

# Healthy Studying in Rhineland-Palatinate

# YOUR HANDBOOK

FOR A RESILIENT  
ACADEMIC JOURNEY

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Many **students** in Rhineland-Palatinate face significant psychological stress. Due to various factors, such as exam anxiety, financial worries related to their studies or fundamental existential questions in light of climate change, a constantly evolving job market and high societal demands for adaptation and performance, students today are confronted with particularly challenging circumstances.

The project "Healthy Studying in Rhineland-Palatinate" aims to take a **preventive** approach, addressing potential stressors before they occur. The goal of the project is to provide students in Rhineland-Palatinate with **resilience-building measures** as well as **practical strategies** and exercises that will help them **cope with stressful life events** and academic pressures.

The program consists of **three main focuses**:

#### ASSESSMENT & PSYCHOEDUCATION

- Impulse lectures on resilience
- Assessment through Resilience Screenings (confidential and anonymous)

#### INDIVIDUAL & GROUP OFFERINGS

- Individual, large and small group formats
- As an extension of existing services for students

#### SCIENTIFIC SUPPORT

- Quality assurance and scientific support
- Pre/post evaluation
- Final report

Commissioned by the **Ministry of Science and Health**, a contribution to **maintaining the mental health of students in Rhineland-Palatinate** is being made in collaboration with the Leibniz Institute for Resilience Research. Over the course of one year, across two semesters including the semester break, various offerings will be created at several universities and colleges in Rhineland-Palatinate. These will provide students with knowledge from current research on resilience, stress, and stress prevention. At the same time, this project will allow for the exploration and identification of measures that are particularly effective for the specific circumstances and needs of students.

**FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE PROJECT AND ONGOING OFFERINGS CAN BE FOUND HERE:**





# ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

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The Leibniz Institute for Resilience Research (LIR) is a **non-university research institute** within the **Leibniz Association**, focused on **studying resilience** — specifically, the maintenance or rapid restoration of mental health during or after stressful life events or circumstances. The central objectives of the LIR are to scientifically understand **resilience mechanisms**, develop and offer psychological, pharmacological and biotechnological interventions to promote resilience and advocate for **changes in living and working environments** that strengthen resilience. In doing so, the LIR addresses questions of **great societal relevance and international significance**, fills a gap in the German research landscape and is the first center of its kind in Europe.

In addition to its research on **understanding the mechanisms of resilience** and developing methods for resilience promotion, the mission of the LIR also includes **knowledge transfer** to society. In line with the motto **theoria cum praxi** (theory with practice), we make our scientific findings available to the public through lectures, workshops, training sessions and advisory services.

# FOR YOU

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Welcome to our **Resilience Booklet** – your new companion on the path to greater calm and strength in your studies! This booklet is an **offering from the Leibniz Institute for Resilience Research** as part of the project "**Healthy Studying in Rhineland-Palatinate.**"

Our goal? To **strengthen your resilience** and help you navigate the challenges of daily life with greater ease.

## What can you expect?

You might be wondering: What is resilience, actually? Don't worry, you'll find out as you go through this booklet. **Resilience** isn't static – **it can be trained** and strengthened!

In this booklet, you'll get an introduction to the topics of **stress and resilience**. It also includes **practical elements** from resilience training, such as reflection exercises and self-assessments. These tools will help you not only understand the topic better but also **actively work** on **improving your own resilience**.

## What can you take away from this booklet?

The **goal of this booklet** is versatile and you can interpret it in a way that suits you personally. Whether you're looking for a general overview or want to dive straight into active training – everything is possible! It's up to you how deeply you want to engage. The exercises in this booklet are valuable tools for immediately addressing stress and cultivating calm. If you're curious, you can take our **free resilience screening** beforehand to get an impression of where your **personal resilience stands right now**.

HERE YOU CAN ACCESS THE FREE  
RESILIENCE SCREENING:



# How can you make the most of this booklet for yourself?

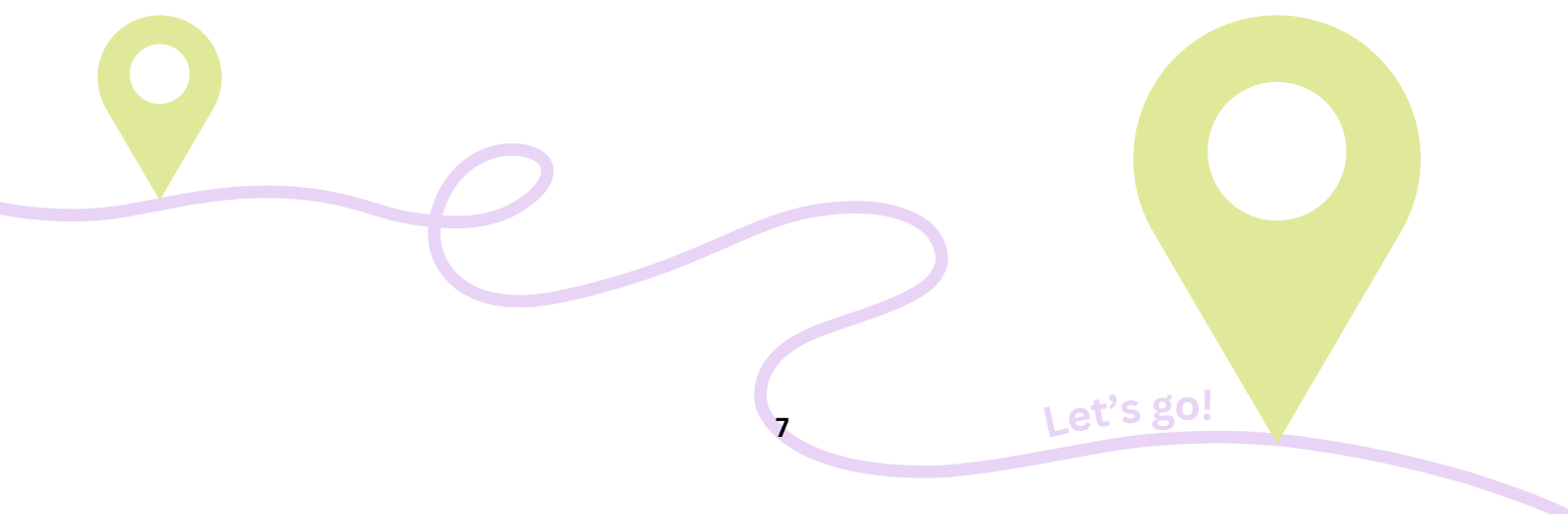
Whether you read a page every day or take a few hours to go through several chapters at once – the choice is entirely yours.

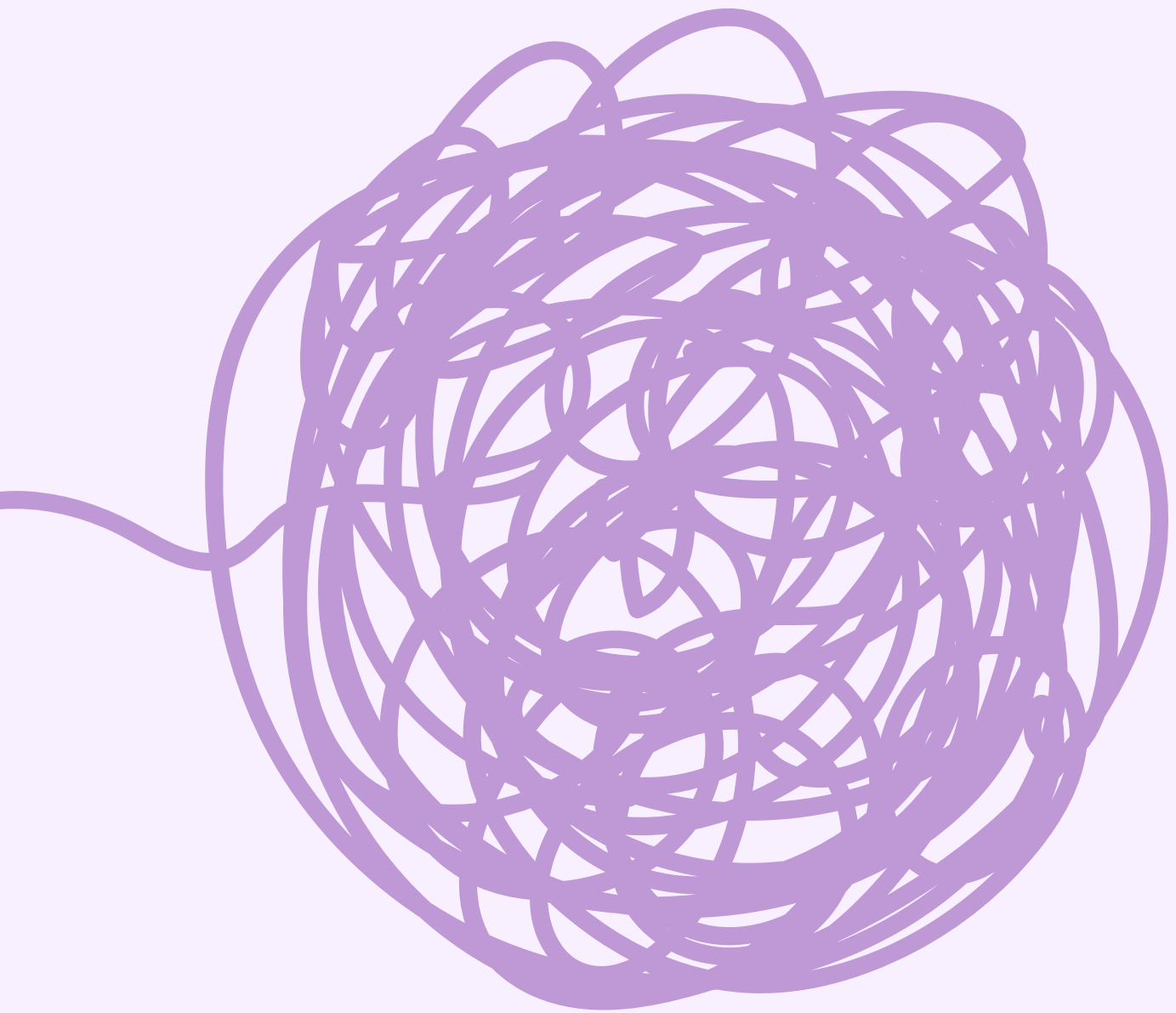
This booklet is divided into **three parts**: First, there is an **introduction to the world of stress and resilience**. In the second part, you'll focus on **strengthening your resilience through various resilience factors**. Finally, the booklet offers more **exercises, tips and suggestions** to help you develop greater mindfulness in your everyday life. At the beginning of the booklet, you'll find **self-assessments** of your stress level and resilience. These snapshots give you the opportunity to reflect on yourself and your current situation.

**Find your own rhythm** to make the most of this booklet. It's not meant to be an additional burden but rather a tool to help you on your way to a more relaxed and mindful study routine. It's normal if not every exercise resonates with you! Simply skip what doesn't fit and continue with what works for you.

## Let's begin your resilience journey!

We wish you much **enjoyment and success** on your journey through this booklet. Use it as a tool to find your own way of coping with stress and bring **more calm** into your studies.







**S T R E S S**

**&**

**R E S I L I E N C E**

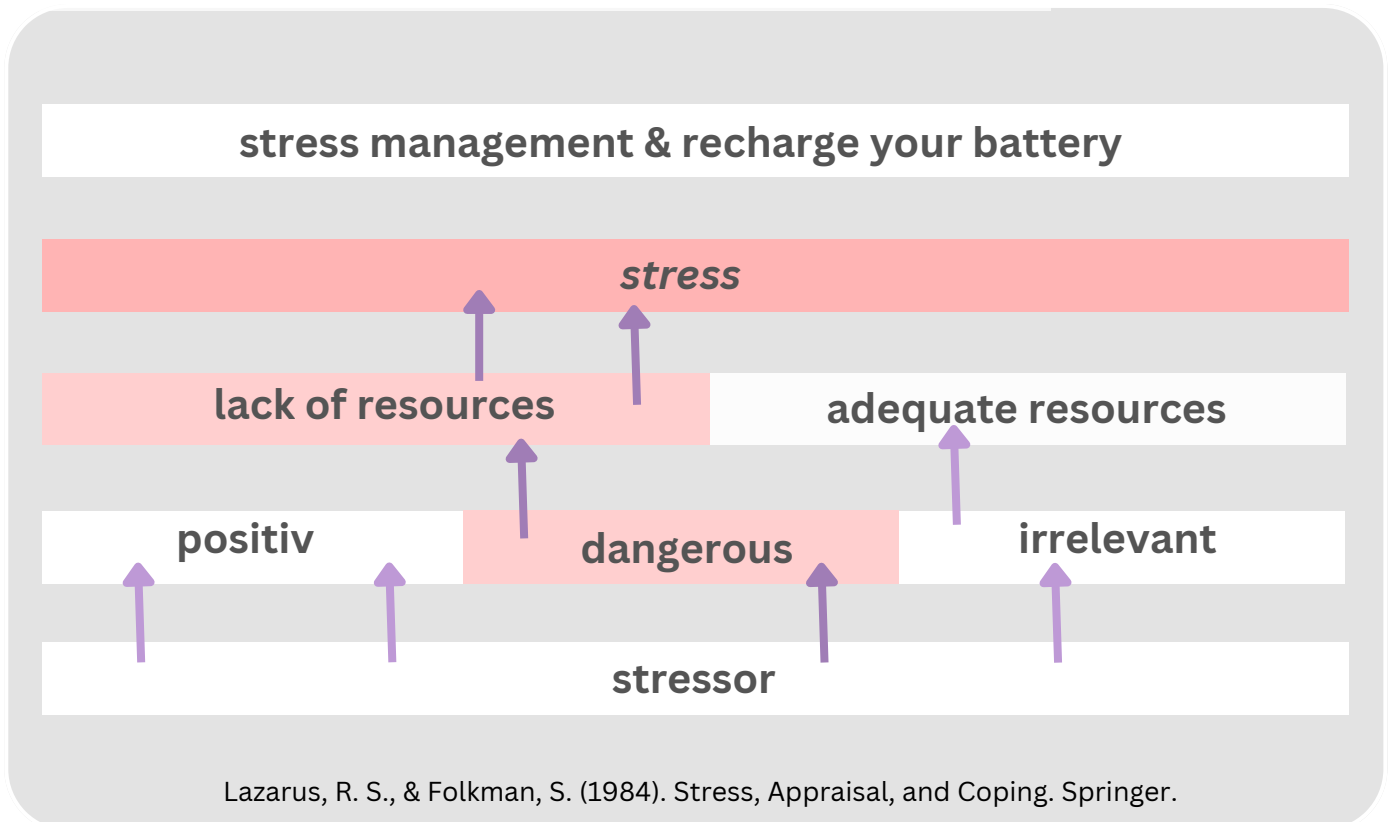
# STRESS AND STRESS MANAGEMENT

**Stress** is an **unpleasant physical and psychological state of arousal**. From an evolutionary perspective, it is a **warning signal** from the body that prepares the organism optimally for dangerous situations. Stress arises when you feel that your own resources are insufficient to cope with a situation. This is why **different people** can **respond to the same situation with varying degrees of stress**.

When stressed, our body releases energy reserves – evolutionarily, to respond to perceived danger with either a fight or flight response. However, in today's world, fighting or fleeing is rarely an appropriate strategy to deal with the pressures of modern life.

Without attacking or running away, the energy provided is not used up but instead builds up, and **psychological and physiological tension** (stress hormones) can persist for longer than is helpful.

## Stress Model - Stress originates in the mind



There are **two different types of stress** that can have varying effects on your body, emotions, thoughts and behavior.

**Positive stress**, also known as **eustress**, can help you become **more focused or productive** in the short term. This type of stress can boost your energy and motivation, especially in situations where you need to perform at your best, such as during exams or important presentations.

However, **chronic stress**, also referred to as **distress**, occurs when stress is prolonged without periods of recovery. This type of stress has been shown to have numerous **negative physical and mental effects**. The body enters a state of constant high alert, which, from an evolutionary standpoint, was meant to help humans cope with emergency situations. The longer the stress lasts, the more the body loses its ability to self-regulate. The stress system stays permanently activated and doesn't return to a normal resting state, even when there is no immediate threat. One sign of this is when sleep becomes less restful.

**Warning signs** of chronic stress can include weekends or even several weeks of vacation not being enough to recharge your "battery." This leads to a constant **state of activation and exhaustion** with little opportunity for recovery (inability to rest). However, this state can be positively influenced through active stress management strategies.

## Distress

greek prefix: dys = "bad"

A state of **overload** that is perceived as **unpleasant**.

*negative stress*



## Eustress

greek prefix: eu = "good"

Demanding **stimuli** that are **perceived as manageable**.

*positive stress*



# SIGNALS OF STRESS

A **stress response** is influenced by **stressors** (e.g., an upcoming exam), the available resources (e.g., limited preparation time) and individual characteristics (e.g., low expectations of success). A **stress response** is closely related to the feeling of fear, and stress symptoms therefore resemble typical anxiety symptoms.

A **stress response** can manifest on four levels:

## BODY

stomach problems

trembling

sweating

teeth grinding

palpitations

loss of appetite

headache

tinnitus

restlessness

despondency

difficulty concentrating

forgetfulness

worries

motivation problems

isolation

sleep disturbances

dissatisfaction

fears

## FEELINGS

unhealthy eating habits

chronic fatigue

frequent colds

## BEHAVIOR

irritability

substance use

skin changes

## THOUGHTS





### EXERCISE: MY STRESS SIGNALS

Sometimes we are so focused on solving a problem that we lose track of how we and our body are actually feeling. In such moments, we tend to neglect ourselves, our body and our emotions. Stressful phases, however, place a significant strain on our physical and mental health. This makes it all the more important to recognize and **understand** our **body's warning** signals.

Write down your **personal stress symptoms** here

**BODY:**

**EMOTIONS:**

**BEHAVIOR:**

**THOUGHTS:**

# RESILIENCE & RESILIENCE FACTORS

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The term **resilience** originates from the Latin word *resilire*, which roughly translates to "to bounce back" or "to spring back." Initially, resilience had nothing to do with people; it was used in the field of material science. Over the past few decades, however, the concept of resilience has increasingly been applied to humans.

*Resilience is formally defined as:*

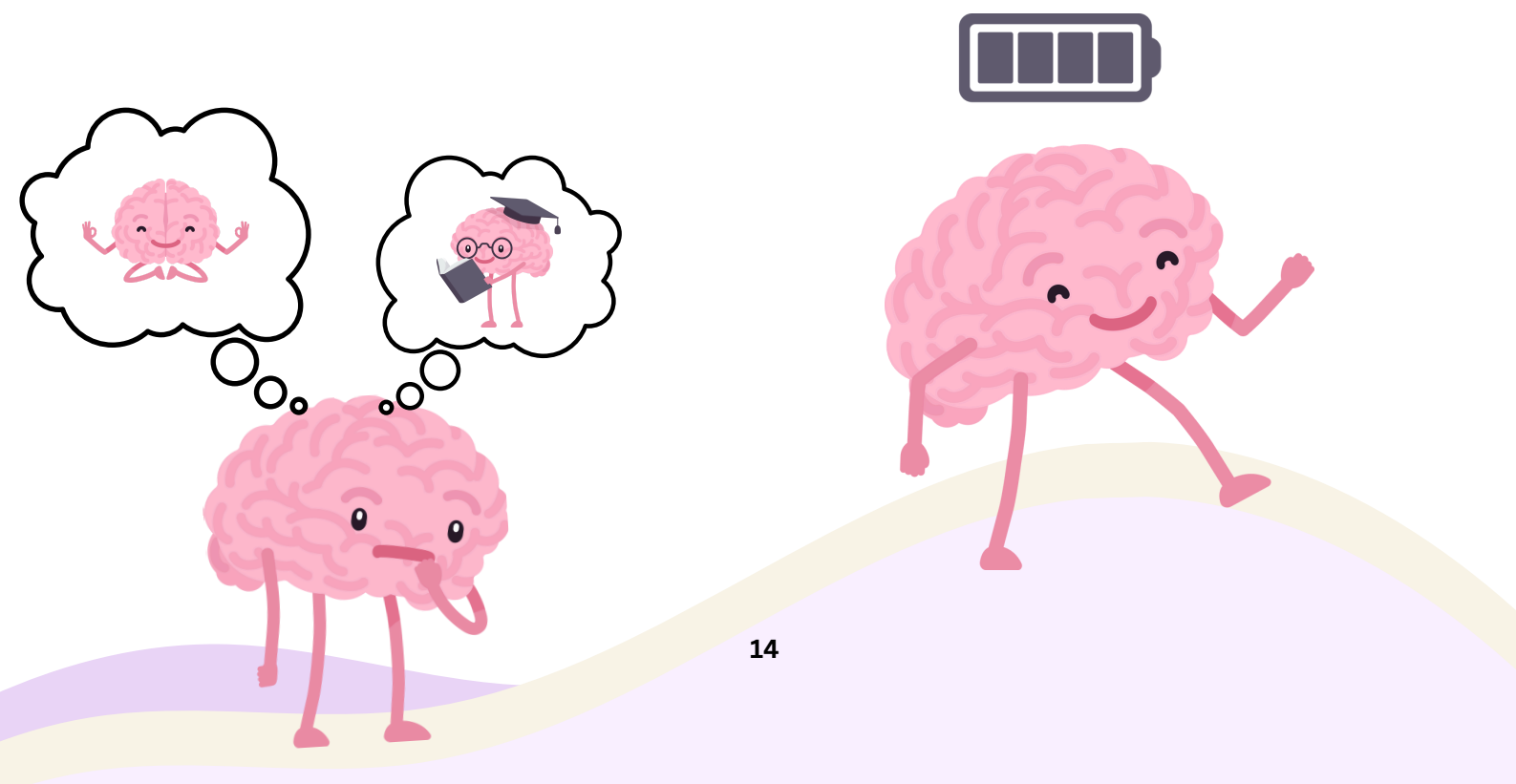
**Maintenance or rapid restoration of mental health during or after stressful life events.**

Leibniz Institut for Resilience Research

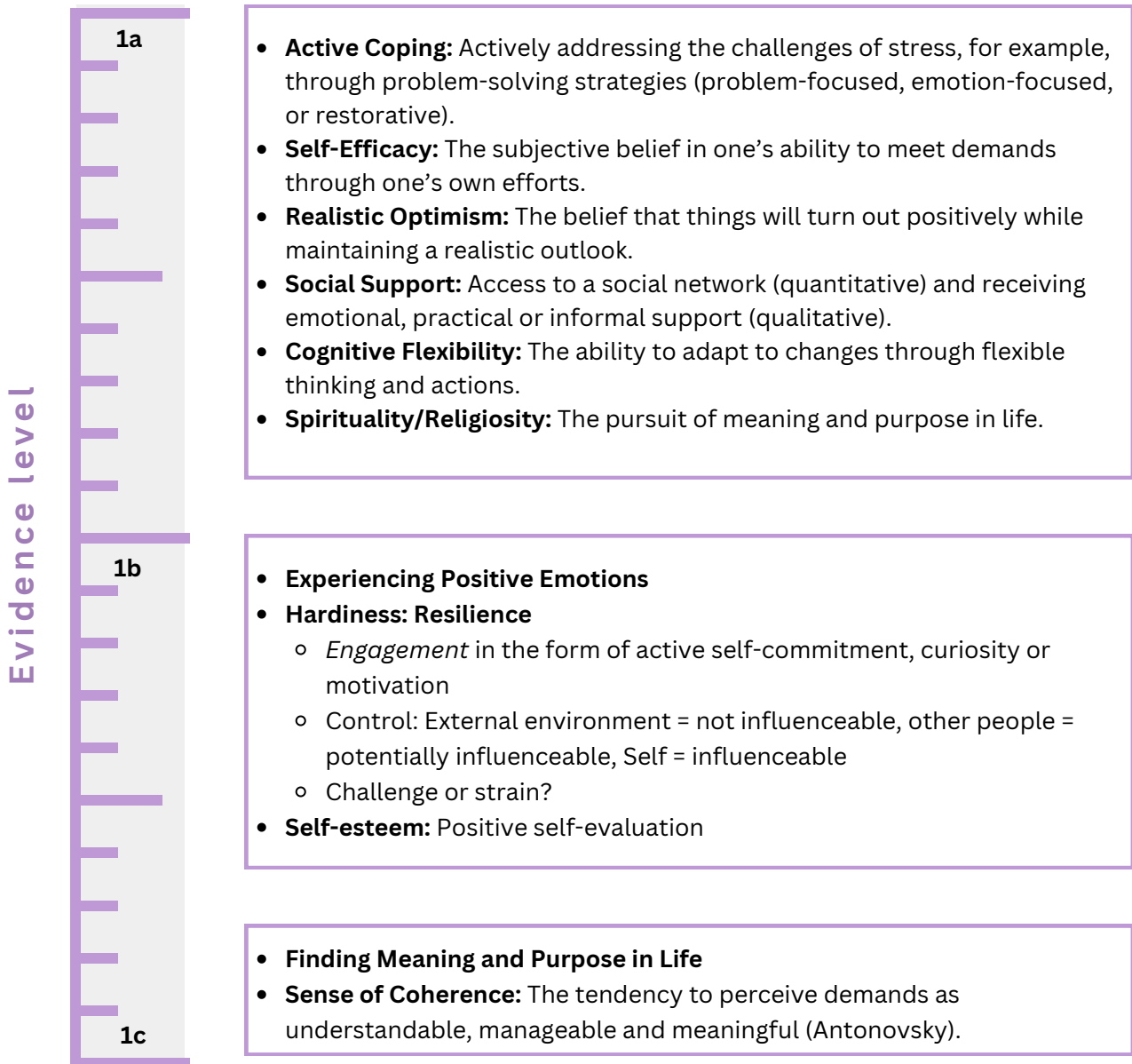
This means: If you remain mentally healthy despite experiencing stress, you are demonstrating resilience.

Resilience is not a fixed trait but a **dynamic interaction** between the **individual** and **their environment**. For example, high levels of stress can be more easily managed if you have a **supportive environment**, enjoy your work and draw **strength from hobbies**. Conversely, if you receive little support from your personal environment and have a highly demanding job, you may be more susceptible to the effects of stress in such situations.

**Resilience is adaptable and can be deliberately trained!**



Resilience research aims to determine which factors are most important for mental health, how they work and which can be most effectively trained. The following **eleven resilience factors** have been well **researched** and are considered trainable (see Bengel & Lyssenko, 2012; Helmreich et al., 2017):



**Evidence level**

This refers to the **scientific strength** or effectiveness of evidence. Through a hierarchically graded system (1a - 5), the strength of recommendations can be derived based on the quality of studies.

# RESILIENCE FACTORS: EXAMPLE

**This is Lea.** She is studying mechanical engineering in her 3rd semester. Currently, she is preparing for her upcoming exams. Since Lea failed one of her exams last semester, she has to retake it now. In addition to studying for the exams, she is working as a student assistant. Recently, Lea has been feeling **quite stressed**, so she attended a lecture at her university on the topic of resilience where she learned about **various resilience factors** that she now wants to apply:

## Social support

Lea actively meets with her fellow students to study together. The others understand her situation and help her with the preparations. This strengthens Lea's mental well-being and reduces physical stress reactions. She knows she can rely on the support of others.

## Cognitive flexibility

The failed exam has motivated Lea to study more and fully understand the topic. Last semester, she only studied superficially. She accepts that it doesn't make sense to be upset about the failed exam and instead sees it as a lesson to put in more effort. By doing so, Lea regulates her emotions in a way that allows her to focus better on her exam preparation.



## Self-efficacy

Lea knows that she is good at math and physics. She motivates herself with the thought:  
"I can do this! I have the ability to influence the situation."

## Active coping

Lea comes up with cognitive coping strategies that suit her:

- Instrumental: She schedules specific times for studying to be well-prepared for her exams.
- Emotion-focused: Lea talks about her worries and concerns with her best friend. By expressing her thoughts, she is able to process them better.
- Regenerative: She gives herself an hour of yoga in the morning or goes for a run.

With the help of these strategies, she actively manages the upcoming challenge.

## Hardiness

Lea has realized that she cannot change the exams themselves, but can only adjust her own behavior to the situation. Therefore, she is now studying more than she did in the previous semester.

## Realistic optimism

Lea tries to regularly remind herself that it's normal not to pass an exam on the first attempt. She encourages herself positively, believing that this time she can succeed if she prepares well. Lea works on not allowing pessimistic or discouraging thoughts, as she knows they would negatively affect her performance.

## Meaning, significance, sense of coherence

Lea finds it easier to accept the challenge of the exam period when she reminds herself of why she is doing all of this. She understands what is expected of her, feels fundamentally capable of handling it and sees a deeper meaning in this challenge.

## Experiencing positive emotions

Lea has started consciously looking for small moments of joy in her everyday life. Today, for example, after a long day of studying, she took half an hour to go for a walk in the park. The fresh air, the sun on her skin, and the chirping of the birds brought a smile to her face. She realized how beneficial it is to incorporate such positive experiences into her day and take a short break. This gives her new energy and strengthens her motivation to keep going.

## Spirituality/Religiosity\*

Lea's individual religiosity and/or spirituality can help her find inner strength. Practices such as meditation or reflection allow her to draw new energy and develop a sense of calm, enabling her to maintain balance despite the challenges of studying and working..

## Self-esteem

Lea knows that she is a lovable and wonderful person. She enjoys meditating and speaks positive affirmations to herself. She reminds herself of what she has already achieved: studying mechanical engineering, a demanding field while also working as a student employee. That's no small feat.

She has decided to show herself more appreciation and to be proud of what she has accomplished so far instead of only focusing on her mistakes.

### \*Note on Spirituality/Religiosity

Spirituality and religiosity are overlapping but distinct concepts that can provide a sense of meaning in life. Religiosity often emphasizes belief systems and involvement in religious communities, whereas spirituality typically focuses on the search for meaning and coherence. Both can have positive or negative effects on mental health, depending on the coping strategies they encourage. Research findings are mixed, as various factors, including social structures, play a significant role.



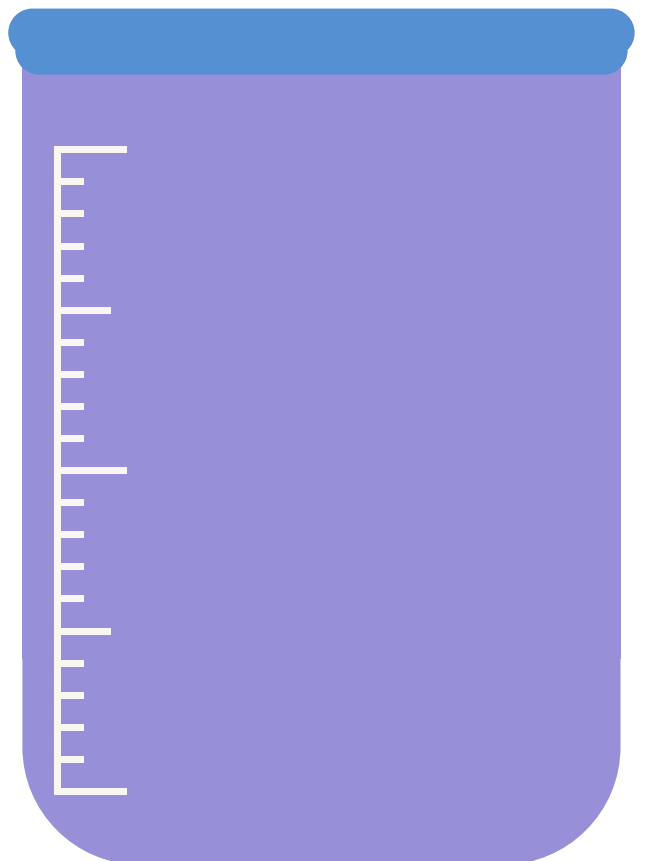
# STRESS BAROMETER

**Stress** is an **unpleasant physical and psychological state of arousal**. From an evolutionary perspective, stress puts us on high alert, preparing our bodies for a dangerous situation to ensure survival: fight, flight or freeze. However, not everything that causes stress today is truly dangerous or a threat. Despite this, our bodies often respond with stress symptoms similar to those from ancient times. For this reason, it is helpful to engage with the topic of stress management to handle everyday stress more effectively and reduce stress symptoms.

## How stressed do you feel right now?

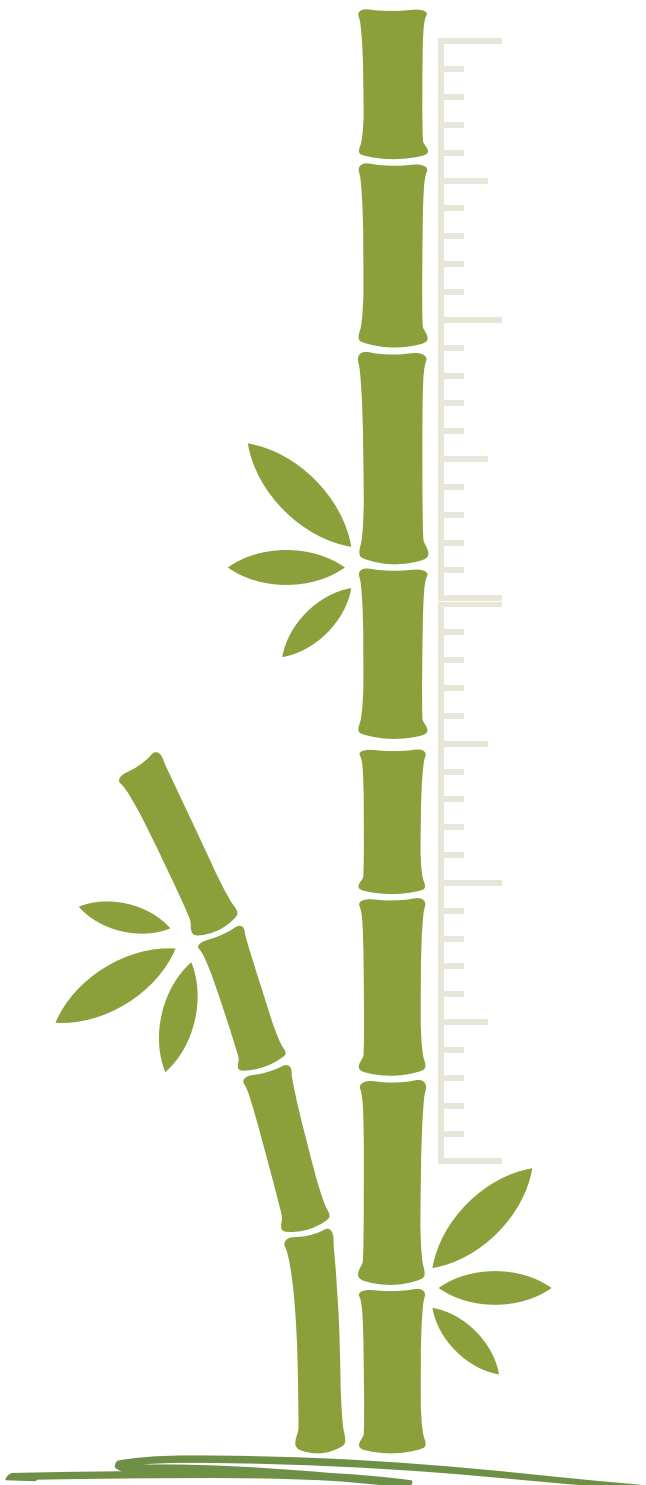
Draw here the water level that represents how stressed you feel right now and how much space is left before the "barrel overflows."

Self-reflection and the early recognition of stress symptoms in yourself are the first important steps towards stress management.



# M E T E R RESILIENCE

**Resilienz** Resilience is **not a static trait** but a skill that allows us to remain **flexible** and **adaptable** in challenging situations and **recover** quickly from difficult phases. Like bamboo, which bends in strong winds but rarely breaks.

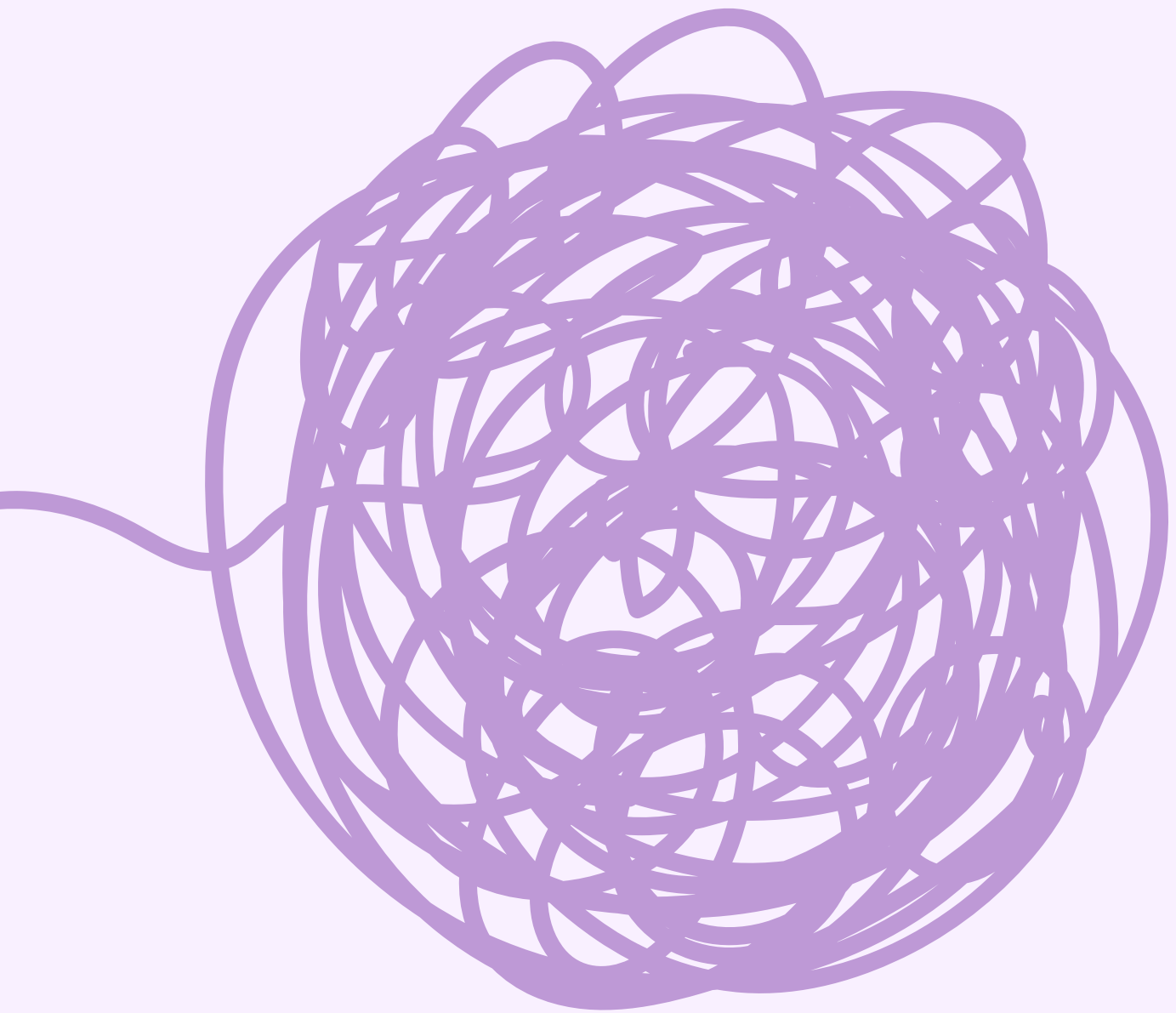


How **resilient** do you feel right now?



Imagine you're a koala. How high would you challenge yourself to climb the bamboo right now? The higher you climb, the more resilient you feel.

Resilience =  
The maintenance or rapid restoration  
of mental health during or after  
stressful life events.







**S T R E N G T H E N  
Y O U R  
R E S I L I E N C E**

# BASIC NEEDS

Like all living beings, you have **basic needs** that you want to **fulfill** and **protect**. Basic needs are those that are essential for your **survival**. When they are not met, your body reacts with stress, signaling that you should change the situation. The psychologist and psychotherapy researcher Klaus Grawe distinguishes between physiological (physical) and psychological basic needs.

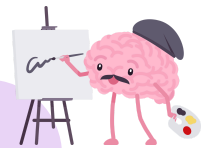
**Physiological basic needs** are the foundation of your survival. Meeting physiological basic needs is a prerequisite for fulfilling psychological basic needs. When a person is hungry, they can hardly experience pleasure.

**Psychological basic needs** serve a different function: they ensure our psychological survival, or rather, our **mental health**. Grawe (1994), drawing on the work of psychologist Mark Epstein, identifies four basic needs: the **need for pleasure** and **the avoidance of discomfort, control, attachment, and self-esteem**.



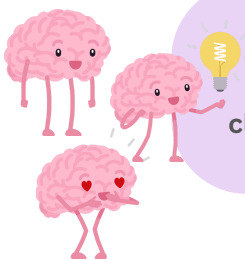
## Control

Control options in life, predictability, security



## Avoidance of discomfort

To bring about pleasant, enjoyable experiences and avoid painful, unpleasant experiences.



## Attachment

Fellow human beings, closeness to significant others.

## Self-esteem

To experience oneself as good, competent, valuable and loved by others.



## Physiological basic needs

Food, water, sleep, physical health, ...



Grawe, K. (1994). Psychotherapie im Wandel: Von der Konfession zur Profession. Hogrefe.



## Can you remember the last time you were truly excited about something?

The **need for pleasure-seeking** and **avoiding discomfort** is one of the oldest discussed human needs. What is perceived as pleasurable can vary greatly from person to person (e.g., eating, sports, reading). This need is closely tied to our experiences: when it is fulfilled, we feel good. When it is not, dissatisfaction quickly arises. Generally, we seek out situations where we feel good and try to avoid or eliminate situations that are unpleasant or make us feel bad. However, since this is not always possible, it is important to regulate our own sense of (dis)pleasure and build a certain level of frustration tolerance (Stahl, 2015).

## Which people are especially important to you? Do they already know that?

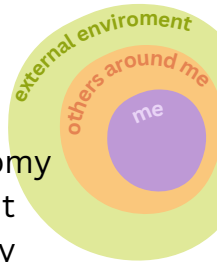
The **need for attachment** describes our desire for closeness and contact. From an evolutionary perspective, bonding was important for forming groups which increased chances of survival. Today, the need for connection drives us to interact with others, enabling social support: people encourage us, provide distraction or help ease the burdens of a sometimes stressful daily life.



## Is it a gravity problem or a getting-up problem?

The **need for control** – often referred to in the literature as the need for autonomy and security – is explained by the fact that having control over our environment enables us to live more safely, plan our actions better and thus avoid potentially stressful and dangerous situations. From birth, we strive to exert a certain influence on our surroundings.

We experience control only when we have options for action in a given situation and when we understand what lies within our control and what does not. A simple rule of thumb applies here: we can (to a large extent) control ourselves. We may sometimes influence others but this is not the same as control. Over the external environment, we often have little to no influence, much less control, even if we might wish otherwise.



## Have you done something good for yourself today?

The **need for self-esteem preservation** or **enhancement**, according to Grawe, means that people strive to think of themselves as "good." We want to perceive ourselves as competent, valuable and lovable and be perceived as such by others. Studies show that low self-esteem or associated behaviors are a key factor in the development of various psychological disorders, such as depression.



# EMOTIONS

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## What exactly are emotions, and what types exist?

Since emotions are crucial for our experiences, the study of emotions has a very long history. Over the years, many researchers have attempted to identify so-called basic emotions. Interestingly, there is no universally accepted list of basic emotions. For instance, as early as 1990, psychologists Ortony and Turner **identified 14 different lists of basic emotions**.

Despite the lack of consensus on which basic emotions exist, there is broad scientific agreement that basic emotions do exist (Brandstätter et al., 2013). **Basic emotions form the foundation of our entire emotional experience**, and all nuances or facets of our emotions can be categorized under these basic emotions. For example, worry could be classified under the basic emotion of fear, hatred under anger and love under affection.

In resilience training, we **distinguish between 8 basic emotions**:



Although emotions can feel different in terms of pleasantness, **every emotion** – even the most uncomfortable ones – has a **function** and is therefore **important for us** as humans (Brandstätter et al., 2013). Fear, for instance, signals that we are in danger and should take steps to protect ourselves. Anger shows us – and others – that a value has been violated or that we are being hindered from reaching a goal, prompting us to initiate change.

Emotions inform us about the **fulfillment or non-fulfillment** of our **basic needs** (information), motivate us to adjust our behavior (motivation) and assist us in communicating with others through the outwardly visible components of emotions, such as gestures and facial expressions (communication). In resilience training, we therefore do not refer to emotions as positive or negative, nor as good or bad, but rather as **pleasant and unpleasant feelings**.

Nevertheless, emotions can also contribute to **stress** experiences. This can occur, for instance, when states such as overwhelm and the resulting fear are not sufficiently recognized, leading to repeatedly entering situations that promote stress. On the other hand, emotions such as fear or anger can, in some situations, be obstructive or counterproductive.



Studies show that engaging in pleasant activities and the **regular experience of positive emotions** in everyday life can act as a "**stress vaccine**" for the future. For instance, Norwegian psychologists Quale and Schanke (2010) found that victims of severe accidents reported lower psychological distress after the event if they had regularly experienced positive emotions before the incident – demonstrating their ability to appreciate the good things in life.



# VALUES AND MEANING

Values give our lives **meaning and continuity**. They not only inform us about how satisfied we are with our lives but also serve as a **compass for our thoughts and actions**. Values can help us **formulate goals** and provide direction in life. When we act (even unconsciously) against our values, it can lead to dissatisfaction and a reduction in psychological well-being.

Therefore, it is especially important to become aware of your personal values and align your life with them as much as possible. This alignment **promotes a sense of purpose and meaning in life**.

*What is important to me in life? What do I want to stand for?*

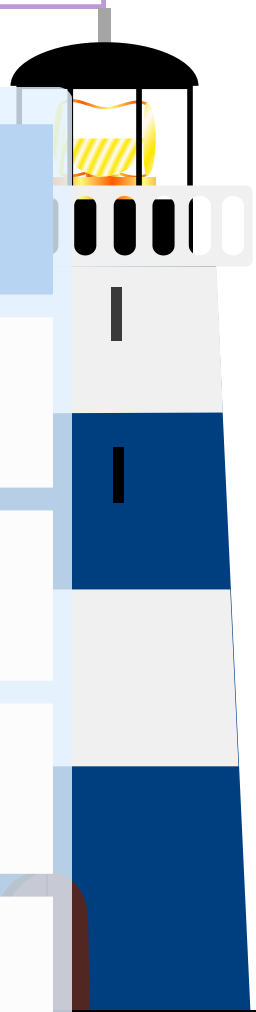
*What decisions do I want to make for my life?*

*How do I want to shape my life?*

Awareness	Carefulness	Experience	Ease	Dedication	Achievements	Wealth	Care
Responsibility	Safety	Humility	Success	Community	Hope	Passion	Perfection
Fun	Reason	Activity	Stability	Seriousness	Creativity	Humour	Optimism
Precision	Play	Vitality	Acceptance	Comfort	Consideration	Pleasure	Individuality
Pessimism	Privacy	Spirituality	Trust	Manners	Mindfulness	Family	Fairness
Innovation	Loyalty	Abundance	Athleticism	Variety	Openness	Education	Industriousness
Justice	Integration	Order	Respect	Consistency	Diversity	Honesty	Gratitude
Flexibility	Health	Integrity	Humanity	Security	Structure	Growth	Perseverance
Perspective	Popularity	Contentment	Clarity	Compassion	Quietness	Depth	Balance
Discretion	Joy	Generosity	Cleverness	Courage	Fame	Tolerance	Wisdom
Love	Effectiveness	Friendship	Kindness	Communication	Sustainability	Beauty	Tradition
Exchange	Efficiency	Peace	Harmony	Competence	Law	Protection	Dreams
Knowledge	Authenticity	Honor	Leadership	Home	Control	Nature	Independency
Faith	Dignity	Excitement	Uniqueness	Patience	Challenges	Power	Curiosity
Dependency	Environment	Commitment	Freedom	Development	Connection	Helpfulness	Energy
Empathy	Efficacy	Change	Solidarity				

## EXERCISE: MY VALUES LIGHTHOUSE

1. Go through the list of **values** and **circle those that feel important to you** without overthinking. Feel free to add your own personal values to the list.
2. Revisit your circled values one by one and narrow them down to approximately **20 values**. Keep in mind that some values may have similar meanings, but choose the wording or phrasing that resonates most with you.
3. Organize your 20 values into **3-4 categories** based on their similarities in meaning.
4. Create **headings** for each group of values. These headings can either be specific values from the column or your own descriptive terms that reflect how you identify with them. Write these headings in your own words at the top of each column below.



# REALISTIC OPTIMISM

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**Optimism** describes the **deep conviction** that **things** will generally **turn out well**, that tough times will pass, and more pleasant phases in life will come again (Gilan et al., 2021). Optimists hold the **expectation** that their actions can lead to **positive outcomes**. This mindset helps them to approach challenges actively and with motivation, enabling them to overcome difficulties with greater perseverance rather than spending excessive energy on worries and doubts.

The protective effect of optimism on mental health is consistently supported in scientific research (see Bengel & Lyssenko, 2012). However, it is important to note that optimism as a **protective factor** does not mean wearing "rose-colored glasses" and naively assuming that everything will always turn out well. Instead, resilient optimists tend to approach problems **realistically**.

This means they acknowledge the problems and obstacles they face but hold a strong belief in their ability to overcome them. This conviction enables them to **actively address** challenges and **improve their situation**.

The resilience factor of **realistic optimism** refers to the belief in the positive development of things without neglecting the given realities — a so-called "positive outcome expectation." Ideally, in terms of resilience, one should maintain a **flexible expectation about the outcome of events** and be able to apply it depending on the situation. An important aspect is not to be hindered by pessimistic thoughts, especially when they are unhelpful or inappropriate.










## EXERCISE: PERSPECTIVE SHIFT

Imagine two students: one is **optimistic** and the other is **pessimistic**. They could also be people you know. In this scenario, both are equally qualified for their studies. Let's call them Ms. White and Mr. Black. Now, imagine both of them receiving the **same challenging assignment** from their professor with a strict deadline.





What do you think: **How will each of them evaluate and handle the situation?**

### Mr. Black - Pessimist

-  *I'll never manage this.*
-  *If I don't succeed, my professor will make my life miserable.*
-  *The professor is just giving me the task to embarrass me.*
-  *If I can't do this, my studies were all in vain.*
-  *I'm going to totally embarrass myself.*



### Ms. White - Optimist

-  *I can handle this!*
-  *I've already managed much more difficult things!*
-  *The professor gave me this challenging task because she believes in me and my abilities.*
-  *Even if it doesn't work out, I'll find a way!*



**The personal evaluation of a situation** has a **significant impact** on **how we feel** and, consequently, how we **behave** in that situation. In this example, Ms. White will likely approach the task with more motivation and a relaxed attitude as she worries less about potential failures and is more likely to perform well. On the other hand, Mr. Black will probably feel more tense, overthink things, worry, and may end up struggling with the task, possibly fulfilling a self-fulfilling prophecy.

# SOCIAL SUPPORT

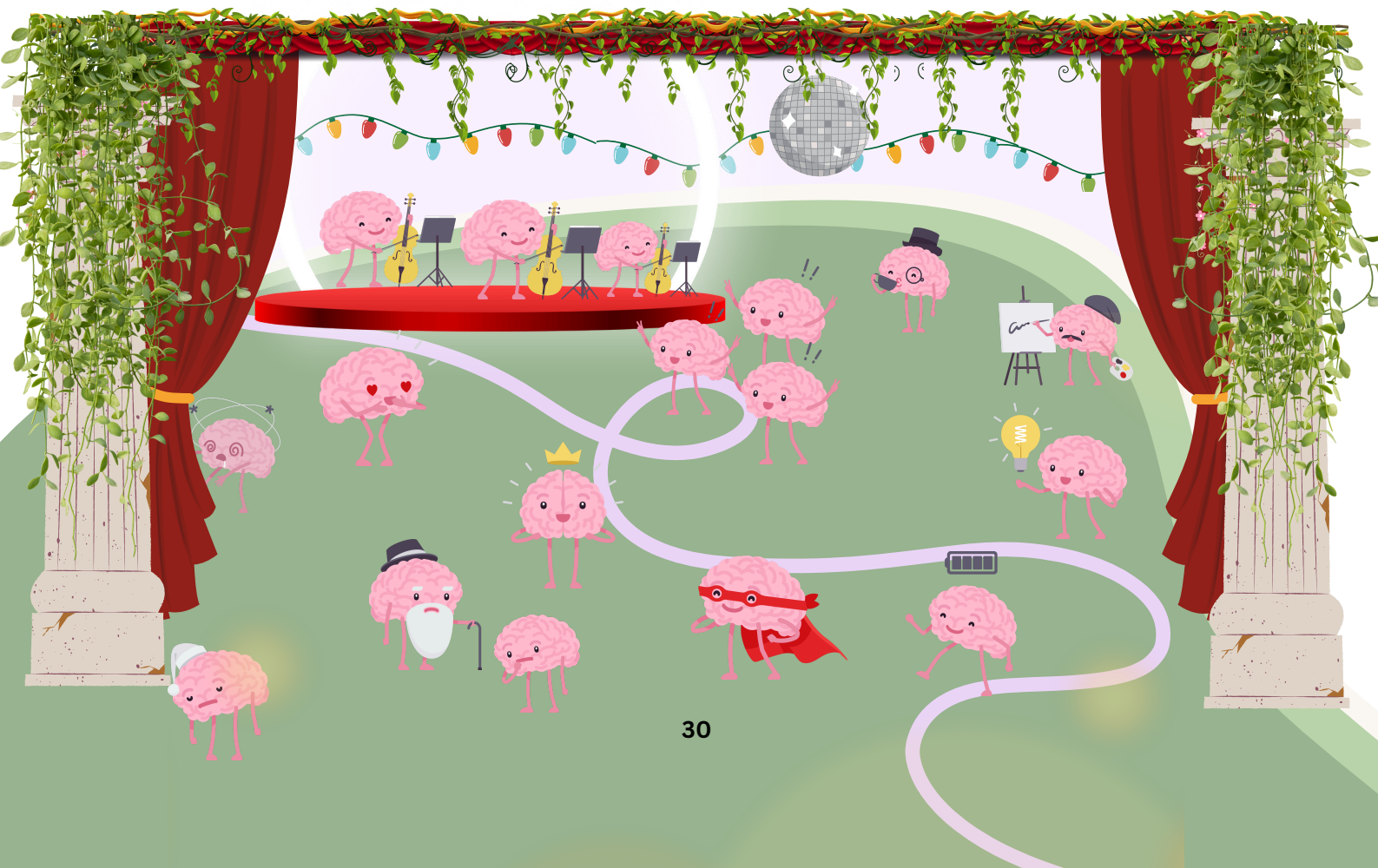
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This resilience factor is closely related to our **basic need for attachment**. The positive impact of this factor is well-documented, not only on **mental health** but also on **physical health** (Berkman, 1981).

Our drive to fulfill the need for attachment leads to the creation and **maintenance of social connections**, such as friendships or romantic relationships. All of these bonds are potential **sources of social support**. For example, we can share problems with friends or turn to classmates for support during the stressful study period. A partnership allows for closeness and the release of "**happiness hormones**" as well as the experience of **positive emotions**.

It is important to note that it is not the quantity of social contacts or the size of one's social network that matters, but rather the **quality of those social connections** (Werner & Smith, 2001). What defines a fulfilling social relationship depends on our personal values and can therefore be perceived very differently by each **individual**. There is no one-size-fits-all rule for how much social support enhances one's well-being. **You likely know best what works for you.**

Our goal, therefore, is to take a closer look at our own social network and identify ways in which it can be adjusted so that you feel comfortable and supported.



## EXERCISE: MY SOCIAL NETWORK

**Draw your social network below.** You are represented by the **circle in the middle.** Draw **circles** for **other people** (or pets or groups of people) next to your **circle** and write the name of the respective person in each. **The closer** a person's circle is to your own, **the more important** that person is in your life. So it's not just about whether the person is in your social network, but about how important that contact is to you. **Consider** which of these **relationships give you energy** and which ones **drain it.** You might want to strengthen some relationships further, while others might need less focus.



# COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY

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Cognitive flexibility is understood as the **ability to adapt flexibly to changing situations or unexpected events** (Gilan et al., 2012).

For example, if you suddenly realize in the late afternoon that your best friend's birthday is tomorrow and you wanted to buy her a very specific gift, it might cause stress to rush to crowded stores after work to find that gift. However, if you manage to quickly adjust to the new situation and come up with an alternative that can still be executed, your remaining day will likely be much less stressful.

This **flexibility**, the ability to easily **adjust to changing situations**, can be applied to many other scenarios. Even if we don't always explicitly notice it, it's often these small daily stressors ("daily hassles") that accumulate and contribute to increased stress levels.

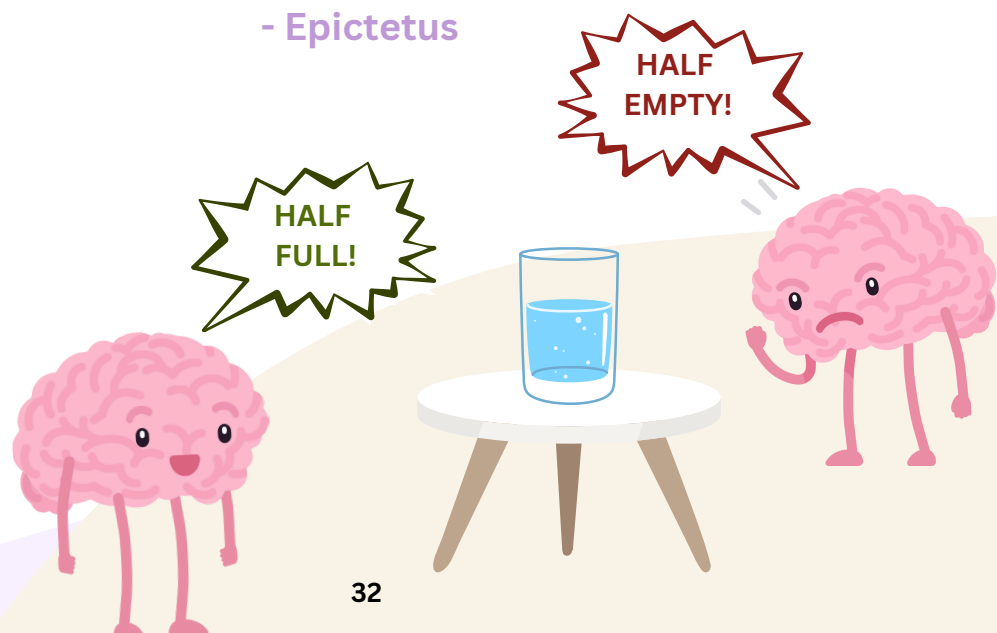
An important aspect of cognitive flexibility is **acceptance**. Because when we are able to accept changes, it becomes easier to see other paths and solutions (Gilan et al., 2021).

Cognitive flexibility is an important **resilience factor** that can be trained.

To do so, it is first helpful to become aware of our own **rigid thought patterns** and, in the next step, to develop **possible alternatives**, allowing us to respond with more calmness to potentially stressful situations in the long run. The key idea here is that it's not the situation itself that determines the feelings, bodily and stress reactions we develop, but rather the **mental evaluation of the situation**.

"It is not the things themselves that disturb us, but our opinions about them."

- Epictetus

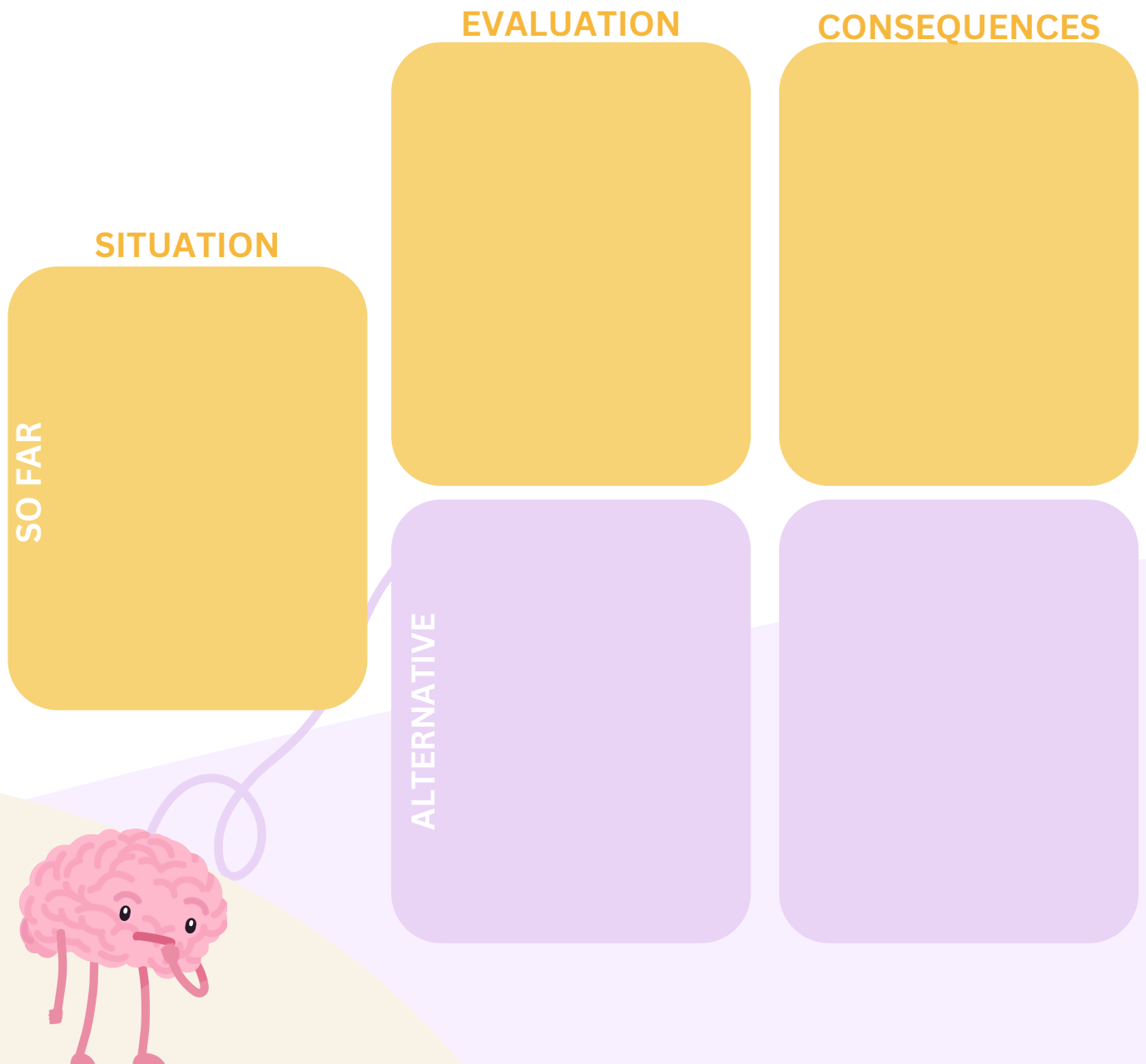


## EXERCISE: The 3-Column Protocol

The 3-Column Protocol helps to **raise awareness of your own thoughts and evaluations**, question **current evaluations** and potentially replace them with **new thoughts**.

**Task:** Think of a **challenging situation** for yourself and write down your evaluative thoughts about it. It is important to clearly distinguish between the situation and your thoughts, meaning: what are objective observations and what are my personal interpretations? Then consider the consequences (e.g., feelings, bodily sensations, personal behavior) your evaluation has caused. Afterward, think about what alternative evaluations and consequences could arise from the situation.

**Tip:** For some people, it may initially be difficult to notice their thoughts. In this case, you can first think about the consequences, such as how you felt, and then consider what thought might have led to that feeling.



# SELF-ESTEEM & SELF-EFFICACY

SELF-ESTEEM

**Self-esteem** refers to whether one perceives oneself as **lovable, competent and valuable**, or whether one rejects oneself (Bengel & Lyssenko, 2012). People with high self-esteem tend to perceive challenges as less threatening, have a stronger sense of control and evaluate their coping strategies more optimistically (Bengel & Lyssenko, 2012). It varies based on experiences, rising through successes and falling through failures. Thus, self-esteem is **malleable** and develops through our life experiences and their evaluation.



**"Self-esteem is an opinion, not a fact."**

It can also be influenced by whom or what we compare ourselves to. But are we truly less valuable if someone compares us to the "best" person that comes to their mind? Are we really less "worthy" if we are not as good at something as the "best" person we can think of in that context? You could probably find arguments both for and against any comparison and evaluation. And that's exactly the point: if there is no comparison or evaluation that is objectively correct, then determining one's **self-esteem is subjective**. It is therefore up to you to **decide what you use to establish your self-esteem**. It's no surprise, then, that self-esteem is closely linked to our resilience, its various factors and ultimately to mental health.

The term **self-efficacy**, coined by Albert Bandura (1977), describes the belief in one's **ability to successfully overcome challenges** through one's own actions.

For example, an athlete with high self-efficacy approaches a competition with the mindset, "I can do this!" Individuals with this attitude actively face challenges and work purposefully to overcome them.

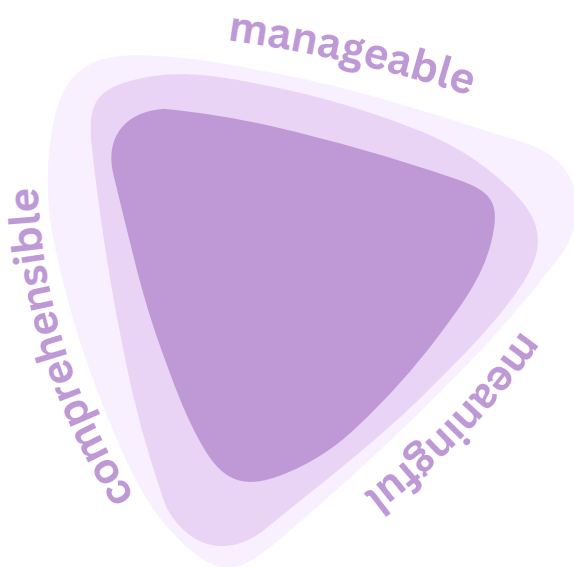
SELF-EFFICACY

## "Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

Similar to self-esteem, self-efficacy develops through various learning experiences in life. It is not a fixed trait but a **dynamic construct** that continually evolves through experiences. The good news is that self-efficacy is **trainable** and well-documented in scientific research as a resilience factor. Regular experiences of success and a constructive approach to failures strengthen the sense of self-efficacy.



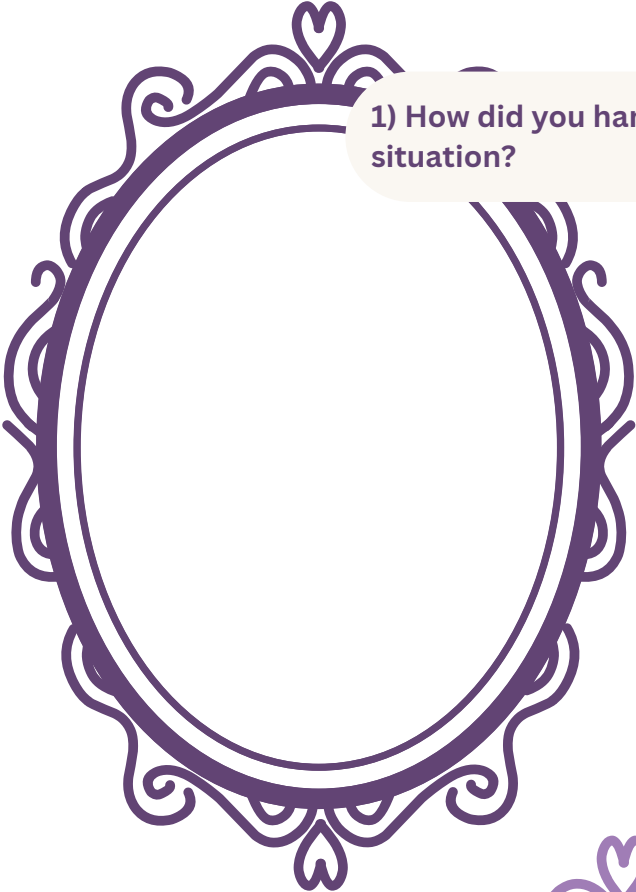
The theoretical model of the **sense of coherence** (Latin *cohaerere*: to cohere) was developed by sociologist Aaron Antonovsky in 1979. It describes a state of life orientation characterized by a consistent, enduring, yet dynamic sense of confidence and certainty that (1) the events of the internal and external environment over the course of life are structured, predictable, and understandable (**comprehensibility**), (2) the resources are available to meet the demands posed by these events (**manageability**), and (3) these demands are perceived as challenges worth investing in and engaging with (**meaningfulness**).



When we **understand** tasks or challenges, perceive them as **manageable** and fundamentally consider their resolution **meaningful**, this can **positively influence** how we approach them and how we feel in the process. The sense of coherence is therefore a fundamental resilience factor and an integral part of our mental health.

## EXERCISE: MY SUCCESSES

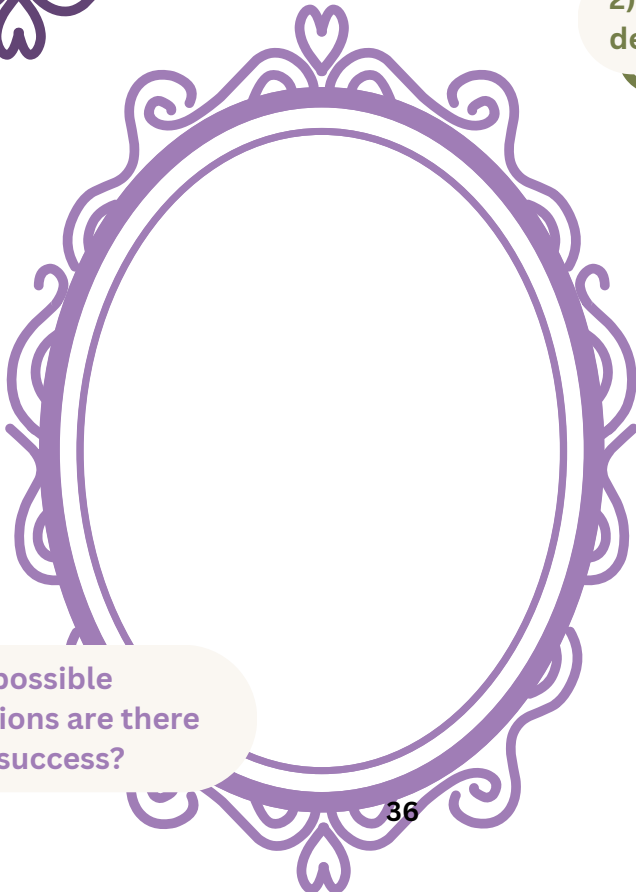
You have probably faced major challenges during your studies or outside of them. At first, you might have thought you wouldn't be able to overcome them. Yet, somehow, you managed to handle them. Think of a difficult situation you overcame. Ask yourself these three questions:



1) How did you handle this situation?



2) What strengths did you demonstrate in this situation?

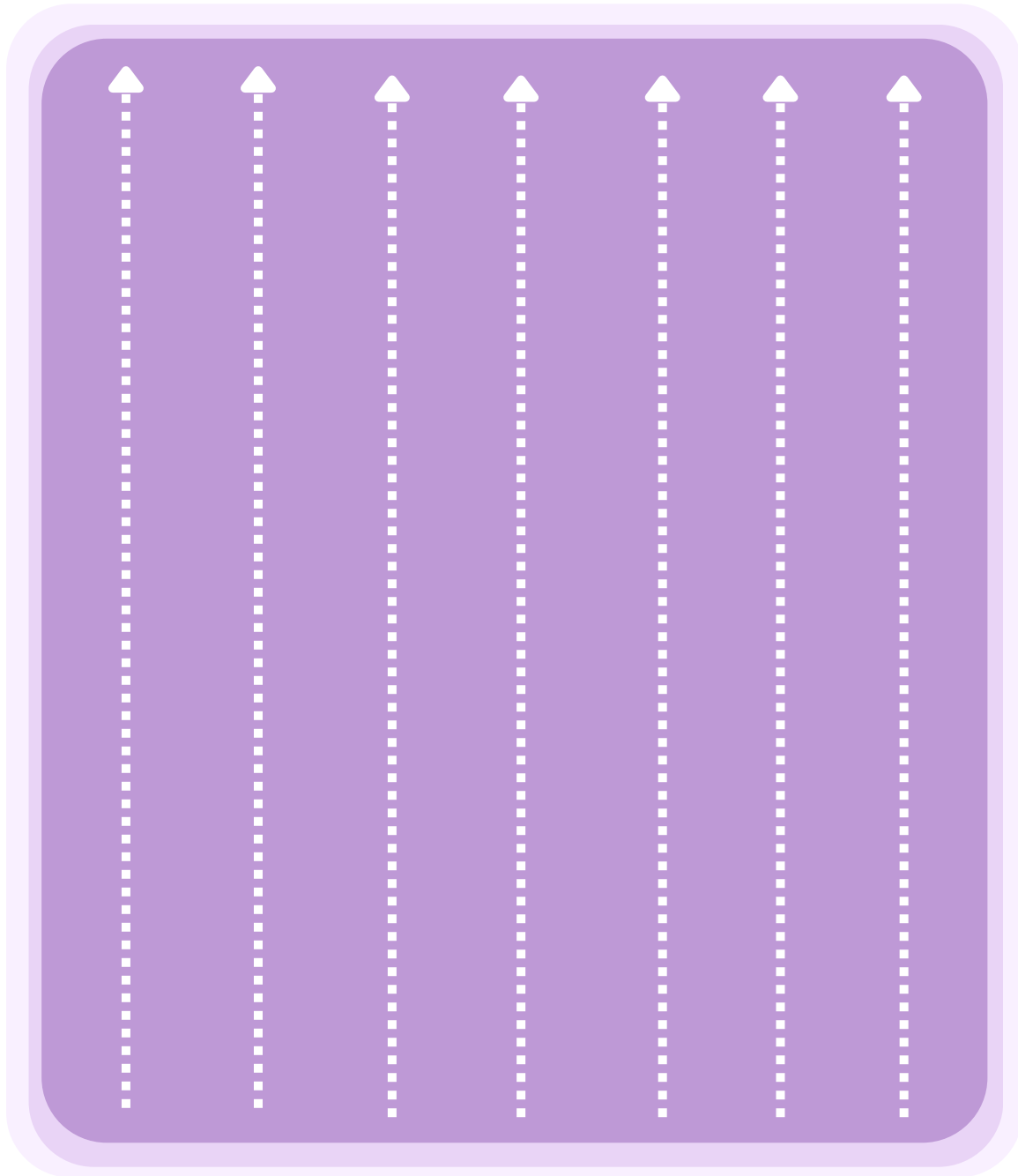


3) What possible explanations are there for your success?



## EXERCISE: MY RESILIENCE RESOURCES

Assess your **individual levels** for a selection of **resilience factors** here. It is completely normal for some factors to be more pronounced than others. Not every factor needs to be strong in order for you to feel resilient. However, you might also recognize factors that you can still work on.



OPTIMISM

SOCIAL SUPPORT

SELF-EFFICACY/  
SELF-ESTEEM

37 EXPERIENCING  
POSITIVE EMOTIONS

ACTIVE COPING

SPIRITUALITY & RELIGIOSITY

MEANING, SIGNIFICANCE,  
SENSE OF COHERENCE



## “Strong together”

**"Shared pain is half the pain!"** You can rely on the people in your surroundings. You know this and are not afraid to ask for support. Because if there's one thing for sure, it's that together we can achieve a lot. And even if some problems can't be solved, you can still count on the support of your friends, family and acquaintances. Whether it's a flat tire, a small favor, exam stress or relationship issues – you know who to turn to. You don't have to know everything or handle everything on your own; sometimes, it's enough to know the right person to ask. As a supportive coping type, **community is important to you**, not only as a safety net but also as a source of energy and inspiration to find solutions and carry them out with confidence. Two brains are smarter than one. And smarter than two brains is collective intelligence.

*However, some problems force you to handle them alone. Whether they arise suddenly or require decisions that only you can make, what else helps you maintain calm and keep a cool head in stressful situations?*

Supportive  
Coping Type

## “Life goes on!”

**"Strength lies in calm."** For you, your physical well-being is a top priority. After all, you handle problems best when you're feeling good. And even better if you don't let yourself get stressed!

What are considered "big" or "small" problems really depends on the perspective. Often, the answers and solutions come when you take a step back from the problems and the stress they cause. Perhaps during a walk? In the bath or on a relaxing day trip? Because in relation to the truly "big" problems in the world, you're actually doing quite well. Often, behind problems, there are challenges that allow you to grow and learn something. A shift in perspective and stepping back from the issue helps you find creative solutions and reassess the situation in a new way. What's most **important to you is to pay attention to yourself and your emotional state.**

*However, sometimes problems require your full attention over a longer period of time. Maybe your acquaintances, friends, family or others might have possible solutions to your problem?*

Positive  
Coping Type

## “There is always a solution!”

**"Few things throw you off balance so quickly.** You tend to approach stress with a clear mind, first seeking to understand the root cause of the problem.

Once that cause is identified, it helps you clearly recognize the possible actions you can take to deal with the issue. By weighing the pros and cons of various solutions, you can often come up with alternative and creative solutions that others might have overlooked. As a problem-oriented coping type, your focus is mainly on dealing with problems in a constructive and analytical way. **Understanding the reasons behind the issue and finding solutions are your top priorities.** After all, there's always at least one solution for every problem!

*However, sometimes it can be worth stepping back a little and shifting focus away from the problem. How are you feeling, actually? Have you talked about your problem with your acquaintances, friends, family or others?"*

Problem-Oriented  
Coping Type

# MY ENERGY-RESERVE

## EXERCISE: MY ENERGY-RESERVE

It's time to ask yourself **how you're really feeling**: How **energetic** do you feel right now?

Understanding when, in what situations or with whom you feel full of energy, motivation and drive can be helpful, especially during stressful times. It can also help you develop an awareness in everyday life to manage your time and energy, so you can allocate your energy wisely and focus properly through long days and stressful periods.

### How full is your battery right now?

The more stressed you are, the emptier your battery is.

If you feel full of energy and balanced right now, then your battery is full!



### What things, activities or people drain your energy and what helps you recharge your battery?



#### Energy drainers

These points drain your energy. How can you reduce/avoid this?

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#### Energy boosters

These points give you energy. How can you promote these?

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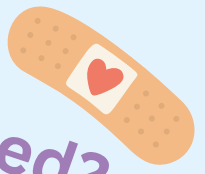
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# What can I do when my energy is drained?



## Behavior

- Mindful activities
- Intentionally plan enjoyable activities in your daily life
- Create distance: visually and acoustically

## Thoughts

- What do I need right now?
- Positive self-talk
- Say "STOP!"

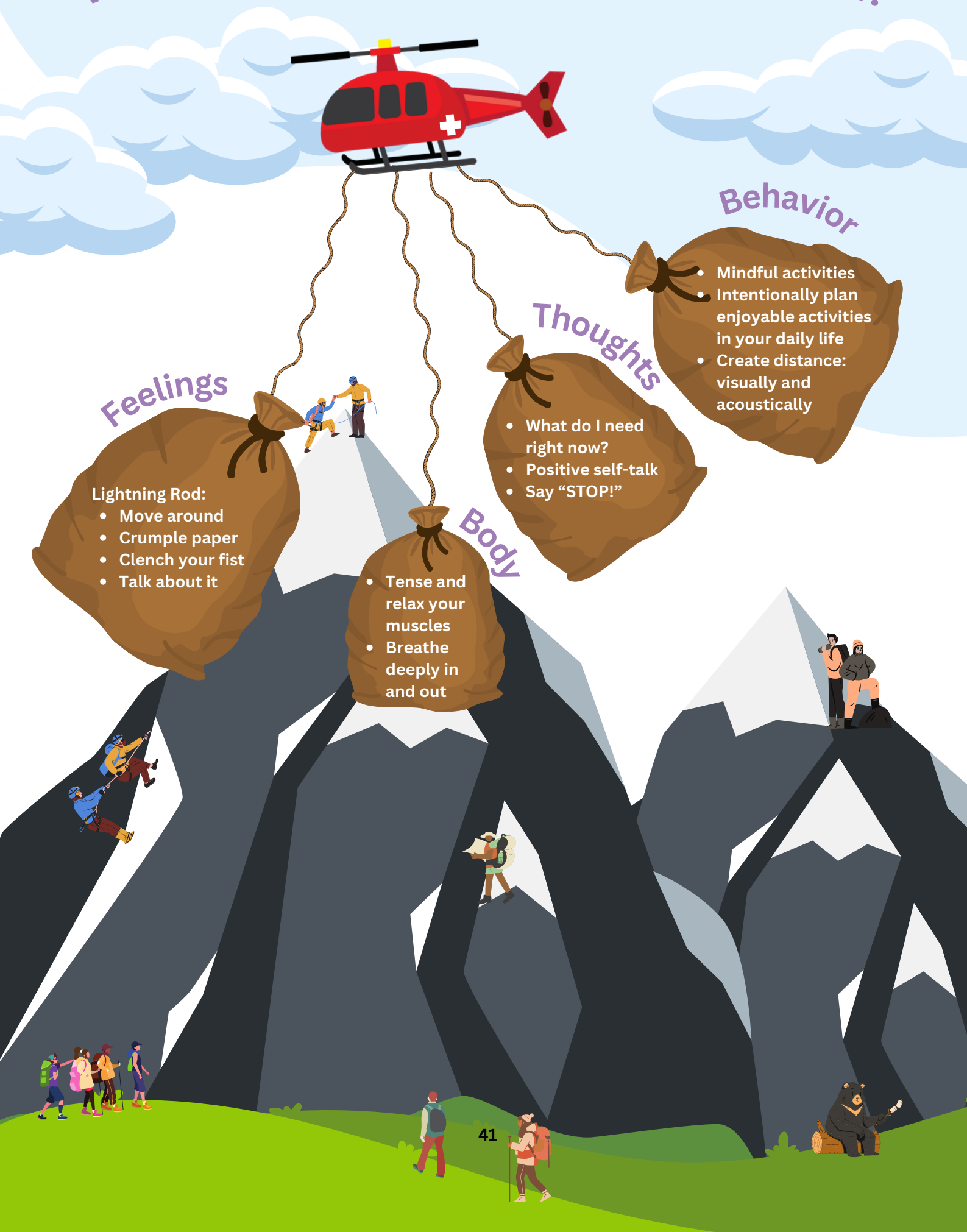
## Body

- Tense and relax your muscles
- Breathe deeply in and out

## Feelings

### Lightning Rod:

- Move around
- Crumple paper
- Clench your fist
- Talk about it



# MINDFULNESS

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“Once, two freshmen went to see a PhD student. They asked her, “What do you do to be so happy and content? We’d love to be as happy as you are.”

The PhD student smiled gently and replied, “When I study, I study. When I get up, I get up. When I walk, I walk and when I eat, I eat.”

The freshmen exchanged puzzled looks. One of them blurted out:

“Please, don’t make fun of us. We do the same things you’re talking about. We study, eat and walk. But we’re not happy. So, what’s your secret?”

She gave the same reply: “When I study, I study. When I get up, I get up. When I walk, I walk and when I eat, I eat.”

Sensing the students’ growing frustration and unease, the PhD student added after a moment:

“Sure, you also study, walk and eat. But while you study, you’re already thinking about getting up. While you’re getting up, you’re planning where to go. And while you’re walking, you’re wondering what you’ll eat next. Your thoughts are always elsewhere, not in the present moment.

Life happens at the intersection of the past and the future — in the present moment. If you fully immerse yourself in this immeasurable instant, you have the chance to be truly happy and content.”

Inspired by the story of the wise man, author unknown.



## EXERCISE: MINDFULNESS BREAK

Is everything going wrong today, with one lecture following the next? Then it's time for a **small break**. Every little pause you allow yourself throughout the day is a direct investment in your energy balance.

- Prepare yourself a delicious **coffee, tea or drink of your choice**. Take your drink, sit down in a quiet and comfortable spot and lean back, relaxed. Make a conscious decision not to use your desk as the place for this short break.
- Now close your eyes and take **two mindful breaths**. Inhale deeply through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Then once more: inhale deeply through your nose and exhale through your mouth.
- **Next, feel your drink in your hands** and continue **breathing mindfully**. Notice how the cup, filled with warm or cold liquid, warms or cools your hands.
- Gently bring your drink close to your nose and **notice its scent**. Breathe calmly and relaxed, inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth.
- Finally, **take a small, careful sip** and notice how the liquid **feels** in your mouth. Observe its taste and how the warm or cool sensation travels down your throat into your chest, leaving behind a cozy warmth or a refreshing coolness.
- **Repeat** this process as often as you enjoy it, perhaps until you've finished your drink completely.
- When you're ready, slowly open your eyes and **give yourself a smile**. Smile at your little break, smile at the day, and silently thank yourself for taking this moment for a brief relaxation.

inhale  
exhale



# MINI-VACATIONS

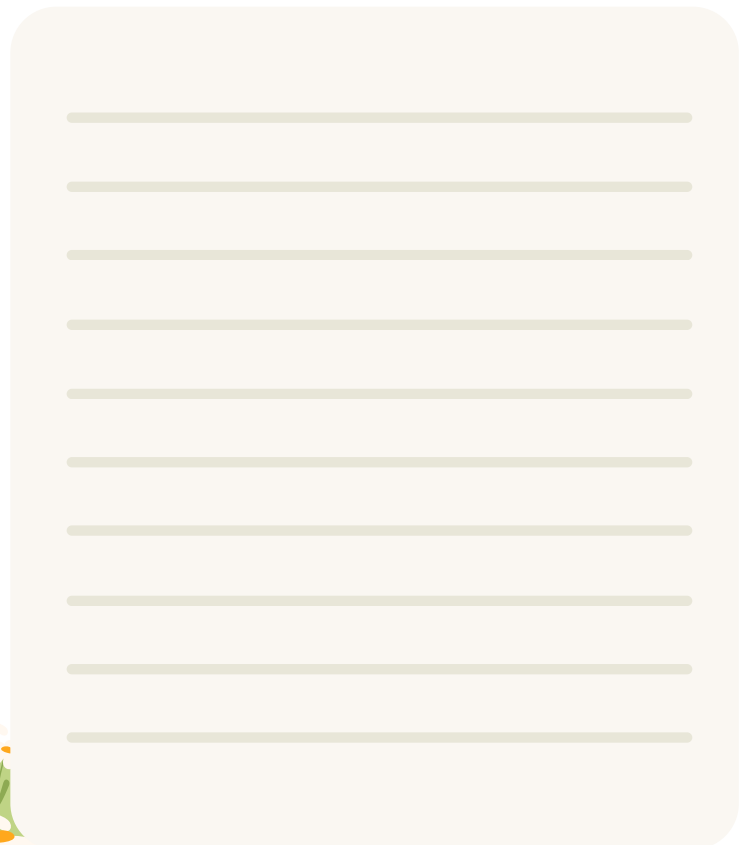
## EXERCISE: MY MINI-VACATIONS

Especially during and after stressful phases, it's crucial to take care of your **energy levels** and do things that **recharge you**. We often recharge best during **vacations**. However, vacations are not always possible, and in the long run, they may not have a lasting impact on our daily lives. What is important, though, is to take regular, small breaks that contrast with your usual activities and are consciously enjoyed..

Incorporating **enjoyable activities** into your daily routine – treating them like little **mini-vacations** – can be particularly helpful. What activities could these be for you?

### 1. Create a list of activities you enjoy doing!

(Short activities, longer activities, activities alone or with others, spontaneous or planned activities)





## 2. Plan your “mini-vacations” into your week:

Create a weekly schedule and **include** activities that bring you joy. Make sure to also plan for longer activities (at least 20 minutes).

Have fun with it!

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

## 3. Put you plans into action and

# enjoy!

Are you having **trouble following through** with the things you’ve planned? **SMART goals** can help you with that.

# SMART GOALS

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Personal goals are often very vaguely formulated, such as “I want to exercise more.” This makes it difficult to determine whether the goals have actually been achieved. To make goals easier to define and therefore more tangible, the **SMART rule** (Drucker, 1977) can help:

S  
M  
A  
R  
T

**specific**

"Is the goal clear, specific and precise?"

**measurable**

"Is it possible to clearly recognize my progress, and if so, how?"

**attractive**


"Is the goal attractive and meaningful to me?"

**realistic**

"Can I realistically achieve this goal?"

**time-bound**

"When should the goal be accomplished?"



It is scientifically proven that the likelihood of achieving a goal increases when it is formulated as specifically as possible (Lawlor & Hornyak, 2012).

example:



“I want to exercise more.”

“I will go jogging in the forest next to the campus for 30 minutes after the lecture on Mondays and Thursdays next week.”



MY SMART GOAL

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# MY RESILIENCE PROJECT

## EXERCISE: FORMULATE MY RESILIENCE PROJECT

Choose a **project for a longer period of time**. Strengthening resilience is, after all, a lifelong task. You can also integrate an exercise from this booklet into your daily routine. The following **six steps** will help you with this:

### Problem description

**In a maximum of three bullet points:**

What is the issue? Where do I currently stand?  
What is the problem? Where/when/why does it occur?



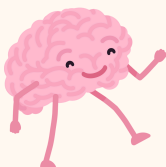
### Goal setting

Where do I want to go?  
What goal do I want to achieve?



### Stages

Into what small steps can I break down the goal?  
What is a small step I could take to get a little closer to my goal?



## Consequences

What potential drawbacks might there be to achieving this goal?  
For me and for my environment?  
How can I deal with them?



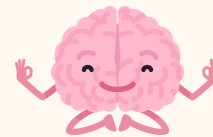
## Obstacles

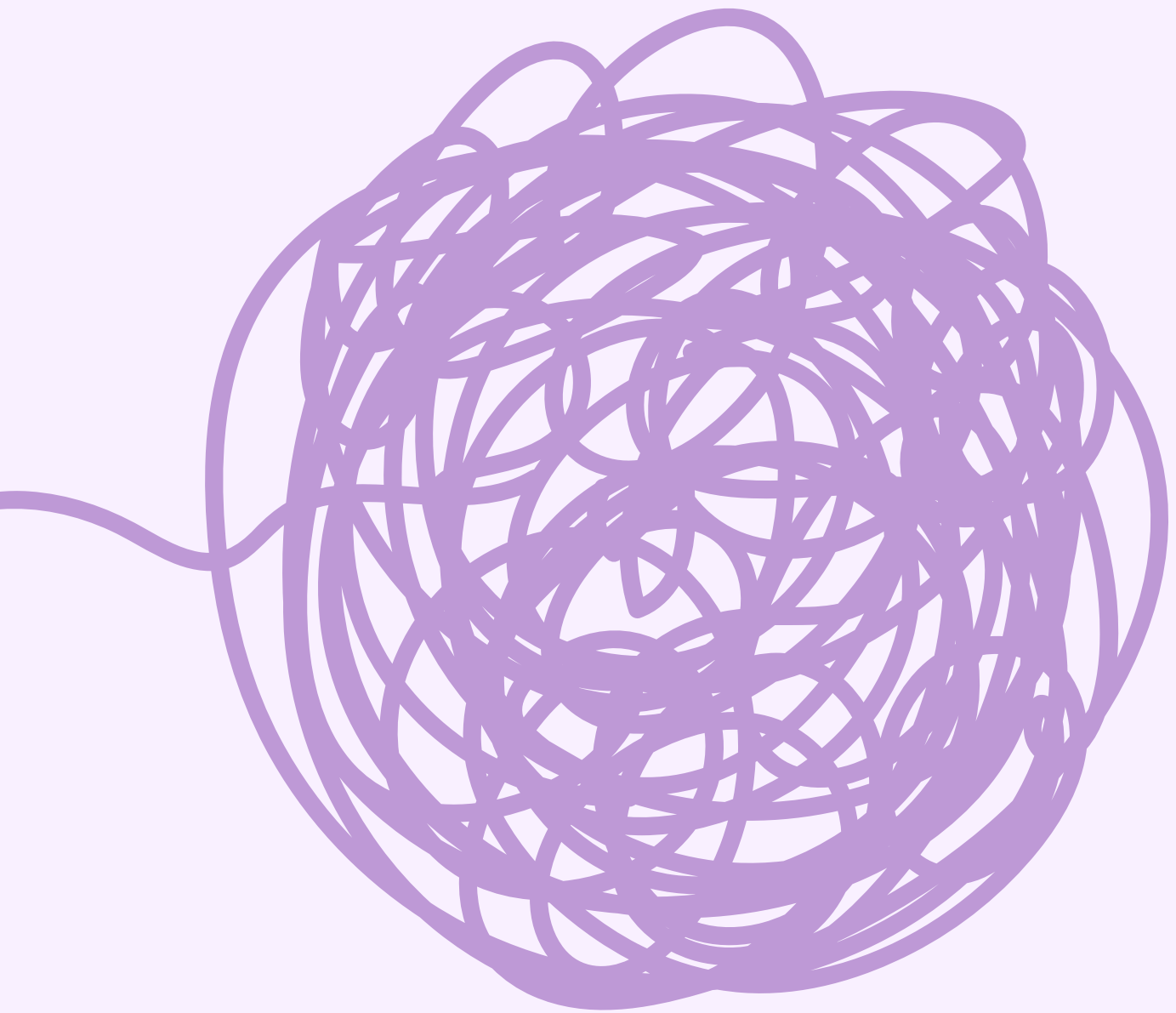
What obstacles are in my way?  
How can I plan in advance to deal with them?



## Reward

How can I reward myself?







**MAKE  
YOURSELF  
RESILIENT!**

# GRATITUDE EXERCISE

Reflect your day!

Studies show that **gratitude exercises increase overall well-being** (Emmons & McCullough, 2003), **strengthen relationships** (Algoe et al., 2013), **reduce stress** and **improve mental health** (Wood et al., 2009, 2010) as well as **promote resilience** (Fredrickson et al., 2008).



What am I grateful for today?

What am I proud of today?



What brought me joy today?



# AFFIRMATIONS POSITIVE

**Affirmations** are **short statements** that can **influence your thinking and behavior**. By practicing them regularly, you can strengthen your **self-image** and **self-awareness**. According to Falk et al. (2015), affirmations activate prefrontal cortex areas associated with **increased self-awareness** and **motivation**. Additionally, as Cohen et al. (2006) suggest, they can also improve your **academic performance**.



“I trust in my potential.”

“I am full of energy and feel strong.”

“I can do this.”

“I can overcome all challenges within my capabilities.”

“I am valuable and lovable.”

“I am motivated to successfully complete my studies.”

“I am confident and believe in my abilities.”

“I achieve what I set my mind to.”

*Stand or sit up straight and speak the **affirmations** aloud or in your mind to **yourself**.*

*Alternatively, you can also stand in front of a mirror or **incorporate them into your routine** while brushing your teeth each day. You can also create your own **positive affirmations**.*

*Make sure to choose a personal theme and formulate a sentence that feels **realistic** for you.*

***What happens to you in the process?***



# 3 THINGS EXERCISE

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What are three things you did last week that went well, and how did you feel about them?

1  
2  
3

What are your three key strengths?

1  
2  
3

What are things you want to achieve in the coming weeks/months?

1  
2  
3

How will you feel once you've accomplished everything?

1  
2  
3

This exercise can help you **focus on the positive** things and, in the long term, improve your mood. It only takes a few minutes and can **boost your well-being** – according to studies, regular gratitude helps you feel more content and less stressed (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

# SERENITY PRAYER

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**"Grant me the serenity to accept  
the things I cannot change,  
the courage to change the things I  
can,  
and the wisdom to know the  
difference."**

***-Reinhold Niebuhr-***



# TIPS FOR YOUR EXAM PERIOD

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WITH THESE TIPS YOU WILL  
NAVIGATE THE EXAM PERIOD WITH RESILIENCE

Listen to your body/notice signs  
of exhaustion



Get enough sleep

Connect with  
others/people close to  
you

Leisure activities, hobbies &  
sports

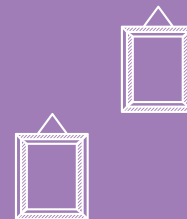


Take mindful breaks and engage  
in distracting activities

Create a study  
plan  
&  
plan buffer time



Set milestone goals and  
reward yourself along the  
way



# GUIDED MINDFULNESS EXERCISE

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Follow and recharge!

## Body Scan

Take your time, **lie down comfortably** on your back and **close your eyes**. Slowly bring your attention from your feet up through your legs, pelvis, back, abdomen, chest, arms, neck and head, pausing briefly in each area. Notice whatever sensations you perceive – whether it's warmth, cold, tension or other feelings. **Finally, become aware of your whole body** once again, gently move your fingers and toes, and **slowly open your eyes**.



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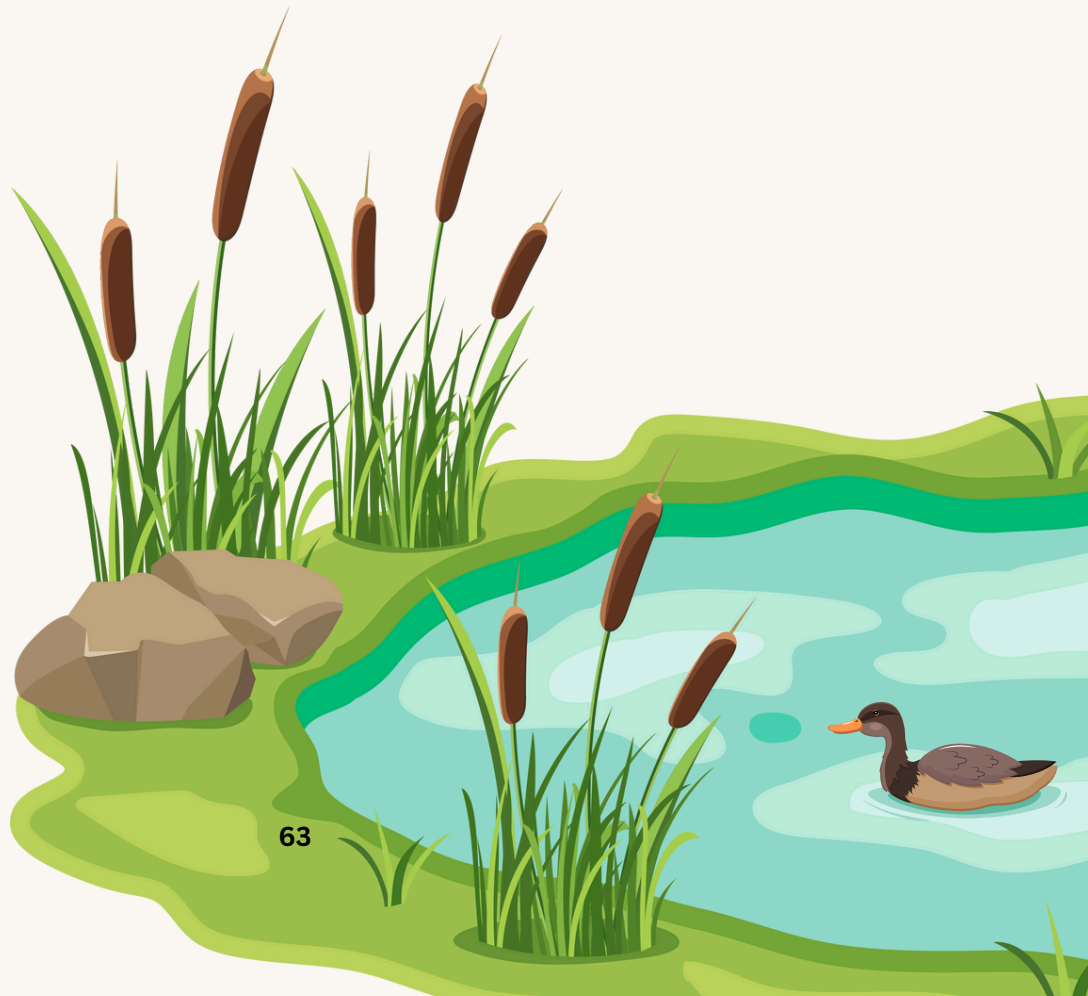
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