

“Hoists and Safety Ropes”

The Rose Programme
for
Stress and Self-esteem

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Acknowledgements

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Credit should be given to anonymous authors for the excellent exercises of the stick people and jelly babies; which have been long circulated in training circles that I don't know where they came from. The rest of the work is my own, though the inspiration is from many sources, not least my own personal path with God without whom I could do nothing.

Particular mention should also be made of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, and especially the works of Mike George, whose gentle training has benefited me in my quest for answers to depression and stress.

Programme Schedule

9.0 **Welcome**; ground-rules and expectations.

9:15 **Icebreakers**: personal objects: sharing the self; treasure box

10.0 **What is stress**? Recognising symptoms; danger points. Root causes. Group work and feedback

10.30 **All in the Mind**? Areas of responsibility/stress.
Juggler exercise – to establish a personal assessment of where stresses are in each person's life.

11.00 **BREAK**

11.15 **Back to Basics:** Who Am I? A study of our core values and the essence of self; how we relate to others and ourselves and what stops us form reaching our potential.

- Life Journey
- Mind Map
- Core Values
- Letting Go
- Relationships
- Saboteur

1:00 **LUNCH**

1:45 **Balloon icebreaker** de-stressing technique

2:00 **Positive Thinking.** Sharing Successes

2:30 **Making Changes:** presentation on practical issues to help personal control (with accompanying notes – apologies: in English only to date)

3:00 **Making Changes - Personal Plan**:
Personal SWOT Analysis
Action plan
Discussion in pairs

3.45 **BREAK**

4:00 **Relaxation techniques**: personal protection; making space; safe spaces; breathing.

4:40 **Visualisation techniques.** Positive visualisation

4.50 **Recap**

5:00 **Evaluation and End**

Aims and Objectives

Aim
To offer support and equip workers with self-understanding, self-appreciation and relaxation techniques to help prevent and release burn-out tensions and to revitalise hard-pressed workers.

Objectives
By the end of the training workers will have:

- Explored issues of stress, in particular warning signs
- Studied their own stress patterns
- Mapped out their life with a particular view to current areas of pressure
- Planned strategies to release particular pressure areas
- Learnt to recognise and value their own skills and experiences
- Studied a useful format for combating burn-out in their lives
- Learnt and practised relaxation techniques
- Made a strategy for future changes in their lives in order to minimise stress and maximise personal support
- Had a releasing and revitalising day which releases tensions and relaxes workers, with a potentially long-lasting impact on their daily living

Methodology
The workshop will be very practical, and aims to offer a supportive and relaxing atmosphere while giving personal strategies that can be used for the long-term benefit of workers, their families and their clients.

Participants will enjoy a variety of individual, small and large group activities which will give them a solid foundation for their own personal development. These activities can also be repeated with their own clientele thus added an extra layer of value to the workshops.

Target Group
The priority target group for this training will be those who have undertaken the previous trainings so that there is a consistency in understanding this methodology. It is not essential to have undertaken previous training, but awareness of the ethos will be beneficial to participants.

Introduction to the Manual

This manual is not intended to cover all of the issues of stress, self-esteem and relaxation techniques comprehensively. It would take many full-length books to achieve anything of great quality. Instead, this manual is designed just to accompany the training as a reminder of some of the issues covered. There will be many gaps, and many questions for you to answer yourself – after all; stress is a very individual experience as we will discover.

The booklet that should be given to you in the training session will be a useful collection of exercises for you to keep your own thoughts and experiences, and I would encourage you to continue with this after the training has finished.

I myself suffer from stress and depression, so I come to this training as a fellow traveller rather than a guru! After running a very successful and highly acclaimed youth project, due to managerial tensions and impossible regulations, I had a few years out of work with stress-related depression and so I have studied and learnt much about this subject to help me on my own path.

I am still learning, and I'm sure I will gain much from you while hopefully you will gain much from this course.

It is only a start.

The rest is a life journey that we each must make.

Stress

What is Stress?

Stress is experienced by each one of us differently. We will see this in the group exercises as we compare our own experiences.

I make the distinction between busyness, challenge and stress. Simple busyness or facing challenges may feel energising, whereas stress brings negative feelings. Stress is when we begin to feel out of control, possibly crushed by events or responsibilities. We will look in more detail at the symptoms of stress later.

We all have different preferences of achieving in life; some of us are peaceful and wish to keep a low profile simply working away quietly with the minimum of fuss, while others like to charge full pelt at life and seek to gain the maximum stimulation from its experiences and opportunities. Both of these ways of living can be fulfilling and bring happiness and joy.

Some people seem to thrive on stress – but this may not be strictly accurate. They may thrive on the challenge which gets their adrenalin going and makes them feel energetic and fired up ready to work at a higher level. Working at a low level of energy makes these kind of people feel lethargic and de-motivated.

However, for most of us stress kicks in when the challenge becomes overwhelming and we no longer feel easily in control, or able to deal with whatever might come next. We can feel depleted of energy and personal resources, empty of ideas.

Stress is derived from our physiological emergency mechanisms. When we are in danger, the body increases our hormones and adrenalin, blood to the brain and sensory awareness in order to allow us a burst of energy to cope with whatever the moment brings. However, in prehistoric times, the flight from a wild beast or enemy might be short-term and the hormone and adrenalin rates would calm down and balance out again, whereas our stresses seem never-ending and this means that the body maintains an unhealthy level of alertness.

Mike George in his excellent book "Learn to Relax" tells us of how Tibetan medicine talks of three 'humours' which each bring different symptoms. If any is out of balance then it can cause different problems. "Wind stress" causes the muscles to tense; "Phlegm stress" causes depression and fatigue and "stress of the bile" causes impatience and irritability. These are not too far from earlier medical philosophies in the west which also talked of 'humours' but included four rather than three which gave rise to different personality types. Certainly balance in our lives is a crucial key to successful control of stress.

For most of us, we lead busy lives and our energies are split into different areas of responsibility; home, family, neighbourhood, faith, social and community responsibilities. All of these can energise us, or leave us depleted. Life is extremely fast-paced now and many people are pressured to keep up working at such a fast pace far beyond what used to be expected of us. The way of life is changing all the time too, new rules and regulations in workplaces take time to absorb and put into practise and often if feels like one new set of rules

follows another with no break which can be overwhelming – especially to conscientious workers who want to be seen to be following instructions and rules well.

It is often the conscientious workers who suffer from stress the most, as they strive to do their best in all areas of their lives, leaving little room for their own relaxation or personal issues. It is for these hard-working self-less workers that this training is primarily designed; but beware that in order to improve and manage the stress in your life – hard decisions may have to be made. Sometimes we cannot carry all of the loads we are asked to without either making some changes – or snapping.

We need to pause every so often to take a thermometer test of our stress levels. How are we coping? Are we excited and challenged, or overwhelmed and daunted? Do we have more than we can cope with? Are we stretching ourselves so thin that one day without warning we will snap and become ill.

The Brahma Kumaris teach that the experience of stress can be like boiling a frog (I apologise for the analogy – but it is a useful one!) If you have a pot full of boiling water and try to put a frog into it, it will immediately jump out in protest! But frogs are very adaptable creatures and if you put one into your cooking pot with cold water it will sit happily adapting as the water slowly heats up. Eventually by the time it notices that the water is unbearable it is too late and it does not have the strength to jump out of the pot.

We so often try our best to adapt to mounting pressure, keeping going without complaint of recognition of the problem until it is too late. We need to take a thermometer test of our lives and see if actually the water is getting too hot; in which case we need to make changes before we to succumb to the heat.

In this training there are several exercises which will help us look at an overview of our lives. There are some basics in order to regain control and refocus to stay true to our inner being. It is only in staying true to our core values that we can fight stress and keep on with our energy intact.

Symptoms of Stress

These are very individual. Add your own here if they are not mentioned. How do you know that you are becoming stressed? Can you tell when you are beginning to feel stressed – or it is only when things begin to go out of control, and you start to make mistakes that you realise something is wrong? Think of your own scale of stress. How does it manifest itself?

Common Symptoms include:

- Tiredness
- Tearfulness
- Depression
- Bouts of anger
- Clouded judgement
- Feeling of being overwhelmed
- Loss of confidence in decisions
- Lack of focus and concentration
- Mind flitting between many jobs without achieving anything
- Unbalanced reactions
- Panic attacks
- Physical manifestations:
- Stomach problems, digestion, ulcers
- Heart and blood pressure problems
- Muscle aches and tension in neck, back and shoulders
- Head-aches
- Poor sleeping
- Inability to relax
- Difficulty in making decisions, or snap decisions you wouldn't normally consider
- Mistakes you wouldn't normally make
- Being overwhelmed by details you would not normally mind
- Poor relationships
- Aggressiveness
- Inefficiency
- Time wasting
- Avoidance of tasks

To name but a few! Add your own on the next page. Number them in order of which comes first as warning signals to you personally. How can you tell that your body is warning you that your stress levels are critically high?

My Stress Symptoms List

Maintaining a Busy Lifestyle

It is possible to manage a busy lifestyle without succumbing to stress if some basic self-protection and self-nurture rules are followed. However, once major stress hits, some restorative work must be done to regain the lost balance. This will be covered later on.

All about Balance

We can try and keep many different parts of lives as juggling balls in the air, or plates spinning, as long as we can keep each of them in balance with each other and most importantly – with our own physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

When we are physically, emotionally and spiritually healthy, we are strong internally and externally and we can cope with a lot of difficulties and requirements of us. It becomes a positive cycle where we feel strong because we know innately that we are achieving and we feel comfortable within ourselves which then offer positive vibrations to others. We feel happier, freer and more able to rise to the challenge that any difficulties might pose.

We need to look at the different areas of our lives to see how they balance each other – which areas nurture us and make us feel positive and which areas drain us of energy.

We cannot expect to have no negative areas in our lives – that is unrealistic; but as long as we are balanced with other areas which bring us joy and replenish our energies, then we will maintain our balance and harmony.

We will look later on at exercises we can use to judge stress areas in our lives, and study further how to regain a balance or nurturing ourselves as well as having the personal resources to offer to others.

Some Useful Tips

These are some tips to help with dealing with real stress in your life, including maintaining the balance mentioned in the previous chapter. It is not the definitive list and is not in any particular order; but may go some way towards preserving and renovating your inner resources.

- Separate; Delegate; Appreciate; Consolidate
- Self-fulfilment: Staying True to Your Core
- Self-preservation
- Focus on Success
- Understanding Your Stressors
- Assessing your Life
- Relationships
- Relaxation Techniques
- Making Changes
- Action Plan

Separate; Delegate; Appreciate; Consolidate

Separate
We need to learn to separate out all the different parts of our lives in order to manage each area effectively. Use exercises like the Juggler to analyse the different pressures you have in your life, the different roles you are and the different issues you are struggling with. Then we need to work out how to separate each from the other.

So often stress gives us a feeling of chaos inside our head – I often say in the West about 'spaghetti brain' – or in Sri Lanka, 'String-Hopper brain'!! Everything is muddled and you cannot find where the thread goes from beginning to end on any issue. If we can manage to separate each section of our lives and be disciplined about leaving those worries for that time, then we will find that we can think clearer about the areas that we are focussing on.

For example, how many of us take bits of work home with us – either physically or mentally – and then our family or relaxation time is broken into by things that we may not even be able to solve infiltrating that other space. There are enough worries and responsibilities at home without adding your work ones to it. (This is of course impossible if your work place is your home, for example if you have an office at home, or if you live and work in a Children's Home for example. In this case I recommend times to escape from that place and get elsewhere!)

I recommend not leaving work until you have made a list of things that need to be done the next day. Then you can shut your office door and forget those things until you arrive fresh the next morning. If you don't write a list then so often you will be thinking 'I mustn't forget to do such and such' and even the thoughts infiltrate your private time. By writing it down you will empty your head and the necessity of trying into remember it. You know that you have written it and there is an end to it. Try not to take work phone calls at home. It is important to try and keep the area safe from work stresses.

It is also important to remember that children need some safeguards from school stresses, and that resilience to homework may be because they struggle, not wanting to use their safe home space to continue their school experience, preferring to try and keep a break. However, this is not realistic for them, but we might be more sympathetic to their struggles with homework if we understand that they too can suffer from stress.

Delegate
We are indeed fortunate if we can delegate our work to another competent person; but then we have to allow them to make mistakes with precious projects. How many times is something delegated only to be taken back by being under too close scrutiny by perfectionist managers who dare not allow others to really have power over some aspect of their work. Give people responsibility and allow them free reign with your support, otherwise you are not delegating, just doing via another person.

But while we may not have employees who can share our work load, we may have friends or neighbours who could help us. Are we too proud to ask for help when someone could share a burden with us or halve a problem? If we all took a part of other's problems with all our range of skills and expertise, how much smoother the world would run and how much more stress-free! But sometimes we are our own worst enemy – refusing to ask for help in case others think we are lazy or incompetent. Then we suffer unnecessary stress. God created us all with different skills precisely so that society could function as one whole unit. Another person may

be desperate for a chance to help you if you allowed it. Don't let personal pride cause you additional stress!!

Delegating means 'letting go' and this does not only mean letting go to another person, but sometimes delegating to the bin or the past. Many times we have stressful baggage from past hurts, and a lack of forgiveness does not hurt the abuser who may not care, only keeps us hurting, resentful, and held back from moving on towards our own fulfilment. It is not an easy thing to do, but it is the healthiest thing, to allow past hurts to fall away and forgive people and move on with a lighter spirit.

Sometimes we must delegate to the bin that which we genuinely cannot do. We must sometimes try and accept the situation we are in and try be positive about it. That may not be easy, but the alternative is continual upset over something we cannot change. This only hurts ourselves and does not achieve anything. There is a wonderful saying "God grant me the Serenity to accept what cannot be changed; the Courage to change what I can, and the Wisdom to know the difference." If only we could all do this then we would be a lot less stressed!

Delegation also includes making sure that we do not hold on to problems that we are not supposed to be holding; either other people's issues which we worry about and fret over, hurting ourselves for no practical reason; or ones which others are more adept at solving than ourselves. We should do everything we can for others, but when we can do no more we need not to feel guilty, but rest our spirit and not take onboard other people's problems to our heart. We so easily feel that we should be doing more. Do what you can and try to put your worries at rest. Forgive yourself for being human!! You cannot be perfect for everyone – it is impossible, so somewhere you will have to stop. Don't feel guilty about that if you have tried your best.

Appreciate

We must learn to see the positive firstly in ourselves, and then in the world around us. Positive thinking is very powerful, but when we are depressed and stressed it is not easy to do. There are other sections in this manual that look at the importance of self-esteem and offer exercises in how to improve our self image. But when we feel stronger in ourselves we feel more able to cope with the pressure from those around us and more able to make an accurate assessment of other's intentions. When we feel low we may be unnecessarily paranoid and create bad relationships out of our own negative reactions. See more on this in the Relationships section.

Understanding our core values is critical in appreciating ourselves and this can be seen in the next section below. Keeping positives in our mind, allowing ourselves to feel our successes and other's compliments to ourselves are really important and something that we do not feel comfortable doing but are really important in combating stress and depression where we so easily focus on the negatives.

We need to train our minds to notice all the small positive and beautiful things that happen around us all the time. It's good to keep a small diary of lovely things, the smiles people offer, the rainbow in the storm, the dew on the grass, the compliments, the words of wisdom we read somewhere in passing… keep a positive diary and read this when you feel depressed or negative. This is for you alone, so you can keep your own successes in it that you can be honest about and no-one need see; but for you to read when you are low to re-focus and remind you of your and the world's achievements.

Consolidate
We need to build on our successes and our positives by rejuvenating ourselves with relaxation techniques and doing things we enjoy. It is a necessity like replenishing our food and sleep and liquids that we also replenish our energy and spirit levels! How we do this is entirely individual. Some people like to be alone, go for walks in nature, meet friends, listen to music, go to spiritual centres, pray, meditate, have massages etc etc. But we need to provide time for ourselves to do this.

Time is the most precious commodity; but if we never give ourselves time we are in danger of burning out and losing ourselves and our friendships through stress.

We must focus on our successes rather than our failures or what needs to be done. For many of us our jobs are never-ending and if we measure our success by how little we have left to achieve then we will never feel we succeed. It is a good exercise to write down our successes at the end of each day; the opposite of a 'to do list' – a 'well-done list!'.

We can also consolidate our spirit and find relief in support networks. Who can give us replenishment with their company? What things and people build us up? For us to give our energy to others and our works and responsibilities, we need to keep that inward flow of revitalisation coming. As long as it is in balance with our responsibilities, it is not selfish – it is self-protection and survival. We need to analyse what feeds us, and make sure we make the time to give ourselves physical, emotional and mental nourishment.

* * *

For our loved ones, we need to do the same, for our children or spouses. Look at the above four criteria and see how you can support them, encourage them, help them to be positive, reward them for what they do, compliment them; take a good look at what might build them up and allow and encourage them to follow these things, even if it is inconvenient for ourselves. Children should be a priority for our energy and focus as they did not request to be born and rely on us for their physical, emotional, spiritual and mental development! They learn best by examples; what example are we setting by our way of life and priorities? How will they develop relationships in their future based on what we have taught them by how we are living?

Happier children usually make better behaved children, though you need to maintain boundaries of good behaviour as they will always test the boundaries to find out what is acceptable. Don't be afraid to say 'no', but also allow children to be children. Don't expect them to be well-behaved mini-adults. They need to play to explore and to develop; they need to make a mess, get dirty, shout and laugh loudly at certain times. Don't allow your own stress to stop their natural behaviour, but make sure they know there is a time and place for such behaviour. The park and beach can support rowdy behaviour; church, temple or restaurant might not appreciate it!

Rude or aggressive behaviour can be the sign of stressed children. Get out of continual punishment cycles. Try changing punishments to reward charts. Focus on the good behaviour instead of focussing on the bad. Give your child small challenges that they can succeed in easily in order to start the cycle of good behaviour and praise them frequently, offering small rewards such as a special treat for every ten successes they have achieved. Get them to make a chart which they can colour in or stick a sticker on each time they achieve something good, however small. They will enjoy the positive attention and you will all feel more positive together.

A happier partner makes a better spouse. If they feel appreciated they are more likely to feel relaxed and comfortable with you and want to spend more time at home. Encouraging them to get out with their friends and maybe take a sporting or leisure activity might be important for them even if you feel you would prefer them to stay at home and talk with you. A sacrifice in the short-term makes a stronger relationship in the long-term.

Self-fulfilment: Staying True to Your Core

A great deal of stress is created in trying to work to rules and lifestyles which do not actually fit with our inner values. If, for example, we crave harmony and co-operative team-working we are not likely to feel comfortable and work at our best in a cut and thrust competitive environment. Eventually we might even become ill working in an environment which alienates our inner self. This can also be the case of an energetic creative person being forced to work in a routine way with no space for development or individualism. Stress can be suffered from not being stretched as much as being over stretched. Managers must assess which situation it is before they try to lighten the loads of employees they identify as stressed. It may be that the person needs more challenge and responsibility to help energise them rather than less.

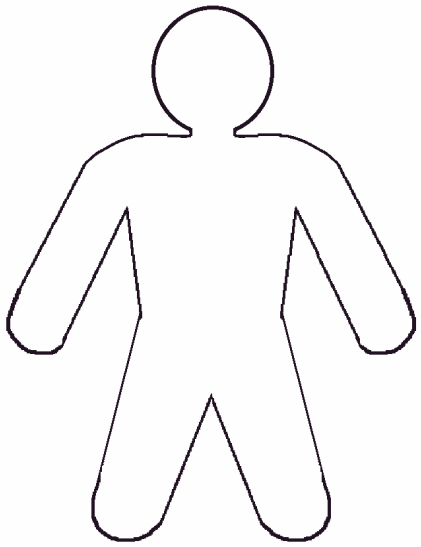
However, in our modern world we are often put into situations which go against our natural preferences; for example, the type of person-centred people who might be attracted to work successfully in service for others in NGOs might end up in a managerial position where they have to compete for funding with other organisations. The very anomaly of this causes much greater strain on this person than someone who thrives on the competition and might choose a career deliberately which includes this competitive aspect.

Initially we need to get back to our basics. What are our individual core values? We do not spend much time thinking of this area of our lives; but we can often see our core values through the things which delight and bring us joy and fulfilment, or realise the opposite by what offends us.

Exercise:
Draw a person on a large piece of paper with plenty of space to write inside the shape. Write down in the space:

- Things we like about ourselves;
- Our skills;
- Our attributes;
- Our experiences;
- Compliments other people have said about us.

Then think what you wish you were like. Add these in – because these are still your core values and as you wish to be like them, they are going to be in you to some extent.



Self Preservation

We need to keep the focus of our inner selves by preserving this from the outside world. Try to find a value in your abilities and value system.

We can do this partly in keeping acknowledging our value in the world. But we must also find time for ourselves to regeneration and refocus. More of this is discussed in the relaxation section later. But for this exercise we can draw another line around the person we have drawn so that we have a double shell of protection of our inner world. Within this line write down all the activities that sooth your spirit – maybe your faith and worship; prayer and meditation, reading books, music, sport, family activities, etc. Not additional responsibilities – but pleasures we would enjoy if we had time.

Focus on Success: Positive Thinking

During stress and depression it is normal to be overtaken with worries and negative thoughts, which because we are focussing on them more often then come true. This is the downward spiral which can cause illness and feelings of defeat.

The only strong way to counter this is to be as specific as possible about positives. Note them down as they happen because we will remember only negatives as time goes by and forget the frequent tiny things that bring us joy and pleasure throughout the day – a rainbow; and smile from a stranger; and small compliments in passing…

Keep a 'Happy Book'
When I was first diagnosed with stress-induced depression I bought a blank notebook, aptly named the Happy Book. I recognised that while many friends were supportive and offering lovely comments, I would brush them off and focus on the negative, and the only way to counter this was to physically note them down. In the book I wrote every positive experience, comment, scenes of nature, etc., that I experienced. I cut out complimentary or caring emails and stuck them in, copied out spiritual verses or other pieces of eternal wisdom from other places; wrote down times I had enjoyed incidents with my children, and so on. Then, when I felt particularly like a failure or negative, I would get the book out and be forced to realise that the world was a good and pleasant place and that I did have a bank of friends and family who cared for me. My negative inner voice could not easily fight such evidence to the contrary.

I strongly recommend that at home or at work we keep a diary of our successes. As well as a 'to do' list at the beginning of the day – write an 'achieved list' at the end of the day. Pin it up for view the next morning to encourage you on your way in to work. Our mind will attempt to knock us down and tell us we cannot achieve anything; but if we have as much evidence to the contrary, this will help us fight to remain strong in our self-belief. Of course, this takes time, and time for our own nurturing and therefore is likely to be put at bottom priority!

Apparently there is a game played in schools in Arabia called the 'hundred blessing day.' From day break on the allotted day the children have to notch up blessings that occur and the competition is to be the first to reach one hundred. It is by having to take note of the small blessings that we realise how blessed we are each day without noticing it.

Assessing Our Lives

There are various exercises for assessing our lives. The *juggler, SWOT analysis* and *mind-map* are most useful. I prefer the mind-map for a comprehensive analysis of any situation and in studying our lives it is most useful. The SWOT analysis is excellent preparation for making an action plan. These are all explained more fully later on in the manual.

Writing these things down in some way helps us unravel the mass of ideas in our heads – which sometimes eases the stress immediately. This means that we don't have to keep things in our heads, worrying about forgetting them, and therefore means that we have fewer thoughts to pressure us.

Whatever the method we choose, the critical questions we ask ourselves must include:

What are we dealing with?

- Break down all the different areas and responsibilities in our lives. What are all the separate roles we play in different parts of our lives?

- Which areas give us pleasure? Which areas cause us pressure? (It can be both! Parenting can bring immense pleasure and incredible strain!)

- Grade the different areas as which one gives most stress and concern.

- Identify as much as possible what it is that causes the tension.

Has anything changed recently which has affected our coping strengths?

- Why have we suddenly identified this as a problem? Or has it been going on a long time, but we now feel the situation has grown critical?

- What did we used to do that helped us which has now changed?

Is the pressure from within us or from external sources?

- We are often our own worst enemies and our harshest critics. Is the stress we feel actually coming from inside ourselves, and not from others? Are we confusing 'doing a good job' with being perfect and unrealistic targets which we cannot meet and therefore makes us feel failures?

- If the pressure is from outside – who is pressuring us? E.g. Boss / family? Is it fair pressure to take responsibilities or unfair pressure? Is it within our control for us to meet these expectations? How can we make things easier on ourselves?

Is the stressful issue something that really should be taken care of by someone else?

- Taking on other people's problems can be a big part of today's stresses. We must remain compassionate and listen to others' problems, try and help wherever possible, but not take them on emotionally as our own problems, and know when to quit! When do you have to pass the problem back and feel that you have done what you can, without feeling guilty.

Relationships

Sadly, many relationships can be affected adversely by stress, causing tensions and strain and in some cases the compete breakdown of the relationship.

Apart from the obvious tensions, stress can cause poor communication, bad decision making, paranoia and poor assessment of the situation, all of which adds up to an unholy quagmire for even the strongest of relationships to survive. Understanding the threat of these issues may help us to watch more carefully for their adverse effects in our lives; but stress also can cause tunnel vision which stops us being easily able to see what is happening around us.

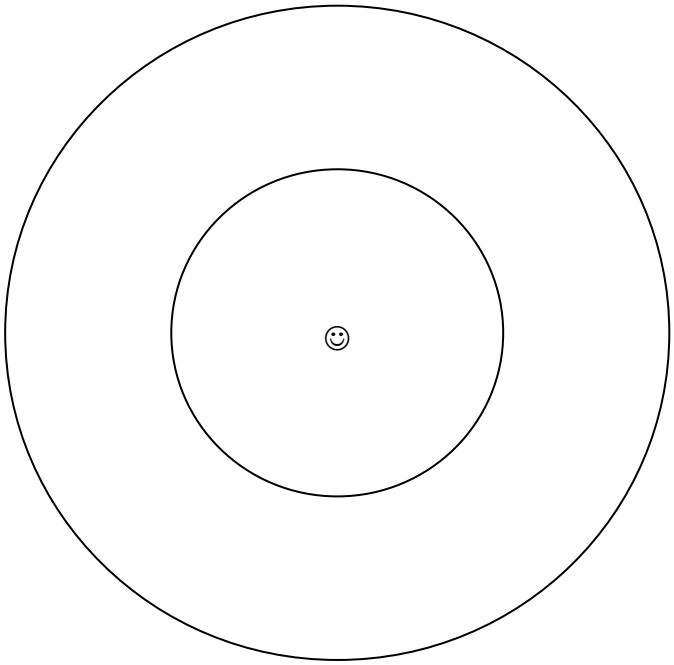
Especially in the caring professions it is a common phenomenon to be able to see other's issues clearly but be blind to our own situation. We can take an objective view of those we try to help; whereas the subjective issues within our own lives are clouded with emotions which are absent from those we help.

Stress can cause someone to act out of character, as our usual coping mechanisms are no longer functioning correctly. Hopefully mistakes that are made during the heights of stress can be undone; but occasionally we are left with long-term breakdowns in relationships. It is not unusual to have marriage break-ups during or immediately after times of great stress, or during and after periods of depression. It takes a special relationship to be able to cope with the paranoia and sometimes irrational behaviour of the seriously stressed person, especially when the behaviour is directly the opposite of that person's normal personality.

A strong objective friend or partner can help immensely, especially if they can understand that unbalanced reactions and comments come from stress rather than intentional hurt and ride out the storms of emotion. But due to the over-stretched resources of the stressed person, who may jump to negative conclusions, the friend would be best to try and be more sensitive than normal. The objective partner can help the person to make more objective analysis of the situation by *gently* challenging what the reality versus the perception of the event was.

Assessing Our Relationships

This exercise is more fully explained in the latter part of the manual, but is useful to make an assessment of where relationships are in our lives, which ones may be important to us and which ones cause us stress. The stick people chart is also very helpful.



Relaxation Techniques

- **Breathing**

Learning how to breathe to slow the body down and relax:

- Sit comfortably in a chair – or lie down on the floor (which is better and more relaxing but not everyone likes to do this).
- Close your eyes.
- Allow your body to feel heavy.
- Concentrate on your breathing. Feel your chest rise and fall, feel the breath coming into your nose and sucked into your lungs.
- Blow out the air and feel it on your lips.
- Count to four as you breathe in slowly.
- Hold your breath in, and then count 4 as you exhale.
- Keep this slow counting and make sure you stay physically relaxed. As you slow your breathing down, your blood pressure will lower and your body will become more relaxed.

Practise this technique at night when you are getting ready to sleep.

- **Guided Fantasy**

While you are in a relaxed state (using the breathing exercise to begin with), someone reads or tells a story about a pleasant journey. The participants imagine being on that journey.

Music is helpful to set the mood; but not necessary. Some example guided fantasies are in the handouts section, but you can make up your own.

Speak very slowly and musically to get the most relaxed effect, as if you were telling a story to small children. Allow as much detail to be left to their imagination – thus speak of seeing flowers, but not what kind or what colour – so that they can imagine this themselves.

Make sure that you end the journey by being back in the room. It can leave people surprisingly disturbed if they are left out in a fantasy, even if the place is nicer than the stresses they have to return to. Psychologically it is important for them to return back to reality at the end.

Some people love these journeys – others find them difficult to relax and enter into the imagination. Tell them not to worry but just to stay relaxed and breathe slowly, not to disturb others.

- **Positive Visualisations**

Close your eyes. Focus your mind to imagine a time in the future that you will feel successful, happy, positive and fulfilled. What are you doing? Really soak in the atmosphere of your success and gain a deep knowledge that you will achieve this feeling. Feel sure it will happen.

➢ **Muscle Relaxing**

Follow the breathing exercise by working through the muscles. Again, speak extremely slowly and gently to keep the relaxed mood.

- Starting at the toes, tell the participants, "clench the toes, then release; clench and then release, and release."
- Then the balls of the feet
- The ankles
- Calf muscles
- Knees
- Thigh muscles etc. up through the body, repeating the instructions to clench or tighten the muscles, and then to release.

Occasionally if someone relaxes very much, they might have trouble getting up. Just tell them to wiggle their fingers and then their toes and not to try and get up too suddenly. They need to re-connect with their body, so let them feel different parts of their body and re-connect bit by bit.

➢ **Safe Space**

Close your eyes and imagine you are in a wonderful place. It can be real or imaginary. It must be a safe and happy place. *Sometimes it is better to use an imaginary place as it can never be tainted by real problems.*

You can imagine being there with your favourite person. What would you like to say to them?

Practise being in this space so that you can summon it by closing your eyes with a moment's notice. This is a useful skill to use when you are stressed, or angry or panicky about anything.

➢ **Music**

The use of relaxing music is very helpful. It affects the mood and can be very positive to have playing quietly when people come into the workshop to demonstrate the difference that this session will be from their normal life. This sets the mood straight away.

It is also very useful for part of relaxation. The use of a CD player with some gentle music is very valuable. But it is not the end of the world if this is not accessible. Most of the exercises can be done without music.

Making Changes

When your body and mind are flashing red lights warning you that your stress level is critical, this is the time that changes have to be made. You have become unbalanced and you are in danger of being ill. Sometimes real stress can cause a breakdown that it may take years to recover from. Far better to take some early precautions than risk this debilitating illness.

I also believe that once you have experienced critical stress, you have a slight weakness in this area which means you have to be even more careful in the future – like having a permanent weak chest after suffering pneumonia. This doesn't mean that you are doomed to a life of

stress; just that you need to be honest with yourself about your limitations and work within them and your self-protection schemes (we will discuss these later).

Something has to change.

- **External Factors**

If you identify that outside forces are causing the stress then you can have certain options. Not all of these are easy. It might not be an easy choice to leave your employment; but if your health is suffering and your relationships with your family too, then this might have to be one option.

Employment issues, family relationships and money are the most stressful areas of life. Again, try to analyse exactly what the problem is, then you can try and think of possible solutions. It is often a feeling of being overwhelmed that causes the most pain, and this can be resolved by breaking the issues down into manageable bites. Even if there are not solutions to all of the problems, if you can see some be resolved, the improvement in your mental health will be dramatic.

For employment issues, first assess if there are any changes you can make to your job. Speak to your manager; but before you do, make a list of the issues so that you are prepared, and also try and figure out some possible solutions so that they are most likely to take you seriously and hopefully agree.

For example; while some people thrive on a busy environment, others find that working in a noisy office with many other people is a strain which causes them to work slowly and lose concentration. Maybe there is a particular person who distracts you. A possible solution might be to move to a different area. If a separate office is not possible, maybe a desk near to a wall, or in a corner with less noise might be a helpful compromise. We will rarely find the exact solutions we hope for, so we need to be ready to offer compromises.

Try to minimise contact with stressful people.

If your boss is chaotically busy and adds to your stress, make sure you prepare your meetings with a list of issues you need answers to and try to keep them on track.

Family and other relationships can be a mine-field – especially with your spouse's family as there can be less tolerance and loyalty than with your own blood relatives. Relationships will be covered more fully later on.

- **Internal Factors**

These are possibly hardest to deal with as the only solutions are improving your state of mind. This is when you feel that you cannot achieve or are failing, but there is no evidence to support this apart fro your own feelings. However, feelings cannot be dismissed as they are the most powerful controller of your mind and body. Emotions can cause physical illness as well as crippling inability to perform. So to tell someone to 'pull themselves together' is not helpful at all, but will probably cause more stress and exacerbate the problem.

Stress can be tightly connected with depression, depending on the personality of the individual. Some stressed people are more prone to externalising their frustration the form of anger, others internalise it and this can be manifested as depression.

This condition can come about by people being very perfectionist where they feel they cannot meet their own or other people's expectations. Others can help with this by encouraging the person that they are doing well, and reminding them of their achievements and successes; however, friends usually tire of the level of encouragement needed by someone suffering from acute stress or depression. We must remember that the psyche is eager to remember criticism whereas we brush off praise far too easily. It has been said that for every criticism we need ten positives to counter the effect on our psyche. As we frequently receive more criticism, implied or direct, than encouragement, it can be seen how easily we lose confidence within ourselves.

Managers can help with this situation by writing positive notes and appraisals for staff, and giving rewards and encouragement as much as possible. Written support is far more useful than verbal as it can be re-read when the individual is feeling less confident and is not reliant on memory.

Positive thinking is a powerful tool; but again for those caught in the cycle of self-doubt and depression it is hard to break into this to begin to think positively. We have to try and be as rational as possible, by making notes of any successes we have achieved and keeping them in mind. But it is a feature certainly of depression that we focus on the negatives rather than positives and chastise ourselves mercilessly for even imagined mistakes. There are many self-esteem exercises in the back of this manual which can be helpful in reminding ourselves that we are good and skilled people, and keeping positive reminders where we can see them can be very important.

Faith is a crucial area of support which can heal and benefit our psyche. Apart from the reassurance of our place in the world, the value which we have as part of creation, and (depending on our beliefs) God's love for us, we can gain benefits by using prayer and meditation techniques to control our thoughts and begin to feel more worthy and capable.

So useful areas to work on to improve internal control over negative pressures can include:

Positive thinking
Focus on successes
Self-esteem
Relaxation and self-nurture (be kind to yourself!)
Prayer/meditation

- **Relief Mechanisms**

Even when we identify the areas of stress, sometimes we cannot make changes easily.

We cannot suddenly gain lots of extra money if we are in debt, or find another job, or resolve family strains and relationship problems. Sometimes we are working in a highly pressure environment and do not wish to lose the excitement.

However for our own health we need to allow some of the pressure to drain away in order to better cope with every day situations. We need to try and take care of ourselves.

There are several ways to try and do this to a greater or lesser extent. Most of these ways require time which might add pressure on to an already bursting schedule, but if you imagine that your doctor has prescribed it to you as a critical form of medication, then taking time for yourself could in fact save your life from a heart attack or other stress-related illnesses.

Replenish yourself: Many stresses come from giving of your time and energy to a point where you feel that you have nothing more to offer. You have not been replenishing yourself. In many professions we think that to take time out for ourselves is selfish; but another way to look at this is that if we want to serve others more whole-heartedly, effectively and long-term, then we need to preserve ourselves in order to do that.

We are each individual and what replenishes one person may stress another. I remember being told I should get out to an exercise class with other women when I was extremely busy working with young people all day and evening. This idea caused great stress – it was not my idea of a pleasant way to use any little free time. I already was exhausted giving out to others and was away from home too much, so I would feel more energised by being at home with my family, maybe playing with my children or reading a book! We cannot prescribe for others; but we need to find a hobby or activity that gives us joy, and re-energises our spirit.

For many people, time spent in prayer and meditation can really replenish the soul. Reading positive books, spiritual guides and positive examples of other's lives and successes can be encouraging, unless we feel depressed that we think we cannot achieve what that person has done!! Creating or listening to music, taking walks in the countryside or by the sea; alone or with others can be soul-rejuvenating. Learning new skills, like a language or trying art work or other crafts can give people the balance they may need. Ghandi was well-known for his spinning which helped him feel calm and balanced.

Although children can be very stressful, there is also a joy which comes from sitting and listening to our children playing, and playing with them. You may well discover that they feel less stressed if you spend positive active time with them, which reaps benefits in their own behaviour. Often disruptive behaviour of children is simply attention-seeking, and this can be frustrating for busy parents – but heed their call and spend some time with them, developing that relationship, and it may well produce seeds of harmony in the long run.

Using others as a form of stress control can also be positive. Many of us bottle up our worries ad feel that we must not admit to our weaknesses. There may be others who can help take a burden off our shoulders in a practical way, or agencies who might be able to help. It is important that we do not try to manage everything alone.

Pride can cause immense stress where people will not allow others to take on any of their burdens, or over-perfectionist managers will not allow others to take their work-load and potentially 'mess it up' so they cling on to all the tasks themselves, needlessly fretting about their busyness.

Relaxation is slightly different to replenishment as it is simply winding down rather than trying to refill your energy. This allows you to let out any negative energies remaining at the end of the day; vital to begin anew the following day without a build-up of stresses. There are many ways to relax; again – it is personal to each one of us. Very stressed people find it hard to relax and this is a practised art especially to fight off the guilt which often accompanies time spent relaxing.

There is more about how to relax in subsequent sections with exercises at the back of the manual. We need to find our own ways to relax and replenish ourselves – but this is not a luxury; it is as crucial as eating or drinking to our long-term well-being.

Action Plan

Use this page to write an action plan for yourself of the changes you need to make, and the people you need to inform or negotiate with.

Exercises

These exercises are a mixture of individual and group work. They can be used and adapted of your own use, but also used in your work with others.

Always try them out on yourself first before using them with others.

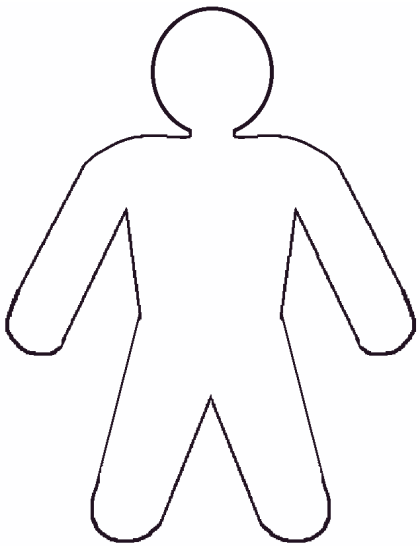
Journey to Now

- **Who Am I?**

A good **self-esteem exercise** is to draw a large gingerbread/balloon person, which is themselves (they could spend some time drawing a proper self-portrait).

Inside this person you write all their attributes, skills, positive feelings – anything positive that will help buoy them up.

Occasionally, with someone with extremely low self-esteem you have to start them off, and promote them a lot. I always add positive comments or prompts myself and work until there is a good healthy list.



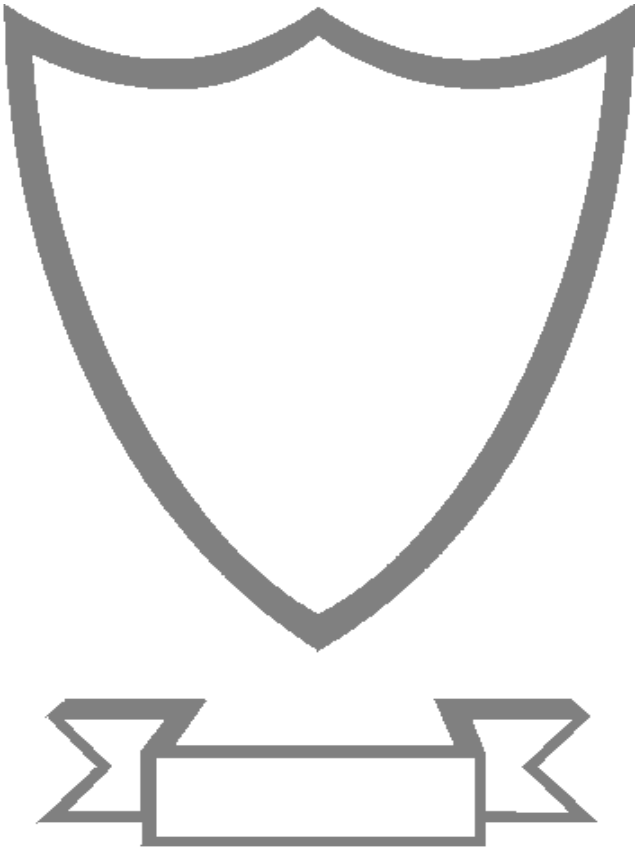
- **Tree of Life**

Draw a tree with long roots, a thick trunk and branches. Label the roots as all the past events and people and experiences which have brought you to today. The trunk is the person you are now – with skills and expertise and positives. The branches are the hopes for the future.

- **Personal Shields / Flags**

Participants can use the shield or flag ideas, or make up any shape they wish to use to think about and express what is important to them in their life, and to have these things valued.

- Draw a shield, or photocopy and enlarge the template below. Or use a flag shape, but remind the participants they can use any shape they wish.
- Draw or write the most important things in your life. (E.g. family, friends, hobbies, faith, job, home, drug, etc.)
- Underneath, write a motto, belief, or summary of what you stand for. (E.g. "love conquers all", "live and let live" etc.)



➢ **Life Journey**

An important exercise to include in the training.

Draw a winding path or river. This is your life and you can write in your age at various times if it is important to you.

Along the way you face certain obstacles, boggy paths or rocks, or boulders. These are the troubles you have faced; or there may be sweet flowers, beautiful trees, and easy paths for happy times.

Make this picture as creative and as symbolic as possible. How did you get around the boulder? What events marked your path and made changes in your direction? Where was it an uphill struggle; where and why was it smooth-flowing water?

Make sure you allow enough time for feedback on this exercise. It can give useful information for how they can manage future problems when they see who they overcame things in the past.

- **Life Measure**

Aim: to give encouragement that they are not as low as they may feel. To look forward and plan some practical improvements to move them forward in their life.

0 **10**

Draw a line across a piece of paper. Draw number 10 at the far end. Tell the participant that this is the best moment they could possibly have in their lives. At the start zero is the worst moment they have ever experienced.

What might number 10 be? Write down their answer under the number 10. Ask what number they feel they are right now? Write down their answer.

Ask what the zero was – the worst moment in their lives. Discuss any issues that come up.

Ask what might be one step toward the number 10 – just one tiny thing that might move them on towards the best they can hope for. Practical issues are easier to aim for. Encourage the participant by showing how far they have come from their worst time of life.

If they can't find any way forward; ask them what is better about now than their worst time, and look at how that can be improved on.

If they are very low, use your own ideas to give genuine support and encouragement, however small the positive might be, e.g. - "you made it to today! That's great; you have survival skills," then swiftly move on to positive things about themselves and other self-confidence exercises.

- **Life Graph**

The above exercise can be done as a graph with highs and lows in life.

Self-Discovery Exercises: Who Am I?

- **Self-portrait**

Draw yourself as you wish to – either realistically, or metaphorically – with labels to explain if you want. The participants should have as much freedom, and encouragement to be as creative and imaginative as possible. When feeding back, so not allow any negative comments or criticism by others as this is very personal.

- **Mind map**

See Handouts section for an example – though it is better to draw your own.

An excellent personal assessment tool for any individual work, but can be used in this group setting to great effect.

This looks at the whole of someone's life at that time, and allows them to choose what aspect they wish to look at. It allows the full picture of their life to be visible, and for the worker to gain an understanding of where drugs, or any other issue, fits into that person's life.

A mind map begins with a circle in the middle of the page with the participant inside it – named or drawn. From this circle lines radiate to other circles. These are the primary issues/relationships in a person's life. An example is shown on the next page, but needs to be much larger than this, ideally on flipchart, or A3 paper.

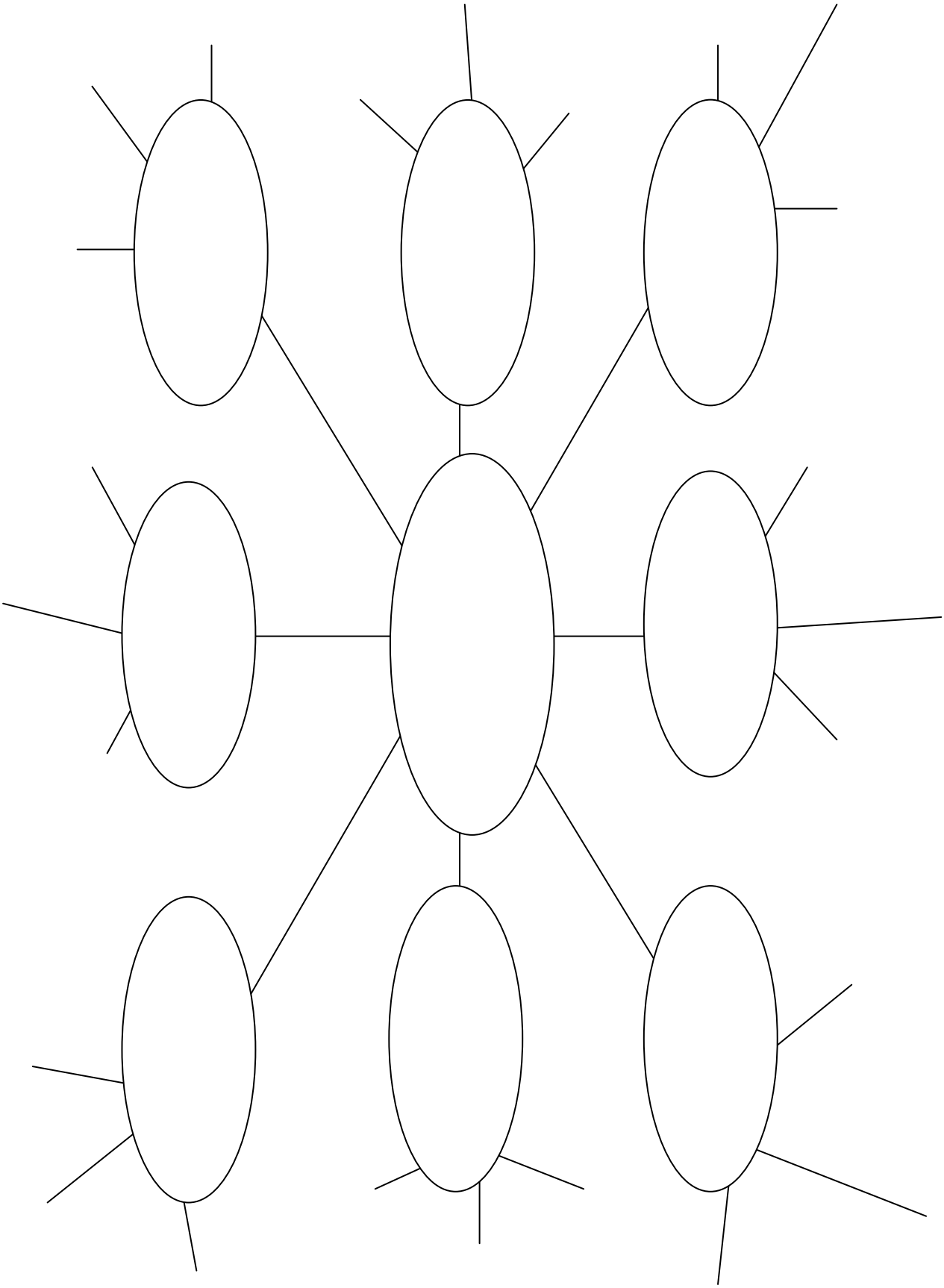
Trainers lead by asking "so what are the things in your life that are most important to you…?"

Try to keep to main categories in this level, so if the person replies, "my mother's illness", you would draw a circle for the *family*, then a line and circle around *mother*, then a line for *illness*, as you sub-divide the issues. Keep asking gently "what else is important to you, what kinds of things do you like to do, or worry you…" Try to give as little prompting of ideas as possible.

The primary issues might include: family, drugs/alcohol, education/training/work, faith, friends, future, fears, etc. – any of the larger issues for which other things can spring off. Then from each of these circles spring off concerns/issues/relationships (not mentioning any value judgement – all things of importance to the person, good or bad). From *family* can come the different people of importance – not necessarily only close family. An uncle might be crucial to have on there as a good or bad influence etc.

If drugs are acknowledged to be a major issue in the person's life, it might be worth having a circle for this alone, as many other issues might come from it in further sessions.

Mind Map (example)



- **Skills inventory**

Either using body-drawing or just words, write a list of all the good things about yourself.

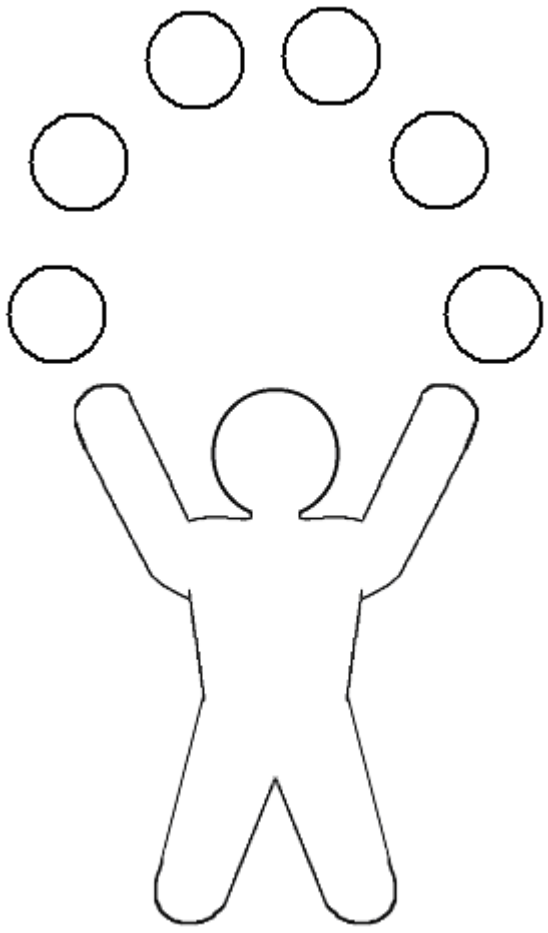
Use skills, experiences, and any physical or mental attributes that you like. Use comments others have said to you ever, even if you are not sure they are true. Include every detail, however small and meaningless you think it is; and break down any larger skills into their smallest component.

- **SWOT analysis**

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats: This is a business analytical tool which can be used for personal analysis of own skills, or the analysis of a situation. Divide the paper/board into four sections and write the headings. Look at the good and bad things about yourself (or the situation); then look at your hopes and fears – which might be able to be achieved but what might stop this happening. It is a great tool also for discussion and planning.

- **Luggage Labels**

Make up large luggage labels and write your name and destination – real or imaginary - on one side and on the other side draw or write all the baggage you struggle to carry with you. This can be emotional baggage, or relationships you are responsible for.



- **Personal Baggage**

Draw a whole load of bags/cases and label each one with an issue that you struggle with – maybe a flaw in your personality e.g. alcohol, anger/depression, loneliness etc.

You can go on to decide how to get rid of these burdens – where can you offload them, or how can you make them lighter to carry?

- **Something that…**

Aim: To give expression to some personal feelings, and to have these feelings validated by the worker. Also a useful starting point for understanding the individual and how they see their life.

The examples in the handout section can be substituted for any other pertinent issues.

- **Juggling**

Draw or imagine yourself juggling with many balls. In each ball write each area of your life you have to keep responsibility for e.g. job, family, parents, money, food, stigma…
How do you balance each part of your life?
What can you pass on to others to help with?
What must you not drop?

- **Aspects of self**

Make a map with yourself in the centre. You can use this about the roles you have in your life, or the burdens you carry. Draw/write the issues at different distances to yourself depending on how much they impact on your life, how much stress they bring.

Variation: You can do this also by colouring three bands across the page and marking each band: spiritual, mental and physical aspects of you. Write in each band the different parts of your personality.

- **Public and Private masks**

Draw or make a mask. On one side make the public face that you present to the world; on the other make your private face that only you see.

Discuss the difference between the faces we put on for the public to see and our own inner world. Why do we have an inner world that is different? What aspects of our inner being are better than the outside world? How do we get stuck in our roles? What changes would we like to make? How can we make changes?

- **Good and Bad**

Draw a large face across the middle of the page and fold it in half. On one side write all the positive things about yourself and on the other write all the negative parts of yourself.

- **Positive Qualities**

Make a set of cards with positive skills and traits written on them e.g. thoughtful, kind, organised, resourceful. Shuffle the cards; let each person take one and say when they have showed each quality in their life.

- **Emotional Creatures**

Draw emotions as creatures and give them life; you can make puppets and have conversations/drama, with someone else or person's worst/best part of themselves.

- **Personal Landscape**

Draw a landscape and relate it to your own personality or experience (similar to Life Journey, but without the movement or timeline). This can be city, village, beach or hill country. Use pictures as metaphors to explain parts of your character or life.

- **Dustbins and Trunks**

Areas of your life that need sorting and organising. Trunks are for storage, dustbins are for disposing of rubbish. Which parts of your life need organising and putting away in the trunk, so that they can be used later on in life? Which parts of your life need throwing away and leaving behind?

- **Hands and Feet**

Draw round hands and feet and write positive things in each finger/toe or over whole picture.

- **Advertisements**

Make an advert about yourself (for a job, or for a spouse, etc. to look at your personal or practical skills).

Positive Futures

- **Hopes and Fears**

Draw a person being held up by balloons and being dragged down by weights. In each balloon write a hope and each weight write a fear. It is a similar, just more creative way of doing a part of the SWOT analysis.

- **Ambitions**

Draw yourself some winner's cups/trophies. Write on them what you would like to achieve and write the date on the bottom to say when you hope to achieve this by.

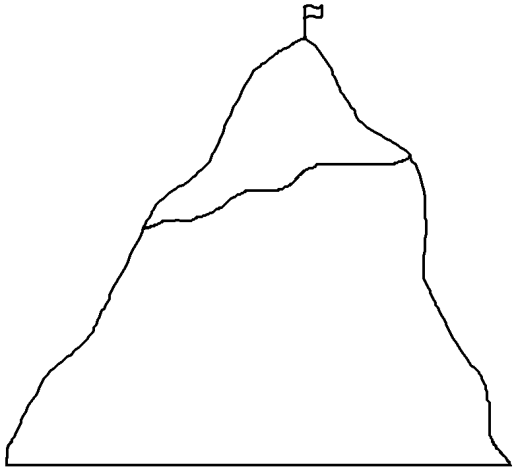
- **Dreams**

Draw, act or discuss a dream you have for the future. It can be as wild and unrealistic as you like. What might get you there? (This should only be done as a forerunner to a more realistic exercise if there is abundant time.)

- **Mountain Climb**

Aim: to encourage the participant to feel positive about their life, to see some successes and to learn how to move forward.

Draw a mountain.



The top is where you would like to be in 20 or 30 years' time. Draw a little flag right on the top, and the person you hope to be.

What does it mean for you? What do you want to have achieved? Write it in.

Where are you now? How far up the side of the mountain? Draw yourself there.

What is the very next small practical step you must take to get closer to your dream?
How far have you come? What points have you struggled with? What have your successes been?

Tell people not to be afraid if they slip a little – they can still be facing the right direction, and have to get back up and keep moving upwards in small steps.

- **Control**

Many problems come from participants feeling that they have no control over their lives. While in many situations this is true, particularly post tsunami, it is not the case in everything.

Aim: This exercise is designed to help participants realise that they do have some control over their lives, to take more control, and to aim towards taking more control over their substance use.

- Ask the participant to rate how much they think they are in control over each issue.
- If they feel totally in control they circle number 1. If they feel totally out of control, they circle number 6.
- Discuss their feelings with them and the implications for their life.
- How can they gain more control over their surroundings?

Control Exercise

I can control…	***not much***					***a lot***
How much I smile today	1	2	3	4	5	6
When I eat	1	2	3	4	5	6
What I wear	1	2	3	4	5	6
Where I live	1	2	3	4	5	6
What time I get up	1	2	3	4	5	6
What I read	1	2	3	4	5	6
Whether I get in trouble today	1	2	3	4	5	6
What I do with my time	1	2	3	4	5	6
Who I am friends with	1	2	3	4	5	6
What my ambitions are	1	2	3	4	5	6
How many friends I have	1	2	3	4	5	6
What my future will be	1	2	3	4	5	6
Who I live with	1	2	3	4	5	6
What subjects I study	1	2	3	4	5	6
What food I choose to eat	1	2	3	4	5	6
What beliefs I have	1	2	3	4	5	6
Whether I take drugs	1	2	3	4	5	6
How much money I have	1	2	3	4	5	6

Relationships

- **Stick People**

I find the relationships chart of stick people on the next page extremely useful.

Ask – "do you recognise anyone on there", and participants can see the relationships more clearly than they can express verbally. Or you can take a specific relationship and ask "which of these people is you and your spouse….?"

Always ask what they see in the picture as it may be a very different interpretation than you have made.

Ask how the other person might see their relationships. Ask what relationship would be their ideal, again asking them to clarify what they see in the picture they have chosen.

KEEP
OUT

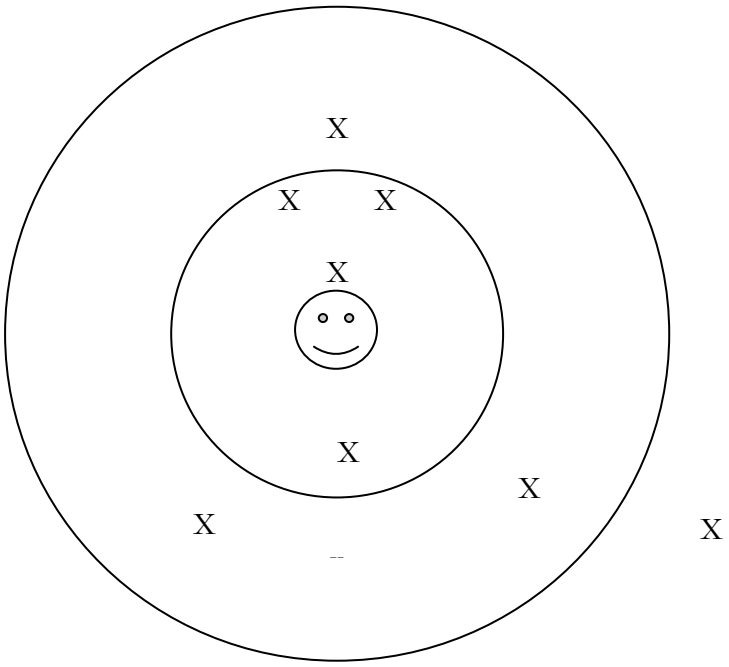
➢ **Relationships chart**

Draw a series of circles inside each other – like a target. Inside the middle circle draw a stick person – that is you! Then mark the different relationships you have in your life with other people who are important to you – for good or bad reasons. Where are they in relation to you? Close by or further away. You can use little figures, or crosses, or initials – it's up to you.

This exercise gives us a view of how we are with other people. Maybe we are very private and have no-one close by, or have lots of people near us. Neither is wrong, it is simply understanding how we function with other people. It is also useful to identify support structures too. For the trainers it is interesting to ask:

- Who would you like to be closer to?
- If you had a big problem, who would you go to for help?

If the person has no one close to them at all, then they will find it harder to gain any support. Equally it can be dangerous if they only have one person on their chart, as it shows that they rely on one person, who will probably find this to be an unbearable pressure. If that person fails in their support, then the person will not be able to cope. That is not fair on any individual to put that much pressure on them. This issue needs to be highlighted, especially where drugs are involved, as someone is likely to re-use if they feel let down by their sole loved one.



➢ **How others see me**

Draw a picture of how others see you, or discuss this issue.

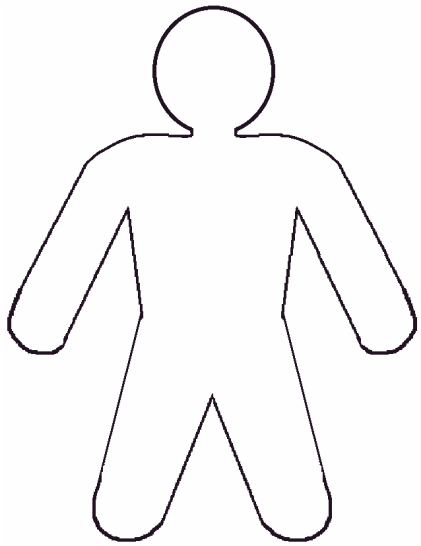
This can also be done as a **tableau** – where the participant uses others as actors who stand as models ready for him to sculpt them into posed figures to illustrate a point. They stand still while he moves their arms and legs and tells them how to have their faces and body-posture, so that he sets up a scene like a photo of how others in his family sees him. This is called a tableau, but is like a photo – a snap-shot of one moment in time. This technique can be used for many other exercises too.

- **What others want**

As above – depicting what others might want from you. This can be drawn as pictures, or written or simply discussed.

- **Good versus evil!**

For those who feel they have no friends and the world is against them. Using the body of the self; use the outside area to write down all the people who they feel are against them.



On the inside write down all the people who care about them. Those who are important write/draw larger. Use yourself if you are struggling for numbers.

Do not use this exercise if there is no-one to support this person as it may highlight their problems, but in most cases they had not realised how many people really cared or would stand up for them. It can be friends, acquaintances… anyone to boost their confidence. You can also look at the importance of those outside the body – does it matter what they think? Who are they anyway?!

- **Trouble-spots**

Draw your home. Highlight any physical places where arguments mostly happen. Label what kinds of things you argue over. If there are no particular places, then write around the edge about the problems and issues you argue over.

- **Friendships**

Draw a friend and their qualities – draw an activity you enjoy doing with them or role-play it.

- **Group sculptures / Tableaux**

A tableau or group sculpture is where the participant uses others as actors who stand as models ready for him to sculpt them into posed figures to illustrate a point.

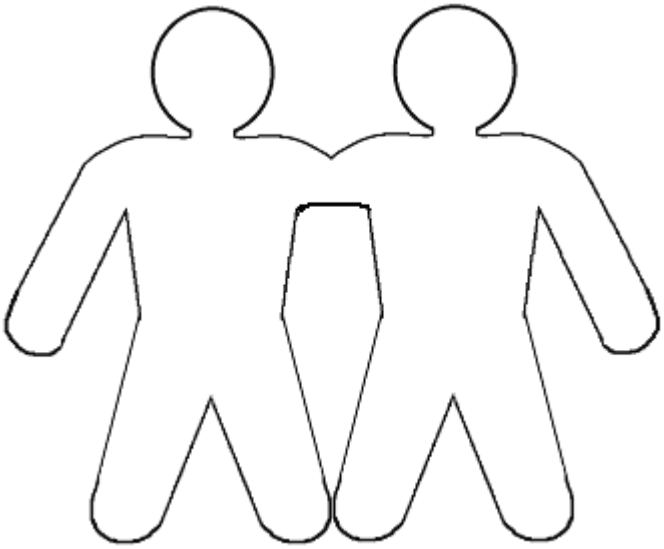
They stand still while he moves their arms and legs and tells them how to have their faces and body-posture, so that he sets up a scene like a photo of how others in his family sees him. This is called a tableau, but is like a photo – a snap-shot of one moment in time.

This technique can be used for many other exercises too.

- **What families need**

Write/draw a shopping list of the needs of families. Don't just include physical things – include emotional and spiritual things like 'love, respect, laughter' etc.

- **Siamese (Conjoined) Twins**



Draw yourself and your spouse/friend as Siamese twins and what characteristics and interests, both good and bad, that you share together.

- **Inheritance: family traits**

Draw a family tree; but where the lines link people, write in the characteristics and traits that you share with your parent/child/sibling.

Which of these are good traits that you want to continue; which are bad traits or experiences (not communicating; always out; always drunk; always shouting etc.) that you don't want to pass on to your children/grandchildren.

How can you break the cycle?

- **Playing with Children**

Discussion around how to play with children. Discuss children's games you used to play, or you have heard about. How can you make a better relationship with your children? Practise playing some of these games.

When Things Get Tough

- **Self-protection**

Draw a body, as seen above. Outside the body write the things that particularly stress you.

Draw an additional line around the body. See this as an aura of protection.

What are your personal stress-busters? What helps you relieve stress? What are your hobbies, relaxation, anger management etc? Write it in-between the two lines as a kind of protective layer against the world.

- **Body Armour**

As above, but draw as items of armour to protect you. Shield of honour? Spear of self-respect? What personal attributes will help you in your fight to stay out of trouble?

- **Safe Spaces**

This is useful for a number of areas.

Close your eyes and imagine you are in a wonderful place. It can be real or imaginary. It must be a safe and happy place. *Sometimes it is better to use an imaginary place as it can never be tainted by real problems.*

You can imagine being there with your favourite person. What would you like to say to them?

Practise being in this space so that you can summon it by closing your eyes with a moment's notice. This is a useful skill to use when you are stressed, or angry or panicky about anything.

- **Desert Islands**

Imagine you are shipwrecked on a desert island. What would you need to survive? Include physical things, but also spiritual and emotional things and attributes, like courage, stamina etc.

Take a moment to imagine yourself with those things, and see how they can help you as you face the real world.

Variation: Think, discuss or act out if you were there as a group – how could you help each other? What would the problems be? Do you prefer to lead or follow?

- **Successes**

Write a list of your successes, however small (e.g. facing a tough time and coming out the other side; surviving poverty or unemployment or death of a loved one). Feel the successes; allow yourself to be immersed in them; feel strong and capable.

Focus on one time you felt a success in your life. Take that feeling away with you. Remember it and meditate on the feeling of success and know that you can achieve this again.

- **Island Escape**

Draw a desert island and show what you are escaping from and what you would find to help you.

Who would you choose to be with you?

- **Monster Fears**

Draw your worst fears. You can draw them as monster faces if you wish. Look at them.

Think of any solutions to combat them.

Then slowly tear the paper up strip by strip until it is in tiny pieces.

Throw the pieces into the air so that they are mixed as tiny as possible like confetti or rice.

Stamp them into the ground. Feel the power of conquering your fears.

- **Super-powers: what you need to overcome any issues**

Imagine you have superpowers. Draw yourself as a Superhero – what powers would help you in your battle for truth and freedom?

- **Role-play**

Take issues that worry you and role-play them in groups to try out any solutions. Practice makes perfect and this gives the opportunity to see how things might work out without actually being there. Replay the role-play, getting feedback from the group, and ask people what they might change.

- **Masks**

Masks can be made out of paper if no real ones can be used. Use masks to explore issues taking away from ourselves as individuals. Experiment with emotions drawn on to masks.

- **Support Structures**

Draw a house held up by scaffolding. All of those scaffolding structures are the different types of support you have. Name each one.

This can also be a simple written exercise or discussion.

Anger Management

These are pictorial exercises, but each can be a simple discussion instead if drawing makes things more difficult. The crucial aim is to look at these issues and explore them and come to some solutions and plans for improved behaviour.

- **Drawing anger**

Draw a picture of how you imagine anger to look like. Or draw an angry face. What do you look like when you are angry?

- **What sparks you?**

Draw a fire with lots of flashes and sparks. In each spark write down things that make you angry.

- **Boiling kettle**

Imagine you are a boiling kettle – in the clouds of steam write down what reactions you have when you feel angry? What does it feel like; what do you do?

- **Stages of anger**

Draw a ladder and on each step write the stages you feel as you get more and more angry. What do you feel like, and what do you do when you are at bursting point?

- **How to stay cool**

Draw a glass of drink with ice cubes in it; each of those ice-cubes is something that can help you cool down when you are angry. Label each one. This will be different for each person.

If you struggle to think of things to calm you down, discuss as a group what helps each of you.

- **Expressing anger safely**

Write a list of ways that you can express anger safely. What can you do to let out your energy? Share this as a group and learn new techniques from each other.

- **Role-plays**

Practise using some of the scenarios of things that annoy you and spark you off, and see what alternative endings can be achieved; practise keeping cool in the face of provocation.

- **Masks**

Repeat the above exercise with masks to see how it feels having your emotions shielded and hidden. Does it give you more or less power over the situation?

This manual was written for the free use of psycho-social workers within Sri Lanka. All ownership in any language is by Linda Rose. Permission is given for free further use for those working for others in Sri Lanka, India and beyond.

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