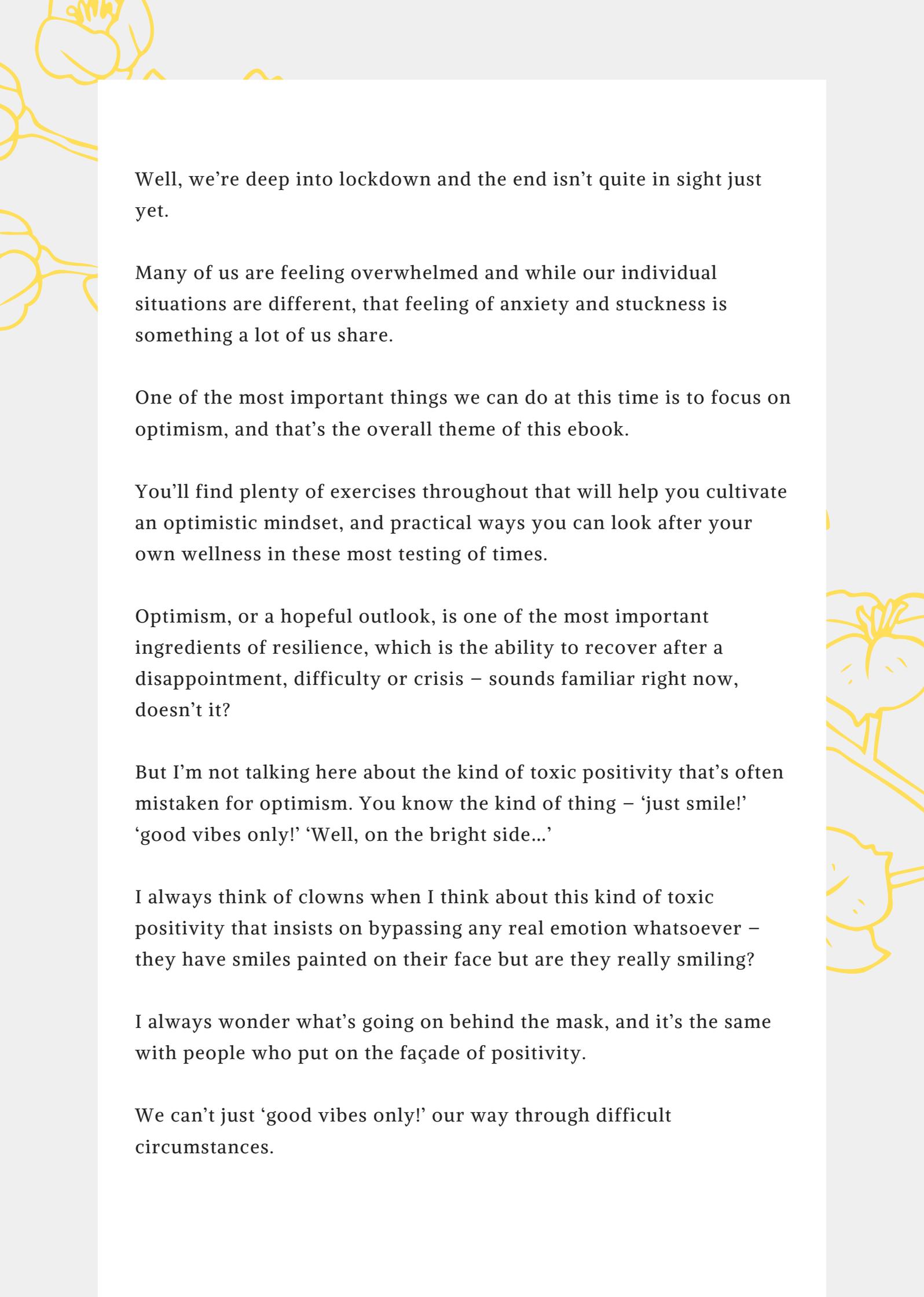


WISHFISH EBOOKLET

**OPTIMISM &
OPPORTUNITY**

FEBRUARY 2021



Well, we're deep into lockdown and the end isn't quite in sight just yet.

Many of us are feeling overwhelmed and while our individual situations are different, that feeling of anxiety and stuckness is something a lot of us share.

One of the most important things we can do at this time is to focus on optimism, and that's the overall theme of this ebook.

You'll find plenty of exercises throughout that will help you cultivate an optimistic mindset, and practical ways you can look after your own wellness in these most testing of times.

Optimism, or a hopeful outlook, is one of the most important ingredients of resilience, which is the ability to recover after a disappointment, difficulty or crisis – sounds familiar right now, doesn't it?

But I'm not talking here about the kind of toxic positivity that's often mistaken for optimism. You know the kind of thing – 'just smile!' 'good vibes only!' 'Well, on the bright side...'

I always think of clowns when I think about this kind of toxic positivity that insists on bypassing any real emotion whatsoever – they have smiles painted on their face but are they really smiling?

I always wonder what's going on behind the mask, and it's the same with people who put on the façade of positivity.

We can't just 'good vibes only!' our way through difficult circumstances.

Optimism on the other hand is about finding the opportunity.

Even in the most rubbish situation, it's looking for the opportunity, or learning, or gift.

It might be a glimmer, just a tiny light, but there's always an opportunity.

If it's a particularly tough time the opportunity could be as simple as the chance to practice sitting in the moment with your feelings and observing that no matter how awful you feel, it will pass.

And sometimes the learning is that it's OK to be sad. If you're sad, be sad.

You can throw yourself a pity party if you like.

Set the timer for five minutes and put the metaphorical balloons up and candles out – have a pity party, all on your own.

I guarantee it won't last five minutes, you just can't stay in that state – and that's the power of optimism.

Love, Debbie.x



LET'S GET STARTED....

Many of us are in situations we feel we have no control over.

Stuck at home, cut off from our support networks, working from the kitchen table and many have children at home too, so will be juggling helping the children with their schoolwork on top of everything else.

That feeling of overwhelm is hard to avoid.

One thing many of us may also be missing is that transition from home to work, that we usually get when we commute.

Even a short journey to work allows us to reset and switch our focus from home life, to work.

Now we don't have that opportunity many of us may be finding the boundaries between home and work are blurred.

EXERCISE: CREATE YOUR COMMUTE

Take some time to mentally and emotionally prepare yourself for the day.

Schedule this into your day, in between finishing breakfast and whatever housework you need to do, getting the children ready and any other morning tasks, and starting work for the day.

If you are able to, go out for a short walk to refresh and reset your mind, and then come back, sit down and start your working day.

If you can't leave the house, go out into the garden for a few minutes, or even just go into a different room, preferably with a window so you can look outside.

Just allow yourself to leave the issues you associate with 'home' behind, and prepare yourself for work.



TREAT OTHERS HOW YOU WISH THEY'D TREAT YOU?

When we're sharing space as many of us are right now, with partners, children and even extended family, it's a real test of our empathy.

There's a popular saying that you should treat other people the way you want to be treated, but I don't think that's the best way of looking at it.

In fact, I think when we look at this carefully, many of us are guilty of not treating ourselves very well at all!

We yell, shout and scream at ourselves inside our heads, we're critical and demanding – that's not how we want to treat other people, and it's not how we want to treat ourselves either!



EXERCISE: SELF-AUDIT

Take a day to notice how you're treating yourself.

Look at all the ways you're selling yourself short. Here are some ways you might be treating yourself badly, without realising it:

- Do you insist your children sit down and eat a proper breakfast, but grab yours on the go and snatch bites off the side in the kitchen while you're running around doing five other things?
- Are you encouraging your children or partner to take regular breaks, get outside and get some fresh air but not going outside yourself and instead using your time to do extra work or catch up on housework?



- Are you being super supportive to your partner or children if they are struggling with work or schoolwork, but criticising yourself for 'failing' if you are finding it hard to cope?
- Are you trying to do everybody's thinking for them and manage everything for everybody?
- Are you going into battle for a reluctant partner or child who isn't getting up and doing their work, organising their schedule for them and reminding them through the day of appointments and meetings instead of trusting them to manage their own priorities?



EXERCISE: SELF-AUDIT

Every time you catch yourself treating yourself badly, make a note in your journal.

At the end of the day look at what you've written and ask yourself – is this really how I want to treat other people?

And more importantly, is this how I want to be treated myself?

To come back to the original premise, rather than treat other people the way you want to be treated, try thinking about it as treating people the way they want to be treated.

And as always, that goes for you too!

Treat yourself how you want to be treated, which is with compassion, kindness and empathy, not endless criticism and sacrifice.



EXERCISE: THOUGHTS AUDIT

As a progression on the self-audit, you can also do a thoughts audit, which will help you to develop a more optimistic mindset.

In your journal, note down a range of thoughts you've had throughout the day, and notice what values you're adding to those thoughts.

For example:

- The house is so messy - I should be trying harder to keep it tidy.
- My child didn't complete their schoolwork today - the teachers will think I'm failing.
- I'm really struggling to keep on top of work at the moment, I'm rubbish!

You get the idea. Look at how often you frame things negatively and critically.

Instead, could you find a way to frame it differently?

- The house is so messy - this is a great opportunity to involve the whole family in keeping it tidy.
- My child didn't complete their schoolwork today - it's important that they prioritise their mental health even if they are under pressure from teachers
- I'm really struggling to keep on top of work at the moment - living through a pandemic is hard.

Notice how in the last example the reframing of the thought isn't about blithely glossing over with a 'oh well, look on the bright side' spin.

Living through a pandemic *is* hard.



The opportunity here is to acknowledge that fact, and in doing so you allow yourself – and everybody else – some compassion.

Take a moment to feel your connection with everybody else.

We might be in different houses, doing different things, but we are all living through the same thing and we are all finding it hard.

There's a comfort in that collective experience.

CELEBRATE THE SMALL WINS

It's really important to give yourself recognition and celebrate the small wins.

Most of us are familiar with the idea of a to-do list but how about a 'did it' list'? As in yahooooooooooo - look what I managed to do today!

Write down the things you've achieved, even the smallest things, and at the end of the day (or halfway through, if you're feeling a bit flat) you can look at that list and see exactly what you've done, and celebrate that.

Not only will this help you look for the good things you've done, it'll also help you celebrate the good in other people too.

If you're more in tune with the good in you, then you'll start seeing it in others and have the courage to tell them.

You should never underestimate the impact you might have on somebody else just by giving good feedback – not to be confused with the usual 'sh*t sandwich' method of feedback which is to praise, criticise then praise.

We don't need to constantly criticise our children or partners to 'help them improve' – we're not their manager.

Telling them 'I think you did brilliantly today' is quite enough.



FOCUS ON PEACE AND JOY, NOT HAPPINESS

Happiness is a big thing people strive for because we think if we're happy then everything is going to be OK.

But it's often better to aim for peace and joy, rather than happiness, which is a fleeting state.

For example if I buy a new shirt, it will make me happy, but then once I've worn it a few times, that effect will wear off and it's just another shirt.

Focusing on peace and joy means we have the power to create that state for ourselves.

We can intentionally decide we want to have more peace and more joy in our lives and choose to create them.

"Do or Do Not,
there is no try."

One of my favourite quotes of all time is from Yoda in Star Wars when he says 'Do or Do Not, there is no try.'

It's a lovely play on words but it comes back to the very serious point that if you want peace and joy in your life, how are you going to create that?

What will you choose to do?

If you know practicing yoga brings you peace, will you practice more yoga?

Will you intentionally choose to spend more time going outside into nature, stopping and being mindful, watching the birds fly by?

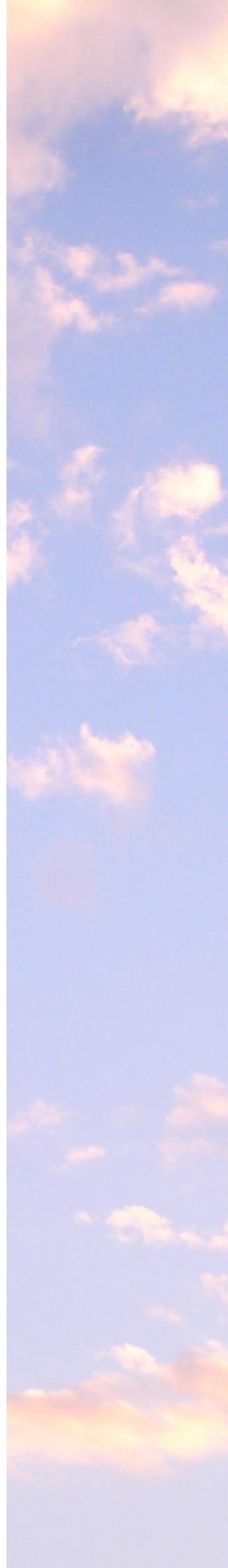
EXERCISE: CREATE A SMILE FILE

Every time something good happens or somebody gives you some positive feedback, write it down and keep it in a 'smile file'.

Try and add at least one thing to it every day, that you feel proud of.

This gives you a resource to look at so you can see what you've achieved, and creates a sense of progress.

You can also reward yourself – make a star chart! I'm doing one for a 30-day yoga challenge at the moment and it really does work.



GIVE BACK

We're all familiar by now with the five steps to mental health advised by the NHS and many of us are also well aware that connecting with other people, getting outside and physical activity, learning new things and practicing mindfulness are really important for our mental health.

But the fifth step is often overlooked – and that's give to others.

By doing something for somebody else, you are performing service to others.

It's not about people pleasing, because if you're a people pleaser you're generally doing it to get something in return.

Service is about genuinely giving to others, and it's a sure-fire way to make you feel ten times better.

"Lose yourself in service to others."

If you're genuinely giving from your heart, there's a deep inner peace and joy to be found in that – as Gandhi says, 'lose yourself in service to others'.

Don't attach yourself to an outcome, do it because you want to.

Volunteer, join a community group or effort (your local Facebook group is a great place to start) – familiarise yourself with the joy of doing something for others.

A FINAL NOTE

Hopefully this guide has given you lots of inspiration and ideas for ways you can prioritise your wellness this winter season.

But if you do find you need extra help and support this year, don't be afraid to ask.

Many people find lockdown and life more generally difficult for all sorts of reasons, and there is lots of formal and informal support out there. Samaritans helpline is available 24 hours on 116 123.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information please contact Debbie, Laura and Gail on 07496 328 745 / 07896 998 136.

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