

MindMatters 2nd Edition

Compiled by Student Counselling and Development

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Art is not the possession of the few who are recognized writers, painters, musicians; it is the authentic expression of any and all individuality. Those who have the gift of creative expression in unusually large measure disclose the meaning of the individuality of others to those others. In participating in the work of art, they become artists in their activity.

They learn to know and honor individuality in whatever form it appears. The fountains of creative activity are discovered and released. The free individuality which is the source of art is also the final source of creative development in time.

John Dewey



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Introduction

Life is abundant with opportunities to grow. We have all faced challenges, and we will continue to experience challenges. This is guaranteed. What you choose to do with these moments is what counts.

This edition of MindMatters is dedicated to art and creativity. Like various artists - whether writers, painters, sculptors, and dancers, we all have the opportunity to make something beautiful with what life throws at us. Being creative gives us the space to exhibit and process our innermost feelings, pain, and triumphs. We are all creative - the medium is just different.

Oxford defines creativity as
"the use of imagination or original ideas to create something; inventiveness."

What will you create today?

Lize van den Bergh
MindMatters 2nd Edition editor

*"Life isn't about finding yourself;
it is about creating yourself."*

George Bernard Shaw



Work Readiness

Compiled by Belinda Janeke
(Head: Career Services, Bloemfontein)

Set to stand out

Are you ready for work? Not just qualified, but fully prepared? To be ready, you need the right attitude, attributes, traits, and coping mechanisms. If you are wondering what this even means – come to us. Career Services at the University of the Free State is geared to set you up for greatness.

Without the right soft skills, many graduates find themselves struggling to get employed, or missing out on their dream job. Don't be like that. You can begin to prepare yourself for the workplace from your first year of studies. Career Services offers a **work-readiness programme** consisting of 12 topics/events. This is a voluntary co-curriculum programme, but we encourage you to make it a priority. Since it is offered online, you can complete it at your own convenience.

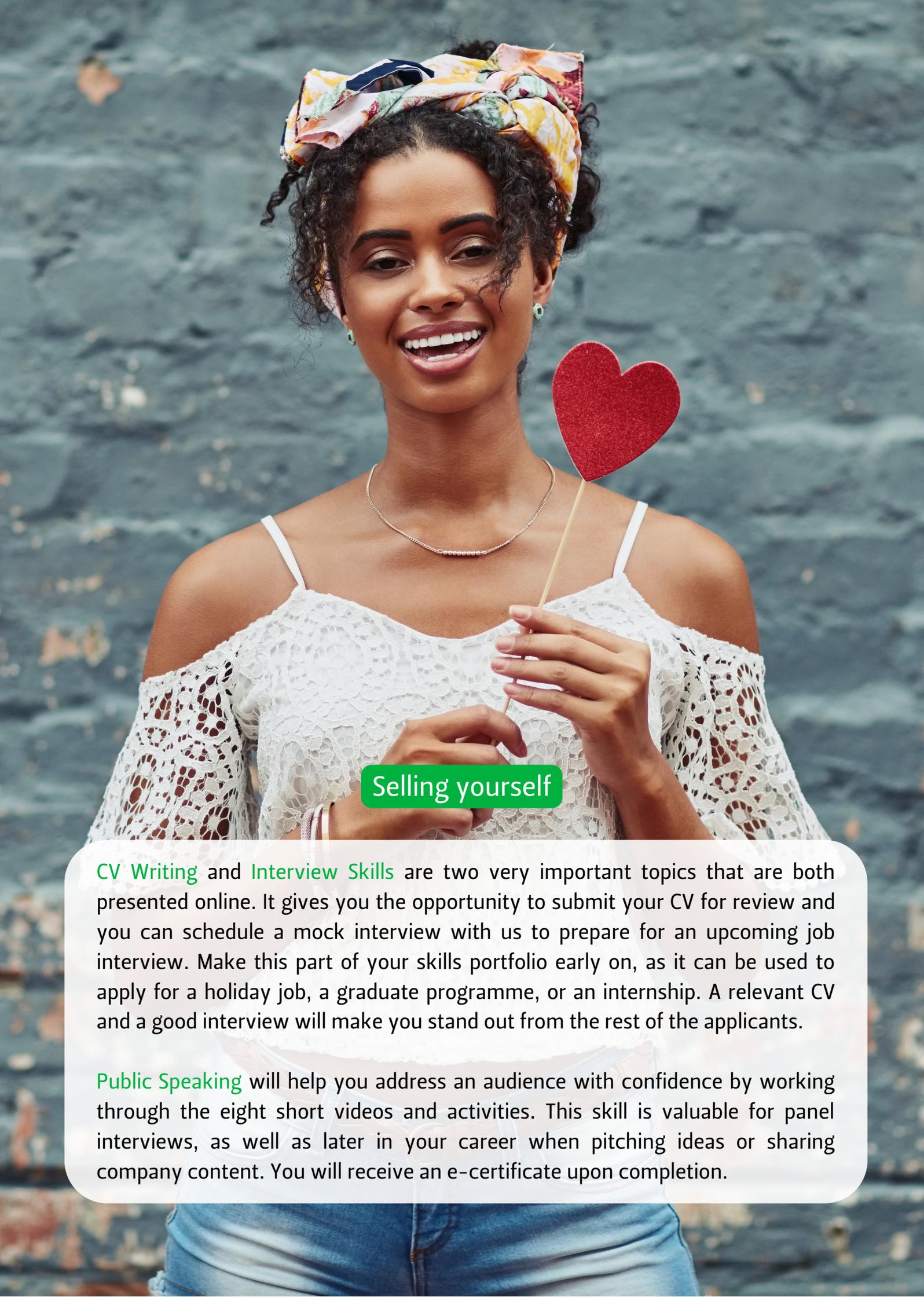


Get the top skills



You can complete any of the 12 topics, or all of them. But we have put together a plan that covers all the sessions if you would like to follow it (see diagram). We suggest that you begin with **Productivity Skills**, which you can also use to improve your studies – you will learn how to manage your time, how to avoid procrastination, and how to prioritise.

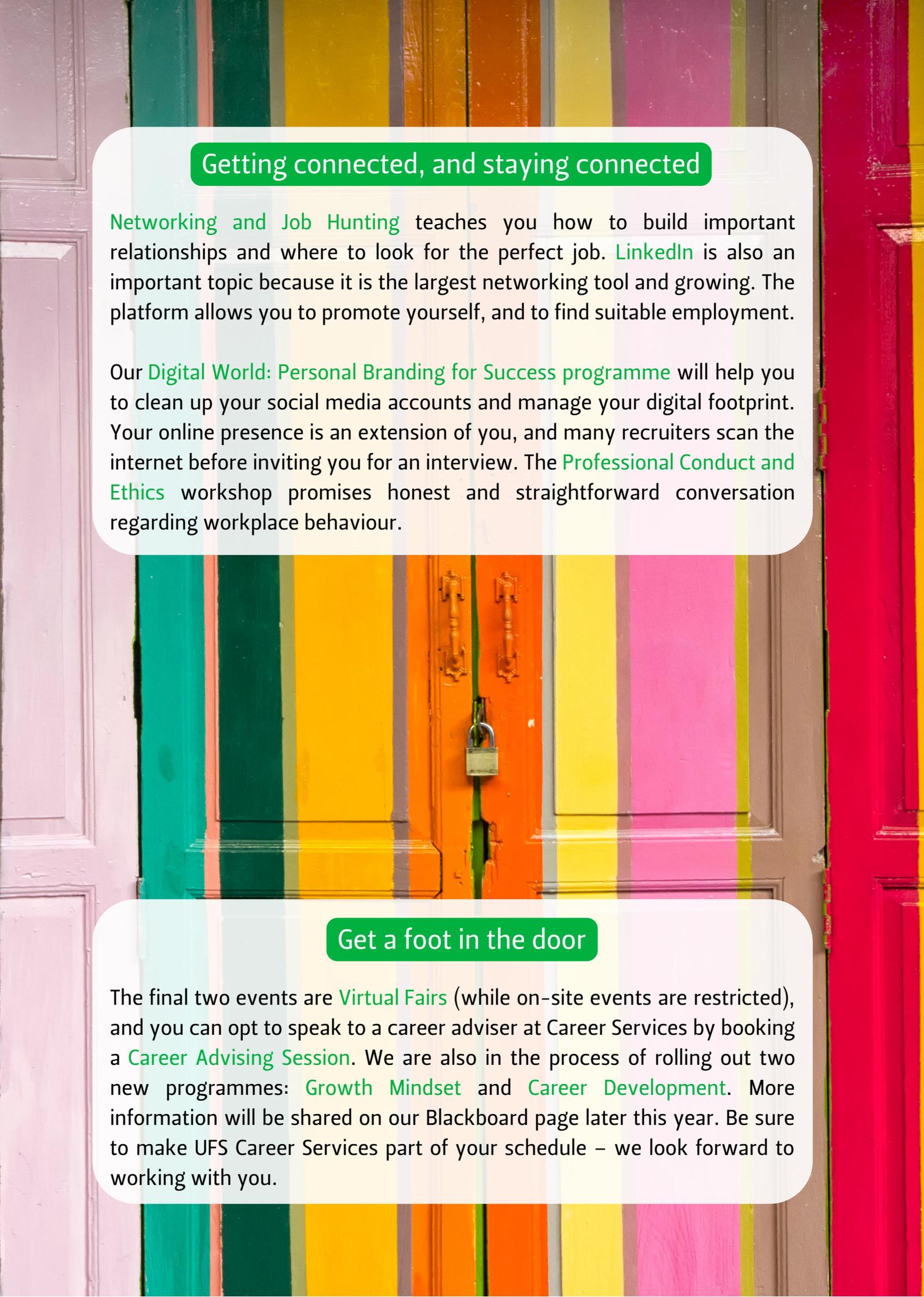
In **Purposeful Living** we ask: What is your purpose? Imagine spending 8-12 hours per day doing something that you dread – that is not on. Let us help you get on the right track. It is also important to keep the **Future of Work** in mind. Some jobs will become irrelevant and brand-new careers will appear.



Selling yourself

CV Writing and **Interview Skills** are two very important topics that are both presented online. It gives you the opportunity to submit your CV for review and you can schedule a mock interview with us to prepare for an upcoming job interview. Make this part of your skills portfolio early on, as it can be used to apply for a holiday job, a graduate programme, or an internship. A relevant CV and a good interview will make you stand out from the rest of the applicants.

Public Speaking will help you address an audience with confidence by working through the eight short videos and activities. This skill is valuable for panel interviews, as well as later in your career when pitching ideas or sharing company content. You will receive an e-certificate upon completion.



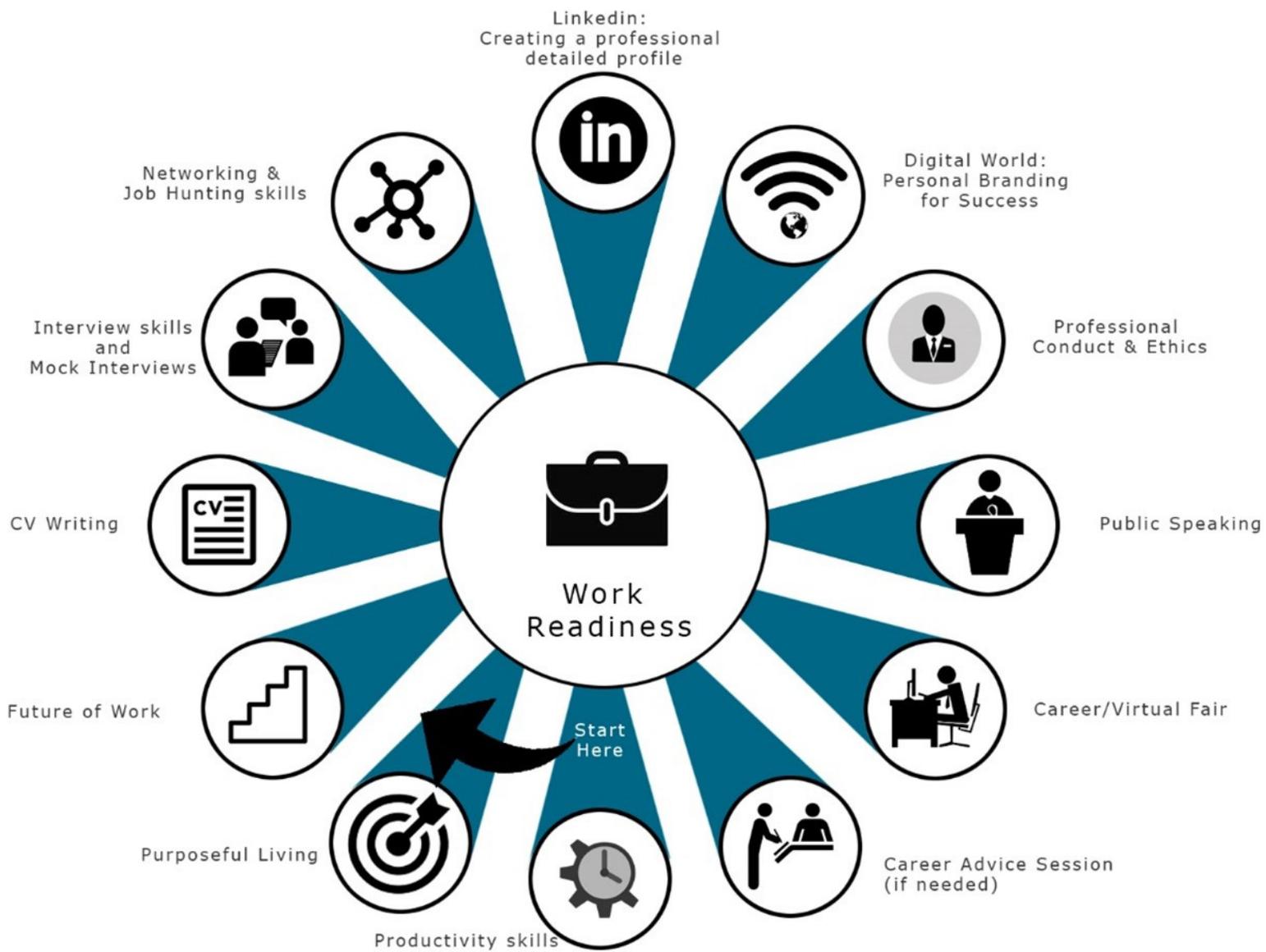
Getting connected, and staying connected

Networking and Job Hunting teaches you how to build important relationships and where to look for the perfect job. **LinkedIn** is also an important topic because it is the largest networking tool and growing. The platform allows you to promote yourself, and to find suitable employment.

Our **Digital World: Personal Branding for Success** programme will help you to clean up your social media accounts and manage your digital footprint. Your online presence is an extension of you, and many recruiters scan the internet before inviting you for an interview. The **Professional Conduct and Ethics** workshop promises honest and straightforward conversation regarding workplace behaviour.

Get a foot in the door

The final two events are **Virtual Fairs** (while on-site events are restricted), and you can opt to speak to a career adviser at Career Services by booking a **Career Advising Session**. We are also in the process of rolling out two new programmes: **Growth Mindset** and **Career Development**. More information will be shared on our Blackboard page later this year. Be sure to make UFS Career Services part of your schedule – we look forward to working with you.



Connect with UFS Careers:



Becoming Career-wise

Compiled by Nonhlanhla Moleleki

Career counselling is one of the essential elements we need in our lives, and it is a never-ending process. The career counselling process involves exploring your personality, interests, aptitude, background, and work-related aspects. For any life path, the process helps with deciding on the best career option, more so at a young age. However, career counselling is most effective for students who want to decide on a dedicated and successful career path.

It is vital to pursue a career in adulthood, and it is stressful to find a new career, considering the amount of time and resources needed. Students become concerned about their career choices due to a lack of jobs and a stressful lifestyle. It is easy to fall into the trap of following a career that your parents and society expect of you, which could lead to regret later. A career selected based on one's potential, interest, and personality has a more favourable prospect of assuring success. Personality traits are helpful in deciding upon a career, for it is easy to polish the skills we already have.

Let me take you through the process of choosing a career:

Know yourself

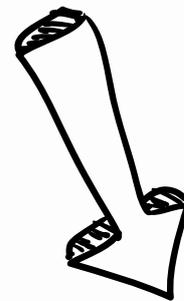
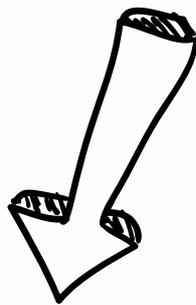
In order to choose a career, you must know who you are, your interests, goals, talents, and values. You can do this through self-evaluation or career assessments. Career assessment helps you discover more about yourself and your prospective career. For example, you can take [this online test](#) to know your personality profile.

Identify possible careers

The career assessment will give you options for different careers that suit your personality. Once you have the list of possible career options, rank each according to preference and interest. It will help to list three preferred career options that match your skill set.

Outline options

Start researching the three career options. Ensure that you examine the following aspects: qualification needed and whether you meet the minimum requirements, job profile, employment outlook, and type of work environment. Information can be acquired online. However, the best option would be to meet with a professional who can guide you through the career counselling process to make an informed decision about the best career path for you.



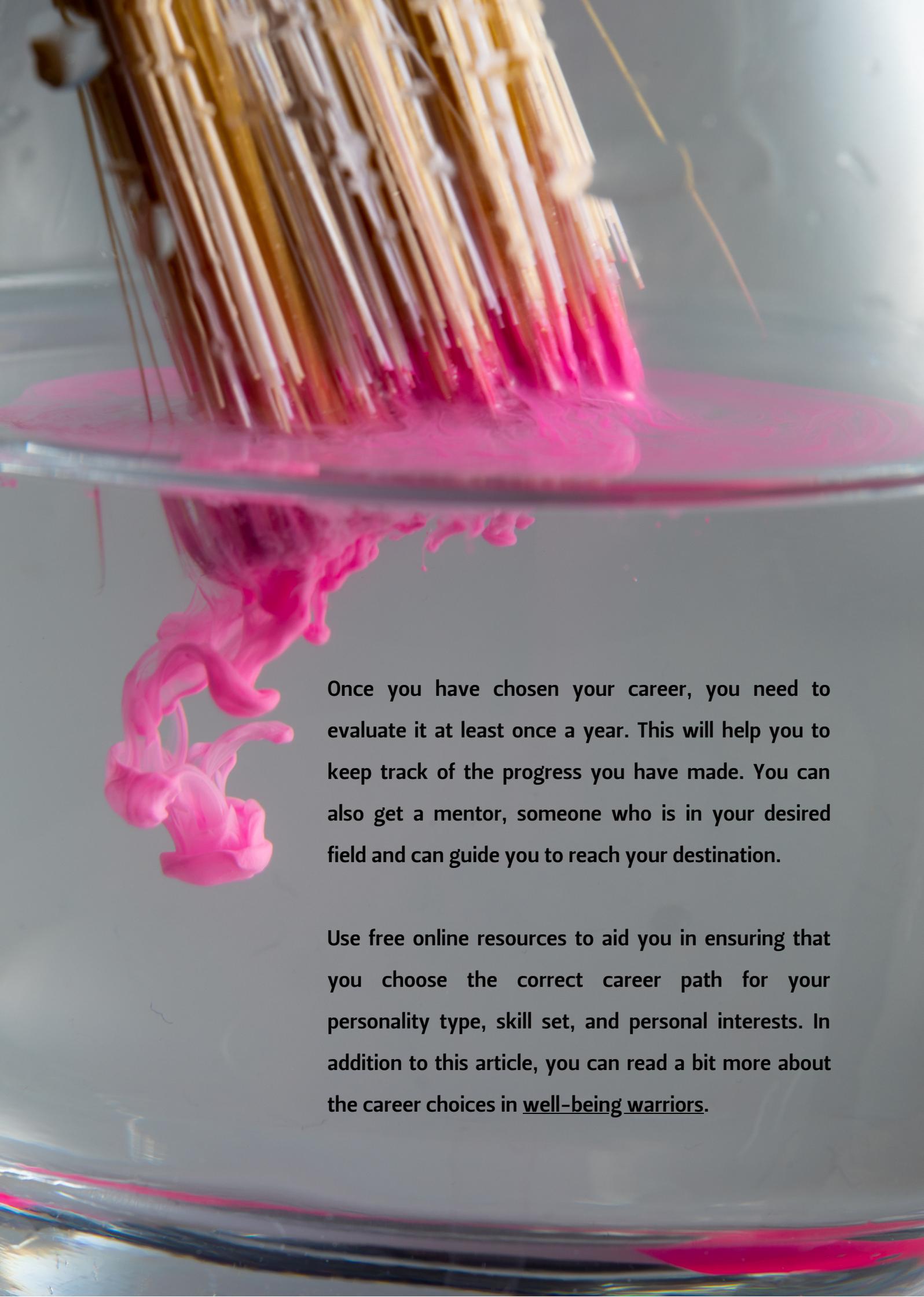


Set goals

After you have chosen and researched your preferred careers, you can then establish attainable goals. Establishing short- and long-term goals is necessary to ensure that you remain on the right track. To learn more on how to set appropriate goals, click on [this link](#). Reaching each goal might be challenging. Ensure that you are ready to work hard, make adjustments, and keep yourself committed. Goals are easier to achieve when they are defined, flexible, realistic, and time-bound.

Construct a career action plan

Once your career goals have been established, you can begin to develop a career action plan consisting of goals and clear steps to attain them. There are potential challenges with possible solutions outlined in a career action plan. This plan will clearly define how you will receive the required training or education, obtain employment, and develop professionally once you have begun your career.



Once you have chosen your career, you need to evaluate it at least once a year. This will help you to keep track of the progress you have made. You can also get a mentor, someone who is in your desired field and can guide you to reach your destination.

Use free online resources to aid you in ensuring that you choose the correct career path for your personality type, skill set, and personal interests. In addition to this article, you can read a bit more about the career choices in [well-being warriors](#).

The art of a successful student journey

Compiled by Eleanor Bernard

Assistant Director:

Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), Qwaqwa

As a student, and perhaps especially as a new student, you might have entered the university realm with one main objective in mind: to get good grades, to pass your modules, and thus to get your degree in the end. And I do agree that this is what our university community efforts should mostly strive towards when we talk about what constitutes a successful student.

But getting distinctions in all your modules might not total a successful student career or journey. What if I told you that there are so many other aspects to learn about, people to learn from, and elements to contribute to in this long journey?

If you indeed want to leave the university behind feeling like you have truly made use of every opportunity to grow into a person ready to immerse yourself into society and an exciting career, there is more to notice than what happens in the classroom.





Instead of focusing only on decent grades and learning as much as you can about your subject and the skills you need for that subject, you might also want to consider trying to work towards the following goals:



1. Know when and how to adapt to or attempt to change your environment.



2. Understand your needs and the needs of others and know how to balance the priorities of the community with your individual priorities.



3. Know how to manage resources (whether you are directly responsible for them, or you share them with others).



4. Realise that you have a unique contribution to the world and be prepared to use your abilities to improve the conditions around you.

Because, in the end, what are knowledge and skills worth if we do not know where we fit into the world, how we can use this knowledge to contribute to a better world or help and support others around us, and be active and conscientious citizens? I do hope that you will use every opportunity available to you while you are a student, in order to leave campus with a degree in your one hand, but also with a fiery and thoughtful mind. This is when you will know that you have completed your student journey successfully.

Rising from the ashes: Tools for times of fire

Compiled by Bonolo Mophosho



Fire refines and allows us to find our light.



When life shows you flames, such as a loss or some other stressor, it can create devastation. The complete loss of control and sense of crumbling can dismantle the foundations of previously held beliefs. These beliefs may relate to who you are and your place in the world. Although it may seem destructive, it is, in fact, a refining process.

You can choose to see adversity as a refining fire. Some previously held foundations of perceptions and beliefs often need to be dismantled. This is the blessing of reaching rock bottom. There is value in 'losing' yourself, because when you find yourself anew, you come away with new tools and perspectives that are necessary for the rest of your life journey. So, how you position yourself through the burn, prepares you for the exit from it. In doing so, you can walk out afresh, anew, and with an understanding of who you are and what you are capable of.

Much like the term 'post-traumatic growth', when you rise from the ashes of adversity, you can find a new lease on life, a reframed perspective on your purpose, and a more profound sense of not only your worth but that of the tides and storms that come with being alive. One needs a storm to learn how to weather future storms, and so one also needs adversity to understand one's power. You can become attuned to and deeply appreciate your strength through the storms. Tough times can show us much about ourselves that could otherwise be missed.



Although you may not immediately be able to answer the question, 'who am I?', rebuilding after a fire or storm is so particular and intentional that only what is genuine and authentic begins to build that new foundation. Only that which is inspiring, enlightening, and strengthening can be laid down as a new brick. You slowly start to rebuild with the knowledge of what can shatter and solidify peace, so the allowance is only for the latter. Whether it be the flames of academic overwhelm, relationship challenges, or an experience of loss.

Here are five tips to forge through to the other side with peace:

1. Recognise that 'this too shall pass.'

Seasons come, and seasons go. No season lasts forever. Make this your mantra.

2. Find your bearings

Hold on to the things that you know are everlasting. Define your values and the essential things that anchor you- your spirituality, the love of family and friends or your goals. Try to look through the haze of destruction to see those everlasting elements.

3. Remember you are still YOU

You are human, you have breath in your lungs, and life is still yours for the living. Centre yourself around beliefs that help you understand the purpose of your being. Values and priorities help to do this, but also retain a sense of identity by reminding yourself of challenges you have overcome in the past and remained standing. Remind yourself of the goals you have achieved. Count your blessings. Name your victories. You will see that you have continued to breathe regardless of what you have faced.

4. In that same breath - welcome change

You may be learning important lessons about life and how you live it; there may be specific behavioural and thought patterns that you need to let go of.

5. Take control of your mind

Your thoughts are instinctual to stress; sometimes, that instinct is more detrimental. Be mindful of your thoughts, and remember that you don't have to believe them. Your mind may want to think, 'this is the end of the world', 'I can't handle this', 'I always make mistakes', or 'I am a failure'. Throw a noose around these and tie them down before you drown. Take control and plant healthier seeds of thought and a belief base that is encouraging and elevating. (Consider taking part in the REBT programme [offered by SCD] that can assist you in achieving this).

With these tips and a perspective that tough times are a challenge to grow instead of an enemy to defeat you, you'll be more equipped to trust yourself to weather the storms. You can see yourself as being refined, not destroyed by the fires, and choose to rise like a phoenix from the ashes.

When your life needs colour

Compiled by Dr Munita Dunn-Coetzee

Have you ever had those days when you feel that you would really have liked to phone someone to share good news with? And there is no one to phone or text. Have you had those days when you really need someone just to listen, but there was no one? Those days when your life feels black and white. No support. No colour.

You know what it means to support others. You always try to be there for your friends and family when they need you. You listen to them, you assist when they need help, you buy them airtime in times of need, and you cheer them up when they are down in the dumps. But who does this for you? Do you have a social support network? And by the way, what does it mean to have a social support network?

Social support means having friends and other people, including family, to turn to in times of need or crisis to give you a broader focus and positive self-image. Social support enhances quality of life and provides a buffer against adverse life events. A strong social support network can be critical in helping you through the stress of tough times, whether you've had a bad day at university, or a year filled with loss or chronic illness. And the lack of social support can lead to isolation and loneliness.





Did you know that a social support network can add colour to your life? One thing we must acknowledge is that there is no perfect social support network, and that each person's network looks different. And that is okay. Perhaps you do not have good relationships with your parents, mother, father, or extended family. And perhaps they cannot be part of your social support network now. And that is also okay. Let's think how we can colour your life a bit more to get other people in your social support network.

What is the job of a social support network? These are people who are in your corner. They have your back. They do not judge you or ridicule you. They provide feedback that is genuine and in your best interest. Their support is not self-serving. They have a positive impact on your personal goals. These people may be close friends, relatives, or simply acquaintances. You may talk to them frequently or just occasionally.

When you have a social support network, there are a lot of good things that can happen:

You feel a connection with others.

It reduces your stress.

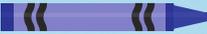
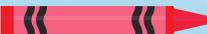
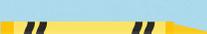
It increases your self-esteem.

It is better for your overall health and well-being.



When you know that you have people in your corner, rooting for you, it has a huge impact on your physical health, your emotional health, and it makes you feel so much better about yourself. It also makes you feel less lonely. It is a win-win situation, right?! Sometimes we forget who we have in our lives rooting for us – maybe make a list on your phone and save it? It is a nice reminder to have – especially on the days that feel without colour.

In case you are running out of ideas on how to build your social support network a bit stronger, what about ...

-  volunteering at an event, or at a society;
-  taking up a sport or joining a gym;
-  starting a book club and inviting people to join;
-  using online resources to reach out to others;
-  if you are into church, joining a group at church (like a cell group); or
-  reaching out to your classmates – they might be more appreciative than you can imagine.

Increasing your social support network can help you colour your life with bright colours.

Grab that pen and start colouring!

Self-compassion checklist

Compiled by Obakeng Makgale

Practising kindness towards yourself should be done as often as brushing your teeth. Use the following checklist to keep track of your overall well-being. You can also use this checklist to set and reach certain goals, such as spending less money or drinking more water.

Physical Well-being

- Did I get enough sleep?
- Did I drink enough water today?
- Did I eat a healthy meal today?
- Did I practise physical hygiene today?
- Did I exercise today?

Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
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<input type="checkbox"/>						
<input type="checkbox"/>						

Spiritual Well-being

- Did I engage with my sense of purpose today?

Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
<input type="checkbox"/>						

"If you don't make time for your wellness, you will be forced to make time for your illness."

Joyce Sunada

Social Well-being

- Have I made time to call someone I care about today?
- Have I spent time with someone whose company I enjoy today?
- Did I make time to check up on people who care about me today?
- Did I talk to someone who uplifts and encourages me today?
- Did I ask for help from someone when I needed it today?

Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun
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Mental Well-being

- Did I make time for my academic work today?
- Have I thought about a positive thing today? E.g. gratitude or positive thoughts
- Have I engaged in something mentally engaging today? E.g. gaming/reading
- Did I manage my time effectively today?
- Have I spoken positively about myself today?

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Challenging the inner saboteur

Compiled by Lize Wolmarans



I bet there are things in your life that you want but just don't get. Do you sometimes feel that someone or something is preventing you from achieving these goals? What if I told you that it is often none other than yourself? Not some stranger or cosmic force trying to sabotage your happiness, but you.

Self-sabotage is defined as behaviour or thoughts that hold you back or prevent you from doing what you want to do or achieve. It could be watching Netflix while you know you should be studying or even pushing people away when in reality you want to be closer to them. Sometimes, we are fully aware that what we are doing is actually going against our goals. But it is not always that easy to recognise our own sabotaging behaviour.

Here are three of the reasons why people sabotage themselves:

For some people, they have developed a belief over time that they do not deserve happiness or success. In other words, some people struggle with low self-esteem, which is marked by self-doubt and negative self-talk. A person may then, for instance, not even try to achieve their goals, because they believe they will never be able to achieve them.

1) Beliefs

For others, it may be that they have many fears related to achieving their goals. They might fear that they can never live up to the expectations or pressure of potential success or achievement.

2) Fear



Another reason why people self-sabotage is that it is sometimes easier to 'not know' than to try and potentially fail. So, they would rather live by avoiding trying. This is closely related to the fear of failure.

Avoiding

3)

It can be quite helpful and illuminating to explore the reasons for your self-sabotaging behaviour. It is also the first step towards conquering the saboteur once and for all. After you have gained a better understanding of why you are sabotaging yourself, you can then:

- 1 Challenge your thoughts and actions.
- 2 If you suspect that you are struggling with low self-esteem, it is a good idea to seek support from a mental health professional.
- 3 Keep a record of your self-sabotaging behaviours and thoughts. This can be especially helpful if you are not 100% sure why you sabotage.
- 4 Put obstacles in place to prevent sabotage. For instance, if you are prone to procrastination, block or switch off your phone for the time you need to be studying.



5

Remind yourself of your values – what is important to you? When you become aware of sabotaging thoughts or behaviours, you can then reflect on your values and rather choose actions that speak to them.

6

Be okay with 'failure' – remember that we all fail at some point, but what counts is how we deal with failure.

7

Practise self-care. We are often more inclined to engage in self-sabotage when we are feeling overwhelmed, tired, or stressed.

***"Remember, you have been criticising yourself for years and it hasn't worked. Try approving of yourself and see what happens."
Louise L. Hay***

When you can recognise your own sabotaging behaviour and thoughts, you are more capable of changing them into actions that will help you achieve your goals, as well as start living the life that you deserve and have always wanted. To live a life achieving your full potential, you need to start by overcoming your biggest saboteur – you! It would serve you much better to become your own greatest supporter.

The language of self-love

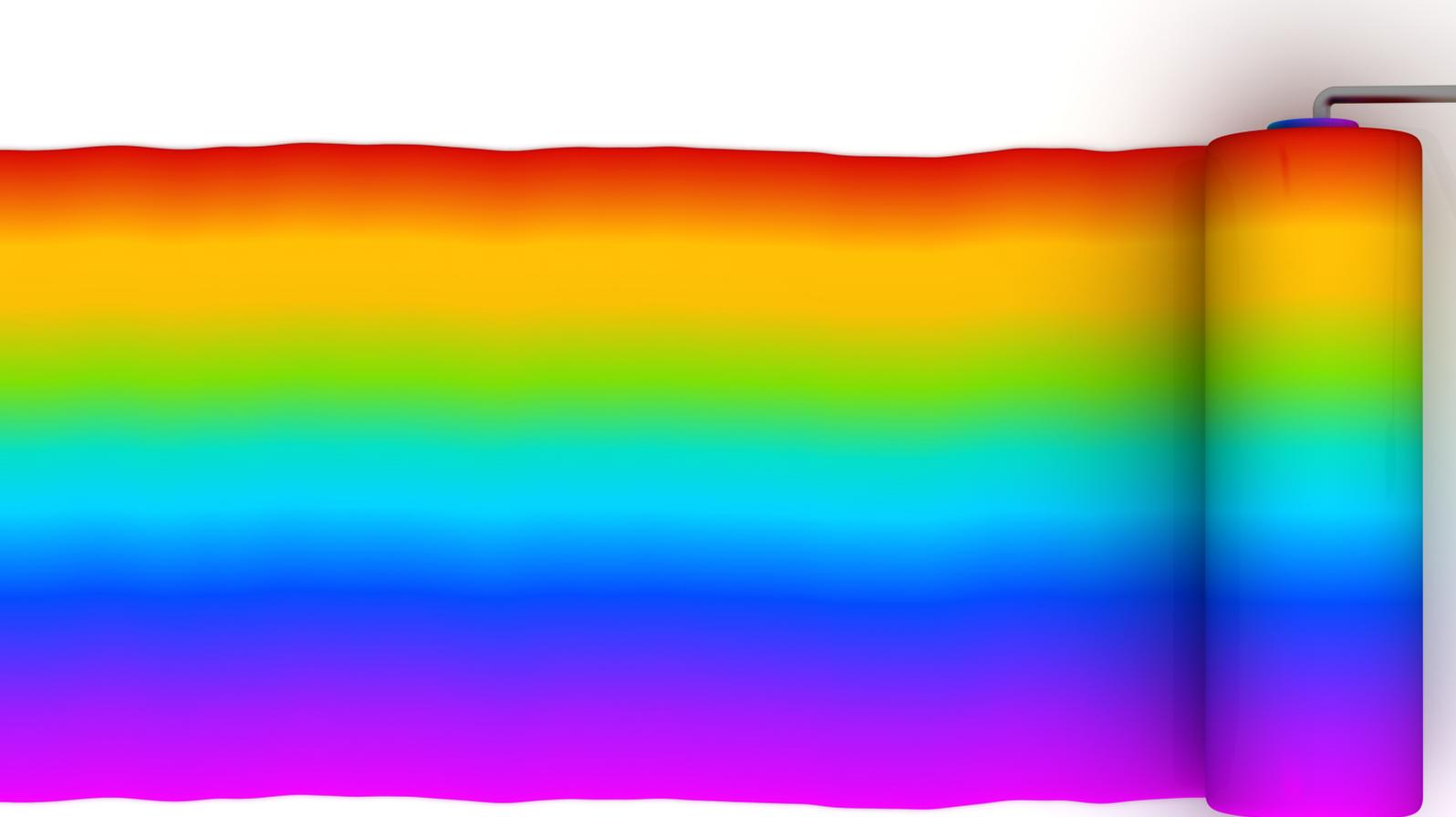
Compiled by Obakeng Makgale

What is love? Is it something we do, feel, or say? Is love an emotion we express? Love is a term that most (if not all) of us are aware of. We have all heard about this interesting term from movies, books, in conversations with family and friends, social media (#couplegoals), or fairy tales. Love has often been defined as an intense feeling of deep affection towards someone. This could be a family member, it could be a romantic partner, or it could be a friend. It is a feeling that is normally associated with the fact that you could go all out for this person that you love. That you would do anything and everything for them when they are in need. It means that you care deeply for this person.

Based on this definition and understanding of love, can one experience an intense feeling of affection for oneself? If love is an emotion, how do we express it towards ourselves? How do we go all out for ourselves and do anything and everything for ourselves when we are in need? Can we love and care deeply for ourselves unapologetically?

Socially, loving others has often been (morally) placed above loving ourselves. There is usually a thin line between loving ourselves and being selfish or egotistic. Very often when we hear of self-love it is not as romanticised as loving others. Often the message of self-love is unclear. This article aims to unpack the meaning of self-love and share ways to practice loving ourselves.





Making self-love clearer

To understand the meaning of self-love, we first need to differentiate between conditional love and unconditional love. Conditional love means that love is only given or reciprocated based on certain actions and/or factors. In other words, love is earned. An example of conditional self-love is feeling affection towards yourself when you have bought new clothes, are spending time with friends and/or a romantic partner, when you are looking good and are in shape, or when you perform well academically.

Unconditional love, on the other hand, refers to affection or love without conditions or limitations. This means that you love yourself regardless of the outward or external factors. In theory, loving ourselves unconditionally sounds easy; however, we all know that life tends to deal us with difficult hand. Loving ourselves unconditionally means accepting and embracing ourselves without needing criteria for self-love. This also means loving ourselves, even when it is hard to. What is it that makes it hard to love ourselves? For many it is past decisions, painful experiences, physical and emotional scars caused by painful experiences. For others, it is the negative voice that tells us everything we feel is wrong about us.

Self-love is a journey, not a destination

Self-love is a journey with many twists and turns. As we learn and grow, the way we need to love ourselves might change. You are a warrior facing daily challenges - you have experienced and are experiencing life in your own way. As people, we may go through unavoidable challenges, expectations, life goals, and even ordeals.

An important part of the journey to self-love, is acceptance. Acceptance of past experiences, wrong choices, and most importantly, acceptance of your current situation and/or position. If we look at self-love as a journey, not a destination, we can look at acceptance as our compass.

Acceptance is a gateway to self-love, it helps us to understand who we are, our values and beliefs. When we push away the painful side or the parts that we do not like about ourselves, this means that we reject ourselves. However, once we embrace and accept the parts that might hurt and might remind us of what we do not like about ourselves, then that means we accept and embrace ourselves.

Acceptance allows a change in perspective and may lead to embracing wounds to find ways to heal from pain, failure, and loss. Although scars serve as a reminder of pain, they do not define a person and they certainly do not mean that one should remain in the position of pain and suffering. These scars are what make us unique in our own way, they remind us of what we have overcome, and they show us our capacity to heal.

By acknowledging the existence of a negative voice, we open the pathway to challenge and disprove that voice. Acceptance and acknowledgement can be a beautiful way to practise loving ourselves in difficult moments.



Loving the self in five ways.

As mentioned before, self-love is a journey that requires the compass of acceptance. Here are the tools to take along on the journey. These tools are inspired by the concept of the five love languages originally published by Gary Chapman in 1992. However, instead of practising them for loving others, these love languages are going to be directed towards the self, and this is how:



Quality time

Quality time is an impact aspect of self-love. It is the perfect time to intentionally spend time with ourselves. This can be seen as setting an appointment to have a date with yourself. This date can include reading a book, doing a hobby, playing a game, meditation, listening to music, etc.

Act of service

An important tool to take with on the journey of self-love is doing something nice for yourself. This can include making your favourite meal, baking, etc. It is also important to practise the act of service to our student side, for example doing an assignment on time so that you can have more time to rest. The important thing about this part is keeping yourself in mind and doing something for yourself as a way of saying 'I love you' to yourself.

Gifts

Gifts are always a fun and nice way to spoil yourself and to make yourself feel loved by you. Think about something you can afford, save up for it, and invest time in making your gift uniquely for you. Put the same amount of effort into this gift that you would put into a gift for someone you care deeply about. The only difference is that you are expressing this deep care and affection towards yourself.

Affirmations

Words of affirmation are just as - if not more - important as the other love languages. It is important to hear yourself say these words to yourself. Feel free to say these words standing in front of a mirror. The words are: 'I love you', 'I care deeply about you', 'I am proud of you' and 'I know you are doing the best that you can'.

Physical touch

Lastly, physical touch is an easy way to express care and affection towards ourselves; this can include stretching, massages, bubble baths, mentalisation exercises for awareness of the body, practising gratitude for your body, etc.

Always remember,
"Self-acceptance is the beginning of self-love."
(Dhiman)



"You cannot pour from an empty teapot. Take care of yourself first!"
Ursula Foster

What palette are you using to colour your life? Become aware of and own your 'stuff'

Compiled by Bonolo Mophosho

What do you believe about yourself? If you thought about it and asked yourself some key questions, what would the painting of who you are and your place in the world look like? Who are you to those you love? What do you mean to them? That is, what do you believe you mean to them? The staggering thing is that it may not be accurate. See, we adopt certain beliefs from specific experiences growing up, which tend to then colour our entire lives, not only relational experiences, but ALL experiences.

Whether you are good enough to get what you deserve. Whether you can achieve what you want. Whether good things are meant to happen to you. If you are holding onto certain beliefs that colour your palette grey and dreary, the strange thing is that you tend to attract those same experiences you are trying to avoid. You are a big girl or boy now. You hold the paintbrush; you can colour your world how you want it to be. You can, in fact, choose new beliefs based on TRUTH.



Choice:

Recognise that the CHOICE is yours to decide how you want to colour your life. The colours you choose are up to you. You can, in fact, determine what you want to believe and build confidence in it over time.

Seeing the truth:

Amazingly, it is not fantasy as it may seem. There is always TRUTH - facts and evidence - to back up those new beliefs. It is readily available to you if you merely pay attention. The power is yours to create a whole new being of existence.

Awareness and Belief:

How you come to BELIEVE is in the effort you put into looking for the evidence; it requires a heightened AWARENESS.

Gathering the EVIDENCE:

You are just pausing in a situation to consider the EVIDENCE of what you believe, compared to what you could think instead - which is often the actual reality.

Making the SHIFT:

You must instigate that SHIFT. This shift is away from unhealthy, unhelpful, and inaccurate perspectives on what you are going through - to healthier, more accurate and beneficial views.



You may have old beliefs such as 'good things never happen' to you, 'happiness never lasts' for you, 'I'm not good enough', 'I'm inherently bad or toxic', or 'people don't love me'. Then you gather evidence to further corroborate that belief (which is not reflective of the actual reality). As a result, you repeatedly come to the place where you feel that way. A relationship ends, and it is - 'see; evidence that I, in fact, don't deserve to be loved', which is clearly and simply not the truth.

See, as children, we grab onto certain pillars of strength and security when facing challenges. It may have been after being bullied, neglected, abused, left alone, or lost something or someone you love. You tell yourself, 'Right, how do I ensure that this never happens to me again?' and try to avoid certain circumstances that may lead to it happening again. Certain beliefs come about, which lie somewhere in the crevices of our minds.

Sometimes it is things someone said to you, e.g., a bully, and you begin to believe 'I am not beautiful', or something that was done to you, e.g., a neglectful parent, and you believe - 'I'm unwanted'. These beliefs do not reflect the truth, yet you go through life thinking you are protecting yourself based on these beliefs. Pushing people away to avoid rejection or getting into situations that make you feel the same way, not necessarily on purpose, but because it is what you 'know'.

*"Life is a great big canvas.
Throw all the paint on it you can."*

Danny Kaye

Even though these beliefs often tell you hurtful, damaging untruths, they colour your existence from the inside out. This, by definition, should be good. Yes? You should define your existence and choose how you feel, but basing your life on inaccurate beliefs is like having a blueprint (or grey print) of all the pain and hardship you have faced and living your life according to it.

So, if your existence is based on a faulty foundation (moreover, one that you are not aware of), it robs you of a colourful life that you could have instead. Furthermore, you inadvertently attract (like a magnet) the very same experiences that you think you are trying to avoid. This is because your mind is telling you the reality of the situation, but if you look closer, it is likely off.



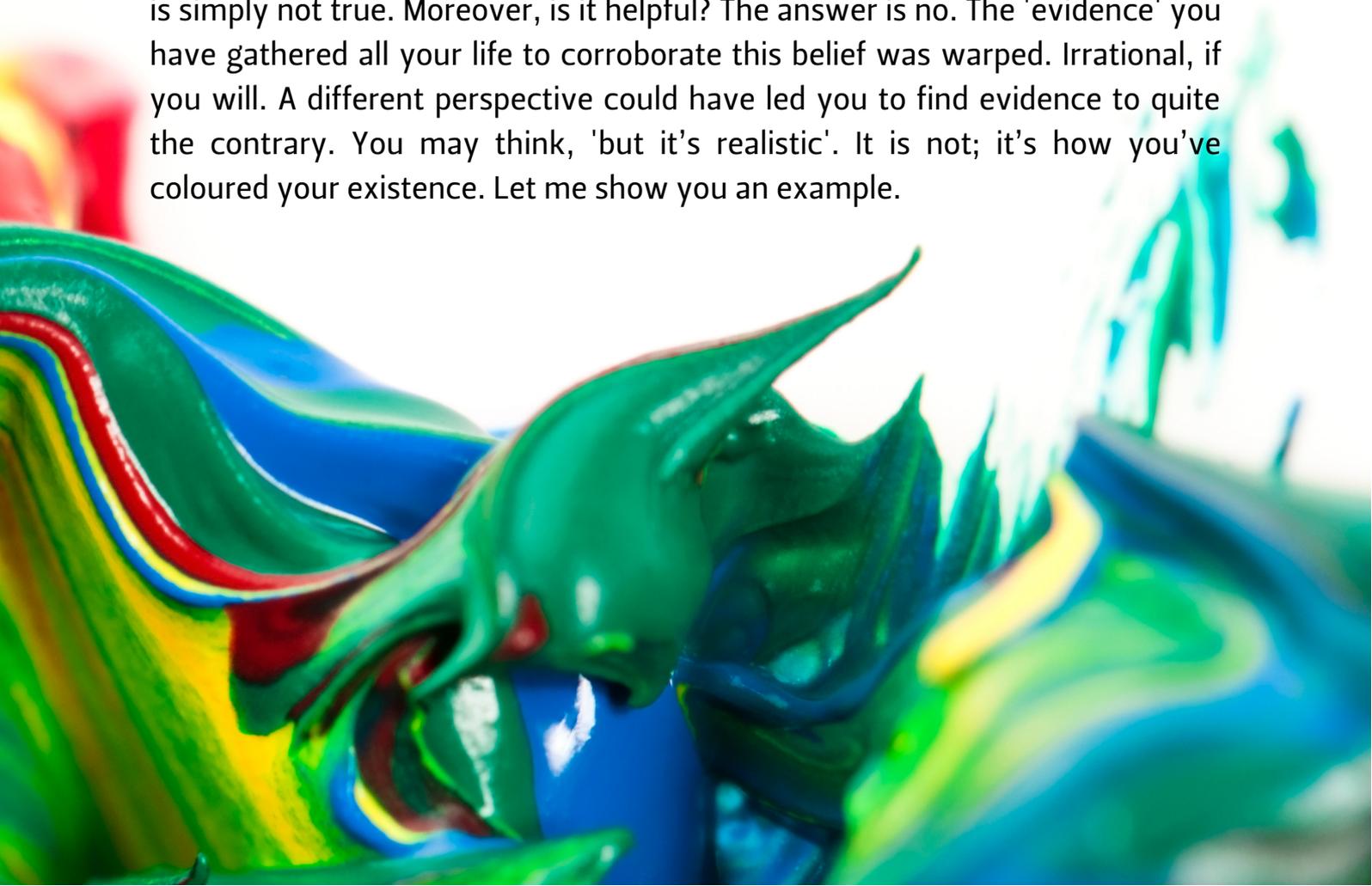
AWARENESS breaks the cycle:

So again, I ask: What do you believe about yourself?

When a relationship brings up anxieties, fears or insecurities, you are likely to have specific automatic thoughts. Or even when it is going well. How do you notice your response? For example, if you have just had a great weekend with someone, perhaps you start to think, 'How can I ensure that this doesn't end?' and you act instinctively.

Maybe you act by desperately trying to attain their commitment to another productive weekend, or by testing their commitment by bringing up something from the past that hurt you - which you were 'just thinking about'. If you asked the question, 'what does that mean about me?' in response to those instincts, you might reveal that it is coming from a place of fear of uncertainty, or a sense of insecurity. So, you confront the thought and ask, 'what does this mean about me?' and listen for the answer. Then, ask, 'What does that mean about me?' and hear the answer. Ask again and again until you reach the true underlying sentiment: 'I'm unworthy of love' or 'I'm unwanted'.

That is your core belief (one of them), and it needs to change. Why? Because it is simply not true. Moreover, is it helpful? The answer is no. The 'evidence' you have gathered all your life to corroborate this belief was warped. Irrational, if you will. A different perspective could have led you to find evidence to quite the contrary. You may think, 'but it's realistic'. It is not; it's how you've coloured your existence. Let me show you an example.



Kipe's story

Kipe grew up with a single mum who worked hard to make ends meet. Every day Kipe came home, mum would be out working late to provide for Kipe and her siblings. Kipe often came home and really felt the need for support, conversation, help, and guidance, but mum would not be available.

So, Kipe became very independent. By the time Kipe was a teen they were both accustomed to that rhythm; mum appreciated that Kipe was so helpful and able to get on without too much nagging from her, she trusted and was proud of how well Kipe did despite her workload. Yet, she regretted the times she had missed. Through this time, Kipe began to tell herself (somewhat subconsciously) that it's too hurtful to need her and that she was unavailable, 'I can't rely on anyone', she began to believe. Thus, the 'wall' was built.

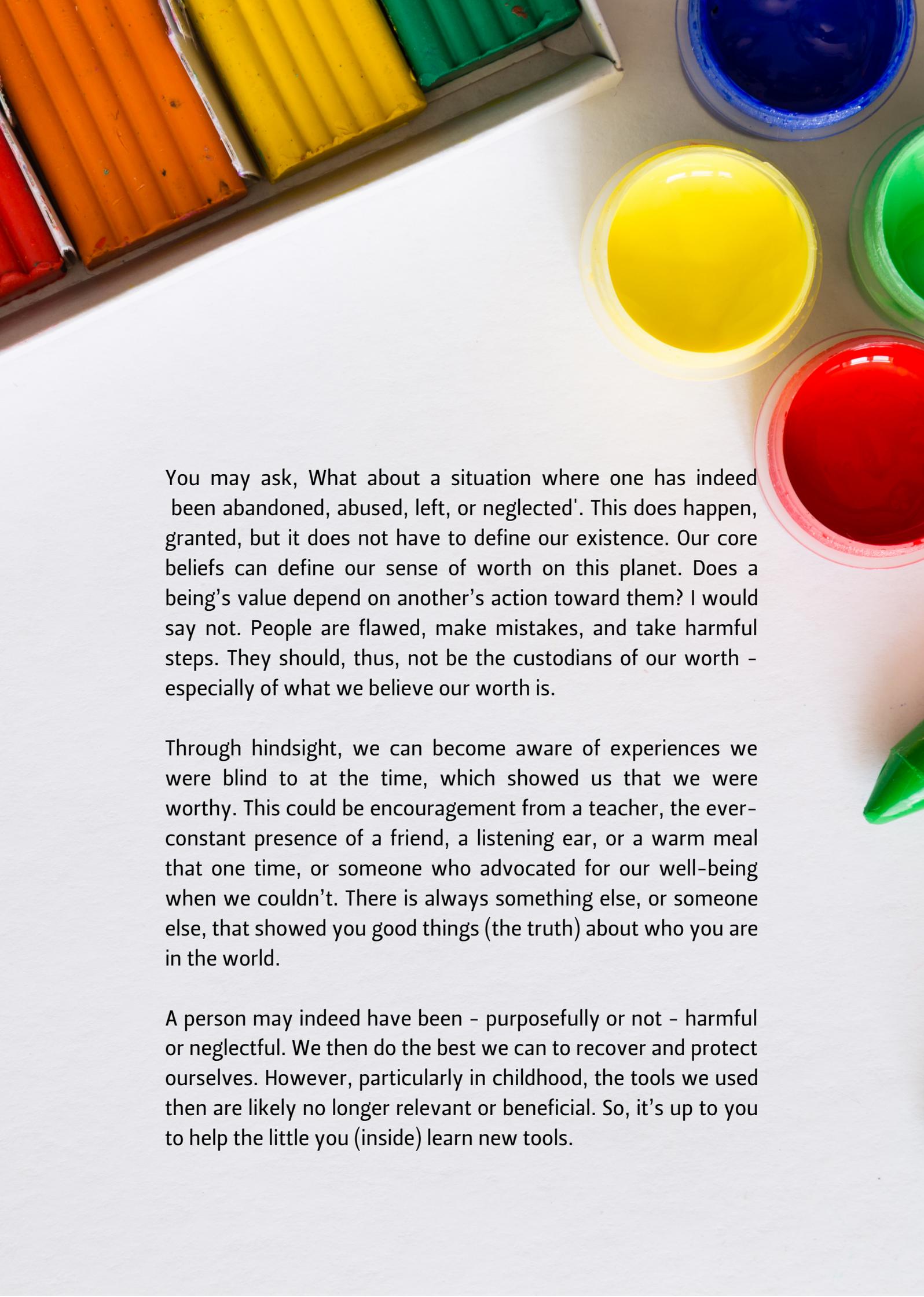
Years later, when Kipe's boyfriend gets busy at work and doesn't answer calls as often as he used to, automatic (or instinctive) thoughts triggered: 'I'll sort it out myself', or 'it's fine, I'll hang out with my friends instead'. These are often met with frustration and most probably some hurt and sadness. Other times, the instinct to panic-driven urgency she would have to secure his commitment instead drove him away.

Now 'what does that mean about me?', she subconsciously asks: and her answer - here it goes again; it means, 'I can't rely on anyone'. And so, she stops calling him regularly; even when he apologises and explains, it is not enough, and the relationship crumbles. Sometimes it would continue with the same cycles repeating. Because deep down, she wants his validation so badly.

So, you see, with each new experience you gather more evidence to further concretise your inaccurate little girl or little boy's belief, making you feel the same sense of despair you felt back then.

A shift in perspective may colour things differently. Kipe could instead become aware of where this comes from. She could challenge her belief and see the actual reality that perhaps 'mom loved me, wanted the best for me, she worked hard for our betterment, yes she wasn't the perfect parent, but she did the best she knew how'. And she would then, years later, be able to think instead; 'he's just started a new job, of course he's busier than usual', or 'he's shown before that he's capable of being responsive, let me give it some time, I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation'.





You may ask, 'What about a situation where one has indeed been abandoned, abused, left, or neglected'. This does happen, granted, but it does not have to define our existence. Our core beliefs can define our sense of worth on this planet. Does a being's value depend on another's action toward them? I would say not. People are flawed, make mistakes, and take harmful steps. They should, thus, not be the custodians of our worth - especially of what we believe our worth is.

Through hindsight, we can become aware of experiences we were blind to at the time, which showed us that we were worthy. This could be encouragement from a teacher, the ever-constant presence of a friend, a listening ear, or a warm meal that one time, or someone who advocated for our well-being when we couldn't. There is always something else, or someone else, that showed you good things (the truth) about who you are in the world.

A person may indeed have been - purposefully or not - harmful or neglectful. We then do the best we can to recover and protect ourselves. However, particularly in childhood, the tools we used then are likely no longer relevant or beneficial. So, it's up to you to help the little you (inside) learn new tools.

If you allow yourself to paint with all the colours available, using all you can see (if you looked), a completely different reality could be visible. Using all the evidence at your disposal could bring the truth to light. Sometimes our minds need a little help; perhaps mum did say kind and encouraging words when she had to leave for work, maybe her love language is acts of service, and in all her work to provide for you, she was setting her love in action for you.

Perhaps your boyfriend has always been reliable in the past or may have told you that things might get tough for him. Perhaps, there is that still small voice of a memory, a person, an experience, showing you the colourful truth of who you are. In short - consider all the evidence, letting your piece of art (the present situation/life itself) come to light with all its varying shades of truth.

So: decide what you believe about yourself; determine what place you would instead hold in people's lives. If you looked, there is already evidence of it being authentic. Of course you matter, you deserve good things, and you are wanted and loved! Even if there is just ONE experience that tells you it is good enough. It shows that the beliefs you have held all this time have not reflected what is true.

So, colour your world, brave one, you hold the paintbrush!



Student Testimonials

Self-esteem programme:

"I am currently attending the self-esteem programme and I am able to connect and not shy away from people in the group. I realised my worth and how to approach situations; because at first, I used to have so much anger that I cursed all the time ... now it is so much better because I am learning different approaches to dealing with conflict."

"I have learnt to put myself and my needs first, without being selfish and still considering others. I can now make use of different conflict management skills. I do not make decisions anymore based on emotions. I have accepted my flaws and mistakes and have learned how to become my own best friend."

"I am in the process of learning to love myself the way that I am. I now know how to handle conflict and I am no longer scared of voicing out when I do not like something."

"I have learnt that it is okay to not be okay, and that you don't need to let that define you."

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The most profound thing that I have learned is to put myself first and know that I am worth and that I deserve more and better. Also, to be unapologetic about my boundaries. My truth matters always, so I should focus more on the internal than what others will try to make their truths 'my truth'.

"I have learned how I have let people define who I am, and how that mostly influenced my self-esteem. Meeting other people with low self-esteem and seeing that I wasn't alone was very enjoyable to me."

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REBT programme:

“ I attended the REBT programme, and it was so fun; sadly it was only for a month, I wish we could participate all year. The ABCDF method was and is still helpful, because I got to realise how we think affects our behaviour.”

“ The REBT programme helped me change my views and thoughts towards things in life that I went through daily.”

“ Last year I faced academic exclusion, and this programme helped me to cope with stress.”

“ It helped me to realise how important it is to manage my emotions and behaviour.”

“ It was easy for me to understand and also apply the solutions to my everyday life.”

“ I started to develop a lot of anxiety. Particularly during the examination season. I was constantly on edge and could not cope with intrusive thoughts. The REBT programme really helped me because I saw that there's a way to manage thoughts, not fix them but rather analyse and assess them and somewhat bring a new perspective, which oftentimes was the more accurate and less tormenting viewpoint. Definitely a skill I will now carry with me going forward :)”

Therapy:

I faced homesickness, low self-esteem and family problems. The therapist validated my feelings and gave me tools on how to deal with the issues I faced. She was kind and thoughtful. I liked that my voice was heard.

I had a hard time coping with anger and being assertive. Even the smallest of things would trigger the anger, which affected most of my relations with friends. I then learnt skills and activities that would help manage how I reacted to what people would do or say.

"Furthermore, the SCD has helped me with coping skills, relaxation techniques as well and others. I wish students can take action and seek help and stop committing or attempting suicide, getting depressed and just attend the programmes offered by SCD."

I had a problem with procrastination and SCD helped and showed me to how to keep a daily to-do list.

Webinars and Workshops:

I had low self-esteem and constantly saw myself as not important. That was until we had a workshop on emotional intelligence at residence and I got to understand that I can do more than I think I can.

Using the SCD resources has helped me a lot, I managed to cope with my academics.

I struggled with emotional intelligence and now I know more about it, and I know that a little act of kindness can make someone's day.



"Every artist dips his brush in his own soul and paints his own nature into his pictures."

Henry Ward Beecher

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