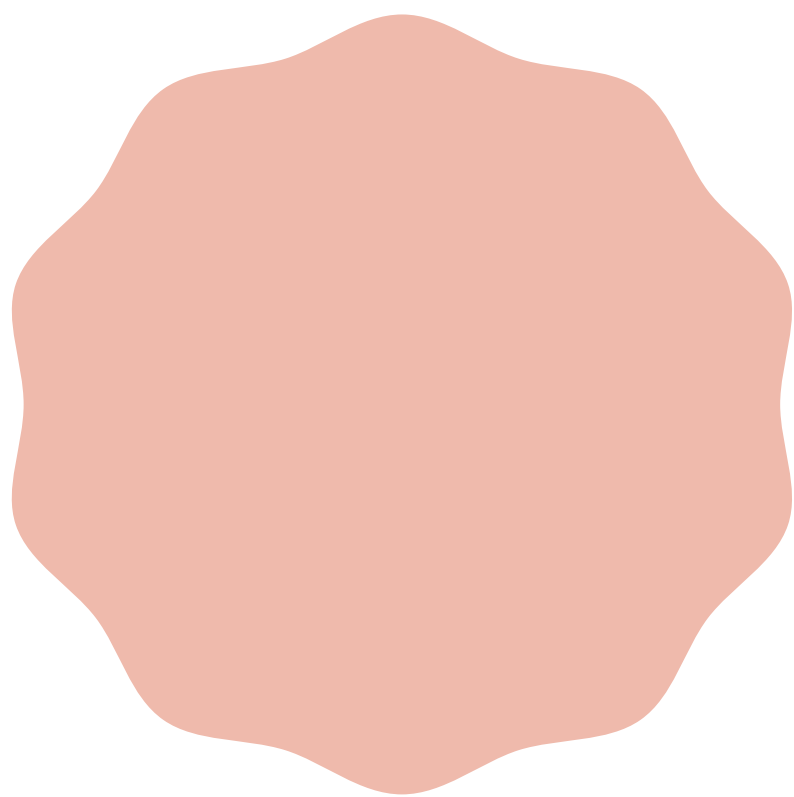
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My Favourite Things to Keep Me Busy

NAME:



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My Chores

NAME: _____

What?

When?

What?

When?

What?

When?

What?

When?

What?

When?

What?

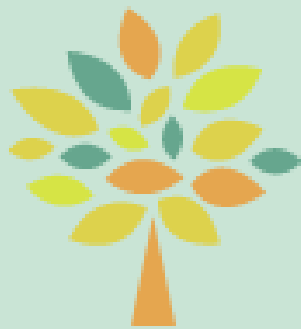
When?

What?

When?

What?

When?



Keeping The Children Happy

Goal Setting

My Goals For This Week:

MY GOAL IS:

MY GOAL IS:

HOW WILL I DO IT?

HOW WILL I DO IT?

WHEN WILL I DO IT BY?

WHEN WILL I DO IT BY?



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My Soothing Box

SIGHT

SOUND

SMELL

TASTE

TOUCH

