



Self-care kit

YOUR SELF-CARE KIT IS HERE

Your self-care kit offers a variety of tools you can use to improve your mental health and live life fully! Our counsellors and other professionals provided the information within this kit, and you can use what you feel suits your needs. Some things may work, others might not and that's okay. Use what works for you!

As you work towards living a fuller life, keep in mind that it's okay to have some bad days, we all do. But remember that you are stronger than the challenges you face, and you can get help when you need it. Your mental health is within your control.

We are here for you when you need us. If you feel you need of professional help, you can register for counselling at Calgary Counselling Centre [online 24 hours a day](#), or by phone at 833.827.4229, Monday to Friday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. If you feel you need to speak to someone outside these hours, call:

IN CALGARY

The Distress Centre's 24-hour crisis line: 403.266.4357

IN ALBERTA

Call 811 or go to informalberta.ca for information or resources in your area

ACROSS CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

Call 211

OUTSIDE OF CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES

Visit depressionhurts.ca for more information

DISCLAIMER This self-care kit is not a substitute or alternative for professional care or treatment. © 2020 Calgary Counselling Centre.

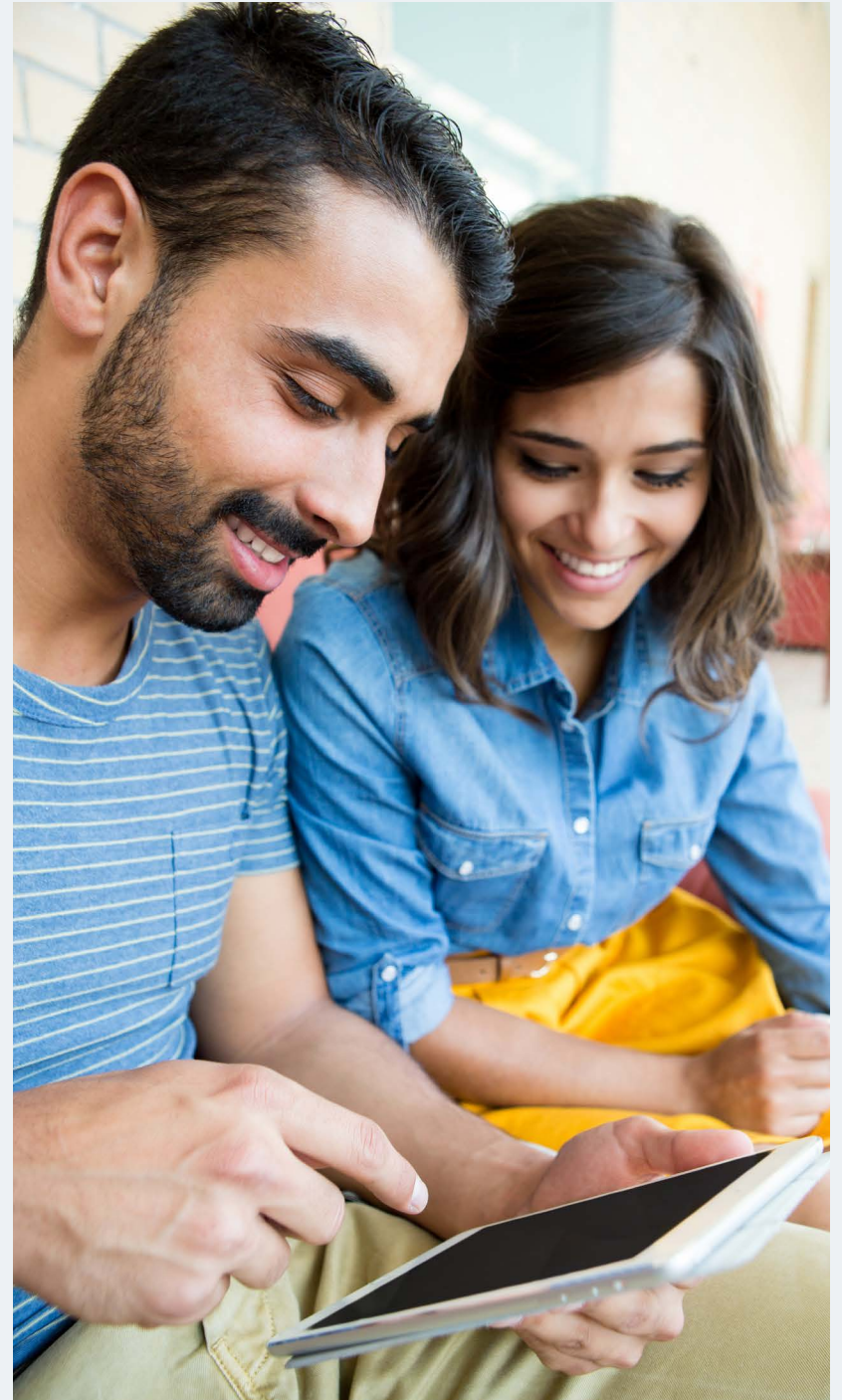


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PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT?

Physical activity and exercise are not only important in maintaining your physical health, but they also go a long way to improving and maintaining good mental health. Whether it's in the form of yoga, walking, running, biking, weight lifting, rock climbing, swimming, etc. Any form of physical activity is beneficial to your mental health, as it releases a chemical called endorphins. Endorphins have the ability to:

- Reduce pain
- Boost your energy levels
- Improve your concentration and focus
- Elevate your mood, impacting depression and anxiety
- Help you get a better sleep



YMCA offers [many exercises on their website](#). Everything from yoga to weightlifting, and for every age and mobility. The YMCA also has great resources for [staying active at home](#). Find time in your schedule to exercise regularly!

You can learn more about the benefits of exercising by watching [our interview with Kaia Kjar from YMCA Calgary](#).

QUICK TIPS TO GETTING ACTIVE



Physical activity, even for **five minutes**, can help with anxiety.



Make it fun. Do something you enjoy so that working out is something you are excited to do!



Try to **incorporate mindfulness** into your exercise, as it will boost the anxiety-reducing benefits.



Do it with a friend. Whether you go out for a walk, go for a bike ride, or do an online class, exercising with someone makes it more fun and helps you stick to it.



TIPS FOR BETTER SLEEPING

Sleep is critical in helping us maintain our physical and mental health and in allowing us to cope better during times of stress. Here are some tips to improve the quality of your sleep:

- **Get the right amount of sleep.** Adults should aim to get 7 to 9 hours per night, 8 to 10 for teens, and 9 to 11 for children. These are the ranges of sleep times to help you function at your best.
- **Try to keep a regular sleep routine.** Keep your bedtime and the time you wake up in the morning the same each day — try not to vary it by more than 90 minutes, even on the weekends. A consistent sleep routine helps hormones in our bodies to be released at the same time each day ensuring a proper rhythm and a well-regulated body.
- **Naps are a good thing.** Napping can be a great way to boost alertness, productivity, and mood. Taking naps that are 20 minutes or less in the middle of the day, between 1 p.m. and 3 p.m. are ideal so that it does not affect your ability to fall asleep at night.
- **Step away from the screens before bed.** About 60 to 90 minutes before you plan on going to bed, turn off any screens, and participate in a relaxing activity that will help prepare your mind and body for sleep like taking a bath or reading a paper book. The light and interactions from digital screens send signals to the brain to stay awake and can make it difficult to fall asleep.

You can learn more tips on the importance of sleep by [watching our interview with sleep scientist Dr. Amy Bender](#).

THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALTHY EATING

REDUCED DEPRESSION

There have been multiple studies showing that a healthy diet, full of fruit and vegetables, lean protein, and whole grains is connected to reducing depression.

A POSITIVE AND UPBEAT MOOD

Food with high levels of iron, such as seafood, chicken and spinach, have shown to have a connection to positive moods.

MORE ENERGY

When you have a healthy and balanced diet, you will find you have more energy, making you more productive. When you need an energy boost, think about fruit, vegetables and nuts!

IMPROVED BRAIN FUNCTION

When you feed your body with the necessary minerals and vitamins, your brain gets the nutrients it needs to function effectively.

BOOSTS SELF-ESTEEM

A balanced diet and knowing you are caring for your body can boost your self-confidence and self-worth. Ensuring you have a healthy relationship between food and your body is important, but it can take time to achieve.

If you'd like to learn more, [check out Canada's food guide!](#)



SCHEDULING IN “YOU” TIME

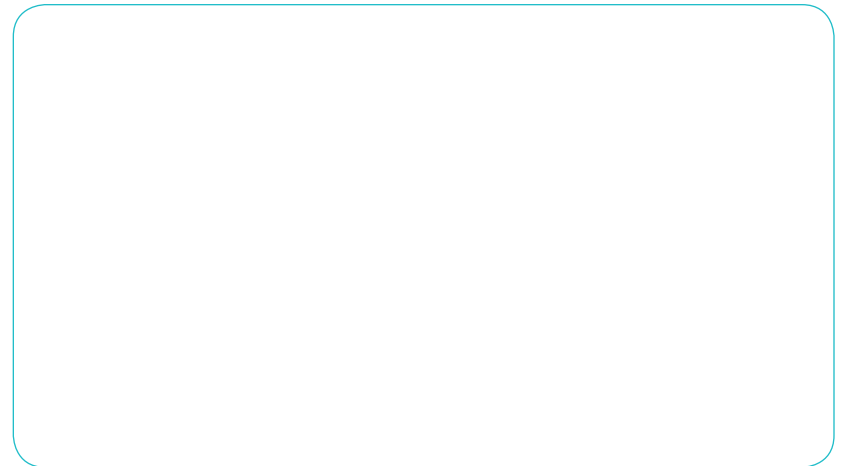
Life can be busy. We have so many responsibilities, to people and tasks, that we sometimes don't feel we can or should make time for ourselves. The busier you are, the more important it is to take some time for yourself and make sure your needs are met.

Self-care is when you choose activities that nurture your emotional, mental and physical health so you can be at your best for you and others. This worksheet is intended to help you make “you” time a priority, and to help you figure out the best way to spend that time.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Pull out a calendar, whether that's an agenda, phone, or a traditional calendar. For the next three months, block out 30- to 60-minute slots twice a week and label them “Me Time”.
2. In the space below, write down a list of things that make you happy, help you de-stress, or make you feel better physically and mentally. Some examples can be:
 - Reading a book
 - Gardening
 - Getting a massage
 - Hobbies (i.e. woodwork, painting)
 - Exercise
 - Meditation
3. Honour your “Me Time” appointments. Treat them like the priority they are.

Write down in the space below any activity that brings you joy, helps you de-stress, and makes you feel better, healthier or stronger.





MINDFULNESS AND MEDITATION

Mindfulness and meditation can be really beneficial to your mental health. Mindfulness is when you take a moment to focus on what is happening right now and acknowledge all your thoughts and emotions surrounding that moment. It can help us step out of our thoughts and view a situation in a new perspective, encouraging us to be aware of ourselves and others. Mindfulness can reduce stress and anxiety, improve sleep, increase our compassion for one another and feel calmer and more collected.

Meditation is a way of exercising your brain to be mindful. When we regularly practice meditation, we will begin to experience the benefits of mindfulness. What meditation looks like is different for everyone, from the exercises to the effects, but the end result is a clearer mind that is able to focus on the present moment and choose how you react to it.

If you'd like to learn more about the benefits of mindfulness, [watch our interview with social worker Anna Hemens](#).

TYPES OF MEDITATION EXERCISES

There are many forms of meditation that focus on different areas of mindfulness – there's no wrong way to meditate! Here are a few you can try. For nearly all exercises, you can find guided meditations on mindfulness websites and apps, including YouTube.

- Watch your breathing. Focusing on your breath helps to put you in the present moment and regulates your heart and breathing rate. Here are a couple breathing exercises you can try:
 - Bring awareness to the process of your breath: This is when you focus on every tiny detail, from the way it feels on your nostrils as you breathe in, the rise of your chest and stomach as it fills with air, and how it feels as you slowly exhale.
 - Counting: this is when you count as you breathe in and out. An example could be that you breathe in for three seconds, hold it for three seconds and let it out for three seconds.
- Mindful walking. Go outside and simply focus on your walking. What smells do you notice? Do you hear the sounds of cars passing or birds in the trees? What do you see? How do your feet feel as they press against the ground? Be curious and get detailed. This can be done with any activity, even drinking your hot cup of tea or cold glass of water. Engage all your senses in the moment
- Body scans. In a comfortable position, focus on each part of your body, slowly moving from the top of your head all the way down to your toes. Try to notice every feeling as you breathe deeply. Notice the areas of comfort and discomfort without judgement.
- Muscle relaxation. Sometimes we don't realise when our body is tense, so this exercise can really help you relax. It focuses on tensing up parts of your body and then releasing the tension, working from your toes up to your head.

Remember, it can take time for the benefits of meditation to show up in your life, similar to how you don't see immediate results after going to the gym. Make meditation part of your regular routine and you will experience its benefits!

BUILDING UP YOUR SELF-ESTEEM

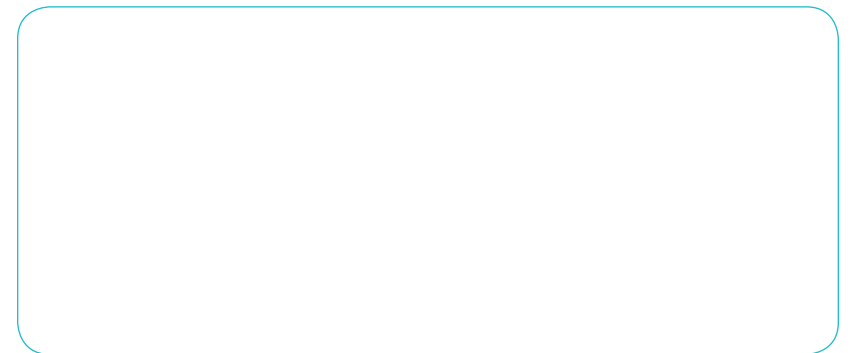
Healthy self-esteem is a belief in your worth as a person, regardless of how others think or feel about you. It's important to work towards a strong and healthy level of self-esteem so you can live with confidence, feel motivated to take good care of yourself, strive towards your personal goals and aspirations and be more resilient to overcome adversity.

Here are a few strategies you can do to improve your self-esteem. In the space provided, write down what that strategy looks like for you.

Positive reminders. These can be statements that reinforce your self-worth, or phrases that motivate you. Ex. *"My value and worth in this world is not determined by those around me or my past. I have significant value just by being alive."*



Practice positive self-talk. Train your brain to be positive and compassionate to yourself. Switch the negative phrases into positive ones. Ex. Instead of *"I never get anything right"*, say, *"I'm still figuring this out."*



Practice gratitude. If you focus on finding the good in your life, you train your brain to see them more often. What are three things you're grateful for today?

Connect with others. Humans thrive on connection, which is why engaging with your friends, family, and community is so important. List three ways you will connect with people this week. Ex. Call a friend. Have dinner with family. Walk your dog with a neighbour.

Do activities you enjoy. You can take your mind off negative thoughts by doing the things that bring you joy. List three activities that bring you joy.



PRACTICING POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Sometimes we can get stuck in a cycle of negative self-talk and it often impacts our self-esteem. Use this worksheet to create phrases that are positive. It will help you retrain your brain into seeing yourself in a better and healthier light. When you are feeling low or poorly about yourself, repeat these positive phrases aloud. Below are some examples to get you started.

NEGATIVE PHRASES	POSITIVE PHRASES
"I fail at everything I do."	"I am learning and I will get better."
"I can't get through this. I'm not strong enough."	"I've felt this way before and I was able to get through that. I can do it again now because I am strong enough."
"Everyone else is better than me."	"I am a unique person with a special set of skills that make me different from those around me. It's impossible to fairly compare myself to others."
"I've never done this before. I'm going to mess up."	"This is a new and exciting opportunity."

NEGATIVE PHRASES	POSITIVE PHRASES

TIPS FOR MANAGING STRESS AND ANXIETY

While stress is a normal part of life, it can sometimes be overwhelming, so we need to adopt coping mechanisms that help us to manage stress. Luckily, there are many ways we can do that. Here are a few good ones:

1. Limit the amount news and social media you consume
2. Stay connected with family and friends
3. Develop and maintain healthy habits (both physical and mental)
4. Create a routine, especially for your mornings
5. Practice having a positive perspective
6. Schedule in self-care time
7. Regularly practice meditation
8. Physical activity, even five minutes, can do wonders for your anxiety
9. Find opportunities to help others or brighten up your neighbourhood
10. Reach out and talk to a friend, family member, or co-worker
11. Limit the amount of pop, alcohol, and caffeine you consume
12. Make sure you're getting enough sleep
13. Acknowledge what you can and can't control
14. Write down your thoughts or concerns
15. Practice gratitude regularly

You can learn more tips on managing stress and anxiety by watching any of our Facebook interviews below:

- [Managing stress and anxiety with registered psychologist Annemarie Rued-Fraser](#)
- [De-stressing the home with registered social worker Marcus Cheung](#)
- [The benefits of helping others with counsellor Angela Dore](#)



JOURNALING PROMPTS

THE BENEFITS OF WRITING IT DOWN

Writing down your thoughts, feelings, and concerns can help clear your mind, and put things into perspective. Journaling can help you gain clarity and meet your goals, as you see where you've been and where you want to go. By clearing your mind and reducing your anxiety, you can become more focused on your goals.



GUIDELINES TO BETTER JOURNALING



Find a private, calm and safe space to write. This can be a room in your house, a certain time of day, a coffee shop, a park bench etc.



Write regularly. Some people like to journal every morning, others might do it two or three times a week. Determine what works for you and stay committed to it.



This is your journal, your private space to reflect. While it's important to have healthy relationships with others, it's also important to have a space where you can be completely open and honest with yourself. Your journal is that safe space.



Take time to reflect after. After you finish journaling for the day/week, give yourself some time to reflect over what you wrote. Practice some meditation exercises if you need help reflecting.



Remove distractions. Turn your phone off and stay away from the tv. Try to become completely immersed in your writing.

WRITING PROMPTS

Sometimes it can be hard to get started. Below are some journal prompts to help you. Read them over and pick the prompt that stands out to you the most. Keep this list for reference to use whenever you feel stuck or don't know what to write about.

- What motivates you and why? How can you incorporate that more into your life?
- What challenged you today? How can you do better next time?
- What are ten things you are grateful for right now? Why?
- What do you admire in other people that are in your life?
- What kind of person do you want to be? What's one thing you can practice to get there?
- What do you appreciate about yourself? Big or small, what are you proud of about yourself and what you've accomplished?
- In this moment right now, what are you in control of?
- What are three new hobbies you'd like to try?
- What are 30 things that make you smile?
- When you think of self-care, what does that look like for you?
- If you could change anything right now, what would it be? Why?
- What did you learn about yourself in the past year?
- What's something that's holding you back from making you happy or doing what you want? How can you work through that?
- When was the last time you helped someone? What did you do and how did it make you feel?
- What are your strengths?
- Is there a quote that really inspires you? What is it? Why does it inspire you?
- What does confidence mean to you? Be detailed.
- What does love mean to you? Be detailed.
- What does being happy look like to you? Be detailed.
- If you could talk to your younger self, what would you say?

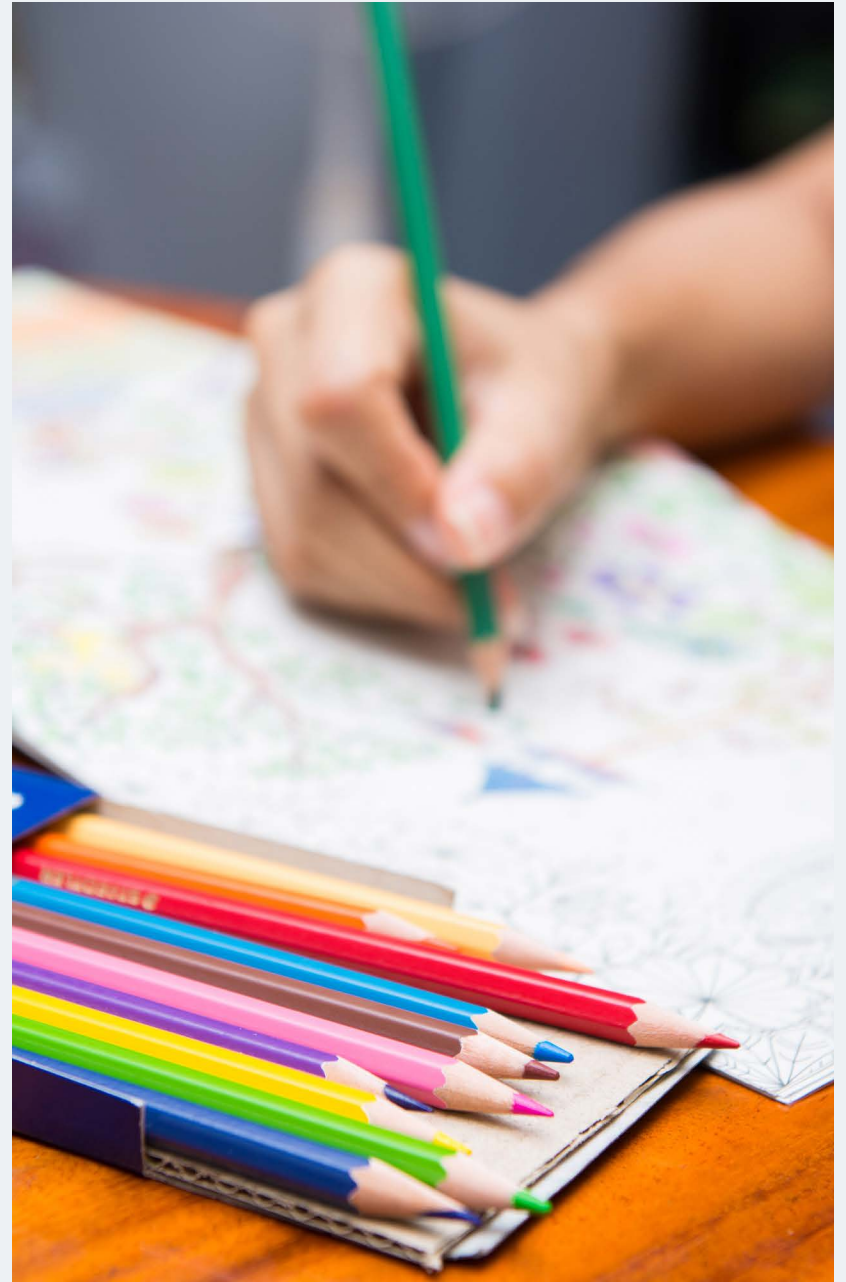


COLOURING AND YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

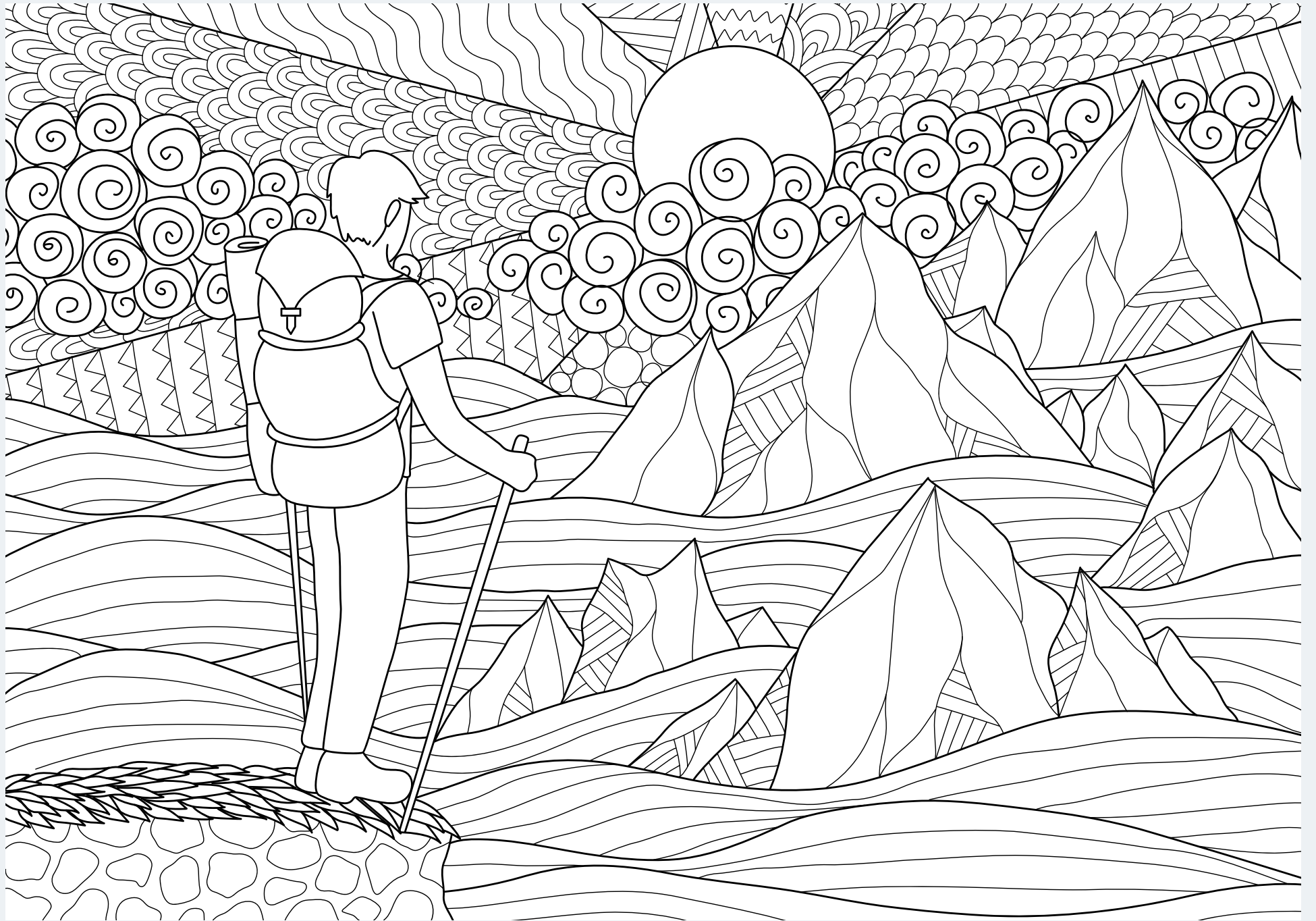
We tend to think of colouring as an activity for children, but the mindful and relaxing act of colouring can be beneficial for all ages. Taking time to focus your mind and practice creativity can bring a sense of calm and help reduce anxiety. To get the most out of this activity, try to limit your distractions. Let yourself become completely immersed in colouring.

Here are some pages for you to try this activity.

INSTRUCTIONS You can print the following colouring pages by clicking the printer icon, then selecting pages 18–20 from the dropdown menu, then clicking 'print.'









WORKSHEET: WHEN YOU FEEL OVERWHELMED...

It's okay if you struggle with being overwhelmed. Life will throw us obstacles and challenges, and it's a human reaction to be overwhelmed sometimes. We can reduce our stress by organizing our worries into things we can control and things we can't. It helps put everything into perspective. Try using the following chart when you are feeling overwhelmed and don't know where to start.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. On a blank sheet of paper, write down everything that is causing your stress. It doesn't matter whether it's big or small, just write it all down.
2. For each item, you will ask yourself two questions. Depending on the answers, you will place it in the appropriate box in the chart.
 - The first question is if that stressor is important right now?
 - The second question is if that stressor is something you can control?
3. After going through each item, look at where everything fell in the chart.
 - If it's not important right now, then encourage yourself to stop worrying about it, because it's a future issue. Your energy is better focused on the items that are important right now.
 - If it's something you can't control, then let it go. This may be hard to do but it's important for you to practice because it will significantly help you focus on the things you *can* change.
 - If it's important right now and you can control it, then focus your energy on those things. If it's still overwhelming you, break it down into smaller steps. What do you need to do to address that particular stressor so that you can move on?

Is this important **right now**?

		NO	YES
Can you control this?	NO		
	YES		

ACHIEVING FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

Finances can significantly impact our levels of stress. When work and income is uncertain or unstable, it can create great concerns and distress. Our friends at Momentum, a Calgary organization that offers programs, services and support for people living on low incomes, have provided the following guidance and resources to help you better manage your finances.



STEP ONE: CREATING A CLEAR VISION

There are a few things you need to do before pursuing a healthy financial well-being. They are:

1. **Try to stay calm.** It's easier said than done, but do your best to stay calm, otherwise anxiety and fear can cloud your ability to find and follow a plan.
2. **Pay attention to what's working right now.** Before making changes to your current situation, look at what's working well for you.
3. **Focus and value all your assets.** These don't have to be strictly financial. Assets can include your connections with people or services that are available to you. Knowing your assets and everything that's available to you can help reduce your stress and put your plan in place.

STEP TWO: UNDERSTAND WHAT YOUR FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES ARE

Sometimes, we can get incredibly overwhelmed by what's happening around us that we can't think clearly about what our financial responsibilities are. To help you with this, do the following:

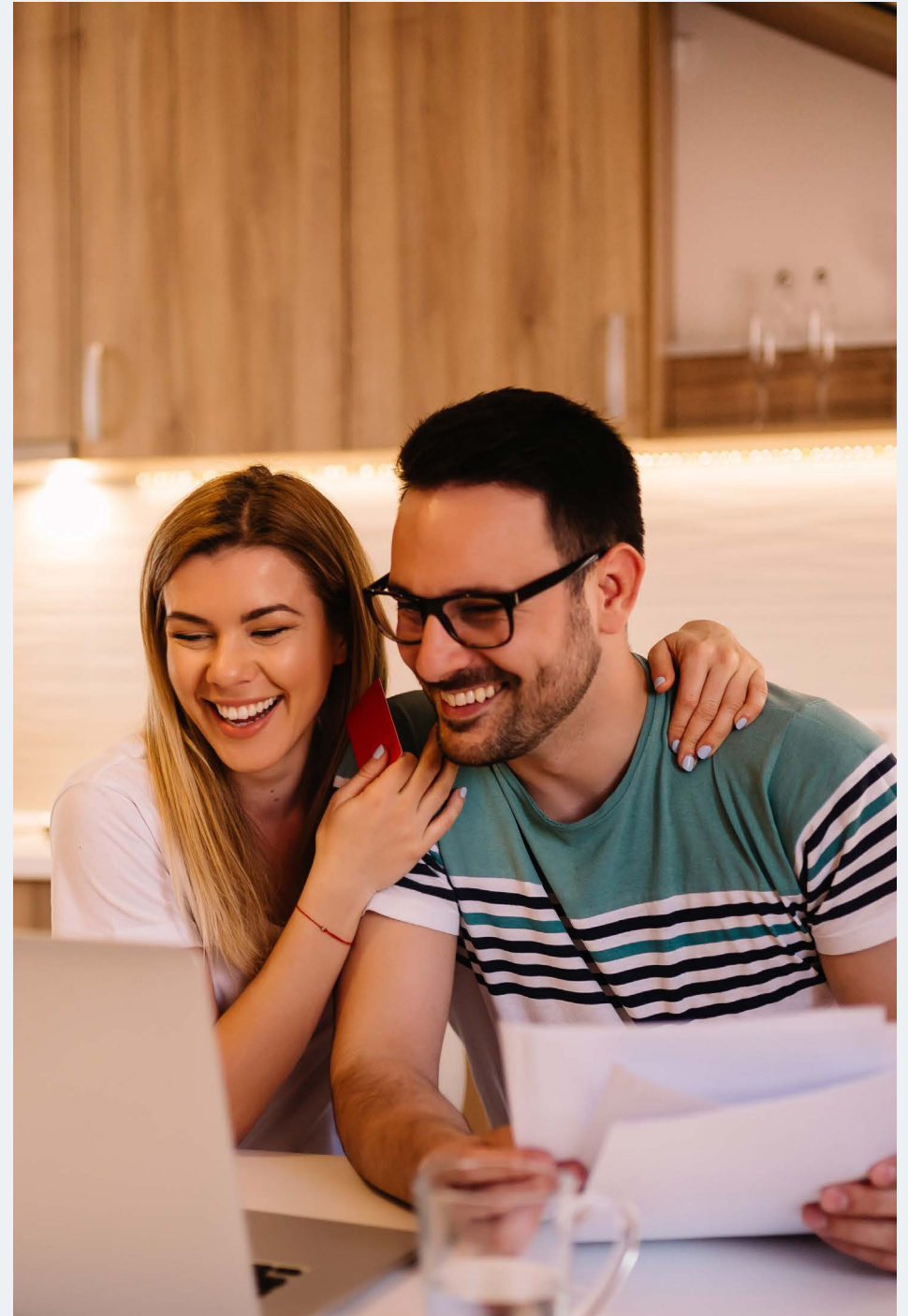
1. **List your crucial expenses.** What's most important to you right now? Rent? Food? Utilities?
2. **Prioritize your expenses.** Is there anything that can wait? Is one thing more important than the other, like water versus visa bill? Which one has the higher interest rate?
3. **Know when the due dates are.** Don't let them sneak past you, even if you can't pay it on time. It's good to know where you stand on everything.
4. **Review your bank statements.** Learn how your spending your money. Are there any trends or unnecessary spending that you can avoid next month?
5. **Create a priority budget.** This can help you visualize where you need to spend your money and make your expenses a priority.

STEP THREE: WHERE YOU CAN REDUCE YOUR SPENDING

After reviewing your spending, look at where you can cut back. Maybe you reduce the number of times you eat out in a month or look for activities you can do that have little or no cost.

Consider talking to your insurance company to reduce your plan or any other service provider where you may be able to reduce costs. Sometimes we don't think we'll be able to get any cost reduction, so we don't ask. There is nothing to lose by asking, and sometimes we can be pleasantly surprised.

Make any changes you can and are comfortable with to reduce spending. Remember, this doesn't have to be forever. It's just to help get you out of financial stress and improve your well-being.





RESOURCES TO HELP YOU BETTER MANAGE AND SAVE YOUR MONEY

START WITH A BUDGET Learn more about how to track your expenses, spend less money and build up your savings by budgeting. Momentum offers a [free, 45 minute, on-demand course](#) that you can take from the comfort of your couch.

LEARN ABOUT CREDIT Credit can be a powerful tool. Learn more about how credit works, building your credit, and credit scores in this [60 minute, on-demand course](#).

ATTEND A MONEY MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP [Sign up](#) for in-person and virtual classroom workshops on assets, banking, consumerism, budgeting and credit to help you build a financially stable life.

EARN MONEY WHEN YOU SAVE MONEY Momentum offers a Match Savings Program where you can earn money while you save (up to \$50 a month in your own bank account). [Learn more or sign up here](#). Youth have a savings program just for them and can [learn more here](#).

CONNECT TO A SAVINGS APP Start saving today with the easy to use [QUBER app](#). Save just \$40 a month for 10 months and earn up to \$100!

STARTSMART AND SAVE FOR YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION You can start to save for when your child finishes high school with an RESP grant from the government that gives you free money for your child's future education. [StartSmart is a 1 hour workshop](#).

You can learn more tips on managing your finances by [watching our interview with Jodie Moffatt](#), a financial empowerment facilitator at Momentum.

**Depression is treatable.
The earlier treatment can begin,
the more effective it is.**

