

Self Pwning

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Three years of experience in cyber security

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Freaking out right now!!!



What is stress and
anxiety?

Stress

A physical and emotional response to pressures or demands, occurring when the challenges you face exceed your perceived ability to cope.

It is not a medical condition

There are no definitive tests or diagnosis



Symptoms/signs of Stress

Physiological

Muscle aches and headaches

Sleep problems

Fatigue

Feeling sick, dizzy or fainting

Existing physical health problems getting worse

Changes to your periods or menstrual cycle

Behavioural

Eat too much or too little

Irritability or mood changes

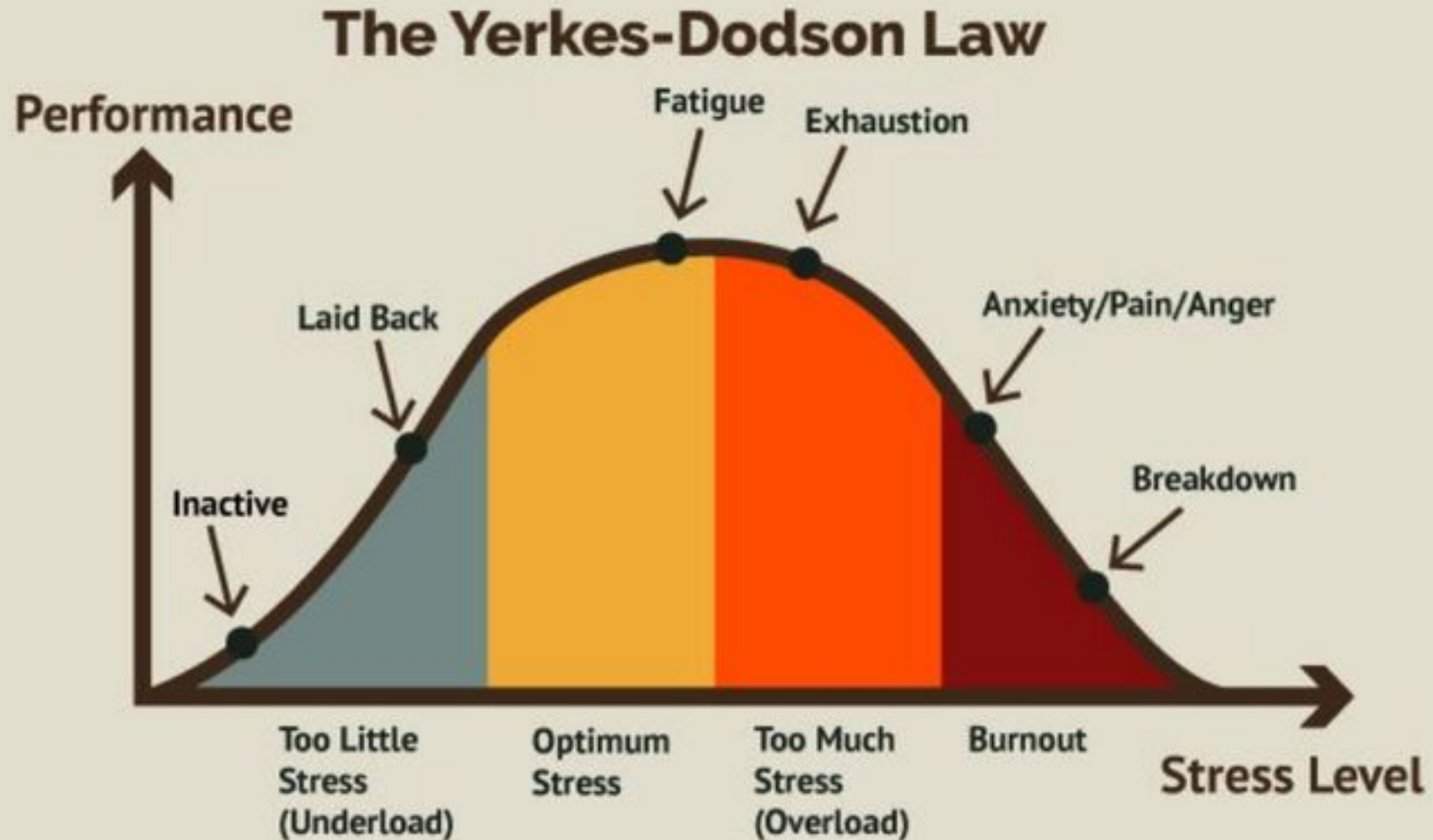
Cry or feel tearful

Unable to concentrate

Grind your teeth or clench your jaw

Withdraw from people around you

Yerkes-Dodson Law



The takeaway: You need some stress to stimulate performance. Too much, though, and performance suffers.

Anxiety

A psychological and physical response involving persistent worry, fear, or a sense of unease, often disproportionate to the situation or without a clear trigger.

It is not a medical condition

There are no definitive tests or diagnosis



Symptoms/signs of Anxiety

Physiological

A churning feeling in your stomach

Sleep problems

Faster breathing

A fast, thumping or irregular heartbeat

Panic attacks

Feeling restless or unable to sit still

Behavioural

Feeling tense, nervous or unable to relax

Low mood and depression

Constant need for reassurance

Worrying that people are angry or upset at you

Rumination

Worrying about things that might happen in the future

Stress and anxiety in Cyber Security

Acute incident stress – responding to security breaches or attacks can create high-pressure situations, leading to adrenaline spikes, sleep disruption, and mental fatigue.

Chronic workload stress – continuous monitoring and alert management can feel never-ending, causing exhaustion and burnout.

Fear of failure anxiety – high stakes and potential consequences for mistakes can lead to self-doubt and imposter syndrome.

Unknown threat stress – dealing with evolving threats and unknown vulnerabilities creates constant worry and mental tension.

Organisational Pressure – conflicting priorities and expectations from management or teams can create frustration and anxiety.



Personal Experience

Coping Strategies

Alcohol and Nicotine



Organise Your Time

Identify your best time of day - Tackle high-energy, focus-intensive tasks when you're most alert - for example, mornings if you're a morning person, or evenings if you're an evening person.

List all your tasks and rank them by importance - Focus on the most urgent first. Use a timetable to plan when to tackle each task. Ask a manager or colleague to help prioritise, and consider postponing less urgent tasks to reduce stress.

Avoid taking on too much at once - Focusing on fewer tasks helps you do each one well and reduces stress.

Take regular breaks and go at a steady pace - It can be hard when stressed, but it helps you manage challenges more effectively.

Ask someone if they can help!!! - Will give you more time to spend completing your tasks that are causing you to feel stressed.



Identify Your Triggers

Track your patterns – Keep a brief journal of stressful incidents to spot recurring triggers over time.

Differentiate controllable vs. uncontrollable – Focus energy on areas you can influence, instead of worrying about things outside your control.

Consider environmental factors – Noise, interruptions, or poor ergonomics can add to stress—sometimes the triggers aren't just tasks.

Recognise emotional triggers – Fear of failure, perfectionism, or feeling unprepared can intensify stress.

Use triggers as signals – Once identified, triggers can guide you toward coping strategies before stress becomes overwhelming.



Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

Cognitive behavioural therapy is a talking therapy that can help you manage your problems by changing the way you think and behave.

Based on the concept that your thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and actions are interconnected and that negative thoughts and feelings can trap you in a negative cycle.

Deals with your current problems, rather than focusing on issues from your past.

Aims to help you deal with overwhelming problems in a more positive way by breaking them down into smaller parts.

Taking Your Thoughts to Court (CBT Exercise)

SITUATION	MOOD	AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS OR IMAGES	EVIDENCE THAT SUPPORTS THE THOUGHT	EVIDENCE THAT DOES NOT SUPPORT THE THOUGHT	ALTERNATIVE/ BALANCED THOUGHTS	RATE MOOD NOW
Describe the actual event leading to the unpleasant emotion.	Specify each mood and rate <u>intensity</u> (0 – 100%).	Write down the thoughts or images that preceded the emotion and rate how much you believe each thought (0-100%). <div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; width: fit-content; margin: 10px auto; padding: 2px 10px;">Circle the hot <u>thought</u></div>	Circle a hot thought from the automatic thought column for which you are looking for evidence. Write factual evidence to support this thought.	Ask yourself the following questions to discover evidence that does not support your thought: Have I had any experiences that show that this thought is not completely true all the time? If a close friend or loved one knew I was thinking this <u>thought</u> , what would they say to me? What evidence would they point out to me that would suggest that my thoughts were not 100% true? When I have felt this way in the past, what did I think about that helped me feel better? Have I been in this type of situation before? What have I learned from prior experiences that could help me now? Five years from now, if I look back on the situation, will I look at it any differently? Am I jumping to conclusions that are not completely justified by evidence? Am I blaming myself for something over which I do not have complete control? Am I looking at the whole picture? Do I apply one set of standards to myself and another set of standards to others?	Based on the evidence in the previous two columns, write alternative or balanced thoughts. Rate how much you believe in the new thoughts (0-100%). <u>Also</u> re-rate your belief in the previous unhelpful automatic thought (0-100%). Ask yourself the following questions to help arrive at alternative thoughts. If someone I cared about was in this situation, had these thoughts, and had this information available, what would be my advice to them? How would I suggest that they understand the situation? If my automatic thought is true, what is the worst outcome? If my automatic thought is true, what is the best outcome? If my automatic thought is true, what is the most realistic outcome? Can someone I trust think of any other way of understanding this situation?	Copy the moods from the second column and re-rate the intensity of each mood (0-100%).

Don't forget the basics

Eat right - Proper nutrition fuels your body and stabilises your mood.

Exercise – Physical activity reduces stress and boosts mental clarity.

Sleep right– Quality sleep restores your mind and strengthens resilience. Aim for 6-8 hours.

Speak to someone – Sharing your feelings eases the emotional burden.

Seek professional advice – Expert guidance helps you manage stress effectively.



What is burnout?

Burnout

A state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged or chronic stress, especially related to work, study, or caregiving responsibilities.

It is not a medical condition

There are no definitive tests or diagnosis



Symptoms/signs of Burnout

Physiological

Exhaustion/fatigue

Sleep problems

Muscle aches and headaches

Weakened immune system

Stomach problems

Behavioural

Eat too much or too little

Irritability or mood changes

Social withdrawal

Emotional detachment

Procrastination

Unable to concentrate

Stress vs. Burnout

Stress	Burnout
Characterised by over-engagement	Characterised by disengagement
Emotions are overactive	Emotions are blunted
Produces urgency and hyperactivity	Produces helplessness and hopelessness
Loss of energy	Loss of motivation, ideals and hope
Leads to anxiety disorders	Leads to detachment and depression
Primary damage is physical	Primary damage is emotional
May kill you prematurely	May make life seem not worth living

Causes of burnout in the workplace

Excessive workload and pressure

- Unmanageable workload
- Unreasonable expectations
- Long hours

Lack of control and recognition

- Lack of autonomy
- Lack of recognition

Poor work environment and relationships

- Toxic culture
- Poor communication
- Lack of support
- Unfair treatment

Work-life imbalance

- Difficulty balancing life
- Job insecurity

Personal Experience

Coping Strategies

Dealing with burnout in the workplace

Prioritise rest and self-care

- Take time off
- Take regular breaks
- Prioritise sleep
- Eat healthy

Set boundaries

- Learn to say no
- Establish work-life separation
- Disconnect from technology

Seek support

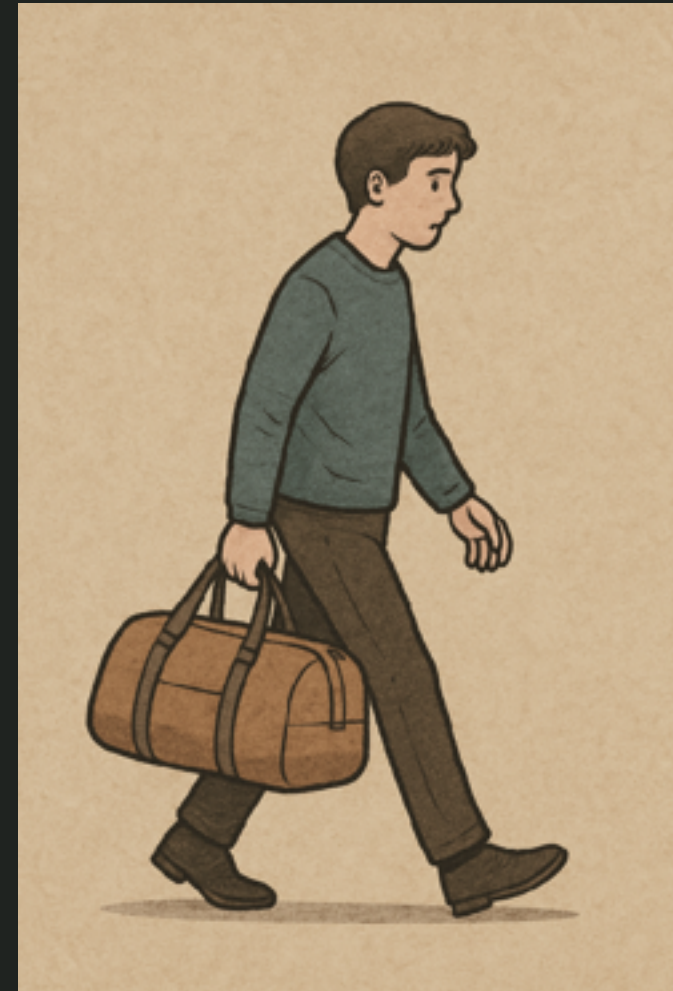
- Talk to others
- Consider professional help
- Talk to your supervisor

Re-engage with hobbies and activities

- Exercise regularly
- Find fulfilling activities
- Practice mindfulness

Burnout Kit / Go bag

- Call my mum once a week
- Joined a local running club
- Walk everywhere as much as possible
- Listen to positive podcasts
- Listen to non-aggressive music
- Always have favourite snacks to hand
- Always have favourite non-alcoholic drinks in the fridge
- Reminder to text a friend
- Beer with a friend
- Keep CV up to date
- Apply for talks for BSides conferences



What is imposter
syndrome?

Imposter Syndrome / Phenomenon

The psychological pattern in which one downplays their achievements and believes that they are secretly a fraud undeserving of their achievements.

It is not a medical condition

There are no definitive tests or diagnosis

Symptoms can include:

Burnout from overworking

Fear of success or failure

Lack of self confidence

Sensitivity to small mistakes or criticism

Setting impossibly high standards

Crediting external factors for your success

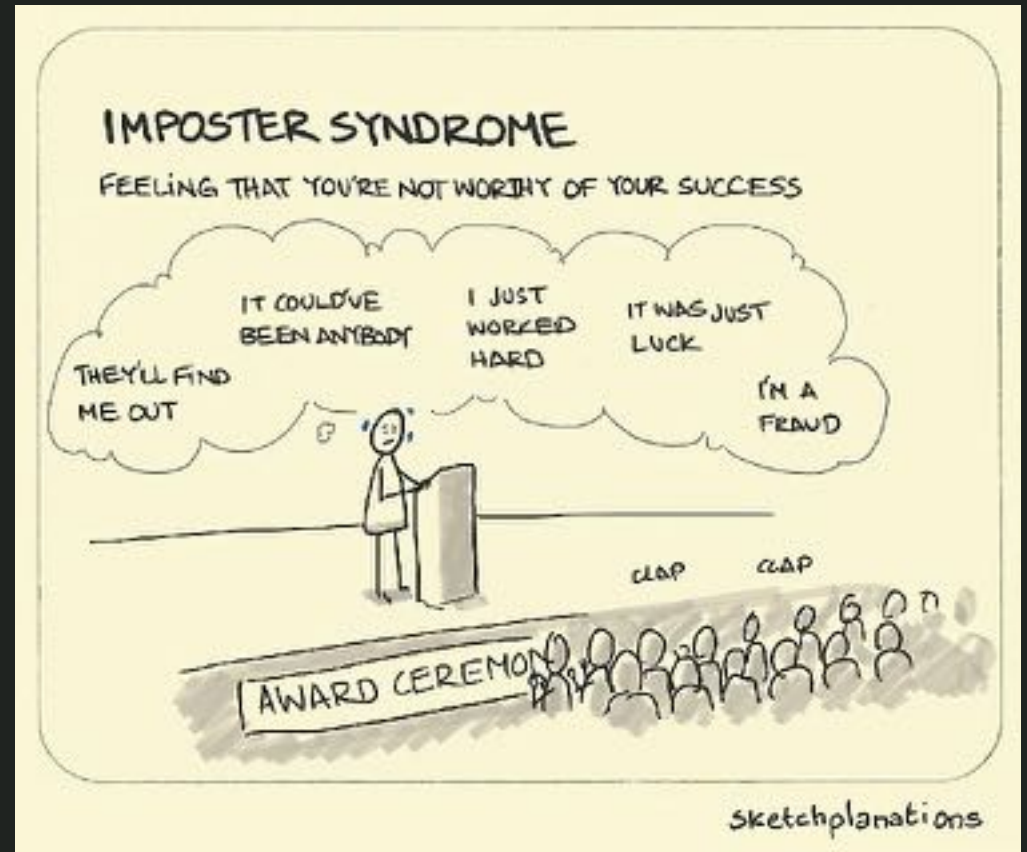
Who does it affect?

7 / 10 people report feelings of impostorism

All genders are equally found to be affected

Some evidence suggests the perception of impostor syndrome reduces with age

Prevalent in professions where expertise or intelligence are highly valued.



<https://sketchplanations.com/imposter-syndrome>

Imposter Syndrome in Cyber Security

High expectations and standards - the pressure to perform at a high level and the fear of falling short can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt.

Constantly evolving technology - the technology landscape continually evolves, and staying up-to-date can be challenging. The need to learn and adapt quickly can be overwhelming, and feeling like falling behind can lead to imposter syndrome.

Fear of failure - when constantly striving for perfection, any mistake can feel like a failure, even more so with the consequences potentially being so severe. This leads to negative self-talk and feelings of inadequacy.

Isolation – since COVID a majority of work is performed remotely. This has meant that we receive less impromptu praise for the work we do, we perceive that we're on the verge of being discovered as a fraud and that we're about to be fired as people talk behind our backs.



Personal Experience

Client Engagement

Self-doubt – I am not good enough for this role.

Fear of being seen as a failure – I don't really know what I'm doing. I'm unable to find any issues.

Extensive procrastination – If I delay testing, then I'm unable to reaffirm my lack of skills.

Overworking – putting more hours into the project means I can overcome my shortfall in abilities.

Constant comparison to other people – My colleague would have found a critical issue. What did the previous company find? They must be more qualified than me.



Report Writing

Exposed as a fraud – my colleagues will notice I'm unable to perform my duties.

Extensive procrastination – if I delay writing the report then I have more time before I'm found out.

Overreaction to criticism – a colleague has found out I'm a fraud.

Downplay accomplishments – I was just lucky / anyone would have found it.



Coping Strategies

Talk to Others

Find a mentor – Opening up and sharing your feelings is a significant step in the right direction. Look for a mentor who can listen and provide support. They don't have to offer solutions; it can simply be someone with more experience in your field who understands the challenges.

Get a cheerleader(s) – To counteract negatives thoughts about oneself we need a source of positivity. Seek a cheerleader(s) to remind yourself of how capable you are, the skills you possess and how you've overcome challenges before. They could be family, friends, not just a fellow colleague.

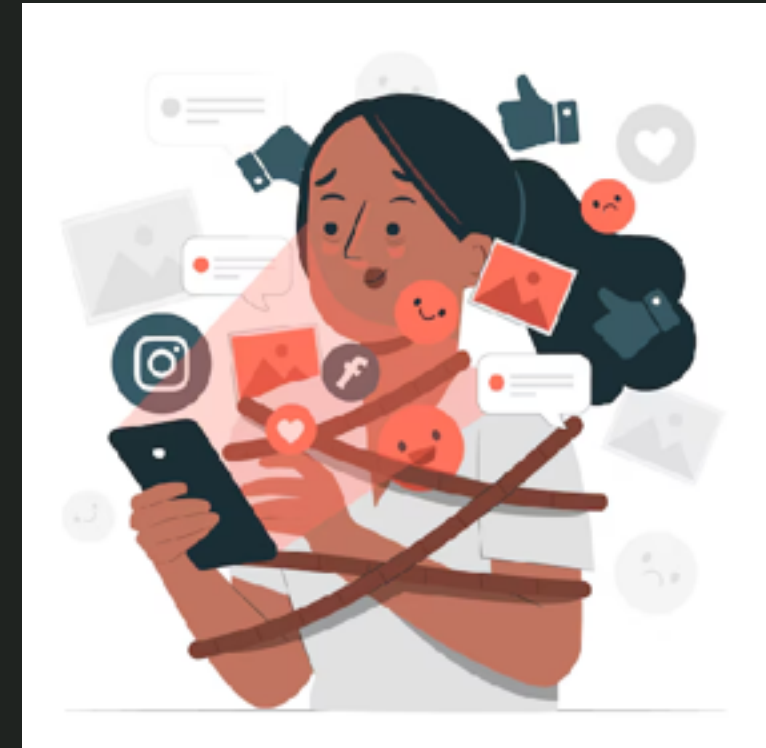
Just talk – A problem shared is problem solved. Perhaps appointing a mentor or cheerleader causes too much anxiety, another individual you feel like you have to check-in with or fake it to. A quick conversation with someone may just do the trick to get the thoughts out of your head. Sometimes we do not need advice or guidance, just hearing ourselves out loud is enough to re-evaluate how our perception is inaccurate.

Stop the Scroll

Comparison loop – it is a natural reaction to compare ourselves to others, especially in our respective fields. With the invention of the infinite scroll we're unable to get escape content to compare ourselves to.

Confirmation bias – the tendency to search for, interpret, favour, and recall information in a way that confirms or supports one's belief of being an imposter.

In small doses – control the amount of time you spend on social media. Studies show that exceeding 30 minutes of usage shifts the balance from beneficial to detrimental.



The Bullsh*t List

Goal / target – Write down the goal you wish to achieve.

Obstacles – List the obstacles you feel are preventing you from achieving your goal.

Call BS on the obstacles – Under each “obstacle” list reasons why they are irrelevant.



Cookie Jar Method

David Goggins - *Can't Hurt Me*

Collect your cookies - Acknowledge moments of personal success, no matter how minor. Whether it's finishing a difficult task, conquering a fear, or offering a kind gesture to someone, each achievement counts.

Fill Your Jar - Keep track of these victories, either mentally or by writing them down. These "cookies" represent your resilience, strength, and ability to handle challenges.

Reach Into the Jar - When facing doubt or difficult times, revisit your collection of "cookies." Reflecting on these past successes will remind you of your capabilities and give you the confidence to tackle new challenges.



My Version of Cookie Jar



Summary

Four Pillars of wellbeing

Mind



Taking care of your body by sleeping enough, eating balanced meals, and staying active can greatly improve your overall well-being.

Body



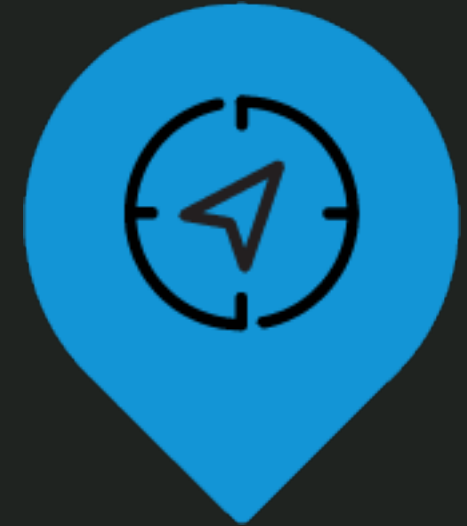
Caring for your mind means doing things that bring you joy and learning how to handle your emotions when stress or overwhelm shows up.

Relationships



Reflecting on what matters to you, including your values and who you aspire to be, can bring greater meaning and appreciation to your life.

Purpose



Caring for your relationships, from forming new bonds to working through difficult moments, nurtures your feeling of connection and belonging.