

STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

InnerDrive resources



THE SCIENCE OF HAPPINESS



What makes someone happy? A famous study, conducted almost forty years ago, found that Lottery winners tend not to be happier than everyone else. This is because once the initial buzz of winning fades, people revert back towards their normal happiness levels. So if hitting the jackpot doesn't put a long lasting smile on your face, what does?

[Teacher morale and happiness levels](#) are never far from the news, with over 50% of teachers stating they have [thought about quitting](#) in the next two years. So what makes someone happy? Research suggests that there are three main factors that govern how happy someone is: their genes, their current circumstances and how they spend their time. Though the first two may be out of our control, the third point on how you choose to spend your time may be the key to feeling happier. What does the research say on how to improve how happy we feel?

DON'T MAKE BEING HAPPY YOUR GOAL

An [interesting study](#) recently found that the more people strived to be happy, the less happy they were. This is because instead of enjoying whatever it is they are doing, they are worrying about if they could be happier whilst doing it (and feeling disappointed when they don't reach this mythical and

unobtainable happiness level). Being happy appears to be linked to embracing the present and not obsessing about the future.

CONNECT WITH OTHER PEOPLE

Spending time with other people and forming meaningful relationships [makes people happier](#). This seems to be especially true for students, who in a study reported feeling at their happiest when they were [interacting with their friends](#) (whilst being isolated corresponded to feeling at their saddest). [Research shows](#) that the teenage brain is more sensitive to social rejection than compared to an adult brain. Be sure to nurture relationships and connect with the people around you and encourage those that you work with to do the same.



PRIORITISE TIME OVER MONEY

Evidence suggests that people who prioritise time over money [report being happier](#).

That is not to say that money makes no impact. A famous [study by Princeton University](#) found that once people are paid \$75,000 a year (about £60,000 in this post-Brexit era), they don't report any increases in happiness. This is obviously considerably more than the [average teacher salary](#).

However, the amount you need to earn to feel happy is probably not as clear cut as that study suggests. Derren Brown, in his recent book *Happy* states "that magic number seems to vary greatly according to what study you read and depends on the cost of living wherever the study was carried

out... while it remains clear that having less than you need is a source of unhappiness, having more than you need does not make you happier". This is because that often an increase in pay comes with an increase in working hours, which can [leave people unhappier than before](#) their promotion.

DO SOMETHING KIND FOR SOMEONE ELSE

A fascinating study took a novel approach at making people happier. Instead of focusing on doing things that they thought would make them happier, participants were instructed to perform five kind acts per week for six weeks.

This act of doing something kind for someone else increases happiness by:

We all want to be happy - these strategies can help.

- Providing [some novelty](#);
- Reminding people that they were an [good influence](#) on the world;
- [Eliciting positive feedback](#) in the form of gratefulness and appreciation;
- Promoting positive relationships.

PRIORITISE EXPERIENCES OVER MATERIAL THINGS

The problem with prioritising material things is that they change quickly. Yesterday's desirable becomes today's essential which in turn becomes tomorrow's relic. What was once seen as a bonus can quickly morph into a necessity. By prioritising experiences, you create life long memories and develop more as a person. This is a fascinating area of research, and we could never do it justice in one short article. To read more about why experiences trump material things, you can read some great research [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

EXERCISE A LITTLE BIT

This is one of the most consistent findings in research on

well-being. [Those who exercise regularly report](#) being more satisfied with their life and are happier. One possible reason is that exercise has both [physical and psychological benefits](#), therefore protecting you against disease, illness, stress and isolation, which overall, [increases your mental health](#).

EMBRACE BAD MOODS

Embracing your bad moods may help minimise the impact they have on you. [A recent article](#) on the British Psychological Study website reported on a study that found that negative feelings can be used in a positive way, such as: *"recognising that anger can sometimes be empowering and that sadness can be poignant and can bring us closer to one another"*.

More research is needed on this, and the research certainly isn't indicating that we want to encourage people to be in a bad mood, just that we shouldn't expect to be happy all the time and learn from these feelings where possible.

SPEND SOME TIME OUTSIDE

[A recent report](#) found that children spend less time outside each day than prisoners. The value of nature can't be underestimated. Those who spend more time outside and feel more connected to nature [report experiencing more positive moods](#) (such as joy, interest and alertness) and life satisfaction. Try and make a conscious effort to steal some time outside where possible. You will feel better for it.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The research area of happiness has been historically overlooked. Typically, psychology has researched areas on what has been going wrong. The last few years has seen a big growth in our knowledge of what makes people feel happier. These include not chasing happiness, spending time with people we love, exercising and prioritising experiences and time over material possessions.

BLOG 2

8 WAYS TO COPE WITH CHANGE



Heraclitus of Ephesus, one of the greatest minds in history, saw life as a river. He states that “*you can never step in the same river twice*”. This is because either you have changed and/or so has the river.

One thing can be assured in life, and that is that change is inevitable. Those who cope best with change adapt faster and more effectively, whilst enjoying the ride. So how can we best cope with change?

GET INFORMATION

[In a study](#) examining how people cope with change, researchers at the London Business School found that through the gathering of information, participants were better able to interpret environmental cues to reduce stress, uncertainty and ambiguity. Once we understand our situation we can pick up on the information that is most important.

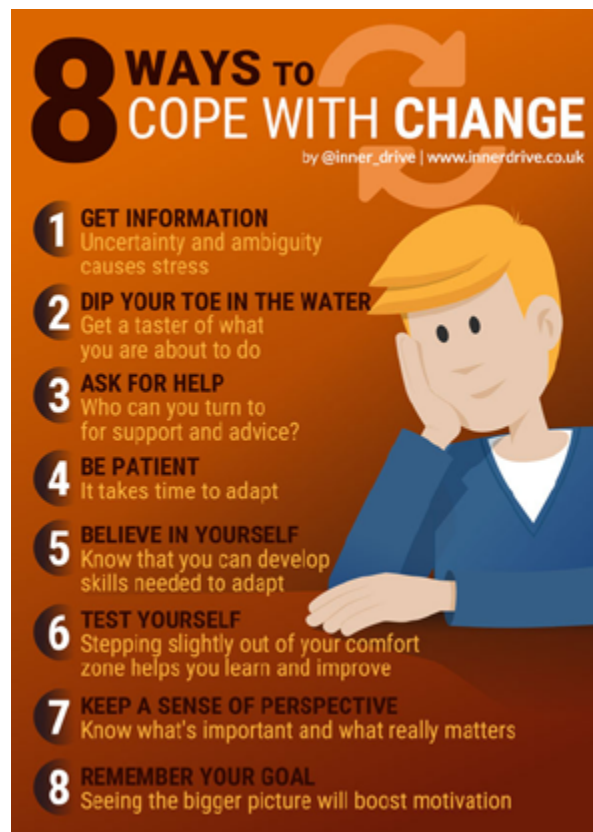
DIP YOUR TOE IN THE WATER

Familiarise yourself with the situation and give yourself a taste of what is to come. Exposing yourself to a situation that might be surrounded by doubt and worry, can help you to [slowly adjust to the requirements](#) of the task at hand. This

helps you prepare for what is to come and allows unhelpful thoughts to be subdued and rationalised.

ASK FOR HELP

Asking for help is a sign of strength, not a sign of weakness. Good people to ask for help include [trusted family members](#) and friends. Researchers [have found](#) that students who exhibited help-avoidance behaviour limited their personal development. Students who look for advice often develop [more complex coping strategies](#) by learning from the experiences of others.



BE PATIENT

When we make changes to important parts of our lives, it takes time to adapt to those differences. Be patient and trust the process you've embarked on, because you might not see differences overnight. After all, the best things worth achieving often take time and perseverance.

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

In line with [a growth mindset](#), those who believe they can develop their skills are more likely to cope better with change. Change should be seen as an opportunity to learn from past mistakes and develop a new set of skills.

TEST YOURSELF

Your comfort zone is a set of behaviours and actions that conform to the routine of daily life to reduce risk and stress

that provides us with a sense of security. [Research has shown](#) that pushing yourself out of your comfort zone socially and creatively will produce the most beneficial learning outcomes.

**Change is inevitable,
so it's better to prepare
for it.**

KEEP A SENSE OF PERSPECTIVE

By understanding what is important we can identify what really matters. Find what is important to you and make that as personalised as possible. Take time to understand yourself and remember that however big the change, there is always a way you can take back control.

REMEMBER YOUR GOAL

When we have [targets and goals](#), it is sometimes easy to forget what the bigger picture is. Remembering where you are going and where you want to be can increase your motivation to succeed.

FINAL THOUGHT

As Heraclitus of Ephesus once said, life involves peaks, troughs, swirls and pits.

However, by using the 8 scientific tips explained above we can ensure that coping with change isn't as daunting as it might seem. By learning how to adapt more effectively, we can develop our resilience and see change as a positive.

BLOG 3

7 WAYS TO GET OUT OF A BAD MOOD



Bobby McFerrin famously sang “*Don’t worry, be happy*”.

But that’s easier said than done, right? Sometimes we find ourselves stuck in a huff and we don’t know why, or maybe we do know why, but we still struggle to break out of it.

Being in a bad mood has a powerful effect; it leads to [social rejection](#), [worse problem-solving skills](#), and an [inability to stop unwanted thoughts](#). So what does psychological research tell us about how to get out of a bad mood? Here are 7 tips:

Go For a Run

Exercise is a great way to lift your spirits; just a 10-minute run [is shown](#) to increase positive feelings and mood. Exercise releases dopamine in your brain acting much in the same way anti-depressants do!

Be Optimistic

Just thinking that positive things will happen to you in the future improves mood. Optimistic people live a higher quality of life than pessimists. In fact, [optimism leads](#) to better emotional flexibility, problem solving, and rationalising despite negative situations.

Positive Imagery

Much like being optimistic, imagining yourself succeeding or being the best you can be helps bring about a good mood.

If you're feeling down, [actively taking time](#) to think or write about your best possible self brings about a positive change in mood. To read more about this, check out our blog about visualization in either [education \(before an exam\)](#) or in [sport \(before a match\)](#).

Take a Deep Breath

Slow deliberate breathing and movement has a [whole host of positive effects](#). This [has been shown](#) to reduce negative feelings such as depression, anger, fatigue, and anxiety.

Take a Nap

Extended periods of being awake or feelings of fatigue and exhaustion will increase negative emotions. To offset that, a single hour-long nap leads to increased feelings of joy and happiness. By both countering situations that lead to negative effects and bringing on positive affects, napping is a powerful tool to snap out of a bad mood. For more tips on how to sleep your way to success, check out our [9 Common Sleep Mistakes](#) and [How to Fall Asleep Quicker](#) blogs

Treat Yourself

Everyone loves treating themselves to a little bit of "retail therapy", but you can now [justify it with science](#)! The consumption of these self-indulgent treats has a lasting positive effect on mood, beyond their immediate enjoyment. Furthermore, even unplanned "impulse buys" (in moderation) done with the purpose of improving



Being in a bad mood only ever gets in your way.

mood do not lead to feelings of guilt or regret later on.

Listen to Music

Music is a powerful tool when it comes to emotions. Happy music is an effective distraction from bad feelings. [In research](#), people who listened to upbeat, positive music when they were in a poor mood did a better job of repairing their mood and had a more optimistic (remember from earlier?) view of their ability to fix their mood.

For even more tips on using mindset to improve your mood, check out our blog on [7 Ways to be More Optimistic](#).

BLOG 4

THE 3 WORST WORDS TO SAY TO YOURSELF



"Watch your thoughts. They become words. Watch your words. They become deeds. Watch your deeds. They become habits. Watch your habits. They become character. Character is everything."

We all talk to ourselves during tasks. For some, [this inner narrative is positive and helpful](#). Others can be their own worst critic. But are some words worse than others? We think these are the three worst words you can say to yourself...

THE THREE WORST WORDS

When people talk to themselves in extreme terms, it tends to make them more stressed and feel more helpless. Indeed, as Obi Wan Kenobi tells Anakin Skywalker, *"only a Sith deals in absolutes"*.

Here are the three most commonly used absolute statements that students would be wise to avoid:

- Should
- Never
- Always

Using absolutes in your self-talk stops you from looking for other ways.

WHY ARE THESE WORDS BAD?

Using absolute statements can be seen to be an overly negative way of expressing your thoughts or emotions, as well as being simply inaccurate. The world is hardly ever 'black or white'. It is more nuanced than 'either-or'. Shades of grey and multiple options often exist.

Each of these words can inspire negative thoughts, feelings and behaviours.

- "Should" enhances feeling of guilt or obligation;
- "Never" is likely to lead to feeling inadequate, stressed or frustrated;
- "Always" makes you believe that, if something is inevitable, why even try?

"Should" isn't just any word, it's a mindset that places ownership on others rather than yourself. Taking personal ownership of a situation allows you to control and/or influence it, rather than leaving it to someone else. [Research has shown](#) that by taking personal ownership, individuals are able to de-stress and work more effectively in present tasks.

CONSIDER THE ALTERNATIVES

Philosopher Carl Jung stated that when people talk in absolute terms, it suggests that they think they know an absolute truth. But this unlikely to be true, as a number of



random factors impact what is going to happen; this is often referred to as the [Butterfly Effect](#).

So what words would be better to use?

- Instead of 'should', say 'could'
- Instead of 'never', say 'often'
- Instead of 'always', say 'sometimes'

FINAL THOUGHT

Talking in absolutes can lead to 'learned helplessness', which is when people give up without trying as they don't believe their efforts will make any difference to the outcome. The words we say to ourselves are powerful. Teaching students how to [better talk to themselves](#) will help them develop their [metacognitive and self-regulation strategies](#).

In short, it is a gift that will keep on giving long after they leave school.

BLOG 5

CHALLENGING UNHELPFUL BELIEFS



We've all had them: irrational thoughts that pop into our head without a moment's notice. And just like that, in a flash, they can take hold. Fleeting moments of frustration become all out anger. A passing worry takes grip and morphs into anxiety and doubt. But what can you do about it?

We have previously blogged about the exciting psychological research emanating from Staffordshire University sport psychologists, Dr Martin Turner and Dr Jamie Baker, on how to [perform under pressure](#) by viewing events as an opportunity, not as a threat.

They have also researched how to challenge unhelpful beliefs (you can read some of it [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)). Central to their research, called Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT) is the maxim that people are not stressed about upcoming events, but by their perception of them. In other words, it is not an exam or cup final that makes someone nervous, it is their beliefs about them that generates their response.

Their work highlights some simple steps on how to manage and overcome irrational and unhelpful thoughts. Below is a brief summary of some of the tips to do so:

Look for proof that the belief is true

A statement without proof is at best an opinion. Opinions can be wrong.

As humans, we have a great history of having inaccurate opinions (for example, hardly anyone saw the financial crash of 2008 coming, many pundits tipped Leicester City to be relegated from the Premiership this year* and Microsoft once famously predicted that Apple wouldn't gain a sizeable share in the mobile phone sector).

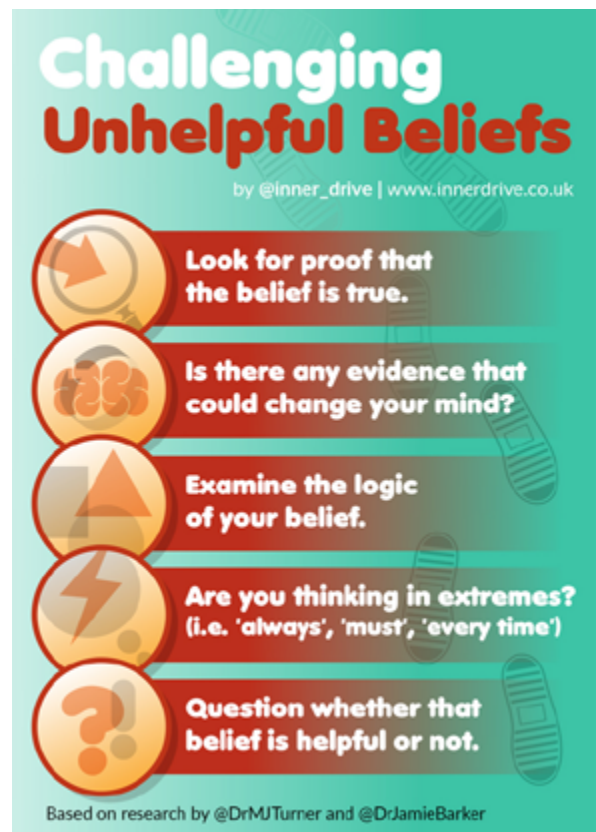
Before listening too much to that doubting voice in your head, first check for evidence. Is there any weight and credibility to justify it? If there is no proof, this thought is a negative guess, a speculative hunch. In reality, it is more likely to be a misplaced myth, akin to a trick of the mind playing worst case scenario than an accurate assessment of your current situation.

Is there any evidence that could change your mind?

This is a great question to ask yourself. This forces you to question whether you are blindly following false or thinly weighted beliefs. If the answer to this question is no, then it means you could well be rejecting contrary evidence without properly considering it first.

Examine the logic of your belief

This is the culmination of both the first two points. Weighing up the evidence is a technique [commonly used by psychologists](#). There are many reasons why your beliefs may not be logical. These include the confirmation bias (only agreeing with evidence that backs up your original belief), the bandwagon effect (believing something because everyone else does) and the negativity bias (paying more



attention to negative information). If you want to read more about our thinking biases, [check out this blog post](#).

Questioning your own beliefs is necessary to grow and learn.

Make sure you're not thinking in extremes

Things aren't always black or white. Life is more nuanced and messy than that. If you are starting a sentence with words like 'Always' and 'Every time', or with the phrase 'I must do this', then it is likely that you may be missing some of the subtleties of the situation. The use of these superlatives could be an indication that your thoughts and beliefs are not as helpful to you as they could be.

Question whether that belief is helpful or not

Performance psychology is not about replacing negative thoughts with positive ones; if it was, it would seem crass. A better viewpoint would be to see your thoughts as either unhelpful or helpful. If you have followed the steps above and realised that some of your thoughts are unhelpful, it may be time to think something else.

FINAL THOUGHT

The above tips are intended to help people identify and overcome their own irrational and unhelpful thoughts. These tips could also prove helpful for teachers or coaches when helping others during moments of heightened stress.

By improving our self-awareness, we can better manage our thoughts, and as a result be more in control of our feelings, behaviours and results.

**At the time of writing (in 2017), Leicester City were joint top in the Premiership after 21 games.*

BLOG 6

5 WAYS TO IMPROVE MENTAL WELL-BEING



During the safety briefing on plane journeys, adults are reminded to secure their own oxygen masks in case of an emergency before they help their children fit theirs.

Why? Because it helps you look after children more effectively. The same is true of mental health, and it is something teachers should consider. After all, it is difficult to discuss good mental well-being in front of class if we, as adults, do not practise it ourselves.

Action to improve the mental health of teachers is certainly needed: worries about [teacher workload](#) has seen 67% of teachers state that their job had [adversely impacted their mental or physical health](#), according to a recent NASUWT survey. This has led to suggestions that half a billion pounds [should be transferred to schools](#) to help them tackle the issue. This is why it's worthwhile for teachers to look at these simple ways, informed by the latest NHS guidelines, to boost their mental health.

CONNECT

[Research has shown](#) the importance of having a range of healthy relationships. They suggest feeling disconnected from

others is as bad for you as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. [The Mental Health Foundation](#) states that *“people who are more socially connected to family, friends and their communities are happier, physically healthier and live longer, with fewer mental health problems”*. As well as forming connections on an individual level, [evidence suggests](#) that being part of a group has similar benefits. People who identify closely with a group reported being happier.

BE AWARE

We live in an age of distraction. Research suggests that we check our phones on average [85 times a day](#). This, among other distractions, limits how much we notice what is going on around us. When world famous violinist Joshua Bell busked at a train station during rush-hour in Washington, of the 1,097 people who passed him, only seven stopped to listen. Just a few days before, people had paid hundreds of pounds to hear him play the same music.

[Watch the video here.](#)

While looking to the future can be motivating (that’s why [psychologists encourage people to set goals](#)), thoughts about the past or future can become too dominant. Sometimes it is important to focus on the present moment. [Practising this skill](#) will reduce stress levels, improve your ability to handle future stressful situations, and help you develop better relationships.

KEEP LEARNING

Why does learning increase your mental well-being? As well as giving a sense of achievement, being enjoyable, and



helping you cope with stressful events, a [study into adult learning](#) (pdf) has found that “*the most fundamental and pervasive benefit from learning of every kind is a growth in self-confidence*”.

Learning does not have to mean formal education. It can be anything that develops your knowledge in any area. Stepping out of your comfort zone and trying something new will enhance this. The feeling of achievement new skills can give you can help your emotional well-being and motivation.

BE ACTIVE

As well as known physical benefits, exercise can help improve your mood, self-esteem and ability to deal with stress. [The World Health Organization](#) suggests that adults should do about 22 minutes of physical activity per day.

There is no magic trick for mental well-being, but these strategies are a good place to start.

It’s easy to be put off [when perceived barriers](#) such as feeling too tired get in the way of exercise. However, physical activity can actually help combat fatigue and doesn’t have to be organised sport (eg gym classes or walking). Furthermore, being active can encourage better mental health, especially if it helps with socialising or focusing on the present.

GIVE TO OTHERS

Most people have heard the phrase “it is better to give than receive”. And economics research suggests that we feel a “[warm glow](#)” when we help someone else. Fans of Friends will be familiar with this concept from [the scene where Phoebe and Joey debate selfless good deeds](#).

The power of giving is supported by [psychological research](#) (pdf) that found that random acts of kindness result in the giver feeling the benefit as well as the receiver. This is an interesting area for those who work in schools where,

by definition, most of the job involves giving either of time, energy or advice. But giving does not have to involve money or be time-consuming. Small, almost incidental random acts of kindness can be powerful enough.

FINAL THOUGHTS

When it comes to mental health, some people don't know where to begin. These five areas offer a starting point.

Connecting with others, learning, giving, being physically active and improving awareness offer tangible strategies even for the most busy of lifestyles.

Encouraging everyone to look after their mental health makes sense for schools, including teachers.