

YES! THIS PUBLICATION IS FREE **TAKE ME HOME!**

ISSUE 2 - MAY 2024



Open Heart

STORIES TO EDUCATE, INSPIRE AND EMPOWER YOU TO LIVE YOUR BEST LIFE.

**PRIORITISING
MENTAL HEALTH**

HOW TO ACHIEVE
**WORK LIFE
BALANCE**

What Is Your
Relationship Style?

UNDERSTANDING YOUR
TEENAGER

Tips to Harnessing Your
Emotional Intelligence

CHECK OUT THIS ISSUE'S
MINDFUL CROSSWORD

PLUS MORE!

- **SPECIAL FEATURE** -

Accepting Autism

Emily shares her personal story on her family's diagnosis

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MINDFUL MASTERING

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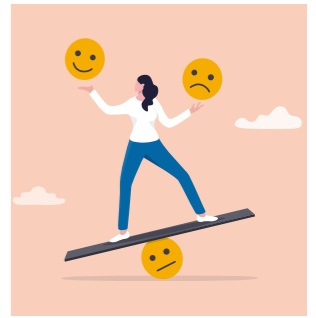
Welcome!

Open Heart Magazine is a FREE publication as we believe all people should have access to the support and stories that resonate and validate them to ensure they can live their best life.

Our aim is to cultivate a nurturing environment where hearts are encouraged to open, stories find a voice, vulnerability is embraced, and connections thrive.

Through these narratives we hope to ignite inspiration and empowerment, fostering courage and resilience in our readers as they navigate life's journey, armed with an open heart and a toolbox of shared experiences to draw from.

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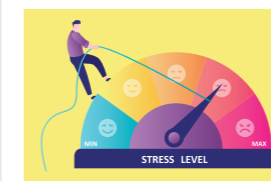
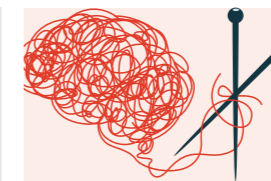
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WARNING: This magazine discusses topics that may be triggering for some readers. Reader discretion is advised. If you are struggling, please consider seeking support from a mental health professional.

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Accepting Autism:

Shifting The Narrative From Awareness To Acceptance

"Every year, as April draws closer, there is a calling to reflect on Autism Awareness Month with curiosity and an open mind. In recent years, myself and many members of the autistic community, have been reflecting and asking if awareness is enough."

Living with Autism:
'Emily' shares hers and her son's journey to diagnosis.

WRITTEN BY 'EMILY'

The author has chosen to use a different name to protect her privacy.

When we are aware of something, we have knowledge and perception of a fact. During Autism awareness month, the aim is for the wider community to have knowledge that autistic people exist and to be aware of our experiences.

However, acceptance would mean that the varied and nuanced lived experience, strengths, needs and lives of autistic people are accepted. If there is widespread acceptance of being different and diverse, this can then lead to differences and needs being understood, supported, and celebrated in all spaces and places in our communities.

Moving towards a renamed Autism 'Acceptance' Month would mean the wider community would have better access to information about the complex experience that being autistic is. It means moving away from long held stereotypes and stigma that have surrounded autism for years, and moving towards a broader understanding of what autism looks like in every-day life.

Historically, autism has been associated with deficits as it has been rooted in a medical model. Some of these deficits are in the areas of social, emotional, and cognitive development and skills. The neurodiversity movement and social model of disability would say autism is based in difference.

Autistic people socialise, feel, think, move, communicate, and experience the world differently. Our development trajectory can be different because we are different. Being different is not always easy in a world that promotes same-ness. Autism can bring with it, wonderful strengths, alongside significant challenges that require support.

My Story

My lived experience is what is driving me to inspire acceptance and broaden the general perspective of autism on the community. My story is not representative of all autistic experiences but is a thread in the tapestry and rich diversity of the autistic community.

I am a late-diagnosed woman who discovered she was autistic at the age of 42. I am a teacher, mother, wife, friend and have studied at university, travelled the world, and lived in different countries and cities. I am raising my autistic son with my neurodivergent husband. Our life is rich and full and never boring!

Growing up in the early 80's, autism in females was not widely understood nor researched. As such, I am a part of the 'missed generations'. Since my childhood, research and the understanding of different profiles of autism are continuing to evolve. Now, many of us that were 'missed', are being identified and receiving

a medical diagnosis. This is helping us to have greater self-understanding, have greater self-compassion and the knowledge to be able to design lives that are supportive for our brains.

I have always felt inherently different. I have always been so curious and never really understood why. I knew I was sensitive and emotional and as a result, I ended up identifying as an introverted empath and highly sensitive person. I am all these things, and now know, I am also autistic.

I am not what most people think of when they hear the word "Autistic." I am generally a quiet and reserved person. I take time to open up to people. I am a deep thinker and I feel things very intensely.

I am in fact hyper-empathetic and sometimes, I find regulating my emotions difficult. I struggle with small talk. I love deep conversations about people and the complexity of being human, which is my life-long special interest. I love learning about history, sociology, psychology, music, and the arts. I am passionate about social justice and human rights. I adore nature and animals are my soul mates. Nature is my escape and solace from a busy, loud, and confusing world that doesn't suit how my brain functions best. Slow, steady, and quiet is what I need.

"Autistic people socialise, feel, think, move, communicate, and experience the world differently. Our development trajectory can be different because we are different. Being different is not always easy in a world that promotes same-ness."



I have a very internalised profile of autism, which is often referred to as 'high masking.' My traits and characteristics mainly affect myself, and I intuitively learnt to minimise my autistic traits to 'fit in'. This was an unconscious process that my brain developed to help me to feel safer in the world. This resulted in me often appearing shy, socially awkward, daydreamy, aloof and difficult for many people to 'figure out'. As I have internalised a lot of my challenges, I am often living in a hidden state of feeling overwhelmed.

My brain is very busy, always trying to process lots of information from my surroundings, all at once. This is due to my differences in sensory processing and how my brain filters information from noise, visual input, textures, and smells.

There are 'traffic jams' when my brain is processing, which leads to feeling overwhelmed and exhausted, especially in busy environments such as shopping centres. I have learnt to limit my time spent in these environments and actively schedule time to recover afterwards to restore my nervous system. I try to do this either in nature, or at home as silence and solitude seem to help me to feel more centred and balanced.

"In changing the narrative of awareness to acceptance, we are creating a more inclusive world, where people who are different and diverse feel like they belong, which at the end of the day, is what we all want and need as humans."

My nervous system is sensitive and perceives many things as threats, which means my survival brain is often activated. Loud unexpected noises will make me jump and consequently, I will feel anxious for some time after. Not being prepared or aware of upcoming changes makes me feel unsafe. Predictability, structure, and routine ensure my nervous system feels safer and as a result, I have rituals and routines that can provide this sense of safety for me.

I often use physical strategies or 'stimming' (repetitive self-regulatory movements). These movements help move the intense energy and feelings I am experiencing, throughout the Rest of my body. Some of the strategies I use include repeatedly cracking my knuckles, biting the inside of my mouth, pursing my lips and wiggling my toes in my shoes.

Amidst all of this, I also take pride in acknowledging my numerous strengths. One of these strengths lies in my passion for words and stories. This passion started very early in my life and resulted in me being able to read before I was of school age. Throughout my life, writing stories has enabled me to escape into my own safe and wonderful inner-world, where my rich imagination is never ending. I have always been able to better express my feelings in written form. I have a love for poetry and my connection to music runs deep; listening to emotional and deep song lyrics is just magical to me.

Socially, I prefer to catch up with friends in small groups or one-on-one. If I feel safe with you, I will be a very loyal friend.

Large group settings at dinners or parties have always been a social and sensory challenge for me. In these environments, I find it hard to speak up or engage in conversations, I often feel that I have nothing worthwhile to contribute. Social anxiety has always been very evident and as a result these situations are difficult for me. At times, I have become so overwhelmed by it, that I have become situationally mute.

My executive functioning is different to most people. I am a bit of a "bottom up" thinker. I notice all the details, find patterns, and put these together to create bigger ideas or to understand concepts. I can become overloaded if I have too many decisions to make or have to organise lots of things at once. This sense of overload often results in a feeling of paralysis. To explain, it can feel like my mind is an office, full of things to do, but I only have one administrator when I could use six!

My Son's Story

My son has a different profile of Autism to me. His expression is more outward and affects others as well as himself. He has more obvious stimming, outward meltdowns and complex support needs. He was diagnosed before I was, and that journey resulted in my own diagnosis, which I am forever grateful for.

We are both autistic and on our own journeys as we navigate the world together, side-by-side. We are always learning and striving to understand our wonderful, yet complicated, brains. Together we are discovering what our brains need to be able to thrive and what they need less of.

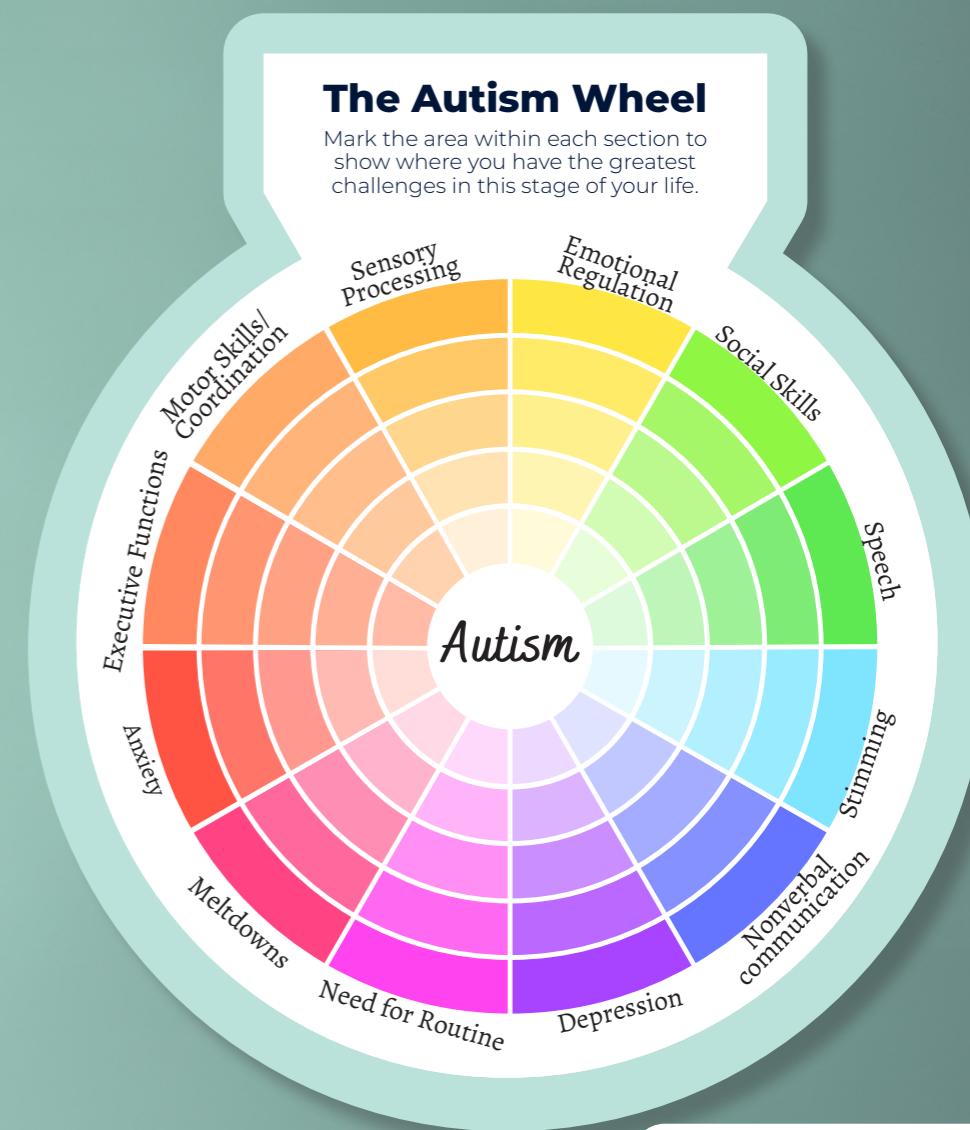
Our days, weeks and months are not always easy. Living in this modern world where the pace of life is so fast, loud, and busy, can be challenging for autistic people. Discrimination and prejudice do still exist, and we don't always feel safe and supported in the various institutions, places and spaces in our communities. Both my son and I have so much to offer the world with our big hearts and creative minds. We are wonderfully complex and worthy autistic people.

So when it comes to Autism Awareness Month, please reflect on 'acceptance' when it comes to autism and what this means for autistic people. When you accept us for all we are, support us and treat us with kindness and respect, you are helping to shift the narrative about autism.

In doing this, we are creating a more inclusive world where people who are different and diverse feel like they belong, which at the end of the day, is what we all want and need as humans. To know that we belong as our true and authentic selves.

The wheel below has many of the areas where traits and characteristics of autism present. We are all in different places in the sections of the wheel at different times.

Let's remember to be kind and accepting of each other and of our differences.



Tips for supporting autistic people who have disclosed their diagnosis with you:

1. Believe them and thank them for sharing with you.
2. Confirm their language preferences (for example 'I am autistic', 'I have autism.')
3. Listen to autistic voices and stories in your community.
4. Read about neurodiversity and neuro-affirming practices.
5. Learn about the social model of disability.
6. Read about the double empathy problem. Autistic people have had to try and fit into society for decades. We ask for people to try and understand us and our ways and meet us halfway.
7. Understand that Autism is a spectrum, not linear like most people think. Autistic people have fluctuating capacities. Depending on our development, environment, relational safety, life demands, stress and other co-occurring diagnoses, we will have more or less capacity in many of these areas at different times and stages of our lives. Which is illustrated by using this colour wheel above.



For information and support, check out some of these online services and resources.

Alternatively you can speak with a mental health professional.

WEBSITES

- www.aspect.org.au
- www.amaze.org.au
- www.thespectrum.org.au

**WEAVING WELLNESS
INTO OUR LIVES,
OUR COMMUNITY
AND OUR LOVED ONES:**



Embracing Mental Health and Overcoming Stigma

BY SHAWN MATTHEWS

As a Mental Health Practitioner I have worked with hundreds of individuals and couples around regaining their own mental health in their lives. Throughout this work (as well as my own personal experiences), it is obvious that obtaining and retaining mental health can be easier said than done, but the impacts of good mental health can be life-changing.

Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables us to cope with the stresses of life, realise our abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to our community. Having good mental health can empower us to live our best life.

Mental health and the maintenance of it, is also one of the reasons I was inspired to create this magazine. Mental health has unlimited intrinsic and instrumental value to our day-to-day lives and is integral to our well-being.

At any one time, a diverse set of individuals, family, community and structural factors may combine to protect or undermine our own mental health. Although most people are resilient, people who are exposed to adverse circumstances in our community – including poverty, violence, disability and inequality – are at higher risk of developing a mental health condition.

Many mental health conditions can be effectively treated at relatively low cost, yet health systems remain significantly under-resourced and treatment gaps are wide all over the world. Mental health care is often poor in quality when delivered. People with mental health conditions often also experience stigma, discrimination and human rights violations.¹

I started studying Mental Health/Psychotherapy and Social Sciences over 13 years ago wanting to make a difference in the world, I was so intrigued by human behaviour and what makes us uniquely us. The deeper I investigated the practices of mental health, the more I realised, it is not linear. Building relationships is something I take pride in as it gives me a purpose to facilitate and connect with people.

There are so many factors that make us human, for example our physical body, our mind, our spirit, our personality, our connections with others, our experiences, genetics, beliefs and values and the goals we are working towards. So why is it that there is a stigma around Mental Health and its conditions that people may face?

Here are some reasons that stigma around mental health persist in society today:

1. Misunderstanding and Lack of Education:

There are numerous misconceptions and fears surrounding the discussion of mental health and mental health conditions. For those who are unfamiliar with this term, society often refers to mental health conditions as mental illnesses.

2. Cultural and Social Norms:

Cultural beliefs often influence the society's attitude towards mental health and the illness associated with it. Some may believe that it is a sign of weakness or failing, which can cause a lot of shame and misunderstanding for people that are struggling with a mental health condition.

3. Fear and Discrimination:

Unfortunately, there is still a stigma in society that stems from misunderstanding, and misinformation around mental illnesses. This in turn, creates fear and prejudice towards people living with



There are so many factors that make us human; our physical body, our mind, our spirit, our personality, our connections with others, our experiences, genetics, beliefs and values and the goals we are working towards. So why is it that there is a stigma around Mental Health and its conditions that people may face?

mental health conditions. This stigma works off the assumption that people with mental health conditions can be dangerous, unpredictable, or incapable of contributing to society. In rare cases, this can be true, however for the most part, people living with a mental illness, are not any of these things. By society continuing to harbour this belief and fear, it only works towards fueling more discrimination and exclusion, which in turn, can cause more harm than good.

4. Media Portrayal:

Sometimes, the way the media portrays mental illness can sometimes censor or inaccurately depict disorders, reinforcing negative stereotypes. This can lead to increased fear and misunderstanding among the public.

5. Lack of Visibility and Advocacy:

The visibility of mental health, unlike physical health, has often been overlooked, leading to more stigma and resistance surrounding an open dialogue. In order to take steps to make positive impacts on the future of mental health for all of us, we need to foster healing as well as offering support and acceptance of each other. It's crucial to normalise discussions about mental health conditions and gain a deeper understanding of their impact on ourselves, our families, and our communities.

6. Self – Stigma:

Many individuals can internalise their mental health challenges, fearing stigma, shame, and guilt, which can result in low self-esteem and . This reluctance often deters them from seeking professional help and support when needed.

7. Structural Stigma in Systems:

Unfortunately, structural stigma extends its roots deep into healthcare systems, employment policies, and legal frameworks. This stigma can lead to limited access to care, reduced employment opportunities and restricted legal rights for individuals living with a mental health condition.

8. Gender and Cultural Factors:

Gender and cultural factors also effect mental health stigma. This leads to unique experiences of discrimination and marginalisation for certain groups, such as LGBTQ+ community, racial and ethnic minorities, as well as women.

9. Fear of Disclosure and Labelling:

People with mental health conditions can struggle with a fear of being judged and labelled, which in turn, prevents them from speaking up and seeking help. The fear of negative consequences associated

with seeking help, such as strained or loss of relationships, job loss, and the stigma surrounding mental health conditions, looms large for many.

In my role as a Mental Health Practitioner, I've witnessed firsthand how individuals, including clients and friends, often feel unheard and misunderstood by family and society, leading to a loss of nurturing and support. This lack of understanding can exacerbate conditions like depression and anxiety. My primary offering, even in the absence of anything else, is acceptance, empathy, and fostering open conversations about mental health.

The broader community and society at large also possess the capacity for understanding and empathy around mental health. However, certain groups and cultures may resist acknowledging mental health issues, this can be a result of denial or due to entrenched belief systems. Regardless of the terminology used, the statistics remain clear: one in four individuals will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime¹.

The global impact of conditions such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse is profound. However, there is hope for those affected by these conditions. If you, or someone you care about, are facing challenges in life, are struggling to navigating life changes, or experiencing heightened emotions or negative thoughts, remember that you are not alone.

There are many organisations who have a vast array of services and resources available, for a range of mental health conditions. We have listed just a few of these below for your reference. Feel free to reach out to a mental health professional, such as myself as well.

“Connection is Energy that is created between people when they feel heard, seen and valued” Brene Brown

Together, through education, advocacy and empathy we can work towards breaking down the barriers of stigma and creating a more supportive and understanding for everyone.

References

1. (World Health Organisation, 2024)



If you need parenting support, check out some of these online services and resources. Alternatively you can speak with a mental health professional.

WEBSITES

- dvconnect.org
- beyondblue.org.au
- relationships.org.au

Building Healthy Relationships AND NURTURING CONNECTION

BY SHAWN MATTHEWS



Starting a new Relationship can be both exciting and nerve wracking. To build a healthy and fulfilling relationship takes time, effort, communication and mutual respect.

Here are some tips to help with some reflection and preparation going forward:

- 1. Knowing Yourself** (self-awareness) before entering in a relationship can be a good starting point. Take time to understand your values, needs and expectations. Reflecting on past relationships and the lessons that you have learned can help you identify what you are looking for in a partner.
- 2. Being Emotionally Ready** can help support you to be available in a new relationship. Can you be open to vulnerability, trust and intimacy for a deeper connection?
- 3. Communication** skills are the most important way to express your thoughts, feelings and needs effectively. Communication is always a work in progress however to start a new relationship it is best that you will be available to listen actively and understand their perspective to come to a mutual understanding.

Building Trust and Connection:

- To begin with **Communication** skills become open and transparent with your partner about your intentions and feelings.
- Consistency and Reliability** in your actions and words will help to build trust, and demonstrates your commitment towards growing the relationship.
- Respect** your partner's boundaries and having them respect yours, helps nurture and create a supportive environment for the two of you.

Nurturing the Relationship:

- Quality Time** together creates connection, intimacy and bonding. Meaningful conversations, shared activities and experiences that you both enjoy build the strong emotional connection.
- Shared Interests**, values and goals create a sense of purpose within the relationship.
- Revisiting Conflict** resolution skills to help better understand each other's needs and wants through different experiences and challenges.

"Relationships don't last because of the good times; they last because the hard times were handled with love and care" – unknown author.

Maintaining Individuality and Independence:

1. **Maintaining Independence**, a sense of individuality and autonomy can help with the growth in a relationship, when you pursue different interests, connections.

Here is an example:

Take David - In our marriage, David is the more independent one. Even as a child, one of his most common refrains when anyone tried to help with something was "I'll do it myself!" That served him well in becoming a functioning and independent adult, especially in a culture that values self-sufficiency and self-determination.

A degree of autonomy is important in a relationship (e.g. having hobbies or activities you prefer to do on your own, or practicing individual self-care or self-soothing), but complete autonomy doesn't serve us well in marriage; in fact, it often pushes us apart. For the health of our relationship, David had to learn how to practice healthy dependence with Constantino. (Davids 'husband'). Reference: Gottman Institute

Provide Mutual Support and Encouragement:

This is of utmost importance for validation and for your relationship to grow and achieve personal goals. It also helps to navigate life's challenges together.

Seeking Support and Guidance:

Relationship Resources and Education can be helpful such as Counselling or Coaching. You can gain strategies and tools to enhance your skills for a better and healthier relationship moving forward.

A Supportive Social Network also helps to provide guidance and encouragement while you are navigating a new relationship.

To summarise, starting a new relationship is exciting and can be nerve wracking. It can be challenging at first but with self awareness, effort and commitment from both partners it has a better chance of flourishing. Investing in self-reflection, open communication, building trust and respect, shared experienced, personal growth you can cultivate a healthy, fulfilling, and lasting relationship with your partner. Remember to enjoy the process, be patient with each other, and celebrate the milestones and joys of building a loving and supportive partnership together.

What's Your Relationship Style?

Relationships come in all shapes and sizes, influencing every aspect of our lives. From romantic partnerships to friendships, family dynamics, and interactions with coworkers, our relationship style profoundly impacts how we navigate the world. This quiz is designed to uncover your unique approach to relationships, offering insights and reflections that can deepen your understanding of yourself and your connections with others.

Instructions: For each question, select the statement that best describes your typical behavior or response. Be honest with yourself, and choose the option that resonates most deeply. At the end of the quiz, tally your responses to reveal your relationship style profile.

1. When faced with conflict or disagreement, I tend to:

- Confront the issue head-on, seeking resolution through open communication.
- Avoid confrontation, preferring to maintain harmony even if it means suppressing my true feelings.
- Retreat inward, needing time alone to process my emotions before addressing the situation.

2. My approach to expressing affection and appreciation is best described as:

- Vocal and demonstrative, with frequent verbal affirmations and physical gestures of love.
- Reserved and subtle, showing affection through thoughtful gestures and acts of service.
- Introspective and private, expressing love through meaningful conversations and shared experiences.

3. In social settings, I am most comfortable:

- Taking the lead, initiating conversations and connecting with new people effortlessly.
- Observing from the sidelines, preferring to listen and observe before engaging with others.
- Seeking out one-on-one interactions, cultivating deep, meaningful connections over small talk.

4. When it comes to making decisions within a group, I am more likely to:

- Assert my opinions and preferences confidently, advocating for what I believe is best.
- Remain flexible and adaptable, willing to compromise and consider alternative viewpoints.
- Step back and let others take the lead, trusting in their judgment and expertise.

5. During times of stress or uncertainty, I typically:

- Turn to my support network for guidance and reassurance, seeking comfort in the company of loved ones.
- Retreat into solitude, finding solace in quiet reflection and self-care practices.
- Throw myself into work or other distractions, channeling my energy into productive tasks to alleviate anxiety.



Scoring:

For each "a" response, assign 2 points.
For each "b" response, assign 1 point.
For each "c" response, assign 0 points.

Interpretation:

0-5 points: Reflective Recluse - You cherish deep connections and often find solace in introspection. Your ability to navigate relationships with sensitivity and thoughtfulness is a valuable asset. Remember to honour your need for solitude while also reaching out to your support network when needed.

6-10 points: Flexible Facilitator - Your adaptability and openness serve you well in relationships, allowing you to navigate various situations with ease. Your diplomatic nature often fosters harmony and understanding among others. Embrace your gift for mediation while staying true to your own needs and boundaries.

11-15 points: Assertive Advocate - Your strong sense of self and confident communication style make you a natural leader in relationships. Your ability to assert yourself effectively can inspire and empower those around you. Remember to balance your assertiveness with active listening and empathy for others' perspectives.

These results offer insights into your predominant approach to love and relationships, highlighting your strengths and preferences in how you connect with people around you. Remember, everyone is unique, and there's no right or wrong way to connect!

Source: Adapted from "The Relationship Style Inventory" by John M. Gottman, Ph.D., and Julie Schwartz Gottman, Ph.D.

IQ

Harnessing The Hidden Power Of Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

BY SHAWN MATTHEWS & AMANDA HARGREAVES

Empathy

Empathy means putting yourself in someone else's shoes, understanding their feelings, and seeing things from their perspective. By acknowledging and validating others' emotions, you create a deeper connection and foster collaboration.

Example: Your partner expresses frustration about a difficult day. Instead of dismissing their feelings, you empathise, acknowledging the challenges they faced.

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness involves recognising your own emotions and understanding what triggers them. Take time for self-reflection, jotting down your reactions to situations, and brainstorming how you could respond differently in the future. Allow yourself to feel your emotions without judgment, understanding that each emotion serves a purpose.

Example: After a heated argument with a friend, you reflect on your reactions and recognise your tendency to become defensive when feeling criticised.

Self-Regulation

Self-regulation is the ability to manage your emotions effectively, staying calm, composed, and objective even in challenging situations. This skill sets a positive tone and helps defuse tension during conflicts.

Example: During a stressful meeting at work, you practice deep breathing and visualisation techniques to remain calm and focused.

Effective Communication

Effective communication is all about fostering mutual understanding through open dialogue. Address concerns promptly and directly, using open-ended questions to encourage discussion and avoiding blame or defensiveness.

Example: When discussing plans with your partner, you express your thoughts and listen to their perspective without judgment, leading to a constructive conversation.

Simply put, harnessing emotional intelligence is a great way to cultivate stronger connections, manage conflicts, and navigate life's challenges with greater resilience and understanding. Remember, life is a journey of continuous growth and learning, any by utilising the toolbox of emotional intelligence, the rewards of deeper, more meaningful relationships are well worth the effort.



Imagine a skill set that not only enhances your understanding of your own emotions but also empowers you to navigate the intricate landscape of others' feelings.

That's emotional intelligence in action. As Daniel Coleman eloquently puts it, *'emotional intelligence is the ability to recognise, understand, and manage both your emotions and those of others'*.

Why does it matter in your everyday life?

Harnessing the power of emotional intelligence can benefit you in numerous ways, from improving how you handle conflicts to making more informed decisions. Here's how:

- Enhance your conflict resolution skills.
- Make better decisions with a clearer understanding of your emotions.
- Build stronger, more positive relationships with your friends, family, and colleagues.
- Increase your resilience, well-being, and self-care practices.
- Foster effective communication in all areas of your life.

Now, let's dive into some practical strategies you can implement to boost your emotional intelligence and enjoy richer connections in your daily interactions.

Active Listening

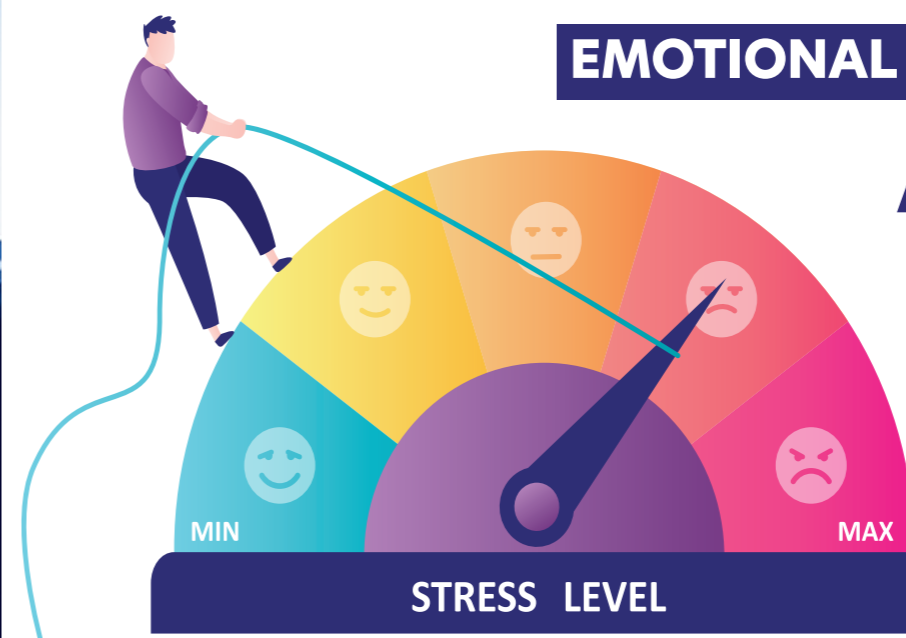
Effective active listening involves being fully present, asking open-ended questions, and showing genuine curiosity while empathising with the speaker's perspective. Create a safe, non-judgmental space for others to express themselves without interruption. Remember to check in with them to ensure you've understood their message correctly.

Example: During a family gathering, your friend shares their struggles with work. Instead of offering immediate advice, you actively listen, asking questions to understand their feelings and concerns.

EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION:

A Guide to Achieving Mindful Mastery

BY SHAWN MATTHEWS



Self-regulation is control over thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and decisions making.

Think about a machine like a car, the car needs fuel to run and to keeping running it requires maintenance. Our brain is a cognitive machinery with resources to run smoothly and effectively. Another way of thinking of self-regulation is self-control.

Self-regulation is essential for adaptive functioning, social interaction, and overall well-being. Think of your mind as a control room and there are many parts moving in so many directions and you need to control the functioning of it. There is a part of our brain which is called the executive function, which directs the rest of your mind and conscious of the body.

Here are 4 main areas that help us to self-regulate:

1. Attention Control – Have you ever tried not to think about something and that's all you can think about? This is thought suppression. Attention control is when you can pay attention to something, or you choose not to ignore it. It's our ability to concentrate.

2. Emotional Regulation – Think about the last time you were angry in a public space, and you knew that it wasn't the right place to voice the anger, this is emotional regulation.

3. Impulse Override – Have a think about when you wanted a piece of chocolate cake and you either went for the cake or you stop yourself from eating it because you want to reduce your sugar intake.

4. Behaviour Modification – It focuses on changing and improving a certain behaviour. This is based on the belief that the behaviour is learned, and it can be modified using different strategies and interventions.

When all these become depleted then the decision-making process becomes more challenging, therefore you become tired and less likely to concentrate.

Self-regulation is essential for adaptive functioning, social interaction, and overall well-being.

Here are strategies to enhance Self-Regulation:

1. Mindfulness and Meditation: It can improve self-awareness, emotional regulation, and cognitive control. There are many meditations you can practice online. The other way to practice mindfulness is going to a yoga session or walking in nature.

2. Journaling and Reflection: This can help you recognise what happened throughout the day and what emotions came to the surface which made you feel a certain way.

3. Goal setting and Planning: Goal setting can help motivation and planning will help you stay organised and focused on what you want to achieve.

4. Coping Skills and Stress Management: Some coping skills may consist of box breathing when you feel like emotions are getting too much for you. This can calm your nervous system and help you relieve stress and anxiety.

5. Consistency and Routine: Being consistent with a routine can help you manage your emotions. It is like anything in life, if you are consistent with things, you become better and more resilient, therefore can handle situations better. Refer to article on emotional intelligence to learn more.

Enhancing self-regulation skills is a lifelong process that involves continuous learning, practice, and adaptation. By developing and strengthening self-regulation abilities, individuals can improve their capacity to navigate challenges, achieve goals, and lead a balanced and fulfilling life.

References: Psychology Today; www.kanopy.com/en/goldcoastlibrary/vid-eo/1237137/1237147

How To Achieve Work Life Balance

BY AMANDA HARGREAVES



In today's fast-paced world, achieving a healthy work-life balance is a perpetual challenge for many individuals. Balancing the demands of work with personal commitments and leisure activities requires intentional effort and mindful planning. Let's explore some strategies for cultivating harmony in our lives.

Understanding Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance refers to the equilibrium between the time and energy invested in work-related activities and those dedicated to personal pursuits, family time, and self-care. It's about finding the right blend that allows individuals to thrive both professionally and personally.

Maintaining a healthy work-life balance is essential for overall well-being. It not only reduces stress and prevents burnout but also enhances productivity, creativity, and job satisfaction. A well-balanced life promotes better physical and mental health, strengthens relationships, and fosters a greater sense of fulfillment.

Various factors can impede achieving work-life balance. Long working hours, tight deadlines, demanding job roles, and the pressure to excel professionally often encroach upon personal time. Additionally, technology has blurred the boundaries between work and home life, making it challenging to disconnect from work-related tasks outside of office hours.

Strategies for Achieving Work-Life Balance

Set Boundaries: Designate set times for work-related tasks and leisure activities, and stick to them and create a dedicated workspace at home to minimise distractions and maintain focus.

Prioritise Self-Care: Engage in activities that promote physical and mental well-being. Exercise regularly, practice mindfulness and relaxation techniques, and ensure an adequate amount of sleep

each night. Taking care of your health is crucial for maintaining energy levels and managing stress.

Manage Time Effectively: Time management techniques can maximise productivity and efficiency. Use calendars, planners, and task lists to organise your schedule and prioritise tasks. Break larger projects into smaller, manageable tasks and tackle them one at a time to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

Set Realistic Expectations: Be realistic about what you can accomplish within a timeframe. Avoid overcommitting yourself and learn to say no to tasks or projects that may compromise your work-life balance. Communicate with colleagues and supervisors about workload and deadlines to manage expectations effectively.

Create Rituals and Routines: Establish daily rituals and routines that promote work-life balance. Schedule regular breaks throughout the day to recharge and rejuvenate. Set aside time for leisure activities, hobbies, and spending quality time with loved ones. Consistency and predictability can help create a sense of stability and balance in your life.

Unplug and Disconnect: Establish boundaries around technology use to prevent work from infiltrating personal time. Set designated periods to check emails and messages and resist the urge to respond outside of those times. Unplugging from digital devices allows for greater presence and engagement in non-work-related activities.

Seek Support: Don't hesitate to seek support from friends, family, or colleagues when needed. Reach out for help with tasks or responsibilities that may be overwhelming, and be willing to delegate when appropriate. Surround yourself with a supportive network of individuals who understand the importance of work-life balance.

Achieving work-life balance is an ongoing journey that requires conscious effort. By implementing these strategies, you can cultivate a more harmonious and fulfilling life. Remember that work-life balance looks different for everyone, so find what works best for you and make it a priority in your life.

SPOTLIGHT ON Workplace Mental Health

ARTICLE APPEARED VIA AUSTRALIANUNIONS.ORG.AU

When it comes to our mental health, the way we work can no longer be an afterthought. We know that meaningful and rewarding work can impact positively on our mental health.

On the flip side, work can negatively impact our mental health when our workplace is poorly managed and we're dealing with high workloads, customer and client aggression, poor worker relationships and other psychosocial hazards.

Safe Work Australia has just released its Psychological Health And Safety In The Workplace Report, which identifies a worrying trend – with work-related mental health issues rising by 36.9% since 2018.

Building awareness of an emerging problem

When you tally up the median time lost and compensation paid for mental health conditions in the workplace, it's more than four times greater than that of all other injuries and illnesses. Thankfully, there is a growing awareness of the issue of workplace psychosocial hazards.

Psychosocial hazards, just like physical health and safety hazards, are all too common in modern workplaces and have the potential to cause psychological harm. Hazards like high and low job demands, isolated work conditions, and poor role clarity all contribute to poor workplace mental health.

Another issue is the stigma workers often face – from colleagues and bosses – once they make a claim for a mental health condition.

A disproportional impact on women

The impact of psychosocial hazards isn't evenly distributed. In fact, the report identifies that 57.8% of all mental health conditions were reported by women.

There are reasons for this disparity.

For instance, the industries that have a higher percentage of women workers – namely healthcare and social assistance and public administration and safety – are also the industries that have higher rates of serious mental stress, workplace bullying, work pressure and exposure to workplace or occupational violence.

The right to disconnect

One thing we all need to manage our mental health is time outside of work to rest and focus on recreation.

But the widespread integration of digital communication technologies has gradually eroded our ability to disconnect from work, bringing work stress into our personal lives. In fact, The Australia Institute found that 79% of Australians have worked outside scheduled hours – adding up to an average of 280 hours of extra work each year.

“The Workplace Report identifies a worrying trend - with work-related mental health issues rising by 36.9% since 2008...”

But there's good news for workers – the Albanese Government recently passed a 'right to disconnect' law, empowering workers to ignore unreasonable communication from their employer outside of their work hours. This is a big deal for many workers who feel immense pressure to stay connected 24/7.

A right to disconnect is all about preserving a healthy separation between home and work life, and prioritising the mental health of workers. The change better reflects the evolving nature of work in modern digital workplaces.

Source: www.australianunions.org.au/2024/03/06/workplace-mental-health-in-the-spotlight/ Published: 06/03/2024

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CROSSWORD ANSWERS DOWN: 1. Empathy, 3. Relaxation, 5. Reflection, 10. Mindfulness, 11. Mindset, 14. Empathy, 15. Recovery, 16. Healing ACROSS: 2. Growth, 4. Self-care, 6. Balance, 7. Awareness, 8. Gratitude, 9. Stress, 12. Connection, 13. Resilience, 16. Harmony, 17. Support, 18. Therapy, 19. Journaling, 20. Insight, 21. Wellness

Understanding Your Teenager

BY AMANDA HARGREAVES

A teen's behaviour may be difficult to understand at times as their brain is still developing. As a result raising a teenager can often feel like a maze of frustration, mood swings, and challenging behaviours.

While these typical teenage traits can be a handful, it can be helpful to remind ourselves that our teens are going through a challenging period of growth and self-discovery, one that we have all gone through ourselves.

Brain development

It's important to remember that the reason your teen's behaviour may feel so difficult to understand at times is because their brains are still developing. During adolescence, the parts of the brain responsible for decision-making, impulse control, and emotional regulation, are still maturing. This can lead to impulsive actions, mood swings, and difficulty managing emotions.

Finding identity

Teenagers are in the process of figuring out who they are and where they fit in the world. This journey often involves questioning authority, exploring new identities, and challenging social norms.

As they seek more independence and autonomy, it's likely that their opinions will differ from your own. These new thoughts and opinions may not be fully formed and could change time and time again as they discover more about themselves.

Influence of peers

Friends become an increasingly significant part of a teenager's life. They often value the opinions of their peers more than those of the adults around them. Frustration can emerge when your viewpoints clash with those of friends or when they feel pressure to be more like their peers.

If they've reached an age where some rules may no longer align with their level of maturity and there's room for negotiation, let them know that you want to hear them out and come to a decision together.

Emotional rollercoaster

Hormonal changes intensify emotions, leading to extreme highs and lows. Seemingly small issues can seem like monumental problems in the eyes of your teen. When responding to these emotions, it's helpful to remember that there are hormonal changes at play and to not take your teen's behaviour personally.

Source: www.sparktheirfuture.qld.edu.au/teen-behaviour/



If you need parenting support, check out some of these online services and resources.

Alternatively you can speak with a mental health professional.

WEBSITES

- parentline.com.au
- parents.au.reachout.com
- headspace.org.au/parents
- triplep-parenting.net.au

5 TIPS

To Bridging The Teenage Gap

1. Lead with empathy

While it's natural to want to solve your teenager's problems, sometimes they just need someone to listen without judgment. Let them express their feelings and thoughts, even if they seem irrational. This validation can help them feel understood and supported and allows them to vent.

2. Choose your battles

Think about what matters most and be willing to let go of minor disagreements to avoid increasing tension. Pick an appropriate time to have conversations – perhaps while walking or in the car where it feels less confrontational for your teen.

3. Speak openly

Foster an environment where your teenager feels comfortable discussing their concerns with you. Avoid jumping to conclusions or getting defensive when they express their feelings, even if you disagree.

4. Offer guidance

While teens seek independence, they still value your guidance. Instead of giving an order, you could try to involve your teen in a discussion about potential solutions.

5. Take a breath

Remember that this phase is temporary. As your teen's brain continues to develop and they gain more life experience, many of the things that frustrate you now may simply go away.



Resilience and Renewal

A Journey To Single Parenthood

BY AMANDA HARGREAVES



Mother of two, Jo shares her journey of becoming a single mother and finding her feet after the end of an 11 year relationship. At the age of 33, with two children under four years old, her story is one of resilience, courage, and the power adaptability.

NOTE - The names of the people in this article and some of the details have been changed to protect their privacy.

Q: Jo, can you tell us about the moment you realised you were going to be navigating parenthood on your own?

A: "Packing up our stuff and leaving the family home alone with the two boys, felt like an overwhelming mix of emotions. It was a mix of fear and clarity. I remember taking a last look at the house as we drove away, my heart was pounding, wondering what the future held. The relationship with their father was always tumultuous, and the realisation that I would be raising two beautiful souls on my own was daunting. Yet, in that moment of fear, there was a strange sense of peace. I knew it wouldn't be easy, but I also knew it was the right path for us."

Q: How did you begin to stand on your own two feet after the separation?

A: "This apartment belongs to my friend who is living overseas and thankfully it was between tenants, so I was fortunate enough to have somewhere for the three of us to land. Once I got the boys settled and moved in, the first step was simply acceptance.

I spent many nights worrying about the future, about how I was going to provide for my children both emotionally and financially. I realised that I needed to accept where we were and make a plan. Luckily, I love planning and am quite an organised person - you have to be with two children! My previous jobs had always been in business development or strategic roles but I was in between jobs due to taking time off to raise a family - so, I reached out to my existing networks started freelancing as a business coach.

This approach allowed me to start earning an income and connecting with new networks, whilst still providing the flexibility to be with the boys. Emotionally, I leaned on a close circle of family and friends for support."

Q: What challenges did you face in the early days, and how did you overcome them?

A: "One of the biggest challenges was dealing with the isolation. Being a single parent to two young kids can get lonely. There were days I felt overwhelmed by the silence once they were asleep. I overcame this by reaching out to my friends and family and building a community around us. I joined local parent groups, connected with other single parents online, and slowly, our new "family" began to grow. These connections were my lifeline, offering both practical help and emotional support which has been a game changer for all three of us.

Getting my business off the ground and earning a steady income hasn't been easy either. But, I've learned that by putting myself out there and believing in my abilities, the work flows in. I've landed some amazing clients, and working with them has not only helped them but also taught me valuable lessons and introduced me to incredible people I wouldn't have met otherwise."

Q: What has this journey taught you about yourself?

A: "It's taught me that I'm stronger than I ever thought possible and can achieve more than I ever imagined. There were moments I doubted my ability to do this on my own, but here we are, building a life filled with love and laughter with some amazing people around us.

I've learned the importance of self-care, of asking for help when needed (that is a hard one to learn), and of celebrating the small wins.

My boys have been my greatest teachers, showing me the depth of my resilience and the power of unconditional love."

Q: What message do you have for other single parents out there?

A: "You are not alone. There's a community out there waiting to support you so don't be afraid to reach out, to ask for help, or to accept it when offered. It's ok to have tough days so believe in yourself and remember to celebrate your progress, no matter how small."



If you need parenting support, check out some of these online services and resources.

Alternatively you can speak with a mental health professional.

WEBSITES

- raisingchildren.net.au
- familyrelationships.gov.au
- mensline.org.au
- relationships.org.au

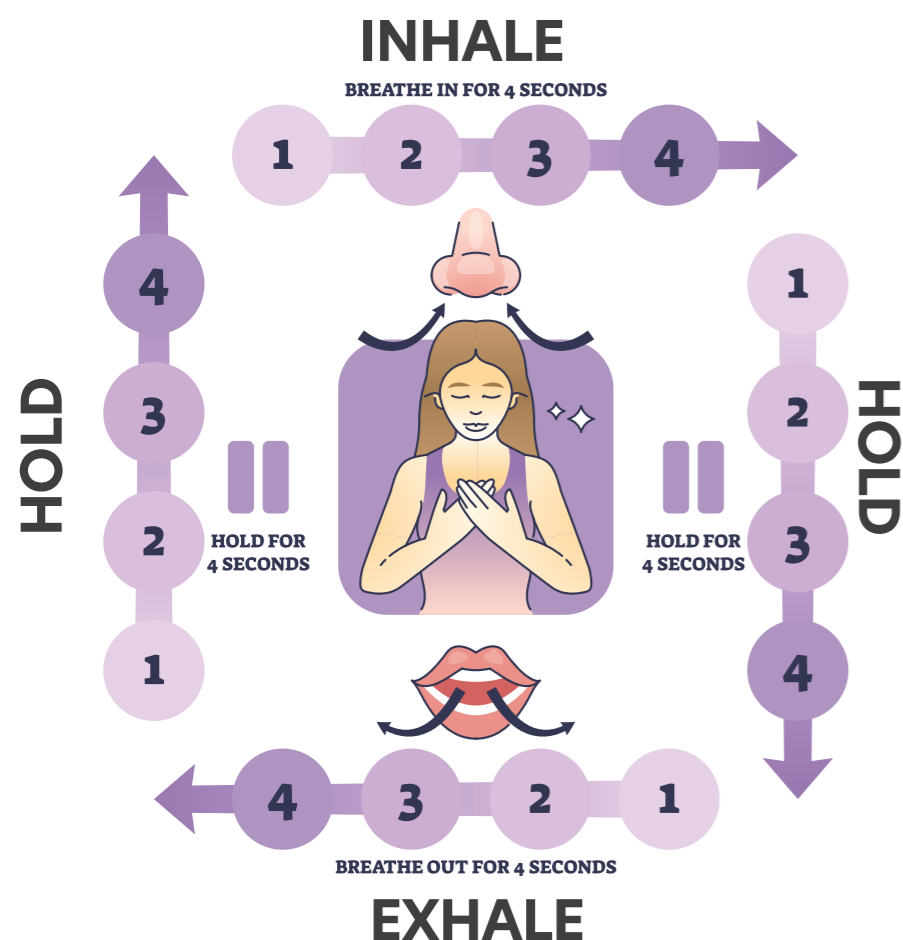
TAKE TIME FOR MINDFUL BREATH WORK

Box breathing, also known as square breathing, is a simple yet powerful relaxation technique that involves taking slow, deep breaths in a specific rhythm. It consists of four steps: inhale, hold, exhale, and hold again, with each phase lasting for an equal count, usually four seconds.

The benefits of box breathing are numerous, particularly for stress reduction. It helps to calm the nervous system, reduce stress and anxiety, improve concentration and focus, and regulate the body's response to stress. Additionally, it can enhance overall mental clarity and help in managing emotions more effectively. This technique is particularly useful in high-pressure environments, aiding individuals in remaining calm and collected.

Instructions:

- Begin by getting comfortable, close your eyes if you like.
- Trace the four sides of a square in your mind as you count.
- Breathe in to the count of four.
- Hold your breath to the count of four.
- Breathe out to the count of four.
- Hold your breath out to the count of four.
- Continue focusing on the breath and the count of four.
- Repeat the same process until you reach a more relaxed state.



IT'S GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH!

Box breathing offers many medical benefits, especially concerning stress management and mental health. Here are some notable benefits:

Stress Reduction: By slowing down the breathing rate, box breathing helps decrease stress levels, promoting a sense of calm.

Lowered Blood Pressure: Regular practice can contribute to reduced blood pressure and improved cardiac health by calming the nervous system.

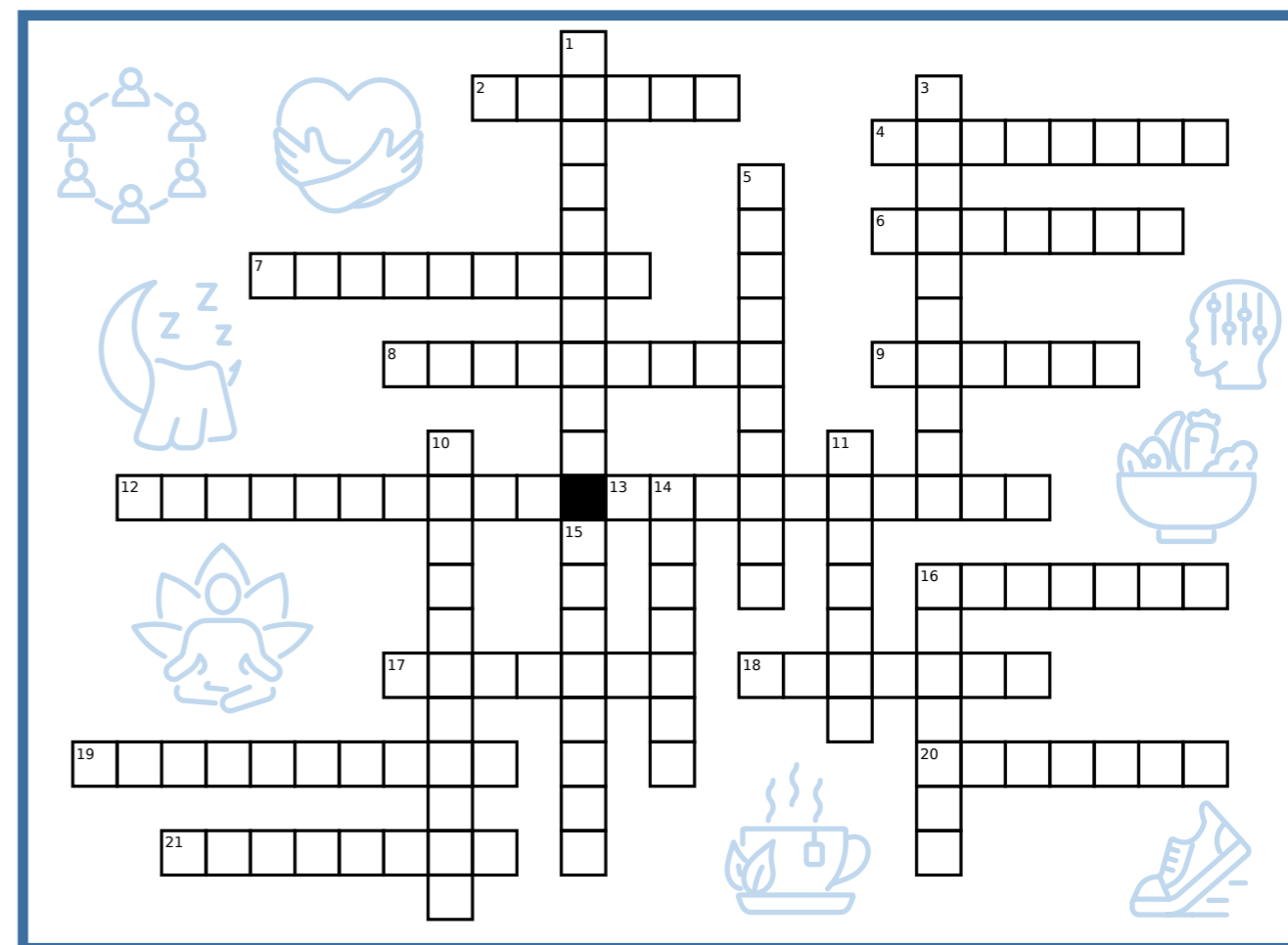
Improved Focus and Concentration: This technique aids in clearing the mind, enhancing concentration and mental clarity.

Enhanced Pulmonary Function: Deep, deliberate breathing can improve lung capacity and efficiency.

Regulation of the Autonomic Nervous System: It helps balance the sympathetic (fight or flight) and parasympathetic (rest and digest) responses, aiding in overall autonomic nervous system regulation.

These benefits make box breathing a valuable tool for both physical and mental health, applicable in daily life and clinical settings.

TAKE A MOMENT FOR A CROSSWORD



ANSWERS ON PAGE 15

ACROSS:

- The process of developing physically, mentally, or spiritually (6)
- The practice of taking action to preserve or improve one's own health (8)
- A condition in which different elements are equal or in the correct proportions (7)
- Knowledge or perception of a situation or fact (9)
- A feeling of thankfulness and appreciation (9)
- A state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances (6)
- A relationship in which a person, thing, or idea is linked with something else (10)
- The capacity to recover quickly from difficulties (10)
- Agreement or peaceful coexistence within a group or environment (7)
- Give assistance to, especially financially or emotionally (7)
- A treatment intended to relieve or heal a disorder (7)
- The activity of keeping a record or diary to explore thoughts and feelings (10)
- The capacity to gain an accurate and deep understanding of someone or something (7)
- The state of being in good health, especially as an actively pursued goal (8)

DOWN:

- Sympathetic pity and regard or interest in a matter (7)
- The state of being free from tension and anxiety (10)
- Serious thought or consideration (10)
- A mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment (11)
- The established set of attitudes held by someone (7)
- The ability to understand and share the feelings of another (7)
- A return to a normal state of health, mind, or strength (8)
- The process of making or becoming sound or healthy again (7)

FIND THE REPEATED WORD TO ANSWER THIS RIDDLE:

"I am the bridge between hearts, understanding others in every part, I walk in their shoes, feel their pain, in my embrace, compassion will reign.

What am I? _____



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