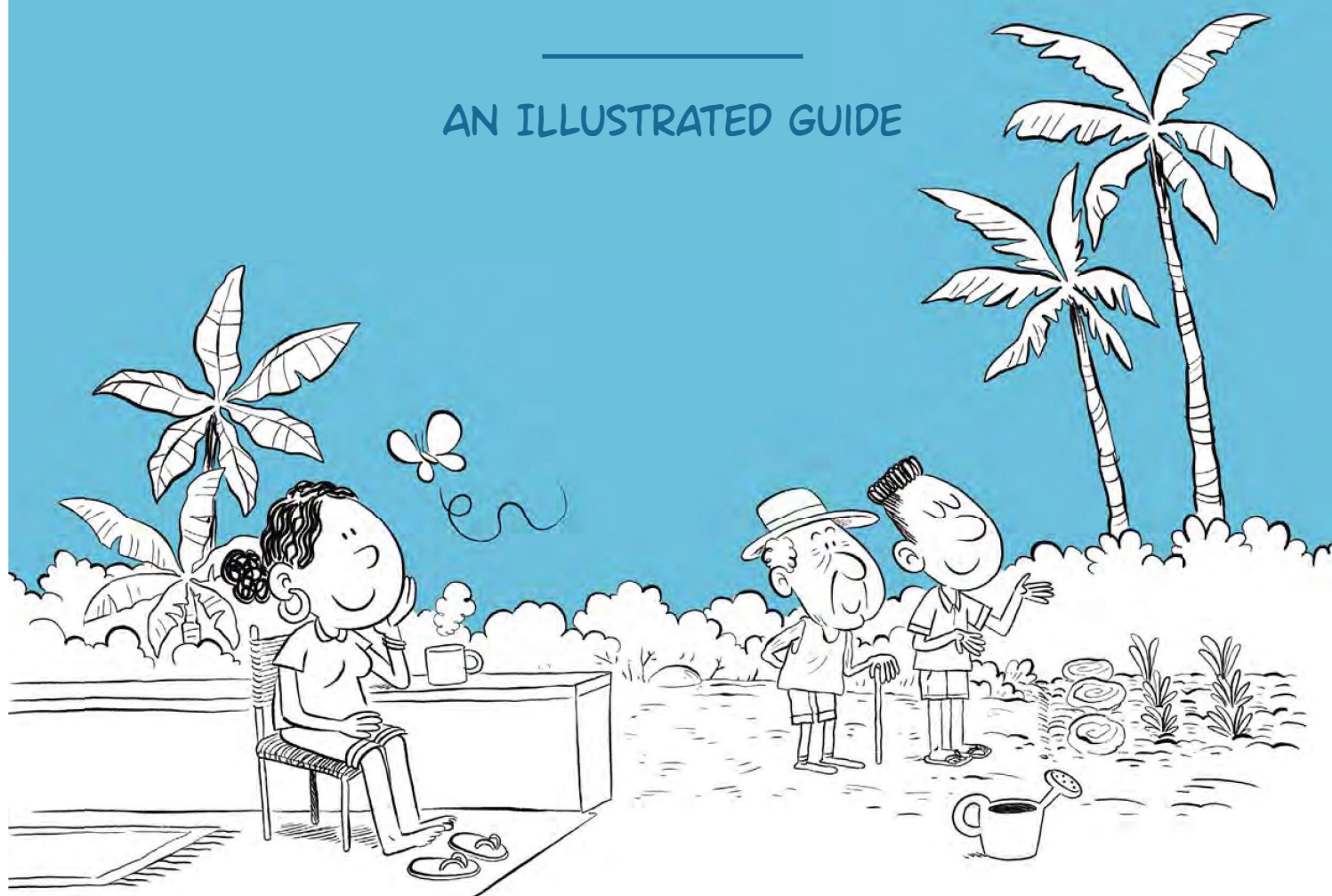


Doing What Matters in Times of **STRESS**

AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE



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Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This book has **five sections**, each containing a new idea and technique to cope with stress. 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 practice 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 practice the techniques. Practicing 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 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.paho.org/en/documents/doing-what-matters-times-stress-illustrated-guide> 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. IT CAN BE DUE TO MAJOR THREATS...



Gender-based violence



Violence in your community



No school



Illness



Displaced from home



Economic hardship



Family violence

OR SMALLER PROBLEMS:

Uncertainty about the future



Argument with your family



The effects of stress

EVERYONE EXPERIENCES STRESS AT TIMES. A LITTLE BIT IS NOT A PROBLEM, BUT VERY HIGH STRESS OFTEN AFFECTS THE BODY.



MANY PEOPLE GET UNPLEASANT FEELINGS.



- Headaches
- Neck and shoulder pain
- Back pain
- Upset stomach
- Not feeling hungry
- Lump in the throat
- Heavy chest
- Tight muscles

OTHER PEOPLE FIND THEIR BODY GETS SICK.



- Skin rashes
- Infections
- Illnesses
- Bowel problems

WHEN THEY ARE STRESSED, MANY PEOPLE ...



have difficulty sleeping



worry



cannot focus



get angry easily



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.



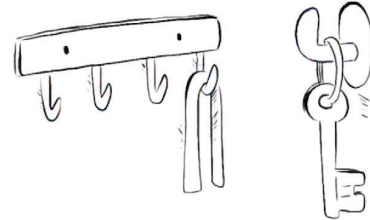
Being hooked?



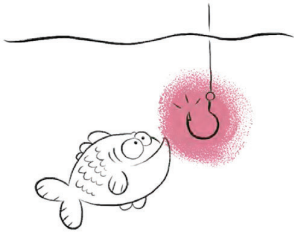
THESE POWERFUL
THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS
ARE A NATURAL PART OF
STRESS. BUT PROBLEMS
CAN OCCUR IF WE GET
"HOOKED" BY THEM.

WHAT DOES
HOOKED
MEAN?

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:

THOUGHTS
AND
FEELINGS



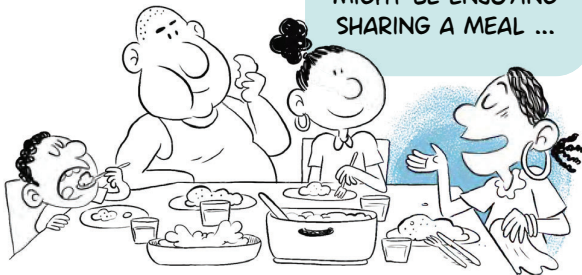
ONE MOMENT, YOU MIGHT BE
PLAYING WITH CHILDREN...



... 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.



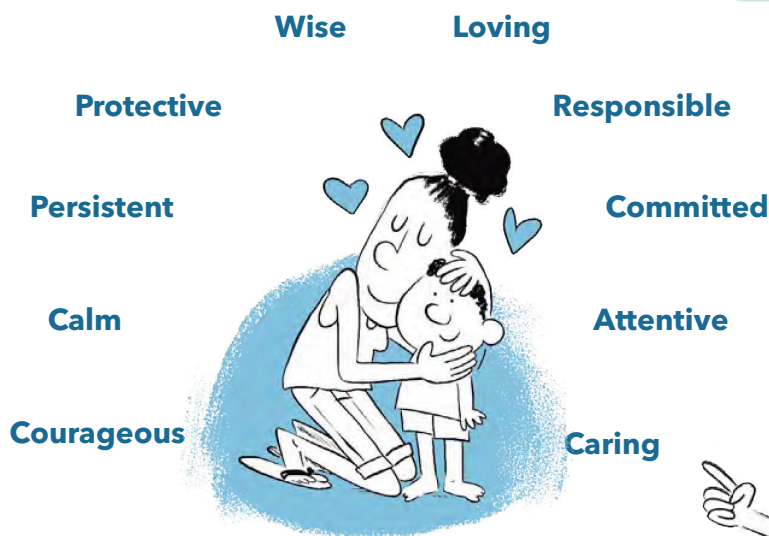
What are values?



THESE DIFFICULT THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS "HOOK" US AND **PULL US AWAY** FROM OUR **VALUES**.

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 "PARENT" DO YOU WANT TO BE?



I WANT TO BE **CARING** FOR MY FAMILY AND I CARE ABOUT MY WELL-BEING.



SO, VALUES DESCRIBE THE SORT OF PERSON YOU WANT TO BE.

HOW YOU WANT TO **CARE** FOR YOURSELF AND OTHERS

AND **CARE** FOR THE WORLD AROUND YOU.

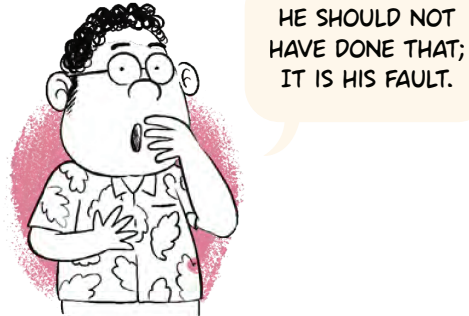
The risks of being hooked

There are many kinds of difficult thoughts and feelings that can hook us.

Thoughts about giving up...



Thoughts that blame others...



Harsh judgments about ourselves...



Memories, especially about difficult events...



Thoughts about the future, especially about what we fear...



Thoughts where we worry about others.



When we get hooked, our **behavior changes**. We often start doing things that make our lives worse. We might...

Get into fights, arguments or disagreements.



Withdraw and stay away from people we love.



Spend a lot of time lying in bed.



WE CALL THESE BEHAVIORS "AWAY MOVES" BECAUSE WHEN WE ACT THIS WAY, WE ARE MOVING AWAY FROM OUR VALUES.

BUT THERE ARE THINGS YOU CAN DO!



Learn how to be engaged and focused

To **engage** in something means to give it your full attention with your body and senses.

WHEN YOU ARE DRINKING SOMETHING, DO YOU GIVE IT YOUR FULL ATTENTION? DO YOU SAVOR 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?



BUT WHEN WE ARE STRESSED, WE FIND IT HARD TO **engage** IN LIFE.

WHEN HOOKED, YOU ARE **disengaged** OR **distracted**.



When you give your full attention to any activity with your mind, we say you are **focused** on it.



BUT WHEN HOOKED, YOU ARE **unfocused**.



AND WHEN WE DO THINGS THAT WAY, WE OFTEN DO THEM POORLY, OR ARE UNABLE TO ENJOY THE ACTIVITY AND FEEL DISSATISFIED.

If you 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.

Exercises: Let's get engaged and focused!



THERE ARE MANY EXERCISES TO PRACTICE ENGAGING IN LIFE OR FOCUSING ON WHAT YOU ARE DOING.

YOU CAN PRACTICE 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 color.



You savor the smell of it.



You sip it SLOWLY.



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



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



Notice the movements of your throat as you swallow...



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



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



And whenever you get hooked ...



I REFOCUS ON THE DRINK!



GO AHEAD AND PRACTICE THIS NOW. GET SOME WATER, TEA OR COFFEE, AND FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS ABOVE.



<https://www.paho.org/en/documents/doing-what-matters-times-stress-illustrated-guide>

Part 1: Grounding - Exercise 1

You can practice engaging or focusing while doing many other activities, for example:

While talking to family or friends, notice what others are saying, their tones of voice and facial expressions. Give them your full attention.



While washing, cooking, or doing chores, you simply give your full attention to the activity.



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.



AND WHENEVER YOU NOTICE YOU GET HOOKED...

THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS



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.



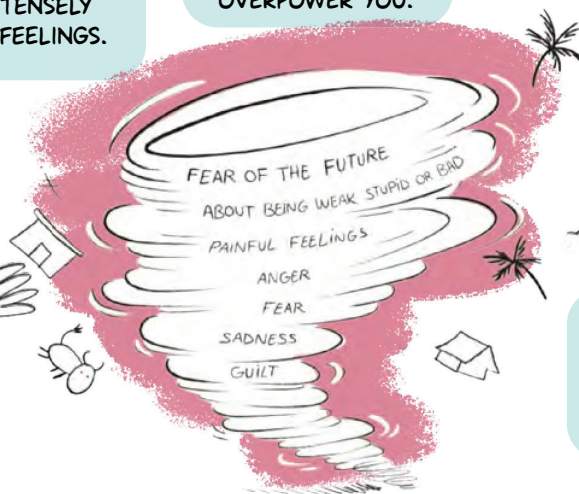
YES, SOMETIMES THEY ARE SO OVERPOWERING THEY TURN INTO EMOTIONAL STORMS.



Overcoming an emotional storm

AN **EMOTIONAL STORM** MEANS THAT YOU EXPERIENCE INTENSELY DIFFICULT THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS.

THEY CAN EASILY OVERPOWER YOU.



WHEN IT APPEARS, WE MUST LEARN HOW TO **GROUND OURSELVES**. LET ME EXPLAIN...

IMAGINE YOU ARE HIGH IN A TREE WHEN A STORM BEGINS.



WOULD YOU WANT TO STAY UP THERE? 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 THERE, 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.

Learning how to ground yourself

We need to "ground ourselves" when our emotional storms appear through **engaging** with the world around us, and **focusing** on what we 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?



Breathe the air. What can you smell?

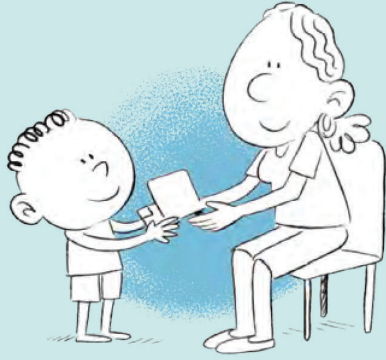


What are three or four things you can hear?



Part 1: Grounding – Exercise 1

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 if you notice there are difficult thoughts and feelings appearing...



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



And you can also use your body and your words to act in line with your values.

GROUNDING DOES NOT MAKE YOUR EMOTIONAL STORMS DISAPPEAR. IT JUST KEEPS YOU SAFE, UNTIL THE STORM PASSES.

SOME STORMS LAST A LONG TIME.

OTHERS PASS QUICKLY.



UNHOOKING AND GROUNDING EXERCISES ARE NOT MADE TO GET RID OF YOUR DIFFICULT THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS, RATHER TO HELP YOU MANAGE STRESS BETTER

The purpose of these exercises is to help you **engage in life. Give your full attention** to others, family and friends.



Move toward 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.



So you can manage stress much better.

BUT I AM IN SO MUCH PAIN.
CAN I GET RID OF MY ANGER,
FEAR AND SADNESS?



NO... BUT WE WILL
COME TO THAT IN
THE NEXT SECTION
OF THE BOOK.



BUT IT SEEMS
SO HARD...



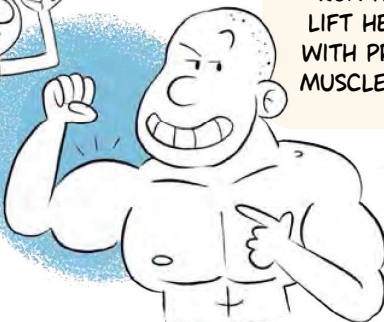
LIKE ANY NEW
SKILL, IT REQUIRES
PRACTICE.



AND THE MORE
WE PRACTICE,
THE BETTER WE
GET!

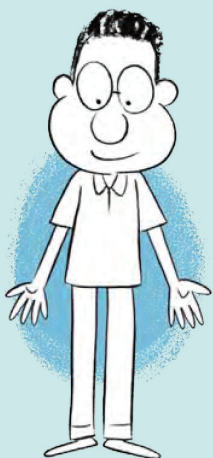


IT IS LIKE BUILDING
YOUR MUSCLES TO
RUN FASTER OR TO
LIFT HEAVIER LOADS.
WITH PRACTICE, YOUR
MUSCLES GET BIGGER!



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.

Developing grounding skills



HERE ARE EXERCISES TO PRACTICE THESE ENGAGING AND GROUNDING SKILLS. WE WILL PRACTICE THEM NOW! DO NOT SIMPLY READ ABOUT IT; ACTUALLY DO IT!

HERE IS A 30-SECOND EXERCISE.

LET'S DO IT! I CAN PRACTICE ANYTIME!



First, **notice** how you are feeling and what you are thinking.

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... see, hear, taste, smell, and touch.

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



DEEPER GROUNDING

5-10 min



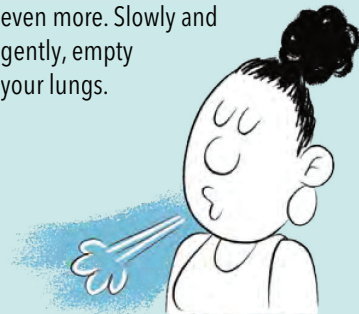
First, **notice** how you are feeling and what you are thinking.



Next, **connect** with your body. Slowly breathe out. Slowly stretch. Slowly push your feet into the ground.



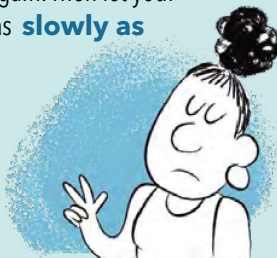
Now slow your breathing even more. Slowly and gently, empty your lungs.



Notice your breathing with **curiosity** – as if it is the first time you have ever encountered breathing.



Now breathe out even more **slowly**. And when your lungs are empty, silently count to 3 before you breathe in again. Then let your lungs refill as **slowly as possible**.



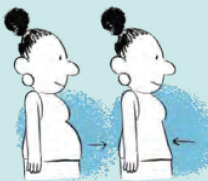
Make sure you breathe slowly and gently. If you breathe too hard, too deeply, or too quickly, it could make you feel panicky, anxious, dizzy, or short of breath. If this happens, slow your breathing.



Notice the gentle movements of your shoulders,



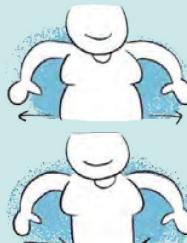
how your belly moves in and out,



the air as it flows in and out of your nostrils,



your chest moving in and out.



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



AS SOON AS I REALIZE THIS HAS HAPPENED,



I REFOCUS ON MY BREATHING. GIVING IT MY FULL ATTENTION.

AND IF OUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS HOOK US 1,000 TIMES... WE UNHOOK OURSELVES 1,000 TIMES!



To finish the exercise, once again ground yourself:

- Slowly stretch.
- Slowly push your feet into the floor.
- **Refocus** and **engage** with the world.
- Pay attention with curiosity to what you can see, hear, taste, smell, touch.
- Notice where you are, who is with you, and what you are doing.



Take a moment

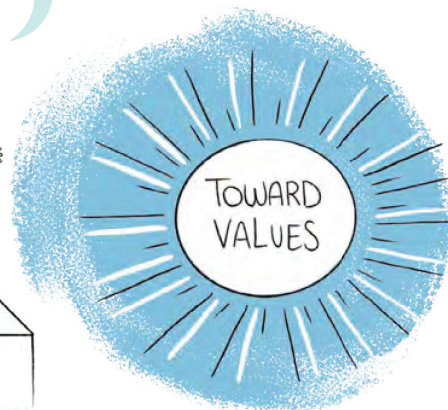
TAKE A MOMENT TO
ACKNOWLEDGE THAT
EACH TIME YOU PRACTICE
THESE EXERCISES...



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
TOWARD YOUR VALUES.



REMEMBER!

Practice 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 practice grounding. Practicing does not need to be inconvenient! You can practice anytime, anywhere, even just for 1–2 minutes.

Ideally, take at least a day or two to practice the skills from this section, before going on to the next section.

Part 2: Unhooking



Unhooking ourselves

WELCOME BACK! EARLIER, WE TALKED ABOUT "TOWARD" AND "AWAY" MOVES.



WHEN HOOKED, WE TEND TO MAKE "AWAY MOVES" – MOVING AWAY FROM OUR VALUES.



WE MIGHT GET INTO FIGHTS, ARGUMENTS, OR DISAGREEMENTS, WITHDRAW AND STAY AWAY FROM PEOPLE WE LOVE, OR SPEND A LOT OF TIME LYING IN BED.



SO, 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 RUN OFF AND LEAVE THEM BEHIND?



Most people try at least some of these strategies to get rid of these thoughts and feelings:

Yelling!



Trying not to think about it



Avoiding people, places or situations



Staying in bed



Giving up



Alcohol or tobacco



Illicit drugs



Starting arguments



Isolating yourself



Blaming or criticizing yourself



What else have you tried?



TAKE A MOMENT TO THINK ABOUT ALL THE WAYS YOU HAVE TRIED TO GET RID OF THESE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS.



MANY OF THESE METHODS MAKE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS GO AWAY.



BUT NOT FOR LONG! THEY COME BACK SOON!



AND MOST OF THESE METHODS PULL US AWAY FROM OUR VALUES!



SO WE NEED A NEW WAY OF HANDLING DIFFICULT THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS!

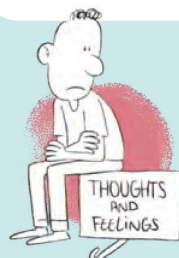


Identifying hooking thoughts and feelings

INSTEAD OF TRYING TO PUSH THEM AWAY,



YOU STOP STRUGGLING WITH THEM.



AND WHENEVER YOU GET HOOKED BY THEM,



YOU UNHOOK YOURSELF AGAIN.



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?



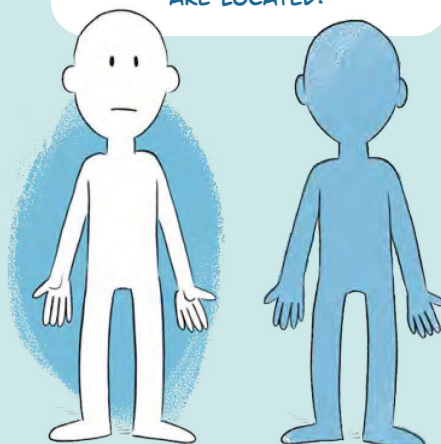
BAD THINGS THAT MIGHT HAPPEN IN THE FUTURE?



WRITE DOWN SOME OF THE THOUGHTS THAT HOOK YOU.



ARE YOU BEING HOOKED BY FEELINGS IN YOUR BODY? MARK WHERE THESE FEELINGS ARE LOCATED:



Noticing and naming



THE FIRST TWO STEPS IN UNHOOKING ARE:

FIRST, YOU **BECOME AWARE** THAT A THOUGHT OR FEELING HAS HOOKED YOU,

SECOND, YOU **NAME IT**,

YOU SILENTLY SAY TO YOURSELF SOMETHING LIKE:

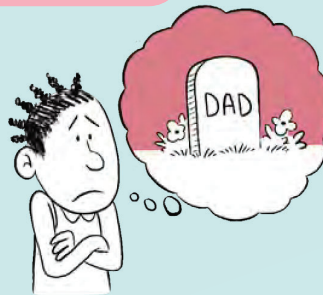
HERE IS TIGHTNESS IN MY CHEST.



HERE IS ANGER.



HERE IS A PAINFUL MEMORY.



HERE IS A DIFFICULT THOUGHT ABOUT MY FAMILY.

HERE ARE FEARS ABOUT THE FUTURE.

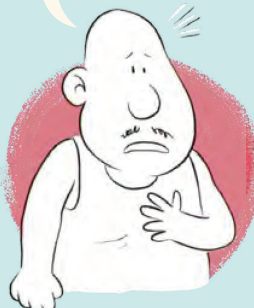


SO, NAMING BEGINS BY SILENTLY SAYING, "HERE IS A **THOUGHT**" OR "HERE IS A **FEELING**."

HOWEVER, IF WE THEN ADD THE PHRASE, "I NOTICE," WE USUALLY FIND IT UNHOOKS US A BIT MORE.

TRY THIS NOW AND SEE WHAT HAPPENS.

I NOTICE HERE IS A TIGHTNESS IN MY CHEST.



I NOTICE HERE IS ANGER.



I NOTICE HERE IS A PAINFUL MEMORY.



I NOTICE HERE IS A DIFFICULT THOUGHT ABOUT MY FAMILY.



I NOTICE HERE ARE FEARS ABOUT THE FUTURE.



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

How does noticing and naming help us?

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 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.



THE FIRST STEP IN UNHOOKING YOURSELF IS TO BECOME AWARE THAT YOU HAVE BEEN HOOKED.



THE SECOND STEP IS TO NAME WHAT HOOKED YOU. YOU SILENTLY SAY TO YOURSELF...



HERE IS A DIFFICULT THOUGHT.



THE NEXT STEP IS TO REFOCUS ON WHAT YOU ARE DOING – WHETHER YOU ARE COOKING, OR EATING, OR PLAYING, 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.

Refocusing

REMEMBER IT IS NATURAL TO HAVE DIFFICULT THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS APPEAR WHEN WE ARE STRESSED. THIS HAPPENS TO EVERYONE!

WE CAN FOLLOW THE SAME THREE STEPS EVERY TIME WE GET HOOKED AND STOP ENGAGING IN LIFE:



1. Notice your difficult thoughts and feelings.
2. Name the thoughts and feelings (silently).
3. Refocus on what you are doing.



I AM NOTICING FEELINGS OF ANGER.

AND EVEN THOUGH I AM HAVING THOSE, I CHOOSE TO ACT ON MY VALUE OF CARING BY REFOCUSING AND ENGAGING WITH MY FAMILY.

AND AFTER WE HAVE NOTICED AND NAMED, WE CAN **REFOCUS** ON THE WORLD AROUND US. WE ENGAGE IN LIFE BY NOTICING WHAT WE CAN...SEE, SMELL, TASTE, TOUCH, HEAR.



Part 2: Unhooking



SO, NOW YOU HAVE YOUR FIRST TWO TOOLS FOR YOUR TOOLKIT.

THE MORE YOU PRACTICE THIS, THE BETTER YOU WILL GET

SEE IF YOU CAN PRACTICE THIS OVER AND OVER AGAIN, ALL DAY LONG AS YOU'RE GOING ABOUT YOUR DAILY ACTIVITIES.

SET TIMES ASIDE FOR THIS, FOR EXAMPLE, IN BED, OR BEFORE OR AFTER A MEAL.



<https://www.paho.org/en/documents/doing-what-matters-times-stress-illustrated-guide>

CERTAIN THINGS CAN GET IN THE WAY OF PRACTICING WITH THESE TOOLS. MAYBE YOU FEEL...

TOO TIRED

TOO SAD

OR ANGRY

OR SCARED

OR MAYBE YOU JUST CAN'T BE BOTHERED.

SO, AS SOON AS YOU REALIZE YOU HAVE BEEN HOOKED BY THESE FEELINGS...

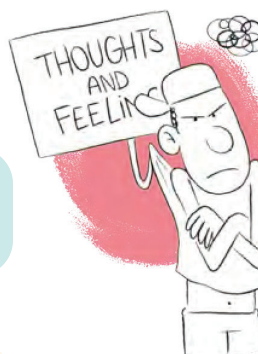
NOTICE

NAME

AND REFOCUS!



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!

Every little bit of practice you do will make a difference. Before continuing with the next part, please take a day or two to practice what we've covered in this chapter. This is like learning a new language. It takes a lot of practice!

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.

When you are lying awake in bed at night, and cannot sleep, then practice 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.

Part 3: Acting on your values



Acting on your values



WELCOME BACK. 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.

VALUES ARE DIFFERENT FROM GOALS.

VALUES $\neq$ GOALS

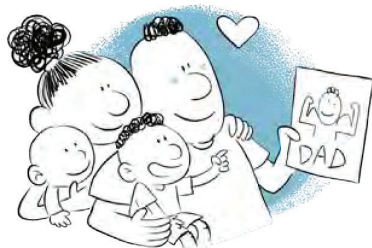
GOALS DESCRIBE WHAT YOU ARE TRYING TO GET. VALUES DESCRIBE THE SORT OF PERSON YOU WANT TO BE.

SUPPOSE YOUR GOAL IS TO GET A JOB SO YOU CAN SUPPORT THE PEOPLE YOU CARE ABOUT.

IT MIGHT BE IMPOSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE YOUR GOAL.

BUT SUPPOSE YOUR VALUES ARE TO BE KIND, CARING, LOVING, AND SUPPORTIVE.

JOB OFFERS



YOU CAN STILL LIVE YOUR VALUES OF BEING KIND, CARING, LOVING, AND SUPPORTIVE TOWARD YOUR FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND 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 BY YOUR VALUES, AND FIND LITTLE WAYS TO ACT ON THEM WITH THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU.



MANY OF YOUR GOALS MIGHT BE IMPOSSIBLE RIGHT NOW. BUT YOU CAN ALWAYS FIND WAYS TO ACT ON YOUR **VALUES**.

Why does acting on your values matter?



THE WAY YOU INFLUENCE THE WORLD AROUND YOU IS THROUGH YOUR **ACTIONS**.

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**.

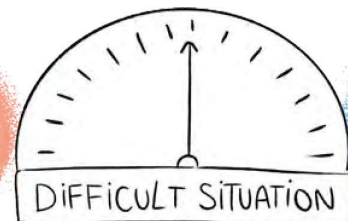


FIGHTING



COLLABORATION

AWAY FROM VALUES



TOWARD VALUES

SO, WE NEED TO KEEP ASKING OURSELVES THIS QUESTION: ARE MY ACTIONS MOVING ME TOWARD OR AWAY FROM MY VALUES?

Choosing 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:



SELECT THREE OR FOUR OF THOSE VALUES THAT SEEM MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU. WRITE THEM DOWN ON A PAPER TO REMEMBER.

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
To be honorable
To be respectful
To be trustworthy
To be fair/just
To be...
To be...

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?

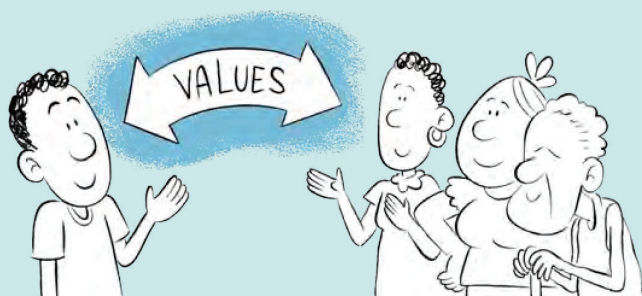


WHICH OF THOSE VALUES WOULD YOU LIKE TO MODEL FOR OTHERS AROUND YOU?

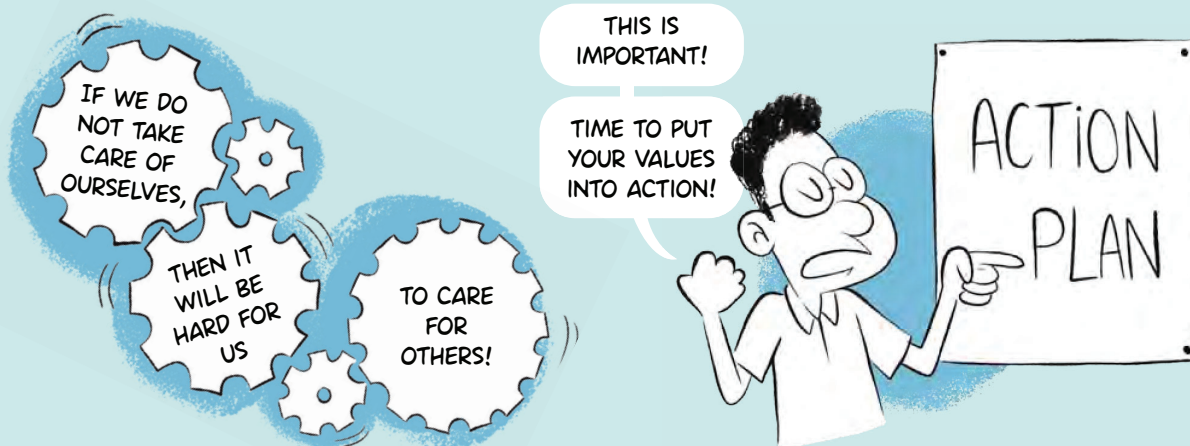
NOW THINK OF THE PEOPLE AROUND YOU. WHAT VALUES DO YOU WANT TO LIVE BY, IN THE WAY YOU TREAT THOSE PEOPLE?

Values go both ways: toward yourself and toward others.

So, if your values are caring and kindness, then you aim to live those values toward both yourself and others.



Putting 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?



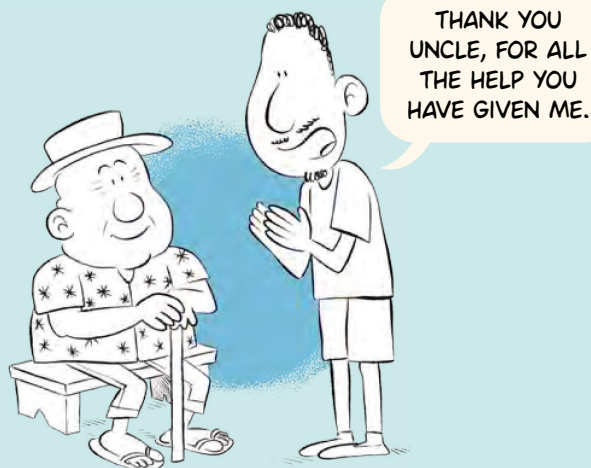
FOR EXAMPLE, SUPPOSE YOU CHOOSE YOUR CHILD. AND THE VALUES YOU WANT TO ACT ON ARE: TO BE KIND, TO BE RESPONSIBLE.

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: TO BE GRATEFUL AND TO BE FRIENDLY.

THEN A SMALL STEP MIGHT BE TO GREET THAT PERSON WARMLY AND EXPRESS YOUR GRATITUDE. REMEMBER, EVEN THE TINIEST ACTIONS MATTER.



Part 3: Acting on your values - Exercise 7

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.

SO, CREATE YOUR ACTION PLAN NOW. WHAT WILL YOU DO IN THE NEXT WEEK TO ACT ON YOUR VALUES?

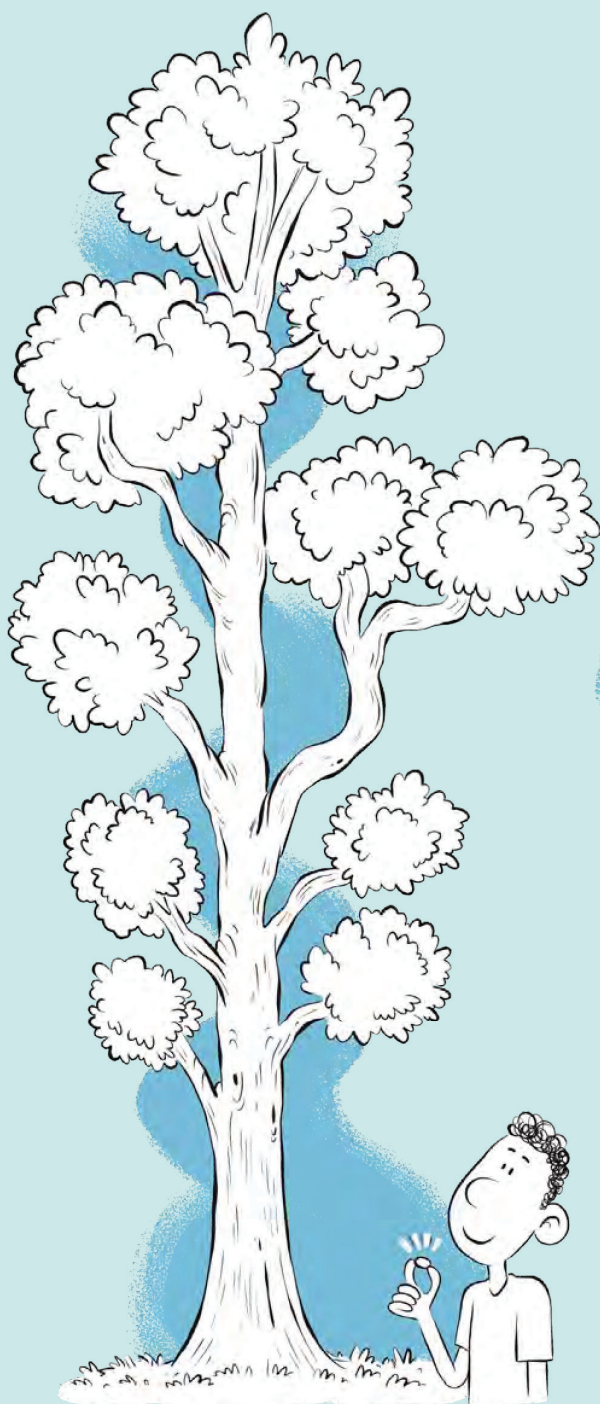
THINK IN TERMS OF ACTIONS. WHAT WILL YOU SAY WITH YOUR MOUTH? WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH YOUR HANDS AND ARMS AND LEGS AND FEET?

PICK SOMETHING THAT SEEMS REALISTIC TO YOU. DO YOU BELIEVE YOU CAN DO THIS?

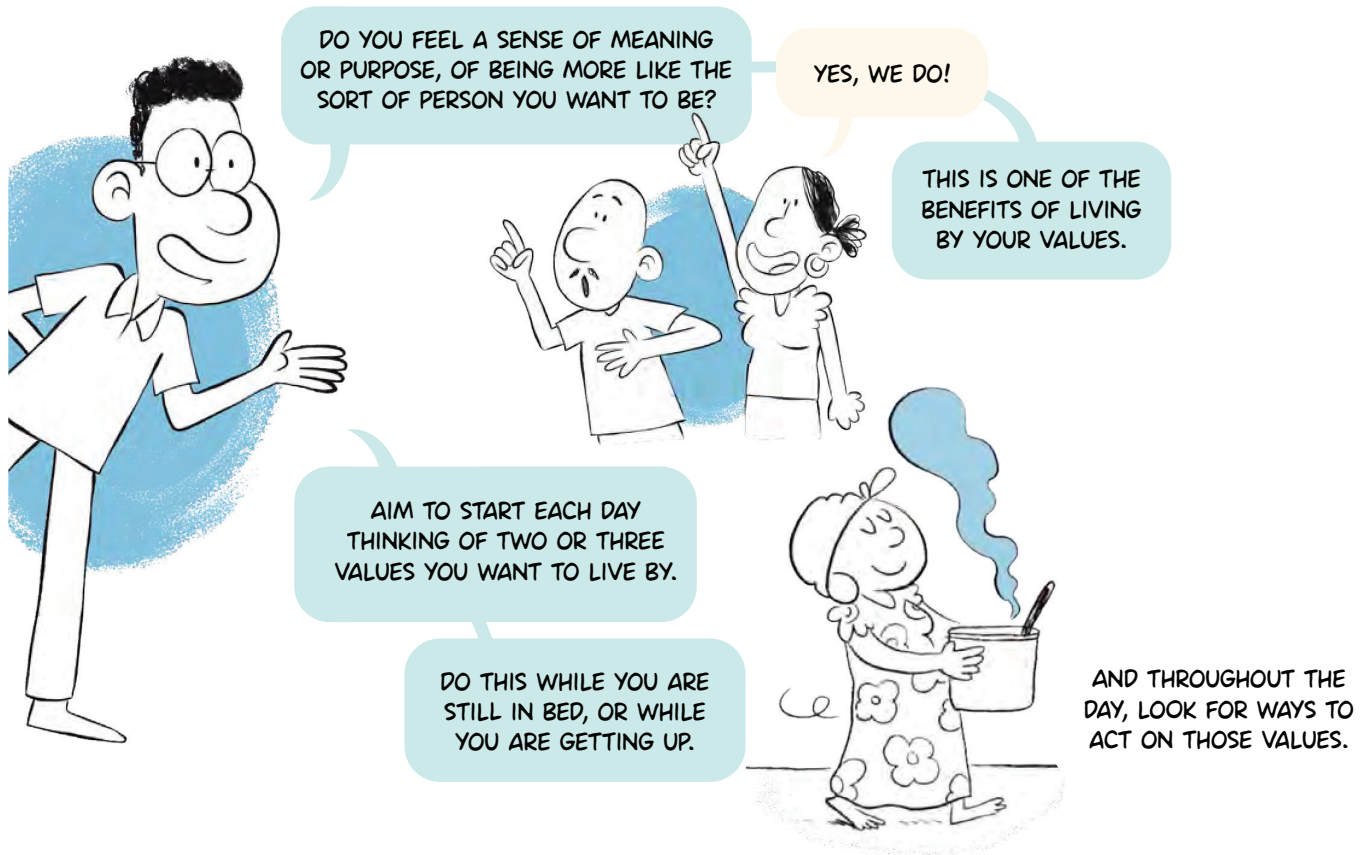


IF YOUR PLAN SEEMS TOO DIFFICULT – IF YOU DO NOT BELIEVE YOU CAN DO IT – PICK SOMETHING SMALLER AND EASIER.

WILL THESE ACTIONS TAKE YOU TOWARD OR AWAY FROM YOUR VALUES?



Please make this action plan now, before reading further. It is important!



Often, as soon as we start thinking about taking action, difficult thoughts and feelings may appear. They can easily hook us and stop us from following our action plan. If this happens, you know what to do! **Notice and name** them and **engage** with the world around you. You can go back to previous chapters for a refresher if needed!



How to deal with difficult situations



SO, NOW YOU KNOW THREE POWERFUL TOOLS: UNHOOKING, GROUNDING, AND ACTING ON YOUR VALUES.

BUT WE ALSO HAVE 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...

BUT I DO NOT LIKE TO GIVE UP AND MOVE AWAY FROM MY VALUES. THEY ARE IMPORTANT TO ME...



SO THEN, OPTION 2 IS WHAT IS LEFT.

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...

Many difficult thoughts and feelings appear when you face difficult situations – especially if you cannot improve them!
So, we unhook and ground ourselves.

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.

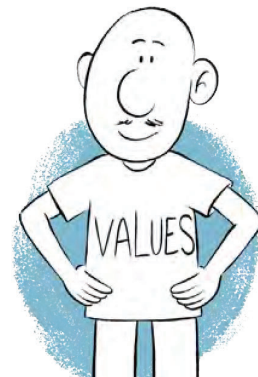


AND NOW, IT IS TIME FOR SOME GOOD NEWS

THERE IS SOMETHING YOU CAN DO THAT WILL IMPROVE ANY DIFFICULT SITUATION, AT LEAST A LITTLE BIT



THIS IS WHAT WE WILL EXPLORE IN THE NEXT SECTION!



Part 4: Being kind



Building a caring environment

NO MATTER HOW BAD
YOUR SITUATION...



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.



I CAN SEE THIS
IS HARD FOR YOU.
LET ME HELP.

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.



I AM HERE
FOR YOU.

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.



Being kind to ourselves



AND WE SHOULD BE KIND TO OURSELVES, TOO.

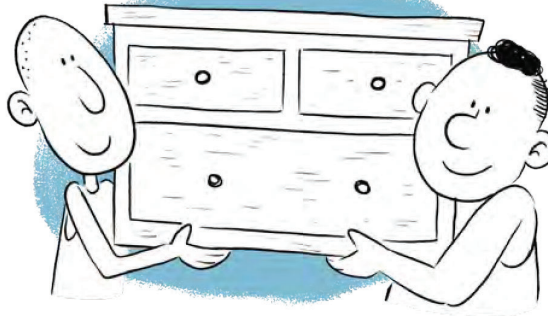
SO, UNHOOK FROM THOUGHTS LIKE...



MY NEEDS DO NOT MATTER.

I DO NOT DESERVE KINDNESS.

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.



SO SPEAK TO YOURSELF KINDLY.

THIS IS HARD. THIS HURTS. BUT I CAN STILL BE CARING TO MYSELF AND OTHERS.

YES! THAT IS CORRECT! THERE IS ONE MORE REALLY USEFUL SKILL TO LEARN TO HELP WITH STRESS.



Before continuing with the final section, please remember to take at least a day or two to practice what we've covered in this section.

Part 5: Making room



As large as the sky...

ON PAGE 4 WE LOOKED AT THE COMMON PROBLEMS THAT HAPPEN WHEN WE STRUGGLE WITH OUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS: TRYING TO PUSH THEM AWAY, AVOIDING THEM, OR GETTING RID OF THEM.



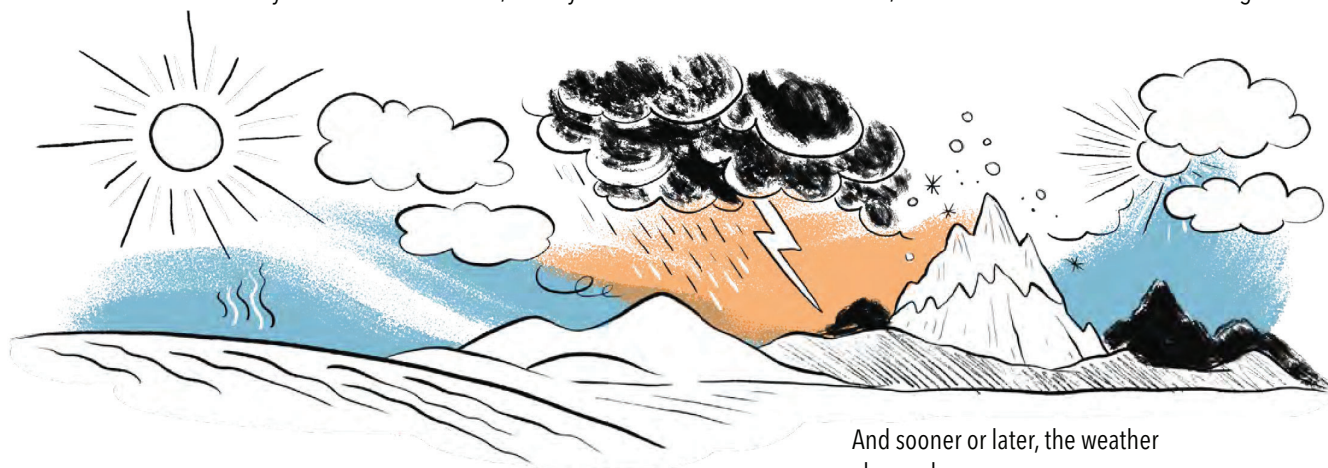
UNHOOKING IS ONE WAY TO STOP STRUGGLING WITH OUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS.

THERE IS ANOTHER WAY TO DO THIS, CALLED **MAKING ROOM**.

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

No matter how severe the weather, the sky has room for it!

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



And sooner or later, the weather always changes.

OUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS ARE LIKE THE WEATHER.

YES! ALWAYS CHANGING.



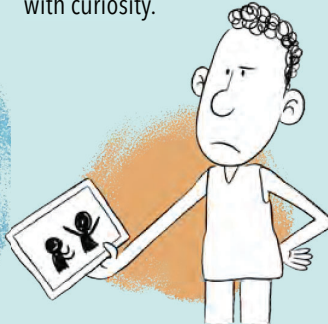
And we can learn to be like the sky, and make room for the "bad weather" of our difficult thoughts and feelings without being hurt by it.

Making room

FIRST, SILENTLY,
FOCUS YOUR
ATTENTION ON A
DIFFICULT THOUGHT
OR FEELING.



NOTICE and NAME
it, then observe it
with curiosity.



And imagine these thoughts and feelings
are like the weather...



And you are like the sky, **making** room for
the weather.

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...

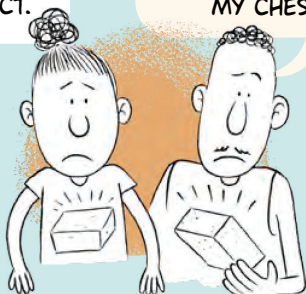


Part 5: Making room - Exercise 8

IT OFTEN HELPS TO
IMAGINE A **PAINFUL
FEELING** AS AN OBJECT.



LIKE A HEAVY, COLD,
BROWN BRICK ON
MY CHEST.



IMAGINE IT HAS A SIZE AND
A SHAPE AND A COLOR AND
A TEMPERATURE,



AND IMAGINE BREATHING INTO
AND AROUND THIS OBJECT -
MAKING ROOM FOR IT.



AND IT OFTEN HELPS TO
IMAGINE A **DIFFICULT
THOUGHT** AS WORDS OR
PICTURES ON THE PAGES
OF A BOOK.



<https://www.paho.org/en/documents/doing-what-matters-times-stress-illustrated-guide>

PLEASE TRY THIS NOW:

Notice your difficult thought...



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



...and imagine it gently resting
on your lap,



... and **engage** with the world
around you.

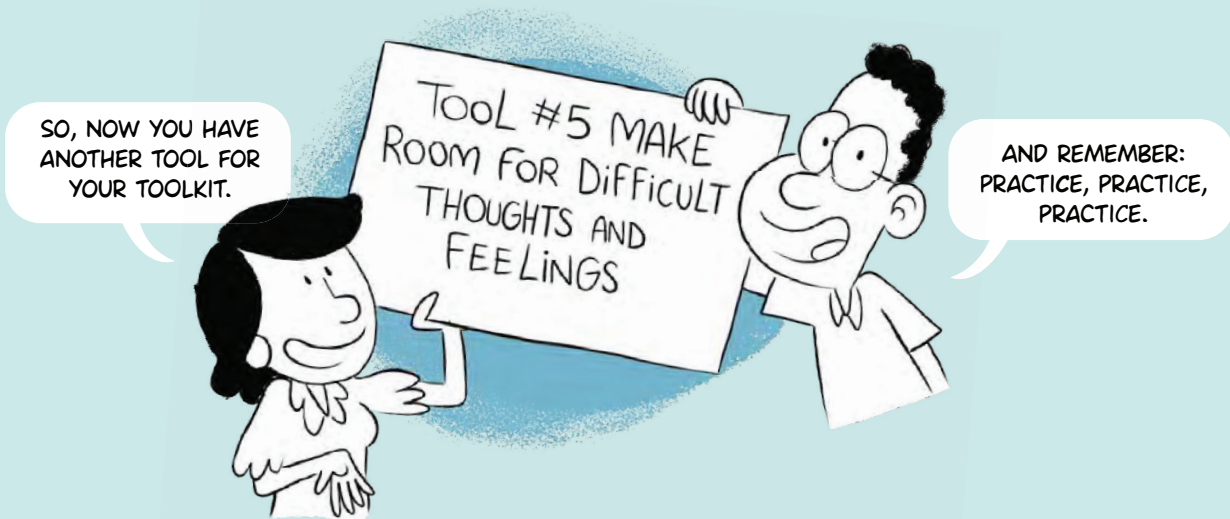


You can also imagine tucking the book
under your arm, and taking it with you.



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

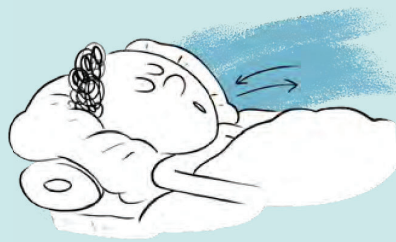




Especially if you are in bed and can't sleep; you can combine **making room** with your breathing exercises:

You breathe into the difficult thoughts and feelings...

...and let the breath flow into and around them.



If you feel pain in your body, notice it with curiosity:



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.



<https://www.paho.org/en/documents/doing-what-matters-times-stress-illustrated-guide>



AND WHENEVER YOU GET HOOKED AND PULLED OUT OF THE EXERCISE... NOTICE AND NAME... AND REFOCUS ON BREATHING AND MAKING ROOM.

Being kind to yourself and making room for your pain

This is a good exercise to practice 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.

AND, OF COURSE,
EVERY TIME YOU
DO ANYTHING FROM
THIS BOOK...



IT IS AN ACT OF KINDNESS
TO OURSELVES AND TO
OTHERS!



TRY TO PRACTICE AND CONSIDER
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.



The Pan American Health Organization has developed this stress management guide to help people cope with adversity. The publication is an adaptation for the Caribbean of *Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide*, a World Health Organization publication to support implementation of its recommendations for stress management.

This guide is for all who experience stress, ranging from parents and other caregivers to health professionals working in difficult situations. Informed by available evidence and extensive field testing, the guide provides information and practical skills to help cope with adversity. While the causes of adversity must be addressed, there is also a need to protect and support people's mental health.

This publication has five sections, each containing a new idea and technique to cope with stress. These are easy to learn and can be used for just a few minutes a day to help reduce stress. Readers can go through one section every few days and take time to practice the exercises and use the learning in the days in between.

Another option is for them to read the book through once, applying whatever they can, and then read it again, taking more time to appreciate the ideas and practice the techniques. Practicing and applying the ideas to daily life is key for reducing stress. The guide can be read at home, during break or rest periods at work, before going to sleep, or at any other time when people might have a few moments to concentrate on taking care of themselves.

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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

This is an adaptation of an original work by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

Views and opinions expressed in the adaptation are the sole responsibility of the author(s) of the adaptation and are not endorsed by PAHO

WASHINGTON, D.C., 2021

PAHO



Pan American
Health
Organization



World Health
Organization
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE Americas

Adapted version of the original title in English
Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide
© World Health Organization, 2020
ISBN 978-92-4-000391-0 (electronic version)

Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide. Adapted Version for the Caribbean
© Pan American Health Organization, 2021

ISBN: 978-92-75-12392-8 (print)

ISBN: 978-92-75-12393-5 (pdf)

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Suggested citation. *Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide. Adapted Version for the Caribbean.* Washington, D.C.: Pan American Health Organization; 2021. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO. <https://doi.org/10.37774/9789275123935>.

Cataloguing-in-Publication (CIP) data. CIP data are available at <http://iris.paho.org>.

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PREFACE

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) has developed this stress management guide to help you cope with adversity. The guide is an adaptation of the World Health Organization (WHO) publication *Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide*, which supports implementation of WHO's recommendations for stress management.

Anyone living anywhere can experience high levels of stress. 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 caregivers to health professionals working in difficult situations. 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 protect and support people's mental health.

We hope that readers will find this guide useful, and that it will help them in their efforts to cope with stress.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This publication would not have been possible without the sustained commitment of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), and in particular of Ms. Kemberley Gittens and Mr. Lothar Mikulla, who provided revision support and facilitated feedback from CDB experts and Caribbean youth networks.

Thanks are due to Ms. Laure Garancher, project manager at The Ink Link, who prepared the outline of the adapted guide and coordinated the work of the illustrator, Sess, and the graphic designer, Mr. Guillaume Biasse.

Thanks also go to Ms. Lisa Bayley, Mr. Ken Carlswell, Dr. Renato De Souza, Dr. Claudina Ellington Cayetano, Mr. Brandon Grey, Dr. Elisa Prieto Lara, Mr. James Underhill, and Dr. Mark Van Ommeren, who assisted in revising and improving the document through the various drafts.

As a result of the work and dedication of these and several other persons not mentioned here, this adapted version of the WHO guide *Doing What Matters in Times of Stress: An Illustrated Guide* will represent an important tool for stress management in the Caribbean.

