



What My Positivity Project Is:

My Positivity Project is *almost* a planner, but not quite - because it's much more. It's a hybrid of stationery, comprising elements of a book, planner, journal, and notebook, but also sprinkled with activities (plus a few little surprises) to foster positivity and wellbeing.

The purpose of the almost-planner is to encourage you to think better, live better, and ultimately *feel* better. This will be achieved through simple mindfulness and journalling exercises (among others), which develop and promote self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-care.

If these concepts are new to you then I'm going to show you how you can use specific techniques to gain control over your emotional wellbeing.



*Happiness is a choice;
Positivity is a mindset;
Gratitude is the path to both.*



And if you already practice mindfulness, then the almost-planner can be used as a companion on your ongoing journey: for jotting down thoughts and ideas; for inspiration, self-improvement, encouragement, or whatever you may need in the moment.

The approaches used in the planner are based upon a combination of personal successes and empirical evidence.



What My Positivity Project Is Not:

Crystals and moon phases and mystic powers are lovely notions and because they bring peace and contentment to many, they undeniably hold value. However, since these ideas have no scientific basis, while I have nothing against them, I don't personally endorse them.

I mention this merely to underline the fact that the concepts included in My Positivity Project are reliable and can be trusted; if you're serious about changing your life for the better, these methods have been proven to work.

That said, I *do* endorse anything that brings harmless joy, and that includes practices which could be attributed to the placebo effect. It's a powerful phenomenon and absolutely has its place.

Plus, while there may not be sections in this almost-planner specifically dedicated to spirituality, it has many blank pages which are designed to be filled to your personal tastes and preferences.





Why My Positivity Project?

My Positivity Planner is more than a pretty journal for you to fill, more than a collection of affirmations, and more than a set of instructions.

It's a labour of love outlining specific therapeutic models which have been proven to work (and have worked and continue to work for me).

It's a project I've poured my heart and soul into because I believe in its power to heal those wanting to live happier, more fulfilled lives.

It's everything you need to begin shifting focus from the negative aspects of your life - which we all have and need to accept and overcome - to the positives which we also all have, if we only look for them and actively choose to embrace them.

Naturally, the planner had to have more than substance - it had to also be beautiful. I hope you'll agree that it achieves both objectives!





Where Did the Idea For My Positivity Project Come From?

I designed My Positivity Project when I became aware that the product I wanted was not available on the market.

I grew up around a lot of negativity, and I absorbed that my whole life until it became my own default mentality. I wasn't happy, but I didn't know how to be different.

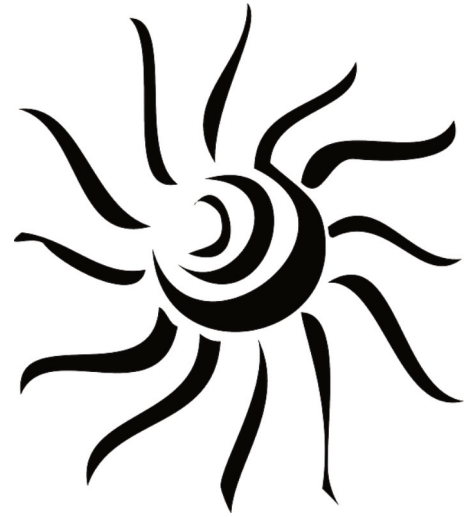
And then I became pregnant with my first child and I decided, for the sake of my unborn baby, I had to do better, which meant I had to *get* better.

One of the first rules of learning to be more positive is accepting responsibility for your mindset. We all have emotional baggage, some far worse than others, but nobody reaches adulthood completely unscathed.



What separates us is how we perceive
and *react* to our environments and stressors.





The day I decided to *do* better was
the day I started to *be* better.



It's worth noting, too, that positivity is not a destination - if it's not your natural disposition then it has to be a new lifestyle you commit to, because you will inevitably encounter hiccups along the way which will throw you off course.

Positivity is the happy byproduct of a set of skills you can learn and implement into everyday life to help you manage uncomfortable feelings. It's entirely possible, but it takes dedication and determination. If you have those and you're willing to practice the suggestions in the planner, you will succeed.





Creating My Positivity Project

For as long as I can remember, I've wanted to write a book. I've published an eBook and, while I'm proud of it, I knew I'd never feel satisfied until I had something I could physically hold in my hands. I toyed with several ideas for writing a work of fiction, but nothing felt quite right - until My Positivity Planner.

Across a couple of years, I've taken my blog in a new direction, with a stronger focus on positivity and wellbeing. It's become a huge part of the way I live, largely because I want to model healthy behaviours for my daughters, but also for my own mental health:

A critical lesson I'll keep coming back to is that though this has worked for me, *I am not 'fixed'*.

Like alcoholics, if you're predisposed to anxiety - as I am - that's something you have to learn to live with and manage. If you implement the practices described in this planner and build them into your lifestyle, you may find that your negativity and anxiety are eliminated - but be careful.

More than once I've taken my eye off the ball and, modern life being what it is, it hasn't taken long for my old inclinations to return... Old habits die hard and I have to continue to work on self-awareness and self-improvement to keep those harmful traits at bay and to retain a positive attitude and healthy mindset.

One of the things that has really helped me is journaling.



What is Journaling?

Journaling involves the practice of keeping a written record, like a diary, of your ideas and feelings. It can be focused on specific events, or it can be more general in nature.

The concept is to explore your deepest thoughts and emotions and where they stem from. The goal of journaling is to better understand yourself so that you can make peace with difficult feelings, and reframe negative thoughts to more positive ones, in order to become more calm and content with life.

Gratitude is often a big part of journaling and is something we'll look at a lot in My Positivity Project.





Mindfulness vs Meditation

Mindfulness is often used interchangeably with meditation - but that's inaccurate. It's said that;

Mindfulness is the awareness of “some-thing,”
while meditation is the awareness of “no-thing.”

“Mindfulness and meditation are mirror-like reflections of each other: mindfulness supports and enriches meditation, while meditation nurtures and expands mindfulness. Where mindfulness can be applied to any situation throughout the day, meditation is usually practiced for a specific amount of time.”

Thrive Global



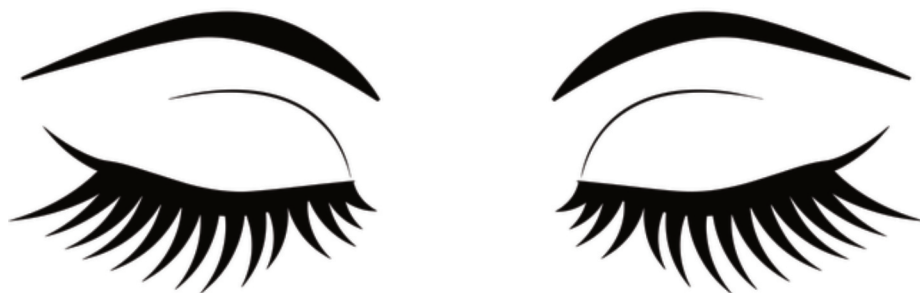


What is Mindfulness?

You could say that mindfulness is the opposite of mind/essness, which - given the fast pace of life and our extensive use of technology - is something we're all guilty of every day. In fact, according to research conducted by Harvard psychologists Matthew A. Killingsworth and Daniel T. Gilbert in 2010, people spend nearly half their time (46.9%) thinking about something other than what they're doing.

The researchers said "a human mind is a wandering mind, and a wandering mind is an unhappy mind", and "the ability to think about what is not happening is a cognitive achievement that comes at an emotional cost".

So, while it may be an entirely 'normal' way for our brains to operate - it's not conducive to a calm and peaceful state of mind.





The Power of Mindfulness

Mindfulness is awareness of the current moment as opposed to living in the past or future; it's tuning into your surrounding and your senses; it's resisting rumination and instead focusing on the present. It's noticing and paying attention to your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours - and how they affect those around you. It's also non-judgemental (objective) awareness, which brings clarity and discernment as opposed to reactive impulses.

And it's harder than it ought to be!



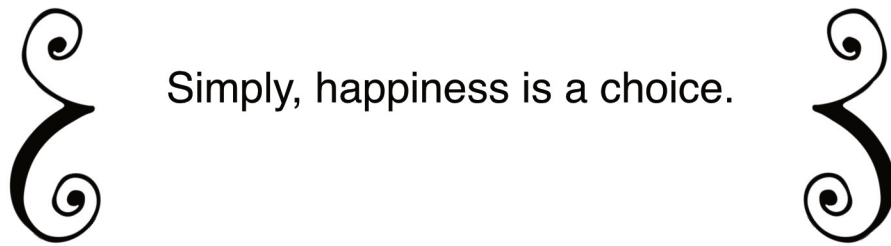
When you begin to master mindfulness it allows you to see situations clearly, and it feels *powerful*.





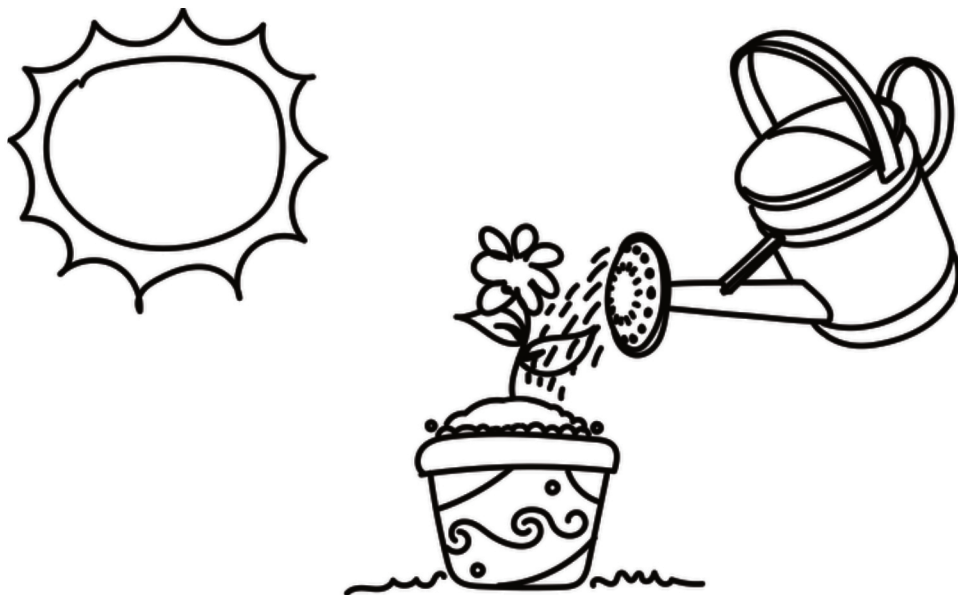
How Can I Be More Positive?

Positivity is achievable for all. The most powerful tool at your disposal is perspective - manipulate that and you can change your life.



Simply, happiness is a choice.

That is - of course - very simplistic. It's also true. There are tactics you can employ to help you get there; it will take time, but with practice it will work.





How Can I Be More Positive When I'm Grieving?

There's one caveat to using this planner to be more positive, and that's when you're working around grief or a mental health disorder.

That's not to say these concepts don't work in those situations - they definitely can. But naturally this will be a different, and far more delicate process. I'm not going to insult anybody experiencing immense pain by suggesting these exercises are going to heal your sorrow - that's not how grief works.

Whilst taking responsibility for our feelings is important, so too is validating them - and in devastating circumstances there is, sadly, legitimate foundation for a lack of positivity.



When there's genuine cause for anguish,
whether grief or a chemical imbalance,
it's vital to both account and allow for that.



I am not a qualified doctor, so if you're experiencing grief or other mental health issues, please seek professional help if appropriate.



The good news is that the activities included in this journal can still help you, if and when you feel ready to use them. Being positive is not about having a perfect life - it's about accepting the hand you've been dealt, letting go of resentments, and appreciating the good in your world.



For somebody experiencing grief,
this will be *alongside* acknowledging
and allowing room for the hurt you feel.



Grief doesn't diminish or go away, but over time the hope is that the good will grow bigger, until you're no longer consumed by sadness.



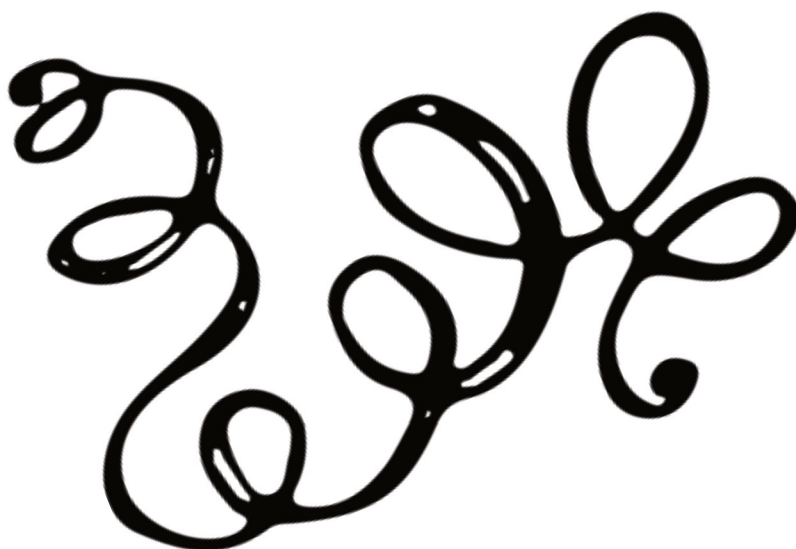


How to Use My Positivity Project

I've created specific sections within the planner to compliment your moods, both positive and negative. Each 'mood' has a corresponding activity, to work as an anecdote and bring relief, or to promote the desirable state of mind.

In addition there are several surprises peppered throughout to encourage you to thumb through the entire planner, even if you're not feeling particularly positive!

I hope you enjoy using My Positivity Project, and find it beneficial.





How to Be Happy

In order to truly happy, there are three areas of our lives in which we need to feel 'settled':



Our work, our home, and our relationships.



Everything else is secondary - if these three basic needs for stability are met, all things being equal, ie. no mental or physical health issues - everything else should fall into place. But how do you help that process along?

No matter who you are or what your life holds, the route to happiness is, on a very basic level, appreciating what you have. It's not always looking to attain the next thing, but instead remembering to be thankful for what you already have.

Unfortunately, in a life that's saturated with consumerism, the preoccupation with acquiring newer, bigger, better and flashier things is deeply ingrained. Learning to shun that mindset can be harder than one might hope or imagine - but it's infinitely possible, and I'm going to show you how with:

- Reflection
- Journaling
- Gratitude



Although the purpose of My Positivity Project is to improve overall wellbeing, that doesn't mean focusing *entirely* on the positives. It's necessary to at least touch on the things which may be preventing us from embracing optimism first.

Life is not always kind, and many of us have other things going on which make it harder to be grateful for our lot. When facing problems with work and/or money, a comfortable place to live, and/or close relationships, life can feel hopeless. Likewise, grief or poor health for yourself or a loved one can also be devastating.

♥ Validation

As well as tackling subjects such as a negative mindset, anxiety, overwhelm and depression, there's another very important topic to cover too.

Everybody in life has baggage. Those who don't talk about it have not led a perfect unicorn life - that doesn't exist. It may be that they are private people who prefer not to share, or perhaps a part of their baggage is that they've learnt *not* to share after their trust and loyalty have previously been broken.

Sometimes, positivity is a struggle too far; you may need time to process. At times like that, appreciating nature and loved ones, and losing yourself in simple distractions can be helpful...





♥ Triggers

Whatever the reason, the fact remains that we all have our issues, our sadnesses - and our triggers. The first step to improving our own wellbeing is identifying and limiting those triggers.

Alas, pinpointing what triggers us is not always straight forward, which is something we'll work through in this planner. But often harder even than *that*, is giving ourselves permission to *remove* the harmful triggers.

If you're in the midst of dealing with a big issue which is affecting your mental health, it's important to recognise that you're entitled to be experiencing negative feelings while you work through your problems.

Feeling depressed during poor health, divorce, or grief is not abnormal - it's to be expected. And while it's true that you may be able to use techniques to reduce your low moods, it's also necessary to feel the big feelings before attempting to rid yourself of them.





♥ *Legitimate Causes of Negativity*

Too often I've heard friends talk about why they shouldn't be so miserable, before going on to tell me a completely valid cause. Whilst it's desirable to take responsibility for our own outlook on life, it's also critical that we acknowledge and validate our feelings, and accept that in some circumstances, being unhappy is the **normal** response to our current environment.

In these instances, it's an unfortunate case of riding out the pain. Damping down your emotions or allowing them to manifest as anger or bitterness are understandable - but it's *not* constructive. It may be that you require the help of a therapist to navigate a loss or trauma before you can even think of beginning to embrace positivity.





Anxiety & Overwhelm

As I write, this section is being drastically altered. Originally, I talked about how anxiety gets up all in specific circumstances, when it's warranted and serves a purpose, but that not everybody is afflicted on a daily basis. Many people are able to live their lives without feeling overwhelmed with disproportionate anxiety about inconsequential events.

So this section was intended to be aimed mostly at those who suffer, like I do, with anxiety which tips over into a condition - the kind that leaves you feeling almost constantly agitated, and frequently for no specific reason at all.

Often, when there's no tangible cause, the best thing we can do to control our anxiety is to simply empty our minds and calm our bodies to achieve some relief. There are exercises at the end of this section to help with that.



Of course, things are different now.
We all have a very real reason to feel anxious.





♥ Lockdown

We're all reacting to this threat to our normal lives differently, but I expect we're united in our anxiety:

About what is going to happen and when; about our finances, our fears of how life will be when this is all over; about how we're going to manage like this for what is looking to be a prolonged and unspecified period of time; about our loved ones who may be key workers, or might be ill.

About whether we're going to be able to acquire the food, medications, or care we need.

There's a lot to be worried about, and it's all valid.

Likewise, there's a phenomenon taking place where some who suffer with anxiety are finding their symptoms have eased. One theory is that the 'terrible thing' that they've been anxious about has happened, meaning they're no longer in the anticipation state, and they're experiencing a little relief.

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Personally, I'm finding it's hitting me in waves: I start to adjust to our new normal and feel cocooned in our secure little bubble; and then I go shopping and see people wearing gas masks as they wait, two metres apart in a long queue - and it smacks me in the face all over again. I'm sure this scenario is played out repeatedly every day across the world at the moment.

But despite its scale, this is *not* normal; life may never be the same again - and anxiety is a legitimate response to the current circumstances that are quickly becoming our new normal.





Yet it's not healthy to maintain that level of high-alertness. Extended periods of stress and tension not only feel emotionally debilitating, they're all physically unhealthy too. For the sake of our mental health and overall wellbeing, we need to try to deal with the resulting surges of adrenalin and apprehension in a constructive way.

Exercise can be a very effective and beneficial way to use up some of the nervous energy you're bound to be experiencing, and yoga or meditation can help to calm and relax the body.



But we also need to look after our minds, and the following activities are designed to help create focus - with the goal of distraction away from our legitimate concerns and worries.



Forgiveness

While the previous circumstances are ones over which you may have little of your reactions and outlook - and they may even be normal and healthy responses - there's another situation in which you *can* start to resume control.

♥ Injustice

When subjected to a situation or situations that are unjust, even the most resilient and positive person can become disillusioned and blighted by fury.

The problem is that anger brings with it physical problems, including a predisposition to anxiety and depression, weakened immune system, risk of stroke and heart disease, and respiratory problems. Plus, of course, having an issue with anger which over time becomes a trait and looks very much like a chip on one's shoulder, is not exactly conducive to healthy relationships, either.

The long and the short of it is that whilst anger can be useful in isolated situations, it is *not* healthy or desirable as an ongoing personality attribute. And while there are many things that can lead to anger, when it becomes ingrained, it's very often as a result of feeling slighted, hard done by, betrayed - or in other words thanks to a series of perceived injustices.





So how can one overcome anger in these circumstances? Well, it can be *damn* hard. But there are techniques we can use to unlearn our angry responses when appropriate.

The most effective - but also the hardest - approach, is to start forgiving the people, bodies, and institutions who have wronged us. No matter the details, no matter how despicable the circumstances of their actions; in order to cease feeling anger as an underlying default emotion, we must forgive. It's not easy, but it can be done. And it must. Without this, there is no room for positivity in your life.

How then can you begin to let go of those old resentments by putting compassion (and common sense!) above pride? The first step is to consider the fact that forgiveness is not for the benefit of the person who has wronged you.



It's an ongoing, aspirational form of mindfulness,
and mastering it will only improve your well-being.





Introspection & Self-Improvement

♥ *Identifying & Eliminating Triggers*

This next section encourages you to look inwards, to assess your own triggers, and how they can be minimised.

For some people it this process is relatively simple; for other it's a long and painful process. If it's a path which involves revisiting a lot of hurt, you may well resist. That's probably a sign that's it's vital to your wellbeing that you do navigate your way through the pain - but that you may require professional help to do so.

♥ *Quieting Your Negative Inner Voice*

We all have an inner dialogue, and for many of us that will include a lot of negative language. Described in psychology as the critical inner voice, it can be common and is often self-sabotaging. But this inner voice is not natural - it's learned or imposed from an outside source.

This negative voice is responsible for your lack of confidence and your self-doubt, your Imposter Syndrome, and your self-criticism. It holds you back from striving for your goals, which in turn can prevent self-fulfilment.

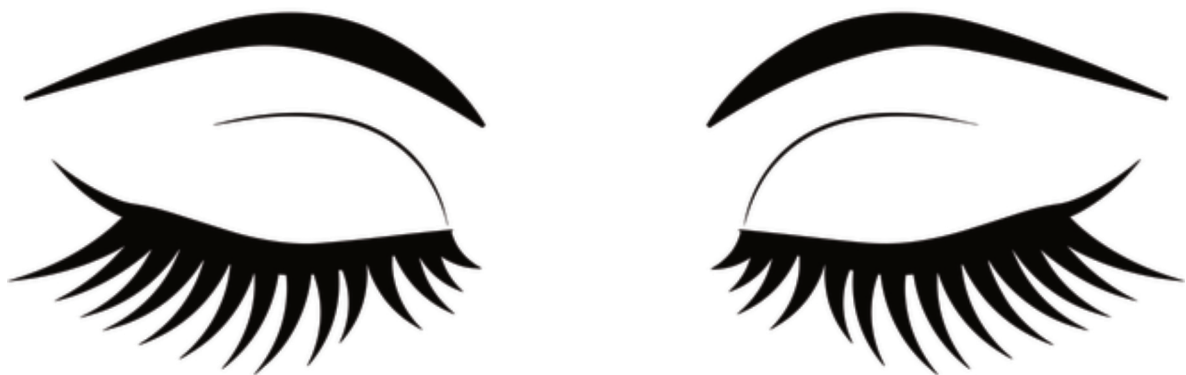




Depending on how severely you're affected by a negative inner voice, quieting this internal enemy is something you may require professional help with. But you can take steps to help yourself, by first identifying the specific criticisms, and then attempting to recognise where they originate from.

Once you've completed the first two steps, you're then in a position to challenge them. Countering the critical voice with rationale and compassion can be very cathartic and help to build up a kinder internal dialogue.

You can also use affirmations to reinforce your new, more gentle inner voice. (Skip forward to start writing your own affirmations.)





♥ *Forgiving Yourself*

The next step in forgiveness is learning to forgive yourself. On the face of it, you may think that's presumptuous of me, but anybody with a conscious has regrets, no matter how small.

Hopefully they're minor, in which case this section will prove fairly straight forward for you.

But for anybody holding onto regrets, it's time to acknowledge them and let them go. Regrets serve no positive purpose, unless we're able to learn from them. So that's what we're going to do.



You may regret decisions you've made, bad behaviours, or treating somebody you care about poorly. Any of these underlying regrets can be enough to have a negative impact on your wellbeing, so it's worth identifying them, thinking about how they can be reframed into a positive or how you can make amends - and therefore *peace* - with them and, ultimately channel your inner Elsa and Let. Them. Go.



When it comes to regrets about the way you've spoken to or treated somebody you care about, the only way to truly overcome that anguish is to tell them you're sorry, hope they forgive you and - either way - forgive yourself.



Once your conscience is clear, you'll find it much easier to stop beating yourself up about a past transgression.





♥ Relationships

It's surprisingly common to have a close friend or family member who you're yet to acknowledge as a negative influence in your life. It can be quite a shock to suddenly realise that a relationship you're deeply invested in is actually destructive.

But if and when that happens, or if you're aware already, then it's really important to learn how to manage that with firm boundaries - especially if it's a relationship which you don't have the option to cut off.

One of the activities in My Positivity Project is designed to get you thinking carefully about which people in your life don't bring you joy and, more pertinently, *why*. It's necessary first to identify who, then how they make you feel, and finally, the trigger for those feelings.





It may be something you can work on yourself, because you may realise that the issue is your own, and has little to do with the other person. For example, you may feel inadequate in their presence, and not because of anything wrong in their behaviour, but perhaps because you feel inferior in some way.

Figuring something like this out is helpful, because it allows you to consider how to move forward positively, perhaps by deciding to take the steps to achieve the thing they have that you envy.





Other times, their behaviour could be the trigger, in which case you may choose to address this in a constructive way that enables you to improve a difficult relationship.

And sometimes, cutting off a relationship *is* the right solution.

As adults, we often feel obligated to maintain relationships that are bad for us, especially where friendships and relatives are concerned. But in ongoing situations where your mental health is suffering and the triggers cannot be stopped, overcome, or otherwise worked through - it's not wrong to put your wellbeing above a toxic relationship.



We all have the right to a peaceful existence.





Wellbeing

There are several key ways to help improve your wellbeing and achieve happiness:

- Purpose
- Acceptance
- Altruism
- Mindset

♥ Purpose

If we have purpose, we have everything we need to keep striving forwards. When we lose purpose we feel lost, and it's easy to spiral into despair. That's one of the reasons that this unprecedented time during which many of us are unable to work or maintain hobbies is going to be so challenging for our mental health.

Purpose can look different to everybody, and it can be big or small, mundane or life-changing - so long as we have something in our life that is driving us, we have a reason to get up in the morning and to live.

The next section encourages you to think about what purpose you have in your life, and how you may be able to build on that.



♥ Acceptance

One of the hardest lessons I've ever learned - and frequently have to *re-learn*, because it's one I struggle with a *lot* - is that:

What other people think of us is none of our business.

Written that way it sounds harsh, but the fact is, when we can make peace with this life lesson, it's incredibly liberating.

There are some people in life who, no matter how hard we try, will never take to us. I've found it incredible tough to accept this, and it's made me try too hard with undeserving people. I've lost sleep over people believing things about me that are simply not true, and I've wasted so much time trying to prove my worth to them.

But the fact is, those people are *not* worth our time - they are *not* our people.





It's hard, but it's necessary to accept sometimes that people will have a bad impression of us that we cannot change. That's life, and it's their loss.

It's also a fantastic opportunity to learn really valuable lesson: take people as you find them, and don't listen to rumours.

Serenity Prayer

*Lord, grant me the serenity to
accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.*





♥ *Acts of Kindness*

One of the simplest and most effective ways to improve your happiness and wellbeing is through altruism.

Spreading kindness around feels good, it increases a sense of community, and it inspires others to do the same. It can also help us to keep a sense of perspective, and therefore promotes a positive outlook. Plus for those of us with children, it's a great way to model desirable behaviours.

Charitable work is rewarding in so many valuable ways.

♥ *Mindset*

We all have an image of ourselves, and a part of our identity may include whether our disposition is generally happy or gloomy.

But, unlike some aspects of our identity, our outlook is something we have a degree of control over. We can choose to gently massage and manipulate our mindset towards a healthier attitude. It takes time and effort, and ongoing practice if it's not your natural default - but, with determination and dedication, it can be done.





Positivity



*Happiness is a choice, positivity is a mindset,
gratitude is the path to both.*



It's easy in this materialistic life of consumerism to always be striving more, bigger, better. But the truth is that happiness is not measured in *things*. Even rich people have mental health issues.

To achieve positivity, we simply need to remember to be grateful for what we have.

It sounds simplistic, but it really is that straight forward: no matter how small or great our problems, when we're ready, we can still make the active choice to appreciate the good in our lives.

Once we've made the decision to claim responsibility for our own attitude, we're half way to becoming more positive. Then it's merely a case of using the correct tools and strategies, and carrying our new skills forward so that they become habit.



Before long, our entire outlook can be turned around.



Practicing gratitude is at the foundation of adopting our new healthier mindset, and that's the focus on the following pages.



Advocacy Cards

For most of us, it can be very difficult to recognise and/or acknowledge our own strengths and qualities. If you found the previous section difficult to complete, then this is especially important for you!

The concept of these care cards is to bridge the gap between how you see yourself and how your loved ones view you.

First, identify the people who you trust most; then hand them a card and ask them to write a favourite memory of the two of you on one side, and your strengths and qualities on the other.



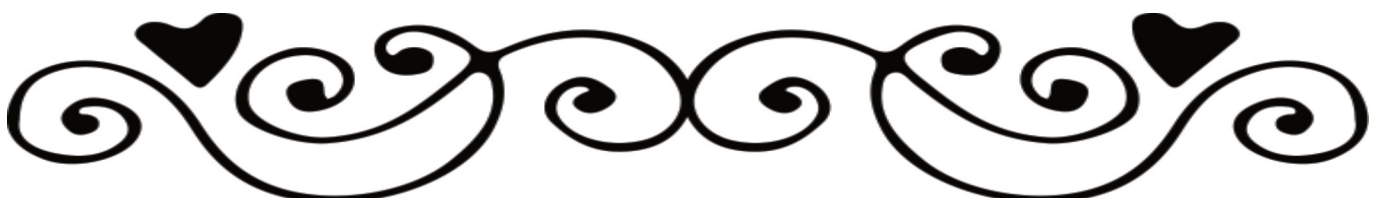
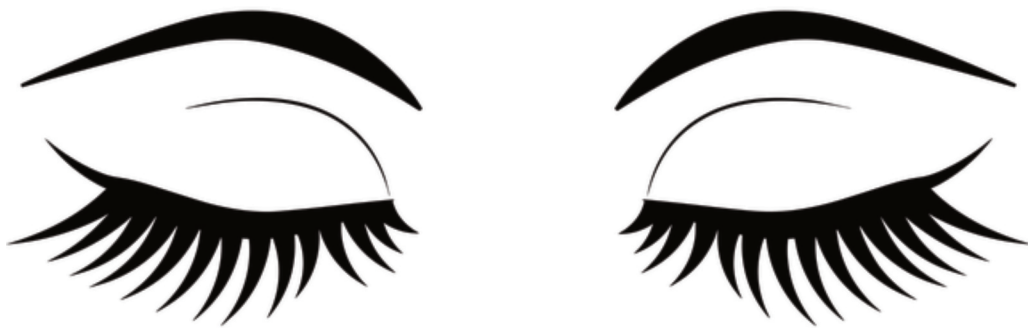


You could pop the card in an envelope to them with a note, or you might like to demonstrate how to use the cards:

Return the favour you're asking of your loved one, with a card listing their most positive traits and the reasons you cherish them.

When you get your cards back, examine the strengths and qualities attributed to you, and note which items on their list are missing from your own.

And be sure to add them to your Affirmations in the next section!





Affirmations

Positivity and happiness is not a destination. Expecting to reach a pinnacle and then maintain it is unwise, because it's not realistic.

Especially if positivity doesn't come naturally to you, if you suffer with anxiety or other mental health issues, or if you're still learning to form healthier habits to reframe your outlook, then it's important to be prepared for setbacks.

Sometimes unexpected financial, health, or relationship problems are thrown up - and all of these things can be enough to leave us unsettled and off-balance. As I mentioned right at the start, having a more positive attitude is dependent upon committing to a new lifestyle. And that means practicing the strategies, and also sometimes having something to fall back on.



Affirmations can be a really powerful way of reinforcing the positive outlook you've worked hard to attain.





Inspiration & Goals: Personal Growth

In this final section we're going to set goals and record achievements.

The idea is to be realistic about achievable lifestyle changes, with a range of objectives. Taken together, they should facilitate helping you feel:

- Positive;
- A sense of purpose;
- Peace;
- A sense of accomplishment;
- Fulfilled.



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Rosenzweig, Reibel, Greeson, Brainard, & Hojat, 2003

Better quality of life

Bruce, Young, Turner, Vander Wal, & Linden, 2002

Cohen & Miller, 2009

Tang et al., 2007

Waelde et al., 2008

Additional benefits

Greason & Cashwell, 2009

Rothaupt & Morgan, 2007