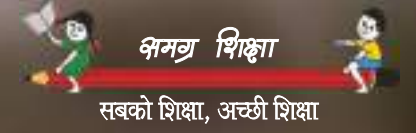
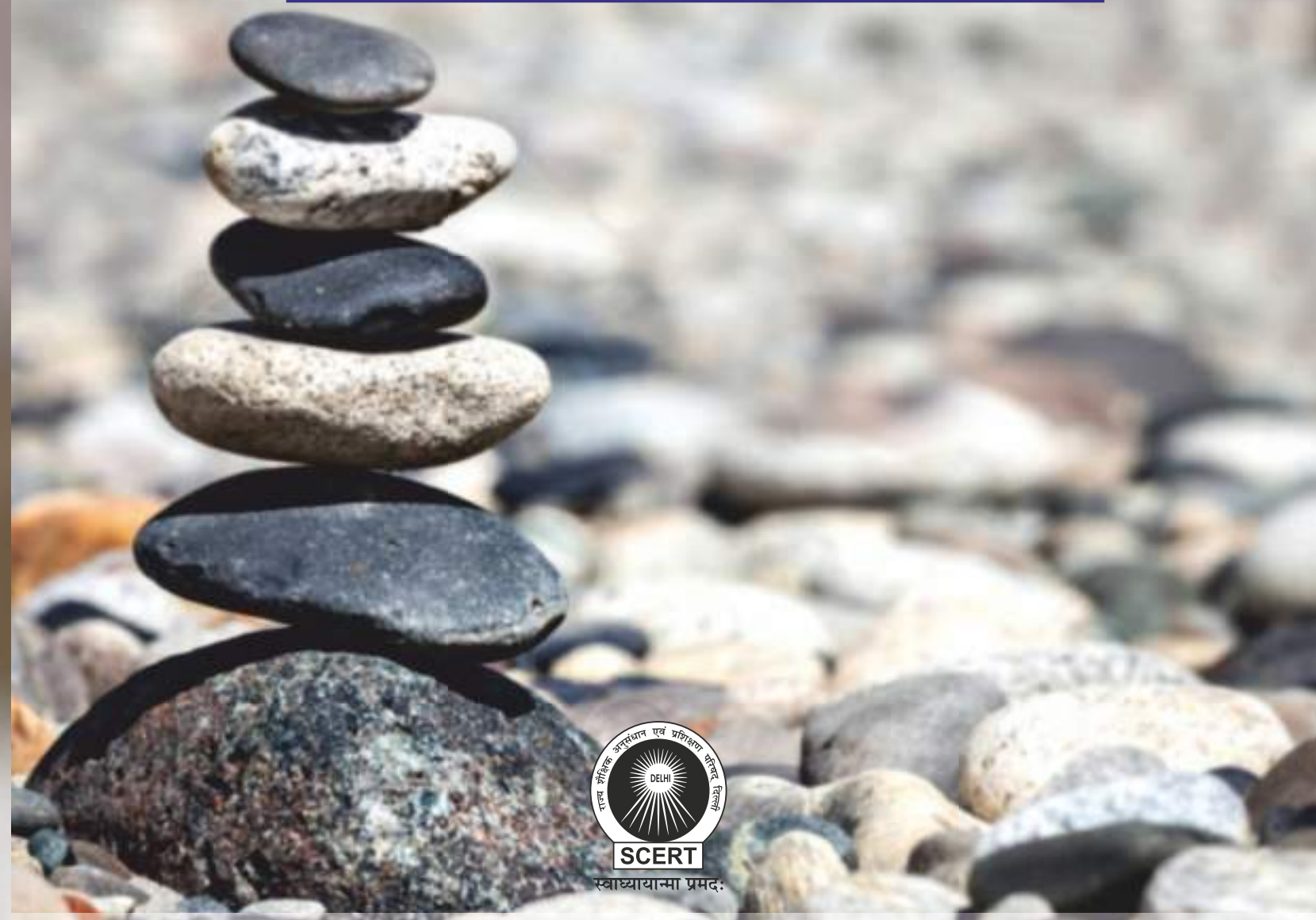


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# DISTRESS TO DE-STRESS!



स्वाध्यायान्मा प्रमदः



स्वाध्यायान्मा प्रमदः

State Council of Educational Research & Training  
Varun Marg, Defence Colony, New Delhi - 110024

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# **DISTRESS TO DE-STRESS!**

**A Stress Management Handbook for Teachers.**

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**Message**

Teachers are the strength of any education system. We recognize their efforts and struggle in improving the learning levels of the students. Their mental health is our priority. With the outbreak of the pandemic, the stress level has increased in the lives of teachers. This Teachers' Workbook is an initiative from State Council of Education Research and Training to comfort our teachers to develop effective skills to deal with stress that will ultimately help to enhance their productivity. This is a small endeavor to ease the stress from the life of our teachers

Stress is not an unknown word. Its effect and impact on our mental health is something that we take lightly. The workbook "Distress to De-stress" caters to this issue by first creating awareness about stress and at the same time suggesting simple management exercises to enhance our skills to improve our mental health. The importance of mental health is recognized globally. It's a sad state that we don't prioritize our mental health. This workbook helps us to understand the importance of mental health with respect to stress and how to overcome challenges. This workbook provides strategies to improve our mental health and is designed as a self-help book to retrospect our stressors. It will help the teachers to create a healthy version of themselves.

I extend my heartiest congratulations to Ms Shilpa Sud , Project Coordinator and her entire team who have put strenuous effort in the development of this Teacher's Workbook.

*All the best !*

  
(Rajanish Singh)  
Director





**Dr. Nahar Singh**  
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### Message

Teachers have been an important pillar of the education system. The pandemic has brought a paradigm shift in the teaching style. We are indebted to our teachers for working so hard during these tough times. This has empowered learners with virtual knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to make informed decisions.

Stress is caused in our life due to work, family issues, health issues and uncertainty about life which make it even more important to deliver this workbook to teachers and other stakeholders. Stress is not any unknown concept but something that we undermine or understate. We use the word stress so casually in our daily life that we underestimate its role in our life. This workbook sheds light on all grey areas of stress and how we can manage it. The ultimate aim of the workbook is to create a stress-free zone for teachers. Taking care of teachers' mental health is our top most priority.

Stress is intertwined with physical and psychological aspects. It explains both aspects with the problem-focused mechanism. The workbook aims to be teachers' go-to book to deal with their daily hassle and to enhance their work-life balance. This is a small initiative by SCERT, Delhi to reduce the increasing stress level prevalent in our society.

My best compliments are hereby extended to the Project Coordinator and the entire team for the successful completion of this teachers' workbook which is an outstanding and exclusive initiative in the field of education.

With best wishes.

Dr. Nahar Singh  
Joint Director (Academic)

## PREFACE

This workbook can be used by any individual but it is specially designed for teachers. Teachers are a big asset to the education system. This workbook increases self-awareness about stress and its impact on mental health. The workbook includes several scientific activities to break myths regarding stress.

The workbook has been created in a way such that it is most effective when you speak back to it. Do your best in involving yourself in the reflective questions given throughout the book! The workbook best serves its purpose if you take your time with it. Even if that means going through one section every day for the next fortnight - that's perfectly okay. Just keep internalizing whatever you're reading and bringing to daily habits. For just as stress is experienced, similarly stress management is experientially realized through practice.

Stress weakens our emotional equilibrium and our physical health. But for some individuals, an optimal level acts as a motivator whereas for some individuals every level affects their productivity. Hence, one activity or exercise that works beautifully for an individual may not show the effect on others. The set of activities shared in this workbook will help you create your own sub-set of personalized activities which are best suited to you.

We learn more from experiential learning empirically so we should try these activities wholeheartedly. The workbook best serves its purpose if you explore yourself with it. There is no right or wrong way. These exercises and tools are not a substitute for any psychological screening or diagnosis. These are scientifically validated activities for your personal upkeep.

Finally, the teachers are free to take any of the suggested learnings for their personal or professional use, including directly picking up elements from this workbook.

May this exploration yield your newer insights about yourself and the pathway to a de-stressed life!

SHILPA SUD  
CO-ORDINATOR



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## WORD GRID: A SMALL EXERCISE TO GET STARTED

This workbook is less about preaching & teaching and more about your interactions with it. In that spirit, let's begin with a small interactive activity. Spot at least 15 words in the grid given below, that relates to stress:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1	A	C	T	A	R	M	H	J	K	F	P	R	E	S	S	U	R	E	T	K
2	C	O	N	S	E	Q	U	E	N	C	E	S	Y	R	J	K	S	Q	I	B
3	S	F	E	A	R	E	R	C	A	R	T	U	Y	K	L	X	Y	R	B	X
4	U	B	T	S	O	A	T	T	E	N	T	I	O	N	E	G	C	A	P	E
5	P	O	E	T	U	R	G	R	A	T	I	T	U	D	E	K	O	C	E	N
6	P	O	E	M	P	A	T	H	Y	E	A	U	T	O	N	Y	N	O	R	S
7	O	F	O	C	U	S	L	L	A	A	O	R	A	T	F	U	N	M	F	A
8	T	I	W	O	R	R	Y	V	L	R	T	V	K	W	Z	B	E	V	E	N
9	T	O	O	T	G	S	R	C	O	N	T	E	N	T	M	E	N	T	C	G
10	O	R	N	V	F	M	E	D	I	E	S	M	R	C	X	A	T	D	T	E
11	V	S	R	K	A	B	N	S	L	R	T	P	F	R	I	E	N	D	I	R
12	E	A	S	S	T	P	R	O	C	R	A	S	T	I	N	A	T	I	O	N
13	R	T	O	E	I	V	I	S	L	I	T	T	K	W	C	R	Y	Q	N	B
14	W	R	P	D	G	N	C	E	T	U	Y	H	L	B	L	A	D	R	I	X
15	H	R	U	R	U	D	H	A	L	R	A	Y	Y	S	H	I	K	E	S	C
16	E	U	L	L	E	M	E	E	R	C	U	R	I	O	U	S	I	T	M	E

(Words are arranged top-down & left-right)

If you found more than 15 words – *Great Job! You found more words than we expected!!!*

If you found between 10-15 words – *Bravo! You put in some great effort!!!*

If you found less than 10 words – *Good Solo Attempt! Involve your family to find more!!!*

All the words used in the grid above and many more similar words are not new to us. Rather, many of them have become an even more integral part of our life since Covid-19. Most of these words are somewhere relevant to a stressful life and are what will be explored throughout this workbook. So, now let's get into this workbook to understand and manage what we call, Stress!!

*(To check the complete list of words and the solved grid, please go to Appendix I.)*





# **BECOMING AWARE ABOUT STRESS**

## THE STARTING POINT: HOW STRESSED ARE WE?

*“If you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it!” - Lord Kelvin*

Let us begin our journey from distress to de-stress by measuring our own perceived stress level. Given below is the “Perceived Stress Scale” (PSS) by Sheldon Cohen. PSS is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress.

### PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE

The questions in PSS asks about feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, you will be asked to assign number to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way.

Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often
0	1	2	3	4

### Questions

1. \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
2. \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?
3. \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?
4. \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
5. \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?
6. \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?
7. \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?
8. \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?
9. \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?
10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

*1. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is a classic stress assessment instrument. The tool, while originally developed in 1983, remains a popular choice for helping us understand how different situations affect our feelings and our perceived stress.*



## Determining Your Perceived Stress Score

1. First, reverse your scores for questions 4, 5, 7, and 8. On these 4 questions, change the scores like this:  
 $0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1, 4 = 0.$
2. Now add up your scores for each item to get a total. My total score is \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Individual scores on the PSS can range from 0 to 40 with higher scores indicating higher perceived stress.

## Understanding Your Perceived Stress Score<sup>2</sup>

The scores on the following self-assessment do not reflect any particular diagnosis or course of treatment. They are meant as a tool to help assess your level of stress.

1. Scores ranging from 0-13 would be considered low stress.
2. Scores ranging from 14-26 would be considered moderate stress.
3. Scores ranging from 27-40 would be considered high perceived stress.

## Reflection

After knowing your score what are the immediate thoughts and feelings that come to you? Express freely in the space below as if you're communicating with a friend (if the space is less, there is also space for writing at the end of this workbook):

### MY REFLECTION

## The Good News!

No matter what your stress score is, don't get stressed! Each of us have different stressors in our life and a score doesn't indicate our phenomenal potential to overcome it. This workbook has been designed to help you realize that potential and bring along with it a lot more smiles (both for you and people around you). So, smile, my friend! You deserve it.

The scores on the above self-assessment do not reflect any particular diagnosis or course of treatment. They are meant as a tool to help assess your level of stress. If you have any specific concerns about your current well-being, please contact a certified medical professional.



*Let us now begin understanding a little more about this perceived villain of our life, 'STRESS'! through a case study. The story of one of our colleagues: Mrs. Paramjeet Kaur.*

## **PARAMJEET KAUR: A TEACHER'S LIFE STORY**

Paramjeet Kaur<sup>1</sup>, an elementary school Maths teacher, heard her WhatsApp beep distract her again just as she had finally sat down after a stressful day. It was her H.O.S., Mrs. Mehta, who had just sent her the “The Stress Management Workbook” asking to work with it and give her feedback on it by the end of the month. “A new task! Doesn't she know I have enough to deal with already?”, she exclaimed. After having spent the past 4 hours straining herself over online classes where her internet was slow, Paramjeet was already stressed enough. Ruminating in the thoughts of how miserable her life had become, she heard her son Angad playing football in the house. “STOP – YOU'LL BREAK SOMETHING. DON'T YOU GET IT!”, she mindlessly shouted. As Angad cryingly left, Paramjeet too had tears in her eyes. She knew her anger was not on Angad but on her own life. She was stressed and didn't know what to do.

### **Paramjeet's Background**

Paramjeet, 35 years old, belongs to Kanpur. At 23, she got married to Rahul, a businessman and shifted to Delhi with him. Together, they live in a 2BHK with their 10-years-old daughter Jasmine and a 6-years-old son Angad. Her in-laws stay with Rahul's elder brother who is also based out of Delhi.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Paramjeet's job, the 1<sup>st</sup> COVID lockdown was announced. It was tough for her right from the 1st month with her maid going on indefinite leave, Rahul's parents shifting to their small house and she being deployed on Covid duty. To add to her woes, all classes were shifted online – a medium she had difficulty handling. But being a sincere and committed person, she managed to fulfil all her personal and professional duties, often at the cost of her own health. She even went out of her way to help her students with data recharges to ensure their studies continued seamlessly.

But in Sept 2021, when one of her colleagues, Disha, was recognized for her “COVID time contributions” through the State Teachers Award, she felt unappreciated and angry. Not only did her frustration prevent her from learning about what Disha had actually done, it spilled over to other parts of her life. In one such instance when Rahul said, “Now you don't even have to travel to school every day, what's causing so much stress?”, she burst into anger. Misinterpreting Rahul's concern as sarcasm, she reacted, “You don't love me. No one does. Please leave me alone”. Rahul left the room feeling sorry and concerned for his wife. He wished she openly expressed her emotions more.

### **January 2022**

“This unending uncertainty will kill me!”, muttered Paramjeet as she heard the news of schools going back to online mode. Later that day she started working with the “Stress Management. Playbook”. As she filled the initial survey, she wasn't at all surprised to find that her perceived stress score was high.

---

<sup>1</sup> The story, characters and incidents portrayed in this production are purely fictional.

## Reflection Questions

Now that you have gone through the life of Paramjeet Kaur, you must have found some elements of distress in her life. Take some moments and think of all the different reasons or causes for her distress. Use the space given below to pen down your thoughts.

### MY REFLECTION

## STRESS: MYTHS & MISCONCEPTIONS

*“The myths that we accept as reality, tend to destroy us” - Anonymous*

Whether it is Paramjeet’s life or our own life, a fact can never be ignored that all of us have our own perception of stress and ways to handle or face them. But along with individual differences in understanding of stress, there are many common misconceptions about stress too. For instance, quite often stress is linked to external major events while the truth is that one doesn’t require to have a major event to go through stress. Even daily hassle can lead to stress!

Just being aware of the truth and facts might prove to be a significant step towards understanding and conceptualising stress. In this section, you will find some of the most commonly or frequently used statements for stress. Some of them are facts and some of them are just myths. It’s time to no them!

*In the box given below you will find some statements related to stress. Read them carefully and write, in the box given against each statement “M” if you think it is a myth, “F” if you think it is a fact and “N” if you are not sure.*

Stress is only in the mind and there is no effect on the physical health.	
Stress score for an individual cannot be altered.	
Stress is directly proportional to the number of circumstances a person is handling.	
Stress cannot be avoided but it can be controlled and managed.	
Stress is always bad for our health.	
Stress comes from thoughts about the circumstances and circumstances themselves.	
Stress is same for those facing similar situations in their lives.	
Stress management techniques prove beneficial over a period of time when woven around the life style.	
No physical symptoms, no stress.	
Stress always affects our performance adversely.	

*(You may discuss the statements with your family and friends. To check the accuracy of your answers you may refer to APPENDIX 2)*

### Reflection Question

Now that you have gone through Paramjeet’s story and understood facts and myths related to it. It’s time to reflect upon your “Perceived Stress Score” and figure out some of the reasons for your own stress. Irrespective of whether the score was low, medium or high what contributed to that score? Think deeply and reflect on what are the triggers, reasons and causes? Use the space given below to pen down your thoughts.

#### MY REFLECTION

A large, empty rectangular box with a light pink background, intended for writing a reflection.

## UNDERSTANDING STRESS: WHAT CAUSES IT?

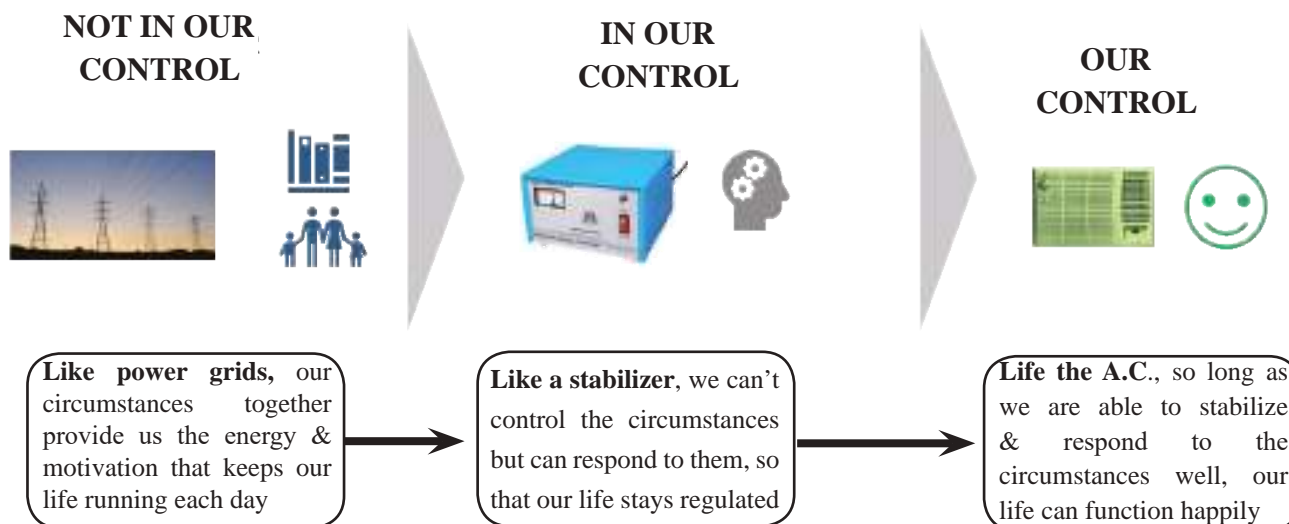
*“When you change the way you look at things; the things you look at change” - Wayne Dyer*

After reading about Paramjeet’s life and reflecting on our own life, it’s time now to delve deeper into understanding the real cause of stress. To facilitate this understanding, let’s use the analogy of a common appliance used in several homes these days - The AC (Air Conditioner).

Every AC needs constant electricity flow to function. However, too often there are unanticipated electricity fluctuations which puts the AC in danger of damage. To ensure smooth functioning of the AC, an intermediate equipment called the ‘Stabilizer’ is installed to regulate the incoming electricity. The stabilizer ensures that irrespective of fluctuations, the AC functions happily. It’s only when the stabilizer is absent that the AC risks getting damaged.

If you think about life, it is not too different from that AC. The electricity is similar to the circumstances in life. Our job, our family etc. give us the necessary input (or motivation) needed to function. Without them, our life might become purposeless. Circumstances become the cause of stress when our “inner stabilizer” is unable to cope with the changes in them. In other words, circumstances in our life don’t have the power to stress & strain us as long as we have the capacity to stabilize whatever life throws at us.

This state of having control over responses, leads to a positive state of mind called ‘**Eustress**’. It is when you lose the capacity to stabilize, that you end up in stress often called ‘**Distress**’.



Eustress helps to find the seed of opportunities in adversities and to respond accordingly while distress leads to habitual reactions. In Eustress one copes with circumstances but in Distress one resigns to circumstances.

The Perceived Stress Scale score is a reflection of how well the stabilizer of your life is working. The worse the working, the greater is the perceived stress. This stress directly links not just with your psychological state but also with your physical state. Stress is often reflected in symptoms like backpain, headache, insomnia etc. So, it is important that we understand and overcome it.

The 1<sup>st</sup> step towards overcoming stress is therefore to understand this inner stabilizer. Once we understand what our stabilizer is, we’ll also be able to understand how to manage stress.

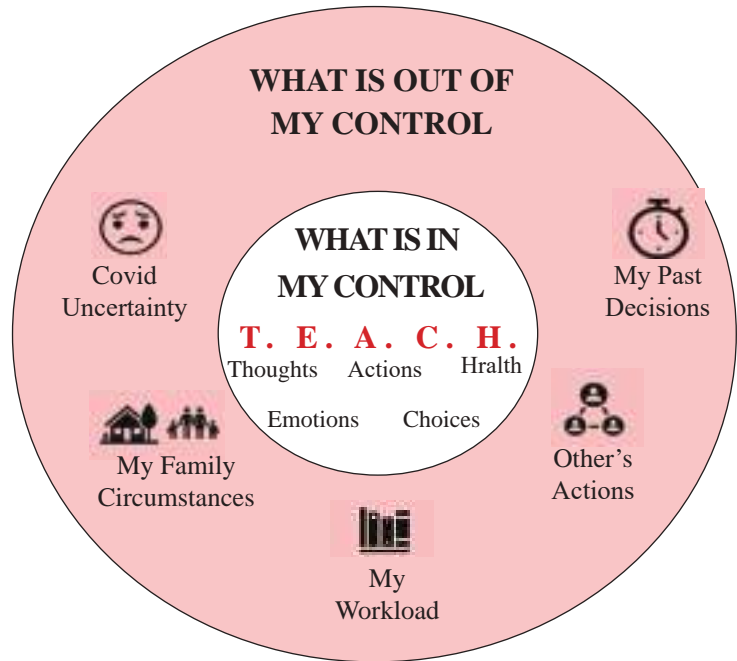


## STRESS MANAGEMENT: WHAT'S OUR STABILIZER?

*“The truth is that stress doesn’t come from your boss, your kids, your spouse, traffic jams, health challenges, or other circumstances. It comes from your thoughts about your circumstances.” —Andrew Bernstein*

Have you ever noticed what happens to the interior of a potato, an egg and a coffee bean when they are boiled? The potato becomes softer, the egg solidifies and the bean becomes fragrant. Despite the circumstances being same, the end results are different. Similar is our life and the circumstances around it. It is in the way in which we respond to circumstances that gives them meaning. Legends like Gandhi and Kalam have exemplified the human abilities to turn circumstantial stressors into productive and progressive responses. There might be several other people who may have faced similar circumstances but might have given up. Each of our lives too have these two elements: **Our Circumstances (or Stressors)** and **Our Responses**.

Circumstances which include our surrounding environment, people, workload etc. are often not in our control. After all, Paramjeet had no control over COVID or Mrs. Mehta’s expectations. However, something that was in her control was what she thought, how she acted and the choices she made including prioritizing her health. The infographic above puts these two elements into the two concentric circles of life. The infographic simply re-emphasizes on the point that in the same circumstances it is possible to live a life of **distress or de-stress**.



To make the infographic more comprehensible, let’s take some examples from our immediate context and see how greater control over the inner circle can turn stressors into triggers of positive thoughts and actions.

**DISTRESS:** *God knows, when this COVID will end? My life is ruined.*

**DE-STRESS:** *How can I use this opportunity I save in travelling to take care of health!*

**DISTRESS:** *Why are my children so mischievous? I have no ‘Me’ time.*

**DE-STRESS:** *What activity can I do along with children to get ME time in our time.*

**DISTRESS:** *Why did I choose this career? I am stuck with it.*

**DE-STRESS:** *This career has provided me an opportunity to help more children.*

**DISTRESS:** *Does Sir/Madam have to assign every work to me? How will I do so much work?*

**DE-STRESS:** *I have never been good at prioritization. This is a great chance!*

The examples shown in the previous page are just a few of the many circumstantial stressors that we all have faced during or before the pandemic. Depending on how we respond, those stressors either lead to **distress or de-stress**. Now, it's time again to reflect and look deeper into your own life and write about some of the immediate circumstantial pressures around you and how you look at them. Can you think of them in a different light now, the positive one!!

### MY REFLECTION

The space in the workbook till now was simply dedicated to understanding stress. In the journey till here we learnt several things about the causes of stress, the myths around them and how circumstances can become both the cause for the stress and the motivation for a positive life. We now summarize the learnings till now through a fun interview that somewhere we take internally almost every day!!

## AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. STRESSOR

Please note while the chosen characters and their looks are purely fictional, the story may not be unfamiliar to any one of us. Let's take a look at an interview being given by Mr. Stressor for becoming a part of the organization called 'Life'!



At this point the boss felt curious to know more about this applicant delving deeper into the various elements of his personality!



The boss was both confused and intrigued to know more of how a stressor can lead to a scenario of it 'not causing problems. And so, he asked....



The boss was both glad and relieved knowing that there's no reason to be afraid of stressors so long as he is able to respond to them positively. He had no choice but to hire the applicant since stressors are inevitable.



The upcoming section of the manual is meant to help gain control over stress and discover our inner stabilizer of stress. This section is the core playground of the manual to help us move from distress to eustress. As the boss said, "You are hired", this section will help us understand how best to use the various stressors in our life (that are inevitable) to make positive out of negative and hope out of despair. It is where you will find tools and strategies to not just go through your circumstances but grow through them playfully and confidently.

# STRESS MANAGEMENT

INFOGRAPHIC



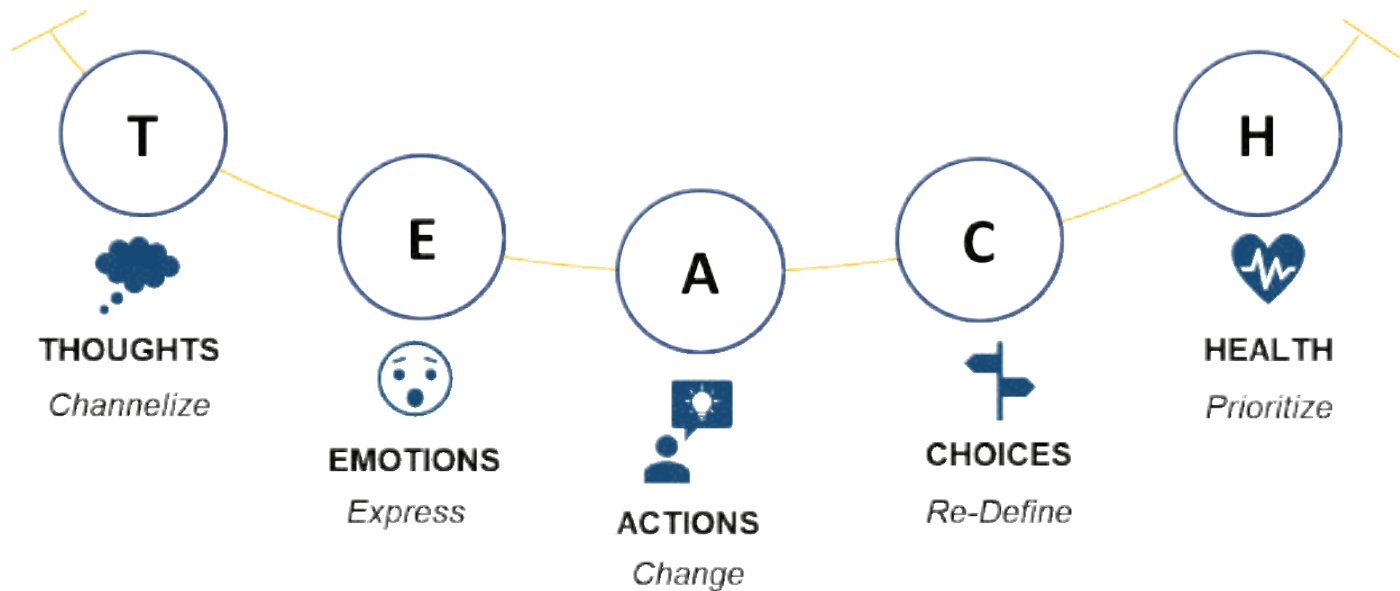
## STRESS MANAGEMENT THE PLAYGROUND



## STRESS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES - WHY TO ADOPT THEM?

*Life is a playground, we are the players, and to win, all we need to learn is to T.E.A.C.H.*

The ability to take control of life is not reserved for few but is available to all of us who can think, feel and act. Events will never stop taking place but our responses to them have an ability to change the outcomes. When we take a deeper look at our inner concentric circle of control, we may find that the resources for our responses lie in our Thoughts, Emotions, Actions, Choices and Health, i.e. our T.E.A.C.H.



If we are able to gradually take control over our T.E.A.C.H., we may turn stressors in our life into a friend from a foe. All the interventions discussed henceforth are intended to provide you with some simple and effective strategies to begin taking control over your T.E.A.C.H. to combat distress and magnify de-stress in our life.

The following section will bring different means and methods to address each of the above pillars. As you go through the interventions given in the next section, keep in mind the following:

- ❖ **Integrity:** Being honest to yourself – try the practices not to complete the workbook but with sincere motivation. Only then, can the practices bring you the desired result.
- ❖ **Consistency:** Being consistent and make an effort to do it as often as possible. Consistency is key for any intervention to bring change to life.
- ❖ **Scheduling:** It helps to be consistent with your timings if you want to be persistent with a practice. Make a note of it in your calendar.
- ❖ **Personalizing:** Find the techniques that are most effective for you and can be done in your surroundings.

## THOUGHTS: MASTERING THEM

*“We become what we think about most of the time, and that’s the strangest secret.”*

**-Earl Nightingale**

Let’s do a short exercise for a moment. Think of the image of a pink elephant. Picture the elephant in a jungle like environment with trees all around it. Now make it also eat bananas. If you wish you can close your eyes and conjure up these thoughts for the next 30 seconds.

How was your experience doing this short exercise? Were you able to do it? Did this small exercise make you realize something?

### MY REFLECTION

If you look back at the activity, you’ll definitely realize that, you can become the master of the thoughts that you create and engage with whenever we want. But too often we enter phases where we seem to lose this mastery. This section is designed to help you find & implement those tools that can help you master your thoughts, even when circumstances seem to become difficult and challenging.

*Let’s start this section by taking a break. A simple STOP. And see how stopping can sometimes become the pathway to peace!*

## PRACTICE 1: S.T.O.P.

Let's do a small exercise for the next 5 minutes. Here are the steps to do this exercise - do read them carefully before you start. The time given for each step are approximate! If possible, once you've gone through the instructions, do the exercise with closed eyes.



**Step 1 ~1 minute**  
Stop and observe: Notice what are your thoughts right now and then notice how your body feels.



**Step 2 ~2 minutes**  
Now take 5 deep breaths mindfully as you observe the air coming into and out of your body.



**Step 3 ~1 minute**  
Now expand your awareness to observe the body, the sounds you hear & smells you sense.



**Step 4 ~1 minute**  
Proceed mindfully with full awareness of the next action you take.

How do you feel after doing this exercise for just 5 minutes?

**MY REFLECTION**

If you did try this short exercise, chances are that like most of the people, you would feel slightly more relaxed and in control. In our daily life, we often get into overthinking, even when it is not needed (or productive) and find ourselves clueless about how to get out of it or proceed to what's important. In fact, overthinking is both a symptom and a cause for stress. As the wise men say, it's always better to nip the evil in the bud and S.T.O.P.

is that weapon which can nip the evil of stress easily and effectively. S.T.O.P. is a simple technique to break the chain of thoughts thus helping you take back the control of your thoughts, as and when, you want to! In its literal sense it is an acronym which stands for immediate on the spot actions to get back the awareness to present and navigate our thoughts rather than swaying down with them.

Once you get your thought process back in control, proceeding with reflective questions works like hooks and pulleys to take you out of the cyclone of overthinking. Like, what matters most in my life? What is the one thing that is good about me or that has happened to me? What do I value the most? Is there one thing/thought/expectation/ that I can let go of today that might enhance my sense of well-being? Will it be wise to be mindful and see how it might impact me? **The technique S.T.O.P. needs nothing much except, just keep it in your mind ALWAYS!!**

Now that you've learnt this short tool, take a moment to reflect on where you can use it in everyday life?

### MY REFLECTION

**Bravo!** You've taken the first step towards implementing an intervention which can slowly act as a stress-reducer in everyday life. Just in case, here are some other ways which can bring a simple S.T.O.P. to everyday life:

1. Doing S.T.O.P. between 2 classes to help clear out your mind and bring it fresh to a new class.
2. After a fight with a colleague or a family member S.T.O.P. can help cut down on the overthinking and direct you towards meaningful action.

*We hope S.T.O.P. becomes the tool that you bring to your life every time it starts to feel that you're getting sucked into a loop of overthinking. While S.T.O.P. helps master ourselves in times of overthinking, there's something more elemental we need to 'change' to further master the thoughts. The next activity shall take us to that element!*

## PRACTICE 2: GRATITUDE

Think back to a time when someone appreciated you for something you did. How long did it take before you stopped thinking about that praise? Now compare that to a time when someone criticized or blamed you and how long did it take to get over that criticism?

Reflect on it briefly and note down any thoughts that you have. Which of the 2 circumstances stuck with you for longer and why?

### MY REFLECTION

There are high chances you might have realized that negatives stick in your mind for way longer than positives do. And it isn't just limited to praise or criticism. In life, we are generally more prone to overthinking about "what's not good about our life" as compared to "what's good in our life". Due to this habit, our mind often creates unnecessary stress and negativity despite the several positives existing in our life. What's worse is that the more we think about negatives, the more habitual we become of it!

The antidote to this is simple. Do exactly the opposite. Instead of counting what's insufficient, take-out time to consciously count each day what's good in life. Or in other words, practice 'Gratitude'.

Let's start this today. Think of a moment in life that you're grateful for. Don't think for too long. Just a quick walk down the memory lane will throw up something or the other. Briefly describe the event and the associated thoughts and feelings in the box below:

### MY REFLECTION



How did that feel? Chances are that just these few moments of reflection will leave you with a smile and more aware of the happenings in your life. In fact, gratitude is one of the widely accepted tools to reduce stress and increase well-being. This conscious recall of 'goodness' of life can be extended to so many different aspects of life as the jar below indicates!

### THE GRATITUDE JAR



This activity will typically take no more than 2-3 minutes each day and can fit in wherever you wish for in your daily schedule (right from when you get up in the morning to when you go to bed at night). What's more is that you can do this activity in multiple ways depending on how you're comfortable. Here are some ways:

1. Writing down on a diary/paper
2. Speaking/discussing with someone close to you
3. Closing your eyes and just visualizing

Can you identify the time of the day and the way in which you will execute this mini-intervention to make yourself a more positive and stress-free person?

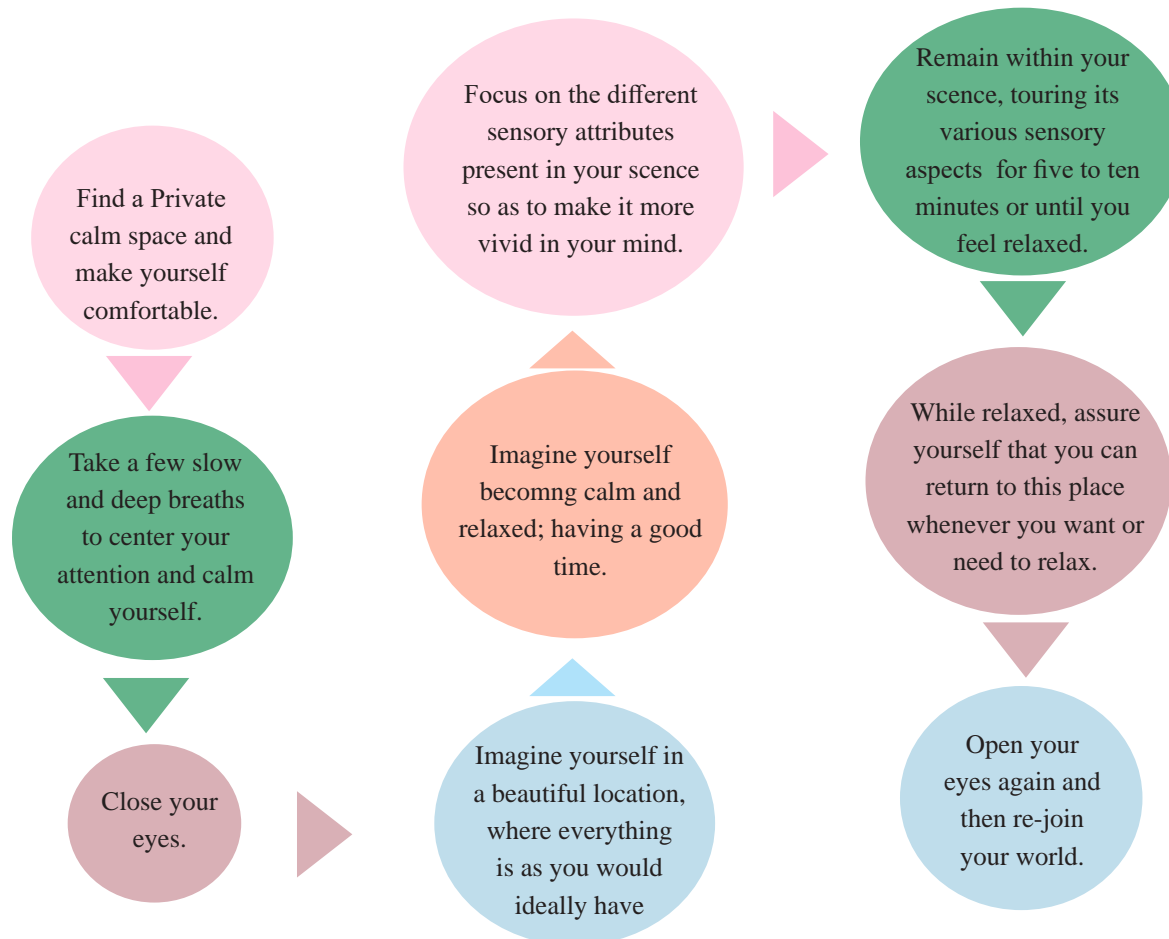
*Linked to Gratitude, is another tool that won't just improve an overall sense of positivity in life but also help to reduce stress. Let's take a look!*

## PRACTICE 3: POSITIVE VISUALIZATION

Remember the pink elephant we visualized in the 1<sup>st</sup> activity of this section. Imagining pink elephant was just an example of this amazing power to visualize whatever thoughts we want, whenever we want. While pink elephants have little relevance in our life, our chosen visualization can be both negative and positive. Depending on what we imagine, visualization has the power to affect our mood and stress levels.

When it comes to negative visualization, it comes all too easily for most of us. That appraisal due next week, the mother-in-law's ringing phone call or opening Angad's school report card are occasions that easily fill up Paramjeet with the dread of uncertainty. Positive visualization, on the other hand, is consciously imagining positive outcomes or recalling positive thoughts and events which fill you with optimism and help in managing inner stress to deal with the circumstances of life.

The next time you enter any such circumstance, here's a way in which you can visualize your way back to peace and effectiveness!



Positive Visualization best serve us when the “beautiful location” we choose is a positive thought related to the challenge at hand. For instance, before getting into a difficult conversation, imagine the scenario of

the conversation going well. Such visualization boosts positivity and confidence and makes way for a more peaceful and positive handling of tough situations in life!

*And with this we end this mini-section on mastering your thoughts. If we were to summarize it in a nutshell for you, it would be:*

1



**S.T.O.P.**

*A 1-minute exercise to do when you realize you're caught in an overwhelming loop of unproductive thinking*

2



**GRATITUDE**

*A 3-5 minute practice to re-orient our thoughts in the direction of the "good things in life"*

3



**POSITIVE  
VISUALIZATION**

*A 2-3 minute exercise to use our past memories & imagination to create a positive mindset*

Thought forms the window to our emotions, actions and choices. It is the foundational step towards managing stress and living a positive life. However, too often emotions become so overwhelming (or deeply entrenched) that getting over them to live a "baggage-free" life becomes nearly impossible.

*How do we handle emotions so that they don't become a barrier to our living? More importantly, how can emotions be realigned to live a healthy and happy life! Let's discover in the next section.*

## EMOTIONS: EXPRESSING THEM

*“Unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways” -  
Sigmund Freud*

Recall a moment in your life from the last month where you wished you could speak to someone and express your emotions. A moment where you wanted to just be heard by someone in a loving way without necessarily wanting any advice in return.

Briefly mention what you thought, how you felt then and what was the action that you took in that moment:

### MY REFLECTION

Congratulations! for taking the first step towards emotional freedom by expressing yourself. Emotional expression is one of the key means to acceptance to the current situation and also to greater self-awareness. Too often, just like clearing out old furniture of our house to allow for new one to come in, our mind and body also need to let it all out.

*While many times people may be unreliable or unavailable, we need friends with whom we can share our emotions with, without fearing judgment. Fortunately, we have those friends and the next few activities will introduce them to you!*



## PRACTICE 2: MINDFUL ART (MANDALA)

There is an old saying, ‘There is a colour for every mood’. Similarly, there’s a drawing for every mood. No matter what the emotions, one can express them freely through art. Do you remember a time when you made some sort of drawing (even if you were doing it informally)? If you can’t recall such an occasion, think back to a time when you were speaking to someone and your hands automatically started creating a pattern. Or a time when you were so angry that you ended up scribbling uncontrollably. All these and many similar instances are ways to express emotions through art.

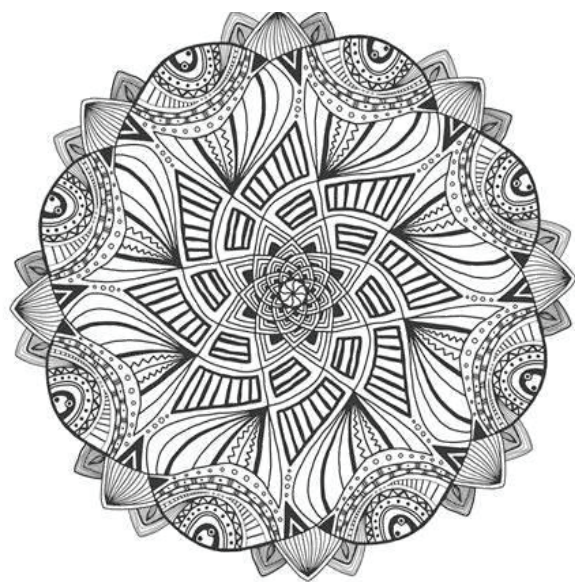
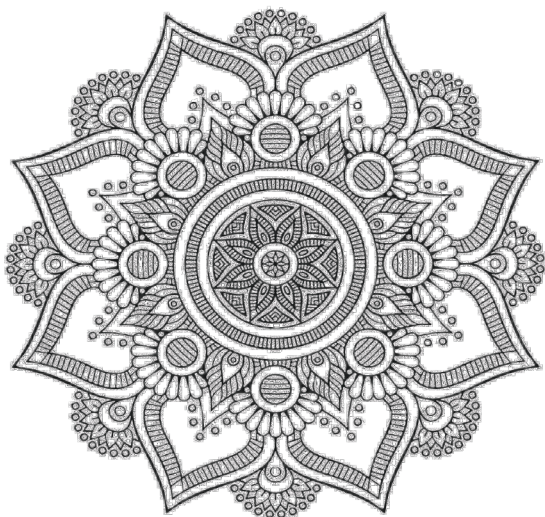
It is a way of clearing out one’s inner emotions. It gives way to reduced stress, enhanced focus, improved positivity & greater Mindfulness.

It’s not about how aesthetically appealing your drawing is or how well-thought out it is. Art, in our context, is simply about expressing yourself. And there are many ways to do it:

1. Picking a paper and just creating a drawing without thinking about what you’re drawing - just going with the flow like you did in Sprint Journaling
2. Picking a pattern and designing/colouring it with whatever idea comes to you

One specific way, which we will discuss here is called Mandala Art. Mandala is a complex, symmetrical or asymmetrical ornament that represents a microcosm of the entire universe. The basic form of most mandalas is a circle, and the patterns within, depict symbolic gates of the cosmos. Each mandala is unique, with minute patterns and symbols. Because of its benefits, some schools and organizations give special importance to include mandalas in their routine.

*Let’s try it ourselves today. Below are 2 Mandala Art pieces - take the next 10 minutes to colour them in whatever way your heart pleases:*





## PRACTICE 3: UNINHIBITED EXPRESSION

When was the last time you laughed without reason as if nothing mattered in the world? Not because a comedy show made you giggle or because you heard a good joke but because you just wanted to. Irrespective of whether you've done this in the past, let's do this today. For the next 2 minutes, without thinking or stopping yourself, just laugh. Laugh as loud as you can! If you're worried that family members may get worried, close the door. Although once the activity is done, they too may end up laughing. If you feel awkward doing it, close your eyes too. Now without thinking, just LAUGH!!

Hopefully, you did and there was no cheating here. Now if you can, come back to sanity and briefly reflect on how these few minutes felt:

### MY REFLECTION

If you did this short exercise with all earnestness, you too, like many others, would feel more relaxed and peaceful. No wonder, in almost every park there is a group of members standing together bursting into laughter, which one can inevitably hear.

This act of uninhibited expression is one of the key activities to manage stress and can be brought out in several ways:

1. Uninhibited laughter (like we just did)
2. Uninhibited singing
3. Uninhibited dancing

Remember, irrespective of the activity you choose the operating word is 'Uninhibited'. For emotional clearance, requires just expression without a restraint on it!

*With this activity we now reach the end of this section that brings out how we can 'control' our emotions by managing them. If you think back, all the activities in this section are also in a way reflective of the same quality of "just expressing" without pondering over the 'why' and 'what' of things. Once we express, we also begin to accept and let go so, new experiences can enter our life.*





### **SPRINT JOURNALING**

*A 5-minute exercise to write non-stop and express in words everything you're feeling (especially when overwhelmed)*



### **MINDFUL ART MAKING**

*An exercise to art lovers to give expression to their emotions in the form of colours and designs*



### **UNINHIBITED EXPRESSION**

*Just laughing loudly or venting out what's suppressed provides release*

Thoughts & emotions are more consciously realized elements, which we all know that we need to work on. There's the third pillar of control which too often isn't focused on because of a set pattern of doing things. But that pillar is one of the most critical in affecting our thoughts and emotions in the first place.

*That pillar is ACTION because how we do things, determines how we think and feel about them!*

## ACTIONS: DOING THEM DIFFERENTLY

*“It’s not about what you do but how you do it” - John Wooden*

There are always several ways in which you can broom the house. You could do it feeling frustrated or do it feeling calm. You can do it fast or you can do it slow. You can do it with attentiveness or you can do it being lost in thought. The way you do something, determines the way you make your life stressful or not.

Take a few moments to reflect on an example or habit from your life where doing the same task in two different ways has resulted (or can result) in a different feeling during/post completing the task:

### MY REFLECTION

Even if the space above is relatively unfilled, that’s perfectly okay! The fact that you took a few moments to ponder on how your actions could be related to how you feel, is itself a big first step.

*Since as you’ll see from the activities and interventions in this section, how we do things is so linked to how stressful or stress managed our life becomes.*

## PRACTICE 1: MINDFUL EATING

Let's begin this section with a small activity. An activity that we all love to indulge in - Eating. While the activity is traditionally experienced using a raisin, you can pick any small edible food article. This could be a chocolate, any dry fruit or even a mini-Hajmola. Once you have it, sit in a secluded and peaceful space with a paper & pen to note down your observations. Make sure you have 5 minutes of uninterrupted time!

### Activity Instructions

To reduce distractions, this activity should be done with closed eyes. Once you close your eyes, pop the edible item you're having, in your mouth and eat it very slowly. Make sure that you savour your food item to the maximum and your entire attention is fixed on sensing the flavours. Ensure that whatever you're having (no matter how small), takes at least 3-5 minutes to completely consume.

Once you're done, just sit for a minute with the whole experience noticing any thoughts coming up about the raisin. Once done, reflect on your experience of eating this small food item for such an extended duration in the space below:

### MY REFLECTION

### Why To Do It?

Eating is a big part of Indian life. From the breadth of cuisines to the depth of masalas, if a westerner sees our food, they may conclude that almost every meal is a treat. Unfortunately, since it is an activity that doesn't require focused attention, too often we eat either in a haste or while watching television, denying ourselves the satisfaction that food can bring about.

Mindful eating helps us to reconnect with our food. It is scientifically linked to managing a healthier weight (tapper et al., 2009). This simple act of focused attention through the senses to our food helps reduce the amount we eat, changes our perception towards the flavours and also brings us newer insights about how in life with Mindfulness, "less can be more".

## Ideas To Bring It to Daily Life

1. Eat any one snack during the day mindfully - notice the nuances through each sense (specially sense of sight, touch and taste). You don't have to note anything down - just be mindful of what you're experiencing
2. No need to specially allocate anytime for this activity

How do you plan to bring Mindful eating to your life everyday?

### MY REFLECTION

*Mindful eating brings out an insight that extends way beyond just eating. Just being fully present to one thing and letting yourself be completely involved in the moment is not just a recipe for reduced stress but also to enhance experiences. This next intervention is another step in realizing the same in a different way of doing things!*

## PRACTICE 2: REDUCE MULTITASKING

Let's ask an age-old question - Is Multitasking good? Your answer is possibly one of the three things: Yes, No or It Depends. Let's demystify this once and for all today! Let's find out that how this simple understanding could lead to reduced stress in our life.

We're going to do 2 activities one by one and then do them simultaneously. We will then compare both the experiences.

### Activity Steps

Activity 1 - Step 1: Recite the alphabet chain from A-Z as fast as you can. Once you're done just mentally note the approximate time you took.

*A-B-C-D-E-F-G-H-I-J-K-L-M-N-O-P-Q-R-S-T-U-V-W-X-Y-Z*

Activity 1 - Step 2: Next, recite the numbers from 1-26 as fast as you can. Again, once you're done just mentally note the approximate time you took.

*1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-16-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-25-26*

Activity 2: Now pair up the recitation of alphabets and numbers: from A1, B2 right till Z26.

*A1-B2-C3-D4-E5-F6-G7-H8-I9-J10-K11-L12-M13-N14-O15-P16-Q17-R18-S19-T20-U21-V22-W23-X24-Y25-Z26*

Through these two simple activities, we just tried 2 different ways of doing things. Initially by doing them one by one (i.e. by not multitasking) and then by multi-tasking. Take a minute to reflect on how your experience of the two ways of doing the activities was. Were you faster while you were multitasking? What was the difference in how stressed you were while multitasking vis-a-vis when you didn't multitask? You may use the space below to write down!

### MY REFLECTION

If you're like most people, you would have realized how Activity 2 takes so much longer than Activity 1 (Step 1 and Step 2) combined. What's more is that multitasking doesn't just make us more inefficient, it also stresses us out. So, why is that?

We've heard for a long time how the capacity to multitask determines how efficient and productive we are in life. Several people also wear it as a badge of honour, "I am a multi-tasker". Unfortunately, modern science disagrees. As per research by Stanford, multi-tasking only makes us inefficient and unproductive.

When we attempt to do two things at a time that demand cognitive involvement, what we actually end up doing is switching between the two tasks rapidly. Human beings aren't endowed with brains that can process parallel. Unfortunately, every switching of tasks has a 'warm up' time before the brain can concentrate fully again on the rules & systems that are needed for completing the new task. This leads to inefficiency in the process.

In Activity 2, when you moved from A to 1, your brain which had first gathered the cognitive resources to process the alphabet script had to 'ungather' and regather some of the different resources needed for the numeric script. This process of gathering, un-gathering and regathering consumed time. That is why Activity 2 took more time than Activity 1.

So every time we are playing on the phone while we speak to a loved one, we end up fully doing neither. On the contrary, as research finds out, multitasking leads to increased levels of stress and decreased involvement with life.

### **How To Bring It to Daily Life**

1. Do One Thing at a Time: When you're on the phone, speak to one person at a time. When you're speaking to a loved one, let go of your work. When you're working, put your phone on silent.
2. Planning Tasks Sequentially: Suppose you have 20 minutes to do two equally difficult, equally important and equally time-consuming tasks. What's the best way? The best way is the way which reduces the number of switches. Since, after every switch it takes a while to return to peak focus again. So, we can say that 10 minutes fully dedicated to Task 1 followed by 10 minutes fully dedicated to Task 2 might make the difference.

*Uni-tasking as opposed to how we may intuitively think is not just the most effective way of living but also the least stressful way. And while we uni-task with our food and uni-task with our work there's one more action that can keep us uplifted no matter how bad the circumstances may be.*

*Let's discuss that in our next activity.*

## PRACTICE 3: SMILING WITHOUT REASON

It's possible that the title of this activity reminds you of your grandparents who used to often emphasize on 'Smiling more in life'. Why did they? Let's begin investigating with a small experiment.

Bring the widest smile possible to your face right now. Don't worry, even if it is much wider than the traditional definition of a 'smile'. Keep that smile on, for the next 1 minute. Now answer a simple Yes/No question: Do you feel slightly more uplifted than you did before smiling? (*Yes / No*)

Now, keep that smile on for another one minute (Don't forget, you look good smiling!). With that smile on, try your best to think of a negative thought. After one minute, reflect on how the activity made you feel with a question: Is it easy to think of negative thoughts with a smile or vice-a-versa? If not, then why? You may use the space below to write down.

### MY REFLECTION

Like most people, unless you were really feeling distressed, you too would recognize this uncanny link between keeping a smile on your face and the difficulty in thinking of something unpleasant. At the same time, if you tried to keep a sad face and tried thinking of something pleasant, the same roadblock would come about! Why does this happen?

### The Mind-Body Connection

Our body and mind are connected, that is why, when we feel stressed, people often look at us and mention to us our state of mind - almost as if they are mind-readers. The flip side of this is that we can use this to change our mood: by doing the right ACTION. Just by keeping a smile on our face we can keep our mind-set positive.

So, remember to keep a smile on your face while doing your daily activities. You'll soon notice that as you smile more, the same events that were neutral or unpleasant and stress causing will start to become the source of joy for you. In-fact your capacity to experience joy in the little things in life will also go up.



With this last activity, we saw that how the way we do things, our ACTIONS are such an integral part of determining the joys (or stresses) we start to experience in life.

To summarize this section, there are 3 interventions we discussed:

1



### **MINDFUL EATING**

*Being attentive to your sensory experience while eating – linked to reduced weight and enhanced taste.*

2



### **REDUCE MULTITASKING**

*Doing one thing at a time for greater productivity and reduced stress*

3



### **SMILING WITHOUT REASON**

*The Mind & Body are connected – try thinking of something bad while smiling? It's difficult right?*

*Till now we have discussed the three foundational pillars of a stress-managed life: Mastering our thoughts, expressing our emotions and changing our actions. All these 3 pillars, however, are contingent on this next 4th pillar.*

*A pillar that forms the foundation of everything we do in life!*

## CHOICES: RETHINKING THEM

*“Life is a matter of choices. And the choices you make, make you” - John Maxwell*

We may learn to orient our thoughts, express our feelings and rethink our actions. All these however eventually hinge on the choices we make in life every day. Take a few moments to reflect on what determines the choices you make for yourself every day. Do you plan your day or does the day decide you? Do you prioritize what’s important to you or do you get driven by circumstances? When was the last time you changed the choices you made in life based on what wasn’t working for you? You may use the space below to write down!

### MY REFLECTION

Even if the above reflection space isn’t completely filled, it’s certain that you may have begun pondering over the importance that choices make in the scheme of how stressed you are in life. Choosing where we should spend our time, what our priorities are and even choosing to review everyday how our life is going is important.

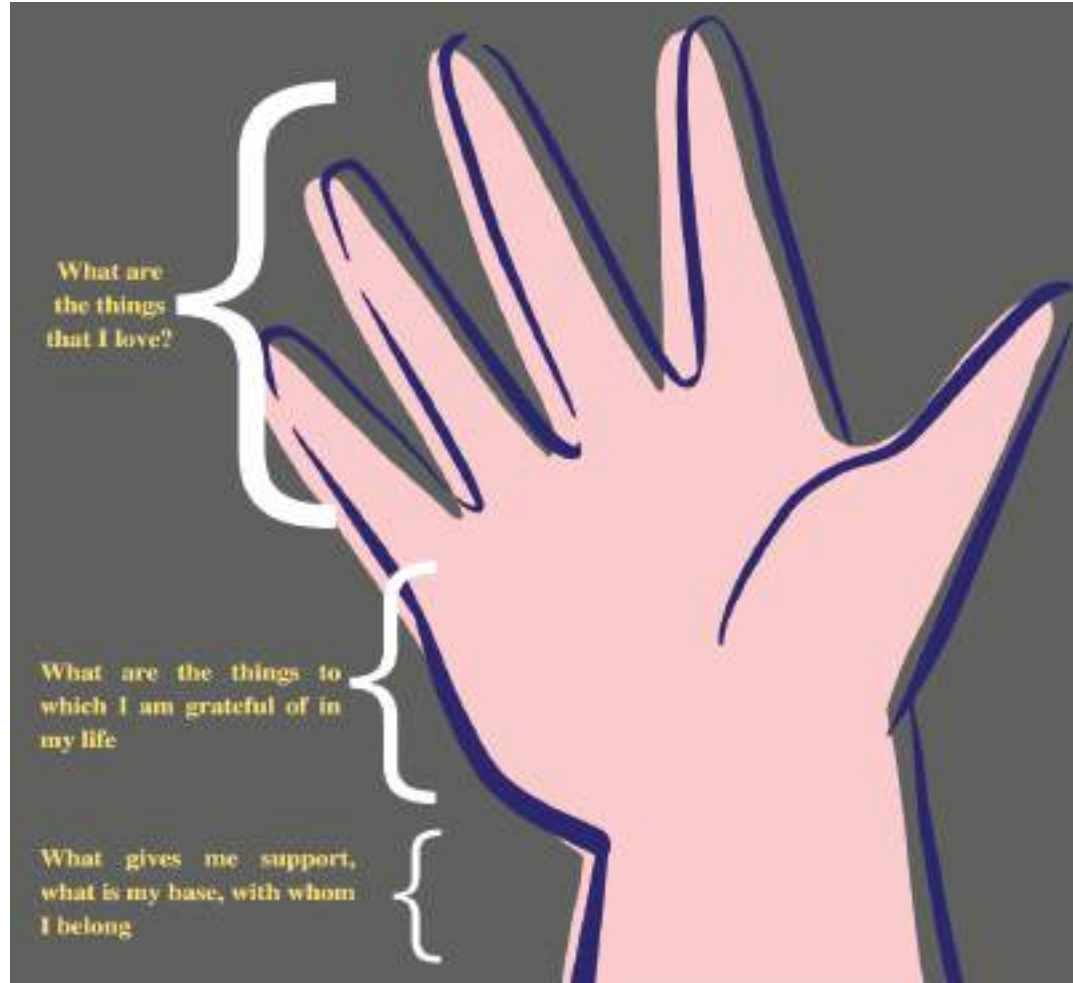
*Each of the interventions below will show, choices become the cause of joy or distress. Knowing what to choose begins with one simple step: understanding your priorities and then ensuring that you live by them, every day of your life. Knowing your priorities is primal to making choices that lead to happiness and a stress-managed life!*

## PRACTICE 1: PRIORITIZING USING ME TREE

More clarity leads to better choices and helps one to prioritize effectively. “Me Tree” is an instrument to identify and align events and relations around us according to their significance in our life. It helps us to gain clarity and make better choices.

### Activity

Draw a tree with roots, stem, branches, leaves and fruits. One interesting way to draw a tree is to draw it using your own hand. To draw a “Me Tree”, you may put your hand on the space given on the next page and start tracing your hand. Leave the fingertips open to draw the leaves and branches as much as you want. Draw some soil at the bottom and leave some space to write over there. Then draw some leaves (big enough to write something) as much as you want, and draw branches as much as you want (again big enough to write).



1. **Soil (or Base of Hand):** What are my roots, what gives me support, what is my base, with whom I belong? Write down all that in this element.
2. **Tree trunk and branches (Fingers):** What are the things for which I am grateful (it could be a person in your life, any experience, any place, any book, any object)
3. **Leaves (Branches emanating from the fingers):** What are the things that I love? It could be your interests, your hobbies, your passion, your wishes and desires and so on.

## MY REFLECTION

### Outcome & Implementation

At the end of this activity, you will be able to recognize the things which make you “YOU”. This Me-Tree is ideally used if you take a photo/printout and stick it at someplace where you can be constantly reminded of what’s important to you! That way you will consciously start to re-organize your choices in life with your priorities, even when circumstances are not in your favour.

*Now, that you have defined your priorities, the next part of making choices will define how we should most effectively distribute our time in line with those priorities. For this, the next activity will give a small yet extremely effective way of learning how to streamline our day-to-day work!*

## PRACTICE 2: TIME MANAGEMENT

One of the most prominent and prevalent factors of stress is the plethora of tasks around us that may be personal or professional. Our inability to accommodate these ever-increasing tasks around us leads to anxiety and stress. The need to manage and categorize tasks according to their relevance was strongly felt by the 34th president of US Eisenhower during his tenure at White House. Through his quotes on tasks and time management, a matrix was derived, widely known as the 'Time management matrix' or 'Important/Urgent matrix'. This tool has been used as a productivity tool by thousands of professionals across the globe for decades.

### What is this Tool?

Every task in our life can be divided by their urgency and importance. Finishing the checking of papers to be submitted by next morning may take 2 hours and is both urgent and important (the latter because a job could be a high priority component of a person's life). Watching YouTube randomly at day end may also take up to 2 hours but can be thought of as unimportant and non-urgent. Similarly, doing yoga for 1 hour is really important for health but may not be urgent while on the other hand calling an old friend you promised to speak with, may be urgent but not important.

In the given below matrix, make a list of tasks that you did yesterday (for the entire 24 hours) and the amount of time you spent on each quadrant.

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important		
Not Important		

Once you have filled the above matrix, check what percentage of your time went in doing **important** things. If the amount of time is less than 75%, then there is a need to realign your time since you may be spending too much time tending to the unimportant things in life. A big hint to what's really important to you can be taken from the Me-tree you drew in the activity earlier!

The following table can give you a hint about how best to manage your time. Each quadrant is indicative of how best to tackle the activities that come to you during the day.

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<b>DO</b> (Do it Now)	<b>DECIDE</b> (Sechedule a time)
Not Important	<b>DELEGATE</b> (Who can do for me)	<b>DELETE</b> (Eliminate it)

### How Best to Use the Matrix?

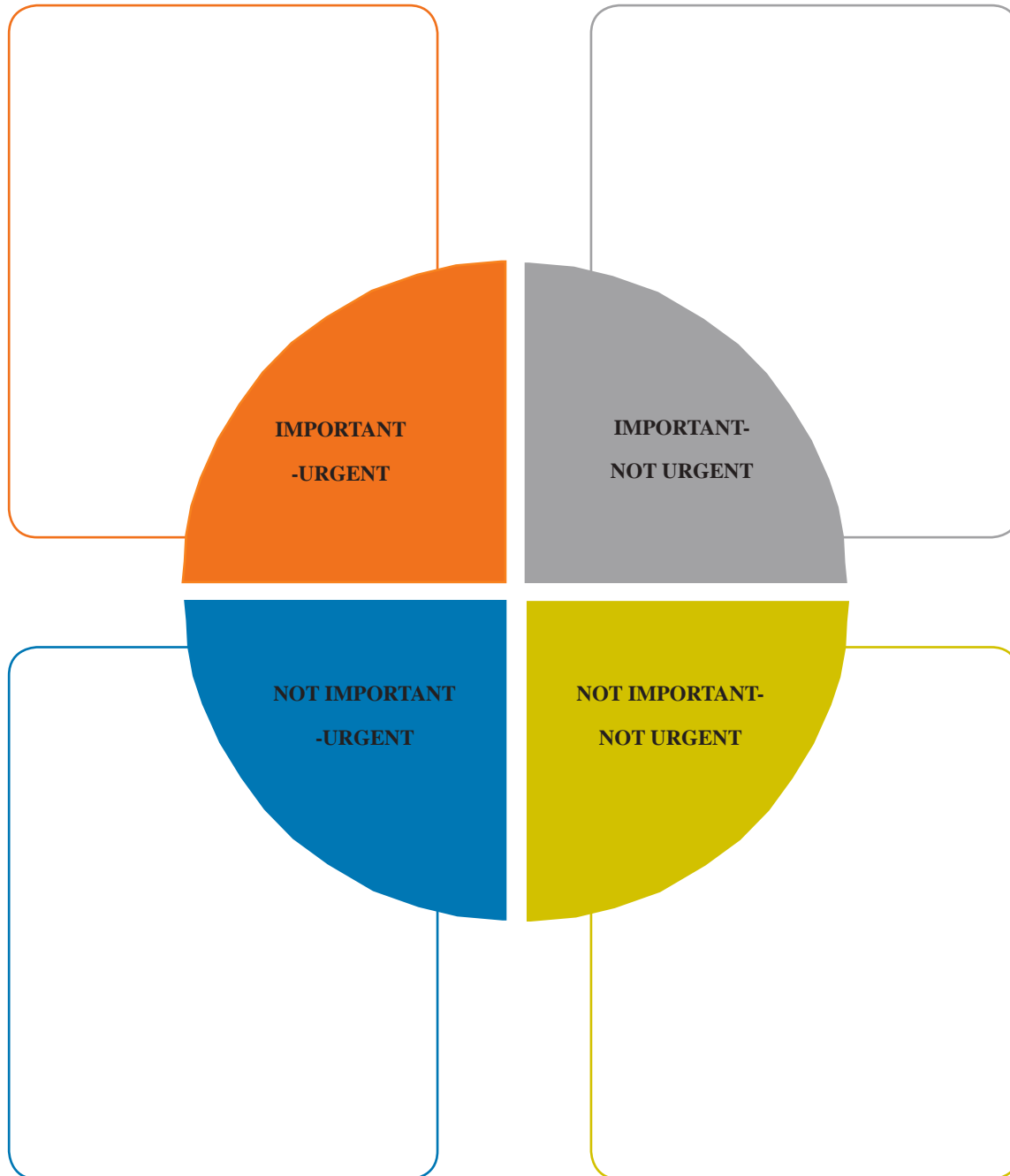
The Matrix can be put to best use if you do 3 things:

1. Make it for each day (Try to make it early morning before starting the day or late night before sleeping for the next day)
2. Put all the tasks that you have to do and allocate time to each task. Remember the 75% rule to ensure that the important quadrants get the bulk of the time.

Keep it with you (either on a notice board or on your table). This way it will keep reminding you of the time decisions you have taken for yourself for the day.

Given on the next page is a blank Eisenhower matrix. You can fill it for yourself and refer to it for prioritizing your tasks for this month.

1. You may get the blank template xeroxed and keep the copy so as to use it multiple times and place it around your table or work area.
2. You may also use the same sheet to make a priority matrix for long-term planning such as for a year!



*This practice to manage priorities along with the practice to manage time spent effectively on each priority becomes the doorway for a well-planned life and a well-lived life. But too often as we start to live life by a plan, we realize something needs to be done/fixd. At this point we need a review system that can tell us if the choices we're making are really making us happier. The next activity introduces you to one such important tool!*



## PRACTICE 3: MOOD TRACKER

*To know whether our choices are really yielding us the benefit, we need a review mechanism. For this, one of the most effective tools is the use of a mood tracker!*

A mood tracker is designed and used to track the mood throughout the month (or year) on a single page using different colours to represent different moods. Each mood corresponds to a colour. Each day of the month has been given two spaces to represent a maximum of two moods to be filled by the representing colour of the mood you experienced during the day. Although we may have more than two moods in the day, identifying the major moods during the day and observing the pattern over a couple of weeks will depict the true picture of the mood swings during a week or a month or over a longer period.

Our moods vary from day to day and emotion to emotion. Sometimes, we might feel anxious and on the same day later on we might feel excited. On certain day we feel extremely tired and another day we might be brimming with enthusiasm and energy.

Some of our major moods or physical and mental states could be:



You may think of many other moods or physical-mental states. To track our mood pattern is an excellent activity to raise our self-awareness and understand our responses to the events around. Given on the next page is a blank mood tracker, you may get it xeroxed and start tracking your moods. With the review process in place, you'll have a monthly system to check and course-correct if the choices you're making are really bringing you the peace they were supposed to. And every time you realize they're not, that is when it is best to rethink your Me-tree and time management!

# Mood Tracker

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
1												
2												
3												
4												
5												
6												
7												
8												
9												
10												
11												
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29												
30												
31												

- AMAZING
- HAPPY
- NORMAL
- EXCITED
- STRESSED
- FOCUSED
- TIRED / EXHAUSTED
- DEPRESSED / SAD
- SICK
- LOW ENERGY
- NERVOUS/ ANXIOUS
- ANGRY
- 
- 

Assign color to a specific mood and color the squares according to your mood



As we complete this last intervention for this pillar of CHOICE, here's a short summary of the 3 interventions we discussed:

1



### **PRIORITIZING / (ME TREE)**

*Creating a tree of priorities – commonly referred to as ME TREE it helps articulate our life's drivers & what's critical for us to streamline our choices*

2



### **TIME MANAGEMENT**

*"What is urgent is seldom important and what is important is seldom urgent." D. Eisenhower*

3



### **MOOD TRACKER**

*A way of tracking how your day(s) have been going to review the choices you're making. Helps you re-align your life!*

*While this section was about CHOOSING our priorities, there is one priority we all must choose and that priority is HEALTH. It is our final foundational pillar of stress-management - a pillar which is too often ignored and perhaps also the most important!*

## HEALTH: PRIORITIZING IT

*“You can’t take care of others if you can’t take care of yourself” - Mary Mazzer*

Let’s start with a small activity. Notice any place where unconsciously your body is tightened right now - this could be a tight shoulder, a tight chest, a tight stomach, a tight back - just about anywhere. Now as you notice this, just loosen your body from those tight or uncomfortable areas. How do you feel as you do this gentle loosening of the body?

### MY REFLECTION

If you did notice tightness in your body and followed it up with loosening yourself, almost always you’ll feel a slight upliftment in how you feel mentally. That’s because, like we discussed in the intervention ‘Smile Without Reason’, our mind and body are connected.

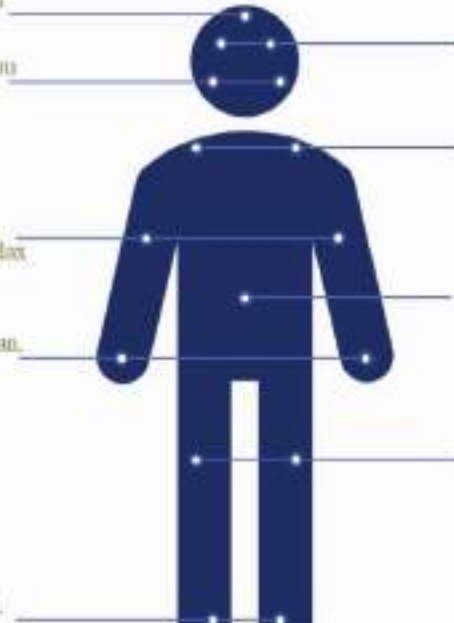
*Only when you have a good physical health, can you live a life that serves your mental health. The following interventions will guide you to a few ways in which you can take care of your health and in turn, your distress.*

## PRACTICE 1: MUSCLE RELAXATION

Our muscles are too often the centres of the stress that gets accumulated. In the last exercise, it's possible that you felt a slight decline in mental stress as you released stress from a tightened part of your body.

Similar to this, let's do a short exercise. Before we begin, it is important to note that you need to take care of the physical limitations of your body while doing this exercise. No need to overstrain yourself in any case. So, with that, let's get ready to release some stress!!

**PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION**



**FOREHEAD:** Tighten your forehead as much as you can, hold for 10 seconds, then relax

**CHEEKS:** Puff up your cheeks as much as you can, hold for 10 seconds, then relax

**ARMS:** Stiffen and straighten your arms as much as possible, hold for 10 seconds, then relax

**FIST:** Clench both your fists as tight as you can, hold for 10 seconds, then relax

**TOES:** Clench your toes as tightly as you can, hold for 10 seconds, then relax

**EYES:** Tighten your eye muscles as much as you can, hold for 10 seconds, then relax

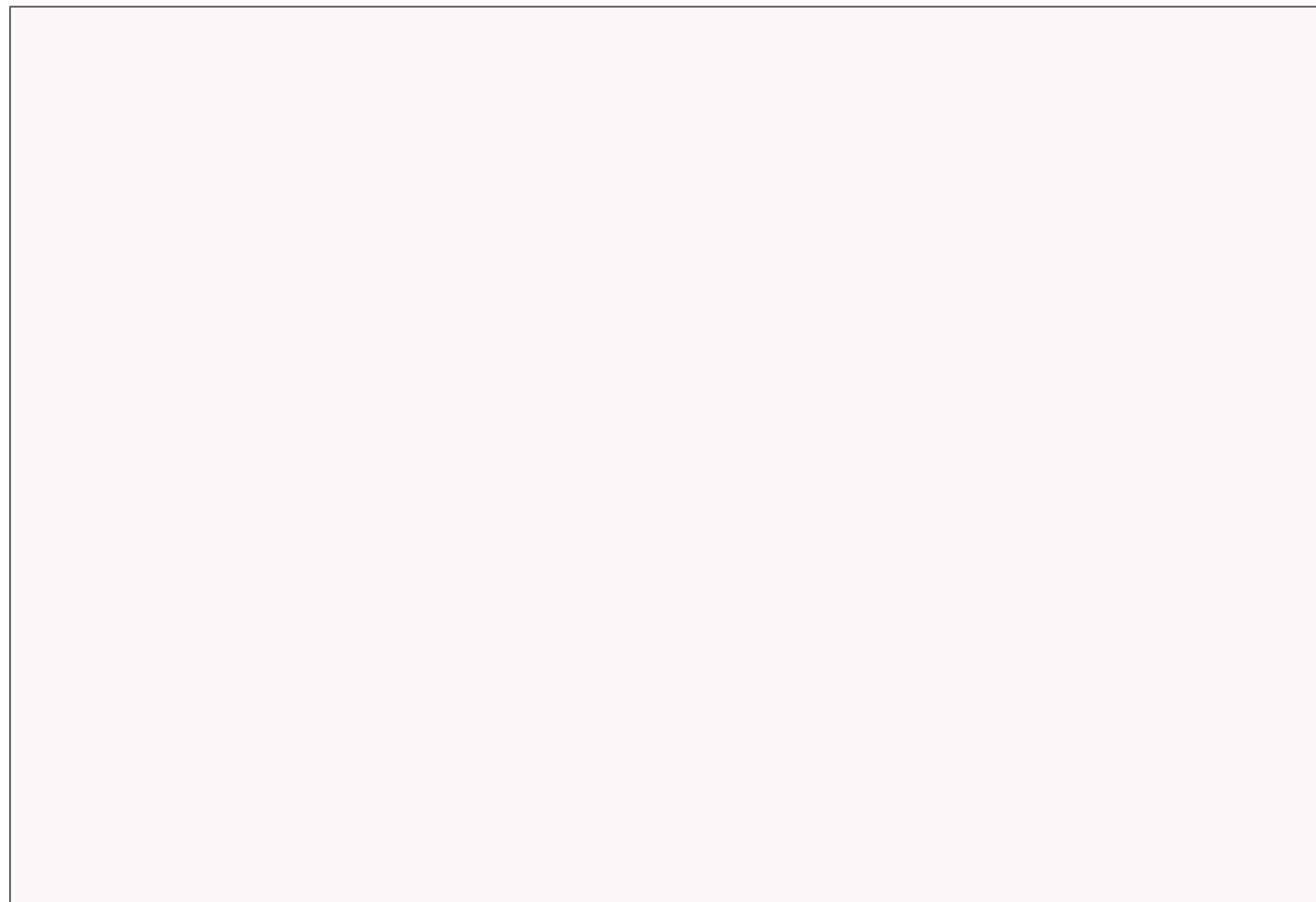
**SHOULDERS:** Squeeze the shoulder blades to bring them as close to your ears as you can, hold for 10 seconds, then relax

**STOMACH:** Tighten your stomach as much as possible, hold for 10 seconds, then relax

**LEGS:** Raise your legs parallel to the ground with toes pointing upwards, hold for 10 seconds, then relax

As you close this short exercise, now reflect on how you are feeling physically and mentally:

### MY REFLECTION



This short exercise, too often, leads to relaxation both of the body and mind thus becoming an overall stress-reducer. While we only did this briefly for three sets of the muscles you can go all the way down to the toes tightening the chest, the stomach, the hips, the thighs, the calves and the toes to maximise relaxation.

*While this short exercise helps release stress, the next one builds greater awareness to where stress may lie. Greater the awareness, more effective is the stress-management!*

## PRACTICE 2: MINDFUL MOVEMENT

### Why To Do it?

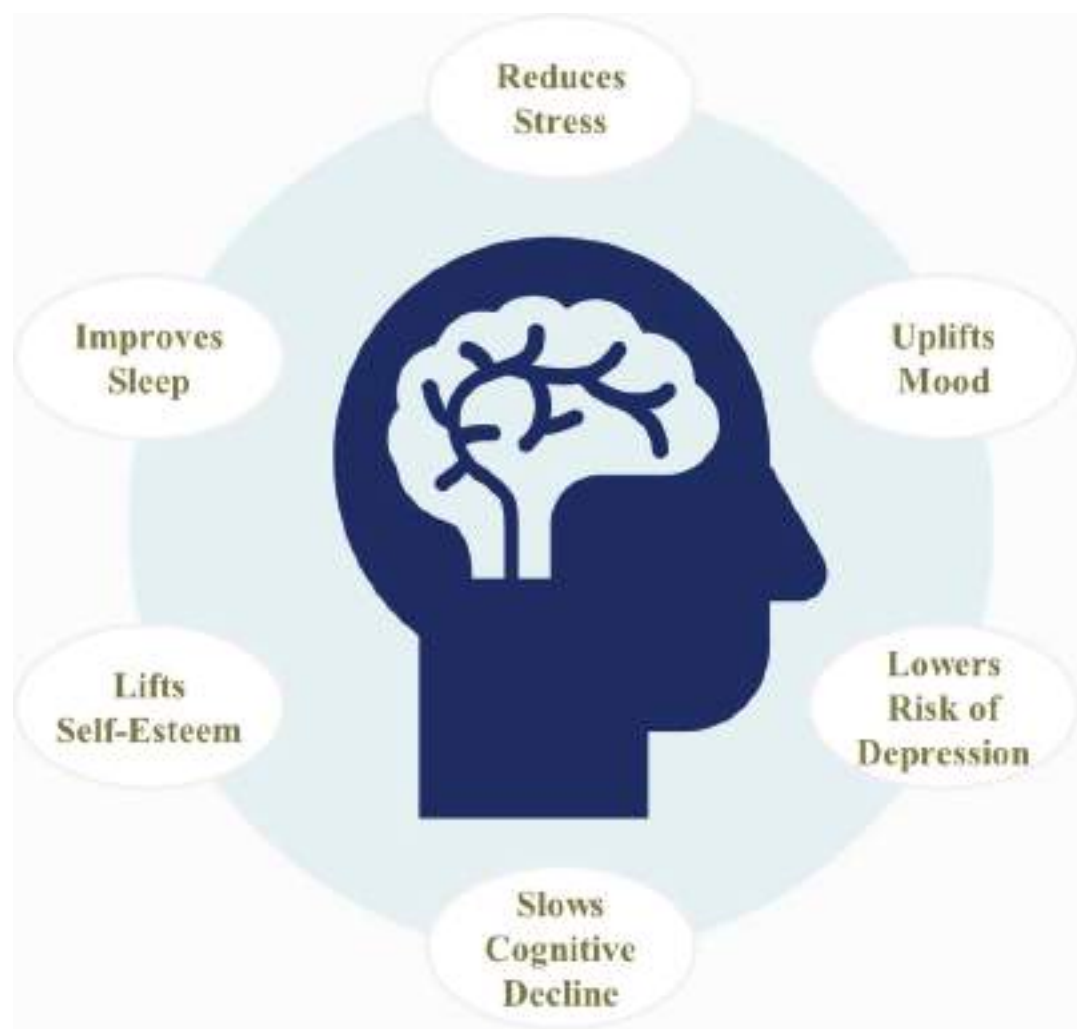
Mindful rhythmic exercise that gets you into a flow of repetitive movement can produce the relaxation response. Incorporate mindfulness throughout your workout for optimum stress alleviation. Mindful exercise necessitates being completely immersed in the present moment, focusing on how your body feels right now rather than on your everyday problems or anxieties. Focus on the feelings in your limbs and how your breathing compliments your movement to “switch off” your thoughts.

### How To Do it?

Focus on the physicality of each step, such as the sensation of your feet contacting the ground, the rhythm of your breath while moving, and the feel of the wind against your face, whether you’re walking or jogging. If your mind starts to wander, gently bring it back to your breathing and movement.

### Examples of Some Rhythmic Exercises Include:

- ❖ Running
- ❖ Climbing
- ❖ Rowing
- ❖ Walking
- ❖ Dancing





## PRACTICE 3: BREATHING EXERCISES

### Why To Do it?

Breathing is one of the most effective techniques to reduce stress in the body since it sends a message to your brain to relax and calm down. Breathing exercises are simple, effective, and handy techniques to reduce the detrimental consequences of chronic stress by relieving tension and reversing your stress response. When you breathe deeply to relax, the stress consequences, such as elevated heart rate, rapid breathing, and high blood pressure, all go down.

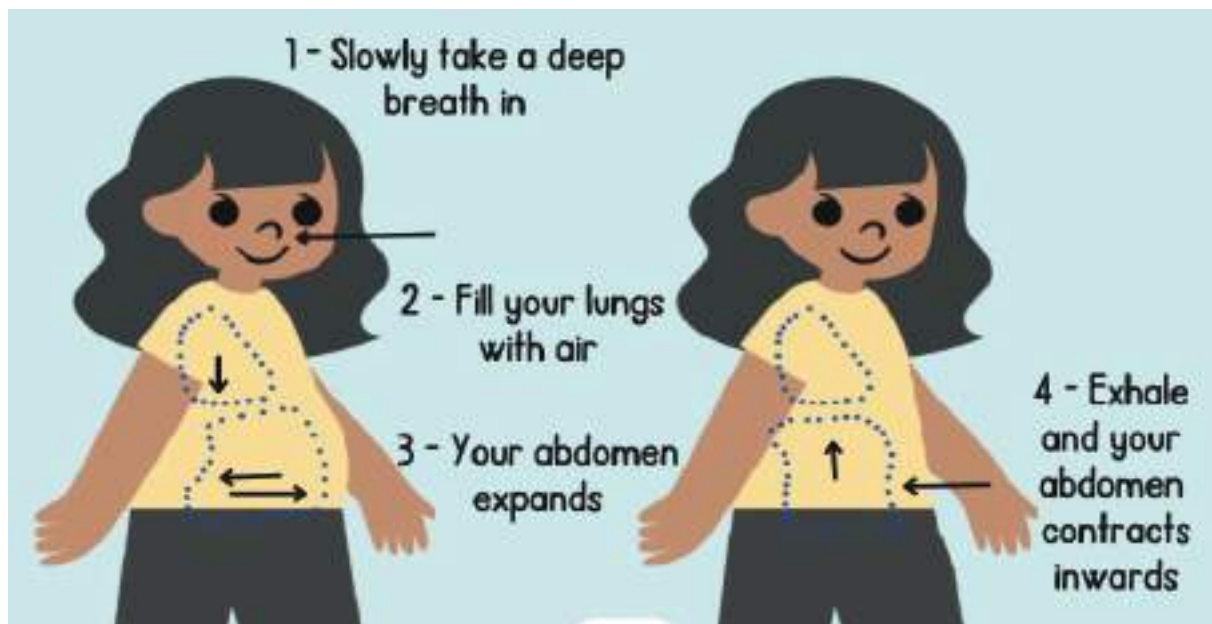
### Types of Breathing Exercises and How to Do Them



**Deep Breathing**



**Fish Breathing**



**Belly Breathing**

All the above activities provide the doorway to greater physical health and consequently better mental health. For as we have seen in this workbook, physical health and mental health are indistinguishable from each other.

Here's a short summary of the interventions we discussed in this section:



*A 5- minute exercise to release the excessive stresses in our body- since our body keeps the score. Helps relax and relieve stress!*



*A regular practice to build greater body awareness- acts as a good long term strategy to reduce stress in life!*



*While Mindfulness is the process of observing natural breath, rhythmic breathing can help the body & mind when in stress!*

(With this, we complete the final intervention that one can deploy in his/her life to enhance his/her well-being. While there are several other interventions that you will keep stumbling upon, we have tried to provide you with a flavour of each of the 5 pillars of T.E.A.C.H. along with activities that are easy to do, quick to implement, don't need much time out of your life and most importantly, can be done without anyone's help.)

*We hope you will carry them with you and make some of them an integral part to lead a more stress-managed life and consequently help your students and family too experience the peace in a stress-managed life!*

## SUMMARY: WHAT WE CAN T.E.A.C.H. OURSELVES

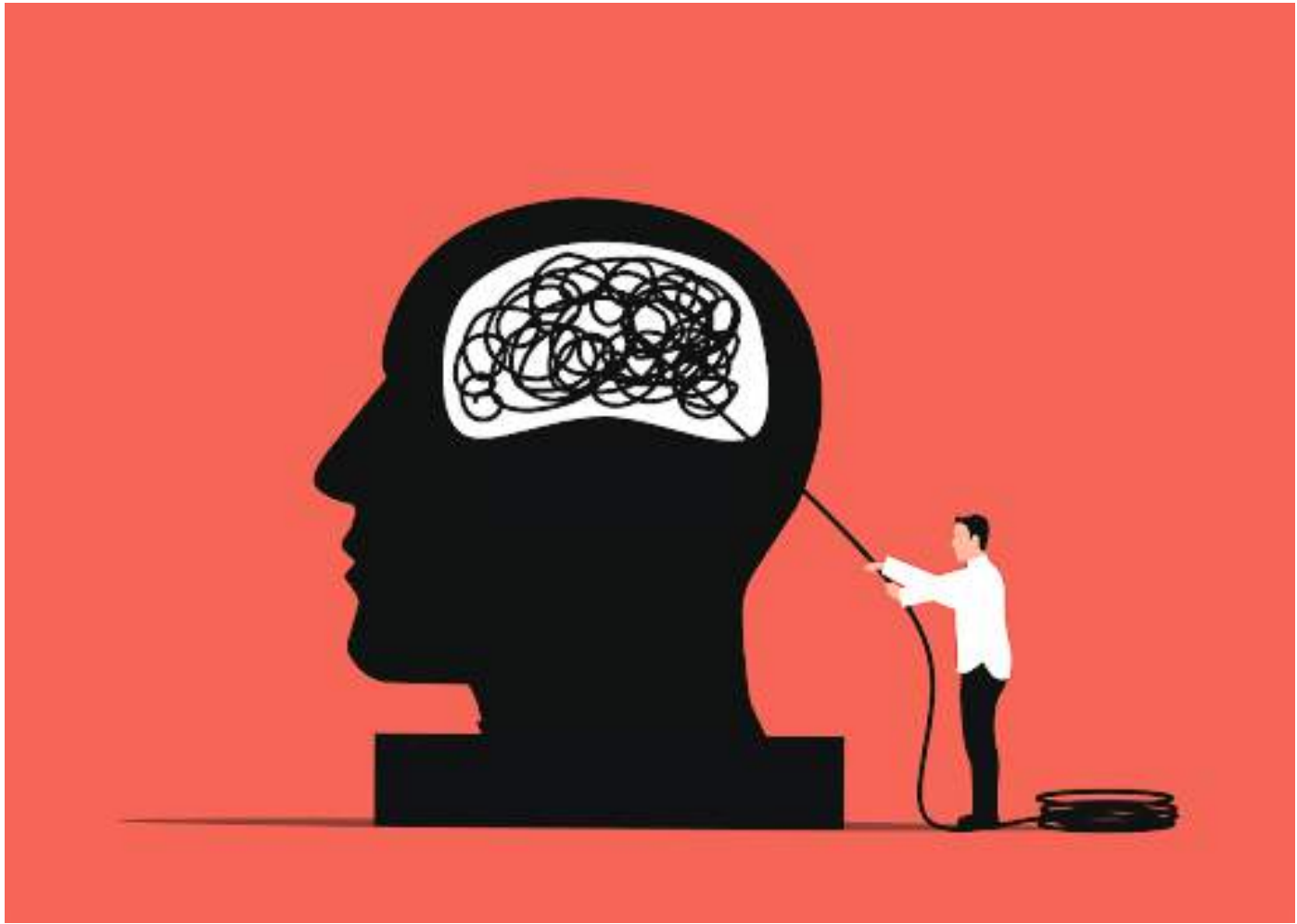
*“While we TEACH, we learn” - Seneca*

For your quick reference below are the interventions, each of which will bring us closer to de-stressing ourselves. Take a quick recap at all that we’ve learnt in this section and mark the ones that you specifically liked (at least 1 in each category).

				
<b>THOUGHTS</b>	<b>EMOTIONS</b>	<b>ACTIONS</b>	<b>CHOICES</b>	<b>HEALTH</b>
Mastering Them	Expressing Them	Doing Differently	Rethinking Them	Prioritizing It
S.T.O.P	Sprint Journaling	Mindful Eating	Prioritization	Muscle Relaxation
Gratitude	Expression through Art	Reduce Multi-Tasking	Time Management	Mindful Movement
Positive Visualization	Uninhibited Expression	Smiling Without Reason	Mood Tracker	Breathing Exercises

Please take a few moments to reflect on which interventions were the most meaningful to you from the 15 that were shared! It would be wonderful, if you could pick at least one from each of the 5 pillars!

### MY REFLECTION



# DESIGNING YOUR LIFE YOUR WAY

*A month after completing the workbook and implementing some of the interventions, here's how Paramjeet's life (and her stress changed). Let's find out!*

## **PARAMJEET KAUR: HER DESTRESS JOURNEY**

As Paramjeet completed the 'Stress Management' workbook, resisting the habit to immediately start scrolling Facebook, she put her phone on 'Do Not Disturb' for another 20 minutes to reflect on all that she had learnt. She knew something in her life was waiting to be changed.

### **Exactly 1 month later**

"Good morning Param - it's a new day", Paramjeet said smilingly to the mirror as she got up. Quickly freshening up, she sat with Rahul for tea while they stuck to the "no mobile while talking" pact they had made a month back. Somewhere Paramjeet could feel that a "no-phone" morning time with Rahul left her happier and more appreciative of his presence in her life.

As they got up to do the morning chores, Paramjeet knew a long day awaited her. Quickly finishing breakfast and lunch preparations, she ensured she got ready 10 minutes before starting her classes. Those 10 minutes were perhaps the most crucial ones of her day as it set the tone for all else. First, she used that time to list the priorities for the rest of her day. Further, to let go of distractions and to be more receptive, she practiced S.T.O.P. for 2 minutes before beginning every class of hers.

Just as she was finishing school that day, Mrs. Mehta messaged her for an important meeting in 2 hours. It was exactly at the time she was also supposed to talk to Jasmine's new tutor. Knowing her priorities, she sent a message inquiring if the meeting can be shifted by an hour owing to personal reasons. Well aware of the overthinking loop of "What will Mrs. Mehta say?" that Paramjeet used to fall in earlier, this time she knew that it's not the circumstance that is driving her but her priorities. She waited for a minute to see if any response came in but when it didn't, she dropped in another message saying, "I'll be away from my phone for 20 minutes on lunch break. In case there's any urgency, please call ma'am". When she came back from her uninterrupted lunch with the rest of the family, she was pleasantly surprised to see Mrs. Mehta had agreed to shift the call by an hour.

That evening, after speaking to Jasmine's tutor, Paramjeet anxiously awaited Mrs. Mehta's call. But instead of ruminating on the stress, she took a paper to sprint journal her thoughts & feelings. As Paramjeet's writing started to give her clarity that she was unnecessarily overthinking, Mrs. Mehta called to inform her about the new 'COVID discipline committee' that she had to head. Paramjeet smiled knowing that while this unavoidable responsibility will consume time, it is also an opportunity for her to grow in her administrative capabilities and become better at managing people.

As she finally got to bed after dinner that night, she knew it was a long day. But something about it was becoming better. Her end of day mood tracker confirmed her thoughts as she saw how gradually the frequency of the words 'amazing', 'happy', 'normal' were growing.

As she closed her eyes to feel gratitude for the meaningful family time she spent that day, Paramjeet’s life too had started making a meaningful shift. From rationalizing her stress, she had started coping with it. From reacting to situations, she had started responding to them. From seeing problems alone, she had started seeing opportunities in them. From letting life make her decisions she had started deciding for herself. For her peace.

### Reflection Questions

1. Did Paramjeet’s problems or circumstances change? If not, what changed in her life?

MY REFLECTION

2. What are the changes you visualize could also come to your life if you did implement some of the stress intervention strategies?

MY REFLECTION

*This was, however, Paramjeet’s story and all that she had started incorporating in her life. You are not Paramjeet and neither are your preferences. You are the only one that exists in the form that you do and so you have every right to decide what interventions will you bring to your life. So, what is it that you liked from the interventions? And what is it that you commit to change about your life?*



## DESIGNING OUR LIFE: WHAT WE COMMIT TO T.E.A.C.H.

*“No one is coming to save you...” - Nathaniel Branden*

It is time for us to make a commitment for ourselves, to ourselves. It is only when we consciously T.E.A.C.H. ourselves a new way of living life can we teach anyone else. In the previous section, we had asked you to pick the practices you liked from the workbook. To help you recall, each of the practices fit into one of the 5 T.E.A.C.H. buckets as shown below. Please circle the ones that you commit to bringing to your life from tomorrow itself:



*Now, take a few moments to reflect on when/where in your day do you plan to use the circled interventions in your everyday life. Please note that in the space below*



**MY REFLECTION**

A large, empty rectangular box with a light pink background, intended for writing a reflection.

## THE COMMITMENT TO A NEW BEGINNING

This workbook will yield no benefit unless you commit to follow whatever you learnt and liked. And since all of us belong to a profession of integrity, here's a small note of integrity and promise that we ask you to make. To no one else but yourself. For no one else's benefit, but yours!

### MY REFLECTION

I, \_\_\_\_\_, commit to myself to implement the above interventions that I've chosen for myself with full sincerity for one month from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. Post one month I will re-evaluate how these interventions have reduced my stress levels by filling the stress survey given in Appendix 3.

I wish myself the best for this journey that I begin!

SIGN:

DATE:

### THE BEGINNING

*Shakespeare rightly said: "The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."*

As we reach the end of this workbook here, we hope this is the moment when you begin a new life. Each of us can use this book as a tool to reduce stress by understanding and practicing reduction strategies on a regular basis. Just remember, circumstances of our life, no matter how unfavourable, does not have to lead to distress and burnout. Circumstances can be transformed into eustress for enhanced health and performance. It's only possible if you start building awareness of the stressors in your personal & professional life and attempt to cope with them by T.E.A.C.H.ing yourself the right way to control your stabilizer!

*If you want success, understand stress, get into Eustress and stay away from Distress.*



# **APPENDIX: FOR YOUR REFERENCE**

## APPENDIX 1: WORD GRID SOLUTION

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1	A	C	T	A	R	M	H	J	K	F	P	R	E	S	S	U	R	E	T	K
2	C	O	N	S	E	Q	U	E	N	C	E	S	Y	R	J	K	S	Q	I	B
3	S	F	E	A	R	E	R	C	A	R	T	U	Y	K	L	X	Y	R	B	X
4	U	B	T	S	O	A	T	T	E	N	T	I	O	N	E	G	C	A	P	E
5	P	O	E	T	U	R	G	R	A	T	I	T	U	D	E	K	O	C	E	N
6	P	O	E	M	P	A	T	H	Y	E	A	U	T	O	N	Y	N	O	R	S
7	O	F	O	C	U	S	L	L	A	A	O	R	A	T	F	U	N	M	F	A
8	T	I	W	O	R	R	Y	V	L	R	T	V	K	W	Z	B	E	V	E	N
9	T	O	O	T	G	S	R	C	O	N	T	E	N	T	M	E	N	T	C	G
10	O	R	N	V	F	M	E	D	I	T	A	T	I	O	N	A	T	D	T	E
11	V	S	R	K	A	B	N	S	L	R	T	P	F	R	I	E	N	D	I	R
12	E	A	S	S	T	P	R	O	C	R	A	S	T	I	N	A	T	I	O	N
13	R	T	O	E	I	V	I	S	L	I	T	T	K	W	C	R	Y	Q	N	B
14	W	R	P	D	G	N	C	E	T	U	Y	H	L	B	L	A	D	R	I	X
15	H	R	U	R	U	D	H	A	L	R	A	Y	Y	S	H	I	K	E	S	C
16	E	U	L	L	E	M	C	U	R	I	O	U	S	I	T	Y	H	G	M	E

## APPENDIX 2: MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

<b>Stress is only in the mind and there is no effect on the physical health.</b>	<b>M</b>
<b>Stress score for an individual cannot be altered.</b>	<b>M</b>
<b>Stress is directly proportional to the number of circumstances a person is handling.</b>	<b>M</b>
<b>Stress cannot be avoided but it can be controlled and managed.</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Stress is always bad for our health.</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Stress comes from thoughts about the circumstances and not from the circumstances themselves.</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Stress is same for those facing similar situations in their lives.</b>	<b>M</b>
<b>Stress management techniques prove beneficial over a period of time when woven around the life style.</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>No physical symptoms, no stress.</b>	<b>M</b>
<b>Stress always affects our performance adversely.</b>	<b>M</b>

## APPENDIX 3: PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE

The questions in PSS asks about feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, you will be asked to assign number to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way.

Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often
0	1	2	3	4

### Questions

- \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
- \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?
- \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?
- \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
- \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?
- \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?
- \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?
- \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?
- \_\_\_\_\_ In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?
- In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

### Determining Your Perceived Stress Score

- First, reverse your scores for questions 4, 5, 7, and 8. On these 4 questions, change the scores like this:  
0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1, 4 = 0
- Now add up your scores for each item to get a total. My total score is \_\_\_\_\_.
- Individual scores on the PSS can range from 0 to 40 with higher scores indicating higher perceived stress.

## Understanding Your Perceived Stress Score

The scores on the following self-assessment do not reflect any particular diagnosis or course of treatment. They are meant as a tool to help assess your level of stress.

1. Scores ranging from 0-13 would be considered low stress.
2. Scores ranging from 14-26 would be considered moderate stress.
3. Scores ranging from 27-40 would be considered high perceived stress.

### Reflection Question

How did your score change? How do you feel compared to how you used to?

#### MY REFLECTION



## APPENDIX 4: BIBLIOGRAPHY

Some of the sources of reference used in the book are indicated below<sup>1</sup>:

1. Perceived Stress Scale:  
<https://das.nh.gov/wellness/docs/percieved%20stress%20scale.pdf>
2. Mind-Body Connection:  
<https://www.johnshopkinssolutions.com/the-mind-body-connection-2>
3. S.T.O.P Practice:  
<https://accelerate.uofuhealth.utah.edu/resilience/practice-s-t-o-p#>
4. Gratitude Practice:  
<https://www.mindful.org/how-to-practice-gratitude/>
5. Positive Visualization:  
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/lidijaglobokar/2020/03/05/the-power-of-visualization-and-how-to-use-it/?sh=559c3b566497>
6. Journaling:  
[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how\\_journaling\\_can\\_help\\_you\\_in\\_hard\\_times](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_journaling_can_help_you_in_hard_times)
7. Mindful Art:  
<https://www.verywellmind.com/mindfulness-based-art-therapy-4588189>
8. Laughter Therapy:  
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27439375/>
9. Mindful Eating: [https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/better\\_eating\\_through\\_mindfulness](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/better_eating_through_mindfulness)
10. Multitasking Myth:  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/creativity-without-borders/201405/the-myth-multitasking>
11. Urgent-Important Matrix:  
<https://www.eisenhower.me/eisenhower-matrix/>
12. Mood Tracker  
<https://positivepsychology.com/mood-charts-track-your-mood/>
13. Progressive Muscle Relaxation:  
<https://www.webmd.com/sleep-disorders/muscle-relaxation-for-stress-insomnia>

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<sup>1</sup> *The given list is not exhaustive but rather an indicative list of the various sources used in the creation of this workbook*

## APPENDIX 5: MY NOTES

You may use the extra space below to jot down any reflections you may have during the process of going through this workbook

### MY REFLECTION

**MY REFLECTION**

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