Doing What Matters in Times of Stress:

An Illustrated Guide

World Health Organization

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Preface

Doing What Matters in Times of Stress is a WHO stress management guide for coping with adversity. This illustrated guide supports implementation of WHO's recommendation for stress management.

There are many causes of stress, including personal difficulties (e.g. conflict with loved ones, being alone, lack of income, worries about the future), problems at work (e.g. conflict with colleagues, an extremely demanding or insecure job) or major threats in your community (e.g. violence, disease, lack of economic opportunity).

This guide is for anyone who experiences stress, ranging from parents and other carers to health professionals working in dangerous situations. It is for both people who flee war, losing all they have, and well protected people living in communities at peace. Anyone living anywhere can experience high levels of stress.

Informed by available evidence and extensive field testing, the guide provides information and practical skills to help people cope with adversity. While the causes of adversity must be addressed, there is also a need to support people's mental health.

I hope that you will find this WHO guide useful, and that it helps all readers in their efforts to cope with stress.

Dévora Kestel

Director
Department of Mental Health and Substance Use
World Health Organization

**(This version of *Doing What Matters in Times of Stress* is a field test version.
Please provide any feedback to: psych_interventions@who.int)**

Acknowledgements

Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide is a component of a forthcoming WHO stress management course, Self-Help Plus (SH+),[1-2] initiated by Mark van Ommeren (Mental Health Unit, Department of Mental Health and Substance Use, WHO) as part of the WHO Series on Low-Intensity Psychological Interventions.

Content creation

Inspired by his previous work,[3] **Russ Harris** (Melbourne, Australia) created the content of SH+, including *Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide*. This comprised both writing the text and making initial sketches to inform illustrations.

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Kenneth Carswell (WHO) (2015–2020) and **JoAnne Epping-Jordan** (Seattle, USA) (2014–2015) have managed the SH+ project, including the editing and design of this book.

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David Wilson (Oxford, United Kingdom) was responsible for text editing, and Alessandro Mannocchi (Rome, Italy) for graphic design.

Narration of audio exercises

Sanjo Ogunseye (Lagos, Nigeria) narrated the audio exercises that accompany the book.

Administrative support

Ophel Riano (WHO).

1 Epping-Jordan JE, Harris R, Brown FL, Carswell K, Foley C, García-Moreno C, Kogan C, van Ommeren M. *Self-Help Plus (SH+): a new WHO stress management package*. *World Psychiatry*. 2016 Oct;15(3):295-6.

2 Tol WA, Leku MR, Lakin DP, Carswell K, Augustinavicius J, Adaku A, Au TM, Brown FL, Bryant RA, Garcia-Moreno C, Musci RJ, Ventevogel P, White RG, van Ommeren M. *Guided self-help to reduce psychological distress in South Sudanese female refugees in Uganda: a cluster randomised trial*. *The Lancet Global Health*. 2020 Feb;8(2):e254-e263.

3 Harris R, Aisbett B. *The Illustrated Happiness Trap*. Boston: Shambhala, 2013.

Book review (with affiliation at time of review)
Book reviewers included Mona Alqazzaz (WHO), Ebert Beate (Aschaffenburg, Germany), Cécile Bizouerne (Action Contre la Faim), Margriet Blaauw (War Trauma Foundation), Kate Cavanagh, (University of Sussex), Rachel Cohen (Geneva, Switzerland), Elizabeth De Castro (Children's Rights Resource Center), Manuel De Lara (WHO), Rabih El Chammay (Ministry of Public Health, Lebanon), Mohamed El Nawawi (Wintherthur, Switzerland), Boaz Feldman (Geneva, Switzerland), Kenneth Fung (UHN – Toronto Western Hospital), Anna Goloktionova (IMC)**,** Brandon Gray (WHO), Elise Griede (War Child Holland), Jennifer Hall (WHO), Fahmy Hanna (WHO), Louise Hayes (Melbourne, Australia), Tiina Hokkanen (Fida International), Rebecca Horn (Queen Margaret University), Lynne Jones (Harvard School of Public Health), Mark Jordans, (Healthnet TPO), Dévora Kestel (WHO), Bianca King (Geneva, Switzerland), Nils Kolstrup (UiT The Arctic University of Norway), Aiysha Malik (WHO), Carmen Martinez (Médecins Sans Frontières), Ken Miller (War Child Holland), Mirjam Fagerheim Moiba (Njala University), Lynette Monteiro (University of Ottawa), Eva Murino (WHO), Sebastiana Da Gama Nkomo (WHO), Brian Ogallo (WHO), Patricia Omidian (Focusing International), Andrea Pereira (Geneva, Switzerland), Bhava Poudyal (Kathmandu, Nepal), Beatrice Pouligny (Washington DC, USA), Megin Reijnders (WHO), Patricia Robinson (Mountainview Consulting Group), Shekhar Saxena (WHO), Alison Schafer (World Vision Australia), Pratap Sharan (All India Institute of Medical Sciences), Marian Schilperoord (UNHCR), Andrew Thomson (Car Gomm), Mikai and Hana van Ommeren (Divonne-les-Bains, France), Peter Ventevogel (UNHCR), Matthieu Villatte (Evidence-Based Practice Institute), Sarah Watts (WHO), Wietse Tol (HealthRight International's Peter C. Alderman Program), Nana Wiedemann (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies), Inka Weissbecker (International Medical Corps), Mike Wessells (Columbia University), Ross White (University of Glasgow), Eyad Yanes (WHO) and Diana Zandi (WHO), and all emergency-affected people in Syria, Turkey, Uganda and Ukraine who participated in adaptation and field-testing of the book and its images.

Testing (alphabetical)

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Funding (alphabetical)

European Commission; Research for Health in Humanitarian Crises (R2HC) Programme (managed by Elrha); United Nations Fund for Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict; and the WHO Country Office in Syria.

Note on translation and adaptation of this guide

WHO will publish a translation of this work into Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, and Spanish.

To avoid duplication of translations, please consider contacting WHO at http://www.who.int/about/licensing prior to starting an adaptation.

If you are experiencing stress, you are not alone.

Right now, there are many other people in your community and all around the world who are also struggling with stress.

We will help you to learn practical skills for dealing with stress. You will see us throughout this book, as we teach you the skills you need.

Enjoy your journey of learning how to do what matters in times of stress!

How to use this book

This book has five sections, each containing a new idea and technique. These are easy to learn and can be used for just a few minutes each day to help you reduce stress. You can read one section every few days and take time to practise the exercises and use the learning in the days in between. Or, you can read the book through once, applying whatever you can, and then read it again, taking more time to appreciate the ideas and practise the techniques. Practising and applying the ideas to your life is key for reducing stress. You can read the guide at home, during break or rest periods at work, before you go to sleep or any other time when you might have a few moments to concentrate on taking care of yourself.

If you find that doing the exercises in this book is not enough for you to cope with intolerable stress, then please seek help from relevant health or social services, or from trusted people in your community.

If you have a device for accessing the Internet and storing audio files, when you see the symbol 🔊 in the book you can download an audio version of the exercise from https://www.who.int/publications-detail/9789240003927 to support your practice.

If you are not able to access the online audio files, you can still get similar benefit from reading and carefully following the instructions and exercises in this book.

Part 1

GROUNDING

This book is to help you manage STRESS.

"Stress" means feeling troubled or threatened by life.

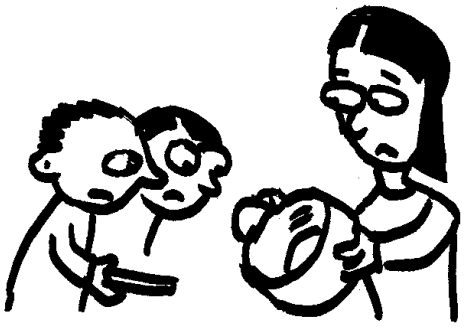
Stress can be due to major threats…

One man did something really bad to me

FAMILY VIOLENCE

ILLNESS

NO SCHOOL



PROBLEMS PROVIDING FOR YOUR FAMILY

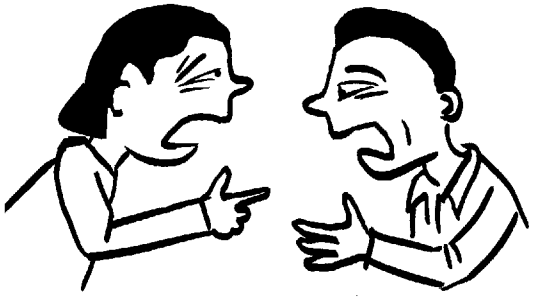
DISPLACED FROM HOME

VIOLENCE

IN YOUR COMMUNITY

…or smaller problems.

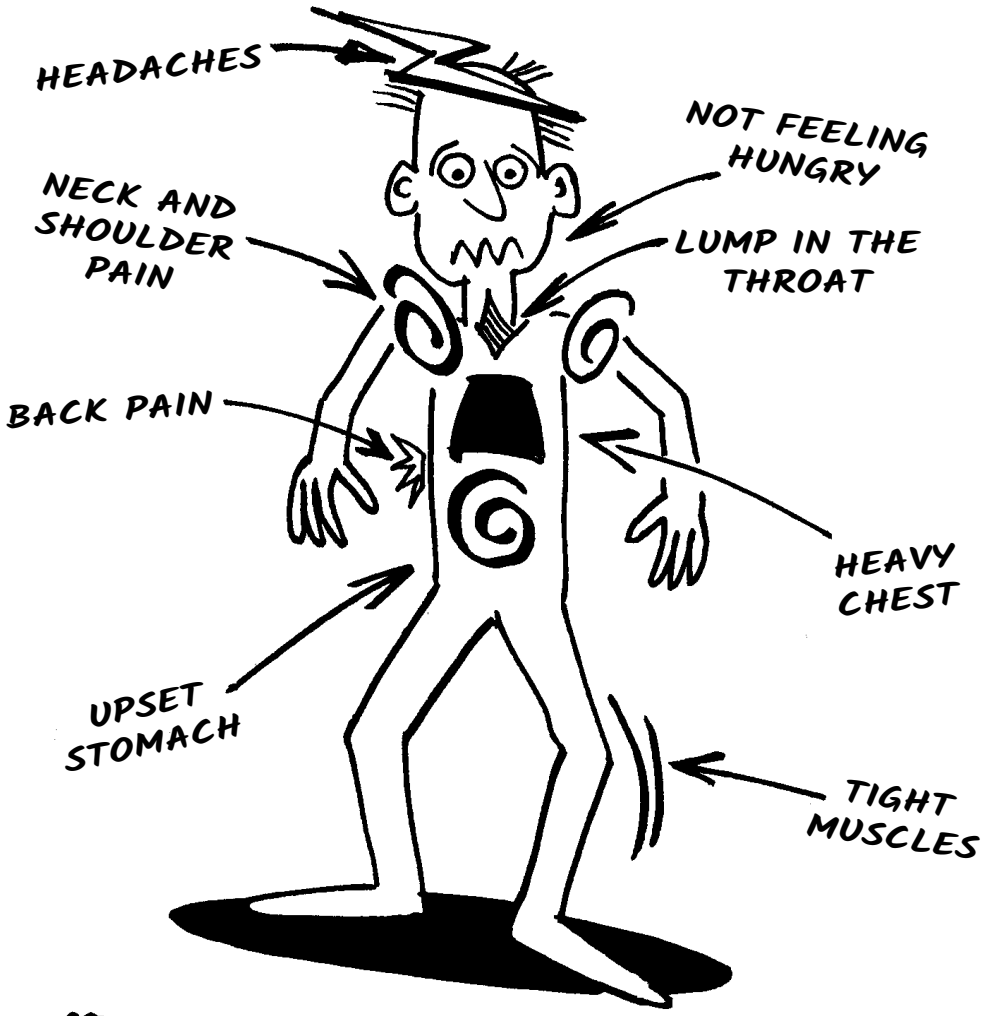
ARGUMENTS WITH YOUR FAMILY



UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE FUTURE

Everyone experiences
stress at times.
A little bit of stress
is not a problem.

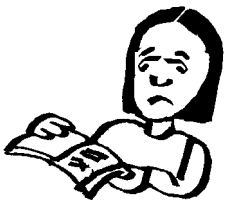
**But very high stress often affects the body.
Many people get unpleasant feelings.**



**Other people find their body
gets sick – skin rashes, infections,
illnesses or bowel problems.**

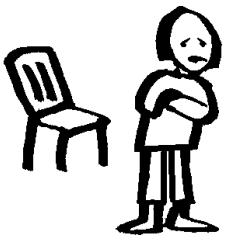
When they are stressed, many people …

…cannot focus



…get angry easily

…cannot sit still

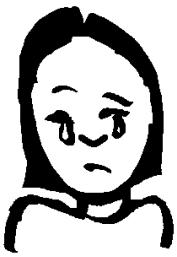


…have difficulty sleeping

…feel sad or guilty

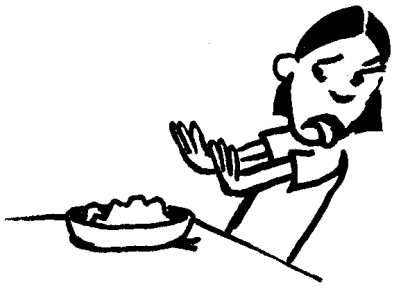
…worry

…cry



…feel very tired

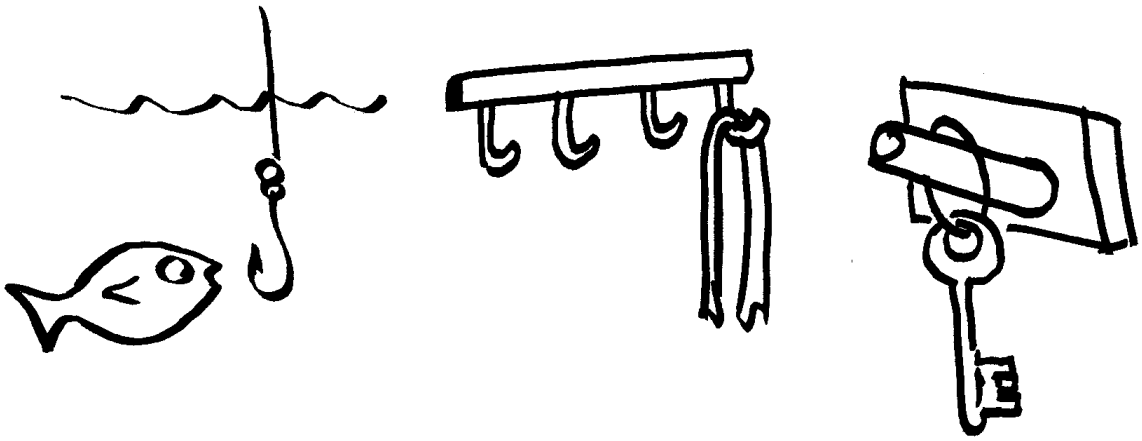
…have changes in appetite.



And many of us think a lot about bad things from the past or bad things we fear in the future.

**These powerful thoughts and feelings are a natural part of stress.
But problems can occur if we get "hooked" by them.**

**What does "hooked" mean?
Well, there are many types of hooks.**



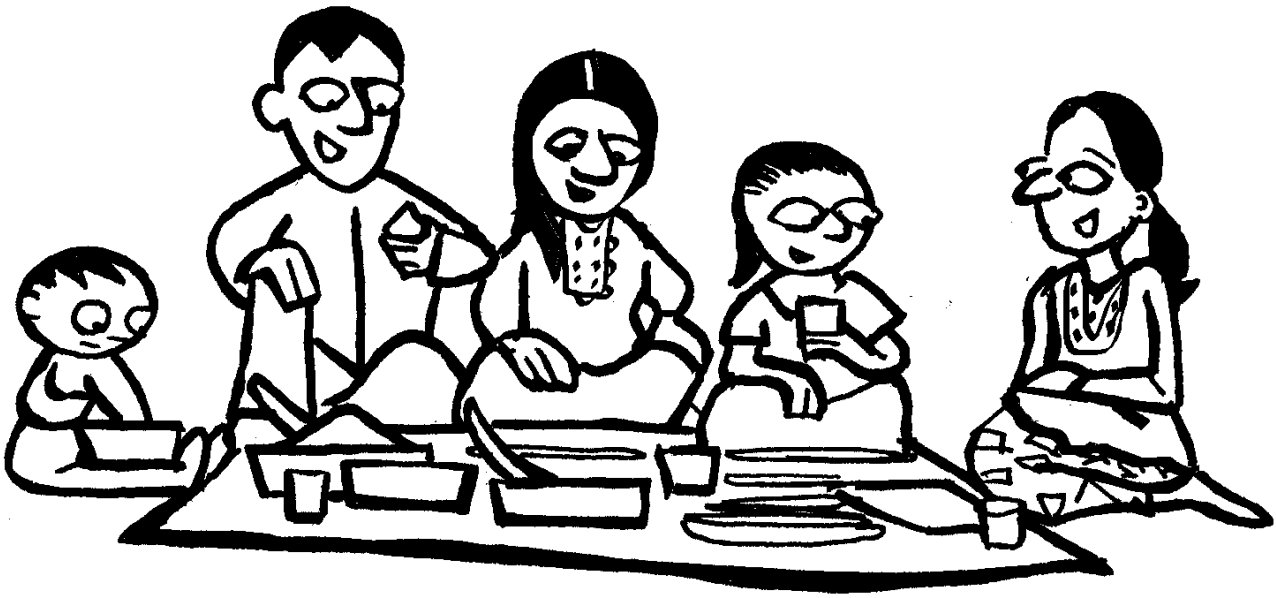
When something is on a hook,
it cannot get away.
The hook traps it.

In the same way, we can get
hooked by our difficult thoughts
and feelings.

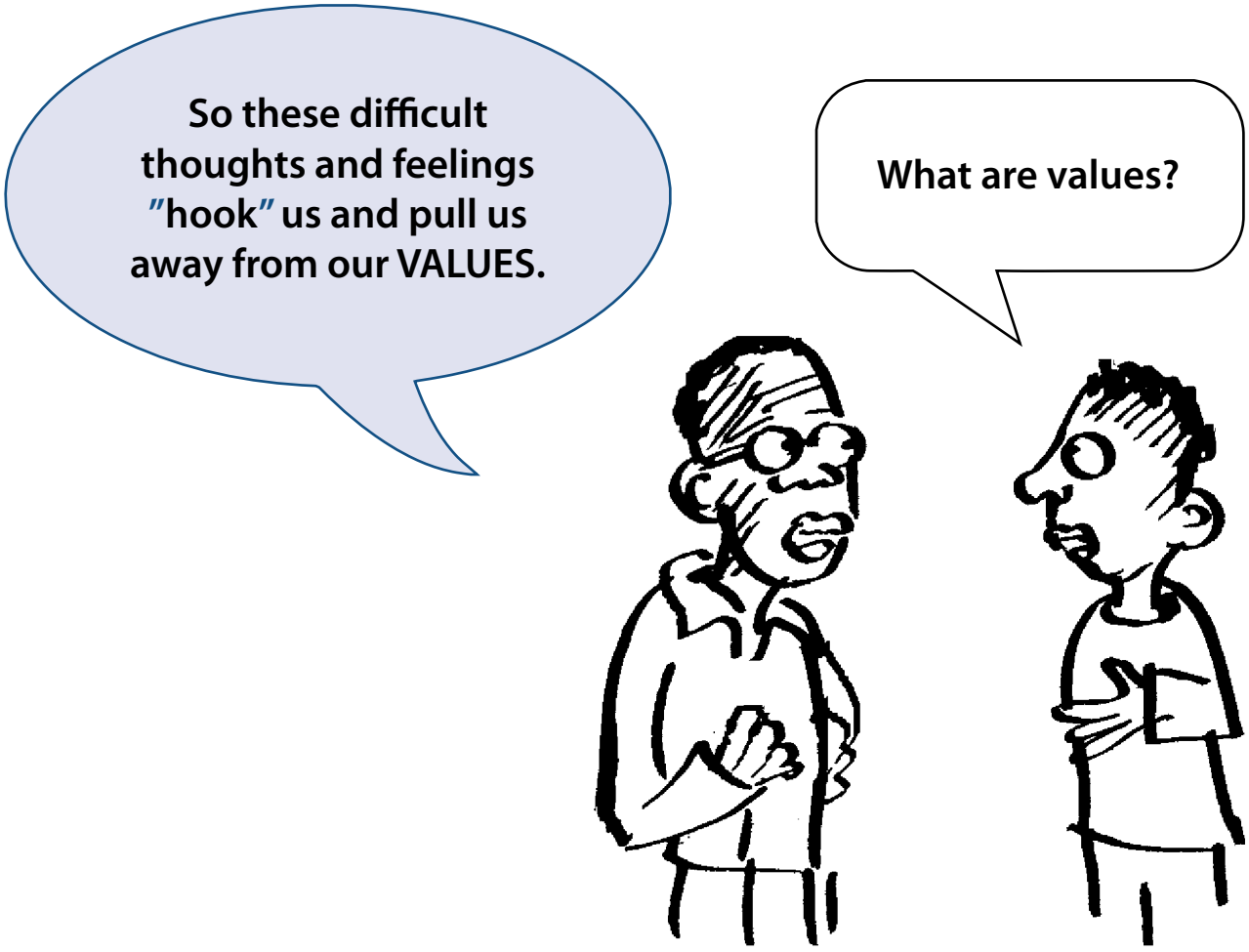
One moment, you might be
playing with children…

**…and the next moment,
you might be hooked by difficult
thoughts and feelings.**

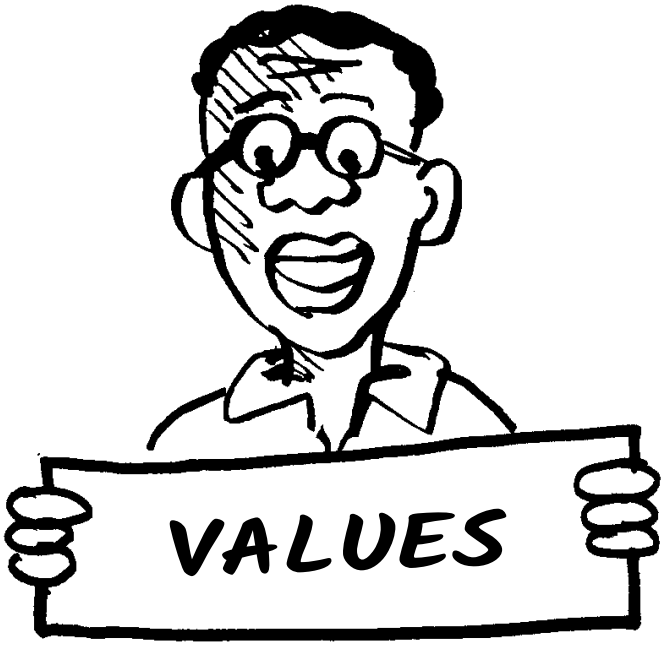
One moment, you might be enjoying sharing a meal…



… and the next moment, you might be hooked by angry thoughts and feelings. You may feel as if you are being pulled away by anger, even if you are still there.



Values are your deepest desires for the sort of person you want to be.



For example, if you are a parent or if you have responsibilities caring for others, what kind of person do you want to be?

- Loving
- Wise
- Attentive
- Committed
- Persistent
- Responsible
- Calm
- Caring
- Protective
- Courageous

So values describe the sort of person you want to be; how you want to treat yourself and others and the world around you.

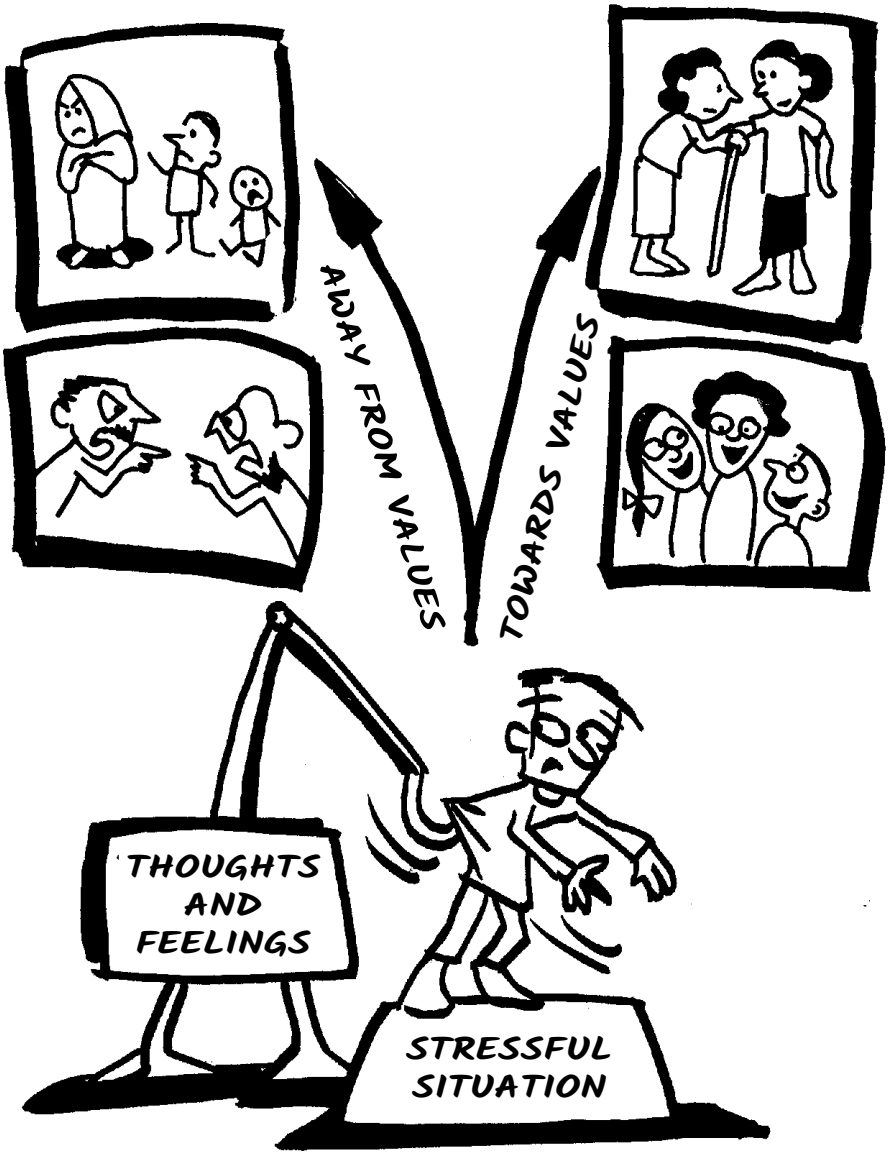
Just reading this book means you are likely acting on some of your values. Do you see how?

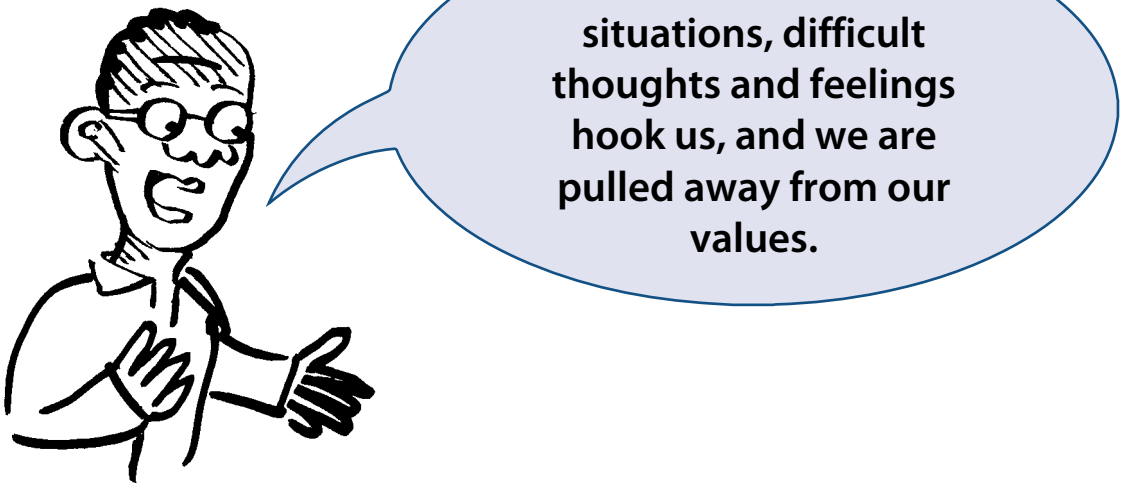
Yes, I am reading this book because I care about my family.

Yes, and I care about my well-being.

That is correct. So likely you are acting on one value that is important to many people: CARING.

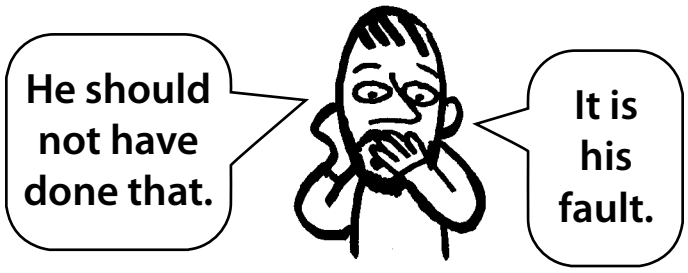
CARING FOR YOURSELF, CARING FOR OTHERS


AWAY FROM VALUES
TOWARDS VALUES
THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS
STRESSFUL SITUATION


In stressful situations, difficult thoughts and feelings hook us, and we are pulled away from our values.

There are many kinds of difficult thoughts and feelings that can hook us. Thoughts about giving up…

Thoughts that blame others…

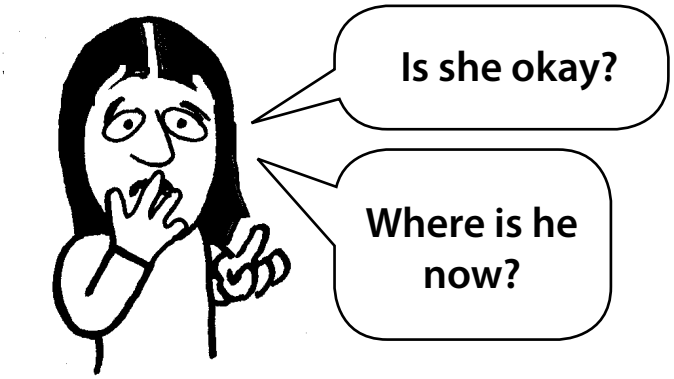


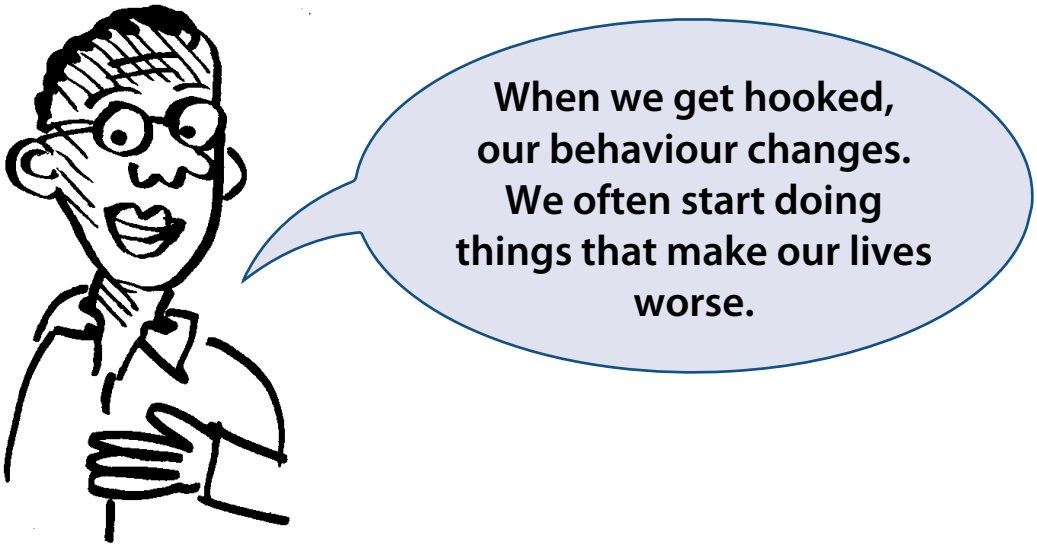
Harsh judgements about ourselves…

Memories, especially about difficult events…

Thoughts about the future, especially about what we fear…

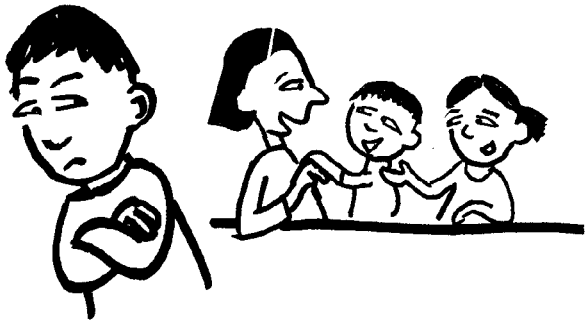
Thoughts where we worry about others.



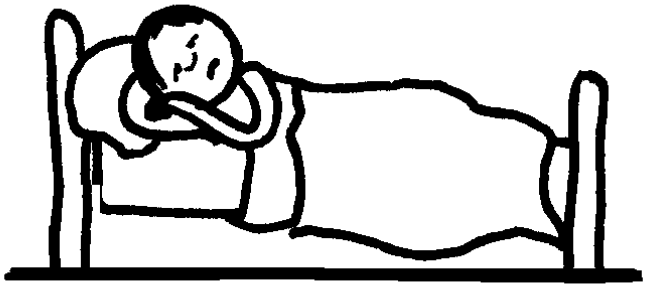


We might get into fights, arguments or disagreements.

Or we might withdraw and stay away from people we love.



Or we might spend a lot of time lying in bed.



We call these behaviours "AWAY MOVES" because when we act this way, we are moving AWAY from our values.

So what can we do?
This book is here to help you!
First you learn how to focus, engage and pay attention better.
How will that help us?
And what do you mean by "focus" and "engage"?
Have patience! I will explain.
When we are stressed, we find it hard to engage in life.

I do not understand what you mean by "engage".

To "engage" in something means to give it your full attention.

When you are drinking something, do you give it your full attention? Do you savour the smell and the taste?

When you listen to music, do you give it your full attention? Do you listen to it and enjoy it?

When you give your full attention to any activity, we say you are "engaged" with it.

But when hooked by thoughts or feelings, you are "disengaged" or "distracted".

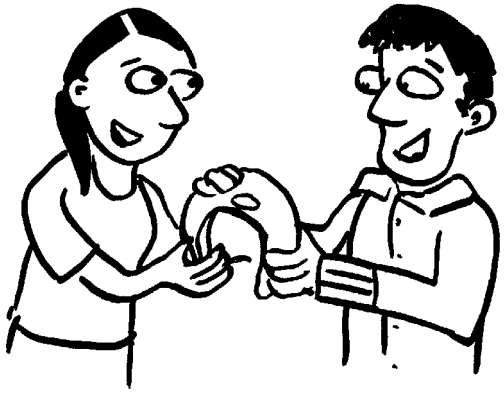
When you give your full attention to any activity, we say you are "focused".

But when hooked by thoughts or feelings, you are unfocused.

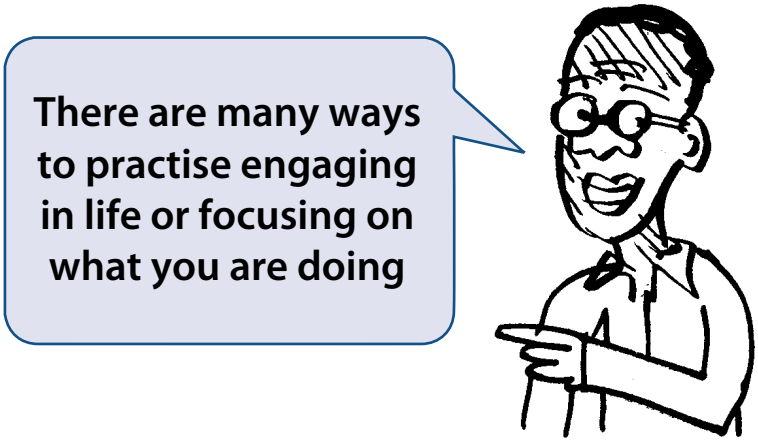
And when we do things in an unfocused way, we often do them poorly, or are unable to enjoy the activity and feel dissatisfied.

So, if you can learn to be more engaged, and focus better, then you will handle stress better.

For example, you will find your relationships with others more satisfying.

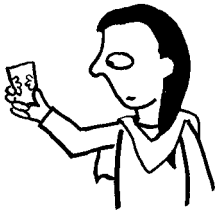


And, you will be able to do important things much better.



You can practise these skills with any activity you do. For example, if you are drinking tea or coffee…

…focus your full attention on it. You notice the drink with curiosity, as if you have never encountered such a drink before. You notice its colour.



You savour the smell of it.

You sip it SLOWLY.

Let it sit on your tongue, feel it on your teeth and savour the taste.

You drink it as slowly as possible, savouring the taste, noticing the temperature.

You notice the movements of your throat as you swallow.

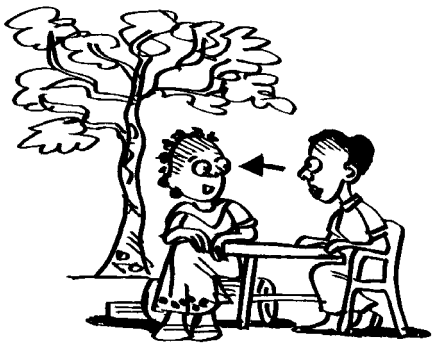
You notice the taste fading from your tongue, as you swallow.

And you drink each mouthful in the same way: slowly, noticing and savouring.

And whenever you get hooked by thoughts and feelings …

Go ahead and practise this now. Get some water, tea or coffee, and follow the pictures and instructions above. You can also go to this LINK and listen to, or download the *Awareness of Drinking exercise*.

You could practise while talking to family or friends. Notice what others are saying, their tones of voice and their facial expressions. Give them your full attention.



You could practise this while playing a game or doing some other activity with children, like teaching them to read. You simply give your full attention to the children and to the game.

You could practise this while washing, cooking or doing chores. You simply give your full attention to the activity.

And whenever you notice you get hooked…

We unhook
by refocusing
and engaging in what
we are doing.

Okay!
I can do that when
my thoughts
and feelings
are not
too difficult.

But sometimes my feelings and stories are just so painful.

Yes, sometimes they are so overpowering they turn into "emotional storms".

An "emotional storm" means that you experience intensely difficult thoughts and feelings. They are so strong they are like a mighty storm, and they can easily overpower you.

When an emotional storm appears we must learn how to "ground ourselves".

What does that mean?

Imagine you are high in a tree when a storm begins.

Would you want to stay in the tree?

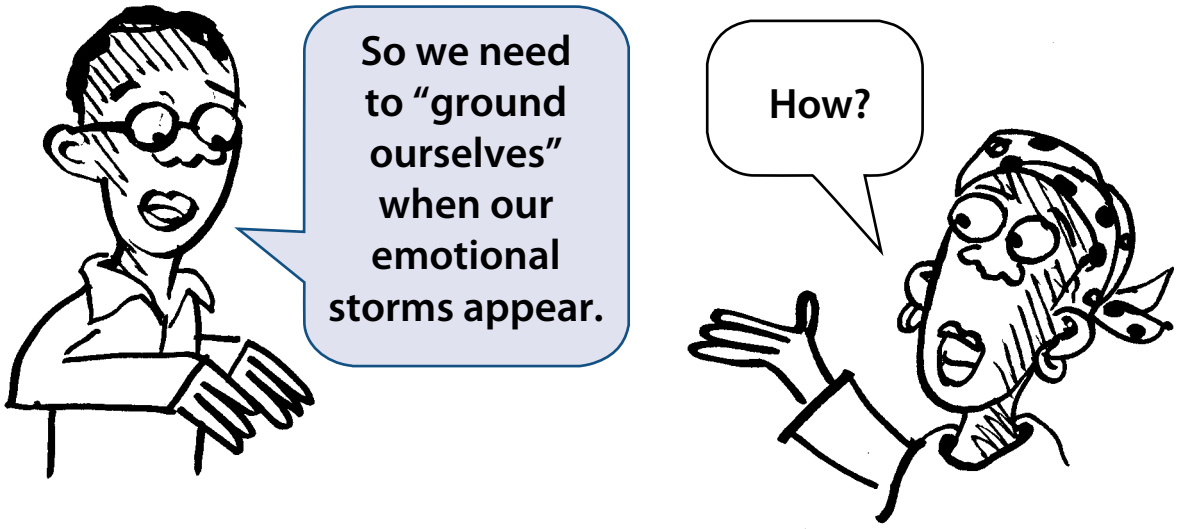
While you are in the tree, you are in great danger!

You need to get down to the ground as quickly as possible!

On the ground, you are much safer.

And on the ground, you can help others.
For example, you could comfort others
while the storm rages.

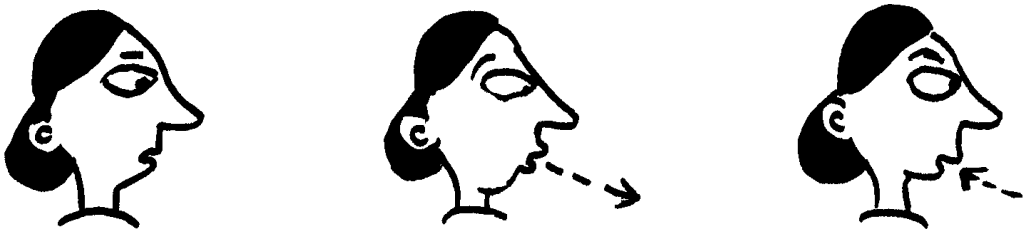
And if there is somewhere safe for you to hide,
you can only get there after you are on the ground.


So we need to "ground ourselves" when our emotional storms appear.
How?

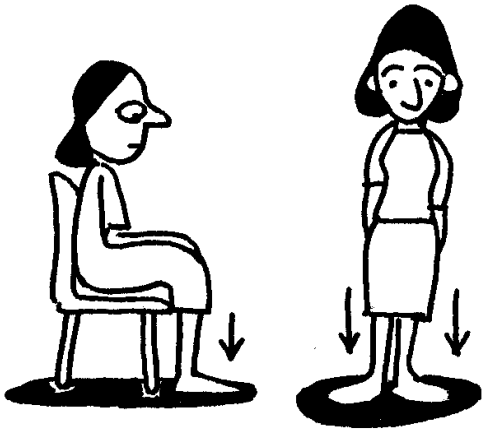
Again, through engaging with the world around you, and focusing on what you are doing.

The first step is to NOTICE how you are feeling and what you are thinking.

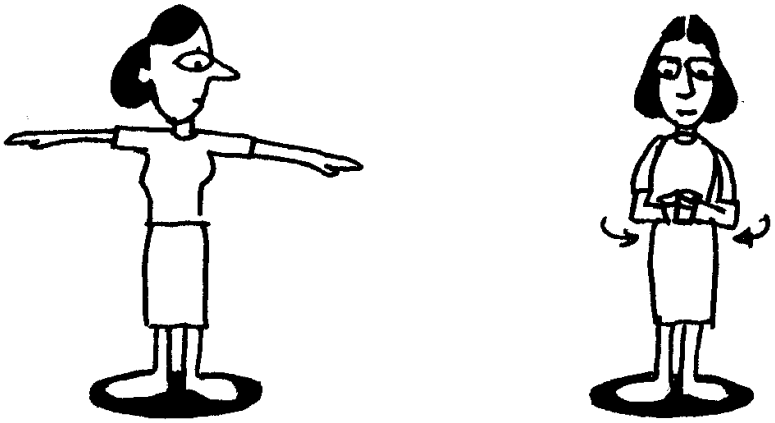
**Next, SLOW DOWN and CONNECT with your body.
Slow your breathing. Empty your lungs completely.
Then let them refill as slowly as possible.**



Slowly press your feet into the floor.

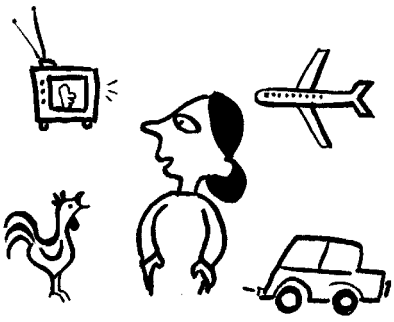


Slowly stretch your arms, or slowly press your hands together.



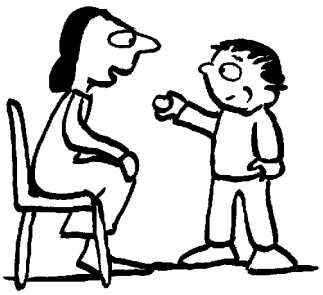
The next step in grounding is to REFOCUS on the world around you. Notice where you are. What are five things you can see?

What are three or four things you can hear?



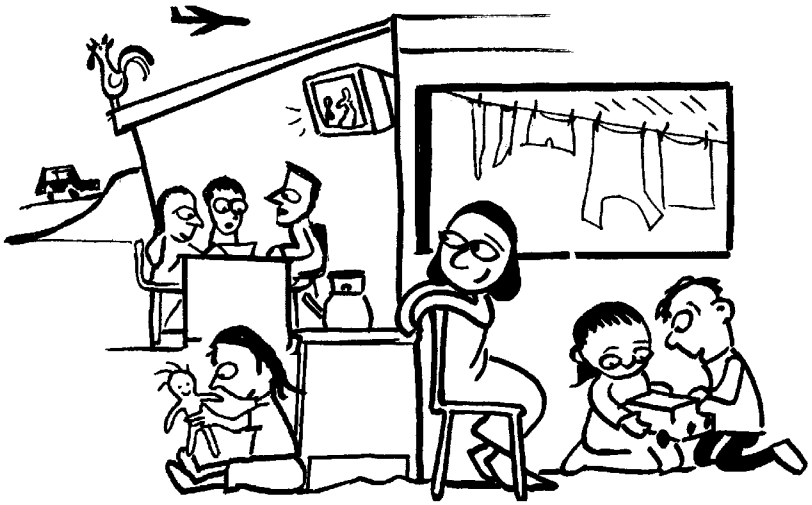
Breathe the air. What can you smell?

Notice where you are and what you are doing.



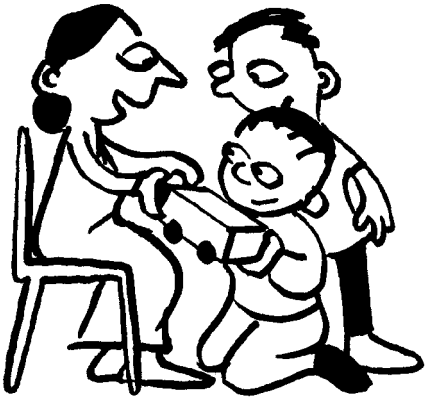
Touch your knees, or the surface beneath you, or any object you can reach. Notice what it feels like under your fingers.

So notice there are difficult thoughts and feelings appearing…

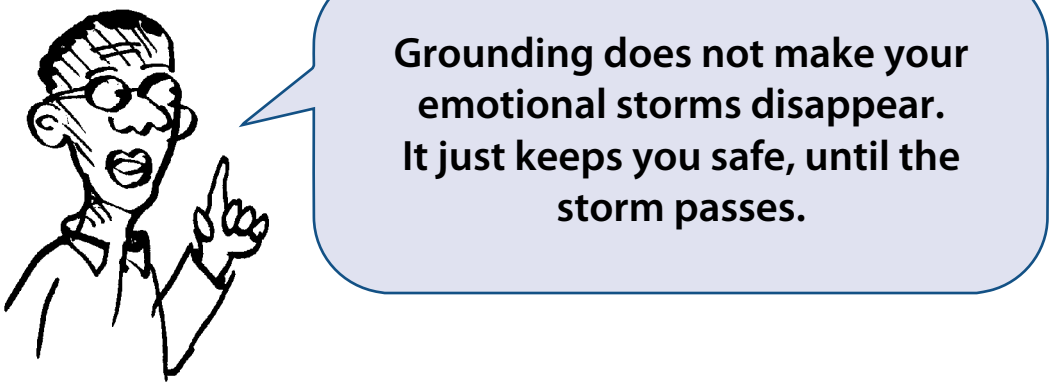


…and there is also a world around you that you can see and hear and touch and taste and smell.

And you can also move your arms and legs and mouth – so if you want to, you can act in line with your values.

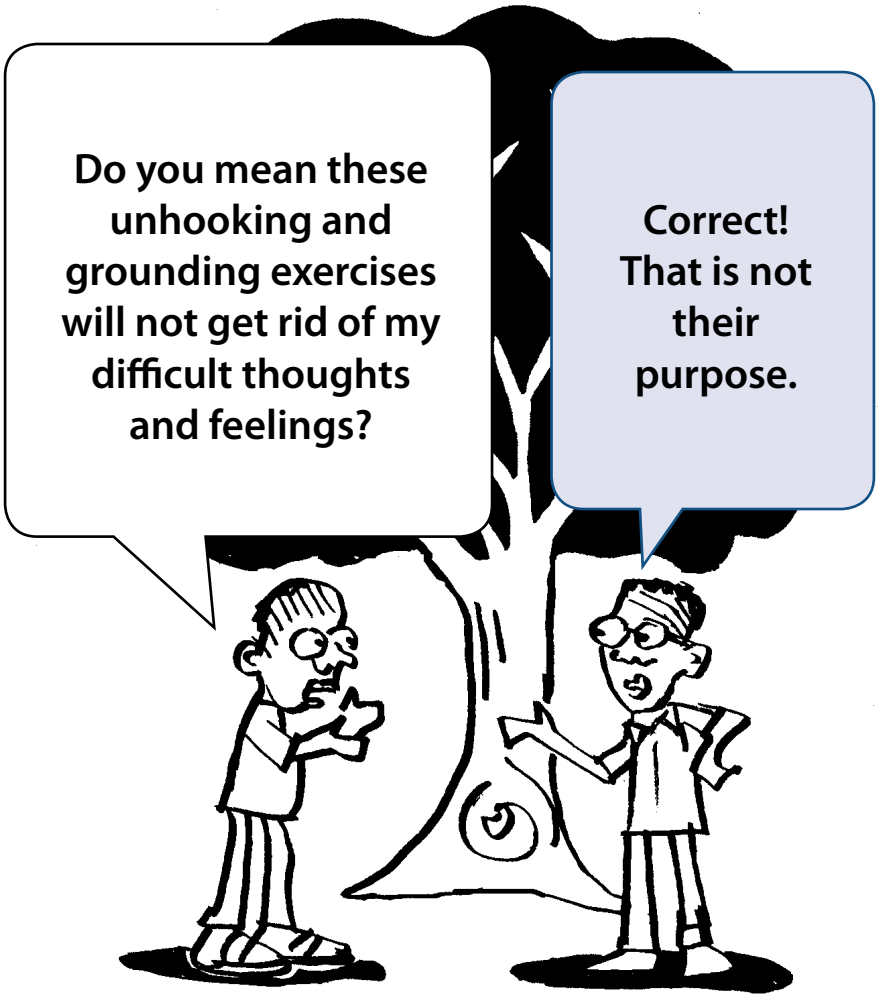


You can go to this LINK and listen to, or download *Grounding Exercise 1*. Or, you can simply follow the pictures and instructions in this book.

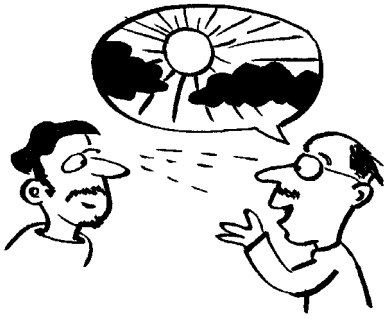


Some storms last a long time.

Others pass quickly.



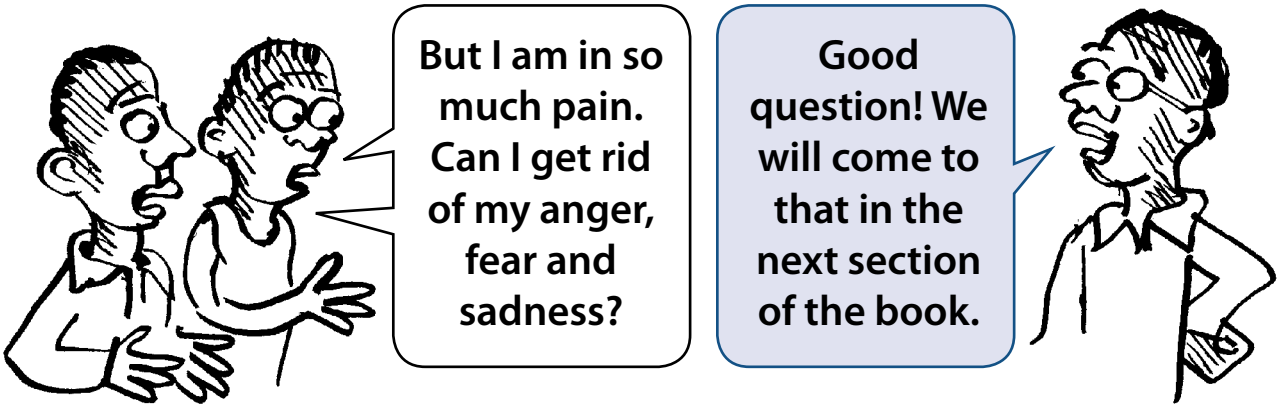
The purpose of the unhooking and grounding exercises is to help you "engage" in life. For example, to help you give your full attention to family and friends.

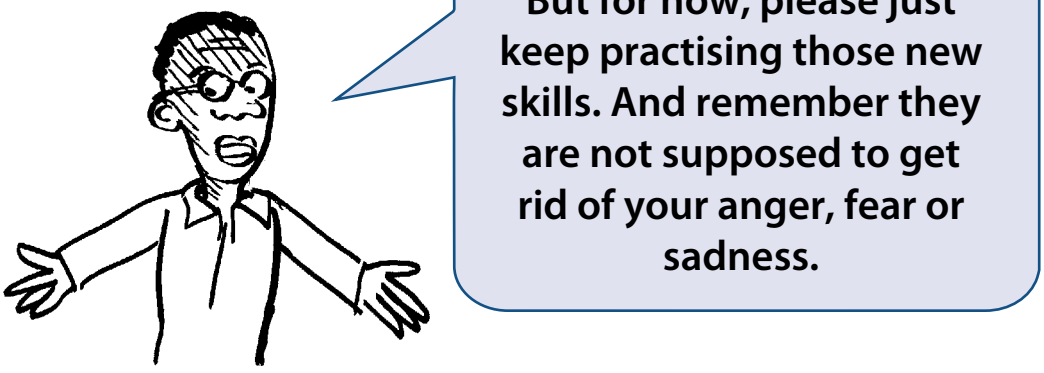


It is also to help you move towards your values; to help you behave more like the kind of person you want to be.

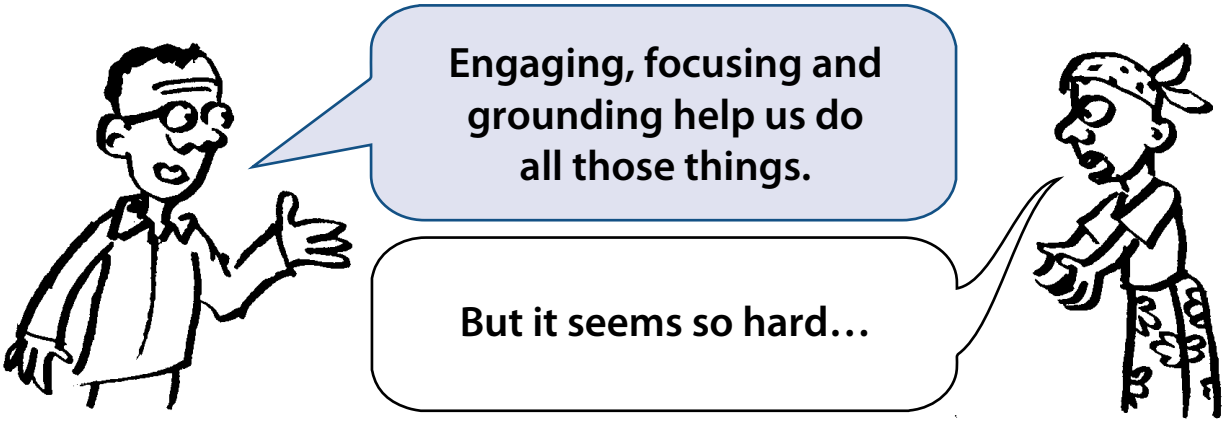
And to help you focus on what you are doing, so you can do it well.

When you pay attention and engage fully in any activity you may also find it more satisfying. This is true even with activities that are boring or frustrating.

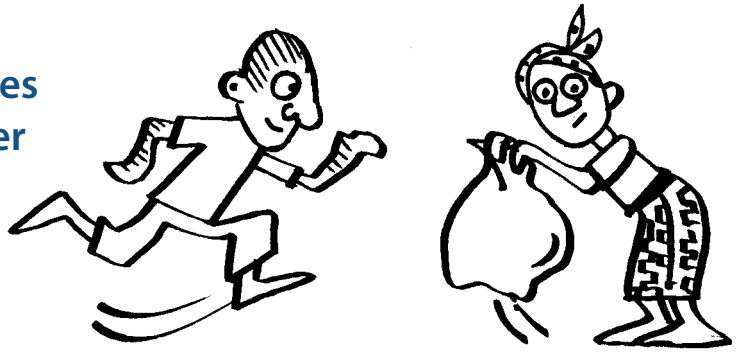


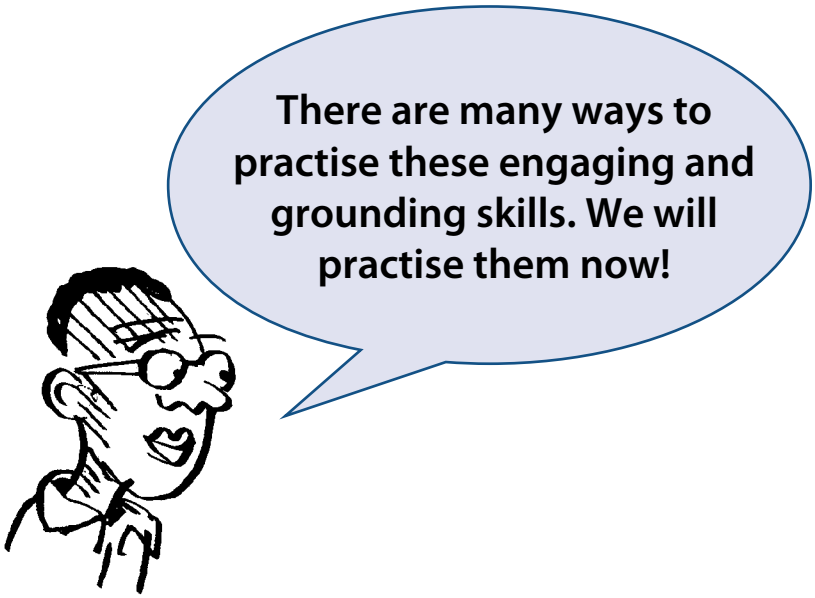


When we engage in life, pay attention to others, focus on what we're doing and live by our values, we manage stress much better.



It is like building your muscles to run faster or to lift heavier loads. With practice, your muscles get bigger!



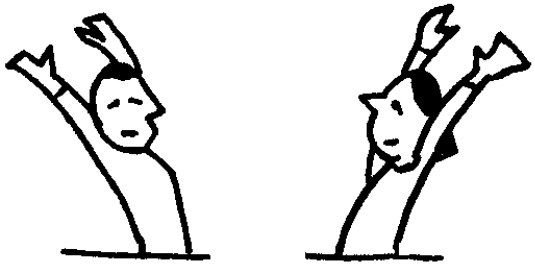


As you read this book, follow the instructions. Do not simply read about it; actually do it!

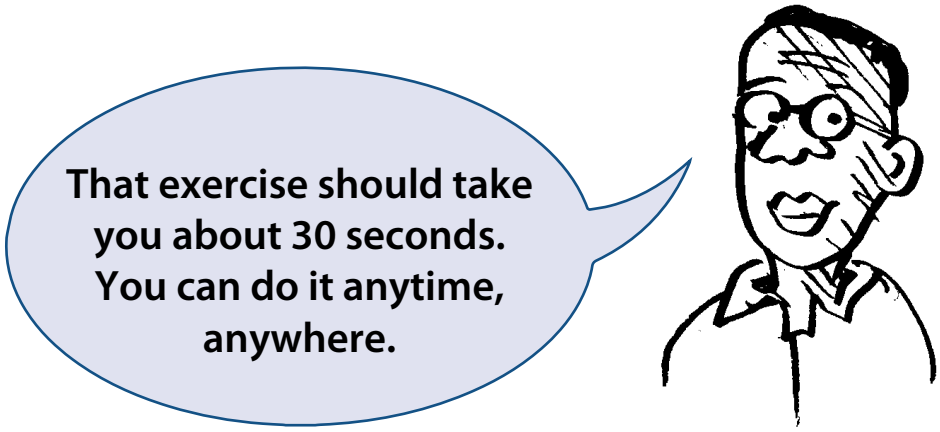
First, NOTICE how you are feeling and what you are thinking.
Then, SLOW DOWN and CONNECT with your body. Slowly breathe out.
Slowly stretch. Slowly push your feet into the floor.

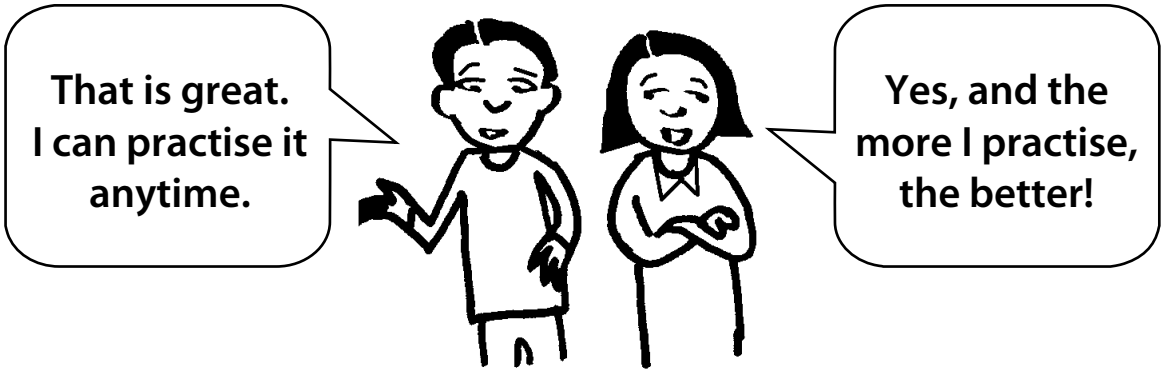
Now REFOCUS on the world around you.
Pay attention with curiosity to what you can …

Now have a good stretch. Engage with the world. Notice where you are, who is with you, and what you are doing.



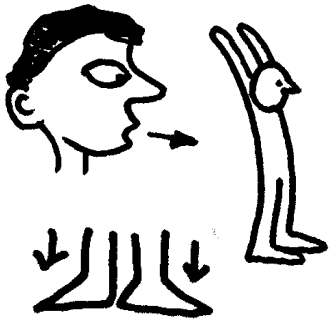
You can go to this LINK and listen to, or download *Grounding Exercise 2*. Or, you can simply follow the pictures and instructions in this book.



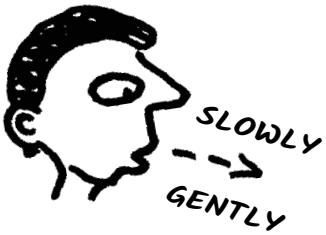


Now here is a longer grounding exercise to practise. First, NOTICE how you are feeling and what you are thinking.

Next, SLOW DOWN and CONNECT with your body. Slowly breathe out. Slowly stretch. Slowly push your feet into the ground.



Now slow your breathing even more. Slowly and gently, empty your lungs.

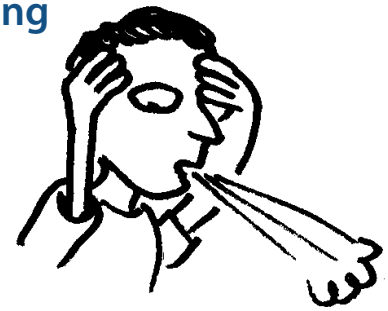


Make sure you breathe SLOWLY and GENTLY.

If you breathe too hard or too quickly, it could make you feel panicky, anxious, dizzy or short of breath.

And as you breath IN, also do so SLOWLY and GENTLY.

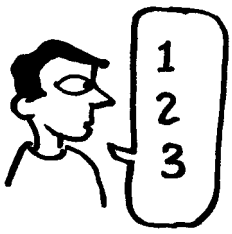
If you start to feel dizzy or light-headed, you are breathing too deeply, too hard or too quickly.



So if you ever start to feel dizzy, or light-headed, or tight-chested, SLOW your breathing. Breathe out GENTLY and breathe in as SLOWLY and SHALLOWLY as possible. (DO NOT take deep breaths. This will worsen your dizziness!)

Now notice your breathing with CURIOSITY – as if it is the first time you have ever encountered breathing.

Now breathe out even more SLOWLY. And after your lungs are empty, silently count to three before you breathe in again. Then let your lungs refill as SLOWLY AS POSSIBLE.



You are training your ability to stay engaged and focused. Can you keep your attention on your breath?

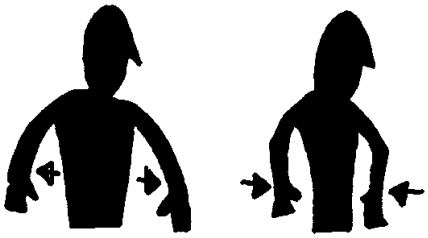
As you do this, from time to time thoughts and feelings will hook you and pull you out of the exercise.

As soon as you realize this has happened, REFOCUS on your breathing. Give it your full attention.

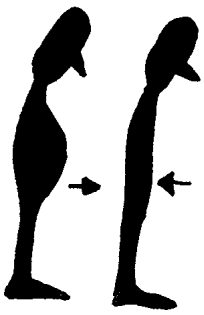
Notice the air as it flows in and out of your nostrils.

Notice the gentle movements of your shoulders.

Notice your chest moving in and out.



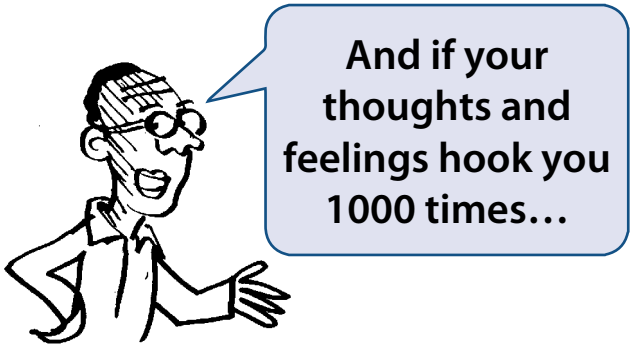
Notice how your belly moves in and out.

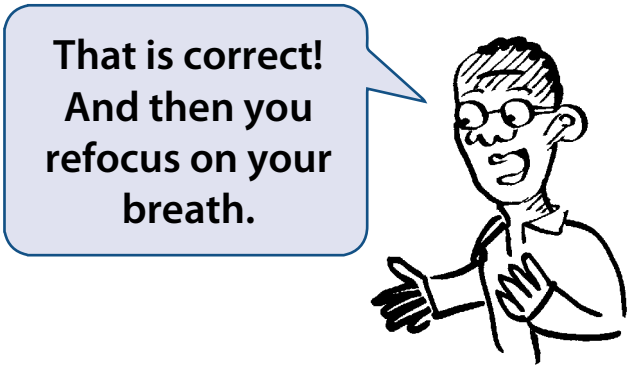


Again and again and again, you will get hooked.

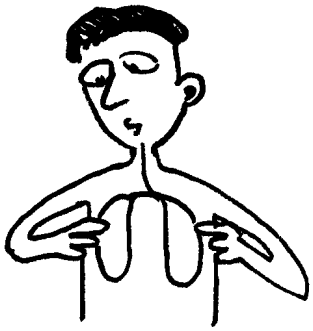
So as soon as you realize this has happened …

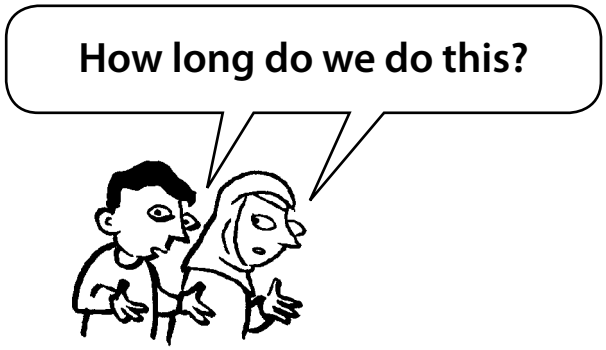
…refocus on your breathing.





Again and again and again, you bring your attention back to your breath, noticing it with curiosity.

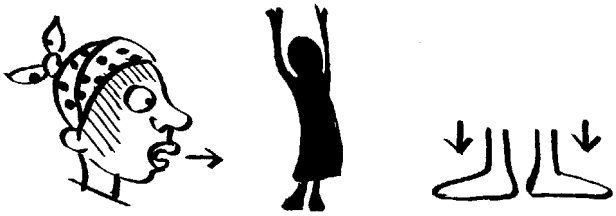




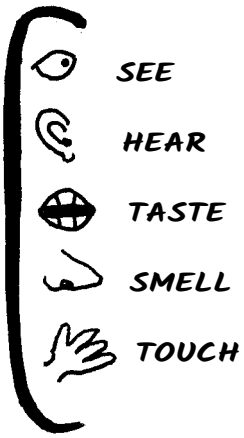
You could do some shorter practices that last for one or two minutes, and some longer practices that last for five to ten minutes.

To finish the exercise, once again ground yourself.

SLOW down.
Slowly breathe out.
Slowly stretch.
Slowly push your feet into the floor.



Then REFOCUS and ENGAGE with the world. Pay attention with curiosity to what you can…



Notice where you are, who is with you and what you are doing.

You can go to this LINK and listen to, or download *Grounding Exercise 3*. Or, you can simply follow the pictures and instructions in this book.

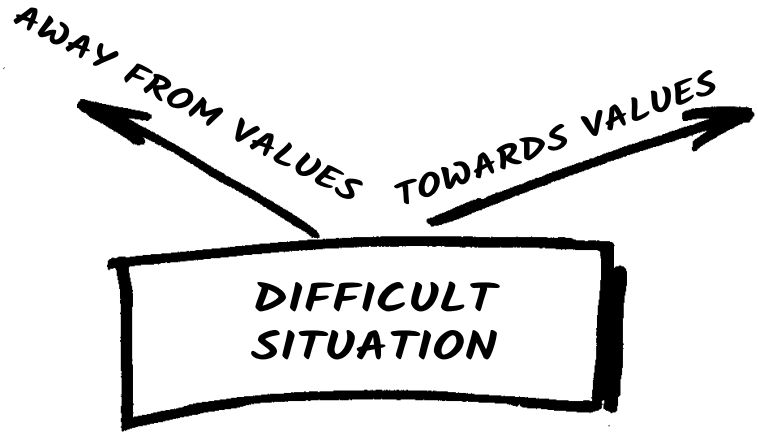
And take a moment to acknowledge that each time you practise this…

I am living by my values of caring…

…for the health of myself, others and my community.

That's right! Because these skills help you to engage, focus and unhook from difficult thoughts and feelings…

... so you can move towards your values.



So remember, practise these skills throughout the day, at every chance you get.

It can help to make a plan. For example, think about when, where and how many times each day you will practise grounding. Practising does not need to be inconvenient! You can practise anytime, anywhere, even just for 1–2 minutes. Ideally, take at least a day or two to practise the skills from this section, before going on to the next section.

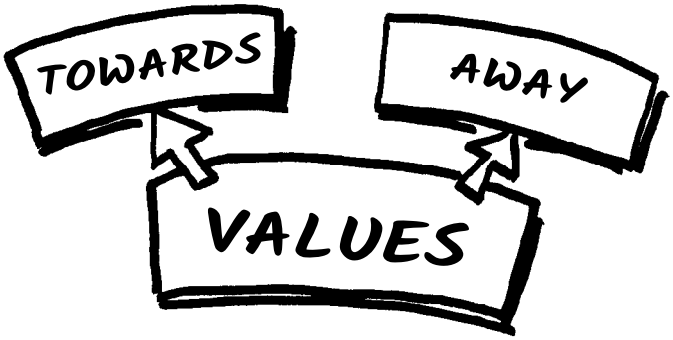
At the end of the book you'll find brief descriptions of every skill, which can remind you of the key points.

Part 2

UNHOOKING

Welcome back. I hope you practised engaging in life, focusing on your activities and grounding yourself during emotional storms.

Earlier, you may remember, we talked about "towards" and "away" moves.



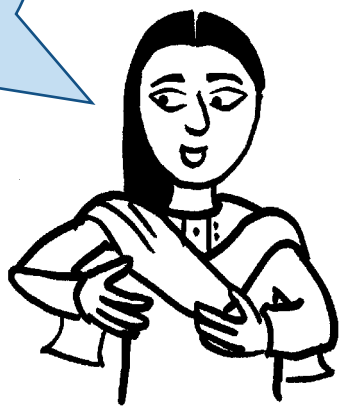
When we get hooked by difficult thoughts and feelings, we tend to make "away moves" – moving away from our values.

We might get into fights, arguments or disagreements.

Or we might withdraw and stay away from people we love.

Or we might spend a lot of time lying in bed.

So today, we are going to learn more about unhooking ourselves from difficult thoughts and feelings.



My life is so hard now. Will my difficult thoughts and feelings ever go away?

Good question. It makes sense that you would want them to go away.

But is it realistic to think we can simply get rid of them?

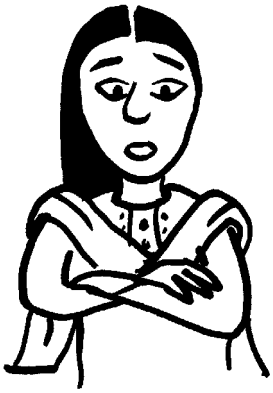
Can we burn them like rubbish?

Can we lock them up, hide them away?

Can we bury them in a hole?

Can we run off and leave them behind?

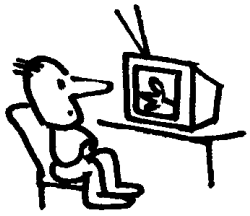
Take a moment to think about all the ways you have tried to get rid of these thoughts and feelings.



Most people try at least some of these strategies:

Yelling!

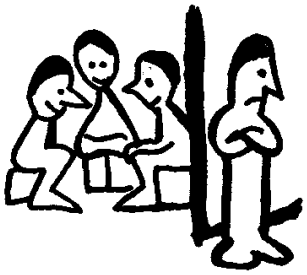
Trying not to think about it



Avoiding people, places or situations

Staying in bed

Isolating yourself



Giving up

Alcohol

Tobacco

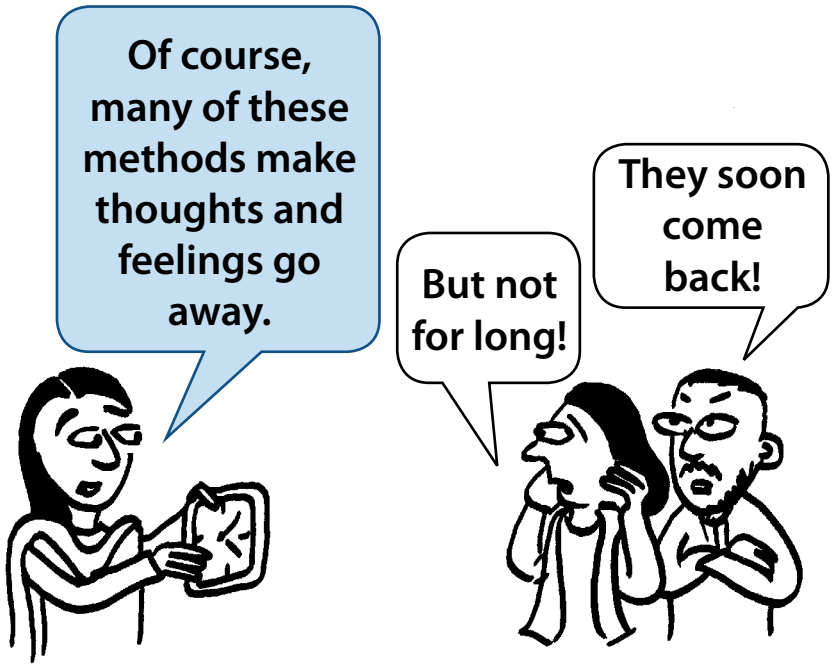
Illicit drugs

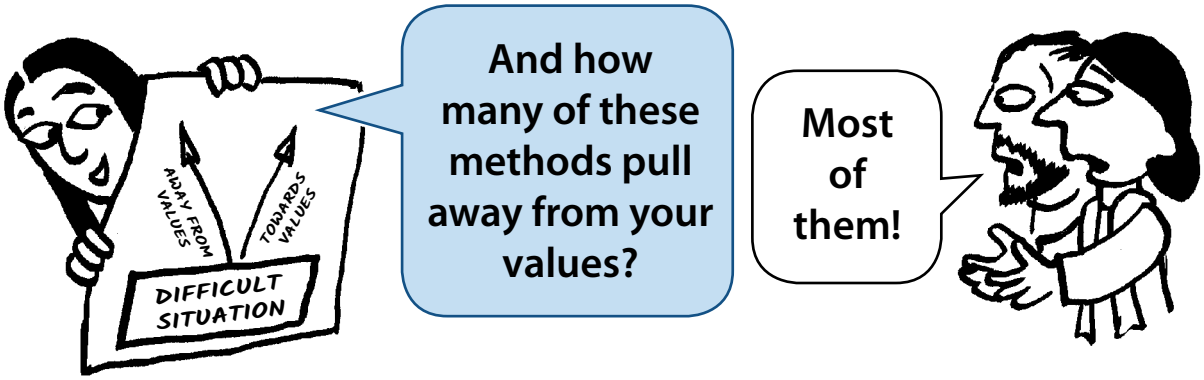
Starting arguments

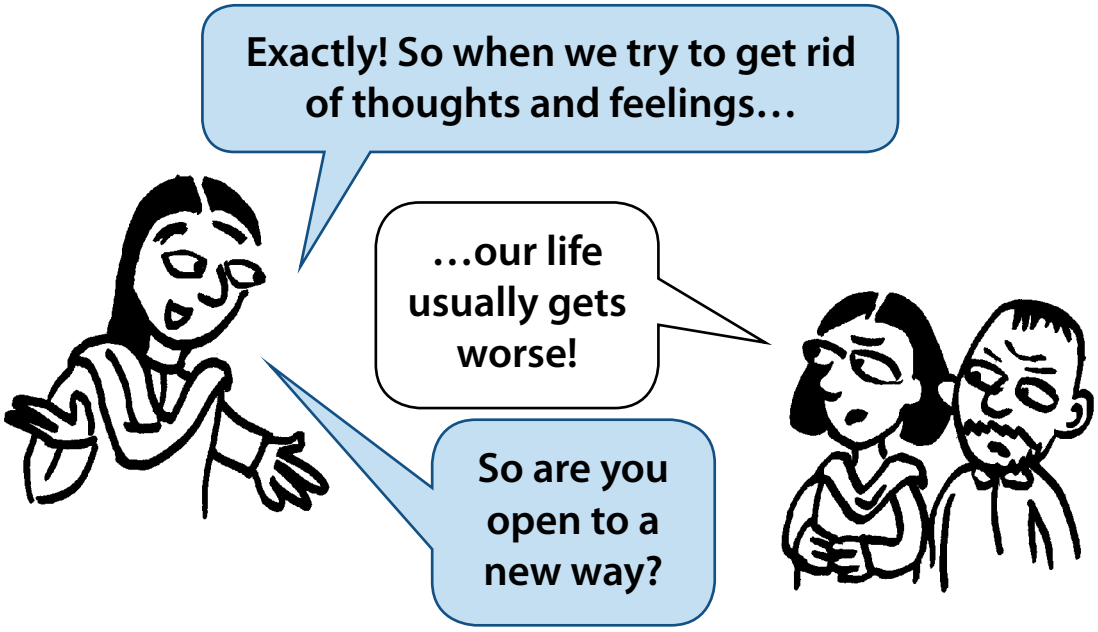
Blaming or criticizing oneself

What else have you tried?

Take a moment to think about or write down the things you have tried for getting rid of difficult thoughts and feelings.





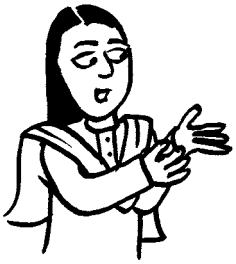


It is a new way of handling difficult thoughts and feelings.

Instead of trying to push them away…

You stop struggling with them.

And whenever you get hooked by them…



…you unhook yourself again.

How do we do that?

I will show you soon. But first let us identify – what thoughts and feelings are hooking you?

Are you being hooked by thoughts about…

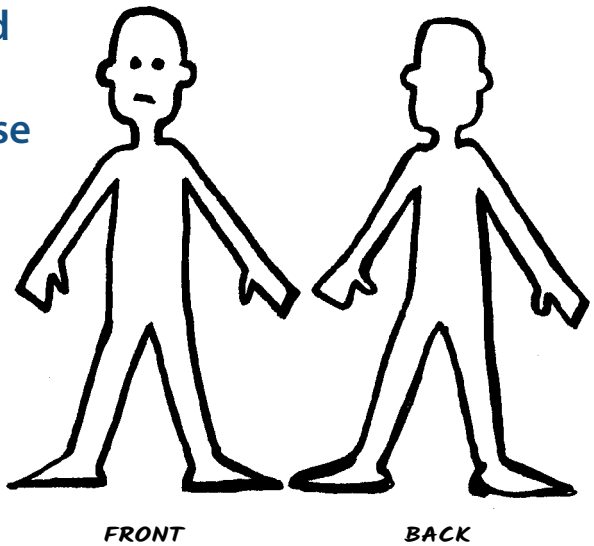
Bad things that happened in the past

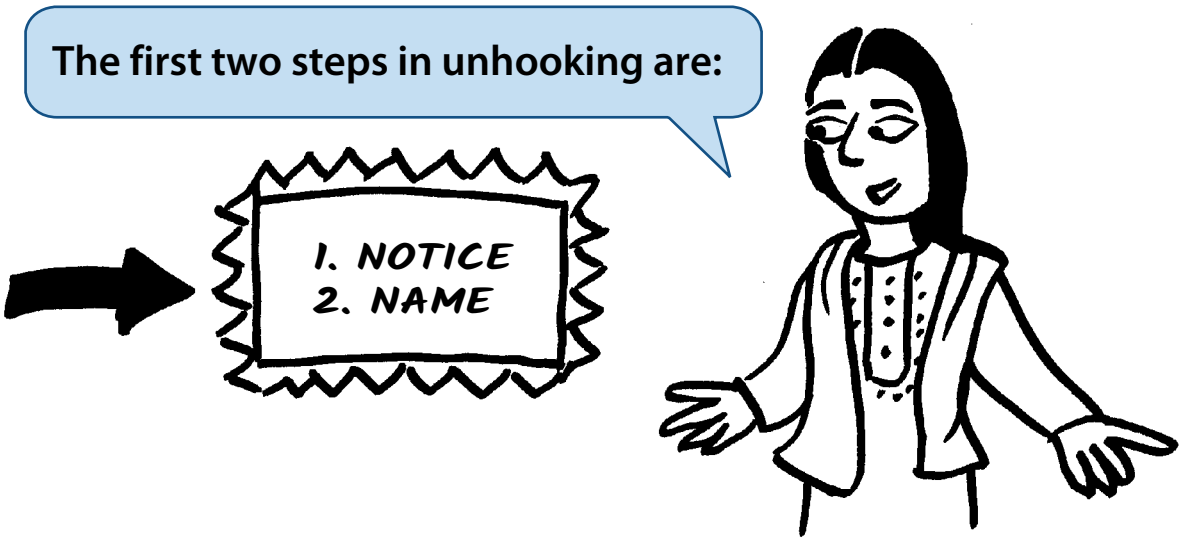
Not being good enough – being weak or crazy or bad

Bad things that might happen in the future

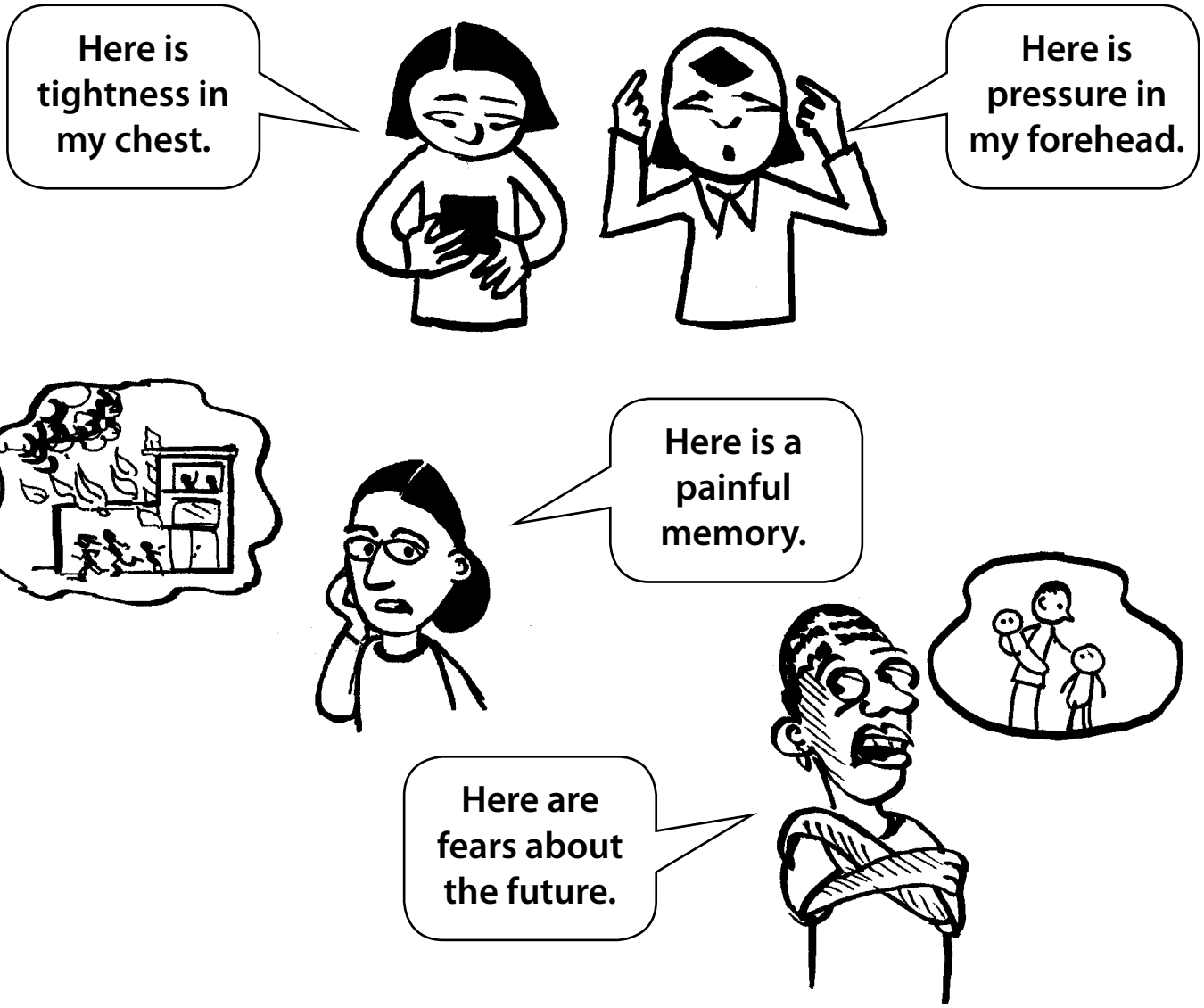
Write some of the thoughts that hook you:

Are you being hooked by feelings in your body? Mark where these feelings are located:

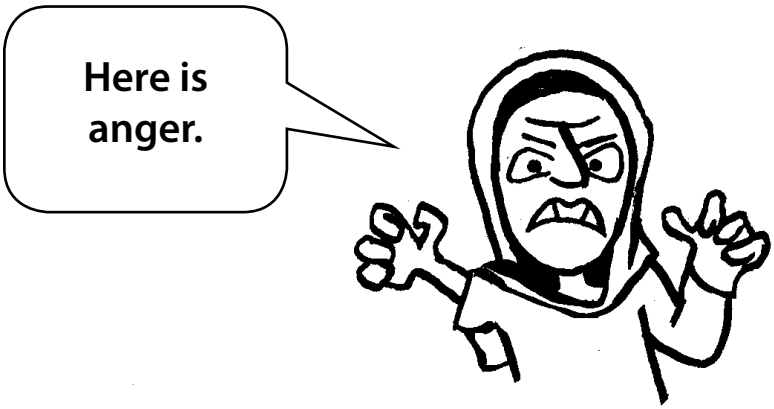




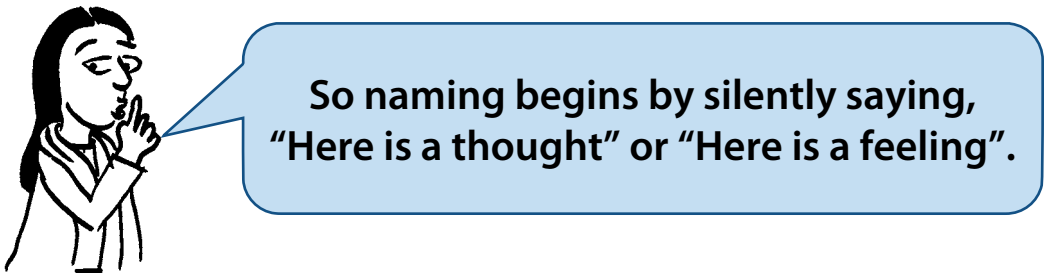
First you NOTICE that a thought or feeling has hooked you. Then you NAME it. To name it, you silently say to yourself something like…



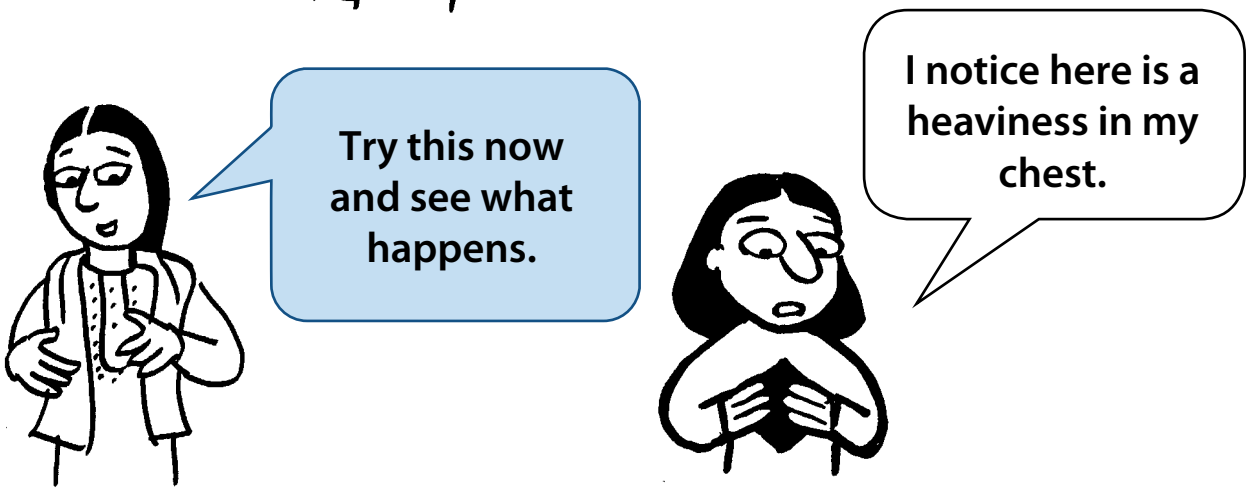
Here is a difficult thought about the past.

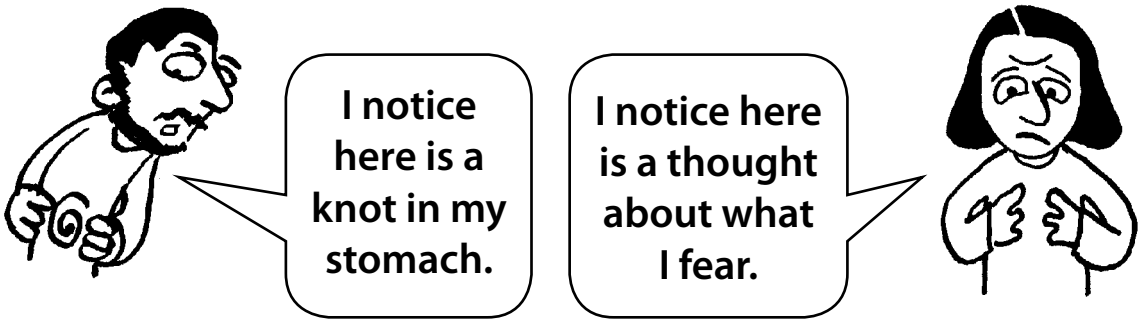

Here is anger.

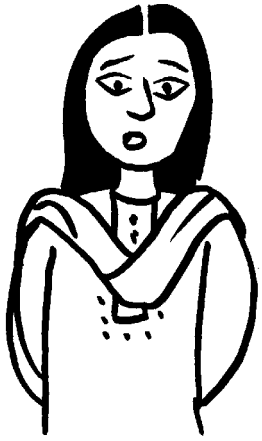
Here is a difficult thought about my family.



However, if we then add the phrase, "I notice", we usually find it unhooks us a bit more.

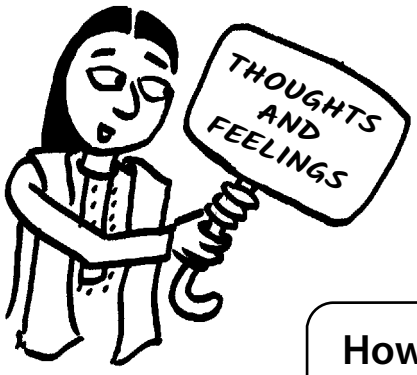






Please try this now before you read any more. NOTICE and NAME a thought or feeling that has been present for you today.

You can go to this LINK and listen to, or download the *Notice and Name* exercise. Or, you can simply follow the pictures and instructions in this book.



How does noticing and naming help us?

Well, thoughts and feelings hook us when we are unaware of them.

One moment you are talking to a friend, interested in what she is saying…

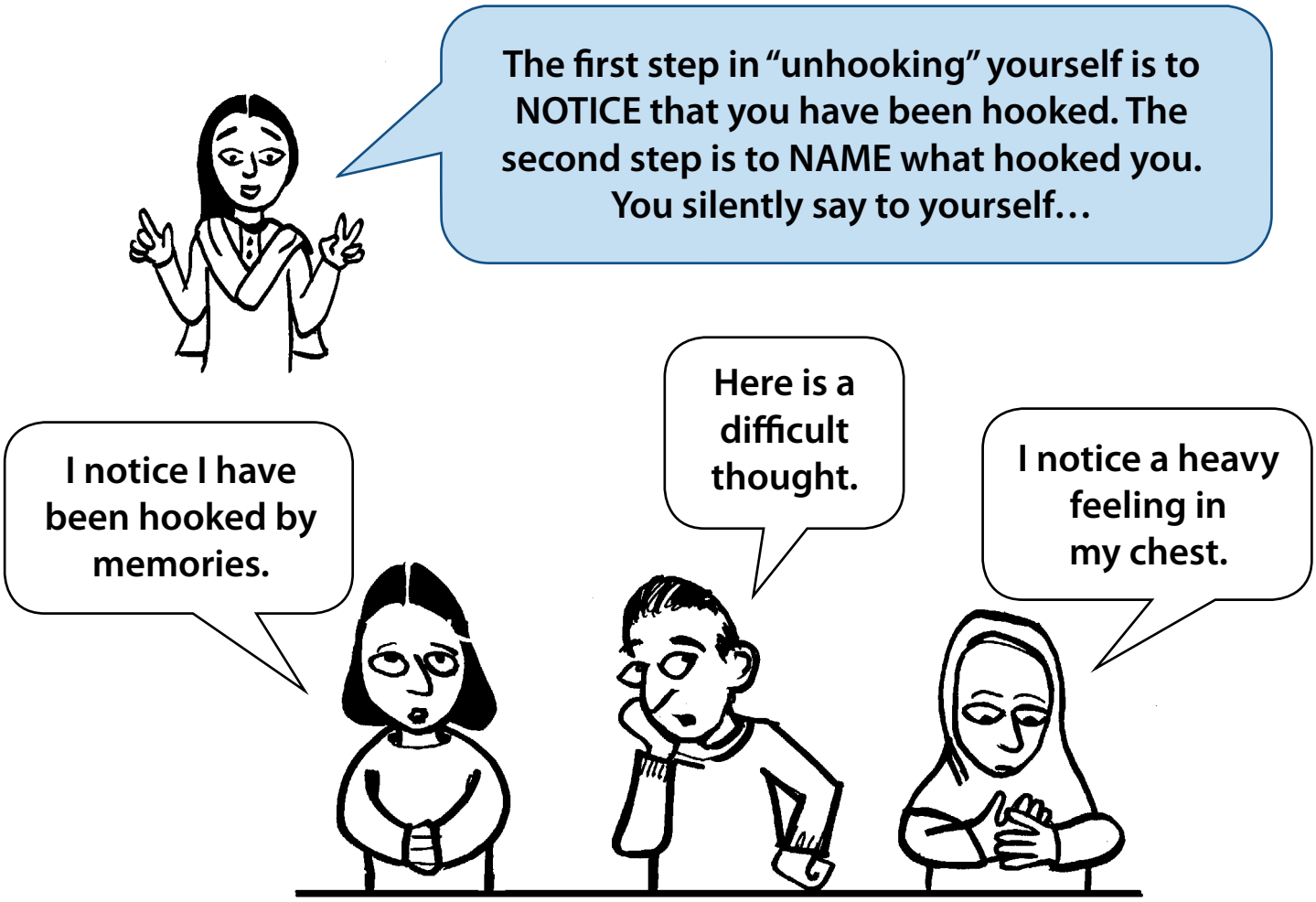
…and then in the next moment, you are hooked.

Suddenly, you are no longer really listening to your friend.

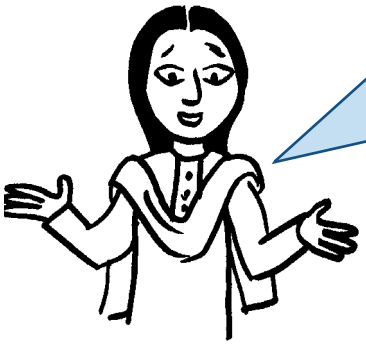
You might still be talking to your friend…

…but you are not really "engaged" in the conversation.

You are only half-listening.
You are not giving her your full attention.
Why? Because you are hooked
by your thoughts or feelings.



The next step is to REFOCUS on what you are doing – whether you are cooking, or eating, or playing or washing, or chatting with friends – and to ENGAGE fully in that activity; to PAY FULL ATTENTION to whoever is with you and whatever you are doing.



We can do the same thing every time we get hooked and stop engaging in life.

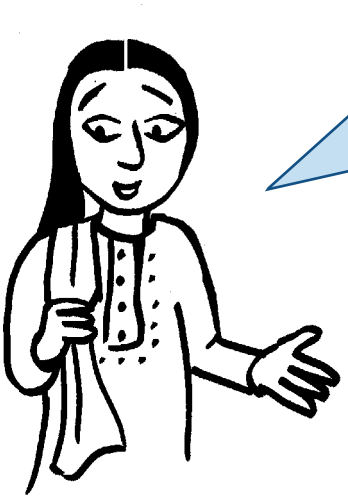
I am noticing feelings of anger.

And even though I am having feelings of anger, I choose to act on my value of caring by refocusing and engaging with my family.

Here is a difficult thought.
THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

And even with this difficult thought, I choose to act on my values of being attentive and caring towards my children.
THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

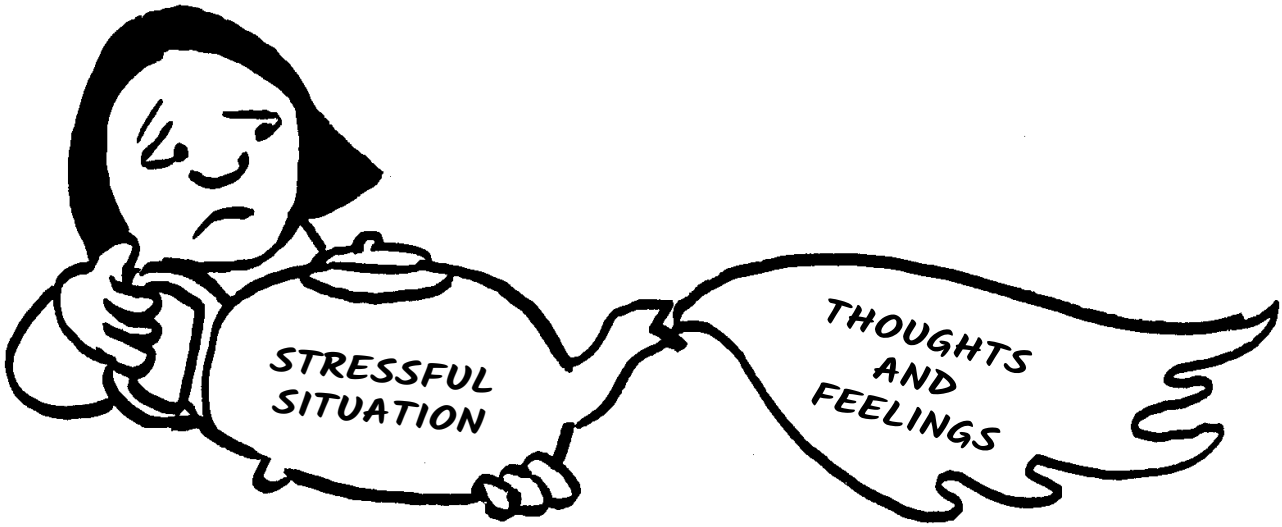
So to unhook from thoughts and feelings…

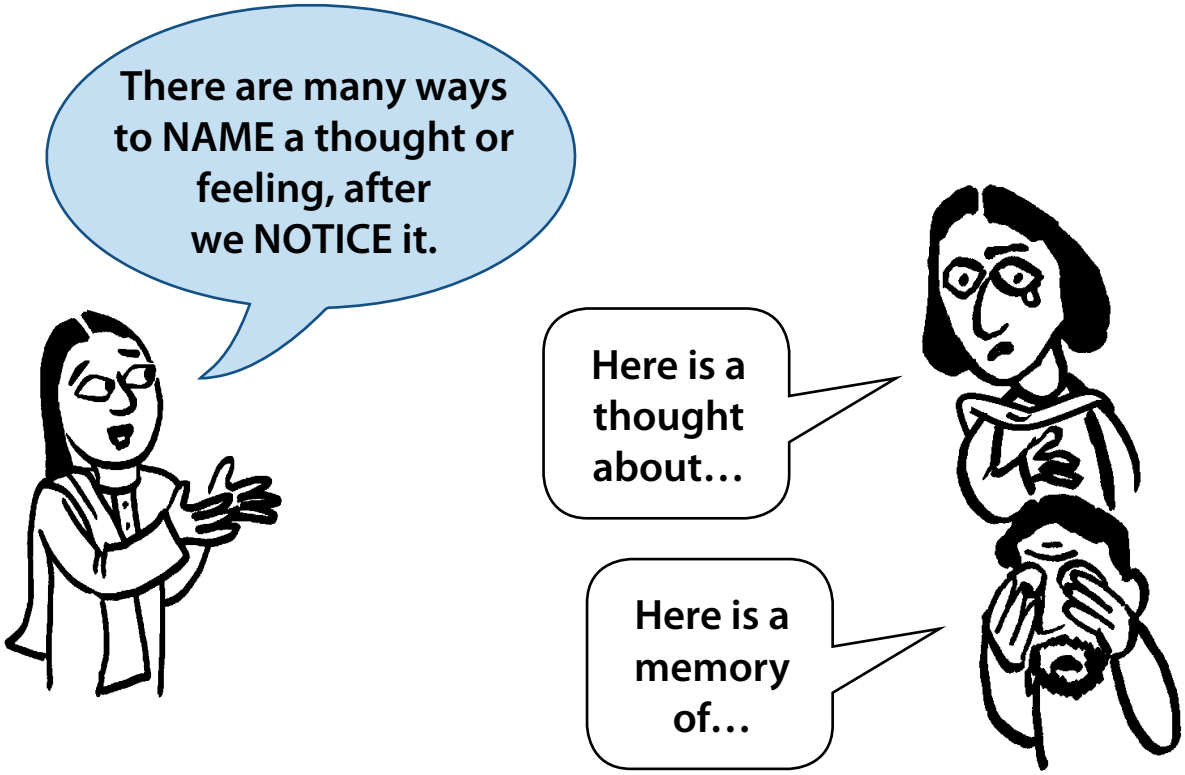


The more you practise this, the better you will get. See if you can practise this over and over again, all day long as you're going about your daily activities. Every time you notice that you have been hooked, run through these steps.

**And remember it is natural
to have difficult thoughts and feelings
appear when we are stressed.**

This happens to everyone!

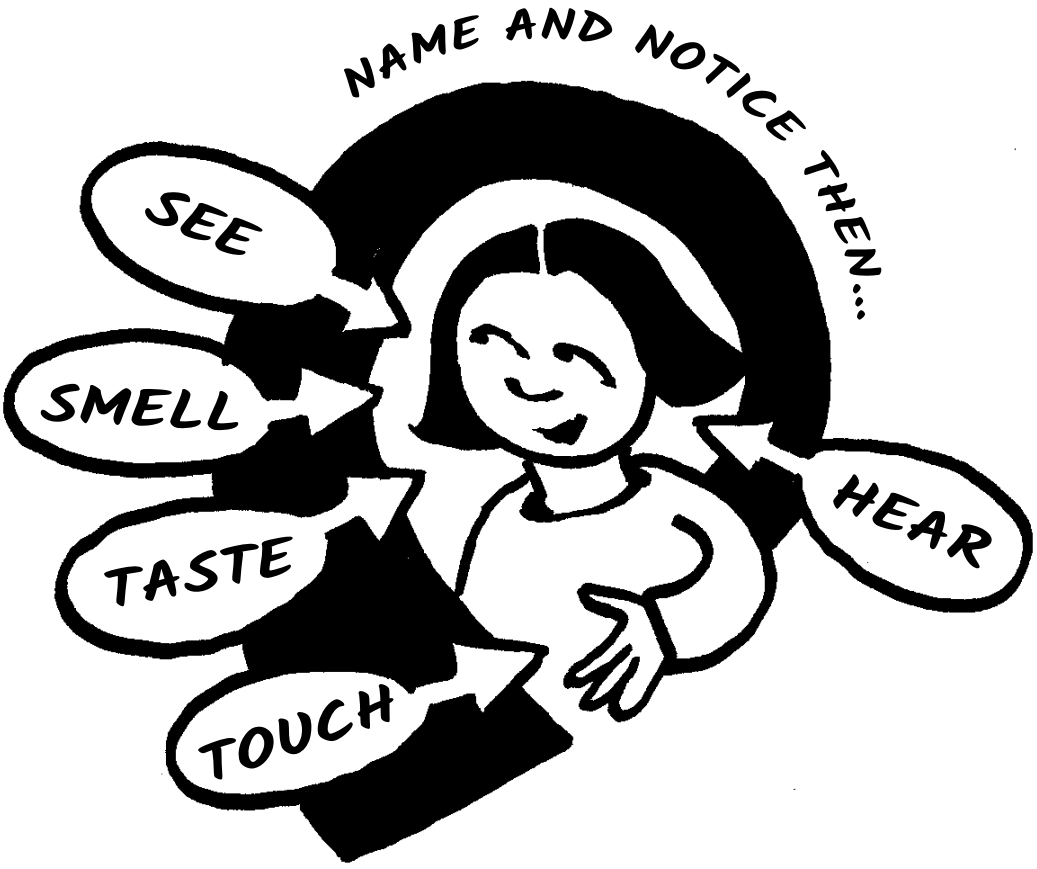



There are many ways to NAME a thought or feeling, after we NOTICE it.
Here is a thought about…
Here is a memory of…

I notice here is sadness.
I notice here is a heaviness in my chest.
I notice I have been hooked by a pain in my belly.

**And after we have NOTICED and NAMED,
we can REFOCUS on the world around us.**

We ENGAGE in life by noticing what we can…

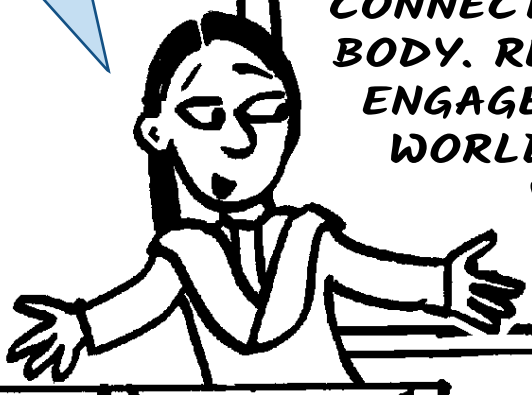


So now you have your first two tools for your tool kit.

TOOL 1
GROUND YOURSELF

DURING "EMOTIONAL STORMS". NOTICE HOW YOU ARE FEELING.

SLOW DOWN AND CONNECT WITH YOUR BODY. REFOCUS AND ENGAGE WITH THE WORLD AROUND YOU.

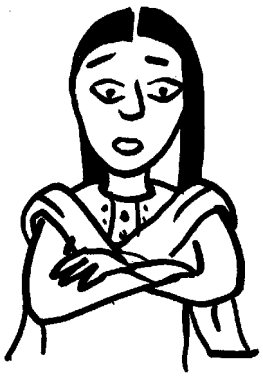


TOOL 2
UNHOOK YOURSELF

FROM THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS BY NOTICING AND NAMING THEN REFOCUSING ON WHAT YOU ARE DOING.

And we can practise using these tools at any time and in any place.

Of course, some people forget to practise.



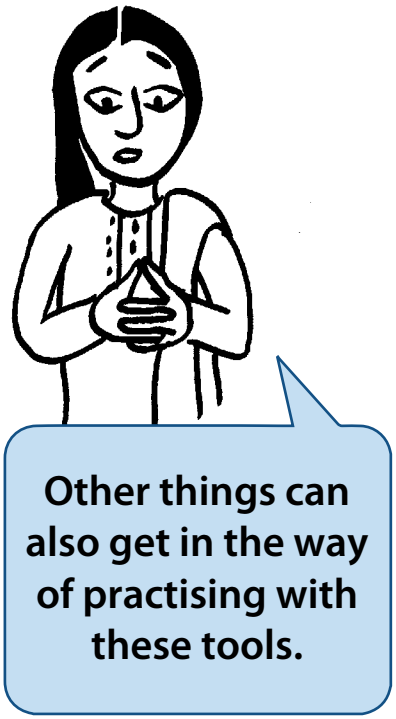
So set times aside to regularly practise these skills. For example, in bed, or before or after a meal.

You can go to this LINK to listen to, or download all of the exercises you have learned so far. Or, you can simply follow the pictures and instructions in this book.

Think of some times, places or activities for regular practice.

And whenever you are lying awake in bed at night, and cannot sleep, then practise slowing down and connecting with your body.

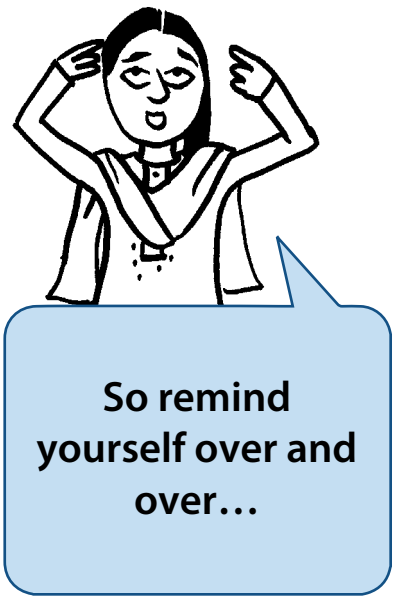
It probably will not make you sleep (although sometimes it does), but it will help you feel rested.



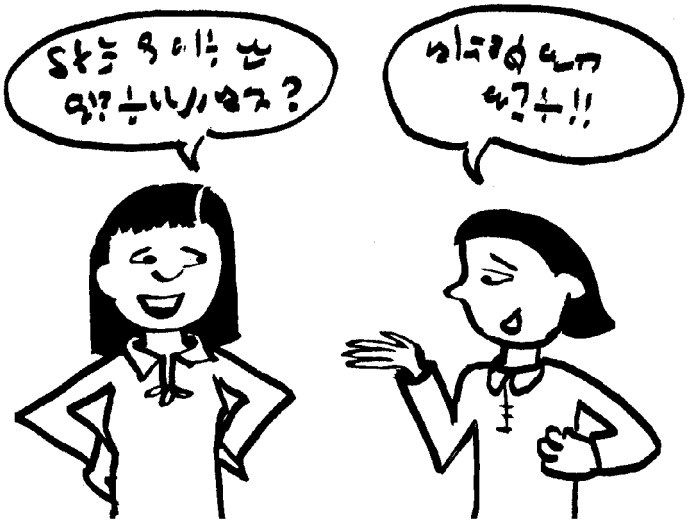
Maybe you feel too tired...

Maybe you feel too sad or angry or scared…

Maybe you just can't be bothered…



This is like learning a new language.
It takes a lot of practice!



You can also be hooked by unhelpful thoughts.

THIS IS ALL SO STUPID!

IT IS NOT IMPORTANT!

IT WILL NOT HELP!

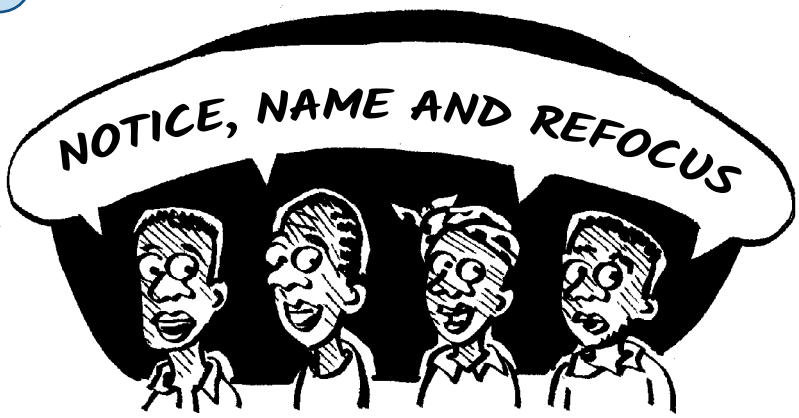
I AM TOO BUSY!

THERE IS NO POINT!

IT IS A WASTE OF TIME!

I CANNOT DO IT!

So as soon as you realize you have been hooked by these feelings…



Every little bit of practice you do will make a difference.

And every time we practise, we are acting on our values of caring!

Yes, that's right. And in the next part of this book, we will explore values in more depth.

But before continuing with the next part, please take a day or two to practise what we've covered in this chapter.

And remember, at the end of the book you'll find short descriptions of every skill you learn.

Part 3

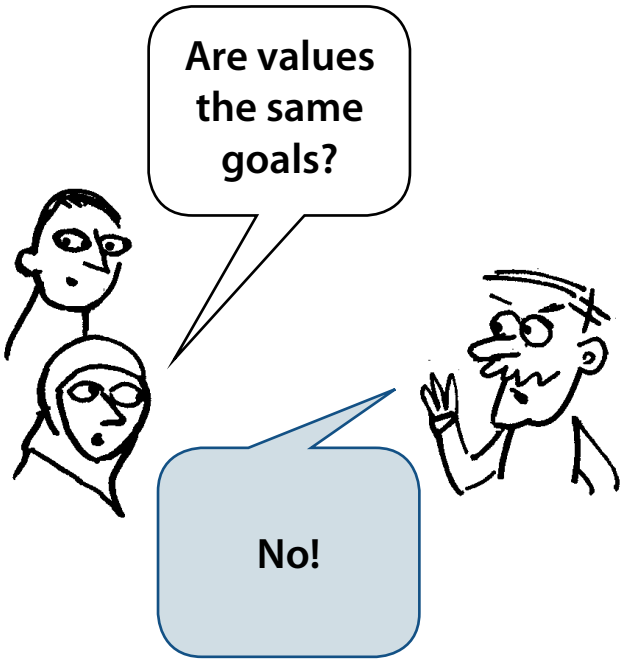
ACTING ON YOUR VALUES

Welcome back. Have you been practising unhooking and grounding?

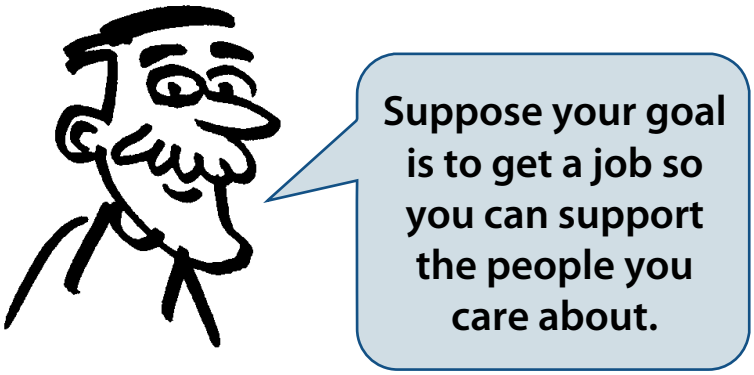
Remember, doing these exercises is like learning any new skill. With practice, you get better and it becomes easier.

Now we are going to look at values in more depth.

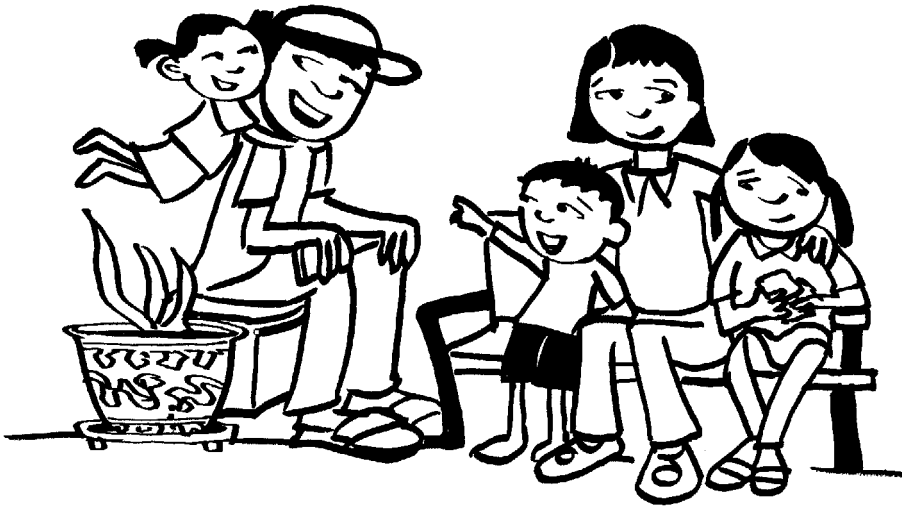
Your values describe what kind of person you want to be; how you want to treat yourself and others and the world around you.



Goals describe what you are trying to get. Values describe the sort of person you want to be.



And suppose your values – the way you want to be with your family, friends or people around you – are to be kind, to be caring, to be loving and to be supportive.



It might be impossible to achieve your goal…

…but you can still live your values of being kind, caring, loving and supportive towards your family, friends or people around you.

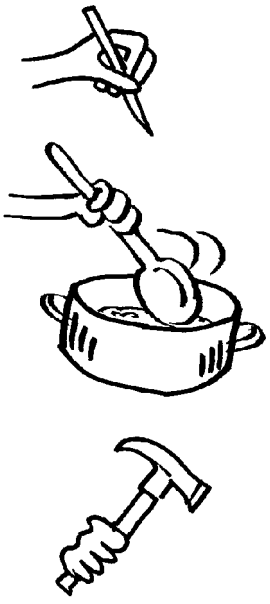
And even if you are facing a very difficult situation and are separated from your family and friends, you can still live your values of being kind, caring, loving and supportive. You can find little ways to act on these values with the people around you.

Many of your goals might be impossible right now.

"ACTIONS" are what you do with your arms and hands and legs and feet, and what you say with your mouth.

The more you focus on your own actions…

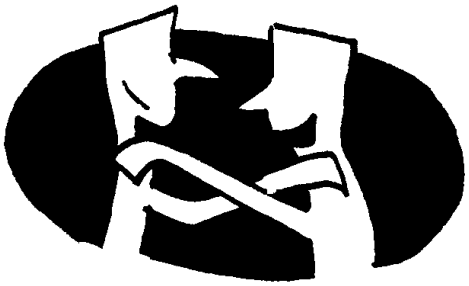
…the more you can influence the immediate world around you: the people and situations you encounter every day.



If your country is at war, you can't stop all the fighting…

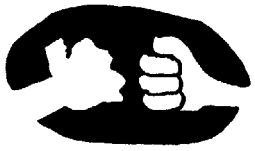
…but you can stop arguing with people in your community…

…and instead, act on your values

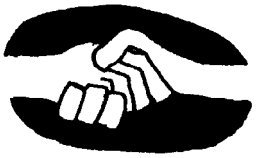


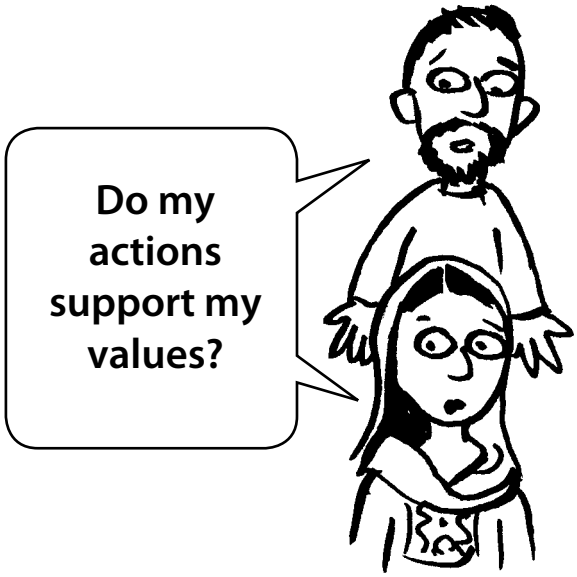
And notice: you may influence the people around you through your ACTIONS.

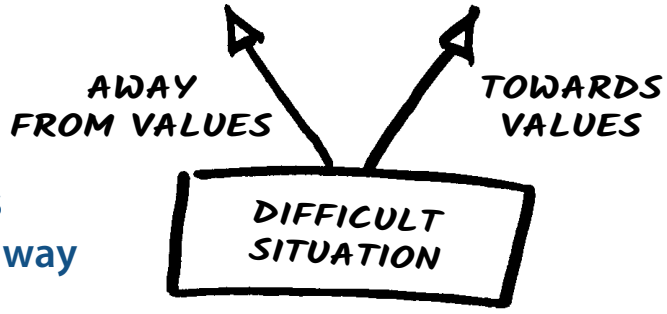
Fighting



Collaboration







Yes. Are your actions moving you towards or away from your values?

To help you clarify your values, here is a list. These are not the "right" values or the "best" ones – they are simply some common ones.

To be kind
To be caring
To be generous
To be supportive
To be helpful

To be patient
To be responsible
To be protective
To be disciplined
To be hardworking
To be committed

To be brave
To be persistent
To be forgiving
To be grateful

To be loyal
To be respectable/honourable
To be respectful
To be trustworthy
To be fair/just
To be…
To be…

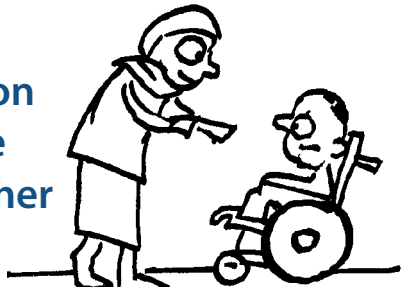
Now select three or four of those values that seem most important to you, and write them in the box below.

Now we will do another exercise. Think of a role model in your community; someone you look up to.

What does this person say or do that you admire?

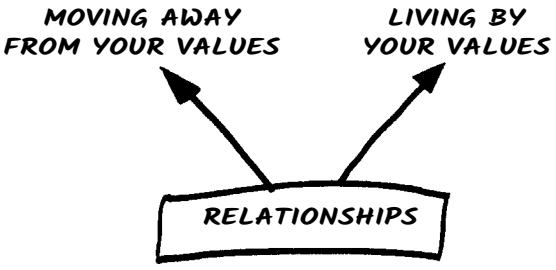
Does this person treat others in admirable ways?

What values does the person demonstrate through his or her actions?

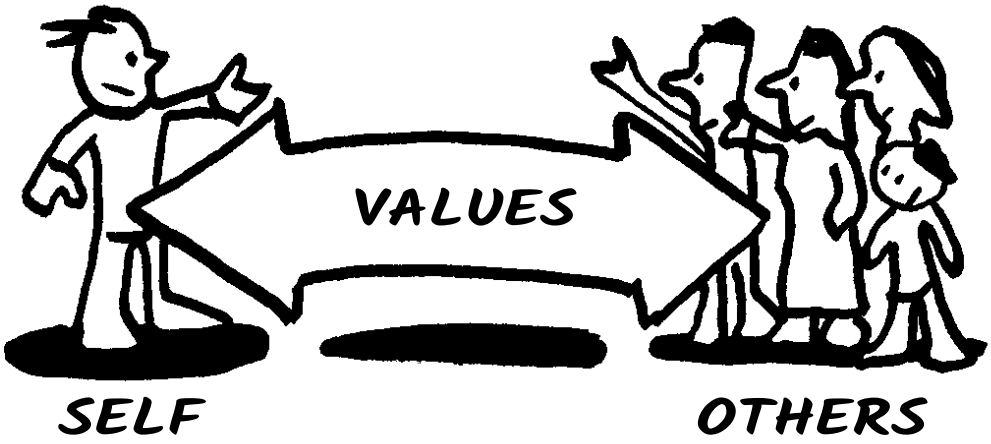


Which of those values would you like to model for others around you?

Now think of the people around you. What values do you want to live by, in the way you treat those people?



Values go both ways: towards yourself and towards others.



…then you aim to live those values towards both yourself and others.

So now it is time to put your values into action.

Pick an important relationship; choose someone you care about a lot, who you see on a regular basis.

What values do you want to live by in this relationship?

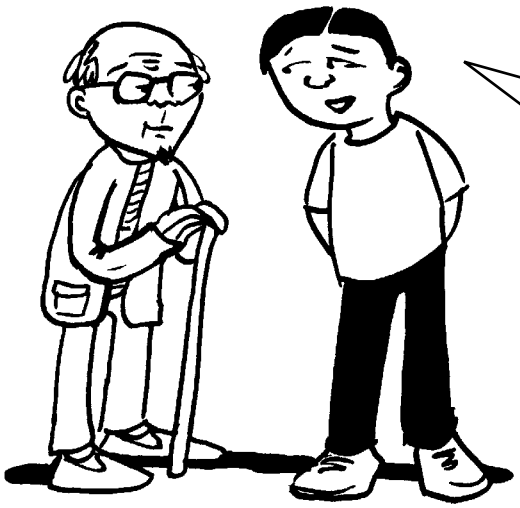
For example, suppose you choose your child.

And the values you want to act on are:

Then a small step might be to play with or to read to your child for 10 minutes every day.

Or suppose you choose a relative.

And the values you want to act on are:



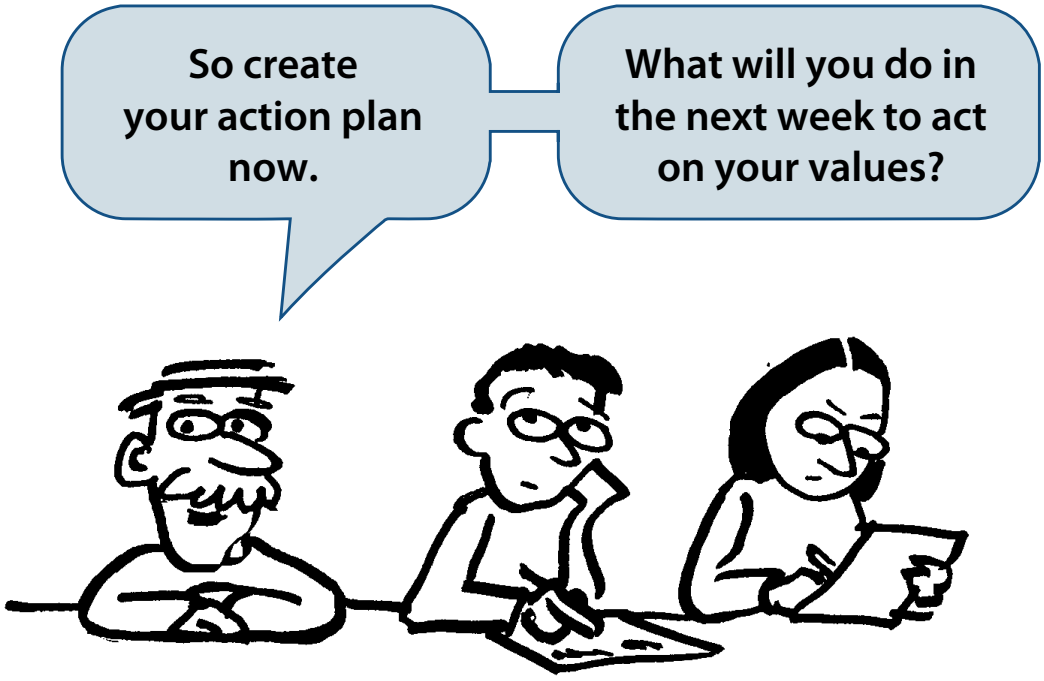
Thank you Uncle, for all the help you have given me.

Then a small step might be to greet that person warmly and express your gratitude.

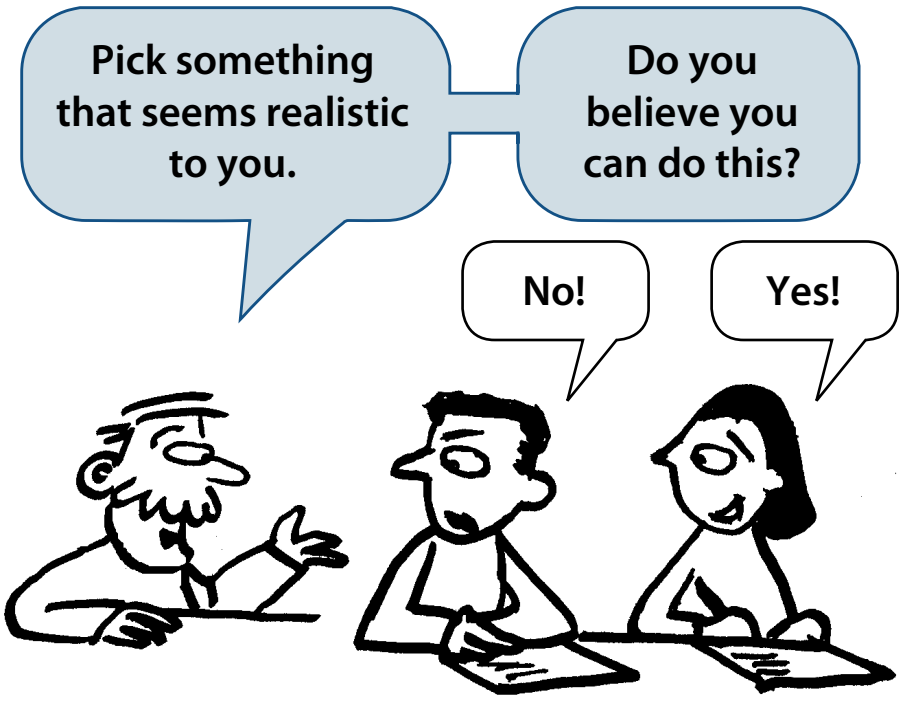
Remember, even the tiniest actions matter.

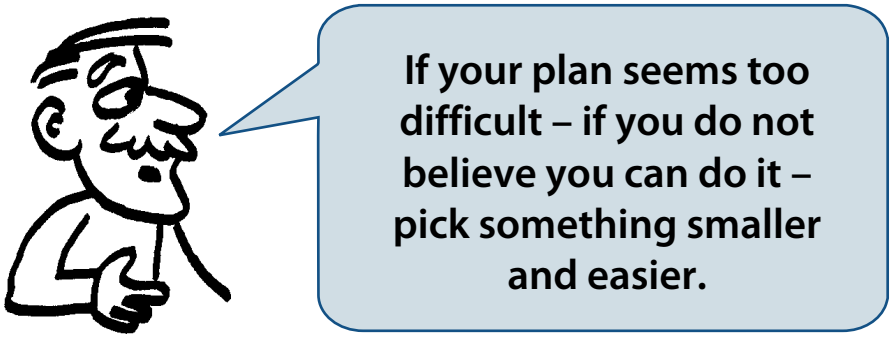
A giant tree grows from a tiny seed. And even in the hardest or most stressful of times, you can take small ACTIONS to live by your values.

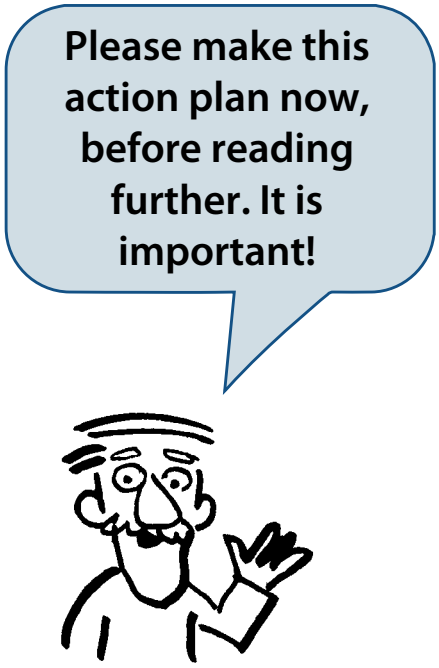
When you act on your values, you will begin to create a more satisfying and fulfilling life.



Think in terms of ACTIONS.
What will you say with your mouth?
What will you do with your hands and arms and legs and feet?







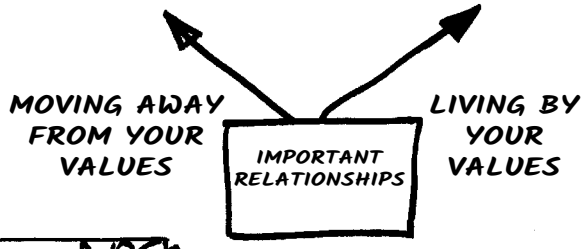
Pick an important relationship. Who is someone you care about, who you see on a regular basis?

What values do you want to live by in this relationship? You can look at page 85 for some examples of common values.

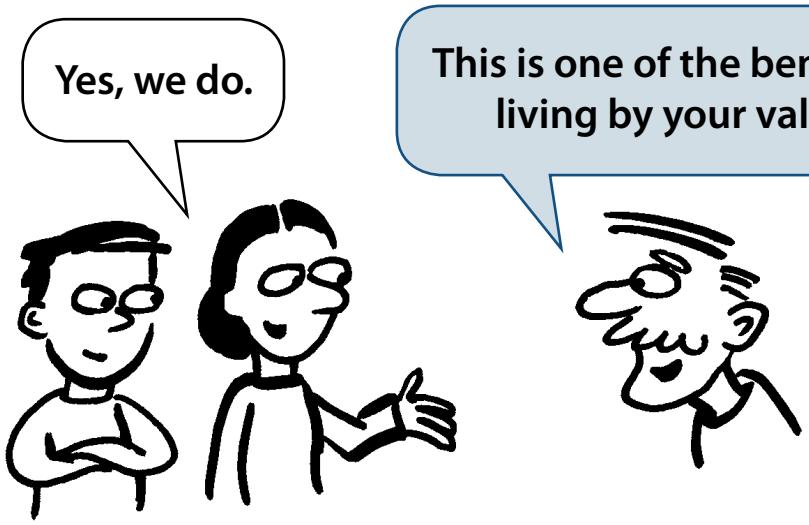
With this person, what one or more ACTIONS could you take over the next week to act on your values? What specifically will you do, or what will you say to this person?

Does your plan seem realistic to you? If not, choose something smaller, simpler and easier.

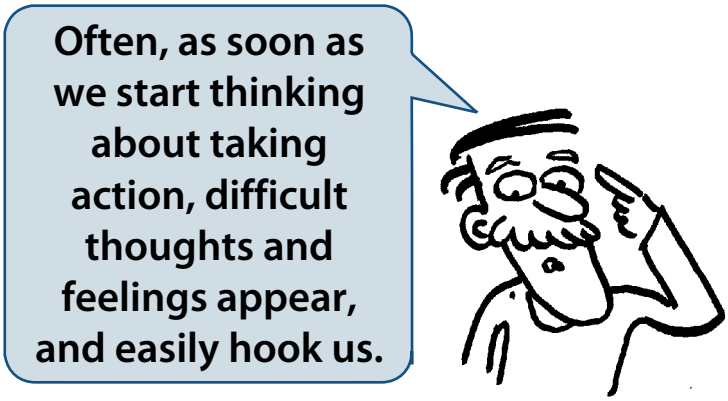
Will these actions take you towards or away from your values?



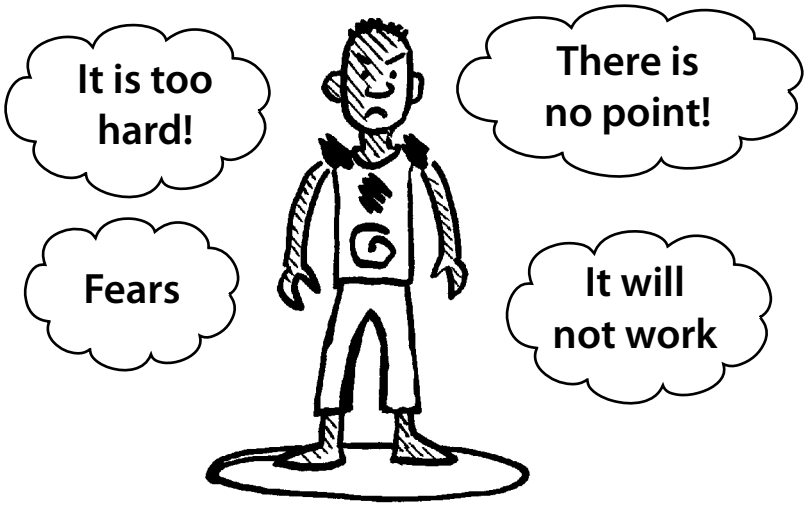
Do you feel a sense of meaning or purpose, of being more like the sort of person you want to be?



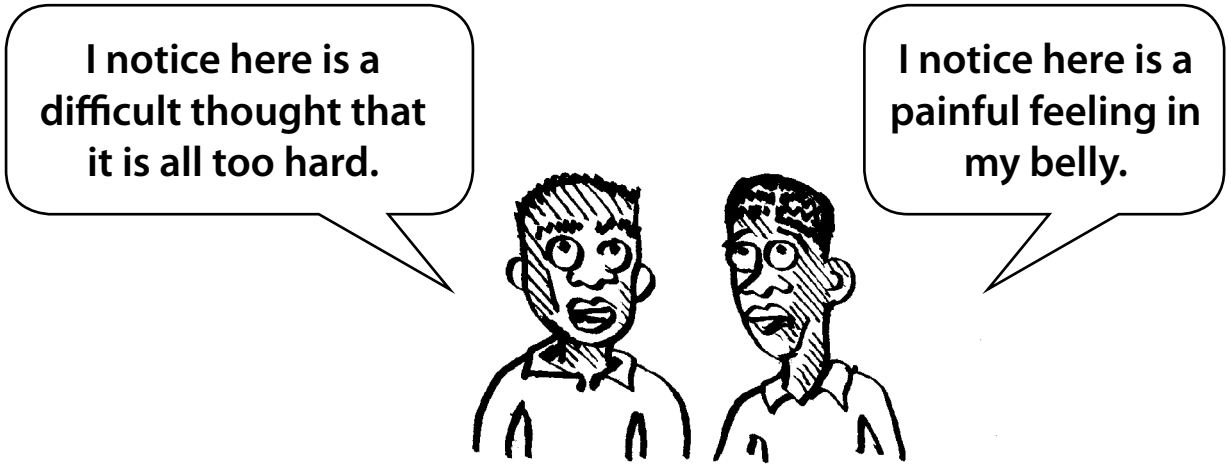
Now notice: are difficult thoughts and feelings starting to hook you and stop you from following your action plan?



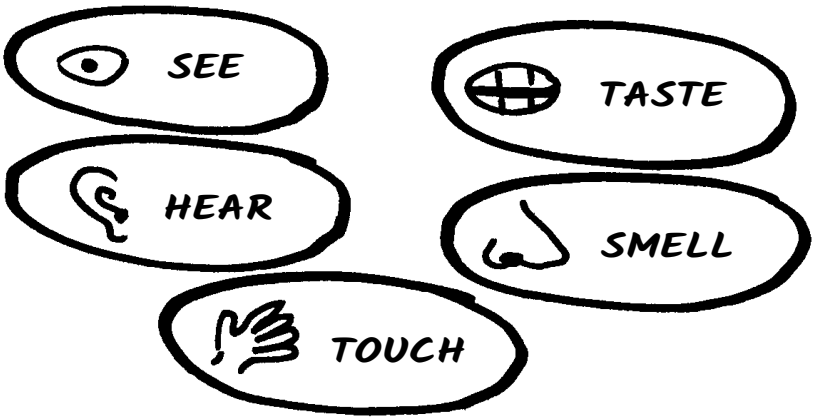
If so, you know what to do.

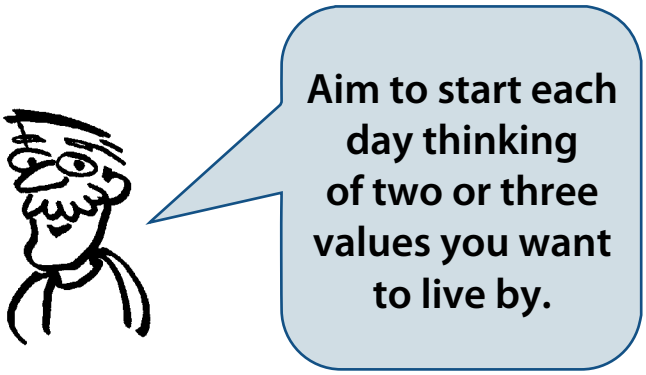


NOTICE and NAME them.

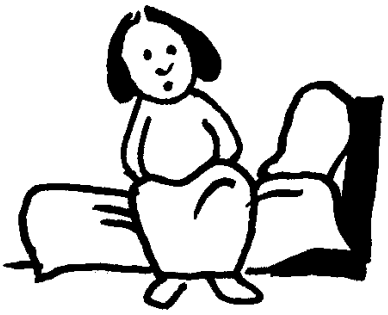


And ENGAGE with the world around you.

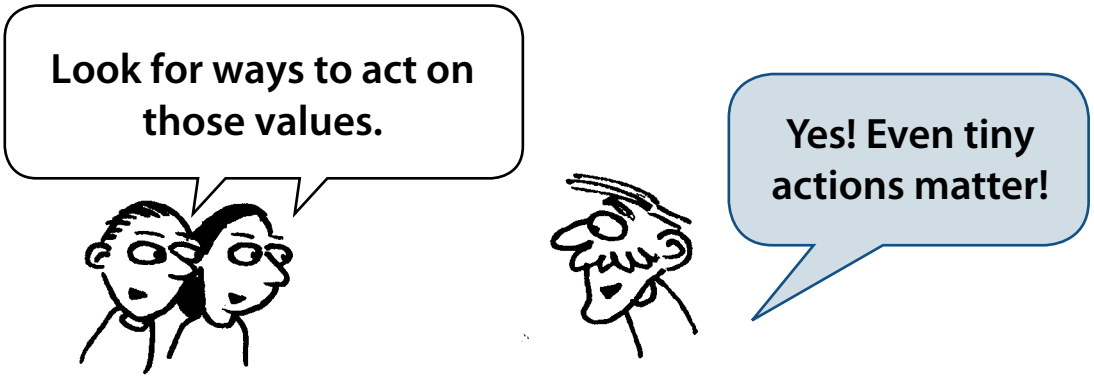




While you are still in bed, or while you are getting up.

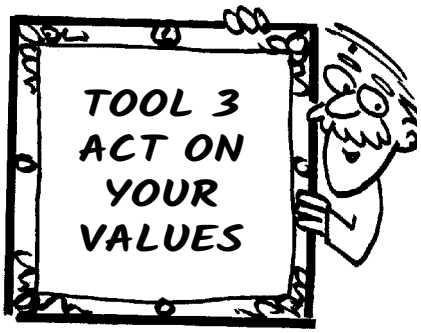


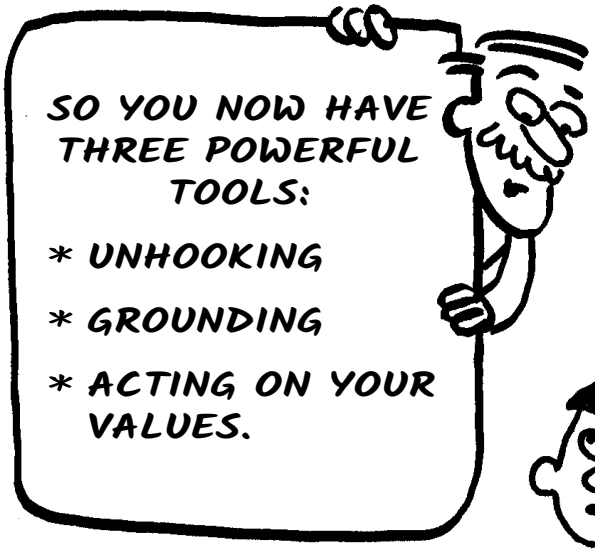
And throughout the day…



The journey of 1000 miles begins with one step!

This is the next tool in your toolkit.



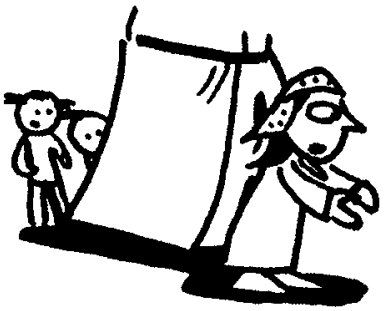


But we have so many problems!

You do! And there are three approaches to any difficult situation.

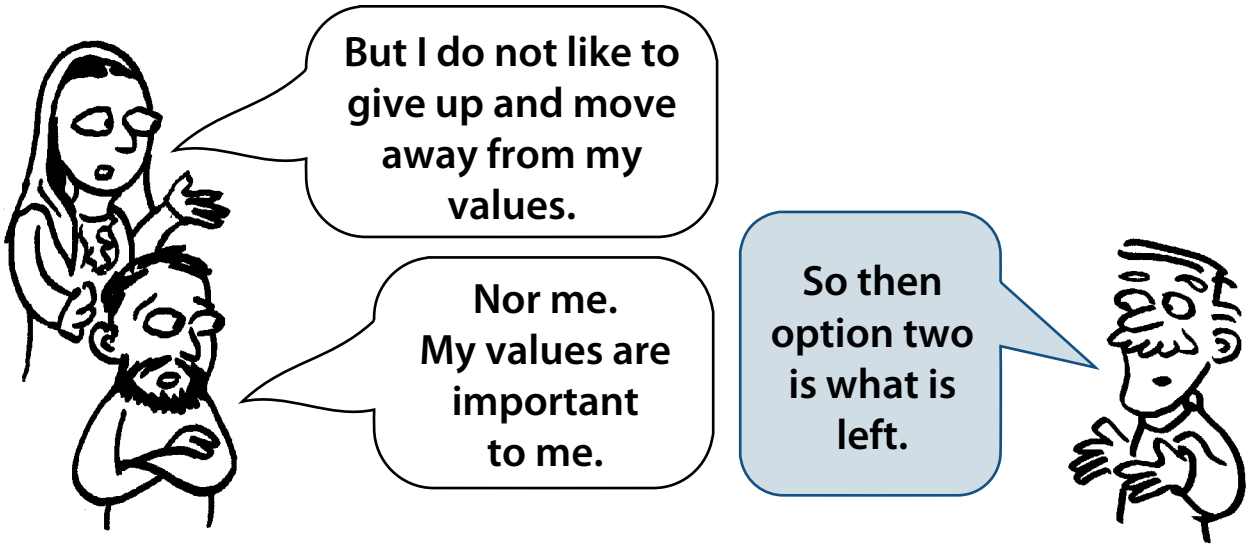
What are they?

1. LEAVE.
2. CHANGE WHAT CAN BE CHANGED, ACCEPT THE PAIN THAT CANNOT BE CHANGED, AND LIVE BY YOUR VALUES.
3. GIVE UP AND MOVE AWAY FROM YOUR VALUES.



But sometimes you cannot leave… for example, if you are in prison, or if leaving is worse than staying.

True! If so, you must choose between options two and three.

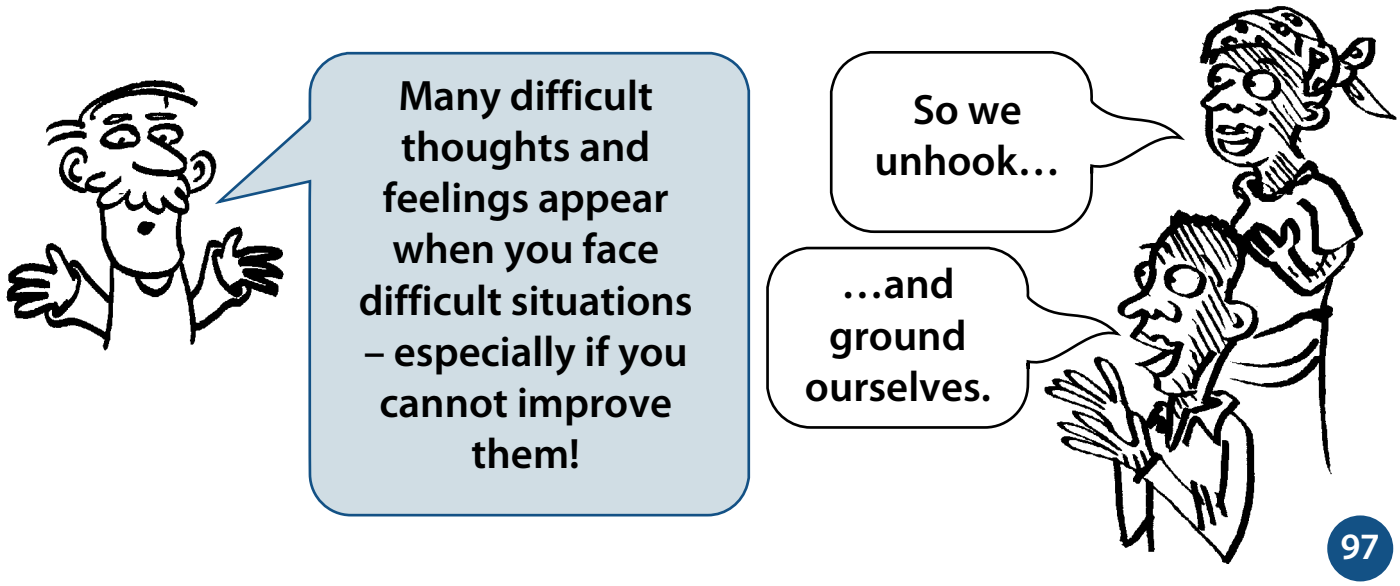


**CHANGE WHAT CAN BE CHANGED,
ACCEPT THE PAIN THAT CANNOT BE CHANGED,
AND LIVE BY YOUR VALUES.**

CHANGE WHAT CAN BE CHANGED…

Use your arms and legs and hands and feet and mouth to TAKE ACTION: to do whatever you can, no matter how small it might be, to improve the situation.

ACCEPT THE PAIN THAT CANNOT BE CHANGED…



AND LIVE BY YOUR VALUES.

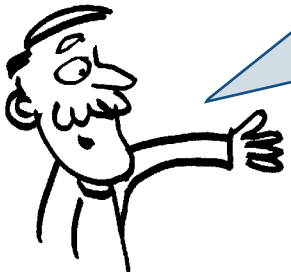
So if there is nothing you can do to improve the situation…

We find other ways to live by our values.

CHANGE WHAT CAN BE CHANGED, ACCEPT THE PAIN THAT CANNOT BE CHANGED, AND LIVE BY YOUR VALUES.

Yes! So commit this to memory, and use it to help deal with your problems.

And now, it is time for some



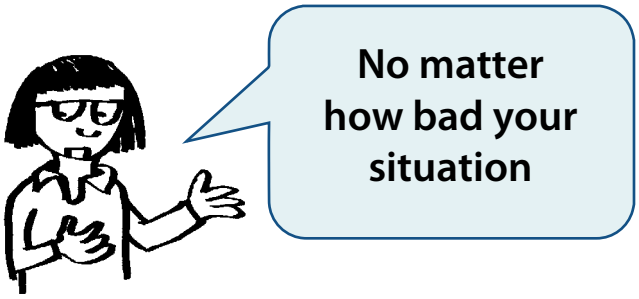
There IS something you can do that will improve any difficult situation, at least a little bit.

What is it?

Good question! That is what we will explore in the next section. But first, remember to take a day or two to practise what we've covered in this section. You can use the summaries at the end of the book to remind yourself of how to use the tools we've learned so far.

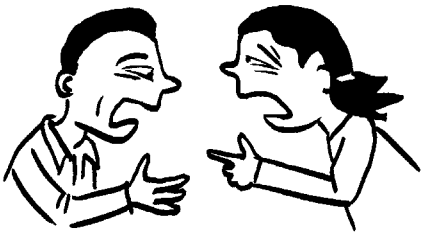
Part 4

BEING KIND



Whether you are in danger…

Or in a family argument…



Or without income…

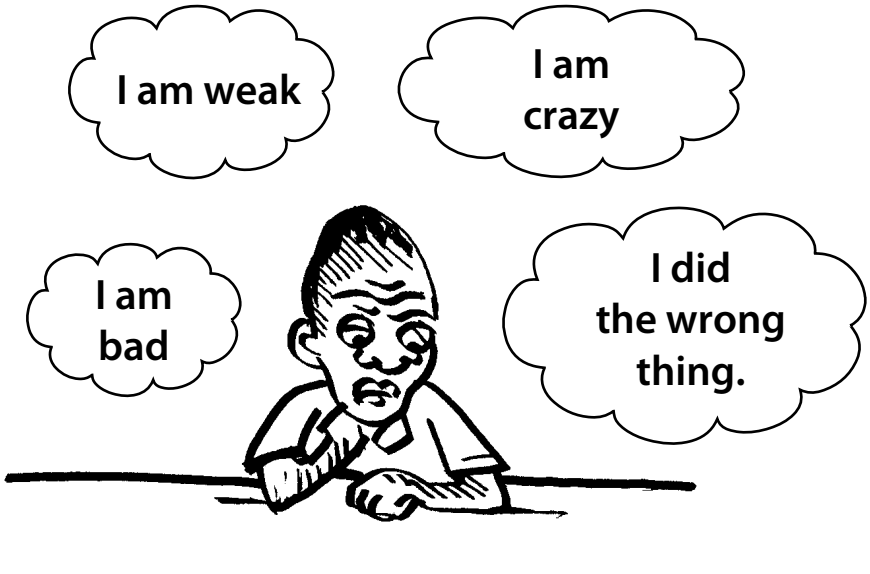
…you are always better off if you have a friend by your side.

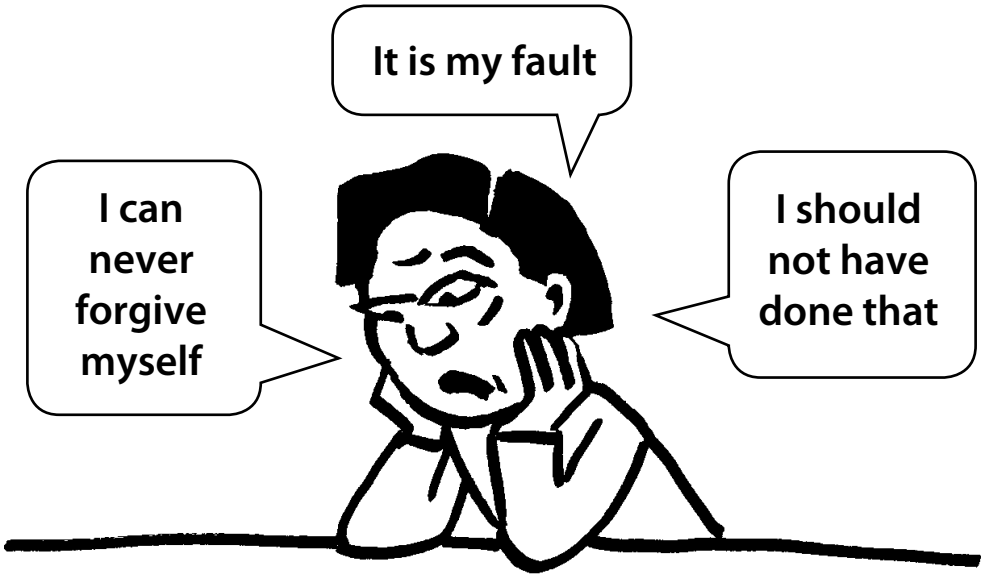
Someone who is kind and caring and helpful…

Someone who says kind things when you are in pain.

Yet many of us are not kind to ourselves when we are in difficult situations.

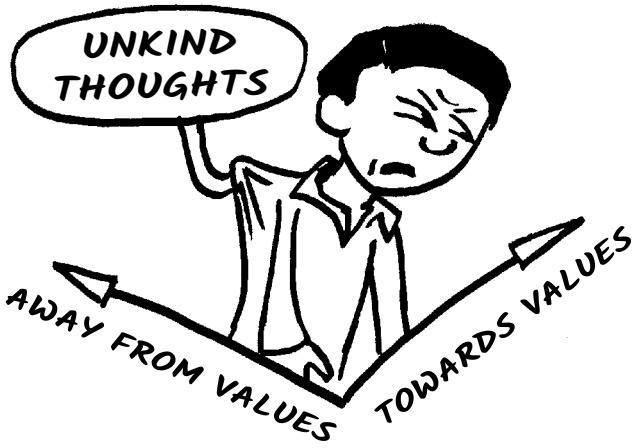
Often, we get hooked by unkind thoughts.


I am weak
I am crazy
I am bad
I did the wrong thing.


It is my fault
I can never forgive myself
I should not have done that

Unkind thoughts are natural and may happen often; that is OK. But it is not helpful to be hooked by them, because…

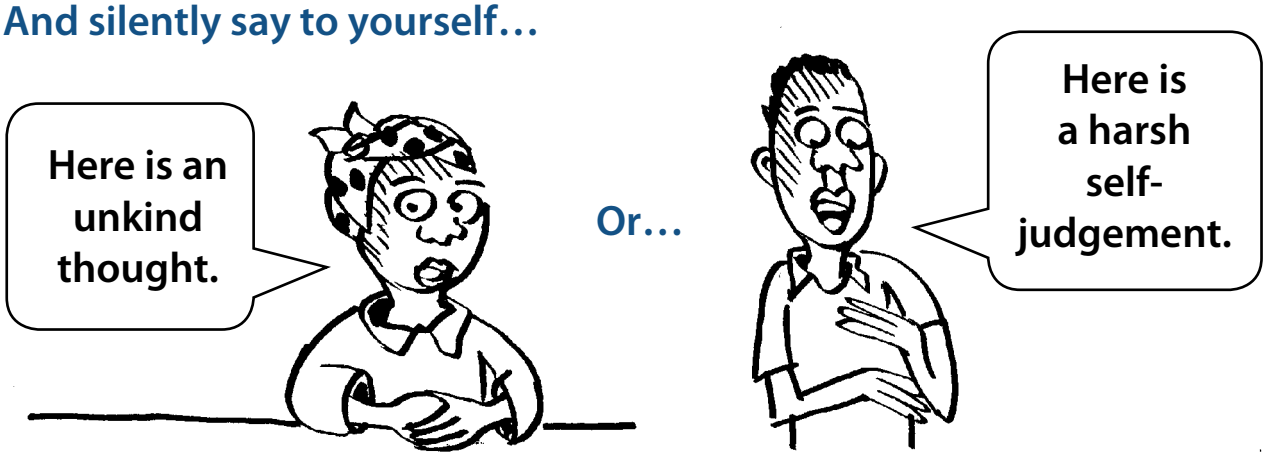
…when we get hooked by these unkind thoughts, we get pulled away from our values.



So we need to NOTICE and NAME them, to unhook from them.

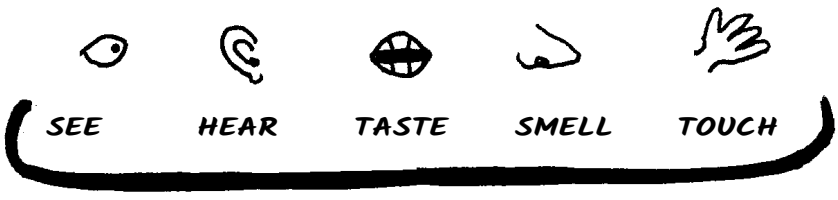
Try this now. Choose an unkind thought about yourself.

And silently say to yourself…



Then add the words "I notice".

Then GROUND yourself and ENGAGE with the world around you.



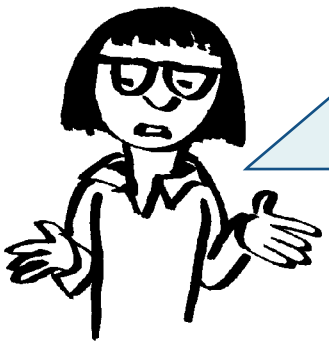
You can go to this LINK and listen to, or download the *Unhooking from Unkind Thoughts* exercise. Or, you can simply follow the pictures and instructions in this book.

How do you feel when you are struggling, suffering, in pain, and someone reaches out to you with kindness, caring and understanding?

Even in the most difficult situations, there are ways we can act on our values of kindness and caring.

Even tiny little actions of kindness can make a difference.

This includes kind words.



When you see someone in pain, suffering and struggling, what are small acts of kindness that you could do?

Every small, kind action makes a difference.

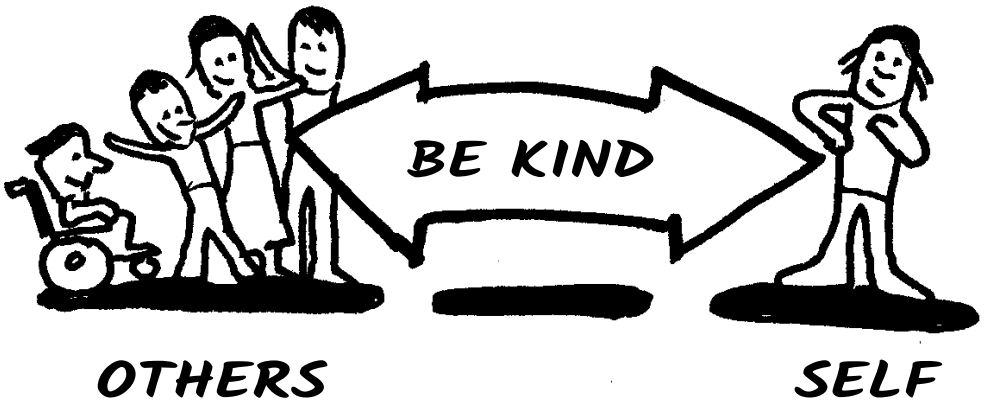
So unhook from thoughts like…

Everyone needs a friend. Everyone needs kindness.

And if you are kind to yourself…

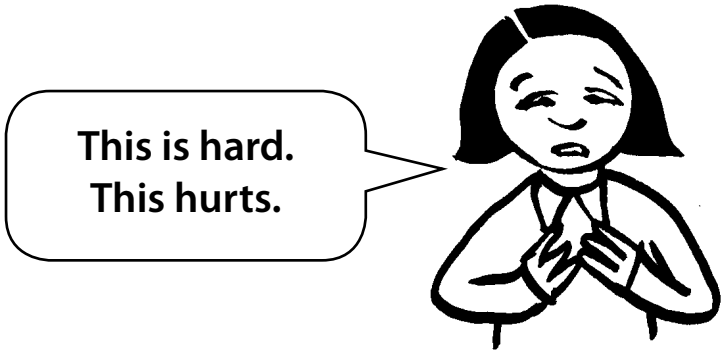
…you will have more energy to help others, and more motivation to be kind to others, so everyone benefits.

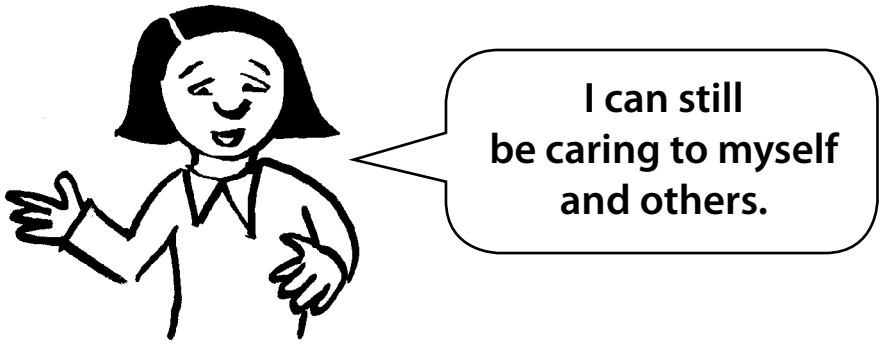
Remember: like all values, kindness goes both ways.



105

So speak to yourself kindly.

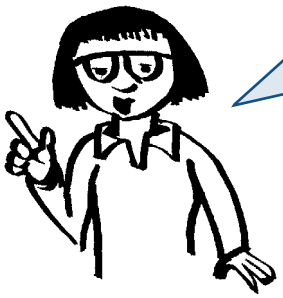




Before continuing with the final section, please remember to take at least a day or two to practise what we've covered in this section. The summaries at the end of the book will also remind you how to practise all of the skills you've learned so far.

Part 5

MAKING ROOM



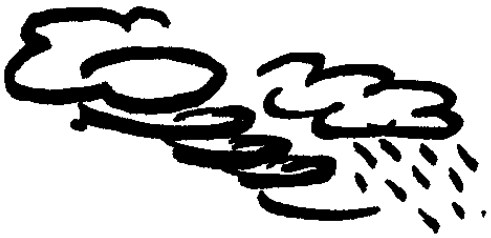
On pages 56–57, we looked at the common problems that happen when we struggle with our thoughts and feelings: trying to push them away, avoid them or get rid of them. If you have forgotten, please read them again now, before reading any further.

So UNHOOKING is one way to stop struggling with our thoughts and feelings.

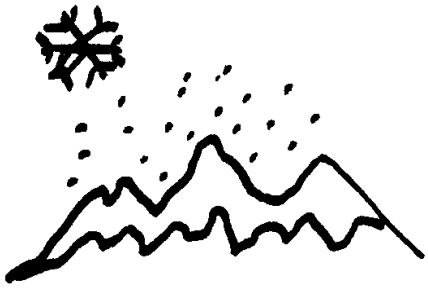
There is another way to do this, called MAKING ROOM.

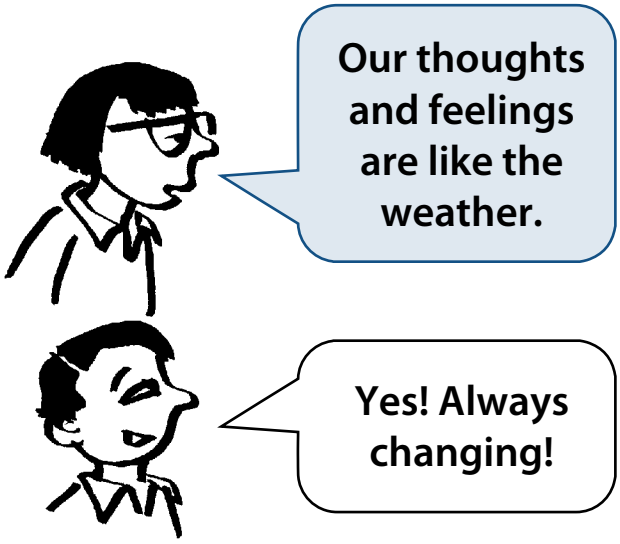
To learn this skill, it is useful to think about the sky.

…the sky has room for it!



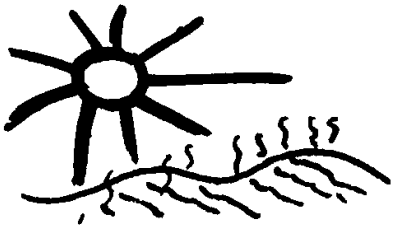
…or freezing cold.



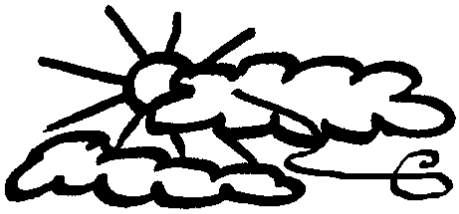


No matter how severe the weather…

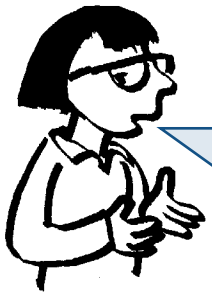
And the sky can never be hurt or harmed by the weather; whether it is intense heat …



And sooner or later, the weather always changes.



And we can learn to be like the sky, and make room for the "bad weather" of our difficult thoughts and feelings without being hurt by it.



So try this now. First, silently NOTICE and NAME.

I am noticing a pain in my chest and belly.

Here are difficult thoughts.

Notice these thoughts and feelings with CURIOSITY.

And imagine these thoughts and feelings are like the weather …

And you are like the sky…

…for the weather.

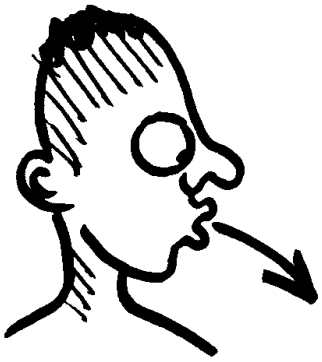
Focus your attention on a difficult thought or feeling. NOTICE and NAME it, then observe it with curiosity.

And as you do this, breathe out slowly. Then once your lungs are empty, pause for a count of three.

Then breathe in slowly, and imagine your breath flows into and around your pain.

Imagine this any way you like.

Breathing out, emptying your lungs…



Breathing in slowly…

Breathing into and around your pain…

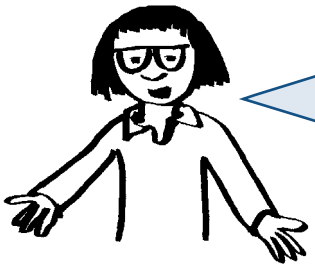
Opening up and making room for it…

Allowing it to be there…

It often helps to imagine a painful feeling as an object.

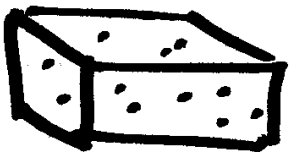
Like a heavy cold brown brick on my chest.

And it often helps to imagine a difficult thought…

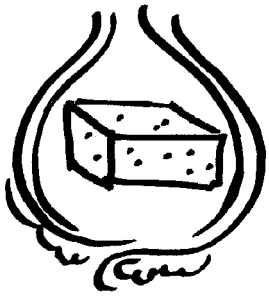


Please try this now.

Imagine it has a size and a shape and a colour and a temperature.



And imagine breathing into and around this object – making room for it.



You can go to this LINK and listen to, or download the *Making Room* exercise. Or, you can simply follow the pictures and instructions in this book.

…as words or pictures on the pages of a book.

Notice your difficult thought…

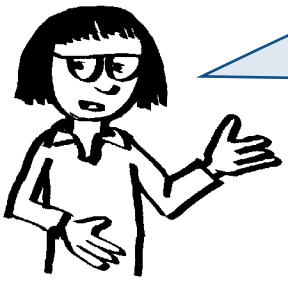
…and imagine it as words and pictures on the pages of a book.

…and imagine it gently resting it on your lap…

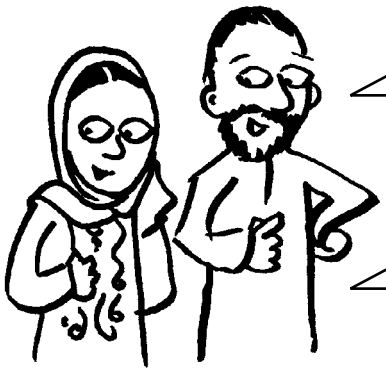
… and ENGAGE with the world around you.

You can also imagine tucking the book under your arm, and taking it with you.

So the thought is still with you, but you can ENGAGE with the world around you.

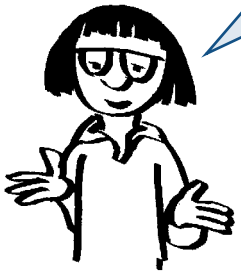


To begin with, this exercise might take a few minutes. But like learning any new skill…



With practice it gets easier!

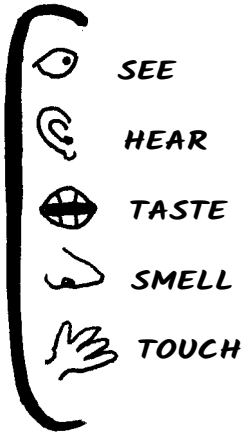
And much quicker!



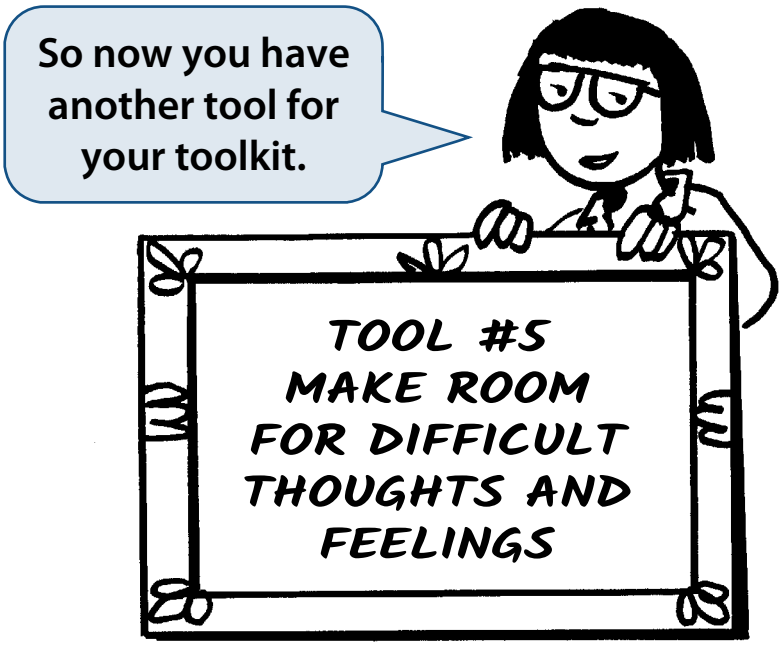
So please go back and practise these exercises now, before reading further. You can also practise during your day, whenever you experience difficult thoughts and feelings.

Remember: it is like learning any new skill.

And after you MAKE ROOM, you then ENGAGE with the world around you.



NOTICE where you are, who is with you, and give your full attention to the activity you are doing.

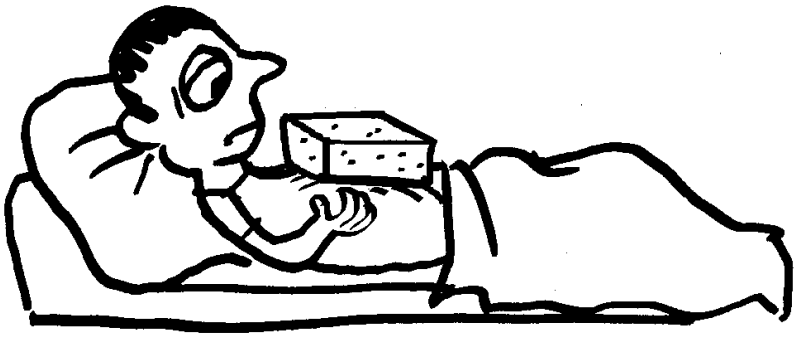


Especially if you are in bed and can't sleep;
you can combine MAKING ROOM with your breathing exercises.

You breathe into the difficult thoughts and feelings…

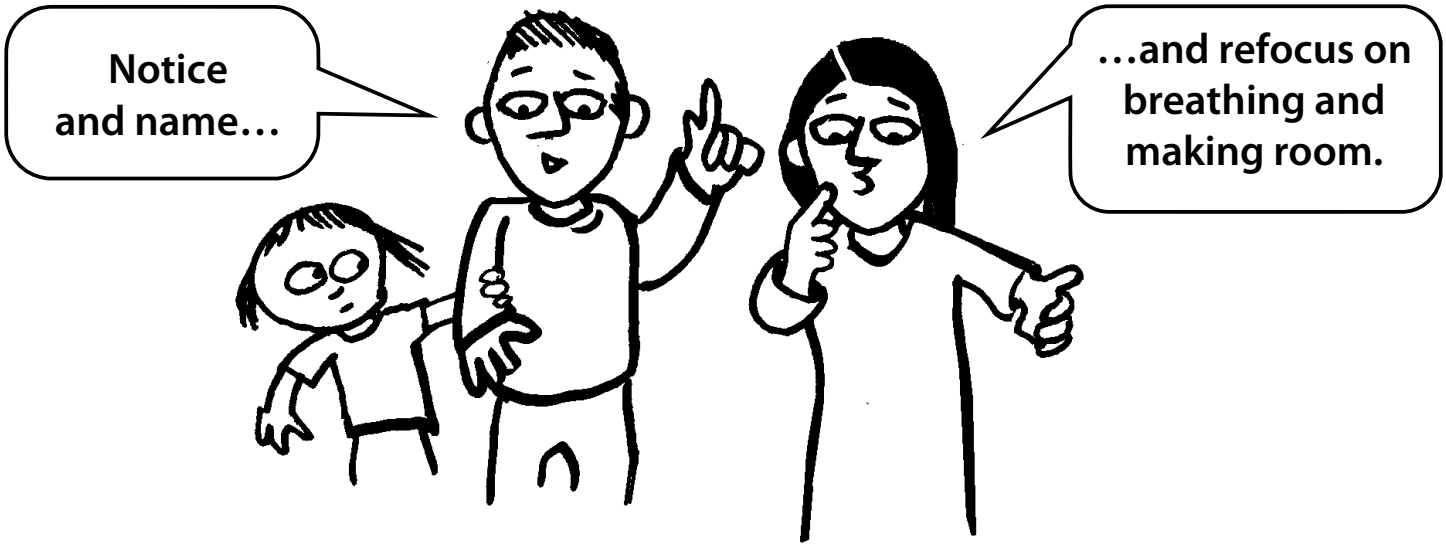
…and let the breath flow into and around them.

Notice its shape, size, and temperature …



…and notice with curiosity what happens.
Your pain might get bigger or smaller; it might stay or it might go.
Your aim is simply to make room for it; to allow it to be there;
to stop fighting it and give it space.

And whenever you get HOOKED and pulled out of the exercise …



So now we are nearing the end of the book. We have time for one last exercise.

An exercise in being kind to yourself and making room for your pain.

This is a good exercise to practise in bed or when you are alone.

Take one of your hands and imagine filling it with kindness…

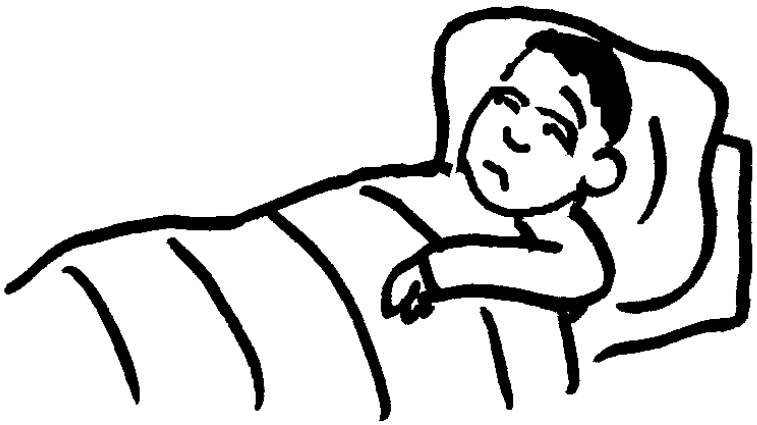
Now place this hand gently somewhere on your body: over your heart, your belly, your forehead or anywhere you feel pain.

Feel the warmth flowing from your hand into your body, and see if you can be kind to yourself through this hand.

You can use two hands, if you prefer.

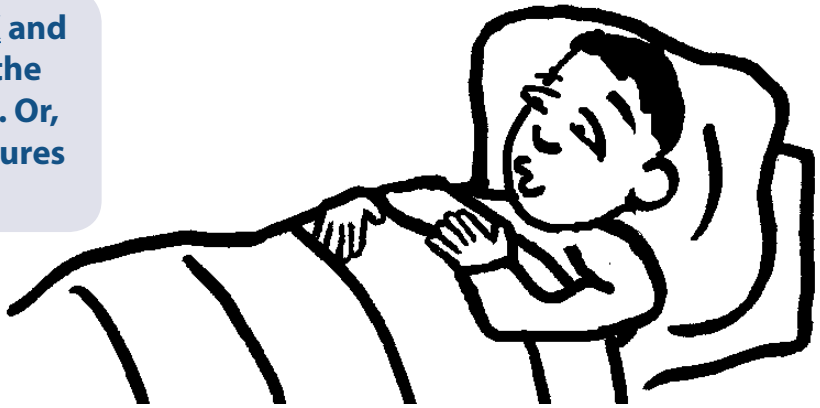
Hold yourself kindly…

If you are in bed and cannot sleep, it can be helpful to add this to your breathing and MAKING ROOM exercises.



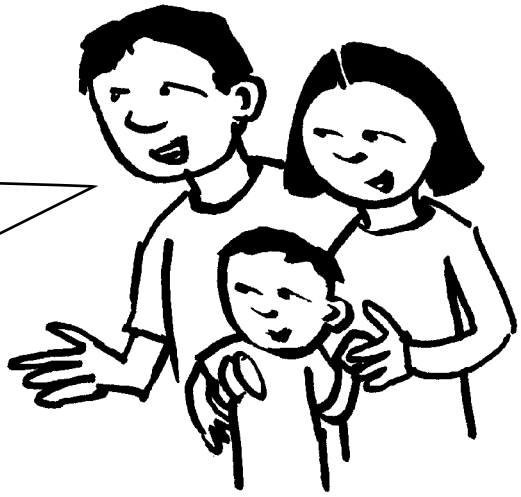
Place a hand over the painful feeling. See if you can be kind to yourself by imagining you are breathing through your hand to this painful feeling.

You can go to this LINK and listen to, or download the *Being Kind to Yourself* exercise. Or, you can simply follow the pictures and instructions in this book.



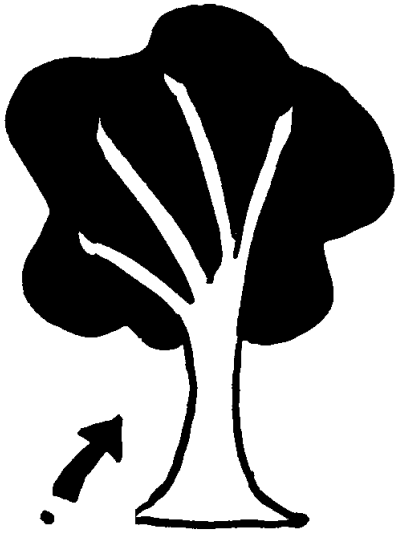
And of course every time you do anything from this book…

…it is an act of kindness to ourselves and to others!



Remember, too:
it is like building muscles. The more you practise, the better.

And every tiny step matters.
A tiny seed grows into a mighty tree.



And the journey of 1000 miles begins with one step.

Enjoy your ongoing journey!
Try to practise and consider re-reading this book again to help you understand the ideas and skills even more. Thank you for your time and please share this book if you found it useful.

Tool 1: GROUNDING

GROUND YOURSELF during emotional storms by NOTICING your thoughts and feelings, SLOWING DOWN and CONNECTING with your body by slowly pushing your feet into the floor, stretching and breathing, and then REFOCUSING and ENGAGING with the world around you.

What can you see, hear, touch, taste and smell? Pay attention with curiosity to what is in front of you. Notice where you are, who is with you and what you are doing.

Practice tip:
Grounding is especially useful during stressful situations or emotional storms. You can also practise grounding when you simply have one or two minutes available, like when you're waiting for something, or before or after an activity you do every day, like washing, eating, cooking or sleeping. If you practise during these times, you may find that boring activities become more enjoyable, and it will be easier to use grounding later in more difficult situations.

You can download or listen to *Grounding exercises* of different lengths at this LINK.

Tool 2: UNHOOKING

UNHOOK YOURSELF with these three steps:

1) **NOTICE that a difficult thought or feeling has hooked you. Realize that you are distracted by a difficult thought or feeling, and notice it with curiosity.**

2) **Then silently NAME the difficult thought or feeling; for example:**
   "Here is a difficult feeling"
   "Here is tightness in my chest"
   "Here is a feeling of anger"
   "Here is a difficult thought about the past"
   "I notice here is a difficult thought"
   "I notice here are fears about the future"

3) **Then, REFOCUS on what you are doing. Pay full attention to whoever is with you and whatever you are doing.**

You can download or listen to the *Notice and Name* exercise at this LINK.

Tool 3: ACTING ON YOUR VALUES

Choose the values that are most important to you. For example:

- being kind and caring
- being helpful
- being brave
- being hardworking.

You get to decide which values are most important to you!

Then pick one small way that you can act according to these values in the next week. What will you do? What will you say? Even tiny actions matter!

Remember that there are three approaches to any difficult situation:

1. LEAVE
2. CHANGE WHAT CAN BE CHANGED, ACCEPT THE PAIN THAT CANNOT BE CHANGED, AND LIVE BY YOUR VALUES
3. GIVE UP AND MOVE AWAY FROM YOUR VALUES.

Tool 4: BEING KIND

BE KIND. Notice pain in yourself and others and respond with kindness. Unhook from unkind thoughts by NOTICING and NAMING them. Then, try speaking to yourself kindly. If you are kind to yourself you will have more energy to help others and more motivation to be kind to others, so everyone benefits.

You can also take one of your hands and imagine filling it with kindness. Place this hand gently somewhere on your body where you feel pain. Feel the warmth flowing from your hand into your body. See if you can be kind to yourself through this hand.

You can download or listen to the *Unhooking from Unkind Thoughts* and the *Being Kind to Yourself* exercises at this LINK.

Tool 5: MAKING ROOM

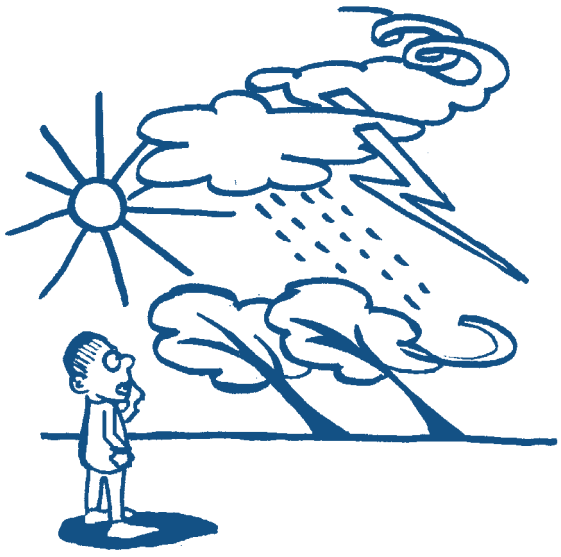
Trying to push away difficult thoughts and feelings often does not work very well. So instead, MAKE ROOM for them:

1) **NOTICE the difficult thought or feeling with curiosity. Focus your attention on it. Imagine the painful feeling as an object, and notice its size, shape, colour and temperature.**

2) **NAME the difficult thought or feeling. For example:**
   "Here is a difficult feeling"
   "Here is a difficult thought about the past"
   "I notice here is sadness"
   "I notice here is a thought that I am weak"

3) **Allow the painful feeling or thought to come and go like the weather. As you breathe, imagine your breath flowing into and around your pain to make room for it. Instead of fighting with the thought or feeling, allow it to move through you, just like the weather moves through the sky. If you are not fighting with the weather, then you will have more time and energy to engage with the world around you and do things that are important to you.**

You can download or listen to the *Making Room* exercises at this LINK.



Doing What Matters in Times of Stress:
An Illustrated Guide

If you are experiencing **stress**,
this guide is for you.

The guide contains **information**
and **practical skills** to help you cope.

Even in the face of tremendous adversity,
you can find **meaning**, **purpose**
and **vitality** in your life.

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