

The
Well-Mind
Christmas
+ New Year
Guide



'Tis the season to be jolly . . .

The festive season can often be a conflicting time of year for our mental wellbeing. Not only do the shorter days, hectic social schedules and stressful Christmas admin make us feel depleted, we also tend to battle the rising anxieties of a new year dawning. Yet, for most of us, it is also a period full to the brim with love and laughter as we connect with our families and friends, a time sprinkled with little moments of delight that we are determined not to take for granted.

Whether 2019 has been one of happiness and triumph, or one that will leave its mark for less joyful reasons, you are most likely feeling the need to slow the pace, recharge and look with a renewed sense of purpose to the new year ahead, I know I am!

For the frazzled and exhausted it can be challenging to find opportunities to nourish and look after our minds over the holidays. That's why at Life + Me we've asked some of the people who inspire us the most to share their guidance, tips and insights to help us navigate the holiday season. To guide us with some moments of mindfulness and mental de-cluttering to start 2020 feeling refreshed.

I hope that you also find a little inspiration amongst these pages, and discover some useful tools or ways of thinking that keeps your mind well and nourished throughout this special time. Do share your experiences with us on social, we'd love to hear from you.

Wishing you the very best for the holiday season... *Sam*



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Sam Miller, founder of Life + Me

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How to be human

By Ruby Wax

As a mental health advocate, author of bestselling books on mindfulness and the human condition, and as founder and patron of Frazzled Cafe (a charity that hosts peer support meetings for those feeling frazzled by the stresses of modern life), Ruby Wax certainly knows how overwhelming this time of year can be for our minds. Here she shares why it's time to upgrade how we think about ourselves, offering a fresh perspective as a new year unfolds ...

I ask myself, why is it that we (and by we, I mean the human race and me) can keep improving our iPhones but not improving our lives? We can create a technology where we can order a husband at two o'clock in the morning or send a pizza to Mars, but how to be happy remains a mystery. This could explain why, to date, there are enough self-help books to circle the equator more than 597 times.

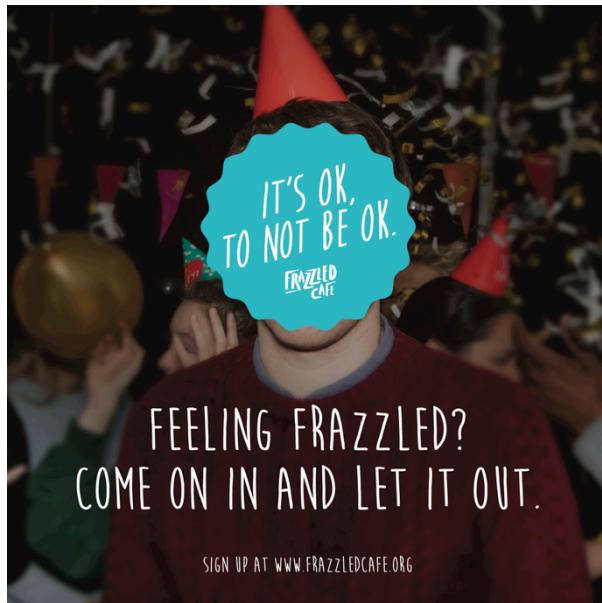
It turns out that we weren't created to be happy, but simply to survive and replicate. "Wham bam, thank you mam." That's it. To me,

it's a miracle we're here at all. No other planet that we know has pulled this off - they haven't made a single cell of anything of interest, while we've already sold twelve trillion McDonald burgers. But this is beside the point.

Why are we so hard on ourselves? As Homo Sapiens we've only been around 200 thousand years in a universe that's around fourteen billion years old. We share 98% of our DNA with great apes, 90% with mice and 25% with yeast, so we're no big deal, we shouldn't push ourselves so hard. We're partly yeast for God's sake... some stale bread.

We do, however, have an all new advanced brain as of about seventy-five thousand years ago, capable of insight and compassion, but this upgraded version didn't replace the old reptile 'kill it before it kills you' brain. They live one on top of the other like a cerebral car crash.

These opposing mindsets explains why we're always in conflict, not just with the rest of the world, but within ourselves. We point the finger at global warming or the latest in



Ruby Wax is founder and patron of Frazzled Cafe

terrorists for the reason things are terrible, but the real enemy lurks within. Until we make peace between the savage and the sage there will always be war.

But this is all because evolution made us so and for a reason: 'to survive'; so in a sense we are not our fault. Our individual condition, which makes us feel so isolated and helpless, is rather the human condition.

This doesn't mean we just sit there like our ancestors did when we were algae on a rock, no, we have that superior brain, so now is the time to use it. If we continue to evolve the way we're heading, we'll just make better and better tools but not better humans.

So now is the time, we have to take over from evolution and consciously evolve ourselves. We need to consciously upgrade our minds, which we can do because the brain is plastic; not set in stone.

Research in neuroplasticity shows that an old dog (you) can learn new tricks. We have this superior brain capable of higher thinking that can tame and rein in the reptilian one, but we need to learn how to do that and if we don't our more basic side will triumph. Like any skill we need to practice (you don't get a six pack by

wishful thinking) you have to get in that gym and repeat those crunches... daily.

Same with our brains, we can practice skills to develop features such as compassion and tolerance by exercising our minds, and also through understanding that everyone in the human race we feel is 'not like us' is 'just like us'.

There is hope, we just need the manual.



Feeling frazzled?

Frazzled Cafe is a registered charity that operates with the purpose of providing a safe, anonymous and non-judgemental environment where it's OK to not be OK, and people who are feeling frazzled can meet on a regular basis to talk and share their personal stories.

It is not just for the one-in-four of us who will suffer from diagnosed mental illness at some point in our lives; it is for the four-in-four feeling frazzled and overwhelmed by the stresses of modern life.

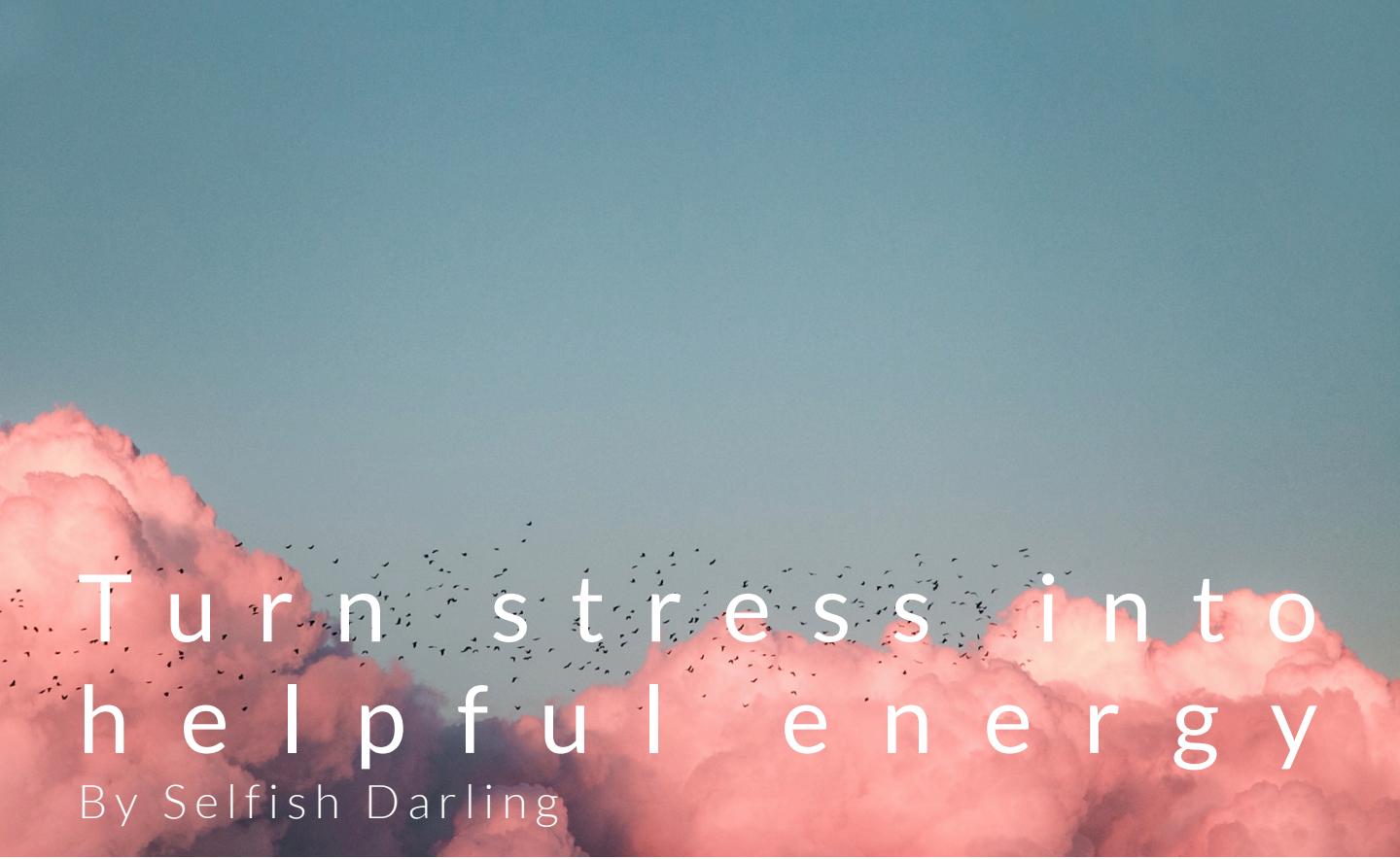
Discover more about Frazzled Cafe, their fortnightly meetings and locations, as well as how you can support the charity, at frazzledcafe.org



@frazzled_cafe



@FrazzledCafe



Turn stress into helpful energy

By Selfish Darling

As Christmas approaches many of us spend December feeling stressed. Stressed about the fact that another year has come to an end, stressed about getting everything ready for Christmas, finding the right gifts, getting the house decorated, attending all the social events that overflow our calendar and sometimes this stress can simply become **TOO MUCH.**

When stress takes over your mind it can sometimes feel like there's no stopping it. It comes in many different forms; maybe you can't eat (or maybe you eat too much) or maybe your sleeping pattern is disrupted meaning you may struggle to sleep (or sleep too much). No matter how stress affects you personally, it's always good to remind yourself that stress is a form of psychological pain.

When we are stressed certain chemicals in the body start to kick in as a reaction to whatever has caused the stress. Hormones like adrenaline, cortisol and norepinephrine are all released to prepare your body for a physical

reaction. Your body's natural instinct is basically going into survival mode, rallying all your troops for battle.

This is obviously a really helpful and healthy response if you're suddenly faced head-on with an angry lion who is ready to fight you. The chances are though, that if you're reading this, your stressful feelings are most likely *not* the result of a pending lion attack, rather a pending Christmas-attack, and we'd say that's something that's a lot more manageable.

We face plenty of different stresses in our everyday life. Things like our relationships, career and social lives all play a part in making us feel like we're in charge of a huge balancing act that sometimes feels too big to handle and like something's got to give. Add Christmas into the already busy mix and we can definitely feel like we're in over our heads!

There are many different ways to try and deal with this everyday stress. Meditation techniques, getting a good night's sleep and generally practicing self-care are all useful

ways of de-stressing, but sometimes it's not enough. You're left at a loose end, tearing your hair out and not able to sit still.

So how about you think of it like this: stress is a form of energy in the body. If you can manipulate that energy by channelling it into something helpful rather than hindering, you use the stress to directly deal with the situation you're in. Here's what we mean ...

Recognise your potential energy

All this stress you're feeling is energy within your body. Although it feels negative right now, remember that it's yours to control. Your energy is powerful and telling yourself that is a step in the right direction to taking control. Stress is a reaction to a situation. So, rather than using all of your energy on the stress itself, use it on solving the situation. Recite affirmations and tell yourself that you are going to use your power to solve the problem, rather than focus on the reaction.



The Selfish Darling Gratitude Journal

Nail your stress

Write down your feelings or causes of the stress in a journal or on a piece of paper to assess which problems are material and which are immaterial. You're most likely worried about something that 'might' happen. Write



The Selfish Darling Gratitude Journal

down the facts of what has 'actually' happened so far. If the thing you're worried about has not yet happened, tell yourself that you will worry about it when it does. Focus on what is concrete and what you can do to make the best possible outcome.

Realign your attention

If something disastrous, upsetting or unmanageable has happened to cause you stress, think about where you can channel your stress to turn it into strength. If you tell your mind that you are doomed, or that this is the worst thing that could possibly happen, you're feeding your stressful mind. Instead, try to feed a calming mind by giving your attention only to the positive and how you can solve the problem.

Focus on what you can control

There are many things completely out of our control and there are many things that we 'think' are out of our control but that actually aren't. Reactions are something that, with a bit of practice, are fully within our control, should we choose to believe it. If something has happened that has caused you stress, focus on how you are going to move forward. Focus on the words you tell yourself and focus on how you're dealing with it. You don't need to give any more attention to the

thing that has happened; that's now in the past, instead give your attention to solving it.

Look for the silver lining

There is a positive spin for absolutely every situation. It could be the worst thing that's ever happened, but if you look hard enough, you will find something that is positive. Choose to focus on the good, even if the only good thing that's come out of a situation is that you've learnt a lesson.

No matter how bad a situation seems Darling it's never really as bad as our mind likes to make it out to be. The more you get to know yourself, your reactions, your stress-factors and how to handle them, the better you will become at handling your stress. So let's use the tips above to do our best to have an (almost) stress-free Christmas!



Selfish Darling's mission is to create a space where you're allowed to be selfish and recharge your energy. Spending time on nurturing yourself will mean you'll have more love and energy to give back.

The Selfish Darling Gratitude Journal (£24.99) is available at lifeandme.com

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LIFE STATUS:

CURRENTLY
HOLDING
IT ALL
TOGETHER WITH
ONE BOBBY PIN



SELFISH DARLING



Merry sober christmas

By Joanne Bradford

I have been a 'sober shaker', as I like to call it, for coming up to 8 years now. Sobriety is an odd thing (I think, anyway...) because on the face of it, it appears to just be about not drinking. Yet I've personally found this to be the first and most superficial layer. There is SO much more to not drinking than simply not drinking, if that makes sense.

Sobriety is a life choice that is by no means a necessity for everyone. But I can't help but feel that in a culture whose attitude is so often 'play now, pay later', it's important that each of us chooses to show up for ourselves now so that we can grow and fully become who we are capable of being.

I can safely say from personal experience, that my own path of inner healing has been greatly accelerated by my choice to live consciously (and by that, I mean choosing not to soothe myself or escape via alcohol or other mind-altering substances). My belief is that sustainable inner change cannot be achieved by temporary external methods. They might provide a short-term fix, but they do not heal or cure.

If you're looking to explore a bit of 'conscious living' yourself this Christmas and New Year, I've jotted down a few thoughts to keep you motivated and inspired along the way ...

Focus on the benefits

It's easy to have a lack mentality when you're giving something up. Oprah Winfrey once wisely said that 'what you focus on expands'. So how about honing in on all that you're hoping to gain from not drinking?

The benefits of sobriety, in my experience, are plentiful; no hangovers (or remorse at embarrassing out-of-control antics), deeper sleep, less anxiety, improved mental clarity, more authentic connection with others, an ability to really feel things (and the emotional resilience that comes with that), heightened productivity, brighter eyes and skin, more money in the bank account... the list goes on!

Have a think about the benefits you hope an alcohol-free period or lifestyle might bring – and make that your fuel and focus.

Identify your super-power illusion

No matter how little (or how much) alcohol you consume, the bottom line is that it has a mind-altering effect. It enables us to feel and behave in ways we don't believe we can – or are not brave enough to explore – when in our right minds. The more we choose to buy into this, the more we reinforce it for ourselves.

Subconsciously, most of us attribute certain 'super-powers' to drinking. Whether we believe it makes us braver, wittier and more interesting or that we simply cannot relax without it. Once you identify the super-power role that alcohol and substance has been playing in your life, you can begin to challenge and dismantle your reliance on it. Over time, most people discover that everything they relied on alcohol for is totally accessible to them in sobriety.

Yes, it takes a bit of work – but nothing worth having comes easy, right? Growth takes time. Like training muscles in the gym, initial discomfort might be necessary in order to yield the desired results. But it's 100% possible! What super-powers have you attributed to alcohol, and are you willing to move beyond your dependence on it?

Emotional release

When we were children, we could shake off our angst by throwing a tantrum. As adults, that's (unfortunately) no longer an acceptable way to deal with pent up emotions. In sobriety, you will still experience a whole plethora of feelings, stress included. Not drinking does not make people exempt from hard times. And without the quick-fix anaesthetisation of booze, it's important to find other ways to work through your emotions.

Resentments are one of the main threats to emotional wellbeing; they leave us feeling heavy and off-balance. An effective way to support yourself in sobriety is to deal with

your niggles head on. Why? Because when you work through them, you feel mentally clearer and no longer need to numb out from the things that tick you off. It's our individual responsibility to make healthy choices and set boundaries with others, to ensure bitterness and resentment don't rear their ugly heads too regularly.

Two of my favourite ways of releasing pent up emotion and letting niggles go, are exercising and spending time in nature (ideally combined). Nature has an incredible way of right-sizing woes and putting them into perspective. And if it doesn't manage to do that, at the very least, it pumps some much-needed fresh air into our foggy minds.

Aside from a glass of wine, what helps YOU to de-stress? Whatever it is; do it more. And regularly.

Named a 'British guru' by Marie Claire magazine, Joanne Bradford is a certified healing practitioner and life-consultant, and also co-author of 'The Inner Fix', published by Hodder & Stoughton.

Joanne is the founder of Motherheart, dedicated to creating the space for you to clear out emotional blockages and discordant energies through Emotional-Freedom technique, sound therapy and life consultancy. Motherheart aims to help you to plug into your inner guidance and live a meaningful life that makes a difference to your world.

You can enjoy a special 20% discount on Motherheart healing sessions until 31 January 2020 when you book through Life + Me, find out more at lifeandme.com



@motherheart



Reconnecting with our families

By Francesca Geens

Christmas can be such a busy and stressful time of year for families. With a constant stream of activities, socialising and cooking taking us through the festive period, not to mention the commercialised messages telling us that 'gifting is loving', it can feel like we don't get the time to step back and reflect on what really matters.

Cue some mindful and free family activities to encourage conversations and connection with your loved ones. Here are a few suggestions of activities we do at the HappySelf family HQ at this time of year (or anytime!) to carve out some special family moments together and to help us reconnect ...

Family meeting

Sometime between Christmas and the New Year we'll sit down and fill an A3 sheet of paper with all the good habits and goals we want to work towards. Because we have been doing this for a number of years we tend to start by looking back at the sheet for the previous year and seeing how far we got.

Things we tend to include any hobbies or goals any of us are working on. Recent ones included my Grade 2 piano (no this hasn't happened - yet) and my daughter working towards a scholarship exam (yes she got it!) as well as any places we would like to travel to (this year we finally made it to Madrid to visit a dear friend after having this on our sheet for many years) and wellness habits like daily meditation (I nearly ran my streak to a full year last year!) or doing Parkrun as a family.

So you see they can be big and small goals, and there is no pressure to complete these, they are simply reminders of what matters or is relevant in your life just at the moment. We always have lovely conversations deciding what we should focus on as a family. It's also fun to check in during the year to see how we are doing and then either remind ourselves of our intentions, or realise we have shifted our focus to other things.

Mindful doodling

Unless you have old wallpaper lying around just order a big roll of white paper and cover



The 'HappySelf Journal' for kids

the dining table with it. Get out all your pens and crayons and just leave it out between meals. Sitting down together or on your own for a bit of mindful doodling is a lovely way to get creative and relax.

Top three things

Gratitude is a big thing in our house and we tend to share our 'top three things' every evening at dinner. Gratitude has been shown to have a deep impact on our wellbeing but it is a 'practice' so needs to be done little and often in order to feel the benefits. Sharing these moments at mealtimes is a nice way to encourage the habit in our children as we can take the lead with a range of examples and challenge them to think about some really special moments in their day big and small!

During the festive period it's nice to think back and reflect on the entire year so you can think about overall top three things, or favourite holiday moments, funny moments, proud moments, difficult moments, favourite acts of kindness etc. picking whatever themes are relevant to you. It is a lovely way to reflect and be grateful for the year you have had.

'Switch off' day or weekend

Agreeing to all not use screens for an entire day or weekend is a big hit in our house. And

it's surprisingly easier than trying to restrict screen use. When it isn't an option at all the mind is free to be truly in the moment.

Whether you spend the day at home baking, playing board games or having some shared reading time or go out for the day, you'll see how nice it is to all be fully engaged with each other.

I hope that you enjoy trying out some of these activities with your family over the festive period. The main thing is to honour your intention to make that time to connect and have fun!



Francesca wanted to do something to help children develop healthy habits as they grow up in this increasingly busy and switched on world. She set about creating the HappySelf Journal (£19.90), a daily journal for children aged 6 to 12yrs based on scientifically proven methods that promote happiness, develop healthy habits for life and nurture enquiring minds. Available at lifeandme.com

@happyselfjournal

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9 ways to take a micro mindful moment

By Gabrielle Treanor

When you read the word mindfulness it might conjur up visions of meditating on a cushion or doing something at glacial speed. While mindfulness can involve meditation or slowing down, that's not all it's about.

At the heart of it mindfulness is about paying attention to what's going on right now, without judgement. And as such it can be applied to anything in our lives, anywhere, at any time (even during the busy festive season!)

Being mindful gives your brain a rest. It doesn't mean you have to stop what you're doing. It means giving your mind a break from thinking 58 different things while zipping back and forth between the past and the future. It's as exhausting as it sounds, it stresses us out and it gets us stuck in overwhelm mode. Taking a micro moment at any time of day lets us take a breather, come out of our busy minds and reconnect with what's real around us.

Here are nine ways you can take a micro mindful moment today or when needed over the Christmas holidays ...

1 As you wash your face in the morning pay attention to how the water feels on your hands, the temperature on your skin, the sensation as the water splashes your face.

2 When you make a cup of tea listen to the sound in the kettle change as the water reaches boiling point. Notice how the water pours out of the spout and the motion of the tea bag under its pressure. Look at the steam rising from your mug, how the spoon feels in your hand as you squeeze out the tea bag.

3 While walking down a street, through a park or along a corridor, engage some of your senses. Notice individual sounds you can hear (a car engine, leaves and tree branches rustling, people talking). Say to yourself silently what you can see (traffic lights, a flower bed, a sign on a door). Pay attention to how your feet feel on the ground (how your weight shifts from foot to foot, how comfortable your shoes are, the rhythm of your stride).

4 At lunchtime give yourself a few minutes without checking your email or scrolling social

media. Give all your focus to what you're eating, look at its colour and texture, notice its aroma, consider how it feels to bite into and chew, how it tastes.

5 When talking with a friend, family member or your loved one really listen to them. Resist the urge to think about what your response will be or to drift off to other thoughts. Pay full attention to what they're saying and how they're saying it.

6 Set an alarm on your phone to sound a few times throughout your day as a prompt to take a micro mindful moment. When you hear the alarm pause in whatever you're doing and bring your attention to your breath. Don't breathe any differently, just focus on where you can feel your breath go in and out of your body and follow it for ten breaths.

7 While you prepare dinner give all your attention to the task. Focus on what you're chopping, notice the weight of the knife in your hand, how it slices through the food and the sound it makes. Observe, for just a few seconds, the pan on the hob with food browning or steam rising. As you put food on the plate notice the colours and textures, how they contrast to the plain or patterned plate.

8 As you massage moisturising cream into your face before bed, notice how your fingertips glide over your skin. Slow down your movements so you can feel your skin being soothed and massaged as you smooth the cream over your face. If it helps to keep your attention on how your skin feels (and not get distracted by looking for wrinkles) close your eyes for a few seconds.

9 When you're finally lying in bed at the end of the day, before you drift off, focus your attention on how it feels to be warm, to be comfortable, for the weight of your body to be supported by the mattress and your breathing to slow.

The key with a micro mindful moment is to observe, not judge, what you're giving your attention to. Once you realise your mind has wandered off to thinking how the walls need repainting, you should be eating a healthier lunch, you want a new kitchen, about where you bought the mug, that you're looking tired, STOP and move your attention back to the subject of your micro mindful moment. You don't need to tell yourself off for your mind wandering, just notice and move it back to what you were focusing on.

These examples of micro mindful moments need only take a minute, that's why they're micro moments! Scattered throughout the day they will give your mind periodic breathers to take a break from running at 100mph and allow your brain to simply focus on one thing - the present moment.



Gabrielle is a certified coach, writer and teacher. She has spent a considerable chunk of life researching how we can live with more ease, joy and contentment. Her online meditation course for beginners 'Exhale' (£49) is available at lifeandme.com



@gabrielletreanor



Crafting your own happy

By Becci Ford

Although I now run my own crafting kits business, Ellbie Co, I first started making things back when I was 6 years old. I loved drawing, and from there I progressed to making things out of cardboard, using sand to create pictures and attempting to sew.

I didn't realise it at the time, but making all of these things made me really happy - it kept my mind active and it made me feel productive and satisfied - even if my day overall hadn't been the best. It was only when I didn't have the time for making that I realised how much crafting had given me in terms of having a positive effect upon my mental health and happiness.

Just think about it. In the age that we live in, where technology means that our lives are a constant hum of notifications and emails, it can be hard to step outside of the 'noise' and take a few moments for yourself, especially ones that don't involve a screen.

When you make something with your hands you get into something called 'flow state', where you are concentrating so much on doing

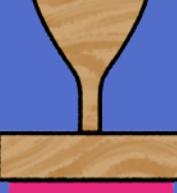
just one activity or task that, as a result, the rest of your body subconsciously relaxes.

It doesn't matter what the outcome is of your crafting (although I think we can agree that when it all comes together it is amazingly satisfying!) What matters is that you have given yourself that time to relax and just focus on one thing for a while. You get in the zone. Even if it's only a project that you pick up for a wind down before bed or for a few minutes before breakfast.

It can be all too easy to fall into the trap of putting a lot of pressure on the outcome of crafting sometimes, and it can be daunting to start a new project. Just in case the finished product isn't perfect enough. But what if the outcome was also that you just felt a bit happier, less anxious and a sense of pride? After all it's about the crafting journey, not just the creation!

So how can you bring some craft and creativity into your life this Christmas? It might just be the wellbeing tonic you need.





'Twas the NO before Christmas

By Kate Taylor

Christmas is a time of joining together with friends, loved ones and long-distance relatives. It's also the time of the endless Christmas parties and celebrations on top of celebrations. So, how do you make sure that you can keep your sense of equilibrium when the family politics and dramas play out?

And how do you keep your energy levels on an even keel when everyone else around you is over-indulging in one-too-many of pretty much everything? And how do you ensure that you get to look out for your own mental wellbeing at a time of year, when everyone seems to have lost the plot to festive fever?

Here's my Practical Magic guide to managing healthy boundaries and exercising your 'NO' muscle, so that you can say more 'YES' to a mindful Christmas full of self care...

Understand your NO limits

Managing healthy boundaries around what you are, and are not, available for over Christmas is vital. Be clear with yourself where

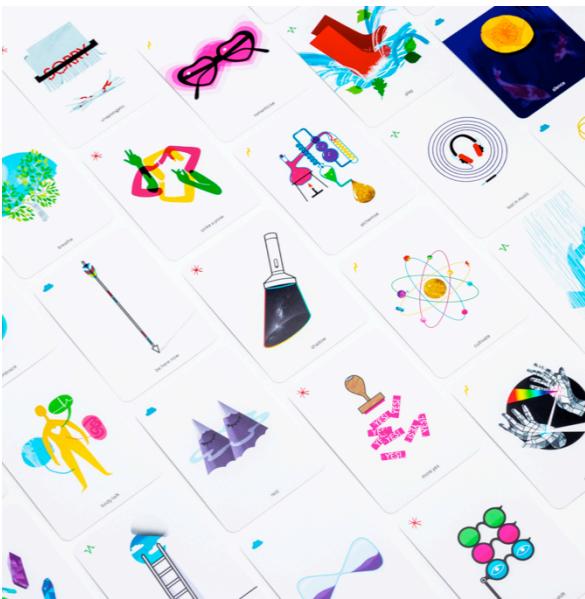
your limits are. If the idea of driving 200 miles to visit long-distance relatives for a less than 24 hour visit *yet again* is stressing you out, or hosting 20 people in your house *and* doing all the cooking is leaving you feeling cold, then tune into what that feeling is telling you.

Get clear on your NOs

There may be some things that you are OK with, and some that you are not, that's totally OK. So, if you are happy to host people at your house for Christmas lunch, but you want a low key evening and Boxing Day without them all there, then let people know in advance. Also, if you are all up for going out for the annual Christmas party, but not up for the booze fest it normally turns into, then know that you are totally within your rights to refuse to neck a shot and not feel like a party pooper.

Communicate your NOs

Once you understand where your boundaries are, and you are clear on those for yourself, communicate them to anyone who needs to know your NOs. Especially those who you know are the usual suspects who can push your proverbial buttons to make you work



The Practical Magic Activation Deck

harder, or party harder, or put undue pressure on you.

NO is a complete sentence

You don't need to over-complicate expressing your NOs by wrapping them up in a million stories and reasons why you are not going to do something. Keep your language clean and simple. And if saying a hard 'NO' is filling you with dread, then work out what you are available for, and go from there. This can be as simple as "that just isn't going to work for me this year, but what I can do is ..."

Hold the stare

Practice self-compassion, and prepare for when the guilt kicks in (and it will). Often with families we can get caught up in old dynamics, which means that we will often look for tell-tale signs that someone is not happy with us, which may, or may not, be the case. You are likely to feel guilty because you are not playing a role you are used to playing, be kind with yourself. Be mindful that because you've started exercising your NO muscle, you are expecting a fall out. Hold the stare.

Give yourself permission to enjoy more YESs

Christmas is a time of year for us all to enjoy, which means you too. This doesn't mean you running around like a headless turkey making

everyone else happy. Feel into what it means for you to have some time for your own peace of mind and pleasure over Christmas, and give yourself permission to create it. This doesn't mean you are being selfish. If you need some quiet time just for you, then make sure it happens.

NOS are for life, not just for Christmas

Whilst creating healthy boundaries will bring you a happy and mindful Christmas, remember that creating more NOs in your life is a self-care practice to bring into each and every day of the year. So start excising your NO muscle over the festive season as a start. And remember this simple mantra for life ...

'If it's not a HELL YEAH, then it's a HELL NO!'



Kate Taylor is an empowerment coach, Master neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) practitioner and clinical hypnotherapist, who is on a mission to help us live an embodied life, full of creative expression.

She is the creator of the Practical Magic Activation Deck (£45) 'your life coach in a box', available at lifeandme.com

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Your positive toolkit

By The Positive Planners

Ali and Finn (aka The Positive Planners) are two mums on a mission to break the stigma around mental health. Their personal experiences have shown them that there can be amazing, fantastic and beautiful moments and days between the clouds and fog. They wanted to create a tool that would help to give people more of these moments in their lives, cue The Positive Planner, a 12-week guided journal / DIY therapist!

Christmas and New Year is often a time full of truly joyful moments mixed with challenging feelings, as we spend time with our families and journey from the end of one year to the beginning of another.

Within the Positive Planner, Ali and Finn have included a selection of mindfulness exercises and positive, thought-provoking activities that help establish the practise of gratitude and positivity for the simplest things in life.

Here we share a few of our favourites, a positive toolkit of exercises that are

guaranteed to help you to take a moment to check-in and reconnect with yourself throughout this festive season ...

High five

You are brilliant, strong and courageous in so many ways; you just can't always see it! Take five minutes to sit down and reflect on your achievements, big and small. On a piece of paper draw a 'high five' hand. Think about your week, month, year (or just your day) and acknowledge everything you've done.

Think about what you have achieved and how well you've looked after others, or even just yourself! Jot some of your thoughts down around this hand illustration. If it is hard to be positive about yourself, try to think what positives you would say to someone else in a similar situation to you. Look at yourself through the eyes of a friend or loved one and give yourself a huge high five, just like you'd give them.

Refer back to your 'high five hand' whenever you are in need of a mood boost.

Gratitude sunshine

There are often so many wonderful small moments over the Christmas holidays that bring us joy and gratitude that can get lost amongst the ‘busyness’ and easily forgotten.

On a piece of paper draw a sun with long lines for the rays. This sunshine is for you to fill with as many things that you are grateful for as possible! When you have a grateful light bulb moment, grab your sunshine and jot it down between each line.

Before you know it, you’ll have a beautiful image shining back at you with all the wonderful things you have in your life to be grateful for. Try to have some lines that focus on the big and important stuff, like relationships, people, places, and things that are strong and consistent in your life. On tough days, this will be a positive picture for you to look back at.

Tip of the iceberg

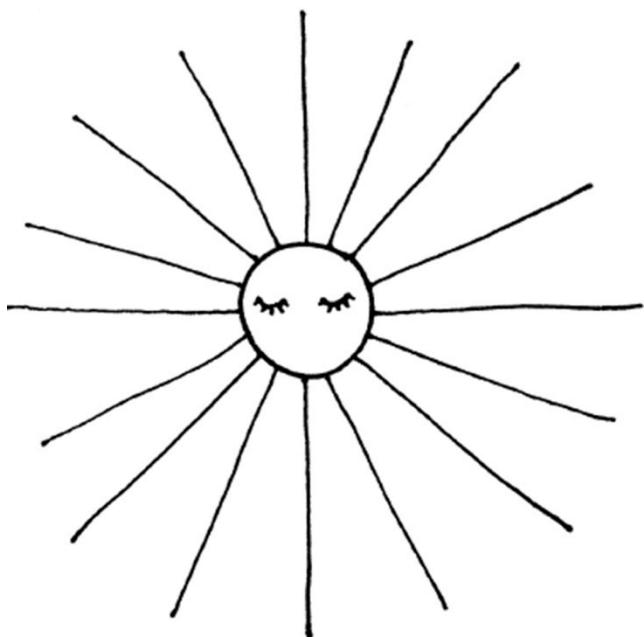
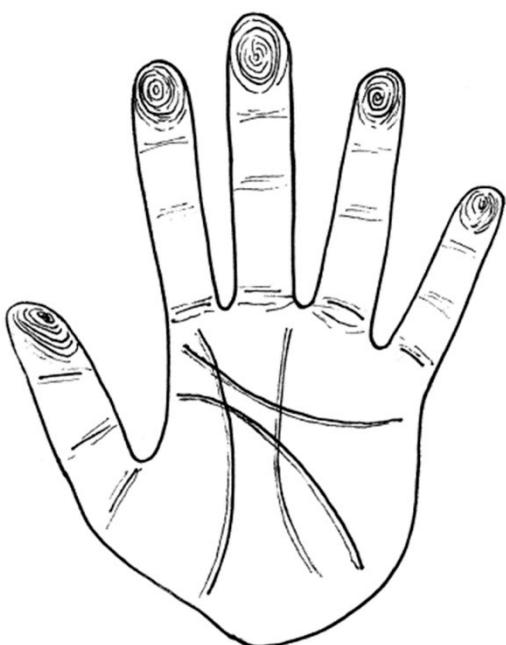
In today’s society we are used to getting to know the ‘profile’ picture-perfect versions of each other. We tend to only share the best

possible versions of ourselves, and our culture has evolved to focus on face value, rather than what’s below the surface.

At this time of year when we are spending time with friends and family who we don’t often see, it can be easy to stay at this ‘face value’ level, rather than truly connecting below the surface. This activity will help you to look a bit deeper into yourself and acknowledge what’s going on beyond your face value ‘profile’. Hopefully this will help you to begin to feel more comfortable opening up about your deeper thoughts and feelings, and sharing these with others to get the support and encouragement you need.

Draw an iceberg shape on a piece of paper, with the line for the sea level. On the surface of the iceberg, above sea level, write the ‘profile’ of yourself that you present to the world. What do you allow others to see? Below the surface, write down the deeper things about yourself that you keep private or find hard to acknowledge or share, the bigger picture of what’s really going on inside your mind. It could be very helpful to share these deeper

‘High Five’ and ‘Gratitude Sunshine’ from The Positive Planner





'Tip of the Iceberg' from The Positive Planner

thoughts and feelings with those around you, if you feel you can.

20 things

Sometimes in the thick fog of life (and Christmas!) it can be tough to remember who you are. Life twists and bends, leading us to new places and phases, and it's easy to feel like you've lost your identity along the way. So grab a pen and write down 20 things about YOU. This exercise is great to do when looking to the new year, and is a fun space for you to remember the weird and wonderful things that make you who you are.

Spend some time visualising the things about yourself that you are most proud of, the things no-one else knows, your fantastic quirks and tales that make you giggle. You are still you, and YOU is a pretty fantastic person to be!

Ali and Finn's collection of journals offer the ultimate in positive planning for mind, body and soul. The range includes The Positive Planner (£23), The Positive Bullet Diary (£24) and The Positive Wellness Journal (£24), all available at lifeandme.com



@the_positive_planner



Tools to beat the winter blues

By Suzy Reading

Why do we get that post Christmas comedown? We've enjoyed the final throes of summer, the beauty of the autumnal hues, and as the darkness and cold set in we had a run of exciting events to keep the spirits high – Halloween, Bonfire Night, the Festival of Light and the joys and indulgence of the festive season.

Once the new year arrives, the tree and decorations are packed away and the social engagements peter out, we are often left with the blues. Just like post-holiday blues, it's normal to feel a sense of sadness that 'the fun stuff is done' and we are literally faced with a cold, harsh reality.

While new year intentions call to us, energetically, and seasonally, we have a few months to weather before the rebirth of spring and the natural resurgence of energy that accompanies it.

Here are my go-to practical tools to help boost your mood and support mind nourishment as you see out the winter months and ready yourself for the new season ...

Respect your energy bank balance

Pace yourself and respect your 'Energy Bank Balance'. Run yourself ragged and you suppress your immune system and make yourself vulnerable to burn out. Tune in regularly and listen to what your bodymind is telling you. Take tender, loving action to deliver what you really need. There is nothing selfish or indulgent about this. Self-care is health care.

Connect with purpose

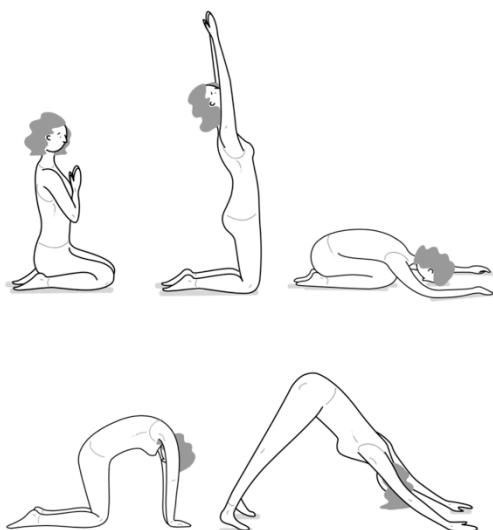
Connect with purpose. If there is something you are dreading, ask yourself WHY you do it.

Yes, I feel a sense of reticence about diving back into work mode but when I recall that I work to put a roof above our heads and live in safety, when plenty of people risk their lives for this privilege, I feel grounded in gratitude and purpose. It is true, I am not looking forward to the hum drum school run, but thank goodness for the opportunities and education available to our kids in this country. Remembering our WHY is galvanising and anchors us in perspective.

Overcome low moods

To overcome fatigue and low moods, turn to the antidepressant effects of exercise, but observe your natural inclinations and be mindful of your energy levels. Be honest about how you feel and allow yourself to make different choices.

At this time of year there is a strong impulse to bunker in and hibernate. If that planned run doesn't fill you with a feeling of zest, try moving in a different way. Take a walk instead and use it as a mindfulness exercise, boosting your mood and mental health. If you just want to lie down then honour that and consider trying some soothing floor based yoga.

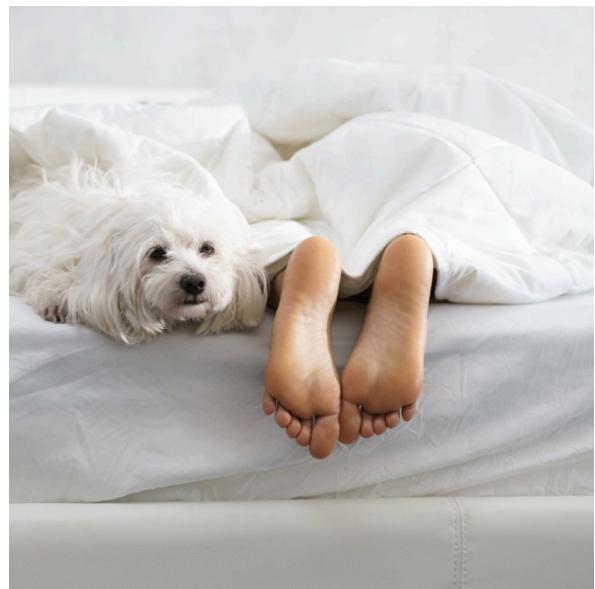


'Prayer Salute' from The Self-Care Revolution

Sleep for sanity

My mantra is 'sleep for sanity' and after the busyness of the festive season it helps to pay attention to your sleep needs. Most adults need 7-9 hours, every night. Get to know how much sleep you need to function well and make it a genuine priority. Getting to the end of the film might feel like enjoyable leisure time but this is not as replenishing as getting the sleep you know you need. If you've had a string of late nights, make sure there are some early nights or quiet time to compensate.

In the absence of good sleep and time to rest,



pay attention to your breathing and allow your breath to be relaxed and spacious. This is very soothing for your nervous system.

The other great tip to counter overwhelm is 'earthing the brow' – think along the lines of child's pose or picture Homer Simpson saying d'oh! Gentle pressure against the forehead is very calming. At your desk, fold your hands and rest your head on them to reboot for 30 seconds.

Get your wellbeing on the radar

Harness that New Year's motivation and get your health and wellbeing on the radar. Resist the temptation to make elaborate, sweeping change - this is hard to achieve, even harder to keep going - and when we falter it can knock our self-esteem.

When it comes to making sustainable lifestyle changes, small, incremental changes work best. Think one small wave of change at a time, work on it until it is habit and then look at the next behaviour to modify.

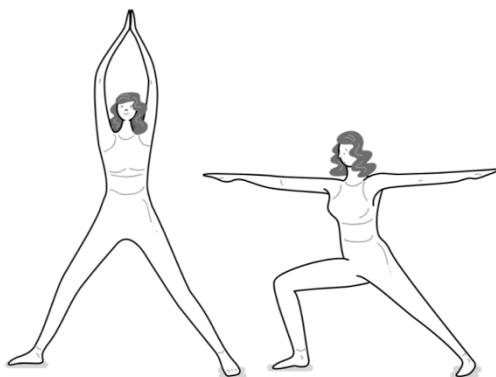
Enjoy the anticipation

Plan one thing you really look forward to and enjoy the anticipation of it. This can be as simple as looking forward to a solo walk on the weekend or something more grand like a

planned holiday. Feel how just the thought of this buoys your spirits.

Do something new

Try out a new hobby, accept a challenge or learn a new skill. Say ‘yes’ where you might habitually say ‘no’ for a change. Doing something new is a great way to grow and keep us energised.



‘Warrior Side Lunge’ from *The Self-Care Revolution*

Bite-sized nourishment

What really helps is self-care in an instant. Here are just a few ideas: Beautify your environment – if taking down the Christmas decorations pained you, adorn the house with flowers or have some favourite snaps printed up. Use scent or music. Savour a cup of tea or a sunset. Sit and stroke the cat. Watch the moving cloudscape. Try adding a Bach Flower remedy to your usual glass of water – in this way I literally feel like I am drinking in ‘patience’. Read, watch or listen to something uplifting – try a podcast or TED talk on something that fascinates you. Cultivating the skill of curiosity is a great mood alchemist.

Self-compassion

And if you do only one of these tips, please let it be a generous dose of self-compassion. Go gently on yourself. While the Christmas and New Year period can be joyful, it can also be full of pressures, some family tension thrown in there, and for many of us, grief bubbles up. Use the mantra ‘I soften into this moment’ and breathe your way through with kindness.

Suzy Reading is a mother of two, a Chartered Psychologist, Yoga Teacher and Health Coach.

She specialises in wellbeing: head, heart and body, helping people manage their emotions, energetic bank balance and the inevitable stresses of life.

It was Suzy’s life experience of motherhood colliding with the terminal illness of her father that sparked her passion for self-care, which she now teaches to her clients to cope during periods of stress, loss and change and to boost their resilience in the face of future challenges.

Suzy is also the author of ‘*The Self-Care Revolution*’, ‘*Stand Tall Like A Mountain*’ and ‘*The Little Book of Self-Care*’, all available at lifeandme.com.

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 @SuzyReading



A dose of self-love

By Susanna Newsonen

What is self-love? Most of us have come across the term but are not sure what it actually means, and why wellbeing gurus keep talking about it. As we consider how to bring more self-love into our lives in 2020, we asked happiness expert and life coach, Susanna Newsonen, to answer our top questions ...

What is self-love?

Self-love, as defined by the Oxford dictionary, is the “regard for one’s own wellbeing and happiness”. In the world of psychology, the definitions vary depending on the angle. My favourite is the one of Carl Rogers from the 1970’s: feeling “a quiet sense of pleasure in being one’s own self”. Basically, it’s about being yourself and loving it.

Where did the concept originate?

Self-love can be traced as far back as to Greek philosophy around 400 BC. In Nicomachean Ethics VIII, Aristotle discussed how he believed self-love is a prerequisite to loving others. In fact, he went as far as to say one must not merely love oneself, but love oneself

most of all. He believes this was the path not only to an individual’s greatest good but the greatest good of mankind. Many philosophers and psychologists, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1750’s), William James (1880’s) and Eric Fromm (1950’s) discussed and evolved the concept of self-love further. It was Fromm who started creating ties to self-esteem and self-worth, whilst Carl Rogers (1970’s) spoke of successful therapy leading to a healthy sense of self-love.

How can practising self-love help us?

Self-love will help you to create a more positive relationship with yourself. That means you will be more supportive and encouraging in your own head towards yourself. This will make you more resilient against challenges and keep you more motivated in working towards whatever you’re aiming for. You’ll be more positive about your skillset and abilities, and hence go after things with more boldness and confidence. You will also be less likely to fall into negative patterns of self-talk, especially when faced with setbacks.



Susanna Newsonen is The Happyologist®

You're also less likely to beat yourself up if you make a mistake, and instead, see the big picture and use it as a learning and growth opportunity. All of this, naturally, will help you to grow and experience more fulfilment. Best of all, you're also much more likely to experience a sense of peace and contentment within you, which will also reflect outwards into your life making you less likely to experience stress or overwhelm.

Is there any science behind it?

There are a lot of relevant concepts, especially in the field of positive psychology, which link to self-love. Perhaps the most predominant of these is the concept of self-esteem, which can be defined as how much a person “values, approves of, appreciates, prizes, or likes him or herself” (Adler & Stewart, 2004). Sedikides and Gregg (2008) take this further with self-enhancement, defined as taking a positive view of oneself, as a fundamental part of human nature. Then there are the more popular streams of concepts that touch on self-love, such as Brené Brown’s work on vulnerability and courage.

Overall, there is a common consensus that self-love both aids and is aided by self-esteem, authenticity, confidence, hope, growth mindset, and, in general, a more positive mindset.

Is self-love the same as self-care?

Self-love goes far and beyond self-care, as self-care is simply one form of self-love. Self-care is about taking care of yourself both physically and mentally. It comes in many shapes and forms, from doing yoga to getting a massage to going offline regularly. Basically, it's any activity that somehow recharges you either physically and/or mentally.

Self-love, on the other hand, goes deeper than that and is about wholeheartedly cultivating acceptance and gratitude towards yourself. They do go hand-in-hand though, as practising self-care helps you to experience more self-love.



Can self-love help my relationships?

Absolutely. Self-love not only helps the relationship that you have with yourself but also the relationships you have with others. When you own up to self-love, you start treating yourself with respect and a better sense of self-worth. Others will notice this in you and hence start to mirror this and treat you better too. It can also help you to set some healthy boundaries in relationships, like speaking up when you’re being disrespected, saying no when you don’t want to do something, and asking to be treated with more kindness.

When you love yourself fully, you're less likely to accept relationships which are abusive and you find it easier to leave the ones that are. Because you love, respect and accept yourself fully, you know you don't deserve to be in a relationship with someone who doesn't, and hence you won't.

What is most misunderstood about self-love?

Some people think self-love is some new age babble which only makes you more selfish, narcissistic or arrogant. This couldn't be further from the truth as it's actually lack of self-love that drives arrogance and narcissism in people. They are symptoms of a deep lack of self-confidence and acceptance of yourself i.e. a lack of self-love. Finally, self-love isn't being selfish because the more you love yourself, the better you take care of yourself and hence the better you'll feel. The better you feel, the more equipped you are to help others.

What are your top 3 self-love actions?

The first is doing more acts of self-care. I used to think taking baths was a waste of time, meditation was something I didn't have time for, and saying no to people wasn't an option. This left me on a never-ending cycle of busyness and on the verge of burnout. Now, I take aromatherapy baths because they recharge me. I meditate, especially to visualise, regularly to feel calm and connected with myself. Finally, I also say no to anything that isn't a hell yes. That way, I've created more time and space in life for things that are a hell yes and recharge me in the best possible ways.

The second is being kinder towards my body, both in how I treat it and how I talk to it or about it. Exercise is not punishment anymore, but something that gets the positive endorphins going. I only do exercise I enjoy doing, such as riding my horse, country walks with the dog and yoga stretches at home. I also talk about my body more positively. I know it's

not perfect and there are parts of it I'd like to improve, but I'm grateful for the parts of it that I love and how strong it is in keeping me healthy.

The third bit is getting better with compliments, both receiving them and giving them. When I met my husband a few years back I struggled to accept them from him. Over time, I've learned to accept them, cherish them and believe them. Something that has helped me to do that is to also give out more compliments, both to loved ones and strangers. If I see somebody on the train with a nice dress or coat, I will compliment them on it. If my best friend is glowing with positive energy, I tell her. If my husband has put on a nice suit, I compliment him too!

What's the number one thing we can start doing today to improve our self-love?

Become more aware of how you talk to yourself. We all have a little bit of an inner critic within us and we need to make sure it doesn't go on overdrive. The only way to do that is to become more aware of it. Then, once you know the kind of stuff you're saying to yourself, you can start to change. If in doubt, a good question to ask yourself is, "Is this something I would say to my best friend?" If the answer is no, change what you're saying to something more supportive and loving that you would say to your best friend.

Susanna Newsonen is on a mission to make the world a happier place. A life coach, keynote speaker and author, she mixes positive psychology, philosophy, life coaching, cultural insights, and personal experiences to bring you the tips that are most beneficial to you. Find out more at happyologist.co.uk



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Top tips to become a pro planner

By Samantha Smith

Did you start 2019 with all good intentions? Have you been planning that new start, had something in mind you really wanted to achieve this year, something you ear-marked to get stuck into or fancied finally making that change in your life?

I did, I had it all mapped out. I left a business I co-owned last year which I set up 8 years ago, it was a tough decision and after lots of soul searching I decided it wasn't for me anymore, so this year was my fresh start, my new beginning. I'd discovered a new-found sense of enthusiasm and drive. I was ready for a year full of opportunities and exciting new challenges pushing myself out of my comfort zone.

And then the unimaginable happened and sent me into a total tailspin. My Dad was diagnosed with aggressive cancer and thus started the most horrific 2 weeks I have ever experienced. His passing has knocked me back down, made me question many things and put plans on hold, but I know with each day I'll take the bravery and courage he showed with his illness and push on through the sadness.

So as the year comes to an end and we are thrown into 2020 at speed, I'll find myself needing all the tools to keep me going and moving forward with those plans Dad would dearly have wanted to see me achieve.

Whether you've been knocked down, not had the time to make a start yet and need to focus to get back in the game, questioning where you want to go next or simply don't know where to start, then I'm happy to share one of my most useful tools ...

Whatever it is you want to achieve, I believe you're only ever seven steps from 'YOU ARE HERE' to 'WHEREVER YOU WANT TO BE'.

My definition of a 'project' is anything that takes more than a few easy tasks to get done. As I designed and built my own planner (now the HELLO TIME planner) each page at a time, I reviewed loads of ideas and research on the subject. I looked at the best ways to make a start, to put those plans into action because as the saying goes 'it's often the start that stops us'. A little planning goes a long way in helping your project succeed.

To get you fired up, here's 7 tips I've gathered along my journey to help you plan like a pro!

- 1** Give your projects a start and end date, and be realistic on timescales.
- 2** When starting a new project, take a moment to quietly review, mentally, each step, then get it down on paper it.
- 3** Set your own due dates for projects earlier than the actual deadline, it will give you some breathing space.
- 4** More times than not, especially those just starting out, don't prioritise their projects enough. Instead, they try to do everything at once. This is a bad idea. It increases stress, decreases the likelihood that you'll finish what you need to and makes it that much harder to progress effectively toward the end game.
- 5** Ideally your tasks will drive completion of your project, and the project will drive the accomplishment of your larger goal, so dream big, you're going to have to clear all the hurdles



that are between you and your goals. Therefore, stay confident and ignore those who are unnecessarily negative.

- 6** You can't do it alone, and there's no shame in asking for help.
- 7** Join a community and if one doesn't exist, build one. Surround yourself with people who motivate and inspire one another.

Whatever your goal next year – starting a business, changing career, getting fitter or renovating your home, getting any large project off the ground – my 'One-Page Plan of Action' (from the Hello Time Planner) will help you get there.

'One-Page Plan of Action' from The Hello Time Planner

PLAN OF ACTION			PLAN OF ACTION		



The Hello Time Planner / Organiser

This easy to use template will help you identify what you have, what you need and how you're going to turn your hustle into your happy.

The view

Where am I now? What's your current situation, how do you feel and why do you want to change?

The goals

Where do I want to be? Be specific, be realistic, but be bold.

The resources

What do I need to help get me there? What do you already have, what skills or what can you acquire to help you achieve your goals?

The obstacles

What is in the way? Remember, we sometimes create our own stumbling blocks.

The strategy

How will I get from here to there? Strategy doesn't need to be complicated, it is just a way of identifying how you'll get from where you are now to where you want to be.

The details

What tactics can I use along the way? Break

down the strategy into tactics or tasks – the smaller things you can do to help you along the way.

The measure

How will I know when I get there? You need to know what success looks like so create your own measure and make sure you celebrate the victory.

Just follow the steps to clear your head and focus on getting your 'Plan of Action' down on paper - it also makes it more real! Getting it all on one page makes it easier to see an overview. Start with 'The View' and end with 'The Measure' and you'll have a clear route for the journey ahead, and all the steps in between that you'll need to get you there.

Sam is the founder of HELLO TIME, a range of beautifully designed, simple-to-use, easy-to-follow tools to help you to reclaim your time.

The range features the HELLO TIME Planner (£34.95) and To-Do Pad (£5.95), available at lifeandme.com



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Why you should scrap new year resolutions

By Selina Barker + Vicki Pavitt

As we step into this next new year, let's collectively make one big New Year's resolution: to scrap New Year's resolutions. They do not work.

Legend suggests that New Year's resolutions have been going on for over 4000 years. Since the Babylonians apparently, but despite being one of the longest lasting traditions in western culture (who knew!) according to modern day research they are disappointingly ineffective.

One study conducted in America found that just 8% of people actually did what they had set out to achieve at the start of the year and another study found that almost 50% of people who had written resolutions, had given up on them within the first month.

The problem with New Year's resolutions is that they are often a list of quite large goals that have been written down on a whim on the 1st January.

'Go to the gym and get fit', 'Learn Spanish', 'Cook healthy food', 'Go on more dates', 'Stop drinking so much' and so on ...

If only 8% of people actually do what is on their list of resolutions, then for a whopping 92% of us this list simply serves as a reminder of all the ways we have failed.

And this is why we believe that New Year's resolutions have got to go. We've given them a chance for over 4000 years and now it's time to try something new.

We need something simple that we can all do. Something that will help each and every one of us step into the new year feeling inspired and full of hope. Something that helps us to navigate through the inevitable ups and downs of life over the following 12 months, while staying focused on the things that matter most.

What could be that simple and powerful? Setting an intention for your year ahead.

Setting an intention for the year helps to anchor you to something that is important to you in life. Something that inspires you and helps to guide the choices that you make and the actions that you take throughout the year.

An intention can become your practical inner navigation tool that can transform, not only your experience of life, but the course of your life. We have seen intentions lead people on all sorts of journeys, from finding love to changing career.

Here are three simple steps to setting your intention for the year ahead ...

Choose your intention

There are a number of ways you can decide your intention. Choose one that has you cultivating something you want more of in your life next year. For example, '2020 is my year of fun', '2020 is my year of self-care' or '2020 is my year of creativity'.

Choose an intention that supports a big dream or change you want to make happen. For example, if 2020 is the year you want to change career then it could be that '2020 is my year of exploring and experimenting' or '2020 is my year of learning'.

Stu Krieger

**LET YOUR HEART
GUIDE YOU.
IT WHISPERS,
SO LISTEN CLOSELY.**

From the 'Goodbye 2019, Hello 2020' Journal

Choose an intention that is a statement of how you want to turn up for yourself and in all that you do. For example, '2020 is my year of saying "yes"' or '2020 is my year of stepping into my power'.

Declare it

Declare your intention to a friend or loved one. Choose someone who you trust who is encouraging and supportive and tell them your



Selina + Vicki are the founders of Project Love

intention for the year and why it is important to you.

Commit to doing 3 practical things

Once you've chosen your intention for the year, write down three actions that you are going to take this month to help bring that intention to life. So for example, if 2020 is your 'year of fun' then you could think of something that would be fun for you to do this month and get it booked into your calendar. You could set up an alert on your phone that asks you 'what is one quick fun thing I could do today?' and finally you could buy yourself a gift that will help you bring more fun into your life, like a pair of roller-skates or tickets to a comedy show.

And every time you tick one of those mini goals off your list then add a new one. And never add something to that list because you think you 'should'. Leave that habit behind with the New Year's resolutions!

'Goodbye 2019, Hello 2020' (£11.99) is an end-of-year journal that helps you to say a proper farewell to 2019 and create a life you love in the year to come, available from Amazon.



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