



North West
Boroughs Healthcare
NHS Foundation Trust

Beating the isolation blues

Wellbeing pack

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#BeatingTheIsolationBlues



Dear reader,

In these challenging times of isolation we recognise that you may be feeling low, restless and lonely. We have developed this pack to support you during these times and want you to know that we are holding you in our thoughts in these difficult times.

The pack can be used daily or when you experience a dip in your mood, are bored or frustrated. One of the most powerful tools we have is to work with the now and resist the opportunity to look too far ahead. We know that's easier said than done.

Help in the here and now

Try and limit your media coverage and stay connected with family and friends via the phone or video messaging. Try and keep to a plan for the day exercise and eat well. We know that for some alcohol can seem a comfort but often can make your mood fall even lower. For those of you who are living alone it can be especially hard and our thoughts are with you. Equally so living in confined spaces relationships may become challenging. So speaking to others is important. There are lots of different exercises in the pack that you can try, alone or with family members.

How to use it

At the front of the pack, we have listed feelings that you may be experiencing. Please find a comfortable chair with the pack in front of you and imagine a string from the base of your spine pulling you upright. Now, bring all your attention to your breathe and repeating for 10 breaths these words.

“I breathe into my body”

“I breathe out from my body”

As you breathe in and out from your body bring your attention to the feelings on the page and see which one you connect with. You might be feeling that you connect with all of them but stay with your breathing in and out of your body and let your mind settle. When you have settled, choose the feeling and try the exercises.

We understand that these are uncertain times for you and your loved ones and we want you know that we hold you in our minds in these difficult times and are here to support you.

Daily practice

Have a look at the list below and chose the one that connects with how your feeling

Feeling bored?	4-7
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#BEATINGTHEISOLATIONBLUES

For many of us being cut off from our family and friends can be lonely and distressing.

Some days might be better than others.

During the coming days and weeks this pack is part of a way we will stay connected to you.

Please be reassured you are not alone. This pack contains essential contact details and support aids.

Activity menu

This activity menu presents example activities that can help keep you occupied and can provide a sense of achievement, pleasure or connection to others.



Animals

Interact with your animal if you have one
Bird watching from your window or garden
Listen to the birds



Cook

Cook a meal for yourself
Cook a meal for someone else
Bake a cake / cookies
Find a new recipe



Mind

Daydream
Meditate
Pray
Practice yoga
Try relaxation exercises
Sit by the window where you can look out over a view of trees or the sky



Self Care

Take a bath/shower
Wash your hair
Give yourself a facial
Take a short nap
Trim your nails



Be active

Home workouts
Online exercises
Cleaning your home
Dancing to music
Going up and down the stairs



Shop

Shop online for groceries (if permitted)
Shop online for clothes (if permitted)
Plan what you want to purchase



Creative

Draw a picture
Paint a portrait
Take a photograph
Doodle / sketch
Organise photographs
Make a photograph album
Start a scrapbook
Finish a project
Do some sewing /
knitting
Colouring



Clean

Clean the house: each
day focus on one room

Clean the fridge and oven
Clean your shoes
Do laundry
Do some chores
Organise your wardrobes
Clean cupboards



Watch

Watch a movie
Watch a TV show
Watch a YouTube video



Music

Listen to music you like
Find some new music to listen to
Turn on the radio
Make some music
Sing a song
Play an instrument
Listen to a podcast



Kindness

Help a friend online or over the
telephone
Make a gift for someone
Make a list of your good points
Make a list of things or people you
are grateful for



Plan

Set a goal
Create a budget
Make a 5 year plan
Make a 'to do' list
Make a 'bucket list'



Connect with people

Contact a friend
Join a new group Join a political party
Join a dating website
Send a message to a friend
Write a letter to a friend
Reconnect with an old friend



Mend

Repair something in the house
Repair your bike
Make something new
Change a lightbulb
Decorate a room



Try something new

Try a new food
Listen to some new music
Watch a new TV show or movie
Read a new book



Learn something new

Learn a new skill
Learn a new fact
Watch a tutorial video Learn a new language



Read

Read a favourite book Read your favourite website
Buy an EBook



Schedule

Get up extra early
Plan your day
Stay up late
Sleep in late
Tick something off your 'to do' list

The key is ROUTINE...

Establish a daily routine which will provide you with structure and purpose.

Grounding techniques

Breathing

When we are anxious or upset our breathing becomes more rapid. We can feel better by deliberately slowing and relaxing our breathing. Anxious breathing is up in the chest, whereas relaxed breathing happens deeper in the stomach.

Relaxed breathing instructions

- Breathe in slowly and steadily through your nose for a count of 4 - don't rush this!
- Pause for a count of 1
- Exhale slowly and steadily for a count of 4 - breathe out gradually - try not to breathe out with a sigh
- Repeat for a few minutes until you notice a change in how your body feels
- If you get distracted, or if your mind wanders, just bring your attention back to how it feels to breathe in and out

Practice belly breathing

Sit comfortably in a chair and place your hands on your belly, with your middle fingertips just slightly touching. Now breathe in deeply and notice how your fingertips move apart a little. That shows you are breathing effectively with your diaphragm. You might need to practice this!

When you are feeling tense and hoping to relax, try breathing out a little bit more slowly and more deeply, noticing a short pause before the in-breath takes over (there is no need to exaggerate the in-breath, just let it happen). You might find it useful to count slowly or prolong a word such as ONE or CALM to help elongate the out-breath a little (to yourself or out loud).

Simple Breathing Exercise

This breathing exercise takes only a few seconds, no matter where you are. It is particularly helpful at stressful times, and also practice it at regular intervals throughout the day.

- Take a deep, slow breath in and hold it for 5 seconds. Feel your belly expand as you do this.
- Breathe out slowly, to a count of 5.
- Breathe in again, make every breath slow and steady and exactly the same as the one before it and the one after it.
- As you breathe out, concentrate on expelling ALL the air in your lungs.
- If you are alone, you could make a noise like WHOO as you do this to help you feel the air being let out.
- Keep the outbreath going for as long as you can. Keep it relaxed for a few seconds before you inhale again.

Colour breathing

For a fast and effective calming technique in a stressful situation, visualise the colour blue. Visualise breathing in that blue calm and breathing out red tension.

Progressive muscle relaxation

- Sit in a comfortable chair (or lie on the floor, or on a bed).
- Ensure you will not be disturbed by other noises.
- If you become aware of sounds - just try to ignore them and let them leave your mind just as soon as they enter.
- Make sure the whole of your body is comfortably supported - including your arms, head and feet. (Rest your arms on the arms of the chair, with your feet flat on the floor)
- Close your eyes. Feel the bed or chair supporting your whole body - your legs, your arms, your head.
- If you can feel any tension, begin to let it go.
- Take 2 slow and deep breaths, and let the tension begin to flow out.
- Become aware of your head - notice how your forehead feels.
- Let any tension go and feel your forehead become smooth and wide.
- Let any tension go from around your eyes, your mouth, your cheeks and your jaw. Let your teeth part slightly and feel the tension go.
- Now focus on your neck - let the chair take the weight of your head and feel your neck relax. Now your head is feeling heavy and floppy. Let your shoulders lower gently down. Your shoulders are wider, your neck is longer.
- Notice how your body feels as you begin to relax.

- Be aware of your arms and your hands. Let them sink down into the chair. Now they are feeling heavy and limp.
- Think about your back, from your neck to your hips. Let the tension go and feel yourself sinking down into the chair. Let your hips, your legs and your feet relax and roll outwards. Notice the feeling of relaxation taking over.
- Think about your breathing - your abdomen gently rising and falling as you breathe.
- Let your next breath be a little deeper, a little slower...
- Now, you are feeling completely relaxed and heavy.
- Lie still and concentrate on slow, rhythmic breathing.
- When you want to, count back from 5 to 1 and open your eyes.
- Wiggle your fingers and toes, breathe deeply and stretch.
- Pause before gently rising

Smells

Smells are an incredibly powerful way of coming to our senses. If you are deliberately paying attention to a smell you are truly in the present moment. Try to find a smell that has positive associations for you - maybe one that reminds you of happy times, or a smell which you enjoy. Carry it with you and use it to bring yourself back to the present moment if you get caught up in an unwanted memory.

Helpful smells

- Small bottles of essential oils - e.g. eucalyptus, mint, lavender, lemon
- Small dried flowers such as lavender
- Perfume soaked on a tissue
- Whole spices from the kitchen



Practice mindfulness

What Is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is a form of self-awareness training adapted from Buddhist mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness is about being aware of what is happening in the present, moment-by-moment, without making judgements about what we notice. Mindfulness meditation practice is a key ingredient in a variety of evidence-based psychotherapies, including dialectical behaviour therapy (DBT) and acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT). There are many mindfulness exercises on YouTube.

Why should I practice mindfulness?

Our minds can be focused on things in the past, present or future. We often find ourselves ruminating about events that have already happened, or worrying about things that could happen. These habits of thought are often distressing.

Mindfulness is a practice which encourages us to attend to the present moment. There is good evidence that mindfulness practice can help people cope more effectively with a wide variety of feeling-states such as depression and anxiety, but also with physical health conditions including chronic pain and illness.

Past

Rumination

Brooding

Present

Being

Future

Worry

Fretting

“Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally”

Why do I need to practice? Can't I pay attention to the present moment already?

We can all pay attention to the present moment, at least for a short while. If you haven't tried meditation before, though, you might notice that your attention wanders and is not easily controlled. Mindfulness strengthens our ability to pay attention in the present moment, but also increases our awareness of how our minds fluctuate, often in unhelpful ways. People who practice mindfulness regularly find that it helps their ability to stay in the present moment without being deflected.

What does it mean to 'cultivate a non-judgemental attitude'?

Shakespeare said "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so", and this is a core idea in therapies like cognitive behavioural therapy. Making judgements about our own experiences can often lead us to becoming quite distressed. For example, thoughts like "this is horrible" and "I can't take any more" are both judgements associated with distress. Practising mindfulness teaches us to accept more of our experience without judging it. This has been shown to help people live more fulfilling lives.

Example: Choose an activity to do mindfully, just for 1 or 2 minutes

- Whatever you do, be in that moment, right now. Focus your attention, and notice what you see around you, right where you are. Listen to the sounds around and inside you. Notice whatever you can smell. Reach out and touch what is within reach - the chair, the floor, yourself. Notice those sensations of breathing in your chest, your belly, your throat and nose.
- Simply notice whenever other thoughts and sensations come to mind - as they surely will - then gently re-focus on our chosen mindful activity.
- Be patient and compassionate with yourself.
- Describe your experiences and what you notice, rather than judging them to be good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant.
- It is as it is.
- It will pass.

“If you let cloudy water settle, it will become clear. If you let your upset mind settle, your course will also become clear”

Guidelines for better sleep

Sleeping well is a habit that you can learn! Small changes can have big effects. Start today by following these rules:

- Take care of your body
- Do not drink caffeine: no tea, coffee, or Coca-Cola after 6 o'clock
- Do not eat a big or spicy meal late in the evening
- Do not go to bed hungry
- Avoid alcohol as it interferes with sleep
- Physical exercise, in the late afternoon can help to make your body tired and help you to sleep. Try to do some exercise every day.
- Sleep only at night-time and do not have day-time naps, no matter how tired you feel. Naps keep the problem going by making it harder for you to get to sleep the next night.
- Having a regular bedtime routine teaches your body when it's time to go to sleep.
- Have a soothing drink like chamomile tea or a milky drink
- Have a bath, or a routine of washing your face and brushing your teeth
- Go to bed at same time each night
- When in bed think of nice things (e.g. think of 5 nice things that happened that day – they might be big or small, such as a nice conversation, seeing the sunshine, or hearing nice music on the radio)
- Do a relaxed breathing exercise (one hand on stomach the other on your chest, deliberately slow your breathing, breathe deeply in your stomach instead of high in your chest)

Coping with bad dreams can be difficult. Some people don't like relaxation before going to sleep or are scared of letting go. If that is you, try these preparation techniques instead:

- Prepare yourself in case you have bad dreams by thinking of a bad dream then think of a different ending for it. Practice this new ending many times before going to sleep
- Before going to sleep prepare to re-orient yourself when you wake from a bad dream
- Remind yourself that you are at home, that you are safe. Imagine your street, buses, local shops
- Put a damp towel or a bowl of water by the bed to splash your face, place a special object by the bed, such as a photograph, or a small soft toy
- Practice imagining yourself waking up from a bad dream and reorienting yourself to the present, to safety by splashing your face, touching special object, having a bottle of rose or lavender essential oil to sniff, going to window to see surroundings
- When you wake up from a bad dream- move your body if you can and reorient yourself immediately (touching object, wetting face, going to the window, talk to yourself in a reassuring way)

Make your bedroom a pleasant place to be

- Get a nightlight
- Keep it clean and tidy
- Introduce pleasant smells such as a drop of lavender oil onto the pillow
- Get extra pillows



REMEMBER: Bed is for sleeping, so if you cannot sleep after 30 minutes, get up and do another activity elsewhere such as reading or listening to music (try and avoid TV as it can wake you up). After 15 minutes return to bed and try to sleep again. If you still can't sleep after 30 minutes get up again. Repeat this routine as many times as necessary and only use your bed for sleeping in.

Exercise

What does exercise do for the mind and body?

Exercise leads to positive changes in physical and mental wellbeing. Here are six reasons to increase the amount of exercise that you get.

Exercise increases your energy levels

Increasing your physical activity will actually reduce feelings of low energy or fatigue. You can think of exercise as being like an elastic band in a child's toy: exercise 'winds up' the elastic band storing more energy in it.

Exercise leads to better sleep

Exercise has been shown to improve sleep quality. Exercise has even been suggested as an alternative or complimentary form of therapy for people who experience problems sleeping.

Research suggests that doing exercise 4 to 8 hours before bedtime is likely optimal for improving sleep quality, although some exercise at any time of day seems to be beneficial.

Exercise increases self-esteem

People who take part in regular physical exercise tend to have a higher level of physical self-worth, improved body image, and a higher level of self-esteem. Physical exercise has been recommended as a treatment for adults with low self-esteem.

Exercise lowers your risk of death

Physical inactivity is estimated to cause 9 per cent of all premature deaths. Research in the USA, suggests that women over 50 who change their physical activity status from inactive to active increase their life expectancy by between 1.5 and 3.5 years. For men the figure is 1.3 to 3.7 years.

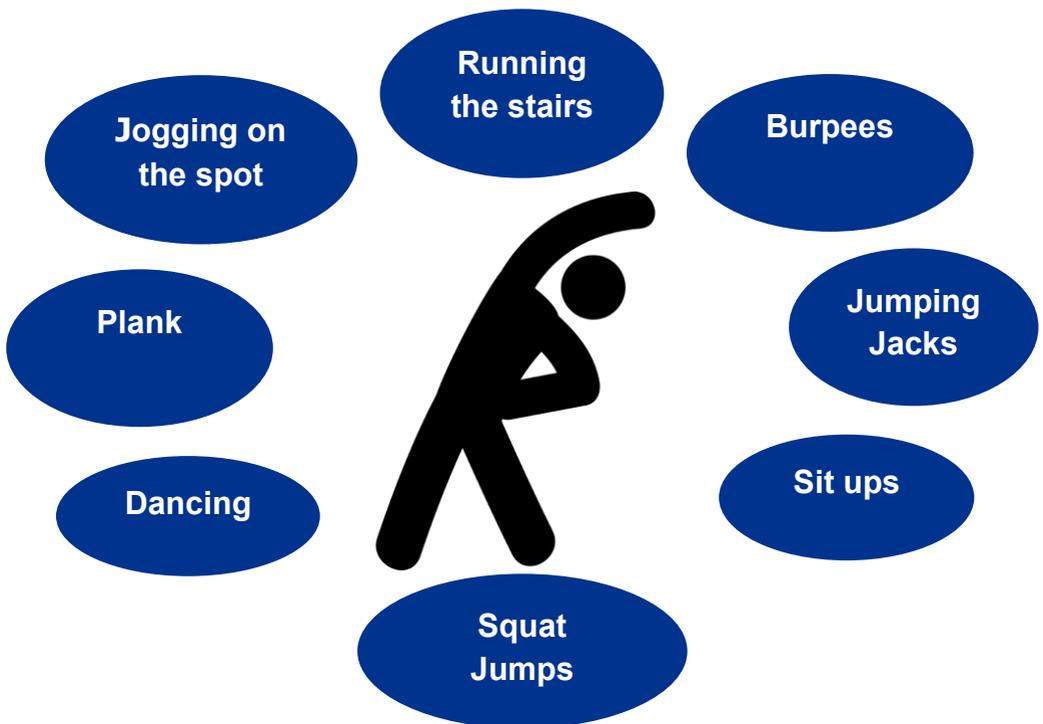
Exercise lowers your risk of ill-health

Regular physical activity is strongly associated with a decreased risk of many serious health conditions including diabetes, stroke, and cancer. Often these health-related benefits occur in the absence of weight changes – so even if you don't lose weight you are still doing your health a favour!

Exercise improves your brain function

Exercise is shown to have a positive effect upon mental performance.

Exercise has also been found to improve concentration, reduce levels of irritability, and may slow the deterioration in balance and mobility in patients with Alzheimer's disease.



Activity pacing

You may find yourself becoming increasingly inactive, or trying to catch up on things all at once which could lead to frustration, irritability, low mood and worsen any existing health condition. During this time of uncertainty and change you need to think about how to manage symptoms of any current health condition in particular pain management.

What is pacing?

Pacing is a planned approach to increase your level of activity. The aim of pacing is to achieve and maintain a fairly even level of activity energy levels throughout the day as opposed to trying to do everything in the morning then having to rest all afternoon.

How to use pacing?

- Work out what you can manage now: decide on your baseline, how much activity you can do on a day-to-day basis
- Decide on a realistic build up rate: build up tasks slowly
- Write down your plan and record your progress

There are three elements to pacing:

Take frequent short breaks

Break up tasks into smaller bits

Gradually increase the amount you do

Tips:

- Start on activities that are easier
- Its ok to ask for help with specific tasks
- Try to change your position regularly
- Write a list of your plans and stick it on the fridge/ computer/phone/cupboard
- Start off with a small change and build on this
- Make a list of why you want to change
- Explain to others why you are changing a habit, get support and help from others if needed
- Reward yourself with a treat
- Do not worry if you fall back into your old habits, everyone does when they try to change, look at your plan and start afresh
- Find a new way of doing something with pacing rather than stopping it altogether
- Setbacks are normal and everyone has them; It does NOT mean you are back to square one

If you put into practice the concept of pacing, you should have opportunities to manage your condition and gradually do more.

The rule of the three Ps that can be applied to any task:

Prioritise, Plan and Pace

Defusion techniques

DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU THINK!

Firstly, what is cognitive fusion?

Cognitive fusion is where we get entangled with our thoughts and 'pushed around by them'. We focus our attention on the contents of our mind (our thoughts, memories, assumptions, beliefs, images etc.) rather than what we are experiencing through our five senses. We then make decisions and take actions based on our internal experience (thoughts, memories etc.) rather than what is really going on in the world.

To break the cycle of cognitive fusion the aim is to practice techniques of defusion.

Defusion involves distancing, disconnecting or seeing thoughts and feelings for what they are (streams of words, passing sensations), not what they say they are (dangers or facts).

Stop, step back, observe (the thoughts and feelings, what's happening to/for the other person).

Notice what's happening - your thoughts, physical sensations, emotions, images, memories. Notice the way you're interpreting what they mean, and how that's affecting you.

Notice the unhelpful thoughts. It can help to say them differently, in a non-threatening way: slowly, in a squeaky or comic voice or write them down.

Defusion techniques can include:

- Notice the thought and ask yourself whether it is helpful for you and whether it will lead you towards the values you have in your life.
- Sitting with the thought and saying to yourself “I am having the thought that...”
- Thank your mind for that thought – “Thank you mind, how very informative!” or “is that right? How fascinating!” or simply “Thanks, Mind!” The spirit here is to not take your thoughts too seriously; or get into a struggle with them.
- Say the thought in your head with a funny voice e.g. Homer Simpson.
- Sing the thought out loud.
- Mindful watching-Imagine you are on top of the mountain, with some steady rocks underneath your feet and a whole landscape in front of you. Inhale the mountain breeze. Then pay attention to your thoughts and imagine you put each and single one on clouds and send them to the sky. You can do that until you feel your mind is slower and emptier of thoughts.
- Write down the thoughts on a piece of paper to see them from a perspective.
- Naming the story- if all these thoughts and feelings were put into a book or movie, titled ‘the something, something story’, what would you call it? Each time this story shows up name it, ‘ahh there’s the XYZ story again!’
- Computer screen- imagine this thought on a computer screen. Change the font, colour and format. Animate the words. Add in a bouncing ball.

- Learn more and practice mindfulness so that you can be aware of when you are in the present moment rather than being 'in your head' and thinking about the past or worrying about the future. Notice what you don't normally notice - sights, sounds, sensations, thoughts, textures etc.
- Use metaphors try to see things differently.

Metaphors can help us understand thoughts in a different way

Passengers on the bus

You can be in the driving seat, whilst all the passengers (thoughts) are being critical, abusive, intrusive, distracting, and shouting directions, or sometimes just plain nonsense. You can allow those passengers to shout and chatter noisily, whilst keeping your attention focused on the road ahead; heading towards your goal or value (values your heart's deepest desires for how you want to behave as a human being.)



Playground bully

The playground is fenced in and the children have to learn to live with the bully. This bully uses threats, mocking and abusive words to upset his victims. We can't stop our thoughts, but perhaps we can react to them in a different way, as these victims show us.

Victim 1 - believes the bully (the thoughts), becomes distressed, and reacts automatically. The bully sees this as great entertainment and will carry on targeting this victim. This is how we normally respond to our thoughts.

Victim 2 - challenges the bully, and bully eventually gives up on this victim.

Victim 3 - acknowledges then ignores the bully, changing focus of attention, and the bully soon gives up.

The tunnel

When we get anxious driving through a tunnel, the best option is to keep going to the other end, rather than stop or look for an exit in the tunnel. This feeling will pass - there is an end to this tunnel.



The weather

We cannot control the weather, so we have to learn to adapt to it. We can put a coat on for instance, but we cannot stop the wind or rain, and it would be foolish to try. Regardless of what we do, the storm will pass.

Our thoughts and feelings are like the weather, they come and they go. We cannot control or stop them, but we can learn to react to them differently. If we give up the futile struggle to try and stop or control it, the storm of thoughts and feelings will pass.



Distress tolerance

Distress tolerance skills are used when it is difficult or impossible to change a situation. They are used to help us cope and survive during a crisis and help us tolerate short term or long term pain (physical or emotional).

Radical acceptance

Acceptance means being willing to experience a situation as it is, rather than how we want it to be. It's to be in the actual situation that you're in, rather than the situation you think you're in, or think you should be in.

'Turning the mind'

Your mind will give you other ideas, interpretations, reminding you of old strategies – whether helpful or unhelpful. Each time your mind wanders and you notice these other thoughts and images, bring your attention back to this moment. Don't judge the situation to be good or bad, bring your attention back to this moment, right now, and being effective in this situation.

Distraction

Distraction helps us feel better by diverting our attention away from the distressing thoughts. It works even better if you choose something that will really grab your attention and keep you absorbed in that activity. Different things work for different people, it's worth trying and practicing lots.

Distraction can also be a useful tool when we might otherwise do something which we will regret later. Notice the thoughts, feelings and urges to respond...acknowledge those experiences rather than fight with them, then choose where to put your focus of attention.

What can you use as distraction that would work for you?

- Play a game
Colouring
- Listen to music
Make a self-soothe box – Can be used as a distraction technique and then once complete can be used as a coping toolbox.

RIGHT NOW!

- **5** things you can see right now
- **4** things you can hear right now
- **3** things you can touch, and reach out and touch them, right now
- **2** things you can smell or like the smell of
- **1** slow, deep breath. Then focus on your breathing, before shifting your focus of attention onto something different...

Self-Soothing

Self-soothing is another way of using distress tolerance. These are physical techniques which use different body senses. Experiment with different techniques until you find some that are comfortable and helpful, when you find these, practice them and use them when you're distressed, when emotions feel overwhelming and when situations feel like you can't stand them anymore. Instead of doing something which may hurt you, try something that gives you comfort and calmness. Self-soothing is to do with comforting, nurturing and being kind to yourself. Think of ways of soothing each of your five senses:

- **Vision**
- **Hearing**
- **Smell**
- **Taste**
- **Touch**

Many of us feel like we don't deserve these comforts, and may find it hard to give pleasure to ourselves in this way. Do you have those feelings?

Some of us may also expect this soothing to come from other people, or not want to do it for ourselves. Have you experienced this feeling?

You may feel guilty about comforting yourself in this way. It may take some practice to allow yourself to experience these pleasures. They are simple human pleasures which everyone has a right to, and will give us some good tools to use when we are feeling bad.

Try at least one of these self-soothing exercises per week. As you do what you have chosen, do it mindfully. Breathe gently and try to be fully in the experience. As you begin to overcome your feelings that perhaps you do not deserve this, or guilt, and start to enjoy one or more of the activities, you will be learning very useful tools to help you deal with uncomfortable feelings and difficult situations.



Contact details

Should you require support, here is a list of contact details.

- **Mind** – mental health charity and support: **0300 123 3393**
- **Samaritans** - If something is troubling you, then get in touch: 24 hours a day, 365 days a year: www.samaritans.org
Call **116 123** free from any phone.
- Rethink Mental Illness: Charity supporting people with mental illness - www.rethink.org
- **CALM** - the campaign against living miserably, is a charity set up in response to the high suicide rate among young men: www.thecalmzone.net **0800 58 58 58** - 7 days a week, 5pm to midnight (anonymous & free phone on 3, Virgin, Orange and Vodafone networks).
- **Cruse Bereavement Care** - Tel: **0808 808 1677** Website: www.cruse.org.uk
- **Relate**: Tel: **0300 100 1234** www.relate.org.uk
- **Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Centre**: Call **0330 3630063** www.rapecentre.org
- **Combat Stress** - support for ex-services (24hrs): **0800 1381619** www.combatstress.org.uk
- **Women's Aid**: helpline@womensaid.org.uk, you can also chat to a support worker using their free instant messenger service, Mon-Fri (10am-12pm)
- **1in6** | Support for Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse or Assault: <https://1in6.org/>

Emergency services (999)

if you don't feel you can keep yourself safe right now, seek immediate help.

Activity diary

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Practice techniques

Name of technique (s) Day/Date	Practiced: yes/no How often?	Benefits and/or difficulties



***Developed by Alishia Bann-Khellaf and Dr Amanda Kinsella,
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Supporting our communities to **live life well**