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The Happy
Ladder



SELF-CARE

WHEN WE THINK OF SELF-CARE, often the first thing that comes to mind is taking a hot foamy bath or a day at the spa. Rightfully so, but self-care is much more than indulging ourselves for a moment. Self-care is the core of our wellbeing in all areas of our lives. It is about releasing and reducing stress, taking care of our health, emotional needs, relationships and work-life balance. It ranges from taking the time to take a bath to getting our finances organized or preparing healthy meals.

Self-care is the core of our wellbeing.

Everyone who has been on an airplane has heard this: “Should the cabin lose pressure; oxygen masks will drop from the overhead area. Please place

the mask over your own mouth and nose before assisting others.” If we don’t take care of ourselves, we can’t help anyone else.

Self-care is not self-indulgent, it is essential. We can’t pour from an empty cup. Just like everyone and everything we care for,



Self-care is taking action regularly to reduce stress, maintain our health, wellbeing and happiness.

our bodies and minds need loving attention.

PRIORITISING, PLANNING & PREVENTION

Self-care is not a luxury.

When we are busy, it is easy to overlook ourselves, but this is when it is especially important. Not just to prevent us from burning out: we actually perform better when we take regular breaks.



A study of professional nurses showed that taking regular breaks is beneficial. Due to the nature of the job, patient responsibility, and workload, nurses are at a high risk of fatigue and are poor at taking breaks. Taking days off, finding the time to sit down and eat, meditate, exercise, doing yoga or something else entirely, like salsa dancing or rock climbing, pays off big time, as this ensures lower risk of shoulder, neck and back pain, more work joy, and a better quality of patient care. This applies for other jobs too.

TO KNOW WHAT WE NEED, WE NEED TO KNOW WHO WE ARE

We all have unique personalities with likes and dislikes, values,

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fears, things we're good or bad at, things that motivate us or things we can't stand. Knowing ourselves makes it easier to make choices that are good for us. It prevents us from being overrun by situations, making the same mistakes over and over again, or losing ourselves in a relationship.

Although sometimes painful and emotional, being honest with ourselves about the things we're proud of and the things that we need to work on helps us to figure out what we want from life and to set healthy boundaries.

We can be so busy in our head that we overlook our body.

EXPRESS YOURSELF

Expressing our feelings in writing – journaling – helps us structure our thoughts and deal with our problems and emotions. Describing what we want – and what holds us back – helps us understand what we need to change.

Showing our vulnerability helps create a stronger bond with people close to us. Our experiences might be unique, but our emotions, struggles and imperfections are not. Talking about how we feel can be very liberating. Confessing our darker sides can be a relief, and learning that others are imperfect too can be very comforting.

Our body and mind are strongly linked.

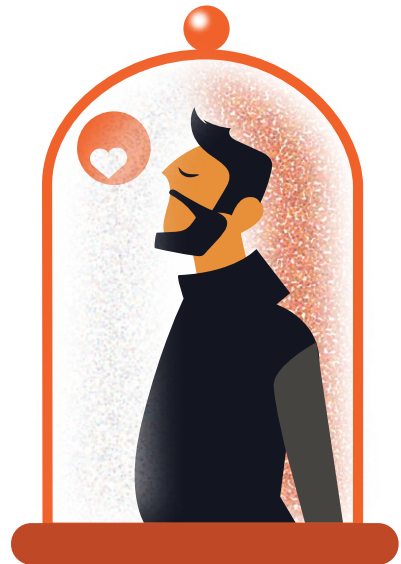
We might like to think so, but people are not psychic and don't know what we like, need and expect without us telling them. If we express what we want, it helps others to support us in our goals.

A HEALTHY DIET

Just like we watch what we eat, we also need to watch what we feed our brain. Too much time on social media or bingeing series can be toxic, but good books and movies open our minds, new things stimulate us, and interesting exhibitions inspire us. Culture connects us to our community, opens the door to others, makes us more tolerant and happier.

MIND-BODY BALANCE

Our body and mind are strongly linked. Taking a walk or eating well improves our mood. We can be so busy in our head that we ignore our body till we get warning signs like a stiff neck or back pain. Apart from training, a top athlete needs the right mind-set to win. Our mind-set – how we think – drives our behaviour. The essence of self-care is the mind-set to care about and for ourselves.





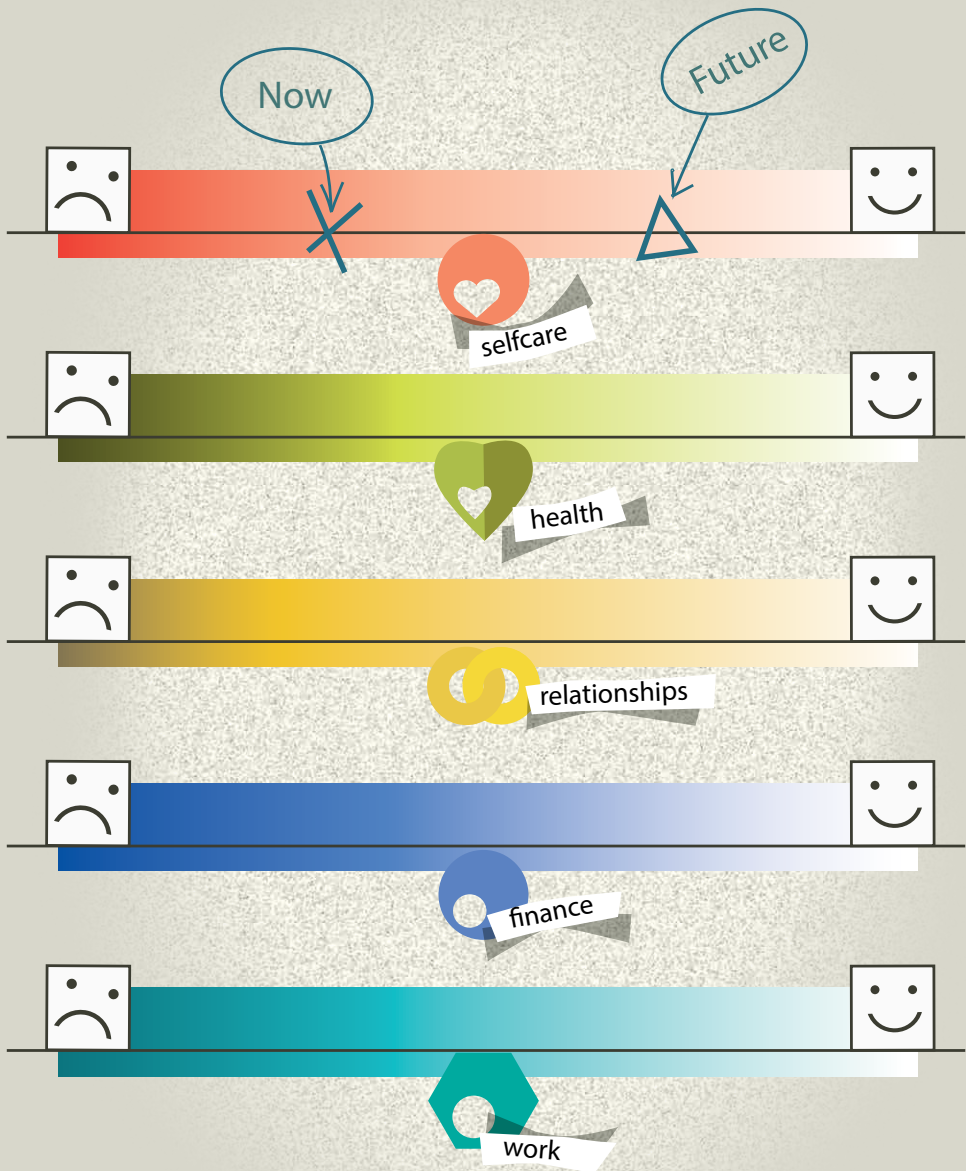
THE LIFE CHART

WHERE DO YOU WANT TO MAKE CHANGES?

THIS IS A USEFUL TOOL to look at different areas of life and assess how you feel about them. Each line represents an area of life. The diagram opposite shows an example. Taking each in turn, give yourself a score for how you feel you are doing right now and mark it with a cross. Think about where you'd like each area to be in 6 months' time. Now mark this with a different shape.

Remember, not everything needs to change!

When you look at your scores, think about what they mean to you. What's going well, what's not? What would be different if you were at your new score? How would you be behaving at your new score? In the example, self-care is scored as not so great. This may mean not having enough time for things you really enjoy, like playing the piano. If you want to move toward the happy smiley face you could plan more time for this. It is really useful to think about what, specifically, you'd like to be different. Instead of "I want to be better at playing the piano" make it specific "I will play for 15 minutes each day". Which section jumps out at you for needing most attention? This might not be where you scored lowest: giving something an ok score and being fine with it is different to scoring something ok that you want to be great.



On page 20 there is a version on stone paper for you to fill in.



JOURNAL PROMPTS

JOURNALING HELPS YOU TO REFLECT ON EVENTS AND FEELINGS. HERE ARE SOME SUGGESTIONS TO HELP YOU START WRITING.

1. HOW AM I LOOKING AFTER MYSELF?
WHAT COULD I IMPROVE?
2. WHEN SOMETHING (RECENTLY) DIDN'T GO MY WAY,
WHAT DID I LEARN?
3. WHAT FEELINGS ARE HOLDING ME BACK FROM GOING
AFTER WHAT I REALLY WANT?
4. WHAT ONE THING CAN I DO NOW THAT WOULD BRING
ME CLOSER TO THE LIFE I WANT?
5. WHAT GIVES ME ENERGY AND WHAT CAN I DO
TO GET MORE OF THAT IN MY LIFE?
6. DO I FOLLOW THE ADVICE I GIVE TO OTHERS?
WHAT ADVICE WOULD I GIVE TO MYSELF?


FOR MORE SUGGESTIONS GO TO THEHAPPYLADDER.ORG OR WRITE WHAT COMES TO MIND.

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal dashed blue lines.

SOMETIMES THE QUESTIONS ARE COMPLICATED AND THE ANSWERS ARE SIMPLE. - DR SEUSS



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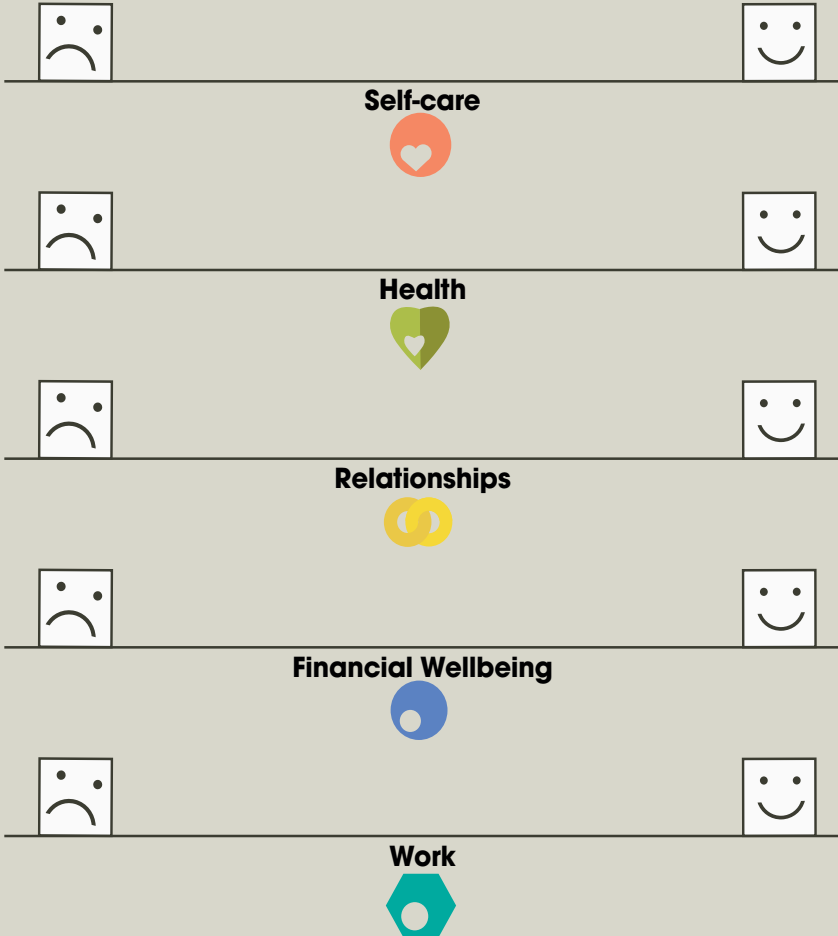
THE GRASS IS ALWAYS GREENER WHERE YOU WATER IT. - NEIL BARRINGHAM





MY LIFE CHART

Where is most important for me to make changes?
See instruction on page 14



Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal dashed blue lines.

**VERY LITTLE IS NEEDED TO MAKE A HAPPY LIFE. IT IS WITHIN YOUR-
SELF, IN YOUR WAY OF THINKING. - MARCUS AURELIUS**



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Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal dashed blue lines.



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A series of horizontal dashed lines for writing.



27th of September 2017: The word self-care was added to the Oxford English Dictionary.

THE GLOBAL WELLNESS MARKET IS VALUED AT OVER \$4.75 TRILLION.

Headspace has had 65 million downloads.

MEDITATION IS 2600 YEARS OLD AND PRACTISED BY 200-500 MILLION PEOPLE WORLDWIDE.

40% of people feel they rarely have time for themselves each day.

1 IN 3 PEOPLE NEVER FLOSS THEIR TEETH.

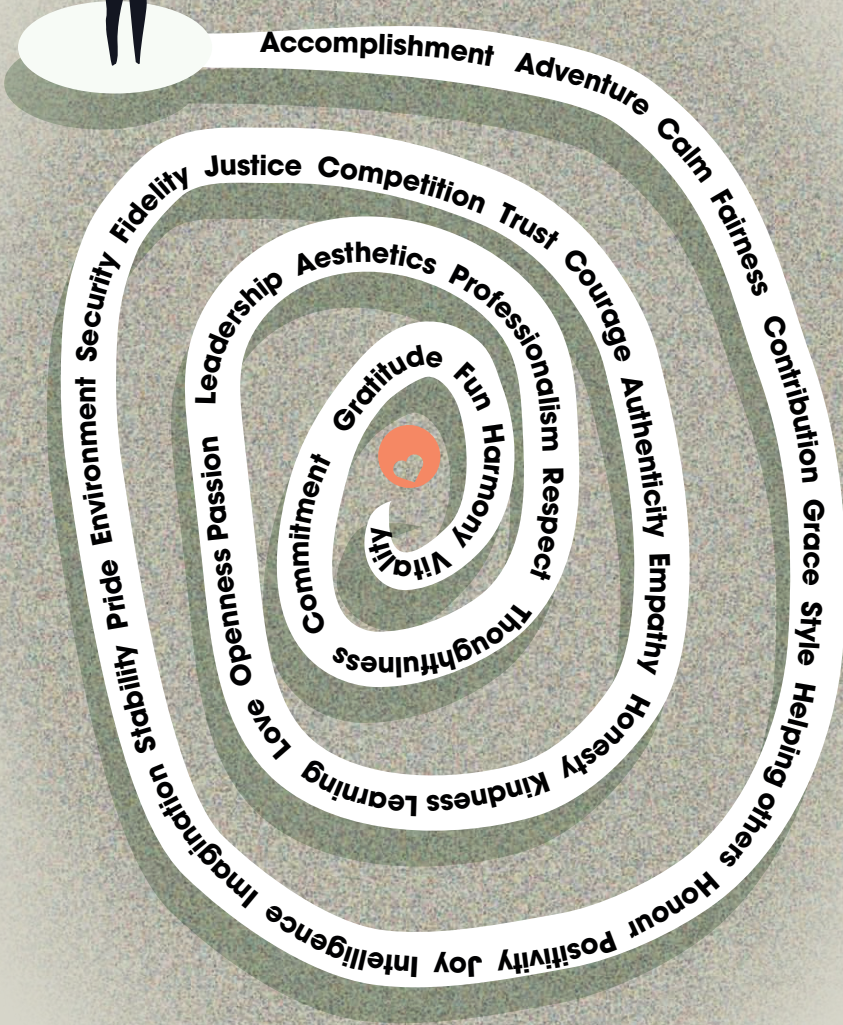
The Netherlands have the lowest burn-out rate in Europe whereas Luxemburg, Slovenia, and France have the highest.

TAKING CARE OF OTHERS IS THE BIGGEST REASON TO SKIP SELF-CARE FOR WOMEN; FOR MEN, IT IS WORK.

13% of people find it hard to wind down on the weekends or evenings.

SAUNA IS A FINNISH WORD — FINLAND HAS 3 MILLION SAUNAS AND A POPULATION OF 5 MILLION.

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WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO YOU?

IMAGINE YOU ARE OUT FOR DINNER, AND AFTER A FANTASTIC EVENING YOUR FRIEND PAYS THE BILL WITHOUT YOU KNOWING. HOW WOULD YOU FEEL?

IT DEPENDS. If you value generosity or kindness, you may be filled with warm feelings towards your friend. On the other hand, you may be disappointed you couldn't demonstrate your generosity by picking up the tab. If fairness is your thing, you may feel a bit of internal conflict. You may be grateful for your friend's generosity, but your fairness value might be poked because you would rather have split the bill. Maybe it tweaks at independence because you didn't want them to pay for you. The point is, how you feel depends on what is most important to you.

These are known as your values, and they are the centre of who you are. They are your personal compass for guiding decisions. When we don't behave in a way that aligns with our values, we tend to feel frustrated and out of balance.

DISCOVERING YOUR VALUES

The key to this exercise is being clear about "What is important to me in life?". Ask yourself the question and write down what comes up. Use one of the stone paper pages to record your thoughts and make your list of personal values.

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If you get stuck, try thinking of these situations:

a) When did you feel at your very best? How did you feel? What happened to make you feel like this? What values had been present?

b) Now go in the opposite direction: When were you angry, frustrated or upset? What was going on? What values were not being met?

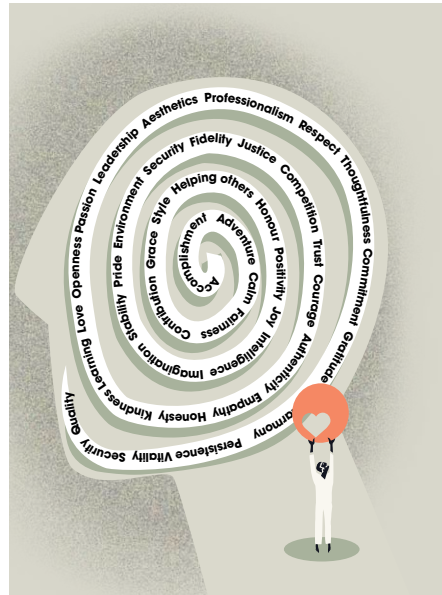
Here are some ideas. Don't feel limited by them. Add in anything you want or look at *thehappy ladder.org* for more.

Accomplishment	Drive	Honesty	Positivity
Accountability	Empathy	Honour	Professionalism
Accuracy	Empowerment	Imagination	Protecting the
Acknowledgement	Enthusiasm	Independence	Environment
Adventure	Equality	Innovation	Pride
Aesthetics	Ethical	Inspiring others	Quality
Altruism	Excellence	Integrity	Recognition
Authenticity	Expertise	Intelligence	Respect
Autonomy	Fairness	Joy	Responsibility
Calm	Family	Justice	Security
Collaboration	Fidelity	Kindness	Sincerity
Commitment	Flexibility	Leadership	Spirituality
Compassion	Freedom	Learning	Spontaneity
Competition	Friendship	Love	Stability
Contribution	Fun	Openness	Style
Courage	Generosity	Organisation	Thoughtfulness
Creativity	Grace	Originality	Tolerance
Curiosity	Gratitude	Passion	Trust
Determination	Harmony	Patience	Truthfulness
Discipline	Helping others	Persistence	Vitality

The next step is to group things into categories that are similar, for example, honesty, integrity, and truthfulness. For each category, choose the word you feel most strongly about.

Think about what values are essential to your life. Your goal is to get to 5-10 core values.

At this point, it is useful to take a break and leave this exercise for a while. Maybe even sleep on it.



Review the list. Do your values feel consistent with who you are and want to be?

The last step is to turn your values into actions that you can live by. For example, if kindness is a value, how do you want to express that in your life? Your statement could be “Be kind, always”, or “Always be kinder than necessary” or “Always do or say the kindest thing”. Whatever words feel right for you.

Do this for each of your values. Now you have your personal manifesto to live by.



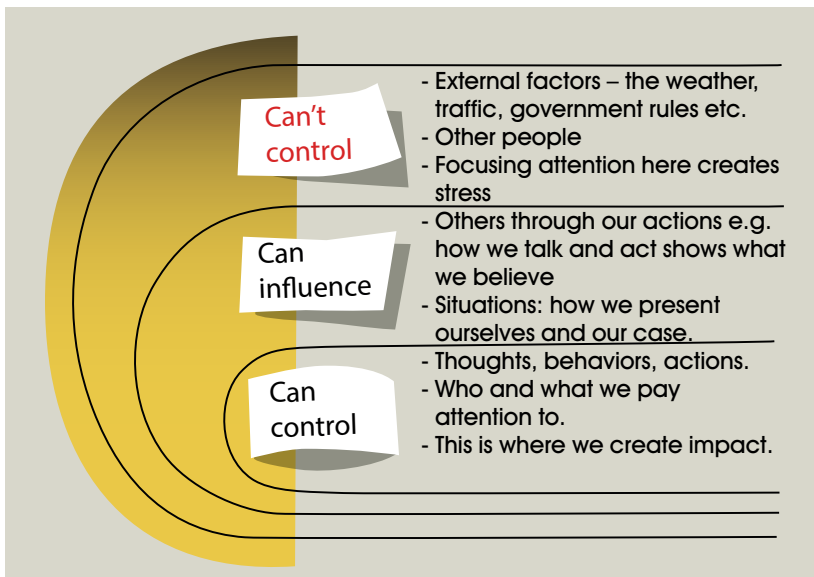
- 1.** MEDITATION HAS BEEN PROVEN TO BE ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE TOOLS FOR MANAGING STRESS, IMPROVING OUR MOOD, CONCENTRATION, AND CREATIVITY. JUST 10 MINUTES A DAY CAN BENEFIT BOTH BODY AND MIND.
- 2.** RESEARCH REVEALS THAT OUR EMOTIONS ARE EXPERIENCED THROUGH THE BODY. AFTER DIFFICULT MEETINGS OR EMOTIONAL ENCOUNTERS, SHAKE IT OFF. BREATHE IN AND OUT A FEW TIMES AND SHAKE YOUR BODY.
- 3.** SCIENCE SHOWS THAT RITUALS ARE USEFUL TO DEAL WITH COMPLEX EMOTIONS. CREATING A RITUAL FOR SOMETHING THAT MAKES US NERVOUS HELPS US GET OUR NERVES UNDER CONTROL AND MAKES US FEEL MORE CONFIDENT AND EVEN PERFORM BETTER.
- 4.** NEW RESOLUTIONS STICK BETTER WHEN THEY ARE MADE EASY. USE THE TIMER ON YOUR PHONE TO REMIND YOU TO DRINK WATER OR TO GET UP AND STRETCH OR DOWNLOAD AN APP TO HELP YOU MASTER MEDITATION.
- 5.** HUMOUR IS PROVEN TO BE A COPING MECHANISM THAT HELPS US TO GAIN PERSPECTIVE AND A SENSE OF CONTROL. WATCHING, LISTENING TO, OR READING SOMETHING WE FIND FUNNY IS A GREAT WAY TO RELEASE STRESS. UPLIFTING CONTENT MAKES US FEEL BETTER, AND IT MAKES US HEALTHIER.



CIRCLES OF CONTROL

MANY OF US SEEK CERTAINTY AND CONTROL TO HELP US FEEL CALM. HOWEVER, WHILE WE CAN PLAN, PREPARE AND INFLUENCE, THERE ARE MANY THINGS THAT WE CANNOT CONTROL.

THE THINGS WE CAN CONTROL are our thoughts and behaviour. We can choose what we do. We can choose how we respond. We can choose what to take action on, what that action will be, and what we will not do. We can choose who we pay attention to and what we will ignore. Focusing on what we can control enables us to be much more effective at managing stress than if we focus on things we can't control.





REFRAMING

HOW WE THINK ABOUT A SITUATION HAS A HUGE IMPACT ON HOW WE FEEL ABOUT IT.

IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT, our emotions jump in first and we feel angry, shocked, delighted, etc., and only after this do our rational thoughts catch up. However, it is usual that our first thoughts are tied up with our emotions. We should accept that our initial thoughts may not be accurate.

Reframing can help us think about a situation from another point of view. It can help us see other ways of solving a problem, see possibilities we hadn't considered, or perhaps look at whether our reaction is helpful.

Questions to help reframe:

- How else could I see this?
- What is the most generous interpretation I could give?
- What would I say to a friend in this situation?
- What else could I do?

Challenging ourselves to look at something differently can help us see opportunities we had previously missed, treat others with more kindness, and feel less anger about something that has upset us.