



Finding Calm Within: A Stress Management Workbook

Introduction

Welcome to "Finding Calm Within," a practical workbook designed to help you manage and overcome stress in your life. Stress is a common experience that can impact our well-being, relationships, and overall happiness.

This workbook provides you with effective strategies and practical activities to regain control and find inner calm. By actively engaging with the exercises, you'll develop valuable skills to manage stress and improve your quality of life.

This document has been developed by NICRO at the request of our beneficiaries. It is being made available to the general public as part of our crime and violence prevention service. Individuals and organisations may make use of this document for non-profit and educational purposes.



Identifying your stress triggers

- Do you have thoughts that surface in your mind multiple times
- When you have these thoughts are they sometimes followed by headache, shoulder tension, stomach trouble, nausea?
- Do you sometimes or often struggle to fall asleep without TV/Music on
- Do you find yourself waking up a lot and night and not be able to get back to sleep
- Do you find yourself getting easily irritated?
- What upsets you the most when people ask about it or something similar to it?
- What are the thoughts and the feelings you have when you experience one or more of the above? Chances are- those are your triggers

Write Your Observations and Insights Here



Exploring Your Stress Triggers

- List common situations, events, or thoughts that tend to induce stress.
- Reflect on how these triggers affect your physical, emotional, and mental well-being.
- Identify patterns and themes to gain a deeper understanding of your stress triggers.

Instructions:

Take some time to reflect on the situations, events, or thoughts that tend to induce stress in your life. Use the space provided below to list your stress triggers and consider how they affect your physical, emotional, and mental well-being. By identifying and understanding these triggers, you can gain insight into your stress patterns and begin to develop strategies for managing them effectively.

Stress Trigger	Physical Impact	Emotional Impact	Mental Impact

Reflection Questions:

1. Are there any common themes or patterns among your stress triggers?
2. How does each stress trigger affect your body? Are there specific physical symptoms or sensations you experience?
3. How do these stress triggers impact your emotions? What are some of the predominant emotions you experience in these situations?



4. Consider the thoughts or mental patterns that arise when you encounter these stress triggers. Do you notice any recurring negative thoughts or cognitive distortions?
5. Based on your reflections, are there any specific stress triggers you would like to focus on managing? Why are these triggers significant to you?

Mindful Breathing

- Practice deep breathing exercises to promote relaxation.
- Observe the sensations in your body as you breathe deeply.
- Use breath as an anchor to bring your attention to the present moment.

Instructions:

Mindful breathing is a powerful technique for reducing stress and cultivating a sense of calm. It involves bringing your attention to the present moment by focusing on your breath. Take a few minutes each day to practice mindful breathing using the instructions below. Use the space provided to jot down any observations or insights that arise during the practice.

1. Find a quiet and comfortable place to sit or lie down.
2. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths to relax.
3. Begin to pay attention to your breath without trying to control it.
4. Place one hand on your chest and one hand at the top of your stomach (where your diaphragm is) Focus on trying to move only your hand that is on your diaphragm when you are breathing- as when you practice diaphragmatic breathing, it allows more air to enter your lungs.
5. Notice the sensation of your breath entering and leaving your body.
6. Focus your attention on the rise and fall of your abdomen or the sensation of air passing through your nostrils.
7. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the breath without judgment.
8. Continue this practice for 5-10 minutes, gradually increasing the duration as you become more comfortable.

Write Your Observations and Insights Here



Body Scan Meditation

- Conduct a body scan to increase body awareness and release tension.
- Slowly move your attention from head to toe, focusing on each body part.
- Notice any physical sensations or areas of discomfort without judgment.

Instructions:

The body scan meditation is a practice that involves systematically bringing your attention to different parts of your body, noticing sensations, and cultivating body awareness. Find a quiet and comfortable space to practice the body scan meditation using the instructions below. Use the space provided to note any physical sensations, emotions, or insights that arise during the practice.

1. Lie down on your back or sit in a comfortable position with your eyes closed.
2. Begin by bringing your attention to your breath and taking a few deep, relaxing breaths.
3. Slowly scan your body from head to toe, noticing any areas of tension, discomfort, or relaxation.
4. As you focus on each body part, observe any physical sensations without judgment or the need to change them.
5. If you notice tension or discomfort, consciously relax those muscles and release any tension.
6. Spend a few moments on each body part, allowing yourself to fully experience the sensations present.
7. Once you have completed the scan, take a few moments to observe your body as a whole and notice any shifts or changes.

Write Your Observations and Insights Here



Panic Attack Exercise

In the event that you suffer from panic attacks, teach yourself the following coping strategy. Practice this so that when you have a panic attack you know what to do.

- If you have shoes and socks on, take them off. If you are not comfortable taking off your socks, you can keep them on
- Feel the sensation of the surface you are standing on
- Try and focus on that sensation
- Say out loud something you know by heart- it can be a recipe, a song, steps to a work process, steps to your morning routine etc
- Say the steps of what you chose out loud as many times as it takes for your heart to start beating slower
- Once you can feel it start to slow, start focusing on breathing diaphragmatically
- Place one hand on your chest and one hand by the diaphragm, Try moving the diaphragm hand and not the chest hand with your beathing
- Repeat until you feel calm enough to call somebody

Write Your Observations and Insights Here



Developing a Stress-Reducing Routine

- Create a daily routine that incorporates activities to reduce stress.
- Identify self-care practices, such as exercise, hobbies, or relaxation techniques.
- Commit to implementing your routine and track its effectiveness.

Instructions:

Creating a stress-reducing routine involves incorporating activities and practices that promote relaxation and well-being into your daily life. Reflect on the following questions and use the space provided to outline a stress-reducing routine that works for you.

1. What are some activities or practices that help you relax and reduce stress?
2. How much time can you allocate each day for stress reduction activities?
3. What specific actions or behaviors will you include in your routine? (e.g., exercise, meditation, hobbies)
4. How will you prioritize and commit to implementing your stress-reducing routine?
5. What potential obstacles or challenges might you encounter, and how can you overcome them?
6. How will you track and assess the effectiveness of your routine?

Write Your Stress-Reducing Routine Here



Cognitive Restructuring

- Identify negative thought patterns related to stress.
- Challenge and reframe these thoughts using evidence and alternative perspectives.
- Replace negative self-talk with positive and realistic affirmations.

Instructions:

Cognitive restructuring involves identifying and challenging negative thought patterns that contribute to stress and replacing them with more positive and realistic thoughts. Reflect on the following questions and use the space provided to practice cognitive restructuring by identifying and reframing negative thoughts.

1. What are some common negative thoughts or self-talk that you experience during stressful situations?
2. How do these negative thoughts impact your emotions and behaviors?
3. Identify one specific negative thought you would like to reframe.
4. What evidence or alternative perspectives can you find to challenge the negative thought?
5. Write down a positive and realistic affirmation or alternative thought to replace the negative one.
6. How can you practice reinforcing this positive thought pattern in your daily life?

Negative Thoughts

Challenging Evidence or Alternative Perspectives

Positive and Realistic Affirmations



Gratitude Journaling

- Start a gratitude journal to shift your focus towards positivity.
- Reflect on three things you are grateful for each day.
- Explore the emotional and psychological effects of gratitude.

Instructions:

Gratitude journaling involves reflecting on and expressing gratitude for the positive aspects of your life. Use the space provided to write down three things you are grateful for each day. Be specific and elaborate on why you are grateful for each item.

Gratitude Journal Prompts

1. _____

Why am I grateful for this?

2. _____

Why am I grateful for this?

3. _____

Why am I grateful for this?



Social Support Network

- Assess the quality and quantity of your social connections.
- Identify individuals who provide support and understanding during stressful times.
- Strengthen your relationships and seek support when needed.

Instructions:

Building and nurturing a social support network is crucial for managing stress. Reflect on the following questions and use the space provided to assess the quality of your social connections and plan strategies to strengthen your support network.

1. Who are the people in your life that provide support and understanding during stressful times?
2. How often do you connect with these individuals?
3. Are there any relationships that need strengthening or nurturing?
4. What specific actions can you take to enhance your social support network? (e.g., scheduling regular catch-ups, seeking professional support)
5. How can you reciprocate and support others within your network?
6. What challenges or barriers might you encounter, and how can you overcome them?

Assessment of Social Support Network



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Learn and practice progressive muscle relaxation techniques.
- Systematically tense and relax each muscle group in your body.
- Experience a deep sense of relaxation and release tension.

Instructions:

Progressive muscle relaxation is a technique that involves tensing and then releasing different muscle groups to induce relaxation. Use the space provided to practice progressive muscle relaxation by following the steps below.

1. Find a quiet and comfortable place to sit or lie down.
2. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths to relax.
3. Begin with your toes. Squeeze them tightly for a few seconds, then release.
4. Move to your calves. Contract the muscles, hold for a few seconds, and release.
5. Continue moving through each muscle group, progressively tensing and relaxing. (e.g., thighs, buttocks, abdomen, shoulders, arms, hands, etc.)
6. Pay attention to the sensations of tension and relaxation in each muscle group.
7. Once you have completed the entire sequence, take a few moments to notice the overall sense of relaxation in your body.

Observations and Insights



Daily Stress Log Template:

Date: _____

Remember to fill out this daily stress log at the end of each day, taking a few moments to reflect on your stressors, coping strategies, and overall well-being. Use this log as a tool to track your stress levels, identify triggers, and assess the effectiveness of your coping mechanisms. Over time, this log will provide valuable insights into your stress patterns and help guide your stress management efforts.

	STRESSOR			COPING STRATEGY	
	Description	Intensity (1-10)	Triggered By....	Coping Strategy	Effectiveness (1-10)
Stressor 1					
Stressor 2					
Stressor 3					
Stressor 4					

Self-Reflection:

1. How did today's stressors affect your physical, mental, and emotional well-being?
2. Are there any patterns or recurring themes in your stressors?
3. What insights or lessons have you gained from today's experience



Self-Care Routine Checklist

Use this checklist to create a self-care routine that promotes your well-being and allows you to prioritize self-care in your daily life. Customize it to fit your preferences and needs.

Physical Self Care	
Get sufficient sleep (7-9 hours) every night	
Engage in regular exercise or physical activity	
Eat a balanced and nutritious diet	
Stay hydrated by drinking enough water throughout the day	
Practice good personal hygiene habits	
Take breaks and stretch regularly, especially if you have a sedentary lifestyle	
Schedule regular health check-ups and appointments	
Emotional and Mental Self Care	
Engage in activities that bring you joy and relaxation (e.g., hobbies, reading, listening to music)	
Practice mindfulness or meditation to calm your mind and reduce stress	
Express your emotions through journaling or talking with a trusted friend or therapist	
Set healthy boundaries in your relationships and prioritize your emotional wellbeing	
Engage in positive self-talk and practice self-compassion	
Limit exposure to negative news or triggers that impact your mental wellbeing	
Engage in activities that stimulate your creativity and imagination	
Social Self Care	
Nurture relationships with friends, family, and loved ones	
Plan and engage in social activities that bring you joy and connection	
Seek support and reach out to others when you need it	
Practice active listening and meaningful communication with others	
Surround yourself with positive and supportive people	
Engage in acts of kindness and contribute to your community	
Spiritual Self Care	
Engage in activities that align with your values and beliefs	
Spend time in nature and appreciate its beauty	
Practice meditation, prayer, or reflection to connect with your inner self	
Seek inspiration from books, podcasts, or spiritual teachings	
Engage in activities that promote gratitude and a sense of purpose	
Explore your spirituality and engage in rituals or practices that bring you peace	
Pampering and Relaxation	
Take warm baths or showers with soothing products	
Indulge in a spa day or pamper yourself with selfcare treatments	
Set aside time for relaxation activities such as reading, taking walks, or listening to calming music	
Treat yourself to a massage or other therapeutic bodywork	
Engage in hobbies or activities that help you unwind and recharge	
Create a cozy and inviting space at home where you can relax	



Checklist: Assessing Healthy and Unhealthy Habits

For each habit listed below, mark whether it is a healthy or unhealthy habit for you personally. Be honest with yourself and consider the impact of each habit on your overall well-being.

Physical Health:	I Do This	I Don't Do This
- Regular exercise		
- Sufficient sleep (7-9 hours per night)		
- Balanced and nutritious diet		
- Drinking enough water		
- Avoiding excessive alcohol consumption		
- Avoiding smoking or tobacco use		
- Regular medical check-ups		
Mental and Emotional Health:	I Do This	I Don't Do This
- Engaging in stress-reducing activities (e.g., mindfulness, meditation, hobbies)		
- Seeking support from friends, family, or professionals when needed		
- Setting and prioritizing realistic goals		
- Maintaining a positive mindset		
- Practicing self-care and self-compassion		
- Managing time effectively		
- Practicing relaxation techniques		
Social Health:	I Do This	I Don't Do This
- Maintaining supportive and positive relationships		
- Engaging in social activities and connecting with others		
- Communicating effectively and assertively		
- Respecting personal boundaries and the boundaries of others		
- Balancing time spent alone and time spent with others		
- Participating in community or volunteer activities		
Productivity and Time Management:	I Do This	I Don't Do This
- Prioritizing tasks and setting clear goals		
- Avoiding procrastination		
- Managing and minimizing distractions		
- Setting healthy work-life boundaries		
- Taking breaks and practicing self-care during work/study sessions		
- Seeking help or delegating tasks when necessary		
Screen Time and Digital Habits:	I Do This	I Don't Do This
- Limiting excessive screen time		
- Practicing healthy online boundaries		



- Avoiding excessive social media usage or comparing oneself to others		
- Balancing screen time with offline activities and face-to-face interactions		
- Using technology for productive purposes and personal growth		
Personal Hygiene:	I Do This	I Don't Do This
- Maintaining regular personal hygiene practices (e.g., showering, brushing teeth)		
- Washing hands regularly		
- Taking care of hair, nails, and skin		
- Wearing clean and appropriate clothing		
Financial Habits:	I Do This	I Don't Do This
- Budgeting and managing finances effectively		
- Saving money regularly		
- Avoiding excessive and impulsive spending		
- Paying bills on time		
- Planning and setting financial goals		

After assessing each habit, reflect on your checklist and identify areas where you can improve your habits for better overall health and well-being. Use this self-assessment as a starting point to make positive changes in your lifestyle and create healthy habits that support your well-being.



Daily Stress Management Reminders

1. Practice deep breathing: Take a few moments throughout the day to focus on your breath and take slow, deep breaths to promote relaxation.
2. Check-in with your body: Pay attention to any physical signs of stress or tension in your body. Take breaks to stretch, move, or release muscle tension.
3. Challenge negative thoughts: Notice negative or stressful thoughts and actively replace them with positive and realistic ones. Remind yourself of your strengths and achievements.
4. Take mini breaks: Schedule short breaks throughout the day to recharge and engage in activities that bring you joy or relaxation. Step away from work or responsibilities to clear your mind.
5. Practice gratitude: Take a moment to reflect on things you are grateful for. Write them down or express them mentally to shift your focus to positivity.
6. Connect with your support network: Reach out to friends, family, or trusted individuals when you need support or simply to connect and share your experiences. Share your feelings and listen to others.
7. Engage in physical activity: Incorporate regular exercise or movement into your daily routine. Whether it's a walk, yoga, or a workout, physical activity can help reduce stress and boost mood.
8. Prioritize self-care: Carve out time for activities that nourish your well-being, such as taking a bath, reading a book, listening to music, or engaging in hobbies that bring you joy.
9. Practice mindfulness: Throughout the day, bring your attention to the present moment. Engage your senses fully in your current experience and let go of worries about the past or future.
10. Set boundaries: Establish clear boundaries in your personal and professional life. Say no when necessary and prioritize your well-being. Protect your time and energy.
11. Seek humour: Find moments of laughter and humour in your day. Watch a funny video, read a joke, or share a laugh with someone. Laughter can be a great stress reliever.
12. Accept imperfections: Embrace the idea that perfection is not attainable. Allow yourself to make mistakes and learn from them. Be kind to yourself and practice self-compassion.
13. Practice time management: Break tasks into manageable chunks and prioritize them. Use time-blocking techniques and set realistic deadlines to avoid feeling overwhelmed.
14. Stay hydrated and nourished: Drink enough water and fuel your body with nutritious foods. Proper hydration and nutrition support your overall well-being and can help manage stress.
15. Reflect and celebrate: Take a moment at the end of each day to reflect on your accomplishments and moments of joy. Celebrate even the small wins and express gratitude for the day.



List of South African Contact Numbers for Help with Stress and Anxiety

Adcock Ingram Depression & Anxiety Helpline	0800 70 80 90
Akeso Psychiatric Response Unit 24 Hour	0861 435 787
Cape Mental Health Society	(021) 447 9040
Cipla Mental Health Helpline	0800 456 789
Dr Reddy's Mental Health Helpline	0800 21 22 23
Healthcare Workers Care Network Helpline	0800 21 21 21
LifeLine	0861 322 322
South Africa Suicide Crisis Helpline	0800 12 13 14
South African Depression & Anxiety Group	011 234 4837
Suicide Crisis Helpline	0800 567 567



Self-Care Checklist Template

PHYSICAL		M	T	W	T	F	S	S
1								
2								
3								
4								
MENTAL		M	T	W	T	F	S	S
1								
2								
3								
4								
EMOTIONAL		M	T	W	T	F	S	S
1								
2								
3								
4								
SPIRITUAL		M	T	W	T	F	S	S
1								
2								
3								
4								



Conclusion

Congratulations on completing the "Finding Calm Within" stress management workbook! By engaging in the practical activities provided, you have taken significant steps toward managing stress and finding inner calm. Remember that stress is a normal part of life, but with the strategies and techniques you've learned, you can effectively navigate and overcome it. Continue to practice these skills, adapt them to your unique circumstances, and embrace a life filled with resilience, balance, and tranquility.



4 Buitensingel St, Schotsche Kloof
Cape Town, South Africa
8001
www.nicro.org.za

