

THE

WONDERMIND

NEWSPAPER

Hey, you good?

If not, that's fine. Honestly, who is? Everyone we know seems at least a little bit anxious, lonely, and overwhelmed lately.

That's why, this Mental Health Awareness Month, we're skipping the polite formalities and getting unfiltered. In this newspaper, you'll find a refreshingly honest look at the thoughts, emotions, and feelings that we usually keep covered up. We're breaking through the surface-level mental health discussion with candid conversations, validating stories, and life-changing tips for whatever you're feeling. Take what resonates and leave the rest. This is just for you, so doodle, draw, and jot down your thoughts wherever you like.

And, seriously, we want to hear how you're doing. So slide into our DMs or tag us on Instagram (@officialwondermind) with the hashtag #letswondermind and tell us what's on your mind.

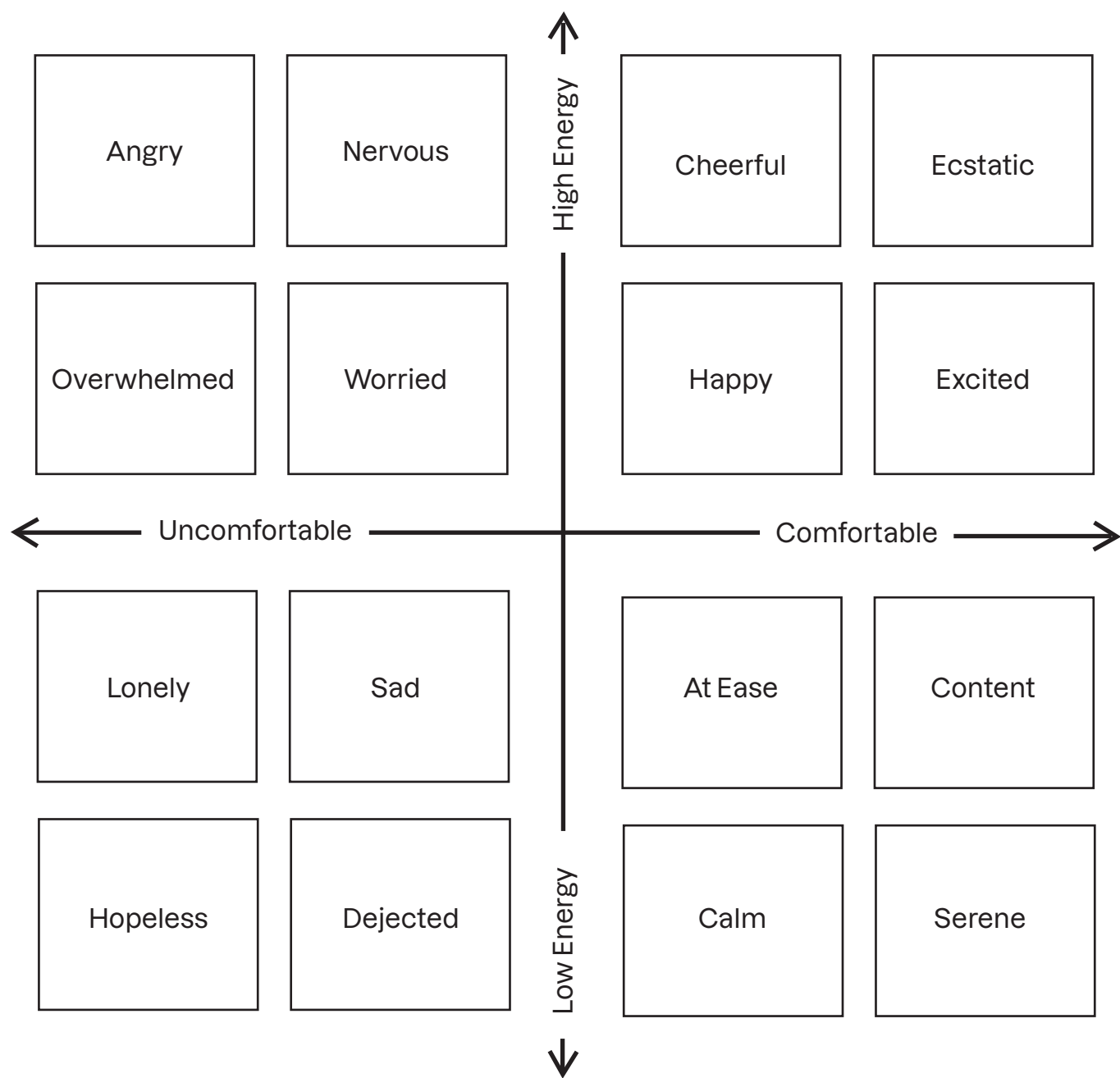
Take care of yourselves,

Mandy Teefey
Mandy Teefey, CEO

Selena Gomez
Selena Gomez, CIO

LET'S TAKE A TEMP CHECK. HOW ARE WE FEELING TODAY?

Color in which emotion most closely aligns.



WEEKEND WIND DOWN

TRY THIS: Write a letter (or a text, DM, whatever) to a friend who's in need of a trip to affirmation station. It doesn't have to be that deep—just tell them why they're great and what they mean to you. Like: "Hey, I'm really glad you (and your cute dog and your great taco recs) exist." While you're at it, write one of these for yourself, too.

THINK ON THIS: When do you feel the most like yourself? What people, places, or situations bring out the true you?

REMEMBER THIS: If you don't choose to take a break now, your body may demand one later.

SAD

Here's How to Actually Sit With Your Sadness

Feeling your feelings can be harder than it sounds.

BY MARINA KHIDEKEL



SHUTTERSTOCK/WONDERMIND

You didn't get that dream job you were manifesting hard. You just scrolled through pics of your friends at a party you definitely weren't invited to. Your pet, who was like a baby to you, just died. How do any of these scenarios make you feel? Uh, really freaking sad. And if your instinct is to bury that sadness somewhere deep inside and get on with things because it hurts like hell, you wouldn't be alone. "Most people were not taught how to feel their feelings, so when intense feelings come up, they automatically tend to numb or avoid them," says Yolanda Renteria, LPC, a psychotherapist and somatic coach in Yuma, AZ, who specializes in healing from trauma.

The advice that you should "feel your feelings" and "sit with your sadness" has been thrown around so often on Armchair Psychology Tok that they've started to feel like empty platitudes. But sitting with, acknowledging, and honoring the sadness that you might otherwise be tempted to suppress can keep it from dragging you down to a darker place. "Everyone experiences moments of sadness," Renteria says. "Sitting with that sadness can be extremely helpful to understand it."

So, how do you actually sit with your sadness (and how exactly is that different from wallowing in your sorrows)? We asked the experts to explain.

Here's what "feeling your feelings" even means.

It sounds obvious, but also... not? When experts talk about feeling your feelings, they talk about noticing and acknowledging intense emotional reactions when they bubble up. Renteria says that can include giving a name to those emotions, noticing where you feel them in your body, understanding why they were triggered in the first place, and—this is key—letting them exist without judging them or yourself.

"Sometimes it can mean taking the time to process the feeling and explore the root cause of it. Other times it can be giving yourself permission to feel your emotions instead of trying to push them away," adds Minaa B., a licensed therapist, social worker, and writer (who is also on Wondermind's advisory committee).

Feeling your not-so-great feelings (as opposed to ignoring them) is generally a good idea because once we actually notice them, the intensity of the emotion decreases, says Renteria.

Why sitting with sadness helps you—even though it's hard.

"Our feelings are messengers," says Minaa B., "which means a story is always attached to why we feel the way that we feel." So if you're hella sad, it might be because you're also feeling abandoned by your friends, rejected by that hiring manager you thought you clicked with, or you're grieving a loss. We shouldn't need to say it, but we will—all those and more are majorly valid reasons to feel sad.

What doesn't work is ignoring your sadness or making yourself too busy to even process it. That will only make you feel worse. "When we don't pay attention to sadness, it tends to come out in other ways. Maybe irritability, anger, frustration, feeling alone, unloved, or misunderstood," says Renteria. You could become even sadder, which can spiral into depression. Pretending you aren't sad will only prolong feelings of grief and can even exacerbate other feelings like anger and rage, all because you are suppressing an important emotion that deserves to be processed, says Minaa B.

Both experts stress that giving your sadness space to exist—and actually feeling it—means allowing yourself to be, well, human. "Acknowledging your sadness also gives space to vulnerability," says Renteria. When you

acknowledge that you're sad and begin to process what's behind it, you are more likely to communicate and connect with people about how you really feel (like talking to your friends about how hurt you were and coming to a resolution about it.)

How to actually sit with your sadness.

First, let's talk about how not to do it. "Sitting in your sadness does not mean sitting in a depressed state that impacts your day-to-day functioning," cautions Minaa. B. "It shouldn't cause you to experience things like not being able to get out of bed for long periods of time, avoiding tasks, or avoiding places like work or school," she says. That said, avoiding a place is normal if you experience a traumatic event there.

The best way to sit with your sadness may not involve any actual sitting at all. Minaa B. suggests that you simply be mindful of the sadness while continuing to move forward in your day, and maybe doing something else that feels good for your mind and body. Basically, acknowledge that sadness and do your best not to force a different feeling or judge yourself for it, while also taking that yoga class, knitting, reading, or doing something else that brings you joy. Maybe you even connect with people who lift you up. It's about letting the sadness exist while simultaneously doing what feels good and gets you through the day.

If you're struggling with the mindfulness part (it's legit hard), it can help to approach your sadness from a place of curiosity, not judgment. Renteria suggests doing this by actually asking your sadness questions, like: How long have you been here? What are you trying to tell me? When do you show up the most? Are there other feelings there besides sadness, like disappointment, rejection, feeling left out, abandoned, etc? What do I need most in this moment?

Normalizing and validating your sadness can also be incredibly helpful in reducing any guilt or shame you might feel about it, Renteria says. Thinking (or saying out loud) statements like, "Anyone in my situation would feel the same way or it makes sense that I feel this way given what happened," can help you normalize your sadness while you're sitting with it. "Sometimes we don't have to understand the sadness," says Renteria. "We can just know it's there and let it exist."

Also super helpful: remembering that your emotions are temporary, and the intensity of emotions like sadness will likely decrease the more you pay attention to them. "On average it takes about 90 seconds to notice the emotion shifting," Renteria says. So when you're in the depths of sadness, remind yourself that the intensity will break, and you will start to feel better.

When to hit pause on the feels party.

"In cases where sitting with your sadness results in you spiraling and becoming depressed, I would advise engaging in healthy distractions," says Minaa. B. Binge a favorite show, call an empathetic friend, or try these very helpful tips for hitting pause on your sadness.

These distractions have a fancy psychological name: pendulation. "When people notice that they spiral in their sadness, it is important to offer the body an opportunity to pendulate, or experience a contrasting emotion to avoid the spiral," says Renteria, who points out that for people experiencing depression, it's super important to find activities (connecting with a friend, being in nature, physical movement) that pull them out of that emotional spiral.

If you try to sit with your sadness but start experiencing flashbacks or feel it consuming you, feeling your feelings may be too overwhelming for where you're at right now. And that's OK. If that's you, Renteria says, find a trauma-trained professional that you can talk to. They'll give you the tools to help you process your intense sadness.

The bottom line: Feeling your feelings—and specifically, sitting with sadness—isn't easy or even all that intuitive. But once you understand how it works and give it a try, it can pay off. By helping you process your sadness, deepening your understanding of your emotions, lessening any guilt or judgment you might be needlessly putting on yourself, and reinforcing that you're lucky enough to be a human who gets to feel ALL the feels. O

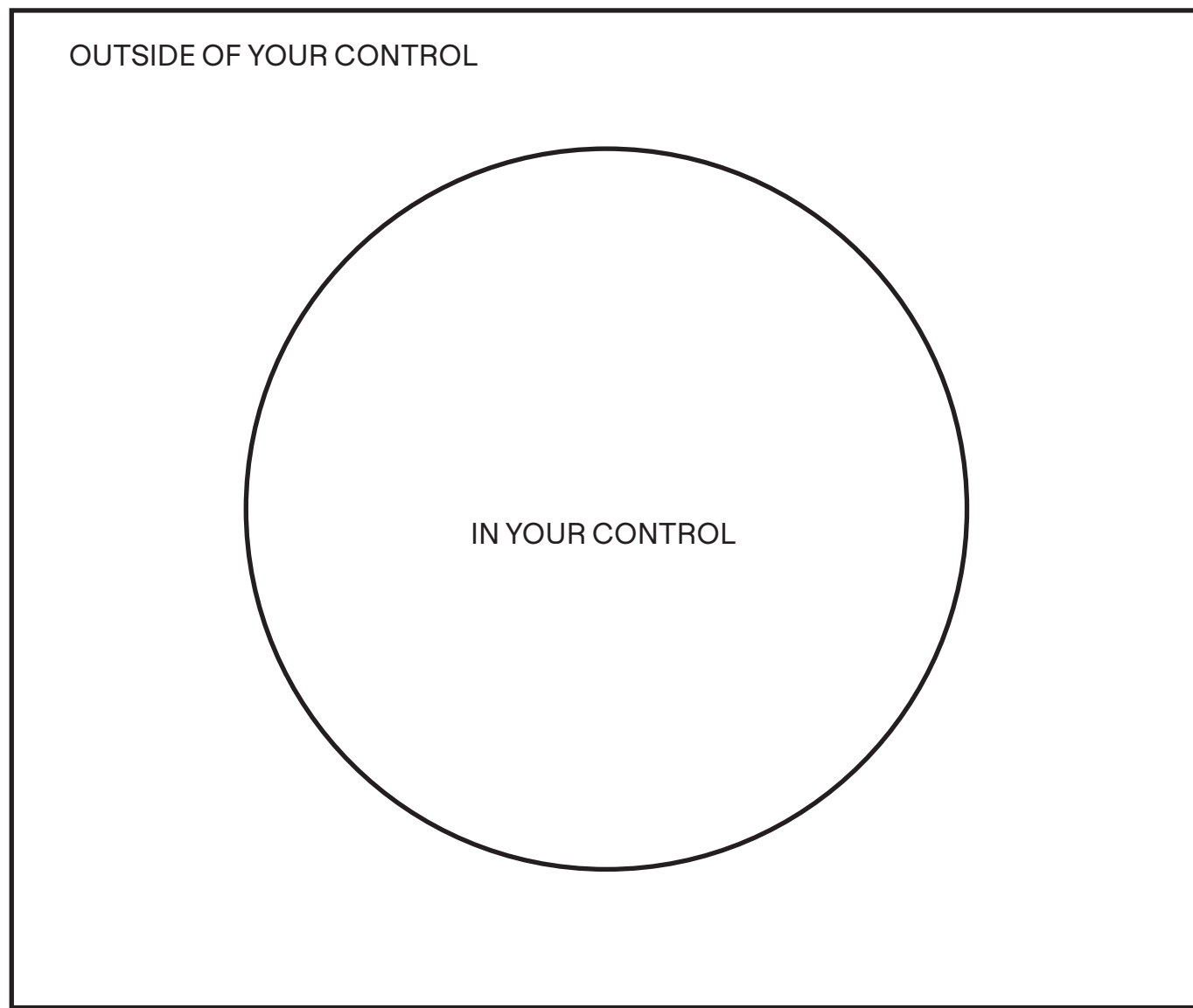
THERAPY HACK

Draw a worry circle.

If you're struggling with anxious thoughts about that dreaded (but really cool!) job interview or anything else consuming your brain, draw a circle and write down every stressy thing you can control inside of it. Outside of the circle, jot down what you have zero power over. So, for the interview, picking an outfit that makes you feel extra powerful, practicing your answers to mock questions, and researching the company can go inside your circle. But how the other candidates do, what your potential boss asks you, and whether they like you stay out of it.

"By breaking down different elements of a stressful situation to test whether or not they're under your control, you're taking things off of your plate that never belonged there," says Yuki Shida, LMFT. TL,DR: You're putting the situation in perspective.

Try it: The next time you're filled to the brim with anxiety, draw a circle and sift through what's really your responsibility and what's not. Take a good look at everything outside of your control, remind yourself that you can't influence those outcomes, and let them go.



What It's Really Like to Quit Your Job for Your Mental Health

"I've held a few jobs in my life that impacted my mental health mostly in the same ways (no appreciation from management, general discomfort from coworkers, etc.). I left because it came to the point where I didn't want to get up in the morning, my favorite hobbies and stress reducers weren't helping me anymore, and I flat out wasn't enjoying my time outside of work. I was so worried about what had happened the day before or what would happen when I went in the next day. I had managers micromanaging my every move, every email, and breaks. No one likes to be watched like a hawk. And whether it was my anxiety-induced paranoia or not, it felt as though coworkers were getting in on this game of 'we didn't want to hire her so let's just run her out of the company.' It became incredibly anxiety-inducing and depressing to exist in that environment.

After quitting, it did make me feel better—the weight was lifted. However, I did leave feeling incredibly violated. I became desperate at times, picking up the next best thing just because I thought it would be better. The jobs did look better on the outside, but when you're in a shitty environment, anything looks better. I signed onto a position to have more money, more stability, a different manager, whatever it was, just to fall into similar traps because I didn't do enough research. I have learned to trust my gut, get out when I can, and research jobs more (ask questions during interviews, read up on reviews of companies, do deep dives on LinkedIn, etc.) to make better judgements and decisions."

— Sam M., 27



SCAN FOR MORE

MEH

27 Very Good Responses for When You're Not Actually OK

How *am* I?!

BY CASEY GUEREN

It's a question you probably ask and answer several times a day: "How are you?"

Most of us, conditioned by ~society~ to keep up the appearance of having our shit together, typically respond quickly, without much thought, and in three words or less.

Fine. Busy but good. Not too bad.

It's become so automatic that any breach of this unspoken rule can feel jarring and almost worrisome. Damn, things must be really rough for Carol to answer this question honestly rather than seeing it as just a polite and obligatory greeting.

While the urge to slap a filter on everything (including our emotions) to make them a little more palatable and a little less real is totally understandable, it's probably not doing us any favors. If we keep saying or thinking that we're fine when we're not, will we eventually stop seeing ourselves as reliable narrators who can identify and process emotions like actual adults? And what's all this doing to our mental health, our relationships, and our collective sense of what's "appropriate" to talk about?

Can we all agree to just remove this filter on our feelings?

Seriously. When you consider just how much we've decreased the stigma and increased awareness of complicated mental health issues over the last few years, it's kind of shocking that we still find it so hard to talk about the seemingly easy stuff, aka how we're doing.

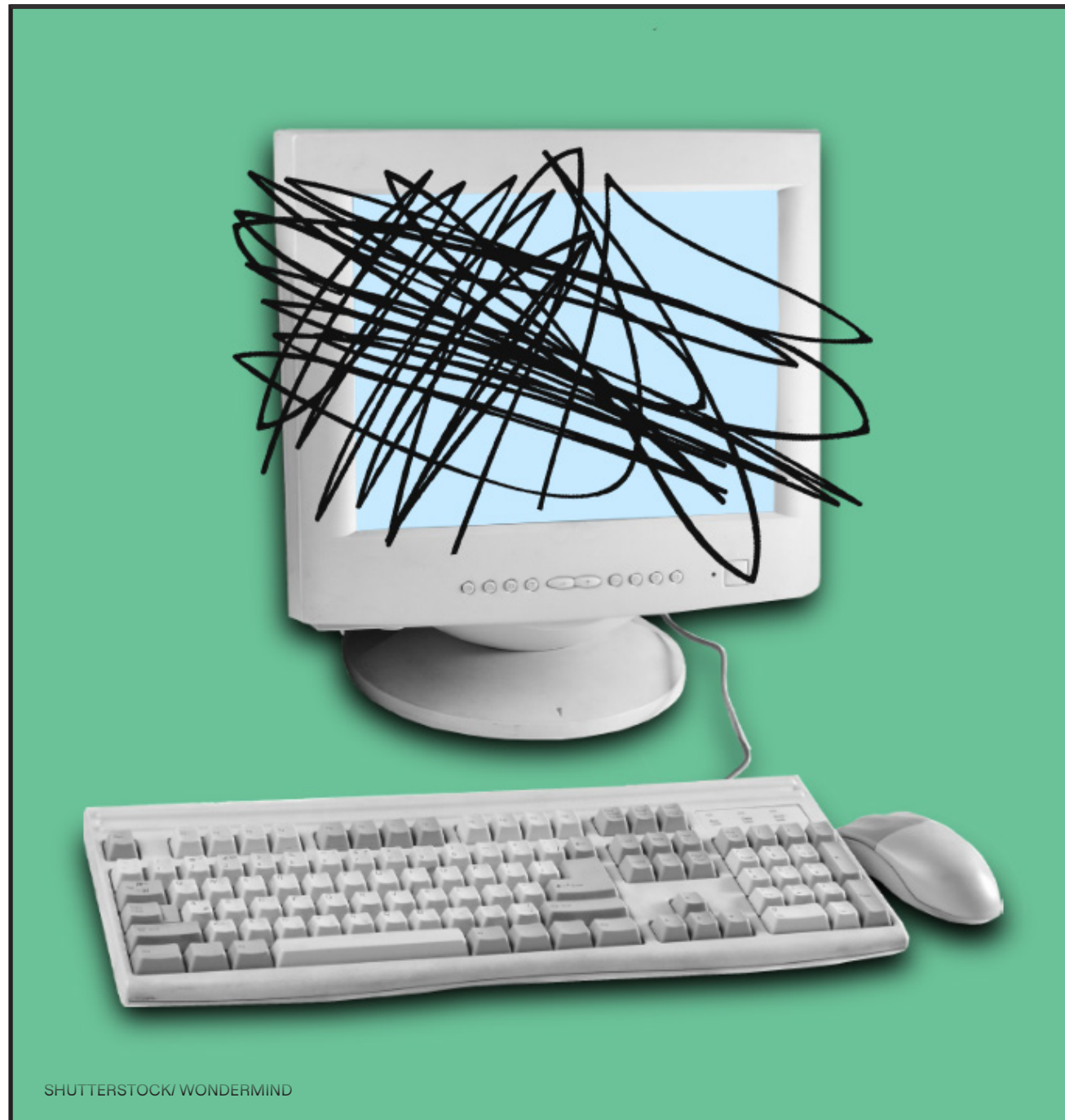
So, consider this your official invitation to give fewer effs with us. This Mental Health Awareness Month, we're ditching the filter in an effort to get a little more comfortable talking about uncomfortable emotions. And if that sounds kind of scary to you, you're probably in the right place. Consider this a judgment-free space to practice talking about big feelings, complicated emotions, and complex mental health topics.

So how are you, really?

And before you respond with a quick, mindless, three-words-or-less answer, take a moment to reflect on your reality. All this emotional honesty making your mind and body freeze up? We got you. Here are 27 excellent responses for when you're not actually OK:



Advertisement for 'Reset Your Mindset' featuring a timer, a brain, and a QR code to subscribe to the WM newsletter.



The Life-Changing Magic of an Adult ADHD Diagnosis

"The validation and relief I felt holding the paperwork with the ADHD diagnosis in my hand was the most pivotal moment in my adult life to this day. For the first time in my life, I felt seen and understood, and I felt I could finally see myself and give myself the compassion I deserved. After years of lost friendships, missed deadlines, late arrivals, breakdowns, depression, and anxiety I had come to believe I was unmotivated, emotional, strange, annoying, clueless, and selfish. When I was diagnosed with ADHD, these beliefs I had about myself changed. I began to view myself with compassion. I realized that coming up short so much of my life wasn't a moral failure—it was a difference in the structures and chemistry in my brain."

— Kelly B., 32



SCAN FOR MORE

A vertical 'PUNCH CARD' with five rows of rewards: 'COMPLIMENT A STRANGER', 'VENMO A LONG-DISTANCE FRIEND \$ FOR THEIR NEXT COFFEE', 'WRITE A POSITIVE REVIEW FOR A LOCAL BUSINESS', and 'COOK OR BAKE FOR SOMEONE'. Each row has a corresponding punch hole on the right.

LOVELY

13 Therapist-Approved Tips for When You're Feeling Lonely

Don't let your lack of a plus-one stop you from doing your thing.

BY SAM BRODSKY

Loneliness can feel like a giant blow to your ego and can come with a whole heap of other emotions like hopelessness and sadness (speaking from experience here). Maybe you lost touch with friends once you set up camp on the shores of Adulthood. Perhaps you moved away from your family or you just had a breakup. It's also very possible you're surrounded by people but don't have emotional or physical intimacy or share common interests or values with them, which can also make you feel lonely, says therapist Daria Stepanian, LMFT. Relatable? Absolutely.

Whatever your situation, feeling isolated is not fun. Still, with a little effort and these tips from mental health professionals, loneliness can feel a little bit less terrible. You got this!

1. First, relish in your ability to do whatever you want with your alone time.

When you're feeling lonely, it can be easy to focus on what you're lacking—like a core group of friends to chill with or a deep connection with another person. And while those feelings are valid, it's also true that you very much deserve joy and happiness and are totally free to seek that out. Finding activities that bring you joy can shift your feelings away from loneliness, which can help you feel a bit better, says therapist Jin Kim, LMFT. So consider the things that you really want to do with your free time, like get lost in a TV show or a good book, listen to your fave album all the way through, go sit in the park for hours—whatever has you laughing or smiling (or both).

2. Do that thing you want to do... even without a plus-one.

People often get hung up on needing to go places with others, but if you do enjoyable things on your own, you may be able to find a potential friend along the way, says therapist Erica Turner, LMFT. "The more that you're like, 'I'm gonna go to this museum,' or 'I'm gonna go to this cookout,' you'll find people there who like to do some of the same things."

If you don't find like-minded people, at the very least, you'll come out of it with some quality me time. And that's also pretty helpful since it lets you focus less on loneliness and more on solitude, "a feeling of being alone and independent while enjoying your own company," says licensed clinical psychologist Ryan Howes, PhD. "If you can shift your mindset toward doing something good for yourself, the time alone can feel like a gift instead of a curse."

3. Join groups that share your interests.

Joining a club (or just a group of people with similar interests that isn't called a club but should be) is a great way to form real-life connections, says licensed clinical psychologist Sophia Choukas-Bradley, PhD, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Pittsburgh. For example, Dr. Choukas-Bradley said she joined a feminist book club when she moved to a new city, which sounds pretty neat! Is there a running group you could join? What about a group that meets every month to show off their cool cars? Hey, it probably exists!

4. Spend some time out and about.

Just going out in public might make you feel less alone, even if you aren't connecting with people while you're out there, says grief and trauma therapist Katherine Hatch, LCSW. You can sit and do work at a coffee shop, go window shopping, or whatever makes you feel comfortable, but the key is just being in humanity, she says. That's because people are hardwired to be social creatures, so it's necessary for us to feel like we're part of a larger group, explains Kim.

If you're up for it, it may also be helpful to make eye contact with people you see in a store or restaurant or wherever, says Hatch. Doing that or simply saying hello and goodbye to strangers can create a tiny connection. Of course if those people don't reciprocate, it might not work, but it could be worth a try anyway.

5. Remember how cool you are.

If your loneliness comes with a side of low self-esteem, that checks out. "A lot of times when we're lonely, we're pretty hard on ourselves," says psychiatrist and psychotherapist Melissa Shepard, MD. "Loneliness tends to be more painful because we blame ourselves for being lonely." Yep, that's a bummer.

It might sound silly or uncomfortable, but create a mental (or physical) list of what you like about yourself and why you're kind of a big deal, suggests Stepanian. This may give you a little boost of self-confidence and help you avoid a self-deprecating spiral. Then, remind yourself that there are other people out there struggling with the same thing, which can help too, says Dr. Shepard.

6. Take care of yourself.

Actively showing up for you is another very helpful way to feel less lonely, says therapist Lawrence Jackson, PhD, LMFT. Ask yourself what would feel good and bring you comfort. Is it doing that tiny thing on your to-do list you've been procrastinating or ordering delicious takeout or finally putting your laundry away? It may sound simple, but sometimes it's difficult to dig deep and be honest about what you really need.

7. Investigate your lonely feels.

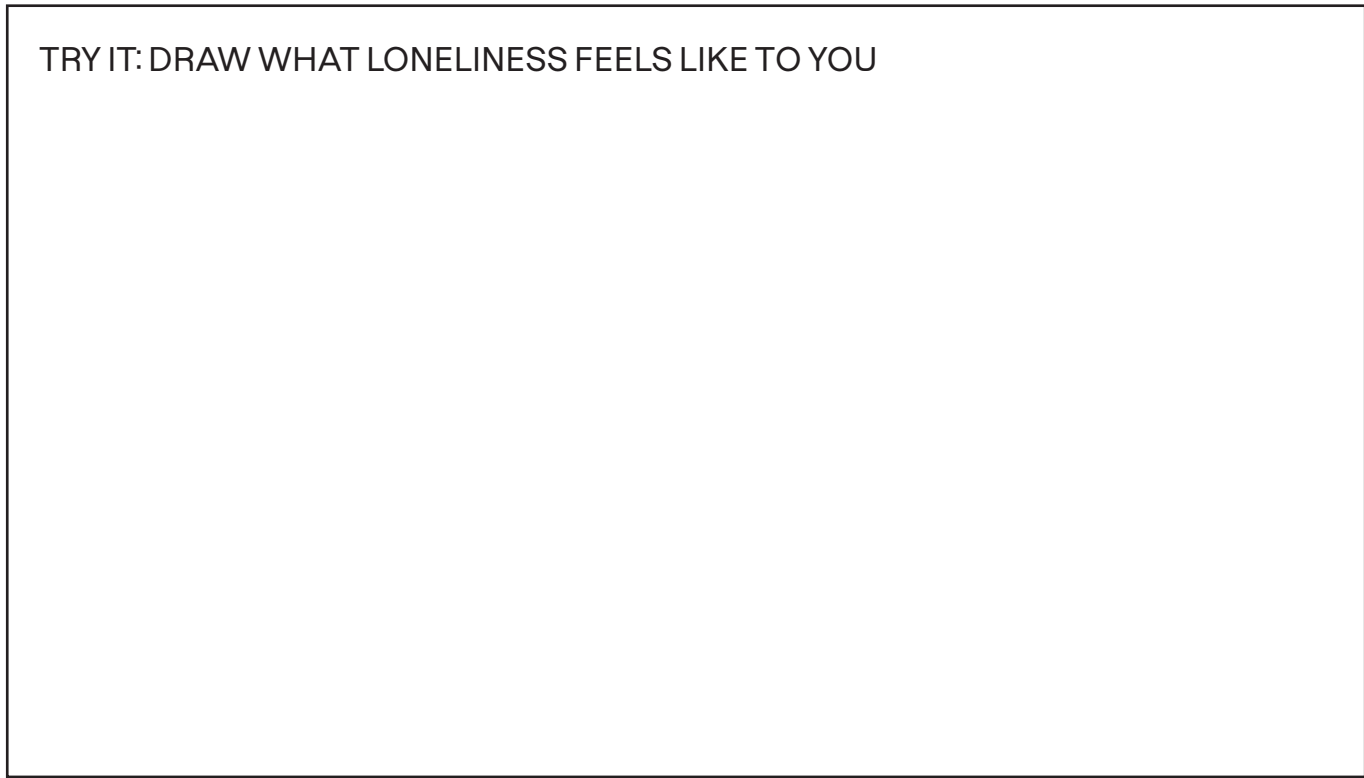
Writing about what you're experiencing in your body and your mind when you're lonely is a good way to find a sense of calm and release what's bothering you, Stepanian told Wondermind in a previous interview. You

can drop them on actual paper, your Notes app, or just a doc on your computer—whatever is easiest for you to get your feels down works.

8. Draw your loneliness.

What does being lonely feel like and/or look like? Reflecting on this separates your emotion from yourself, taking its power away. That can make the sense of isolation more manageable and less overwhelming, says Hatch. "We can externalize it to the extent that we actually get to be curious and compassionate about it. We get to take care of it."

Doodling what loneliness means to you may help you understand it better. If you're not sure where to start, think about what color your loneliness is, what its shape is, where it is located in your body, and if it could be a character or a sensation, says Hatch.



9. Scroll through your phone.

When you're in the pits of loneliness, it's easy to tell yourself that you don't have anyone to reach out to or that no one cares, says therapist Alo Johnston, LMFT (he says he gets that way too). However, swiping through your phone contacts, texts, or DMs can remind you that there are people in your life you could talk to, he says. You don't have to reach out, but it's a step toward realizing that you're not alone.

10. But maybe stay away from social media.

While many people report that social media helps them feel less lonely by enabling them to meet new people, it can also serve to snowball your loneliness in a lot of situations. After all, scrolling through a highlight reel of people out with other people doing fun things can send your FOMO through the roof. So, if you're craving connection ASAP, try opting for a prolonged conversation in real life, on the phone, or via Zoom for a more effective way to squash loneliness than quick, often passive or surface-level convos on the socials, Dr. Choukas-Bradley says.

11. Decide how you want to socialize.

If you do want to reach out, stop to ask yourself what level of connection you're looking for. Are you up for a real convo? Great! Go for it. But you may just be in the mood for a quick check-in text or a battle of who can share the best memes before bed, Johnston says. "There isn't this one universal way that we feel connected, but I think in times when we feel extra lonely, we wanna look at what's the easiest access point to feel connection," explains psychotherapist Sahar Martinez, PsyD, LMFT.

If you want to text, call, or FaceTime someone you haven't chatted with recently, don't let yourself believe that they'll be annoyed by you, says Johnston. We might all have those people in our lives we've been meaning to catch up with, so remind yourself how you'd feel if you heard from *them*, he says. You'd probably be open to talking to them, and they could very well feel the same.

12. Reality test your negative assumptions.

Oftentimes people who are lonely want to connect with others but fear rejection, says psychotherapist and author Chris Warren-Dickins, LPC. Maybe you're tempted to chat up that person you always see at your coffee shop or pilates class, but you worry they'll think you're weird for talking to them out of nowhere. Challenge the validity of that fear when it comes up by thinking about times where you actually had good conversations with people you didn't really know, he says. Also, think about times that friendly, well-intentioned strangers struck up a conversation with you. Did you assume they were weird or did you appreciate the chance to connect? Chances are you'll be able to find a few welcoming people.

13. Volunteer for a charity or cause you support.

"Not only do you get the gratification of doing your part to make the world a better place, but you could find yourself serving wonderful people and meeting other volunteers with similar passions," says Dr. Howes. Love animals? Search for shelters in your area that could use some help. Want to spend more time outdoors? Look for park cleanup events happening near you. In fact, one study suggested that widowed adults 51 and older who volunteered for two or more hours a week felt less lonely. Yeah, this is very specific, but you get the point. FYI, if volunteering isn't your jam, you can send a friend coffee money or give your cousin some clothes you're ready to part with. Doing something (anything) nice for someone else fosters connection that'll make you feel seen.

○

ASK THE EXPERT

Is it bad if I think my therapist is hot? Should I find a new one?

Take a breath, people. Being attracted to your therapist isn't necessarily a problem. We're human! And it's very, very normal for us to notice how good looking someone is—even if that person is our health care provider.

Actually, it's possible your therapist seems more attractive *because* they're your therapist. Sometimes, a person can direct romantic or sexual feelings from past relationships toward their therapist, which is an example of transference. And since therapy is one of the rare places where a person can be completely vulnerable by sharing the details of their life with someone who's validating and attentive (aka their therapist), it makes sense that a client might feel attracted to their mental health professional.

So should you stop seeing your therapist if you're feeling some type of way about them? It depends! The biggest thing to consider is whether your feelings for them interfere with your sessions. Are you distracted by your emotions? Are you feeling self-conscious? Are you less open and honest because you're trying to show a more "polished" version of yourself? If that's the case, it's probably a good idea to have a convo with your therapist about your feels. That's because, if you're comfortable, discussing it could lead to more self-discovery and insights. You could start with something like, "This is sorta embarrassing to say, but I'm having these feelings of attraction here, and I'm not sure if it's getting in the way of my sessions." The therapist might go ahead and talk it out with you and reiterate any necessary boundaries. They may even take the initiative to refer you to another therapist if they think it's best.

Honestly, it's not weird if this sounds like the last thing you want to do since, well, it's awkward. But you should know that therapists are trained to deal with many client situations—including this one. It happens!

—*Jasmynn Smith Abernathy, LMFT*

○ AWKWARD

10 Lies People Told Their Therapists

Being for real is easier said than done.

BY SHANNON BARBOUR



[Heads up: This article deals with suicide in case you want to skip it.]

If someone says they've never lied to their therapist or conveniently left some crucial piece of information out of their session, well, they might be lying. Honestly, filtering yourself is just a part of life for most of us. From saying you're fine when you're totally not to code-switching in the workplace and biting your tongue in front of your opinionated in-laws, there's no shortage of situations where you do not feel free to be you. And while almost every therapist will tell you that therapy is the one place to be unapologetically yourself, it can also sometimes be the hardest place to get brutally honest.

Even if you know deep down that filtering yourself means you won't reap all the benefits you're paying for, that doesn't make it any easier for some of us to open up in therapy. Sometimes you just don't feel safe. Maybe you're not ready to talk about the thing or you're worried about what they'd think of you if you really got real with them. At the end of the day, you're only human.

It's so easy to feel alone or ashamed or weird about being guarded with your therapist since baring your soul is usually touted as a cornerstone of therapy. But this is actually a pretty common experience among therapy-goers. So if you rarely tell your pro what's up or have spun entire fake storylines (yeah, this is a thing), I hope reading the stories below makes you feel seen.

So let's be real for a sec, shall we? Here are 10 very real lies (or omissions) that people actually told their therapists. May you learn from their experiences and maybe even feel better about finally getting unfiltered.

1. I lied about feeling better.

"The only thing I'm scared of is my therapy sessions coming to an end. I'm scared my therapist will think I'm better and that I should move on. So sometimes I lie and tell my therapist that nothing has changed or I feel worse, even if I've had some good days. I can't move on. ... I'm scared of being alone again." —*Takuro M., 24*

2. I lied about why I was really there.

"As soon as I stepped into my therapist's office, I could feel my heart racing. I knew what I needed to talk about, but I didn't want to. 'I've been OK,' I lied. 'Just some family problems, but they don't really affect me.' My therapist nodded, but I could tell she wasn't fully convinced. ... We talked about the weather, politics, and our favorite TV shows. But as much as I tried to distract myself, the memories and hallucinations kept creeping up on me. I felt like I was drowning in my own thoughts.

Finally, one day, I couldn't take it anymore. I broke down in tears and told my therapist the truth. I told her about the traumatic events that had been haunting me and how I had been suffering from strong hallucinations and flashbacks. I sobbed, 'I didn't mean to lie to you. I just didn't want to be vulnerable.'

That conversation was a turning point for me. I realized that it was okay to be vulnerable and there was no shame in admitting when we're struggling. With my therapist's help, I was able to confront my trauma and start the healing process." —*Cécile, 20*

3. I gloss over the negative details.

"My therapist will sometimes ask me whether I experienced certain situations, thoughts, or feelings as a child, and I usually gloss over the truth to avoid painting people in a negative light. For the most part, the people in my life had the best intentions, and I don't want my therapist to have a bad perception of them. And sometimes I'll act like the tactics and suggestions my therapist gives me seem like they'll help me when I know deep down that I've already tried them or that there's a reason why they won't help. I don't ever want to seem rude or dismissive because I care about what everyone thinks of me—even my therapist." —*Kiley A., 23*

4. I said I did my therapy homework, but...

"I met my therapist a year ago. I was suffering from my anxieties, and I hadn't told anybody. I had strict parents and there was never a right time for me to share this with them. My therapist suggested I talk about my anxiety with my parents, but I never had the courage to do it because my overthinking never let me. So I lied and said I opened up to them and am doing great. Eventually, I had to tell my therapist the truth. She supported me in every way possible." —*Anonymous, 19*

5. I skipped over the unhealthy relationship patterns.

"I'm polyamorous, and I have a partner who doesn't know how to handle his own emotions. I often found his moods unpredictable, and I would 'hurt his feelings' by doing normal things, which left me feeling as though I was walking on eggshells. ... I glossed over much of our relationship in therapy because I knew it wasn't healthy. ... Obviously, I knew this was a bad sign, but I loved him, so I just kept it to myself. Eventually, I did talk to my therapist, and my partner began therapy too. Now that my partner and I are working hard to get to a healthy place, I'm trying to be more honest with my therapist, but it's hard. As a self-aware person, I never lied to a therapist before this, even about my worst, most selfish thoughts. But letting a partner cloud my judgment just felt so embarrassing." —*Anonymous, 30*

6. I didn't tell them just how bad it was getting.

"I was diagnosed with ADHD by my primary care doctor when I was 23. I took medication as prescribed, and as the dosage got higher, my mental health declined more and more. I started going to a therapist again, but I was so afraid to tell them I was having suicidal thoughts and ideation because I was afraid of what would happen. Fast forward seven years, and over and over again I omitted that I was experiencing severe depression and anxiety. Luckily, my family picked up on my behavior changes and stepped in. This allowed me to be radically honest with my therapist and with my family. I was so afraid of being judged and lonely because of what I was feeling, but now I'm not afraid anymore." —*Jessica C., 28*

7. I avoided a hard story from my past.

"For the first six months with my therapist, I omitted my experience of being displaced from my home because I was afraid the therapist would pathologize a family member who is important to me. Omitting this story caused extra therapy anxiety. Eventually, I told my therapist I was keeping her at arm's length and had a difficult story I hadn't yet disclosed, which led to important and interesting work around secrecy. A year later, I still haven't told the story but feel the details are less important than the transparency about the story's existence. It would've been a lot easier if I said from session one, 'There's a challenging experience from my past that I'm not ready to talk about' to save myself all the internal fear and debate around disclosure. She's been respectful and has never asked me to tell her." —*Anonymous, 26*

8. I kept skipping the important stuff.

"I didn't tell my therapist that I suffer from severe dissociation. I kept forgetting about it until one day when I was on my way home right after therapy. I wrote to my therapist about it and we addressed it right at the beginning of our next session. These days, I feel more comfortable telling the truth about how I actually feel, and that lets me be more honest with myself. I put on this 'I'm happy' mask less frequently." —*Heidi F., 21*

9. I avoided talking about my suicidal thoughts.

"I was going through a difficult time during 2020 and 2021. Between my move from Puerto Rico to Florida on my own [and] missing family and friends, my anxiety built up in ways I never imagined, and I suffered a severe depressive episode. It was too much to bear, and my mind was already starting to play with the idea of suicide to just escape the pain and loneliness I was feeling. Although I always had the support of family and friends, I still felt alone in this world. I met with a therapist but did not come clean about my suicidal thoughts, which [felt like] not caring if I was here tomorrow or not. I was avoiding having to hear the 'hospitalization' word, which carried a huge stigma for me at the time. Eventually, [my thoughts] became worse and I had to come clean about how deep of a hole I was in. I eventually went through a partial hospitalization, and it was the best thing I could have done—that's when they gave me my diagnosis of having generalized anxiety disorder." —*Taisha V. HZ, 27*

10. I tried to make it sound like things weren't that bad.

"My parents were always very concerned with appearances, and, on some level, I felt that not being perfect or having problems was my fault and meant there was something wrong with me. When I started going to therapy in high school, I never felt like I could be honest with my therapist. I would always automatically edit my responses to make my situation sound not as bad or just completely lie if there was no way to spin it to be more positive. I was convinced the therapist would say my circumstances were my fault. It took me years before I really understood that my therapist was there to help me navigate things. For therapy to work, I had to share what I needed help with." —*Sahara P., 30*

Quotes have been edited and condensed for length and clarity.

○



STUCK

8 Ways to Get Psyched About Life Again

Anyone else in a funk? Let's fix that.

BY AMY MARTURANA WINDERL

Raise your hand if you have felt personally victimized at some point (or many points) since 2020. We're all raising our hands now, right? If you've been feeling down, or stuck, or just struggling to figure out how to be motivated again welcome to the damn club. A few years full of —unprecedented times— where you've been unable to enjoy the things that typically played a role in your life—like spending time with loved ones, traveling, social collaboration, or big sweaty concerts—will do that to a person. It's all been pretty soul-crushing, to put it lightly.

Even if the last couple of years didn't totally beat your spirit down (if that's you, please teach us your magic) you can probably remember a time or two in your life where you've been lacking motivation or purpose. Maybe your job doesn't feel exactly like the career of your dreams or you took a look around one day and realized you were just going through the motions instead of doing things that really psych you up. Maybe the stuff you used to enjoy just isn't thrilling you anymore. You've lost that loving feeling, and you aren't sure how to get it back.

Sound like you? We asked mental health professionals to share their best tips for re-igniting that *joie de vivre* after it's been snuffed out for so long. Try these things to get your spark back.

1. Figure out what's actually tanking your motivation.

First things first. If you're feeling bleh, you want to dig into why that might be. "What tends to happen is we notice that we're not feeling inspired or motivated, but we're not looking at what the root causes are," says licensed psychotherapist and psychoanalyst Babita Spinelli, LP. "How do we help ourselves if we don't know what it's really about?"

When you stop to think about it, you might realize that you've actually been through some pretty big changes or there have been specific stressors in your life that you can try to reduce. Maybe you've been doomscrolling a lot lately (honestly, who hasn't?),

and it's really bringing you down. Or maybe changes to your job, location, or social life have messed with your mind more than you expected. "Sometimes our lack of motivation is feeling like we don't have meaning or purpose," Spinelli adds, "so getting to the root of what's causing these feelings can help us make a change."

2. Pinpoint one joyful thing you can do each day.

Most of the time, you don't need to make some sort of grand gesture or intricate life-changing plan to turn things around. Small changes can make a huge difference, Spinelli says. "Ask yourself: What is one thing I can get myself to do each day—or just today—that's going to help me feel a little happier? It could be something as simple as heading to the local coffee shop to get your favorite green matcha iced latte," Spinelli says. Little acts build momentum over time, and if a cold bevy or inspiring podcast is what puts a smile on your face for 30 minutes then that's a step in the right direction.

3. Get outside.

The power of nature is real, people. "Even if you live in a city, find your sanctuary. Breathing in fresh air and seeing that there's something bigger and beautiful out there can be inspiring," Spinelli says. It's kind of impossible to go for a walk on a beautiful day and not feel a little bit better about the world, but don't feel like it has to be a whole thing. Just a quick lap around the block or some barefoot time in your lawn may shift your perspective.

If you can't get in some outdoor time, just do something outside your home, suggests psychotherapist and psychoanalyst Stephanie Roth Goldberg, LCSW-R, founder of Intuitive Psychotherapy NYC. "We spend so much time at home, and that in itself can be demotivating," she says. So, just go somewhere else for a little bit. Having a change of scenery can get you into a new headspace and thinking about other ideas that might excite and inspire you, she says. "Having a novel experience is really useful."

or local bakery—and heading there solo or asking a friend to join. "You can support them at the same time you're supporting yourself," Goldberg says.

7. Show yourself some grace.

As you're navigating all this, being patient with your progress is really important, says therapist Siobhan D. Flowers, PhD, LPC-S, an adjunct professor at New York University. "You need to have realistic expectations and know you might be looking at a new normal or that it might take some additional time to get back to the way you felt before," she says. Before you felt so blah, before the pandemic, before whatever it is that got you stuck in this rut.

Setting realistic expectations also means showing yourself some grace if progress comes slowly. "You can never guilt or shame anyone into changing and that includes ourselves," Dr. Flowers says. "We need to be careful about our own inner critic when evaluating what progress looks like. When we want to spark joy, meaning, or purpose, it's always best to not be too hard on ourselves and approach things from a place of positive support and encouragement." So, when you have a good day or afternoon or moment, high-five yourself. Cheer yourself on. Remind yourself that baby steps are still progress.

8. Ask for help if you need it.

At a certain point, you might need a little guidance to get your spark back. No shame in that! Therapy is an amazing resource, one that you can benefit from in good times and in bad. "When it's been long enough that you can't remember doing the things you have wanted to do or taking care of the things you used to typically take care of, it's time to ask for help," Goldberg says. Similarly, if you're not finding joy in the things that you used to, this can be a sign that your bleh mood has dipped into depression territory.

TBH, if you're debating seeking mental health care, it's probably a good idea. "If it has come into your mind, it's so much better to take care of it instead of waiting until things feel worse," Goldberg says. A professional can give you tools to feel unstuck and help coach you to a better place where you feel jazzed about life again. Having someone to help you take that first step can give you all the momentum you need to start that journey back to your happy self again. ○

4. Try your hand at a new hobby.

And no, you definitely do not need to turn it into a side hustle. (Unless you really, really want to.) We're talking a hobby for the sake of simply doing an activity that you enjoy. Because, the truth is, maybe you're uninspired simply because you're bored, Spinelli says. It really could be that simple. A new hobby or skill can be inspiring and add some much-needed change to an otherwise monotonous daily routine.

5. Recall a person or activity that inspired you in the past.

"Think back to a time when you felt inspired and motivated and what that was about. What worked for you?" Spinelli says. Maybe you used to swim and loved it but stopped doing it for some reason. Maybe you miss the hope and possibility of back-to-school season now that your school days are behind you. Find that thing that used to make you excited and bring it back into your life in some way. "Go back to what works," Spinelli says. Yes, this is your excuse to buy all of the fun school supplies you want.

Similarly, that source of good feels could be a person. If there's a friend or someone who you always feel good around, connect with them. Call them up and just chat or ask them to meet up for coffee. If you're lacking these strong personal connections and could use a sense of community, find a group online that can help you feel motivated. Groups and forums focused on a hobby can give you the kick in the butt you need to get back into said hobby IRL.

6. Pay it forward.

Experts say that volunteering and giving to charity can help boost your mood, but it can also give you a new sense of purpose. For these reasons, Goldberg recommends thinking about any businesses you've been wanting to support—be it a restaurant, fitness studio

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FIND 7 (PERFECTLY VALID!) FEELINGS

- Anxious
- Motivated
- Awkward
- Lonely
- Stuck
- Confused
- Meh

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How to Deal With All Your Climate Anxiety

Anyone else feeling sweaty and stressed?

BY COLLEEN STINCHCOMBE

ANXIOUS

If you're anything like us, you've had some conflicting feelings on these recent unseasonably warm days. On the one hand: *Hello, outdoor dining weather and beach days in May!* But also: *Um, Earth, you good? As temperatures and rates of extreme weather incidents soar, so does our collective climate anxiety.* Basically we're all sweaty and stressed about the planet... especially on days that we didn't expect to be quite so sweaty.

While not an official diagnosis, climate anxiety is a term used to describe the sometimes overwhelming feelings of worry, grief, sadness, hopelessness, and other emotions around climate change. And it's really common: more than two-thirds of U.S. adults say they experience it, according to a survey by The Harris Poll on behalf of the American Psychological Association.

Climate anxiety can take a lot of forms depending on your situation. You might be a young person who's freaking out about what the world will look like 50 years from now or you might be directly experiencing climate disasters already. Maybe you're worried about what this all means for your kids—whether you're already a parent or contemplating becoming one. It's a lot.

For some people, climate anxiety can also look like avoiding the topic



together or mentally checking out, says Laura Carter Robinson, PsyD, a clinical psychologist in Michigan focused on helping adults and college students experiencing climate distress. Relatable? Yes. Helpful? Not so much.

One of the first steps to dealing with climate anxiety is acknowledging that the fears are there and that it's valid to be concerned. Those feelings are not in themselves an issue. In fact, they're

a beautiful thing, Dr. Carter Robinson says. "They speak to how much you care about the planet," she says.

That said, if your feelings about our increasingly chaotic climate are causing you distress, despair, or to disengage, there are some ways to process these big emotions and work through them. Here's what you can do with all that eco-anxiety.

Let yourself feel multiple feelings.

When it comes to moments of dissonance—like the simultaneous joy and trepidation you feel when it's 90 degrees in New York City... in May—practice embracing the both/and or in-between of emotions. "Part of living a full human experience is saying things are never totally good and they're never totally bad," says

Practice calming your nervous system, especially when you're out in nature.

Climate change is happening, but we have to find ways to not despair. "We're not going to get out of this in our lifetime, and so learning how to mitigate that distress is going to be really helpful for us to be resilient throughout our lifespan," Feaver says.

Breathwork and meditation practices can be great stress-relievers, but if those don't appeal to you, you can start by just spending more mindful time in nature. "Being out in the natural world with other beings is incredibly calming. There's a lot of research that suggests things like gardening or walking in forests or walking along the water really calms the system down," Feaver says. Even sitting in your own backyard or front porch or touching some nearby grass can help.

A more intentional mindfulness activity in nature might help, too, like taking time to look closely at a particular tree or flower, says Dr. Carter Robinson. "Don't think of it as a flower or tree, but notice the colors. Notice the shapes that you see. Notice the shadows, notice the lines, notice the textures, and just let yourself go into that space," she says.

If being outside triggers your feelings of grief or anxiety around climate change, try starting smaller to ease back in, Dr. Carter Robinson says. That might be as simple as visualizing nature or

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spending less time outside to start. But if you're really struggling to find any peace in nature due to climate anxiety, that's a good reason to speak with a mental health professional if you can.

Connect with people who understand your concerns.

A lot of people feel like they're alone in their worries about climate change. But a recent study by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communications found that 64% of Americans are at least "somewhat worried" about climate change, and over half feel "disgusted" or "sad."

It can be incredibly isolating to feel like you're alone in your fears, so connecting with people who get your eco-anxiety can be a great way to feel validated and supported. "Whether that's friends or families, youth climate groups, either online or in person, climate cafes—there are lots of ways to find other people who are like you," says Dr. Carter Robinson. "When we connect with other people, we're less anxious and less lonely."

Of course, there's a fine line between validating each other's concerns and ruminating over them, so if you find yourself getting more anxious when you connect with others over climate concerns, that might be a sign to take a break or find a more action-oriented group.

Set some healthy limits on your news consumption.

Checking out of climate change can be a sign of not dealing with it, but that doesn't mean you need to subject yourself to an endless feed of doom and gloom. In fact, 56% of people listed media coverage of extreme climate events as a top cause of their eco-anxiety, according to a survey by OnePoll on behalf of Avocado.

"We have to protect ourselves from some of the vicarious trauma that we experience from being exposed to that," Dr. Carter Robinson says. That doesn't mean ignoring developments in climate change—but setting limits is important. "It's preserving your own ability to function and, in turn, that preserves your ability to care," she says.

A few simple things you can try, courtesy of Dr. Carter Robinson: Limit yourself to one trusted news source rather than multiple feeds, increase the number of solutions-focused climate sources you read, and monitor how you feel when you're reading. If a particular source tends to send your stress levels soaring, consider removing it from your lineup.

Pick one small action to take.

There are a million things that can be done to help the planet,

but no one person can do all of them. In fact, trying to do too many things at once can be paralyzing. "Don't try to overhaul your whole life. Most of us don't have the stamina for that," Feaver says. Instead, "pick one thing to start with that you can fall in love with," she says. Maybe that's working toward eliminating single-use plastics in your home, or volunteering at a community garden, or working with an organization to protect your local waterways.

Change your focus to the future you *want* to see.

Anxiety can keep us stuck in imagining worst-case scenarios. That's hard on us, and it's no good for the planet either. Dr. Carter Robinson says, "Climate change is real and it's frightening and we need to act quickly," she says. But panicking only makes it harder to focus on solutions.

She encourages people to shift their focus. Instead of keeping a mental list of everything that's gone wrong with climate change, she asks people to envision the future they want to live in. "Use that instead of fear as your motivation," she says. Then, find small but meaningful ways to work toward creating that future.

Being Estranged From Your Family Is Hard. Let's Talk About It.

BY SHARON MCDONNELL



You hear it all the time: Blood is thicker than water, and it's important to stick by family. But for many people—including myself—family estrangement, or not being on friendly or speaking terms anymore, is simply a reality.

Unfortunately, estrangement isn't something people talk about very often, and it's shrouded in stigma, says licensed counselor Kelly McDaniel, LPC, who specializes in mother-daughter relationships. This means people might have to navigate these uncomfortable feelings on their own and work through the shame that can follow. But there are a ton of valid reasons why people choose this path, and there can actually be many benefits to it too. Life with my parents felt impossible, but once I chose to distance myself from them, the world became much easier to navigate.

It's important to note that there's a spectrum of estrangement, and it's not always a forever thing, says psychologist Joshua Coleman, PhD, author of Rules of Estrangement. Sometimes people distance themselves or experience a loved one pulling away from them for short periods of time, long stretches, and sometimes forever. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the most common reasons for family estrangement is abuse, differences in cultural values or identity, and the failure to acknowledge the hurt that was caused, Dr. Coleman says.

When I was 20, I resolved I'd never tell my mother where I worked for the rest of my life. My decision to not stay in touch after I left home was far messier: I had to settle for not initiating contact, just enduring it. Around the same time, I decided I'd never initiate contact with my father, who left our family when I was 14. At one point, he disappeared for seven years, and I assumed he died. He later re-appeared, and I didn't ask for an explanation, continuing our sometime-y relationship.

Still, as an only child who wasn't in touch with my aunts, uncles, and 20 cousins, I felt obligated to remain in some contact with my parents. But I also did what I had to do for self-protection, as I saw no possible advantage in staying in frequent contact with people I found cruel and absolutely unreliable in every way. I knew no one else who estranged themselves from their family (this was long before internet support groups), and I constantly faced uncomfortable questions like, "So are you seeing your family this Christmas?" I never knew what to say, but I knew replying that I didn't know if they were alive or dead was not the desired response.

These days, odd things make me sad, like news reports about criminals whose parents assured their kid that they loved them. But, for me, there is one shining, unexpected benefit to estrangement: I'm overwhelmingly happier. Without the burden of my complicated and unhealthy relationship with my parents, life as a whole feels like a cinch in comparison to what it was.

Estrangement isn't an easy path to walk, and it can be filled with a whole range of feelings—like relief and contentment that you no longer have to deal with an unhealthy dynamic, grief for the relationship you once had, nostalgia for some cherished memories, confusion, and even excitement about what's to come in the future, McDaniel says. But, because estrangement still doesn't seem to be a topic that's often brought up at dinner parties, it's also not uncommon to feel overwhelmingly alone in your experience. If that's the case for you, we collected stories from nine people on what it feels like to be estranged from their family—whether they committed to that journey or someone in their family pulled away from them.



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Big Plans

BY KAITLIN CHAN



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7 Eco-Friendly Self-Care Products to Add to Your Mental Fitness Routine

Feel-good products that you'll also feel good about using.

BY CHRISTINA STIEHL

Self-care isn't just bubble baths and green juice (though if those are your jam, by all means, do you). When it comes to building a mental fitness routine, the key is filling it with tons of big and small ways to care for your mental health on a regular basis—like getting enough sleep, moving your body, journaling, staying connected to friends and family, and maybe even therapy and medication. Because everyone is different, what works for you might not be what works for your best friend or the rest of TikTok, and that's OK.

If you're looking to level up your mental fitness routine, check out these seven self-care products we picked to help you move your body, de-stress, rest, and recharge. Bonus? They're all eco-friendly, so you can feel good about helping the environment while you help your mind.



2. Avocado Green Pillow, starting at \$109

1. Avocado Green Mattress, starting at \$1,399

Sleep is pretty much the foundation of self-care, and a good mattress is (quite literally) the foundation for a restful night of sleep. "There is a very strong bi-directional relationship between the quality of your sleep and your overall mental health," explains Sarah Silverman, PsyD, sleep psychologist and behavioral sleep medicine specialist. "Evidence suggests that sleep problems may be both a cause and a consequence of mental health problems," she says. So while one fantastic night's rest isn't going to banish anxious thoughts forever, improving your sleep habits is kind of a no-brainer when it comes to looking after your mental health.

And your mattress plays a huge role in how restorative your sleep is. Dr. Silverman likes the Avocado Green Mattress for its quality materials and generous trial policy. These mattresses have been third-party tested and meet the standards set forth by the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) and the Global Organic Latex Standard (GOLS). They're made from 100% GOTS-certified organic

wool, 100% GOLS-certified organic latex and 100% GOTS-certified organic cotton—all of which are grown on and harvested on their own farms. They're also made without polyurethane foams and toxic fire retardants.

So if not knowing exactly what you're sleeping on keeps you up at night, you can rest easy on this mattress. Plus, you get a one-year trial, which is a great amount of time to make sure this is the right bed for you. Dr. Silverman recommends at least a month to see if your new mattress is a good fit for your unique needs.



4. Heath Lavender Plant the Box Candle, \$29.50

Yes, your mental fitness routine can absolutely include chilling out with a soothing, scented candle, and there are plenty of eco-friendly options. This Heath Lavender Plant the Box Candle is made with relaxing lavender essential oil and 100% soy wax made from domestically grown, environmentally sustainable soybeans. KOBO candles are also made without any dyes, phthalates, or oil-based petroleum products. But here's the best part: You can plant the biodegradable box it comes in to grow fresh lavender at home. (Have we mentioned that gardening is also a great mental fitness activity?)

5. Girlfriend Collective Black Compressive High-Rise Legging, \$78

You probably/definitely need to release some tension in your hips, shoulders, and pretty much your whole body after a long day. "I'm a huge fan of yoga before bed," says Dr. Silverman, especially yoga nidra, which is a practice where you hold certain yoga poses and focus on your breathing. "That has been shown to reduce muscle tension [and] allow your mind and body to produce more of that parasympathetic activation, which is the part of our nervous system that we want more of when we're trying to transition to sleep."

So whether you go with a virtual or IRL yoga class or just move through some intentional stretches, you're going to want some quality yoga pants. The Girlfriend Collective Black Compressive High-Rise Leggings have great reviews and come in sizes XXS to 6XL with three different inseam lengths. They're sustainable and made from 25 recycled water bottles, and when you're done with them, you can recycle them with Girlfriend Collective's Re-Girlfriend upcycling program. Plus, the compression means they'll stay in place—even in Downward-Facing Dog.

3. Decomposition Ruled Spiral Notebook, \$11

6. All Birds Women's Tree Dasher 2, \$135

Journaling is a tried-and-true mental fitness tip for a reason: It's a great way to reflect, process, and just let it all out. And one of the best ways to make journaling a habit is to have a very cute notebook that you're excited to crack open every day. This Ruled Spiral Decomposition Notebook is made from 100% post-consumer recycled paper that can also be recycled when it's done. Plus, it comes in a variety of fun covers, and the lined paper makes it easy to write your thoughts down.

get out there, and comfortable shoes are crucial. The All Birds Women's Tree Dasher 2 shoes are made with FSC-certified TENCEL upper and natural rubber outsole; an FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification means the products come from responsibly managed forests and is considered a "gold standard" of ethical production. Plus, the shoelaces are made from recycled plastic water bottles.

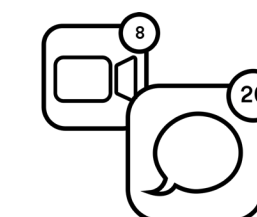


7. Avocado Organic Yoga Meditation Pillow, \$79

Even if you're someone who thinks that sitting quietly with your thoughts is the exact opposite of relaxation, it's worth giving meditation a try. You can find free guided meditations on YouTube, download a meditation app, or just practice taking a few minutes each day to focus on nothing but your breath and the present moment. To make this activity even more comfortable, the Avocado Organic Yoga Meditation Pillow gives you just enough height and support. Plus, it's made from organic and vegan materials, including a buckwheat fill and a GOTS-certified cotton cover.

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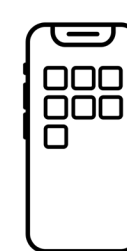


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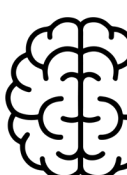


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Can We Talk About Intrusive Thoughts?

Everybody has them, but some thoughts can be stickier than others. BY COLLEEN STINCHCOMBE

It's the middle of a blue-sky afternoon and you're thinking about how lovely the sun feels on your skin when, boom, out of nowhere, you imagine a car crash killing your loved one on their drive home. It's a terrible thing to think about, and you might be wondering WTF it means and where that even came from. You might even wonder if having these awful thoughts means something about you—if your brain is somehow filled with darker, scarier thoughts than everyone else's.

So hopefully it's somewhat comforting to know that most people imagine truly gruesome scenarios from time to time (Stephen King has made a whole career out of it). If they're not bothering you (other than to make you think, *Um, WTF was that about?*) then there's no reason to worry about them.

But intrusive thoughts can sometimes start to eat at people. Unwelcome thoughts can be so upsetting that they play a role in several mental health conditions, particularly anxiety conditions like obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and generalized anxiety disorder.

It's not the initial thought that's the problem, exactly. It's that the thought didn't float by like the rest of them—it got caught. This is when intrusive thoughts start to be a concern. One way to determine whether intrusive thoughts are a problem for you is to figure out, "how much distress are they starting to cause? How much time are they taking up in somebody's day?" Dr. Fraire says.

These thoughts getting "stuck" can actually happen as early as childhood—which is also a great time to start working on it. "If we catch it early, we can teach them skills on what to do when these kinds of thoughts show up," Dr. Fraire explains.

But don't freak out if you're an adult who is just now realizing that your intrusive thoughts are really effing with your life—there are ways you can learn to manage them too.

Here's how to cope with intrusive thoughts:

1. Call out the intrusive thought.

For example, let's say you think about how gross your keyboard is—but then you can't stop thinking about it, even after you've wiped it down, even after you reassure yourself you've been using the same keyboard for years and it hasn't hurt you before. Or maybe you imagine a loved one dying, and even though you know they're just down the street, you can't stop thinking about it and crying.

It sounds funny, but when it comes to our thoughts, sometimes you're halfway down the metaphorical road before you realize you've taken a turn. Ever thought, *Hmm, I'm hungry*; and been pulling a snack from the fridge

before you realized it? It's a little like that.

There's a lot of "what if" thinking in anxiety, Dr. Fraire says: What if this happens, and then this, and then this?! So the first step is working on noticing when you've had an intrusive thought. "I think this is one of the areas where mindfulness is actually really helpful even though it's such a buzzword," she says.

Exactly which mindfulness technique you use doesn't matter, Dr. Fraire says—maybe it's deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or guided meditation. Find one that works for you, even if that means trying a few to see what you like. Most mindfulness techniques ultimately focus on bringing your attention to the present moment, rather than thinking in the future or past. This is clutch because being able to return to the present moment will help you recognize when an intrusive thought has pulled you out of it.

2. Practice letting thoughts go.

As we mentioned earlier, having an intrusive thought isn't usually the problem. The problem is when the thoughts get stuck. One way they get stuck? Trying too hard to get rid of them.

and go as they would normally," says Jessica Frick, LPC, NCC, counselor at Metamorphosis Counseling in Erie, PA.

When you have a distressing thought, try not to probe at it too much. Instead of thinking, *What does this mean? What if it really happens? Am I a horrible person for thinking this?* or paying it similar attention, try to treat it as a normal thought like any other. "They might hang around for a little while, or they might leave very quickly, which is more often the case whenever we don't fight against them," Frick says.

3. Talk to a professional if these thoughts are really messing with your life.

The above techniques work more generally for intrusive thoughts, but there are also well-studied treatments for dealing with this symptom in the context of certain mental health conditions. For example, intrusive thoughts that come with OCD might benefit from exposure and response therapy, according to the American Psychological Association (APA).

Exposure and response therapy basically works by ramping up exposure to situations that trigger a person's intrusive thoughts and helping them tolerate being uncomfortable while the thoughts pass. Meanwhile, they're being coached by a mental health professional not to engage in the ritual or compulsive response they'd normally use (like washing their hands or counting their steps). "When we do that, [the intrusive thought] will no longer have power and have weight and it'll go away," Dr. McIngvale explains.

Another example of condition-specific treatment for intrusive thoughts is cognitive therapy paired with prolonged exposure therapy for PTSD. Cognitive therapy involves normalizing the PTSD response as a coping mechanism while helping to shift your thoughts patterns. Prolonged exposure helps people gradually face their trauma-related memories, feelings, and thoughts so that their thoughts and triggers aren't seen as dangerous.

The bottom line: Intrusive thoughts are normal, but for some people, they can be disruptive and distressing. It's totally OK to turn to help if intrusive thoughts are bothering you. The Anxiety and Depression Association of America is a great place to learn more about anxiety disorders and find therapists skilled in treating them, Dr. McIngvale says.

"A lot of times intrusive thoughts can be really scary. They can be very stigmatizing. And so people often don't seek treatment for them because they're afraid of what people think or how will people respond," she says. "But the great news is there's an amazing treatment for really all mental health conditions and for whatever you're going through."



REMEMBER THIS: IT'S NOT SELFISH TO MAKE SURE YOUR NEEDS ARE MET TOO.



FEELING SAD AS HELL? HERE ARE SOME JOURNAL PROMPTS FOR THAT:

WHERE DO YOU FEEL SADNESS IN YOUR BODY? WHAT PHYSICAL SENSATIONS COME UP FOR YOU?

Handwriting lines for journaling.

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED SIMILAR SADNESS BEFORE? HOW DID YOU COPE LAST TIME, AND HOW MIGHT YOU WANT TO COPE DIFFERENTLY OR SIMILARLY THIS TIME?

Handwriting lines for journaling.

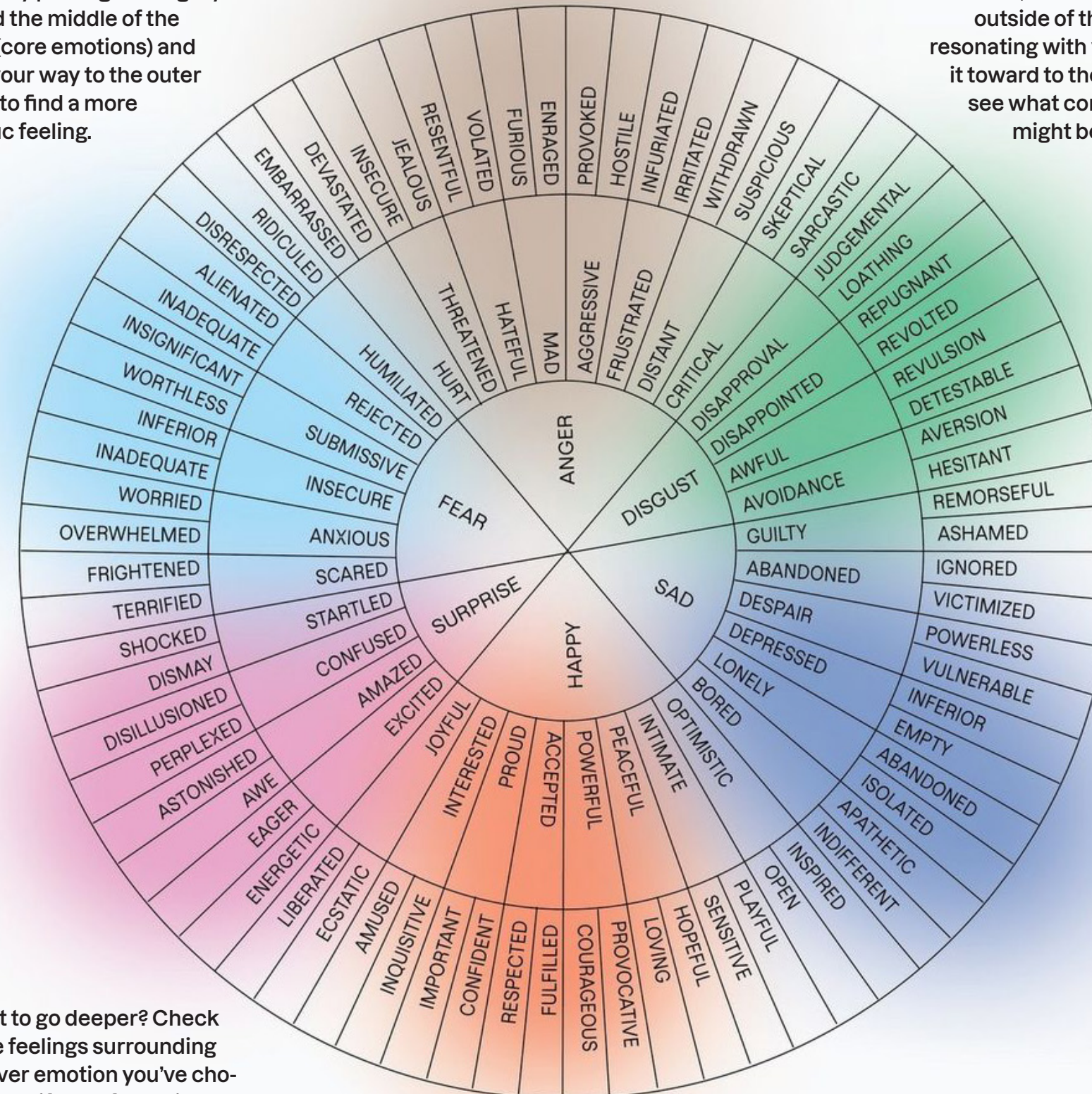
WRITE A LETTER TO YOUR SADNESS. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO SAY TO IT? WHAT DO YOU WANT IT TO KNOW ABOUT YOU?

Handwriting lines for journaling.

FEELINGS WHEEL

Start by picking a category toward the middle of the circle (core emotions) and work your way to the outer edges to find a more specific feeling.

Or, if a feeling on the outside of the wheel is resonating with you, follow it toward the center to see what core emotion might be behind it.



Want to go deeper? Check out the feelings surrounding whatever emotion you've chosen to see if any of that rings true too. You might be surprised by the nuances of your current mood.

FEELINGS WHEEL INSPIRED BY DR. GLORIA WILLCOX'S RESEARCH FOR POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY



Carrying too much? Let it go with

BAGGAGE DROP



Scan to listen.



QQ: What Self-Care Do You Really Need Right Now?

Consider your needs met.

1. Choose an emotional-support snack.

- A) An aspirational-looking matcha latte
- B) Um, whatever you're having is fine with me
- C) \$1 vending machine chips

2. If you had to pick a theme song for the current state of your life, what would it be?

- A) "The Lazy Song" by Bruno Mars
- B) "You're on Your Own, Kid" by Taylor Swift
- C) "Bitch Better Have My Money" by Rihanna

3. What's the last thing you called your mom to vent about?

- A) Oh shit, I should probably call her back
- B) Feeling like a fraud or looking terrible in clothes or other personal failures
- C) Taxes and why I never learned to do them

4. Which of these sounds most delicious?

- A) A huge slice of achievement with a side of structure, hold the stress
- B) A family-size bag of boundaries—the kind with 20% less effs given
- C) A year's supply of free therapy

5. It's 9 a.m. on a Saturday. What are you doing?

- A) How am I supposed to know this far in advance?!
- B) Catching up on work or knee-deep in a negative thought spiral
- C) Avoiding my Uber receipts from last night

6. Does your TikTok algo have a theme?

- A) Organization and GRWM content I'll never use
- B) I'd say there's a pretty strong ~healing~ narrative
- C) Money manifestation mostly

MOSTLY A's Goal-setting advice that doesn't suck

Seems like you're craving some daily routine action. But don't let those lifestyle influencers intimidate you. Setting guidelines for yourself doesn't have to involve 4 a.m. alarms, daily meditation, or a 12-step skincare routine. Nah, the bar can (and sometimes should) be way lower. Here's how to set yourself up for success so you can feel less overwhelmed by life.



MOSTLY B's A little self-love 101

It's time to do less them and more you. And while that could look like a 48-hour You Appreciation Fest where you go on airplane mode and watch trash TV or read that dusty novel you've been meaning to crack, doing self-love is a long-term process. Check out these very helpful ideas for working more self-love into your life ASAP.



MOSTLY C's A solve for money stress

Seems like money is seriously freaking you out, which kinda makes sense in the year 2023. But if you're letting your bank statements talk you out of taking care of your mental health, that's no good. Thing is, you don't have to choose between paying rent and self-care. Nope, there are plenty of affordable or even free (heard of boundaries?!) ways to do yourself a solid. Here's how to get started.



Need Help Now?

SAMHSA
(Substance Abuse and
Mental Health Services
Administration)
National Helpline

Call: **1-800-662-4357**

TTY: **1-800-487-4889**

Get free, 24/7 help or treatment recs for mental health, drug, and alcohol misuse issues.

**Suicide Prevention
Lifeline**

Call or text: **988**

You'll find all-day-every-day access to mental health crisis counselors (and translators for more than 240 languages, if you need one) at this easy-to-remember hotline.

The Trevor Project

Call: **1-866-488-7386**

Text **678-678**

If you're part of the young LGBTQ+ community, you'll find crisis counselors 24/7, 365 days a year ready to talk.

Trans Lifeline

1-877-565-8860

This never-not-available hotline provides support for trans people in a mental health crisis with trained volunteers.

NEDA

Call or text:
1-800-931-2237

Monday-Thursday 11 AM—9 PM ET and Friday 11 AM-5 PM ET. If you're struggling with an eating disorder (or disordered eating habits), this hotline can help you find care and resources when you need them.