

Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide



World Health
Organization

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Preface

Doing What Matters in Times of Stress is a WHO stress management guide for coping with adversity. This illustrated guide supports implementation of WHO's recommendation for stress management.

There are many causes of stress, including personal difficulties (e.g. conflict with loved ones, being alone, lack of income, worries about the future), problems at work (e.g. conflict with colleagues, an extremely demanding or insecure job) or major threats in your community (e.g. violence, disease, lack of economic opportunity).

This guide is for anyone who experiences stress, ranging from parents and other carers to health professionals working in dangerous situations. It is for both people who flee war, losing all they have, and well protected people living in communities at peace. Anyone living anywhere can experience high levels of stress.

Informed by available evidence and extensive field testing, the guide provides information and practical skills to help people cope with adversity. While the causes of adversity must be addressed, there is also a need to support people's mental health.

I hope that you will find this WHO guide useful, and that it helps all readers in their efforts to cope with stress.

Dévora Kestel

Director
Department of Mental Health and Substance Use
World Health Organization

(This version of *Doing What Matters in Times of Stress* is a field test version.
Please provide any feedback to: psych_interventions@who.int)

Acknowledgements

Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide is a component of a forthcoming WHO stress management course, Self-Help Plus (SH+),¹⁻² initiated by Mark van Ommeren (Mental Health Unit, Department of Mental Health and Substance Use, WHO) as part of the WHO Series on Low-Intensity Psychological Interventions.

Content creation

Inspired by his previous work,³ **Russ Harris** (Melbourne, Australia) created the content of SH+, including *Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide*. This comprised both writing the text and making initial sketches to inform illustrations.

Project coordination and management

Kenneth Carswell (WHO) (2015–2020) and **JoAnne Epping-Jordan** (Seattle, USA) (2014–2015) have managed the SH+ project, including the editing and design of this book.

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At different stages of this project, Teresa Au (WHO), Felicity Brown (WHO), Kenneth Carswell (WHO), JoAnne Epping-Jordan (Seattle, USA), Claudette Foley (Melbourne, Australia), Claudia Garcia-Moreno (WHO), Russ Harris (Melbourne, Australia), Cary Kogan (WHO) and Mark van Ommeren (WHO) contributed to the conceptualization and development of the SH+ project, including this book.

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Julie Smith (Melbourne, Australia) provided all illustrations and artwork.

Book production

David Wilson (Oxford, United Kingdom) was responsible for text editing, and Alessandro Mannocchi (Rome, Italy) for graphic design.

Narration of audio exercises

Sanjo Ogunseye (Lagos, Nigeria) narrated the audio exercises that accompany the book.

Administrative support

Ophel Riano (WHO).

1 Epping-Jordan JE, Harris R, Brown FL, Carswell K, Foley C, García-Moreno C, Kogan C, van Ommeren M. *Self-Help Plus (SH+): a new WHO stress management package*. *World Psychiatry*. 2016 Oct;15(3):295-6.

2 Tol WA, Leku MR, Lakin DP, Carswell K, Augustinavicius J, Adaku A, Au TM, Brown FL, Bryant RA, Garcia-Moreno C, Musci RJ, Ventevogel P, White RG, van Ommeren M. *Guided self-help to reduce psychological distress in South Sudanese female refugees in Uganda: a cluster randomised trial*. *The Lancet Global Health*. 2020 Feb;8(2):e254-e263.

3 Harris R, Aisbett B. *The Illustrated Happiness Trap*. Boston: Shambhala, 2013.

Book review (with affiliation at time of review)

Book reviewers included Mona Alqazzaz (WHO), Ebert Beate (Aschaffenburg, Germany), Cécile Bizouerne (Action Contre la Faim), Margriet Blaauw (War Trauma Foundation), Kate Cavanagh, (University of Sussex), Rachel Cohen (Geneva, Switzerland), Elizabeth De Castro (Children's Rights Resource Center), Manuel De Lara (WHO), Rabih El Chammay (Ministry of Public Health, Lebanon), Mohamed El Nawawi (Wintherthur, Switzerland), Boaz Feldman (Geneva, Switzerland), Kenneth Fung (UHN – Toronto Western Hospital), Anna Goloktionova (IMC), Brandon Gray (WHO), Elise Griede (War Child Holland), Jennifer Hall (WHO), Fahmy Hanna (WHO), Louise Hayes (Melbourne, Australia), Tiina Hokkanen (Fida International), Rebecca Horn (Queen Margaret University), Lynne Jones (Harvard School of Public Health), Mark Jordans, (Healthnet TPO), Dévora Kestel (WHO), Bianca King (Geneva, Switzerland), Nils Kolstrup (UiT The Arctic University of Norway), Aiysha Malik (WHO), Carmen Martinez (Médecins Sans Frontières), Ken Miller (War Child Holland), Mirjam Fagerheim Moiba (Njala University), Lynette Monteiro (University of Ottawa), Eva Murino (WHO), Sebastiana Da Gama Nkomo (WHO), Brian Ogallo (WHO), Patricia Omidian (Focusing International), Andrea Pereira (Geneva, Switzerland), Bhava Poudyal (Kathmandu, Nepal), Beatrice Pouligny (Washington DC, USA), Megin Reijnders (WHO), Patricia Robinson (Mountainview Consulting Group), Shekhar Saxena (WHO), Alison Schafer (World Vision Australia), Pratap Sharan (All India Institute of Medical Sciences), Marian Schilperoord (UNHCR), Andrew Thomson (Car Gomm), Mikai and Hana van Ommeren (Divonne-les-Bains, France), Peter Ventevogel (UNHCR), Matthieu Villatte (Evidence-Based Practice Institute), Sarah Watts (WHO), Wietse Tol (HealthRight International's Peter C. Alderman Program), Nana Wiedemann (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies), Inka Weissbecker (International Medical Corps), Mike Wessells (Columbia University), Ross White (University of Glasgow), Eyad Yanes (WHO) and Diana Zandi (WHO), and all emergency-affected people in Syria, Turkey, Uganda and Ukraine who participated in adaptation and field-testing of the book and its images.

Testing (alphabetical)

The following organizations supported development of this book through field testing: HealthRight International's Peter C. Alderman Program (in collaboration with Ministry of Health Uganda, UNHCR, WHO Country Office in Uganda), International Medical Corps, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Médecins du Monde, the University of Verona and other members of the RE-DEFINE consortium, and the WHO Country Office in Syria. Acknowledgements of the contributions of colleagues involved in the testing of the SH+ course will be included in the publication of the course and articles describing its evaluation.

Funding (alphabetical)

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Note on translation and adaptation of this guide

WHO will publish a translation of this work into Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, and Spanish.

To avoid duplication of translations, please consider contacting WHO at <http://www.who.int/about/licensing> prior to starting an adaptation.

If you are experiencing stress, you are not alone.

Right now, there are many other people in your community and all around the world who are also struggling with stress.

We will help you to learn practical skills for dealing with stress.

You will see us throughout this book, as we teach you the skills you need.


Enjoy your journey of learning how to do what matters in times of stress!



How to use this book

This book has five sections, each containing a new idea and technique. These are easy to learn and can be used for just a few minutes each day to help you reduce stress. You can read one section every few days and take time to practise the exercises and use the learning in the days in between. Or, you can read the book through once, applying whatever you can, and then read it again, taking more time to appreciate the ideas and practise the techniques. Practising and applying the ideas to your life is key for reducing stress. You can read the guide at home, during break or rest periods at work, before you go to sleep or any other time when you might have a few moments to concentrate on taking care of yourself.

If you find that doing the exercises in this book is not enough for you to cope with intolerable stress, then please seek help from relevant health or social services, or from trusted people in your community.

If you have a device for accessing the Internet and storing audio files, when you see the symbol  in the book you can download an audio version of the exercise from <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/9789240003927> to support your practice.

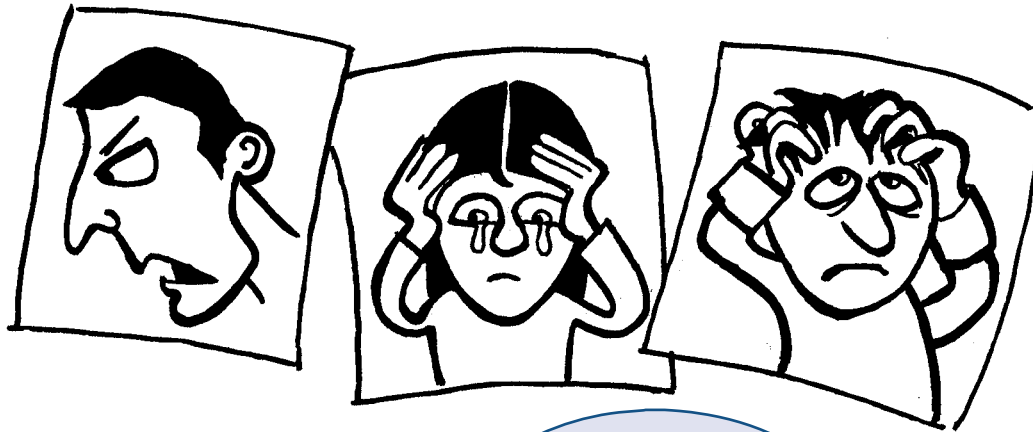
If you are not able to access the online audio files, you can still get similar benefit from reading and carefully following the instructions and exercises in this book.

Part 1

GROUNDING



This book is to help you manage **STRESS**.



1A



"Stress" means
feeling troubled
or threatened
by life.

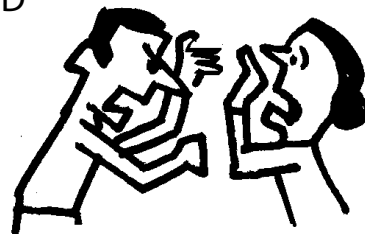
1B **Stress can be due to major threats...**



One man did
something really bad
to me

1C

1D



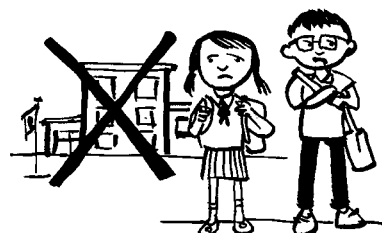
**FAMILY
VIOLENCE**

1E



ILLNESS

1F



NO SCHOOL

1G



**PROBLEMS
PROVIDING FOR YOUR
FAMILY**

DISPLACED FROM HOME



1H

1I

VIOLENCE

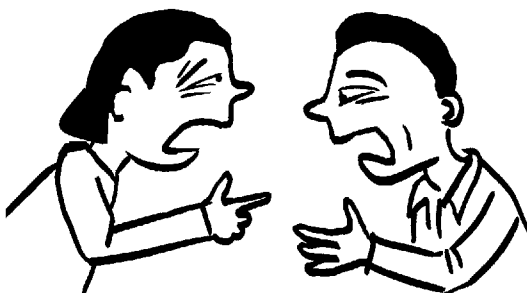


**IN YOUR
COMMUNITY**

1J

...or smaller problems.

**ARGUMENTS WITH
YOUR FAMILY**



1K

**UNCERTAINTY ABOUT
THE FUTURE**



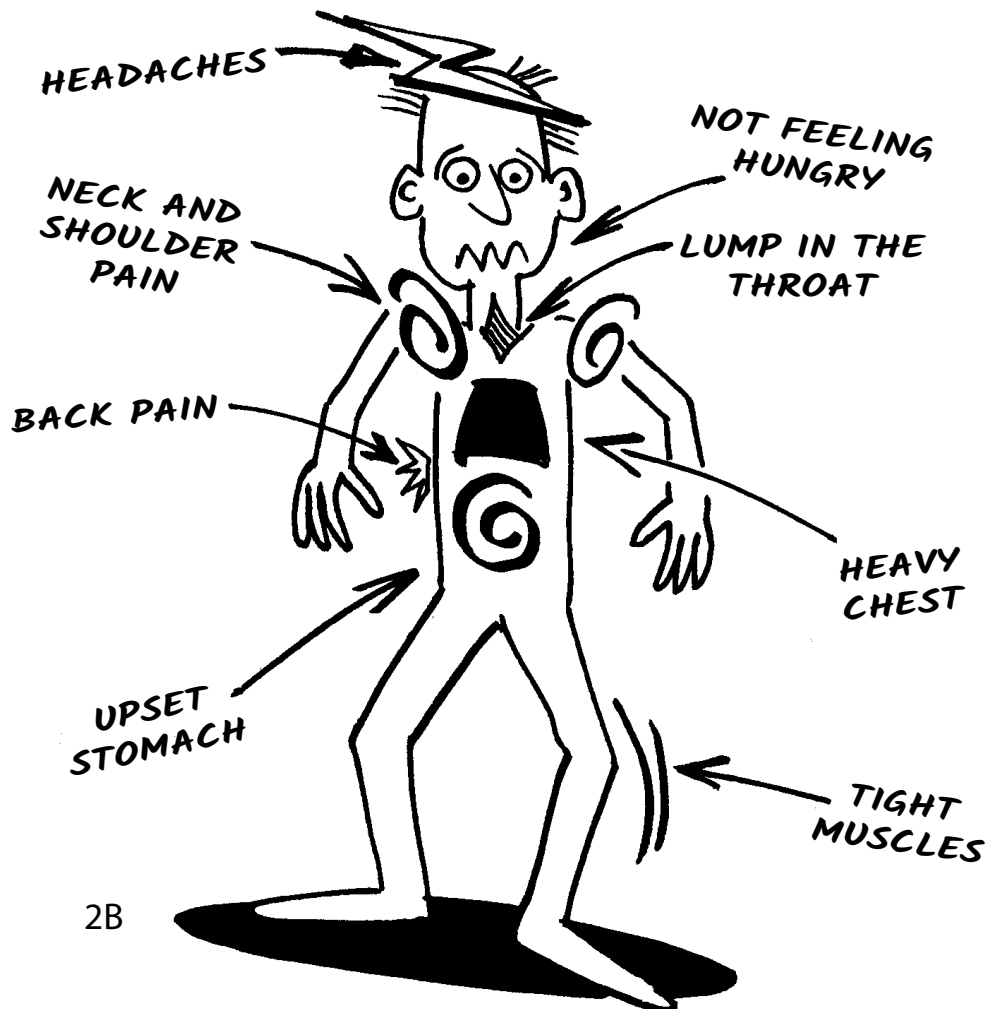
1L

2A



Everyone experiences stress at times.
A little bit of stress is not a problem.

But very high stress often affects the body.
Many people get unpleasant feelings.



2B

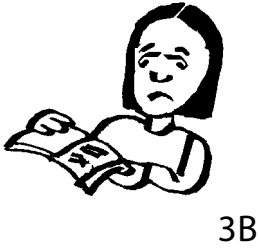


Other people find their body gets sick – skin rashes, infections, illnesses or bowel problems.

2C

When they are stressed, many people ...

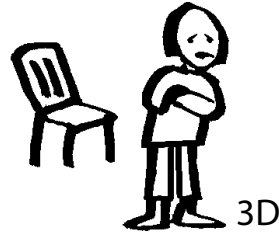
...cannot focus



...get angry easily



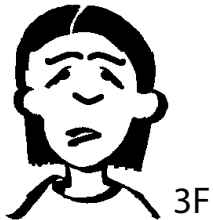
...cannot sit still



...have difficulty sleeping



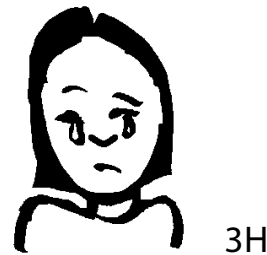
...feel sad or guilty



...worry



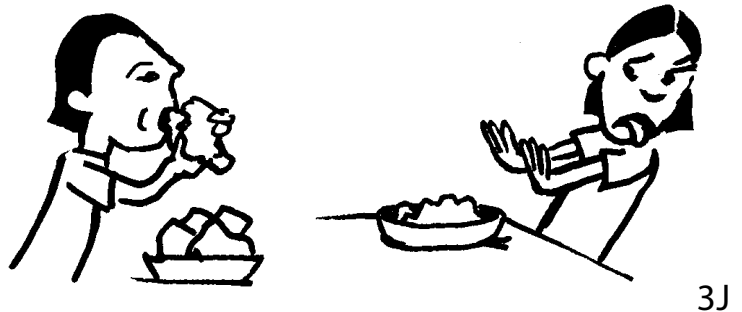
...cry



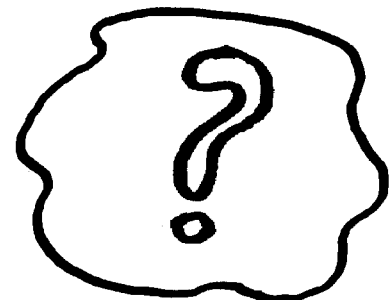
...feel very tired



...have changes in appetite.



And many of us think a lot about bad things from the past or bad things we fear in the future.

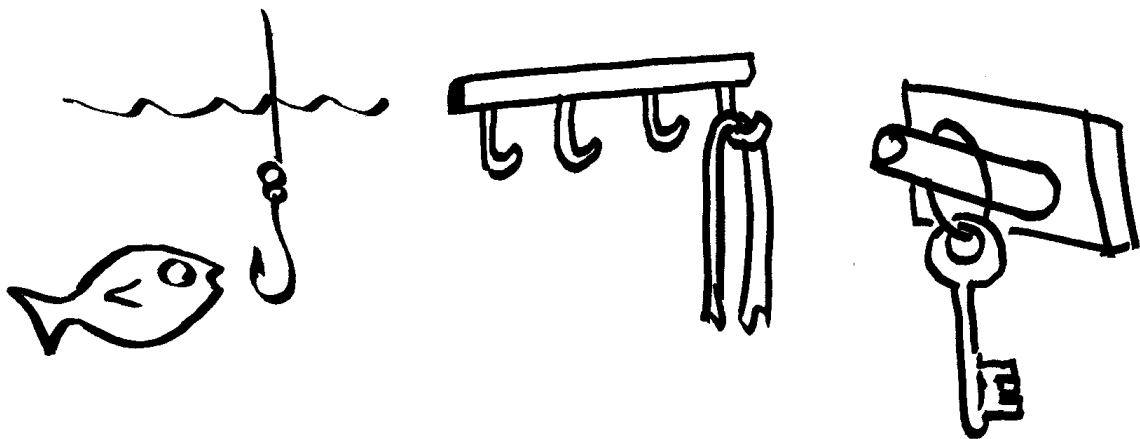


3K

These powerful thoughts and feelings are a natural part of stress.
But problems can occur if we get “hooked” by them.



What does “hooked” mean?
Well, there are many types of hooks.



When something is on a hook,
it cannot get away.
The hook traps it.



4A

In the same way, we can get
hooked by our difficult thoughts
and feelings.



4B

One moment, you might be
playing with children...



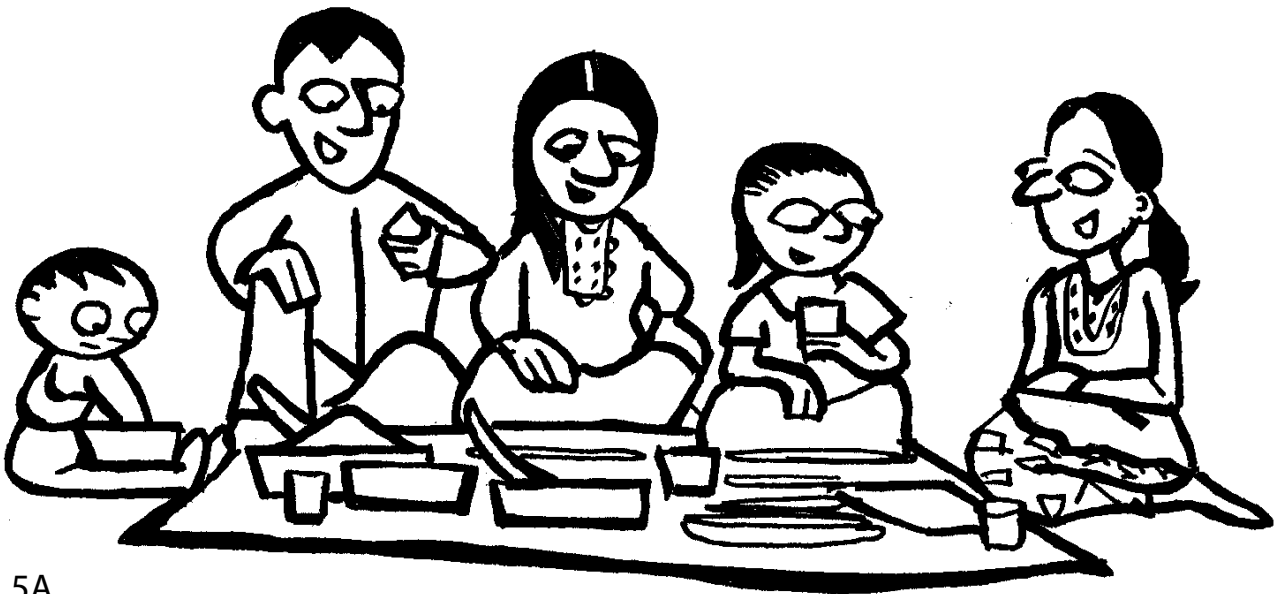
4C

...and the next moment,
you might be hooked by difficult
thoughts and feelings.



4D

One moment, you might be enjoying sharing a meal...



5A

... and the next moment, you might be hooked by angry thoughts and feelings. You may feel as if you are being pulled away by anger, even if you are still there.



5B

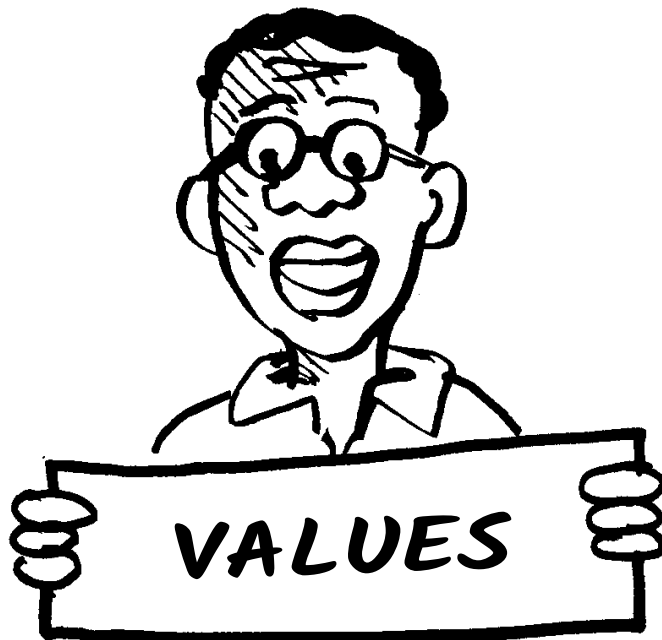
So these difficult
thoughts and feelings
"hook" us and pull us
away from our **VALUES**.

What are values?



5C

**Values are your deepest desires
for the sort of person you want to be.**



5D

For example, if you are a parent or if you have responsibilities caring for others, what kind of person do you want to be?



- Loving
- Wise
- Attentive
- Committed
- Persistent
- Responsible
- Calm
- Caring
- Protective
- Courageous



So values describe the sort of person you want to be; how you want to treat yourself and others and the world around you.





Just reading this book means you are likely acting on some of your values. Do you see how?

Yes, I am reading this book because I care about my family.

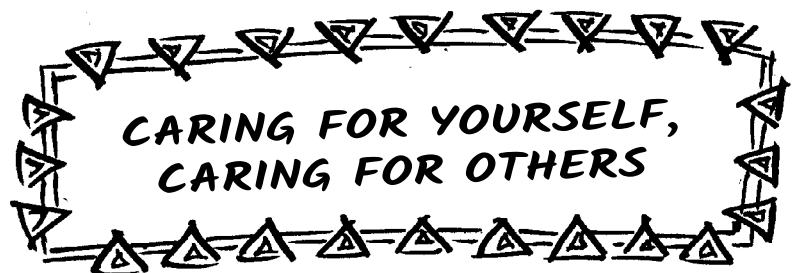
Yes, and I care about my well-being.

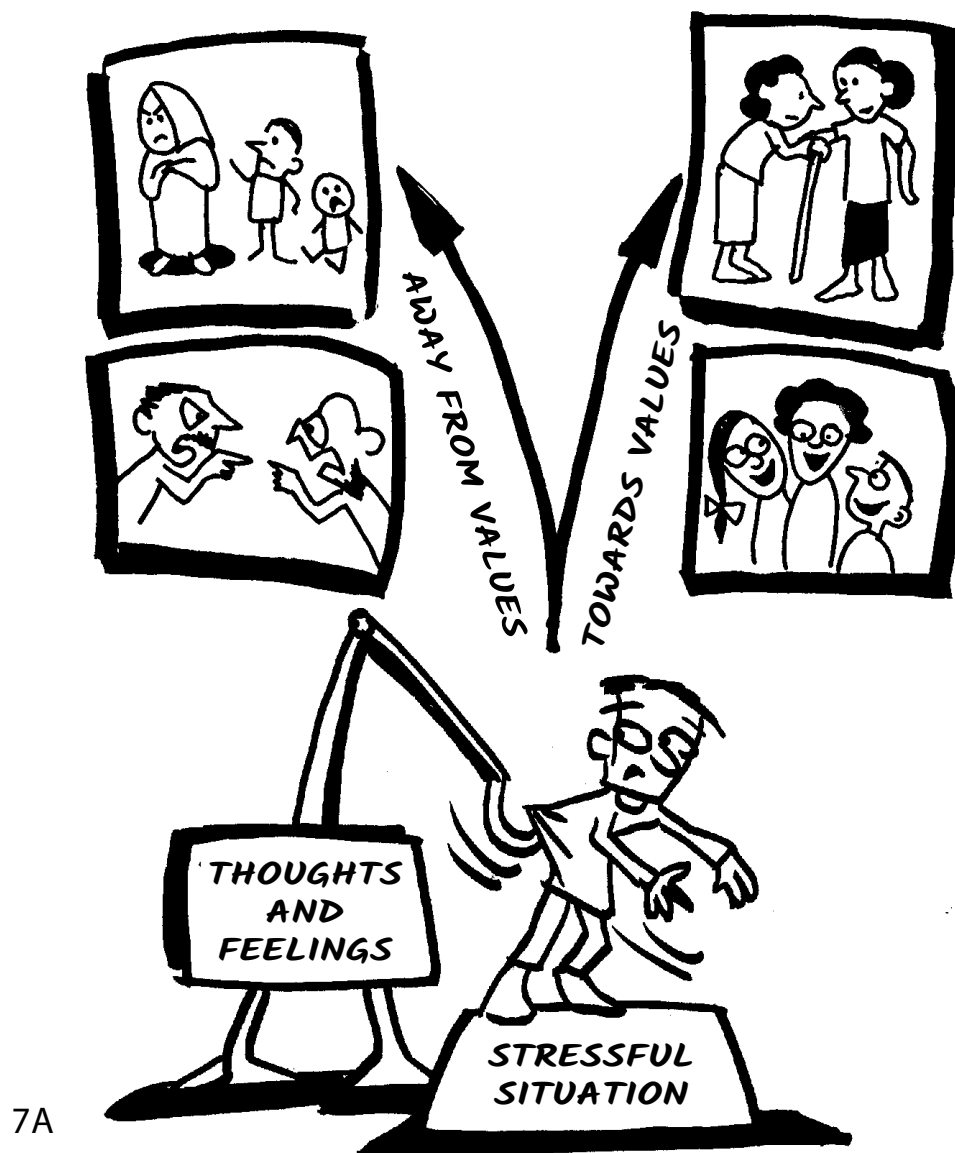
6E



6F

That is correct. So likely you are acting on one value that is important to many people:
CARING.





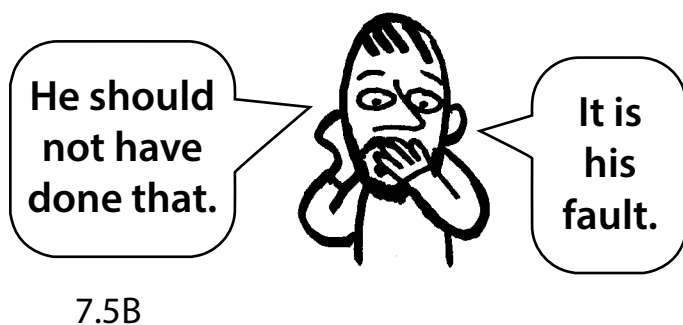
In stressful situations, difficult thoughts and feelings hook us, and we are pulled away from our values.

7B

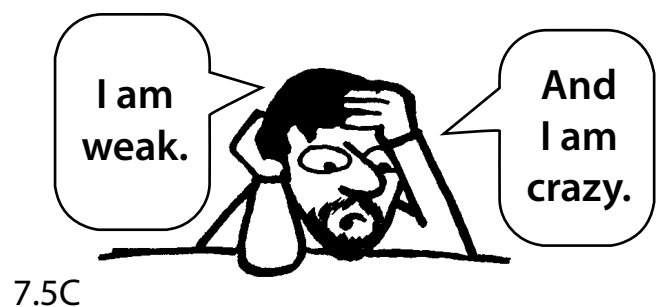
There are many kinds of difficult thoughts and feelings that can hook us. Thoughts about giving up...



Thoughts that blame others...



Harsh judgements about ourselves...



Memories, especially about difficult events...



Thoughts about the future, especially about what we fear...



Thoughts where we worry
about others.

7.5F



7.5G

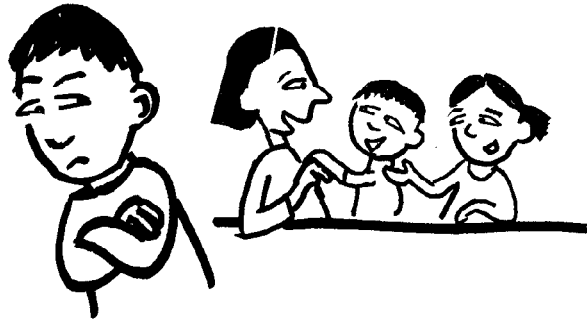
When we get hooked,
our behaviour changes.
We often start doing
things that make our lives
worse.

We might get into fights,
arguments
or disagreements.

7.5H

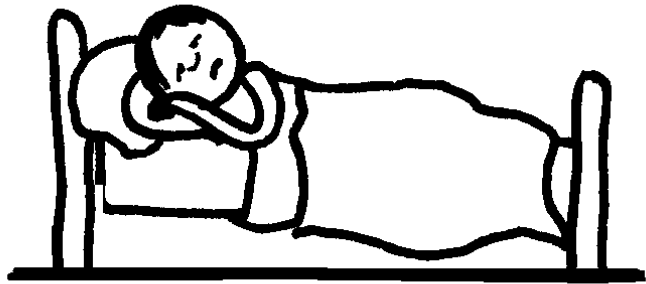


Or we might withdraw
and stay away from people
we love.



7.5I

Or we might spend
a lot of time lying in bed.

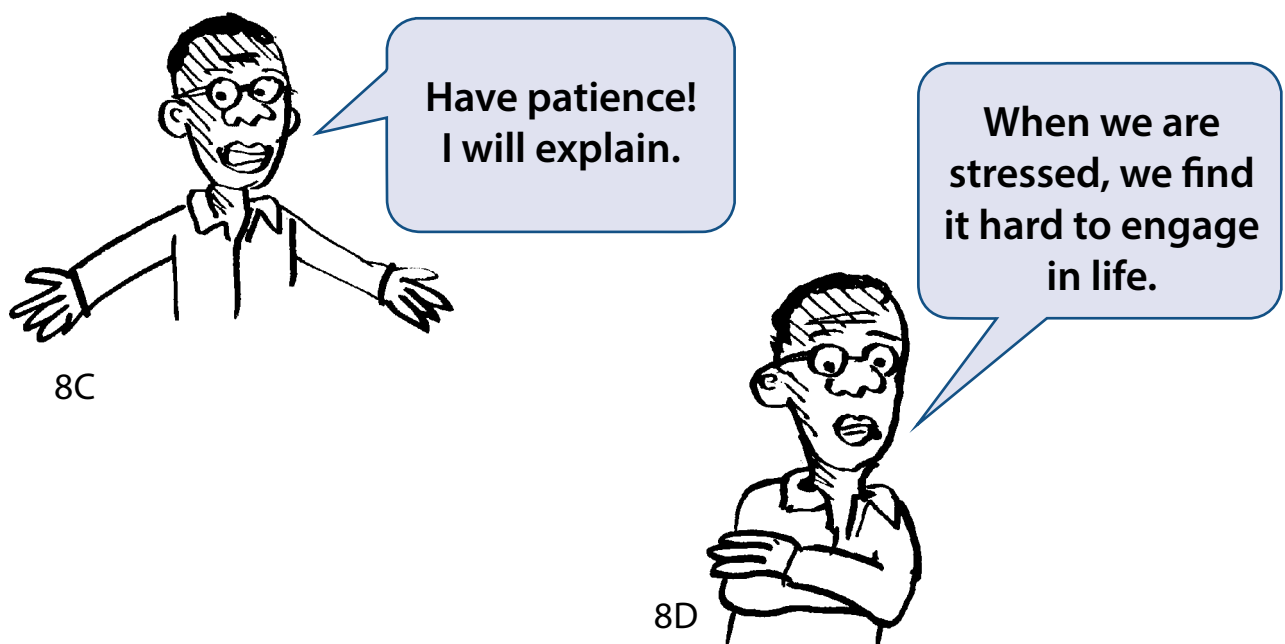


7.5J



We call these behaviours
“AWAY MOVES” because
when we act this way, we
are moving AWAY from our
values.

7.5K





I do not understand what you mean by "engage".

8E



8F

To "engage" in something means to give it your full attention.

When you are drinking something, do you give it your full attention? Do you savour the smell and the taste?



8G

When you listen to music, do you give it your full attention? Do you listen to it and enjoy it?



8H





When you give your full attention to any activity, we say you are “engaged” with it.



But when hooked by thoughts or feelings, you are “disengaged” or “distracted”.



9B



When you give your full attention to any activity, we say you are “focused”.

But when hooked by thoughts or feelings, you are unfocused.

And when we do things in an unfocused way, we often do them poorly, or are unable to enjoy the activity and feel dissatisfied.

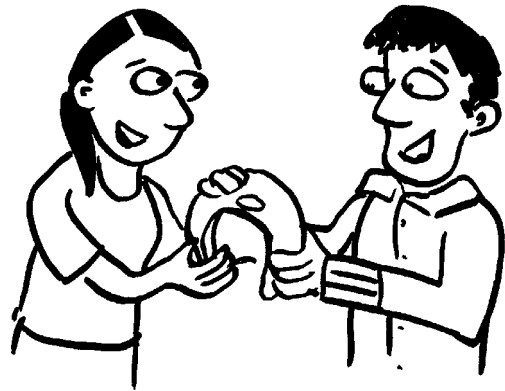


9D



So, if you can learn to be more engaged,
and focus better, then you will handle
stress better.

For example, you will find your
relationships with others more
satisfying.

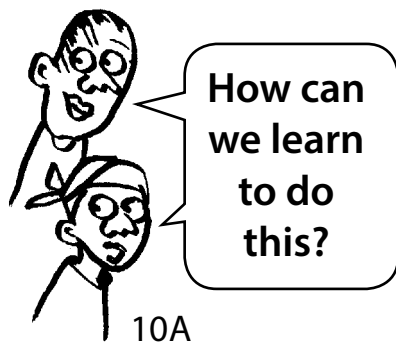


9F

And, you will be able
to do important things
much better.



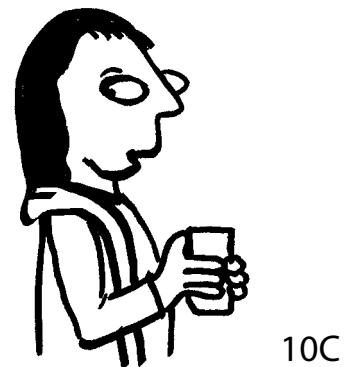
9G



There are many ways to practise engaging in life or focusing on what you are doing

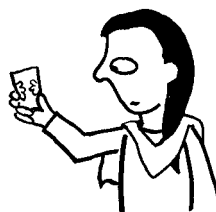


You can practise these skills with any activity you do. For example, if you are drinking tea or coffee...



...focus your full attention on it. You notice the drink with curiosity, as if you have never encountered such a drink before. You notice its colour.

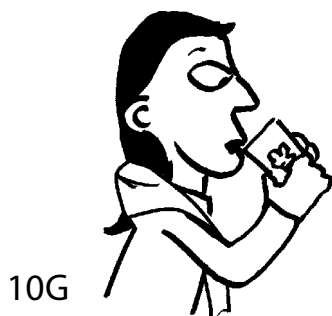
10E



You savour the smell of it.



You sip it SLOWLY.



Let it sit on your tongue, feel it on your teeth and savour the taste.

10H



You drink it as slowly as possible, savouring the taste, noticing the temperature.



You notice the movements of your throat as you swallow.



You notice the taste fading from your tongue, as you swallow.

11C



And you drink each mouthful in the same way: slowly, noticing and savouring.



And whenever you get hooked by thoughts and feelings ...

11F



Exactly! What other activities could you use to practise engaging or focusing?

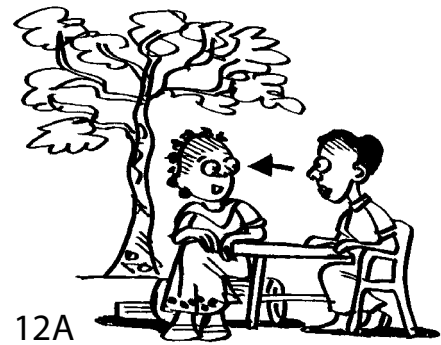
11G



Go ahead and practise this now. Get some water, tea or coffee, and follow the pictures and instructions above. You can also go to this [LINK](#) and listen to, or download the *Awareness of Drinking exercise*.



You could practise while talking to family or friends. Notice what others are saying, their tones of voice and their facial expressions. Give them your full attention.



12A

You could practise this while playing a game or doing some other activity with children, like teaching them to read. You simply give your full attention to the children and to the game.



12B

You could practise this while washing, cooking or doing chores. You simply give your full attention to the activity.



12C

And whenever you notice you get hooked...



12D

**We unhook
by refocusing
and engaging in what
we are doing.**



12E



12F

**Okay!
I can do that when
my thoughts
and feelings
are not
too difficult.**



13A

But sometimes my feelings and stories are just so painful.

Yes, sometimes they are so overpowering they turn into "emotional storms".



An "emotional storm" means that you experience intensely difficult thoughts and feelings. They are so strong they are like a mighty storm, and they can easily overpower you.



13B



13C

When an emotional storm appears we must learn how to "ground ourselves".

What does that mean?



Imagine you are high in a tree
when a storm begins.



14A

Would you want to stay
in the tree?



14B

While you are in the tree,
you are in great danger!



14C

You need to get down to the
ground as quickly as possible!



14D

On the ground, you are much safer.



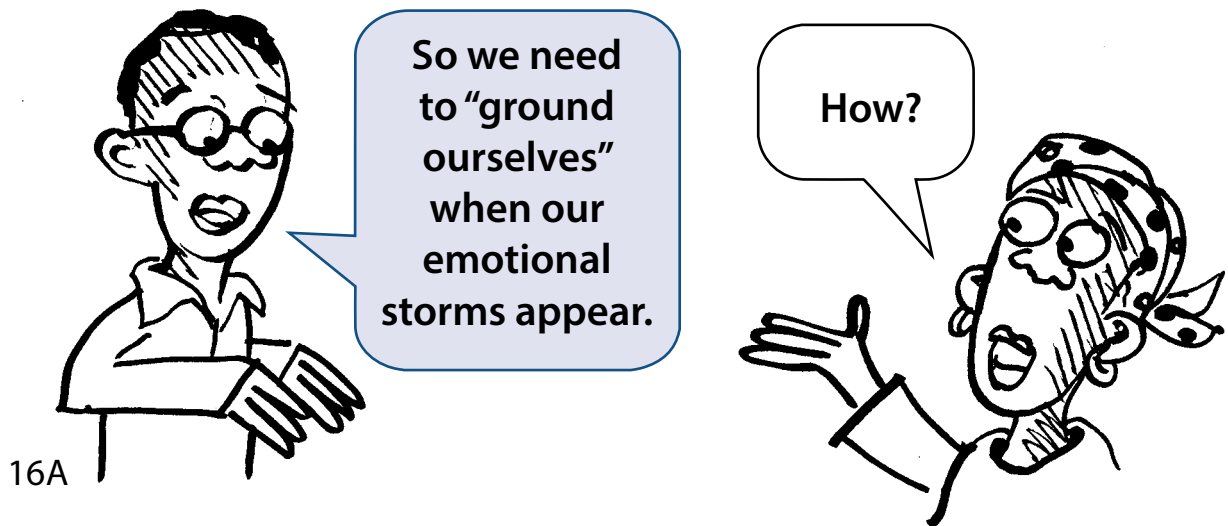
15A

And on the ground, you can help others.
For example, you could comfort others
while the storm rages.



15B

And if there is somewhere safe for you to hide,
you can only get there after you are on the ground.

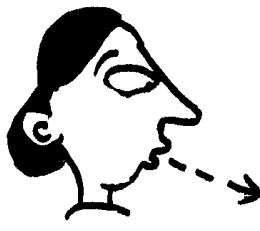


Next, **SLOW DOWN** and **CONNECT** with your body.
Slow your breathing. Empty your lungs completely.
Then let them refill as slowly as possible.

17A



17B

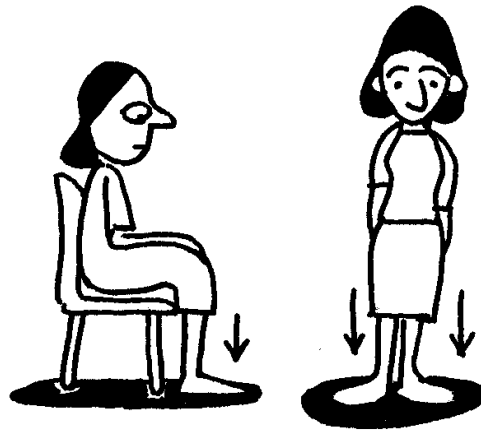


17C



17D

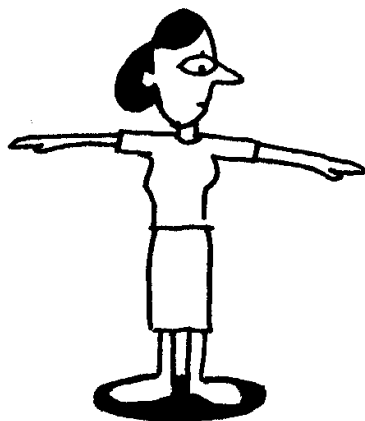
Slowly press your feet into the floor.



17E

17F

Slowly stretch your arms, or slowly press your hands together.



17G



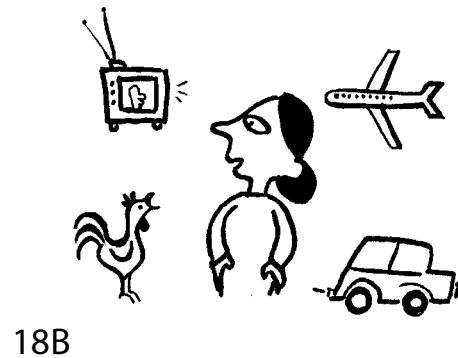
17H

The next step in grounding is to **REFOCUS** on the world around you.

Notice where you are.
What are five things you can see?



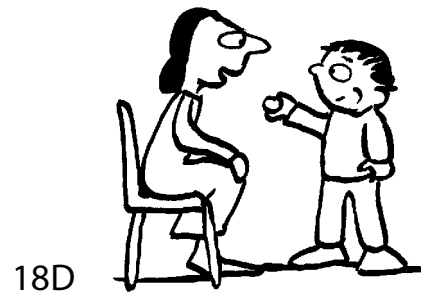
What are three or four things you can hear?



Breathe the air. What can you smell?



Notice where you are and what you are doing.



18E

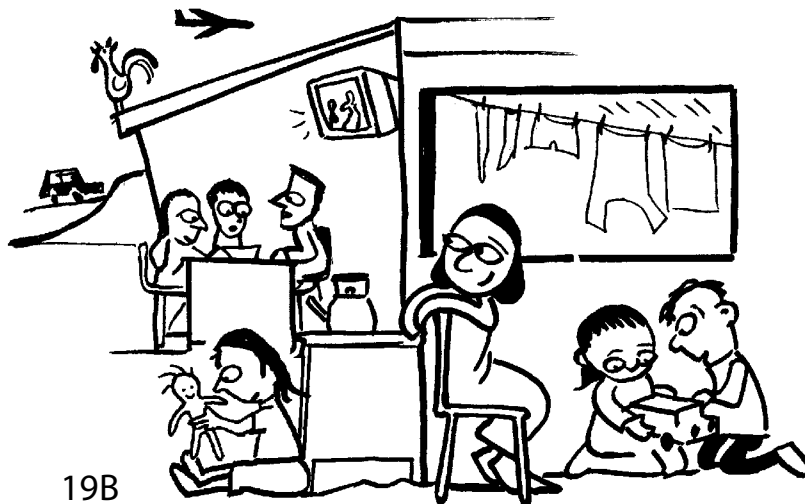
Touch your knees, or the surface beneath you, or any object you can reach. Notice what it feels like under your fingers.



So notice there are difficult thoughts and feelings appearing...




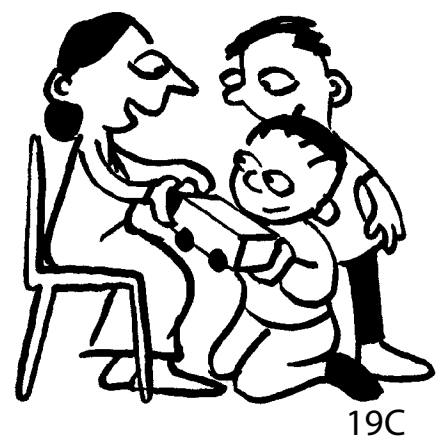
...and there is also a world around you that you can see and hear and touch and taste and smell.



And you can also move your arms and legs and mouth – so if you want to, you can act in line with your values.



 You can go to this [LINK](#) and listen to, or download *Grounding Exercise 1*. Or, you can simply follow the pictures and instructions in this book.





20A

Grounding does not make your emotional storms disappear. It just keeps you safe, until the storm passes.

Some storms last a long time.



20B

Others pass quickly.



20C

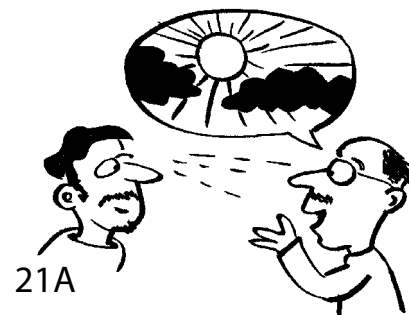
Do you mean these unhooking and grounding exercises will not get rid of my difficult thoughts and feelings?

Correct! That is not their purpose.



20D

The purpose of the unhooking and grounding exercises is to help you “engage” in life. For example, to help you give your full attention to family and friends.



21A

It is also to help you move towards your values; to help you behave more like the kind of person you want to be.



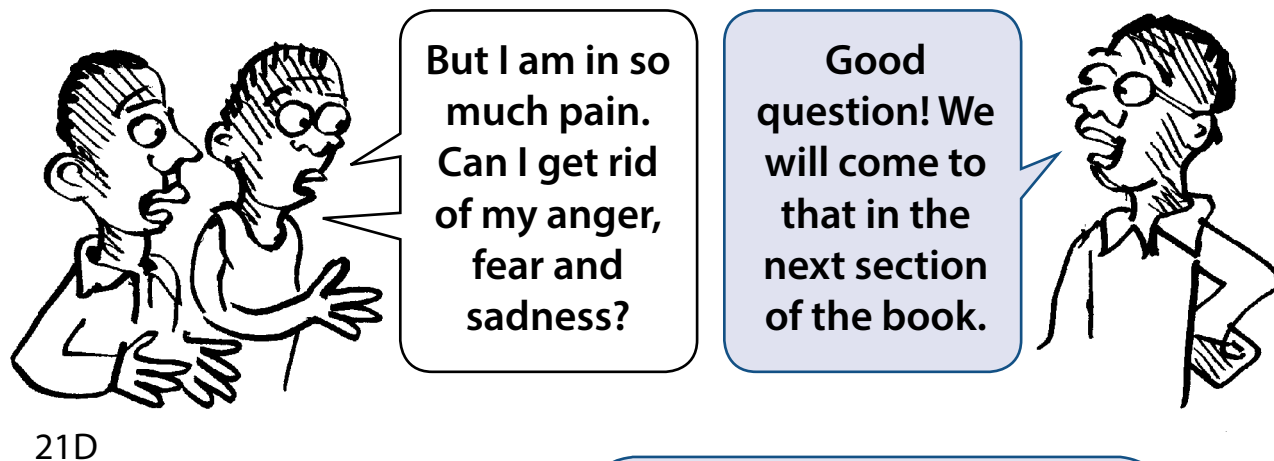
21B

And to help you focus on what you are doing, so you can do it well.



21C

When you pay attention and engage fully in any activity you may also find it more satisfying. This is true even with activities that are boring or frustrating.



21D

But I am in so much pain. Can I get rid of my anger, fear and sadness?

Good question! We will come to that in the next section of the book.



21E

But for now, please just keep practising those new skills. And remember they are not supposed to get rid of your anger, fear or sadness.

When we engage in life, pay attention to others, focus on what we're doing and live by our values, we manage stress much better.

22A



Engaging, focusing and grounding help us do all those things.

But it seems so hard...



22B



Like any new skill, it requires practice.

And the more we practise...



...the better we get!



22C

It is like building your muscles to run faster or to lift heavier loads. With practice, your muscles get bigger!



22D





22.5A

There are many ways to practise these engaging and grounding skills. We will practise them now!

As you read this book, follow the instructions. Do not simply read about it; actually do it!



22.5B

First, **NOTICE** how you are feeling and what you are thinking. Then, **SLOW DOWN** and **CONNECT** with your body. Slowly breathe out. Slowly stretch. Slowly push your feet into the floor.



22.5C

Now **REFOCUS** on the world around you. Pay attention with curiosity to what you can ...

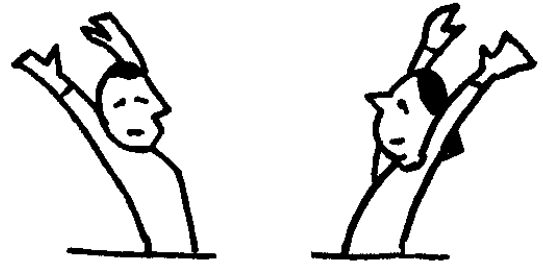


22.5D

Now have a good stretch.
Engage with the world. Notice
where you are, who is with you,
and what you are doing.



You can go to this [LINK](#)
and listen to, or download
Grounding Exercise 2. Or, you can
simply follow the pictures and
instructions in this book.



22.5E

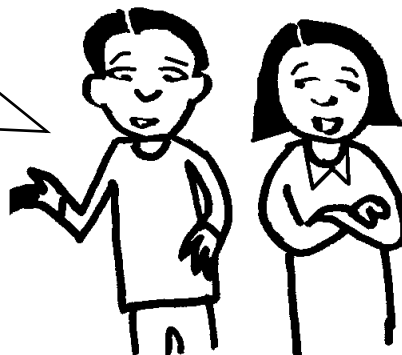


That exercise should take
you about 30 seconds.
You can do it anytime,
anywhere.



22.5F

That is great.
I can practise it
anytime.



Yes, and the
more I practise,
the better!

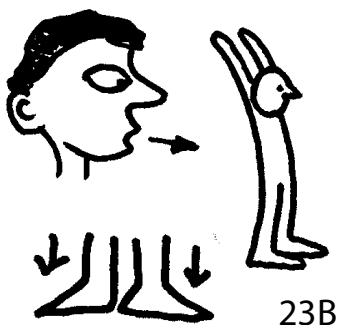
22.5G

23A



Now here is a longer grounding exercise to practise. First, **NOTICE** how you are feeling and what you are thinking.

Next, **SLOW DOWN** and **CONNECT** with your body. Slowly breathe out. Slowly stretch. Slowly push your feet into the ground.



23B

Now slow your breathing even more. Slowly and gently, empty your lungs.



23C



23D

Make sure you breathe **SLOWLY** and **GENTLY**.

If you breathe too hard or too quickly, it could make you feel panicky, anxious, dizzy or short of breath.



23E



23F

And as you breath **IN**, also do so **SLOWLY** and **GENTLY**.

If you start to feel dizzy or light-headed, you are breathing too deeply, too hard or too quickly.



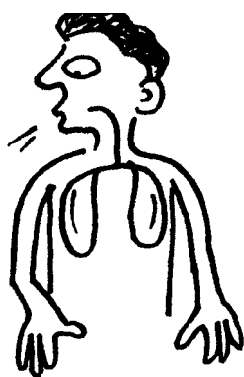
23G

23H



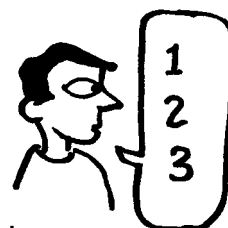
So if you ever start to feel dizzy, or light-headed, or tight-chested, **SLOW** your breathing. Breathe out **GENTLY** and breathe in as **SLOWLY** and **SHALLOWLY** as possible. (**DO NOT** take deep breaths. This will worsen your dizziness!)

Now notice your breathing with **CURIOSITY** – as if it is the first time you have ever encountered breathing.



23I

Now breathe out even more **SLOWLY**. And after your lungs are empty, silently count to three before you breathe in again. Then let your lungs refill as **SLOWLY AS POSSIBLE**.



23J



23K

You are training your ability to stay engaged and focused. Can you keep your attention on your breath?

As you do this, from time to time thoughts and feelings will hook you and pull you out of the exercise.



23L

As soon as you realize this has happened, **REFOCUS** on your breathing. Give it your full attention.



24A

Notice the air as it flows in and out of your nostrils.



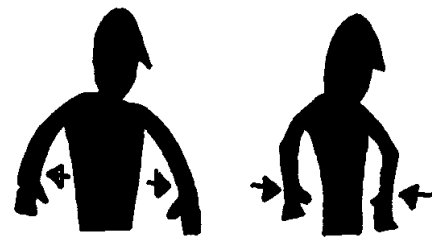
24B

Notice the gentle movements of your shoulders.



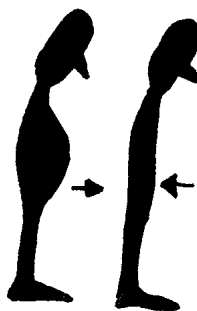
24C

Notice your chest moving in and out.



24D

Notice how your belly moves in and out.



24E

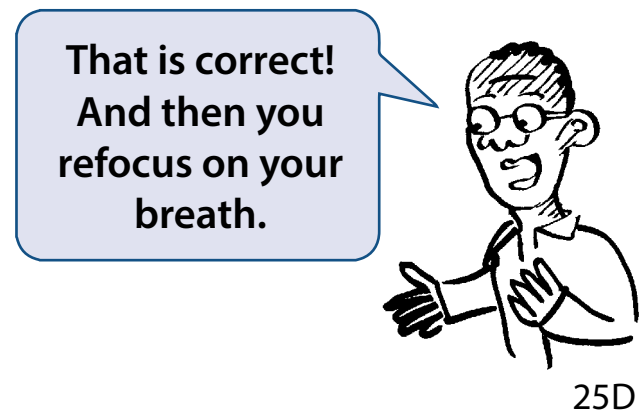
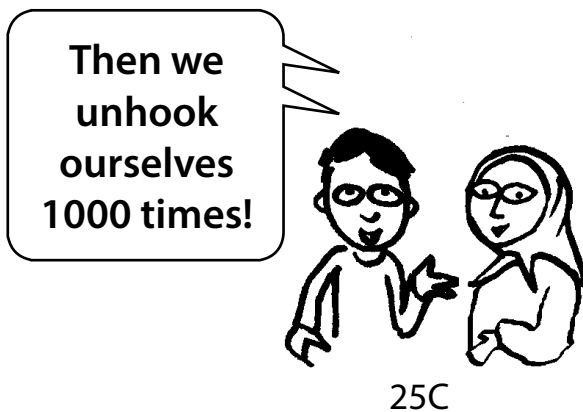
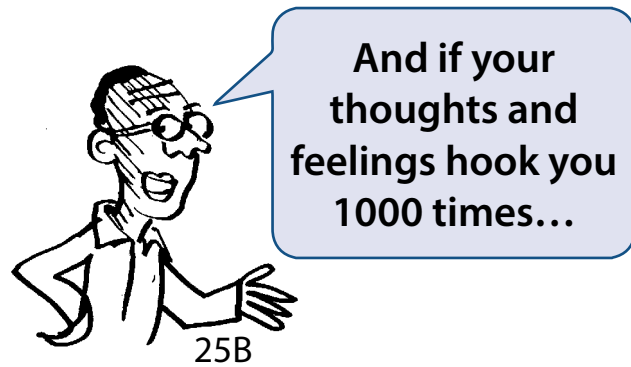
Again and again and again, you will get hooked.

So as soon as you realize this has happened ...

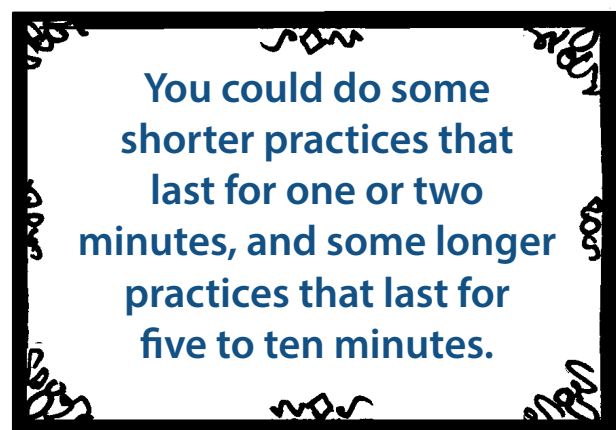
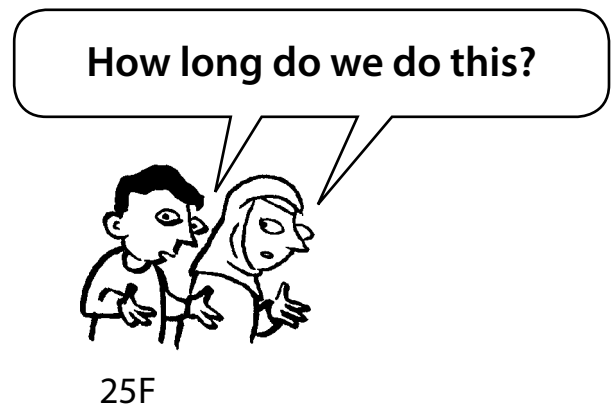
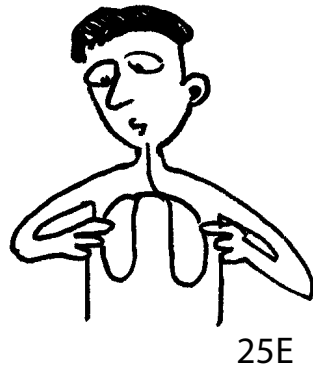


24F

...refocus on your breathing.



Again and again and again, you bring your attention back to your breath, noticing it with curiosity.

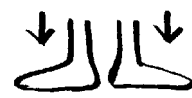




To finish the exercise,
once again ground
yourself.

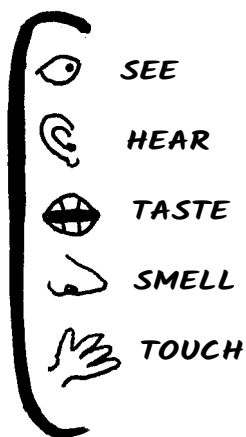
26A

SLOW down.
Slowly breathe out.
Slowly stretch.
Slowly push your feet into the
floor.



26B

Then
REFOCUS and
ENGAGE with
the world.
Pay attention
with curiosity
to what you
can...



26C



Notice where you
are, who is with
you and what you
are doing.

26D



You can go to this [LINK](#)
and listen to, or down-
load *Grounding Exercise 3*.
Or, you can simply follow the
pictures and instructions in
this book.



And take a
moment to
acknowledge that
each time you
practise this...



26E

I am living by
my values of
caring...

...for the health of
myself, others and
my community.



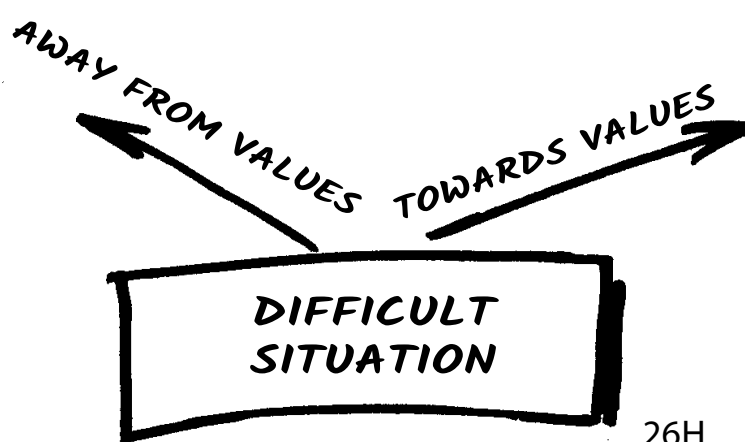
26F



26G

That's right! Because these skills help you to engage, focus and unhook from difficult thoughts and feelings...

... so you can move towards your values.



26H



26I

So remember, practise these skills throughout the day, at every chance you get.

It can help to make a plan. For example, think about when, where and how many times each day you will practise grounding. Practising does not need to be inconvenient! You can practise anytime, anywhere, even just for 1–2 minutes. Ideally, take at least a day or two to practise the skills from this section, before going on to the next section.

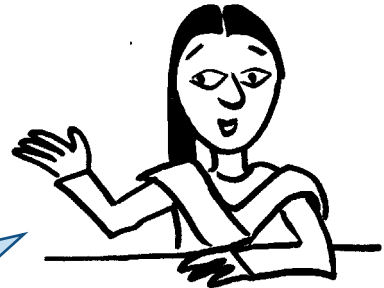
At the end of the book you'll find brief descriptions of every skill, which can remind you of the key points.

Part 2

UNHOOKING



Welcome back. I hope you practised engaging in life, focusing on your activities and grounding yourself during emotional storms.

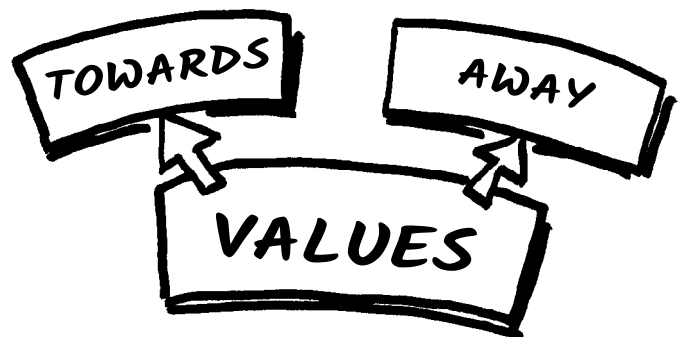


27A

Earlier, you may remember, we talked about "towards" and "away" moves.



27B



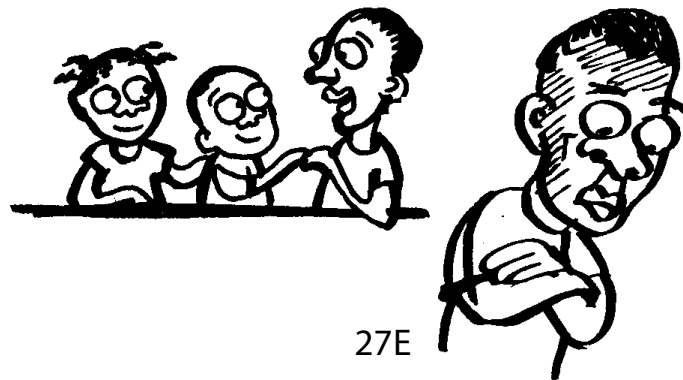
When we get hooked by difficult thoughts and feelings, we tend to make “away moves” – moving away from our values.



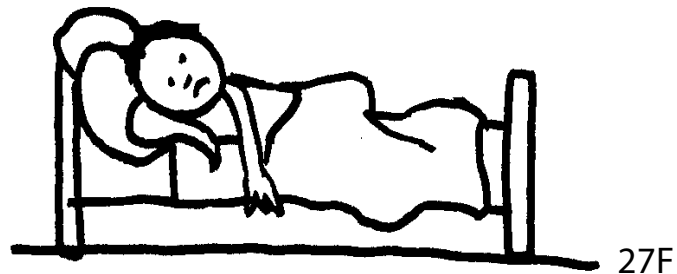
We might get into fights, arguments or disagreements.



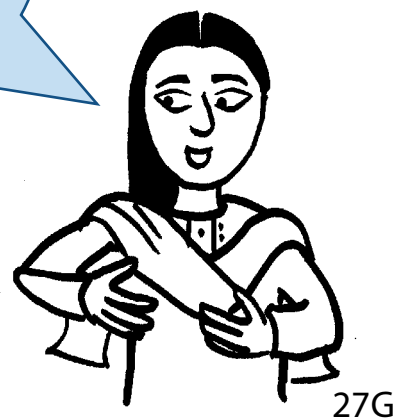
Or we might withdraw and stay away from people we love.



Or we might spend a lot of time lying in bed.



So today, we are going
to learn more about
unhooking ourselves
from difficult thoughts
and feelings.

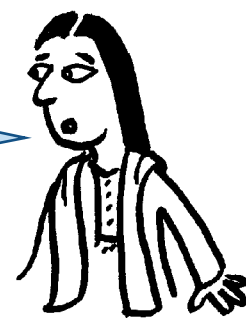




28A

My life is so hard now. Will my difficult thoughts and feelings ever go away?

Good question. It makes sense that you would want them to go away.



But is it realistic to think we can simply get rid of them?

Can we burn them like rubbish?



28B

Can we lock them up, hide them away?



28C

Can we bury them in a hole?



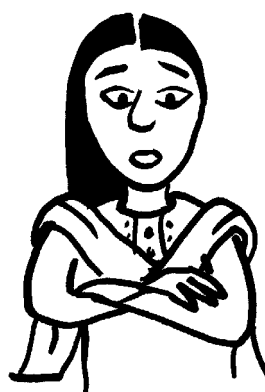
28D

Can we run off and leave them behind?



28E

Take a moment to think about all the ways you have tried to get rid of these thoughts and feelings.



28F

29A

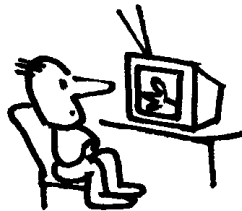
Most people try at least some of these strategies:

Yelling!



29B

Trying not to think about it



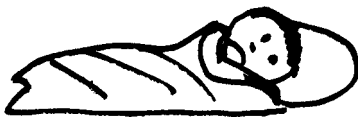
29C

Avoiding people, places or situations



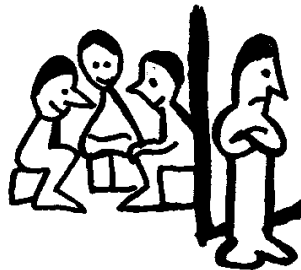
29D

Staying in bed



29E

Isolating yourself



29F

Giving up



29G

Alcohol



29H

Tobacco



29I

Illicit drugs



29J

Starting arguments



29K

Blaming or criticizing oneself

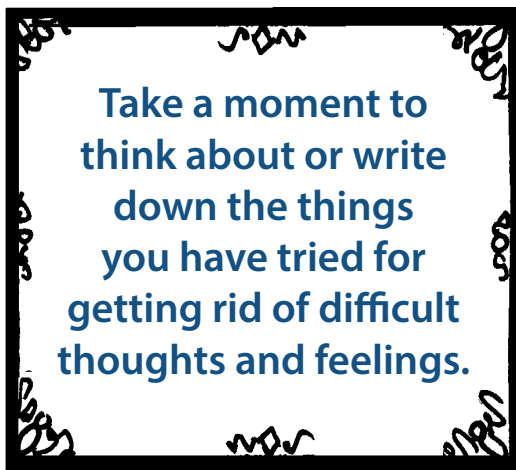


29L

What else have you tried?



29M



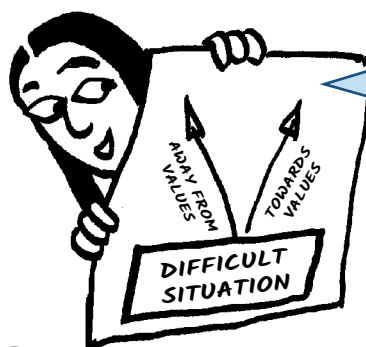
29N



Of course, many of these methods make thoughts and feelings go away.

But not for long!

They soon come back!



30B

And how many of these methods pull away from your values?

Most of them!



Exactly! So when we try to get rid of thoughts and feelings...



...our life usually gets worse!

So are you open to a new way?



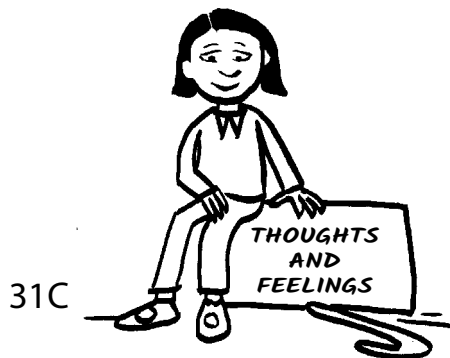
It is a new way
of handling
difficult
thoughts
and feelings.



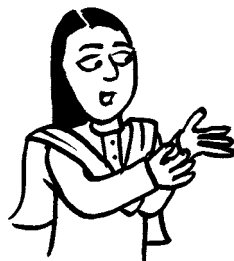
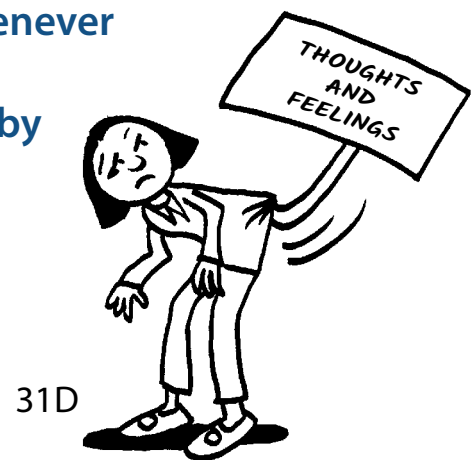
Instead of trying to push them
away...



You stop struggling with them.



And whenever
you get
hooked by
them...



...you unhook yourself
again.

How do we
do that?

I will show you soon. But first let us
identify – what thoughts and feelings
are hooking you?



Are you being hooked by thoughts about...

Bad things
that happened
in the past

Not being good
enough – being weak
or crazy or bad

Bad things
that might happen
in the future

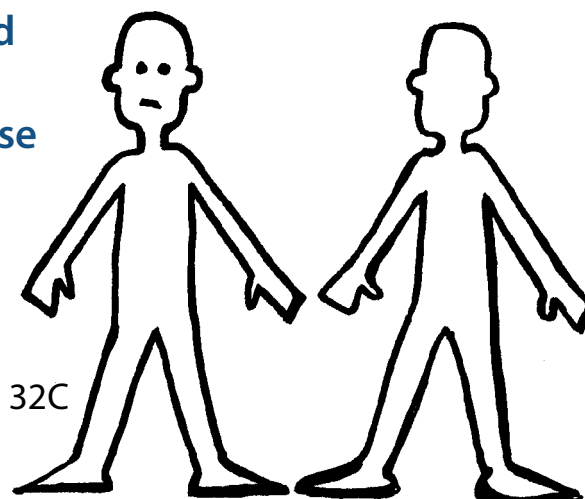


32A

Write some of
the thoughts
that hook you:

32B

Are you being hooked
by feelings in your
body? Mark where these
feelings are located:

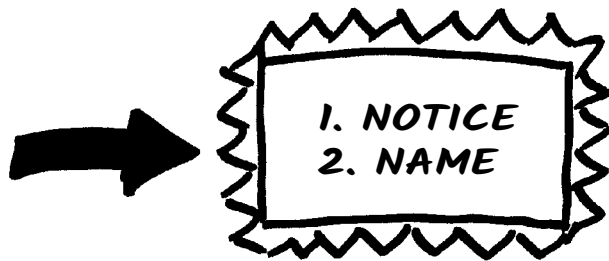


32C

FRONT

BACK

The first two steps in unhooking are:



33A

First you **NOTICE** that a thought or feeling has hooked you.
Then you **NAME** it. To name it, you silently say
to yourself something like...

Here is
tightness in
my chest.



Here is
pressure in
my forehead.



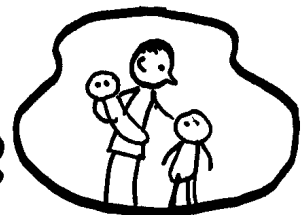
33B



33C



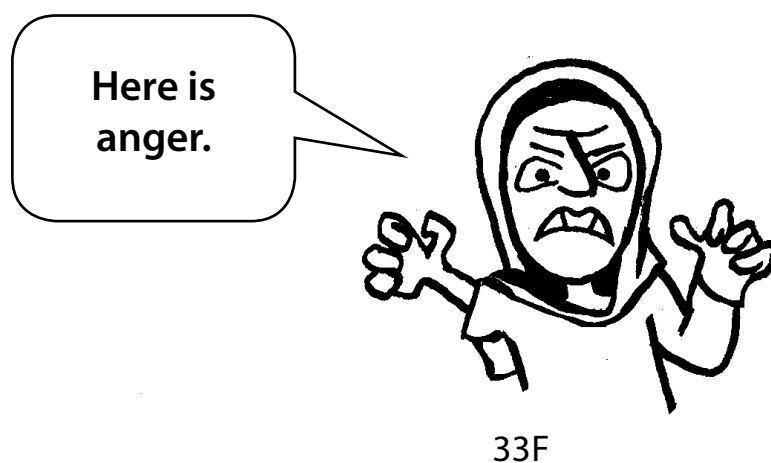
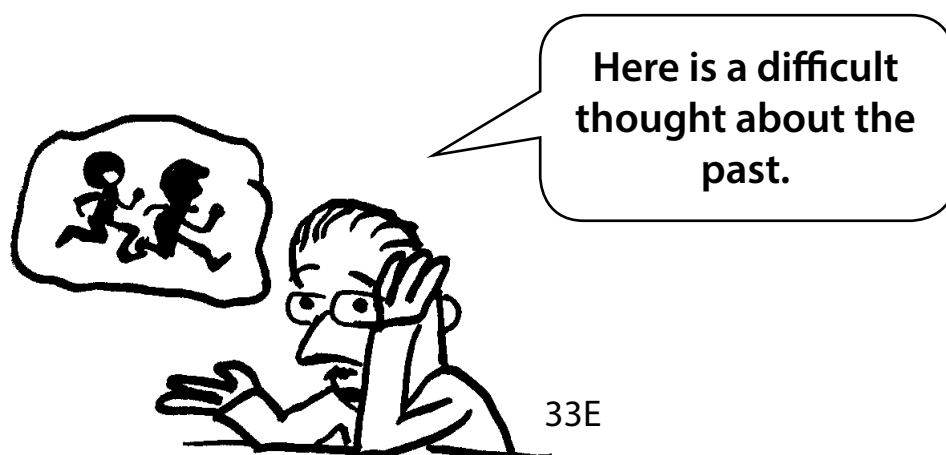
Here is a
painful
memory.

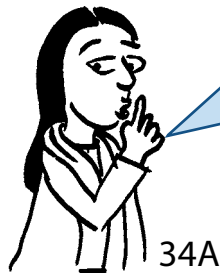


Here are
fears about
the future.



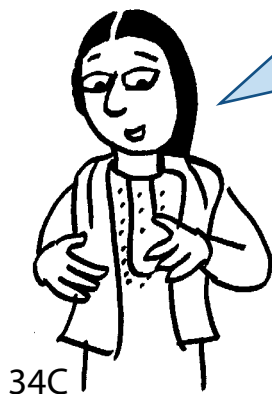
33D





So naming begins by silently saying,
"Here is a thought" or "Here is a feeling".

However, if we then add the phrase, "I notice", we usually find it
unhooks us a bit more.



Try this now
and see what
happens.



I notice here is a
heaviness in my
chest.



I notice
here is a
painful
memory.



I notice
here is
anger.



35A

I notice here is a knot in my stomach.

I notice here is a thought about what I fear.



35B



35C

Please try this now before you read any more. NOTICE and NAME a thought or feeling that has been present for you today.



You can go to this [LINK](#) and listen to, or download the *Notice and Name* exercise. Or, you can simply follow the pictures and instructions in this book.



35D

How does noticing and naming help us?



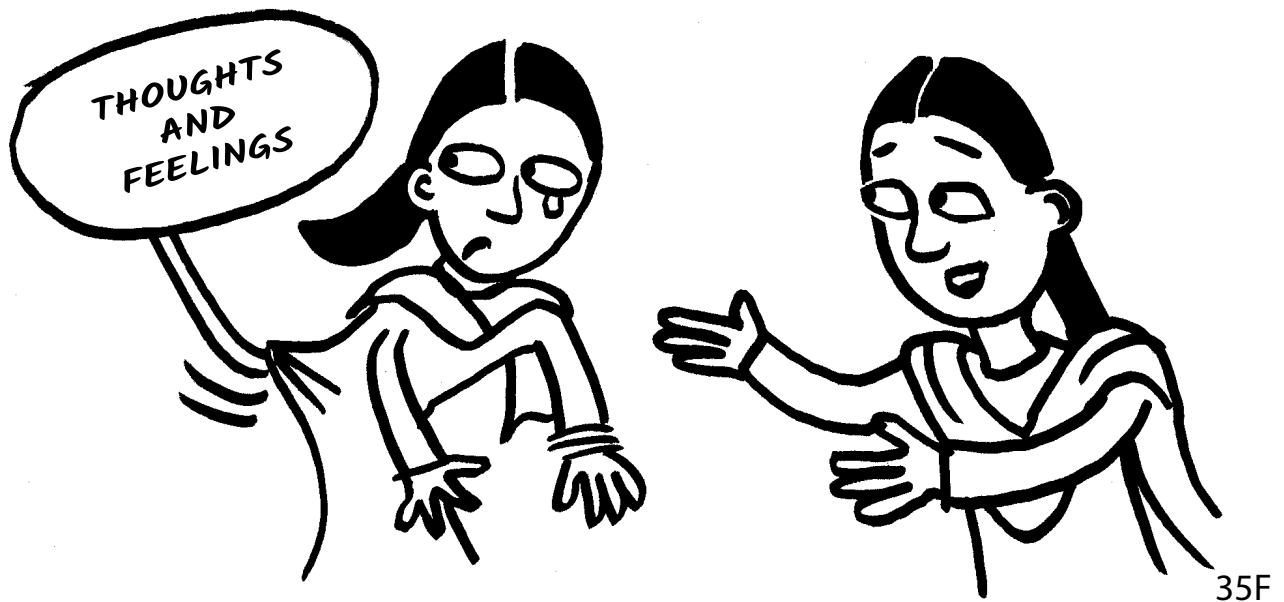
Well, thoughts and feelings hook us when we are unaware of them.

One moment you are talking to a friend, interested in what she is saying...



35E

...and then in the next moment, you are hooked.



35F

Suddenly, you are no longer really listening to your friend.

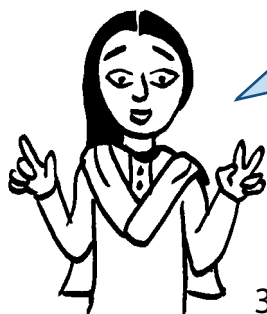


You might still be talking to your friend...



...but you are not really "engaged" in the conversation.

You are only half-listening.
You are not giving her your full attention.
Why? Because you are hooked
by your thoughts or feelings.



37A

The first step in “unhooking” yourself is to **NOTICE** that you have been hooked. The second step is to **NAME** what hooked you. You silently say to yourself...

I notice I have been hooked by memories.



Here is a difficult thought.



I notice a heavy feeling in my chest.



37B

37C

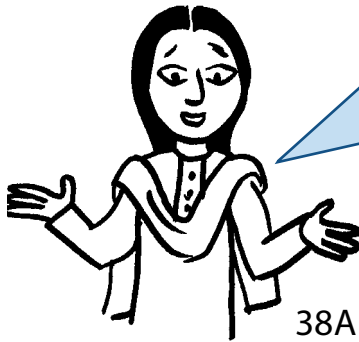
The next step is to **REFOCUS** on what you are doing – whether you are cooking, or eating, or playing or washing, or chatting with friends – and to **ENGAGE** fully in that activity; to **PAY FULL ATTENTION** to whoever is with you and whatever you are doing.

I am noticing a painful feeling in my throat.

THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS



37D



We can do the same thing every time we get hooked and stop engaging in life.

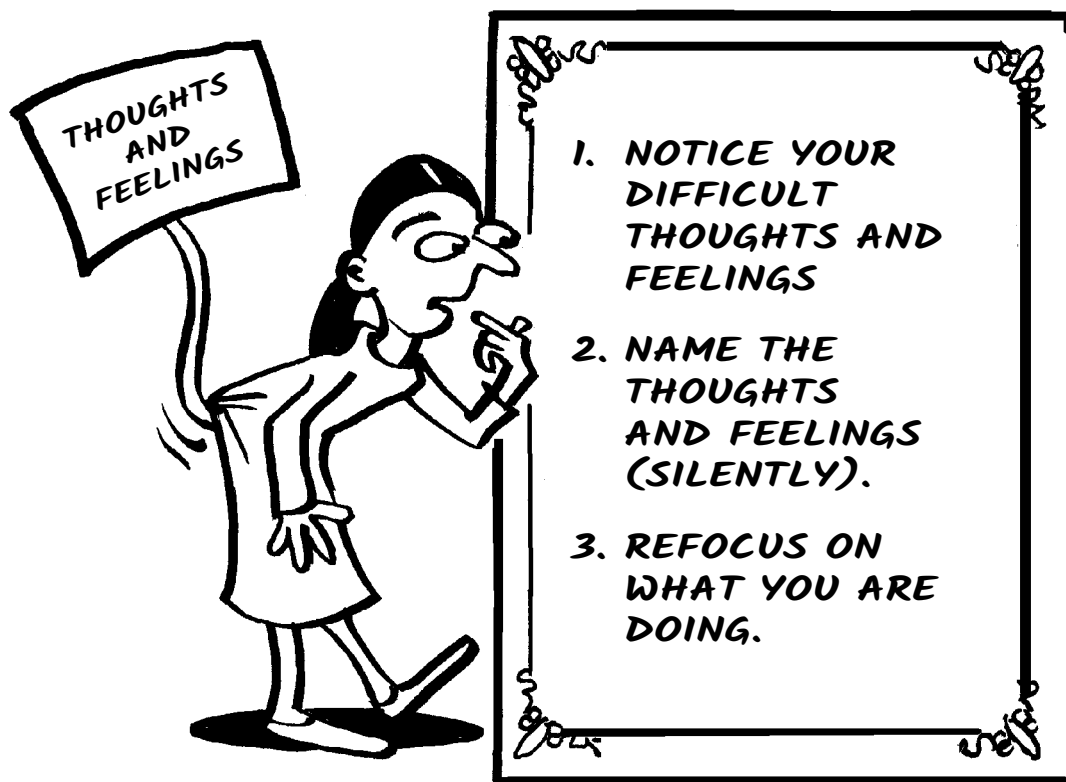


And even though I am having feelings of anger, I choose to act on my value of caring by refocusing and engaging with my family.

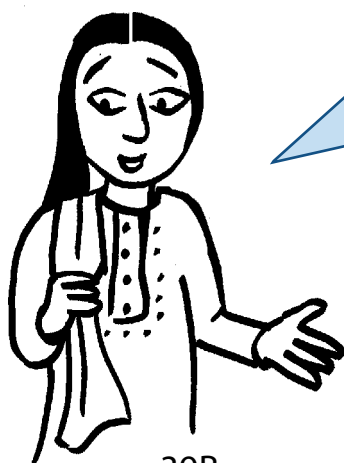




So to unhook from thoughts and feelings...



39A

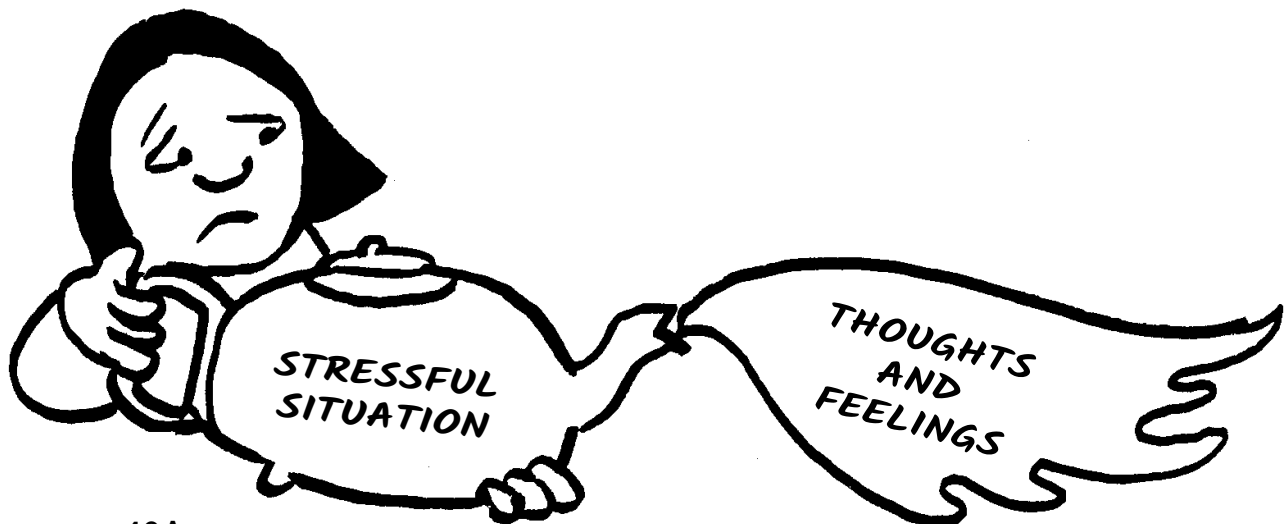


39B

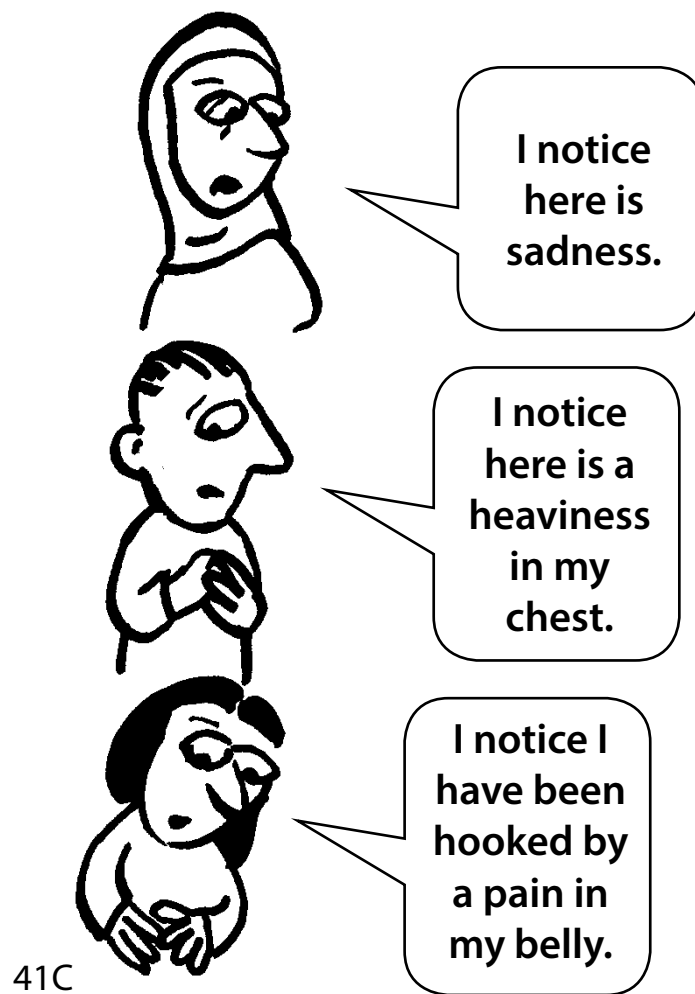
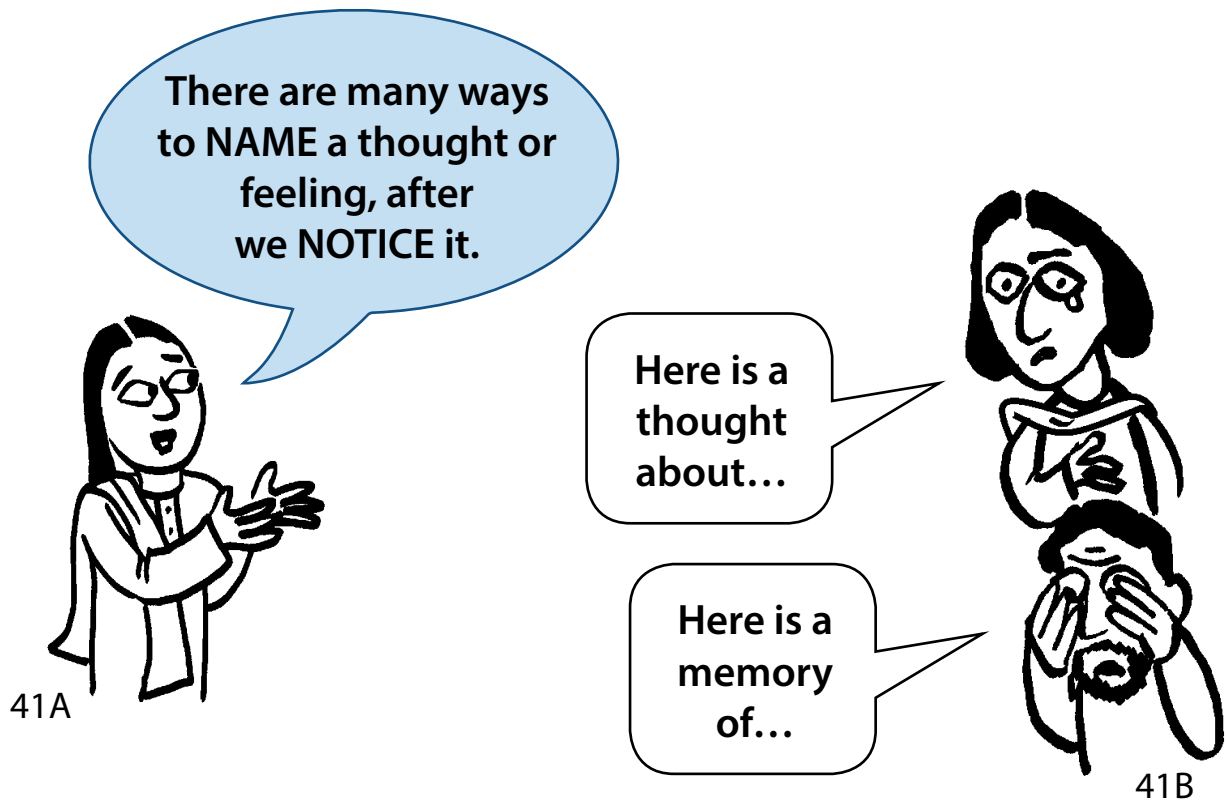
The more you practise this, the better you will get. See if you can practise this over and over again, all day long as you're going about your daily activities. Every time you notice that you have been hooked, run through these steps.

And remember it is natural
to have difficult thoughts and feelings
appear when we are stressed.

This happens to everyone!



40A



And after we have NOTICED and NAMED,
we can REFOCUS on the world around us.

We ENGAGE in life by noticing what we can...

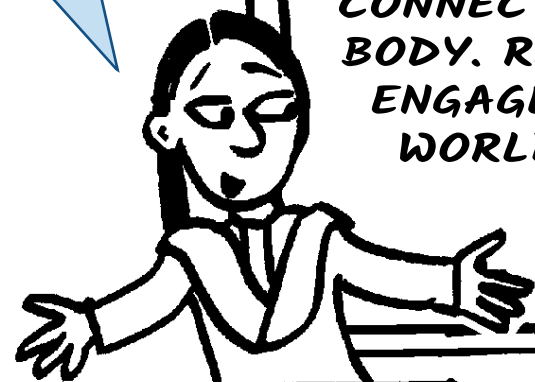


So now you have
your first two tools
for your tool kit.

TOOL 1 GROUND YOURSELF

**DURING “EMOTIONAL
STORMS”. NOTICE HOW
YOU ARE FEELING.**

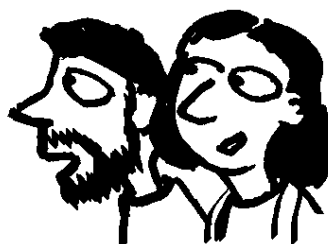
**SLOW DOWN AND
CONNECT WITH YOUR
BODY. REFOCUS AND
ENGAGE WITH THE
WORLD AROUND
YOU.**



TOOL 2 UNHOOK YOURSELF

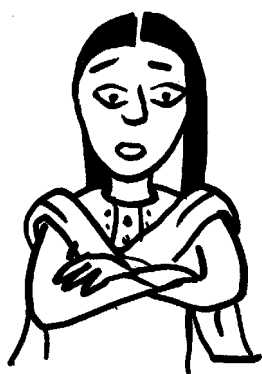
**FROM THOUGHTS
AND FEELINGS
BY NOTICING
AND NAMING
THEN REFOCUSING
ON WHAT
YOU ARE DOING.**

And we can practise
using these tools at
any time and in any
place.



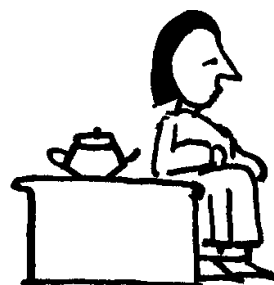
42A

Of course,
some people
forget to
practise.



42B

So set times aside to regularly practise these skills.
For example, in bed, or before or after a meal.



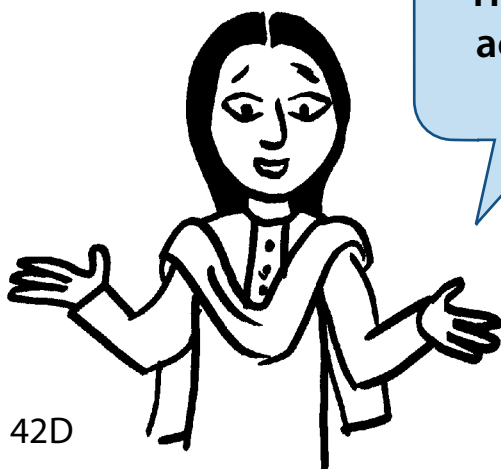
42C



You can go to this [LINK](#) to
listen to, or download all of the
exercises you have learned so far. Or,
you can simply follow the pictures and
instructions in this book.



Think of some times, places or
activities for regular practice.



42D

And whenever you are lying
awake in bed at night, and cannot
sleep, then practise slowing down
and connecting with your body.

It probably will not make you
sleep (although sometimes it
does), but it will help you feel
rested.



42E



Other things can also get in the way of practising with these tools.

43A

Maybe you feel too tired...

Too tired!



43B

Maybe you feel too sad or angry or scared...



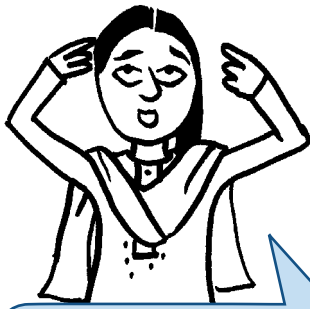
43C

Maybe you just can't be bothered...

This is useless!



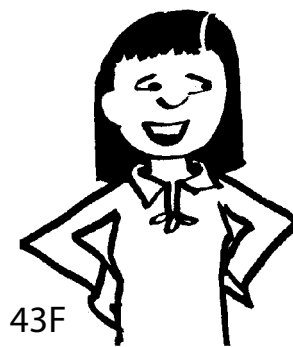
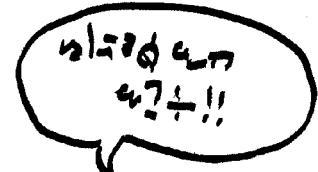
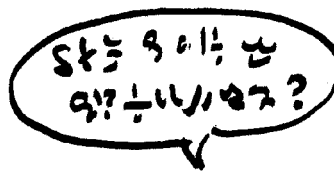
43D



So remind
yourself over and
over...

43E

This is like learning a new language.
It takes a lot of practice!



43F



You can also be hooked by unhelpful thoughts.



43G

THIS IS ALL SO STUPID!
IT IS NOT IMPORTANT!
IT WILL NOT HELP!
I AM TOO BUSY!
THERE IS NO POINT!
IT IS A WASTE OF TIME!
I CANNOT DO IT!

So as soon as you realize
you have been hooked by
these feelings...



44A

NOTICE, NAME AND REFOCUS



44B

Every little bit of practice
you do will make a
difference.

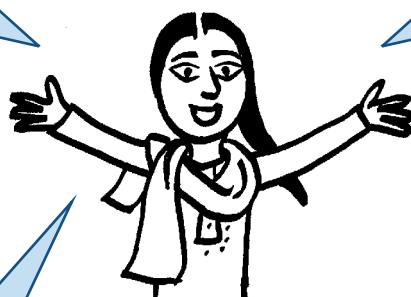


44C

And every time we practise,
we are acting on our values
of caring!



Yes, that's right. And
in the next part of
this book, we will
explore values in
more depth.



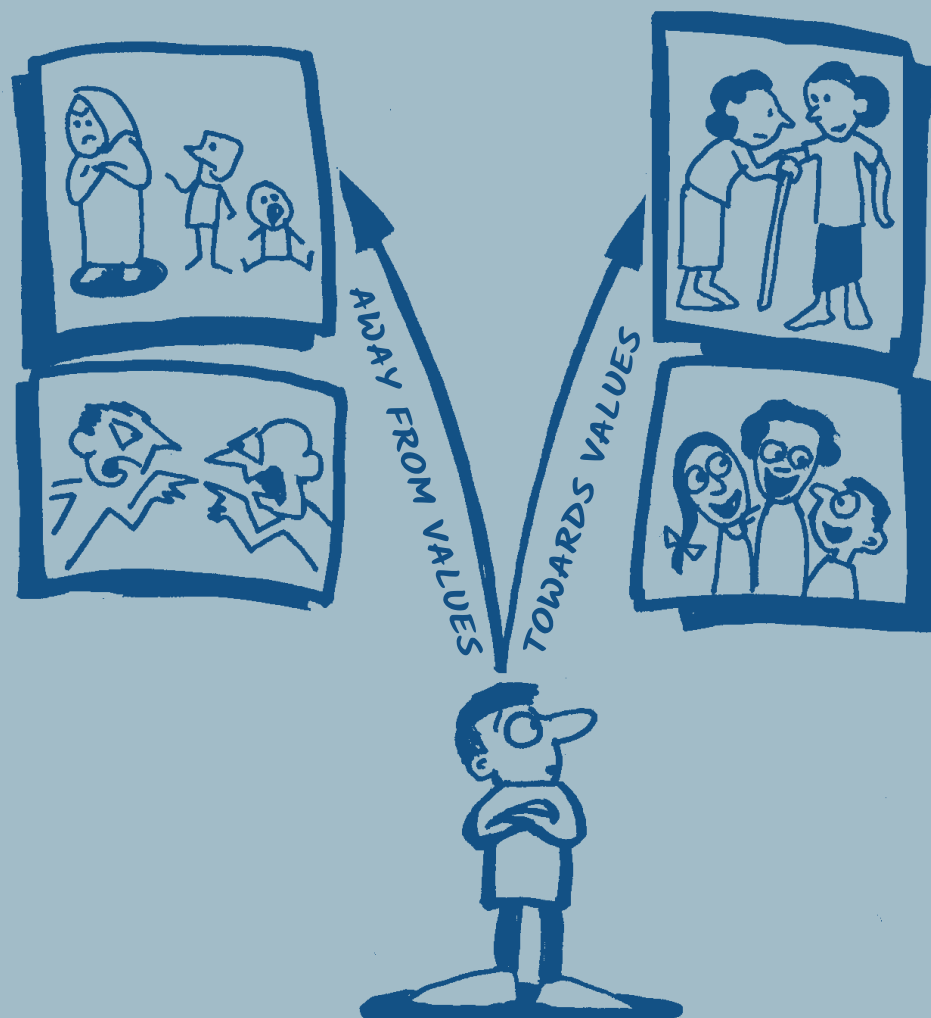
But before
continuing with the
next part, please
take a day or two
to practise what
we've covered in this
chapter.

And remember, at the end of the
book you'll find short descriptions
of every skill you learn.

44D

Part 3

ACTING ON YOUR VALUES

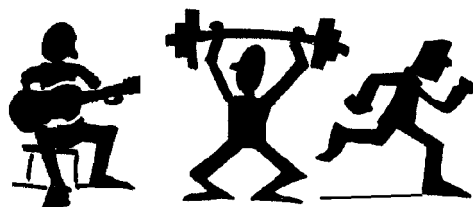




Welcome back.
Have you been
practising
unhooking and
grounding?

45A

Remember, doing these exercises
is like learning any new skill.
With practice, you get better
and it becomes easier.



45B



Now we are
going to look at
values in more
depth.

45C

Your values describe what
kind of person you want to
be; how you want to treat
yourself and others and the
world around you.

45D



Are values
the same
goals?

No!

45E



Goals describe what
you are trying to get.
Values describe the
sort of person you
want to be.

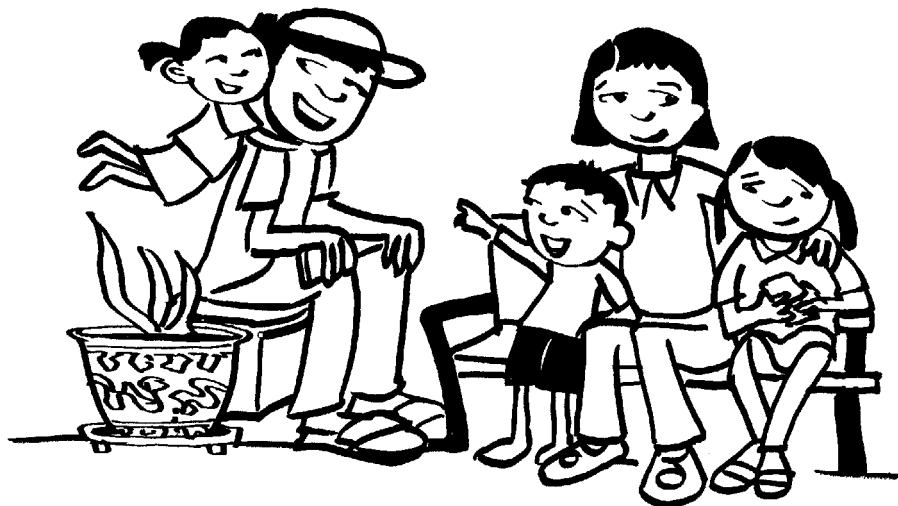
45F



Suppose your goal is to get a job so you can support the people you care about.

45G

And suppose your values – the way you want to be with your family, friends or people around you – are to be kind, to be caring, to be loving and to be supportive.



45H



46A

It might be impossible to achieve your goal...



46B

...but you can still live your values of being kind, caring, loving and supportive towards your family, friends or people around you.

And even if you are facing a very difficult situation and are separated from your family and friends, you can still live your values of being kind, caring, loving and supportive. You can find little ways to act on these values with the people around you.



46C

Many of your goals might be impossible right now.



46D



But you can always find ways to act on your values.



Why does that matter?



46E



46F

Because the way you
influence the world
around you is through
your **ACTIONS**.

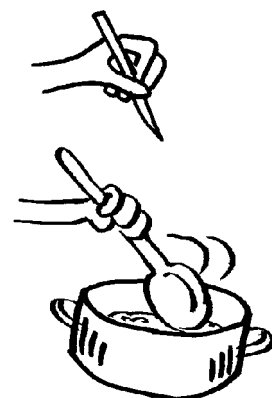
"ACTIONS" are what you do with your
arms and hands and legs and feet, and
what you say with your mouth.



46G

The more you focus on your own actions...

...the more you can influence the immediate
world around you: the people and situations
you encounter every day.



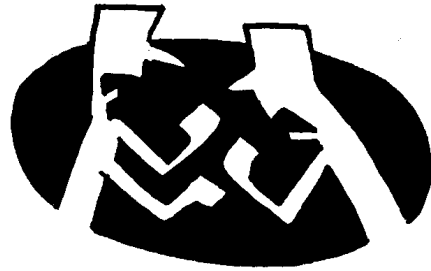
47A

If your country is at war, you can't stop all the fighting...



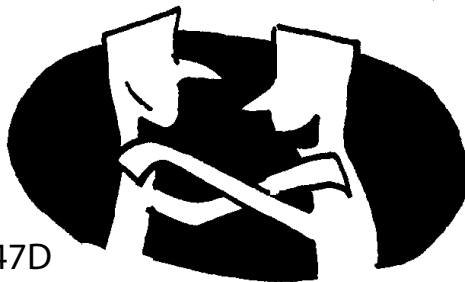
47B

...but you can stop arguing with people in your community...



47C

...and instead, act on your values



47D

And notice: you may influence the people around you through your **ACTIONS.**

Fighting



Collaboration



47E



48A

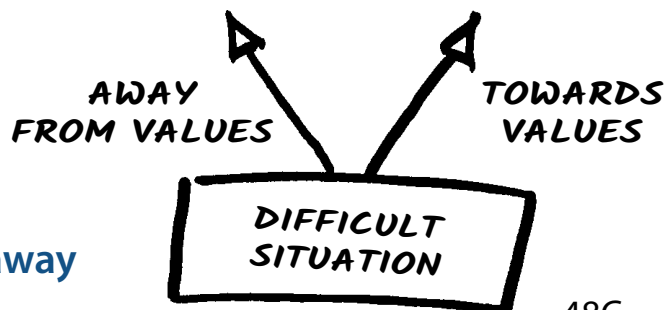
So we need to keep asking ourselves this question:

Do my actions support my values?



48B

Yes. Are your actions moving you towards or away from your values?



48C

48D

To help you clarify your values, here is a list. These are not the “right” values or the “best” ones – they are simply some common ones.

To be kind
To be caring
To be generous
To be supportive
To be helpful

To be patient
To be responsible
To be protective
To be disciplined
To be hardworking
To be committed

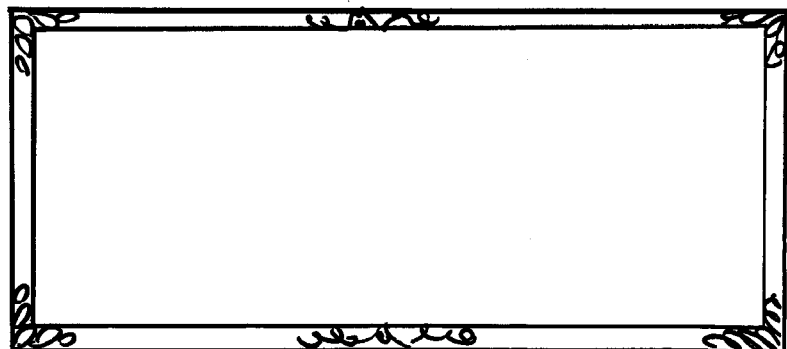
To be brave
To be persistent
To be forgiving
To be grateful

To be loyal
To be respectable/honourable
To be respectful
To be trustworthy
To be fair/just
To be...
To be...



49A

Now select three or four of those values that seem most important to you, and write them in the box below.



Now we will do another exercise. Think of a role model in your community; someone you look up to.



49B

What does this person say or do that you admire?



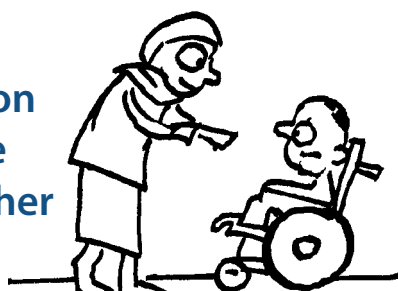
49C

Does this person treat others in admirable ways?



49D

What values does the person demonstrate through his or her actions?



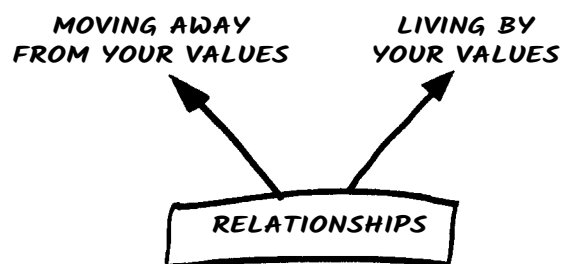
49E

Which of those values would you like to model for others around you?



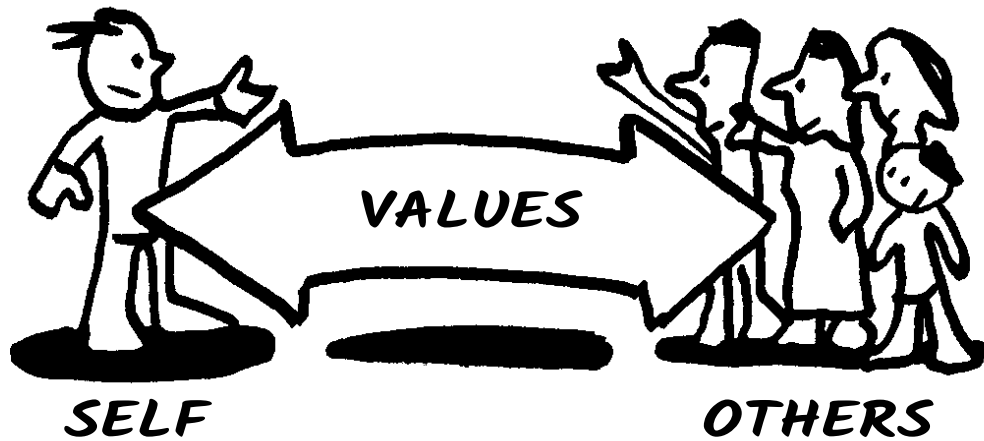
49F

Now think of the people around you. What values do you want to live by, in the way you treat those people?



49G

Values go both ways: towards yourself and towards others.



50A

So if your
values are
caring and
kindness...

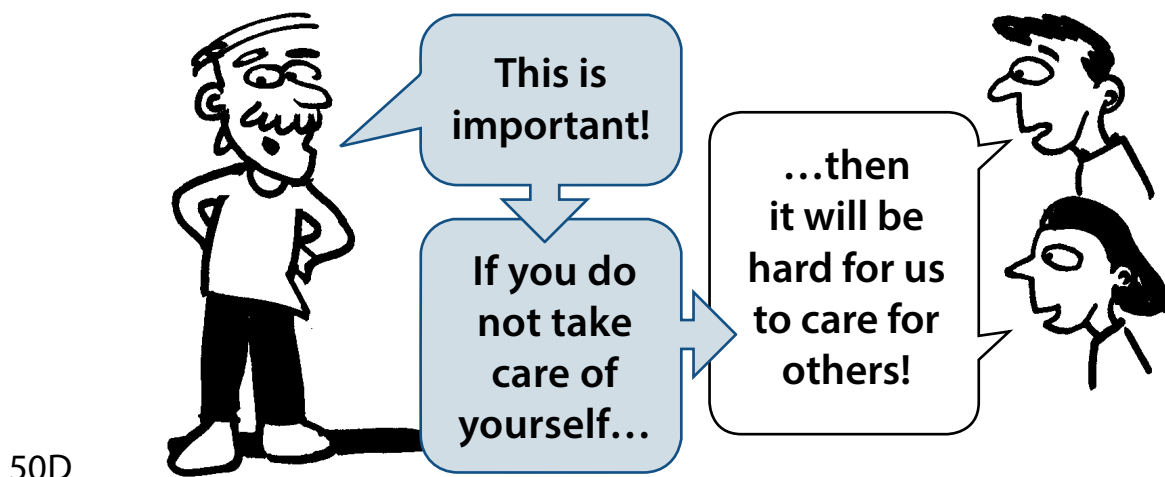


50B



50C

...then you aim to live those values towards both yourself and others.



So now it is time to put your values into action.



50E

Pick an important relationship; choose someone you care about a lot, who you see on a regular basis.



What values do you want to live by in this relationship?



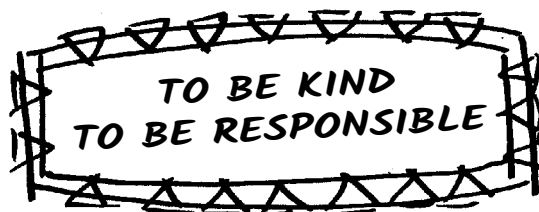
50G

For example, suppose you choose your child.



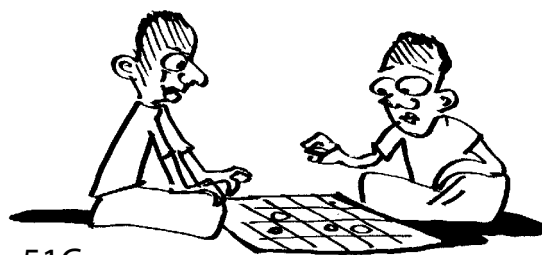
51A

And the values you want to act on are:



51B

Then a small step might be to play with or to read to your child for 10 minutes every day.



51C

Or suppose you choose a relative.



51D

And the values you want to act on are:



51E



51F

Thank you Uncle, for all the help you have given me.

Then a small step might be to greet that person warmly and express your gratitude.

Remember, even the tiniest actions matter.

A giant tree grows from a tiny seed. And even in the hardest or most stressful of times, you can take small ACTIONS to live by your values.

When you act on your values, you will begin to create a more satisfying and fulfilling life.



So create
your action plan
now.

What will you do in
the next week to act
on your values?



52A

Think in terms of **ACTIONS**.
What will you say with your mouth?
What will you do with your hands
and arms and legs and feet?



52B

Pick something
that seems realistic
to you.

Do you
believe you
can do this?

No!

Yes!



52C



If your plan seems too difficult – if you do not believe you can do it – pick something smaller and easier.



OKAY!

52D

Please make this action plan now, before reading further. It is important!



53A

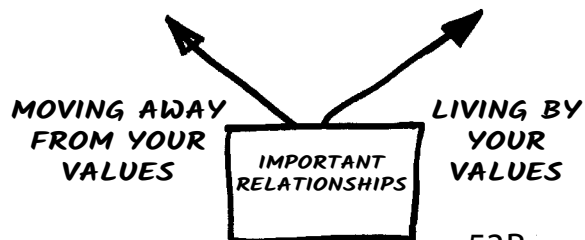
Pick an important relationship. Who is someone you care about, who you see on a regular basis?

What values do you want to live by in this relationship? You can look at page 85 for some examples of common values.

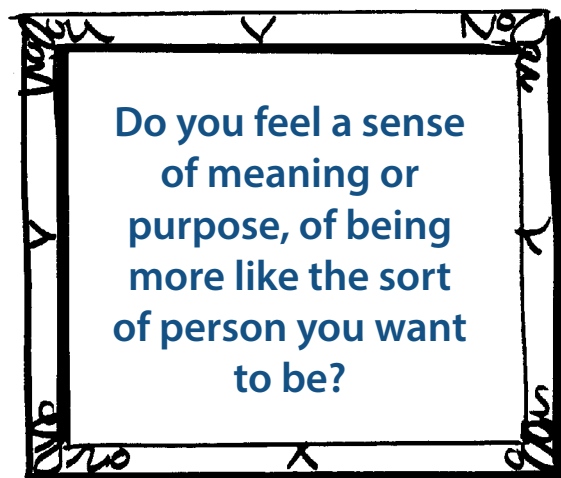
With this person, what one or more **ACTIONS** could you take over the next week to act on your values? What specifically will you do, or what will you say to this person?

Does your plan seem realistic to you? If not, choose something smaller, simpler and easier.

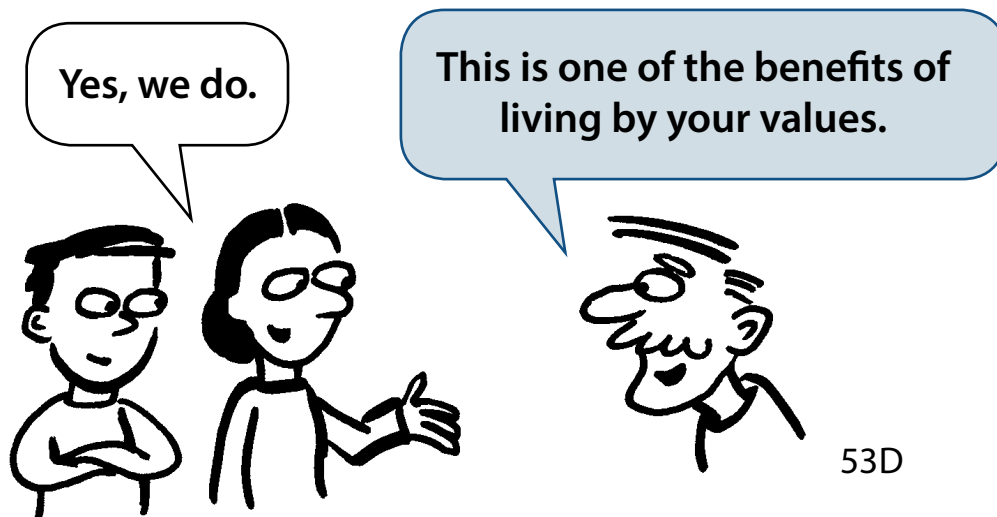
Will these actions take you towards or away from your values?



53B



53C



53D

Now notice: are difficult thoughts and feelings starting to hook you and stop you from following your action plan?



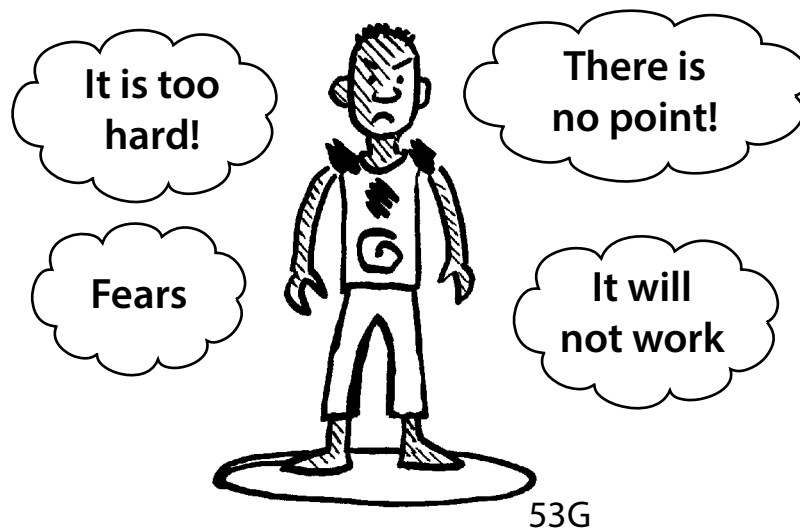
53E

Often, as soon as we start thinking about taking action, difficult thoughts and feelings appear, and easily hook us.



53F

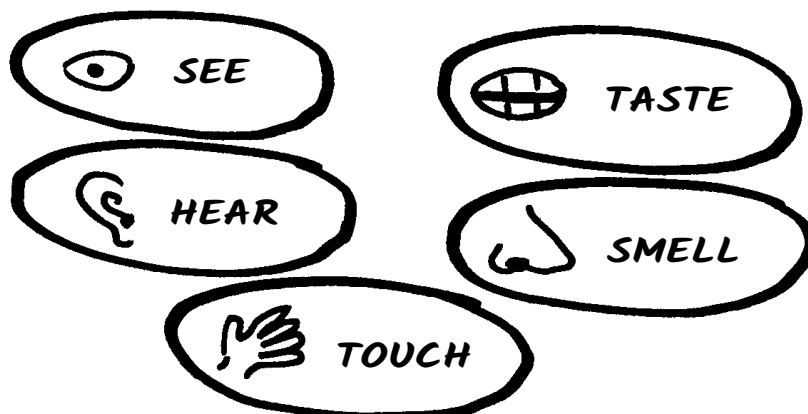
If so, you know what to do.



NOTICE and NAME them.



And ENGAGE with the world around you.

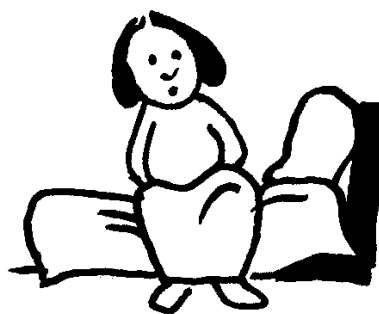




54A

Aim to start each day thinking of two or three values you want to live by.

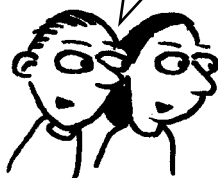
While you are still in bed, or while you are getting up.



54B

And throughout the day...

Look for ways to act on those values.



54C

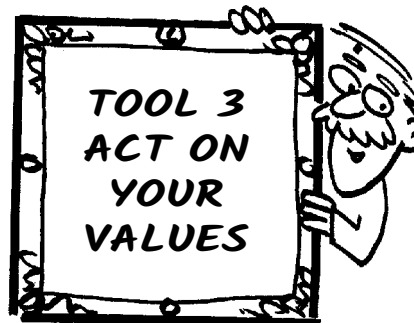
Yes! Even tiny actions matter!

The journey of 1000 miles begins with one step!



54D

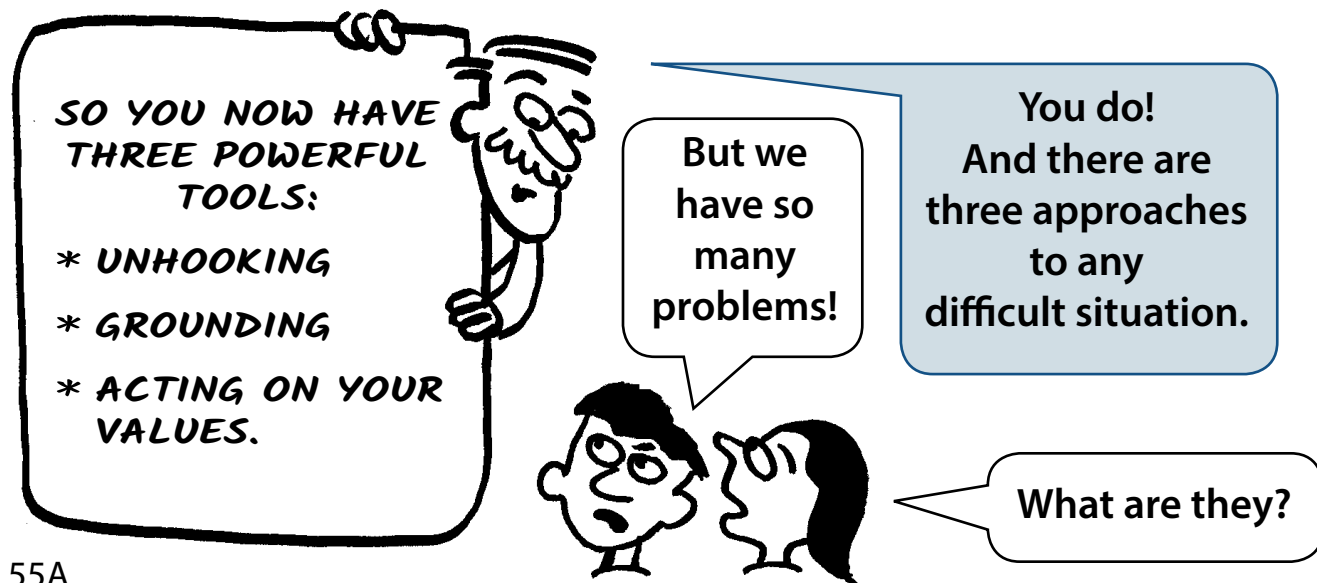
This is the next tool in your toolkit.



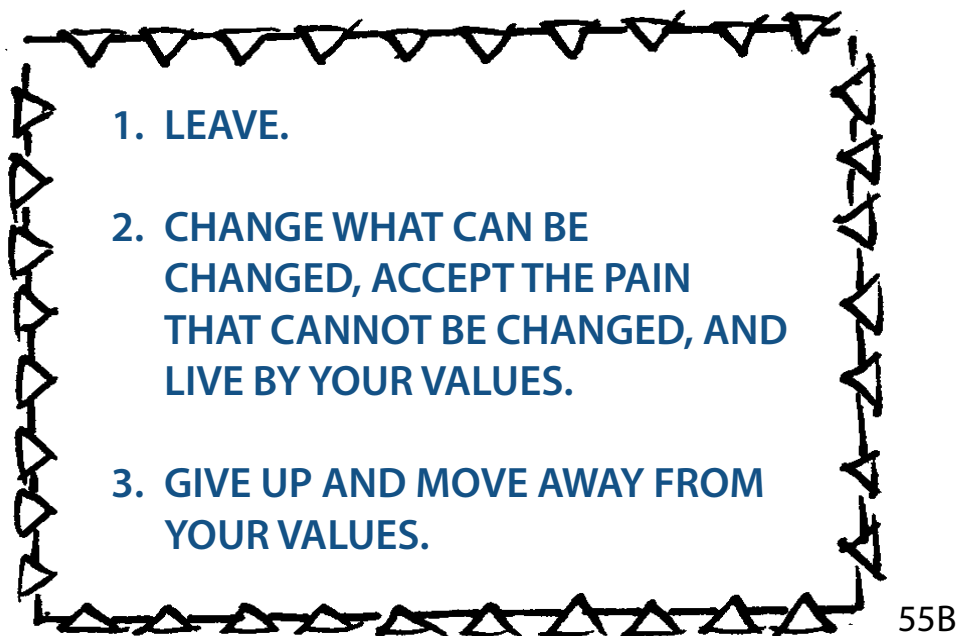
54E



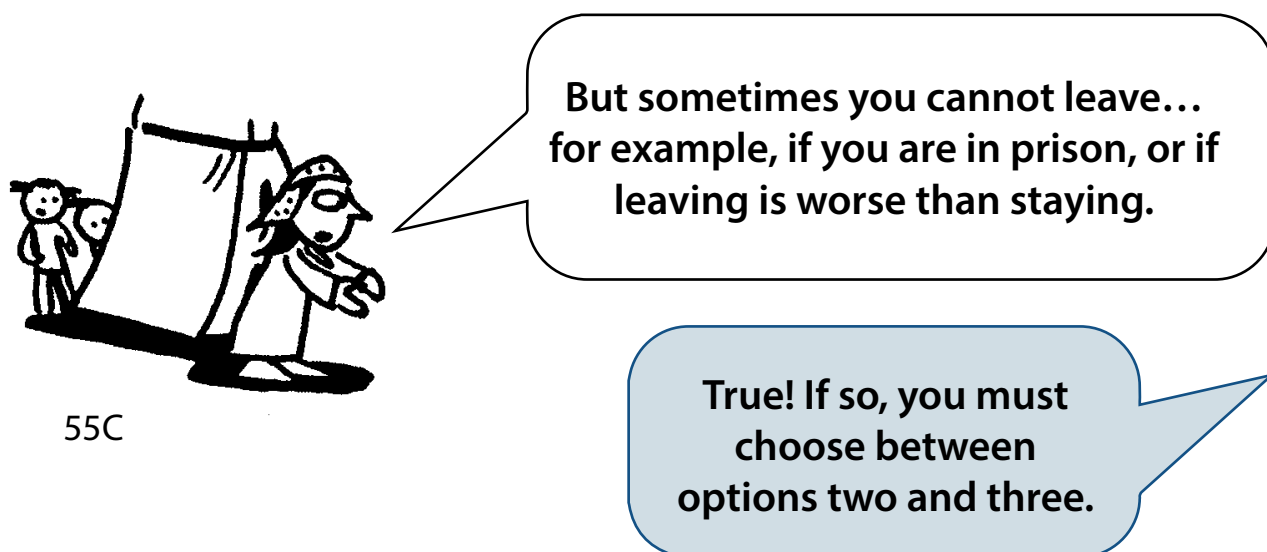
54F



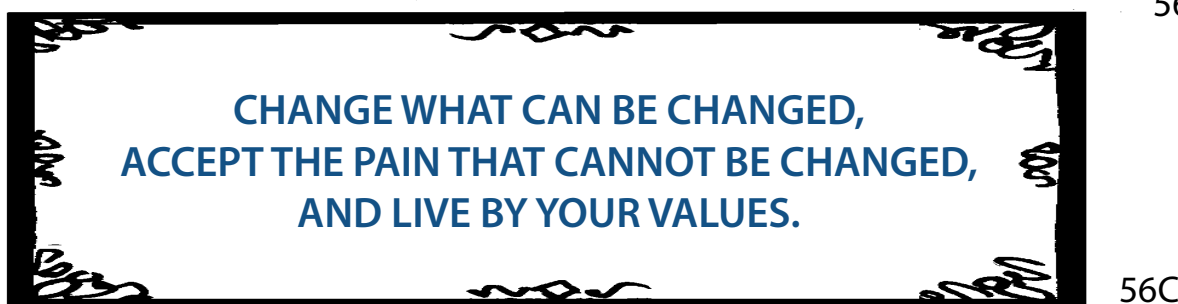
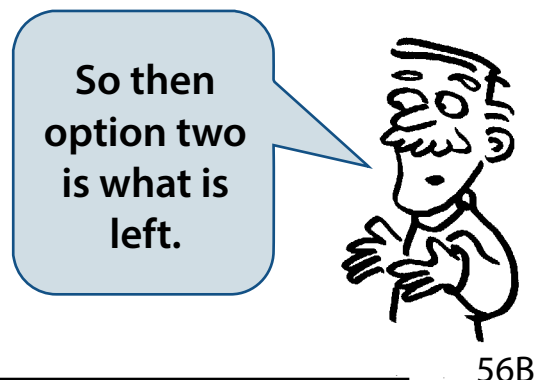
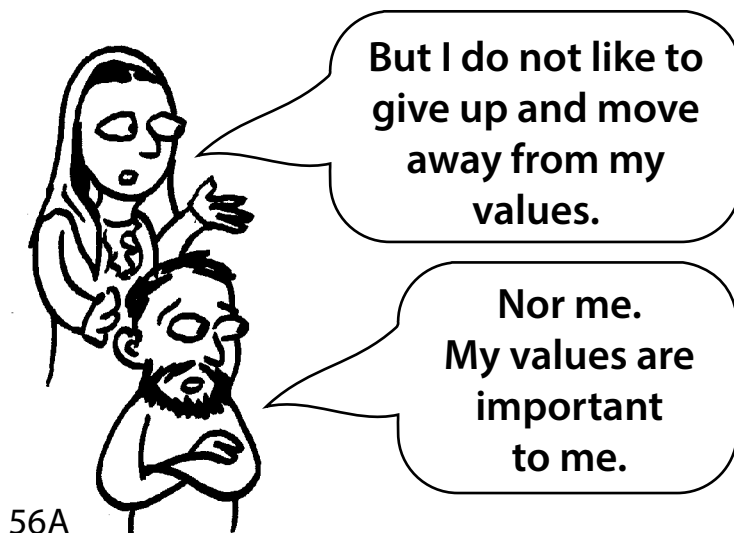
55A



55B



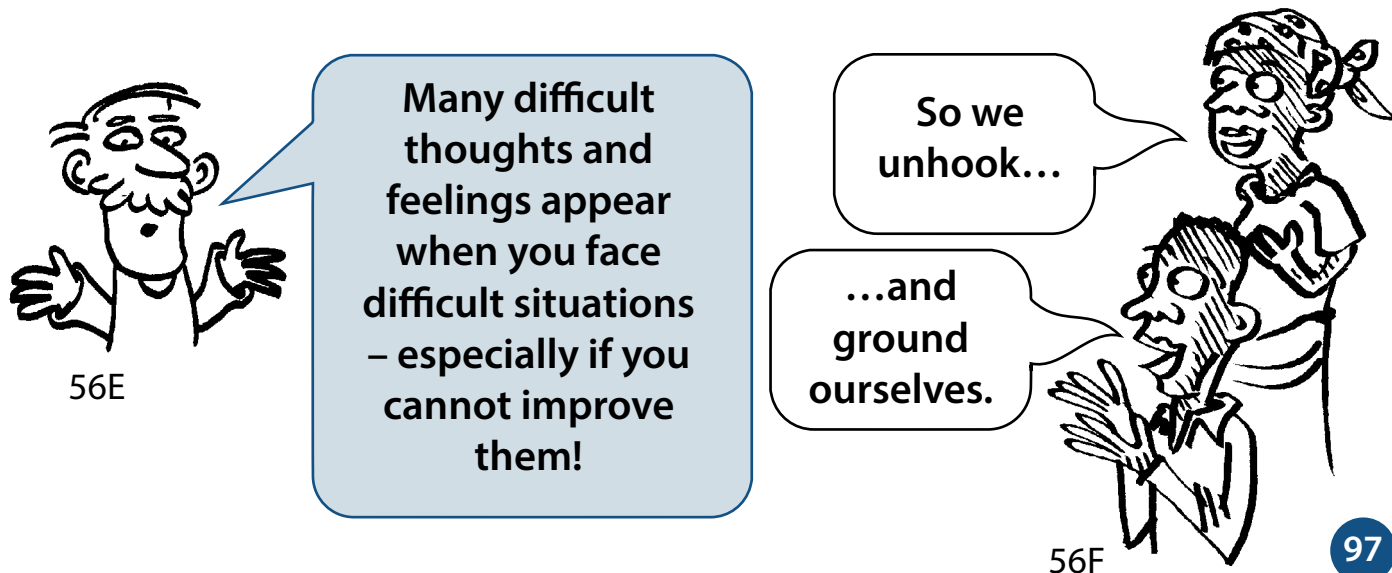
55C



CHANGE WHAT CAN BE CHANGED...

Use your arms and legs and hands and feet and mouth to **TAKE ACTION**: to do whatever you can, no matter how small it might be, to improve the situation.

ACCEPT THE PAIN THAT CANNOT BE CHANGED...



AND LIVE BY YOUR VALUES.



57A

So if there is nothing you can do to improve the situation...

We find other ways to live by our values.



57B

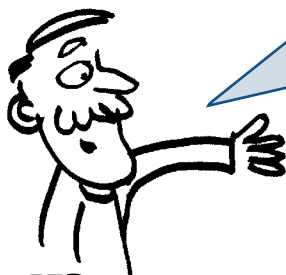
**CHANGE
WHAT CAN
BE CHANGED,
ACCEPT THE
PAIN THAT
CANNOT BE
CHANGED,
AND LIVE BY
YOUR VALUES.**

57C



Yes! So commit this to memory, and use it to help deal with your problems.

And now, it is time for some



57D

There IS something you can do that will improve any difficult situation, at least a little bit.

What is it?



57E



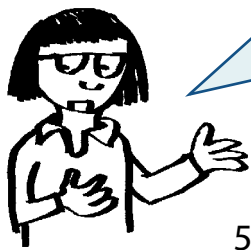
57F

Good question! That is what we will explore in the next section. But first, remember to take a day or two to practise what we've covered in this section. You can use the summaries at the end of the book to remind yourself of how to use the tools we've learned so far.

Part 4

BEING KIND

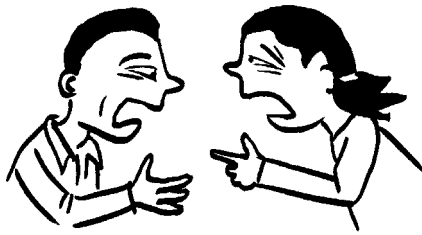




No matter
how bad your
situation

58A

Or in a family argument...



58C

...you are always better off if you
have a friend by your side.



58E

Someone who says kind things
when you are in pain.

I can see this is
hard for you.
Let me help.



58G

Whether you are in danger...



58B

Or without income...



58D

Someone who is kind and
caring and helpful...



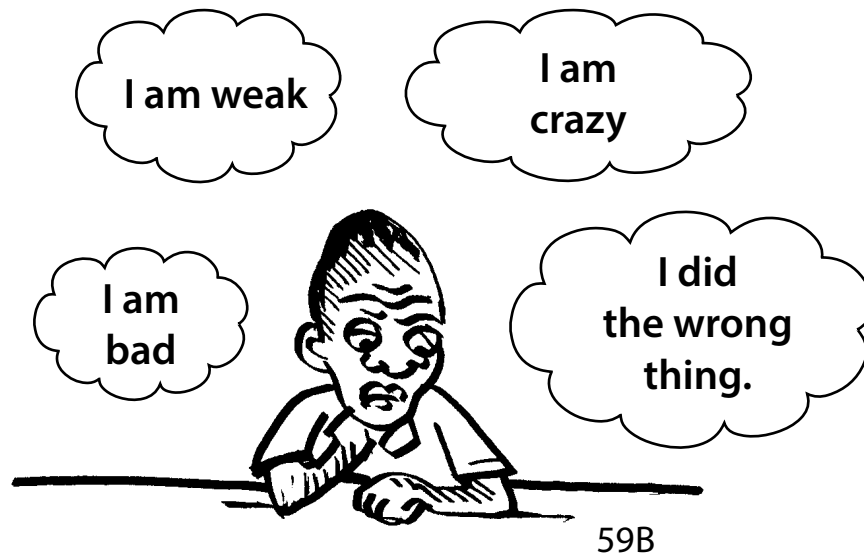
58F

Yet many of us are not kind
to ourselves when we are in
difficult situations.

58H



59A



59B



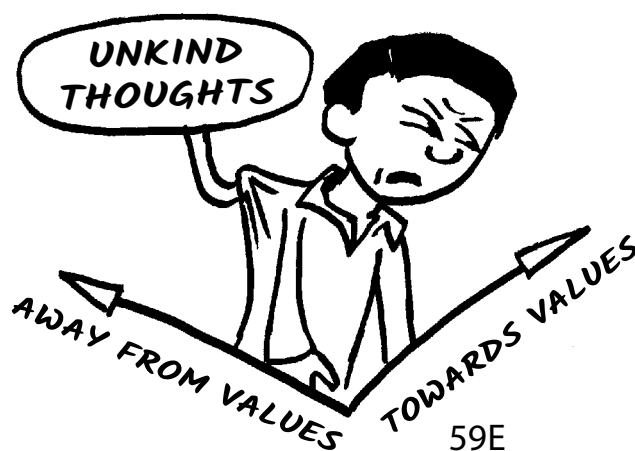
59C



59D

Unkind thoughts are natural and may happen often; that is OK. But it is not helpful to be hooked by them, because...

...when we get hooked by these unkind thoughts, we get pulled away from our values.



59E



60A

So we need to NOTICE and NAME them, to unhook from them.

Try this now. Choose an unkind thought about yourself.

I am a bad mother.

I am weak.



60B

And silently say to yourself...



Then add the words "I notice".



Then **GROUND** yourself and **ENGAGE** with the world around you.



You can go to this [LINK](#) and listen to, or download the *Unhooking from Unkind Thoughts* exercise. Or, you can simply follow the pictures and instructions in this book.

How do you feel when you are struggling, suffering, in pain, and someone reaches out to you with kindness, caring and understanding?



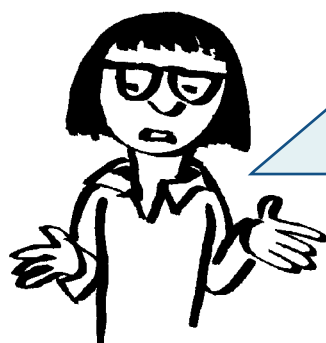
Even in the most difficult situations, there are ways we can act on our values of kindness and caring.



Even tiny little actions of kindness can make a difference.



This includes kind words.



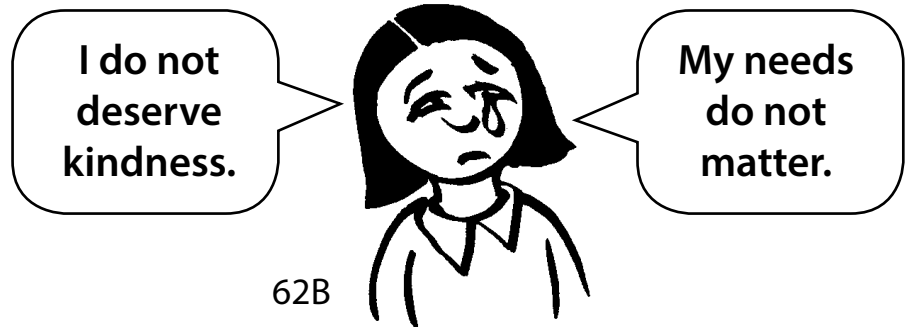
When you see someone in pain, suffering and struggling, what are small acts of kindness that you could do?



Every small, kind action makes a difference.



So unhook from thoughts like...



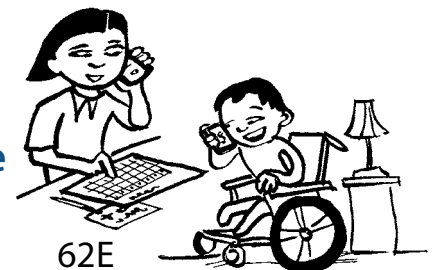
Everyone needs a friend. Everyone needs kindness.



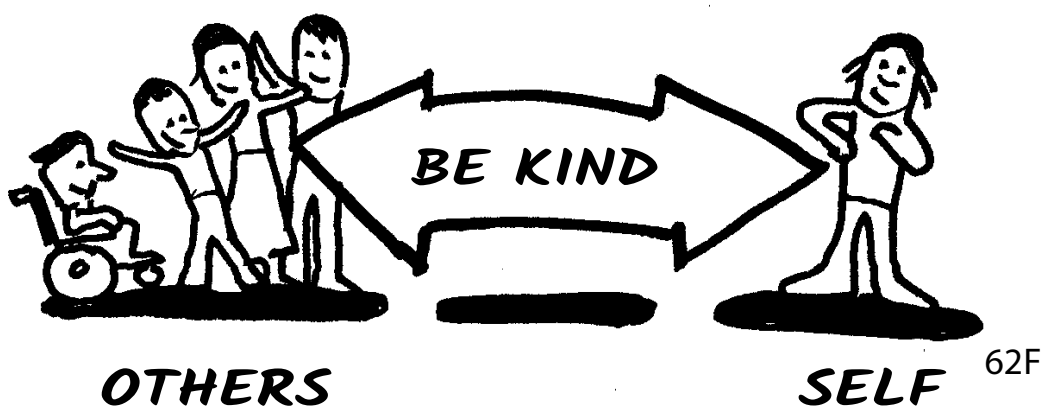
And if you are kind to yourself...



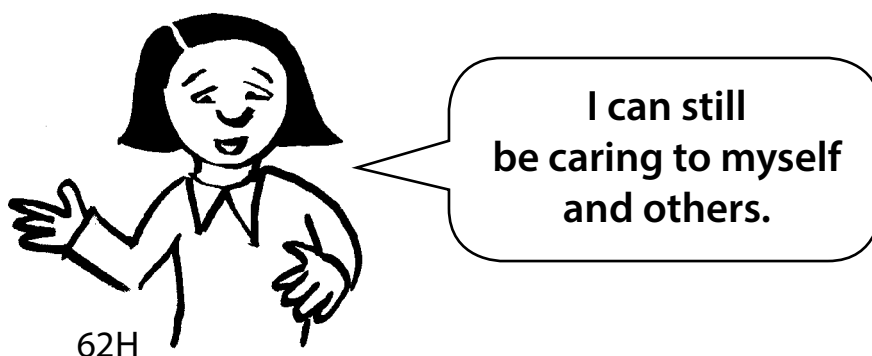
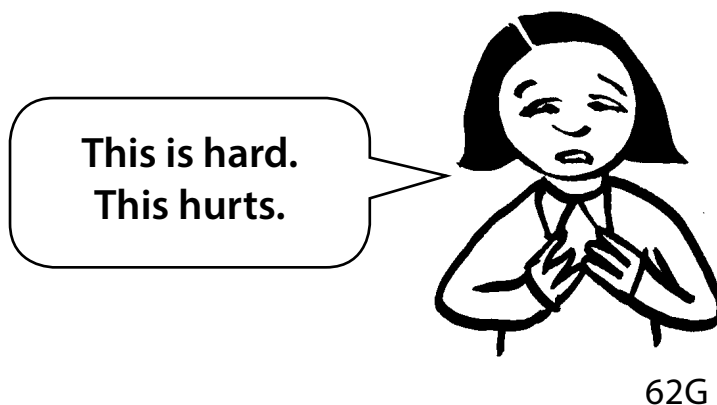
...you will have more energy to help others, and more motivation to be kind to others, so everyone benefits.



Remember: like all values, kindness goes both ways.

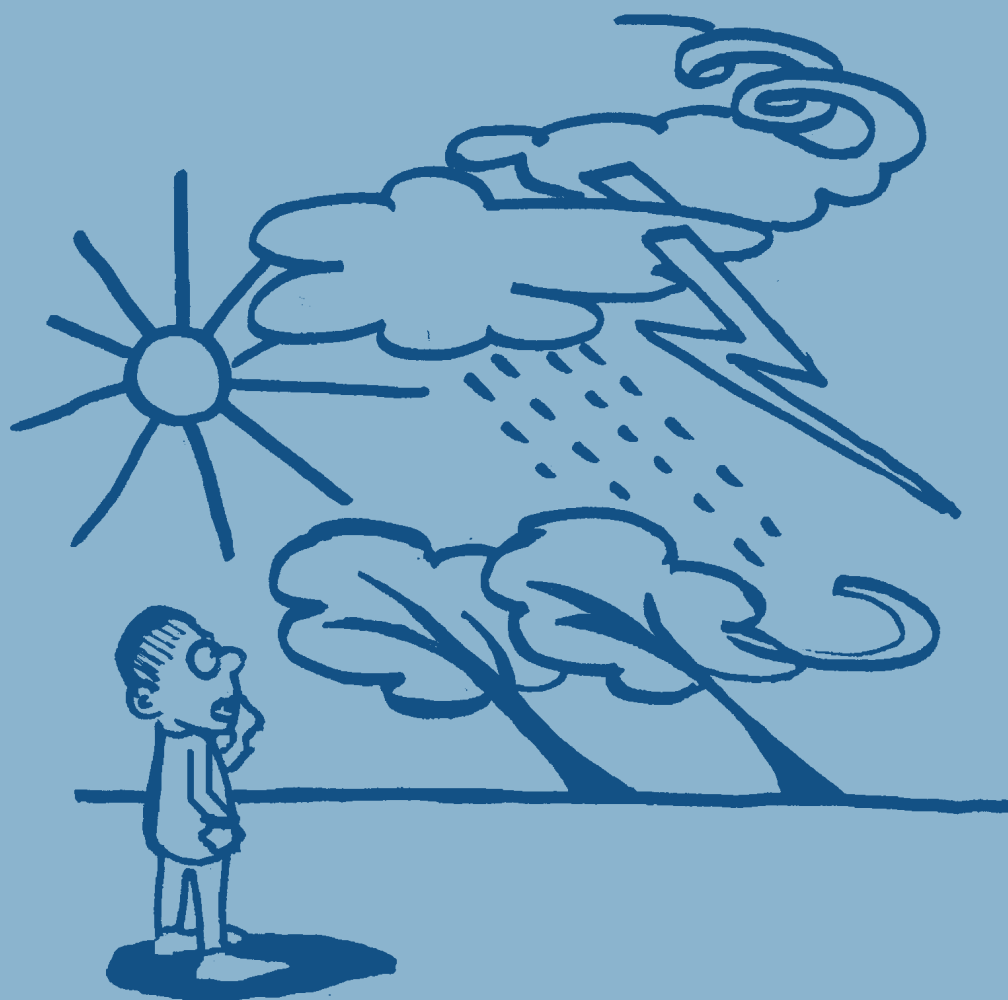


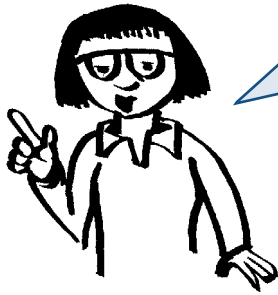
So speak to yourself kindly.



Before continuing with the final section, please remember to take at least a day or two to practise what we've covered in this section. The summaries at the end of the book will also remind you how to practise all of the skills you've learned so far.

MAKING ROOM





63A

On pages 56–57, we looked at the common problems that happen when we struggle with our thoughts and feelings: trying to push them away, avoid them or get rid of them. If you have forgotten, please read them again now, before reading any further.



63B

So UNHOOKING is one way to stop struggling with our thoughts and feelings.

There is another way to do this, called MAKING ROOM.



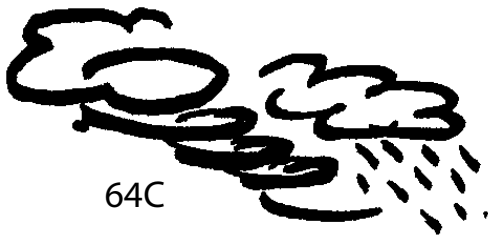
63C

To learn this skill, it is useful to think about the sky.



64A

...the sky has room for it!

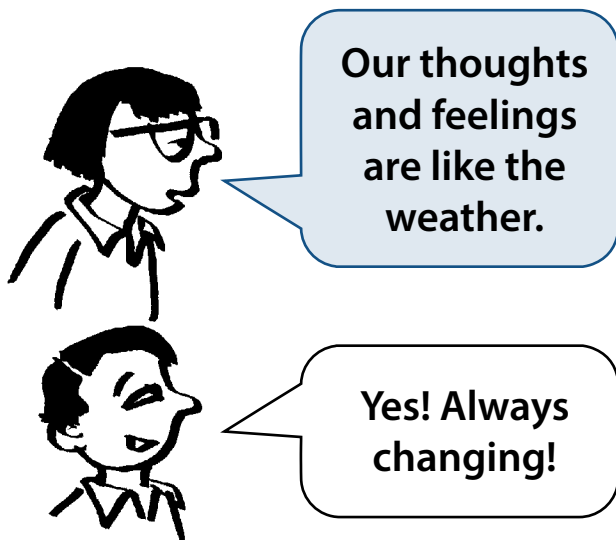


64C

...or freezing cold.



64E



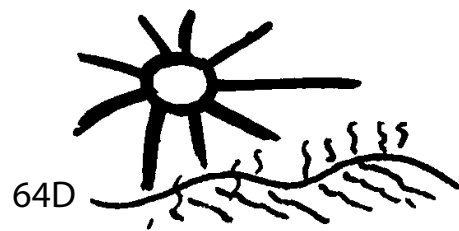
64G

No matter how severe the weather...



64B

And the sky can never be hurt or harmed by the weather; whether it is intense heat ...



64D

And sooner or later, the weather always changes.



64F

And we can learn to be like the sky, and make room for the "bad weather" of our difficult thoughts and feelings without being hurt by it.



64H



65A

So try this now. First, silently **NOTICE** and **NAME**.

I am noticing a pain in my chest and belly.



Here are difficult thoughts.

65B



65C

Notice these thoughts and feelings with **CURIOSITY**.

And imagine these thoughts and feelings are like the weather ...



65D

And you are like the sky...



65E

...for the weather.

Focus your attention on a difficult thought or feeling. **NOTICE** and **NAME** it, then observe it with curiosity.



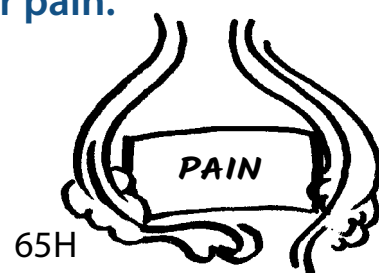
65F

And as you do this, breathe out slowly. Then once your lungs are empty, pause for a count of three.



65G

Then breathe in slowly, and imagine your breath flows into and around your pain.



65H

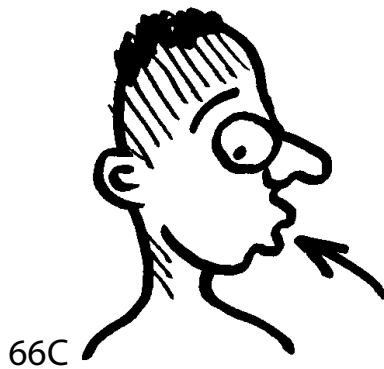
Imagine this any way you like.



Breathing out, emptying
your lungs...



Breathing in slowly...



Breathing into and around
your pain...



Opening up and making room
for it...



Allowing it to be there...

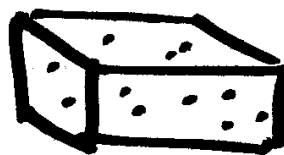




67A

It often helps
to imagine a
painful feeling
as an object.

Imagine it has a size and a
shape and a colour and a
temperature.



67B

And imagine breathing into
and around this object –
making room for it.



67D

Like a heavy cold brown
brick on my chest.



67C



You can go to this
[LINK](#) and listen to, or
download the *Making Room*
exercise. Or, you can simply
follow the pictures and
instructions in this book.



67E

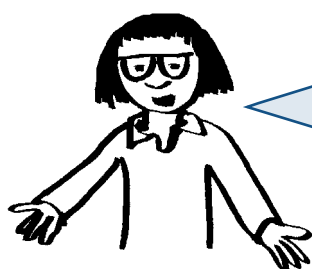
And it often
helps to imagine
a difficult
thought...

...as words or pictures on the
pages of a book.



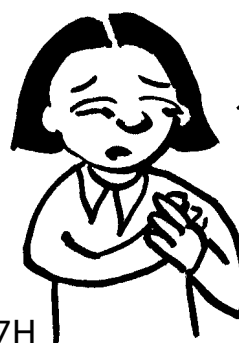
67F

Notice your difficult thought...



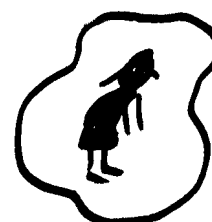
67G

Please
try
this
now.



67H

I am weak



...and imagine it as words
and pictures on the pages
of a book.



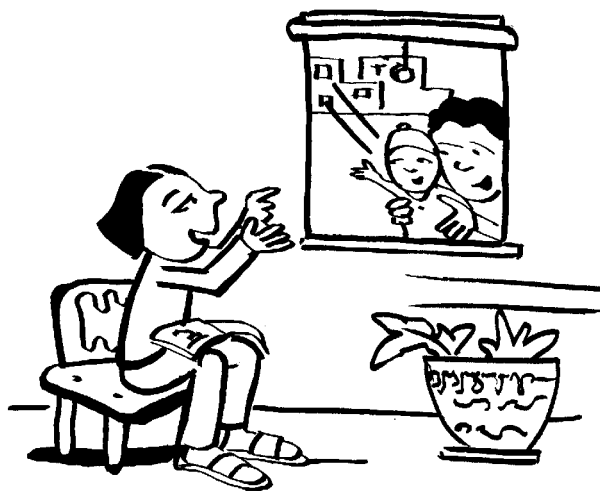
67I

...and imagine it gently resting it
on your lap...



67J

... and ENGAGE with the world
around you.



67K

You can also imagine tucking the
book under your arm, and taking
it with you.

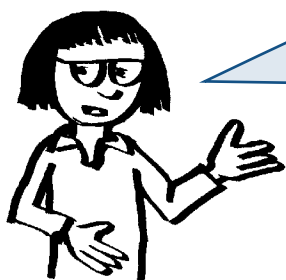


67L

So the thought is still
with you, but you
can ENGAGE with the
world around you.



67M



68A

To begin with,
this exercise
might take a
few minutes.
But like
learning any
new skill...



68B

With practice
it gets
easier!

And much
quicker!



68C

So please go back and
practise these exercises
now, before reading
further. You can also
practise during your day,
whenever you experience
difficult thoughts and
feelings.

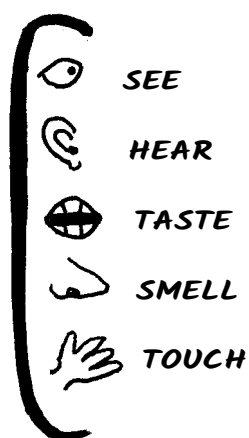
**Remember: it is like
learning any new skill.**



68D

**And after you MAKE ROOM,
you then ENGAGE with the world
around you.**

**NOTICE where you are,
who is with you, and give
your full attention to the activity
you are doing.**

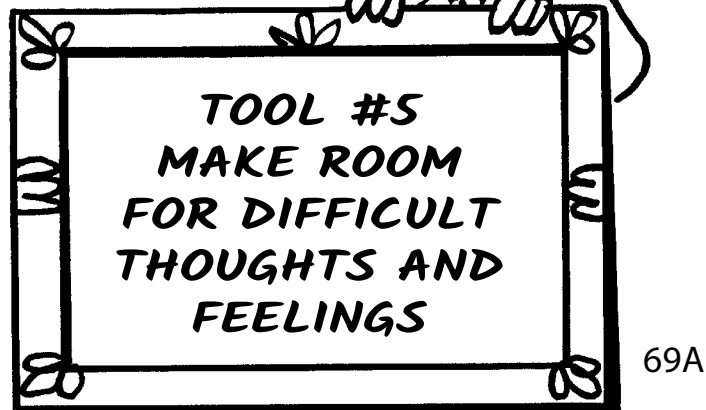


68E

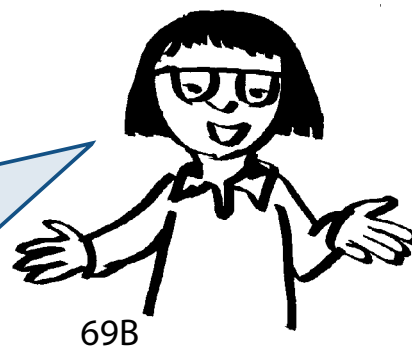


68F

So now you have
another tool for
your toolkit.



And remember: practise,
practise, practise.



**Especially if you are in bed and can't sleep;
you can combine MAKING ROOM with your breathing exercises.**



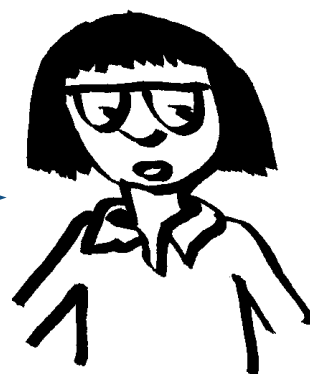
You breathe into the difficult thoughts and feelings...



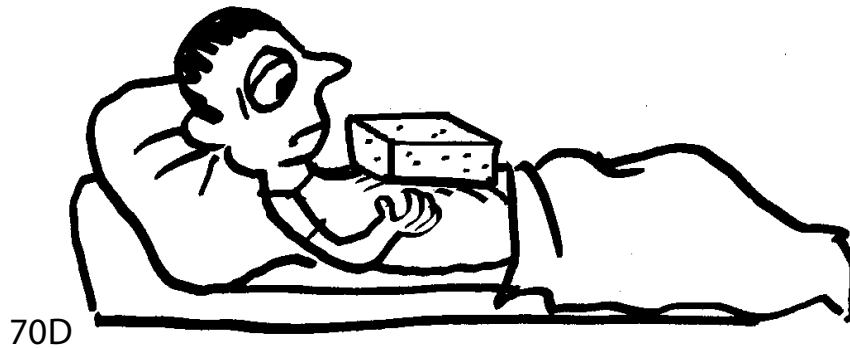
...and let the breath flow into and around them.



If you feel pain
in your body,
notice it with
curiosity.



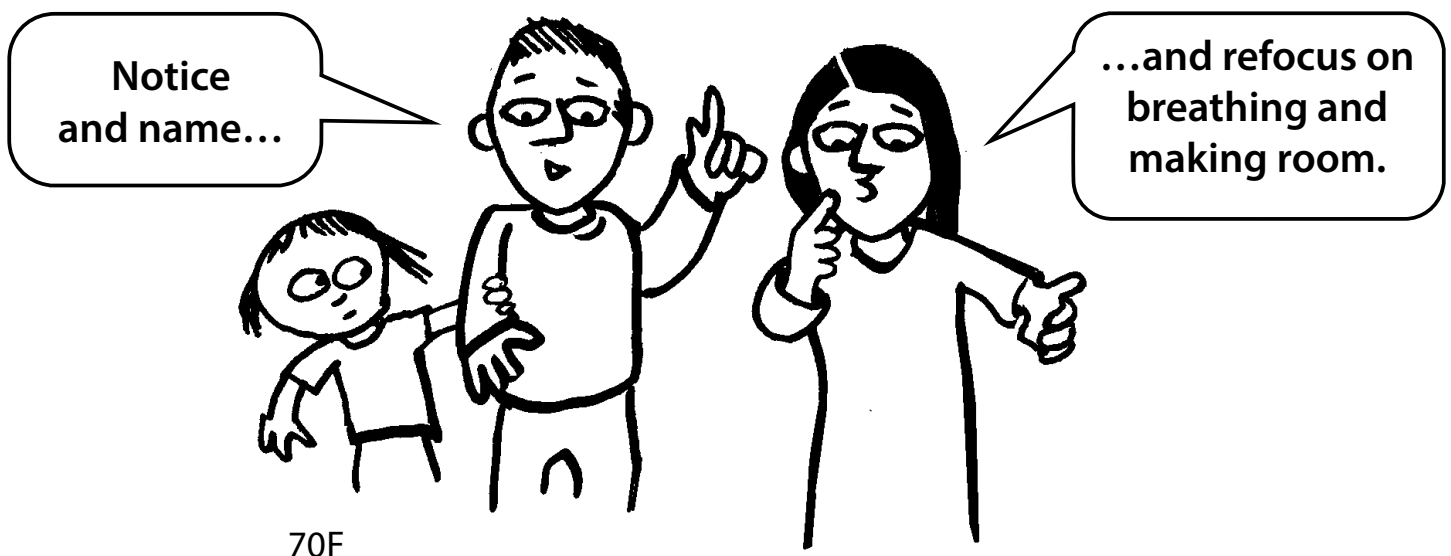
Notice its shape, size, and temperature ...



...and notice with curiosity what happens.
Your pain might get bigger or smaller; it might stay or it might go.
Your aim is simply to make room for it; to allow it to be there;
to stop fighting it and give it space.



And whenever you get HOOKED and pulled out of the exercise ...





71A

So now we are nearing the end of the book. We have time for one last exercise.

An exercise in being kind to yourself and making room for your pain.



71B

This is a good exercise to practise in bed or when you are alone.

Take one of your hands and imagine filling it with kindness...



71C



71D

Now place this hand gently somewhere on your body: over your heart, your belly, your forehead or anywhere you feel pain.



71E

Feel the warmth flowing from your hand into your body, and see if you can be kind to yourself through this hand.



71F

You can use two hands,
if you prefer.



72A

Hold yourself kindly...



72B

If you are in bed and cannot sleep, it can be helpful to add this to your breathing and MAKING ROOM exercises.

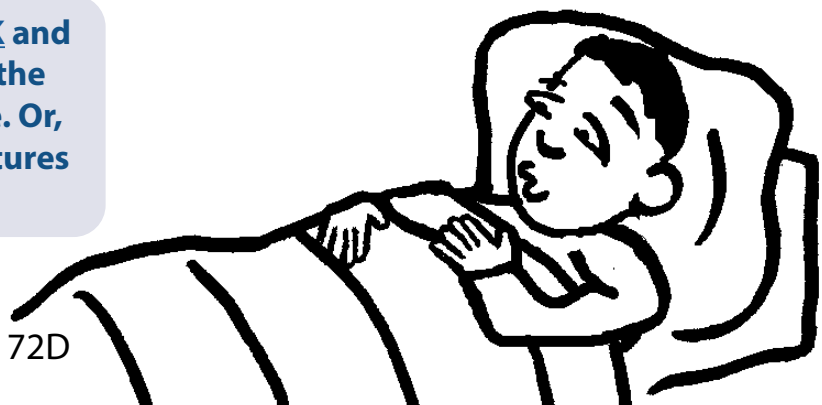


72C

Place a hand over the painful feeling. See if you can be kind to yourself by imagining you are breathing through your hand to this painful feeling.



You can go to this [LINK](#) and listen to, or download the *Being Kind to Yourself* exercise. Or, you can simply follow the pictures and instructions in this book.



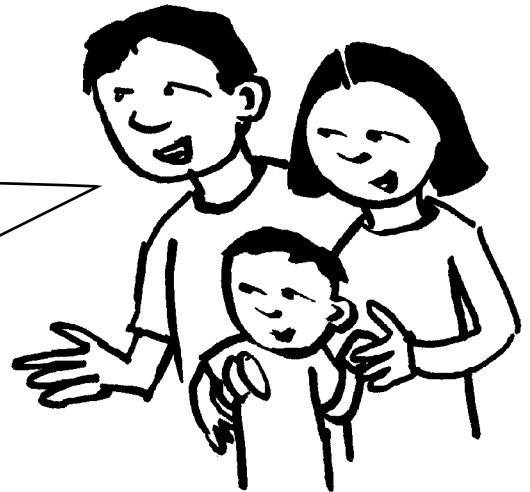
72D



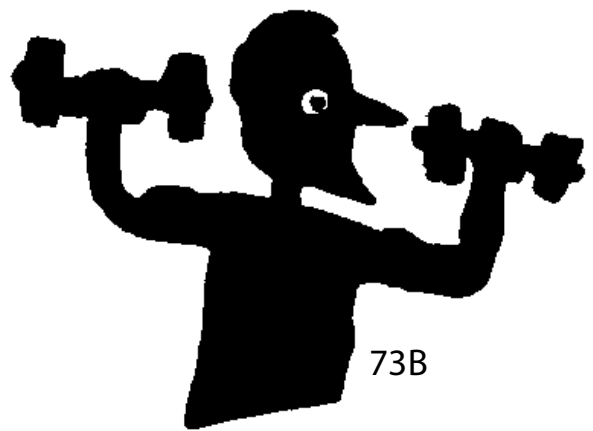
73A

And of course every time you do anything from this book...

...it is an act of kindness to ourselves and to others!

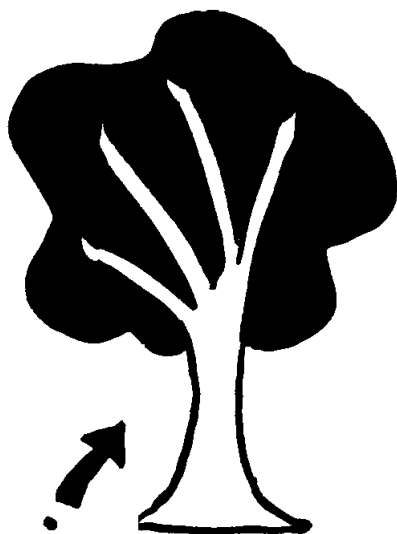


Remember, too:
it is like building muscles. The more you practise, the better.



73B

And every tiny step matters.
A tiny seed grows into a mighty tree.



73C

And the journey of 1000 miles begins with one step.



73D

**Enjoy your ongoing journey!
Try to practise and consider re-reading
this book again to help you understand
the ideas and skills even more. Thank you
for your time and please share this book
if you found it useful.**



Tool 1: GROUNDING

GROUND YOURSELF during emotional storms by **NOTICING** your thoughts and feelings, **SLOWING DOWN** and **CONNECTING** with your body by slowly pushing your feet into the floor, stretching and breathing, and then **REFOCUSING** and **ENGAGING** with the world around you.

What can you see, hear, touch, taste and smell? Pay attention with curiosity to what is in front of you. Notice where you are, who is with you and what you are doing.

Practice tip:

Grounding is especially useful during stressful situations or emotional storms. You can also practise grounding when you simply have one or two minutes available, like when you're waiting for something, or before or after an activity you do every day, like washing, eating, cooking or sleeping. If you practise during these times, you may find that boring activities become more enjoyable, and it will be easier to use grounding later in more difficult situations.



You can download or listen to *Grounding exercises* of different lengths at this [LINK](#).



Tool 2: UNHOOKING

UNHOOK YOURSELF with these three steps:

- 1) NOTICE that a difficult thought or feeling has hooked you. Realize that you are distracted by a difficult thought or feeling, and notice it with curiosity.
- 2) Then silently NAME the difficult thought or feeling; for example:
 - “Here is a difficult feeling”
 - “Here is tightness in my chest”
 - “Here is a feeling of anger”
 - “Here is a difficult thought about the past”
 - “I notice here is a difficult thought”
 - “I notice here are fears about the future”
- 3) Then, REFOCUS on what you are doing. Pay full attention to whoever is with you and whatever you are doing.



You can download or listen to the *Notice and Name* exercise at this [LINK](#).



Tool 3: ACTING ON YOUR VALUES

Choose the values that are most important to you. For example:

- being kind and caring
- being helpful
- being brave
- being hardworking.

You get to decide which values are most important to you!

Then pick one small way that you can act according to these values in the next week. What will you do? What will you say? Even tiny actions matter!

Remember that there are three approaches to any difficult situation:

1. LEAVE
2. CHANGE WHAT CAN BE CHANGED, ACCEPT THE PAIN THAT CANNOT BE CHANGED, AND LIVE BY YOUR VALUES
3. GIVE UP AND MOVE AWAY FROM YOUR VALUES.



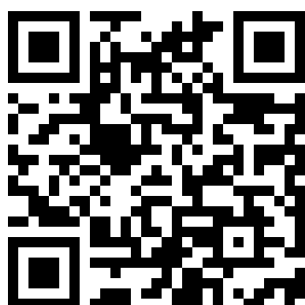
Tool 4: BEING KIND

BE KIND. Notice pain in yourself and others and respond with kindness. Unhook from unkind thoughts by **NOTICING** and **NAMING** them. Then, try speaking to yourself kindly. If you are kind to yourself you will have more energy to help others and more motivation to be kind to others, so everyone benefits.

You can also take one of your hands and imagine filling it with kindness. Place this hand gently somewhere on your body where you feel pain. Feel the warmth flowing from your hand into your body. See if you can be kind to yourself through this hand.



You can download or listen to the *Unhooking from Unkind Thoughts* and the *Being Kind to Yourself* exercises at this [LINK](#).



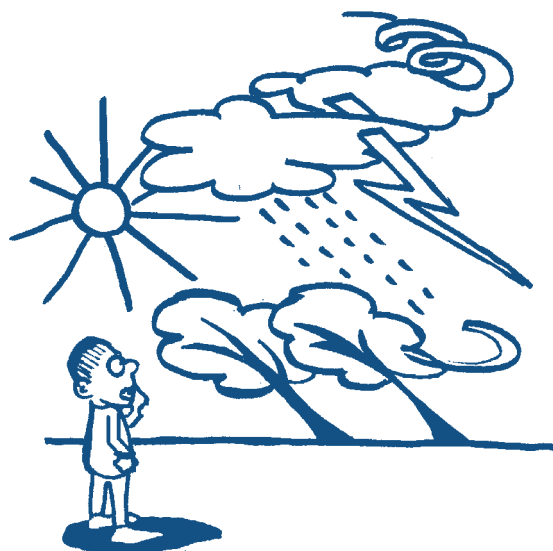
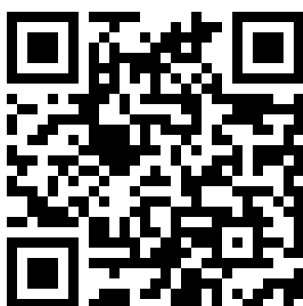
Tool 5: MAKING ROOM

Trying to push away difficult thoughts and feelings often does not work very well. So instead, MAKE ROOM for them:

- 1) NOTICE the difficult thought or feeling with curiosity. Focus your attention on it. Imagine the painful feeling as an object, and notice its size, shape, colour and temperature.
- 2) NAME the difficult thought or feeling. For example:
 - “Here is a difficult feeling”
 - “Here is a difficult thought about the past”
 - “I notice here is sadness”
 - “I notice here is a thought that I am weak”
- 3) Allow the painful feeling or thought to come and go like the weather. As you breathe, imagine your breath flowing into and around your pain to make room for it. Instead of fighting with the thought or feeling, allow it to move through you, just like the weather moves through the sky. If you are not fighting with the weather, then you will have more time and energy to engage with the world around you and do things that are important to you.



You can download or listen to the *Making Room* exercises at this [LINK](#).



Doing What Matters in Times of Stress:

An Illustrated Guide

If you are experiencing **stress**,
this guide is for you.

The guide contains **information**
and **practical skills** to help you cope.

Even in the face of tremendous adversity,
you can find **meaning, purpose**
and **vitality** in your life.

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