

A workbook  
helping you  
to Thrive  
at Night



# Introduction

With over 116,000 people in Bristol working at night, you are not alone in what you're thinking and feeling. This workbook is designed to help you to take steps towards taking care of your mental health and wellbeing.

It's jammed full of tips and techniques to give you the ability to cope with stressors and challenges you might be facing at work or at home.

Night work can be enormously rewarding, but we know it can also be a tough gig, with disturbed sleeping patterns, unsociable hours, and a different body clock to the daytime workforce.

However, our research showed that most wellbeing at work advice failed to recognise the realities of night work, offering unhelpful or even insensitive advice.

This document compliments the Managers' Handbook, which can be found on the Bristol Nights website [www.bristolnights.co.uk/thrive-at-night](http://www.bristolnights.co.uk/thrive-at-night).

Additional resources can be found through our eLearning course on creating a mentally healthy workplace, and in-person training.

This workbook is for the individual to work through. Some activities can be done in collaboration with your manager or team... some are for you, and only you.

*“This workbook has been designed with night workers in mind, no matter which sector you're in... you spend your working lives looking after the wellbeing of the city, this workbook aims to help look after you”*



# What do we Mean by Mental Health and Wellbeing?

Mental health relates to our emotions, thoughts, and relationships. It's important because it helps us handle stress, connect with others, and make decisions in our lives.

Wellbeing is a broader term that includes mental health and other factors that contribute to a good life. It involves happiness, life satisfaction, and the ability to cope with difficult times.

## Stressed out??

Stress is normal, and everyone experiences it. Not all stress is bad, and sometimes it's even useful to help us reach goals, meet challenges, and manage deadlines.

However, stress in our lives can build up. Prolonged exposure to stress that is not well managed can have a deep impact on our mental and emotional wellbeing, as well as our physical health.

Studies show that a musician performing to a crowd can produce the same amount of stress hormones as someone jumping out of plane!

## Stress Vs Anxiety

It's important to know how to identify and differentiate between signs of stress and anxiety. Stress is a common trigger for anxiety and it's important to catch anxiety symptoms early to prevent development of an anxiety disorder.

Generally, stress is a response to an **external** cause, such as a tight deadline at work or having an argument with a friend, and subsides once the situation has been resolved. Because stress is caused by external factors, tackling these head-on can help.

Anxiety is a person's specific reaction to stress; its origin is **internal**. Anxiety is typically characterised by a "persistent feeling of apprehension or dread" in situations that are not actually threatening.

Unlike stress, anxiety persists even after a concern has passed.

## Stress and the Body

When we are exposed to stressful situations, our bodies produce stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol as part of the fight or flight response. This is the primal response that has been helping humans escape danger for thousands of years.

There are easy ways to calm your body and your brain, such as breathing techniques and getting the right kinds of rest.

Keep reading to find out some easy coping mechanisms.



# What can Affect our Mental Health and Wellbeing?

In our busy lives, we face many stressors that affect our mental health and wellbeing. These common stressors include tough work situations, tricky relationships, money worries, and health issues. Frequent sources of stress for the night time workforce might include....

## Increased Frustration

Often experienced by not feeling seen or heard



## Being Stuck in Survival Mode

Prolonged exposure to stressful events, the pressure to 'hold it together', with no time or place to offload and reset



## Relationship Conflict

Disruption to our sense of connection & belonging



## Disrupted Sleep Patterns

Leading to sleep deprivation and fatigue

## High-Stress Environment

Tight deadlines, long hours, and high pressure to perform



## Financial Instability

Fluctuating finances, working too much overtime or taking on additional jobs



## Social Isolation

Feeling lonely or unsupported



## Safety Concerns

Including exposure to violence and harassment



## Sexual Harassment and Objectification

Being inappropriately touched or comments made by customers at work



## Assumptions about Your Job

The opinion of some people that nightlife jobs are not a career or that you're looking for a 'real job'



## Witnessing Traumatic Events

Fights, accidents, verbal abuse, sexual violence or overdoses at work



## Physical Health Conditions

Not dealing with ongoing physical conditions



# How are You Feeling?

To improve your overall mental health and wellbeing, you first need to learn how to notice and identify the things that affect your wellbeing.

Rate how you are feeling to the following questions:

**On a scale of 1 – 10, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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**On a scale of 1 – 10, how happy did you feel yesterday?**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

**In the last three months have you ever come to work despite not feeling well enough to perform your duties?**

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**Has something been on your mind a lot lately? (This isn't just in work)**

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**Do you think about these things intentionally or do they just keep popping into your mind?**

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**What do you do when you have these thoughts?**

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**What feelings do you notice when you have these thoughts?**

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**Do these feelings change the things you do?**

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# How does Stress Impact our Mind and Body?

Stress impacts our mind and body in different ways, some of which might surprise us.

The physical response is known as the Fight or Flight response.

## **Racing thoughts**

Thoughts become quicker to help us evaluate danger and make fast decisions

## **Dry mouth**

Digestion shuts down during dangerous situations

## **Rapid breathing**

Quicker breathing takes in more oxygen to power the muscles for fight or flight

## **Adrenaline release**

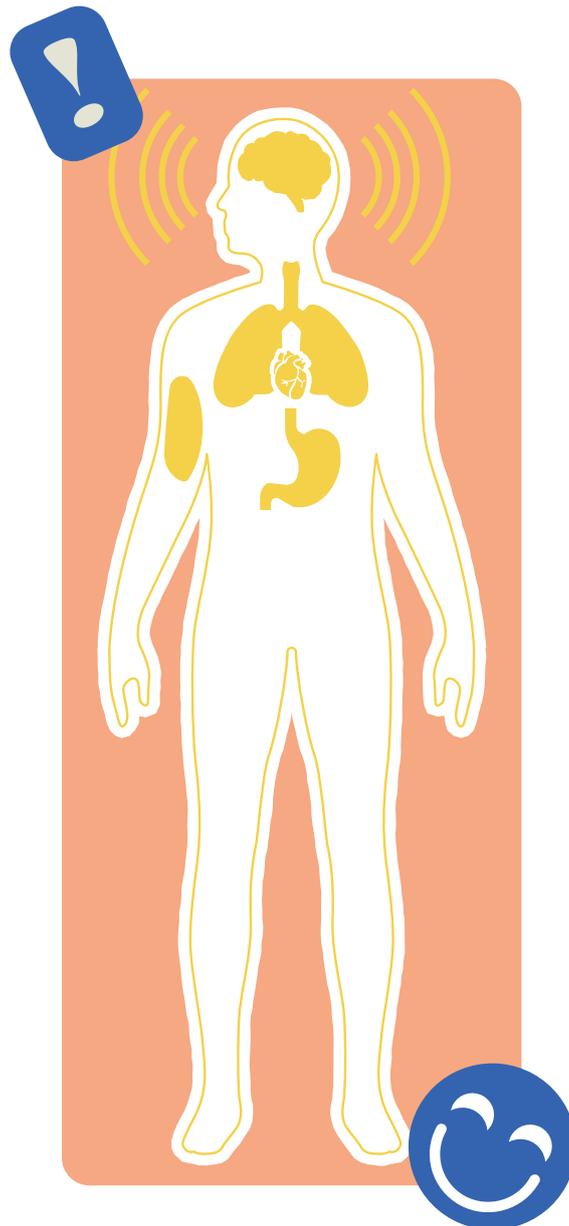
Adrenaline signals the body to get ready to respond to danger

## **Bladder urgency**

In response to stress muscles in the bladder relax

## **Nausea or “butterflies” in the stomach**

Blood moves from the digestive system leading to feelings of nausea



## **Changes in vision**

'Tunnel vision' may occur to sharpen attention to the danger

## **Dizziness**

As the heart rate increases and breathing patterns change the body's oxygen levels, this can leave you light headed or dizzy

## **Heart beats faster**

A faster heartbeat drives more blood to the muscles so they are ready for fight or flight

## **Sweaty palms**

When in danger, the body sweats to keep cool

## **Cold hands**

Blood vessels constrict and send blood to muscle groups

## **Muscles tense**

Muscles all over the body react to get ready to fight or flight

# Five Ways to Wellbeing

Research shows there are five simple things you can do as part of your daily life – at work and at home – to build resilience, boost overall mental wellbeing and lower the risk of developing symptoms of poor mental health.

## Connect...

*“Strong relationships with others are an essential part of building resilience and boosting wellbeing”*



Connecting with others can help us feel close to people, be a great leveller and help us feel valued for who we are. Being social means different things – you might prefer being in quieter situations or you might like being in big groups. You might like to connect with people online, or you might enjoy phone calls or sometimes just whatsapp messages can help you feel connected.

When you spend time with friends, family, and co-workers, ask them what they think you're good at? Where could you do better? Think about how you act around others to learn about your social skills and how you handle emotions.

## Be active...

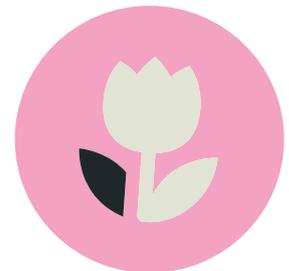
*“Being physically active everyday is great for our bodies and minds”*



Many people find that physical activity helps them maintain good mental health. We're not talking about taking up marathons here, go for a walk, cycle, get dancing. Exercising makes you feel good. It's proven to help happier moods, reduce feelings of stress and help with racing thoughts. Do activities you enjoy and notice how they make you feel. See how your energy, mood, and excitement change before, during, and after exercise. This can help you choose activities that are fun and good for you.

## Take notice...

*“Paying more attention to the present moment, to thoughts and feelings and to the world around us can boost our wellbeing”*



Remind yourself to take notice and be aware of how you're feeling. It can help you to understand what triggers your feelings of stress or anxiety. Savouring the moment can help you feel more positive in life. Take a breath and notice the small things....

## Keep learning...

*“Being curious and seeking out new experiences positively stimulates the brain”*

Trying something new can help us feel like we're achieving and improve our mood. Whether it's rediscovering an old interest, fixing something that's been broken or trying a new recipe, learning is a great way to boost your self-esteem. As you learn new things, think about how you like to learn and what motivates you. Knowing this can make learning more enjoyable and help you set goals that are right for you.



## Give...

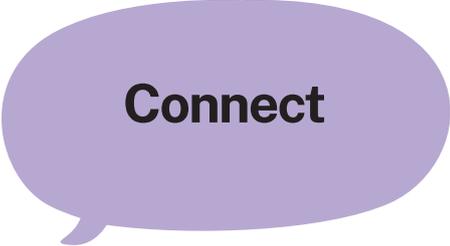
*“Giving makes us feel good. Carrying out acts of kindness whether small or large, can increase happiness, life satisfaction and general sense of wellbeing”*

Do something nice for a friend, colleague or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you. Notice how helping others makes you feel and what skills you gain from it. This can help you make better choices in your finding fulfilment in life.



# Goal Setting Template

Here are some daily things that show the Five Ways to Wellbeing in action



## Connect

- Drop a message to someone you haven't spoken to in a while
- When someone asks your weekend was, tell them how you're really feeling
- Give a colleague a lift to work or share the journey home with them for a chat
- Get into work a bit early and spend 10 minutes connecting before your shift



## Be Active

- Take the stairs rather than the lift
- Organise a work sporting day or night out
- Do some stretches before you leave for work
- Join a running club, class or organised exercise class



## Take Notice

- Tidy up your workstation - whether its your back bar or a tiny desk space
- Take a different route back from work and notice things on the journey
- Visit a shop or space you've never been to before
- Take a moment to enjoy when something good happens



## Keep Learning

- Do a crossword or today's Wordle!
- Start learning an instrument or skill
- Learn a new word
- Research something you've always wondered about



## Give

- Make a cup of tea for your teammate
- Set up a charitable initiative, from a charity collection to volunteering your venue to a charity
- Say hello to the neighbour you've never met or the person you pass each day on the bus
- Volunteer to do something that makes you feel good, walk a dog for someone, visit an elderly person or pick litter in a park!

Take a look at the activities below, and tick any you have done in the last week

**Connect**

**Be Active**

**Take Notice**

**Keep Learning**

**Give**

Phoned a friend <input type="checkbox"/>	Walked to work <input type="checkbox"/>	Sat quietly in a garden or park <input type="checkbox"/>	Asked for help and learnt something new <input type="checkbox"/>	Helped with housework or the dishes <input type="checkbox"/>
Wrote a letter <input type="checkbox"/>	Danced <input type="checkbox"/>	Watched the sunset/sunrise <input type="checkbox"/>	Tried a new recipe <input type="checkbox"/>	Supported a friend <input type="checkbox"/>
Dropped a message to someone you haven't spoken to in a while <input type="checkbox"/>	Used the stairs <input type="checkbox"/>	Found out about a local issue <input type="checkbox"/>	Used Wikipedia to answer a question <input type="checkbox"/>	Thanked someone <input type="checkbox"/>
Chatted with a neighbour <input type="checkbox"/>	Went to gym <input type="checkbox"/>	Closed my eyes and breathed or practised mindfulness <input type="checkbox"/>	Attended a course or took on a new task <input type="checkbox"/>	Made hot drinks for colleagues <input type="checkbox"/>
Talked or phoned instead of emailing <input type="checkbox"/>	Did housework and/or gardening <input type="checkbox"/>	Listened to my favourite song <input type="checkbox"/>	Went to the library to get information <input type="checkbox"/>	Paid someone a compliment <input type="checkbox"/>
Invited someone for coffee or a walk <input type="checkbox"/>	Walked my dogs <input type="checkbox"/>	Went to a park and noticed nature <input type="checkbox"/>	Read a book <input type="checkbox"/>	Smiled at a stranger <input type="checkbox"/>
Attended a local event with others <input type="checkbox"/>	Did some stretches before leaving for work <input type="checkbox"/>	Asked about someone's day, and listened <input type="checkbox"/>	Learnt a new word <input type="checkbox"/>	Helped someone out <input type="checkbox"/>
Add your own <input type="checkbox"/>	Add your own <input type="checkbox"/>	Add your own <input type="checkbox"/>	Add your own <input type="checkbox"/>	Add your own <input type="checkbox"/>

SCORE: now add up the number of ticks in each column:

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Are there any areas that have none or only one or two activities? Pick out something from the list or add something you would like to do that isn't noted and make time to try these out next week.

# Feeling Stressed?

Think about the everyday pressures that are stressing you out. Things that are going on in your world can mount up. Money worries, relationship issues, health concerns, poor diet and external factors are part of everyday life. Having resilience is the ability to manage these stressful situations without feeling too overwhelmed.

Imagine your capacity to cope with everyday stress is like a bucket, it's normal for stress to flow in and out. How we respond to these stressors helps us build resilience, but sometimes these different types of stress can mount up.

Actions of self-care that can help empty the stress bucket are things like socialising, exercising, talking with friends.

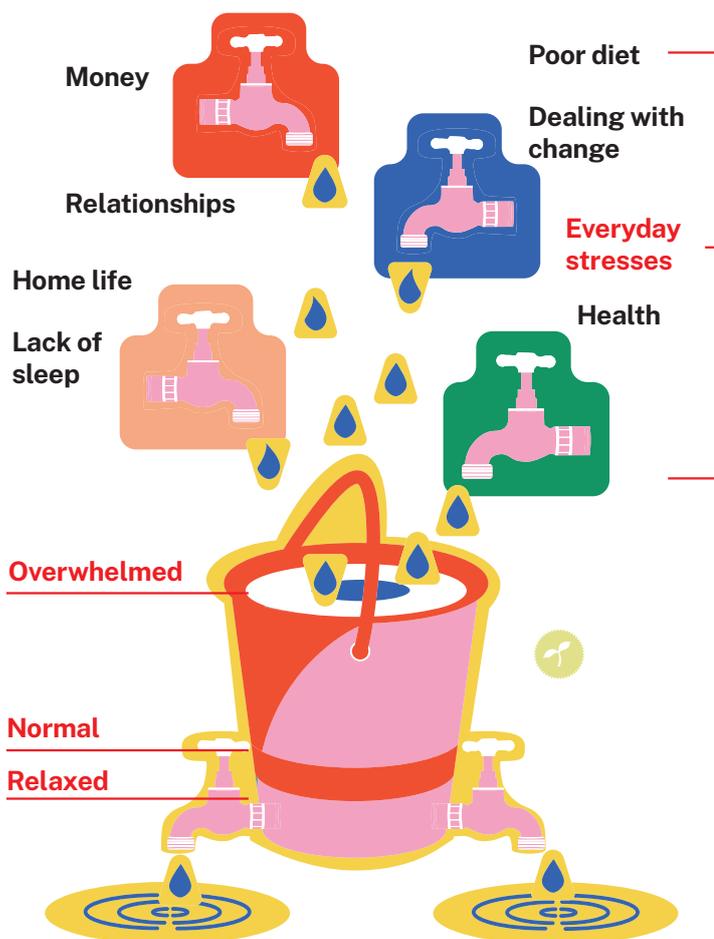


## What's in your Stress Bucket?

The 'stress bucket' is a visual way for you to think about the stresses in your life, to try to avoid it overflowing.

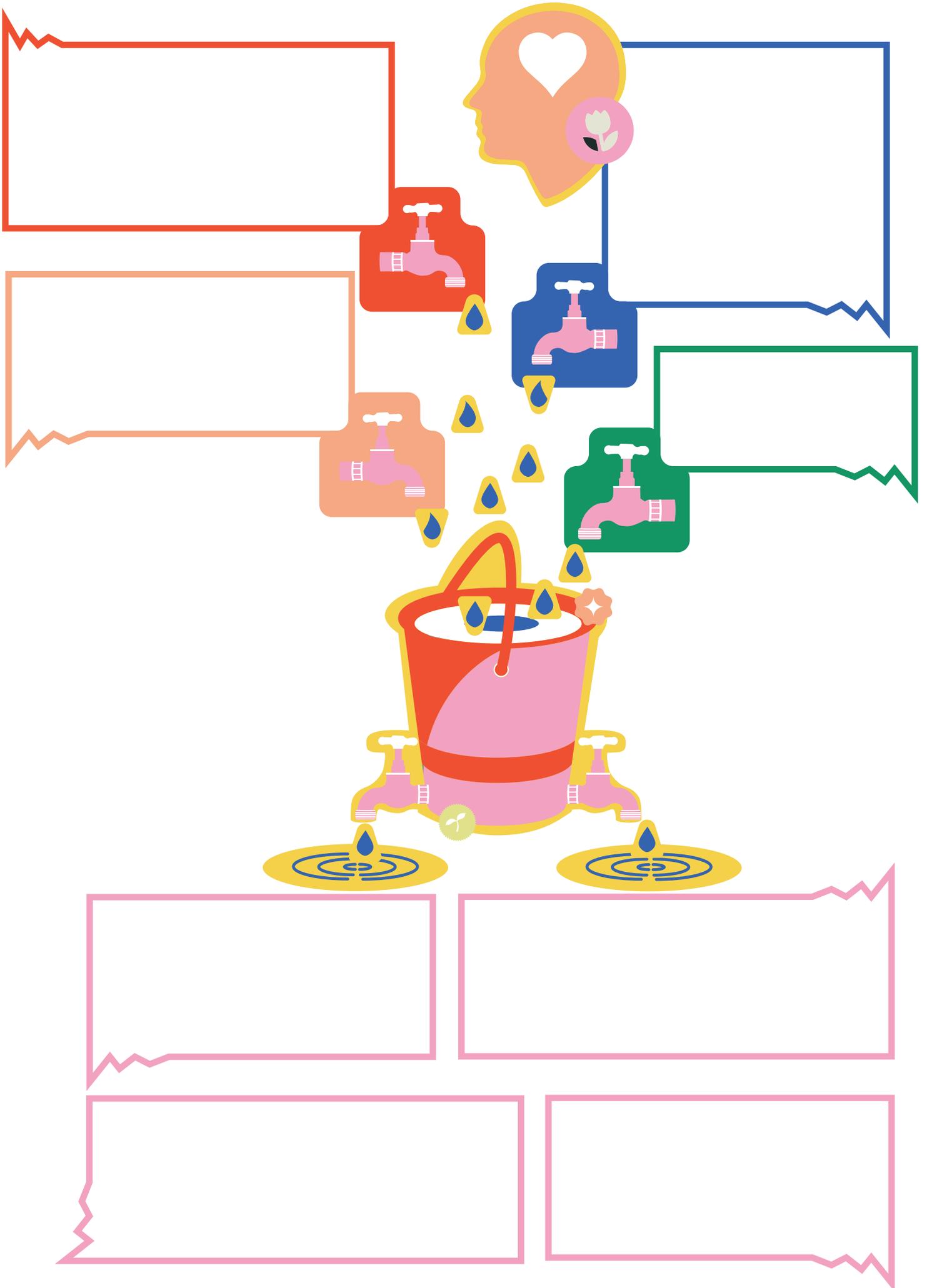
Now you try! On the next page, draw a line on the bucket showing how full your stress bucket is today. Use the boxes above the bucket to write down the things that are making you worry and causing you stress.

Underneath the bucket are the things that help you release stress. Using these boxes, write or draw the things that can help manage these feelings. These could be talking to friends, exercise, or spending time in nature?



### Things that help empty the bucket:

- Socialising • Exercising • Taking a break
- Talking with friends • Asking for help



# Breathing Exercises

## Breathing for stress

Shallow, upper chest breathing is part of the typical stress response. The stress response can be reduced by consciously breathing using the diaphragm.

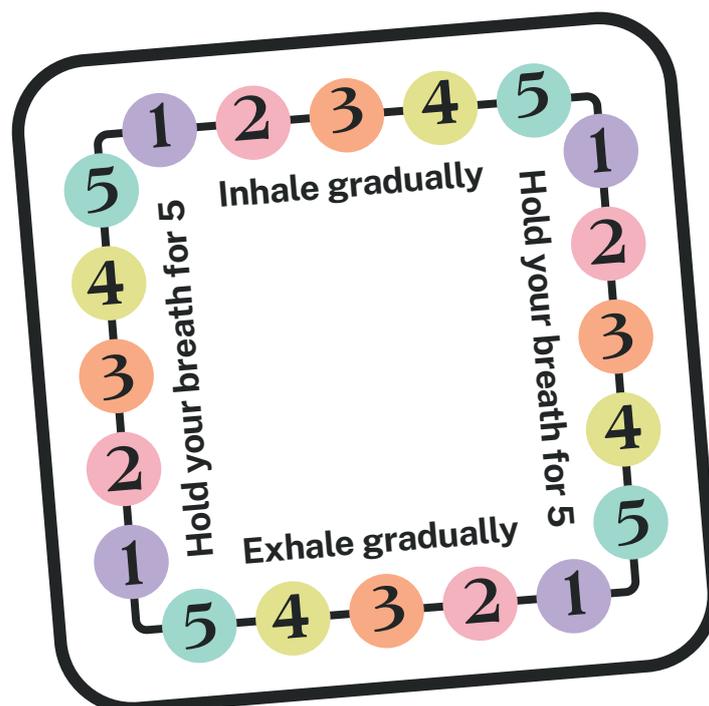
## Conscious breathing

Helps us feel calm by working with our brain and nerves. When we focus on our breath and take deeper, slower breaths, we trigger a calming response in our body.

- Sit comfortably in a chair or on the floor
- Breathe in through your nose - as you do, count to five
- Then breathe out and count to five
- Repeat several times until you can increase how long you breathe to ten counts.

## Square breathing

It can help to visualise it as a square. Imagine you're breathing around the square. Inhale as you visualise going up one side. Then when you reach the top hold your breath for five seconds and exhale as you imagine going down the other side of the square. Pause again for five seconds. And repeat ten times.



# My Circle of Control

When dealing with the things that fill our stress bucket, we can often become focused on the things that are outside of our control. The more we do this, the more disempowered we are, and the more disappointed, angry or anxious we can feel.

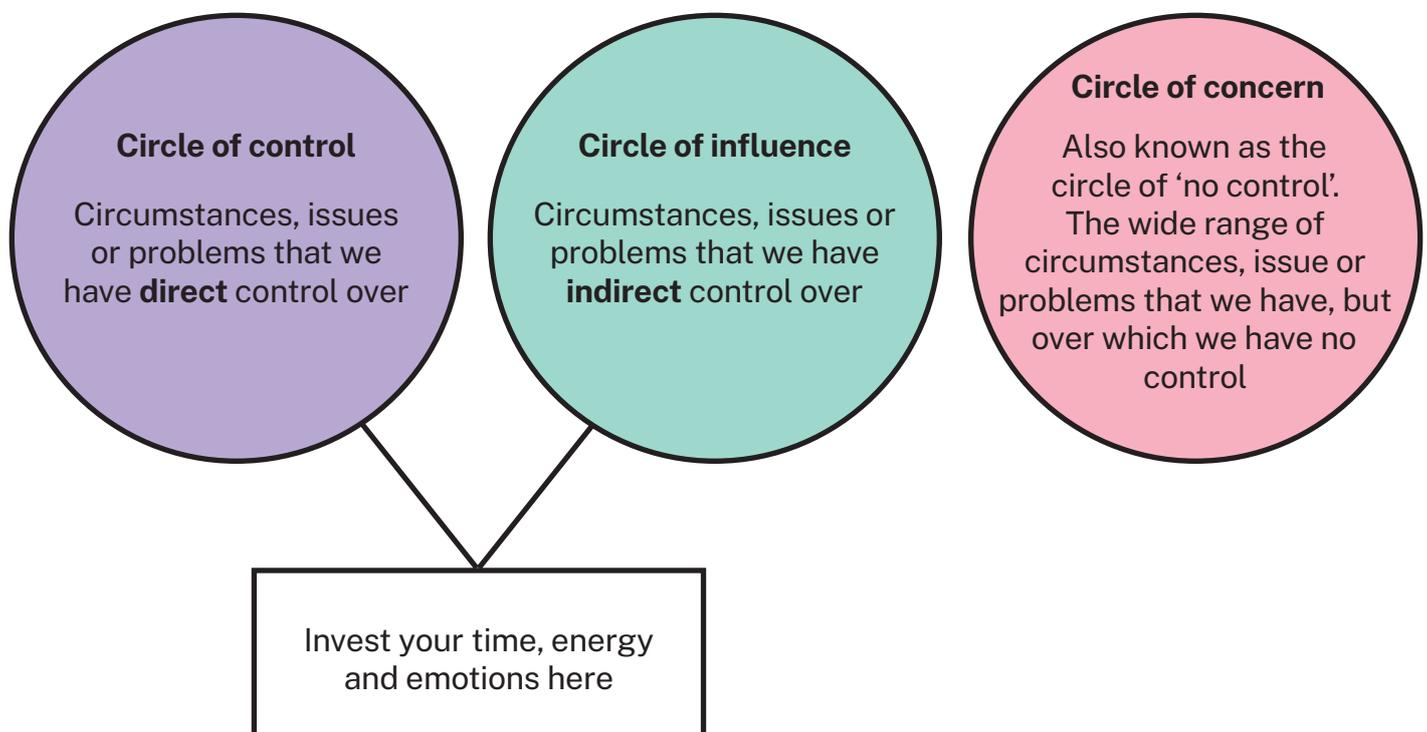
We can often encounter a number of challenges that leave us feeling overwhelmed. Many of these things may be out of our control but it doesn't stop us worrying about them, which can leave us feeling anxious.

Accepting the idea that there are things beyond our control can help us let go of anxiety and stress and allow us to focus on the things that we **can** control.

The Circle of Control is a tool to help you manage your emotional reactions to stressful situations. It can help you to identify your strengths and weaknesses and develop a better sense of belief in your ability to take control over your own activities.

Individuals who focus on the Circle of Control are more likely to be resilient when faced with stress and to experience positive emotions and wellbeing.

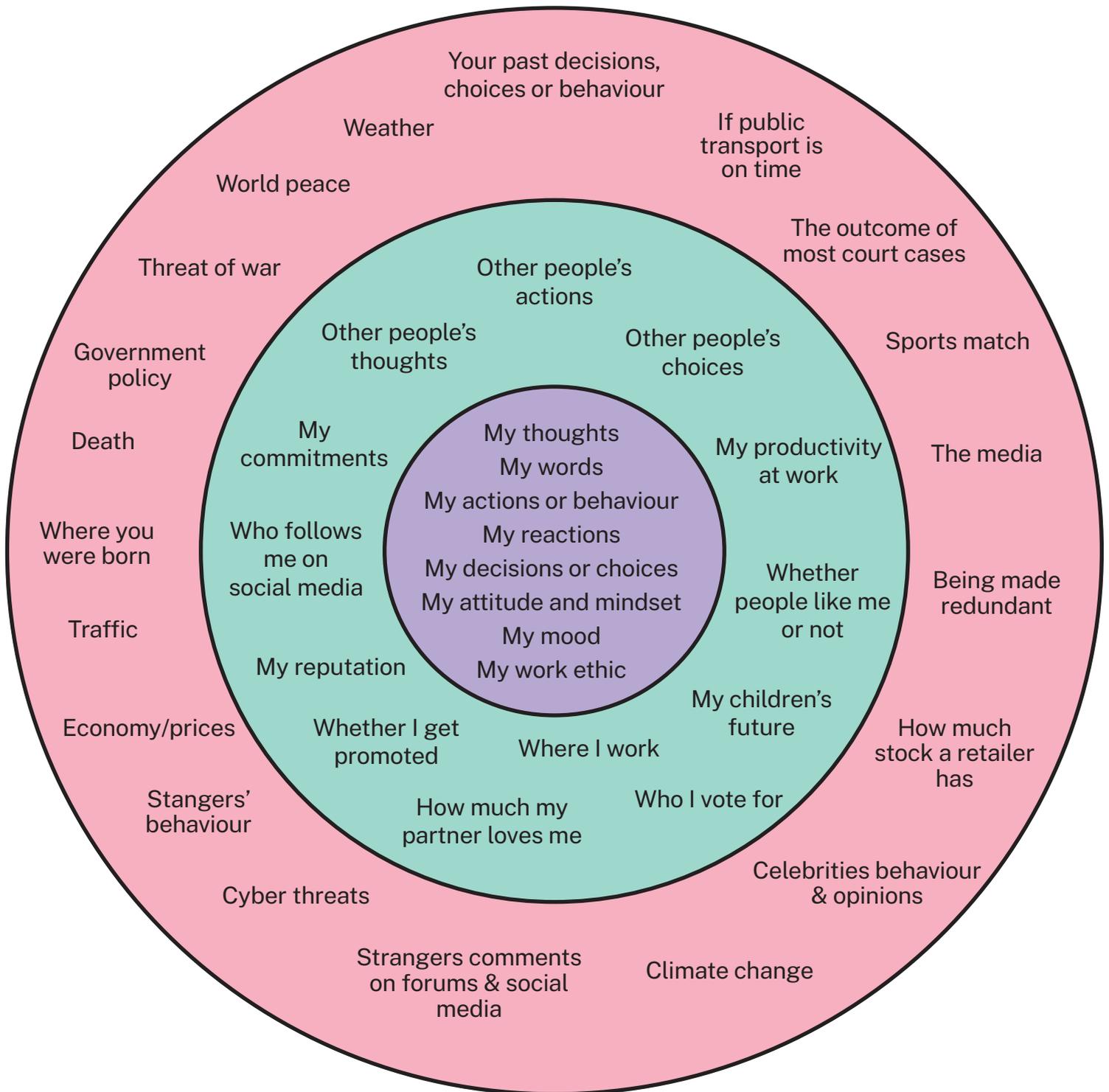
In the diagram below, the 3 circles show Circle of Control, Circle of Influence and Circle of Concern (where we have no control). When feeling anxious or stressed, it's helpful to focus on the Circle of Control and the Circle of Influence. Here is an example:



# Circle of control

This exercise can help you to focus your energy on YOUR circle of control and let go of the things you cannot control.

It can also help you identify where you might increase your influence through intentional or meaningful words, whilst letting go of controlling the outcome. Doing this can help you make the best use of your energy.



 **Circle of concern**

 **Circle of influence**

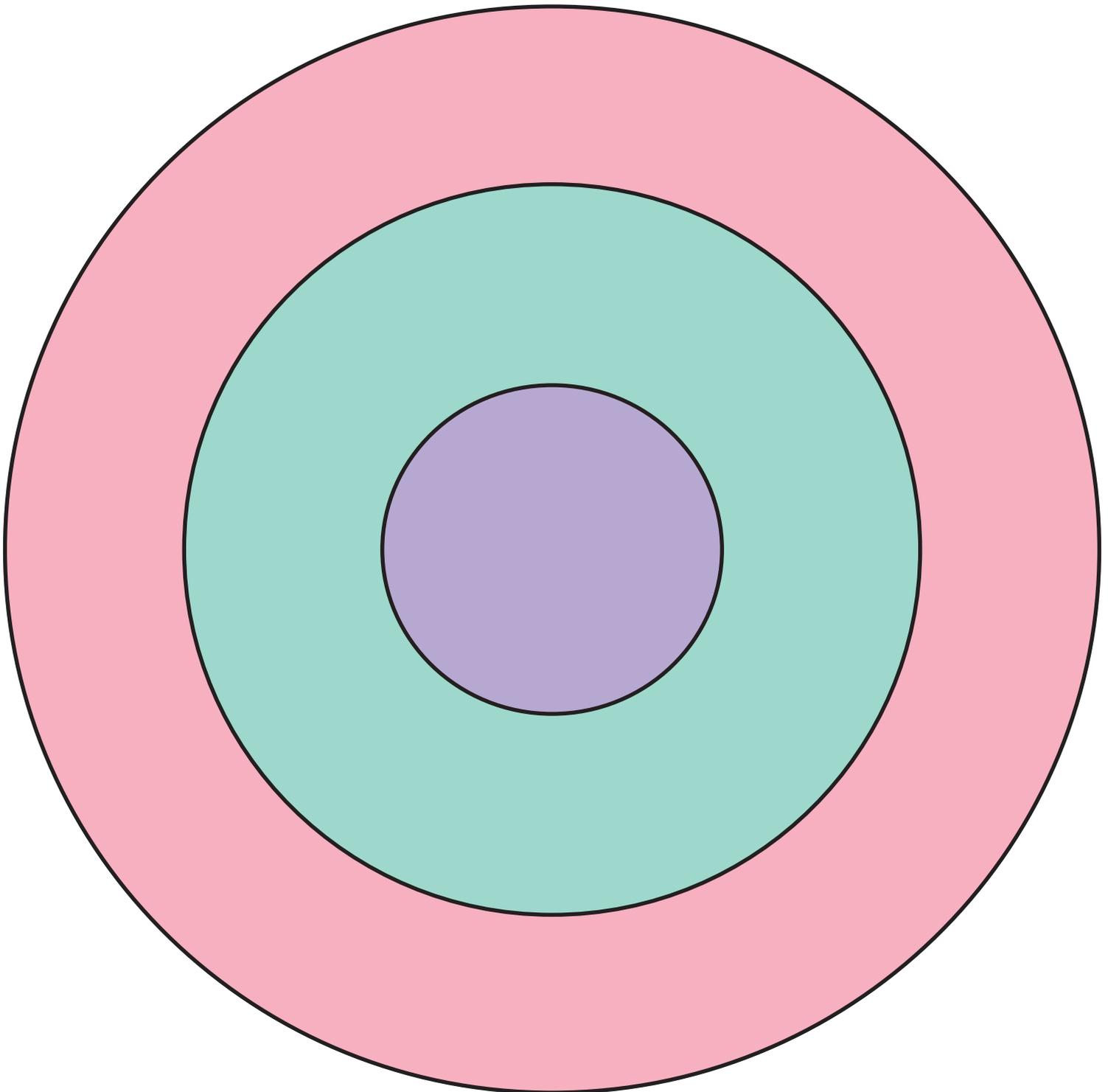
 **Circle of control**

## We can try this for ourselves - draw your own

In the outer pink circle list the things that you are concerned about but can't control or influence.

In the inner green circle, list those things that you are concerned about, and you can influence.

In the central purple circle, list the things that you have control over RIGHT NOW.



When you have finished this exercise take a moment to reflect.

Is there anything which has surprised you? Can you take action on things in your circle of control, or make a plan to address anything in your circle of influence?

# Battling Anxiety

Anxiety is what we feel when we are worried, tense or afraid – particularly about things that are about to happen, or which we think could happen in the future.

Anxiety is a natural human response when we feel that we are under threat. Anxiety can affect our mind, body and behaviour, for instance we might feel tearful, get stress headaches, or start avoiding things or people that trigger anxiety.

Common symptoms of anxiety include:

- **Feeling tired, restless or irritable**
- **Feeling shaky or trembly, dizzy or sweating more**
- **Being unable to concentrate or make decisions**
- **Trouble sleeping**
- **Worrying about the past or future, or thinking something bad will happen**
- **Headaches, tummy aches or muscle pain**
- **Dry mouth**
- **Pins and needles**
- **Noticing your heartbeat gets stronger, faster or irregular, or you get short of breath when you start feeling anxious.**

Most people feel anxious or scared every now and then. It's particularly common to experience some anxiety while coping with stressful events or changes, especially if they could have a big impact on your life. If anxiety is affecting your life there are things you can try that may help.

Support is also available if you're finding it hard to cope with anxiety, fear or panic.

## Tips on Managing Anxiety

### Live in the moment

Mindfulness techniques, such as breathing exercise or relaxation, can help to shift your focus away from your worries, and calm your anxiety. Think about how you can bring your attention back to the here and now.

### Understand your anxiety

Keeping a diary of what you are doing and how you feel at different times may help you understand why you're anxious and identify ways to manage or get rid of anxiety. Some people find journaling, or keeping a Worry Diary can help understand anxiety triggers.

### Make time for worries

Is anxiety taking over your day? Try setting a daily "worry time" to go through your concerns. Doing this at a set time every day can help you to focus on other things.

### Face your fears gradually

Avoiding situations or relying on habits we think will keep us safe might actually make our anxiety worse. Slowly facing up to a situation might help, and eventually it will feel OK.

### Look at the bigger picture

If we're feeling anxious about something, we might get stuck on the details and stop seeing things clearly. Thinking about your problem or situation from someone else's view can make it easier to come up with a plan for tackling it. What advice would you give to a friend?



# Creating a Mindfulness Anxiety Plan

One way to manage anxieties is to make a plan for mindfulness techniques when your anxiety levels start to rise.

The following steps can help you create a mindfulness plan for your anxiety:

## **When I begin to notice anxiety in my body, I will:**

For example, practise slow, deep breathing, or mindfully focus on each of my senses in turn

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## **Every day I will do the following activities to help keep my anxiety at bay:**

For example, practice mindfulness, go for a walk outside, stop and enjoy a mindful cup of tea

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## **If my anxiety is getting away from me, I will call or text:**

For example, best friend, partner, or family member

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*“Making mindfulness a habit can help your overall background anxiety and reduce your response to triggers that cause emotional upset, fear, and panic”*



# The 7 Types of Rest that Everyone needs!

It's easy to suggest 'get more rest' as a self-care strategy, but as night workers this is not always possible with the reality of shift work and late nights. Sometimes our bodies and brains need more than just physical rest.

Scientists have identified seven types of rest that help us feel better in different ways. They help us with irregular sleep patterns, by giving other ways to unwind and feel refreshed. These rest types help lower stress, lift mood, improve focus, strengthen friendships, and make life's demands more manageable overall, even when sleep isn't regular.

## How many of these have you managed in the last week?

### Physical Rest

Let your body relax by lying down or taking a nap. This helps your muscles recharge and boosts your energy level

### Mental Rest

Enjoy activities like daydreaming or doodling to clear your mind to help you feel less stressed and more focused.

### Emotional Rest

Talk to friends, jot down your thoughts, and be kind to yourself to process your feelings to improve your mood and emotional balance.

### Social Rest

Spend quality time with loved ones or enjoy some alone time, depending on your needs to strengthen your connections with others and help you feel understood.

### Sensory Rest

Turn down the lights and noise or close your eyes to minimise stimulation to help you concentrate and feel more at ease.

### Creative Rest

Explore nature, art, or try new hobbies to spark your imagination to help inspire you and keep your creativity flowing.

### Spiritual Rest

Connect with your beliefs and help others to feel connected to a bigger purpose to bring a sense of inner peace and contentment.

# Mindfulness Techniques

Mindfulness doesn't just mean 'meditation'. People can practise mindfulness in their daily lives. Some people find it in simple actions, such as doing the washing up, or prepping the food for service. There are many ways to practise mindfulness at work or through your hobbies.

Think! How can you bring mindfulness into your day to day life?...

## **Centre your attention on your body, your breathing, and your senses.**

The Five Senses exercise is a mindfulness technique that helps you to regulate your senses and brings you back into the here and now.

### Grounding Exercise

Look around you, identify and name...

- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste



# Where Can You Get Some Support?

Now that you have developed an understanding of how to check in with yourself. You may want to continue this conversation. Below you can find a guide on how to talk to your manager, friends, family or dedicated professionals about your mental health and wellbeing in the workplace and what support they may be able to offer.

## **What helps you stay mentally healthy at work?**

(eg...I like to decompress at the end of the night with the team, I need to have food in the middle of my shift etc.)

## **What can your manager do to support you to stay mentally healthy at work?**

(eg...Encourage me to take my holiday, put a microwave in the kitchen)

## **What situations at work can trigger mental ill health for you ?**

(eg...Negative language from our customers, double shifts without sleeping in between)

**Are there any early warning signs that you or others might notice when you are starting to feel stressed or mentally unwell?**

(eg....I feel angry about coming to work)

**What kind of support could help to minimise triggers or help you manage them?**

(eg....A weekly check in with my manager)

**If others spot any early warning signs, what could they do to support you?**

(eg....speak to me informally on a break)

**Is there anything else you would like to share with your manager or colleagues?**

# Support for the Night Time Economy

Whichever part of the night time economy you work in, there are local and national resources which can help you to find all kinds of support. Whether you learn best through watching films, or chatting things through with your peers, head to [www.bristolnights.co.uk/thrive-at-night](http://www.bristolnights.co.uk/thrive-at-night) and select your area of interest from the resources menu.

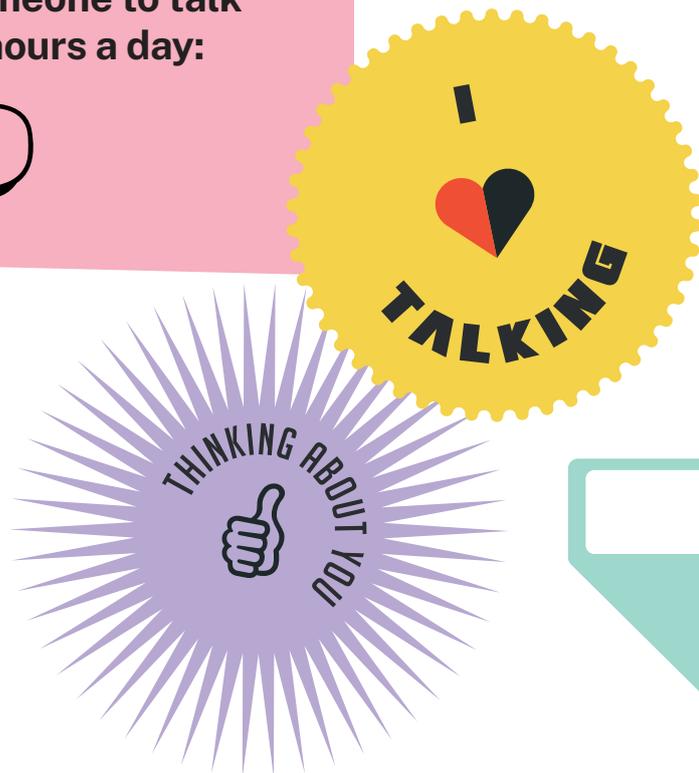
**If you think you are feeling symptoms of anxiety, depression or a loss of wellbeing, there are some great tests to take to help you identify what might be wrong.**

For a 5 question quiz about how you're feeling, head to: <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-wellbeing-tips/your-mind-plan-quiz/>

**In case of emergency always call 999 if someone is in immediate danger.**

**Samaritans: If you need someone to talk to, in confidence, open 24 hours a day:**

**Call 116 123 for free**





Scan for more information or visit:  
[www.bristolnights.co.uk/thrive-at-night](http://www.bristolnights.co.uk/thrive-at-night)

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