Living with Purpose

Australian Institute of
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YOUR FIRST CHOICE FOR A CAREER IN COUNSELLING

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AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE *of* PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLORS

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Introduction

In a nutshell, the goal of this guide is to help you figure out what your purpose is and how you can get there. This is a big ask, so we are breaking it down into simple, practical steps. We start with the basis, the absolutely essential element: ***you***. Who are you? What are your values? What do you want your life to mean? What do you want to contribute? How can you develop a sense of purpose? How can you live this purpose? What will you do when things get tough? We will guide you through activities to help you find answers to these questions.

After developing some ideas about your purpose, and what a meaningful and valued life is for you, we will get practical. We will look at how hopes can be turned into tangible goals, and how small steps can help us achieve big changes. We know that every meaningful endeavour is challenging at times, so we will consider things that can interfere with our progress or even derail us; you will develop knowledge and skills to prepare you for facing these difficulties. We will look at how the way that we think and act can help or hinder us in this process; some of the common mistakes we make when we are trying to live meaningful, happy and satisfying lives; and the science of what actually increases wellbeing.

Finding your purpose can seem like a big ask. It might even seem too big and complicated a question to be able to answer. But, as you will see throughout this guide, the way to deal with big things is to break them down into small, manageable chunks. (You might remember the cliché about eating an elephant: one bite at a time). We will return to this strategy over and over again as we talk about identity, purpose, values, goals, and dealing with obstacles.

It might also be helpful to take some of the pressure off by remembering that identity, purpose and goals are not set for life. You are not required to answer the question of who you are and what a meaningful life is once and for all. We are interested in helping you figure out what your purpose is now and how you can move towards that purpose. As you learn and grow, and as your circumstances change, it is only natural that some of the things you value and want from life will change too. In fact, you might find that some of your values and goals change as you reflect on them and complete the activities that follow. 'Living with purpose' seems like a big thing, but it does not have to be overwhelming.

So our first step might be to relax a bit. Take a deep breath, let out a big sigh, or give your body a good shake. Now we can move on to a simple second step – reading a bit about identity – and by the time you are done with that you will already be on the journey. After that, it is largely a matter of putting one foot in front of the other. You might be surprised by what you discover and how far you get by taking small, simple steps.

Helpful Hint:
Have pens and paper handy. A dedicated notebook might be particularly helpful). We will be doing a range of activities, and you will need to write answers to questions and record action plans. You might also like to take notes, write your reflections, and draw mind-maps. We encourage you to get as creative as you like – use colour, pictures, and collage in activities that grab you; the more visually interesting your activities are, the better.

Identity and Purpose - Finding Answers to Big Questions

Who are you?

When 'identity' gets mentioned, a whole range of things may be implicated. Identity is a complex issue (there are plenty of philosophical and psychological investigations into it). For our purposes, we are focussing on our ideas about ourselves - the aspect of identity that is sometimes referred to as personal identity, self-concept, or self-identity.

Take a moment to think about what makes you who you are, and what makes the people around you who they are. There is probably a lot to think about!

Are all of the aspects of identity in this diagram important to you? There may be some that are critical, while others may matter less or not apply at all. Some may have been central at different times in your life, while others may matter to you in a lasting way.

Making things a little more complicated, we often present ourselves differently or even feel ourselves to be different across contexts: we show one 'side' of ourselves at home, and other sides at work, with friends, with family, on social media, when we are in public, when we know we are being observed, and so on. Furthermore, identity does not stay the same over time. The things that matter to us when we think about our roles, strengths, beliefs, likes and dislikes change with the passing of time. We do not expect people to be the same over long periods. We expect children to be less knowledgeable, responsible and competent than adults; we talk about how much people have grown or changed over a certain period and after particular events or experiences; and we actively work to develop new strengths or change our habits of thought and action.

Some people take the idea that identity is changeable and look at how we might be able to make changes purposefully – to get an idea of a preferred identity, and change the ways that we think about ourselves and how we act in order to move towards that way of being. So as we consider identity, keep in mind that this is not set in stone; aspects change with time and circumstances, and your identity may even be changed by the way you choose to think and behave.

So, let's get to work.

Activity 1.1: Identity Chart

1	Take a blank piece of paper or a new page in your notebook.
2	Draw a circle in the middle of the page and write your name in it.
3	Around your name, write things that come to mind when you think about who you are. If you like, you could 'mind map' it, linking aspects of your identity around common areas (qualities, roles, interests, and so on).
4	Identify aspects that are particularly important to you at the moment. Why do these things matter?
5	Identify areas that have been important to you across time. Why do they matter?
6	Highlight any areas that have been neglected but which you would like to develop. You might like to use the goal-setting and other activities that come later in this guide to create a plan for developing these areas.

If you have trouble pinning down aspects of your identity, consider the following questions and what your answers could say about who you are:

- What do you enjoy doing?
- What beliefs do you hold? (E.g., Ideas about ethics, spirituality or religion, or politics.)
- Which relationships matter the most to you? Why are they important?
- Think about a challenge you have overcome. How did you overcome it?
- What would people who know you say about you?
- Is there an event or person that has helped shape you? How?

You might like to draw or paint representations of what matters to you, create a collage, or develop a personal coat of arms that highlights important aspects of your identity.

Identity can feel like a fuzzy thing, and how we describe it tends to change as we grow (Bernstein, 2018). Early on in life, we describe ourselves in fairly concrete terms: if asked about our identity we talk about our physical traits, the things we have, and what we like, for example. Over time, we develop a sense of our abilities, character traits, and relationships. Later in development, we start to include morals, belief, ethics, and values in our sense of identity.

We will shortly delve into values and how you might go about figuring out a purpose you want to pursue. Before we do so, however, there is another activity that can help clarify the aspects of identity that are important to us, and give an indication of what we want in our lives, such as the values we want to live by and the effects we want to have. It is called the obituary exercise, and while it might sound a little grim, the purpose is an energising one. (Of course, if you think that it may be distressing for you, you can simply skip past it.)

Activity 1.2: The Obituary Exercise

1	Take a blank piece of paper, a new page in your notebook, or a new document on your computer or device.
2	Imagine that it is many years in the future. After a long life, it is now time for your obituary. Spend a few minutes thinking about the kind of life that you would like to have reflected after you are gone.
3	Write the obituary that you would like to have published after your death or the eulogy you would like read at your funeral. In doing so, answer the following questions: ⊕ What characteristics and values did you consistently demonstrate? ⊕ Who were the important people in your life? Who did you care for? ⊕ What or whom did you impact? How? ⊕ What did you contribute? ⊕ What were your interests and passions? What excited you? What were you enthusiastic about? ⊕ What is your legacy?

(Adapted from Stanford Graduate School of Business, n.d.)

The purpose of the obituary (or eulogy) exercise is to help you think about who you are and how you want to live. What are the qualities or aspects of your identity that appear most important as you worked through the activity? What would you like to have contributed – to the people around you, your environment or community – over the course of your life? Did ideas about how you would like to live and what you would like to do emerge as you wrote?

This sort of exercise can help identify whether we are living in accordance with the identities and values that matter to us. It can help us identify where we might like to put our energy in the future – perhaps even suggest a purpose. So with a few ideas starting to simmer about what a life of meaning and purpose might look like for you, let's turn our attention to another cornerstone: values.

What Really Matters?

Do you know what matters to you? Some people might rattle off a list of values with ease, while others among us struggle to answer the question at all. Some people clearly articulate certain values but demonstrate other (sometimes opposite) values in practice; that is, what they say matters is different from the priorities that are evident in the choices they make, their behaviours, and their treatment of the people or environment around them. In addition, our values can change – for example, you may have dropped values you used to hold and taken on new ones as you grew and learned and developed.

Our values are the things that matter to us. They are not things we want to achieve (i.e., goals), but the ways we want to be and the qualities we want our lives to have. Russ Harris, author of *The Happiness Trap* and a major figure within acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), suggests we think about values as a direction, and goals as particular places we pass through as we head in that direction:

> Values are not the same as goals. Values are directions we keep moving in, whereas goals are what we want to achieve along the way. A value is like heading north; a goal is like the river or mountain or valley we aim to cross whilst traveling in that direction. Goals can be achieved or 'crossed off', whereas values are an ongoing process. For example, if you want to be a loving, caring, supportive partner, that is a value – an ongoing process. If you stop being loving, caring and supportive, then you are no longer a loving, caring, supportive partner; you are no longer living by that value. In contrast, if you want to get married, that's a goal – it can be 'crossed off' or achieved. Once you're married, you're married – even if you start treating your partner very badly. If you want a better job, that's a goal. Once you've got it – goal achieved. But if you want to fully apply yourself at work, that's a value – an ongoing process.
>
> (Harris, 2008)

Values differ between people and over time. You may share your values with people around you – you may have 'inherited' cherished values from the people who raised or taught you, or you might choose to have people in your life who share your values. On the other hand, you may be aware that there are values that you do not share with the people around you. This may feel uncomfortable or anxiety-provoking, or you may not mind it. You may hold shared values as important (in a sense, sharing values with the important people in your life may be one of your values) or you may be comfortable holding different values from the people around you.

The activities and questions that follow are intended to help you identify and clarify what matters to you. They are about exploring and answering simply for yourself – they are not about getting a 'right' answer. The important thing is that you are able to think about what matters to you, regardless of whether it matters to anyone else. You do not need to share your answers with anyone, although if you do share them you might find that the discussions they stimulate make for interesting conversation.

When you have a clear idea of what your values are – what matters to you in life – you will be in a better position to make choices that help you move towards living that value. So, what are your values? What matters to you? What characteristics and qualities do you want to embody? What qualities do you want your life, your roles, and your relationships to have? You may already have an idea about what your values are, or you may not. Either way, the following activity will help you highlight your values and consider how they can help you build a meaningful and satisfying life.

Activity 1.3: Identifying Your Values

1 **Read through the values in the list that follows. Consider each value and identify whether it is very important to you, somewhat important to you, or not important to you. Add any values that matter to you but are not listed. (List adapted from Harris, 2010).**

Acceptance	Fitness	Pleasure
Achievement	Flexibility	Power
Adventure	Freedom	Reciprocity
Assertiveness	Friendliness	Respect
Authenticity	Forgiveness	Responsibility
Beauty	Fun	Romance
Caring	Generosity	Safety
Challenge	Gratitude	Self-awareness
Compassion	Honesty	Self-care
Connection	Humour	Self-development
Contribution	Humility	Self-control
Conformity	Industry	Sensuality
Cooperation	Independence	Sexuality
Courage	Integrity	Spirituality
Creativity	Intimacy	Skilfulness
Curiosity	Justice	Supportiveness
Decency	Kindness	Trust
Dependability	Love	Wealth
Encouragement	Mindfulness	_____
Equality	Order	_____
Excitement	Open-mindedness	_____
Fairness	Patience	_____
Family	Persistence	

2	Write a list of the values you have marked as very important.
3	From these values, select the five or six that are the *most* important to you. Hint: Some values are similar or overlapping. If you are having trouble reducing the list to only five or six critical values, try grouping similar values and choosing the most important or representative from each group.
4	Consider your list of the most important values you have identified. ⊕ How well do you think these values capture what is important to you in life? ⊕ Are there any surprises?
5	Do something creative with your values. You could write them out and display them somewhere you will see them regularly, create pictures or posters representing them, or find photographs that symbolise each value and decorate your home or office with them. Visual cues such as these will help you remember and focus on your values in your day-to-day life and when you have decisions to make.

Would you feel comfortable sharing your values with another person? Consider engaging a friend, family member or someone else you know in this activity. Discussing ideas and information with others helps us gain deeper insights and different perspectives, and you might learn new and interesting things about the people you know. Just remember, this is not about right and wrong, but exploring what matters to each person.

Having identified some of the things that matter to you, we can turn now to focus on how values can help us figure out how we want to act and how we want our lives to be.

Living our Values in Everyday Life

Emily and Jon both identify **caring** and **responsibility** as core values. Emily works in a job she does not like, but which enables her to enact these values in a way that matters to her much more than having work she likes: through working this job she is able to provide for herself and her family. Jon works in a fairly low-paying position in the community sector; he knows he could earn more elsewhere, but his work involves helping vulnerable people, and through doing so Jon enacts his care for others and responsibility towards his community.

Eric, Alex and Salma all value **generosity** highly. Eric enacts this through sharing his time and resources with friends and giving gifts; Alex makes significant charitable donations; and Salma volunteers her time mentoring and supporting survivors of trauma.

Izzy and Chen both value **challenge** and **achievement**. Izzy actively seeks challenging projects at work; Chen studies hard and competes in community sporting events.

Although some values may be quite common, sets of values often vary between people. Even when a value is shared, it may be enacted in different ways. Each person in the examples above has found a way to live in which they enact values that matter to them. Naturally, they will have other values which they try to enact, too, and they will have times when they do not act in accordance with their values; but they are each working towards a life of value and meaning.

When we know what our values are, we can use this knowledge to inform our decisions. These may be big decisions relating to life choices or challenges, such as how we will deal with a serious medical condition; whether to reduce our work hours to return to study or take care of a family member; whether we will accept lower pay in order to move into a field that will allow us to live in greater accord with our values and pursue a particular purpose; or whether to remain in or end a relationship, for example. Bear in mind, however, that we enact (or do not enact) our values every day, even when we are not aware of making decisions: in how we interact with others; whether we drive ourselves to work on a project or make time for relaxation; whose wants and needs we prioritise and how; what we choose to buy and consume; whether we exercise or not…

Identifying or clarifying your values can help in answering the big questions – such as what purpose you would like to pursue – and responding to many day-to-day issues and decisions. But having a sense of our values is not the same as enacting them. Consider where you are acting consistently with your values and what other values might be suggested by the choices you make. This can help in guiding future, value-driven action.

Patrick has always said that family is the most important thing in life; he also places high value on responsibility. He loves his partner and children, believes that putting his children first is his responsibility as a parent, and encourages his children to take responsibility for their actions. One evening Patrick snaps at his son; seeing the disappointment in his son's face, Patrick realises that he regularly comes home from work irritated, communicates harshly with his children, and chooses to spend his evenings doing tasks which limit the time he spends with them.

Activity 1.4: Reflecting on Values in Action

1	Write a list the important areas of your life, for example: ⊕ Family relationships. ⊕ Parenting or caring relationships. ⊕ Intimate relationships. ⊕ Friendships and social life. ⊕ Community engagement and civic life. ⊕ Health and well-being (both physical and mental). ⊕ Work (paid or voluntary). ⊕ Education and learning. ⊕ Fun and enjoyment. ⊕ Spirituality or finding meaning. Some of these may not apply to you, in which case simply skip them; if there are areas not covered in this list, add them to your own.
2	For each area, list the important values that are relevant to that part of your life.
3	Spend a few minutes thinking about what enacting those values in each area would look like. (In Patrick's case, for example, acting consistently with his values relating to family and parenting might involve, among other things, coming home from work calm and keen to engage with his children.)

4	Identify how consistent your actions and values are in each area, using the following scale: ⊕ 1: Not consistent at all. ⊕ 2: A little consistent or occasionally consistent. ⊕ 3: Somewhat consistent. ⊕ 4: Fairly or regularly consistent. ⊕ 5: Very consistent or very often consistent.
5	Does your behaviour in any area suggest that you hold a value that you are unaware of or have not acknowledged? If so, identify the value: is it one you want to adopt or does it point to an area in which you would like to change your behaviour?
6	Consider whether there are areas in which you would like to act more consistently with your values. For each area consider: ⊕ What would acting more consistently with your values look like? ⊕ What could you do to move up one point on the scale?
7	Select one area in which you would like to act more in accordance with your values. Focus on areas in which your life (and perhaps the lives of others) can be positively impacted by a change, even a very small one. Write one simple step that you can take to do this. (You might find the goal-setting process in the next section of this guide helpful, if you decide to make a change.) If you are unsure of what sorts of actions might be beneficial, sections three and four of this guide have a whole range of ideas for improving wellbeing, dealing with challenges, and generally living a more positive life.

We do not act consistently with our values all of the time. It would not be realistic to expect such perfection of ourselves or each other – we all make mistakes and fail to meet our own standards. At other times, acting in accordance with one value violates another; values of achievement and fun, for example, might conflict when we receive an invitation for an enjoyable activity that is to occur during time we had intended to spend working on an important project; values of kindness and honesty may conflict when we are asked our opinion, but know that telling the truth would be unnecessarily hurtful. At still other times, actions we take indicate that we value something we had not previously realised, or we show that we are not acting in accordance with something that we claim to value highly.

When we reflect honestly on our actions, we are likely to see that there are areas in which we are not acting in accordance with a value we hold dear. Patrick, for example, has identified that he is not acting in accordance with his values of family and responsibility when he comes home from work feeling frustrated, and takes this out on his children. While it would be unrealistic for Patrick to think he will enact his values perfectly all of the time, there are some concrete steps he could take to live his values more consistently. He could put plans in place to discharge his frustration before getting home – sitting quietly and letting the frustration go, exercising, doing a mindfulness activity, or making time to talk things out with his partner, for example; he could practice gratitude for his family and make a deliberate effort to be mindful of his communication when he gets home; and he might like to seriously consider what is happening at work that he is reacting to, and whether the work situation or his responses to it could change.

In acceptance and commitment therapy, choice points are times when we are challenged, sometimes by situations but most often by our own thoughts and reactions. In the midst of such a challenge, we may make a decision in response to the thought, feeling or reaction, rather than in accordance with our values. In these moments, we have a decision to make about whether we act in accordance with the thoughts and feelings that 'hook' us, or whether we choose an action that is consistent with our values (in ACT, this called values committed action). So, whether big or small, knowing the values we want to enact can be very helpful in decision making.

You can also use your values to inform your purpose and develop goals that will help you achieve this purpose. The values you identified might well point towards a purpose you would like to pursue. Did any values stand out as those you would like to build your life around? Is there a course of action that could help you enact one or several of these core values?

Finding Your Compass

Psychologist Angela Duckworth's concept of grit has come to prominence recently. For some people, grit is simply about perseverance and hard work, but Duckworth disagrees. Although grit is correlated with goal completion and achievement, it is not simply working hard at something across time. It is about working hard for meaningful ends, achieving small and medium goals in order to work towards an 'ultimate concern' – a real purpose.

In fact, purpose is part of grit as Duckworth defines it. The thing is, our purpose is something we need to discover for ourselves, and this often takes a long time. No one can give us a purpose – someone else might suggest or model something we then adopt as our purpose, but a true purpose is not imposed from the outside. We find our purpose though exploring both our internal and external worlds, and Duckworth focusses on the external. Often, Duckworth says, finding purpose starts with an interest, and even one we might not be aware of. For many people, finding their purpose will only come with experience. Over time, experiences lead to interests, which develop into passions, and eventually into purpose. As Duckworth says:

> If you'd like to follow your passion but haven't yet fostered one, you must begin at the beginning: discovery.
>
> Ask yourself a few simple questions: What do I like to think about? Where does my mind wander? What do I really care about? What matters most to me? How do I enjoy spending my time? And, in contrast, what do I find absolutely unbearable? If you find it hard to answer these questions, try recalling your teen years, the stage of life at which vocational interests commonly sprout.
>
> As soon as you have even a general direction in mind, you must trigger your nascent interests. Do this by going out into the world and doing something… Experiment! Try! You'll certainly learn more than if you don't!
>
> (Duckworth, 2017, pp. 114-115)

Duckworth goes on to say that this is not about finding the right thing first up and pursuing it for the rest of your life (although that could happen). You might try a number of different things and find that they do not evoke your interest or passion (or not enough for you to attach purpose to them). But as you experiment, you will learn more about what interests you, and when you find what you are interested in you can dig in. Trying different activities, interacting with people, volunteering, and engaging in community groups are all ways in which you can experiment and explore what might be meaningful for you.

Even once you have found a passion, there is work still to do – learning, developing skills, and living with purpose takes effort, discipline, and the capacity to deal with challenges. But if you approach challenges with a sense of purpose and a determination to persist, to adapt, and overcome obstacles, you will be rewarded.

In our discussion of values, Russ Harris introduced the idea that values are like a direction. Duckworth comes to a similar conclusion. Our passion, purpose, or 'ultimate concern' can be a compass. At first, we might need to tinker with it to get it working just right, but after that, keeping our 'ultimate concern' in mind can help steer us through the myriad decisions, tasks, and goal we need to make, complete, set and achieve, in order to pursue our purpose.

So, What is Purpose?

For many people, purpose is not only about something significant or interesting to them, but has a broader impact – that is to say that, often, part of having a purpose is to provide benefit to others, or to forward a meaningful cause. As Zakrzewski (2018) explains in her article about helping adolescents identify their purposes, "Researchers define purpose as a personally meaningful, long-term goal that will make a positive impact on the world at large. In other words, making a lot of money to live a life of luxury is not a purpose, in the scientific sense." Similarly, Suttie (2018), who writes about finding purpose later in life, explains, "Having a purpose in life means caring deeply about a goal that you are willing to work toward achieving – often to help others or affect the world in some positive, productive way."

Interestingly, a life of purpose (even when that purpose is not focussed on helping others) is associated with personal benefits: physical health and happiness appear to be higher among people living purposeful lives and working towards personally meaningful goals. However, among older people, research has found that those with a prosocial purpose (i.e., a purpose or goal aimed at helping others) experienced ***greater*** wellbeing and health benefits (Suttie, 2018).

Developing a Sense of Purpose

Your purpose, then, may be individual, but in general a purpose can be considered "a commitment to goals bigger than yourself" (Smith, 2017). As Smith explains, purpose is:

> An ultimate goal that shapes your short-term choices and behavior. It is personally meaningful, coming from within. In other words, no one is standing over you forcing you to pursue your goal; you are self-motivated. The goal imbues your life with importance and value. Finally, a purpose in life goes beyond the self, leading you to want to make a difference in the world.
>
> (Smith, 2017)

Note:
It is important that you critically consider a potential purpose before adopting it. Values and purpose can be very positive (i.e., can have positive effects), but they can be negative, too. Purpose is a strength, and strengths can be applied for ethical or unethical ends (Smith, 2017). While we are focussing on positive purposes here – that is, purposes that will help you and likely others – purpose can drive negative behaviours, including serious harm. When you have an idea of what your purpose is, consider what the outcomes of following your purpose could be for yourself and others. Is it possible that your following this purpose could harm others (or yourself)? If so, then it is not of the kind we are discussing here. Pursuing a purpose does not excuse harm.

Identity and values are closely connected with purpose. Reflecting on these things may have given you some clues about what sort of purpose you would like your life to have, either in the short or longer term. You may have identified one or two values that you want to enact in a particular way or to drive a particular project, and this could become your purpose. If not, that is perfectly okay, too. Purpose is a big idea and we would not expect you to be able to identify a purpose quickly. Taking some time to play with different ideas and consider various approaches is a good thing.

If you are having trouble finding a sense of what your purpose could be, in addition to Duckworth's ideas about experimenting, Smith (2018) has lots of suggestions:

- **Read books:** Fiction, non-fiction, prose or poetry, reading books can broaden your perspective and provide ideas about what makes for a meaningful, good life.

- **Think about pain:** For some people, purpose is sparked by the stress or suffering that they or others have experienced, and deciding to act to reduce the cause of the suffering or support people who are experiencing its effects.

- **Gratitude and generosity:** Practicing gratitude and generosity (both of which we discuss in section three) can build our sense of connection with our community or a larger purpose. Reflecting on what we are grateful for can provide ideas about how we could contribute to the lives of others, while generosity is positively associated with a sense of purpose.

- **Get feedback from others about what you give:** The people around you might have some ideas about what you already do that is valuable, or you might get a sense of the strengths that you could use in pursuing your purpose from the feedback you get. Purpose and direction can develop when people "apply their strengths to effect personally meaningful changes in the broader world" (Cotton, 2017): while having a sense of purpose can help drive action, developing a sense of purpose can also come as a result of taking positive action (as Duckworth suggests when she tells us to experiment).

- **Connect with a community:** This could be based on your interests, locality, values, politics, beliefs, or causes that you care about. For many people, community and purpose are closely linked: their purpose is tied to serving their community in some way.

- **Write:** As Smith says, "Purpose often arises from curiosity about your own life. What obstacles have you encountered? What strengths helped you to overcome them? How did other people help you? How did your strengths help make life better for others?" Writing about your story, your experiences and challenges, can highlight values or themes from which a purpose may emerge.

Activity 1.5: Imagine Your Future

Imagine yourself ten years in the future, looking back from then to now. Write your answers to the following questions:

1	What would you like to be seeing in your memories of those years?
2	What would you like to have spent time working on? What skills and capacities would you like to have developed? How will you have used your strengths?
3	What would you like to have achieved?
4	What would you like your life to look like?

Real Life Purpose

Looking for inspiration? It does not take long to find countless examples of purposeful living. Just a few will illustrate how experience and interest can lead to astonishing achievements and a life with purpose.

You have probably heard of Rosie Battie, 2015 Australian of the Year. After her ex-husband killed their 11 year old son, Battie spent several years effectively campaigning for improved understanding of, and responses to, domestic violence in Australia. Battie, who has now stepped back from public life, experienced a devastating tragedy and, at significant personal cost, improved the society around her.

New South Wales' 2017 Australian of the Year, Deng Thiak Adut was a child solider in Sudan, kidnapped at six years of age and forced into a civil war (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2016). He came to Australia as a refugee and, having never attended school, started going to TAFE. He then went on to university and supported himself through work:

> at supermarkets, service stations and factories. "What motivated me were those people who think I'm not equal to them, or inferior," he says. "This country has given me an opportunity." ... Deng feels it's his responsibility to give others the same opportunities he has received "so they can go and work in their community and feel like Australians," he says.
>
> Special Broadcasting Service. (2017).

He has taken that opportunity. He has built a legal practice which prides itself on non-discriminatory service delivery; provides scholarships for students from non-English speaking backgrounds; and advocates for other refugees.

While running an ultramarathon, Turia Pitt was caught in a grassfire. Pitt, who has made her injuries and the aftermath public, says that the fire caused scarring and damage that required two years of recovery and over two hundred surgeries; but she is back to work, competing in Ironman competitions, and raising funds for charitable causes. When asked why she works with a medical charity that provides surgical care to people who cannot afford it, she explained:

> Before the fire, I felt so blessed to live in Australia but it was only afterwards that I realised how bloody lucky we are to live here. If my accident had happened in a developing country, there's no question – I would have died. Access to quality medical care is one of those things you don't think about much and take for granted until you really need it.
>
> (Pitt, 2017)

Danny Murillo and Stephen Czifra grew up in crime-ravaged communities and were subjected to domestic violence in childhood. By mid-adolescence, both were in jail, spending significant lengths of time in solitary confinement. They met at university and started a group where students who had been in prison could meet. That developed an organisation through which they help ex-prisoners to access university education. Both graduated with bachelors' degrees in 2015; Murillo continues their work in the professional realm; while Czifra is studying for a Masters in Social Work, mentoring others, and pushing for his school to play a greater role in advocating for those who are disempowered (Berkeley Social Welfare, n.d.; MacFarquhar, 2016).

Zakrzewski (2108) writes about young people who won scholarships after submitting essays about their purpose. One young university student overcame domestic violence and drug abuse in early life to, and decided that her purpose would be to help other disadvantaged young people. Another was moved to work at preventing sexual assault after a friend disclosed that she had been raped; he went on to become a peer educator while at university, raising awareness of sexual violence, and then went to work in sex education within the school system. A young woman who attended medical appointments with her grandmother became aware of the substandard treatment members of ethnic minority groups receive; she made it her purpose to get into the health field and ensure that culturally diverse communities receive adequate care.

Reading the real-life examples above, it might strike you that these people only managed to achieve such positive ends through hard work – and that is true. A sense of purpose is associated with persistence and resilience. These achievements are also more likely with effective planning, and so we will now turn our attention to how we can take a sense of purpose and develop it into something actionable. In the next section of this guide, we will look at how you can use your increasing self-understanding, develop clear goals, and identify concrete and achievable steps that will help you move towards your purpose, and a meaningful, satisfying life.

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“I want to inspire people. I want someone to say 'Because of you I didn't give up'.”
What's your purpose?

Goal-Setting for a Purposeful Life

In this section the rubber hits the road.

Think back to the examples of purpose at the end of the previous section. For each person, purpose was tied to action. Having a purpose is one thing – enacting it is another. The fact is that we are much more likely to take effective action and achieve our aims if we plan how we will do so. It is well-established within the psychological literature that achievement is more likely after appropriate planning and goal-setting. Luckily, there are effective, simple processes that will help you do this.

In this section, you will learn and practice concrete skills that will help you achieve your goals, whether big or small. This does not have to be a daunting or difficult process – in fact, we recommend that you begin with small, easy steps. You will be guided through goal-setting processes and learn strategies for making progress even when it gets hard. When it comes to working towards bigger, longer-term goals, the same steps apply.

Starting Small

In her book *Grit*, Duckworth identifies different levels of goals. The 'top level goal' is your purpose – an ultimate concern, or a particular way of enacting an important value. This is different from other goals in that it may be quite abstract and it is not achieved in order to get something: "The top level goal is not a means to any other end. It is, instead, an end in itself" (Duckworth, 2017, p. 63). This is similar to Smith's definition of purpose as your ultimate goal. But how do you get there? That is where goal-setting comes in.

To achieve our top level, ultimate goals, we need to achieve low and mid-level goals. Each of these is a step towards the top level goal, and there are likely to be a great many of them. They include regular, daily steps such as getting up or getting to work, class or some other commitment on time; doing particular tasks; and practicing to improve skills. They also include bigger goals, such as completing a major project or course of study, obtaining a position, or making another big change. These low and mid-level goals enable us to live our purpose; they are practical actions, and getting them done is the focus for this section of the guide.

You will be familiar with the old cliché that the first step is the hardest. It makes sense, then, to start small, whether you are learning a new skill (such as goal-setting) or making a change. Taking a small first step and being able to achieve something quickly can make taking the steps that follow that much easier. This will also mean that, when you come to setting bigger goals, you will be familiar with the processes and skills that will guide you towards achievement.

With this in mind, we suggest that you try a goal-setting experiment. Start with something that is small and tangible, and which will be accomplished fairly quickly. Activity 2.1 will guide you through a goal- setting process that works for big and small goals alike.

Activity 2.1: Getting Started

Think about a small, positive change that you would like to make. If you have a big goal (perhaps your exploration of values in the previous section inspired you!) note this and put it aside – you will be able to apply the strategies that follow more effectively in planning for your big goal if you have successfully worked through the process with a simpler goal first.

If you are having trouble identifying a simple goal, you might like to consider:

- Getting something done that you have been putting off, such as a chore, an unfinished project, or an appointment you have been avoiding.
- A habit or skill that you would like to develop; it could be as simple as flossing your teeth every day, or doing something several times per week (e.g., meditating for a few minutes, practicing gratitude, or going for a walk).
- Saving a certain amount of money by the end of the month.
- Taking a certain number of steps each day for a week or month.

The goal must be simple, positive, and quick to achieve. It should be about getting something done that will help you (or someone else), and doing so in quick and simple steps. The first step, at least, should be one that you will complete today.

This will help you learn the process of goal-setting and will also make taking bigger steps easier; this helps with progressing through to goal achievement, and may also be a useful strategy when we turn our focus to larger goals later.

When you have decided on a small goal, write your answers to the following:

1	*Who?* Who is going to carry out the action? Who will be involved? You will certainly be on this list; anyone else who will be helpful in achieving the goal should be identified too.
2	*What?* What is the goal – what will you achieve? Write the goal as a clear statement of outcome. For a discrete outcome, it might be, for example, "Homework task completed," or "Car cleaned." If your goal is to do something more or less, specify a certain amount or frequency, and when you will do it. Rather than "walk more," for example, you could write, "Walked for at least 15 minutes on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings."

3	How? How will the outcome be reached? List a few simple steps that will achieve the goal. If it is going to take more than three or four steps, return to step 2 and create a smaller or simpler goal.
4	When? When will it be done by? Set a due date for achieving the goal. If reaching the goal has multiple steps, set a due date for each step.
5	Why? Why are you doing this? What is its importance? Write a sentence or two about why the goal matters. Highlight any values that the goal is consistent with or which you plan to enact through working towards the goal.

Now go and take that first step!

SMART Goals

Developing action plans that include small, concrete and time-limited steps will increase your motivation and the likelihood that you will achieve your goals (Bernstein et al., 2018). One way to do this is to ensure that your goals are SMART. A SMART goal is:

Specific	The goal is clear and specifies a particular outcome.
Measureable	A concrete indicator shows whether the goal has or has not been achieved.
Achievable	The goal is realistic and you have the means to reach it.
Relevant	The goal relates directly to what you want, need or value.
Time-bound	The goal (and each step) specifies a due date or deadline.

(Note: If you do some research, you will notice that other terms are sometimes used for the 'R' in SMART. The SMART model has been adapted and various words are preferred by different sources. In addition to 'relevant', sources may include 'realistic' and 'results-focussed'. We prefer 'relevant', because this highlights some important aspects that are not covered elsewhere in the SMART format, while the other concepts to which 'R' can refer are already included if the goal is specific, measureable and achievable.)

If you re-read Activity 2.1, you will see that the instructions guided you to set a SMART goal: you identified a specific goal that you could achieve; considered why it mattered (relevance); wrote it in such a way that you have an identifiable outcome against which your progress can be measured; and gave yourself a time-frame in which to complete it.

Let's now take a closer look at some of the elements of goal-setting and what you should be considering as you set goals for yourself. This will be particularly helpful when you are setting bigger or more complex goals, but all of the principles apply to small goals as well.

The Goal

What is the goal? A goal might be big or small; it might be something that you can complete quickly or that will take significant time to achieve. The important thing is that the goal matters to you. While we recommend starting out with small, easily achieved outcomes, as you progress your goals should become more challenging (while still being realistic and achievable). Appropriately challenging goals require work and dedication, but are achievable given the resources you have or are able to access. The outcome of the goal may not be what we usually think of as an outcome – getting something tangible – although it could be. It might also be doing something: completing a project or developing a new habit, for example. The important thing is that your goal should clearly state the outcome you are aiming for, and how it can be measured.

The other important factor here is why the goal matters. How is it relevant? What values is it associated with? How will achieving this goal meet a need, or improve your life or someone else's? Will it help you work towards your purpose? This guide is about living as well as we can – living a life with purpose and values, and increasing wellbeing as we do so. You may have some goals that are associated with things that matter to other people – and some of these goals will be important – but what we are focussing on here are goals that matter to you. A personally meaningful goal is more motivating and, as we discussed in section one, purpose is something that you choose to pursue for yourself.

Action Steps

In most cases, a goal is not achieved all at once, but requires a number of steps. All of the SMART goal characteristics also apply to each action step. Each step should be concrete, specific and achievable; it should move you towards the goal (i.e., it should be relevant); it should be clear whether the step has been completed or not; and each step should have its own due date.

It is ideal if the first step can be something you do immediately. Taking action means that progress has started, and this will help keep your motivation up. Action steps do not have to take you all the way to achieving a particular goal – for goals involving a high number of steps, you may go through multiple goal-setting processes where you plan the next few steps you will take. However, where this is happening, it may be helpful to take the goal and break it down into further sub-goals, so that each set of action steps does lead to the achievement of a stated goal.

Obstacles

For a long time we have been told to 'think positively' and imagine reaching our goals. The problem is, focussing only on the positive can actually reduce the chances that we will reach our goals (Santos, 2018). This makes sense when we consider how frequently we face obstacles and setbacks, and how much easier problems are to deal with when we have a plan in advance. This does not mean that we should stop visualising achieving our goals, but that we should combine this with visualising possible obstacles and how we will deal with them.

Consider a person trying to balance work and study. They may have a goal or action step of studying for several hours on the weekend, say, "Study for five hours on Saturday, between 9am and 3pm (allowing time for lunch)." However SMART that goal is, it does not take long to imagine a whole range of potential obstacles. These could include interruptions from family, housemates, or friends; invitations to go out during study time; other tasks that need to be completed, such as housework and errands; unexpected phone calls, emails, text messages, and social media notifications; or the person may simply feel their motivation is lacking on a certain Saturday. If they do not consider these potential obstacles in advance, the chances that they will effectively deal with obstacles – without letting them interfere with achieving the goal – are limited.

When you are goal-setting, then, it is worth taking a few minutes to answer the following questions:

- What could get in the way of this action step or goal?
- What will I do if this happens?

When you have an idea about how you will deal with an obstacle, plan it in detail and imagine yourself taking the action you have decided on. This is called an implementation intention. Implementation intentions are 'if-then' plans, which is to say that *if* a particular thing happens *then* you will take a certain action. This not only applies to obstacles – planning how and when you will do something, which we have already discussed in this section, is a kind of implementation intention, as is using a cue to prompt you to take a step. Implementation intentions are, however, particularly helpful in overcoming obstacles. It is important that you clearly state and visualise what you will do if an obstacle occurs; this is the process of forming an implementation intention, and is associated with higher rates of goal completion (Gollwitzer & Oettingen, 2013). You can also take action in advance that will help you follow through with your implementation intentions.

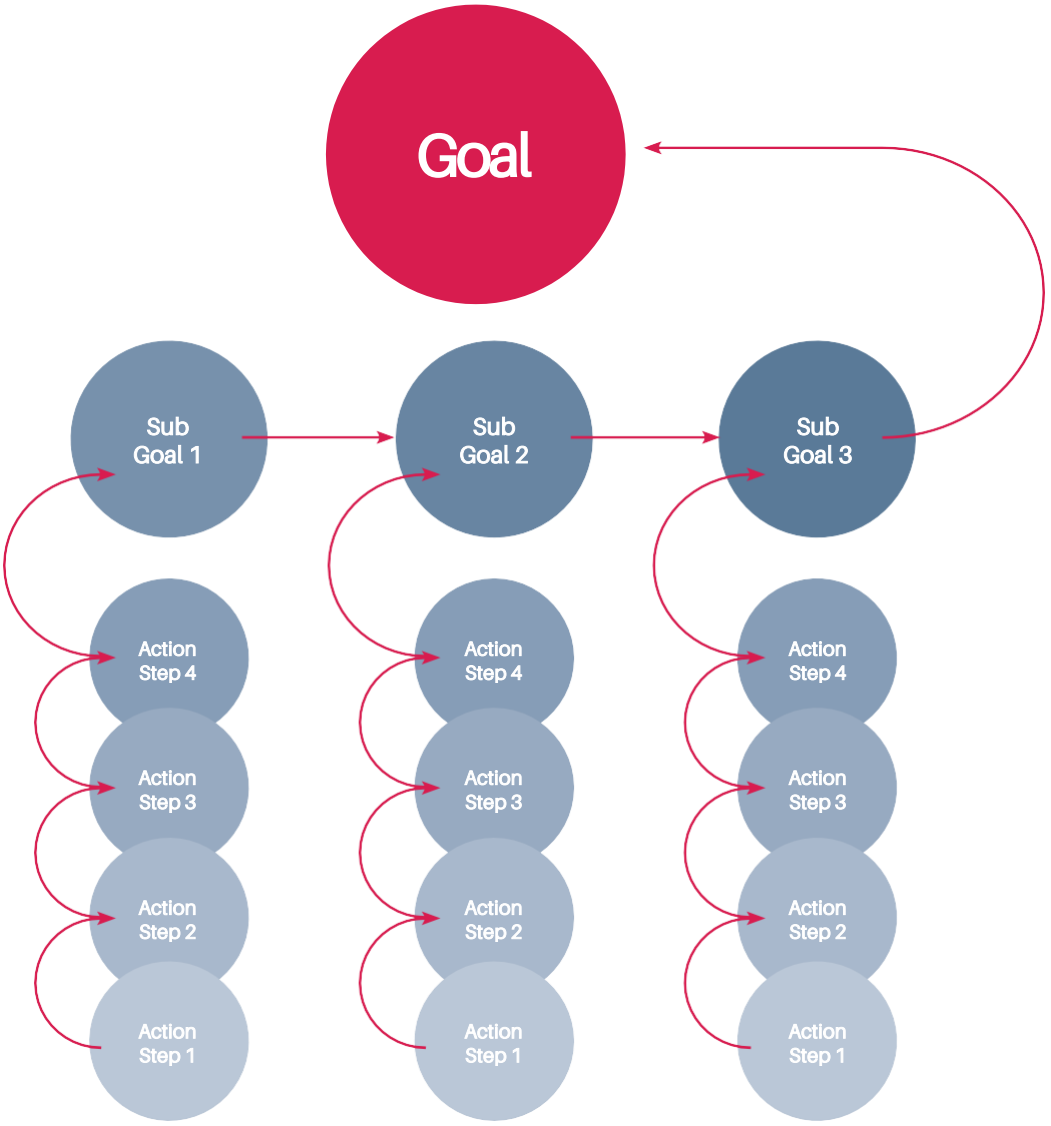
Robbie is working towards improving his health. He has set two goals that he knows will be subject to obstacles.

His first goal is to limit his alcohol consumption to the weekends. He predicts that when he has dinner with friends during the week, his friends will offer him drinks and so will the wait staff. Robbie imagines this happening and himself saying in response, "I'll just have tea, thanks."

He also has a goal of exercising three mornings each week. He knows that when he wakes early to exercise he will be sorely tempted to remain in bed, so he visualises himself getting out of bed before he turns off his alarm. He also puts his exercise gear out each evening before mornings he is scheduled to work out.

Setting Bigger Goals

While some goals will be quite small and simple – achieved after a few action steps – many goals are more complex. When it comes to big changes and living with purpose, you can expect your goals to be multiple. You may be seeking, for example, to change career, develop a new skill-set, complete a course of study, improve your health, or engage in a meaningful project; any of these goals would likely require more complex goal-setting. The same process you have already worked through applies here, however complex or long-term the goal. The key is to break the overall goal into specific medium or short-term sub-goals, each of which is viewed as a goal in itself and has its own goal-setting process associated with it. For example, a goal that requires multiple sub-goals (each with a number of action steps) might be visualised like this:



Let's look at putting this into practice for bigger, more complex goals, with an example.

Marta wants to make a significant change, but is unsure how to start. She knows what she wants, but her goal is not specific; as such, her capacity to identify and plan appropriate actions is limited. She already knows, however, that it will take a large number of steps on her part, and she is feeling overwhelmed.

Marta speaks with her friend, Terri, explaining that she wants to move into a new career. She tells Terri that she values caring and would like to work in a position where she can express this. Marta says, "I'd like to use my knowledge and my life-experience to help young people who are struggling." When Terri asks Marta how she will achieve this, and Marta says, "I don't know."

Marta and Terri talk about what it would take for Marta to be in a position where she is able to work with young people in a supportive capacity, and Marta develops a new goal: "Get a support work position in a youth organisation." She puts a three-year time-frame on the goal, and starts listing what she needs to do to get into a position where she can apply for the kind of work she wants. Her ideas include completing a Diploma of Youth Work and volunteering for a community organisation.

Marta prioritises working towards the Diploma, and sets out a number of sub-goals. The first sub-goal is to enrol. Marta writes out a plan:

Goal-Setting

Goal: **Enrolment in Diploma of Youth Work.**

This is important because: **This is an essential step in meeting my overall goal of gaining employment in the youth work field. Achieving this goal will move me towards a career where I use my care for others and my own experience and knowledge to help young people in need.**

Action		Due Date	Completed
Step 1:	Search accredited providers of Diploma of Youth Work. Request course information from three providers.	1st July	
Step 2:	Read course information and compare offerings.	6th July	
Step 3:	Discuss options with Terri and Dad.	13th July	

Action		Due Date	Completed
Step 4:	Decide on preferred course provider.	20th July	
Step 5:	Complete and submit enrolment documents.	25th July	

Dealing with obstacles: **I might start to feel overwhelmed by information and having to make a decision. If this happens, I will take a break, walk around the block, and then go back to completing the action step. If necessary, I will call Terri and talk things through.**

As you can see from Marta's example, even setting goals for complex, mutli-part processes can be broken down into simple steps. The trick is to take some time – if you are tempted to rush the process, remember that you improve your likelihood of achieving your goal when you make sure the ingredients are right, and that takes a bit of care and attention. So take the time to work through these steps, and set yourself up to succeed. (You might like to use a template for goal-setting that prompts you to write SMART goals. We have provided you with a template at the end of this section, but you could also find one online or develop your own.)

So, if you have a big goal, this is what you should do:

- Develop a list of the sub-goals that will, when they are achieved, mean that you have achieved your overall goal.
- Prioritise the sub-goals and identify any that need to be completed before others can be started or completed.
- Select the first sub-goal you will work on. If the sub-goals do not need to be achieved in a particular order, you might like to select a simple, quick goal to start with; this can help in developing momentum and your building your motivation to continue.
- Complete a SMART goal-setting process for first sub-goal, specifying the action steps that will achieve it.
- Review your progress regularly. If the goal is not workable or needs to be adapted, review and reformulate the sub-goal and action steps.
- When the sub-goal is achieved, celebrate!
- Move on to the next sub-goal.

Remembering the basic steps of goal-setting is helpful, particularly when what is required to meet the goal feels overwhelming. All you need to do is break it down, and take it one step at a time.

Looking Back to Go Forward

Make a date with yourself to review your progress and your goals. Reviewing progress is important for maintaining motivation and planning further action. It is not just about reviewing what has gone well, however. You should also ask: Has a plan been derailed? Is there a barrier to taking an action step? Have you tried something, perhaps repeatedly, and found that it has not worked? Is the goal still relevant or is an update in order?

Think about your action steps as experiments. Sometimes experiments work and sometimes they do not. Regardless of the outcome, each experiment provides information that can be used in planning the next action; one experiment might indicate that a particular strategy works well; another might tell you that you need to develop a skill or take a different approach. Do a review if you notice that you are getting stuck, as well as when you have taken a few steps or met a sub-goal. Consider your progress and what you have learned, and apply these lesson when setting the next goal.

At times, a bigger review is required. You might come to the realisation that a particular goal is not going to get you the outcome you want, or that the outcome is no longer wanted or appropriate. While it can be disappointing or frustrating to have to change our goals, it is sometimes the best path forward. Your values and purpose may not stay the same forever, and that is okay. Check in with yourself and ask whether the overall goal is still relevant, whether it accords with your values and is leading you towards the life you want. If not, you can change it using the same skills and strategies you have already developed. And if it is still relevant, keep on striving.

Maintaining Motivation ... or Not

Feeling motivated is great. When we feel motivated to do something, doing that thing is a whole lot easier than when we are not feeling driven to get it done. Motivation is a tricky thing, though. Sometimes, even though we want to achieve a goal and it is important to us, we do not feel motivated to take the action required to achieve it. While working on a challenging project may be important to you, you may feel much more motivated in the moment to watch a TV show or chat to a friend than to put in another hour's work. Plan strategies for such situations in advance (this might be one of the implementation interventions you form while goal-setting).

Finding ways to increase the motivation you feel can be helpful. Goal-setting itself can do this, provided the goals are specific, concrete, measurable and meaningful for you. Other strategies include:

- **Ticking off:** Ticking or crossing action steps off your goal-setting chart (you can see on the goal-setting template that there is a column where you can write the date you completed each step or tick off when it has been done). You could also write out a to-do list and tick or cross off activities as you complete them, or use a reminder or to-do list app that allows you to make items complete.

- **Tracking:** Tracking your progress on a chart, document or app to highlight the work you have done and the progress you have made.

- **Using images:** Pictures and visualisations that connect with the outcomes you want to achieve or the values you are striving to enact.

- **Visual cues:** Putting reminders (e.g., signs or pictures) up where you will see them regularly.
- **Sharing your goals:** Talking to others about your goal and the actions you are taking.
- **Accountability systems:** Having someone else who knows what your goals and action steps are and checking in with them on a regular basis can help in maintaining motivation for consistent action. If you know someone else with a similar goal, you could also work together or check in on each other's progress (exercising or studying together, for example).
- **Small rewards:** Give yourself a treat when you have completed particular action steps or achieved a goal. Save your favourite TV show, a cup of coffee or something else you want until after you have taken an action step.
- **Scheduling and routine:** While it might sound pedestrian, scheduling action steps into a diary, calendar or reminder system can be very helpful. Similarly, developing a routine or habit can mean that a change or repeated action step (e.g., studying for one hour each evening, exercising on particular days of the week) is easier to maintain. Using cues can be helpful here, too (cues are things you are already doing that you use to prompt another behaviour, such as using tooth brushing as a cue to floss).

Perhaps the most important thing, however, is to avoid falling into the trap of thinking that feeling motivated is necessary for achievement. There is nothing intrinsic to action steps that says we need to feel motivated in order to complete them; feeling motivated makes this process easier, but it is not required. In fact, it can be a serious mistake to conflate feeling motivated with motivation. Feeling motivated is certainly one kind of motivation, but is not the only kind. You might have a goal that is important to you in the longer term, but feel motivated to take a contradictory step or fail to complete a required action in the present – a strong desire to eat too much pizza, for example, might challenge us in taking the required actions to meet a values-driven goal of living a healthier lifestyle. This is not to say that we are not motivated to live a healthier lifestyle, but simply that we feel motivated to do something contradictory at a particular point.

Indeed, the idea that feeling motivated may also follow action, rather than only ever leading it, has significant support. It is one of the tenets of behavioural activation, a psychological therapy for depression. Among other things, behavioural activation teaches that, while we are very familiar with the idea that emotion can drive behaviour, behaviour can also change our emotions (including motivation). One of the steps in behavioural activation is taking action regardless of whether we feel motivated (McEvoy, 2016). If we wait for motivation to strike before taking action, we might well be waiting a long time; however, if we take action, we may actually increase our motivation as a result. Scheduling, routine and cueing can be very handy here, as well – they may prompt us to take a planned action step regardless of whether we feel motivated to do it, and we might then end up feeling more motivated to take further action.

Russ Harris talks about the trap of relying on feeling motivated and suggests that, instead, you "Let your values be your motivation" (Harris, 2017). The funny thing is, when we act in accordance with our values, even when we do not feel like acting that way, the motivation to continue doing so often follows.

Activity 2.2: Setting Yourself Up for Success

1	Choose one of the strategies for building and maintaining motivation.
2	Create a plan for using this strategy. What steps will you need to take to set up this strategy? If further steps are necessary, list each step and set a due date (ideally in the next day or two).
3	Take the first step *now*.

Knowledge is important, but it does not create change; change relies on action. These activities are designed to help you identify how you can create change in your own life, but writing down your answers will not achieve this alone. Take the ideas for a test drive, give them a chance, and see what happens. Knowledge is power, but you have to choose to use it.

Quick Guide: Goal-Setting

1	Decide on your goal. If the goal is long-term or complex, break it down into sub-goals. If these need to happen in a particular order, write them out in order; if the order does not matter, you might like to select the simplest, quickest or easiest sub-goal to complete first.
2	State the goal. Check: ⊕ Is it specific? ⊕ Is it written in such a way that whether I have met the goal is clear? ⊕ Is it achievable and realistic? ⊕ Is it relevant? Does it help me meet a need, do something that matters to me, live my values, or move me closer to my purpose? ⊕ Have I specified a timeframe or due date? If the answer to any of these questions is 'no', re-write the goal and check again.

3	Write a short statement about why the goal is important. This includes the relevance of the goal (e.g., its relationship to your values and purpose).
4	List the action steps. Each step should only involve one action. If the action is repeated, list it as many times as necessary (e.g., Step 1: 15 minute walk on Monday; Step 2: 15 minute walk on Wednesday, and so on). Decide on an appropriate timeframe for each step. It can be helpful to use a format or list that allows you to tick off each step as you complete it. Look at each step and ask yourself: ⊕ Is it specific? ⊕ Is it written in such a way that whether I have completed this step is clear? ⊕ Is it realistic? ⊕ Is it relevant (i.e., does it directly move me closer to meeting my goal)? ⊕ Does it have a due date? If the answer to any of these questions is 'no', re-write the step and check again. Repeat this as many times as necessary to get SMART action steps.
5	Consider potential obstacles and form implementation intentions. Think about what could get in the way of taking the action steps you have identified: possible interruptions, unexpected events, other responsibilities, experiencing a lack of motivation, wanting to do something else, competing priorities, and so on. Try to identify the two or three obstacles most likely to interfere with your progress and write out how you will deal with each obstacle. Imagine encountering each obstacle and visualise yourself using the strategies you have developed.

Goal-Setting

Goal:			
This is important because:			

Action		Due Date	Completed
Step 1:			
Step 2:			
Step 3:			
Step 4:			
Step 5:			
Step 6:			

Dealing with obstacles:

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"I followed my passion, and in-turn it lead me to finding my purpose."
What's your purpose?

Using Positive Psychology

Psychology seeks to understand how and why people feel, think and act as they do. This work has often been focussed on understanding and dealing with problems – mental illnesses, behavioural issues, and so on. While this is critical, some psychologists have also turned their attention to wellbeing, in an area known as positive psychology. While positive psychology is in its infancy, and can be expected to take a number of missteps (as in every human endeavour), it is already generating insights into what tends to bring us happiness and how we can enhance our wellbeing and satisfaction in day-to-day life.

In this section, we will be considering what positive psychology has to tell us about wellbeing. You will be guided through activities to help get you thinking about your own wellbeing and learning skills that, if you practice them consistently, are likely to increase your happiness and satisfaction in life. They may also help in developing your sense of meaning and purpose. By this point, you may not be surprised to learn that values, goals, and a sense of meaning or purpose are closely connected with wellbeing.

Wellbeing

Wellbeing, at its simplest, involves both regularly experiencing positive feelings and having a sense of doing well, developing or being satisfied. It turns out, though, that we are often poor judges of what will increase our happiness and wellbeing. We often think about 'things' that will make us happy. Most of us associate having more money with happiness, for example; we think getting a new car, phone, item of clothing, or other desired object will make us happier (just think about how much money we spend on things we do not need – often, this is because we are chasing happiness); we might seek to be 'made' happier by another person; and we might put a lot of resources and effort into particular events or accomplishments, assuming that when the change happens, it will bring a permanent increase in our level of happiness. But do these things bring us happiness in the long term? What does the evidence say?

Andie has been working hard to increase her income. When she gets the promotion she has been waiting for, which comes with a significant pay rise, she is delighted. After a few weeks, however, she realises that she is no happier than before she got the promotion.

Jens and Margo got married a few years ago. Before the wedding, they were hugely excited, and rated themselves as happier in the lead up to their wedding than they had been before they met. After a while, though, they realise the excitement has gone – they are not unhappy together, but neither feels as though they are happier on a day-to-day basis than they were before the pre-wedding excitement started.

Someone might regularly experience positive feelings – they might spend a lot of time and money buying things or pursuing experiences that bring temporary excitement or enthusiasm – but not feel satisfied with their life. Others work towards things that they think will make them happy, such as increased income and material possessions; the problem is, each time they get a pay rise or a highly prized new possession, their initial excitement fades and, before they know it, they are back to being as happy (or unhappy) as they were before.

Another person might be dealing with things that we associate with negative emotional experiences – working a job that is boring or stressful, or living with a disabling condition, for example – and yet experience a reasonable level of wellbeing and happiness. The presence of negative emotions does not preclude experiencing positive ones, and despite such limitations people can find effective ways to live in accordance with their values. Even activities which are not 'fun' can be satisfying and enhance our enjoyment in life – from the satisfaction of completing a chore to putting in significant effort to help another person.

> Madeline has a debilitating illness. The condition meant that, several years ago, she had to leave university and was unable to pursue the career she had hoped for. The condition is likely to be long-lasting and potentially life-limiting. In addition to causing a significant amount of pain and limiting her mobility, the condition means that much of the time Madeline is not able to leave her home. She does not sugar-coat things – she openly acknowledges the pain she is in, and the disappointment and grief she experiences with the on-going losses that the illness causes her. Nonetheless, she finds joy and meaning in her life: she reads voraciously, thoroughly enjoys contact with her friends and community, and uses her knowledge and experience to advocate for better health care and support for people with the same diagnosis.

Naturally, we would hope that your life brings you both aspects of wellbeing – positive feelings and a sense of satisfaction – on a regular basis. If you want to improve in this area (as many of us do), developing a sense of and living in accordance with your values and purpose is likely to help. The following exercises, habits and strategies have also been demonstrated to improve wellbeing in the short and long term, when practiced regularly.

Insights from Positive Psychology

One of the problems with aiming for happiness or a sense of wellbeing is that, in general, we are just plain bad at predicting what will 'make' us happy (and unhappy). Psychological studies have repeatedly demonstrated that while events and circumstances do impact our wellbeing to some extent, it is often to a smaller extent than we expect; in addition, many of the things we think will bring us happiness simply do not, at least not in a lasting way. Andie is not alone – beyond a certain level (and that level is almost certainly lower than you think), increased income is not associated with significant increases in wellbeing, happiness or life satisfaction. And yet we persist in thinking that it is. Similarly, thousands of people line up for hours to get their hands on the first release of a new phone or other gadget, but shortly after purchase their level of happiness returns to what it was when they were using their old device.

Conversely, we expect that negative events will seriously reduce our happiness, and they certainly can. However, studies in many areas of life have shown that the average decrease in happiness after a given negative event is often less significant than expected. In her lecture series *The Science of Well-Being*, Laurie Santos (2018) explores research findings that support this contention. Some studies, she reports, have asked students to estimate how happy they would be if they received a poor grade; some of those students then went on to receive a bad grade and were asked to rate their level of happiness. On average, the expected level of happiness was much lower (i.e., the level of unhappiness was much higher) when students guessed what their response would be than when the event actually occurred. Similarly, when asked to predict how they would feel in the weeks after a break-up, study participants imagined they would feel worse than people who actually experienced a break-up reported that they felt.

Some events and changes do bring us joy, and some do lasting damage to our wellbeing, particularly serious loses or traumas and chronic stressors (Bernstein et al., 2018). We should certainly not discount the importance of environmental and structural barriers to health, wellbeing, relationships, and achievement. The fact is that both personal and socio-cultural problems can have extremely serious effects. However, it is worth bearing in mind that many negative events are not as damaging to our wellbeing as we expect they will be and, conversely, some of the things we most hope for may prove to have a negligible impact on our happiness.

The good news is that we can influence our wellbeing, and to quite a significant extent. While various physical, socio-political and circumstantial factors may impact our capacity for wellbeing, there is a range within which we can increase or decrease our levels of happiness. But, given that we tend to be such poor judges of what will bring us more or less happiness, what should we do to increase our wellbeing? As it turns out, there is growing support for the effectiveness of a variety of strategies, many of which will be simpler (and cheaper) than you might think.

Re-Setting Your Perspective

Santos (2018) explains that a large part of our lower-than-expected levels of happiness, especially after events or changes that we think will make us happier, has to do with adaptation and reference points. For a person who is bored at work, getting a new job can be great. For a while, they go to the new job excited and happy. Part of this is because the new job is contrasted with the job they were, until recently, bored by. That is to say, the old, boring job is their reference point, and the new job is better in comparison. Pretty soon, however, they have adapted to the new job and it is now 'normal' – the person's reference point is no longer the old job but the new one, and they have adapted to their new situation.

Reference points can also mean that two people may respond to the same event in very different ways. For a person who is used to earning $40,000 per year, being told that they will be paid $60,000 in a new position is exciting and positive – it is a better income in comparison with what they are used to. For a person used to earning $80,000, by contrast, going to a $60,000 position is likely to be a less positive experience – it compares negatively with what they are used to. Each person has a different reference point, and this is one of the reasons why the same event can have varied effects across individuals or at different times. Psychological studies have also highlighted the importance of comparisons with others. Research has found, for example, that a large proportion of people say they would prefer to be paid a lower amount that is higher than what those around them earn, than a higher amount that is lower than what those around them earn (Bloom, 2007; Santos, 2018).

Comparisons can operate as powerful reference points. Santos discusses the case of medal winners. Think about gold, silver and bronze medal winners in sporting events. We would probably expect the gold medal winner to be happiest, the silver winner the next happiest, and the bronze the least happy of the three (although hopefully still happy to have won a medal!). Santos claims, however, that gold medal winners tend to appear very happy, silver medal winners less so, and bronze medal winners happier than the silver medal winners. This, she says, is because the reference point for the silver medal winner is the gold medal winner – a negative comparison – while the reference point for the bronze medal winner consists of the competitors who did not get a medal at all.

We also get trapped in negative effects of comparisons and the development of unhelpful reference points through traditional and social media (Santos, 2018). Television viewing can decrease our satisfaction by providing reference points to which our own lives, circumstances, incomes, possessions, achievements and looks compare poorly. Similarly, social media often involves seeing images that generate negative comparisons. As the theory behind reference points would suggest, consuming such traditional and social media is associated with feeling worse about ourselves; it is also associated with expressing lower levels of satisfaction with other people in our lives.

What can you do to challenge the effects of adaptation and increase your happiness? Luckily, there are simple steps you can take, for only the cost of a few minutes of your time. Practiced regularly, these strategies have been empirically demonstrated to increase wellbeing (Diener et al., 2017).

Change Your Reference Points

You have already learned that reference points can reduce our wellbeing; this does not have to be the case, however. You can change your reference points in such a way that that the increased happiness you feel in the immediate aftermath of a positive change is more sustained. There are exercises, for example, that will help you re-set your reference point to a time before you had something you value, which in turn helps you appreciate what you now have (Santos, 2018).

Activity 3.1: Using Memory to Re-Set Your Reference Point

This exercise involves using your memory and imagination to really engage with a previous state or circumstance. It will take several minutes.

1	Think about something that you were excited about and used to appreciate but which is now 'normal' or which you take for granted. If you have trouble identifying something, the following prompts might spark an idea: ⊕ A relationship. ⊕ A job or income level. ⊕ An item or possession. ⊕ A skill or ability. ⊕ A state of health. ⊕ A housing situation. ⊕ The relief of a negative circumstance or difficulty.
2	Remember your life before you gained this relationship, thing or situation. Focus on what life was like and imagine yourself back in that situation. Actively focus on how things felt and looked, what the conditions were, what you did and did not do and have. Spend several minutes focussing on this.
3	Reflect on how the state you have been remembering differs from your life now.

(Adapted from Santos, 2018)

This activity directly challenges our mental adaptation to circumstances. Andie, who found that within a few weeks of promotion she was back to her previous level of happiness, could use this technique to re-appreciate the promotion and pay rise she has received; she could even spend a week or two limiting her budget in accordance with her salary prior to the pay-rise to remind herself of the increased resources she now has (Santos, 2018).

Activity 3.2: Imagine an Absence

1	As with Activity 3.1, think about something in your life that you are used to.
2	Spend a few minutes imagining what your life would be without the circumstance, person or thing.
3	What would you lose? What do you have in your life now that you would not have if the person, situation or thing disappeared? What would be different day to day? How would each day look without this thing? What would be more difficult or even impossible to do? How would you feel?
4	What would your life be like if you never had this person, situation or thing?

(Adapted from Santos, 2018)

Activity 3.2 increases our appreciation for what we have. It could help Jens and Margo increase their happiness and satisfaction in their relationship. They could each spend some time thinking about what their life would be like if the other was not in it; imagining going through every day without the other person; imagining what their home would be like, how they would feel, what they would miss if the other was not there. Activities like this can be used for any number of situations in which we have found an initial joy, appreciation or excitement has dissipated.

Other activities that help re-set reference points and reduce negative comparisons include:

- **Imagining less fortunate circumstances:** This is similar to the exercises you completed in Activities 3.1 and 3.2. Focus your imagination on a different set of circumstances by which your own situation looks more positive in comparison.
- **Practicing gratitude:** Developing gratitude can also assist in both reducing the impact of adaptation and unhelpful reference points (we discuss developing gratitude shortly).
- **Choose media wisely:** Limiting traditional and social media engagement, especially media that encourages negative comparisons, can have a beneficial effect on wellbeing.

If you pay attention to the reference points you use and the comparisons you make, you may find that you become aware of particular thoughts associated with reference points or comparisons that encourage dissatisfaction or ingratitude. When this happens, you have an opportunity to choose how you will respond, and your response could increase or decrease the negative effects of the thought. If you want to respond in such a way as to decrease the negative effects and increase your wellbeing, you could choose to use any of the activities and techniques above; you could also use cognitive or mindfulness strategies to challenge unhelpful thought patterns (we discuss these strategies in more length later in this section, and in the next). These strategies include:

- **Challenging:** Thinking of evidence against the particular thought or a different perspective you could take on the situation.
- **Thought stopping:** Noticing the thought is happening and stopping it. You could say "Stop!" out loud, think "Stop," imagine a stop sign, or hold up your hand in a 'stop' gesture. You can then re-focus your attention on something more positive or challenge the thought.
- **Observing:** Using a mindfulness approach, simply noting that the thoughts are occurring without buying into them or trying to change them.

Helpful Hint:
When doing activities to improve your wellbeing, such as changing your reference points and practicing gratitude, varying the activities you do will be helpful (Diener et al, 2017; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade, 2005). Experiment, find a few activities that you enjoy, and mix them up.

Develop Gratitude

Consciously reflecting on what you are grateful for is effective in increasing wellbeing and reducing the negative impacts of adaptation and unhelpful reference points (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Santos 2018). Some people have a particular practice they do regularly, a gratitude diary they write in, or a document where they list a certain number of things they are thankful for; others simply spend a few minutes focussing their attention on the things they appreciate. However you choose to practice gratitude, it is a quick, easy, and completely free way to boost your wellbeing.

Activity 3.3: Exploring Gratitude

This exercise takes only a few minutes, although you can take longer and write more if you wish.

Take a blank piece of paper or a new page in your notebook. Write down:

1	Three things that have happened today that you enjoyed, or felt touched or moved by. Your list could include a major event, a moment of attentiveness, or an everyday occurrence. Describe what happened and how you felt.
2	Three people whom you are grateful to have in your life. These may be people who are still in your life, people you used to know, or people who have died. There may even be a person you have never met but who, through their work or art, has had a positive impact on you. Think about that person, picture them in your mind, or bring to mind a positive memory you have of them.

3	Three places that you are grateful for having been. Picture each place in your mind for a few moments. What would you see, hear, and feel if you were there?
4	Three other things you are grateful for. This could be anything that brings something positive to your life; it could include pets, things that bring you comfort or security, or particular activities you find enjoyable or satisfying. Again, it does not matter whether the item is big or small, whether or not it is 'important'; what matters is that you are concentrating on things for which you are grateful.

Read back over what you have written. How are you feeling now?

Other activities that you can work into your day, week or month include:

- **Gratitude lists:** Simply listing a certain number of things you are grateful for – say, five – is an effective gratitude practice. Try writing these things down, rather than just thinking about them. Get specific: identify different aspects that you are particularly grateful for, especially if you are focussing on the same things repeatedly.

- **Gratitude journal:** Keeping a journal in which you record and reflect on things you are grateful for. There are many gratitude journals with particular formats and exercises available, but a simple notebook can do the trick.

- **Say thank you:** Say thanks or send thank you notes to let others know you are grateful to them and to share reflections on what you are grateful for.

- **Imagine an absence:** Activity 3.2 also helps develop gratitude.

- **What went well:** Write three things that you did today, or that happened today, which had a positive effect on you. Specify how each thing happened. (This is an exercise developed by Martin E. P. Seligman [2018], a major figure in positive psychology.)

- **Savour:** Focus on a good thing or positive experience as it is happening. This could be a physical sensation, such as when eating a delicious meal or snuggling into a warm bed on a cold night; a positive emotional experience, like feelings of joy or comfort when you return home or are in the company of someone you love; the laugh-out-loud enjoyment of something funny; or the benefits bought through a particular circumstance. If you start practicing mindfulness (discussed shortly) those skills can be useful here.

You might find it useful to have objects around that help you develop gratitude. You may have photographs of important people, an item from a place or person that helps inspire thankfulness in you, or a picture of a thing or place that brings you a sense of gratitude. Alternatively, you might select an item to use as a cue to practice gratitude, or write a gratitude-related question or cue on colourful paper. You could put an object on a table or desk, in your bag, or attached to a key chain; a picture or sign could go on a wall, on the fridge, or in your wallet; a photo or other image could be the desktop or screen saver on your computer, tablet, or phone. You could even set up reminders to practice gratitude using an app.

You might remember from section one that gratitude can help with the development of a sense of purpose. Reflecting on what we are grateful for can inspire ideas about things that we would like to do or effects that we would like to have. People who are grateful for assistance they have received, for example, may decide to pursue a purpose in which they help others in turn.

Helpful Hints:
You do not have to commit to a gratitude exercise every day in order to see a result, although some people enjoy doing so. Lyubomirsky and fellow researchers (2005), for example, found that a weekly gratitude practice was more effective, at least over the course of their study, than daily practice.

When you practice gratitude regularly it is more effective to vary your focus, rather than reflecting on the same things each time. For example, if you take time once per week to list things you are grateful for, vary the areas of your life that you focus on week to week; one week you could focus on relationships; the next, what brings you comfort; then things you enjoy doing; things you are grateful for at work or things you have learned through study; moving on to health and wellbeing; reflecting on positive changes; and so on.

Investing in What Matters

Connecting with others is another important piece of the wellbeing puzzle, and benefits us both physically and mentally. Spending time with people who matter and whose company we enjoy is one of those things we often correctly recognise as beneficial, but it may be even more so than we tend to think. Prioritising and savouring time with loved ones is a good investment, but the benefits of connection can come from even brief interactions (Santos, 2018) – a conversation on the bus, or smiling and saying thank you, for example.

Being kind to others, even in small ways, benefits us as well (Diener et al., 2017), whether you are taking time to contact someone who will appreciate the connection; ensuring that you are friendly and thank someone for something they do; spending money on another person (even a very small amount!), such as buying a treat or gift; or doing something for another person that takes a significant amount of your time or effort. In recent years, the instruction to 'commit random acts of kindness!' has become popular, but unlike many popular ideas, this one is on the money.

Activity 3.4: Act of Kindness

One of the best ways to help ourselves is to help others. Try this activity and pay attention to its effects on you.

1	Write down a few simple, kind things you can do for others this week. The size does not matter – what matters is that you do something for the benefit of someone else.
2	Work these things into your week. You might choose to do one specific kind thing each day (although hopefully you are doing other kind things everyday anyway, perhaps without even noticing).

3	Check in with yourself after you have completed each kind act. How do you feel?
4	At the end of the week, list the kind things you did and reflect on your list. How did it feel to do these things? What effects on others did you notice? What effects on yourself did you notice?

Helpful Hint:
If you cluster kind acts together – perhaps, deliberately doing five kind acts on one day – the benefit to your wellbeing could be increased (Lyubomirsky et al 2005).

Seligman (2018) tells a story about a student who worked a job she did not like: bagging groceries at a supermarket. The student identified that social intelligence was a particular strength of hers, and decided to integrate it into her work. She made it her aim to make the few moments that a customer spent interacting with her the highlight of their day. Of course, this was likely to be the case only occasionally, but acting in accordance with her values and using a strength to connect with and be kind to others made her job, which was otherwise the same, a much more enjoyable and satisfying experience. Stories such as this highlight the benefits of social connections and kindness, setting personally meaningful goals, engaging our strengths, and enacting positive values.

Finding ways to enact our values in our everyday life not only moves us towards a life of purpose, it also makes us happier. This happiness may not be the short-term fun or enjoyment of some of those things we think will make us happy, like buying something new; in fact, enacting a value may be a challenging thing. But the satisfaction of doing so and the benefits to your wellbeing that it brings will be much more sustainable. You might like to review the answers you wrote for Activity 1.3. Is there a positive value you would like to live more consistently with or which you could engage in different areas of your life?

What else might be worth investing in? Putting time into long-term projects; volunteering; learning; engaging in community activities – these activities also link wellbeing with purpose. In addition, building healthy habits is likely to benefit your mental and physical wellbeing, while setting you up for a productive and purposeful life.

Healthy Happy Habits

In addition to practicing strategies that will help you re-set your reference points, reduce the negative impact of comparisons, and increase your satisfaction and sense of wellbeing, there are a number of basic habits you can cultivate that will build your wellbeing.

The Basics

Sometimes it seems as though, no matter the issue, the same three things keep coming up as important in preventing, fixing or reducing the impact of the problem: eating well, exercising, and getting enough sleep. Each of these things has been demonstrated, over and over again, to help in addressing a wide range of physical and mental health problems, and increasing our overall happiness and wellbeing (Santos, 2018).

Eating well means eating a variety of foods, mostly plant-based, and limiting consumption of highly processed, sugary, and fatty foods. It does not mean dieting – that is a trap which can have highly negative consequences – but is about developing sustainable eating habits that centre on eating a moderate amount of nutritious food, with occasional treats. Good food is fuel for our physical bodies; it also improves our mental health.

The Department of Health (2014) has recommendations for physical activity, with the aim of preventing and reducing the impact of a number of serious physical and mental health conditions, and improving general wellbeing. For adults aged 18-64, they recommend (after getting a doctor's advice) starting small, with a little bit of activity each day, and working up to a regular routine. They point out that 1.25 hours of high intensity or 2.5 hour of moderate intensity exercise per week brings a range of benefits, such as improving strength and heart health. Working up to 2.5 hours of high intensity or 5 hours of moderate intensity exercise per week brings additional benefits, such as reducing the risk of cancer. (It is also possible to combine moderate and high intensity exercise: each minute of high intensity is worth two minutes at moderate intensity).

If you look at the recommended amount of exercise and feel put off or think, "I don't have time for that!" here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Basically, exercise involves physical activity that raises your heart rate. This means that housework, gardening, and the walking you do in the course of your day can count, provided that you are working hard enough at it. You can also work exercise into your day in little bits: walking or cycling rather than driving; walking to and from the bus or train, or during your lunch break; doing housework or yard work at a pace that lifts your heart-rate. A good rule of thumb is that if you can hold a conversation with a reasonable degree of comfort while exercising, you are doing so at a moderate intensity; if you are breathing hard enough that you have trouble holding a conversation, this is high intensity exercise.

- There are countless ways to get enough exercise each week to see improvements in strength and your cardiovascular system. For example:
  - A 30 minute swim or 15 minute run, five day a week.
  - A 15 minute walk each weekday morning or on your lunch-break, and a 15 minute set of weight-based exercises or another walk in the evening.
  - Two one-hour, moderate intensity exercise classes plus a half hour easy bike ride.
- You can get your friends or family involved. Exercising with others will help you all stay motivated, and you get the benefits of social connection as well.
- In addition to physical health benefits, exercise improves mental health and general wellbeing. If you are exercising regularly, you will feel happier and more satisfied; imagine how feeling better, mentally and physically, will improve your day-to-day life.

Exercising during the day (but not immediately before going to bed) also helps with sleep, as does:

- Preparing to sleep with a routine that involves time for winding down.
- Avoiding screens (TV, computer, phone, etc.) for an hour before bed. You could start with half an hour, or even just fifteen minutes, if an hour seems too long, and build from there.
- Going to bed and getting up at a regular time.
- Avoiding alcohol, nicotine and caffeine for several hours before going to bed.
- Making the sleep environment dark, quiet (and TV-free!), and comfortable – not too warm and not too cool.

Many people underestimate the amount of sleep they need and are mildly sleep deprived on a regular basis. It is not uncommon to hear people say that they get by with less than six hours of sleep, but they may well be risking more than they know, including accidents, injuries, and illnesses. And while most of us can probably repeat the common idea that eight hours is about right, that is not the whole story. Much research has been done in this area, and many reputable sources (e.g., Mayo Clinic, 2016) agree that adults typically need between seven and nine hours; for a small proportion less than seven hours will suffice or more than nine hours be necessary. This allows for significant variation, so be prepared to need a bit more or a bit less sleep than the people around you, and consider whether you need more sleep than you previously thought.

In addition to physical and mental health benefits, both exercise and sleep also improve cognitive functioning (Santos, 2018). Remember, the better you take care of your health, the more energy and resources you will have to devote to the things that matter: enacting your values, reaching your goals, and living with purpose.

Note:
The information provided here is general and basic. It is not medical or health advice, and it is highly recommended that you discuss eating, sleep and exercise with your general practitioner, particularly if you are planning to make any changes in these areas. If you have an issue with eating, sleep or exercise, it is particularly important that you seek medical advice.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is simply being aware of what is happening in the moment. Mindfulness is often associated with meditation, but it can be applied much more broadly. It is something we all do naturally, at least some of the time. You will often have been mindful without necessarily knowing it: you are mindful whenever you are absorbed in what you are doing, focussed only on the present moment. You may be mindful while concentrating on cooking, playing a musical instrument, practicing a sporting skill, paying close attention to what someone is telling you, listening with careful attention to a piece of music, or gazing attentively at a landscape.

Much of the time, however, we are not mindful. This is not always a problem – we do not need to be mindful in everything we do – but many of us will benefit from becoming more mindful in our day-to-day lives. This can be through a formal meditation practice, but it may also be simply through concentrating on what we are doing, thinking or feeling, or what is happening around us.

Activity 3.5: Five Senses

Five senses is a simple, common mindfulness exercise (it is sometimes called '5- 4-3-2-1'). If you practice it a few times, you will find it very easy to remember and quick to do. It can help in connecting to the present moment, and in grounding when feeling disconnected or distressed.

5	Look around you and focus on what you can see. List *five* things you can see – items, objects, shapes, patterns, or colours. If you have done this activity in a similar setting before, try noticing things you did not name last time.
4	Bring your attention to physical sensations. Name or describe *four* things you can feel. These could include the temperature or breeze; the feeling of your clothing, shoes, hair or accessories; the feeling of your feet against the floor or your back against a chair; the sensation of a surface you are touching; or the sensations associated with your breath.
3	Attend to the sounds around you. Identify *three* sounds you can hear. You could notice whether the sounds are loud or quiet, steady or changing. You may be surprised by the number of sounds around you that you had not previously been aware of.
2	Take a breath and identify *two* things you can smell. It does not matter if the smells are pleasant or unpleasant, just notice what is there.
1	Name *one* thing you can taste. If you have some food or a drink, you could take a mouthful and focus on the taste. If not, you may have a residual taste in your mouth from a previous meal or drink, or from lip balm; your breath may have a slight flavour to it; or you may simply notice natural taste in your mouth.

Mindfulness can also be developed in everyday activities. Some people practice by attending (and regularly returning their focus when it wanders, which is inevitable) to walking, washing dishes or doing other chores, showering, patting or playing with pets, listening to music, and so on.

The benefits of mindfulness are currently a hot topic for psychological and health studies. Although not definitive yet, research suggests that it can assist in dealing with a range of health issues or symptoms, and is associated with increased focus, decreased stress, and reduced anxiety (Santos, 2018). In addition to improving wellbeing, increased focus and decreased stress could be very helpful as you work towards achieving your goals and enacting your purpose.

Choosing Your Environment

The situations you are in – the environment and the people around you – directly impact your wellbeing (Santos, 2018). While there are things about your environment you cannot significantly alter, there are many ways in which you may change or choose your environment to enhance your wellbeing. This includes your social environment, which exerts a powerful effect (Lyubomirsky et al, 2005); think carefully about the social situations you place yourself in and the people you choose to interact with.

Let's consider a few simple examples. If your goal is to develop healthier eating habits, having sugary food nearby is an issue; you will likely eat less unhealthy food if you ensure that none is on display and if you have more healthy food on display. If you are trying to quit smoking, you are more likely to succeed if you surround yourself with non-smokers. If you are trying to study, sharing this experience with other students may help with motivation and embedding information. Reducing distractions and temptations in your environment, and selecting helpful people to spend time with, will help you achieve your goals and improve your wellbeing.

Goal-Setting

You might be interested to learn that goal-setting not only increases the chances that we will achieve what we set out to do; setting specific, achievable, and personally meaningful goals is also associated with greater wellbeing (Bernstein et al, 2018; Lyubomirsky et al, 2005). The goal-setting skills and strategies you have learned, including those involving planning for and overcoming obstacles, will bring you real benefit in this area of your life. You might also use goal-setting to incorporate other strategies to increase your wellbeing into you day-to-day life. Setting goals and action steps for increasing healthy habits or regularly practicing gratitude and reference point re-sets, then, might be a very wise move: you could increase your wellbeing by taking the actions involved in the goal, and also by the very act of goal-setting.

The strategies discussed in this section can all enhance wellbeing. In some cases, such as eating healthily, they are universally helpful; other activities will benefit some people more than others. You might try a range of gratitude practices, for example, and reflect on your experience – you might notice that the effects of one or two seemed to be particularly strong, while the effects of others were more limited. You will have noticed that we have not set any goals for you – as with other strategies, goal-setting in this area will be most effective and most beneficial for you if you ensure that each goal you set is personally meaningful and aligns with your own positive values. Experiment with different strategies, see what fits best for you, and consider using your goal-setting skills to develop new, healthy, positive habits to improve your wellbeing.

Note:
Some people experience distress or other negative outcomes from mindfulness and other meditation practices. While in general it appears that mindfulness practice is beneficial, if you are going to try meditation or activities that involve focusing on thoughts and internal sensations, or long periods of sustained mindful focus, it is recommended that you receive health advice first. If you have a mental illness or history of trauma, please discuss meditation with your general practitioner or other medical professional before engaging in mindfulness practices.

At the outset, you may have been surprised by the different topics covered in this guide. By now, you will see that wellbeing, values, purpose and goals are all inter-linked. Your values can inform the purpose you choose and the goals you set, while living in accordance with your values and setting clear goals increases your wellbeing (Lyubomirsky et al, 2005); higher levels of passion and persistence are associated with higher levels of subjective wellbeing (Duckworth, 2017). Progressing towards your goals and a purpose-driven life also requires a range of skills for responding to challenges, whether these are associated with adapting to a new state, experiencing a lull in motivation, or dealing with specific issues. In the next section, we apply what you have already learned about wellbeing, and develop further skills and strategies to assist you when things get tough.

Quick Guide: Strategies to Increase Your Wellbeing

Re-Set Reference Points & Comparisons ⊕ Remember previous circumstances ⊕ Imagine an absence ⊕ Imagine less fortunate circumstance ⊕ Practice gratitude ⊕ Choose media wisely ⊕ Challenge unhelpful thoughts ⊕ Thought stopping ⊕ Observe thoughts	Develop Gratitude ⊕ Gratitude list ⊕ Gratitude journal ⊕ Saying thank you ⊕ Thank you letter ⊕ Imagining an absence ⊕ What went well ⊕ Savouring
Invest in What Matters ⊕ Social connection ⊕ Acts of kindness ⊕ Enact positive values ⊕ Personally meaningful goals ⊕ Long-term projects ⊕ Community engagement	Healthy Happy Habits ⊕ Eat well ⊕ Exercise regularly ⊕ Sleep enough ⊕ Mindfulness exercises ⊕ Choose your environment ⊕ Goal-setting

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"You owe it to yourself to be happy and live your dreams daily."
What's your purpose?

Dealing with Challenges

As much as we might like to pretend otherwise, no endeavour is without challenge. It is inevitable that things will arise from time to time that make achieving your goals, and living your purpose, more difficult. In this section, we discuss common challenges that can derail progress and reduce wellbeing. Some of the strategies you have already learned – re-setting your reference points, gratitude, investing in what matters, and healthy habits – will help you manage the challenges you face as you move forward; however, in this section, you will also learn additional strategies that can help in addressing particular difficulties so that you can re-coup your energy and get back on track.

Stressors, Changes and Transitions

There is no getting around it, change is stressful. Even good changes – such as attaining a high level of achievement, buying a home, getting married, and having a longed-for child – are stressful. This does not mean they are bad, of course, but we need to recognise the impact of stress, even when it is associated with positive events. Other common stressors include health problems; relationship breakdown; work issues, unemployment or changing jobs; moving house; and chronic stressors (the ones that stay with us over time). These things are just a part of life – no one gets to avoid all stressors – so it is in our interests to find ways to mitigate the detrimental effects of stress.

Stress Management

The good news is, there are a whole lot of things we can do to help reduce our stress levels. They may not directly fix whatever is causing us stress, but they help us cope and get into a better frame of mind for problem-solving. Stress management techniques include:

- **Time out:** If something in particular is causing you stress, consider taking a break. If the stress is more general, give yourself positive things to do. This will not take the stressor away, but it will help you reduce the level of stress you are experiencing and put you in a better headspace for dealing with the problem.

- **Healthy habits:** At the risk of repetition, good food, exercise and sleep are important tools for managing stress (as well as all the other benefits they bring!).

- **Mindfulness:** Practicing mindfulness can be helpful in reducing the impact of stress and stressful thoughts. In addition, although mindfulness practice is not a relaxation strategy, many people find particular mindfulness exercises relaxing.

- **Social connection:** Connect with your social supports to help reduce your stress levels (see 'Your Natural Support System' on pages 55-56).

- **Enjoyable activities:** Remember to have some fun! Do something that you enjoy; if it is a shared activity that brings you into contact with others, so much the better.

Relaxation Strategies

If you are having trouble relaxing, we have more good news – relaxation is a skill you can learn. Like any other skill, it takes a bit of practice – you would not expect to be able to play the violin the first time you picked one up (luckily, relaxation skills can be developed with much less time than it takes to become a violin virtuoso!). You already know the importance of exercise and, in the last section, you practiced a basic mindfulness technique (Activity 3.5) – both of these strategies can be useful in helping us relax, as can the other stress management techniques discussed on the previous page. Other relaxation strategies (e.g., BeyondBlue, n.d.; Corliss, 2016: Mayo Clinic, 2017) include:

- **Breathing techniques:** Deep breathing and focussing on the breath can be very relaxing. (However, for some people focussing on the breath is distressing. Do what feels right for you, and if a technique is uncomfortable or distressing, simply stop and try something else.)

- **Visualisation:** Some people like to imagine themselves in a beautiful or calm location – on a beach, by a stream, in a garden, on a mountain, even in outer space. Pick a scene you think would be relaxing and imagine yourself there. What would you see, smell, hear, and feel? You could also visualise soothing movement such as clouds or water drifting by, or something that encourages the release of tension, such as a twisted object unwinding.

- **Muscle relaxation:** Progressive muscle relaxation involves tensing one muscle group, holding the tension for a few seconds and then releasing, before moving on to the next muscle group (feet, legs, and so on up through the body). Another technique involves tensing the whole body for a few seconds and then slowly releasing, and repeating several times.

- **Guided relaxation:** You can listen to audio tracks that guide you through relaxation strategies. There are guided relaxation CDs freely available through the public library, and more than you could possibly listen to online.

- **Yoga and tai chi:** These practices combine mindful awareness with movement, and can effectively reduce stress, with added health benefits from the physical exercise involved. As always, get medical advice before starting an exercise program, and consider taking classes from qualified teachers if you would like to start practicing yoga or tai chi.

- **Creative activities:** Many people find engaging in creative activities such as writing, drawing, colouring, painting, sculpting, singing, playing music, or dancing helps them relax. The quality of the art does not matter; engaging in a creative practice is the important part.

Activity 4.1: Practice, Practice, Practice

1	Re-read the lists of stress management and relaxation strategies, and select a strategy you believe could be helpful to you.
2	Write the strategy on a blank piece of paper or in your notebook.
3	Practice the strategy now. If it is not the right fit for you, experiment until you find a strategy you are comfortable with.
4	Develop a plan to practice the skill several times (say, three or four) over the next week. As with goal-setting, write down how and when you will practice it.
5	Set a reminder for yourself. Write it in your diary, on your calendar, on a reminder note on the fridge, or set reminders on your phone or other device.
6	Tick off each time you complete the practice.

When you have completed this week's practice, either schedule the same strategy for practice next week or choose a new technique to try, and start this activity again.

Helpful Hints:
As with all skills, stress management and relaxation techniques work better when you practice them regularly. Someone who does not exercise will have trouble when they need to run 200 metres to catch the bus; someone who exercises regularly will manage this with ease (and they have a much better chance of catching it!). Similarly, if you want to be able to effectively deploy stress management and relaxation techniques when you are under pressure, you will need to practice them regularly.

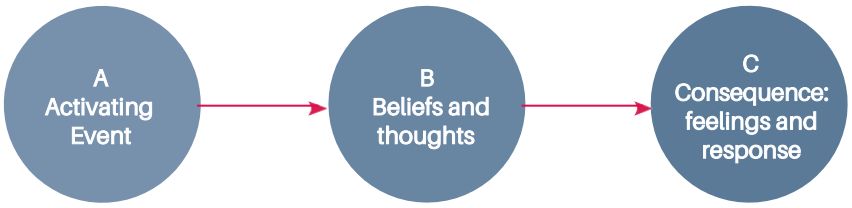
You are more likely to do this if you schedule them in and commit in advance to completing each practice as planned. Setting reminders can help make practice habitual; it is also helpful to link the practice to something you regularly do, such as getting up or getting ready for bed, brushing your teeth or showering, or finishing a meal or other activity.

Finally, you are much better off starting with a limited time commitment than pushing yourself to do a more comprehensive or time-intensive practice from the start. If you start small – say, five minutes, three times a week – you will still see a benefit, and you can build up your practice over time.

Cognitive Techniques

When we feel stressed, upset or angry, we often assume that we are feeling that way because of a particular event, but this is only part of the story. The impact of events should not be denied, and normal emotional responses (e.g., feeling sad after a loss, feeling angry at an injustice) should not be treated as pathological. However, we often suffer more than necessary due to the ways in which we think about and react to events; at times, we even feed our unpleasant feelings.

For decades, cognitive behavioural therapy has been using the ABC model to understand how our responses to events can make difficulties harder to bear, and to help people change their thinking in order to feel better. The ABC model looks like this (Corey, 2013):



We tend to think that A leads to C – that the activating event leads to feelings and responses – but in fact there are generally thoughts that intervene in this process, particularly when our feelings or responses are negative. The activating event triggers beliefs or thoughts about the event, and these thoughts have an impact on how we then feel about and respond to the event. For example, the end of a relationship tends to be painful, but it is likely to be more so for the person who thinks about it as awful, life-ruining, or an indictment on their own worth, as compared with the person who views the break-up as sad without tying additional negative meanings to it. Some of these thoughts occur automatically, even below our level of awareness, but we can bring awareness to them and intervene to create less negative or more beneficial consequences.

Dr David Burns developed a list of he calls the 'ten forms of twisted thinking', which are common, problematic types of thought and belief that tend to leave us feeling worse after a given activating event, and which can perpetuate chronic issues such as anxiety and depression:

All-or-nothing thinking	Things are either all good or all bad: one issue or set-back means failure; one problem means that an event or day (week, month…) is ruined. Also known as black-and-white thinking.
Over-generalisation	Generalising negative events as a consistent pattern. It often appears as thoughts that something bad always (or good never) happens. E.g., "I never catch a break!" and "Why is this always happening to me?"
Mental filter	Like glasses that filter certain light waves, this habit filters out positive and lets in only negative. E.g., Hearing one positive and one negative story, and only attending to the negative one.
Discounting the positive	Positive things do not count. For example, a worker receives both positive and critical feedback; they take meaning from the negative feedback but wave off the positive as meaningless.
Jumping to conclusions	Negative interpretations are assumed without evidence. *Mind-reading* involves jumping to conclusions about another person's thoughts or feelings, while *fortune-telling* is making negative assumptions about the future.
Magnification	Bad things are magnified or exaggerated. For example, thinking, "This is terrible!" about a problem, when it might be merely frustrating or require some effort to solve.
Emotional reasoning	Emotional states are viewed as reflections of reality. For example, a person might be experiencing difficulties and saying, "I can't cope," when in fact they are coping; or someone might feel afraid and assume that this means they are in danger, when in fact they are not.

'Should' statements	Ideas about how a person, a situation, or the world should be. These expectations are often unrealistic and set us up for hurt and frustration. 'Shoulds' about our own behaviour can also put unhealthy pressure on us, or leave us wanting to act in opposition to what we think we 'should' do. ('Shoulds' can also be 'musts' or 'have tos'.)
Labelling	An incident or issue is generalised and negatively labelled. For example, a person who has made a mistake might say to themselves, "I'm such an idiot!"
Personalisation and blame	Both of these are about placing undue responsibility: *personalisation* is when we hold ourselves responsible for things that we cannot control, and *blame* is when we hold others responsible for things they cannot control.

(Adapted from Burns, 1999, pp. 118-119)

Luckily, there are a number of simple strategies that can help 'untwist' our twisted thinking. In general, they rely on first identifying that our thinking is twisted (it can help to figure out what kind of twisted thinking it is), and then using some strategy to challenge the particular twisted thought:

- **Critical examination:** Write down the thought and critique it. Is it accurate? Is another perspective possible? Are there positive aspects or interpretations you are missing?
- **Identify unrealistic expectations:** Is there a 'should' or something else implied in the thought that is simply unrealistic?
- **Change your language:** Sometimes just changing the words that you use can make a twisted thought less powerful. For example:
  - Changing "I should always be polite" (a 'should') to "I aim to be polite" keeps the focus on positive behaviour without undue pressure or unrealistic expectations.
  - After someone is disrespectful, thinking, "What a jerk!" (labelling) is likely to encourage you to feel worse than thinking, "Well, that was rude" (a reflection on the behaviour) or, "That felt unpleasant" (a reflection on the experience).
  - When having a hard few days, "What a terrible week" (over-generalisation, mental filtering and emotional reasoning) can be replaced with "There have been some challenges this week," or, "This week has felt really hard." These things still recognise the difficulty, without exacerbating negative feelings and reactions.
- **Perception check:** Talk the matter through with someone else and see what they think. (Just make sure you choose a sensible, level-headed and reasonable person to speak with!)
- **Consider the consequences:** Is it helpful or harmful to think this way? What effects is it having on your feelings and behaviour? Could a different way of thinking be more helpful?
- **The double-standard method:** This is a great strategy from Burns. It involves imagining that someone you care about is experiencing the same thing or having the same thought or worry as you, and responding to yourself with the kindness you would show them.
- **Repeat a new (helpful) thought:** Where a twisted thought is repeated, it can be helpful to develop an alternative thought that is realistic and helpful; when you notice the twisted thought, repeat the new thought to yourself.

Activity 4.2: Untwist Your Thinking

1	Over the next few days, regularly check with your thinking. Each time you recognise that you are using one of the ten forms of twisted thinking, make note of it.
2	How many forms have you noticed?
3	Take one example, and write the thought down.
4	Choose one of the strategies listed above to challenge the thought, and practice it.
5	Write down a new, more realistic and helpful thought. Repeat this replacement thought to yourself whenever the twisted thought appears.

It is important to note that challenging twisted thinking (or 'cognitive distortions', as these kinds of thought are technically called) is not about simply thinking positively or using positive affirmations. Things may not be all positive; there may be real challenges or difficulties to deal with; and in some cases simply telling ourselves 'positive' things can be counter-productive. In challenging twisted thinking we are not seeking to become Pollyanna-ish, but to develop ways of thinking that are more rational and helpful when we find ourselves in negative thinking traps.

Acceptance and commitment therapy takes a different approach to troubling thoughts. ACT still recognises that thoughts can happen automatically, and that some can be unwanted or distressing. But while this approach also involves identifying the thought, rather than challenging or seeking to change the thought, here the person accepts that the thought is happening and 'defuses' themselves from the thought. Harris (2017) suggests imagining our thoughts as a sushi train. Our mind is the sushi chef, putting different kinds of thoughts on the train. We do not have to 'pick up' any particular thought; we do not have to buy into it or think that it is important or true. We can just watch the thoughts go by.

Using Your Strengths

If we are able to bring our strengths to bear on a difficult situation, the situation often improves – think about Seligman's student who made a job she disliked much more enjoyable by using her social intelligence. Using strengths also increases our sense of wellbeing (Diener et al, 2017). Your strengths are the qualities and abilities you have; they may be characteristic ways of behaving that 'just come naturally' or things you have consciously developed. If you have trouble identifying your strengths, think about your abilities, what you are good at, the positive things that other people have said about you, and skills you have shown during difficult times or when you have accomplished something. You might show strengths in your relationships, at work or study, in community engagement, in what you enjoy and appreciate, or while pursuing a project or interest.

Activity 4.3: Identifying Strengths

The following list of strengths is put together by VIA (Values in Action) Institute on Character (2018). While the list does not include all possible character strengths, it is one of the inventories that is freely available online, and can help you get thinking about your strengths.

1	**Read the list of strengths below.**			
	Appreciation of beauty and excellence Bravery Creativity Curiosity Fairness	Forgiveness Gratitude Honesty Hope Humility Humour Judgement	Kindness Leadership Love Love of learning Perseverance Perspective	Prudence Self-regulation Social intelligence Spirituality Teamwork Zest
2	**Identify any strengths or qualities from the list that you think you possess. If you feel comfortable doing so, ask some of the people you trust what strengths they see in you.**			
3	**Take one or two strengths you see in yourself and consider the various ways in which you could apply them. What activities could they help you complete? What values could they help you enact and how? On what challenges can you bring these strengths to bear?**			

When you face a challenging or difficult situation, consider your strengths. Remember the lesson of Seligman's student: bringing our strengths to bear on a challenge can help us overcome obstacles and can in itself be a way of enacting our values and living with purpose.

Problem Solving

Some stressors are caused by situations that are within our sphere of influence. If what is causing you stress is a problem you can solve (or partially solve), taking productive action can be very helpful. It is important to take the time to carefully consider your action. This can be particularly difficult while we are under stress, but the last thing we want is for the situation to be exacerbated by hasty or inadvisable action. The Centre for Clinical Interventions has a sensible six-step process for problem solving:

Define	Clearly define the problem, as well as any associated behaviours or circumstances, and factors that cause or maintain the problem.
Brainstorm	List all the solutions you can think of. Brainstorming is about getting as many ideas as you can, and it does not matter if some of them seem silly. You are only generating ideas at this stage, not evaluating them. It is helpful to engage in creative thinking and, if possible, get someone else on-board to generate a wider range of ideas.
Evaluate options	Strike off the solutions that are irrelevant, inadequate or unrealistic. Consider the pros and cons of the remaining solutions: ⊕ What are the possible outcomes? ⊕ Could there be unintended consequences? Strike off any further untenable or unhelpful solutions, and those with harmful or otherwise unacceptable consequences.
Decide and plan	Choose a solution or solutions to implement (it may be necessary to combine a number of solutions to achieve a positive outcome). Make a concrete plan for how this will be done: ⊕ Think about who, when and how. Apply your goal-setting skills. ⊕ Do you need to include anyone else? Get help where appropriate.
Implement	Carry out your planned solution.
Evaluate outcome	Consider the outcomes. If the solution was not successful, or was inadequate, repeat the problem-solving process.

(Adapted from CCI, n.d.)

Helpful Hint: Effective problem solving requires the engagement of areas of the brain that are less active when we feel highly anxious or distressed. If possible, take some time to practice stress management or relaxation strategies before problem solving.

Self-Doubt and the Fear of Failure

Sometimes we face external obstacles or are beset by difficulties that we have not created; at other times, we are blocked by our own thoughts, worries and fears. These can include thinking that things are out of our hands or doubting that we have what it takes to reach our goal. It is normal to have a few worries and doubts, particularly when we are working towards a goal that matters to us. If these thoughts (and accompanying feelings) become frequent or powerful, however, they can be distressing or lead us to freeze – either ceasing forward movement for a time or giving up on a goal completely. Luckily, there are things that we can do to combat self-doubt and fear of failure (and you already know many of the strategies and techniques that can help!).

Growth Mindset

Do you believe that people's abilities and capacities are set – perhaps, genetically determined? Or do you think that people can develop skills and abilities across their lifespan? Psychologist Carol Dweck (2017) theorises that these two approaches represent our mindsets, or characteristic ways of thinking. The 'fixed mindset' says that capacities are set, while the 'growth mindset' involves believing that capacities can be developed. Dweck claims that we have fixed or growth approaches in various areas of our lives, and that these are particularly relevant when we face challenges.

Dweck reports that when people encounter a challenge – say, they are trying to learn a new skill and are not yet performing adequately – those with a fixed mindset in that area believe that this shows they are not capable of performing the skill. They may avoid trying challenging activities because of the risk of failure, and their association of failure to perform a particular task with failing or lacking as a person. In contrast, a person who has a growth mindset will believe that they can develop the capacity to meet the challenge. A growth mindset includes putting effort into learning and persisting, even when we face criticism, failures and set-backs.

No one has a growth mindset all the time or in all areas, but it is something that you can cultivate. It involves believing in your capacity to learn and develop, persisting with challenges, and finding new ways to approach things when you are stuck. It is not about seeing all effort as worthwhile or praising effort alone, although the growth mindset has been misrepresented in this way; it is about persisting where it is worthwhile to do so, problem-solving, and accessing help and resources where appropriate. When you get stuck in pursuing your goals, you can develop a growth approach by considering what has got you stuck, and going on to strategise, problem solve, and seek help.

The fixed mindset is closely linked with a number of the issues we have already discussed – negative judgements and comparisons, and many kinds of twisted thinking. Just as we have techniques for dealing with those issues, there are concrete strategies for developing a growth mindset (Dweck, 2017). For example, you could encourage a growth mindset in yourself by:

- Setting challenging goals and engaging in persistent work to meet them.
- Learning from criticism.

- Investigating setbacks, with questions like:
  - What else could I learn that would help me here?
  - What additional information or skills do I need?
  - How will I get the additional information or skills?

And following up with a concrete plan (your goal-setting template will work for this).

- Identifying when an approach is not productive, thinking up new processes, and trying again with the new strategy.
- Asking for feedback.
- Seeking assistance.

> James's goal was to move from sales into human resources. He faced a major set-back when, after interviewing for an HR position in his company, he was told that he had not been successful. He was upset, and spoke to a friend about feeling hopeless. The friend suggested a strategy that James could use to learn from the situation and put himself in a better position the next time he applied for a similar role. Although his friend did not know about the growth mindset, her advice was in accordance with it: she told James to meet with the HR manager and ask what skills or capacities he could develop to improve his chances of getting a similar role in future. It was an uncomfortable process, but it provided James with the information he needed to adapt his strategy and take further, concrete steps towards his goal.

Reframing

Tchiki Davis repeatedly failed to get accepted into a university graduate program. Naturally, each time an application was rejected, it hurt. She could have been excused for not trying again, at least after the third or fourth attempt. She could have told herself, "I'll never get it," asked, "What's the point of trying again?" or even thought, "I'm obviously not good enough for this." Of course, then she would not have been accepted (which happened on her fifth attempt) and she would not now have a PhD. Davis (2018) says, "When we fail, we worry that we'll be punished and we feel ashamed, so we try to avoid failure at all costs."

The idea of failure is ripe for reframing and, if you are experiencing self-doubt or fear of failure, doing so will help you move forward. When we apply reframing to a problem situation, we view the situation as a challenge that we can take action in response to. We reframe by changing our perspective on the situation. (This, of course, may be applied in a whole range of problem situations, as well as when we face set-backs and self-doubt.) So how do we reframe failure?

Say you have a goal that will take some time and effort to achieve. You are struggling to take your action steps and are repeatedly thinking, "What if it doesn't work?" You are worried by the prospect of failing. Whether or not failing to meet a goal is a terrible thing, however, is determined in large part by how we think about it. Is failure the end? Does it say that the goal will never be achieved and there is no point in continuing to try? Does failing to meet a goal say something negative about us as people – that we are incompetent or even that we ourselves are failures? These kinds of ideas certainly make failure a frightening prospect.

But this is only one perspective. From another perspective, failure is an opportunity to learn – it gives important information about the situation and what it will take to achieve the goal or deal with the problem. In fact, it does not make sense to think that the things that matter should be achieved without a few (or many!) failures. Babies do not simply stand up one day and walk competently; the ability to walk takes countless 'failures' in the process of learning. At first, simply standing unsupported is an impossible feat, let alone moving without falling. Pretty soon, however, the child is walking, then running. Nothing we learn comes without errors, and it is often only by making errors that we learn things essential for actually doing what we are seeking to do. Davis herself says she makes mistakes and experiences failures every day, but she learns from them and persists, and that is how she progresses.

From a reframed perspective, failure is temporary, it does not necessarily say anything negative about us, and in fact can provide valuable information with which we can improve our efforts. This also directs us to the very questions we ask to encourage a growth mindset: What else could I learn? What is another way I could approach this? Is there someone who can help?

Davis (2018) has three suggestions for reframing and dealing with the fear of failure. First, examine past failures and identify three lessons you learned (you will also need to practice what you have learned!). Next, reframe failure as a challenge, taking what she calls a 'challenge mindset'; this can be promoted by thinking about how you have overcome challenges previously and imagining yourself performing a challenge well. The third is to be nice to yourself when you fail – none of us can meet our goals and avoid failure all of the time, that simply is not realistic, so be compassionate with yourself.

If you think back to Seligman's student (the one who did not like her grocery-bagging job), you might suspect that she used reframing, too: she reframed the job she did not like so that it became an opportunity to use her strengths and bring some positivity to her customers.

Activity 4.4: Reframing in Practice

1	Think about a challenge you have overcome – a time when you did not feel able to achieve something or felt as though you had failed along the way, but persevered. If you are having trouble thinking of a particular achievement, consider: ⊕ Completing a course of study. ⊕ Learning a new skill or struggling with a task, and yet completing it. ⊕ Experiencing an issue in a relationship and persevering. ⊕ Experiencing worry, self-doubt, or fear of failure and continuing despite this. ⊕ Being knocked back for a job and continuing to apply for others.
2	What kept you going? List the strengths, qualities, people and resources that helped.
3	What can you learn from this? What lessons can you apply when you face future challenges?

Helpful Hint:
If you are having trouble reframing, try applying the strategies you have learned for evaluating and challenging twisted thinking. Still feeling stuck? Do something active – exercise, purposeful activity, talking or writing it out. Then come back to your goals and action steps, and try again.

When you reframe – whether you are reframing the fear of failure, a particular situation, or an outcome that was not what you wanted – you are then in a position to use the skills you are learning in this guide to deal with the challenge. You can problem-solve and learn from set-backs, change the way you think about things, take care of yourself, and access further support. In these ways, you make it much more likely that you will achieve your goal.

Self-Efficacy and Locus of Control

Do you believe that you have a large influence on what happens to you? Do you think that luck and the actions of others play a greater role in shaping your life than you do? Are you able to influence your own health? Are your chances of goal achievement largely reliant on outside forces? The answers to these questions might give you some clues about whether you have a more internal or more external locus of control – that is, how powerful you believe you are in influencing your own life (internal locus of control), compared with how powerful you think external forces are (external locus of control – this could include the impact of luck, other people, a higher power, and so on).

Locus of control is not an either-or proposition, but a continuum, with highly internal at one end and highly external at the other. While it would be unwise and unrealistic to think that either extreme is accurate – we are all subject to variations in luck, physical and socio-cultural factors, and so on – having a belief in our own capacity to shape our circumstance (within reason) is associated with problem-solving and other positive behaviours. It is theorised, for example, that a higher degree of internal rather than external locus of control is associated with taking more action to protect our health and prevent future health problems (Helmer, Krämer, & Mikolajczyk, 2012).

Locus of control is also linked to our sense of self-efficacy, which is the extent to which we see ourselves as capable of taking action towards achieving an outcome. Albert Bandura, another major figure in the field of psychology, linked self-efficacy with our likelihood of setting challenging goals and taking action to achieve them:

> People with high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided. Such an efficacious outlook fosters intrinsic interest and deep engrossment in activities. They set themselves challenging goals and maintain strong commitment to them. They heighten and sustain their efforts in the face of failure. They quickly recover their sense of efficacy after failures or setbacks. They attribute failure to insufficient effort or deficient knowledge and skills which are acquirable. They approach threatening situations with assurance that they can exercise control over them. Such an efficacious outlook produces personal accomplishments, reduces stress and lowers vulnerability to depression.
>
> In contrast, people who doubt their capabilities shy away from difficult tasks which they view as personal threats. They have low aspirations and weak commitment to the goals they choose to pursue. When faced with difficult tasks, they dwell on their personal deficiencies, on the obstacles they will encounter, and all kinds of adverse outcomes rather than concentrate on how to perform successfully. They slacken their efforts and give up quickly in the face of difficulties. They are slow to recover their sense of efficacy following failure or setbacks. Because they view insufficient performance as deficient aptitude it does not require much failure for them to lose faith in their capabilities.
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> (Bandura, 1994)

You might note from Bandura's statement here that he associates higher self-efficacy with aspects Dweck identifies in the growth mindset, and lower self-efficacy with aspects of the fixed mindset and twisted thinking. Once again we see the same elements enabling purposeful action: viewing ourselves as capable of taking positive action, learning and developing skills that will help us make changes, and overcoming obstacles. (However, like with internal locus of control, we do not want to go to extremes with self-efficacy – too high self-efficacy causes its own problems.)

If you are looking for ways to develop your sense that you are able to exert influence and achieve outcomes, the skills you have already learned in this course will be helpful:

- Start out with small goals, and reflect and build on yourachievements.
- Consider potential obstacles and plan how you will overcome them.
- Take an interest in learning and view yourself as capable of it.
- Reframe challenges as opportunities to learn.
- Use cognitive or acceptance strategies to deal with self-doubting thoughts.
- Develop a support network that will encourage you.

Over and over again, we come back to the importance of perspective and taking action. At times, this will require the help of others. We may need to get ideas, information, and feedback in order to achieve our goals in particular circumstances; we also need the support of others in general, for our wellbeing and for a purposeful life.

Getting Help

In human services, support networks are often broken into two: professional supports and the 'natural' support system. Both can be helpful, with your natural support system being essential for wellbeing across your lifespan, and professional supports being required at particular times and in response to particular issues.

Professional Supports

Professional supports are those you pay to access (or which are funded by governments or charities). Many difficulties do not require professional support to resolve or get through, but if some additional support would be helpful, being willing to ask for it will serve you well.

If you are concerned about your health – physical or mental – a general practitioner (GP) is a good place to start. In addition to the services they provide themselves, GPs can assist with referrals to a range of health care providers, including mental health professionals and community services. A counsellor, psychologist or social worker should have the skills to help you figure out what the problem is and develop a plan to resolve it. Particular types of support required vary according by situation – someone with a financial issue might be best served by a financial counsellor or accountant, while a legal issue requires advice from a legal service, for example – but there are professional services that can be helpful in a range of situations, and helplines (such as Lifeline – 13 11 14) can refer you to a service or services that may be of assistance.

Your Natural Support System

You natural support system includes the people within your community with whom you have connections, and is incredibly important when it comes to your wellbeing. From practical help, to information and knowledge, to emotional support, your natural support network can provide a range of valuable resources. (Naturally, this should be a reciprocal arrangement – consider whose support network you are part of in turn, and how you can show care for the people around you.) The importance of natural supports in helping us deal with stressors, losses, and health problems is significant.

Your natural support network includes the people you consider close; friends and family members; people you engage in common activities with, such as interest groups, community sports, or volunteering; and others within your social, work, educational, religious or spiritual, and ethical or philosophical communities. Your natural supports may be within your home, school, place of worship, work, local parks and other public spaces, shops and cafes, gyms, support groups, and even online. If you have a pet, they may well be a natural support too. Look around you and try to identify who is in your natural support system and what they bring to your life (this can also become a gratitude-building activity).

Getting the full benefit of a natural support network can be limited by two particular challenges: building a network and reaching out when we need help. Some people have a ready natural support network – family, friends and acquaintances already in place – but for many people this is something that must be developed. Building a natural support system might involve:

- Actively seeking new connections; inviting people to connect or meet up (even when it is nerve-wracking to do so!).
- Making an effort to connect with neighbours, workmates, fellow students, other parents' at school or kids' activities (of course, there are some situations that will be relevant for you and others that will not), and other places you regularly attend.
- Reconnecting with family members or old friends you have lost contact with.
- Getting involved in your local community; finding a group that shares an interest, value or belief; and attending regularly.
- Finding a cause you care about and volunteering your time to support an organisation or social action group that forwards this cause.
- Joining an online community (while taking care to be safe online).
- Finding a mentor within your field of study or work, an area of interest, or to assist with a particular issue.

Unfortunately, when we are in particular need of help it can be especially difficult to reach out for support, even when our networks are well-established. We might struggle to tell someone what is happening or how we are feeling; we may be afraid of being a burden or having a request for help refused. The nature of stressors and challenges can mean that we most need to reach out at the same time as we feel least able to do so. However, while asking for specific help when you need it and having people you can speak to about your difficulties is important, it can also be helpful to simply have contact with others; even if you do not feel able to tell someone in your support network that you need help, connect with them and get the benefits of social interaction.

Note that we are discussing a support system, not a support person. One person is not a system, and however much you may appreciate a particular person's support, a system is required to support wellbeing, particularly when we are facing challenges.

We are all going to face challenges, and no worthwhile purpose is likely to be achieved without difficulties and set-backs along the way. An interest in developing, learning, and viewing difficulties as challenges to be overcome is a great place to start. And with a bit of planning and practice, you will develop a range of techniques and strategies that will help you deal with the challenges that come your way.

Quick Guide: Dealing with Challenges

Stress Management

- Time out
- Healthy habits
- Mindfulness practice
- Social connection
- Enjoyable activities
- Problem solving

Relaxation

- Exercise
- Breathing techniques
- Visualisation
- Guided relaxation
- Yoga and tai chi
- Creative activities

Untwist Twisted Thinking

- Critical examination
- Identify unrealistic expectations
- Consider the consequences
- Perspective check
- Change your language
- The double-standard method
- Repeat a new (helpful) thought

Problem Solve

- Define the problem
- Brainstorm solutions
- Evaluate options
- Decide and plan
- Implement the plan
- Evaluate outcomes

Deal with Self-Doubt and Fear of Failure	Build your Support Network
⊕ Set-goals ⊕ Plan to overcome obstacles ⊕ Reframe problems as challenges, setbacks as learning opportunities ⊕ Change strategy where required ⊕ Seek feedback ⊕ Develop social support	⊕ Seek new connections ⊕ Reconnect with family and friends ⊕ Connect with locals ⊕ Community involvement ⊕ Volunteering ⊕ Online communities ⊕ Find a mentor

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Conclusion

Having a sense of purpose is a wonderful thing, but figuring it out is just the start. Living that purpose requires time, effort, planning, action, learning from set-backs, and dealing with challenges. You are now equipped with a broad range of strategies that will help you do this, from effective goal-setting processes, to practical life-skills, to ways of changing how you think. As with anything that is meaningful, living your purpose will not always be easy, but it will make your life more worthwhile... and it will boost your physical and mental wellbeing, too.

Congratulations on coming to the end of the guide, and thank you for taking this journey with us. We hope you have a clearer idea of what matters in your life, how you can enact your values and purpose, and how you can harness your strengths to help yourself and others. Keep making time to reflect, review, and continue learning. Your life will be richer for it.