STEPH SCHMIDT
FARM LIFE PSYCH

FARM LIFE HANDBOOK

NAVIGATING THE ROCK AND THE HARD PLACE

farmlifehandbook.com.au

CONTENTS

HOW TO NAVIGATE THIS MANUAL 4

INTRODUCTION: THE ROCK AND THE HARD PLACE 5

THE "FILL YOUR SILO" CHECK-IN 6

PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY 8

MEASURING YOUR PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY 10

BUILD YOUR PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY 12

YOUR NOTICING MAP 12
SHARED PURPOSE MAP 14

HONE YOUR NOTICING SKILLS 15

1. NOTICING SKILLS IN OUR DAILY ACTIVITIES 15
2. NOTICING 'CHECK-INS' 16
3. REGULAR GUIDED PRACTICES 17

EXPLORING YOUR VALUES 20

YOUR 80TH BIRTHDAY 21
VALUE SORTING EXERCISE 22

DO WHAT MATTERS 25

WHAT GETS YOU HOOKED? 28

JOIN THE D.O.T.S. 28

SKILLS TO UNHOOK 31

HOLDING IT LIGHTLY 32
CREATING SPACE BETWEEN OUR THOUGHTS AND OURSELVES 33
OTHER STRATEGIES TO PRACTICE HOLDING IT LIGHTLY 35

GETTING SOME PERSPECTIVE 36

UNHELPFUL THINKING PATTERNS 36
THE 5X5 RULE 38

GETTING THE NAC OF IT 39

TOOLS FOR MANAGING STRESS 40

SIGNPOSTS OF STRESS 41

BEHAVIOURAL 41
PHYSICAL 41
EMOTIONAL/MENTAL 41

SH*T WILL HAPPEN: HOW TO COPE 42

MAKING TRACKS - SIMPLE STEPS FOR FORMING NEW HABITS 44

HEALTHY HABITS 46

SLEEP SOUNDER 48

BUILD A BETTER RELATIONSHIP 50

SO, YOU'VE HAD AN ARGUMENT? SOW THE SEEDS OF CONNECTION 51

DAILY DOSE OF B.R.E.A.D.S.S. 52

BREATHING 52
RELAXATION 52
EXERCISE 53
ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE 53
DIET 53
SLEEP 53
SUPPORT 53

TUNE UP YOUR TIME MANAGEMENT 54

SETTING GOALS THE S.M.A.R.T. WAY 55

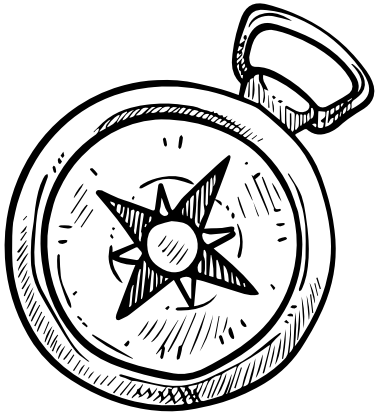
THE FINAL WRAP-UP 56

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT 57

EMERGENCY SUPPORT 24 HOURS, 7 DAYS A WEEK 57
SELF-HELP WEBSITES 58

ABOUT STEPHANIE SCHMIDT 60

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 61
ROADMAP FOR SUPPORT 62



HOW TO NAVIGATE THIS MANUAL

Look out for the trailmarkers to jot down what step you could take to get yourself back on track.

Work through the skills to build your psychological flexibility, then use the tips for managing stress and extra resources for additional tools.

Check out www.farmlifehandbook.com.au for video, audio and print-out resources to accompany this handbook. Simply scan the QR code on the page to head directly to the accompanying resource.

Disclaimer: The strategies and information in this handbook are general in nature and are not a substitute for individual medical or mental health advice. If you're struggling or need support, please speak to your GP, call **Lifeline on 13 11 14**, or contact **Regional Access 1300 032 168** for free professional counselling. You don't have to go it alone.

INTRODUCTION: THE ROCK AND THE HARD PLACE

Life is full of challenges – managing relationships, children, work, and business pressures. In farming we face many challenges outside of our control – unpredictable weather, uncertainty in income, and expenses with changing prices for both our inputs and income. Every day we navigate the choices we make. When we are stuck in autopilot it can feel like much of life is out of our control, like life is happening to us, rather than by us. By building skills in psychological flexibility you can get back control over the choices you make, the actions you take. You can learn to unhook from difficult emotions and thoughts, zoom out and take perspective on tricky situations, and choose to take action towards what matters most to you. ACT for Ag gives you the skills to keep yourself on track, even when the road gets rocky.

ACT for Ag is about being informed, reminded, and connected. The most important thing to know from attending the workshop and reading through this manual is that **practice makes the difference.** Knowing about these skills, knowing about being present, accepting difficult experiences, knowing about it – changes nothing. However, putting it into practice, in small, achievable steps, will start to make a difference every day. The ideas shared in this manual are backed by science. They have been shown to improve wellbeing, improve people's ability to manage stress at home and in the workplace, and to have healthier and more vibrant relationships.

Overall, the aim of this manual is to provide a user guide of sorts – simple strategies to practice to start to do things differently and begin to have a rich, meaningful, vibrant life – even during times of stress and adversity.

Don't just take our word for it. In the same way as when you get some new machinery, or even a new phone, try these ideas on for size. Try them out for yourself and see how it works. This program will give you the tools to start taking action straight away, but you can also refer back to the manual whenever you need it.

Start simple: Use your notepad or the trail markers at the end of each section to note down one thing you can do to get back on track.

THE "FILL YOUR SILO" CHECK-IN

HOW FULL IS YOUR SILO?

Every harvest, we always set aside seed for the next season. Not just for sowing crops, but also for feeding livestock through the tougher months. Just like we maintain our silos on the farm, we also need to tend to our own silos - our emotional, physical, and relational reserves.

Because when our silos run low, we can't keep giving without eventually burning out.

Sometimes, no matter how hard we've tried, we can't fill those silos ourselves. Maybe it's a drought, a flood, a frost - or just a season that's taken more than it's given. In those times, we lean on others. We buy in seed from a neighbour, call on mates, or source feed from further afield.

Our wellbeing is no different.

There will be times when, no matter how hard you try, you can't do it alone. That's when it's time to reach out - to friends, family, or professionals - and let them know your silo has run empty.

You're not failing. You're doing what we all need to do at times: looking after what matters most.

(If that's where you're at right now, flick to the Roadmap of Support on page 58 for some practical next steps)

Try this simple 4-step check-in:

1. NOTICE – How full is your silo today?
(hold out your hands in front of you, mark it in this booklet, or draw it on a page)

2. DECIDE – What helps to fill your silo?
(A decent sleep, a cuppa in the sunshine, a moment of connection, a walk, saying "no," asking for help?)

3. TAKE ACTION – Choose one small thing you can do today to top up your silo.

4. REASSESS – Notice how that action impacted your energy, your mindset, your ability to keep going.

This isn't about adding more to your to-do list - it's about making small, conscious choices that keep you going, without losing yourself along the way.

STEPS TO REFILL:

.....

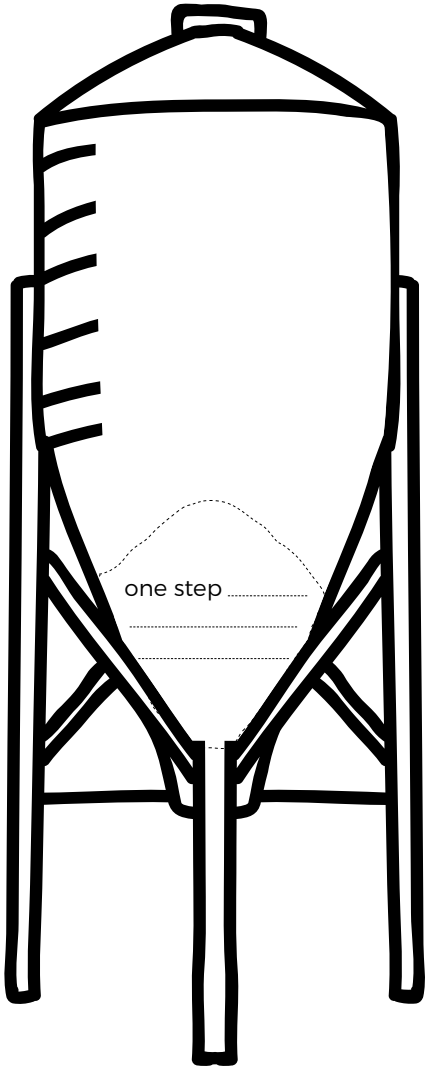
.....

.....

.....

IDEAS:

- Hydrate (with water)
- Eat something (nutritious)
- Connect with someone
- Do something you love
- Move your body
- Get present



PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY

ACT for Ag is all about building skills in psychological flexibility – in a nutshell, being able to take steps towards what truly matters to us even in the face of challenging stuff.

Psychologists and social sciences have found that when we move towards something that truly matters to us, we are more energetic and our lives are more meaningful, rather than when we are acting out of fear or avoiding something.

We can't control the initial, automatic thoughts and feelings that show up – but when we slow down and switch off autopilot, we can start to notice how our minds might drive us towards helpful or unhelpful behaviours. When we switch off autopilot and begin to observe ourseves with openness and non-judgement, we can gain a bit more control over our behaviours and actions – choosing to move towards the person we want to be.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

People with low scores in psychological flexibility have been found to have:

HIGHER ANXIETY

MORE DEPRESSION

WORSE PERFORMANCE AT WORK

DIFFICULTY LEARNING

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

LOWER QUALITY OF LIFE

INCREASED STRESS

Psychological flexibility is the opposite of rigidity – or inflexibility. Especially during times of stress, we can become more and more rigid in our actions – often persisting with choices, actions, behaviours, because they may have worked in the past, even if they are not working anymore. What can also happen is that on the outside, it may look like we are being flexible and adaptable, we change our actions to adapt to the situation – but on the inside we are still fuming, ruminating, chewing over in our minds everything that went wrong or how things should be different.

This can end up being pretty unhealthy, like trying to bend a brittle old piece of wire, which eventually snaps.

Building skills in psychological flexibility help us to learn to bend, and adapt our behaviours. We can learn to relate differently and more adaptively to everything that comes up inside of ourselves – so that ultimately, we can practice doing what matters most, even when the tough stuff shows up.

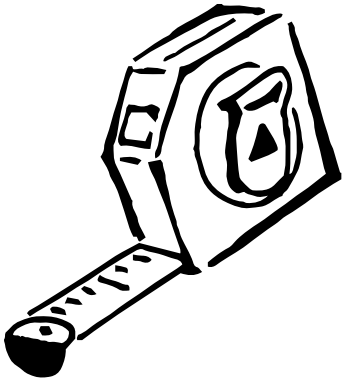
Humans, like all animals, are driven to move towards what's important to them and move away from things that may be painful, dangerous, or unpleasant. So we move towards food, safety, connection with other people, and away from things that may cause us harm (snakes, hot stoves, lions).

Humans also have an additional capacity of language – the capacity to create words and meaning, which allows us to create images and ideas of the past and the future. This means we can create two worlds – the world of our inner experiences (our thoughts, feelings, memories, sensations, stories) and the outside world – what we can sense with our 5 senses.

So, not only do we move away from things that may be dangerous in our external world, we can also get caught up trying to get away from potential 'dangers' in our internal world.

For example, you might start thinking about the lack of rain and next minute your mind takes off predicting, planning, worrying about everything that might happen next ...

These thoughts and the accompanying feelings (anxiety, worry, frustration, disappointment) are uncomfortable and often don't feel very nice. So, our human reaction is to try and get rid of these feelings - to try and feel better, to get away from pain. But in doing this, we can at times get ourselves stuck, or at times end up moving away from what really matters to us.



MEASURING YOUR PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY

Use the following quiz to measure your current levels of "psychological flexibility" and to see if you would benefit from building your flexibility muscles.

Even if your scores are low, there are lots of simple steps you can put in place to build your flexibility.

Work through the following statement on the following page, select the rating that best describes your experience over the past 7 days. Add up your scores to find your overall psychological flexibility score, higher scores indicate strong flexibility, while lower scores indicate that you would benefit from improving your flexibility and practicing the skills in this handbook.

The Psy-Flex questionaire was developed by Andrew Gloster, Victoria Block and colleagues.

The questions refer to your experiences in the **last seven days.**

	Very often	Often	From time to time	Seldom	Very seldom
	5	**4**	**3**	**2**	**1**
1. Being present Even if I am somewhere else with my thoughts, I can focus on what's going on in important moments.					
2. Being open for experiences If need be, I can let unpleasant thoughts and experiences happen without having to get rid of them immediately.					
3. Leaving thoughts be I can look at hindering thoughts from a distance without letting them control me.					
4. Steady self Even if thoughts and experiences are confusing me I can notice something like a steady core inside of me.					
5. Awareness of one's own values I determine what's important for me and decide what I want to use my energy for.					
6. Being engaged I engage thoroughly in things that are important, useful, or meaningful to me.					
TOTAL					

BUILD YOUR PSYCHOLOGICAL FLEXIBILITY

YOUR NOTICING MAP

The Noticing map forms the foundation of psychological flexibility. It can be used to review tough situations, to plan ahead, and with practice you can start to use it in the heat of the moment.

The map gives us a different perspective on our experiences.

It helps us look at who and what matters most to us (even during stress and adversity); how we would like to show up in the world as a human being and what actions we can take to move towards that; some of the uncomfortable and challenging stuff that can hook us and get in the way of how we would like to be; and some of the things that we tend to do when we become hooked.

Like any map it can help you during tough times to find the next direction, the next best step to take. It is a tool that can be used to review previous events and see what you might do differently next time, to plan future events, or with practice to be able to work through the questions in your mind in present moment difficult situations. It can help you move towards what matters most – **even when the tough stuff shows up.**

If you have attended an ACT for Ag workshop, you will be familiar with working through the Noticing Map. If you haven't attended a workshop, the following template steps through the questions, and you will also find an example completed template.

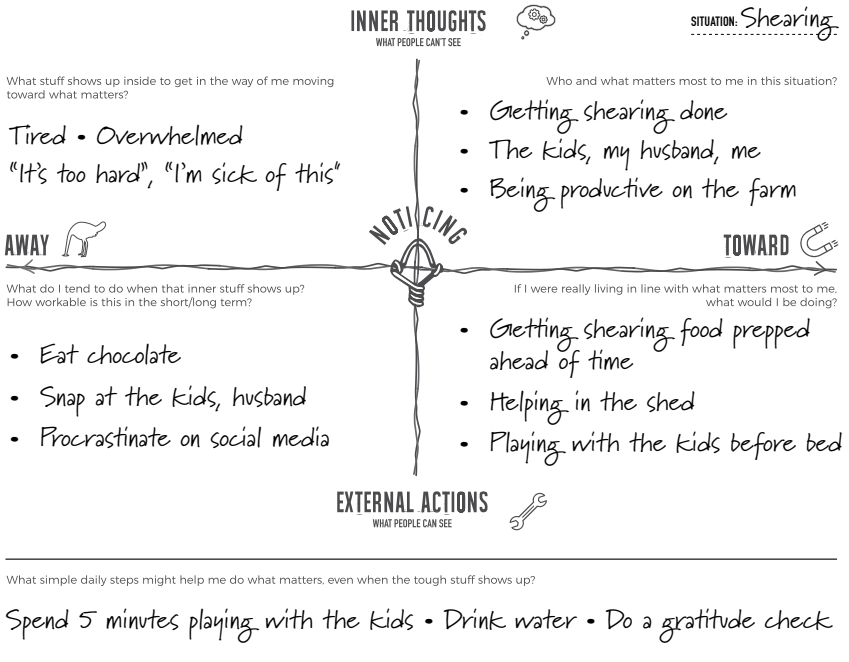
You can use the noticing map to work through any situation.

Asking yourself:

1. Who and what matters most to me in this situation?
    - What really matters to me about how I respond to this?
    - How do I want to be as a person?
2. If I were really living in line with what matters most to me, what would I be doing?
3. What stuff shows up inside that can get in the way of moving towards what matters? (thoughts, feelings, sensations)
4. When I get hooked on that inner stuff, what do I tend to do?
5. How well do these strategies work (how workable are they?) in the short and long term?

In the centre of this map we have ourselves, noticing and observing – we can practice this skill in noticing, observing our own experiences and the actions of others in a kind and curious manner.

Finally, we can plan for success by noting: "What simple steps can I put in place to move towards what matters, even when the tough stuff shows up?"



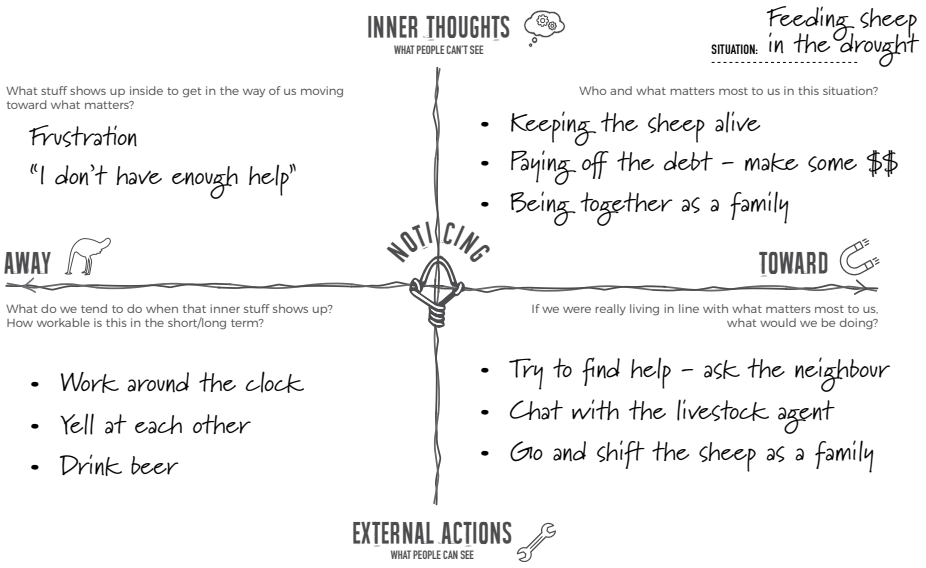
SHARED PURPOSE MAP

– WORKING TOGETHER

The beauty of the noticing map is that we can easily adapt it to look at how to move towards what matters most for a group – this may be a couple, a family, a business, or a community group.

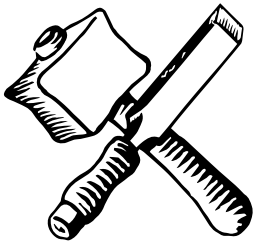
See the following example of the Shared Purpose Map – the key change is to notice: "What matters most to US in this situation?" "What is our shared purpose?"

Templates of both the Individual Noticing Map and the Shared Purpose Map can be found at farmlifehandbook.com.au



What simple daily steps might help us do what matters, even when the tough stuff shows up?

Think of the good things that happened during the day • Get some sleep
Send messages to connect • Talk to each other at the end of the day



HONE YOUR NOTICING SKILLS

Noticing skills are about strengthening your awareness of yourself and others. They help us to practice experiencing what is happening, right now. However, our mind is a fantastic time traveller – being able to replay difficulties from the past, or predict potential challenges or dangers in the future. But we can start by getting present and just checking in with ourselves "where is my mind right now?". Although noticing and awareness sounds simple, we now live in a world where we are constantly faced with distraction and interruption while our mind attempts to multitask and think about a lot of things at once - when our mind is scattered it becomes pretty ineffective. Building our noticing skills is essentially a form of mental training. Increasing our ability to be present and aware of what's happening in the present moment, while also remaining non-judgemental.

We can switch off autopilot, and pull in our scattered minds.

Noticing skills can be developed in 3 key ways:

1. Becoming more aware during our daily routine activities
2. Regular noticing 'check-ins' through the day
3. Guided practices

1. NOTICING SKILLS IN OUR DAILY ACTIVITIES

Practice switching off autopilot while you go about your daily activities. You may choose to practice building your noticing skills while you take an action that is important to you (e.g., noticing and observing while you play with your kids). You can also practice noticing skills during those daily routines that we tend to do on autopilot (e.g., having a cup of coffee, cleaning your teeth, having a shower, driving) - see if you can bring mindful attention to these daily activities and notice what you experience?

Think about one or two of the activities you regularly do on autopilot and practice engaging your noticing skills during this activity over the next week.

2. NOTICING CHECK-INS

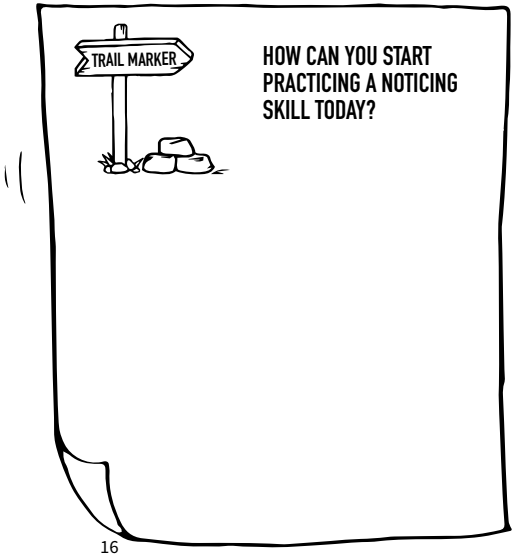
Throughout the day, practice briefly checking in with yourself. This can simply be done by pausing for a moment and checking:

(is it here in the present moment, or is it time-travelling to the past or future?)

Note: It can be difficult to create new habits. So try popping sticky note reminders around the house with

"notice"
"switch off autopilot"
"get present"
"be here now" or
"where is my mind right now?"

Even pop a reminder in your phone to ding and remind you a couple of times each day.



5-4-3-2-1

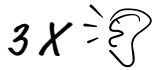
You can also practice switching off autopilot and engaging with your immediate environment by practicing the 5 senses exercise.

Practice noticing:

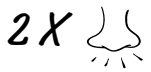
5 THINGS YOU CAN SEE

4 THINGS YOU CAN FEEL/TOUCH

3 THINGS YOU CAN HEAR



2 THINGS YOU CAN SMELL



1 THING YOU CAN TASTE

This can be a useful exercise to practice when you need to unhook from tricky or uncomfortable thoughts and feelings in your mind.

3. REGULAR GUIDED PRACTICES

In the same way that you wouldn't turn up to play a game of footy without going to practice, or try and run a marathon without training first, regular noticing practice helps us strengthen our attention and noticing 'muscles'. There are a wide range of tools available to do this. You may like to try out the free apps:

- **Smiling Mind** - simple guided meditation exercises to help develop mindfulness for the whole family
- **Headspace** - free 10-day basics pack to learn the essentials of meditation and mindfulness
- **Mindfulness Coach** - gradual training program for mindfulness exercises and goal-setting

Alternatively, audio recordings of 2 simple exercises:

- **Mindful Breathing**
- **Noticing the Rock**

are available at www.farmlifehandbook.com.au. You can also read through the script here and then practice yourself (although like anything, when you are learning a new skill, it's helpful to have some guidance on the way).

NOTICING YOUR BODY

This is an exercise that can be done briefly, or you can also extend this exercise over 5-10 minutes.

1. *Sit comfortably and close your eyes.*
2. *Bring attention to your toes and your feet. Focus on any sensation that you may feel in that area. Notice the feelings of your toes in your shoes, or as you gently press into the ground.*
3. *Slowly work your way up your body, gently bringing awareness to each part of your body: your feet, ankles, lower legs, knees… until you reach your head. Engage your curiosity, like a curious scientist or child – just attend to each area of your body.*
4. *Sit for a few moments and just notice and observe your body, exactly as it is, in this moment right now.*

MINDFUL BREATHING

Our breath is something we have with us all the time. We can use it simply and easily to practice building our noticing and awareness 'muscles'. This can be done in any situation, you might practice taking 3-5 mindful breaths, or if you find it beneficial you can pop on a timer and practice mindful breathing for 5 minutes or link in and use one of the audio exercises online to help you practice.

Close your eyes if you are comfortable.

Bring your attention to your breathing. Just notice and observe the sensation of your breath flowing in and out of your body. Notice the gentle rise and fall of your shoulders, the gentle rise and fall of your chest and stomach. Notice the breath flowing in and out of your nostrils, how your breath is slightly warmer as it flows in and slightly cooler as it flows out.

Don't try and change your breathing in any way, but just observe it and notice it. Choose one of the sensations of breath in your body and focus your attention there. You may also say to yourself "I notice I'm breathing in", "I notice I'm breathing out". Or count the breaths – counting each breath as you breathe in and out.

As you do this, notice if your mind interrupts you, or if you get hooked by different thoughts and feelings – and then gently bring your awareness back to the breath. Time and time again your mind will distract you - this is perfectly normal and natural. Just acknowledge what distracted you, thank your mind, and gently guide your attention back to your breathing.

MIND THE ROCK

If you've attended an ACT for Ag workshop, you may have received a rock. There is nothing special about this rock, you can do this exercise with any rock - in fact you can do it with anything you have with you right now (e.g., a pen, a coffee cup).

Take the rock (or whatever physical object you have with you right now) and start to explore and observe the rock, like a curious scientist or a curious toddler who has never seen this before.

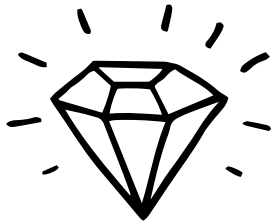
Notice what it looks like *– any bumps, colours, the shape and size of it, any variations in it?*

Notice what it feels like *– is it smooth, rough, hot or cold, heavy or light, what does it feel like as you move it between your hands? Notice the sensations as you pass it between your fingers.*

Notice what it sounds like *– can you make a sound with it in your hands, or on the desk in front of you?*

Notice the smell *(and taste, at your discretion)*

After a few moments of exploring, observing, and noticing the physical rock, see what happens if you put the rock down, close your eyes, and bring to mind the rock. See what happens in your mind as you picture that rock, play with it in your mind. Just notice and observe the difference between the physical, external world rock, and how your mind can create an internal memory or story of that rock inside of you.



EXPLORING YOUR VALUES

WHO AND WHAT MATTERS MOST TO ME?

Our values can be defined as your heart's deepest desire for how you want to behave as a human being. Values are not about what you want to get or achieve - they are about how you want to behave or act on an ongoing basis; how you want to treat yourself, others, the world around you.

Personal values can be defined as: "the personal qualities a person most wants to express in their daily behaviour".

There are no 'right' or 'wrong' values, our values are unique to us, and our values may also flow and change, and be different in different situations. We don't often pause and take note of what our values are, so one of the most important first steps in becoming active and moving towards what's most important to us is actually taking the time to explore and examine what's most important to you, what your 'Why' is.

Try out the following exercise to start to explore what your values may be:

YOUR 80TH BIRTHDAY

READ THROUGH AND THEN PRACTICE THE EXERCISE.

Let your gaze soften, and your eyes lower and gently close, if you are comfortable, or let them fall to a spot on the floor. Take a few moments just to centre yourself, let your attention focus on your breathing. Now I invite you to imagine yourself standing at your 80th birthday party. Imagine who you want to be surrounded by, your friends, family, colleagues, all of those who have mattered to you in life. Imagine that this is your birthday celebration after having lived a rich and meaningful life. You are not bound by any laws of physics so you can imagine having anyone you like there (even if they would be really really old), there may even be people there who you haven't met yet.

Take a moment just to observe and notice who is there (whether it's a large or small gathering, just your close family and friends, or a huge celebration with everyone who has been important in your life).

Now, like all good parties, it is time for the speeches. Picture someone important to you coming up to stand and speak about you - about what you have meant to them; what you have stood for as a person; the impact you have had; the challenges you have faced and how you have overcome them as a person.

You are not imagining what they might likely say, at the moment, but what they may say if you had lived your ideal life - if you had been bold, made brave choices. Imagine them speaking about the difference you have made, the life you have lived when you have made bold choices.

Take time to invite a few more people to speak - it may be someone from a different part of your life - a colleague, neighbour, someone in your community. Again, imagine what you might like them to say about what you have stood for in your life.

As you finish off this exercise, gently bring your attention back to the present moment, thank your mind for this experience, and take a few moments to reflect on the following:

- What did people say about you?
- What does that mean to you?
- Who did you imagine speaking?
- What did you most want them to say?
- What did you notice and observe while you did the exercise?

VALUE SORTING EXERCISE

This exercise is designed to help you clarify and become more aware of the direction and purpose in your life. Values reflect our heart's deepest desire for how we want to behave and be in the world. For some areas of our life, our values may be easy to know, but for other areas you may find that you need to take time to reflect on what is most important to you, what you really care about, and how you would ideally like to be as a person.

We can't act on all our values at the same time, but by taking time to define your values in different areas of your life, you can then be more aware of making choices that take you towards your values. Importantly, your values are about how you want to be as a person, not how you would like others to treat you.

There are no right or wrong answers to this exercise. While there are a lot of common values which we all share, we each place different strength on different values at different times. Your responses to this exercise can even change over time.

Remember:

- Values can never be achieved – they provide a direction for goals/actions, but can't be 'ticked off'.
- Think of your values as guides for your behaviours, that you get to choose for each area of your life.
- They are about how you choose, or desire to be.

Using the following list, or your ACT for Ag Values Cards, identify your key values in the following activity.

Read through the following list of values and rate each value in terms of:

V - Very Important **I** - Important **N** - Not Important

There are no right or wrong answers for this – just identify your first response to each value.

ACCEPTING	CREATIVE	HARD-WORKING	PROBLEM SOLVER
ADVENTUROUS	CURIOUS	HARMONY	RATIONAL
ASSERTIVE	DISCIPLINE	HELPFUL	RELIABLE
AUTHENTIC	DEPENDABILITY	HONEST	RESPECTFUL
AUTHORITY	EFFICIENT	INDEPENDENT	RESPONSIBLE
AUTONOMY	EMPATHIC	INNOVATIVE	ROMANTIC
BEAUTY	ENGAGED	INTIMATE	SECURE
BOLDNESS	ENVIRONMENTAL	INCLUSIVE	SELF-CARING
CARING	FAIRNESS	JUSTICE	SIMPLICITY
CHALLENGE	FAITHFUL	KINDNESS	SINCERE
COMMITTED	FLEXIBLE	LEARNING	SKILLFUL
COMMUNITY	FRIENDLY	LOVING	SPIRITUAL
COMPASSIONATE	FRIENDSHIP	LOYAL	SUPPORTIVE
COMPETENT	FORGIVING	MINDFUL	THOUGHTFUL
CONFIDENT	FUN	NONCONFORMING	TRADITIONAL
CONNECTION	GENEROUS	OPENNESS	TRUSTING
CONTRIBUTING	GENTLE	PASSIONATE	TRUSTWORTHY
COOPERATIVE	GENUINE	PEACEFUL	OTHER ……
COURAGEOUS	GRATEFUL	PERSISTENT	OTHER ……
COURTEOUS	GROWTH	PLAYFUL	OTHER ……

LIST THE VALUES YOU RATED AS VERY IMPORTANT

-
-
-
-
-

-
-
-
-
-

-
-
-
-
-

FROM THESE VALUES, CHOOSE YOUR TOP 5 VALUES

1

2

3

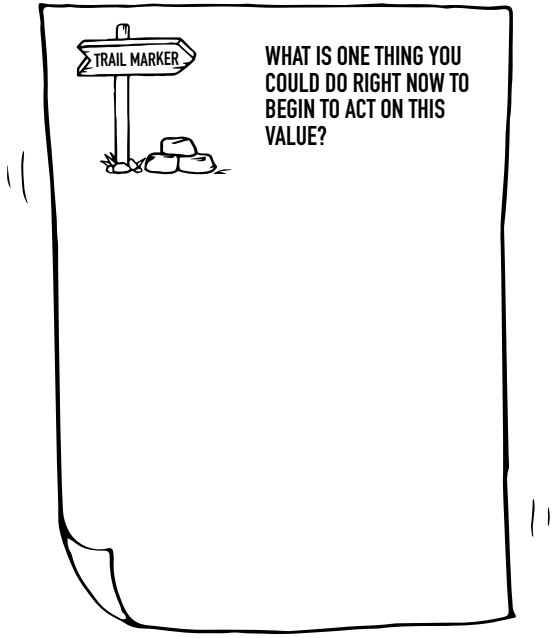
4

5

FROM THESE TOP 5, CHOOSE YOUR MOST IMPORTANT VALUE

 # 1

What did you notice as you did this exercise?



DO WHAT MATTERS

Once you have started to identify what some of your key values are, you can also identify your values in each of your life areas (e.g., family, work, health community). You may have different values in different areas of our life.

Knowing your values opens up space to then choose to act on your values - in both the little moments and the big moments.

Now that you have identified some of your key values, you can use the Life Silo worksheet to identify how well things are working in each of your life areas.

Choose four valued areas that are important to you at the moment (e.g., farm, family, health). You may also note down what your value is for each of these areas (eg., farm = efficient, family = kind, health = fun).

Then draw a line indicating how full each of your silos feel today.

Write down one step you can take today to fill the silo.

Then ask yourself again at the end of the day: "how full is your silo?".

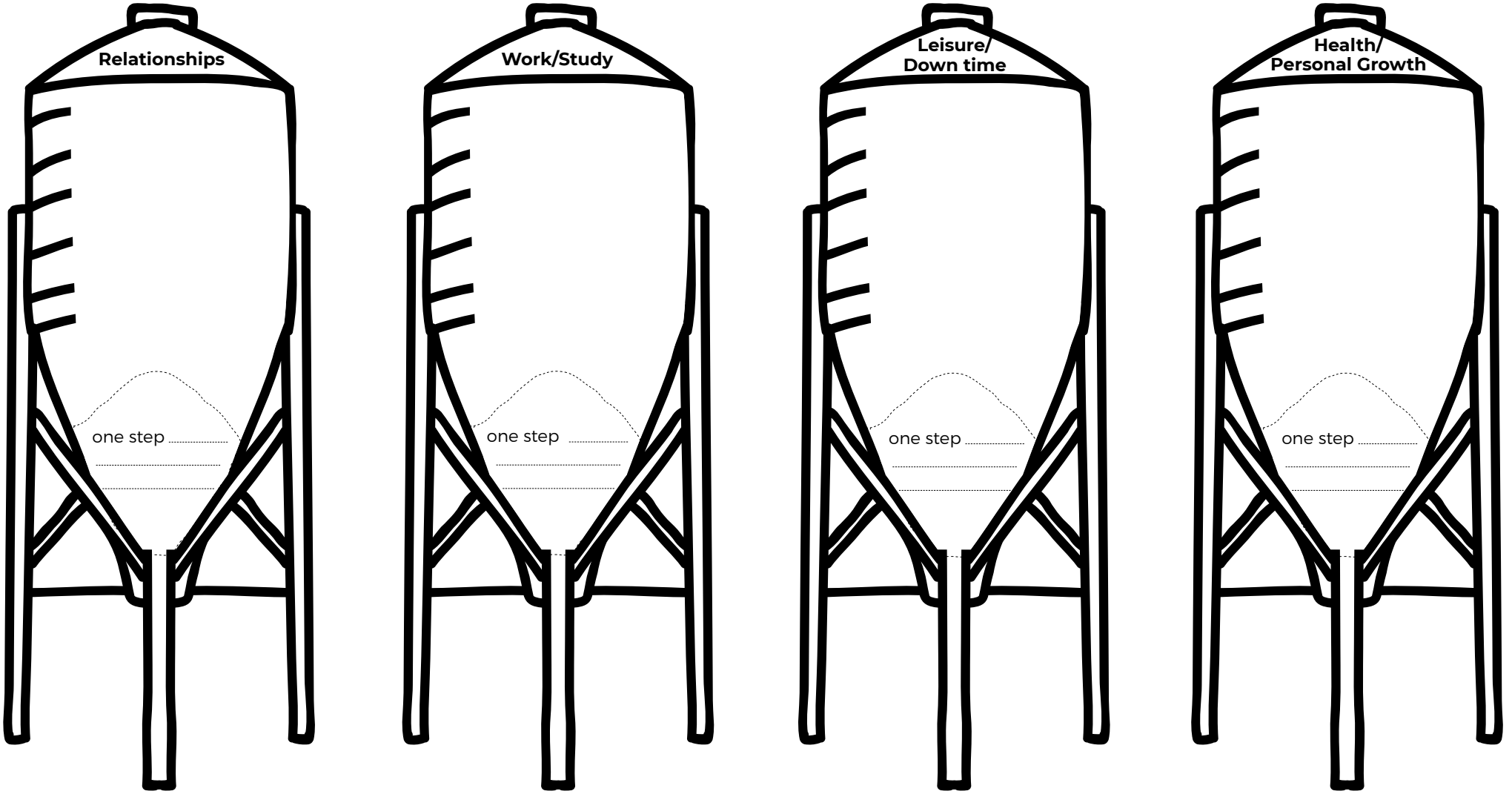
Doing what matters isn't necessarily taking the easy road. In fact, whenever we move towards our values and what truly matters to us, we usually experience difficult thoughts and feelings along the way.

In an ideal world, where the difficult stuff that tends to show up was no longer an issue for you, what would you really be doing, what would you be doing if you were really acting in line with who you want to be as a person, and what matters most to you?

Write down some of these actions here, then the skills in the next sections will help you to manage the uncomfortable thoughts and feelings differently when they come up.

To explore your values further you can try out the Values Card Sort app.

YOUR FOUR VALUES SILOS



Taking some time to identify what's most important to us in the key areas of our lives is an important step to gain clarity over what action to take next. Take some time now to work through identifying just how full your silos are, and what you can do to begin to fill them.

1. Identify 1-2 key values for each life area. Our values may be different in each area of life, and not everyone has the same values. Values are like a compass - guiding the direction we want to head, rather than goals we can tick off a list.
2. Indicate how full each silo is right now. Honestly evaluate how full your silo is as a reflection of how well you are living your life according to those values.
3. Indicate how full you would like each silo to be in an ideal world. If nothing stood in your way how much time and energy would you like to dedicate to each area of your life?
4. Note down ONE action you can take today to begin to fill just one silo.

WHAT GETS YOU HOOKED?

We all have uncomfortable, difficult or challenging thoughts and feelings show up, it's part of being human. As you may have noticed as you worked through the Noticing Map, we can get stuck or hooked in the uncomfortable stuff. In the short-term, these actions can work well to get rid of discomfort, but it's important to assess how well they work in the long-term, especially assessing how well they work to take us towards who we really want to be as a person.

JOIN THE D.O.T.S.

shared with permission from Russ Harris 2018, www.Imlearningact.com

Use the following prompts to further explore the bottom left of the Noticing Map. The aim of this exercise is to:

a) notice what you tend to do when you are hooked, or trying to get rid of difficult feelings, and

b) assess how well they work in the long term to move you towards what's important to you.

**Note* Please don't let your mind start judging these strategies as 'good' or 'bad, 'right' or 'wrong,' 'positive' or 'negative'. The aim is to find out how workable they are. Do they work in the long term to move you towards your values and give you a rich and meaningful life?*

D – DISTRACTION

What do you do to distract yourself, or 'take your mind off' painful thoughts and feelings? (e.g., Netflix binge, social media, scroll farm clearing sales, exercise, TV, internet, gardening, food, drugs, alcohol, gambling)

O – OPTING OUT

What important, meaningful, or life-enhancing activities, tasks, events, challenges, or people, do you avoid, quit, escape, withdraw from, or procrastinate? (If they're not important, meaningful, or life-enhancing – then opting out is no problem!)

T – THINKING STRATEGIES

How do you try (consciously or not) to think your way out of pain? Highlight any of the following that you have done, and write in others that aren't included:

Worrying; dwelling on the past; fantasising about the future; imagining worst case scenarios in the future; imagining escape scenarios (e.g., leaving your job or your partner) or revenge scenarios; thinking to yourself "It's not fair…" or "If only…"; blaming yourself, others, or the world; talking logically and rationally to yourself; positive thinking; positive affirmations; judging or criticising yourself; giving yourself a hard time; analysing yourself/ the situation/ others; planning; strategising; constructive problem-solving; making to do lists; repeating inspirational sayings; challenging or trying to prove negative thoughts wrong; telling yourself "this too shall pass"; other thinking strategies.

S – SUBSTANCES /OTHER STRATEGIES

What Substances do you put into your body to avoid or get rid of pain: food, drinks, cigarettes, recreational drugs, naturopathic/herbal remedies; over the counter and prescription medications?

Any other Strategies you ever use in response to unwanted thoughts and feelings? For example, have you tried yoga, relaxation, meditation, having an affair, aggressiveness, massage, exercise, Tai Chi, dancing, picking fights, music, suicide attempts, self-harm, prayer, smashing things, staying in bed, self-help books, seeing a therapist/ doctor/other health professional; getting angry at life or other people? Tried 'tolerating it', 'sucking it up and getting on with it', 'putting up with it'?

Ever tried giving up?

What are the main thoughts, feelings, memories, emotions, urges, sensations that you don't want?

Some of these methods probably are helpful – as long as we use them flexibly, moderately, and sensibly – if this is the case, keep using them!

However, when we over-rely on these methods – when we use them excessively, rigidly, or inappropriately – they have significant costs.

When you have over-used them, what have these methods cost you in terms of health, money, wasted time, relationships, missed opportunities, work, increased pain, tiredness, wasted energy, frustration, disappointment, etc.?

How many of these strategies give you relief from pain and discomfort in the short term, but keep you stuck, or even make your life worse in the long term?

NONE | A FEW | ABOUT HALF | MOST | ALL

SO, YOU'RE NOT LAZY OR STUPID!

You have been trying very hard to get rid of these uncomfortable, painful thoughts and feelings. Everyone uses all of the strategies above to some extent, to avoid or get rid of our pain. It's human nature to try to avoid pain. We have all had times where we have distracted ourselves; opted out of difficult situations; thinking our way out of problems; or trying substances of one sort or another to get rid of these yuck feelings. Often, we are encouraged to do this by our family, friends, health professionals, and society as a whole!

But more and more, we find that no matter how hard we try to avoid or get rid of thoughts and feelings, in the long-term they keep coming back.

THE VICIOUS CYCLE?

As we start to use our noticing skills, and step out of the autopilot mode of life, we start to become aware that at times we get stuck in a cycle:

It can be difficult and painful when we notice and realise this cycle. Can you take a moment to notice and acknowledge for yourself just how painful and difficult it is to be caught in this cycle? (Is there something kind you can say to yourself while you acknowledge this?)

No matter what we do, how much we try to avoid, get rid of, buy into, get hooked by, or push out our difficult thoughts, feelings, memories, and emotions – they just keep on coming back. Could you try out a new way of responding to them? Try something that is radically different to everything you have done before?

Let's try and see what happens when we unhook and acknowledge the uncomfortable stuff, instead of trying to get rid of it.

SKILLS TO UNHOOK

As identified above, difficult and painful thoughts, feelings, memories, and sensations are inevitable. In fact, they are human nature and vital to our experience.

Can you imagine what might happen if we didn't have a mind that told us about potential dangers or what might go wrong? What might happen if we had a mind that didn't replay difficulties or struggles from the past, to problem solve how we might deal with them in the future?

What might happen if we had a mind that didn't care what other people think? A mind that didn't care whether or not we fitted in with our social group, our peers, and our families?

Our mind has evolved to keep us safe, to keep us alive, and to keep us connected socially.

All of these things are vital, so it makes sense that we have a mind that problem solves, compares, judges, criticises, worries, and predicts the future.

Our body also gives us data on the world around us through our emotions and feelings. Anger tells us that something is wrong, fear and anxiety tells us something might be dangerous, sadness might tell us that we have lost something that matters – all of our feelings are like signposts, giving us data and information about our external world.

However, when we get stuck on these thoughts and feelings rigidly, or get stuck trying to avoid these thoughts or painful feelings, we can end up being hijacked and moving away from what truly matters to us.

HOLDING IT LIGHTLY

Holding It Lightly is about learning to skillfully relate to our inner world. Instead of getting caught up and hooked by our difficult thoughts and feelings, or putting all our energy into trying to get rid of the uncomfortable stuff – we can learn to open up and hold this stuff lightly, so that our hands are free to do what really matters to us.

Have you ever skirted sheeps wool? When we skirt the wool, we can't stop the prickles, dags, shitty bits, from being there – but it's much more pleasant to do it with a light touch, rather than grabbing hold of prickly wool with both hands. Holding it lightly recognises that the tough stuff is going to show up in life whether we like it or not, but with a light touch, you can sort through thoughts, feelings, and sensations that come up under your skin – and choose to hold on to those that help, and let go of those that don't.

These techniques help us to more skillfully relate to our thoughts, feelings, urges, and moods – all the stuff that as humans, we have going on inside of us, most of the time.

BUILDING SKILLS TO HOLD IT LIGHTLY

LEARNING TO RELATE DIFFERENTLY TO THE STUFF INSIDE OUR HEADS

Our mind can be like a never-ending live commentary of everything that is happening in our lives – a livestream of judgements, observations, criticisms, worry, predictions, replays. Instead of putting your energy into trying to stop or change those thoughts, which at times can be like engaging in an unwinnable battle, we can learn to change our relationship with the stuff that shows up in our minds.

It sounds simple but practicing NAMING our thoughts and feelings can start to change our relationship with them. Simply starting to notice and recognise our thoughts and feelings just as they are – thoughts and feelings that come up in our mind, can start to give us that space to choose our actions.

We can also use the acronym NAME:

NOTICE – what thoughts/feelings are showing up

ACKNOWLEDGE – recognise that they are there

MAKE SPACE – just allow them to be there

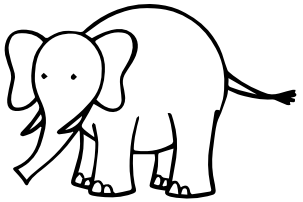
ENGAGE IN VALUES – move towards what's important, even with tough stuff showing up

CREATING SPACE BETWEEN OUR THOUGHTS AND OURSELVES

At times our thoughts can hook us in, we can get trapped into believing our thoughts to be true or real, and our thoughts can hijack us and take us away from what's important to us. We don't need to get into an argument with our thoughts – to try and prove them wrong, or even buy into them completely. Alternately, at times we try and put our energy into stopping thoughts we don't want to have. Unfortunately, because of the way our mind works, this can backfire.

To try this out, I want you to make sure that for the next 30 seconds, you DO NOT THINK about a pink elephant. You can think of anything at all, but whatever you do...

DO NOT THINK ABOUT A PINK ELEPHANT...



How did you go? Chances are, the thought or image of a pink elephant popped into your mind, even if only for a moment.

Psychologists and researchers have found that because our mind works by creating relationships and associations, the more we try not to think about something, we actually prime our mind to think about it. So, instead, what we can do, is just practice making space between our thoughts and ourselves. Recognising our thoughts for exactly what they are – just thoughts/images/stories/memories that pop up in our mind, and then we can choose whether or not we engage with them.

For example, as I sit here writing this manual, my mind starts telling me:

"this is pointless"

"no-one will read this"

"I'm not smart enough"

At times I start to argue and convince myself of all the reasons why writing this is a good idea. Other times I get caught up and hooked by the thoughts, ending up doing things to avoid those uncomfortable thoughts (hello, Facebook and chocolate...)

But, instead of getting stuck in the cycles of trying to change my thoughts or getting caught up in them, I can choose to change my relationship with my thoughts.

I can recognise my thoughts for what they are... just thoughts! They don't have any power to make me do anything.

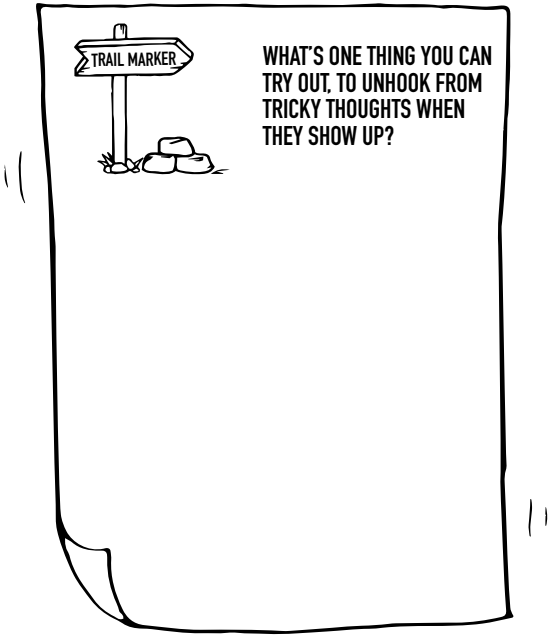
I can shift some of this power by simply adding "I'm having the thought that..."

e.g. "I'm having the thought that ..."

or "I'm noticing that I'm having the thought that ..."

or "I'm having the thought that ..."

This then opens up space to choose to do what's most important, in this case for me, it's continuing to write this manual!



OTHER STRATEGIES TO PRACTICE HOLDING IT LIGHTLY

Psychologists have described this skill as 'defusion' – the process of unhooking from difficult thoughts and feelings. My husband is out welding the airseeder as I write this, and I realise that defusion is exactly that – finding ways to become un-fused, un-welded from the tough stuff that comes up.

When we unhook from our thoughts we can look at them and notice them, rather than getting caught up in them. There are lots of playful ways that you can try this out. The idea of these exercises is not to make fun of your thoughts, but to build the skills to defuse or hold them lightly.

Try practicing each of the following for 30 seconds and just observe what happens to the power of your thoughts.

REPETITION

Try out and see what happens when you repeat the thought over and over and over, repeat as many times as needed until the thought loses its power (for 30-60 seconds).

THANK YOUR MIND

Next time your mind pops up with a tricky or unhelpful thought, just try saying "thanks mind" and moving on with what you need to do.

THOUGHTS AS CLOUDS

See if you can observe your thoughts like clouds moving through the sky – sometimes they move slowly, sometimes they race, sometimes the sky is dark and stormy, other times the sky is clear.

SOUND IT OUT

See what happens when you play with your thought – say it very, very slowly.

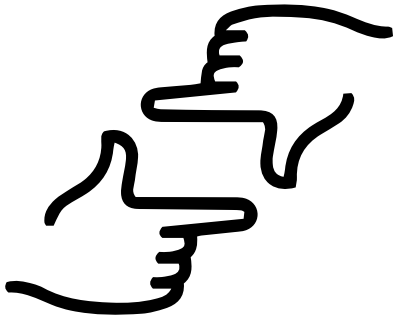
MAKE IT A SONG

Sing the thought in your mind (or out loud) to a tune – e.g., happy birthday.

DRAFT YOUR THOUGHTS

Imagine your thoughts like sheep going through the drafting race. Focus on drafting out the unhelpful stuff, and keeping the helpful thoughts.

You won't stop the unhelpful thoughts from coming but with awareness you can practice letting them go.



GETTING SOME PERSPECTIVE

Imagine that you are outside at night, spotlight on so that you can see where you are headed. The only problem is that you can only see what you've focused that spotlight on.

Stepping back to get some perspective lets you widen the focus of the spotlight to see what else is around. When we realise that we are focused on what's straight in front of us, we can choose to shift that perspective, look up and notice all the stars in the sky, or move the spotlight around to check if we are on track.

UNHELPFUL THINKING PATTERNS

Human minds have developed thinking habits and biases as our brains have evolved and developed.

We are constantly trying to interpret and make sense of the world around us, and because of the huge amount of information our brains are trying to process, our brains have developed 'short cuts', which are sometimes not completely accurate.

There are a number of thinking habits or biases that most of us do at times. These aren't entirely problematic, and they tend to happen automatically, but the problems occur when we are unaware of them and let them take control of our lives and actions and stay on autopilot.

Have a look at the following thinking habits and notice which ones you tend to do at times, then watch out for them as you go about your day, and notice if you can observe them without getting hooked by them. Notice with kindness, and remember to treat yourself as you would treat a friend.

MENTAL FILTER

– 'filtering in' and 'filtering out' certain aspects of a situation, usually focusing on the negative aspects and ignoring the positive aspects (e.g., focusing on how one crop did not perform well this season and ignoring that the other crops performed well).

SHOULD-ING OR MUST-ING

– placing unrealistic demands on yourself through "I should..." or "I must..." statements (e.g., "I should be going to bed by 11pm each night, no matter what"; "I must be a better farmer, partner, and parent").

OVERGENERALISATION

– imposing instances from the past or present onto current or future situations (e.g., "I never get enough work done in a day" when you get plenty of work done each day).

JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

– mind reading by assuming you know what someone else is thinking or fortune telling by assuming you know what will happen in the future (e.g., "I know that my business partner thinks I have not been pulling my weight"; "I know that the upcoming season will be disastrous", but these are merely assumptions, not facts).

CATASTROPHISING

– viewing a situation as unmanageable when the situation may actually be manageable (e.g., "there is no way the machinery can be repaired in time for harvest, and then harvest will be delayed" when the machinery may actually be able to be repaired in time).

BLACK & WHITE THINKING

– thinking in only one extreme, with no shades of grey (e.g., "I'm either the type of person who can deal with this or I am not", rather than recognising that your ability to cope may fluctuate, which is normal).

EXCESSIVE RESPONSIBILITY

– blaming yourself for things that have or could go wrong when you are not responsible or only partly responsible (e.g., blaming yourself for financial hardship when it is actually the culmination of drought and unpredictable markets).

LABELLING

– making a broad statement based on behaviour in a specific situation (e.g., "I am incompetent, I forgot to pick up the machinery part", but your competency has nothing to do with one forgetful moment).

EMOTIONAL REASONING

– basing your view of a situation solely on how you are feeling rather than on evidence (e.g., feeling that a conversation with your partner will go wrong and therefore believing that it will go wrong when there is no evidence to suggest that it will).

MAGNIFICATION AND MINIMISATION

– magnifying others' positive attributes while minimising your own positive attributes (e.g.,

"my neighbour had a successful season because they planned well, but I had a successful season just because I got lucky",

even though you planned just as well as your neighbour).

THE 5X5 RULE

Sometimes in the heat of the moment it can be tricky to take a step back and see the bigger picture.

You can use the 5 x 5 questions to help zoom out. Ask yourself:

WILL THIS MATTER IN...

5 MINUTES,

5 HOURS,

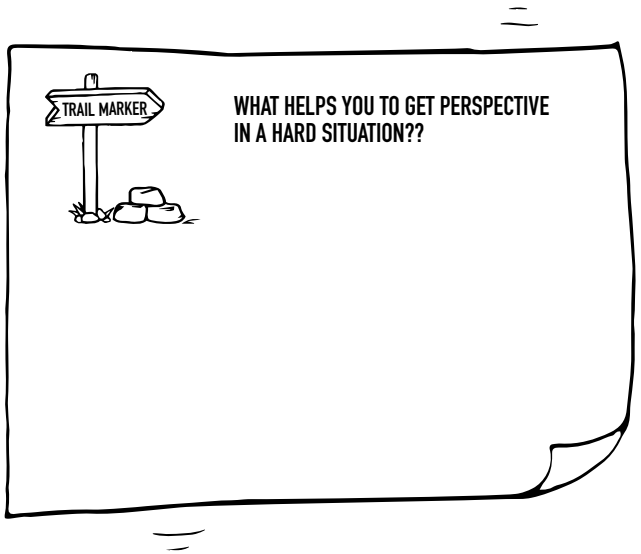
5 DAYS,

5 WEEKS,

5 MONTHS,

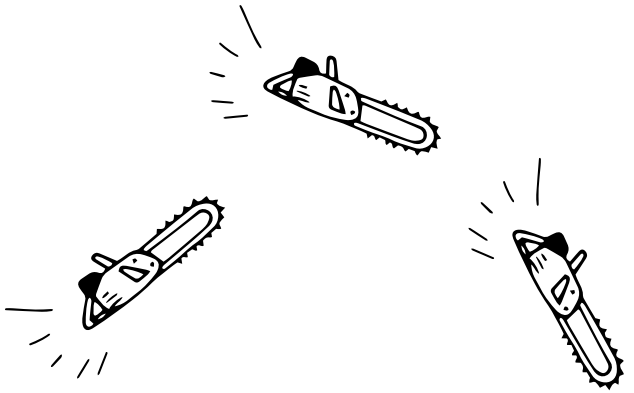
OR 5 YEARS?

Then proceed accordingly.



knack | nak |
noun [usually in singular]

A clever or tricky way of doing something



GETTING THE NAC OF IT

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

You can practice getting the NAC in your everyday life, to start doing what matters, even when the tough stuff shows up:

NOTICE IT

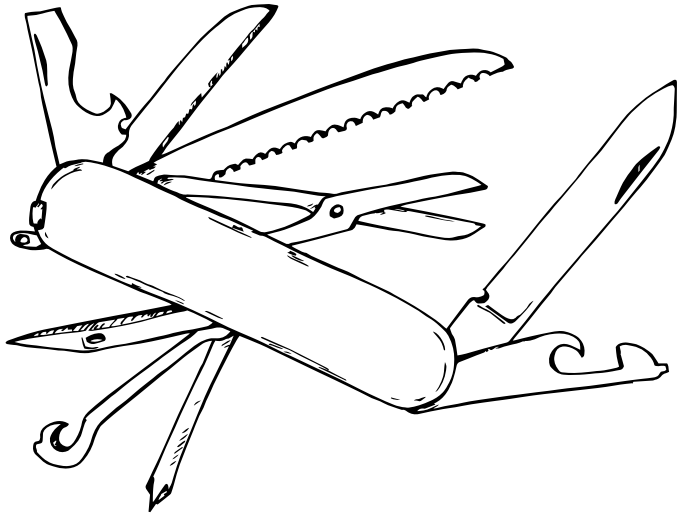
ACKNOWLEDGE IT

CHOOSE VALUED ACTION

Practice this again and again and again. Every day, you will end up doing things when you are hooked by the tough stuff, that can take you away from what really matters to you.

But, when you practice switching off autopilot – noticing your everyday experiences, and being present in what is really happening in this moment right now… that's when you get opportunities every single moment, day after day, to Notice, Acknowledge, Choose to do what matters most to you.

Head to the Farm Life Handbook digitial hub for extra resources to help you to put this into practice.



TOOLS FOR MANAGING STRESS

SIGNPOSTS OF STRESS

Keep an eye out for these signposts of stress in yourself and others.

BEHAVIOURAL

Angry blow-ups, sarcastic arguments

Over- or under-eating, unhealthy eating

Social withdrawal

Change in sleep patterns

Poor concentration

Difficulty relaxing

Loss of motivation

PHYSICAL

Headaches

Fatigue

Stomach problems

Nausea

Chest pain

Racing heart

Loss of sex drive

EMOTIONAL/ MENTAL

Frustration, impatience, short temper

General unhappiness, depression, finding it difficult to enjoy things

Suicidal thoughts

Feeling worried or over-whelmed

Difficulty managing emotions

Feeling alone

Observed some signposts of stress in yourself or someone you know? Check out the Roadmap to Support on page 62 and Resources on page 57.

SH*T WILL HAPPEN: HOW TO COPE

Between extreme climatic events, unpredictable markets, financial concerns, social and geographic isolation, and long working hours, it is difficult not to feel stressed. While you usually cannot change these sh*t situations, you can change how you cope with them.

ACKNOWLEDGE AND ACCEPT

Acknowledge and accept that some stressful situations are out of your control, and it is just the way it is for now. This will free up space in your brain to think about how to best cope with the uncontrollable problems and what actions to take to reduce controllable problems.

GET SUPPORT

Identify peers, industry groups, and professional services that can assist you. They have the experience and skills to work through the situation with you.

LEAN ON OTHERS

Lean on your family and friends – they want to be there for you, whether that is by making you laugh, or commiserating with you.

STAY HEALTHY

Although it can be hard to focus on anything other than the stressful situation, maintaining your physical health, sleep, relationships, and fun activities will help you pull through.

TAKE TIME OUT

Just like your machinery, you cannot run on the smell of an oily rag forever. Take time out to do fun activities, like playing or watching sport, enjoying a cuppa, or gardening to re-fuel yourself. Your greatest farm asset is you, so treat yourself with as much care as you would your best piece of machinery!

GIVE YOURSELF SOME CREDIT

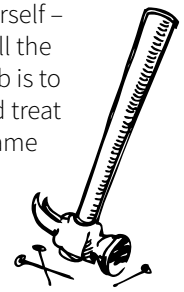
Give yourself credit for the hard times you have survived, and celebrate the little wins each day, even if it is just the fact that you finished a job a few minutes quicker than you expected.

TAKE STOCK

Take stock of the good things that happened or the things that you are thankful for each day. This could include being grateful for your family or thankful that you noticed an open gate before any livestock escaped.

GIVE YOURSELF A BREAK

Remember to be kind to yourself – it is okay not to be positive all the time. A general rule of thumb is to treat yourself how you would treat a friend going through the same situation.



MAKING TRACKS

- SIMPLE STEPS FOR FORMING NEW HABITS

Change is often put in the 'too hard' bucket. But change is really just performing a series of new behaviours frequently enough that they become habits.

New behaviours and new ways of thinking are tricky at first, but like tracks through a paddock, the more you take the track, the more worn it gets.

With focused effort, over time it becomes easy and in fact can become automatic. And when we focus our energy on creating new tracks, the old tracks can gradually become overgrown and fade away.

With these simple steps for forming new habits, you can learn to unload change from the 'too hard' bucket.

START EASY

Choose a habit that is easy – so easy that you will not require any motivation or willpower to do it (e.g., begin with 2 minutes of mindfulness each day, rather than 15 minutes).

INCREASE SLOWLY

Increase your habit in small increments. These small increments will add up surprisingly quickly over time and provide you with the inspiration to keep progressing (e.g., increase your mindfulness by 1 minute each week).

BREAK IT UP

As you are increasing your habit, consider breaking it up into smaller chunks to keep it achievable (e.g., if you are building up to 20 minutes of mindfulness, break it up into two 10 minute chunks).

GET BACK ON TRACK

If you get off track and miss performing your habit, get back on track as quickly as possible without worrying about having gotten off track – after all, this is normal and to be expected (e.g., if you missed your mindfulness today, focus especially hard on performing it tomorrow).

BRAINSTORM

Brainstorm ways that you might get off track and make a plan for how to work around these issues if they arise and/or how to get back on track (e.g., if you unexpectedly have to drive into town, leaving you with less time in the day, consider if any of your daily tasks can wait until the next day to make time for mindfulness).

BE PATIENT

Be patient with your progress and focus instead on sustaining it. New habits should feel easy in the beginning, and if you stay consistent and slowly increase your habit, it will be less likely to feel hard in the future. Avoid burning out when you get to the hard part by sticking to a pace you can sustain.

WHAT'S ONE STEP TO HELP YOU GET BACK ON TRACK?

Adapted from https://jamesclear.com/habit-guide

HEALTHY HABITS

Being healthy can reduce the risk of making poor business decisions or having a farming accident. Your physical health can also have a big impact on your mental health, helping you to deal with stressful situations. Give these healthy habits a go, and remember the clichés that a small change is better than no change, and that every little improvement counts!

EAT WELL

Eat a balanced diet of more fibre, fruit, and vegetables, and less fat, salt, and sugar. Aim for half a plate of veggies, quarter of a plate of carbohydrates like potatoes or bread, and quarter of a plate of meat (or an alternative).

MOVE YOUR BODY

Move your body as much as possible. Where possible, integrate activity into your daily life (e.g., swapping the ute for your legs for shorter distances). Work out what type of exercise you enjoy doing to avoid it feeling like just another chore (e.g., walking instead of weightlifting, cycling instead of jogging). Consider if you would prefer to exercise alone (e.g., time to think or listen to music) or with others (e.g., going for a walk with family, friends, or pets).

STRETCH

If you are sitting for long periods (e.g., driving or operating machinery), schedule in breaks for stretching and moving your legs. Try the tractor and header exercises on page 47 too.

DRINK WATER

Drink plenty of water, and avoid soft drinks and cordials. On average, men should drink 2.6 litres of water per day, and women should drink 2.1 litres of water per day. Drink more water when you are moving your body and when it is hot or humid.

LIMIT YOUR ALCOHOL

Limit your alcohol consumption to no more than 10 standard drinks a week, and no more than 4 standard drinks on any one day. One standard drink = one can of mid-strength beer, 100ml of wine, or a 30ml nip of spirits.

GET A CHECK-UP

Remember to visit your GP for regular health checks – prevention is better than cure, after all. If there are any problems, it will always be better to deal with them sooner rather than later.

TONE, TIGHTEN, TRIM AND TARGET YOUR HEALTH IN THE TRACTOR AND HEADER THIS SEASON

These tractor and header exercises may help if you are sitting for long periods. Remember to schedule in breaks for stretching and moving your legs too.

1. TONE YOUR BUTT

You can tone the gluteus muscles almost anywhere by squeezing together your buttock muscles for 10 seconds and then releasing. Repeat 1 0 times.

2. TIGHTEN YOUR TUMMY

Flatten your stomach by breathing out and pulling your stomach in towards your back as far as possible. Hold for 6 seconds and release. Repeat 10 times.

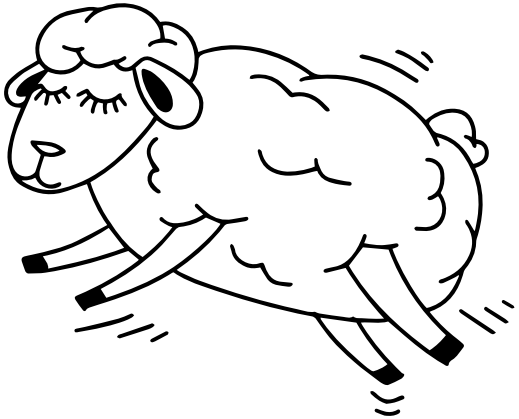
3. TRIM YOUR THIGHS

Squeeze your thighs together as hard as you can. Hold for 10 seconds and release. Repeat 10 times. If this is too easy you can increase the toning effect by squeezing something like a ball or sweater between your legs.

4. TARGET YOUR SHOULDERS

Keeping your arms and shoulders relaxed and holding lightly onto the steering wheel, lower your shoulders and pull back as far as you can moving your shoulder blades together. Hold for 10 seconds. Repeat 5 times.

Credit to National Centre for Farmer Health.



SLEEP SOUNDER

We all know that sleep is important, but getting enough good-quality sleep can be elusive. Try these top tips for sleeping sounder.

REMOVE NOISY ANIMALS

If possible, move noisy pets and livestock away from the house to avoid being disturbed.

AVOID THE SUGAR

Avoid heavy meals, sugar, caffeine, cigarettes, and alcohol before bedtime.

RELAX

Develop a bedtime routine of relaxing activities like breathing exercises or mindfully brushing your teeth to prompt your brain to slow down and prepare for sleep.

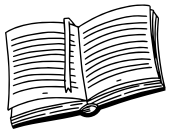
CONTROL THE ENVIRONMENT

Ensure the light, noise, and temperature in your bedroom is just right – block-out blinds, an eye mask, ear plugs, blankets, an open window, or a fan may help.

REMOVE THE CLOCKS

Remove any clocks that are visible from your bed to avoid re-checking the time and worrying about not being asleep yet.

GET UP



If you find yourself lying awake in bed and feeling frustrated or worried about not sleeping, get out of bed and do something relaxing like reading a book or listening to music. Only return to bed when you feel like you are ready to sleep.

GET INTO A ROUTINE

If possible (easier said than done at certain times of the year!), develop a regular sleep pattern by waking up and going to sleep at the same time each day and avoiding daytime napping.

GET SOME RAYS

If possible, bask in the morning sunlight to help wake your body up and avoid electronic screens at bedtime as they emit light that keep your body awake.

Try the free app Calm – guided meditation exercises to reduce stress and improve sleep.

BUILD A BETTER RELATIONSHIP

Relationships, whether they be romantic partnerships, family, friends, or parent-child, are bound to be fraught with difficulties – it is just one of life's unfortunate certainties. This is especially so during times of farm hardship, or if you are sharing both a personal and a business relationship in a family farm. Here are the tools you need to build a better relationship.

HAVE PATIENCE

Acknowledge that communication takes time and patience and involves each person both listening and talking. Respectfully share your thoughts and feelings and encourage them to do the same, remembering to focus on trying to truly understand them.

DISTANCE FROM YOUR THOUGHTS

We can get stuck inside our minds with thoughts of what has gone wrong in the past, what could go wrong in the future, and what is not perfect. Try recognising that these thoughts are exactly that – just thoughts your mind has made. Putting some space between you and your thoughts will allow you to be more present in the here-and-now.

MAKE TIME

With long farm working hours comes limited quality time together. Make the choice to make the most of your time together, rather than being stuck inside your mind or distracted by other things.

ASK QUESTIONS

Be genuinely curious about each other's thoughts and feelings by using open-ended questions (e.g., "how did your fencing job go today?").

ESTABLISH RITUALS

Establish small daily rituals to show you care, like checking how each other's day went, sending a nice text message, or finding something to laugh about together.

LOOK AT THE POSITIVES

Focus on the positive aspects of the relationship and what they bring to it. You might like to let your business partner know that you appreciate their business planning, praise your child for drying the dishes without being reminded, or communicate the qualities that you are attracted to in your romantic partner.

CLARIFY YOUR VALUES

Clarify what your values are and use them to inspire your daily actions. Values reflect what is most important to you and how you want to be as a person in your relationship.

Some relationship values you might like to consider are connection, caring, and contribution. Think about how you can take little steps to demonstrate your values, or reflect on ways you are already acting in line with your values.

NOTICE

Some painful/uncomfortable feelings in relationships are normal and to be expected. Rather than putting energy into avoiding them through unhelpful distractions or band-aid reactions, notice them and allow yourself to sit with them. This will reduce the impact the feelings have on you and prevent you from becoming hijacked by them.

SO, YOU'VE HAD AN ARGUMENT? SOW THE SEEDS OF CONNECTION

After an argument, whether it be big or small, it is important to make repairs to the relationship. Re-engage with them by taking steps to reach out, like a hug or a phone call, or by being open to their steps to reach out to you. SOW the seeds of connection after an argument by following these simple steps.

SLOW DOWN

– take a few deep breaths and get a bit of space from the situation.

OBSERVE/OPEN UP – observe what is happening for you and for them, and open up to your painful/comfortable feelings.

WHAT MATTERS – do what matters, remembering to act in line with your values.

Never accept violence or abuse (physical, verbal, sexual, emotional, social, psychological, financial, spiritual, or cultural). Safely remove yourself from the situation.

If you are in immediate danger, call emergency services (000 or 112 from satellite/GSM phones).

For anyone who has experienced or is at risk of sexual assault, domestic or family violence, 1800 RESPECT or 1800 737 732 is a 24 hour, 7 days a week telephone helpline and www.1800respect.org.au/ is a 24 hour, 7 days a week online chat.

NOTE DOWN ONE THING TO TRY TO BUILD YOUR RELATIONSHIPS?

DAILY DOSE OF B.R.E.A.D.S.S.

Bread is not just a nutritious essential – having a daily dose of B.R.E.A.D.S.S. can help you to maintain peak performance, especially during stressful situations. These strategies can be practiced each day to keep you on-track and minimise the effects of stress.

Do a brief assessment of your current daily B.R.E.A.D.S.S. by giving yourself a rating for each area 1 star = needs a lot of improvement, 5 stars = on track

This helps identify one area to start to focus on.

BREATHING

Breathing slowly and deeply clears your mind, relaxes your body, and allows you to focus. Bonus – it only takes a few minutes, so it can be done multiple times during the day!

1. Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds. Feel the air enter your lungs.
2. Hold your breath by avoiding inhaling or exhaling for 4 seconds.
3. Slowly exhale for 4 seconds.
4. Repeat steps 1 to 3 at least three times.

RELAXATION

Think about what helps you to relax quickly. Perhaps it is petting the dog, listening to the birds, or taking the time to really savour a cuppa. Make time for whatever it is daily.

You want to consider progressive muscle relaxation, a technique for reducing muscle tension by tensing particular muscles and then relaxing them. Tense each muscle for 5 seconds and relax each muscle for 10 seconds. Once you've made your way through each of the muscles, repeat in the same order a few times.

FOREHEAD

raise your eyebrows, as though you're surprised, then release.

MOUTH

open your mouth wide, as though you're yawning, then release.

Neck: gently tilt your head forwards, pushing chin down towards chest, then slowly lift again.

SHOULDERS

pull your shoulders up towards the ears (shrug), then relax them down towards the feet.

SHOULDER BLADES AND BACK

push your shoulder blades back, trying to almost touch them together so that your chest is pushed forward, then relax.

CHEST

breathe in deeply, filling your lungs, then breathe out slowly.

ARMS

stretch your arms away from your body, reach, then relax.

WRISTS AND HANDS

stretch your wrist by pulling your hand up towards you, stretch out the fingers and thumbs, then relax.

HIPS AND BUTTOCKS

squeeze your buttock muscles together, then relax.

LEGS

push your toes away from the body, pull them towards the body, then relax.

EXERCISE

Check page 41 for information about exercise healthy habits.

ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

Maintaining a positive attitude might seem impossible during stressful situations, but there is usually something to be grateful for, even if it seems insignificant or silly. Each day, think of three things that you were grateful for. For example:

DIET

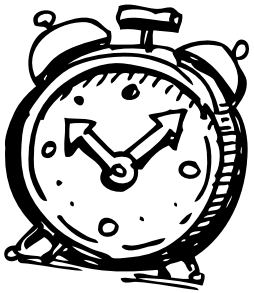
Check page 41 for information about dietary healthy habits.

SLEEP

Check page 48 for top tips for sleeping sounder.

SUPPORT

Seek support from those around you. Who's in your support team? What can you do to connect or strengthen your team?



TUNE UP YOUR TIME MANAGEMENT

Much like a regular mechanical service, these tips and tricks can help you tune up your time management skills.

MAKE A TO-DO LIST

Make a to-do list to keep on top of what tasks need to be done and when they need to be done. Prioritise tasks in order of importance and/or when they need to be completed by.

BREAK UP BIG TASKS

Break up big tasks into smaller, more manageable tasks to make the workload feel more achievable.

GROUP SIMILAR TASKS

Group similar tasks together (e.g., schedule to pick up a replacement machinery part from town on the same day that you do your groceries to avoid making two trips).

BE REALISTIC

Set realistic daily workloads – there is only so much that you can do in one day.

PICK YOUR TIMING

Tackle the important or difficult tasks during times of the day when you are likely to be most productive (e.g., if you are a morning person, first thing in the morning), or when you are likely to have required resources easily available.

PLAN AHEAD

Plan ahead for stressful seasonal periods by servicing equipment and conducting maintenance activities ahead of time.

SAY NO

Decline extra commitments if they will likely make you struggle to achieve your existing commitments, especially during stressful seasonal periods.

DELEGATE

Consider if any tasks could be delegated to others. You might like to barter skills with a neighbour. Delegation may be especially important during stressful seasonal periods.

TAKE A BREAK

Remember to schedule time out to take breaks and do fun activities each day. Taking time out from work will make you feel more productive when you resume.

KEEP TIME UP YOUR SLEEVE

If there is one thing that you can expect, it is that the unexpected will happen! Always leave a little 'buffer' time each day to deal with problems that pop up.

SETTING GOALS THE S.M.A.R.T. WAY

Setting short- and long-term goals the SMART way will help you to achieve what you would like to happen in your life and on your farm.

SPECIFIC

Set a concrete goal that addresses behaviour and results (e.g., I want to walk for exercise most mornings and build up to being able to easily walk 5 kilometres).

MEASURABLE

State your goal in a way that will allow you to easily measure progress (e.g., I will measure how many mornings I go walking and how many kilometres I walk each time).

AGREED

Ask others to help and support you (e.g., I will ask my partner to remind me and keep me accountable).

REALISTIC

Your goal should challenge you, but also be achievable given your knowledge, skills, ability level, and available resources e.g.

"I can currently easily walk 2.5 km, so building up to 5 km is realistic."

TIME-SPECIFIC

Set a practical deadline for achieving your goal. Keep track of your progress in a visible way to stay motivated. e.g.

"by the beginning of spring, I want to be able to walk 5 km most mornings. I'll note in my diary how many mornings I go walking and how many kilometres I walk each time so I can reflect back on my progress".

THE FINAL WRAP-UP

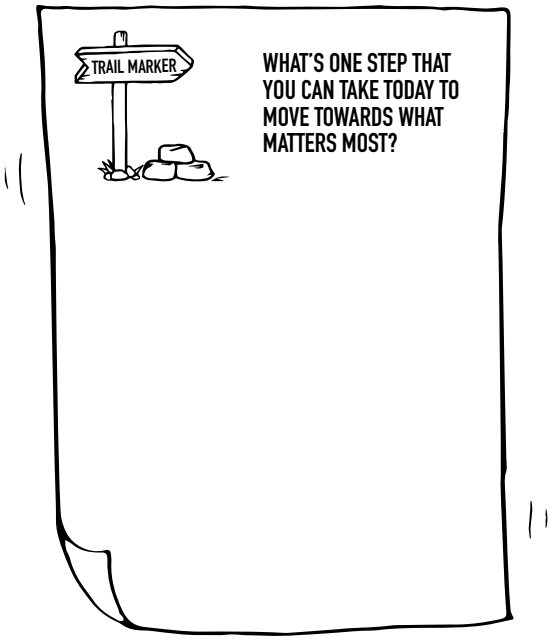
If you're anything like me, you've flicked to the last part of the book to find the juicy stuff, the reason why you should actually take the time to work through this book!

For me, it's simple. Doing these exercises, taking the time to build your 'muscles' in flexibility, the ability to notice and be aware of your experiences without getting caught up in them - it's worth it. It's worth it because these skills help you take the steps to be the person you want to be. It's worth it, because when you can adapt more flexibly to the inevitable challenges in farming life, you can show up with love in your relationships, you can show up with energy and enthusiasm in your business (even when the stress builds up), you can show up and do the things that matter, the things you care about, even when it's hard.

Writing this handbook and giving ACT for Ag presentations helps me learn to navigate between the rocks and the hard places, whenever they show up. Sometimes I end up off track, sometimes I stumble and trip, especially when the path gets extra rocky. I'm learning that all of that is part of being human. The hurt, the pain, the joy, even simple contentment - all part of being human.

I'm excited to build a community of individuals connected throughout rural Australia - men, women, farmers, and people connected to farming who are practicing skills to unhook from the tough stuff, navigate the path ahead, and do what matters even during the rocky times.

"You won't get it perfect — and you don't need to. What matters is ongoing practice, especially during the tough seasons. Come back to these strategies often, and keep experimenting with what works for you."



ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

If you or someone you know needs support or additional information, here are a few resources:

BOOK AN APPOINTMENT WITH YOUR LOCAL GP

your GP can provide you with a Mental Health Care Plan that provides access to free psychological sessions if available or a Medicare rebate with a private provider.

REGIONAL ACCESS

1300 032 186 or **www.saregionalaccess.org.au** – Regional South Australia only. 24 hours, 7 days a week. Up to 3 free telephone or online counselling sessions.

RURAL HEALTH CONNECT

www.ruralhealthconnect.com.au – connect with a psychologist for Zoom or telephone sessions. Medicare rebates are available if eligible.

EMERGENCY SUPPORT 24 HOURS, 7 DAYS A WEEK

EMERGENCY SERVICES

000 or **112** from satellite/GSM phones

LIFELINE

13 11 14 – counselling, crisis support, and suicide prevention for anyone experiencing a personal crisis.

SUICIDE CALL BACK SERVICE

1300 659 467 – 24/7 counselling for anyone affected by or considering suicide, including support and call back service in case of suicide risk.

www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au (24/7 online chat or video chat)

SA HEALTH MENTAL HEALTH TRIAGE SERVICE

13 14 65 – staffed by mental health clinicians. You can call to access SA mental health services, advice and information in a mental health emergency or crisis situation.

TELEPHONE HELPLINES AND ONLINE SERVICES

BEYOND BLUE

1300 224 636 – 24 hours, 7 days a week. Information and referral for anyone feeling stressed or down.

BEYOND BLUE ONLINE CHAT

www.beyondblue.org.au – 1pm to midnight (AEST), 7 days a week. Online chat for anyone feeling stressed or down.

LIFELINE CHAT

www.lifeline.org.au – between 7pm to midnight (AEDT), 7 days a week. Online chat for anyone feeling overwhelmed and having difficulty coping or staying safe.

LIFELINE TEXT

0477 13 11 14 – 12pm to midnight (AEDT), 7 days a week. Texting chat for anyone feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping.

MENSLINE AUSTRALIA

1300 789 978 – 24 hours, 7 days a week. Counselling for men dealing with family and relationship issues, suicidal thoughts, or stress.

MENSLINE AUSTRALIA ONLINE COUNSELLING

www.mensline.org.au – 24 hours, 7 days a week. Online chat or video chat for men dealing with family and relationship issues, suicidal thoughts, or stress.

MEDICARE MENTAL HEALTH

Between 8.30am-5pm weekdays (excl. Public holidays). To speak with a trained professional about your mental health and wellbeing. Phone **1800 595 212**

RURAL AID

Counselling on phone or farm for farmers and their families. Phone - **1300 175 594, www.ruralaid.org.au/services-provided**

TIACS (THIS IS A CONVERSATION STARTER)

A free phone and text counselling service offering mental health support to Australia's blue collar workers, including farmers. Phone **0488 846 988, www.tiacs.org**

SELF-HELP WEBSITES

ACT FOR AG

Find resources and tools referred to in this guide at **www.farmlifehandbook.com.au** Listen to the podcast "Farm Life Psych with Steph Schmidt", find out more at **www.stephschmidt.com.au**

receive ongoing reminders via the Little Rocks email list - **www.steph-schmidt.com.au/littlerocks**

BEYOND BLUE

www.beyondblue.org.au – mental health information and support.

MEDICARE MENTAL HEALTH

www.medicarementalhealth.gov.au

IFARMWELL

www.ifarmwell.com.au – a toolkit to help farmers cope effectively with life's challenges and get the most out of every day.

MINDSPOT

www.mindspot.org.au – free, anonymous assessment and treatment for adults experiencing stress, anxiety, depression, OCD, PTSD, and chronic pain.

THE BLACK DOG INSTITUTE

www.blackdoginstitute.org.au – mental health resources to help individuals, workplaces, schools, and parents.

THIS WAY UP

www.thiswayup.org.au – low-cost online courses to help with a wide range of mental health conditions.

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR FARMER HEALTH

www.farmerhealth.org.au/support-hub

LIFELINE SUPPORT TOOLKIT

A practical, evidence-informed collection of tools, worksheets, self-help strategies to support mental health and wellbeing **www.toolkit.lifeline.org.au**

FREE SELF-HELP APPS

BEYOND NOW

allows you to create a personalised suicide safety plan.

BLACK DOG INSTITUTE HEADGEAR

measures your mental fitness and provides a 30-day mental fitness challenge to build resilience and wellbeing. Designed for a male audience, but suitable for anyone.

REMINDER SUICIDE SAFETY PLAN

allows you to create a suicide safety plan.

GOTCHA4LIFE MENTAL FITNESS GYM

Free, practical tools to help you build your mental fitness - anytime, anywhere.

SMILING MIND

Free mindfulness app with programs for adults, children, and families. Great for beginners and easy to use offline.

INSIGHT TIMER

Free access to thousands of meditations, sleep tools and courses, including content from Australian professionals.

MOODMISSION

Strategies to cope with stress, anxiety, or low mood by completing small, evidence-based “missions” tailored to how you’re feeling.

FURTHER READING

A LIBERATED MIND
Dr Steven C. Hayes

ACT WITH LOVE
Russ Harris

THE HAPPINESS TRAP
Russ Harris

BURNOUT
Solve your Stress Cycle. Emily and Amelia Nagoski

ABOUT STEPHANIE SCHMIDT

Steph Schmidt is a clinical psychologist, farmer, and mum, living and working on a sheep and cropping farm in South Australia with her husband and three boys. She combines her lived experience on the land with her professional training to share practical, relatable tools that support mental health in farming communities.

Steph first developed the ACT for Ag handbooks in 2020 as the South Australian winner of the AgriFutures Rural Women’s Award. Since then, the handbooks have been shared widely across rural and farming communities throughout Australia.

ACT for Ag workshops bring skills in psychological flexibility and practical strategies for navigating stress to farming and rural communities across Australia.

She is the founder of Farm Life Psych, host of the Farm Life Psych with Steph Schmidt podcast, and continues to advocate for accessible wellbeing tools tailored for life on the land.

Explore more resources and podcast episodes at stephschmidt.com.au.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the support of the South Australian Government and Preventive Health SA for funding the Farm Life Handbook resources and digital hub as part of the State Government’s $73 million Drought Support Package.

DROUGHT RESPONSE

Government of South Australia

NOTES

ROADMAP FOR SUPPORT

Are you concerned about yourself or someone you know? Follow this roadmap.

CONCERNED

Been feeling worried or overwhelmed recently, but don't need support right now?

BOOK AN APPOINTMENT WITH
YOUR LOCAL GP

your GP can provide you with a Mental Health Care Plan that provides access to free psychological sessions if available or a Medicare rebate with a private provider

MEDICARE MENTAL HEALTH

1800 595 212

Mon-Fri 8.30am-5pm
Free, confidential mental health and wellbeing support

PIRSA FAB MENTORS

Help primary producers navigate through tough times
Pirsa Recovery Hotline
1800 931 314

RURAL BUSINESS SUPPORT

Free and independent financial counselling
1800 836 211

Feeling worried or overwhelmed and need support right now?

REGIONAL ACCESS

1300 032 186
or
www.saregionalaccess.org.au
regional South Australia only; up to 3 free telephone or online counselling sessions

BEYOND BLUE

1300 224 636
or
www.beyondblue.org.au
online chat 1pm to midnight [AEST]

LIFELINE

www.lifeline.org.au
chat 7pm to midnight [AEDT]
or
0477 13 11 14
12pm to midnight [AEDT]

MENSLINE AUSTRALIA

1300 789 978
or
www.mensline.org.au
online chat or video chat

Having suicidal thoughts?

LIFELINE

13 11 14

SUICIDE CALL BACK SERVICE

1300 659 467
or
www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au
online chat or video chat

IN CRISIS

In an emergency, including planning suicide?

EMERGENCY SERVICES

000
or
112 from satellite/GSM phones

MENTAL HEALTH TRIAGE SERVICE

13 14 65
available 24/7

PRESENT TO YOUR NEAREST EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT FOR SUPPORT

STEPH SCHMIDT
FARM LIFE PSYCH

farmlifehandbook.com.au

DROUGHT RESPONSE

Government of South Australia