

MINDMATTERS

FIRST EDITION

2020

TOP TIPS FROM THE TOP

LETTING GO...

Find out how
inside!

MANAGE YOUR STRESS

Psychologist
Bonolo
Mophosho
shares how to
conquer stress

AND...



LIVING ON A STUDENT
BUDGET



WHAT TATTOOS WOULD
APPEAR ON YOUR BODY?

PLUS!

How to be
more
employable
p.31

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Message from the Editor

What's in a Name?

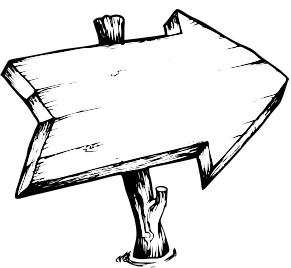
A name matters. When I was decades younger, I participated in school athletics and regularly competed against a lad with a particularly challenging surname; kids at school often mocked him because of his surname. Then, there was a high school teacher, named X, by his parents. No jokes, we asked proof, and he showed us his ID. Imagine his mixed bag of schooling experiences: “X marks the spot”, “He has the X-factor”, “Hunter’s Xtreme”...

Our names follow us wherever we go. Names are symbolic representations. A name becomes part of a specific socially constructed identity or understanding of a thing, person, or being. Identities are co-constructed. Identities and names cling to us until the day we die, and even after we leave this physical and mortal plain.

Names are important. I learned this when I travelled back to my home province, Mpumalanga, in 2008, in my first ever car. It was an old, broken down VW beetle. I named it Monster because it liked to devour petrol and you could hear its roar from 200 meters away. I needed it, and it was functional enough for me to fulfil my duties. During our first year of Masters in Psychology, we had to visit schools, clinics, and hospitals for various activities and as part of our applied and practical academic component. So, my bicycle would not do anymore. Despite its practical value, if Monster were a dog, and I a veterinarian, I would have suggested euthanasia. Needless to say, I would never again travel in it over such a long distance (i.e. from UFS Bloemfontein to my Mpumalanga hometown). Much like Akani Simbine, it was quick over short distances, but not built for long-distance.

On this day, as I crawled 600 kilometres, in a car that sounded like it might die or explode at any moment, to the province where the sun rises, I realised the importance of a name. I didn’t have Google maps and wrote down the directions provided by a knowledgeable other. There was one very important off-ramp close to Pretoria and Johannesburg. If I missed it, I’d have no choice but to enter a busy city centre, before I can manoeuvre back to the highway and my path to my loved ones.





I missed it. You see, I was informed to keep an eye out for the sign and name 'Witbank', and to steer a specific direction from there, with a straight shot to my destination. My eyes were fixed on every highway sign in the designated area. Still, Witbank never came, and so I ended up in the middle of the hustle and bustle of peak time city traffic. It took two hours to get back on track. Only later I discovered that, at some point, the name Witbank was changed to Emahlaheni.

So, what's in a name? I guess it depends on who you speak to. But there are many reasons for names. Names guide us, help us to make sense of things and create a shared or common understanding. Names tell a story. Names represent identities. This is the maiden, and historic, 1st edition of the mental health publication: Mind Matters. The name was chosen with the care and thoughtfulness that some parents apply when naming a child.

The sections that follow aim to highlight what matters most when it comes to your mind. Some sections share how individuals at the top echelons of the UFS take care of their minds. Other sections focus on how to support your grey matter (i.e. your brain) and consequently improve your general functioning. Some parts discuss matters related to careers, wellbeing, finances, and self-development. We also provide news and resources that might matter to you.

Whatever your fancy, Mind Matters focuses primarily on why the health of your mind, matters. Our minds and brains are the most powerful intelligence or apparatuses on the planet. A power like that needs to be wielded wisely, or we might suffer much at our own neglect of our mental health. It's not always easy, but it is always necessary!

By the way, my given name, Tobias, means 'God is Good', and my inherited surname, van den Bergh, translates to 'from the mountains'. So, from the glorious mountains of Qwaqwa, I wish you enjoy this first edition and may peace be with you wherever you go. We will endeavour to continually improve and develop Mind Matters as its identity and lifespan grows. Your feedback and voices are most welcome.

With gratitude,
Tobias van den Bergh



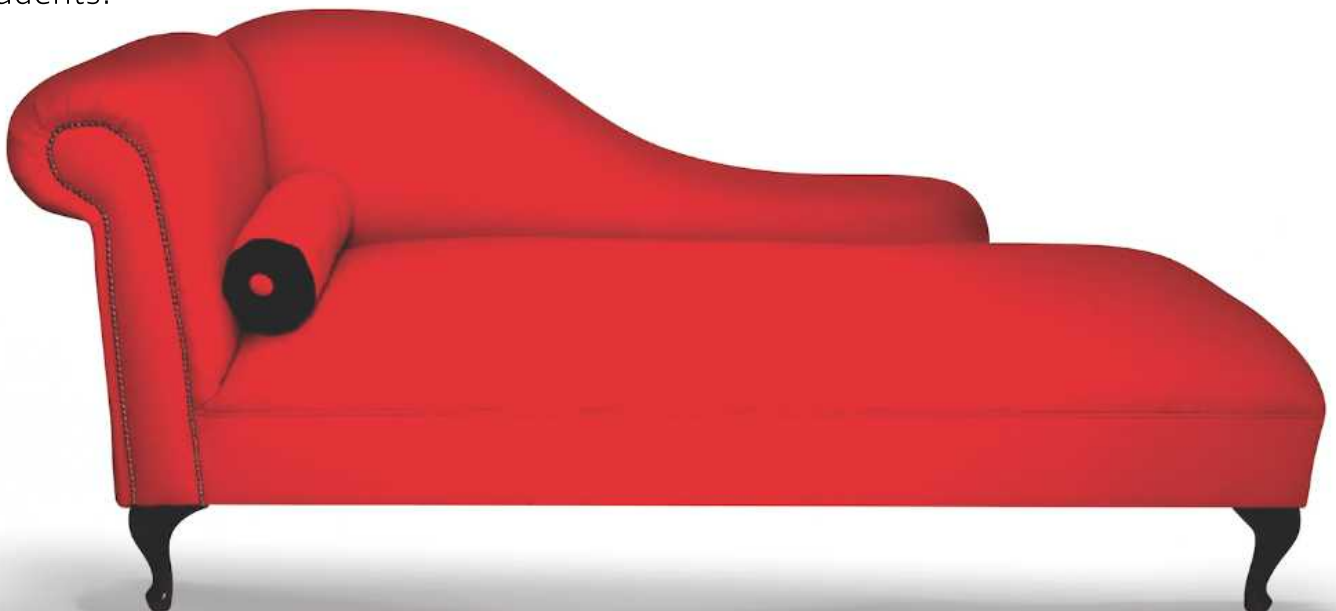
The fight for the mental health of South African students

Tobias van den Bergh

The state provision of mental health services is inadequately funded. With private mental health services inaccessible to many South Africans, most students have to rely on campus mental health facilities as their one and only service provider. This predicament is highlighted in a significant [South African study](#), wherein the authors report that student mental health centres at universities do not have sufficient capacities to plug the enormous gaps in state service provision and meet the tremendous [mental health needs of students](#).

The COVID-19 pandemic added fuel to the fire, bringing the mental health plight of South African students to the forefront. Several organisations such as [Higher Health](#), the [South African Federation for Mental Health](#), the [Southern African Association for Counselling and Development in Higher Education](#) (SAACDHE), and [Universities South Africa](#) recognised and expressed the need for substantial action.

Considering the aforementioned situation, Mind Matters interviewed the Director: Student Counselling and Development (SCD), Dr Melissa Barnaschone, to explore current mental health trends among UFS students; how students can take care of their mental health; and the actions SCD took to support the mental health and development of students.



What mental health challenges are students struggling with during this period?

Experiencing feelings of anxiety within several domains, including switching to online learning, the pandemic and their health, fears of loss, and uncertainty about their futures. Students may also struggle with a sense of loss of independence.

Being at home may exacerbate these challenges if family and friends do not fully grasp and respect their space to do online learning. Also, the presence of relational difficulties and negative self-esteem contributes significantly to mental health challenges.



What can students do to maintain or improve their mental health?



If students make it their life journey to understand themselves and increase self-awareness, then they are in a better position to take responsibility for their mental health, emotional wellness, and overall wellbeing. It is also important to acknowledge when you are struggling or experiencing difficult emotions and thought processes. Acceptance of internal experiences allows us to shift our focus to the things we can control or change. Different approaches work for different people; there is no blueprint. Some might need to talk about their challenges, some benefit from regular exercise, writing, or listening to music. You need to discover the blueprint that works for you and make full use of it.



What mental health resources were developed during this period and are available to UFS students?



The SCD departments across all three campuses developed numerous mental health resources to meet the diverse needs of students. We implemented a dedicated, toll-free mental health helpline operated by SADAG trained counsellors, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. SCD also offers online counselling to UFS students. We conduct online workshops; publish psycho-educational and mental health promotion Podcasts; we do Q-Lit (Qwaqwa student and community radio station) broadcasts; and initiated an extensive mental health campaign called #WellbeingWarriors that consists of several psycho-educational articles, videos, and informative e-posters. Our focus is to embrace change, make our online presence more prominent and expand the services we provide.

If you could give one piece of mental health advice to students, what would it be?

Take responsibility for your mental health. It's like brushing your teeth every day to avoid decay and staying healthy. This same perception applies to mental health. It's a habit that you perform daily. We need to engage in daily activities and routines that are in support of our mental health. We also need to focus our efforts on the things within our environment that we can control or change, and not the things outside of our control. We can thus focus our energies on areas that make a positive difference in our lives.



From distress to de-stress

Bonolo Mophosho:
Counselling Psychologist

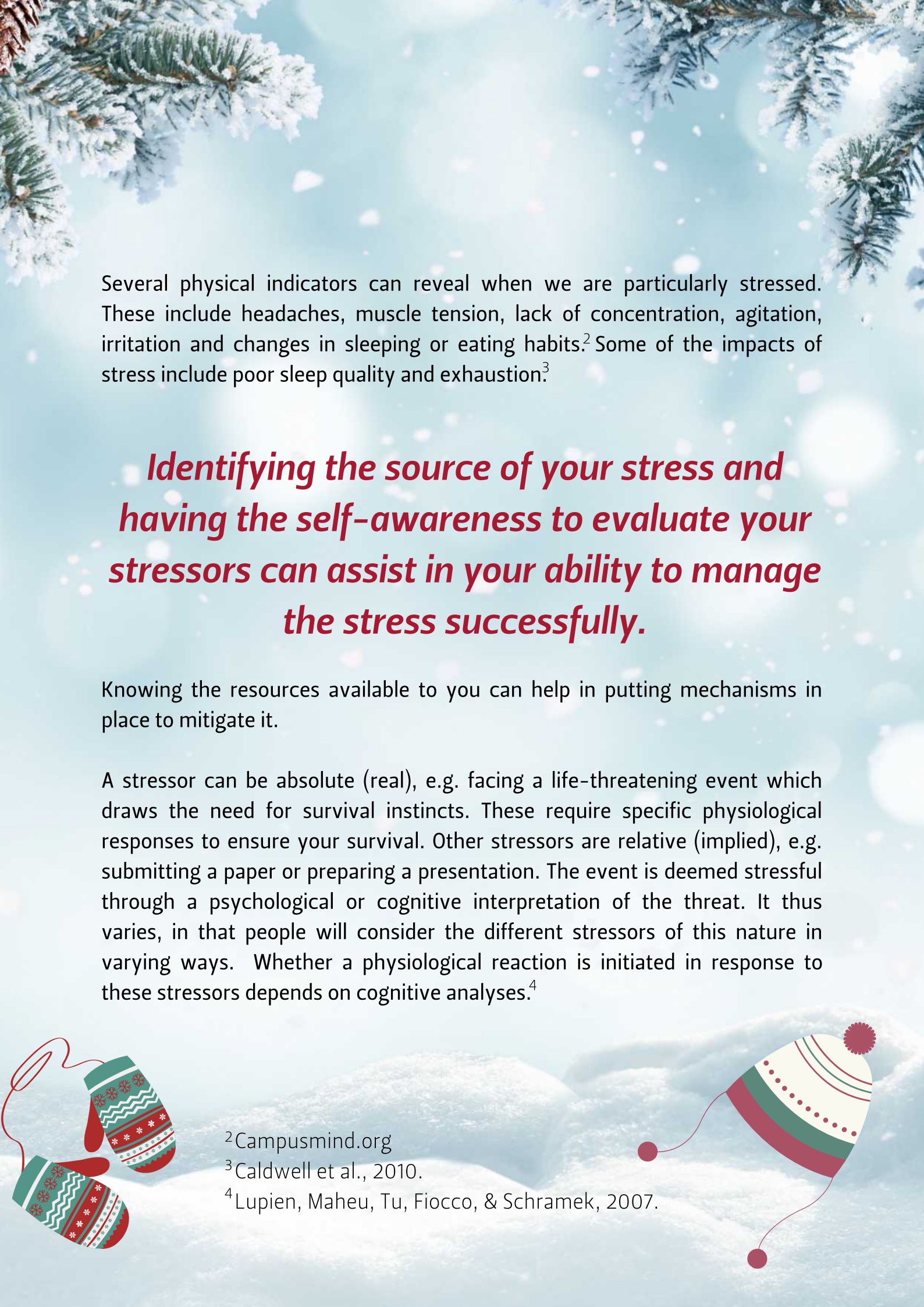
***Stress in university life is as cold as winter.
Inevitable.***

Being a student entails dealing with pressures to succeed academically, whilst also managing workload, performance disappointments and other social or emotional challenges. The importance of having an awareness of one's own stress triggers and the impact it has on our wellbeing cannot be highlighted enough. We must be prepared to notice when our stress levels rise and the possible impact this has on our functioning.

When academic stress is added to other social or emotional stressors, one may feel overwhelmed and find it challenging to put in the required effort. Although stress has certain benefits for one's performance, there are adverse effects which can negatively affect one's ability to efficiently navigate student and campus life.¹

¹Deckro, Ballinger, Hoyt, Wilcher, Dusek, Meyers & Benson, 2002.





Several physical indicators can reveal when we are particularly stressed. These include headaches, muscle tension, lack of concentration, agitation, irritation and changes in sleeping or eating habits.² Some of the impacts of stress include poor sleep quality and exhaustion.³

Identifying the source of your stress and having the self-awareness to evaluate your stressors can assist in your ability to manage the stress successfully.

Knowing the resources available to you can help in putting mechanisms in place to mitigate it.

A stressor can be absolute (real), e.g. facing a life-threatening event which draws the need for survival instincts. These require specific physiological responses to ensure your survival. Other stressors are relative (implied), e.g. submitting a paper or preparing a presentation. The event is deemed stressful through a psychological or cognitive interpretation of the threat. It thus varies, in that people will consider the different stressors of this nature in varying ways. Whether a physiological reaction is initiated in response to these stressors depends on cognitive analyses.⁴



²Campusmind.org

³Caldwell et al., 2010.

⁴Lupien, Maheu, Tu, Fiocco, & Schramek, 2007.





The reasons a person would, through cognitive analyses, view a stressor as threatening is based on their individual markers such as the support available, existing pressures, or high expectations. When a situation is interpreted as stressful, the stress hormones, known as cortisol and adrenaline, are released. These trigger the flight or fight responses such as an elevated heart rate and blood pressure.⁵

There are multiple stressors, in addition to those related to academic life, with which students deal. Challenges such as those related to home life- with parents or siblings; worries about their wellbeing, or their concerns about your studies, relational issues; going through break-ups or tensions in your various relationships; financial problems or issues related to job searches. These all compound on the primary need for academic success⁶ and navigating the changes each new year or semester brings.

***It is essential to be aware of what is within
your control and what is not.***



External stress triggers are those that occur outside of the individual, such as a break-up or receiving bad news. These are, in many ways, less in one's control. Internal stress triggers occur within the individual, such as placing too high expectations or pressure on yourself⁷. Awareness of the triggers and the limits of your control are essential coping tools in being able to mitigate the impact of stress.



⁵Lupien et al., 2007.

⁶Chao, 2012.

⁷Campusmindworks.org



Ineffective coping skills are considered to be one of the main reasons for increased stress levels in students.⁸ The necessity of garnering tools to manage stress is of extreme importance in combating its effects.

It is imperative to be aware of the support structures, such as Student Counselling and Development (SCD), available. Services and sources of support that assist with coping skills such as time-management skills, test preparation and effective goal-setting are key in managing your stress. These are in addition to beneficial habits such as exercise and good sleeping and eating routines. Mindfulness and relaxation are also considered as useful tools for stress-management.

Ensure your coping skills are sufficient to manage the load of the propensity of student life stressors. Bolster up your preparedness for the winter seasons of stress, by having an awareness of the possible triggers and the resources available to you in aiding your coping skills.

***"Bolster up your
preparedness for
seasonal stress."***

⁸Murff, 2005.



What tattoos would appear on your body?

Lize van den Bergh:
Counselling Psychologist

A brief history of tattoos tells us that they have been around for thousands of years and used for various purposes. In Borneo, for example, women would get tattoos depicting their skills. For many other cultures, tattoos represent identity and rites of passage.

In the animated movie, “Moana”, one of the main characters, Maui, is covered with tattoos. At one point he explains to Moana that the tattoos appear as soon as he has “earned” them. In other words, his tattoos are symbolic depictions of his heroic acts over the years.





*“My body is my journal,
and my tattoos are my story.”*

Johnny Depp

Most tattooed individuals will tell you that their tattoos have special meaning; they are reminders of someone important to them or represent a key-value or belief system. Tattoos are also quite painful and can almost be considered a permanent marker on your body.

In life, we undergo many marking and painful experiences. Ironically, these are often the most profound and meaningful moments in our lives. Psychologists and philosophers have theorized that the most compassionate people have experienced the most pain and hardship. Without our challenges – who would we be? Or not be?

**Our battle scars tell our story, but more
than that, they tell us who we
decide to be – despite our pain.**

Which skills have you earned? Which values and life choices have you decided are important to you? Pain does not discriminate between people, and it is unavoidable. The difference is what you decided to do with it. Do you choose to let it break you? Or, do you acquire a new ability that will strengthen and guide you during future heartaches?

The most resilient people show an amazing ability to transform themselves when confronted with hurt. They choose to become kinder, more creative and often wiser individuals. They are inspiring and motivating and have accepted that hurt is part of life and no longer endeavour to avoid it. They embrace their scars – because it is who they continuously choose to be.

So, my one question to you:

**What tattoos will appear
on your body?**



Acceptance and mindfulness: The practice of letting go.

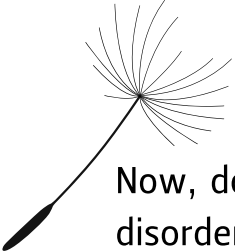
An alternative approach to dealing
with difficulties

Tobias van den Bergh:
Counselling Psychologist

*In today's society,
we are somehow
convinced that a life
worth living is
a life without pain or
suffering.*

This perspective is purported by advertisements, companies and the media trying to make a quick buck selling the idea of everlasting happiness; self-help authors promising permanent freedom from feelings such as anxiety, stress, and sadness; and, especially, the pharmaceutical industries. I'll never forget an American ad I watched many years ago, depicting precisely this. It showed people, whom at first seem sad and distraught with life, aimlessly drifting from one disappointing moment to the next.

Then, at some point, they discover a particular (and branded!) psycho-pharmaceutical drug. Pop a pill, and voila – no more worries and eternal bliss! All their problems appear to have dissolved, they run around smiling, and high-fiving everyone, and genuinely seem happy, industrious, and content with life.



Now, don't get me wrong. There is a place for medications that treat psychological disorders or alleviate the negative effects of certain mental states, and some individuals do need and benefit from it. As an avid reader myself, there are also many books and literature out there that can provide useful tools and knowledge to help us negotiate life's difficulties. Nevertheless, what I am pointing out is the fact that in so many societies we have become socialised to believe that if we are not constantly happy, excited about life, or full of vigour, then something must be wrong with us. We believe that we need to get rid of difficult feelings and thoughts and that we have to avoid problems and difficulties, because then and only then, can we live a life of vitality and meaning, filled with joy and satisfaction.



It is simply not true. Life just doesn't work that way. But, if you believe that it should work that way, you may end up creating more suffering for yourself and others. We spend energy and time fighting our own minds or attempting to avoid certain situations and events that are unavoidable. Or we distract ourselves from internal or external experiences, by spending exorbitant amounts of time on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Netflix. Or we use and abuse substances to numb the pain or difficulties. Unfortunately, this gradually takes us further away from what we value most in life and creates a toxic and vicious cycle. So, what is the alternative you might ask? Well, M. Scott Peck, a psychotherapist and author of the book 'The Road Less Traveled', points us in the right direction with the very first sentence in his book, stating: "Life is difficult." He doesn't mean it pessimistically. He simply states a universal fact of life. That life as a human comprises of many and varied experiences. Joy, sadness, pleasure, birth, loss, pain, happiness, calm, worry... The list is endless.



***"You can't stop the waves,
but you can learn to surf."***
Jon Kabat-Zinn





There is wisdom in accepting that life is beautiful but difficult. This principle is a central tenet of Buddhism, which emphasises that accepting life also has difficulties and hardships, is the beginning of wisdom and peace. This is also expressed within Christianity and the Bible. For instance, Romans 5:3-4 states: “And not only that, but we also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope”. So too within the Islam religion, as the Quran states: “We will surely test you through some fear, hunger and shortage of money, lives and crops. So give good news to the patient ones”. Consequently, when we learn to actively and genuinely accept the things we cannot control or avoid, we free up energy and create a space to focus on the things we can change or influence. But what is acceptance, and what is it not? How can we practise and cultivate it?

At its core, acceptance is an attitude of acknowledging things as they are, and not as we wish them to be. The image below illustrates this beautifully. When we accept the things we cannot control, we free up energy, and we create space within us. It is within this space that we can then consider alternative behaviours or responses to our inner or external life situations.

What is acceptance?



It is raining



- I don't like rain
- I wish it wasn't raining
- My day would be better if it wasn't raining
- My day is ruined
- Every day is like this
- Why does it always rain when all I want is for it to be sunny?

• Yup

The late Dr. Viktor E. Frankl, a holocaust survivor and the founder of logo-therapy, famously said that:

“Between stimulus and response there is space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

However, sometimes there is very little space within our minds. We are so focused on our pain, thoughts, feelings, or fantasies about how we rather wish things to be, leaving very little room for anything else. Alternatively, we may become so dedicated and focused on attempts to change things that we cannot, leaving us exhausted or the difficulty exacerbated. This is like repeatedly smashing our heads against a brick wall in the hope of creating a new doorway.

So, acceptance is an alternative to the control and avoidance of difficulties or problems. It enables us to create space and some calm within the storm. When we have managed this, then we can consider behavioural responses that are focused on the things we can influence or change.

At this point, you may wonder what the things that we need to accept are. The section that follows was adapted from "The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Depression" by Drs. Strosahl and Robinson. As a professional specialising in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) for several years, this is probably the best explanation of what acceptance is, and what it is not, that I have come across. The following human experiences or private events, we usually cannot control (although we sometimes and unsuccessfully attempt to):

- Spontaneous feelings
- Spontaneous thoughts
- Spontaneous memories
- Certain physical sensations
- An objective event, act of fate, or external stressor
- Other people's behaviour
- Past events or our personal history.





One of the most common sources of suffering (as opposed to natural suffering or pain) is when we desperately attempt NOT to experience certain spontaneous thoughts, feelings, memories, or physical sensations. We experience sudden onsets of worry, sadness, or recurring distressing thoughts, self-criticism, or rejection and label these experiences as unpleasant and unwanted. This judgement or evaluation is often followed by various attempts NOT to think, NOT to feel and avoid situations that might elicit these difficult experiences. In other words, we try to control something that we cannot. These attempts at control and avoidance often come at a cost, and it keeps us focused on the things we cannot control, at the expense of what might be most important to us. Acceptance does not mean that I have to give in to a life of misery.



Acceptance means acknowledging that these difficult and private (i.e. inner) experiences are not the enemy. Acceptance is acknowledging and knowing that these feelings, thoughts, or bodily sensations are not harmful, but a normal, natural, and healthy part of being human. We are designed to have these private experiences even if they are uncomfortable and difficult. What makes the difference is our response to uncontrollable and unwanted situations and experiences. Our response to situations we cannot control and/or avoid will determine our life results. People tend to misunderstand the concept of acceptance and how we can develop it. To avoid some of these conceptual and practical pitfalls, the table below highlights some key considerations. Thereafter, we explore different ways to cultivate acceptance in our daily lives.



Acceptance Is Not Resignation:

It is not giving in to a life of misery. For instance, we're not saying that a female student who is suffering abuse within a relationship needs to accept that she will be abused for the remainder of the relationship. Acceptance is acknowledging that the abuse is happening, that it is gruelling, and that she may not want this for her life. What she needs to accept, is that she has options available to her, however difficult those choices may seem. She can stay, or leave, or do something in-between. What she needs to accept is that if she chooses to do nothing, she'll probably continue to get the same results.

Acceptance Doesn't Mean You've Failed:

Acceptance is not an admission of failure or defeat. When you give up on fighting the unwanted private events, you're simply giving up something that has never worked. This form of acceptance simply means that you recognise this strategy isn't working. What have you done in the past when you feel sad or worried, for example? And how has this worked for you? Acceptance is also about non-judgementally acknowledging that how you have tried to manage difficult feelings, thoughts, or situations has not worked.

This opens space for us to build a more flexible and effective response to the situation. For instance, let's say your habitual reaction to difficult private events, such as stress and worry, is to avoid studying and spend hours on social media or watching series. This gives temporary relief, but with long-term costs – you end up studying late into the night, feel more pressure, do not get enough sleep, etc. Acceptance is noticing that what you've been doing isn't working – and then you have to be ready to accept what shows up when you stop engaging in unworkable responses.





Acceptance Doesn't Mean Tolerating Personal Pain:

Another common misconception about acceptance is to confuse it with toleration. Toleration is a form of acceptance “with strings attached”; you’re only willing to accept distress or suffering up to a certain level and no further. We all practice toleration when we go to the dentist; you tolerate the pain and discomfort of that big needle or the drilling because the consequences of avoiding the dentist will eventually be far worse than what you have to go through in the present.

At the same time, you may have an evaluation of pain that says it isn’t acceptable to have pain above a 7 on a scale of 1 – 10. So if the pain exceeds that level, you’ll alert the dentist or take action to control the pain, even if it includes leaving the scene! Or, you may accept the pain at that moment but vow never to see that particular dentist again, which transforms it into a future avoidance. So, toleration is a kind of acceptance, but it isn’t the same as acceptance.

(Source: The Mindfulness & Acceptance Workbook for Depression: Using Acceptance & Commitment Therapy to Move Through Depression & Create a Life Worth Living. Strosahl and Robinson, 2008, p.126).

How do you know when you are successfully accepting an experience, private event, or situation? There is no singular answer to that question. However, we can usually find clues in the way we talk to ourselves. Notice your inner dialogue or self-talk and compare those phrases to that of a non-acceptance or acceptance attitude:

Examples that illustrate resistance to what is (i.e. non-acceptance) and acceptance (of what is):

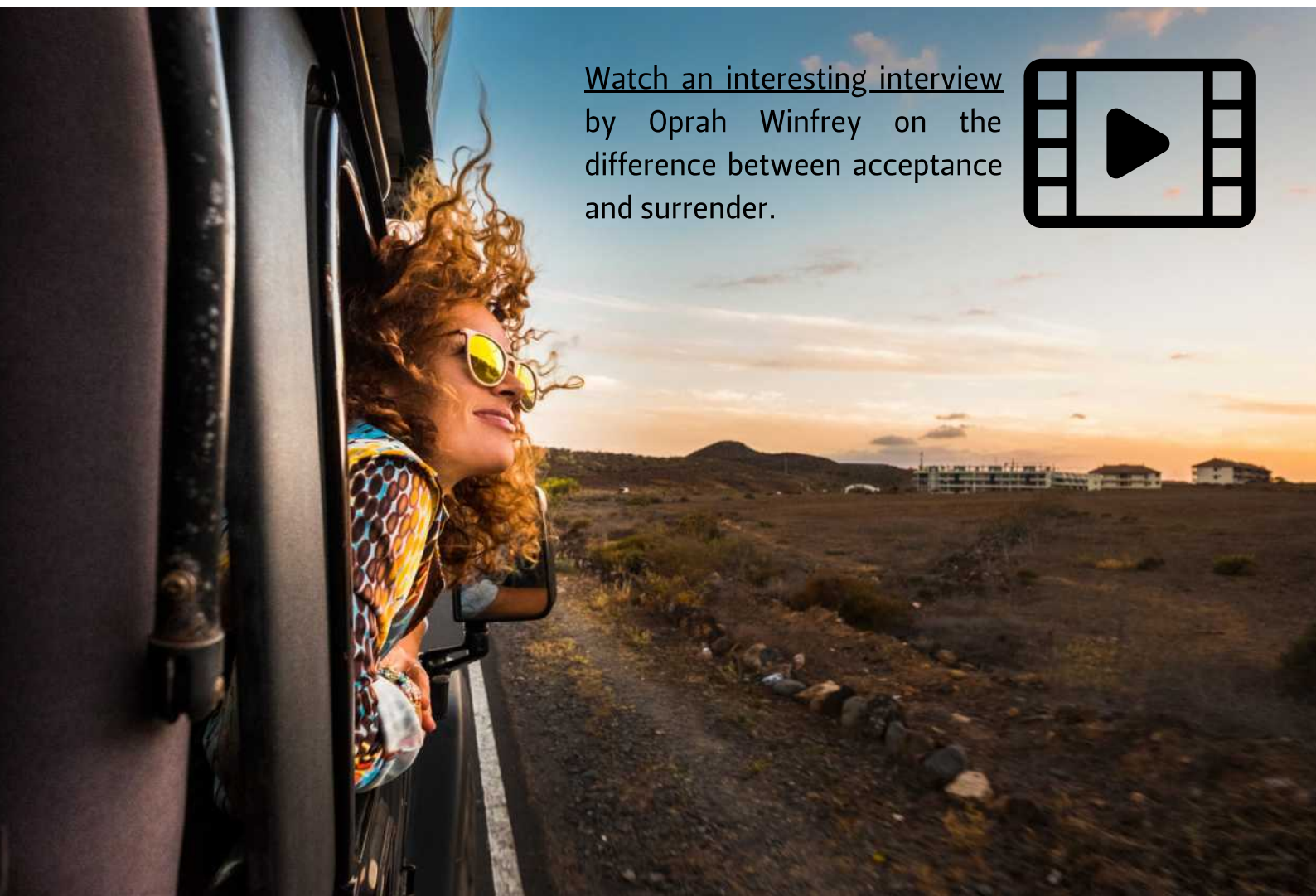
Non-Acceptance (or resistance)

- I just need to put this behind me.
- I want to get rid of these feelings, thoughts, or memories.
- I want to get on top of the way I feel.
- I need to get a better handle on where these thoughts come from.
- I want to be able to control the way I feel.

Acceptance

- I'm willing to go through this.
- I know my reactions are a healthy part of me even though I don't like them.
- I can make room for the way I feel.
- I'll face the situation and do the best I can.
- I'm capable of feeling this way and doing what needs to be done anyway.

Watch an interesting interview
by Oprah Winfrey on the
difference between acceptance
and surrender.



3 Ways to cultivate acceptance

1

Mindful Acceptance of the Present Moment

During difficult periods we may become trapped in our own minds, becoming fused with our constant thinking and feeling. This can become overwhelming, and we may spend ample time trying to suppress or avoid these difficult and unwanted thoughts and feelings. The more we fight our own thoughts and feelings, the stronger they become. Instead, practise mindful acceptance.

Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Focus as much of your attention simply on the experience of breathing. Notice the qualities of the breathing in. Where do you feel the air the most? Maybe on your lips? Notice the temperature of the incoming air. Is it cold or warm? Do the same with the breathing out. Notice how it feels as you exhale through your nose or mouth.

Where do you feel the out-breath most prominently? Is the out-breath temperature cool or warm? Notice the sounds of the in- and out-breaths. Then, expand your awareness and notice sounds in your environment. Do this non-judgementally, just using your senses to notice what is here, in this moment. Make room for the difficult feelings, thoughts, and sensations. Notice where your mind wanders, what thoughts and sensations it produces. Acknowledge that they too are a normal part of life and that these thoughts and feelings are okay. Embrace them with loving-kindness and gently guide your awareness back to your body and your breath.



Watch the Mindfulness guru JKZ explain what an attitude of acceptance is and how mindfulness can help us achieve it.



Try a guided meditation for self-acceptance by Sara Raymond from the Mindful Movement.



Practicing Self-Compassion During Difficult Moments or Situations

We often berate ourselves during difficult periods when we fail to engage in behaviours that we know would have been helpful, such as studying instead of binge-watching movies. This self-criticism increases our pain and suffering and makes it even harder for us to choose value-consistent behaviours. Self-compassion is not about justifying wrong or unhelpful behaviours. Self-compassion is acknowledging the way things are and that these moments are difficult. It opens up the possibility for self-responsibility for change, but in a loving and supportive way.

Next time you struggle with difficult private events (i.e. thoughts and feelings), challenging situations, or you notice that you are criticising yourself (e.g. “I should’ve studied earlier and harder”; “I am so weak and stupid”; “Other people seem so happy, why am I so sad?”), practice some self-compassion. Take a moment to ground your experience in the present moment. Focus your attention on your breathing, non-judgementally notice the act of breathing, the rise and fall of your chest, the qualities of the breath, that point of stillness between the in- and out-breath. When you are grounded in the present moment, expand your awareness to the sensations in your body, from the top of your head all the way down to your toes.

Merely guide your attention throughout your body, paying particular attention to bodily sensations. When you notice some tension, possibly in your shoulders, the space around your eyes, or your stomach and abdominal area, simply relax that area with your out-breath. When your mind wanders away from your current experience (as it usually does) or you have a strong negative emotion, simply acknowledge it for what it is. The Vietnamese Buddhist monk and mindfulness teacher, Thich Nhat Hahn, suggests repeating this phrase to yourself:



This is a thought happening within me, but it is not me.

Or

This is a feeling happening within me, but it is not me.



You may also offer yourself some understanding and loving-kindness by repeating this mantra:

“

*This is a moment of suffering;
Suffering is part of life;
May I be kind to myself in this moment;
May I give myself the love and care I need right now.*

”



Repeat this mantra until you really feel the words resonate through your being, whilst still holding awareness of your breathing. The aim of this exercise is to accept what you cannot change or control even when it is difficult, to give yourself compassion instead of self-criticism, and to open up the possibility of changing the things that you can.

3

Talk to someone

We can become so entangled within our own minds that we develop mental myopia – the inability to see beyond our own thoughts and feelings. We struggle to see ourselves and life clearly and can begin to feel very isolated. Talking through our concerns and issues with a family member, a friend, or a fellow student, can help us better understand ourselves. Sometimes we need to verbalise our thoughts, feelings, and concerns. This creates some space between us and our mental events, which helps us view them as mental creations and not necessarily reality. Alternatively, write your thoughts and feelings in a journal. Written expression is an effective way of dealing with difficult internal experiences, and the act of writing them down may be more helpful than merely keeping these thoughts and feelings in your head.

Mindfulness: Creating peace within the storm

Tobias van den Bergh:
Counselling Psychologist

All people have a continuous stream of thoughts and feelings. It is a natural part of being human. It is an everyday experience to have a multitude of thoughts, sensations, or feelings. We have opinions about the future, we ruminate on the past, and our minds continuously judge, label, and evaluate. Some neuroscientists estimate that we have as many as 60 000 – 80 000 thoughts and feelings each day, most of which we do not experience consciously.

Have you ever wished you could turn off your thoughts and feelings? Has your mind sometimes been so busy with endless thinking about the future or the past that you find it difficult to focus? Have you ever tried to distract yourself from what is going on between your ears and behind your eyes, in an attempt to avoid distressing feelings and thoughts? The fact is, most if not all of us have such experiences, and periodically wish we could force our minds to act on command. However, many of our mind experiences occur automatically and spontaneously. Thoughts and feelings are quintessential parts of the human condition, and some of these internal experiences are difficult, often determining what we do or don't do. Ultimately, our life consequences are a product of our behaviour. What we choose in response to these internal or external experiences, defines our life directions. Our choices either move us in the direction of our values and goals, or we drift further away from that, which is most important to us.

Our minds are quite impressive and active; a fantastic tool that has no equal. Yet, we may often feel overwhelmed by the activity of our minds, fighting to change or avoid what is happening inside, trying desperately to control our thoughts and feelings. These attempts to control or alter the automatic content of our minds frequently result in more suffering and pain.





Many of the thoughts and feelings we have are unprompted and beyond our control. Although, we mistakenly use much energy and time trying to control something we cannot. What can we do when the storm inside our heads is raging, and we need some inner peace? What if the goal is not to stop specific thoughts or feelings from happening, but instead to allow them to come and go naturally, as they distinctly do? One alternative to control is to cultivate a non-judgemental awareness and acceptance of private and internal mind experiences. This practice is a challenging but straightforward life attitude to adopt. With practice, this becomes a way of being. We can develop and practice this stance of non-judgemental acceptance through mindfulness and meditation.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness has been around for thousands of years, and initially mainly practised in the East. It was only during the 20th century that mindfulness reached the West and steadily grew in terms of both scientific inquiry and general popularity.

“

Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. This kind of attention nurtures greater awareness, clarity, and acceptance of present-moment reality.

Jon Kabat-Zinn

”

“

Noticing, this second, how you feel, what you think, what you want, without criticism or judgement.

Corinne Sweet

”



“

It wakes us up to the fact that our lives unfold only in moments. If we are not fully present for many of those moments, we may not only miss what is most valuable in our lives but also fail to realize the richness and the depth of our possibilities for growth and transformation.

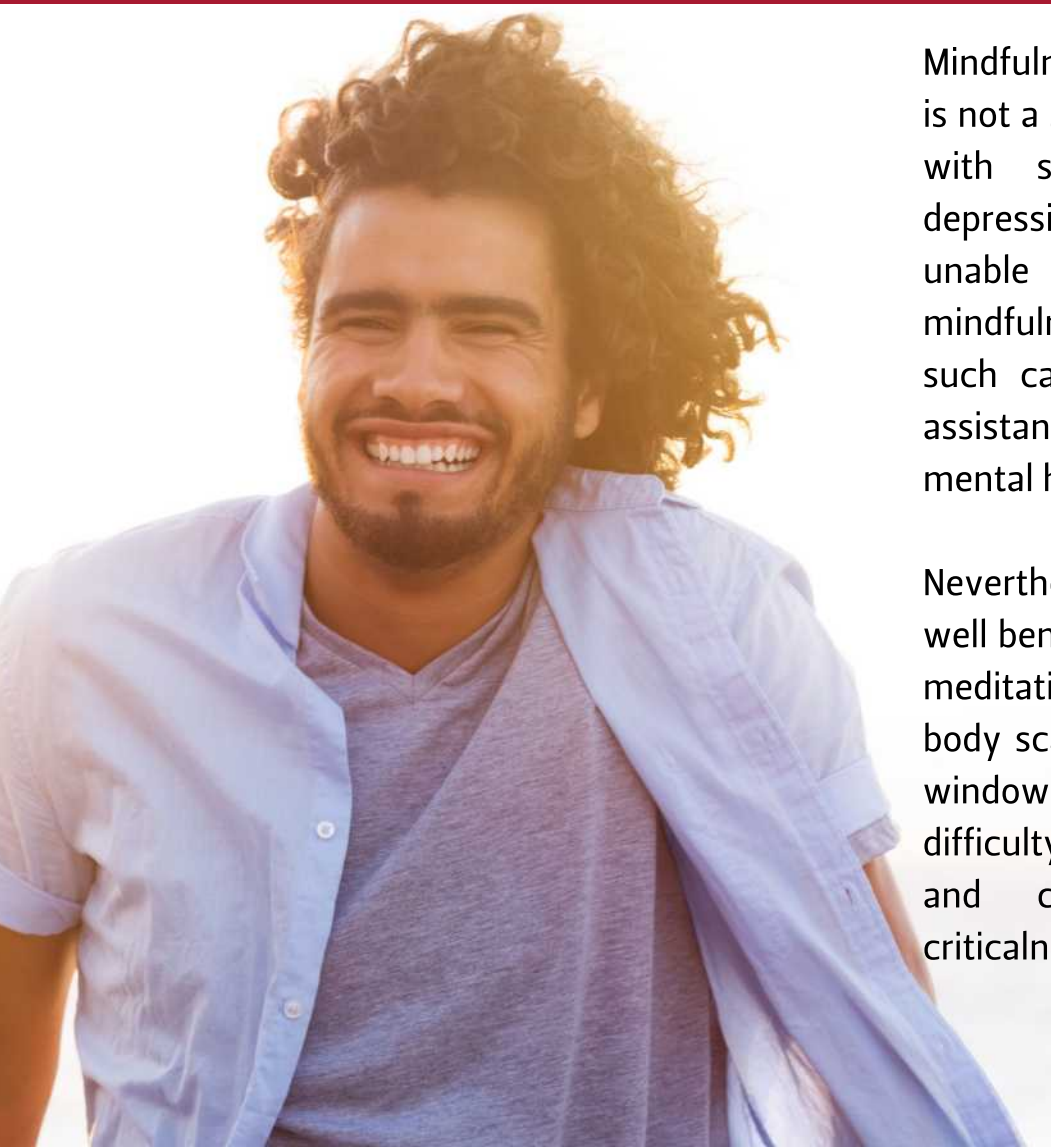
Jon Kabat-Zinn

”

Today, a plethora of research studies support the potential health benefits of mindfulness.

Regular mindfulness and meditation practices have several potential health benefits:

- Increases awareness, concentration, and focus.
- Promotes the development of empathy and compassion.
- Improves learning.
- Improves sleep, general wellbeing, and physical health.
- Creates a sense of calm and inner peace.
- Promotes self-awareness and development.
- Could help people cope or reduce the harmful effects of stress, anxiety, pain, and illness.



Mindfulness and meditation practice is not a silver bullet. Some individuals with severe forms of anxiety, depression, or psychosis may be unable to benefit from regular mindfulness meditation exercises. In such cases, it is best to seek the assistance and guidance of a trained mental health professional.

Nevertheless, many of us may very well benefit from regular mindfulness meditation and practice. Doing a brief body scan meditation may provide a window of opportunity to respond to difficulty with kindness, compassion, and clarity instead of self-criticalness, judgement, or confusion.

“Every time you create a gap in the stream of mind, the light of your consciousness grows stronger”

Eckhart Tolle

A Brief Body Scan Meditation: Grounding Yourself in the Present Moment

1

Setting the stage: create a meditation space

First, you need to create conditions that will support your practice and meditation. There is no right or wrong way to do this. However, consider the following suggestions:

1. Switch off your mobile, or at least switch it to silent.
2. Find a space where you can be undisturbed for a while.
3. Sit or lie down comfortably.
4. Gently cover yourself with a blanket or shawl to avoid feeling cold, if needed.
5. Set an alarm clock or timer for the desired duration (e.g. 10 minutes).
6. Eliminate any possible distractions that you can.
7. Close your eyes and remind yourself that you have nowhere else to be.

This moment in life is a gift; this moment is your life.





The brief body scan



When you are comfortable, take a couple of deep cleansing breaths. Breathe in through your nose and gently out through your mouth. Notice the qualities of each breath. Maybe you notice the cold of the in-breath and the warmth of the out-breath. Notice your chest rising and falling with each breath. Notice the slight pause between each breath. Use your breath as a means to anchor your awareness in the here-and-now.

Then, direct your focus and attention to the top of your body. Start at your head. Notice any bodily sensations there. Some people feel a tingling sensation or warmth. Continue to move your attention down to your forehead, your eyes, nose, your chin, chest, abdomen, hips, buttocks, legs, feet, and toes. Move through each area, paying particular attention to what you notice in your body.

When your mind wanders at any point, or you become distracted by something (thoughts or sensations), acknowledge where your mind went. Acknowledge the thought and allow it to drift away like a cloud in the sky. Then, gently guide your attention back to your breath and your body. Whenever you notice tension or tightness during your in-breath, relax that part of your body with the out-breath. Continue this process of grounding your experience in the present moment. Use your breath and body as a point of return every time you notice that you become distracted by thought, sensations, feelings, or external events.

The goal is not to stop your mind from doing what it does naturally. The goal is to deliberately focus your attention (on your breath and body) and to notice what your mind does. To non-judgementally and kindly acknowledge when your mind wanders elsewhere. Then, to gently guide it back to your anchor point in the here-and-now (i.e. your breath or body). This process of repeated noticing and guiding your mind and attention is the practice.

At the end of your practice, express gratitude and thank yourself for taking the time to care for your mind and body.

You might also want to try a guided 5-minute body scan meditation, or a 10-minute breath meditation by the mindfulness guru, Jon Kabat-Zinn.

*"You can't calm the storm...
so stop trying. What you can do is calm
yourself. The storm will pass."*

Timber Hawkeyel

Be employable

Motlogelwa Moema:
Career Development Officer

As more and more young people flock to institutions of higher learning, to change their lives, many also leave universities as graduates looking for an opening in the job market. Graduate unemployment is a real crisis in South Africa. Even industries that were once deemed to require scarce and critical skills are no longer brimming with opportunities. This means that not only is there competition for a seat in the office, but competition in the office is also rife. As a new graduate, the following points will distinguish you from your peers:

"Graduate unemployment is a real crisis in this country."



1

Always learn

Learning and being taught are not the same. To learn is to be actively in charge of the outcomes of the process; it is your desire for knowledge of the process. It is this desire for knowledge that sets you apart. To reward those who teach you new skills in the workplace, go back to show them how you have applied their transferred skills. They will remember you.

2

Manage your personal life

There's tragedy, and then there is recklessness. Death is tragic. Waking up late because of La Liga is reckless! Do not allow things in your personal life to spill into your professional life.

3

Protect your attitude

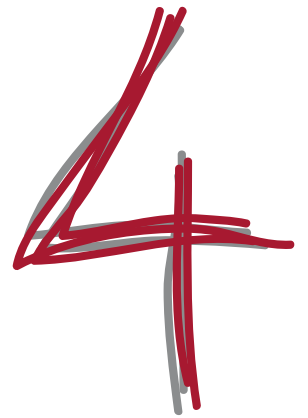
They say it is our attitude that determines our altitude. Graduates are faced with the challenge of merging their creativity and adventure with existing systems and people. When you get to your new workplace, do not allow your attitude of excellence to be swallowed up by the workplace culture. You are privileged in that you do not know how they have always done things. Honestly, you don't even need to know; you were not there for a reason.





Progress with the process

If you allow your goals to be dependent on personalities, you will always be begging others for your progression. One of your first tasks in a new job is to know and understand the process of getting things done. Remember that people are there as part of the process and not as the process in themselves. If you know where to go, it will not matter who is there. Nobody will have power over you. Of course, I'm not saying you should be arrogant and unfriendly.



Be nice

Be really nice. As much as you are young, driven and qualified, you still need human relationships; be compassionate and considerate in the office. Most companies are moving towards the so-called "open plan" offices, so your movements within the office affect your colleagues. Keep phone conversations to a minimum. Show respect towards other human beings.



Be unapologetic about the fact that you are a graduate and interact as often and as broadly as possible, treating every conversation as a potential job opportunity. Your qualification can be very helpful in getting you the right audience, but you need to sharpen your presentation and soft skills to stand out amongst other graduates. You are presented with a rare opportunity to redefine yourself; make good first impressions and leave a lasting impression on those you cross paths with...don't waste it!

How to survive on a student budget

Keneilwe Chologi:
Registered Counsellor



We all know that being independent while still studying can get a bit tricky; having to think about things like budgeting for food, clothes, books, transport and having extra cash so you can have fun with your friends now and again. Surviving financially, every month, during your studies can be disastrous if not done properly.

Here are a few tips and tricks to help you through your tight budget.



1

Research which stores have discounts; this will allow you to compare prices and purchase the cheapest grocery or toiletry items.

Download a budget-saving app. There are numerous apps to assist with how to stretch your money (e.g. money manager expenses and budget, spending tracker, monthly budget planner and expense tracker). Go on the app store and check them out.

3

Share groceries with a friend or roommate. Not only will this save you a few rands, but you will also get to taste different styles of cooking.

Buy certain items in bulk. Get a group of friends together and purchase things like toilet paper, sanitary towels or even deodorant in bulk. Split the bill, and you all get to save some money.

5

Buy clothes only when there is a sale. If you are a person of expensive taste, this will allow you to purchase more items at discounted prices.

Get a part-time or weekend job. Not only will this assist you financially, but having work experience also looks good on your CV.

2

4

6





7

Avoid unnecessary expenses, like opening a clothing account or buying food at the cafeteria every day.

Avoid drinking alcohol every weekend. Not only is this bad for your pocket, but it is also bad for your studies. Use your weekends to catch up on work that you may be behind on or to prepare for an upcoming test.

9

Turn your unneeded items into cash; sell your old textbooks, phone or laptop so that you can have extra money.

Use your skills and talents, Ladies and Gents. If you are good at doing something, then let that make some money for you. You could do hair, offer tutorials on subjects you are very good at, bake muffins - anything you can think of.

8

10

The most important thing to remember is to stick to your budget every month. You are allowed to spoil yourself now and again, however, be very careful not to overindulge. Use one or all of these tips and see if your financial life improves.

*Lastly, Dave Ramsey said,
“We buy things we don't need with money we don't have
to impress people we don't like.”*

Don't be one of these people!

Top Tips from the Top

Tobias van den Bergh

We thought it well to ask the top management of Qwaqwa campus what their top three tips are for success in life and work. The Qwaqwa top management has more than a century of life experience and decades of work knowledge between them.

These are the pearls of wisdom they shared. We may do well to take their advise to heart, and to put it into practice.



Dr Martin Mandew
Principal: Qwaqwa campus

Planning and time-management

1

As the saying goes, if you fail to plan, then you plan to fail. Life at university can be very busy, and there are only so many hours in a day, a week, a month. Design a plan that will help you strike the right balance between your studies and extra-mural activities. Make this plan as detailed as possible, setting out goals you plan to achieve on at least a weekly basis.



Discipline

Another saying goes, procrastination is the thief of time. Stick to your plan, deviating from it only under unavoidable circumstances. Avoid being distracted by things that are outside of your plan, and that will make you fall behind. If you do fall behind for whatever reason, make up the time by sacrificing some of the social things you had planned to do.



Relaxation

Make sure your plan includes time for relaxation, especially constructive forms of relaxation. Constructive relaxation helps you to become a well-rounded person. This could be sport, art, debate club, mountain-hiking, music, movies, etc.

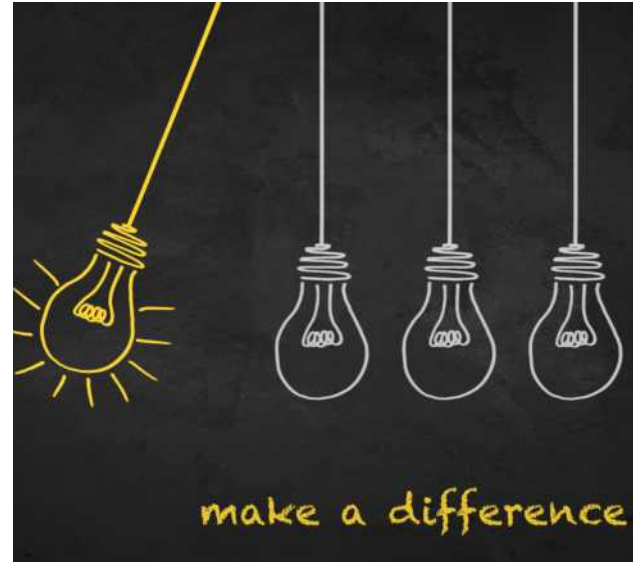




Prof Pearl Sithole
Vice-Principal: Academic and Research
Qwaqwa campus

Impact-orientation

In life, you are always a winner when your efforts are targeted on impact. Whether it is making a difference in a community through your professional work or it is representing a few who will look up to you, make sure that you do not deliver just for the sake of delivery.



Self-love

If you love yourself, you will succeed for you as much as for others. If you love yourself, you will easily internalize a moral code – because you are doing it for YOU!



Be adaptable

We are taught to excel, and so we must. But little effort is directed to learning to read the circumstances and being adaptable. Do yourself an emotional favour, learn that skill too.



Mr Teboho Manchu
Vice-Principal: Support Services
Qwaqwa campus



Have a vision

You need to know where you want to go. When you know this, you can match your actions in service of that vision.

1



Be passionate

When you are passionate about what you are doing, it becomes effortless.

2

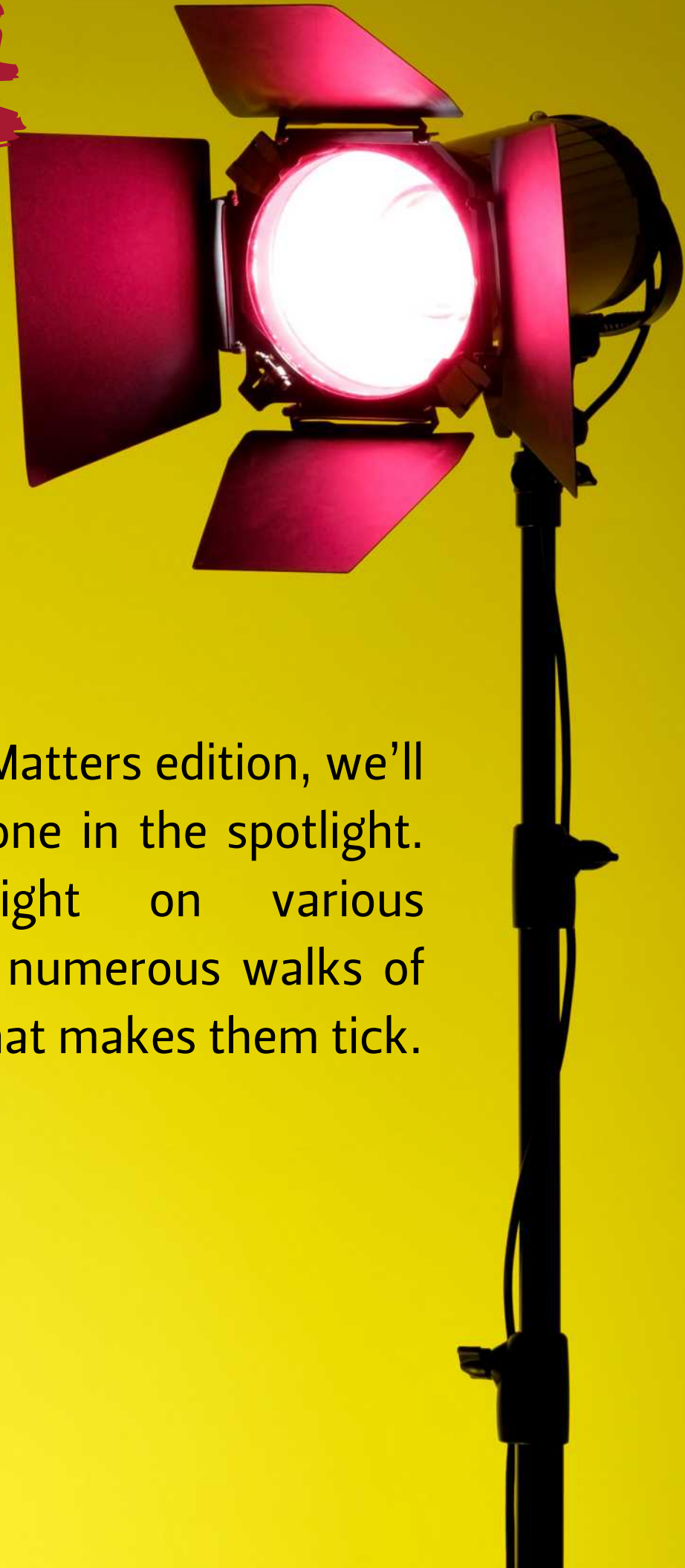


Integrity is essential

In whatever you do, practice integrity. Approach your studies with integrity. Be a leader with integrity. Because whatever you do will follow you wherever you go. To develop and maintain integrity requires self-discipline.

3

In the Spotlight



With every Mind Matters edition, we'll be putting someone in the spotlight. Shining the light on various individuals, from numerous walks of life, to explore what makes them tick.



In this edition, we delve into the inner world of the new(ish) Director: Student Affairs, Qwaqwa campus, **Nicole Morris**. She commenced her position just as the COVID-19 lockdown arose, so who better to ask about adjustment and overcoming challenges.

Tell our readers more about your professional background?

I've worked in Student Affairs for the last 10 years in areas of Student Governance and challenge management. Then I found my niche in student leadership and development. In that space, I was able to develop programmes and systems with several university stakeholders to develop student success programmes. I studied and worked at WITS, where I obtained all my experience, was vice-president of the SRC and a very engaged student. I did a lot of work in the space of Student Affairs as an active student, and on the other side of working with students.

What is your vision for Student Affairs, Qwaqwa?

To implement the Student Affairs Humanising Strategy 2022, which aims to establish and maintain a humanising, vibrant, and aligned student experience while upholding the values of humanity, ethics, critical diversity literacy, social justice, integrity, and innovation. I think if we can work collaboratively as a team, we can achieve this vision of creating a humanising and vibrant experience for our students.



Who are your role-models and why?

I have many role-models, and one of my youngest role-models is Malala Yousafzai, who was shot by the Taliban for advocating for women's rights in Pakistan. So too, Sheryl Sandberg who is the COO of Facebook and the first woman appointed to the company's board of directors. Serena Williams, a multiple tennis grand slam winner, and South African author and entrepreneur, Wendy Luhabe, who spends a great deal of time inspiring previously deprived persons, especially women.

How have you maintained your mental and general health during the COVID-19 period?



In the beginning, it was a bit of a slump, but once we got through the slump, I decided to take specific actions. Doing self-care activities made a big difference and is so important. Completing tasks is very important because, with postponement, there is no gratification, and as humans, we have a constant need for gratification. So, if you can't get it from others, the important thing you need to do is to complete tasks. Healthy eating is important, regular exercise makes a big difference, practising meditation is essential and creates calm, giving to others, and celebrating small successes and wins is vital.

What is one of your favourite quotes and why?

A quote by a 17th century Japanese poet, Mizuta Masahidem, who wrote:

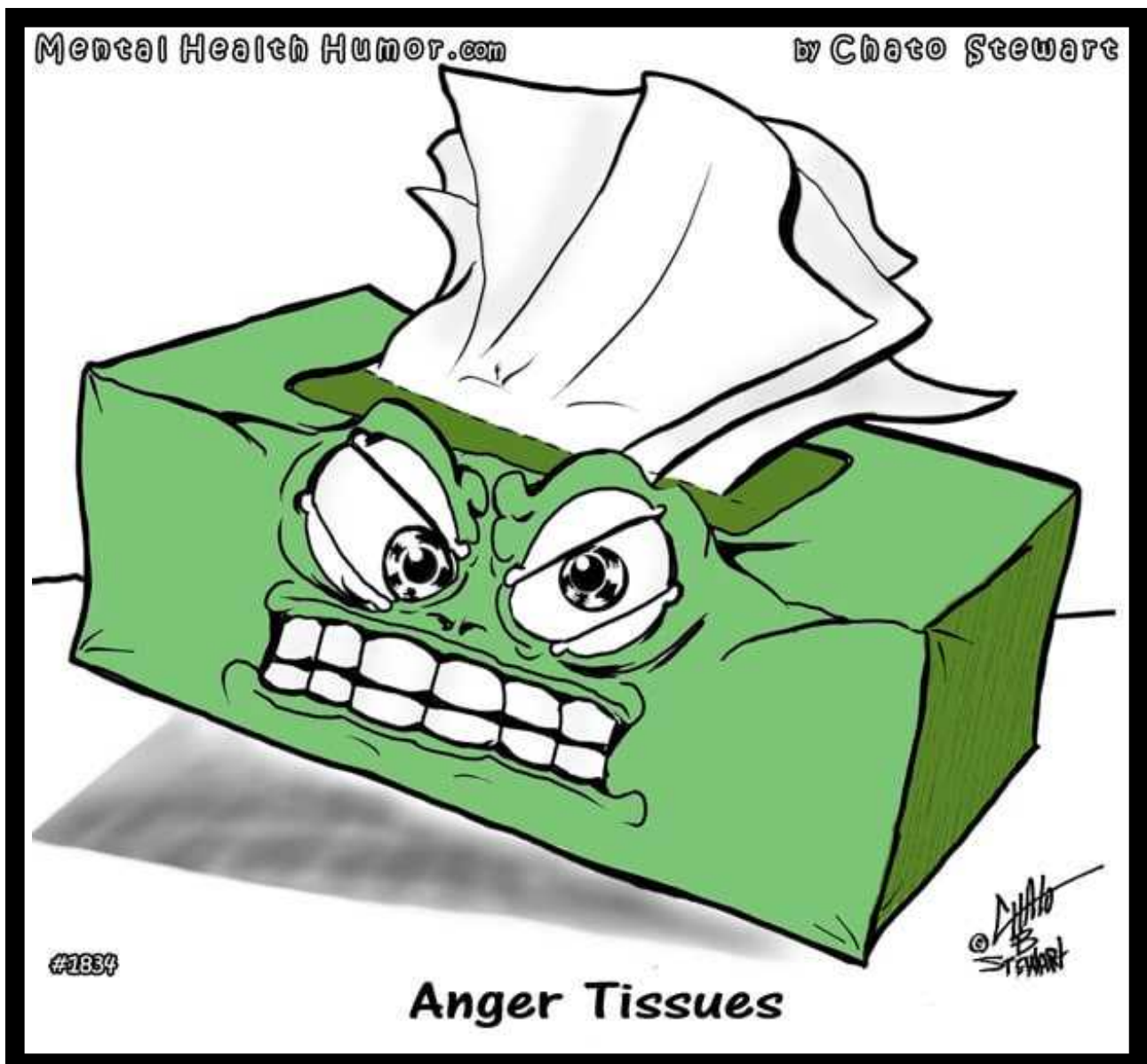
"Barn's burnt down – now I can see the moon."

For me, it's about resilience, and I find solace in understanding that even when everything seems like it is crumbling, we can bounce back. As you approach your deepest fears, you should know for sure that your deepest struggle can, if you are willing and open, produce your greatest strength. By approaching your fear, your path and mind will become clear. The most important thing we need right now is the courage to overcome, to remain resilient, to find what works, find your rhythm, and stick to it!

***By approaching your fear, your path and mind will become clear.***

The Lighter Side

Chato Stewart has a mission; to draw and use humor as a positive tool to live and cope with the debilitating effects and symptoms of mental illness. Chato Stewart is a Mental Health Hero and Advocate, and a Recovery Peer Specialist - board-certified in Florida, USA. Chato is the artist behind the cartoon series Mental Health Humor, Over-Medicated, and The Family Stew. The cartoons are drawn from his personal experience of living with bipolar disorder (and other labels).



Kindness





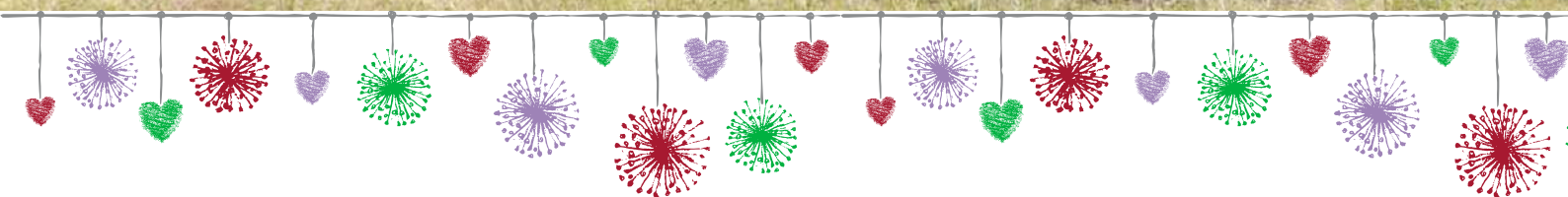
Kindness: The everlasting hope for humanity



During the COVID-19 lockdown period the Gift of the Givers, a non-profit organisation, donated over 200 food parcels in support of the No Student Hungry (NSH) initiative.

Social worker, **Ms Selloane Phoofolo**, from the Qwaqwa Campus Health and Wellness centre, emphasised the importance of such initiatives:

“It’s an offence for a student to go to bed on an empty stomach. We cannot postpone hunger so, with the No Student Hungry Program, we aim to support students and alleviate hunger.”



The Social Support Offices from Bloemfontein and Qwaqwa campuses collaborated to assist students in desperate need.

SALUTE

A poem by N.P. Ncwane

B. Ed student

I thought you dumb
I thought you stupid
But you proved me otherwise
I salute you.

I thought it done
I thought it over
But no, not with you
You keep on pushing
Crawling forward,
Like a wounded soldier on the battlefield.

Betrayed
you hang on
Hurt
you keep on.
Keep on loving, keep on carrying
my heart
you amaze me
Salute, I salute you!

Several times you were broken
Broken into unimaginable fragments
But you, my heart, you made it.
You collected all those pieces, stuck
them together like a puzzle
Salute, I salute you.

I never thought you would make it again,
I never thought you would heal,
I never thought you would love.
But you never stop amazing me
You're the best salute of all.
Salute, I salute you.

Creative Corner



Resources



"Be strong enough to stand alone, smart enough to know when you need help, and brave enough to ask for it."

Ziad K. Abdelnour

ACADEMIC RESOURCES

For help with:

- Time-Management
- Study strategies
- Exam preparation
- Goal-setting



Email
advising@ufs.ac.za (BFN) or
advisingqq@ufs.ac.za (QQ)

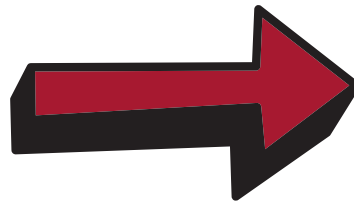


For more information on how the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) can support you, click [here](#).

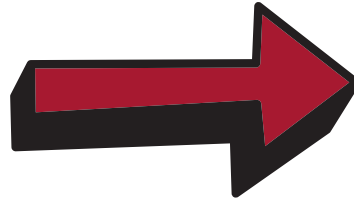
SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

For help with:

- Relationship issues
- Financial problems
- Abortion
- Sexual assault
- Alcohol and drug abuse



[Bloemfontein campus](#)



[Qwaqwa campus](#)

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

[80 Awesome Mental Health Resources](#)

[Anxiety Support Online](#)

[Cipla](#)

[Depression and Bipolar Support](#)

[Helpguide](#)

[Mobieg](#)

[South African Depression & Anxiety Group](#)

Adcock Ingram Depression & Anxiety Line 0800 70 80 90

Lifeline (Trauma) 0861 322 322

SADAG Suicide Crisis Line 0800 567 567



Make use of the
24/7 toll-free dedicated SADAG
(South African Depression & Anxiety Group)

UFS STUDENT CARELINE
0800 00 6363

SMS 43302

helpline@sadag.org

UFS STUDENT COUNSELLING & DEVELOPMENT (SCD)

Access our **online resources** which cover a variety of topics ranging from academic support to psychological wellbeing.



[UFS Student Toolkit](#)

[#WellbeingWarriors](#)



To schedule an appointment with a Mental Health Professional, please contact:

BLOEMFONTEIN CAMPUS

051 401 2853
SCD@ufs.ac.za

QWAQWA CAMPUS

058 718 5032
SCDQQ@ufs.ac.za

SOUTH CAMPUS

051 505 1298
SCDSouth@ufs.ac.za

Feedback

Your opinion matters!

Complete the shortest feedback questionnaire ever at [this link](#). If it takes longer than 3 minutes, you are probably overthinking it. Your voices will guide the development of the second edition of Mind Matters.





MIND MATTERS

1st Edition
2020

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