

**M+**  
PROMOTING  
MENTAL WELLBEING  
AMONG EDUCATORS

# The Immersive Training Self-Care Toolbox for Adult Educators





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# Table of Contents

Introduction

04

Section 1: Developing Self-Awareness

- Introduction & Theoretical Background
- Description of Activities and Exercises

09

Section 2: Self-Compassion and Emotional Wellbeing

- Introduction & Theoretical Background
- Description of Activities and Exercises

19

Section 3: Stress and Time Management Techniques

- Introduction & Theoretical Background
- Description of Activities and Exercises

31

Section 4: Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques

- Introduction & Theoretical Background
- Description of Activities and Exercises

58

Further Reading

69

# Introduction





# Introduction

*The Immersive Training Self-Care Toolbox for Adult Educators* is a key outcome of the “M+: Promoting Mental Wellbeing Among Educators” project. This project, developed by teams from Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Latvia, is centred on improving the mental wellbeing of adult educators through a comprehensive toolbox of self-care strategies. The toolbox was designed based on insights gathered during the early stages of the project, including adult educator’s responses to questionnaires and focus groups.

The findings from these research activities inspired us to focus on different tools that could help manage stress, develop awareness, foster self-compassion and take steps towards awareness. *The Immersive Training Self-Care Toolbox* was designed to provide educators with practical activities and tools that can be used independently and integrated into daily lives, helping them better manage the unique challenges faced in professional roles.

This toolbox is based on the understanding that well-being is a broad concept that includes mental health. It refers to the overall state of emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It includes factors like having strong social connections, feeling a sense of purpose, and being satisfied with life.

*The Immersive Training Self-Care Toolbox* is a resource designed to take control of your mental wellbeing as an educator. Engaging with these tools and incorporating them into daily routines can help create a healthier work-life balance. This toolbox is not about quick fixes but about developing sustainable habits to enhance professional life and personal wellbeing in the long run. The only recipe for initiating change is to take your wellbeing at work seriously and start with small steps to nurture it.

Based on the educators' needs, we have composed this toolbox into four sections. Even with many different self-care tools available, there is still a lack of securing a work-life balance. We offer a selection of tools we have tried out during the project and found helpful for regaining wellbeing at work.



**...This toolbox aims to cultivate sustainable practices that will improve your overall professional and personal wellbeing...**

# Overview of the Toolbox

The toolbox consists of four sequenced sections, each focusing on a different aspect of wellbeing. The aim is to provide educators with practical strategies they can integrate into their personal and professional lives. Every section is structured around five practical tools that are easy to follow and can be completed independently.

The toolbox is divided into four key sections: Self-Awareness, Self-Compassion and Emotional Wellbeing, Stress and Time Management Strategies, and Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques. The sections are designed sequentially, each building on to the previous one, offering a holistic self-care experience. However, you are free to navigate through the toolbox at your own pace, focusing on the most relevant areas.

Disclaimer: the resources provided on this website and within our tools are intended to promote mental well-being and self-care among educators. They are not a substitute for professional mental health care or treatment. If you are experiencing severe mental distress, crisis, or thoughts of self-harm, we strongly encourage you to seek immediate professional support. Please contact a licensed mental health professional or a crisis hotline in your area. In case of emergency, please call emergency services or visit your nearest emergency department. Your well-being matters and help is available. You don't have to face this alone.

## Sections and Objectives

### **Section 1 – Self-Awareness**

Objective: By the end of this section, you will engage in self-reflection exercises and complete assessments to gain deeper insights into your personality, strengths, and mental wellbeing. Developing self-awareness is foundational to better understanding your needs, emotions, and behaviours in the workplace.

Activities: Tune-in, Self-scan, Self-Assessment of Wellbeing, Work Symbol, Self-Awareness of Work Tasks.

### **Section 2 – Self-Compassion and Emotional Wellbeing**

Objective: This section helps you develop self-compassion practices and improve your emotional intelligence. You will learn how to navigate complex emotions and build stronger, more positive relationships with colleagues and students, contributing to a supportive and healthy work environment.

Activities: My Classroom for Self-Compassion, Self-Care Plan of Sparkling Moments, Mindful Drawing/Doodling, Setting Boundaries: Saying No with Respect, Self-Compassion, and Compassion for Others.

### **Section 3 – Stress and Time Management Strategies**

Objective: Upon completing this module, you'll be equipped with time management techniques, boundary-setting skills, and cognitive strategies to manage your workload and stress levels better. The goal is to improve your work-life balance and enhance your overall wellbeing by reducing the impact of daily stressors.

Activities: Set your priorities (using the Covey Matrix), Does it fit? Pick what can help you the most! S.O.B.E.R. – Stress Interruption, Stress Management: Emergency Plan.

### **Section 4 – Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques**

Objective: The final section focuses on providing mindfulness and relaxation techniques that you can use to reduce stress, improve concentration, and promote a sense of calm. These practices are designed to help you develop resilience, enhance productivity, and foster a healthier work environment.

Activities: Deep Breathing Exercise, Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR), Voice Relaxation, Five-Minute Stretching Routine, Five-Minute Circuit Workout.

# How to Use the Toolbox

## Start With Self-Awareness

It is recommended to begin with Section 1 to lay a solid foundation for understanding your needs and mental wellbeing. Self-awareness is key to identifying the areas in which you need to improve. You are also welcome to explore the toolbox in an order that suits you, in your own pace!

## Progress at Your Own Pace

You can work through each section sequentially or choose the most relevant to your current needs. Take your time with each activity, allowing space for reflection.

## Practise Regularly

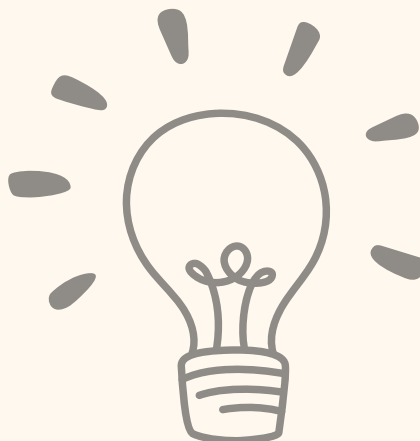
The tools in this toolbox are most effective when practised regularly. Consistency in applying these self-care strategies will help you develop long-term habits that support mental wellbeing.

## Reflect on Your Growth

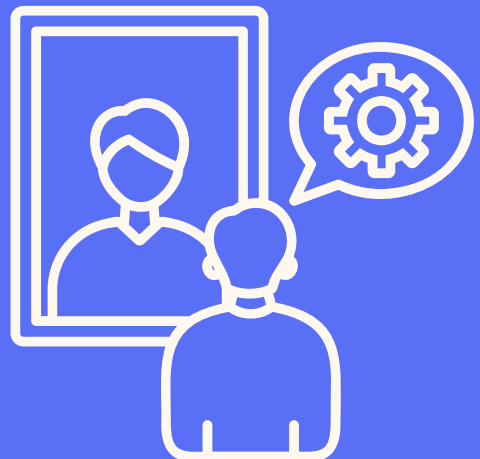
Use the self-reflection of each section to track your progress. Reflecting on your growth will help you appreciate your accomplishments and stay motivated to continue practising self-care.

## Access Further Resources

If a particular topic resonates with you, explore the bibliography at the end of each section for further reading and research. This will deepen your understanding of the strategies you're implementing.



# Section 1: Developing Self-Awareness



## Introduction & Theoretical Background

Self-awareness plays an important part in addressing your mental wellbeing at work and in life. Why? To focus on any area of your life, you first need to understand and recognise: How am I feeling? How is my body doing? How does it feel? What sensations am I experiencing? How do I generally think about my work life? What are my challenges, and what can I do or avoid doing? Learning to listen to yourself and understand how you are doing is a skill that can be developed. Some people have a more developed self-awareness, while others find it more difficult.

Shelley Aronov-Jacoby writes: "Self-awareness can be explained as a practice. For many, an overlooked or an uncomfortable practice. You see, it takes humility and strength to allow oneself to open up, to dig deep within, and sit with what you see, feel, and observe. With awareness of self, you can regulate your interior condition, which has a ripple effect through your behaviour and actions. It is a practice that can challenge your thoughts, your behaviour and sense of self. When done consistently, you are better able to regulate your emotions and responses. From there, you are able to recognize where your thoughts and emotions are leading you, and hence, make the necessary changes you need... Let your walls down. Try to let go of any judgement and the instinctual urge to protect yourself. Through a willingness and openness to yourself, you can let go of your defences, thereby seeing yourself in different ways than what you have always assumed." [1]

Self-awareness is being aware of who you are — of your thoughts, feelings, and actions. Having self-awareness does not mean you have to thoroughly understand every single emotion you have or justify every thought. Instead, being self-aware simply means you observe your internal and external experiences.

Hogan explains three main components of self-awareness:

- Understanding our own strengths and opportunities for change and growth
- Understanding how our strengths and challenges relate to those of others
- Understanding how to adapt our behaviour to increase our effectiveness [2]

Self-reflection is crucial for developing self-awareness because it allows individuals to examine their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. By reflecting on past experiences, people gain deeper insights into their strengths, weaknesses, and patterns of behaviour. This process of introspection helps individuals understand how they respond to various situations, make more informed decisions, and identify areas for personal growth. In essence, self-reflection enhances self-awareness by fostering a conscious understanding of oneself, leading to improved emotional intelligence and more intentional actions.

[1] <https://www.hrh.ca/2022/01/27/the-benefits-of-self-awareness/>

[2] <https://www.brightside.com/blog/how-self-awareness-reduces-stress/>



## Description of Activities and Exercises

### Activity 1: Tune In

Objective	This activity aims to get acquainted with self-awareness
Time	5 minutes
Materials	No material needed
Preparation	Find a convenient and quiet place
Instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Find a quiet space (30 seconds)</li><li>• Sit or stand comfortably in a quiet space where you won't be disturbed. Close your eyes or soften your gaze. Take a moment to settle in, feeling the surface beneath you.</li><li>• Focus on your breathing (1 minute)</li><li>• Begin by taking slow, deep breaths. Inhale deeply through your nose for a count of 4, hold for 2, and exhale slowly through your mouth for a count of 6. Focus on the sensation of the air entering and leaving your body. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breath. (1 minute)</li></ul>

- Bring your attention to the present moment by focusing on something simple, such as the feeling of your breath or the sounds around you. Let go of any thoughts about the past or future. If thoughts arise, acknowledge them, and then gently return your focus to the present. Pay attention to the sensations in your body. Notice if any emotions are there. (2 minutes)
- Take a final deep breath in and out. Slowly bring your awareness back to your surroundings. Open your eyes if they were closed. Take a moment to notice how you feel before you continue with your day. (30 seconds)
- If needed, react on your needs.

**Note:**

Try to practise this every day.



## Activity 2: Self-Scan

Objective	This activity aims to enhance self-awareness
Time	30 minutes
Materials	No specific material needed
Preparation	Find a peaceful and quiet place
Instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sit or lie down in a comfortable position, allowing your arms and legs to be relaxed.</li><li>• Focus on your breath for a moment. Inhale and exhale, paying attention to whether your breathing is fast or slow, shallow or deep. (2 minutes)</li><li>• Take a deep breath in through your nose and exhale through your mouth, ensuring that your exhalation is longer than your inhalation. Repeat this 3 times.</li><li>• Return to your normal breathing pattern.</li><li>• Tune in to your body, starting from the tips of your toes. Feel your toes, feet, joints, calves, and other parts of your body. Ask yourself: How does each part feel?</li></ul> <p>Reflection:</p> <p>→What is the overall condition of my body?</p> <p>→Is there a part I haven't paid attention to?</p> <p>→What is my body trying to tell me? If my body could talk, what message would it convey to me?</p> <p>→Write down your reflections. Write down the first 3 steps you could take.</p> <p>→If needed, talk to someone about your worries.</p> <p>→Work on an action plan using the other chapters of toolbox.</p>

### Activity 3: Self-Assessment of Wellbeing

Objective	This activity aims to assess wellbeing as a means of developing self-awareness.
Time	30 minutes
Materials	Pen
Preparation	Nothing specific
Instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Please answer the questions below as honestly as possible by selecting the most appropriate answer for each statement from the three provided options (see below).</li><li>• Review your answers. What do they reveal?</li><li>• Identify the areas where you answered, "never" or "sometimes." Consider the first three steps you could take to improve in these areas.</li><li>• If most of your answers fall under "never" or "sometimes," consider seeking support or assistance.</li></ul>



Wellbeing self-assessment

Statement about mental wellbeing	Never	Sometimes	Often
1. I follow a healthy diet, practise exercise and take a rest when needed			
2. I have time to reflect on my thoughts, feelings and the physical state of my body			
3. I have a sense of fulfilment and meaning in my work			
4. I am open to new experiences, learning and personal development			
5. I have a supportive and caring network of relationships			
7. I feel supported			
8. I love to have contact with other people			
9. I want to go to work			
10. I am good at dealing with problems			
11. I have energy for my leisure activities			
15. I can prioritise things that are important to me			

#### Activity 4: Work Symbol

Objective	This activity aims to enhance self-awareness of resources
Time	1 hour
Materials	Phone with camera, A4 sheet of paper, pencils/crayons/markers (anything that is suitable for drawing).
Preparation	Set aside some time to focus on yourself. Consider a location where you can take a walk and afterwards sit down to draw and reflect.
Instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Find a symbol in nature (take a photo or pick it up) that appeals to you when you think of the question "How would I like to be at work?". The symbol can be any object you find (grass, road, leaf, stone, tree etc.).</li> <li>Try to follow your heart in choosing the symbol.</li> <li>When you have chosen it, take a photo or if it is possible, take it with you.</li> <li>Find a place where you can draw and write.</li> <li>Draw the symbol as you see it.</li> <li>Describe it asking questions to yourself about the symbol: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is it? What colours and shapes do I see?</li> <li>What attracted me to it?</li> <li>What are the strengths of this symbol?</li> <li>What do I notice when looking closer at it?</li> <li>How do I connect this symbol with the question: "How would I like to be at work?".</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Reflection:</p> <p>→Do you see how your longings and wishes in your work situation relate to this symbol? Name it!</p> <p>→Which possible resources (inner and outer) did you discovered? Name them!</p> <p>→Are there any actions or changes possible? Name the first three steps you could do to reach the satisfied way of how to be at work.</p>



### Activity 5: Self-Awareness of the Work Tasks

Objectives	There are times when we think: It is too much to do and we may feel overwhelmed by all the work. There may be tasks that we do not enjoy anymore or tasks that we feel bring us down and everything feels out of control. This activity gives the opportunity to look at our every day tasks and gain awareness of the amount and the effect they may have on us.
Time	30 minutes
Materials	Notebook or 4A sheet of paper, pen and tree coloured pencils/markers/pens etc..
Preparation	To set aside time to focus on yourself.
Instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• List all the tasks you have at work using the template provided below. Try to be as detailed as possible.</li><li>• Review your task list and assess each one based on the following categories:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ Tasks you enjoy or find satisfying.</li><li>◦ Tasks you feel neutral about; you do them because you have to, but you neither enjoy nor dislike them.</li><li>◦ Tasks you don't enjoy at all; they bring no satisfaction, and you have to force yourself to do them.</li></ul></li><li>• Focus on the tasks you've marked as "do not enjoy at all." Use three different colours to categorize them:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ First colour: "I could change this now."</li><li>◦ Second colour: "I need time to change this."</li><li>◦ Third colour: "I cannot change this."</li></ul></li><li>• Pay particular attention to the tasks marked as "I could change now." Identify the first step you will take to start changing them.</li></ul> <p>Reflection:</p> <p>→What does this exercise reveal about your daily work life and the tasks you are responsible for?</p> <p>Note: If you find that most of your tasks fall under the "neutral" or "do not enjoy at all" categories, consider speaking to someone or seeking professional support.</p>

## TEMPLATE OF THE TASKS SHEET

Nr.	Tasks	Enjoy	Neutral	Do not enjoy at all
1				
2				
3				
4				

### Questions for Reflection on Section 1: "Self –Awareness."



Looking back at all the previous exercises in this section, what are the three key learning points I have learned about my self-awareness?

**Reflect on your Experience:** How was it to engage in exercises about self-awareness? What conclusions do you have about yourself regarding mental wellbeing at work?

**Identify Effective Techniques:** Which exercises did you find most effective in helping you to improve your self-awareness about your mental wellbeing? Why do you think this activity worked well for you? Are there any activities you found less effective?

**Application and Integration:** How can you integrate these self-awareness exercises into your daily routine? Name examples of when and how you plan to use and bring forward the outcomes to enhance your overall wellbeing.

# Section 2: Self-Compassion & Emotional Wellbeing



## Introduction & Theoretical Background

Self-compassion is a crucial tool for the wellbeing of adult educators. The ideal adult educator is perfect—always in the best mood, smiling, and endlessly serving their students—which is unrealistic and often harmful. The pressure to constantly maintain a positive attitude can lead to toxic positivity, leaving no room for adult educators to express the challenges and frustrations that are part of their daily lives. Practising self-compassion and self-acceptance regularly can significantly support educators' emotional wellbeing, allowing them to navigate their work more resiliently and authentically.

From a theoretical perspective, self-compassion is rooted in the work of Dr. Kristin Neff, who defines it as being kind and understanding toward oneself in moments of suffering or perceived inadequacy. It involves three key components: self-kindness, the ability to offer oneself warmth and care instead of harsh judgment; common humanity, recognising that suffering and failure are part of the shared human experience; and mindfulness, the ability to observe thoughts and emotions without becoming overwhelmed. For adult educators, who often face high expectations and emotional challenges, cultivating self-compassion is essential to maintain emotional balance and avoid burnout.

Managing others' emotions, especially in a classroom setting, ties closely to emotional intelligence, a concept popularised by Daniel Goleman. Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognise, understand, and manage one's own emotions while also navigating the feelings of others. It involves five key components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. In the classroom, adult educators with high emotional intelligence can better understand their students' emotional states, respond empathetically and create a supportive environment. By practising self-compassion, adult educators improve their emotional resilience and model emotional regulation and empathy for their students, fostering a healthier emotional climate in the classroom.

Empathy also plays a vital role in emotional wellbeing. Adult educators who practise empathy towards themselves and their students are more likely to feel connected, grounded, and patient. Drawing or visually expressing these emotional experiences can be a helpful way to process them. For example, educators can draw representations of their inner critic and compassionate self, helping to externalise and better understand their internal dialogue. This process encourages self-reflection and provides a creative outlet for emotional expression.

In practical terms, adult educators can enhance their emotional intelligence and self-compassion through simple strategies such as pausing to reflect on their emotional state, reframing negative self-talk, and practising mindfulness techniques.

This theoretical foundation serves as a guide to developing a more compassionate and emotionally intelligent approach to managing one's own wellbeing and the emotional needs of others.

## Description of Activities and Exercises

### Activity 1: My Classroom for My Self-Compassion

Objectives	This activity aims to increase your self-awareness, support you in shifting from self-criticism to self-compassion, foster emotional regulation, and create positive associations in the classroom.
Time	-
Materials	The furniture and materials of the classroom
Preparation	<p>Find a quiet moment in your classroom.</p> <p>Take a few deep breaths and set an intention of compassion.</p>
Instructions	<p>The classroom is the physical space where adult educators spend a large part of their day. This physical space can serve as an anchor for your support when self-doubt and inner criticism come in your thoughts.</p> <p>1. The next time you experience self-doubt or self-criticism; notice the words you hear. Can you identify specific patterns in your thoughts? For example: "I am not good at my job", "I should be more patient", "This is too hard", "I made a mistake again", "My class should be better", "No one respects me".</p> <p>2. Now, look at all your notes and take 15 full breaths to experience the weight of the criticised self. Write down the reaction of the self to the inner critic.</p>

### Instructions

3. Get up and shake your body intensively. Zoom out of this situation and embody the compassionate self by imagining you talking to a child and yourself with kindness. Now, try to reply to the painful thoughts with compassionate answers: "I am patient with my class", "Mistakes are part of the process, and I am allowed to make them", "My class is as it is, and it is okay", "I remember that I am allowed to feel overwhelmed". If you wish, hug yourself as you are replying to your thoughts.

4. Get up from your seat and walk in your classroom. Are there specific parts of the classroom where self-doubt exists? What triggers self-doubt in your space? Keep walking and reflect until you have identified some spots.

5. Once you have your spots, pair them with their corresponding answers. Try to take mental notes of the triggers and pair them with reminders of kindness and understanding. So the next time, you feel overwhelmed, you can physically or even mentally receive the message of self-compassion.

### Notes

If possible, add an item on the specific parts (a sticker, a drawing, a phrase, a vase of flowers, a candle) as a reminder to support your mental wellbeing proactively.

### Questions for self-reflection

→What changes in my body and mind after I physically shake off the negativity and take on the role of my compassionate self? How do I feel when I speak to myself with kindness?

→How can I symbolically or mentally "claim" these parts of the room to create a space of self-compassion and support for myself?



## Activity 2: Self-Care Plan of Sparkling Moments

Objectives	This activity aims to enhance intentional self-care, foster personal ownership of wellbeing, and integrate small, joyful practices into daily routines to promote resilience and emotional balance.
Time	-
Materials	Notebook/piece of paper and pen/colours
Preparation	<p>Find a quiet place and stay in the silence or add some relaxing music.</p> <p>Take a few deep breaths and allow yourself to be creative.</p>
Instructions	<p>Caring for your wellbeing is a personal and intentional task. You know best how to support yourself, but sometimes we forget to bring awareness and ownership to the small, joyful moments that keep us grounded. This activity invites you to create a self-care plan of sparkling moments, designed to integrate wellbeing into your everyday life with purpose and intention.</p> <p>Start by reflecting on what sparks joy, peace, or relaxation for you. These can be small, simple activities or moments that make you feel calm, centered, and cared for. Some examples might be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Drinking your favourite tea while looking out the window.</li><li>• Taking a short walk during a break, feeling the fresh air on your face.</li><li>• Writing in a gratitude journal or reading an inspiring book.</li><li>• Taking a few deep breaths before starting a task or lesson.</li><li>• Savouring a quiet moment before the class begins.</li></ul>



Now, take out a piece of paper or open a notebook. Begin by listing these moments of self-care accessible to you throughout your day. These moments should be realistic and easy to fit into your routine.

1. Reflect on the small things that bring you joy or peace throughout the day. Write down 5–10 moments that you can intentionally create. These can be as simple as pausing to stretch, smiling at a student, or taking a mindful breath between tasks.

2. Look at your list of sparkling moments. Can you connect them to specific times or triggers during your day? For example, “I will take three deep breaths before I open my classroom door in the morning” or “I will have my tea at my desk before grading papers.”

3. Write down your plan, detailing when and where you will integrate your sparkling moments into your day. This is your Self-Care Plan of Sparkling Moments, a guide to ensure you care for yourself while teaching and managing your responsibilities.

4. Spend a moment visualising your day. Picture yourself going through your routine and imagine yourself pausing for these moments of self-care. How does it feel to bring this intention into your day?

#### Notes

By consciously planning for moments of care and joy, you are reminding yourself that your wellbeing is a priority, just as important as the care you give to your students. Your sparkling moments will not only nourish you but also create a positive ripple effect in your classroom.

#### Questions for self-reflection

How do these small moments help you feel more grounded, resilient, or joyful?  
Reflect on the importance of making self-care a regular part of your life, and how your intention to create these sparkling moments brings you closer to a sense of ownership over your emotional wellbeing.



### Activity 3: Mindful Drawing/Doodling

Objectives	This activity aims to promote mindfulness, enhance concentration, reduce stress, and foster creativity through a simple, reflective practice.
Time	10 minutes
Materials	Pen/pencil, paper
Preparation	<p>Find a quiet place and stay in the silence, or add some relaxing music.</p> <p>Take a few deep breaths and allow yourself to be creative.</p>
Instructions	<p>Mindful drawing is a simple, effective way to bring yourself into the present moment, fostering creativity and inner calm. This activity is designed to recharge and focus you during breaks or training, promoting mindfulness in just a few minutes.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Take a piece of paper and a pen or pencil. Hold it in your hand and observe its texture, weight, and feel. This moment of awareness helps you begin to ground yourself.</li><li>2. Choose a quiet space where you can sit comfortably, free from distractions. Take a few deep breaths to center yourself, letting go of any tension or thoughts.</li><li>3. Place your pen or pencil on the paper and start drawing freely —without any specific goal or plan in mind. Focus only on the movement of your hand and encourage your sense of presence and flow.</li></ol>



4. Pay attention to the sensation of the pen or pencil moving across the paper and the sound it makes. Let these small sensory details keep you anchored in the moment, encouraging mindfulness.

5. Notice the lines, shapes, or patterns on the paper. Let go of any judgment or expectation about the drawing and encourage your open-mindedness and curiosity.

6. If your mind wanders, gently bring your focus back to the drawing and the sensations of the process. Allow this moment to enhance your concentration.

7. Continue this mindful drawing process for 5 minutes. This is enough time to center yourself and recharge during breaks without feeling rushed.

8. Once the time is up, observe your drawing. Rather than criticising it, reflect on how the experience felt. Did it help you feel more present or relaxed?

#### Notes

Try to incorporate this mindful drawing activity into your breaks or transitions during the day. It is a quick and accessible way to recharge, allowing you to reconnect with yourself and enhance your mindfulness and creativity, even during a busy schedule. Over time, this practice can help you approach tasks with greater calm, focus, and openness.

#### Questions for self-reflection

- How did focusing on the sensations of drawing affect your sense of presence and calm during the activity?
- What did you notice about your thoughts or emotions while drawing without a specific goal or plan?



#### Activity 4: Setting Boundaries: Saying No with Respect

Objectives	This activity aims to increase your ability to set healthy boundaries, enhance self-respect, and promote respectful communication when saying "no," fostering emotional balance and mutual understanding.
Time	10 minutes
Materials	-
Preparation	<p>Find a quiet space where you can reflect without distractions.</p> <p>Have a recent situation in mind where you struggled to set a boundary.</p> <p>Practise calming deep breaths to center yourself before beginning.</p>
Instructions	<p>Setting boundaries is essential for maintaining your wellbeing and fostering healthy relationships. This activity focuses on practicing how to say "no" with respect, both for yourself and others, promoting self-respect and clearer communication.</p> <p>1. Take a moment to reflect on a recent situation where you felt the need to set a boundary but struggled to say "no." What feelings came up? Were you worried about how others would react or how you would be perceived? Acknowledge these emotions without judgment.</p> <p>2. In a quiet space, practise saying "no" out loud. Keep your tone respectful, but firm. For example, you might say, "I appreciate your request, but I need to prioritize my time right now." Repeat this a few times until you feel more comfortable.</p>

3. Understand that saying “no” does not mean you are selfish—it is a form of self-respect. By saying no, you are honouring your limits, time, and energy.  
Remind yourself: “Respecting my boundaries helps me respect others.”

4. Close your eyes and imagine a healthy boundary around you—a line that protects your wellbeing while allowing you to engage with others.  
Visualize how it feels to uphold that boundary confidently.

5. Reflect on how respecting your own boundaries helps you understand and appreciate the boundaries of others. Consider situations where someone else said “no” to you. How can you offer them the same respect and understanding you are working with to cultivate for yourself?

6. Take a deep breath and reflect on how practising these steps makes you feel empowered and more in control of your emotional wellbeing.

#### Notes

You can integrate boundary-setting into your daily life by practicing it regularly in both personal and professional situations. By saying no with kindness and clarity, you will create space for self-respect, healthier interactions, and a greater sense of balance.

#### Questions for self-reflection

- How does setting boundaries help you maintain balance in your personal and professional life?
- How can you approach saying “no” with confidence and kindness, without feeling guilty?





### Activity 5: Self-Compassion and Compassion for Others

Objectives	This activity aims to promote self-compassion and empathy during interactions, support emotional regulation, and help balance personal needs with understanding toward others.
Time	5 minutes
Materials	-
Preparation	<p>Find a quiet space to center yourself before the interaction.</p> <p>Take a few deep breaths and set an intention of compassion.</p>
Instructions	<p>Interacting with others can sometimes bring up challenges, but practicing compassion, both for yourself and for others, can help you navigate these moments with grace and kindness. This activity focuses on how to support yourself while maintaining compassionate in your interactions.</p> <p>1. Before engaging in a conversation or interaction, take a moment to check in with yourself. How do you feel emotionally and physically? Are you calm or tense? Acknowledge any emotions or tension without judgment.</p> <p>2. As you prepare for the interaction, set a mental intention to approach the situation with compassion. Say to yourself, "I will be kind to myself, and I will be kind to others", which sets a tone of understanding before you begin.</p> <p>3. Stay aware of your own needs. If you notice feelings of stress or frustration building up, silently remind yourself that it is okay to feel this way. Take a deep breath, and practice self-compassion by thinking, "I am doing my best in this moment, and that is enough."</p>

4. If the other person seems stressed or reactive, remember they may be experiencing their own struggles. Respond with understanding by thinking: "Just like me, they want to be accepted and understood." This thought can help soften your response and increase empathy.

5. After the interaction, reflect on how you handled the conversation. Were you kind to yourself during the process? Did you offer understanding to the other person? Acknowledge any effort you made to stay compassionate and forgive yourself if it was not perfect.

#### Notes

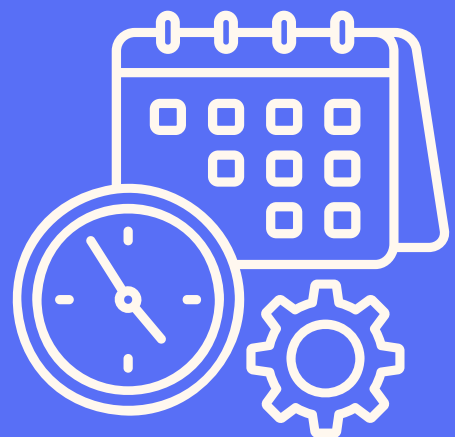
You can continue practising self-compassion during interactions by being aware of your own emotional state and offering yourself the same kindness and understanding you give to others. This approach helps you stay balanced and present, even in challenging situations.

#### Questions for self-reflection

- How did self-compassion affect your emotional state during the interaction?
- How can you continue showing empathy to others while also caring for yourself?



# Section 3: Stress & Time Management Techniques



## Introduction & Theoretical Background

There are several important connections between stress and poor time management, as these factors often feed into one another in a cycle that can exacerbate both issues. Here are some key ways they are linked:

- **Increased Workload Perception.** Poor time management often leads to a sense of being overwhelmed by tasks. Without proper planning, individuals may feel as though they have too much to do and too little time to do it, increasing stress levels.
- **Procrastination and Last-Minute Pressure.** When time is not managed effectively, tasks tend to be postponed until deadlines are imminent, leading to last-minute rushes. This creates high-pressure situations, elevating stress as individuals scramble to complete their work on time.
- **Decreased Productivity.** Ineffective time management can reduce productivity, as it may cause individuals to spend too much time on low-priority tasks or get distracted easily. As a result, important tasks may remain unfinished, leading to stress from unmet goals or looming deadlines.
- **Loss of Control.** Poorly managed time can lead to a sense of loss of control over one's schedule and commitments. This perceived lack of control is a major contributor to stress, as individuals feel unable to keep up with their responsibilities.
- **Work-Life Imbalance.** Inadequate time management often spills over into personal life, disrupting the balance between work and leisure. Overworking or an inability to detach from work-related responsibilities increases stress levels, contributing to burnout and dissatisfaction.
- **Impact on Health.** Chronic stress from poor time management can lead to health issues such as headaches, fatigue, sleep problems, and even long-term conditions like high blood pressure or mental health disorders. This further reduces one's ability to manage time effectively, creating a vicious cycle.
- **Constant Feeling of "Busyness".** Poor time management often creates a sense of perpetual busyness without real progress. This leads to mental clutter and a sense of being "always on," contributing to higher levels of stress and exhaustion.

One of the key findings that emerged from the previous phase of the project, through surveys and focus groups, is that the feeling of not having enough time to accomplish everything and stay up-to-date is one of the major sources of stress for our profession. This is further exacerbated, compared to other professional categories, by the moral sense of duty and mission that operators often feel, coupled with the fact that their work involves the growth, development, care, and recovery of human beings. Failing to do everything does not merely mean leaving documents incomplete, but rather falling short in providing the level of care and assistance that meets the desired standards. Addressing time management issues can, therefore, significantly reduce stress by creating a sense of control, improving productivity, and helping maintain a healthier work-life balance.

For the purpose of this section, we will address the topic of the correlation between time management and stress in a dual approach: on one hand, by introducing techniques to improve the planning, prioritization, and scheduling of activities; on the other hand, by providing tools for stress management, both to reduce stress and to better prepare for handling it.

## Description of Activities and Exercises

### Activity 1: Set Your Priorities (Using the Covey Matrix)

Objectives	<p>The goal of using the Covey Matrix is to prioritise tasks based on their importance and urgency, focusing first on Quadrant 1 (Urgent and Important), then Quadrant 2 (Not Urgent but Important), while minimizing time spent in Quadrants 3 and 4. This approach helps individuals increase productivity, reduce stress, and align their actions with their long-term goals.</p> <p>The Covey Matrix, also known as the Time Management Matrix or Eisenhower Matrix, is a tool developed by Stephen Covey, author of "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People." It helps individuals prioritize tasks based on urgency and importance.</p>
Time	60 minutes (at least). It is an ongoing process, to be done regularly
Materials	A3 or A4 paper, pen or markers
Preparation	-
Instructions	<p><b>1. Create a Grid with Four Quadrants</b></p> <p>Draw a large square and divide it into four equal sections by drawing a vertical and a horizontal line intersecting at the center. You now have four quadrants.</p> <p><b>2. Label the Axes</b></p> <p>X-axis (Horizontal): Label it "Urgency." The left side is "Urgent" and the right side is "Not Urgent."</p> <p>Y-axis (Vertical): Label it "Importance." The top is "Important" and the bottom is "Not Important."</p>

### 3. Label the Four Quadrants

- Quadrant I (Top right): Important but not urgent
  - This quadrant includes tasks that are important for long-term success but do not need immediate action. It focuses on planning, prevention, and personal development.
- Quadrant II (Top left): Important and urgent
  - This quadrant contains tasks that require immediate attention. These are often crisis-driven or deadline-driven activities.
- Quadrant III (Bottom right): Not important but urgent
  - This quadrant contains tasks that are distractions or timewasters and do not contribute to your objectives.
- Quadrant IV (Bottom left): Not important and not urgent
  - These tasks are often interruptions or distractions that appear urgent but are not necessarily important to *your goals*.

### 4. Assign tasks to quadrants

List out your tasks or activities and categorize them based on urgency and importance. Place each task into one of the four quadrants accordingly.

### 5. Define action steps for each quadrant

- Quadrant I (Important but not urgent):
  - Schedule these tasks into your calendar. These are often related to personal growth, strategic planning, or relationship building.
- Quadrant II (Important and urgent)
  - Take immediate action on these tasks. They are critical and time sensitive.
- Quadrant III (Not important but urgent):
  - Delegate these tasks if possible. They need to be done but do not require your personal attention.
- Quadrant IV (Not important and not urgent):
  - Eliminate or minimize these activities. They do not contribute to your success and waste your time.

#### Notes

An important question that may arise regarding the variables of importance and urgency is: important and urgent *for whom*? For you, for your upline, or for your client? If, considering these three perspectives, the resulting matrices are significantly different, this is already a good indicator of the source of your stress. Therefore, beyond the previously suggested actions, it is essential to find convergence with the other stakeholders.

## TEMPLATE OF THE COVEY MATRIX


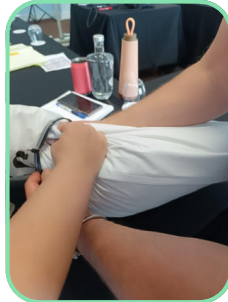
	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	<b>DO</b> PRIORITY 1	<b>DECIDE</b> PRIORITY 2
NOT IMPORTANT	<b>DELEGATE</b> PRIORITY 3	<b>DELETE</b> PRIORITY 4

Here are some questions that can help you reflect during and after the exercise.



- How much time do you typically dedicate to activities in each quadrant?
- What emotions do you associate with each quadrant?
- What would you like to change about this situation?
- What would allow you to feel less pressure?

## Activity 2: Does It Fit?

Objectives	The goal of this brief experiential activity is to help you deeply understand and visualize the process that leads people to feel overwhelmed by the quantity of activities and tasks they have. This understanding will guide you every time you schedule an appointment in your calendar or plan an activity.
Time	10 minutes for the task + 30 minutes for reflection
Materials	A small sealable bag and a big pillow
Preparation	
Instructions	<p>You have 10 minutes to place the cushion into the bag without breaking or damaging it, and then seal the bag. Even if you think it is impossible and nonsensical, I invite you to try it for 10 minutes.</p> <div data-bbox="659 1055 887 1355"></div> <div data-bbox="959 1055 1187 1355"></div> <p>It is actually impossible, isn't it?</p> <p>So what is the point of proposing an exercise that cannot be done?</p> <p>Because then, the next time you try to fit 12 hours of activity into an 8-hour workday, you will remember that it s impossible, and (hopefully) you will stop – with a smile.</p>
Notes	You can also do this exercise in pairs, helping each other



### Activity 3: Pick What Can Help You the Most!

Objectives	In this activity, we will briefly introduce some of the most well-known time management principles and tools, explained in a simple and concise manner, to give you an overview of how time management can be beneficial in your work.
Time	-
Materials	-
Preparation	-
Instructions	<p>Below, you will find a brief description of some of the most common time management tools and approaches. Please read through all of them carefully and then answer the reflection questions at the end. If something particularly stands out to you, refer to the brief bibliography in the notes for further exploration.</p> <p><b>Pareto Analysis (a.k.a., the 80/20 rule)</b> The 80/20 rule is a technique created by the Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto. It is the idea that 20% of the actions are responsible for 80% of the outcomes. The goal of Pareto analysis is to help you prioritize tasks that are most effective at solving problems.</p> <p><b>Pomodoro Technique</b> The Pomodoro Technique was created by the entrepreneur and author Francesco Cirillo. This technique uses a timer to break down your work into intervals. Each interval is known as a Pomodoro, named after the tomato-shaped timer that Cirillo created. The idea behind this concept is to install a sense of urgency and, at the same time, to make sure you take breaks!</p> <p><b>Parkinson's Law</b> British historian Cyril Northcote Parkinson became famous for the phrase "work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion." In other words, the amount of time you give yourself to complete a specific task is the amount of time it will take you to complete that task.</p>

### Eat That Frog Technique

This technique is named after a Mark Twain quote: "Eat a live frog the first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day." Start your day by doing the most onerous tasks first and getting them out of the way.

#### Notes

If you want to know more about:

-The Pareto principle <https://activecollab.com/blog/project-management/pareto-principle>

-The Pomodoro technique <https://activecollab.com/blog/culture/pomodoro-technique>

-The Parkinson's law <https://asana.com/resources/parkinsons-law>

-Eat that frog technique <https://activecollab.com/blog/growth/eat-the-frog-method>

### Questions for Reflection



- What techniques could have a positive impact on your job?
- If you had to choose only one, what would it be?
- What can you do differently tomorrow to manage your activities? (Just brainstorm)





#### Activity 4: S.O.B.E.R – Stress Interruption

Objectives	<p>Stress arises when your body perceives a threat or experiences excessive mental or emotional pressure. During stressful times, it is common to react out of habit rather than considering the situation carefully and choosing the most effective response. This habitual reaction often leads to autopilot mode, where you respond without genuine awareness of the situation. The purpose of this exercise is to interrupt stress by pausing and stepping out of autopilot before responding with mindfulness. This technique is known as S.O.B.E.R. Stress Interruption.</p>
Time	25 minutes
Materials	-
Preparation	-
Instructions	<p>To remember the steps involved, think of the acronym S.O.B.E.R., which stands for:</p> <p><b>Stop:</b> Cease whatever activity you are engaged in.</p> <p><b>Observe:</b> Notice what is happening in your body and mind.</p> <p><b>Breathe:</b> Focus on your breathing.</p> <p><b>Expand:</b> Broaden your awareness to encompass your entire body and surroundings.</p> <p><b>Respond:</b> React mindfully rather than automatically.</p> <p>These steps will become more familiar with practice, and using the S.O.B.E.R. technique during stressful moments will become second nature.</p>

- **Step 1: Stop**

We often operate on autopilot, so pause whatever you are doing. This interruption helps you break free from your usual stress response, enabling you to remain present in the moment. Whether sitting, standing, or walking, take a moment to stop where you are. Relax your posture to release tension and allow yourself to be fully present.

- **Step 2: Observe**

Shift your focus to your body and mind. Imagine yourself stepping back from the situation, observing it from a distance. Notice the sensations in your body and identify the emotions and thoughts present. Acknowledge any tension without trying to push it away. Simply observe the moment.

- **Step 3: Breathe**

Direct your attention to your breath to calm your thoughts and relax your body. With a relaxed posture, inhale gently through your nose, hold for 3-5 seconds, then exhale slowly through your mouth, repeating 5-10 times. Notice the physical sensations and focus on the sound and rhythm of your breath.

- **Step 4: Expand Awareness**

Broaden your awareness beyond your breath to encompass your entire body and surroundings. Release any tension you feel and observe any changes in sensations. Extend your understanding of your environment, noticing what is happening around you.

- **Step 5: Respond with Awareness**

Recognise that you have a choice in how you respond to stress. After observing and assessing the situation, consider the available responses and their consequences. Respond with mindfulness, even if that means allowing stress to pass naturally.

Notes	
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### Questions for Self-Reflection



→How did you find going through this exercise?

→What insights did you gain?

→In what recurrent situations could the S.O.B.E.R. technique be useful?

→What aspects of the exercise did you find most rewarding or challenging?

### Activity 5: Stress Management: Emergency Plan

Objectives	<p>In this activity, you will craft a personalised plan to tackle various forms of stress. By creating this plan, you will gain insight in four distinct stressors:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1.Time-related stressors</li><li>2.Situational stressors</li><li>3.Anticipatory stressors</li><li>4.Encounter stressors</li></ol> <p>This tool aims to pinpoint your stress triggers across the four categories. While you may not encounter identical situations repeatedly, you may notice recurring themes that evoke emotional responses.</p> <p>Understanding these triggers and having coping strategies at your disposal can enhance your stress management.</p> <p>The final objective is to have a plan to avoid being stressed and to refer to when you feel stressed.</p>
Time	Around 2 hours
Materials	The reflection questions, the matrix of the plans and the suggestions in the Appendix
Preparation	Gather all the necessary materials
Instructions	<p>Each step of this tool outlines different stressors.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1.Starting from step 1, pinpoint a scenario where you encountered each stress type by answering the questions.</li><li>2. Make an emergency plan outlining the resources you already have to cope with that kind of situation + the resources you could get access to (you can find some inspiration in Appendix B, C, D and E)</li><li>3. Repeat the process for each step</li><li>4. Summarise your plan in the quadrant in Appendix A</li></ol>

This tool aims to pinpoint your stress triggers across the four categories. While you may not encounter identical situations repeatedly, you may notice recurring themes that evoke emotional responses. Understanding these triggers and having coping strategies at your disposal can enhance your stress management.

By responding to the prompts below, you will identify coping mechanisms to combat each stressor. The objective is to complete the four sections of your Stress Management Emergency Plan (located in Appendix A), with each quadrant corresponding to a specific stressor.

Notes

You do not need to fulfill all four quadrants. You can start with the most frequent stressor or the one that has the most significant impact on you.



### Step 1: Time-Related Stress



Time stress arises from the feeling of having insufficient time to complete tasks. It is often experienced in work environments due to project deadlines and client demands. For instance, you might be preparing for an upcoming exam or putting in extra hours to meet work deadlines.

Reflect on a recent instance of time-related stress. Briefly outline the scenario below:

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What did it feel like?

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What other experiences trigger this feeling in you?

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How did you cope?

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How effective was this behaviour in reducing stress?

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## Time-Related Stress: My Stress Management Emergency Plan

What skills will you use to cope when this type of stress occurs again? (see Appendix B for suggested ways to cope with time stress).

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Now that you have identified your time stress coping skills, write them in the corresponding quadrant in Appendix A.

## Step 2: Anticipatory Stress



Anticipatory stress emerges from anticipating upcoming events. An example could be feeling anxious about an upcoming presentation scheduled for next week.

Managing pre-event stress often involves addressing apprehensive thoughts regarding the impending event and/or adequately preparing for it.

When do you typically encounter pre-event stress?

Reflect on a recent instance of anticipatory stress. Briefly outline the scenario below:

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What did it feel like?

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What other experiences trigger this feeling in you?

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How did you cope?

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How effective was this behaviour in reducing stress?

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## Anticipatory Stress: My Stress Management Emergency Plan

What skills will you use to cope when this type of stress occurs again? (see Appendix C for suggested ways to cope with time stress).

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Now that you have identified your time stress coping skills, write them in the corresponding quadrant in Appendix A.

### Step 3: Situational Stress



Situational stress arises when confronted with situations that evoke feelings of powerlessness or lack of control. Unlike other stressors, this one tends to catch you off guard. The unexpected nature of situational stress underscores the importance of devising strategies to maintain composure and resilience in challenging circumstances. For instance, you might feel stressed after being unexpectedly laid off.

Reflect on a recent instance of situational stress. Briefly outline the scenario below:

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What did it feel like?

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What other experiences trigger this feeling in you?

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How did you cope?

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How effective was this behaviour in reducing stress?

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## Situational Stress: My Stress Management Emergency Plan

What skills will you use to cope when this type of stress occurs again? (see Appendix D for suggested ways to cope with time stress).

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Now that you have identified your time stress coping skills, write them in the corresponding quadrant in Appendix A.

#### Step 4: Relational Stress



Relational stress stems from interactions with others, such as dealing with a difficult client or coping with an anxious manager. It can also include adjusting to a new supervisor's leadership style at work or navigating a social gathering where you are unfamiliar with most attendees.

This stress may arise when there is excessive interaction without sufficient downtime. It can be challenging to anticipate such encounters, like encountering an irate stranger in traffic, a friend in an unexpectedly bad mood, or an unyielding customer service representative. Effectively managing encounter stress can help maintain healthy relationships and prevent burnout.

Reflect on a recent instance of encounter stress. Briefly outline the scenario below:

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What did it feel like?

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What other experiences trigger this feeling in you?

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How did you cope?

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How effective was this behaviour in reducing stress?

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## Relational Stress: My Stress Management Emergency Plan

What skills will you use to cope when this type of stress occurs again? (see Appendix E for suggested ways to cope with time stress).

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Now that you have identified your time stress coping skills, write them in the corresponding quadrant in Appendix A.

## Appendix A: My Stress Management Emergency Plan

Time stress

Anticipatory stress

Situational stress

Relational stress

## Appendix B: Strategies for Managing Time-Related Stress

- Avoid the to-do lists in different notebooks or mobile notes. Reserve one place to note what you have to do along with the estimated time required for each task. As soon as possible, integrate them into your calendar to schedule your project effectively over time.
- Break down larger projects into smaller, manageable tasks. Sometimes, tasks appear overwhelming when viewed as a whole but become more manageable when divided into smaller segments.
- Capitalize on your peak productivity hours. Recognise your body's natural rhythms and work during periods when you feel most energised.
- Incorporate breaks into your schedule. Working while fatigued can exacerbate stress. Plan regular breaks to prevent feelings of overwhelm.
- Practise assertiveness. Learn to say no when you are overwhelmed with commitments. Being assertive about your boundaries can alleviate chronic time-related stress.

## Appendix C: Techniques for Addressing Anticipatory Stress

- Develop a contingency plan. Consider various potential outcomes and devise plans for each scenario. This proactive approach can mitigate anxiety about uncertainties and reduce the risk of failure.
- Cultivate positive thinking. Our mindset can significantly impact how events unfold. Practicing optimism can alleviate anticipatory stress and potentially influence outcomes positively.
- Prepare adequately. Taking steps to prepare in advance can bolster your confidence in handling anticipated events.
- Engage in mindfulness practices. Activities like meditation can help you remain grounded in the present moment. By cultivating mindfulness, you use less energy attempting to control future events.

## Appendix D: Techniques for Managing Situational Stress

- Acquire conflict resolution skills. Learning techniques like non-violent communication and active listening enables you to navigate confrontational situations while empathetically understanding others' perspectives.
- Recognize your physical stress indicators. Your body provides cues when you feel stressed, such as increased heart rate, shallow breathing, or sweating. Identifying these signs empowers you to take timely action. Utilise relaxation methods like deep breathing to counteract these symptoms and induce a sense of calm.
- Engage in grounding exercises. Grounding techniques can help you regain composure during stressful moments. Examples include focusing on your surroundings by identifying objects, noting colours, or reading text backwards. Explore various grounding exercises or create your own to find out what works best.

## Appendix E: Strategies for Addressing Relational Stress

- Establish boundaries. Recognising your socialisation limits allows you to allocate time for self-care and rejuvenation.
- Practise effective communication. Expressing your emotions facilitates boundary-setting and fosters genuine connections with others.
- Incorporate regular breaks. If you feel overwhelmed by social interactions, such as during a series of meetings, take breaks to decompress. Consider going for a walk or practising deep breathing to recharge during intervals.

# Section 4:

# Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques



## Introduction & Theoretical Background



Educators, including adult educators across various sectors, are subject to high stress levels due to the demanding nature of their profession. While specific statistics regarding stress levels among adult educators or those in the third sector may vary and may not be as readily available or widely studied, research on teachers in primary and secondary education indicates that up to 61% report experiencing work-related stress (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). The lack of specific statistics does not diminish the validity of acknowledging adult educators' stressors in their professional roles. Short, frequent relaxation exercises have significantly improved mental wellbeing, particularly for educators and professionals under stress. Research supports that even brief interventions, such as deep breathing, mindfulness meditation, and visualisation, can reduce cortisol levels, alleviate anxiety, and enhance mood. For instance, a study published in the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* found that short relaxation exercises can lower perceived stress and increase positive affect (Bostock et al., 2019).

Another study in *Applied Ergonomics* demonstrated that micro-breaks, including brief relaxation activities, can reduce fatigue and improve cognitive function (Bennett et al., 2018). These findings underscore the importance of incorporating short, effective relaxation practices into daily routines to promote mental health and productivity.

For the purpose of this section, we will approach the topic of relaxation techniques based on the five senses. By incorporating sensory-based relaxation techniques, we can provide a comprehensive approach that engages multiple sensory modalities, catering to different learning styles and preferences. This approach also acknowledges the interconnectedness of mind and body, recognising that sensory experiences can profoundly impact mental wellbeing.

### Visual Relaxation Techniques

Research indicates that colouring can lower anxiety and improve mindfulness. Colouring mandalas, in particular, have been found to reduce stress and induce a meditative state. Colouring engages the visual and motor cortex, providing a creative and soothing activity that promotes focus and relaxation.

**Tips:** Keep a small colouring book and coloured pencils at your desk. Spend a few minutes colouring a section of a simple pattern or mandala. It allows you to engage the visual and motor senses, providing a creative outlet and reducing anxiety.

### **Auditory Relaxation Techniques**

Numerous studies have shown that listening to music can reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and decrease cortisol levels. Music therapy is an established method for improving mental health; it addresses emotional, cognitive, and social needs and leverages the brain's response to rhythmic and harmonic patterns.

Tips: Take your time to prepare a relaxing music playlist according to your preferences, or simply play a favourite relaxing song or instrumental music using headphones and focus on the rhythm, melody, and instruments. Music can quickly alter mood and reduce stress, providing a mental break from work.

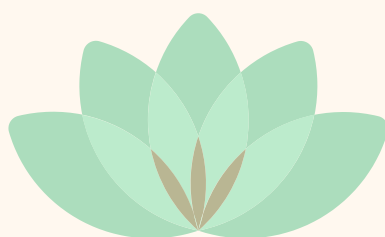
Alternatively, listen to recordings of natural sounds, such as rain, ocean waves, or birds chirping. These sounds can create a calming environment and help you feel more relaxed and connected to nature.

### **Tactile Relaxation Techniques**

Using stress balls or fidget toys can reduce stress and anxiety by providing a physical outlet for nervous energy and improving focus. These tools engage fine motor skills and provide sensory feedback, which can be calming and help improve concentration.

Furthermore, massage has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety. It can lower cortisol levels and increase oxytocin, promoting relaxation and a sense of wellbeing; massage therapy uses touch to manipulate muscles and tissues, which can relieve physical tension and enhance relaxation.

Tips: Keep a stress ball or fidget toy on your desk. Spend a few minutes squeezing or fidgeting it, it helps release tension and provides a physical outlet for stress.





### **Olfactory Relaxation Techniques**

Aromatherapy has been found to reduce stress and improve mood. Essential oils like lavender have been particularly effective in promoting relaxation and reducing anxiety, involves using natural plant extracts to improve physical and emotional health through the olfactory system. Furthermore, the use of scented lotions combines the benefits of aromatherapy with the relaxing effects of tactile sensation, promoting overall relaxation and stress reduction.

Tips: Keep a small bottle of essential oil on your desk, like lavender, peppermint, or eucalyptus. Take a few deep breaths of the scent to promote relaxation and reduce stress. Alternatively, apply a small amount of scented lotion to your hands and massage them gently, combining the soothing effects of touch with the calming influence of a pleasant scent.

### **Gustatory Relaxation Techniques**

Mindful eating practices have been shown to reduce stress and improve mindfulness. Focusing on the sensory experience of eating can enhance relaxation and promote a healthy relationship with food. It encourages full awareness of the eating process, engaging all senses and promoting a mindful, present-focused experience. Furthermore, drinking herbal teas like chamomile or peppermint has been found to reduce stress and promote relaxation. These herbs contain compounds that have calming effects on the nervous system. It leverages the therapeutic properties of plants, providing a simple and natural way to enhance relaxation and wellbeing.

Tips: Eat a small piece of dark chocolate, a slice of fruit, or a few nuts. Focus on the texture, taste, and sensation as you slowly chew and savor it, this practice engages the senses and encourages mindfulness, helping to ground you in the present moment.

### **Kinesthetic Relaxation Techniques**

Scientific evidence suggests that these techniques can elicit physiological responses that promote relaxation. For example, deep breathing exercises stimulate the vagus nerve, leading to a decrease in heart rate and blood pressure and an increase in parasympathetic activity, which induces a state of calmness and relaxation. Similarly, progressive muscle relaxation involves systematically tensing and relaxing muscle groups, which can help reduce muscle tension and alleviate physical symptoms of stress. Furthermore, stretching exercises have been shown to increase blood flow to muscles, improve flexibility, and reduce muscle stiffness, all of which contribute to feelings of relaxation and wellbeing.

Tips: Below, we'll introduce some Kinesthetic Relaxation Techniques, but remember, there's a vast array of options available online. If these techniques don't resonate with you, feel free to explore and discover others that better suit your preferences or any physical limitations you may have. It's essential to ensure that any physical activity aligns with your health status, so don't hesitate to consult your doctor if necessary.



## Description of Activities and Exercises

### Activity 1: Deep Breathing Exercise

Objective	This activity aims to support you by providing a structured approach to relaxation during work breaks, helping to reduce stress and promote a sense of calm.
Time	5 minutes
Materials	You can listen to the audio to support you in this activity. Available in English <a href="#">here</a>
Preparation	-
Instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Find a comfortable position: Sit in your chair with your feet flat on the floor and your hands resting on your lap. You can also stand or lie down if you prefer.</li><li>• Close your eyes: If it's comfortable for you, gently close your eyes. If not, you can keep them open with a soft gaze.</li></ul> <p><b>Check-in:</b> As you breathe, notice any sensations in your body, such as the rise and fall of your chest or the feeling of air moving in and out of your nostrils. If your mind starts to wander, gently bring your attention back to your breath.</p> <p><b>Counting breaths:</b> Start by inhaling slowly and deeply through your nose, counting to 4 as you fill your lungs with air. Hold your breath for a count of 2, feeling the air held inside you, bringing a sense of calm and presence. Exhale slowly and steadily through your mouth, counting to 6 as you release the air from your lungs. Pause briefly at the bottom of your exhale before beginning the next cycle.</p> <p><b>Repeat:</b> Continue this deep breathing pattern for several breaths, focusing on the sensation of each inhalation and exhalation.</p> <p><b>Open your eyes:</b> When you're ready, slowly open your eyes and take a moment to reorient yourself to your surroundings.</p>

## Activity 2: Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

Objective	This activity aims to support you reducing stress and tension during work breaks. Repeat as often as needed to promote relaxation and mental wellbeing throughout the day.
Time	5 minutes
Materials	You can listen to the audio to support you in this activity. Available in English <a href="#">here</a>
Preparation	-
Instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Find a quiet area where you can sit comfortably without interruptions.</li><li>• Sit in a comfortable chair with your feet flat on the floor and your hands resting on your lap.</li><li>• Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths, inhaling slowly through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. Focus on the sensation of your breath filling your lungs and then leaving your body.</li><li>• Start by tensing the muscles in your feet. Tense the muscles in your feet by curling your toes. Hold for 5 seconds..., then release the tension completely and let your feet relax.</li><li>• Next, tense your calf muscles by pointing your toes up. Hold for 5 seconds..., then release and let your calves relax.</li><li>• Continue this pattern, moving up through your body:</li><li>• Tense your thighs by squeezing them together... Relax...</li><li>• Tense your hip muscles by squeezing your glutes... Relax...</li><li>• Tense your belly muscles by pulling your belly button towards your spine... Relax...</li><li>• Clench your fists and tighten your forearm muscles... Relax...</li><li>• Raise your shoulders up towards your ears and hold... Relax...</li><li>• Tense your neck muscles by gently pulling your chin down towards your chest... Relax...</li><li>• Tighten your facial muscles by scrunching up your face... Relax...</li></ul>

- Finally, take a deep breath and tense your entire body, squeezing all your muscles tightly... Relax...
- Now, release all the tension at once and let your entire body relax.
- Focus on the feeling of relaxation spreading throughout your body, from your head down to your toes.
- Take a few moments to enjoy this sensation of deep relaxation.
- When you're ready, slowly open your eyes and return to your surroundings.



### Activity 3: Voice Relaxation

Objective	This activity aims to connect with your voice, releasing any tension and acknowledging your voice as a vital tool used everyday.
Time	5 minutes
Materials	You can listen to the audio to support you in this activity. Available in English <a href="#">here</a> .
Preparation	Find a quiet place where you are not disturbed  Take a few deep breaths to settle into the present
Instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Close your eyes and take a deep breath in... then gently exhale. Let your body relax, softening your shoulders, your face, your jaw. Allow yourself to settle into the present moment.</li><li>• Now, bring your attention to your throat. As you inhale deeply, feel the air passing through your throat, soft and smooth.</li><li>• Exhale, letting go of any tension you may be holding here. Your throat is the home of your voice. Your throat is the tool you use everyday to guide and connect.</li><li>• With each breath, feel your throat relax. Imagine warmth and ease spreading through this area. Notice the power in this space – your voice. Calm and strong, always ready to share.</li><li>• Breath in, feeling the energy in your throat, and as you breath out, imagine your voice flowing effortlessly – steady, clear and kind.</li><li>• Feel the vibration of your voice here, even in silence. A gentle hum, a connection to your breath. Your voice doesn't need to be loud to be powerful – it simply needs to come from a place of calm.</li><li>• Take another deep breath in, filling your lungs, and as you exhale, feel gratitude for your voice. It is your tool for teaching, for inspiring, for comforting.</li><li>• Take one last breath in... and slowly exhale. Your throat is open. Your voice is strong, calm and ready.</li><li>• When you are ready, you can open your eyes.</li></ul>

#### Activity 4: Five-Minute Stretching Routine

Objective	This activity aims to experience both mental relaxation and physical benefits, helping to improve overall wellbeing, by incorporating this quick stretching routine into your working breaks.
Time	5 minutes (or longer if preferred)
Materials	-
Preparation	Before beginning any exercise program, please consult your doctor/physician. If you experience any pain or difficulty with these exercises, stop and consult your healthcare provider. Consult with your healthcare professional to design an appropriate exercise prescription. The creators, producers, and distributors of this exercise program disclaim any liability or loss in connection with the exercises and advice herein.
Instructions	<p><i>Neck Stretch:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sit or stand tall with your shoulders relaxed. Slowly tilt your head to one side, bringing your ear towards your shoulder until you feel a gentle stretch along the side of your neck. Hold the stretch for 15-30 seconds, then switch sides. Repeat 1-2 times on each side.</li></ul> <p><i>Shoulder Stretch:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reach one arm across your body at shoulder height. Use your opposite hand to gently press the arm towards your chest until you feel a stretch in your shoulder. Hold the stretch for 15-30 seconds, then switch arms. Repeat 1-2 times on each side.</li></ul> <p><i>Upper Back Stretch:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Clasp your hands together in front of you and round your back, reaching your arms forward as you tuck your chin towards your chest. Feel the stretch between your shoulder blades and along your upper back. Hold the stretch for 15-30 seconds while breathing deeply. Release and repeat 1-2 times.</li></ul>



#### *Upper Back Stretch:*

- Clasp your hands together in front of you and round your back, reaching your arms forward as you tuck your chin towards your chest. Feel the stretch between your shoulder blades and along your upper back. Hold the stretch for 15–30 seconds while breathing deeply. Release and repeat 1–2 times.

#### *Hamstring Stretch:*

- Sit on the edge of a chair with one leg extended straight out in front of you and the other foot flat on the floor. Keeping your back straight, hinge forward at your hips until you feel a stretch in the back of your thigh. Hold the stretch for 15–30 seconds, then switch legs. Repeat 1–2 times on each side.

#### *Calf Stretch:*

- Stand facing a wall with your hands against the wall at shoulder height. Step one foot back and press your heel into the ground, keeping your leg straight. Lean forward slightly until you feel a stretch in your calf. Hold the stretch for 15–30 seconds, then switch legs. Repeat 1–2 times on each side.

#### *Benefits:*

- **Physical Benefits:** Stretching increases blood flow to the muscles, improves flexibility, and helps prevent muscle stiffness and tension. It can also reduce the risk of injury during physical activity and promote better posture and range of motion.

**Mental benefits:** Performing a stretching routine can help release tension stored in the muscles, leading to a sense of relaxation and reduced stress. Focusing on deep breathing during stretches can also help calm the mind and improve mindfulness. Additionally, taking a short break to stretch can provide a mental reset, increasing focus and productivity.



### Activity 5: Five-Minute Circuit Workout

Objective	This quick circuit workout not only helps to reduce stress and promote mental wellbeing by increasing endorphin levels but also provides physical benefits such as improved strength, endurance, and cardiovascular health. It can be done anywhere with minimal space and equipment, making it ideal for a short break during the workday.
Time	5 minutes (or longer if preferred)
Materials	-
Preparation	Before beginning any exercise program, please consult your doctor/physician. If you experience any pain or difficulty with these exercises, stop and consult your healthcare provider. Consult with your healthcare professional to design an appropriate exercise prescription. The creators, producers, and distributors of this exercise program disclaim any liability or loss in connection with the exercises and advice herein.
Instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Perform each exercise for 1 minute, aiming for as many repetitions as possible while maintaining proper form.</li><li>• Take a 15-30 second rest between each exercise to catch your breath and transition to the next one.</li><li>• Repeat the circuit if you'd like</li></ul> <p>Here's a sample circuit:</p> <p>Squats: Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, lower your body by bending your knees and pushing your hips back, then return to standing.</p> <p>Push-ups: Start in a plank position with your hands shoulder-width apart, lower your body until your chest nearly touches the ground, then push back up to the starting position.</p> <p>Lunges: Step forward with one leg and lower your body until both knees are bent at a 90-degree angle, then return to standing and repeat on the other side.</p>



**Tricep Dips:** Sit on the edge of a sturdy chair or desk, place your hands behind you with fingers pointing towards your body, lift your hips off the chair, bend your elbows to lower your body towards the ground, then push back up.

**Plank:** Get into a plank position with your forearms on the ground, elbows directly beneath your shoulders, and your body in a straight line from head to heels, hold this position for as long as you can while maintaining proper form.



**Reflect on Your Experience:** How did you feel physically and mentally before and after completing the mindfulness and relaxation exercises? Describe any changes in your mood, stress levels, or physical tension.

**Identify Effective Techniques:** Which of the mindfulness and relaxation techniques did you find most effective in helping you relax and improve your mental wellbeing? Why do you think this particular technique worked well for you? Are there any techniques you found less effective?

**Application and Integration:** How can you integrate these mindfulness and relaxation techniques into your daily routine or work breaks? Provide specific examples of when and how you plan to use these exercises to manage stress and enhance your overall wellbeing.

# Further Reading



# Further Reading

## Books

Nonis, S., & Sager, J. K. (2003). Coping with Stress: The Role of Time Management Behaviors. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95(3), 610–622.

Peeters, M. C., Montgomery, A. J., Bakker, A. B., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2005). Balancing Work and Home: How Job and Home Demands Are Related to Burnout. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 12(1), 43–61.

PositivePsychology.com – 17 Stress & Burnout Prevention Exercises.

## Other Recourses

[https://practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/PT-The-Professional-Wellbeing-Self-assessment-Tool\\_05.24FINAL.pdf](https://practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/PT-The-Professional-Wellbeing-Self-assessment-Tool_05.24FINAL.pdf).

<https://www.hrh.ca/2022/01/27/the-benefits-of-self-awareness/>.

<https://www.brightside.com/blog/how-self-awareness-reduces-stress/>.



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