

PRACTICE RESILIENCE

Program Introduction:

In times when almost all the countries in the world have been struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic, the most natural feelings we, humans, experience are fear, anxiety or insecurity. At moments of threat, from the most ancient times, our sympathetic nervous system is activated, which invokes our instinct of "fight or flight."

Unfortunately, if we are in "fight or flight" mode for a long period, the stress increases tremendously, and it is extremely hard to cope with it. The bad news is that stress can harm our health.

That is why it is really important to control our mind and carefully choose our thoughts. This can help us stay resilient in times of adversity.

Why is resilience so important?

Here is the definition of resilience formulated by researchers from the University of Pennsylvania, USA: "Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity. But resilience is also the ability to grow from challenges".

The main groups of factors that predetermine and sustain our resilience, according to Assoc. Prof. Karen Reivich, are:

1. Biology: the spread of the human race and our genetic predisposition;
2. Self-awareness: what is the exact degree of our mindfulness;
3. Self-regulation: how and to what extent we can successfully manage our feelings and actions;
4. Mind agility: the ability to reflect on a situation from different perspectives;
5. Optimism: the ability to believe in the positive outcomes in any situation;
6. Mastery or self-efficacy: our ability to get out of the position: "I can do it";
7. Connection: the availability of at least one very strong connection with another human being that we have established, and the fact that we can rely on this person's support anytime;
8. Positive institutions: support we get from family, government, the organization we work for.

Something that resilient people do really well, is to think about stressors, not as threats, but rather as challenges. So, when there is a problem in front of them, they are guided by their growth mindset (the



opposite of fixed mindset), believing that they can overcome any challenge. They would rather lean in to it, than to withdraw.

To help you cope better in times of adversity, we have created COPE Program which contains 5 modules:

- **Module 1: Prioritizing own health.** In this module we will focus on the 3 main healthy life ingredients: eat healthy, exercise more and sleep better. All of the activities we will be suggesting to you will help to reduce your stress level and feel better.
- **Module 2: Social and emotional learning.** In this module we will be focusing on self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision making, relationship skills and social awareness.
- **Module 3: Coping.** In this module we will be focusing on emotional literacy, meditation, dealing with hardship, how to offset negative events and recover quicker.
- **Module 4 Self-efficacy.** In this module we will be focusing on character strengths, taking care of one's brain, working with judgement, looking at the bigger picture and self-control.
- **Module 5 Optimism and Self-compassion.** In this module we will be focusing on strategies that can help to boost positivity and increase life satisfaction like: gratitude, finding meaning/purpose, savouring, self-love etc.

MODULE 1: Prioritizing own health

Day 1

Informational Message Topic: Eat Healthy

When it comes to be resilient and be able to face challenges, what we eat starts to matter even more. When we are stressed, our body feels fatigued and we start to crave more high-energy foods like sugars and refined carbohydrates. But in a study done back in 2016, researchers found that a diet with a high glycemic load may cause increased symptoms of depression and fatigue. A diet with a high glycemic load includes many refined carbohydrates, such as those found in soft drinks, cakes, white bread, and biscuits.

Including in your daily meals plenty of antioxidant-rich green vegetables and fruits, omega 3 from oily fish, B12 from animal products and choline from eggs, can help your body and brain operate optimally, giving you a better foundation to face life challenges.

Daily Task:

Eat healthy: include in your daily meals plenty of antioxidant-rich green vegetables and fruits, omega 3 from oily fish, B12 from animal products and choline from eggs.

Day 2

Informational Message Topic: Create habits for healthy eating

The medical community has long recognized the link between trans fats and heart-related illnesses, such as coronary heart disease.

If a person eliminates trans fats from their diet, this will reduce their level of low-density lipoprotein cholesterol. This type of cholesterol causes plaque to collect within the arteries, increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Reducing blood pressure can also be essential for heart health, and limiting salt intake to 1,500 milligrams a day can help. Salt is added to many processed and fast foods, and a person hoping to lower their blood pressure should avoid these.

To make the first step toward adopting the habit of healthy eating, complete our daily healthy lifestyle task.

Daily Task:

Put unhealthy items (e.g., potato chips) in hard-to-reach places and healthy items (e.g., carrot sticks) in easier-to-reach places. You can even stop buying unhealthy items.

Day 3

Informational Message Topic: Move More

Physical activity will help maintain a healthy body weight, decreasing the likelihood of developing type two diabetes, cardiovascular disease and other chronic illnesses.

Being physically active, especially doing weights, will help to build more muscle and increase your basal metabolic rate, helping to manage body weight.

As a bonus – you'll look and feel fabulous.

As a further incentive, people who are physically active regularly experience:

- better sleep
- decreased cognitive decline
- reduced stress
- lower risk of osteoporosis
- enhanced immune function

Moving more can be done in so many ways that exercise shouldn't be a chore and the benefits of it go beyond looking good.

Daily Task:

Make it a rule to walk if you are going somewhere less than X km away (you get to choose "X"). Or take the stairs if you go to a floor lower than floor number Y (you get to choose the floor number "Y")

Day 4

Informational Message Topic: Good Night Sleep

A variety of factors, including sleep apnea, can disrupt sleep patterns.

Sleep apnea occurs when the airways are repeatedly blocked during sleep. Risk factors include obesity, drinking alcohol, and eating an unhealthy diet.

Reducing the consumption of alcohol and caffeine can help to ensure restful sleep, whether or not a person has sleep apnea.

Daily Task:

Choose one of the activities below and do it on daily basis for a week.

1. Swap soft drinks for water and herbal tea.

or

2. Take a warm shower 30 minutes before sleep.

or

3. Make bedroom 2-3 degrees cooler than the rest of the house (if this is not energy inefficient); use thick blankets if needed.

Day 5

Informational Message Topic: Addictions – sugar intake

Emerging evidence suggests a close relationship between diet and mood.

A concept that has received increasing attention over the past 10 years is the notion of food addiction. Historically, the term addiction was reserved for drugs of abuse and encompassed the loss of control over consumption, increased motivation to consume, and persistent consumption despite negative consequences. The term is now used more broadly to also describe behavioural addictions, also known as 'routines that are habitually undertaken to attain reward - again - despite apparent negative consequences. Individuals who develop food addiction are proposed to display symptoms analogous to those of drug addiction, including cravings for 'problem foods', tolerance (needing more food to satisfy cravings), limited control of food intake, unsuccessful attempts to reduce intake.

Much of the research surrounding the addictive properties of food is focused on sugar, which contributes to the notion that addiction to sugar is the underlying cause of food addiction.

Unlike many other substance use disorders or behavioural compulsions, sugar addiction is often easy to spot. The clearest signs of sugar addiction involve consumption of large amounts of food or drinks laden with sugar. The individual may eat constantly, eat to combat boredom, and become hyper and crash.

In 2016, researchers found that a diet with a high glycaemic load may cause increased symptoms of depression and fatigue.

A diet with a high glycaemic load includes many refined carbohydrates, such as those found in soft drinks, cakes, white bread, and biscuits. Vegetables, whole fruit, and whole grains have a lower glycaemic load.

While a healthful diet may improve overall mood, it is essential for people with depression to seek medical care.

Daily Task:

Reduce sugar intake (from, say, ten spoons a day—across all your drinks—to six).

Day 6

Informational Message Topic: Mindful walking

Mindful walking is a brilliant combination of two important anti-stress strategies: movement and mindfulness.

Just as mindfulness is the practice of bringing your attention to the present moment, mindful walking is the practice of becoming aware of your surroundings and how your body and mind feel while moving. Practice mindfulness while walking. So your benefit from time spent walking will double.



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Daily Task:

Here is a guided meditation that you can use for today's walk.

<https://youtu.be/bVvhK4bdbSA>

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MODULE 2: Social and emotional learning

Day 1

Informational Message Topic: Self-awareness

Self-Awareness concerns knowing one's internal states (feelings and emotions), one's resources (strengths and weaknesses); one's preferences (drives, values, prejudices) and one's needs and impact on others.

Daily Task:

The goal of the today's task is to get to know ourselves better, to accept ourselves the way we are and from this standpoint to embark on the road to developing a better and more balanced version of ourselves.

SWAN is an abbreviation for:

S: Strengths

W: Weaknesses

A: Aims / Ambitions

N: Needs

The strengths are our positive qualities. They may be character traits (kindness, gratitude, bravery, and others) or skills we have developed (drawing, physical endurance, presentation skills and others). While doing the exercise and describing our strengths we shouldn't only think of our distinctive strengths, but we should think about our full potential. We may have sleeping strengths, strengths that we do not actively use. It is good to write down everything, exhaustively, but to do it honestly and impartially.

The weaknesses are those qualities that limit our potential. They stop our progress. For example: laziness, procrastination, anger and irritability, lack of patience etc.. Most of us have learned to or think that we must hide our weaknesses. This very often leads to increasing or problems and not to solving them. Our goal should be to be aware of our weaknesses and to find out how we can use our Strengths for overcoming our Weaknesses.

The aims (ambitions) are the things that make us get up from bed every day, work hard and go forward. When we think about and list our aims it is good to remember that they should be realistic, things that we can achieve (using our Strengths) and not irrational dreams.

Every person has needs. Our basic needs are our needs of food, water, shelter, clothing etc. When our basic needs are covered, we start perceiving needs like love, education, social status, growth etc. In general, we have six types of needs: physical, mental, emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual. We must take time, list our needs and order them in specific categories.

Building a better and more balanced version of ourselves.

The SWAN exercise requires that we take time and work on ourselves. For this we need perseverance in looking for answers to the following questions:

Strengths:

- What strengths do I want to develop in myself?
- What strengths have I inherited from my family?
- What are my strengths, according to the people that know me?
- Which of my strengths can I use to overcome my weaknesses?
- Which of my strengths can help me achieve my aims?

Weaknesses:

- Which are my main weaknesses?
- Which weaknesses can I overcome?
- Which weaknesses can I accept and live with? Which weaknesses can I not accept?
- Can I turn my weaknesses into strengths?
- Which weaknesses hinder me from achieving my aims?

Aims

- Which aims are realistic and achievable? Give up the unrealistic aims.
- What is the origin of my aims: the family, my dreams, expectations of the society?
- What are my goals based on: fear, desire, love?

Needs

- What are my real needs, not desires?
- Is this my need or an expectation from society?
- Which of my needs are met? What should I do to meet the rest?

The creator of this exercise, Swami Niranjananda, recommends that we do it every day for 3 months. We can use the old and tested method – filling-in the SWAN table (please download [the SWAN Worksheet](#)) on paper and with a pen, or we can do a meditative practice (https://youtu.be/NolEKUEET_g) in a convenient time during the day (in the morning or in the evening at best).

Day 2

Informational Message Topic: Self-management

Emotional Self-Regulation (also called self-control or internal control) - This is the ability to control our behaviour based on managing our thoughts and emotions as well as by improving our physical and emotional well-being. People who have internal control typically do not act on their impulses and do not give way to anger, jealousy, fear, panic or other emotions to negatively influence their decisions and

behaviour. Emotional self-regulation improves communication, helps avoid conflict and also improves the sense of well-being.

Daily Task:

Today we offer you an exercise called Mental Chatter. It will help you achieve a deeper and better understanding of the quality of your emotional palette. You can also gain insight into the goals you prioritise and the values and worldview that shape your perceptions.

Stage 1:

Keep a diary of your thoughts from your "chatter mind" for at least 7 days.

One way to succeed in this task is to try to observe your thoughts as if you were an outsider, someone who is delving into your mind, observing and tracking your thoughts and images in your mind.

When trying to do this, don't judge the thoughts, feelings and images that arise. Try to resist the tendency to categorise them as "positive," "negative," "good," or "bad." Your task in the first stage is simply to observe the thoughts that arise without judging, evaluating or commenting on them.

If you feel that the activity of monitoring your thoughts is interfering with your ability to record them, don't worry. This is a very common experience. After you have taken a short break, go back to observing your natural thoughts.

Stage 2:

At the end of the period, review your thoughts and answer the question: "What are predominantly thoughts in my head?"

- Negative;
- Positive.

Categorise your recorded thoughts into the following categories: a) thoughts in which you compare yourself to others; b) thoughts about your relationships with people; c) thoughts about tasks and work; d) thoughts related to past events; e) thoughts about future events; f) other.

You can download [the Mental Chatter Worksheet here](#). We wish you good luck!

Day 3

Informational Message Topic: Responsible Decision Making (1)

Clever choices

When you buy new clothes do you consider your fashion environment impact?

In fact, how often we buy new clothes and throw away our old ones has a great impact on planet resources.

Do you know that fashion accounts for up to 10% of global carbon dioxide output—more than international flights and shipping combined, according to the United Nations Environment Programme.

The clothing production of some of the top world brands in China, India and Bangladesh have destroyed prosperous rivers with its factory wastewater discharges. These rivers have now become biological dead zones full of carcinogenic chemicals. Additionally, the tiny plastic microfibers that fall from synthetic clothing during the laundry process are flooding our water supply and food chain.

If we want to act responsibly in that regard we should try to buy as little as possible and choose better quality clothes from sustainable brands.

Daily Task:

Think twice before you decide to buy new clothes and “throw out” your old / unused clothes. And if you decide to throw out old ones, make sure that you leave them in the special recycle bins for textile products.

Day 4

Informational Message Topic: Responsible Decision Making (2)

Your Transport Optimization

According to European Environment Agency data, in 2017, 27 % of total EU-28 greenhouse gas emissions came from the transport sector.

Among these the highest contributor is the road transport sector with 71,7%, followed by aviation and maritime transport.

Road transport has the highest impact because it is by far the widest used mode of transport.

Based on the data in today’s task we provide some ideas for optimising your transport.

Daily Task:

Check the ideas for optimising your transport and pick at least one that you will start using regularly:

- Whenever possible, leave the car at home and take public transport.
- Use shared public transport (especially electric trains, trams and buses).
- They are far more energy-efficient than individual car-driving.
- Try to share trips, use the car with 2 or more people.
- Riding a bike is a great option if the place where you live is bike friendly.

Day 5

Informational Message Topic: Do Things for Others

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According to one study, people who suffered from chronic pain tried working as peer volunteers. As a result, they experienced a reduction in their own symptoms.

Furthermore, if you're at risk of heart problems, your doctor has probably told you to cut back on red meat or the hours at your stressful job. However, you should also consider adding something to your routine: a regular volunteer schedule. One piece of research showed that older individuals who volunteered for at least 200 hours a year decreased their risk of hypertension by a whopping 40 percent. This could possibly be because they were provided with more social opportunities, which help relieve loneliness and the stress that often accompanies it.

Helping other people is not only good for them; it's good for you too. It makes you happier and can help to improve your health. Giving also creates stronger connections between people and helps to build a happier society for everyone. It's not all about money - we can also give our time, ideas and energy. So if you want to feel good, do good.

Daily Task:

Do something to help a project or social initiative you care about.

Day 6

Informational Message Topic: Give Time

To many people, giving time is simply volunteering. You do it because it's the "right thing to do." Or, you do it because you were asked.

Yet, giving time is much more fundamental to our well-being than just volunteering or doing good things. It's a foundation on which we can build a better life for ourselves while we build better neighbourhoods and communities. It's a safe and solid way to become more integrated into our communities, to build networks and friendships, and learn to act with intention. It's a foundation to build meaningful purpose into our lives.

Plus, it's free.

Daily Task:

Take time to talk to an elderly relative or lonely person.

MODULE 3 Coping

Day 1:

Informational Message Topic: How do you feel today?

Do you pay attention to your feelings and emotions? Can you describe precisely how you feel in the present moment? Ability to recognize our feelings and emotions is key for us in order to avoid troubles, manage our stress levels, being able to make good decisions and form stronger relationships.

Today we offer you an easy to do practice that can help you to describe how you feel.

Daily Task:

Do the practice of Weather report. It will help you to improve your awareness about the body, the thoughts and the emotions. These three aspects of being human make us complete as well as unique. Let's describe them as a weather report for the present moment.

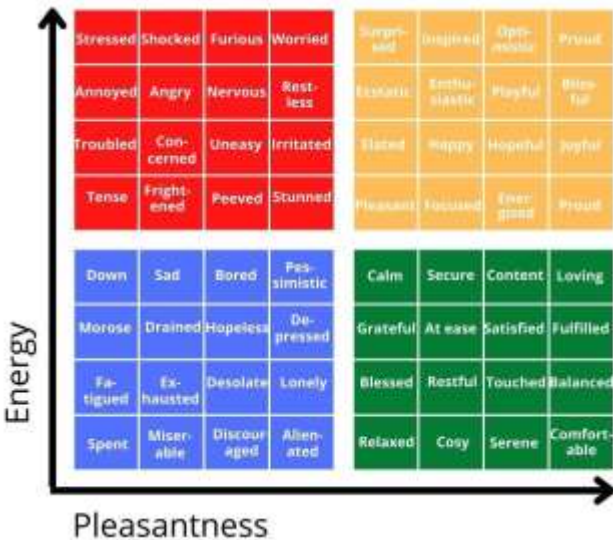
<https://youtu.be/y114Dnh34c>

Day 2:

Information Message Topic: Mood Meter

The Mood Meter is a tool that was developed by the Yale Centre for Emotional Intelligence in the United States. It helps us to recognize and to understand our own emotions and feelings better.

Inspired by the Mood Meter we have created our Mood Square which contains four coloured quadrants - red, blue, green and yellow, each containing a different set of feelings. These feelings are grouped according to their pleasantness and energy.



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Feelings in the RED ZONE include high energy and low pleasantness (e.g., angry, scared, and anxious);

Feelings in the BLUE ZONE include a low degree of energy and a low degree of pleasantness (e.g., sad, frustrated, and anxious).

Feelings in the GREEN ZONE include low levels of energy and high levels of pleasantness (e.g., calm, peaceful, and relaxed);

Feelings in the YELLOW ZONE include high energy and high pleasantness (e.g., happy, excited, and curious).

As we become more aware of our feelings, we begin to notice how they influence our decisions and behaviour. The Mood Meter enables us to more easily determine where we are in the present moment so that we can take action to improve our mood if necessary.

Our goal should be to be in the green and yellow zone about 70% of the time. This way we can increase both our own level of happiness and that of those around us. Scientists have already proven that happiness is "contagious" and when we are happy - the happiness of the people we are in close contact with increases by 15% and of those we have indirect contact with, it increases by 6 to 10%.

Daily Task:

Choose from the [Mood Square](#) what are your feelings in the present moment.

Think about what thoughts and perceptions are causing or triggering your feelings.

If the majority of your feelings are in the red or blue zone – make a plan to do something today that can shift your feelings to the green and yellow zone.

Day 3

Informational Message Topic: Let's understand why we behave the way we do

Today we would like to introduce you to the [ABC Model](#), developed by the psychologist Dr. Albert Ellis. It helps us understand the connection between activation events (A), our beliefs (B), and our emotional and behavioural responses (C).

Albert Ellis taught us that it's not the activating event that determines what we feel and what we do. It's what we say to ourselves, our beliefs, our thoughts about the situation that impacts how we feel, what we do. Sometimes our beliefs about a situation are not accurate, and our reactions undermine resilient responses.



A-B-C MODEL



Daily Task:

Emotional hijack is a term coined by Daniel Coleman – the famous writer and expert in Emotional Intelligence. It refers to situations when the amygdala – the part of the brain that serves as our emotional processor, hijacks our normal reasoning process. In cases of emergency, the amygdala helps us to survive (when we are chased by a tiger), but in everyday situations that we perceive as threats thanks to our wrong beliefs, the amygdala can force us to engage in risky, irrational, and even dangerous behaviour.

So, think of an occasion when you have been emotionally hijacked.

1. Describe the situation
2. What caused the situation (trigger)?
3. How did you react? How did other people react?
4. What was the outcome?
5. What have you learned from this situation?

Download the [Emotional Hijack Worksheet here](#).

Day 4

Informational message topic: Contingency planning

In business or government management – there is a term used – contingency planning. It presents a deliberate planning of strategies that can be forced when the organisation faces roadblocks / challenges on the executions of its planned activities.

You might think that it is not worth planning how you can respond to risks you can imagine, because it never happens what we can think of, but some other things that we cannot think of.

But the reality is that when we have some contingency measures at hand, whatever happens, we have a backup plan. And it is much better to choose from ready-to-use activities than to figure out what to do when you are under stress.

Let's move to the daily task and make a contingency plan.

Daily task:

Based on the emotional hijack situation that you have described in the previous task; think of 3 action-related strategies you will use in the next month to better manage stress and avoid emotional hijacks? Plan in detail on exactly how you plan to implement each strategy with specific activities.

Download [the Contingency Plan Worksheet here](#).

Day 5:

Informational Message Topic: How to offset negative events?

We, as humans, are hard-wired to negativity. That design of our nervous system has helped us to survive historically. Unfortunately, it also predisposes us to stress. So, what can we do? Scientists have discovered it takes three positive experiences to offset one negative experience. It is called the 3-to-1 positivity ratio. And the good news is that we can evoke the positive experience and this way to outweigh the hardship we face.

Daily task:

Make a list with as many as possible things you can think of that bring you joy. Next time you face a negative event, proactively do 3 things that bring you joy.

Day 6

Informational Message Topic: Equanimity – how to recover quickly

Equanimity is the ability to accept “what is” without resistance. To be equanimous is to truly have inner peace, because you do not waste time fighting what you can't change.

If you succeed in making equanimity your primary coping mechanism you will be able to control yourself and avoid the outbursts of anger and frustration that cause so many social conflicts.

Daily Task:

Try this Emergency calm practice and use it in stressful moments.

<https://youtu.be/Fs9kDhMbGmM>

MODULE 4 Self-efficacy

Day 1

Informational Message Topic: Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviours necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997). The main benefits of self-efficacy are:

- It boosts our resilience in stressful moments
- It helps us to lead a healthy lifestyle
- It is key for our success in education and at work.
- It boosts our self-confidence and life fulfilment.

Daily Task:

Download [the Self-efficacy scale from here](#), fill it in and see your result.

Day 2

Informational Message Topic: Know your strengths

Through modern research conducted by the VIA Institute for Character Research, it has been discovered that there are 24 core strengths of human character that are common for all people. These strengths present the positive parts of our personality, qualities such as kindness, curiosity and perseverance that define who we are and are perceived as valuable by other people and society at large. Interestingly, there are over 600 sextillion possible combinations (i.e. the number 6 followed by 23 zeros!) of the 24 strengths, so profiles can be extremely rarely exactly the same. Although the 24-character strengths are ubiquitous, the way people manifest their qualities is unique. The individual combination of strengths in each person predetermines our unique human nature.

Do you know which your character strengths are? Do our daily task to find or re-confirm your unique positive traits combination.

Daily task:

Do [VIA Character test](#) and save your results. After that find a character strength in a friend and compliment them. Motivate your friend to make the VIA Character test too and learn about their strengths.

Day 3

Informational Message Topic: Develop your strengths

Let's go back to your VIA Character Strengths Profile and check which are the last 3 strengths in your list. These are not your "weakest" strengths, but the ones that for some reason you do not use or value enough. Science teaches us that in hardships we should rely on our signature strengths and in good times we can learn how to better use the ones at the bottom of your test result.

Daily task:

Read more about the last 3 strengths from your VIA Character Strengths Profile following this link:

<https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths>

Make a decision to use on purpose one of these strengths extensively this week.

Day 4

Informational Message Topic: Take care for your brain

While most people aren't aware of this, our brains shrink with age. Like a muscle that atrophies from a lack of use, the human brain begins to lose neurons and get smaller as we get older. Over time, this re-formation of the brain can lead to a feeling of mental dullness, at best, and memory loss and dementia, at worst. Fortunately, just because ageing is inevitable doesn't mean a declining mind has to be. Although it's true that your brain changes as you age, it's possible to use a series of specially designed games and activities to exercise your brain, just like you would any other muscle, and keep it sharp. In fact, studies have shown that adults who take part in mind games and other mental exercises are 63% less likely to suffer dementia than their counterparts. Just like a healthy back or strong arms, your mind is a "use it or lose it" tool, and the more proactive you are about keeping it healthy, the better.

Daily Task:

Challenge your brain: play the Colour Game. It is simple: you write out a list of colour names, and change the colour of the actual text so that it does not correspond to the colour referred to. Here's an example:

Black Blue Yellow Green Red Purple Orange

You read out loud the colour each word is written in, not the word itself. While it sounds easy, this is a tough game! Move as quickly as you can through the set, and then start again to see if you can boost your score. Once you've got this set down, create another, larger set and try your hand at that one.

Day 5

Informational Message Topic: Judgement

Here is a story named: “Good thing, bad thing who knows”*

There was once a farmer who owned a horse and had a son.

One day, his horse ran away. The neighbours came to express their concern: “Oh, that’s too bad. How are you going to work the fields now?” The farmer replied: “Good thing, Bad thing, who knows?”

In a few days, his horse came back and bought another horse with her. Now, the neighbours were glad: “Oh, how lucky! Now you can do twice as much work as before!” The farmer replied: “Good thing, Bad thing, who knows?”

The next day, the farmer’s son fell off the new horse and broke his leg. The neighbours were concerned again: “Now that he is incapacitated, he can’t help you around, that’s too bad.” The farmer replied: “Good thing, Bad thing, who knows?”

Soon, the news came that a war broke out, and all the young men were required to join the army. The villagers were sad because they knew that many of the young men would not come back. The farmer’s son could not be drafted because of his broken leg. His neighbours were envious: “How lucky! You get to keep your only son.” The farmer replied: “Good thing, Bad thing, who knows?”

*This story and the exercise in the following daily task are taken from the book “If you are so smart, why aren’t you happy” of prof. Raj Raghunathan.

Daily Task:

Let’s look at the bigger picture. [Download the Worksheet: “Good thing, bad thing – let’s see”](#) and start reflecting on your selected past negative events.

Day 6

Informational Message Topic: Self-control

While self-control has often been related to positive outcomes in life such as higher academic achievements and better health, recent insights reveal that people with high trait self-control may even experience greater life satisfaction and happiness.

Results from a study done with 545 individuals in University of Utrecht, Netherlands suggest that people with higher trait self-control are happier possibly because they are: (1) more promotion-focused on acquiring positive gains thereby facilitating more approach-oriented behaviours, and (2) less prevention-focused on avoiding losses thereby reducing avoidance-oriented behaviours.

Self-control has been linked to successes in different walks of life, and it appears that with greater self-control one could focus more on aspirations and less on warding off hindrances along the way. That said, although the pursuit of happiness may not be easy, it appears to be nonetheless in our control.

Daily Task:

Let’s use a coping mechanism for anxiety called 5-4-3-2-1 and tap into our senses.

Step 1: Stand up nice and tall with the feet slightly apart and take 3 slow breaths in and out.



Step 2: Notice **5 things** that you can see (a chair, a desk, a window, your pet, a lamp).

Step 3: Touch **4 things** (your hair, your belly, your clothes, a wall).

Step 4: Hear **3 things** (the clock in the room, traffic outside, kids playing in the other room).

Step 5: Smell **2 things** (your shampoo, your perfume).

Step 6: Taste **1 thing** (what is the taste in your mouth).

Step 7: Breathe in and out and notice how do you feel.

MODULE 5 Optimism and Self-compassion

Day 1

Informational Message Topic: Self-compassion

It has been proven in many psychology studies that self-compassion is extremely important for mental health and well-being, keeping depression and anxiety under control and away from us. The famous happiness lecturer and researcher, prof. Raj Raghunathan from McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas, advises that when things are not going well, we should practise self-compassion and when things are going well, we should practise gratitude. To practise self-compassion means not to be hard on ourselves about what we did wrong, but to imagine how we would console a friend of ours if he or she would happen to be in a situation like ours and to change our mental talk accordingly.

Daily Task:

Let's do a Self-compassion exercise. It involves treating ourselves as we would a good friend or relative after they have failed to achieve something, or failed to live up to an ideal. That is, it involves treating yourself with kindness and compassion after a failure.

[Download the Self-compassion worksheet here.](#)

Day 2

Informational Message Topic: Best Possible Future

Mindfulness, being present in the moment, is key for our resilience, for the ability to take the right decisions and to act appropriately. But we humans also have the tendency to dream, to make plans for the future, which also plays a key role in our life satisfaction and well-being.

Thinking positively about our future and making a plan for our future achievements and successes, can help us to:

- strengthen our motivation for action
- improve our psychological state
- be better and more generous with others
- overcome difficulties more easily
- make better decisions about our future.

Laura King, a Professor of Psychology at Southern Methodist University, has created an exercise called "Best Possible Self". It involves visualising a "best possible future" for yourself in one or more of the following domains of your life: 1) personal, 2) relational, or 3) professional. In this exercise, you should first visualise, and then write about, all three domains. Specifically, you should imagine that in the next 10 years, your life has gone as well as it possibly could have. Then, you should write about how this life would look.

In the next daily task, we offer a Worksheet with a version of this exercise.

Daily Task:

[Download the Best Possible Life Worksheet](#) and follow the instructions.

Day 3

Informational Message Topic: Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a state in which we bring our attention to the present moment, with a dose of curiosity, with an open heart and a non-judgemental mind, accepting the reality that surrounds us as it is. Mindfulness is also the process in which we practise achieving a mindful state.

Awareness in the present moment helps us expand the knowledge of ourselves, others, improve our health and increase our level of happiness.

When we are mindful in the present moment, we enhance the joy in our lives because we get rid of the past worries and the anxiety for the future. The past is behind us and we cannot change it, and the future is completely unpredictable, which is why only the present moment matters. Mindfulness helps us to live fully and harmoniously.

We can develop and deepen our mindfulness by practising meditation and through purposeful mindful activities to which we devote from a few minutes to as much as we want during the day.

And, what if we can tell you that there is a mindful activity that is so easy that you can do it anytime, anywhere, and on the other hand, we are all doing this activity, but not mindfully most of the time.

We are talking here about breathing. If we do it mindfully, it is the quickest way to shift our attention to the present moment. It is also the easiest way to focus or to calm down. There are many breathing techniques that we can use on a daily basis, like: deep breathing, extended exhale breathing, synced breathing, box breathing, etc. Choose your breathing technique and start using it regularly to improve your mindfulness.

Daily Task: Here is a breathing technique that can boost your mindfulness and is specifically helping us to focus. It is a breathing exercise that can heighten performance and concentration while also being a powerful stress reliever. It's used by everyone from athletes to U.S. Navy SEALs, police officers, and nurses. This technique can be very beneficial to reduce digital stress. It's also called box (square) breathing, because it consists of 4 steps:

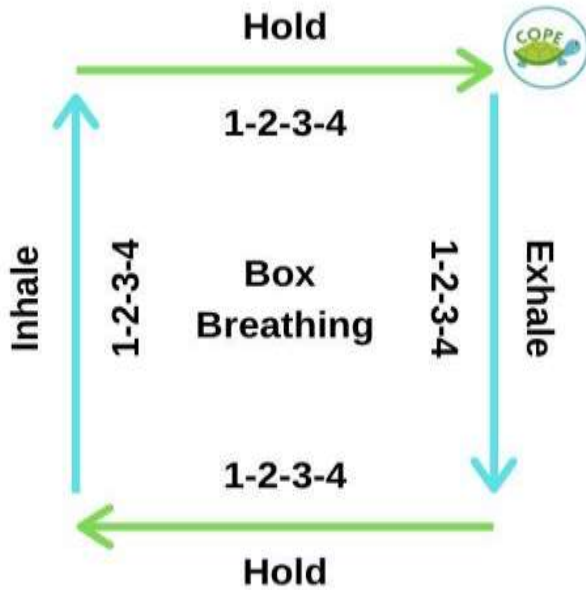
Step 1: Breathe in counting to four slowly. Feel the air enter your lungs.

Step 2: Hold your breath for 4 seconds. Try to avoid exhaling for 4 seconds.

Step 3: Slowly exhale through your mouth for 4 seconds.

Step 4: Hold your breath for 4 seconds. Try to avoid inhaling for 4 seconds.

Repeat this exercise as many times as you can. 30 seconds of deep breathing will help you feel more relaxed and in control.



Day 4

Informational Message Topic: Gratitude

Gratitude is a practice that helps to rewire our brains and change them from negativity to positivity.

The father of positive psychology Prof. Martin Seligman, from the University of Pennsylvania, tested the impact of various positive interventions on 411 people. When the week's assignment was to write and personally deliver a letter of gratitude to someone who had never been properly thanked for his or her kindness, participants immediately exhibited a huge increase in happiness scores. This impact was greater than that from any other activity they made during the experiment, with benefits lasting for a month.

One of the reasons gratitude is so strong as a practice is that it helps people refocus on what they have instead of what they lack. In addition, it helps build and strengthens our connections.

Daily Task:

Write a gratitude letter to someone and sent it to him / her over email or call them and read it aloud.

Day 5

Informational Message Topic: Self-Love

Self-Love is often mistaken with narcissism or having a big ego. But is that correct? Isn't it more like having high regard for our own well-being and happiness, taking care of our needs? Loving yourself doesn't mean that you think you are the best, most beautiful, smartest and s.o, but it means accepting yourself, who you are with your

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shortcomings and weaknesses. Self-Love means to give yourself (your body, brain and heart) what you need in order to survive life as long and as healthy as possible.

When we have Self-Love we accept much better our weaknesses as well as our strengths, we don't need so much to hide or explain our shortcomings, but we also don't let pride overshadow our judgement; we have compassion for ourselves when we fail or face adversity; it is easier for us to find meaning in life and to live according to our values.

Self-love is important for a good life. It influences the image you project to other people (friends, colleagues, bosses, business partners) and thus influences your success both in terms of work and in terms of building good connections. The more self-love we have the more successful we are in those fields.

It is extremely helpful in times of adversity. The more self-love we have the better we cope with problems, failures and loss.

Daily Task:

Here is a practice for you to do the first thing when you wake up tomorrow. It is suggested by Shauna Shapiro, a Professor of Psychology at Santa Clara University who works on mindfulness.

- When you wake up, place your hand on your heart. Focus on your palm and feel your heartbeat.
- Take breath, and say: Good morning, [your name] or Good morning, I love you, [your name].
- Notice how this makes you feel. See if you can bring kindness and curiosity to however you are feeling. There is no right or wrong way to feel.
- Trust that you are planting the seeds of presence and compassion for yourself and that these seeds will grow and strengthen your self-love.

If you create a habit of greeting yourself with love each morning, these first moments of the day can transform the rest of your day, your life, and the lives of others.

Watch how prof. Shauna Shapiro describes this practice (you can use the video subtitles and automatic translation, if needed): <https://youtu.be/CqxNevDwMM4>

Day 6

Informational Message Topic: Common Humanity

Common humanity involves the recognition that all humans are the same in their basic needs and desire to avoid suffering. It also involves recognizing that failures are a part of life and that everyone experiences them. In addition, common humanity involves recognizing that everyone experiences hardships and failures. This recognition can help you be less insecure by affirming that you are not alone or separated from others. It can feel more connected with others.

On the other hand, feelings of safety, security, trust and belonging shape the foundation of healthy relationships.

Scientists have found that relationships in which hugging and touching are present tend to be stronger and longer lasting.

Getting a good squeeze before going into a stressful situation can help you relax and calm down a bit. The reason for this is that when we hug or kiss a loved one, our oxytocin levels go up. This powerful hormone is often called “the bonding hormone”, because it promotes attachment in relationships, including between mothers and their new born babies.

Hugs are a universal expression of our common humanity. Hugging makes us happier, healthier and improves our relationships!

Daily task:

Express your love and support by hugging someone today.