## YOUR MENTAL HEALTH DETOX

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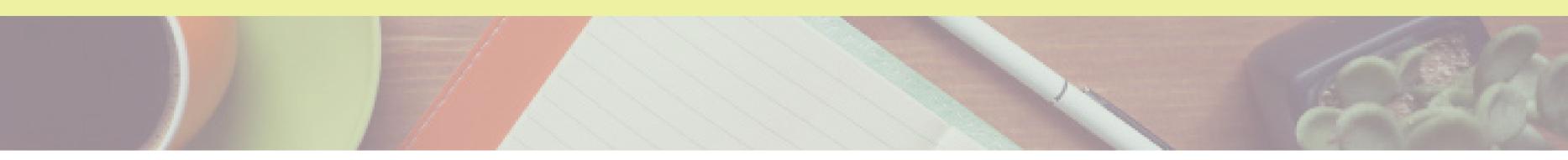


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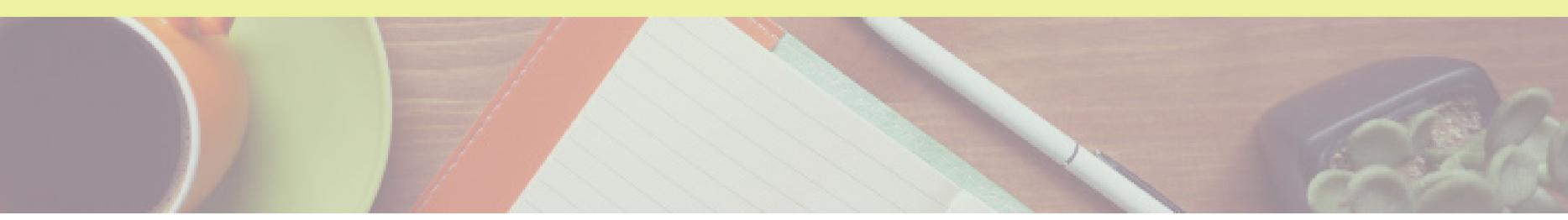
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#### FINAL WORDS

#### **GET IN TOUCH**

## WHAT IS A mental health detax?



**D** etoxification is defined as a process or period of time in which one rids the body of toxic or unhealthy substances. While you've likely heard this used as a buzzword for physical health programs that cleanse your body, a mental health detox involves abstaining from participating in unhealthy habits as a way of helping your mind and spirit feel rejuvenated, decluttered, and grounded.

Unfortunately, so many of us spend our days being enveloped by a haze of never-ending, frantic thoughts about what we need to get done and where we need to be that we create mental environments that promote anything *but* good mental health.

On top of this, we bog ourselves down with nasty thoughts about our appearance, capabilities, and more. Like smog over a polluted city, the haze around us becomes thicker, darker, and more toxic until it feels inescapable.

My hope is that through following this program, you'll be able to clear some of that haze around you. All I ask is that you give yourself permission to engage in the program's exercises and suggestions as wholeheartedly as you can. And while I know there are likely many things on your to-do list, it is essential that we all learn the skill of setting time aside for ourselves. As pilots often remind us before a flight, we need to put on our own oxygen mask before we can put on others'.

So without further ado, let's take some time to help you get reacquainted with, well, you.



## HOW THE program works



 The program is divided into five separate weeks, with each week representing a habit for you to detoxify from. Each week also starts with a quote that will serve as your mantra.

 Being a part of this program requires completing activites that require self-reflection, curiosity, vulnerability, honesty, and openness. Some of them might feel strange, silly, or foreign, and that's okay! Embrace it as part of the process.

3. Journaling is a vital component of this workbook. This will allow you to reflect on your habits, new learnings, and more.

4. There are two ways to do this program: you can focus on detoxifying from only habit per week or you can continue detoxing from the previous week's habit and "layer as you go." Doing the latter means you will be detoxing from five habits at once by the end of the program. Neither way is better, it's just about personal preference!

# THE DETOXED Mind



The detoxed mind is **compassionate**. It shows itself the same kindness it's so willing to give to others.

The detoxed mind **has time to think**. It reflects on its experiences, lets itself wander and imagine, and fantasizes and envisions. It knows that it's okay to be underwhelmed or bored, for this gives it time to play and create.

The detoxed mind is **relaxed**. It is well-rested from a good night's sleep that allowed necessary processes like memory consolidation to occur.

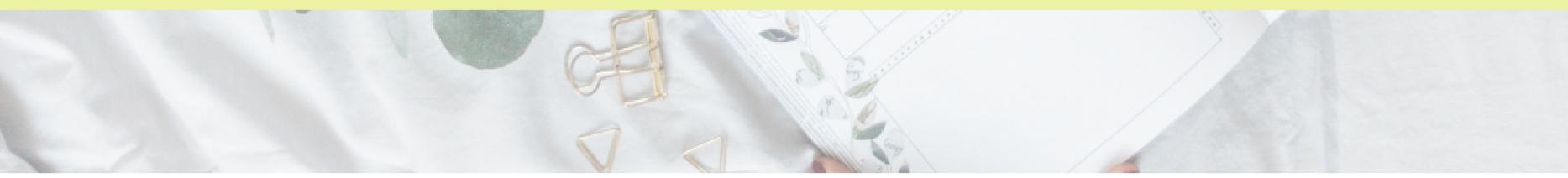
The detoxed mind is **calm, collected,** and **in control** rather than being reactive to the behaviours and attitudes of others.

The detoxed mind remains **confident** of what it knows, yet **flexible** and **open** to others' opinions and thoughts.

The detoxed mind **makes time for itself**. It knows what it needs and sets aside time for these needs to be tended to.



## PRE-PROGRAM *exercise*



I'd like you to take a moment to imagine what it's like to be in your head... literally. Imagine you've shrunk to the size of an ant and have the power to go places that can't be reached by humans.

As you explore the world from this perspective, you come across a door, which is an entry into your "big self's" brain. Curious about what it must be like inside, you cautiously go through the door and are able to see all of the thoughts that are going on in your mind.

I know, I know—it's weird to imagine doing this! But stay with me. The reason we're doing this is so that you have some sort of metric for what it feels like to be in your head before engaging in this workbook.

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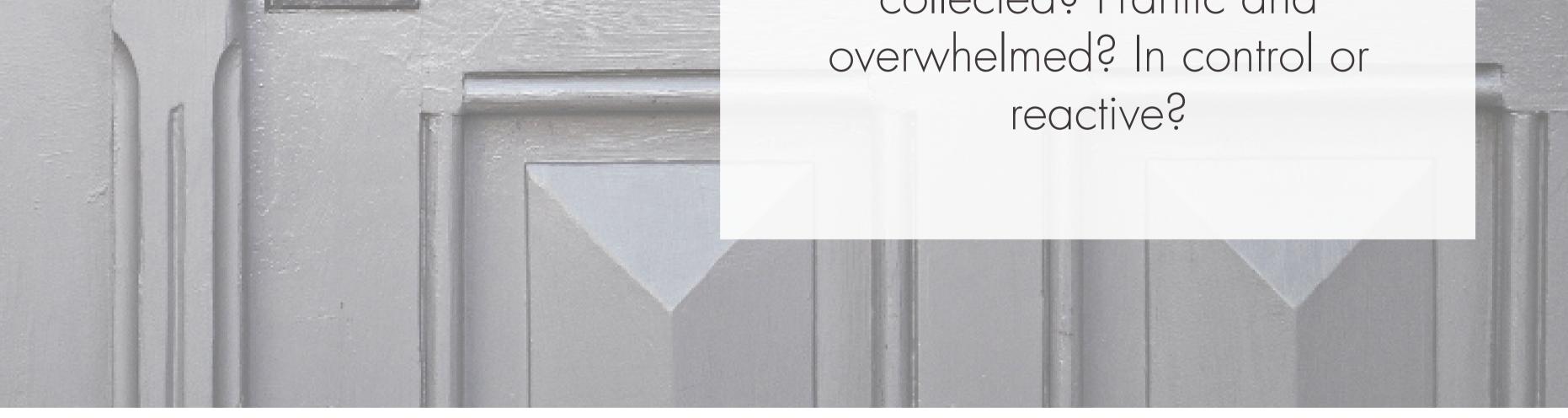
#### What does it look like?

What is the energy, vibe, or aura like?

What does it feel like to be in this place?

Are there other people around? What are they doing or saying?

Does it feel calm and collected? Frantic and



#### Let's summarize your answers on the next page.

Note that your responses can be written directly in this workbook or in a separate journal.

Right now, my mind looks...

When I step into my mind, it feels...

#### The most frequent thoughts that occur in here are...

#### I'd rather my mind feel...

It's important for me to focus on improving my mental health because

Пе	am	Decuuse	

Now, I'd like you to circle or write down the different qualities that begin to surface when your mental health has been low on your priority list for too long. Feel free to add your own if they are not listed below:

Irritable	Moody	Snappy	Lethargic
Quiet	Tired	Impatient	Distracted
Unable to relax	Sleepy	Anxious	Overwhelmed
Dismissive	Checked out	Angry	Unpleasant to be around
Overly emotional	Judgmental	Bitter	Resentful
Cynical	Apathetic	Numb	Withdrawing from others
Preoccupied	Negative mindset	Dislike for others	Poor attitude
Other			



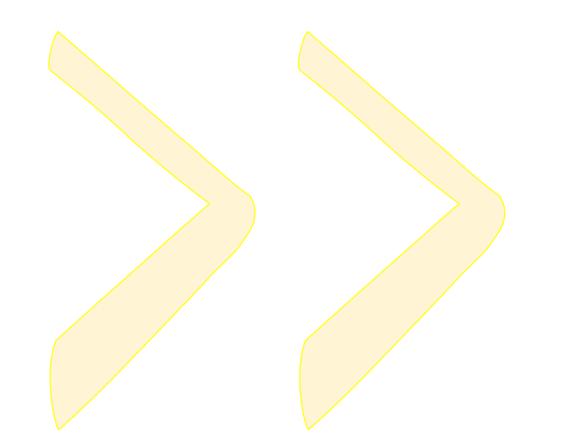
### Ask yourself: when these qualities surface, what do I want to/tend to do?



Pick a fight with loved ones	Stay in bed	Sleep excessively	Self-harm
Isolate myself	Argue	Yell	Stop going to school/work
Reach out to friends	Drink more alcohol	Use cigarettes	Take a mental health day
Eat more than usual	Eat less than usual	Avoid certain people or situations	Feel clingy/ needy
Engage in helpful self- care activities	Talk to a therapist	Exercise	Constantly ask for validation
Improve my diet	Unplug	Vent to someone	Stop exercising
Blame others	Criticize others	Watch TV excessively	Use drugs
Other			

#### When these qualities surface, how does it affect your view of yourself?

#### How does it affect your relationships with others?



Contrary to popular belief, it is rare us to feel burnt out out of nowhere; it usually is a slow, gradual process that involves different events, situations, or feelings building up over time until we feel exhausted. However, with heightened awareness, we can learn to detect the warning signs that are so desperately trying to tell us that **it's time to pay attention to our mental health.** 

Take a look again at the lists/tables above. These are the warning signs—AKA the qualities or habits that start to surface when your "mental health tank" is running low on fuel. We're now going to take it one step further by identifying the order in which you notice these "symptoms."





The scale below represents your stress levels, with "1" representing moments where you feel cool as a cucumber and "10" representing moments where you feel like you're barely keeping it together. Beside each number, write the things you (or others) might notice about your behaviour:

1 <u>EX: 1 have lots of patience with people, l'm not</u> on my phone often, 1 enjoy some hobbies...

3	
4	
5	_
5	_
6	_
	_
7	_
8	_
	_
9	
10	_



In order to make positive changes in our lives, we need to be aware of our starting point. Knowing this makes it easier to track when we might be making progress or regressing to old habits.

If this exercise brought up some uncomfortable feelings for you, don't be discouraged; we have all had moments where we've acted in ways we wish we didn't. The point is that you are taking this time *now* to learn from these moments and change in ways that are more helpful for your wellbeing—and for the wellbeing of those around you.

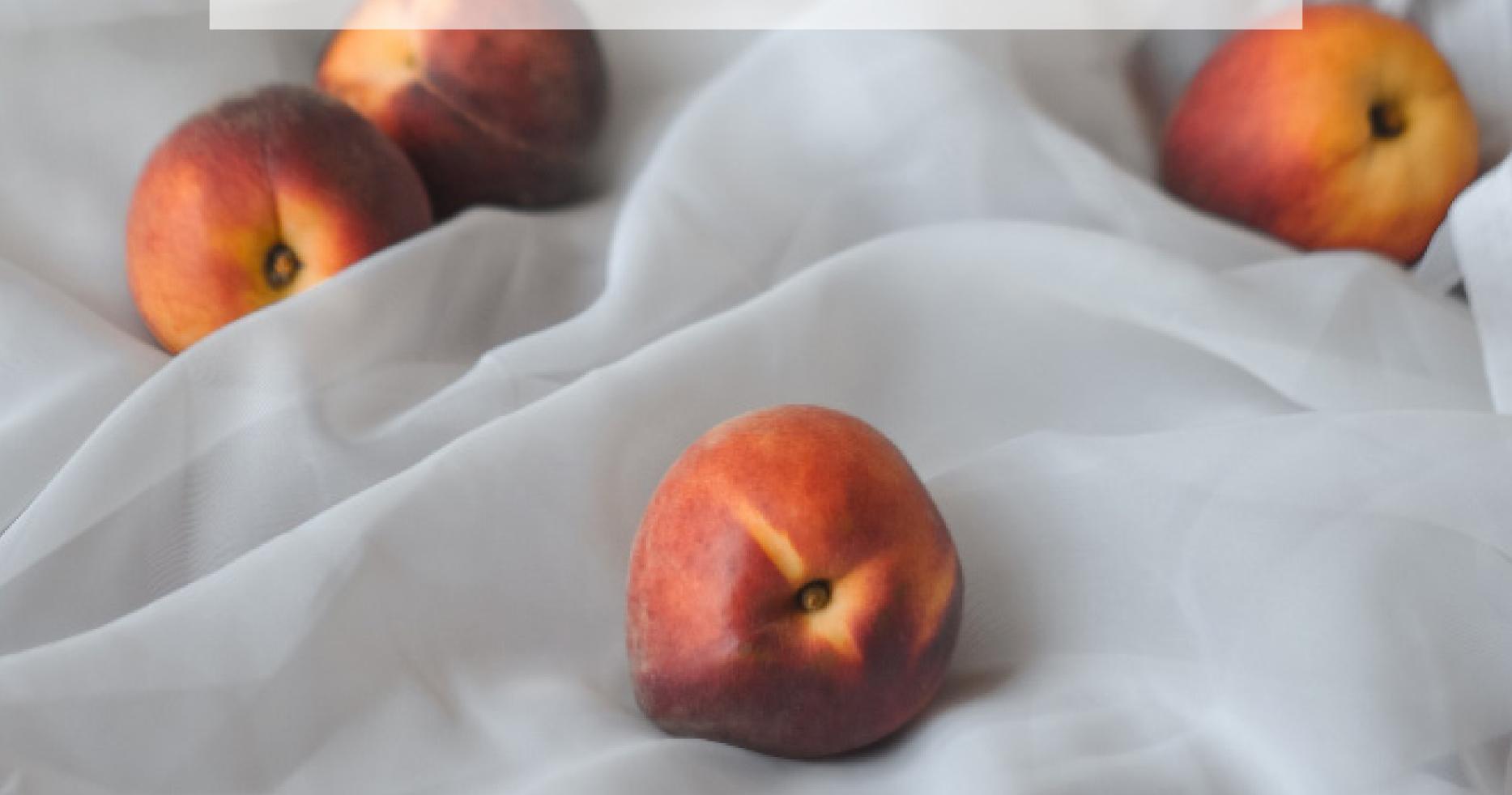
## WEEK 1: Detox from





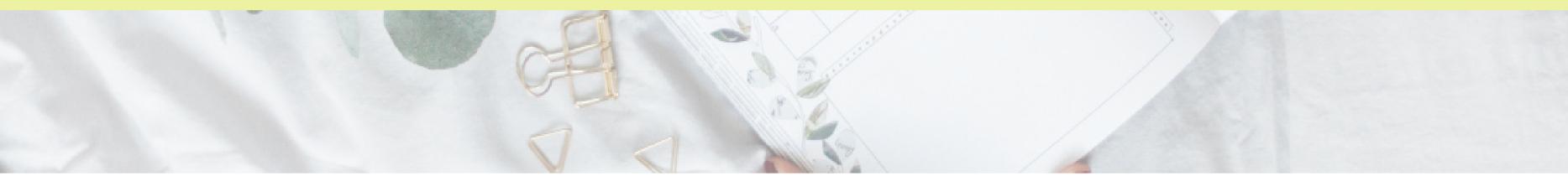
## YOU CAN BE THE RIPEST, JUICIEST PEACH IN THE WORLD, AND THERE'S STILL GOING TO BE SOMEONE WHO HATES

### PEACHES. DITA VON TEESE



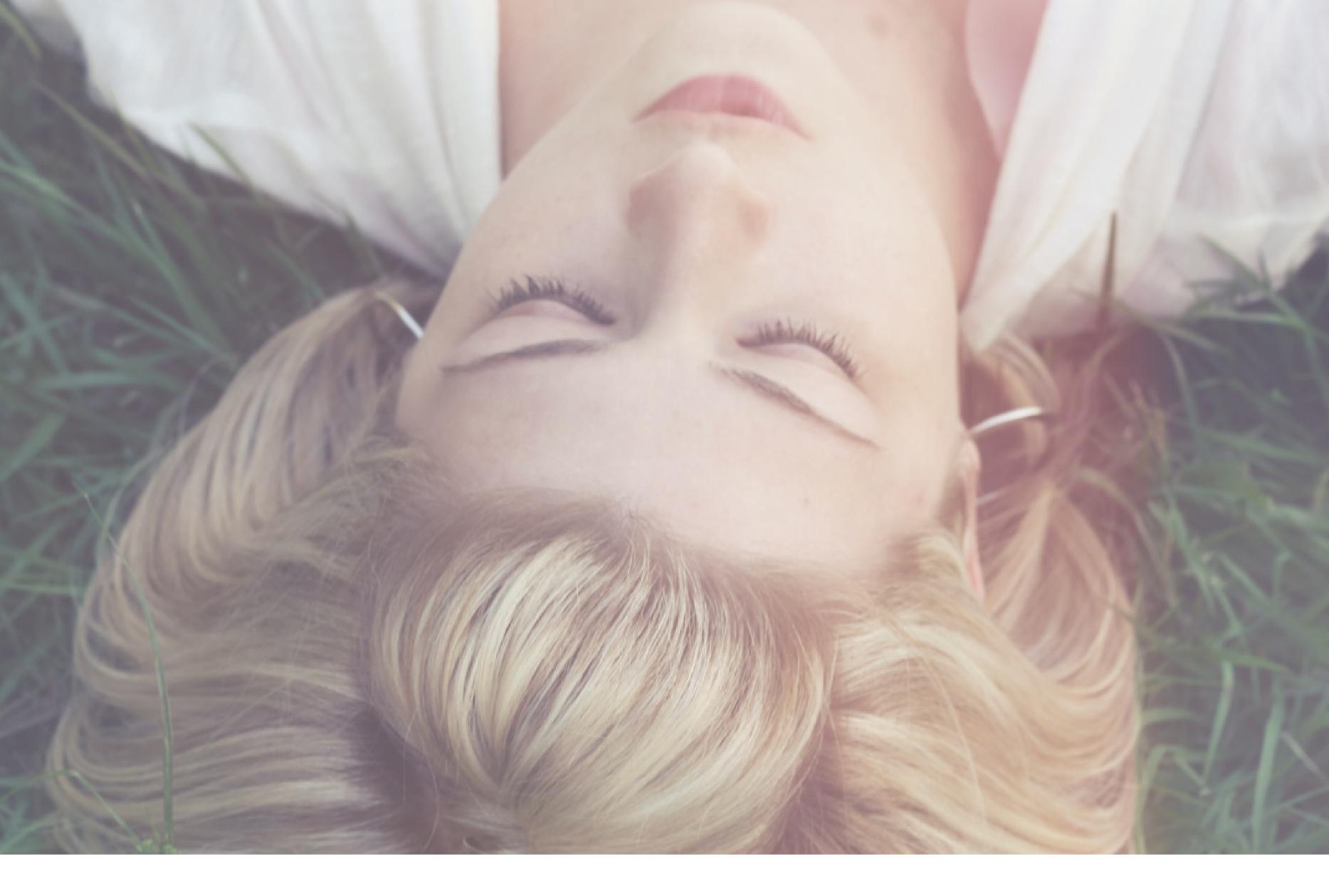


## STEP ONE *awareness*



I was very intentional about starting this program with a focus on detoxing from people pleasing simply because it's something I see so often among the individuals with whom I work. This means I've also seen the negative consequences of this habit time and time again.

**People pleasing** can be defined as continually focusing on making others happy in lieu of tending to your own needs. It means agreeing to split a dessert with someone even though you've been trying to eat healthier lately. It means dropping someone off on your way home even though you were planning on doing a meditation class (which you will now be late for or miss entirely). It means forgetting that you are human and need to tend to yourself—physically, mentally, and emotionally.



Below are some signs you could be a people pleaser:

- You have a hard time saying no.
- You believe you're "less than" others.
- You're constantly worried about hurting other people's feelings.
- You want everyone to like you.
- You have a hard time accepting praise or taking credit for your work.
- Asking for help is very hard for you.
- You like to be known as an independent person who is capable of doing everything themselves.
- You're the first person people go to when they need a favour.
- You hate confrontation and feel like you're being "aggressive" when you share your needs.
- You equate setting boundaries to "being selfish."

Here's the thing: people pleasing isn't a good habit. Rather, it can be a significant contributor to feelings of **emotional burnout**. After all, when we spend the majority of our time trying to make others happy, it's likely that we don't have the time, energy, or capacity to engage in any form of self-care. Additionally, it's not uncommon for people pleasers to inevitably tire of playing this role, eventually feeling **resentful** towards the very people they've been trying to please. In other words, while it might seem like a harmless—or even helpful—habit from the outside, it has the capacity to erode our patience and compassion for ourselves and others.

So if being a people pleaser can lead to stress, resentment, and exhaustion, **why do people do it?** 



From my perspective, there are three main reasons that people engage in frequent people pleasing (and perhaps all of them apply to you):

1. Fear of rejection: an individual who falls into this category may think that if they do enough favours for people, keep to themselves, and avoid any risk of confrontation, people will like them more. Conversely, if they don't do these things, they feel like they won't have any relationships. In this way, people pleasing becomes a way to create and maintain relationships.

However, having this mindset is inherently problematic and can prevent us from forming healthy, authentic relationships. After all, if you have to be needless and wantless for someone to like you, then that's not a "relationship" at all; this obvious lack of reciprocity actually causes you become a service provider of sorts—a taxi, a therapist, a bank.

2. Parentification in childhood. Parentification occurs when there is a role reversal between parents and children and can take the form of *instrumental* or *emotional* parentification. Instrumental parentification occurs when a child is expected to perform various duties like getting the family's groceries, paying the bills, or preparing all of the meals. On the other hand, emotional parentification occurs when a child becomes a mediator, confidante, or therapist to a parent and becomes responsible for tending to any emotional needs that are not being met elsewhere. An example of emotional parentification would be a mother venting to a child about the emotional challenges they are having with their partner, the child's father.

When emotional or instrumental parentification occurs, children often receive the message that their parents' love is earned through doing, performing, or providing in some way. This can extend into adulthood and the person assumes they have to be a people pleaser to form meaningful relationships rather than understanding that healthy relationships are formed, in large part, through simply enjoying someone's company.



3. Insecurity (and an accompanied need for ego-stroking). There's a certain paradox that can come with people pleasing where people will please others so that they can have their own ego stroked. In these examples, it's not necessarily the act of giving that one finds satisfying, but the praise and recognition that he or she gets thereafter. Their title of "the nice one" or "the self-sufficient one" becomes a badge of honour that they peacock around to the world under a veil of humility, continually performing one good deed after another as a way of getting the validation they so desperately yearn for. Through this lens, one could suggest that people pleasing, then, becomes the vehicle through which someone achieves a sense of heightened esteem, which they might feel is necessary to combat underlying feelings of worthlessness and/or shame.

#### Now, take a moment to reflect on some of the factors that you feel might be contributing to your people pleasing behaviours:

## What have been some of the benefits of this habit in your opinon?

#### What about the negative consequences?

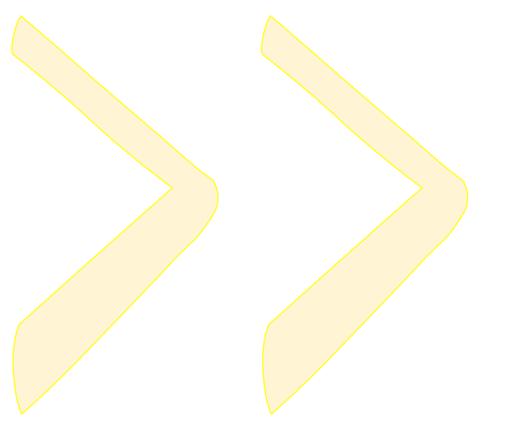


# STEP TWO setting boundaries

The antidote to people pleasing is learning how to set healthy boundaries. **Boundaries** can be defined as the limits or rules one creates in different situations so that others know what behaviours and/or actions are acceptable.

Many people falsely believe that setting boundaries means being selfish or aggressive. However, a big reason why boundaries are important is precisely so that you can be (appropriately) generous to others without eventually resenting them or burning out. In this way, boundary-setting can actually be seen as a way of **fostering more connection** in your relationships rather than eroding it.

Healthy benefits of boundary setting include: improved relationships that are less likely to be co-dependent, increased self-respect, more respect from others, and more honest and direct communication.



There are three types of boundaries:

1. Permeable boundaries: aloowing anything and everything into your life without taking your own feelings, wants, or wishes into consideration. People pleasers typically have very permeable boundaries. A visual example of this is a line in the sand: it's there... until a wave comes and washes it away. A consequence of permeable boundaries is that you constantly expose yourself to unwanted feelings, emotions, or situations.

**Rigid boundaries:** closing yourself off from any form of influence whatsoever, visually represented by a brick wall. The consequence of this is being inflexible, walled off, and difficult.

Flexible boundaries: being firm and clear about what's 3. acceptable versus unacceptable, while also being open to new ideas and thoughts when helpful. Flexible boundaries both protect you from harm and allow you to engage with the world around you. This is the zone you want to live in.

It's worth noting that many people have different boundaries in various areas of their lives. For example, you might be great at setting flexible boundaries at work, only to employ extremely permeable ones in your romantic relationships. If this is the case for you, this is encouraging news! It means that the skill of boundary-setting resides somewhere in you; you just need to apply it to a different domain!

I also want to take a moment to remind you that all of us, as human beings, have basic rights, including:

- The right to say no without feeling guilty
  - The right to be treated with respect
- The right to make your own needs as important as others
  - The right to be accepting of your mistakes and failures
    - The right to not meet others' unrealistic expectations

Source: Chesak, J. (2018). "The No BS Guide to Protecting Your Emotional Space." Healthline.







Here are some examples of setting healthy boundaries in different domains:

Anger: When you yell at me like that, I'm afraid it's hard for me to hear your point. We can only have this conversation if we're able to both be calm.

Criticism: I don't feel comfortable when other people make comments about my weight or body, so I'd appreciate if you stopped doing that.

**Emotional support:** Although I can see that what you're going through is hard, I wonder if it might be best to continue this conversation with someone else in your life, as l'm afraid I don't know what other advice to offer in this situation and am a bit overwhelmed myself. If there are ways I can support you other than talking about what happned, please let me know as I'd love to be there for you in other ways.

Events: Unfortunately, I will not be able to make it to your event but I hope you have a great time. (Note that you do not always have to give a reason for why you can't make it to something!)

Money: I won't be lending you money any more. I care about you and our relationship and cannot maintain a healthy dynamic with you if I continue to engage in this habit.

Here's one of the handiest sentences to help you set healthy boundaries:

#### I FEEL [EMOTION] WHEN YOU DO [SPECIFIC ACTION] BECAUSE [REASON]. AS I RESULT, I WOULD LIKE [SPECIFIC, REALISTIC REQUEST].

Example:

I FEEL SAD WHEN YOU'RE ON YOUR PHONE WHEN WE'RE TOGETHER BECAUSE IT MAKES ME FEEL AS THOUGH YOU DON'T VALUE OUR TIME TOGETHER. AS A RESULT, I WOULD LIKE IF WE COULD PUT OUR PHONES AWAY WHEN WE'RE HAVING A CONVERSATION, EVEN IF IT'S JUST FOR AN HOUR.

### Some additional tips:

• Keep the thing you're setting a boundary around specific, to-the-point, and present. This isn't the time to lament every frustration you've had for the past 10 years. Keep is short and sweet.

• Speak from the "I" position rather than placing blame. This looks like, "I feel [emotion]" not "I feel like you're a jerk."

• Make your request something that's doable in the moment versus asking the person to change an intrinsic personality trait in the next five seconds.

• Avoid using words like "always" and "never" when describing the other person's actions. It not only sounds accusatory, but is inaccurate. (Surely, there have been times when they have *not* behaved this way!)

I'm going to say it again for safe measure: do NOT use this as an opportunity to engage in unbridled self-expression. That is, when you're explaining the reasons for your request, do not go on a 20-minute monologue. I can guarantee that the other person will tune you out if you do.
Check your expectations. Asking someone to never be on their phone around you, for example, is unrealistic. Telling them you want there to be certain periods of time when it's on silent *is*.





# STEP THREE communicating effectively

When talking about boundaries, it's vital to differentiate between the three types of communication styles as well, which are: **passive aggressive, aggressive**, and **assertive**.

Passive aggressive communication involves sharing your disapproval or dislike of something in an indirect way so as to avoid direct confrontation. Forms of passive aggressive communication include ignoring someone or making snide comments. This form of communication is not only ineffective, but also encourages feelings of powerlessness for the person who is upset since they're being unclear about why they're upset in the first place and what their expectations are.

**Aggressive communication** involves stating your needs and wants in a way that doesn't take the other person's into account. This usually involves bullying and verbal abuse like name-calling.

Assertive communication involves clearly stating your needs and wants in a way that also makes space for the needs and wants of others. (This is where you want to be.)



Here are examples of the different forms of communication at play:

**Passive aggressive:** If you could pick up some groceries after you're done visiting your "friend" for the fifth time this week, that would be great. I mean, only if you have time, of course. Otherwise, I can get them myself...

**Aggressive:** You never pick up the groceries! You're so lazy I have to do it all the time. Pick them up when you're on your way home or else you'll be sleeping on the couch tonight.

Assertive: Could you please pick up the groceries tonight?



# staying in your lane

Our society typically focuses on the importance of setting external boundaries but not so much about internal ones. In the simplest terms, external boundaries protect us from others, while internal boundaries protect others from us.

Setting appropriate internal boundaries is vital as it allows us to: behave appropriately, avoid taking advantage of others, and respect boundaries that have been put in place by others, too.

If any of the below apply to you, it might be a sign that you have weak internal boundaries. In other words, others might feel as though you are invading their space, time, and more:

 Whenever you're stressed, you repeatedly call or text your significant other, friends, or family members so they can calm you down.

 You expect your friends to be compassionate listeners and advice-givers for hours on end when you're going through a hard time.



• You often ask people when they're going to get married, have kids, or move in together.

• You frequently make comments about other people's appearance (i.e. weight, fashion, hairstyle, nails, etc.).

• You regularly ask people to live their life similarly to you (i.e. telling them that they should become vegan even though they haven't expressed any interest in doing this).

• You have the mindset that it's better to ask for forgiveness rather than permission.

• You frequently lash out at others or have "meltdowns," which you apologize for later.

• You regularly gossip about others—and with people who also know the very person you're gossiping about.

• You share others' secrets with friends, family members, or your significant other without the person's permission.

• "I'm just being honest" is one of your most commonly-used phrases.

If you answered "yes" to most of the above questions, it's a sign that you need to strengthen your internal boundaries. Specifically, you might need some assistance regulating your emotions and/or learning new social skills.

Additionally, while what I'm about to say might sound harsh, I believe we all need to hear it from time to time: sometimes, we just need to keep our mouths shut. **Not everyone needs to know your every opinion,** which many people with weak internal boundaries fail to remember.



Below are different domains in which boundaries can be set. In the far right column, write your assessment of how healthy or unhealthy your boundaries are. You might want to also explore why this might be the case or what you would need to do to improve this boundary, whether it's internally or externally.

	Definition	Healthy vs. Unhealthy	Your Boundaries
Physical         Boundaries	Refers to person- al space and physical touch.	Healthy: awareness about what type of touch is appropriate in different situations. Unhealthy: non-con- sensual/unwanted touch or the invasion of someone's personal space.	
Emotional boundaries	Refers to a person's feelings.	Healthy: knowing when to share or not share personal information. Unhealthy: criticiz- ing, belittling, or inval- idating another per- son's feelings. Sharing too much too soon.	
Intellectual Boundaries	Refers to thoughts and ideas.	<ul> <li>Healthy: respect for others' ideas and awareness about what topics are appropriate for discussion.</li> <li>Unhealthy: belittling someone else's ideas or bringing up "hot button" issues at inappropriate times.</li> </ul>	

	Definition	Healthy vs. Unhealthy	Your Boundaries
Sexual Boundaries	Refers to the emotional, intellectual, and physical aspects of sexuality.	Healthy: respecting limitations and desires between you and another person. Unhealthy: unwanted sexual touch, pressure to engage in sexual acts, or making unwanted sexual comments.	
Material Boundaries	Refers to money and possessions.	Healthy: setting lim- its on what is shared (and with whom). Unhealthy: stealing or damaging another person's possessions or pressuring them to lend things to you.	
Time Boundaries	Refers to how people use their time.	<ul> <li>Healthy: setting aside enough time for work, relationships, and hobbies.</li> <li>Unhealthy: demand- ing too much of another person's time or demanding that they speak with you when it is not conve- nient or appropriate for them.</li> </ul>	



## STEP FOUR round out your identity

Many people who are people pleasers become overly attached to this part of their identity. They start to gain a certain sense of esteem and satisfaction from being known as someone who is "easy-going," "independent," "nice," etc.

While there's nothing inherently wrong with these adjectives, problems can occur when we allow them to be the *only* adjectives that describe us. When we **over-identify** with certain characteristics, it can cause us to lose touch with other parts of ourselves that are very important in their own way.

For example, when we over-identify with the independent part of ourselves, it might become harder to let our more vulnerable parts come to the surface, which is important for emotional intimacy, self-awareness, interpersonal connections, and more. The key idea here is that we mustn't forget about the importance of **balance** when it comes to our identity.

## Though this might sound like an odd question, take a moment to consider what your "middle name" would be if you asked others.

For example, are you Jane "Perfectionist" Doe? John "Withdrawn" Doe? Then, reflect on why you think this is what you're known for, as well as positive and negative consequences of having this type of identity.


#### Now, write what you might need to start doing to help "round out" your identity.

For example, what might a perfectionist need to start doing to start accepting that they are a perfectly flawed human being? What might a withdrawn person might need to begin doing to foster a greater sense of connection and engagement with others?

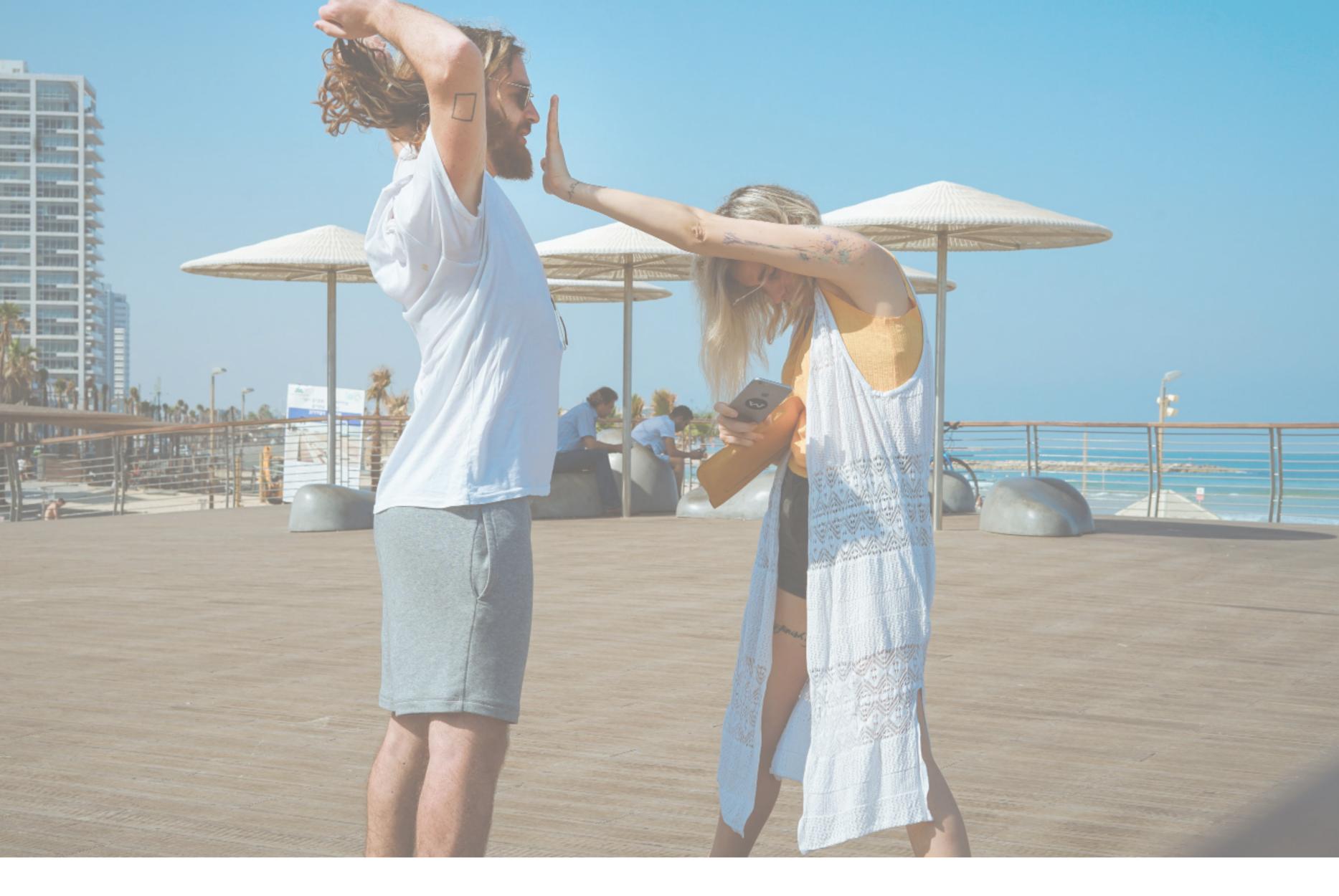




There's a funny phenomenon I see quite regularly that I have called **The Pendulum Effect**. This occurs when someone feels dissatisfied with a particular habit or decision and starts acting in the extreme opposite way as a result. Put simply, it's a way of over-compensating for behaviours or decisions that we come to see as "bad."

The Pendulum Effect applies to many areas of our lives. I've seen it dictate how people choose significant others, such as going from dating a sensitive, "nice guy" to a more boorish and blunt character. Or, someone might go from a boring desk job to one with intense deadlines and long, frantic work hours.

The Pendulum Effect applies to the world of boundaries, too. Time and time again I see people realize that they've had very permeable boundaries only to start instilling ones that are unhelpfully rigid. At this point, I must remind them that this isn't helpful either. It does us no good to go from people pleasing to disconnecting completely, though it's very easy to do.



Part of what's going on here is that people become completely exhausted, as mentioned previously. After all, they've been working hard to please others for years and years and have simply had enough. Cue very rigid boundaries where they don't want to do anything for anyone.

Additionally, people often start wrongfully assuming that they've "earned" the right to have rigid boundaries, as if all of that people pleasing was a form of "paying their dues" so they can now act selfishly. **Reminder**: while setting flexible and firm boundaries isn't selfish, setting rigid ones that are completely inflexible and permanent *is* as this typically involves completely disregarding how other people are affected by your decisions.

The take home message her is to keep checking in with yourself and adapt accordingly.

Take a moment to write down any reflections from your first week of doing this mental health detox. You may choose to write about new information you've learned, personal reflections, or whatever feels most relevant for you.


### WEEK2: DETOX



## JUDGING



## ENOTIONS



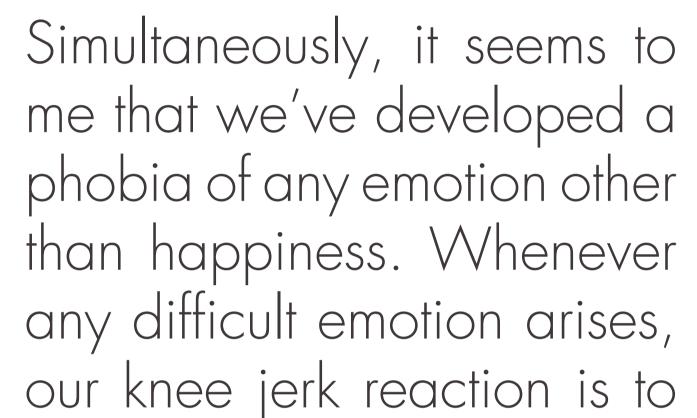
## WHAT WE RESIST, PERSISTS.

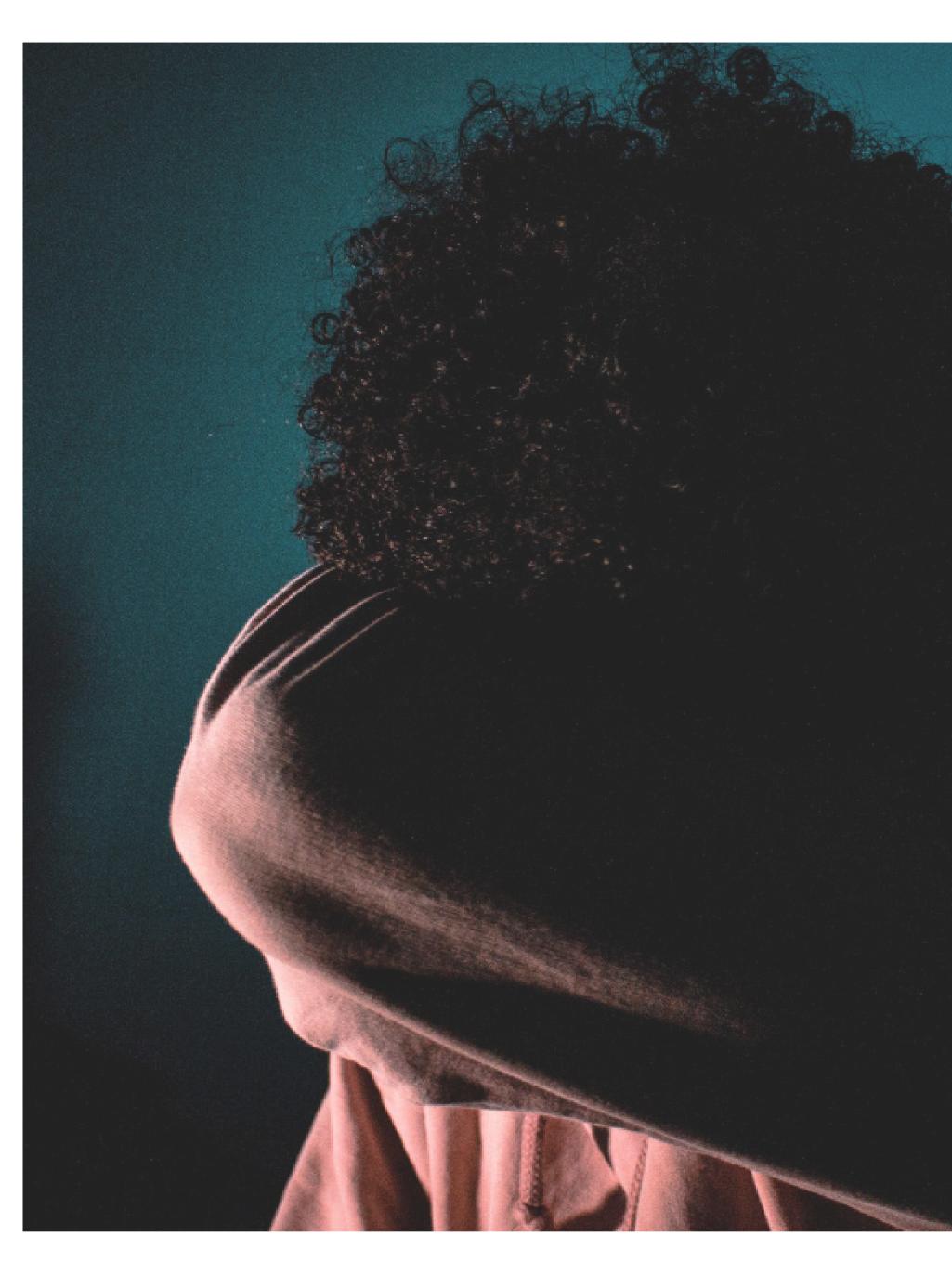
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I often witness a vicious cycle play out before my very eyes: an individual will experience a difficult emotion, feel some corresponding physical symptoms (i.e. clammy hands, racing heart) and then become extremely critical of themselves for having such feelings in the first place: What's wrong with me? I'm losing my mind! No one else experiences this. Why am I such a baby?

This only adds fuel to the fire. The more we rag on ourselves for being upset or anxious, the more power the emotion has.





stifle it, get rid of it, or mask it. But think of what happens when someone tells you to stop thinking about elephants: all you can think about is elephants!

Remember, emotions are often messengers that are trying to tell us something, so when we cover our ears and try to drown out the message, they respond by simply becoming louder. Next thing you know, our feelings have become almost unbearable.

To figure out if you're someone who has a hard time accepting your emotions, complete the quiz below:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
l apologize for my emotions.					
I get mad at myself when I feel emotions other than happiness.					
I avoid telling people about any negative emotions I experience for fear that they'll judge me or think I'm weak.					
When difficult emotions arise, I'm quick to think of reasons why they're stupid.					
I feel weak when I experience difficult and/or painful emotions.					
I think I'm bad at dealing with emotions.					
I'm convinced that I'm worse at dealing with my emotions than other people.					

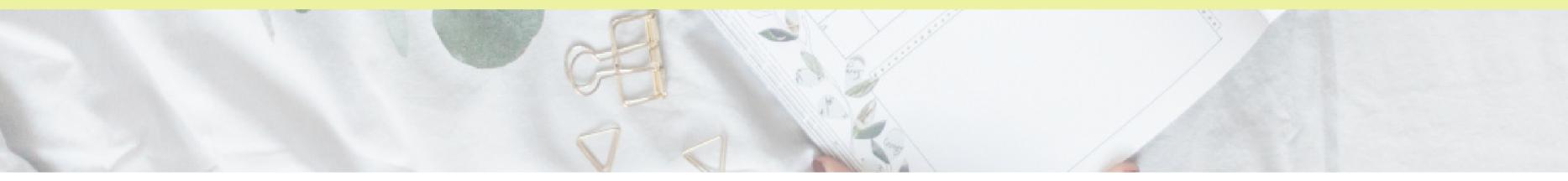
If you mostly answered "agree" or "strongly agree," it's quite possible that you have a tendency to downplay your emotions. You might also feel silly or weak whenever a difficult emotion arises and feel compelled to get rid of it as soon as possible. My hope is that this chapter will help you look at your emotions in a new way.

If you're someone who mostly disagreed or strongly disagreed with the above statements, it looks like you're quite comfortable with feelings! Feel free to move on to the next week. Or, you can read through this chapter to remind you why it's so great that you're already doing what you're doing.





### STEP ONE acceptance

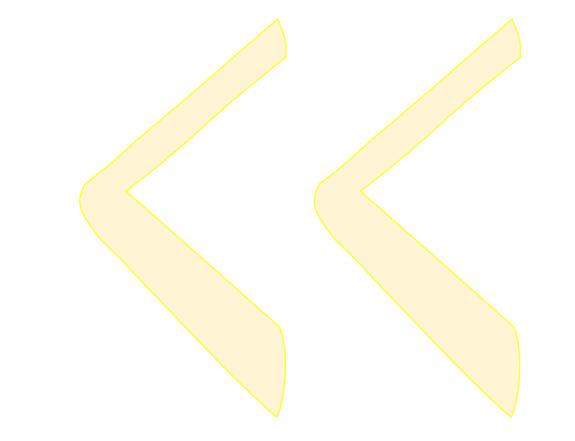


**Radical acceptance** means wholeheartedly accepting something rather than trying to change it. Whether it's a challenging situation that has come up or a difficult emotion, you don't fight it, get angry with it, or try to change it into something it's not; you allow it to be.

Let's use the weather as an example. Imagine you're hosting an outdoor party and it happens to rain. You could stand there and scream about how frustrated you are with the rain, how "life is unfair," and how you can't stand our country's weather, but it won't change the fact that it's raining. The other option is to accept the situation and assess what should be done to make the party as comfortable for your guests as possible.

There's an expression that says, "**Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional.**" When we continually resist reality or try to turn it into something it's not, the truth is that we are using our energy in a way that's totally unproductive and only adding to our suffering.





Radically accepting ourselves also allows us to acknowledge our good qualities rather than just our faults. After all, when we become angry or disappointed in ourselves for having not-so-pleasant feelings, we can be seduced into negative self-talk that tells us we're stupid, worthless, or defective. And when we get in this mindset, it's impossible to think of doing anything helpful.

The process of accepting painful emotions is much easier said than done. The key is to **reframe the way that you see emotions** and the way you talk to yourself when they arise. On the following page, you'll see some different ways to reframe your reactions to emotions.

What you usually say	What you can try saying				
	I care about myself and other people.				
l'm way too sensitive.	I'm a sensitive person who experiences the world differently, but this is a great quality in many circumstances.				
	My sensitivity has given me rich emotional experiences.				
	I'm good and nobody's perfect.				
I'm so stupid for feeling	I embrace both my good and bad qualities.				
this way.	I radically accept myself.				
	laccept who lam.				
	I love myself.				
l'm worthless.	l might have some faults, but l'm still a good person.				
	l'm a good person, not a mistake.				
Insert your own:					
Chart modified from: McKay M,	Wood J. The Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Workbook. 2007 Jun.				



### STEPTWO name your feelings



There's an expression in the mental health field that says, "Name it to tame it." The reason why naming our feelings is so important is because doing so activates our **prefrontal cortex**, the more "rational" part of our brain involved in decision-making, planning behaviour, and more. It also gives us a bit of **distance** from the emotion, reminding us that we have not become it, but are just experiencing it temporarily.

Please go to the "Resources" page of my website (fresh-insight.ca/resources) to access the Feelings Wheel. This can be a helpful tool for people who have a hard time naming their emotions. To use it, start at the inner-most ring and select the overarching emotion you're experiencing. Then, work your way outward to select the more specific emotion you're experiencing.

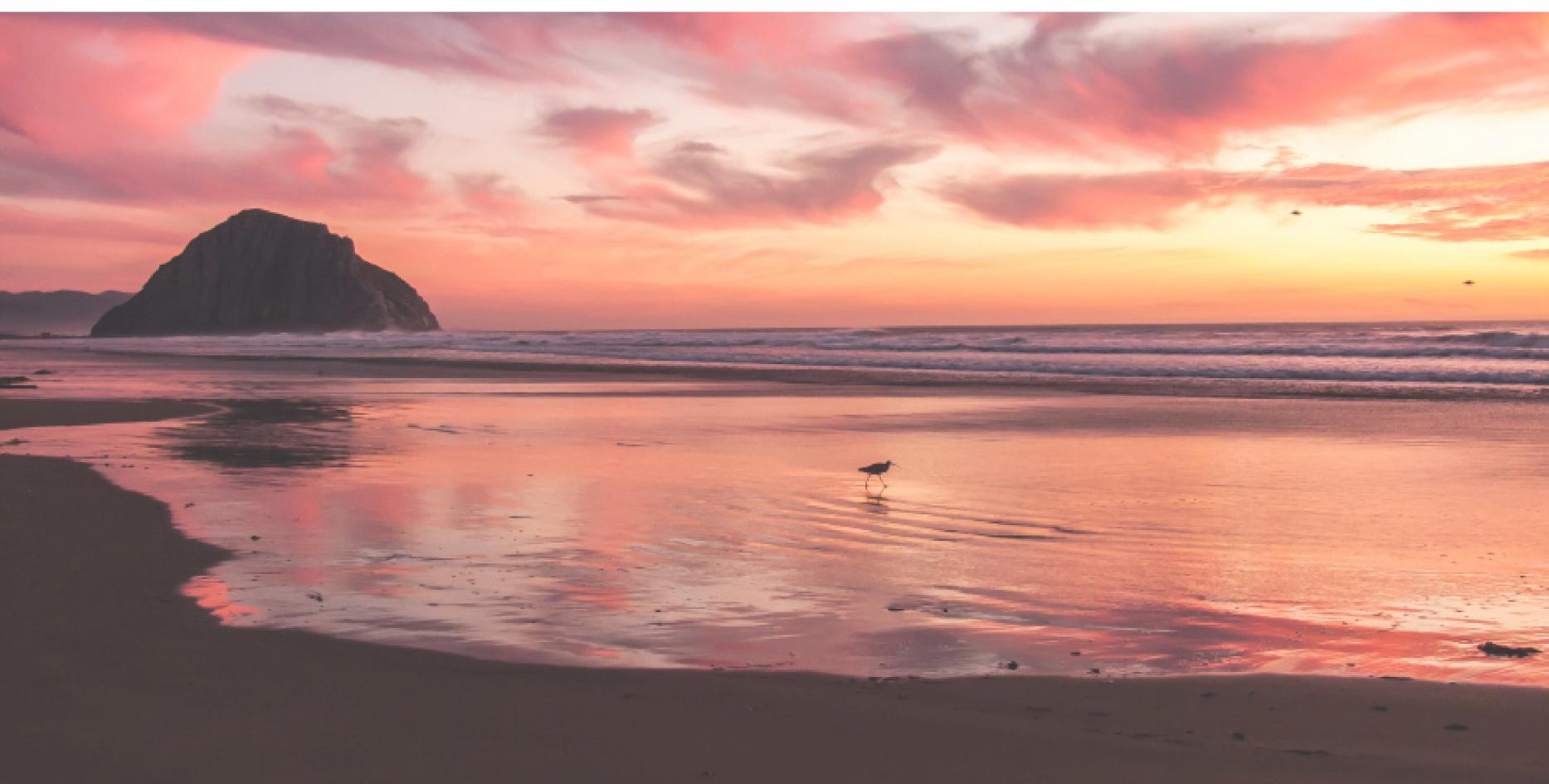
Once you've pinpointed the exact feeling you're experiencing, it's important to name the emotion out loud:

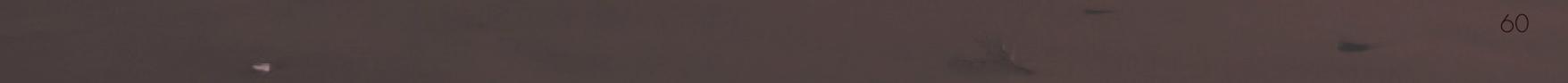
Right now, I feel \_\_\_\_\_.

Try saying this a number of times if you need to.

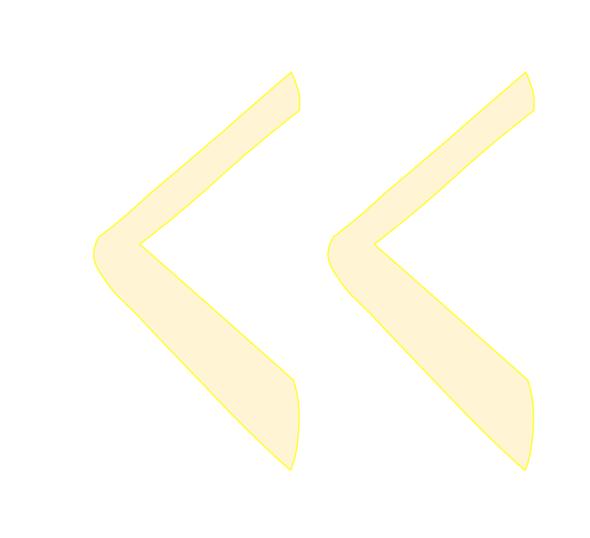
**Disallow yourself from judging your experience**. This is not the time to ask why it's here, nor is it the time to ask it to go away. Your only task in this moment is to acknowledge it.

Other ways to gain some distance from your emotion include: talking from the third person (i.e. Kristina is feeling sad) and saying, "The feeling of \_\_\_\_\_\_ is occurring right now."









You might feel a little silly doing this exercise, and that's okay (and very normal). However, when we say things out loud, our thoughts and feelings become more real yet also more distant, as if they've finally been given the opportunity to exist in the universe. There have been a number of times in therapy when people will describe an experience to me before saying, "Wow, I've never said that out loud before." From there, many of them discuss feeling like a weight has been lifted or like an energy has been released due to not having to cling to something so tightly any longer.



### STEP THREE acknowledge impermanence

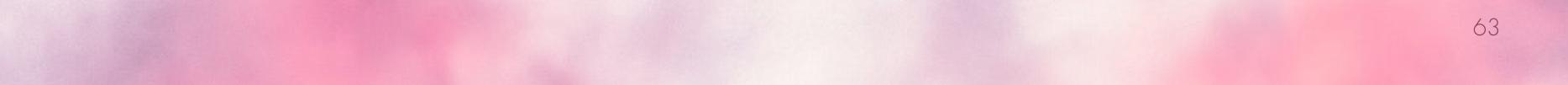


When negative emotions arise, it's important to remember that they are temporary. Not only that, but **we rarely experience only one emotion at a time**. Indeed, it is very possible for different parts of us to have different responses to the same situation.

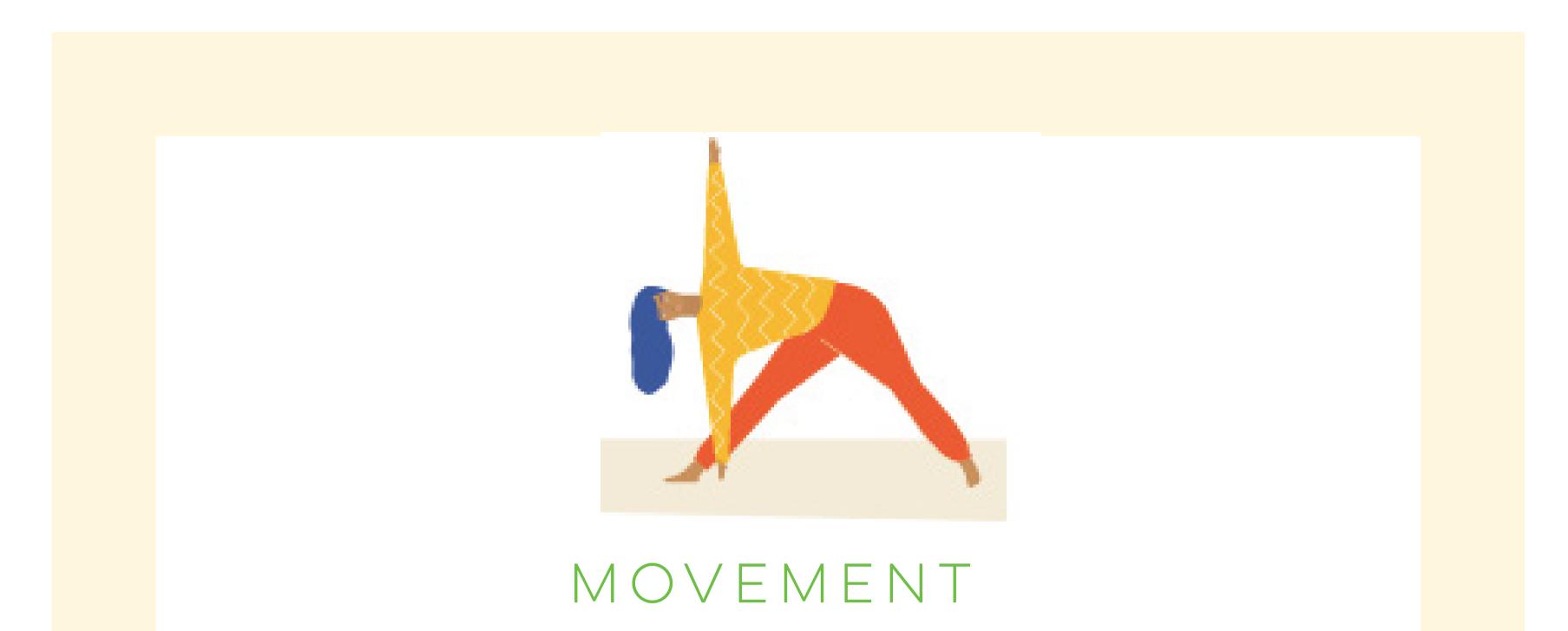
Let's say you get sick, for example, and need to take a day off work. While one part of you might feel guilty for having to take the day off, another part of you might be thankful that you've given yourself permission to stay home and rest. **Different parts of us have different reactions to many situations** and keeping that in mind is crucial when practicing radical acceptance.

Your body also wouldn't allow you to feel a "negative emotion" permanently. After all, our brain's main job is to ensure our survival. When we're experiencing something painful or emotionally charged, our sympathetic nervous system is activated, which tells our body to release different hormones like adrenaline and cortisol to help us deal with the stress. This can be a taxing process, and after awhile we need a break. Our body and mind inherently know this, which is why they'll eventually say, "I know you're upset and all, but I'm tired now. Time to rest." This explains why sometimes people cry themselves to sleep or feel "cried out"—because their body is too exhausted to keep going.

I say this to be comforting. You see, when a painful emotion arises and you feel like you need to GET RID OF IT AT ALL COSTS!!!!!!, you must trust that your body will bring you back to homeostasis on its own **if you give it what it needs** (which we'll discuss momentarily). But I assure you that your painful experience will not last forever.



So what does your body need during this time to help calm you down? It needs:



1.1





#### BREATH

#### VISUALIZATION



#### TOUCH

#### MOVEMENT

There's a reason why parents rock their children when they're trying to calm them down—because it works. In a study published in <u>Current Biology</u>, Japanese researchers found that when infants' mothers moved as they held them, they experienced a rapid decrease in their heart rate in comparison to infants who were held by mothers who were sitting still. Movement, it appears, allowed the infants' parasympathetic nervous systems to be activated, which is the "rest and digest" system.

Additionally, new <u>research</u> is suggesting the importance of integrating movement into the treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as doing so can allow for the integration of the body, limbic region, and cortex, which are the areas of the brain that are primarly affected after a traumatic incident.

Simply put, **our bodies often store painful emotions** as tension and other physical sensations, but certain movements can provide us with an important release.

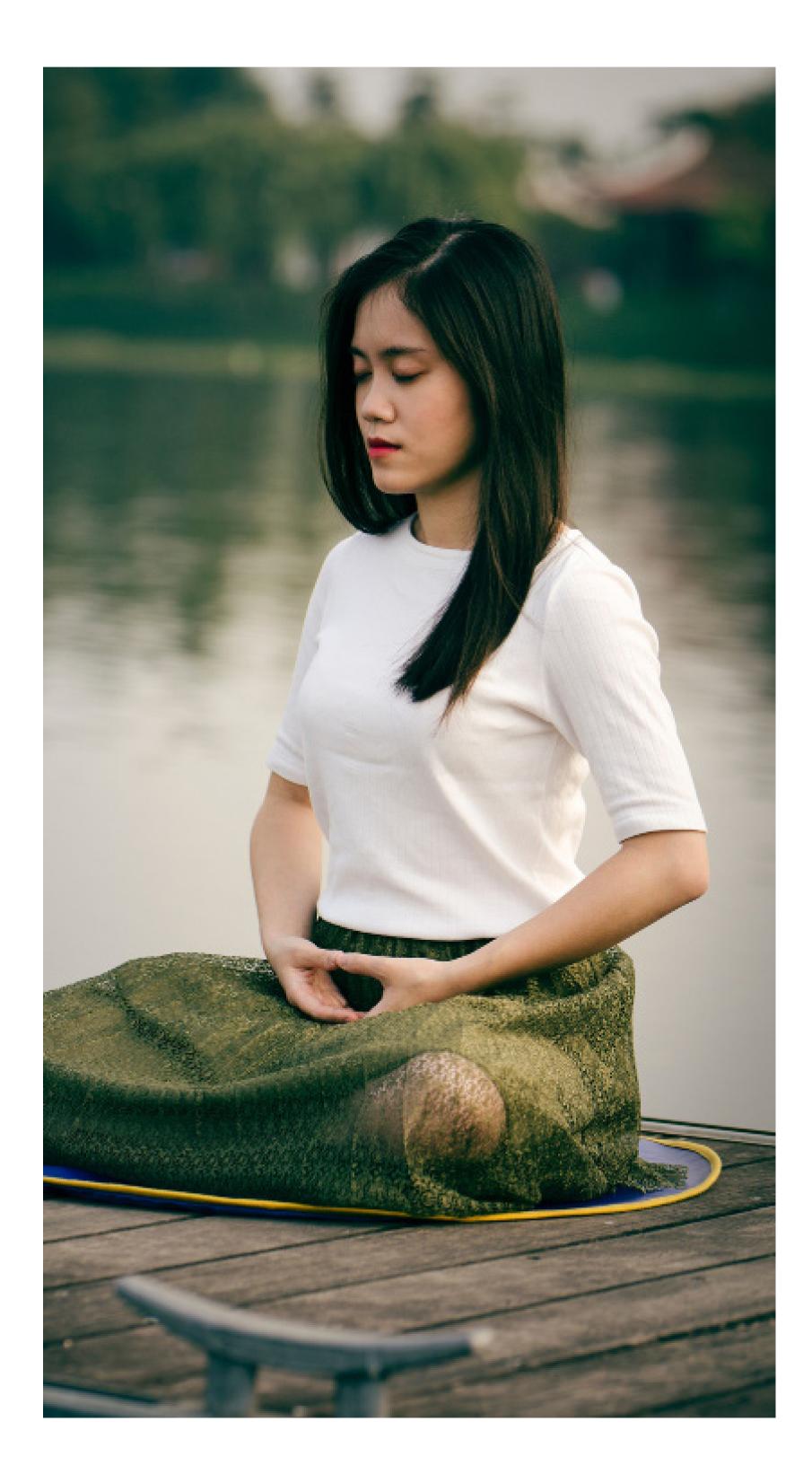
Here are some helpful movements you can do to help release tension induced by painful emotions:

• Stand up and rock back and forth.

• Complete exercises that relax your psoas (SO-azz) muscle. Wrapping around your pelvis and lower spine, this muscle often becomes tight and tense when we are stressed. For a helpful psoas-releasing exercise, check out this fantastic <u>video</u> (starts at 2:12).

 Engage in tension-releasing exercises, which are designed to make your body tremor so it may reach a state of deep relaxation thereafter. To do this, lie down on your back and place the soles of your feet together so your knees are spread apart. Lift your knees up towards the ceiling about one inch. At this point, you may experience some tremoring, which is normal. If this is enough for you, stay in this position. If you're looking for a bit more of a release, lift your hips up towards the ceiling and squeeze your buttocks.Lift your knees one inch towards the ceiling and hold for about 5 seconds. Release. Repeat as many times as you feel comfortable. Note that you will likely begin tremoring by the third round, which is perfectly normal. To see this in action, check out this video.

 Stand up with your feet hip-width apart. Fold your body foward. Let your right hand hold your left elbow and your left hand hold your right elbow. Let your head hang heavy.
 Bend your knees. If you begin tremoring, don't worry you're doing it correctly!



Stress often causes us to take shallow breaths that disallow our parasympathetic nervous system from being activated, which helps us rest and be calm. **Diaphragmatic breathing** involves breathing through your

belly (or diaphragm) so this system may be helpfully activated. It also quiets your amygdala, which is the part of the brain that "sounds the alarm" when you experience fear.

Close your eyes and place your hand over your stomach. As you breath in, focus on breathing in to your belly so that it expands outwardly away from your spine. (The "fatter" your stomach looks, the better!) As you exhale, feel your stomach retract towards your spine. Repeat.

#### VISUALIZATION

Lay down or sit in a comfortable position. Gently close your eyes, allowing every teeny tiny facial muscle to relax. Imagine a beautiful, never-ending ocean. You hear the waves as they come and go, slowly and consistently. This ocean contains the stressful thought or feeling you are experiencing. This distressing emotion is represented by a humongous wave that's coming towards you on shore. And then, ever-so-beautifully, the wave retreats, as does the negative feeling. You watch the emotion go further and further into the distance with every wave that passes while the sun begins to set in the background.







#### TOUCH

In a series of observational <u>studies</u>, it was concluded that brief, casual touch from strangers had positive behavioural effects on people, making them more generous throughout the day. Other studies have highlighted the therapeutic benefits of touch in couples and friendships. The positive effect of physical touch is due to the release of different neurotransmitters like oxytocin, serotonin, and dopamine,

which make us feel connected to others and happy.

While we can rely on others to receive kind, physical touch, there are also ways we can experience soothing touch on our own:

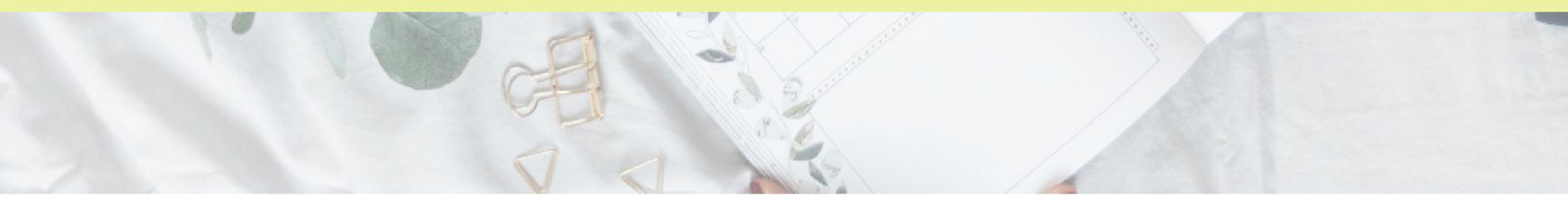
• Place your hand over your heart.

• Place your right hand on your left shoulder and your left hand on your right shoulder so you're giving yourself a gentle hug. Slowly caress your arms from the shoulder to elbows.

- Cuddle or hug a pet.
- Wrap yourself in a warm blanket or put a hot water bottle on your body wherever it feels most comforting.



## practice self-compassion



Dr. Kristin Neff, author of Self-Compassion, explains that there are three steps that can help us cultivate self-compassion:

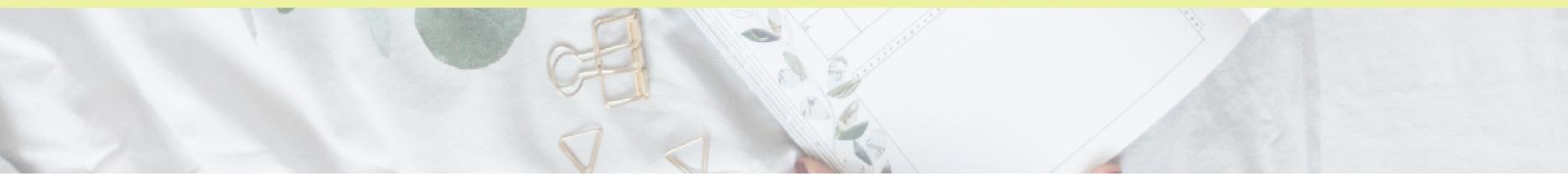
1. Name/acknowledge the pain. This involves saying something as simple as "this sucks" or "this hurts a lot right now."

2. Validate that emotion. Acknowledge why and how the emotion you're experiencing is understandable or makes sense in some way. For example, you might say to yourself, "It makes sense that I'm feeling hurt right now given how much I care about my relationship with this person."

3. Extend care to yourself. What do you need right now to make yourself feel just a bit better? If someone else were experiencing this emotion, how would you tend to them? For example, if your friend were crying about a breakup, perhaps you'd make them a hot cup of tea and allow them to cry without judgment. Can you extend the same care to yourself?











Your task this week is to refrain from judging your emotions when they arise. Instead, use the selftalk exercises listed in this chapter and the activities involving movement, breath, visualization, and touch to help calm your nervous system. Each day, please write down what the experience of accepting your emotions has been like for you.



At the end of the week, notice what themes appear and record your reflections.





## Social media

AND

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## COMPARISON IS THE THIEF OF JOY.

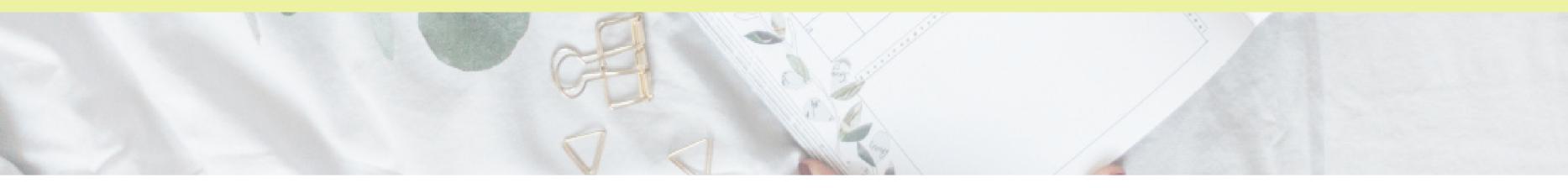
THEODORE ROOSEVELT







## STEP ONE detoxing from the news



If there's anyone who knows the importance of being informed about world events it's me, a former journalist.

However, when we become consumed by headlines and news reports about racism, terrorism, and acts of violence, it becomes all too easy to forget about the number of people who aren't racist, who aren't terrorists, and who aren't violent.

Our brain also unfortunately engages in a number of cognitive biases, which are errors in thought patterns that affect how we see the world and make decisions. One such cognitive bias is known as the **availability heuristic**, which describes our brain's tendency to remember information that we've heard recently and/or often rather than information that's accurate.

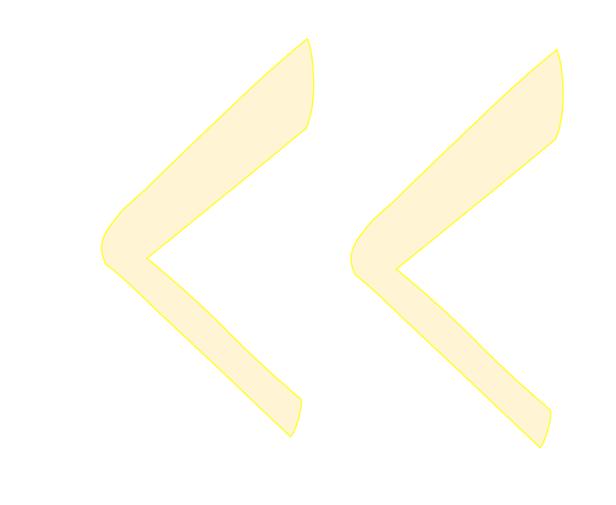
For example, let's say your friend is deciding whether or not to get a security system installed at his house. If you saw a news report on a break-in the night before, you'd likely tell your friend that getting a new security system installed is of the utmost importance. However, if you recently saw a video of a 90-yearold woman talking about how she "hasn't locked her doors in 50 years," you'd be more inclined to tell your friend that installing a fancy alarm system isn't necessary. In reality, you have no knowledge of any facts related to break-ins; your brain has made a decision based on the availability heuristic principle.



Who cares, you ask? Well, the media hardly talks about anything positive. We're constantly exposed to things that are going wrong or getting worse. This means our brain is more likely to recall negative information more regularly despite the accuracy of said information. This can have serious repercussions on our mental health as it can lead to feelings of hopelessness, despair, worry, and more.

I'd invite you to completely disengage from the news for a week to see how this influences your demeanour. Remember that there are countless ways to consume the news now, so disengaging from this habit entirely could mean not looking at specific Twitter feeds, turning off the TV on your treadmill at the gym, finding something else to watch after dinner, etc.





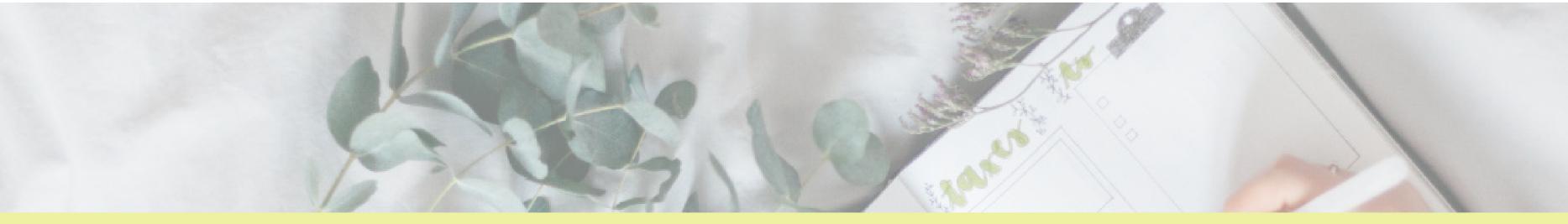
Now, I understand that you might not want to completely avoid the news for the rest of your life, which is completely understandable. However, it's important to place **boundaries** on how you're going to consume the news after your No News Week is over. Here are some different ways to set boundaries for news consumption:

 Set specific time frames during which you'll read up on the news. Ex: only looking at news-related Twitter feeds between 8:00am - 8:30pm each night (AKA at the end of the day so you don't start your day on a bad note).

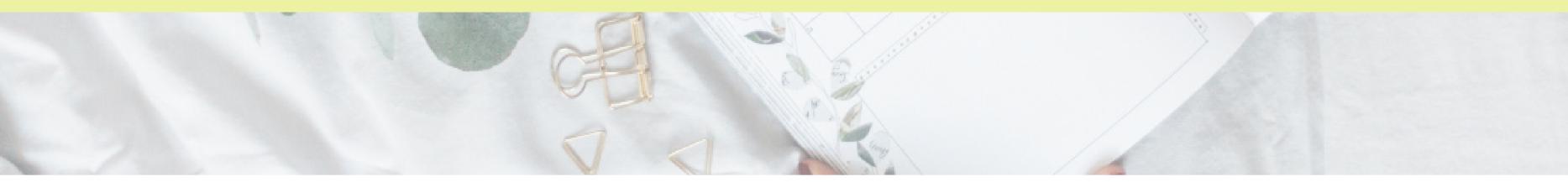
2. Use apps for updates rather than watching the news, as visuals, audio clips, and more can have a great impact on our emotions. Apps like Quartz, The Skimm, and others are good options as they provide you with the top news headlines without going into too much detail.

3. Balance negative news stories with positive ones. Good News Network is a great option for finding happy news stories.

Please take a moment to list other ideas you have on how to mitigate some of the harms that might come with news consumption in the future:

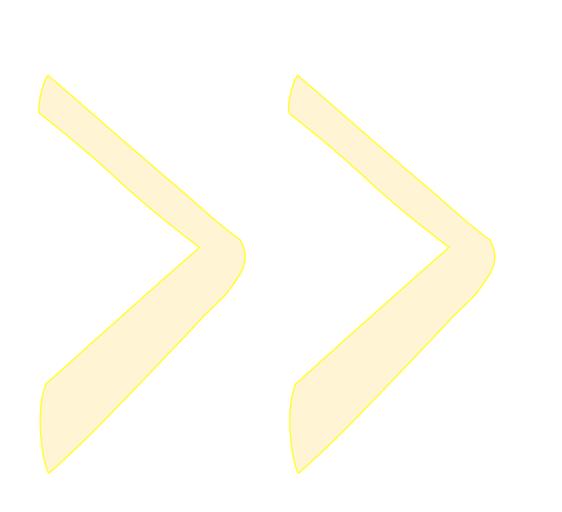


## STEP TWO social media detox



Social media has its perks: it allows us to stay connected with people who live on the other side of the world, find online communities with different interests, collaborate with others, and more. That being said, it's not all good.

In a fascinating study from 2017, researchers interviewed university students about their social media use. As it turns out, 88% of them admitted to comparing themselves to others on Facebook. But here's the thing: of those 88%, almost every single one of them said they were making upward social comparisons. In other words, they were comparing themselves to people who they felt possessed more positive attributes and were **more superior** to them.



Comparing upwardly isn't a bad thing in theory; it can inspire us to try harder and be better people. But when it comes to



social media, the researchers found that it had a negative impact on the students' self esteem. In fact, they discovered that **one hour spent on Facebook daily resulted in a significant decline in scores related to self esteem**. Additionally, they concluded that while most people go on Facebook to check in on other people's lives, these upward social comparisons inevitably leave us feeling inferior, less privileged, and ungrateful.

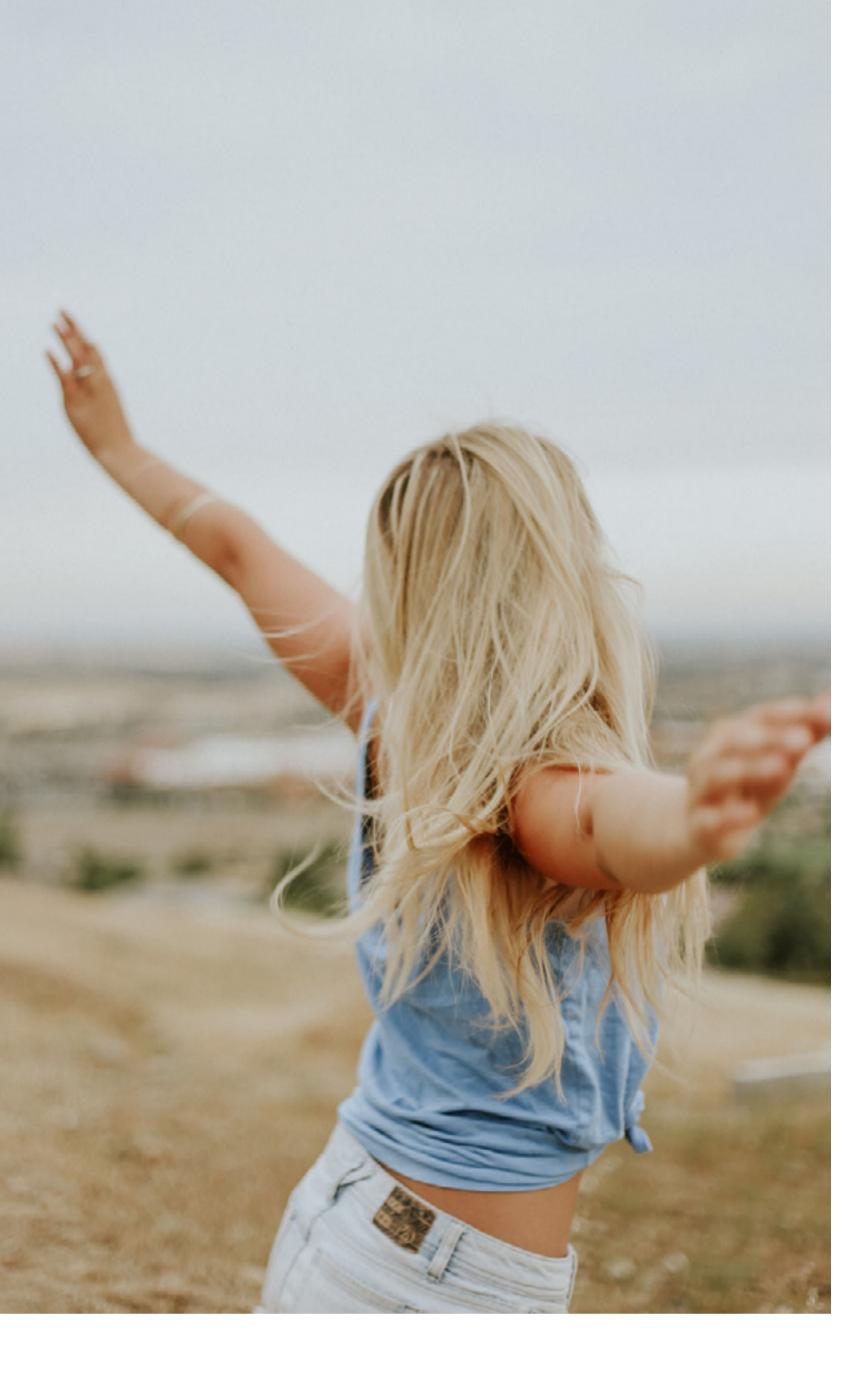
Many people also fail to realize that Facebook, Instagram, and other social media profiles are akin to false advertising. In my personal experience, **people who post the most photos about their "awesome life" or "amazing relationship" are the most miserable** (generally speaking). And this makes sense if you think about it; if they were really enjoying their lives as much as they appear to be, they wouldn't even be *thinking* about social media; they'd be enjoying the present moment instead.

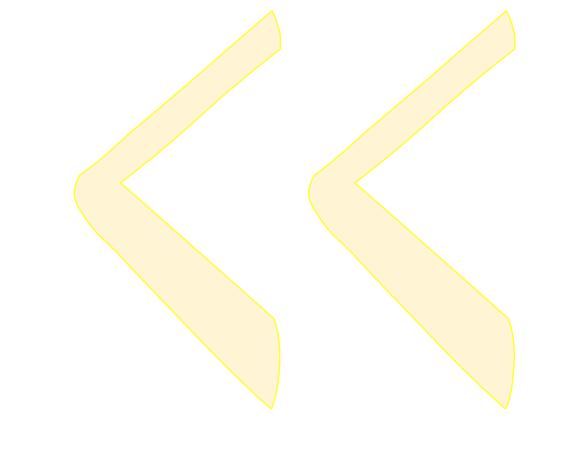


Instead of taking the photos we see on social media at face value, we must remind ourselves that we are only seeing a **snapshot** of other people's lives rather than the whole picture. Additionally, we're comparing our inner lives to someone else's outer life—the one that has been curated so as to present a certain "image."

Let's use me as an example just to drive the point home: I once posted a picture of my new sleek-looking Trek bike on Instagram. On the surface, people would have seen a big smile and a flashy bike. In reality, I had to purchase that bike after mine had been stolen—on the same day that I had not one, but two of my pets put down.

> Surface level: nice bike! Reality: I hate that I had to buy that stupid bike.





While social media has its perks, it can remind us of all the things we don't have, of all the thing we aren't doing, of all the ways we're less than. This does nothing but harm our self esteem. Imagine what difference it would make if we only compared ourselves to our former selves rather than other people?

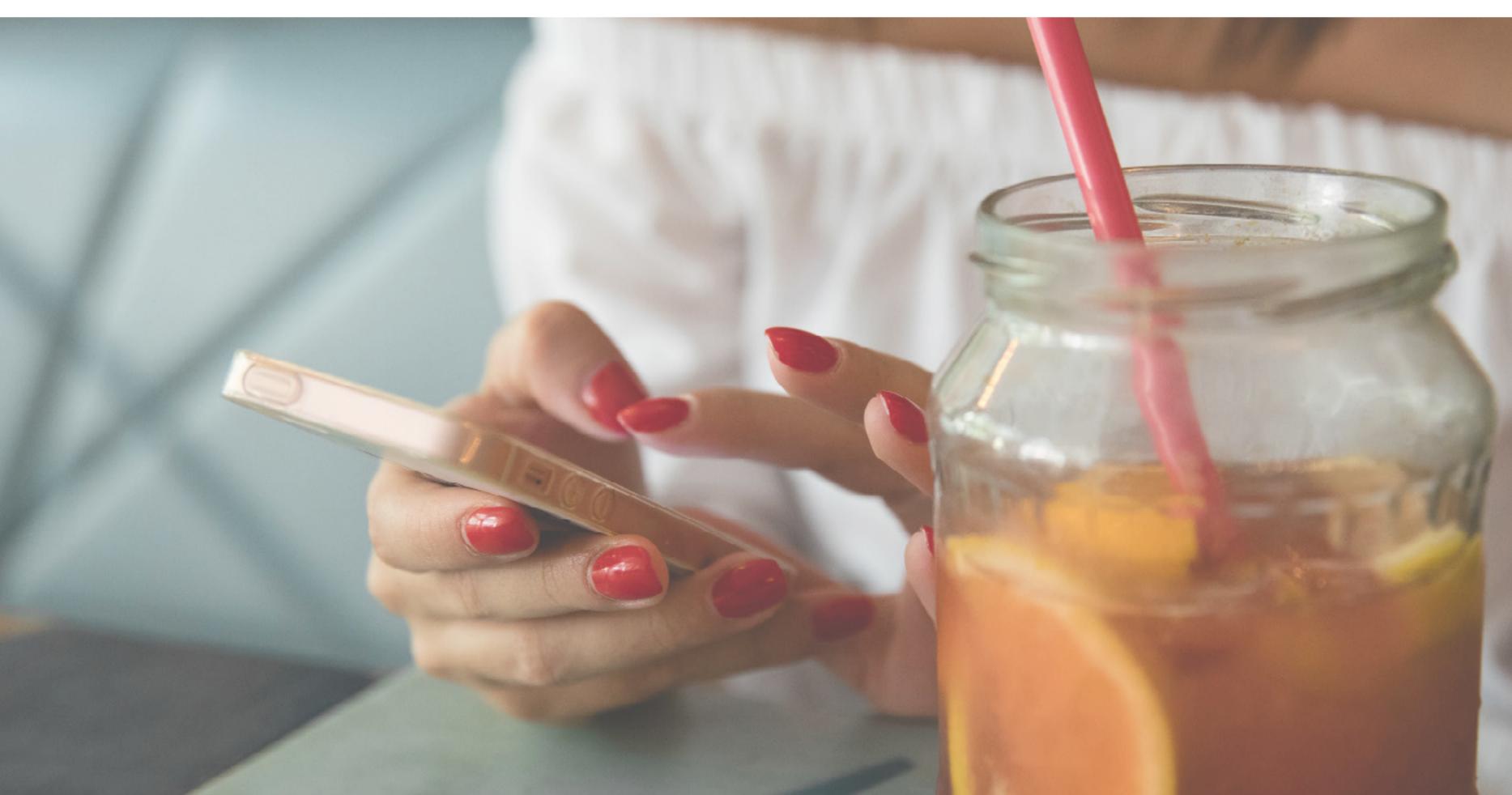
#### Your task is to completely unplug from social media. Delete Instagram. Delete your Facebook account temporarily. Post a status update that you're taking a hiatus if need be. Then, complete the reflection questions at the end of this section to see what differences you notice when you're "off the grid."

#### If a full blown deletion doesn't seem possible, here are things you can do to limit your social media usage:

a. Download apps that track the time you spend on your phone like <u>Moment</u>.

b. Download apps that prevent you from accessing Facebook, Snapchat, or whatever you choose. <u>FocusMe</u> is a great option when you're using a laptop, while <u>Offtime</u> and <u>BreakFree</u> are great options for iOS and Android devices.

c. Block off specific chunks of time to be on social media and set a timer to remind yourself of when it's time to start doing something else.



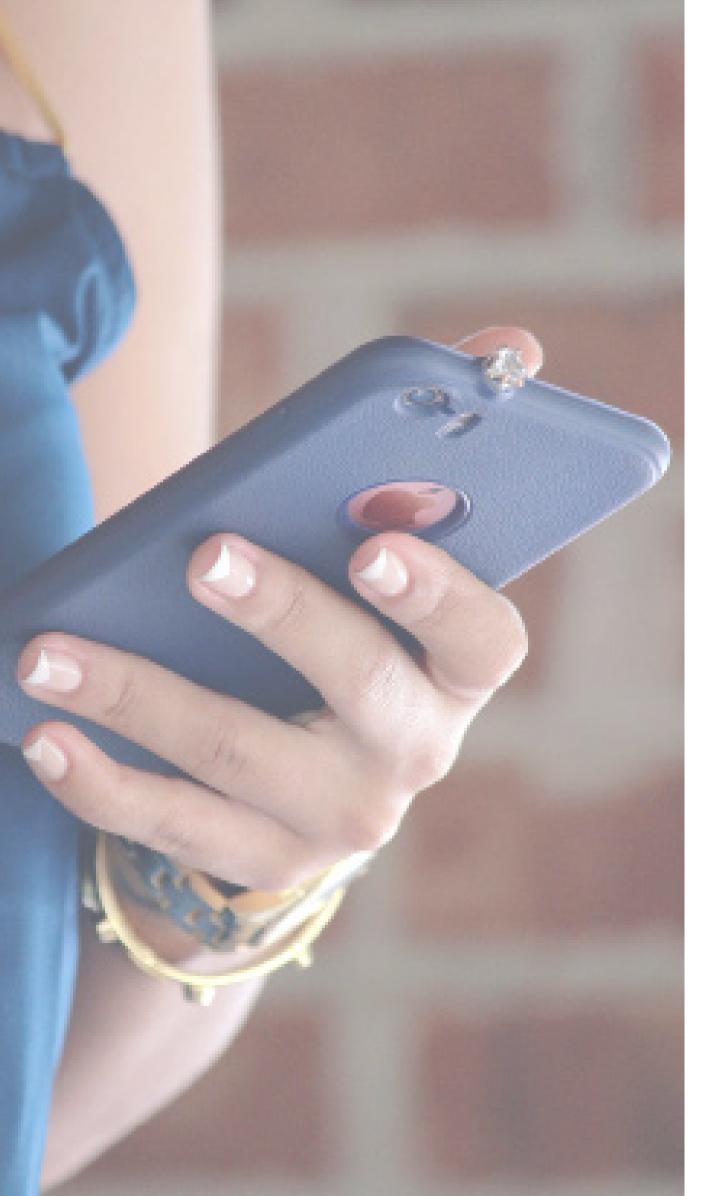


## STEP THREE reducing phone use



To me, s

To me, social media use and phone use



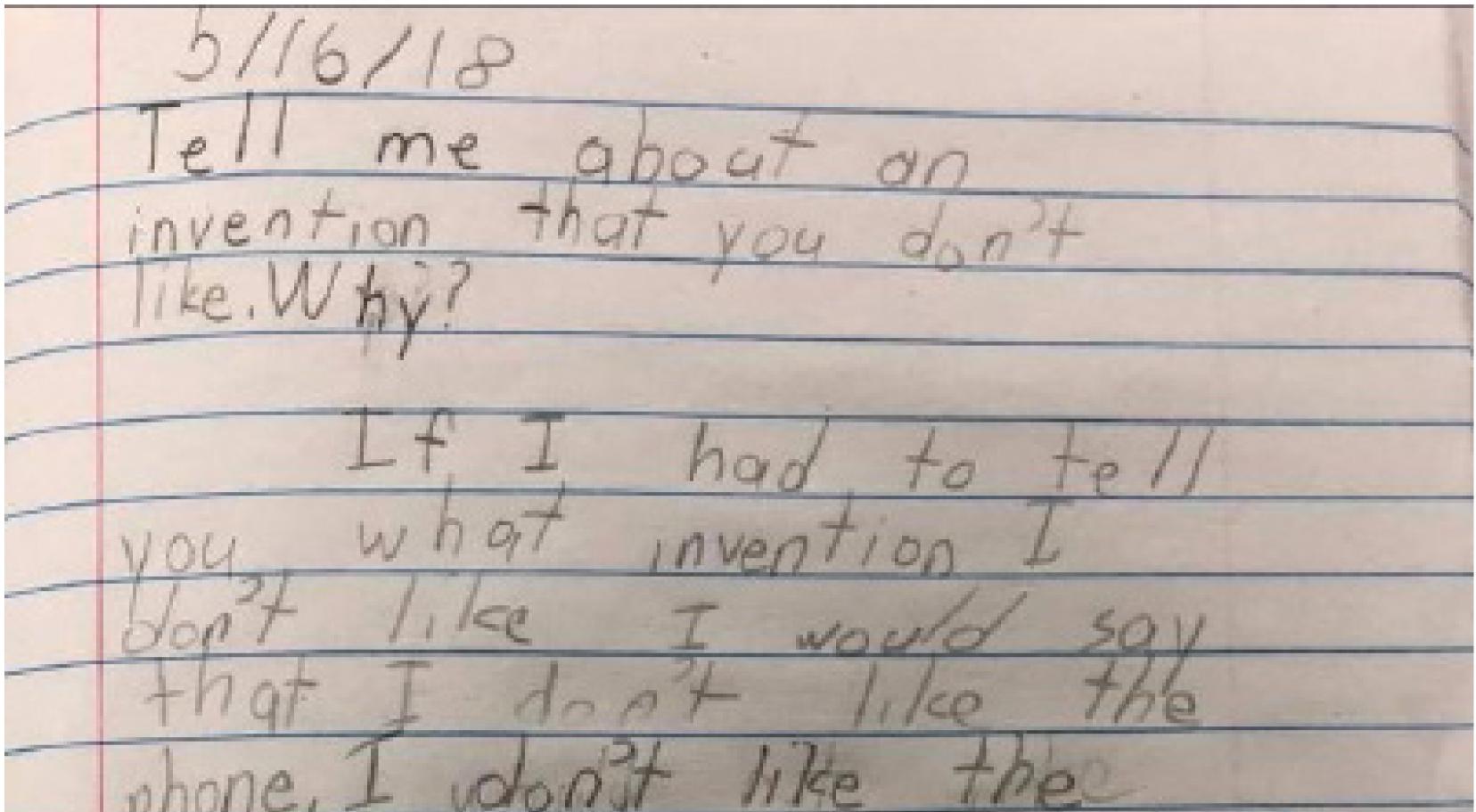
are interconnected. Going on social media too much can increase your phone use and being on your phone too much can increase your obsession with social media—both of which are problematic.

Quiz question: on average, how quickly do you think office emails are read? The answer is a measly **six seconds**. This statistic highlights the unsettling reality of phone addiction in today's culture.

I'd like you to ask yourself: When was the last time you turned off your phone? Chances are, your phone is on 24/7 unless it dies.



Take a look at this photo posted by Jen Adams Beason, a grade two teacher. Apparently, 4 of the 21 students wrote about this topic:



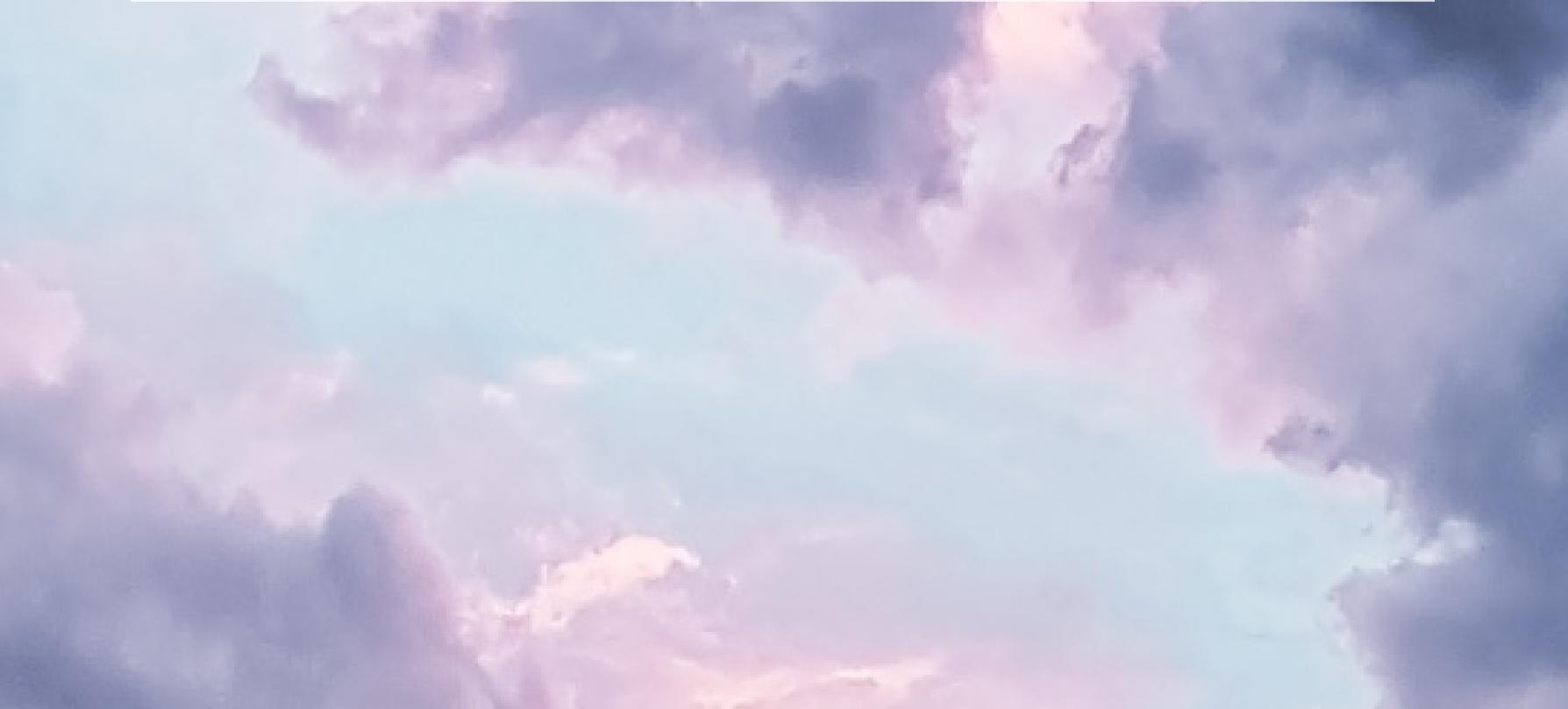
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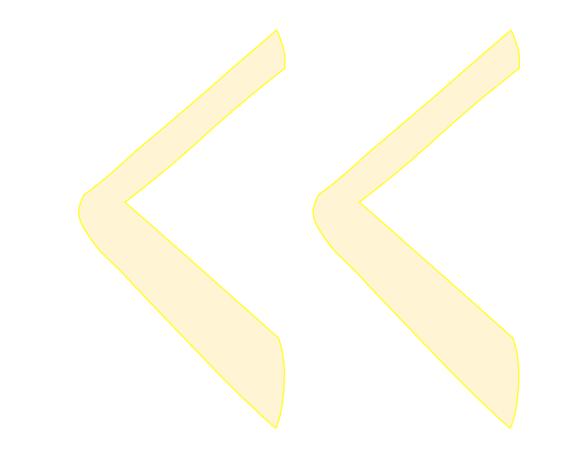
One study found that people were less satisfied with their romantic relationship when their partner ignored then to be on their phone, and others have shown that 88% of people think using your phone during a family dinner isn't okay. Finally, almost 50% of adults in another survey said occasional cell phone use in social gatherings hurts more than helps the conversation.

When we don't have a single moment of peace because a boss is emailing us, a friend is texting us, or a family member is trying to catch us on the phone, it can not only make us feel like we lack control over our time, but like there's an immense amount of pressure to always be available. Interestingly, research has shown that having a sense of control over our lives leads to lower levels of psychological distress and decreased symptoms of depression and anxiety. As such, feeling in control of how we spend our time can play a crucial role in making us feel more grounded.

I'd like to give you a friendly reminder: while it might feel like you HAVE to be available to your boss, HAVE to pick up whenever your friend calls, or HAVE to reply to that email right away, you don't. **You have a choice.** Work emails can wait. So can your friend (she's a big girl/ boy). This isn't about avoiding responsibility; it's about simply postponing them so you can give yourself some much-needed attention.







#### Here are some tips for how to break your phone addiction:

1. Use apps that lock your phone for set periods of time so you can't use it at all. <u>Flipd</u> is a great option here as even turning off your phone won't

#### disable it!

2. Remove your work account from your phone email.

 Stop using your phone as an alarm clock. Picking it up to hit "snooze" makes it all too easy to lie in bed checking Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and all of your other social media channels that you don't need to waste time on the moment you open your eyes.

4. Get rid of time-sucking apps. They're only stopping you from focusing more time on your lovely self!

5. Turn off notifications for various apps. There is no reason why Buzzfeed should be able to alert you about the latest quiz on "what spirit animal suits you best."

6. Leave your phone in another room—or (dare I say) leave it at home altogether. This will prevent you from mindlessly reaching for it for no reason.

7. Use "do not disturb" to your advantage.

8. Disable notifications on your smart watch or put on "do not disturb." This will stop your Apple Watch or Fitbit from vibrating every time you get a text or notification.

9. Turn off iMessages on your computer and/or iPad.

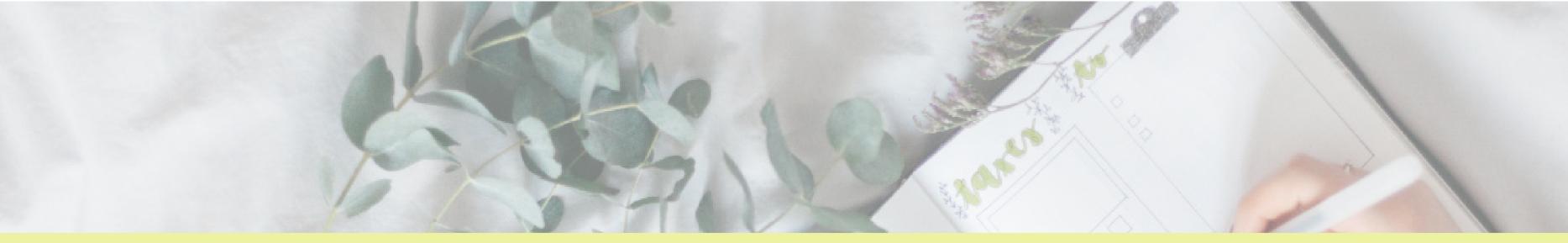






10. If you're *really* dedicated to breaking your addiction, change your data plan so you have less data than you usually need. The fear of being charged for going over your limit may be the very thing you need!

11. Stop taking your phone into the bathroom. It's not only collecting way more bacteria than you think in there, but it's far too easy to start mindlessly browsing through your social media channels that are eroding your self esteem.



# making a plan

Between unplugging from the news and social media and decreasing your phone use, this week is full of changes! To make sure you're set up for success, consider the following questions:

1. If you won't be using your phone as your alarm clock, what will you use instead? Do you own this item already or do you have to pick it up?

2. Have you deleted social media apps from your phone and those pesky time-sucking apps?

3. Have you turned off notifications for different apps (including those that go to your smartwatch)?

5. Are different apps installed that will make your life easier this week (i.e. Flipd, Moment, etc.)?



follow wisely

Social media platforms are smart. They play close attention to what you search for or like online and rely on clever algorithms to send more of the same material your way. On the one hand, this is awesome. I mean, I love when Intagram shows me more videos of cats being ridiculous or unlikely animal friendships. But let's say you've liked a photo of a healthy meal. Well, Instagram might start directing pictures of personal trainers or fitness models to the top of your search page. Next thing you know you're being bombarded with workout videos and diet tips, and so starts the negative self-talk that you "should be in better shape."

Our insecurities can be triggered in the strangest, most unexpected moments, but something we can control is who we follow and what we like online. If you're feeling insecure about your body, start following users who are promoting body positive content so that your feed becomes filled with positive messages and diverse body types to help you maintain a balanced perspective.



## STEP FIVE reflection



Throughout the week, please reflect on/answer the following questions, either here or in a separate journal:

1. How often did you feel the need to check your social media channels throughout the week?

#### 2. How did being "offline" feel?

#### 3. What fears (if any) did you experience about being offline?

#### 4. How did you go about handling these fears when they arose?

### 5. What pleasant surprises did you experience as a result of being offline?

#### 6. What have you learned about your phone/social media/ news consumption habits?

#### 7. What are some changes you'd like to instil going forward?


## WEEK 4: Detox from



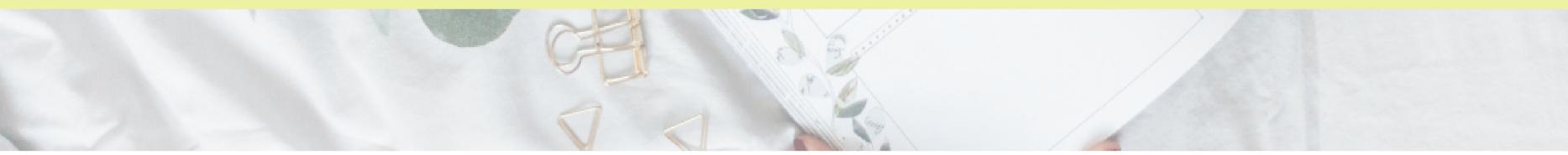


#### YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH YOURSELF SETS THE TONE FOR EVERY **OTHER RELATIONSHIP** YOU HAVE.





## STEPONE defining healthy

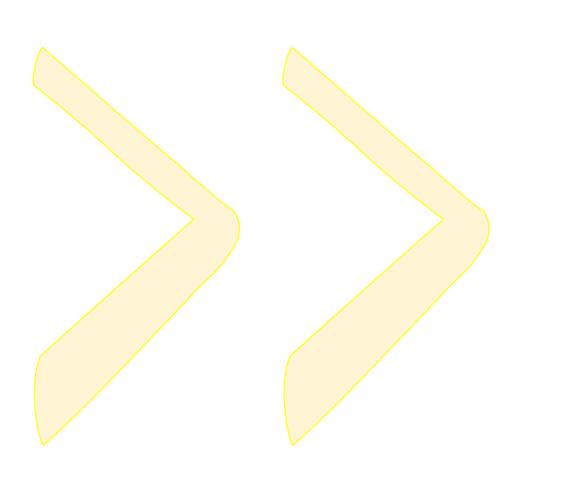


You know that feeling of complete and utter relief? That feeling of a weight being lifted off your shoulders so you can finally breathe again? Maybe you've felt this at the end of a presentation you've been stressing about for weeks. Or when you get into a clean, cozy bed at the end of a long day. Ahhhhhhhh.

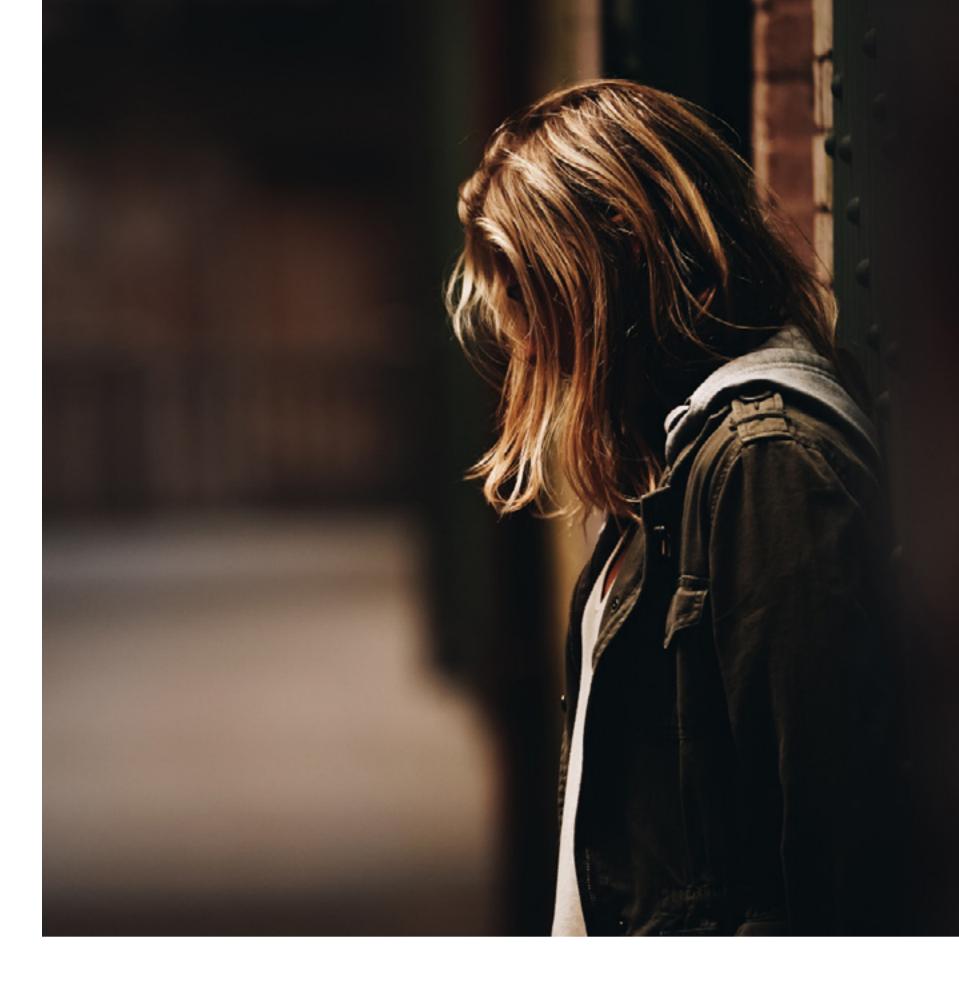
To know "relief," however, means knowing its opposite. Tension. Limitations. Restraint. Discomfort. Exhaustion. I'm sure you know these feelings too, like having to bite your tongue during a heated conversation or continually working at a job you hate. It's exhausting to hold onto all of that, isn't it?



The thing is, we can experience similar negative feelings in unhealthy relationships, including those with significant others, friends, family members, and more. To make matters worse, sometimes **we lose sight of when a relationship has become unhealthy in the first place**. This section is all about how to identify the relationships in your life that might be unhealthy—and what you can do about it.



There's a wide spectrum of 'unhealthy' when it comes to relationships. At the most severe end, there are relationships that are

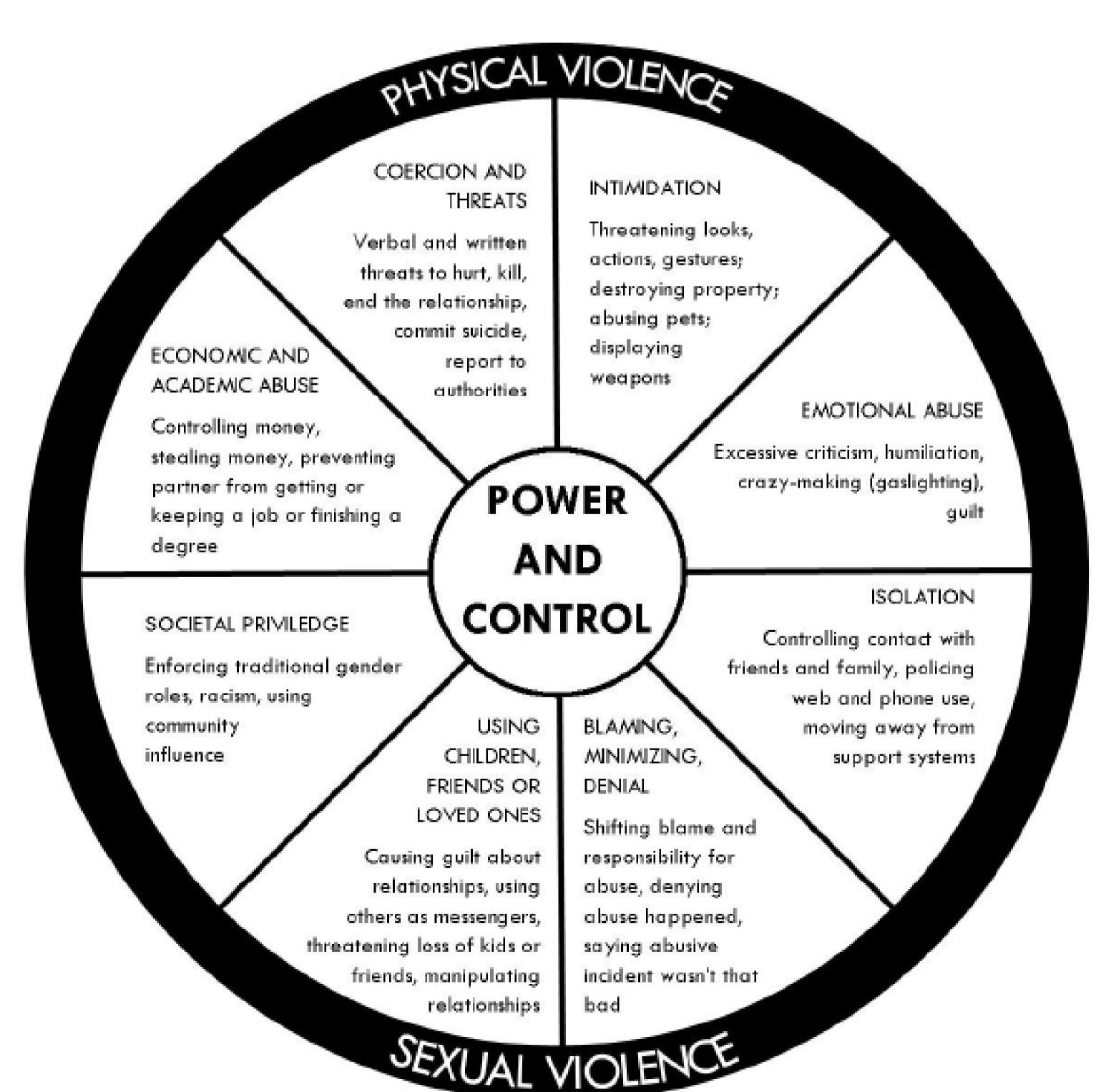


physically, emotionally, verbally, and/or sexually abusive. On the less severe end are those relationships that seem totally "fine" on paper, yet constantly leave us feeling drained and/or bad about ourselves.

It seems to me that people have a pretty narrow idea of what constitutes 'abuse.' They think of punching, hitting, and sending someone to the hospital. In reality, however, abuse can be much more subtle. Furthermore, when our ideas of "unhealthy" are restricted to things like physical violence, we miss a big part of the picture that always comes with it: emotional manipulation, verbal abuse, and more. It is only when we are able to broaden our definition of 'unhealthy' that we are able to see red flags sooner rather than later. And in doing so, we can better define 'healthy,' too.

Now... you might be sitting there thinking, "Why on earth are we talking about abuse in a mental health detox program?" The reason is: abuse happens way, way more often than you'd think. And I want to ensure that you're educated about the different warning signs so you don't go through the all-too-common experience of leaving a relationship and wondering, "WHAT WAS I THINKING?!"

Take a close look at the Power & Control Wheel developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Program:



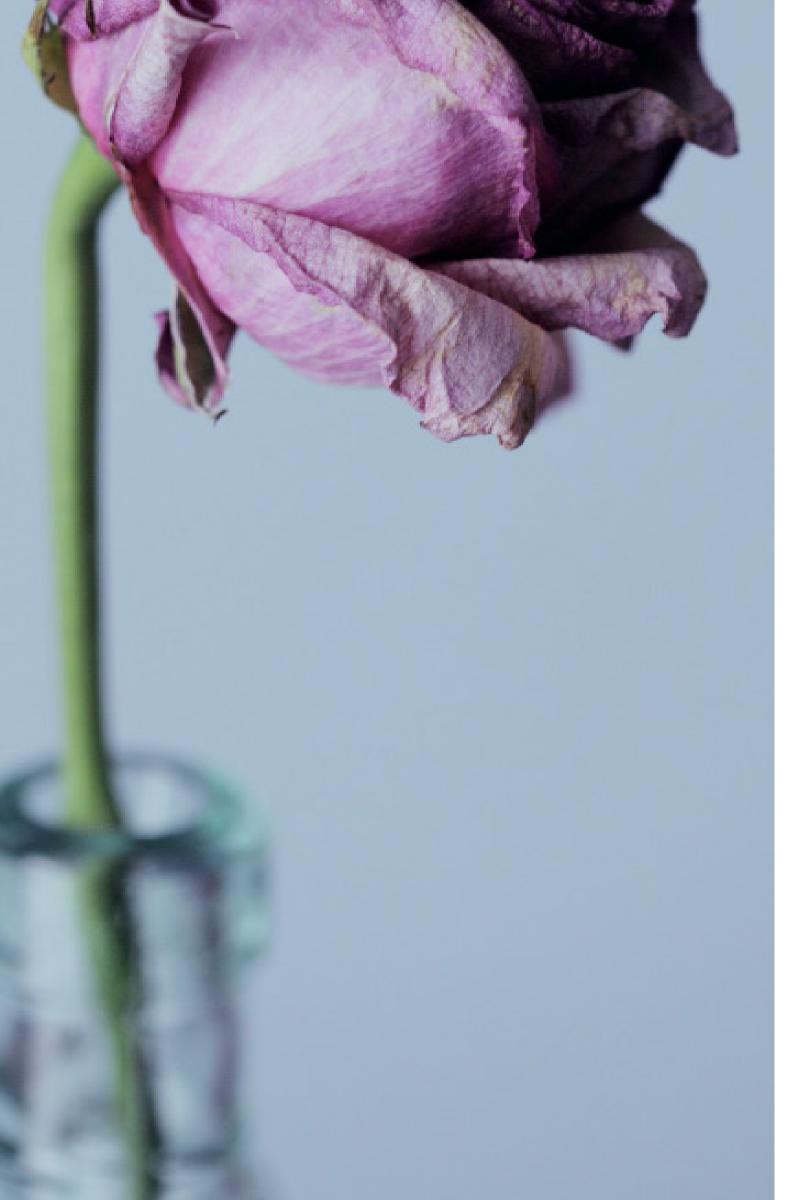


Here are some other warning signs that commonly occur in abusive relationships:

1. **Jealousy**. A little bit of jealousy for a partner is healthy and normal. And hey, it can be a good sign that you only want your partner to have feelings for you. However, when jealousy gets out of control, it can be problematic. This can look like: constant check-ins about what you're doing or where you're going, continually accusing you of "flirting" with others, getting angry when time is spent with others (or refusing to allow this to happen in the first place), calling frequently or checking things like your gas mileage or text messages, etc. When the jealousy continually seems disproportionate to the actual situation, this is a red flag.

2. Rushing into the relationship. Many abusive individuals do whatever they can to seduce their partner into developing serious feelings for them as quickly as possible. This might include lots of wining and dining at first, saying "I love you" very early on, taking your commitment to the next level quickly (i.e. through moving in together, getting engaged, buying a pet, etc.). The plan is to "get you on their hook" as soon as possible so it's harder to leave. Additionally, they might make you feel guilty or question your commitment should you communicate that you aren't ready to take such steps. 3. Gaslighting. This is a manipulative process aimed at making you question your reality. For example, your memory might constantly be called into question through statements like, "You never said that." It might also involve continually downplaying your emotions in the hopes that

you'll come to realize you're "just being dramatic." As a result of these various gaslighting techniques, you're left constantly second-guessing yourself, wondering if you're too sensitive, dramatic, incompetent, or going crazy. 4. **Guilt-tripping and blaming**. An abusive person will often manipulate a situation so that you feel as though you've done something wrong and have therefore caused



them pain. For example, if you decide that you'd like a night with your girlfriends instead of them, they might claim that "you just don't love them enough" as a way of trying to gain your sympathy (and continue to manipulate you). Threats of suicide are also common in abusive individuals as a form of manipulation.

5. **Sexual coercion**. This involves the act of relentlessly demanding sex when it has been made clear that you are



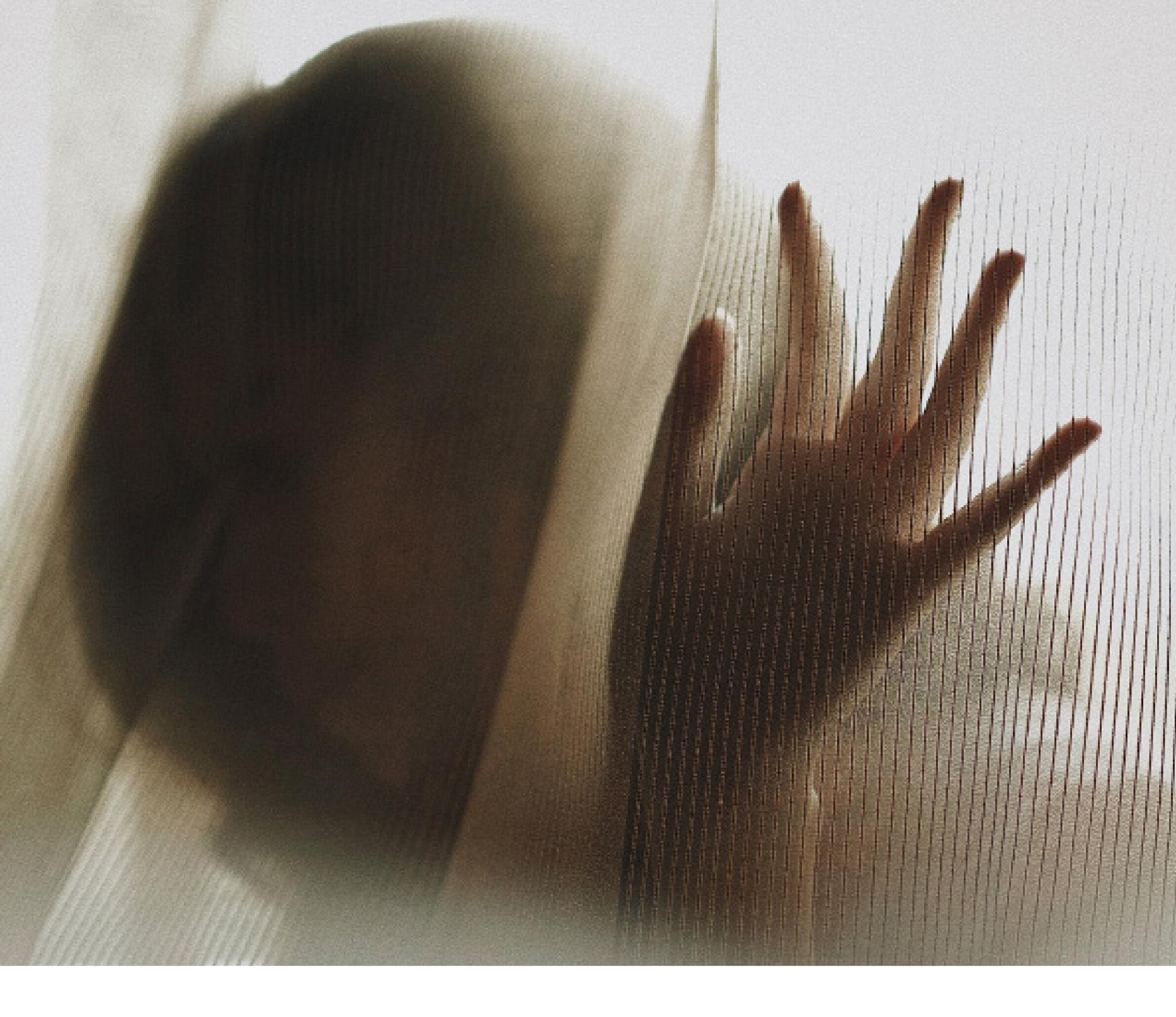
not interested. Eventually, you might think to yourself, "I might as well get over it or he'll never stop asking," which is problematic. While practically everyone has had sex when they might not fully be "in the mood," if you're afraid of facing negative consequences when you say no, this is a problem.

6. **Name-calling**. You're often told that you're stupid, dramatic, a bad partner, etc. These types of phrases attack your character, sense of self, and self esteem.

7. **Isolation**. Abusers often want their partners all to themselves so they paint family members, friends, and co-workers in a negative light in the hopes that you'll want to further isolate yourself. This effectively cuts off your support network and eliminates the risk of someone telling you that your partner is up to no good.

Note that some of these warning signs are sometimes celebrated in romantic movies and books. Think of *The Notebook* when Noah hangs from the ferris wheel until he gets a 'yes' to a date. No means no!





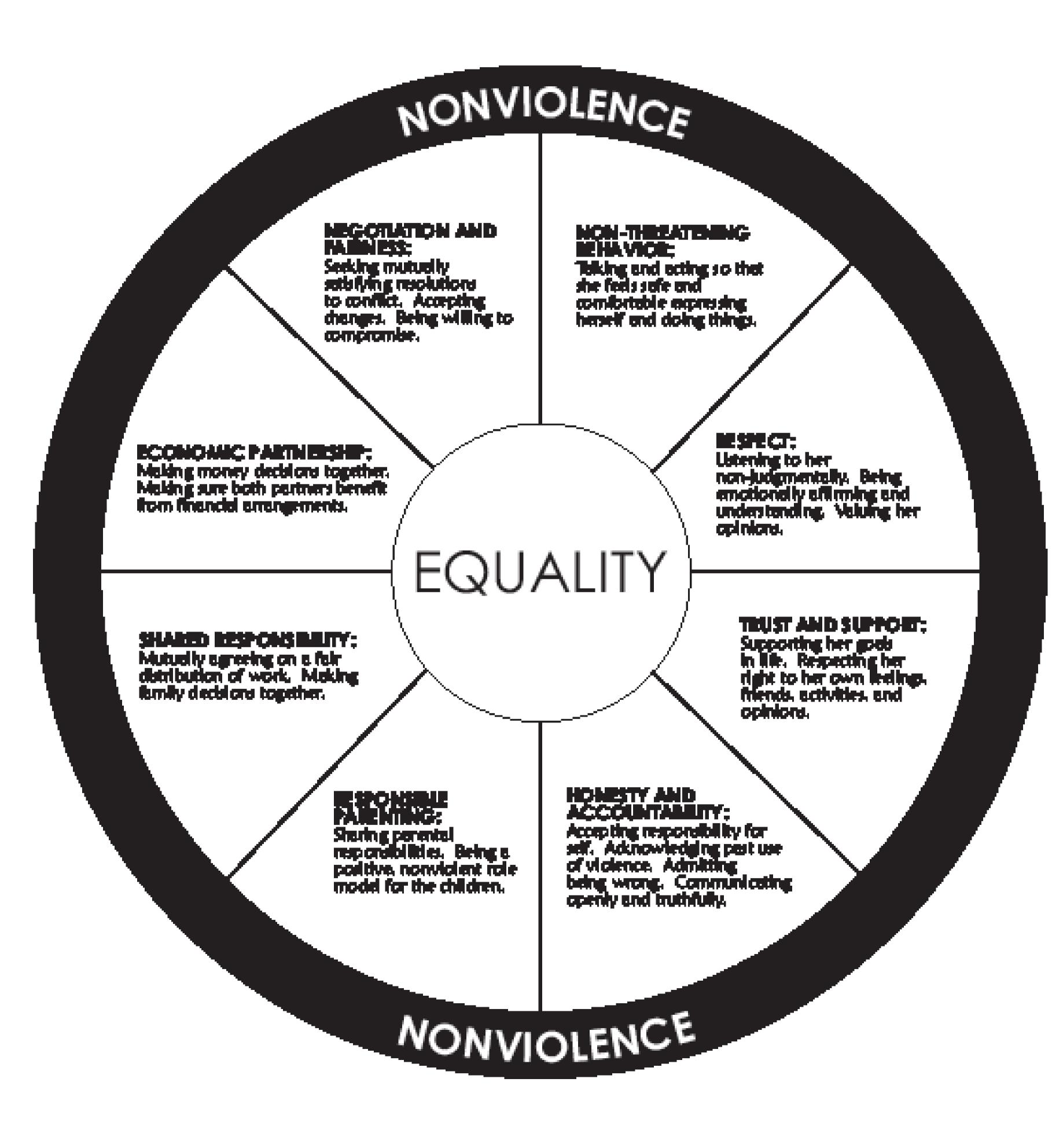
With every abusive relationship, the main goal is to establish power and control over the other person. Additionally, abusers engage in several actions to ensure that their partner knows that "they're the boss," which often creates a climate of fear. For example, while hitting a wall might not be considered direct physical violence towards someone, it is actually considered a form of emotional abuse since it makes someone feel unsafe. *Will he punch me next?* 

Here are some feelings/thoughts that often come up for people in abusive relationships:

- Feeling like you're walking on eggshells
- Feeling like you can't do anything right
- Experiencing a sense of unease or nervousness
- Fearing repercussions or punishments for acting a certain way (i.e. being ignored for a week after spending a night with friends) Questioning your self-worth constantly • Experiencing physical sensations like nausea around the abuser • Frequently making excuses for your partner's behaviour to friends, family members, and more • Experiencing heightened levels of anxiety (and all the symptoms that come with it like sleeplessness, constant worry, etc.) Continually wondering "what's wrong with you"



Now that we have a clearer picture of what 'abuse' might entail, here is the Wheel of Equality. Note that this isn't supposed to represent some abnormally perfect relationship; this is very much an achievable and common dynamic that we should experience in all of our relationships.





# identifying draining relationships



A relationship doesn't have to be abusive to be considered unhealthy. When we feel emotionally depleted, invalidated, or unworthy whenever we finish spending time with someone, that can also be an indication that the relationship isn't in good health.

Here are some of the warning signs that a friendship or romantic relationship might be heading down a not-so-great path:

#### 1. You're always initiating hang-outs, conversations, etc.

As adults are so keen to tell each other, life is busy. We all have commitments, priorities, and other relationships to tend to, which is completely fine. However, if you feel like you're constantly the one to arrange seeing someone, it might be a sign that you aren't as much of a priority to them as they

are to you. And hey, it never feels good to feel like we aren't important to someone.

#### 2. Passive aggressive behaviour.

Being passive aggressive means indirectly expressing your hostility through behaviours like ignoring someone, making small jabs at them, and more. If someone is continually unable to have a mature conversation with you about why they are feeling a negative emotion, it can be very exhausting. Additionally, these subtle attacks can erode one's self esteem over time.

#### 3. Co-dependency.

It's nice to feel wanted and loved, especially by people we care about. However, feeling completely consumed by another person and becoming overly reliant on one another can create an unhealthy dynamic where neither of you have your own lives, friends, or hobbies any more. When spending time with others is associated with guilt-tripping or jealousy, this can only make matters worse.

#### 4. Jealousy and/or lack of support.

Friends are supposed to make us feel good about ourselves and bring us up when we're feeling down. While it's impossible for someone to meet all of your needs at any given

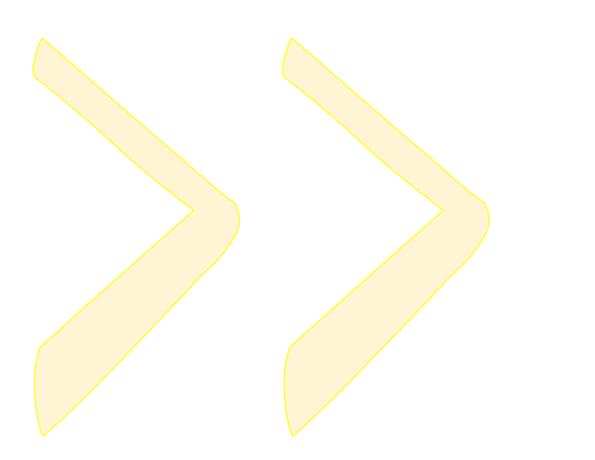
moment, it's important that you feel like they have your back at the end of the day. If you're constantly worried that they're gossipping about you or feel like they just can never be happy for you, it might be time to rethink your relationship.

### 5. Different values.

Of course it's okay to disagree about little things like what type of music to listen to or what movie to watch. But if your values and those of your friends/partner are significantly different, it can make it difficult for your relationship to grow. For example, if you're a feminist who values authenticity and you're hanging out with someone who doesn't believe in feminism and seems to be fake, that sounds like a recipe for distaster if you ask me!

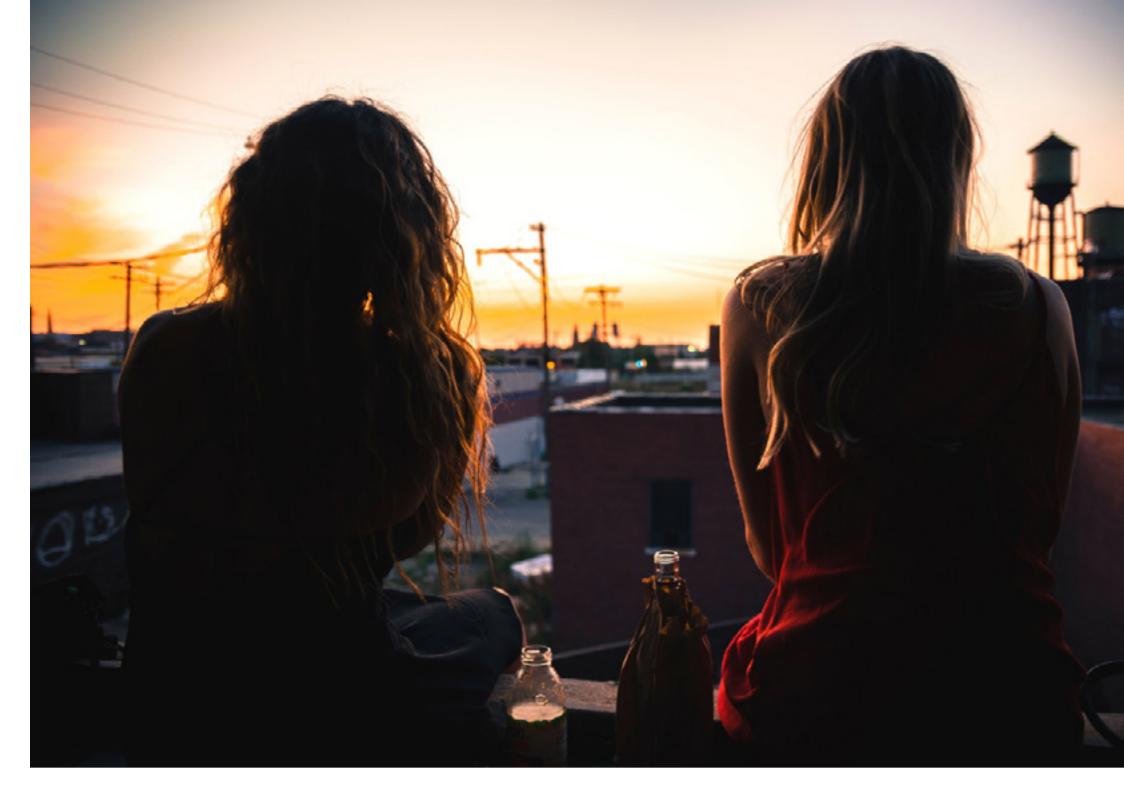






### 6. Growing pains.

Sometimes, we develop relationships with people



at certain points in our lives when we have particular needs. However, we might sometimes find that we outgrow these relationships that were once useful or enjoyable. For example, perhaps we became friends with someone who loved partying during a time when we were newly single and needed a wingman/woman, yet we later find ourselves completely disinterested in the club scene. Sometimes it can be best to appreciate the relationship for what it was and then move on.

### 7. Lack of reciprocity.

It's certainly important to give without looking for anything in return, but if you're constantly giving and giving and giving—or you're only being contacted when the person needs something—it could be a sign that they're in the relationship for the wrong reasons.

### 8. Exhaustion.

If you find yourself looking at your watch the whole time you're with someone or feel like you have to feign enjoyment, that's a red flag.

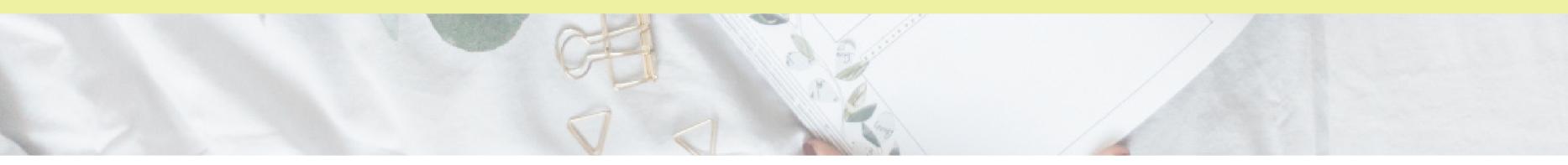


### 9. Tolerance versus acceptance.

It is such a relief when we feel like we can totally be ourselves with someone. This means not fearing that we'll be judged and being able to let loose for awhile. If you feel like you simply can't be the real you, it might be a sign that you and the other person just aren't on the same page.



# re-evaluating relationships



As you've been reading this section, I imagine that the

names of one or more people have come up. This is a sign.

It can be really difficult to face the reality that a relationship with someone might be over. You've spent time and energy nurturing it so considering closing the door can bring up a number of feelings. Guilt, grief, loss, and sadness are just some emotions people commonly experience when a relationship runs its course. However, it is important that we take things at face value rather than falling in love with the idea of something. And at the end of the day, it feels good to be accepted in our relationships. If you cannot accept a friend or partner for their true self, then staying connected might not be healthy for them either.

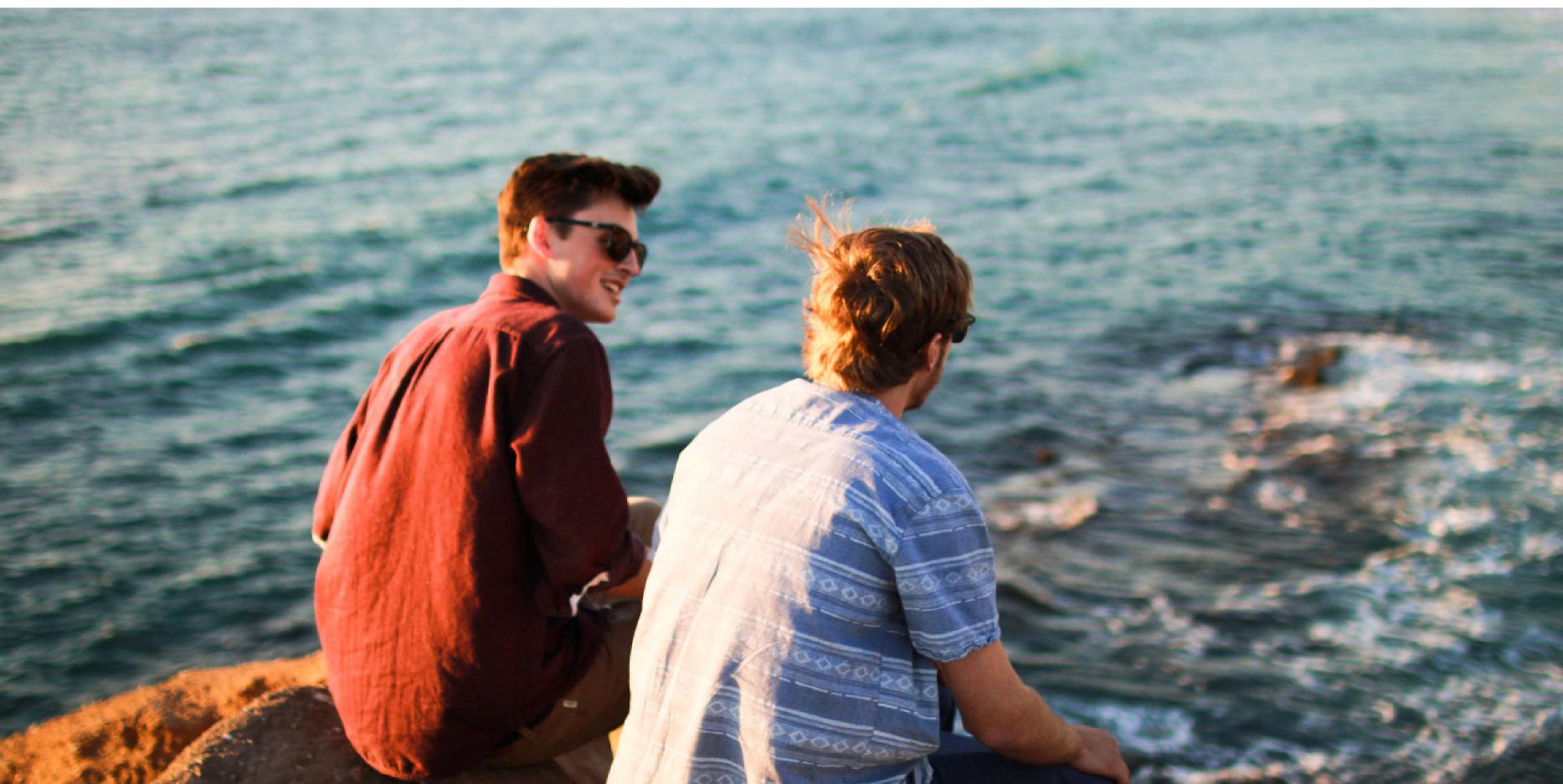
The question now becomes: if I've realized a person isn't the best influence in my life, how do I end the friendship/relationship? There are a few ways you could go about doing this:

### 1. Set different expectations and/or boundaries.

This might involve being less available, not initiating hang outs as often, not texting as frequently, and so on.

### 2. Phase it out.

This can be a hurtful route to take if the other person is still invested in making the friendship work. If it seems like you two might be on the same page though, simply spending less time together, chatting less, and becoming less involved with one another's lives overall can subtly send the message that you've both moved on.





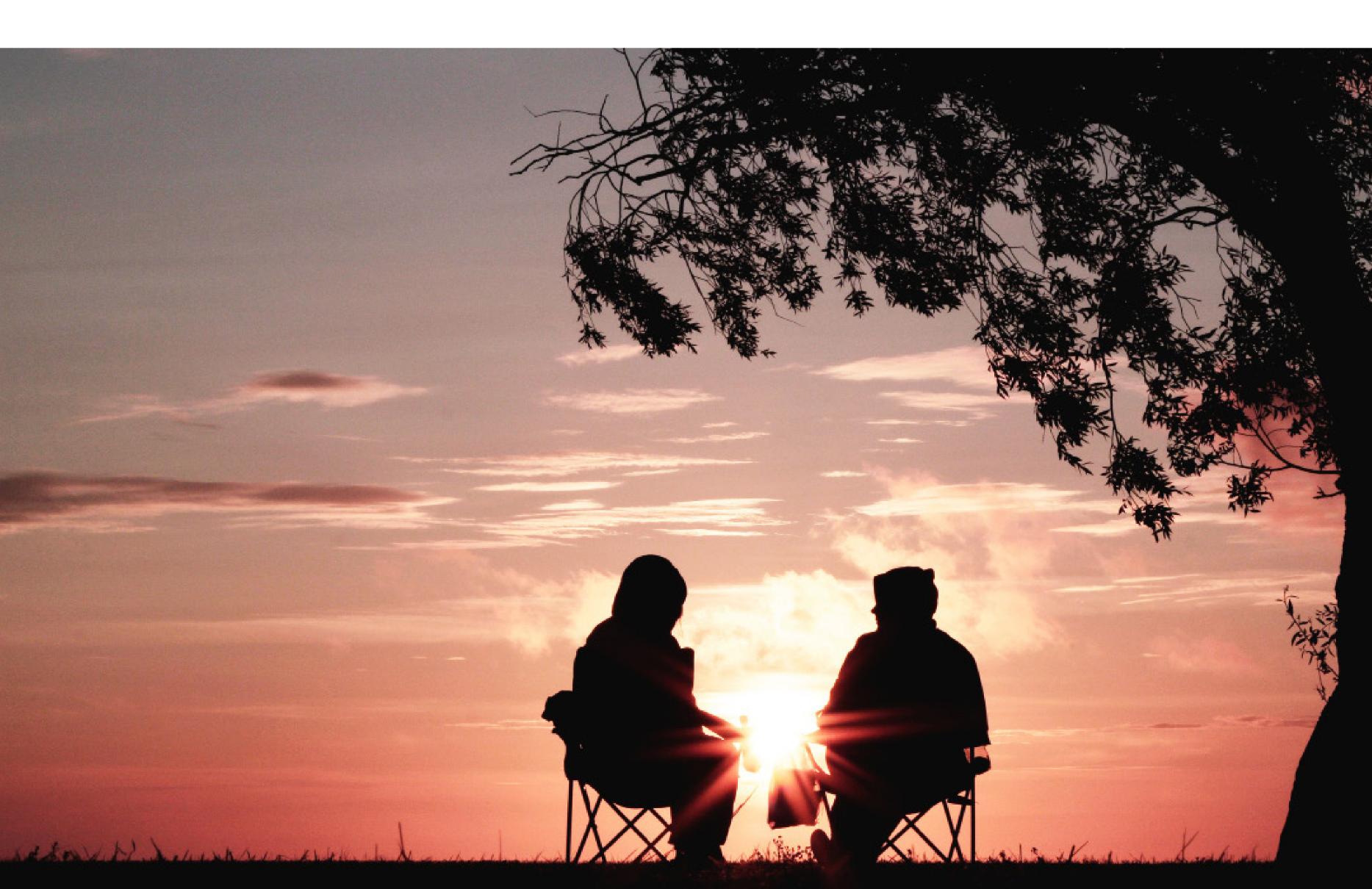


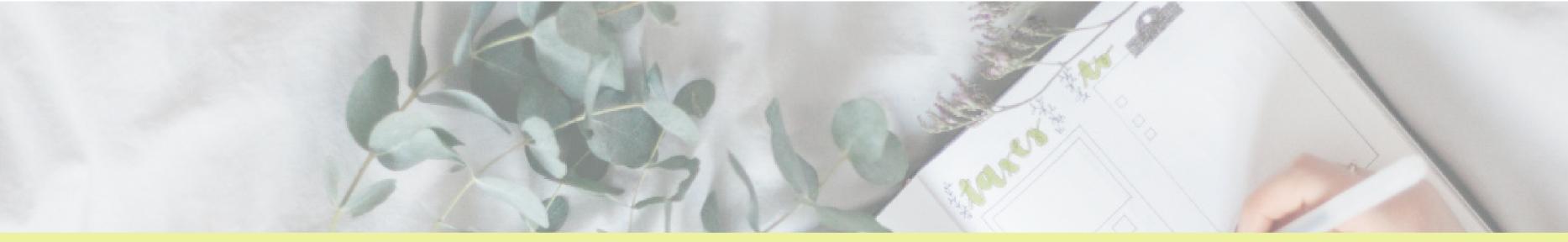
### 3. Make it a formal thing.

If you feel like neither of the above options would be appropriate—or you've tried them with no avail—it might be time to take a more direct approach. I'd recommend picking a date and time and having such a conversation in a public (yet comfortable) place. A tip: avoid playing the Blame Game. While you might feel tempted to give all the reasons you're leaving the relationship, telling people all the things they've done wrong can encourage defensiveness and increase the chances that things will end on bad terms. Speak in "I" terms and express that you worry that your lack of commitment to the friendship is creating an unfair dynamic for them, too. Additionally, it can be important to

remind yourself that sometimes it's not about one person being right and the other person being wrong. Sometimes, people just don't fit despite being two wonderful people separately.

Overall, remember that regardless of how you feel about the person now, **there was a time when you had a great deal of love and care for them.** When you've reached the point of wanting to end a relationship, this can be a hard thing to remember, which makes it all too easy for frustration and anger to take over. Ending ties as respectfully and maturely as possible can be especially important when you and the other person have mutal friends.

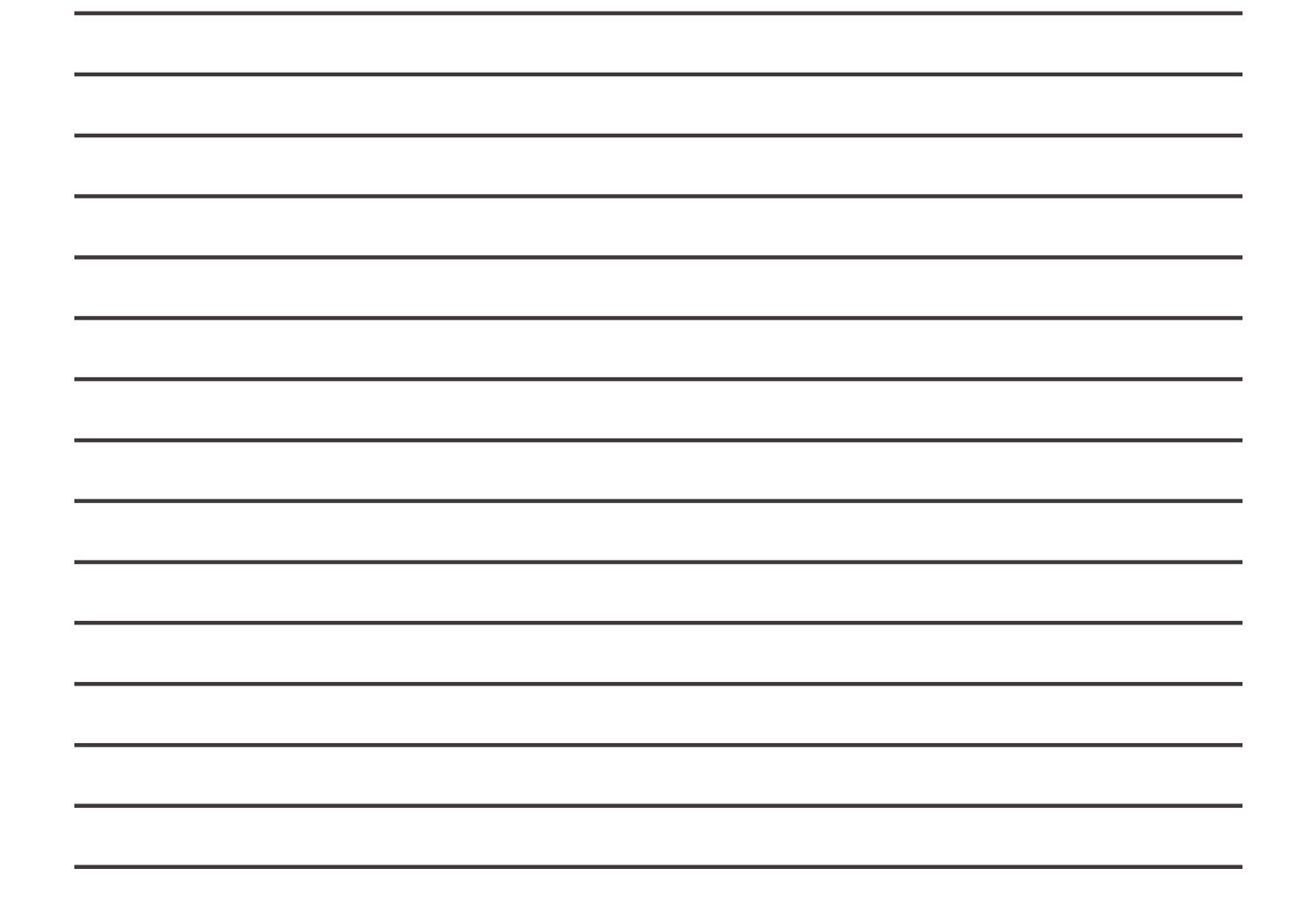




# reflective exercise

1. Name all of the people who you would consider to be in your innermost circle in the space below.

2. Of those names, what friendships/relationships do you cherish most and why?





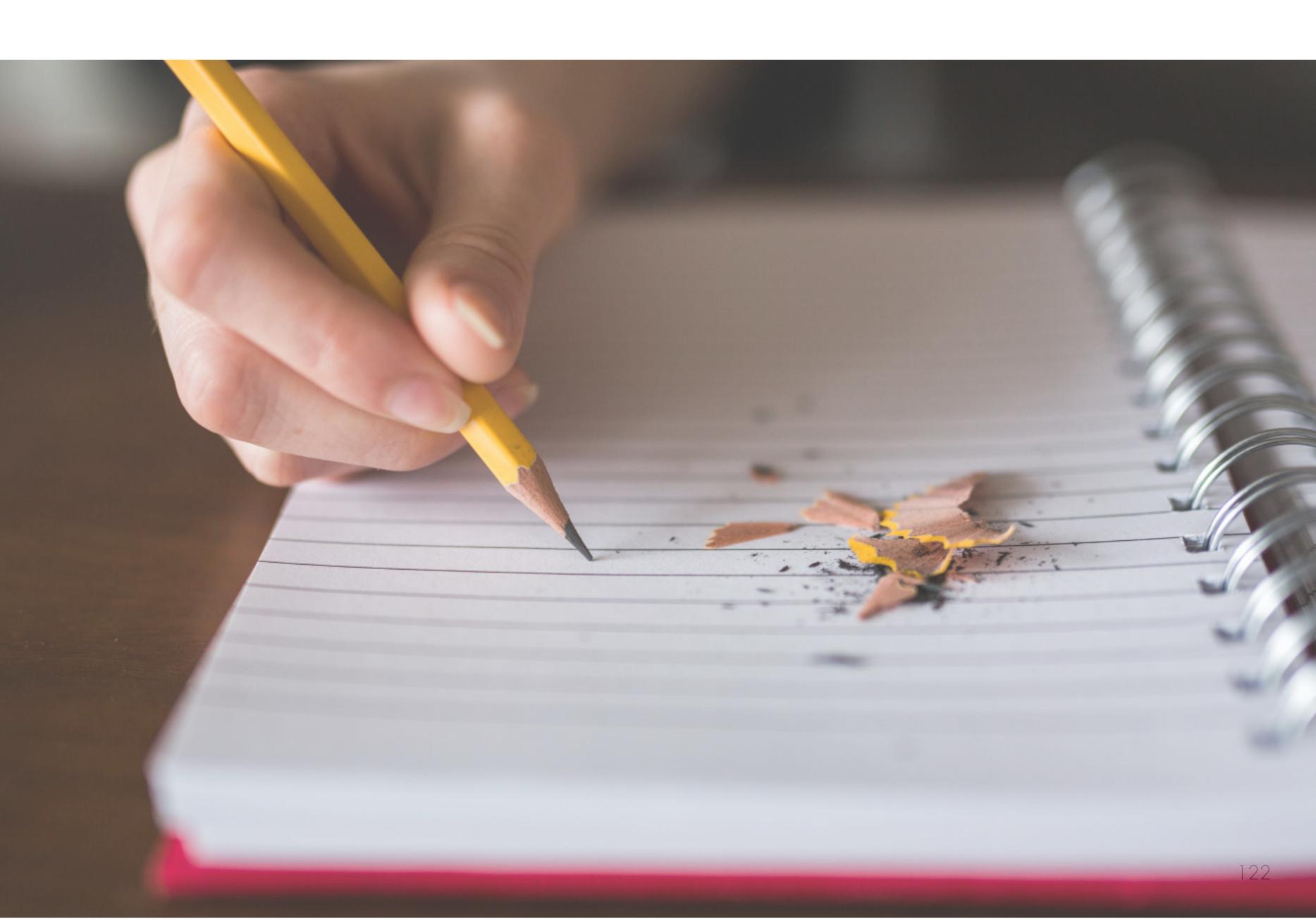
3. Have you been rethinking any of your friendships/ relationships recently? Why do you think that is? What things have you noticed that make you question if this relationship is healthy?

### 4. How long have you been feeling this way?

5. Based on what you know about yourself (and your friend), what do you think is the best way to proceed with the relationship?

6. Are there any risks of saying/doing something? What about the risks of *not* saying/doing something?

7. What will your life be if this person isn't as involved in your life (or completely removed from it altogether)?





WEEK 5: DETOX FROM negative self talk

# TALK TO YOURSELF LIKE YOU WOULD TO SOMEONE YOU LOVE.

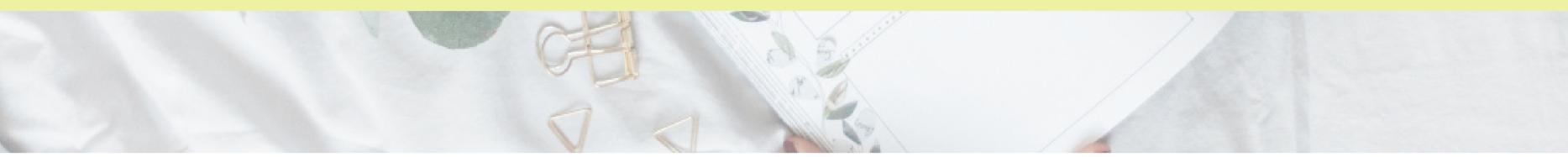
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### STEP ONE *Quareness*



**Self talk** includes the things you tell yourself throughout the day and it can be positive or negative. Negative self talk involves thinking unhelpful, unkind thoughts about yourself and they're often disproportionately or unnecessarily harsh.

The trouble is, when we let negative self-talk run wild in our minds, we subconsciously expose ourselves to a form of **self-hating propaganda** that tells us we are worthless, ugly, inferior, and more. This contributes to negative self-esteem, which can influence the type of relationships we seek, the jobs we go for, and other areas of our lives.

Conversely, having an **over-inflated sense of self** can be just as harmful, which often involves engaging in excessively positive self-talk that makes us feel like we are superior to others.

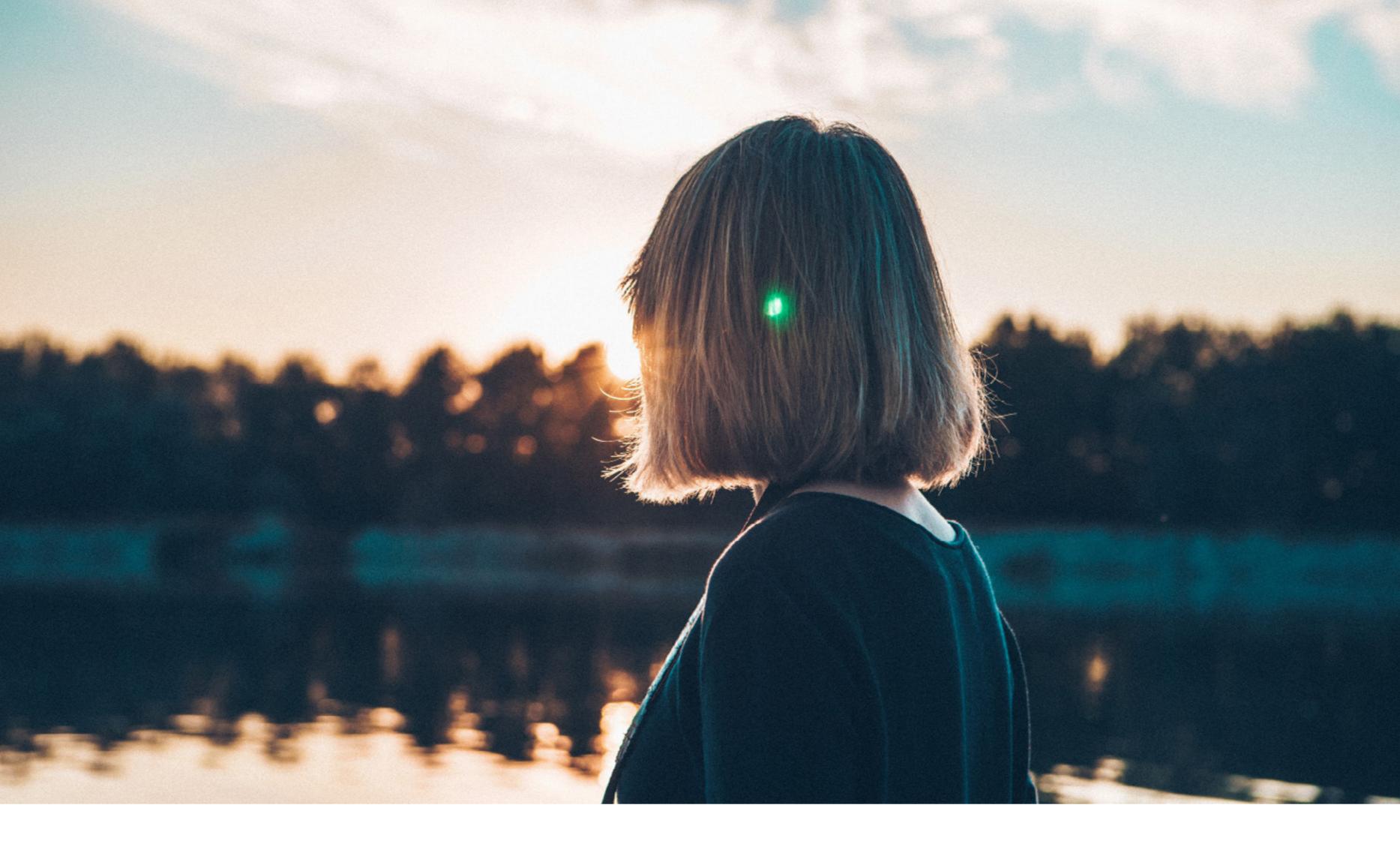


I'd like you to complete the quiz below to gain some awareness of what thoughts run through your mind most often. On a scale of 1 - 10—with 1 representing "never" and 10 representing "always"—rate how often you have the following thoughts:

Negative Self-Talk/	Over-Inflated Self Talk/
Self-Esteem	Self-Esteem
<u>l'm worthless</u>	Everyone is stupid
l'm ugly	I knów more than
	everyone else
l'm fat	I deserve good
	things
<u> </u>	People owe me
There's no point	I'm incredibly
	unique
No one could pos-	There's no one out
sibly love me	there like me
l cán't do it	No one can do
	what I do
l'm incapable	If only there were
	more people like
	me, the world
	would be a better
	place
<u> </u>	
stupid	Way
My opinion isn't im-	People should do
portant	as I say
No one cares what	I can't stand it when
I think	people don't take my
	advice

Other thoughts I frequently have:





### What did you notice from this exercise? Were you

surprised about anything? Share your reflections in the space below.

**Cognitive Behavioural Therapy** is a popular model of therapy that asserts that the thoughts we have about situations —and the meanings we ascribe to them—influence our feelings and behaviours (and vice versa). The goal of therapy, then, involves changing these thoughts so as to alter our feelings and behaviours.

The model also states that we often succumb to **cognitive distortions**, which are thoughts that paint an inaccurate picture of what's happening around us. It can be very useful to start noticing when your brain is giving in to these cognitive distortions. With a heightened sense of awareness, you can learn to stop these unhelpful thoughts in their tracks and replace them with more accurate, helpful ones.

Distortion	Description
Polarized Thinking	Seeing things as "black and white."
	Ex: you have to be perfect or you're
	a failure and there's no middle
	ground.
Overgeneralization	Making broad, general conclusions
	from specific situations. Ex: you go
	on a bad date and start thinking
	dating is a waste of time.
Catastrophizing	Exaggerating the importance or
	significance of something and usually
	jumping to the worst conclusion. Ex:
	getting a critique at work and
	assuming you'll be fired the next day.

	Thinking that everything others do is a direct, personal reaction to you. Ex: your partner is in a bad mood so you assume it's because of some- thing you did.
	Believing that what you feel must be true. Ex: if you feel stupid it must be because you are stupid.
Global Labeling	Using emotionally-charged labels to describe someone in their entirety. Ex: "He's a complete jerk."
	Thinking you know what is fair and feeling frustrated when others don't agree. Ex: because you worked hard on something, it's "only fair" that you get promoted.
Mind Reading	Acting like you 100% know what someone must be thinking in any given moment. Ex: You go to a movie alone and think to yourself, "Everyone must think I'm a loser with no friends."



In the space below, write which cognitive traps you seem to fall into most often. If you'd like, you can give an example of when this happened recently.







Our thoughts have the ability to greatly influence how we feel and behave. For example, if you have the thought of, "I'm worthless," you'll likely start to feel sad or ashamed. And when those feelings arise, you might be more likely to retreat to your room rather than reaching out to friends or engaging in an activity you enjoy.

Oftentimes, people get stuck in vicious cycles where their behaviours start to strengthen their unhelpful thoughts. So, the more you retreat to your room, the more thoughts you have about being worthless.

Thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are all interconnected. The best place to start is to learn how to differentiate between **thoughts**, **feelings**, and **behaviours** in the first place so we can make changes to each area individually.



This might sound simple, but people often fail to do this correctly at first. For example, when I ask people how they feel about a certain situation, they'll often respond with something like, "I feel like he's being a real jerk." This is actually a **thought**: your thought is, "He's a real jerk." But what is the feeling that goes with that? Anger? Frustration? Hurt?

From there, you can ask yourself how your **behaviours** were affected as a result of those thoughts and feelings. Maybe you started being short with people throughout the day, which only put you in a worse mood. Being aware of these patterns is an important step to creating change.

For the next week, your challenge is to complete a Thought Record. This will allow you to document and reflect on common cognitive distortions you employ, while also giving you the opportunity to correct them.

Situation	Thoughts	Feeling	Behaviours	Distortion	Alternative thought/ evidence
Friend Said they couldn't hang out.	They don't like me any more.	De- pressed, anxious.	Lie in bed thinking about how I'm a bad friend.	Catastro- phizing	My friend usu- ally likes my company. Maybe she's just un- available.

Situation	Thoughts	Feeling	Behaviours	Distortion	Alternative thought/ evidence



I'm not asking you to simply start thinking positively; it's about thinking more accurately and realistically. When you connect with your wise mind—that is, the place where reason and emotion overlap in a balanced way—you can start to respond more appropriately. From there, you can practice distancing yourself from your thoughts. Remember: just

because you have a thought doesn't make it true. Think of how many times you've said to yourself, "I'm so frustrated I could kill that guy!" Obviously, you know you're not going to hurt anyone (unless you're reading this from a jail cell, in which case I'm impressed that this mental health detox has reached such an ecclectic group!). Thoughts typically only cause distress when we latch onto them as if they're 100% true.

have à thought CRNIT, make it

### Here are some more ideas on how to distance yourself from thoughts:



• Re-centre yourself so you're completely focusing on the present moment. Attune your senses to your immediate surroundings. Remind yourself of where you are, what time it is, what day it is, and more.

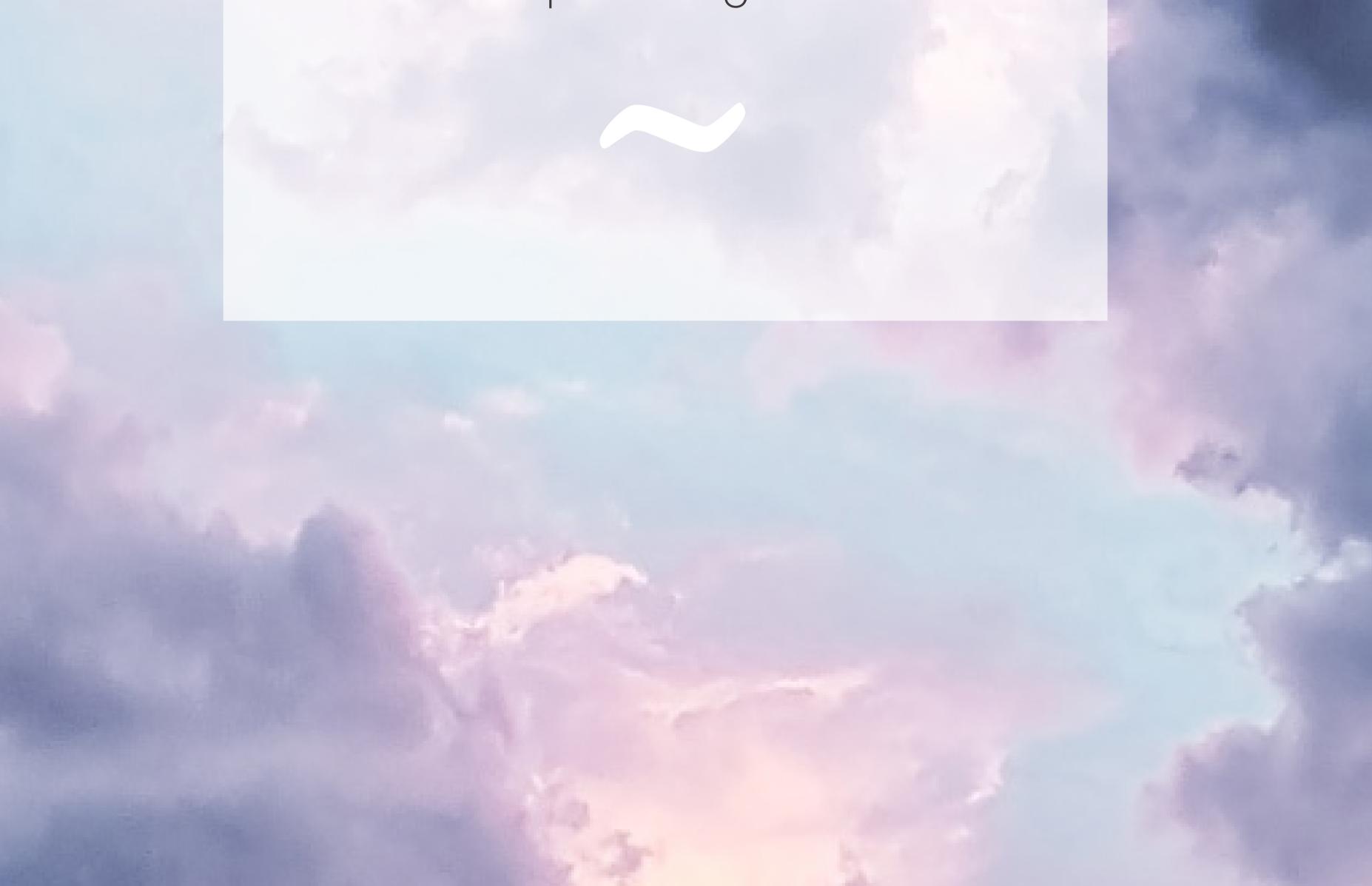


• Bring additional awareness to your senses. Grab an object nearby and focus 100% of your attention on it. What does it feel like? What does it smell like? What different textures can you feel?



• Visualize your thoughts as clouds passing by. Avoid judging them or trying to change them. Instead, just allow them to pass through your mind effortlessly, as though you're watching clouds drifting.

Creating distance from your thoughts takes practice. The key is to be patient with yourself and keep working at it.



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# STEP THREE creating a culture of kindness



In a capitalist culture that values hard work, self-improvement,

and competitiveness, it can become all too easy to continually speak to ourselves in a harsh manner. At the same time, we can get in the habit of judging others negatively as well. Creating a culture of kindness is about knowing in our hearts that **everyone deserves to be treated with respect and compassion**. Further, it involves putting these values into practice through small daily acts of kindness.

We can create a culture of kindness towards ourselves in a number of ways: we can make ourselves a hearty breakfast that we sit down and enjoy in the morning rather than grabbing a microwaveable burrito as we run out the door. We can write positive affirmations on sticky notes and place them around our house or apartment. We can practice accepting ourselves rather than ruthlessly searching for another flaw to criticize.



Likewise, we can start being kinder to others. We can stop honking at the pedestrian that's taking a little long to cross the road, knowing full well that we've sometimes done the same thing. We can smile at the Starbucks barista and ask how their day is going. We can call our parents or grandparents to ask how they're doing. Life really is a collection of moments, so choose the moments you want to create.



## FINAL WORDS



Firstly, I'd like to thank you for joining me on this mental health detox. I hope you have gained a heightened sense of awareness about some of your thoughts, feelings, habits, and more.

Secondly, I'd like to invite you to take a moment to thank yourself for committing to this program. It was designed to be thought-provoking and challenging, so give yourself a pat on the back for engaging in the exercises.

Finally, if there's one thing I can leave you with, it's this: **the most important relationship you have is with yourself**. And how you treat yourself sets the tone for so many other interactions in your life. Never forget that you are a person of worth. You are important. You are needed. Putting your mental health first isn't selfish; it's a form of self-love. Never stop loving yourself.



If you feel like you, your partner, and/or a family member could benefit from getting some additional support, please do not hesitate to reach out. My private practice, Fresh Insight, offers psychotherapy and nutritional counselling for individuals, couples, and families in Woodbidge and Markham. I am also available to do sessions via Skype.



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