

# EXAM STRESS SUPPORT WORKBOOK



Name: .....



# MOVING MINDSETS EXAM STRESS GUIDE

This guide has been created by your local Mental Health Support Team, Moving Mindsets. This is an evidence-based resource, meaning that the information and strategies within the guide have been proven to help many other young people.

It contains lots of information, tips and activities to help you manage stress during the exam period.

Take some time to look through and complete the activities to develop skills to cope with some of the pressure you might feel before, during and after exams.



We hope you find it useful!

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# Are thoughts of your exams causing you...

- sleepless nights
- to feel overwhelmed
- to have racing thoughts or difficulty concentrating
- a lack of self-confidence
- to feel constant worry, anxiety or fear
- to eat more or less than usual
- to be irritable
- to drink or smoke more than usual
- to avoid things or people you are having problems with.



Both exams and the anticipation of results can be a stressful time.

Having fears and concerns is completely natural – your mates are probably feeling exactly the same, whether they let on or not. If these anxieties start to overwhelm you, don't worry – there are things you can do to help yourself.



## Exam stress could be caused by various different reasons:

- pressure from parents and relatives to do well.
- the need to get high grades to get on track for the career you really want.
- uncertainty about what to do next – ‘There are so many options, what if I make the wrong choice?’
- the feeling of everything changing in your life – you might be moving away to university or going to college for example.



## There are many different signs and symptoms of exam stress:

- difficulty getting to sleep or difficulty waking up in the morning
- constant fatigue
- forgetfulness
- aches and pains for no apparent reason
- poor appetite
- social withdrawal
- increased anxiety and irritability
- ‘flying off the handle’
- increased heart rate
- migraines/headaches
- blurred vision
- dizziness
- loss of interest in activities



# Why do we feel like this when stressed?

The body sometimes perceives stressful situations as dangerous and works to protect us. This is sometimes referred to as the fight, flight, freeze response and it's a survival mechanism which prepares the body to take action. We get feelings in our body for good reasons when we're stressed to prepare our bodies to run away, hide from or fight the situation our brain interprets as danger... but it's not always helpful in exams.

## Thoughts racing

We think quicker to help us evaluate danger & make speedy decisions. It's difficult to concentrate on anything other than the trigger when the fight or flight response is active.

## Changes to vision

Vision can become acute so that our attention is more focused on the danger. You might experience tunnel vision, or sharper vision.

## Dry mouth

The mouth is part of the digestive system. Digestion stops during dangerous situations as energy is sent towards other muscles.

## Heart beats faster

A faster heartbeat feeds more blood and energy to the muscles, enhancing your ability to run away or fight.

## Nausea and butterflies in the stomach

Blood is diverted away from the digestive system which can cause feelings of nausea or butterflies.

## Hands get cold

Blood vessels in the skin contract to send blood towards major muscles instead.

## Dizzy or lightheaded

If the extra oxygen in the body is not used by exercising (e.g. run away or fight), then we can start to feel dizzy or lightheaded.

## Breathing becomes quicker and shallower

By breathing quicker, more oxygen is taken in to power the muscles, making the body more able to fight or run away.

## Adrenal glands release adrenaline

Adrenaline is released and spreads through the bloodstream, quickly signalling to all body parts that they need to get ready to respond to danger.

## Bladder urgency

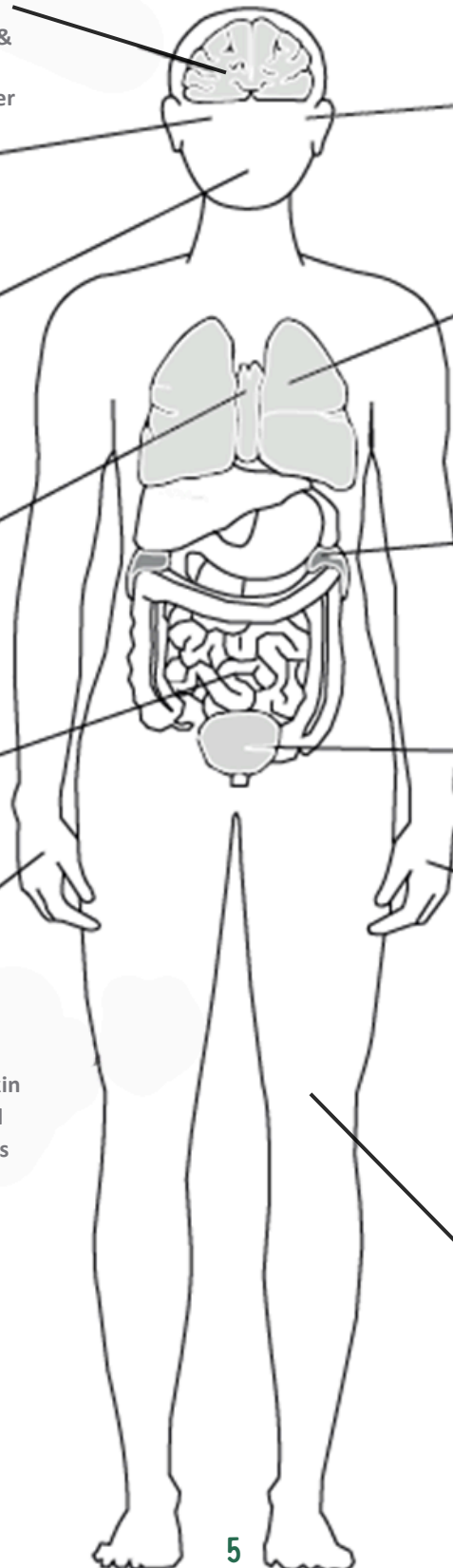
Bladder muscles sometimes relax when your body is in extreme stress.

## Palms become sweaty

If your brain detects danger, the body sweats to stay cool. A cool machine is an efficient machine, so sweating makes the body more likely to survive in dangerous situations.

## Muscles tense

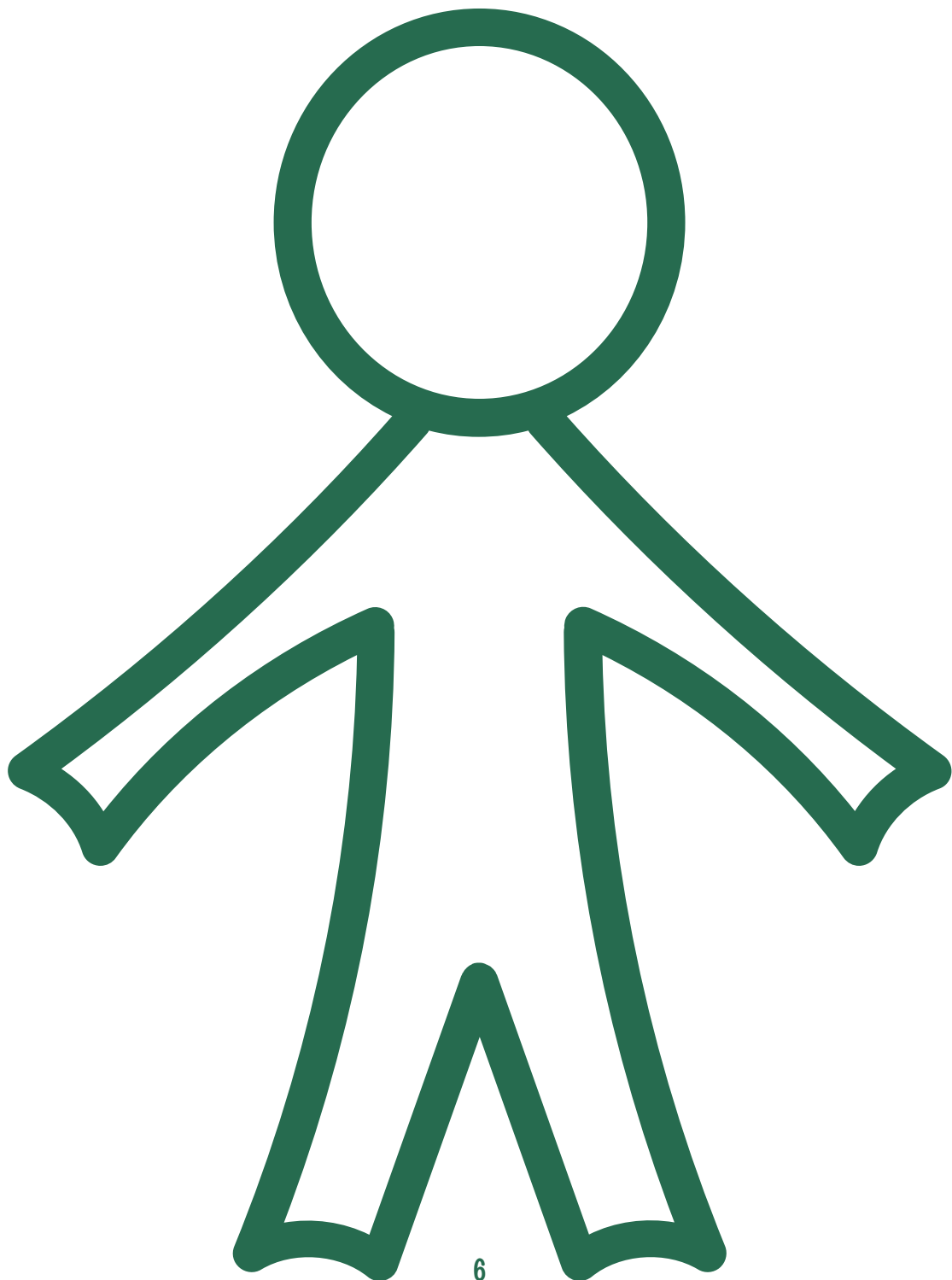
Muscles tense so you are ready to run away or fight. Muscles may also shake or tremble, especially if you stay still, because they are staying 'ready for action'.



# Signs and Symptoms of Stress

It can be helpful to recognise what symptoms you experience when stressed. Understanding what's going on in your body and why it's happening before/during stressful situations can prevent it from escalating.

Label the human body diagram. Think about what you might think or say when stressed (head) and the physical symptoms you might feel (body).

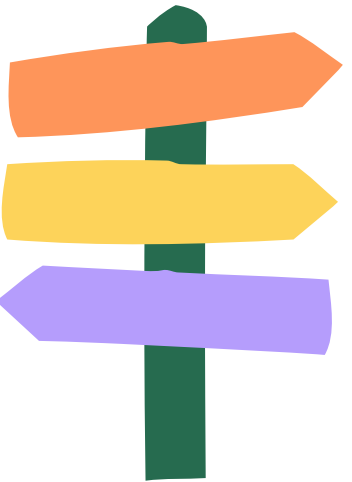


# Self Management Plan

Consider what signs show that you are becoming stressed.

What am I thinking?

How am I behaving?



What am I feeling?  
Consider emotions and  
physical symptoms



What do I do that is helpful?

What do I do that I find unhelpful?



What do others do that I find helpful?



What do others do that I find unhelpful?

# Feeling the Fizz

The Fizz Scale can be helpful for recognising the level of stress you are feeling. Complete the scale with the different physical signs you feel in your body when stressed.

1 = lowest level of stress, 10 = highest level of stress



1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

# STOPP Strategy

**S**top what you're doing

**T**ake a breath

**O**bserve

- What am I thinking?
- What am I reacting to?
- What am I feeling in my body?

**P**ull Back

- Put in some perspective and see the bigger picture
- Is this fact or opinion? How would someone else see this?

**P**ractise what works

- What is the best thing to do for me, for others, for the situation?



5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

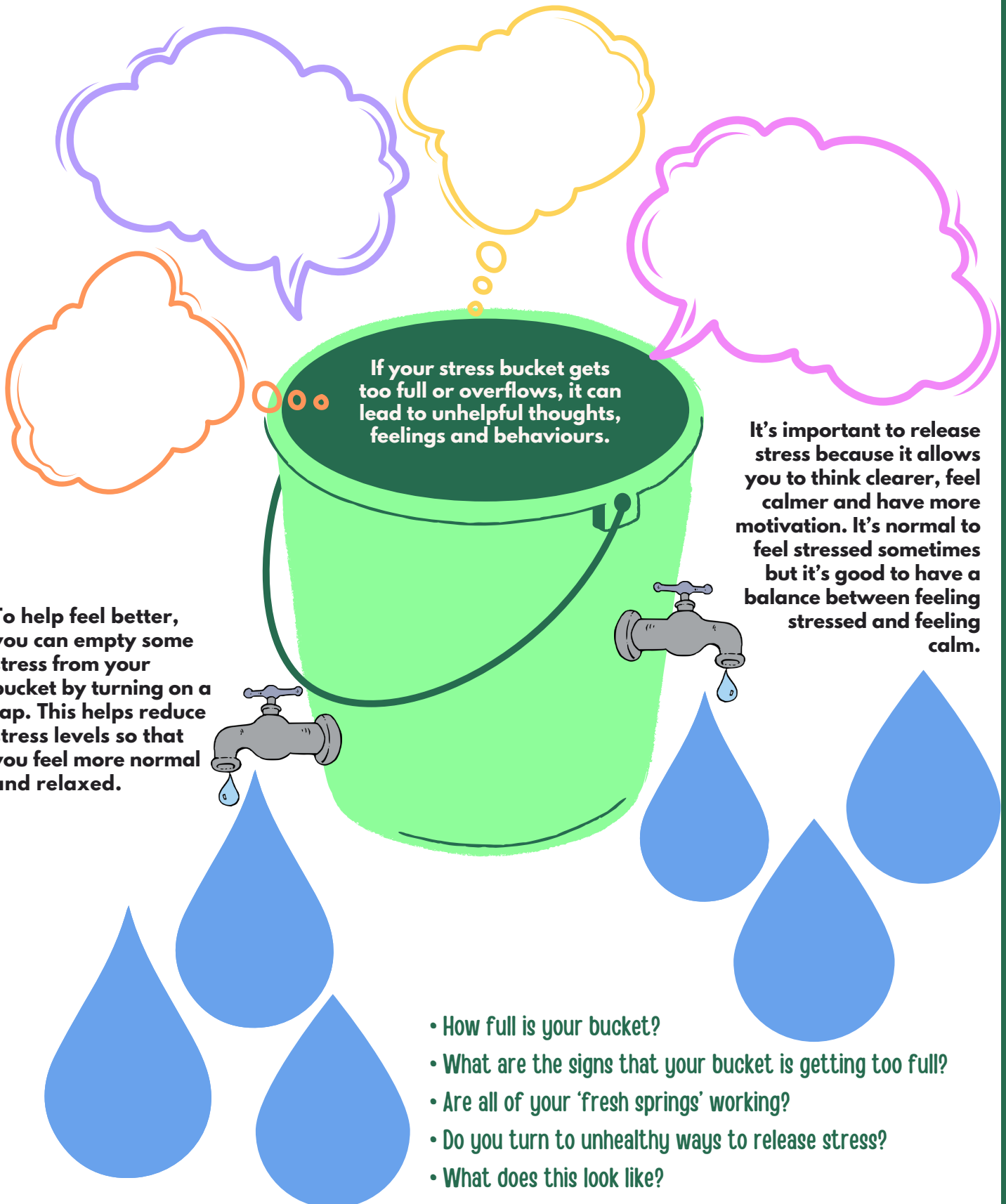
Notice:

5 things you can see,  
4 things you can feel,  
3 things you can hear,  
2 things you can smell,  
1 deep breath.

This gives you chance to calm down before focusing on a current or new task.

# Stress Bucket

Complete your own stress bucket. Identify the things that cause you stress (the clouds filling the bucket) and the things you do to manage them (the fresh springs).



# Coping Tools

## What helps me?

Take slow, mindful breaths

Drink a cold cup of water



Rest and take a break

Stretch



Journal or write a letter

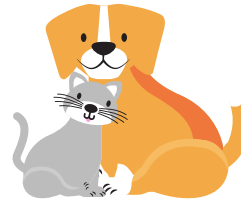
Listen to your favorite music

Talk to someone you trust



Get a hug

Cuddle or play with your pet



Use positive affirmations

Use a stress ball

Tidy your work area

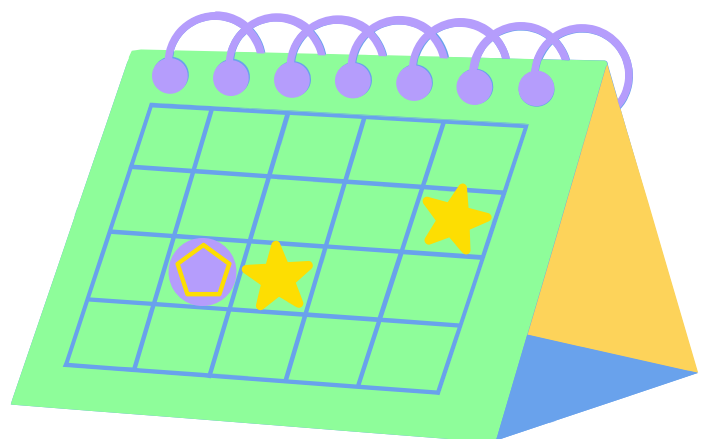
Draw or paint



Have a warm drink

Read a book or magazine

Take a shower or bath



# Weekly Planner (Example)

Month of:

Week:

## MONDAY

- Finish maths homework
- Study for biology quiz
- Practice piano for 30 minutes
- Read for English

## TUESDAY

- Attend after-school club meeting
- Organise notes
- Write in journal
- Make flash cards of definitions

## WEDNESDAY

- Check college application
- Go for a 30-minute run
- Study for English test
- Practice cooking a new recipe

## THURSDAY

- Watch documentary for history lesson
- Go shopping for Emily's birthday
- Attend school football game
- Check if Miss has done reference yet

## FRIDAY

- Finish writing essay for history
- Complete practice paper
- Chill time
- Go for meal with friends for Emily's birthday

## SATURDAY

- Do laundry
- Clean room
- Sign up for volunteer work
- Call grandparents

## SUNDAY

- Finish any unfinished homework or notes
- Plan out week
- Get some exercise
- Spend time with family and friends



• **BREAK REVISION DOWN INTO CHUNKS**

• **TAKE REGULAR BREAKS**

• **BE REAL ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN DO IN A DAY**

• **PLAN TIME AND MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR ACTIVITIES OTHER THAN REVISION THAT YOU ENJOY**

# Weekly Planner

Month of:

Week:

**MONDAY**

Four rows of dotted lines for writing, each starting with a purple dot on the left margin.

**TUESDAY**

Four rows of dotted lines for writing, each starting with a purple dot on the left margin.

**WEDNESDAY**

Four rows of dotted lines for writing, each starting with a purple dot on the left margin.

**THURSDAY**

Four rows of dotted lines for writing, each starting with a purple dot on the left margin.

**FRIDAY**

Four rows of dotted lines for writing, each starting with a purple dot on the left margin.

**SATURDAY**

Four rows of dotted lines for writing, each starting with a purple dot on the left margin.

**SUNDAY**

Four rows of dotted lines for writing, each starting with a purple dot on the left margin.

**NOTE:**

Eight horizontal lines for writing notes.



# Weekly Study Planner

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
9:00 am			
10:00 am			
11:00 am			
12:00 pm			
1:00 pm			
2:00 pm			
3:00 pm			
4:00 pm			
5:00 pm			

Time	Thursday	Friday
9:00 am		
10:00 am		
11:00 am		
12:00 pm		
1:00 pm		
2:00 pm		
3:00 pm		
4:00 pm		
5:00 pm		

Note

Homework



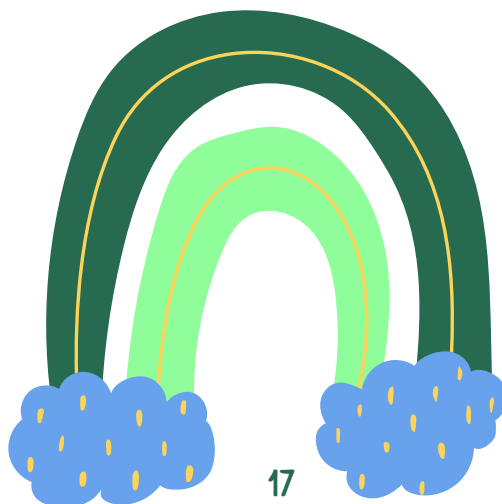
# Find Some Positive Activities

It's important that you recognise all of the positive things you are doing, especially during stressful times.

Circle how many of these activities you have done today

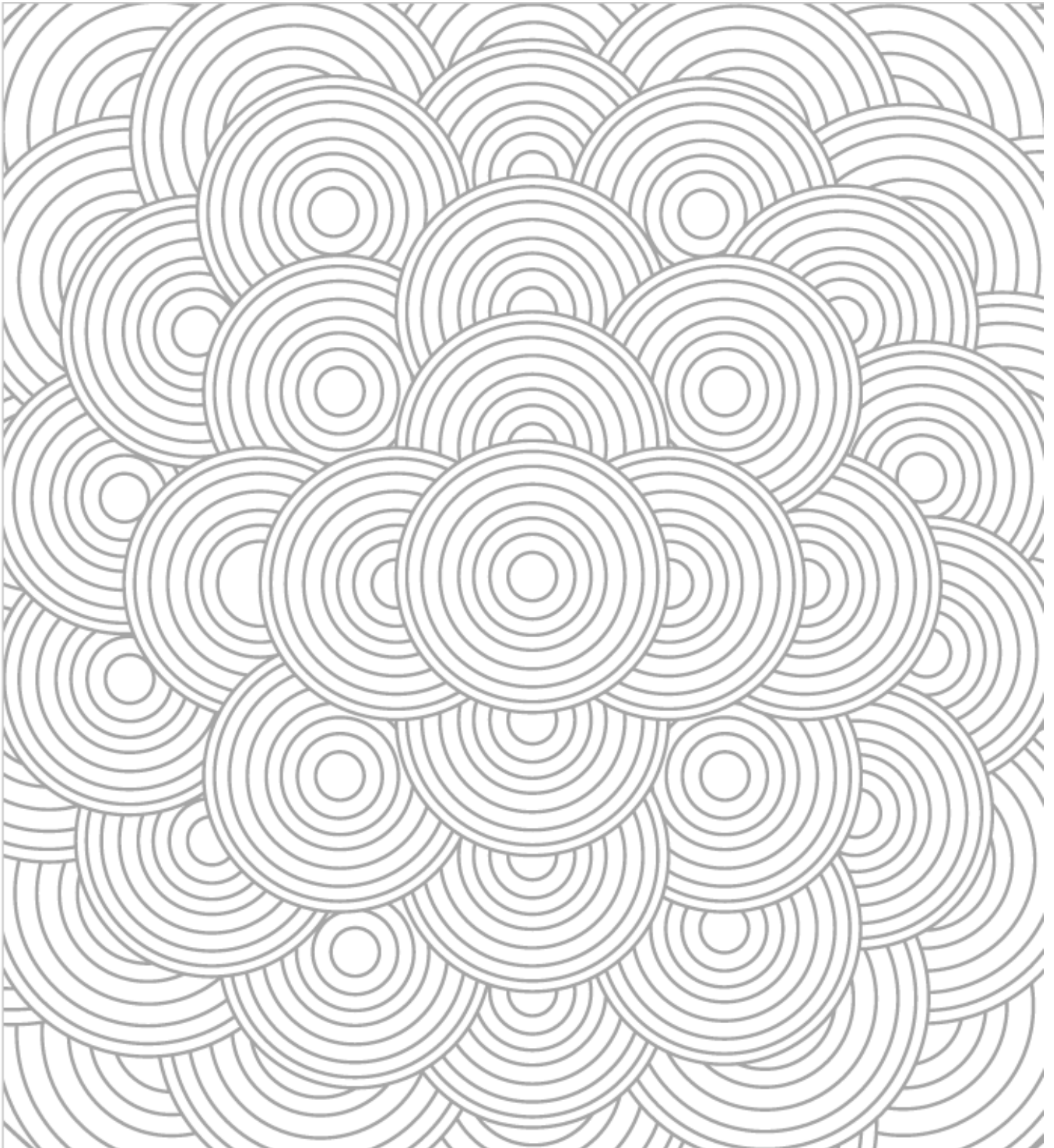
Enjoyed your favourite food	Read a book	Achieved a new goal	Laughed
Spent 15 minutes outside	Listened to your favourite song	Achieved a new goal	Done a good deed for someone else
Drank plenty of water	Had a good night's sleep	Spent time off your phone / computer	Smiled
Spoken to friends or family	Helped another person	Cleaned something	Taken time out
Completed a puzzle	Took a shower or bath	Tried a mindfulness activity	Cooked a new meal

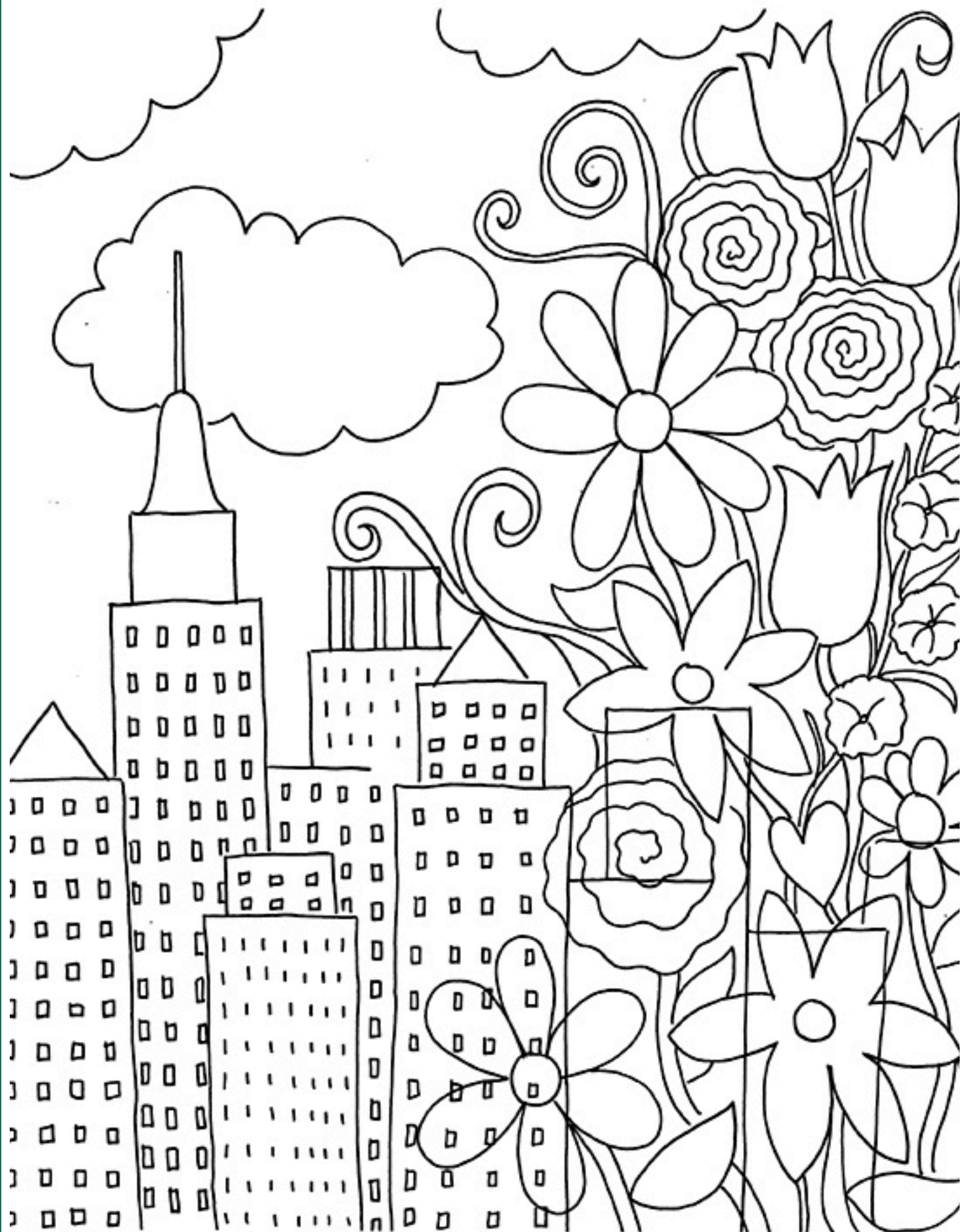
Be proud of yourself for what you are achieving every day!

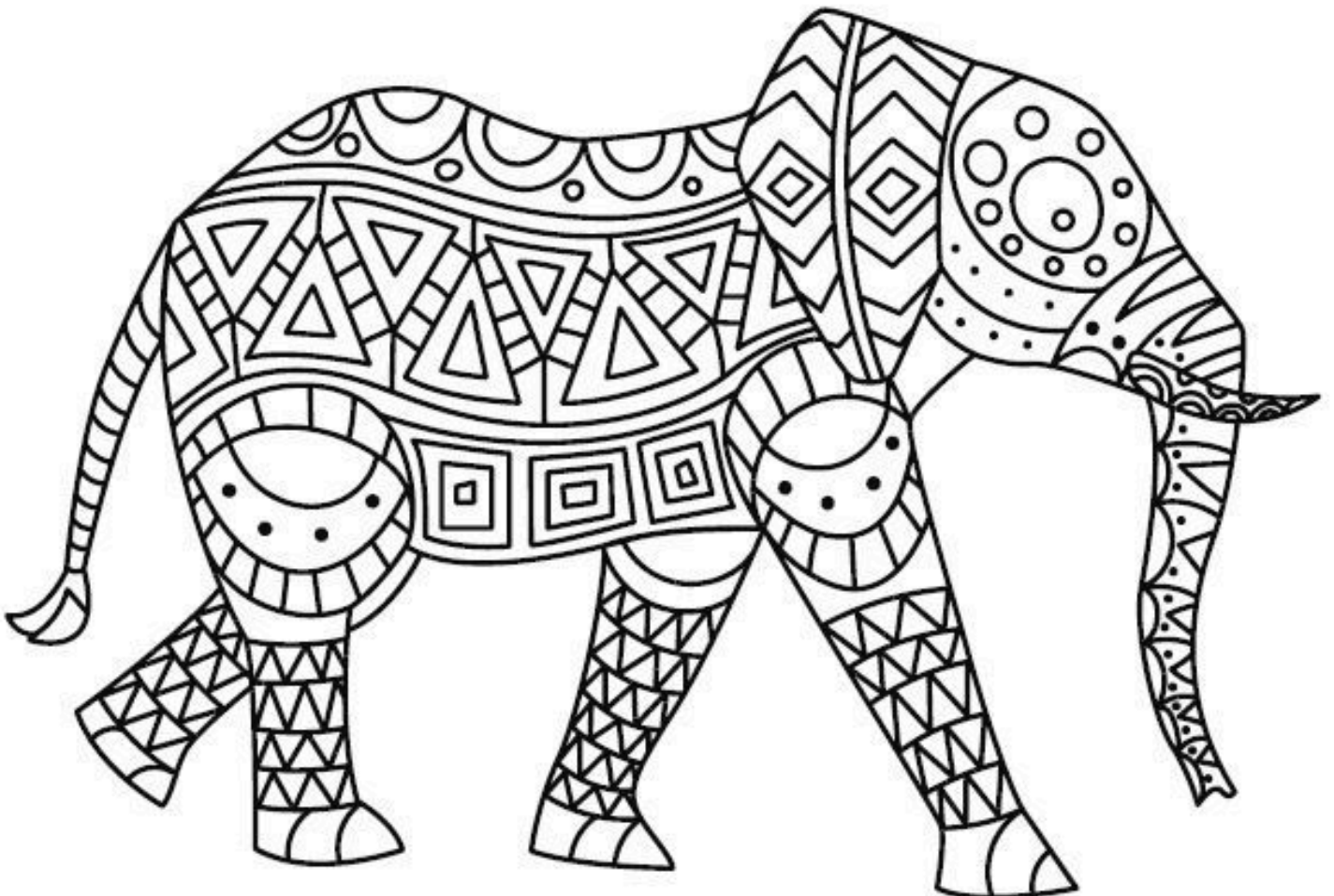


# Colour to take time out

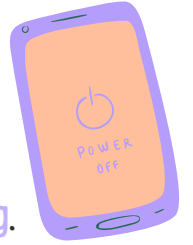
Spend some time colouring in these pages to relax the fear centre of your brain, the amygdala. It induces the same state as meditating by reducing the thoughts of a restless mind. This generates mindfulness and quietness, which allows your mind to get some rest.







# Mindfulness



Practise this mindfulness activity. It will help you to **tune in to your breathing**.  
Mindful breathing can be done whenever you are feeling stressed.

Sit comfortably and close your eyes. Ask someone to read out the following script or you could record yourself reading the script and play it back.



Take some deep, calming breaths.  
Breathe in through your nose for six seconds and hold your breath once you can't breathe in anymore... then let go quickly through your mouth.

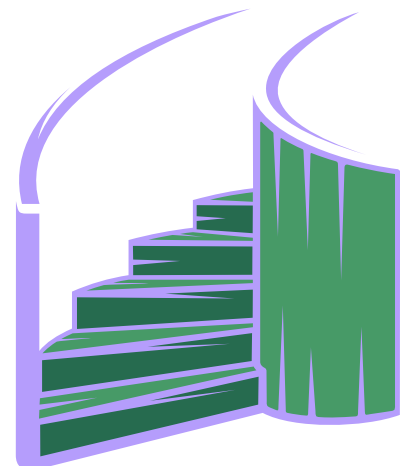
Let's do that twice more.

Now, silently breathe in through your nose for six, and slowly let out your breath for six counts...

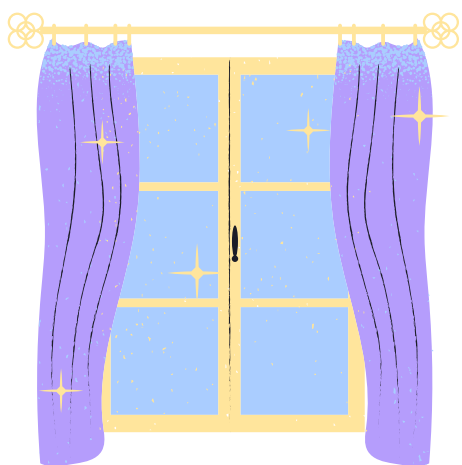
Let's do that twice more.

Then just continue breathing in this way, relaxing your whole body. Maybe you can notice certain parts of your body, like your face or jaw that have a hard time relaxing. Try to let everything relax as you breathe, and focus on the images that come up during this visualisation exercise.

Imagine that you are walking up some stairs. At the top of the stairs, there is a closed door, and you know that on the other side of the door, there is a safe, calm room that you love. It's where you always go when you feel stressed.



As you open the door, **you breathe in and out...** the biggest breaths you have taken all day. You know you are safe in this room and that you can relax. The room is yours – it's where you want it to be, it's how you want it to look, it has all the things you want to be in there.



You walk to the wall in front of you, where there is a big, beautiful curtain. As **you breathe in... and out... and in... and out...** you draw back the curtain. On the other side, through a huge floor to ceiling window, you can see all the goings on and happenings in your life and in the world around you.

You walk back, and relax down on to the softest, most comfortable chair/sofa you have ever sat on. As **you breathe in... and out... in... and out...** you relax more and more into this soft, comfortable, supportive sofa. You have never felt more comfortable and relaxed.



You feel so relaxed, you are able to observe everything that is going on outside. You see things come by your window... people... cities... schools. You watch and you feel that you can slowly think through whatever it is you need to think through.

You watch the events unfold outside your window and you feel safe and calm inside... knowing that you have the time and the space you need, to think through anything that might be troubling you... and figure out what it is you need to do.

**You breathe in and out... in and out...** You feel more and more relaxed and your body keeps relaxing into the chair or sofa.

You start to roll your wrists... you roll your ankles... **you take a few more deep, slow, long breaths.**

And you open your eyes, ready to go back and join the world.

# Ways of Learning and Revising

Flashcards, mind maps, voice notes, videos and even teaching the work to a friend/family member can all be used to engage different areas of our brain and keep it interesting.

## Visual - Learning by looking

- make posters, post-it notes or flashcards
- use colour-coded revision timetables and notes
- draw mind maps, spider diagrams or graphs

## Auditory - Learning by listening

- record yourself reading your notes and listen back
- listen to podcasts or audiobooks
- listen to a playlist while you revise



## Verbal - Learning by talking

- go to group revision sessions
- read your revision notes aloud to yourself or someone else
- rewrite lesson materials in your own words

## Kinesthetic - Learning by doing

- do practice papers
- go to group revision sessions
- use flashcards

Experiment with different techniques. One way might click for one subject, but not for others, so find whatever works.

## Revision Apps



Quizlet  
(Flashcards)



Knowunity  
Study & Revision



StudySmarter:  
Study & Revision



BBC Bitesize  
Exam Revision

# Tips to deal with Stress

## PLAN AHEAD

Try to prepare for things in advance. Use to-do lists, planners/diaries, Get things ready and be organised in good time so things can run smoother.

## CHALLENGE UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

Remember that how we think affects how we feel and what we do. The more positively you think, the more positively you'll feel and the more positively you'll do!

## BREAK DOWN BIG TASKS

If a task seems too overwhelming or difficult, break it down into smaller/easier chunks. Tick steps off as you go and give yourself credit for what you're achieving.

## GET ACTIVE

Exercise or activity can help burn off nervous energy and allow you to feel less stressed. It also increases chemicals in our brain that improve our mood.

## ALLOW YOURSELF SOME POSITIVITY

Spend some time thinking about all the good things in your life. Try to list 3+ things that you are grateful for each day.

## SELF-CARE

- Try to eat right
- Get some sleep
- Give yourself a break
- Listen to your body

## Apps to Prepare & Organise



Adapt  
(Study Planner)



My Study Life  
(Digital Diary)



Exam Countdown

## Apps to Cope with Stress



Smiling Mind  
(mindfulness app)



STOPP



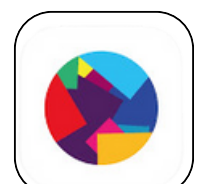
Calm  
(stress & anxiety)



MindShift  
CBT app



Habitbull  
(motivational app)



Decider Skills

# Coping with Exam Pressure

## Be kind to yourself

Think about things you have already achieved, related and unrelated to school. Remind yourself of all the things you CAN do and are good at. Keep doing things you enjoy as it will help your self-esteem.

## Don't compare yourself to others

Focus on what YOU can do and what you're doing – not others. Remember that everyone had different skills and works in different ways. What works for other people might not work for you and that's ok!

## Talk about feeling under pressure

Be real with people about how much pressure you are feeling and explain if it's getting too much for you. Make it clear what your expectations are and emphasise if these are different to others. Talk about your feelings with your friends who might also be experiencing them too.



# In the lead up to Exams

## Ask for any practical help you need

If you are finding it hard, have a chat with a teacher/tutor. They can help with things like:

- a tricky subject
- tips and tricks for revising
- juggling different subjects
- finding a calm place to revise
- access arrangements

## Check in with your friends

If your friends are studying too, chances are they get what you're dealing with. Knowing that someone else feels the same way can make all the difference. Link up with them to chat about exams or to take a break from studying.

25

## Ask for access arrangements if you need them

We all have different needs.

Access arrangements help students with special education needs or disabilities. They include:

- extra time during exams
- assistive technology (like a computer, text-to-speech software etc.)
- breaks during an exam

# Before an Exam: Checklist

Use this checklist before an exam to help you prepare and be at your best!

- Have a good breakfast, if you can.
- Make sure you know where the exam is being held and what time it starts. Give yourself plenty of time to get there.
- Take all the equipment you need for each exam, including extra pens and pencils.
- Take in a bottle of water and tissues.
- Go to the loo beforehand!



If you're feeling really anxious, breathe slowly and deeply while waiting for the exam to start.

- Read the instructions before starting the exam.
- Ask the teacher or exam supervisor if anything is unclear.
- Read through all the questions before starting writing, and make sure you are clear how many questions you are required to answer.
- If there is a choice, start by answering the question you feel you can answer best.
- If you are stuck on a question, go on to the next. You can always come back to it later. If you are really stuck, try to have an intelligent guess anyway.
- Leave time to read through and check your answers before the exam finishes.
- Plan how much time you'll need for each question.



# After Exams

## Don't compare your answers

Resist the urge to talk about the exam with your friends afterwards. This can make you feel more stressed. Try to let go of the exam talk now that it's done.

## Reward yourself

Once you're done, have something good lined up after. It could be hanging out with friends or taking some time for yourself.

## Focus on next steps

Plan what you'll do next, like going home, doing something fun, then revising for the next exam. Think ahead in a positive way – if you have another exam, focus on the time and date that it'll be over.

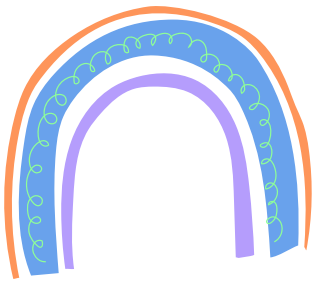
## Let it go

Once the exam is finished, there's nothing you can do. Remember that you did your best and try to let it go. It can be tempting to look back at notes and see if what you put was correct but try to move on instead.

## Relax before your next exam

The stress from doing an exam can leave you feeling exhausted. You might find it hard to switch off if you have more exams coming up, but it's important to let yourself recharge first.





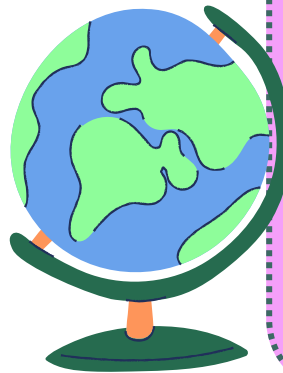
Exam results do not define who you are! Remember your strengths. You have so many skills and qualities.

Your mental health is so much more important than how you do in exams, there are always other options if you don't do as well as you want to'  
Service User

Even if you score a low grade or score, it doesn't mean you're not able to achieve great things. Just give it your best shot!



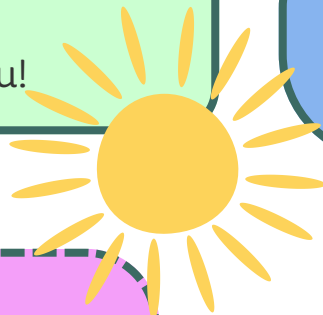
The skills you've learnt from studying will be called upon time and time again throughout your life.



'What success really looks like is a lot of ups and downs, as opposed to the straight line we all imagine. Without failure we cannot grow, and without failure there is no success.'  
Ulfa, Activist - [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

There are so many wonderful things about you not determined by exams. There is a future for you!

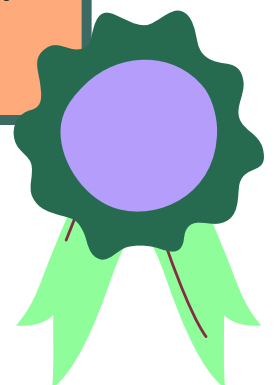
The fact that you feel stressed is a good thing. It shows that you care. You know that you have worked hard which is the most important thing!



Make a list of all the things you want from life which don't involve exams. This can help you discover other routes to your goals.

**'I FAILED IN SOME SUBJECTS IN EXAMS, BUT MY FRIEND PASSED IN ALL. NOW HE IS AN ENGINEER IN MICROSOFT AND I AM THE OWNER OF MICROSOFT'**  
**BILL GATES**

**Most importantly, remember to be kind to yourself!**



# GETTING MORE HELP

If you feel like your exam stress is still unmanageable,  
remember you can always speak to someone:

A friend or family member

A teacher/school staff member

A doctor/GP or a Support Service

Helpful Services and Numbers for further  
support during this stressful period:

Kooth – [www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)

Shout – [www.giveusashout.org](http://www.giveusashout.org) or text 85258

The Mix – 08088084994 – [www.themix.org.uk](http://www.themix.org.uk)

Papyrus – 08000684141

Exam Results Helpline – 0800 100 900

[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

[www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)



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