



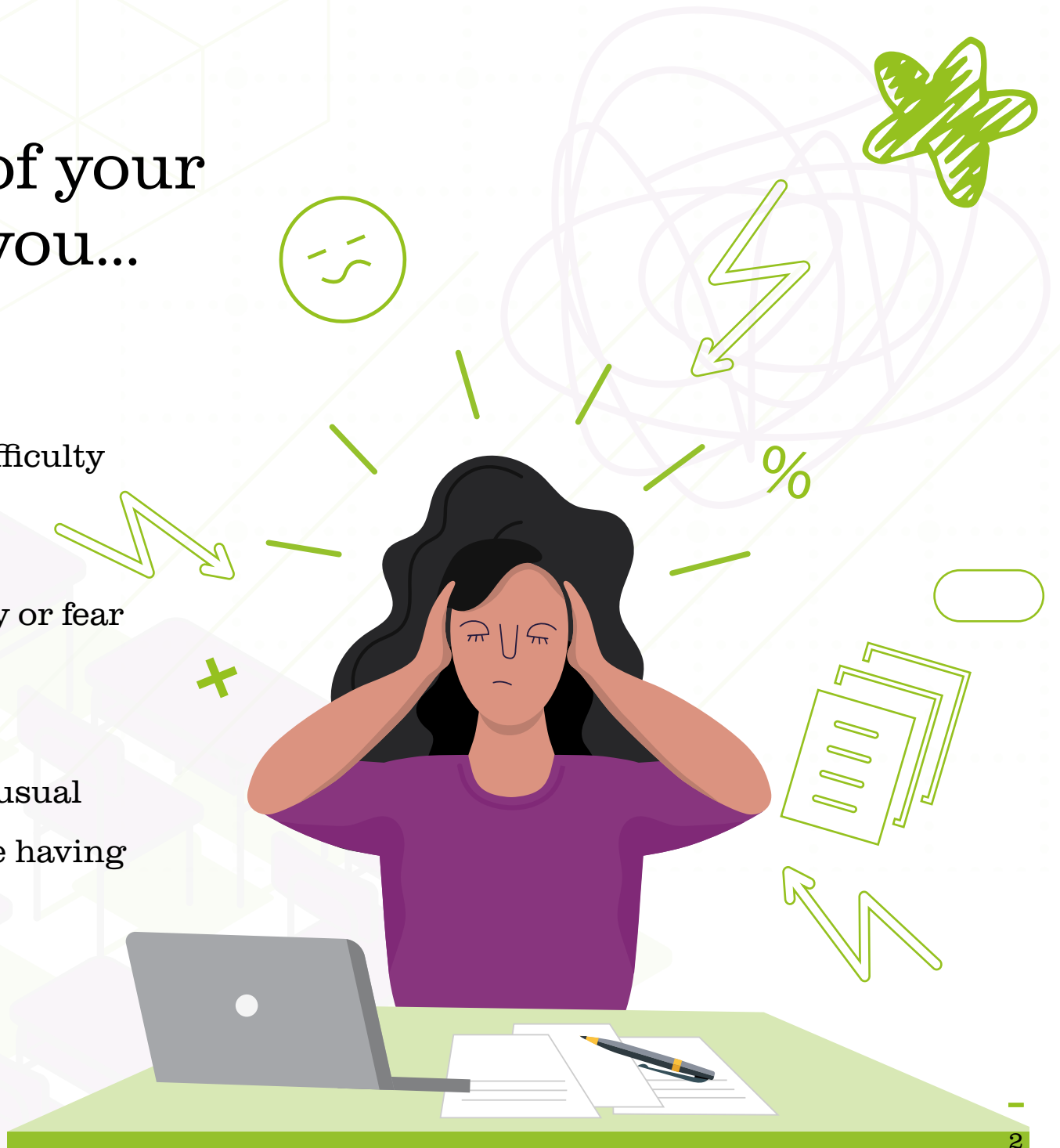
Exam stress toolkit

Guidance for students

Believe in
children
 Barnardo's

Are *thoughts* of your exams causing you...

- sleepless nights
- to feel overwhelmed
- to have racing thoughts or difficulty concentrating
- a lack of self-confidence
- to feel constant worry, anxiety or fear
- to eat more or less than usual
- to be irritable
- to drink or smoke more than usual
- avoid things or people you are having problems with.



Both *exams* and the anticipation of results can be a stressful time

Having fears and concerns is completely natural – your mates are probably feeling exactly the same, whether they let on or not. If these anxieties start to overwhelm you, don't worry – **there are things you can do to help yourself.**



Symptoms of exam stress

Exam stress could be caused by various different reasons:

- pressure from parents and relatives to do well
- the need to get high grades to get on track for the career you really want
- uncertainty about what to do next – *‘There are so many options, what if I make the wrong choice?’*
- The feeling of everything changing in your life – you might be moving away to university or going to college for example.

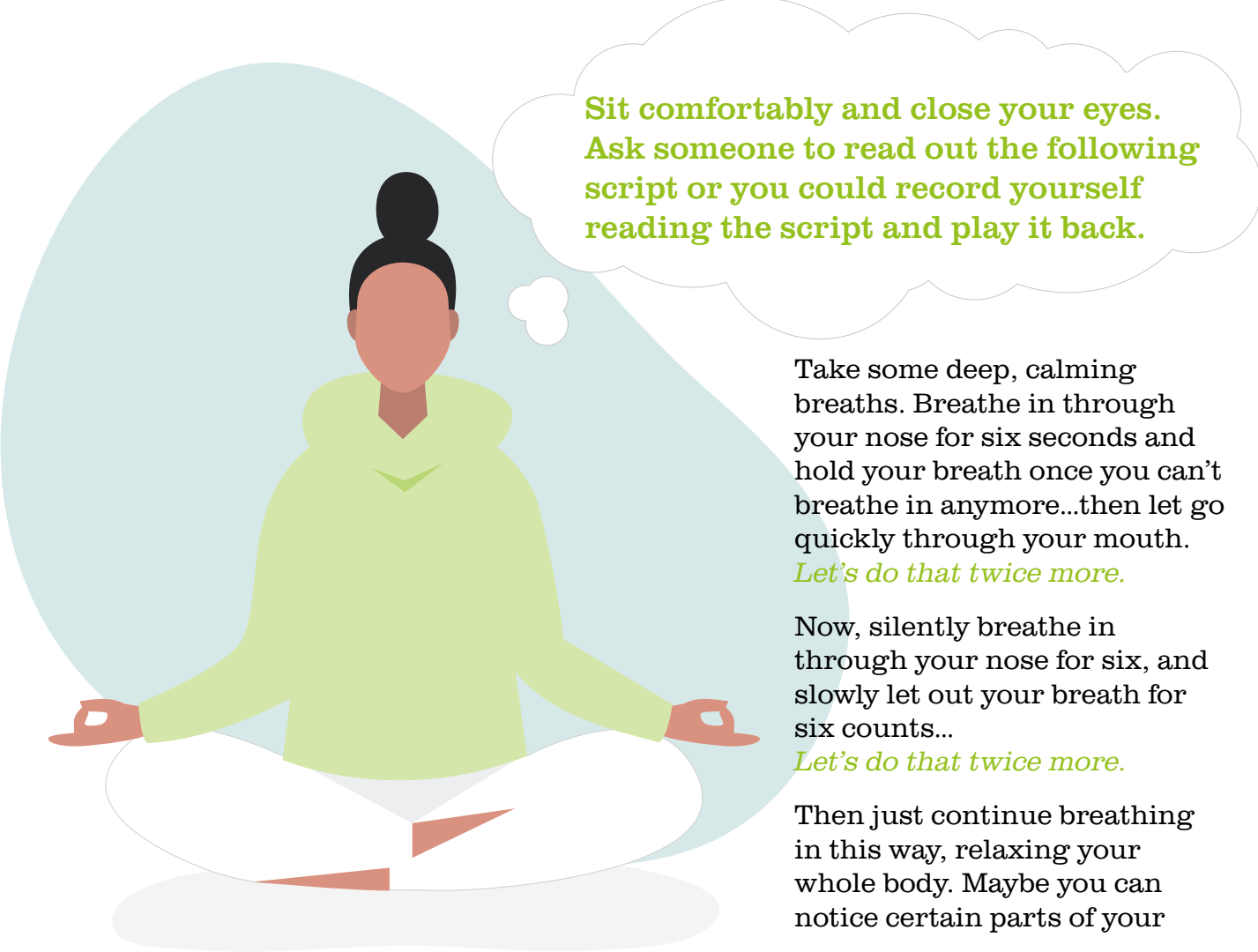
There are many different signs and symptoms of exam stress:

- difficulty getting to sleep or difficulty waking up in the morning
- constant fatigue
- forgetfulness
- aches and pains for no apparent reason
- poor appetite
- social withdrawal
- increased anxiety and irritability
- ‘flying off the handle’
- increased heart rate
- migraines/headaches
- blurred vision
- dizziness
- loss of interest in activities.



Mindfulness- Watch the world go by

Practise this mindfulness activity. It will help you to tune in to your breathing. Mindful breathing can be done whenever you are feeling stressed.



Sit comfortably and close your eyes. Ask someone to read out the following script or you could record yourself reading the script and play it back.

Take some deep, calming breaths. Breathe in through your nose for six seconds and hold your breath once you can't breathe in anymore...then let go quickly through your mouth.

Let's do that twice more.

Now, silently breathe in through your nose for six, and slowly let out your breath for six counts...

Let's do that twice more.

Then just continue breathing in this way, relaxing your whole body. Maybe you can notice certain parts of your

body, like your face or jaw that have a hard time relaxing. Try to let everything relax as you breathe, and focus on the images that come up during this visualisation exercise.

Imagine that you are walking up some stairs. At the top of the stairs, there is a closed door, and you know that on the other side of the door, there is a safe, calm room that you love. It's where you always go when you feel stressed.

As you open the door, you breathe in and out... the biggest



breaths you have taken all day. You know you are safe in this room and that you can relax. The room is yours – it's where you want it to be, it's how you want it to look, it has all the things you want to be in there.

You walk to the wall in front of you, where there is a big, beautiful curtain. As you breathe in... and out... and in... and out... you draw back the curtain.

On the other side, through a huge floor to ceiling window, you can see all the goings on and happenings in your life and in the world around you.

You walk back, and relax down on to the softest, most comfortable chair or sofa you have ever sat on.

As you breathe in... and out... in... and out... you relax more and more into this soft, comfortable, supportive sofa. You have never felt more comfortable and relaxed.

You feel so relaxed, you are able to observe everything that is going on outside. You see things come by your window... people... cities... schools. You watch and you feel that you can slowly think through whatever it is you need to think through.

You watch the events unfold outside your window and you feel safe and calm inside... knowing that you have the time and the space you need, to think through anything that might be troubling you... and figure out what it is you need to do.

You breathe in and out... in and out. You feel more and more relaxed and your body keeps relaxing into the chair or sofa.

You start to roll your wrists... you roll your ankles... you take a few more deep, slow, long breaths.

And you open your eyes, ready to go back and join the world.



Self-Management *plan*



Consider what signs show that you are becoming stressed.

What am I thinking?

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What am I feeling?

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How am I behaving?

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What do I do that is helpful?

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What do others do that I find helpful?

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What do I do to find unhelpful?

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What do others do that I find unhelpful?

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The FIZZ factor



The fizz factor aims to highlight the physical signs of emotion in your body and what triggers them.

Complete the Fizz factor for yourself.

	SCALE	Signs that I am feeling The Fizz
	1	
	2	
	3	
	4	
	5	
	6	
	7	
	8	
	9	
	10	

STOPP *strategy*

Another strategy you can practice is 'STOPP'

STOPP

Take a breath

Observe

What am I thinking?

What am I reacting to?

What am I feeling in my body?

Pull Back

Put in some perspective

See the bigger picture

Is this fact or opinion?

How would someone else see this?

Practise what works

What is the best thing to do for me,
for others, for the situation?



Stress bucket



Complete your own stress bucket. Identify the things that cause you stress (*the clouds*) and the things you do to manage them (*the fresh springs*).

Also consider:

- What size and shape is your stress bucket?
- How full is it?
- What are the signs that your bucket is getting too full?
- Are all of your 'fresh springs' working?
- Do you turn to unhealthy ways to release stress and what does this look like?

Normal

Relaxed

Revision planner



Make a plan of how you are going to spend your time. Remember to include brakes. They are important.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							



Create your own Exam Buddy app

Have a go at designing an Exam Buddy app. First think about the following to help with the content for your app:

Why do exams cause stress?

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How could you tell if you or a friend is experiencing stress?

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What would you like to know about dealing with exam stress?

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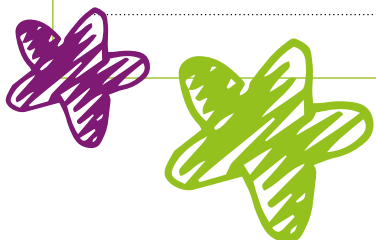
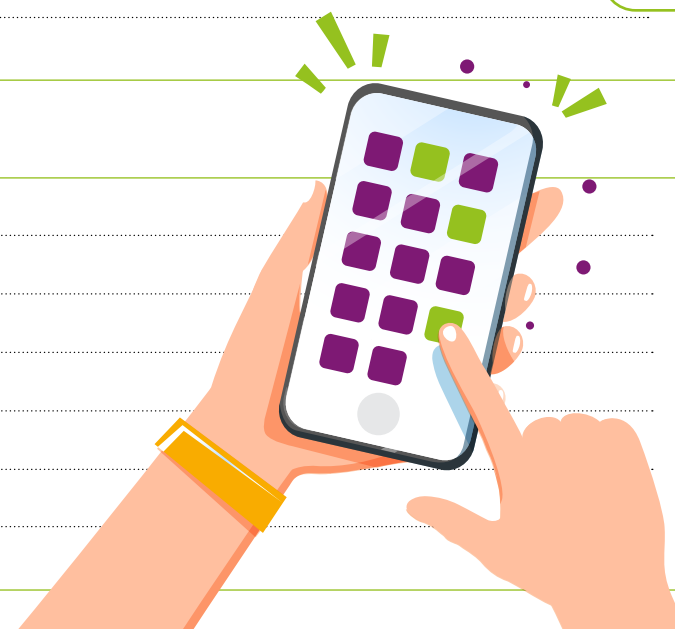
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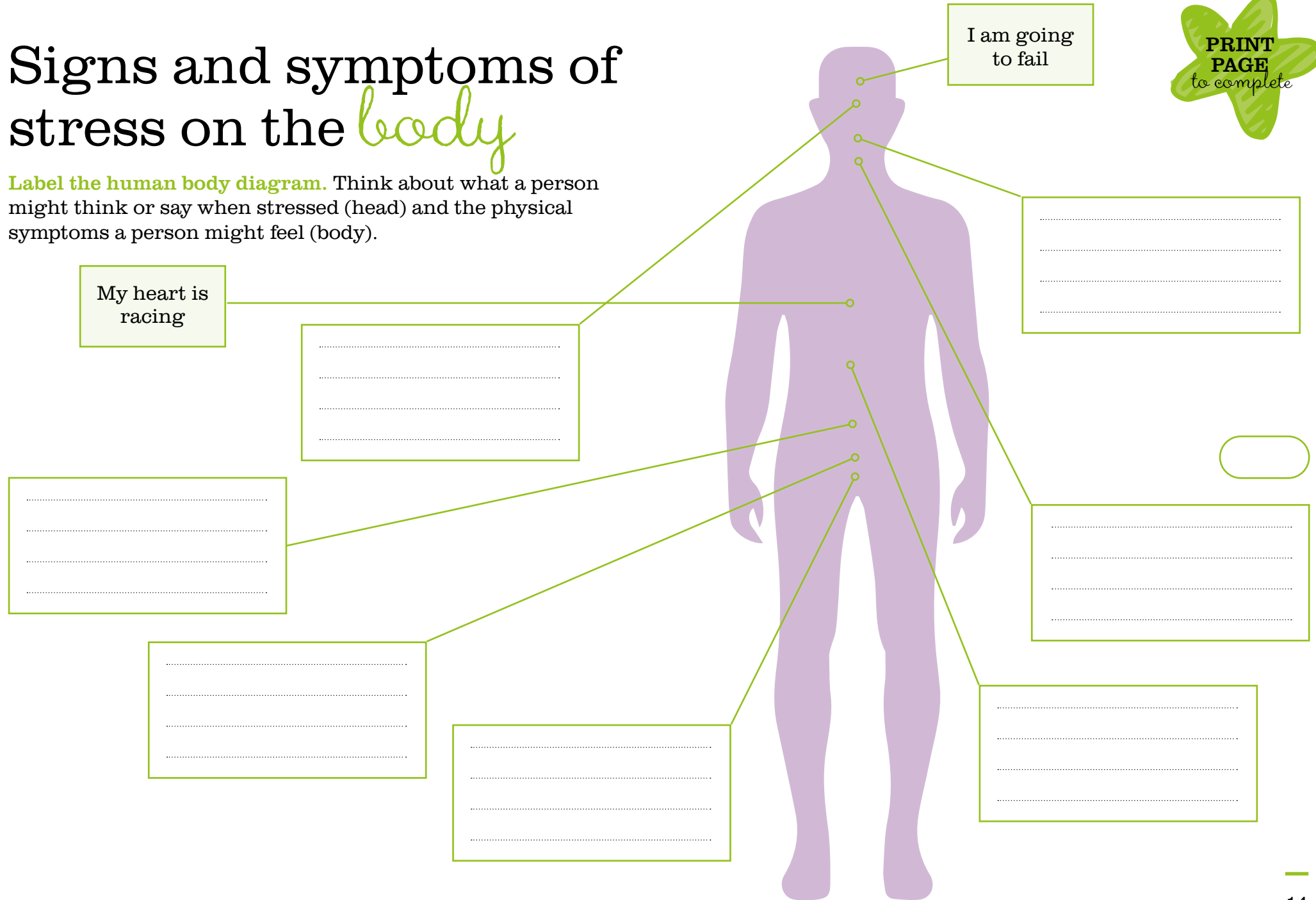
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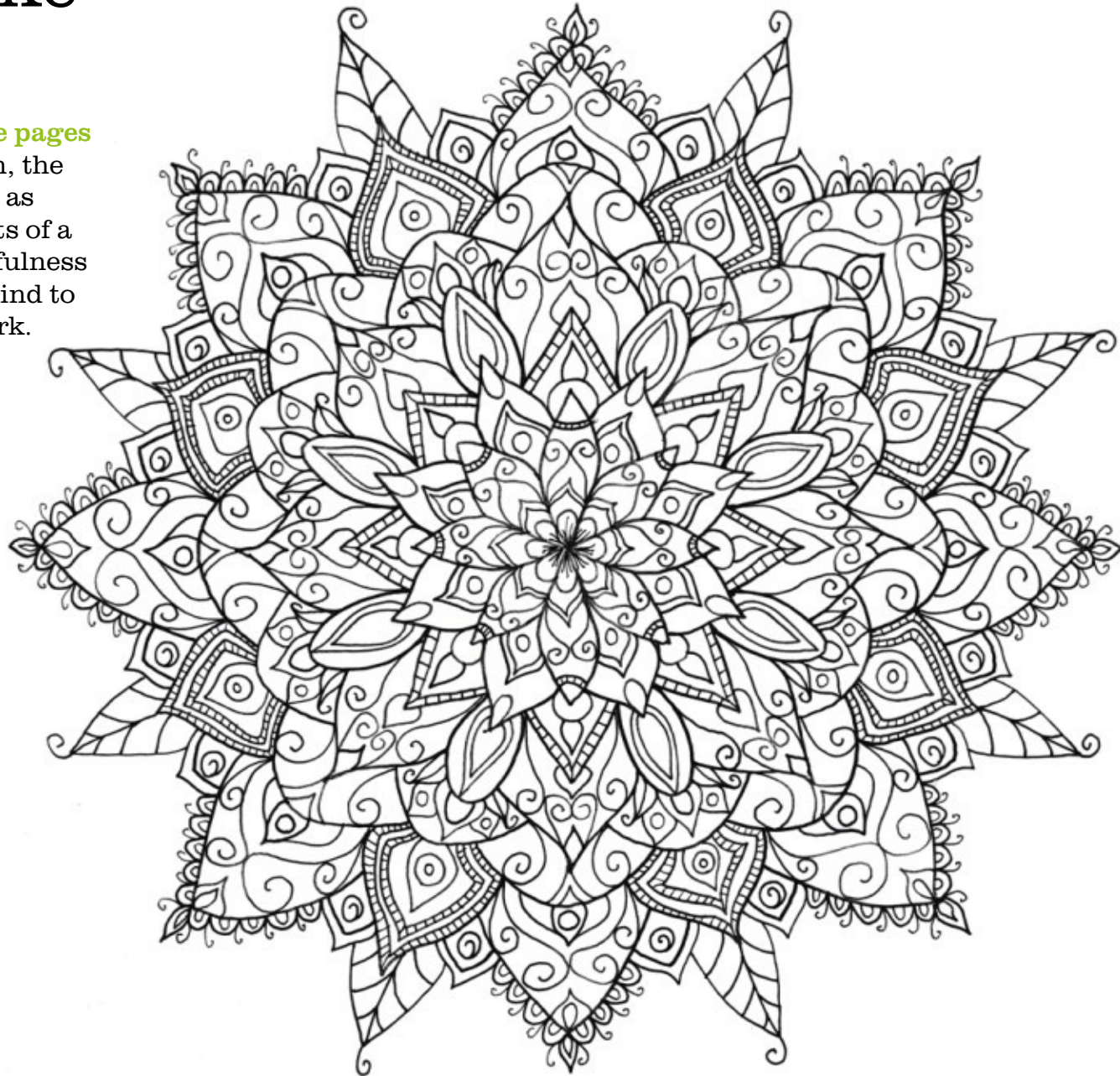
Signs and symptoms of stress on the *body*

Label the human body diagram. Think about what a person might think or say when stressed (head) and the physical symptoms a person might feel (body).



Colour to take time out

Spend some time colouring in these pages to relax the fear center of your brain, the amygdala. It induces the same state as meditating by reducing the thoughts of a restless mind. This generates mindfulness and quietness, which allows your mind to get some rest after a long day at work.



PRINT
PAGE
to complete



Find some *positive* affirmations

Circle how many of these activities you have done today?

My day 2021

Enjoyed your favourite food	Read a book	Achieved a new goal	Laughed
Spent 15 minutes outside	Listened to your favourite song	Achieved a new goal	Done a good deed for someone else
Drank plenty of water	Had a good night's sleep	Spent time off your phone / computer	Smiled
Spoken to friends or family	Helped another person	Cleaned something	Taken time out
Completed a puzzle	Took a shower or bath	Tried a mindfulness activity	Cooked a new meal

Five apps for *beating* exam stress

Look up these apps. They could be useful in helping support you with more techniques.



My Study Life

This app is like a digital diary, and it's designed to help you keep on top of due dates and study schedules. It can be used to track deadlines: just input an assignment name and the date that it's due, and the app will remind you as often as you like.



ReachOut Breathe

The ReachOut Breathe app helps you to slow and maintain your breathing, while also measuring your heart rate. As a result, it's not only good for exam time; it's useful for dealing with stress in general.



Habitbull

A motivational app, that allows you to track and input good habits, even giving you a score based on how well you're keeping up with routines. It's great for noticing patterns in your behaviour, too: maybe there are specific days when you're more alert than others, or maybe you tend to work better on the weekends rather than on school nights.



Recharge

The app helps track your sleep schedule, gives you some activities to do in the morning to get the blood pumping, allows you to track your mood, and – maybe best of all – comes with a super-loud, super-effective wake-up alarm.

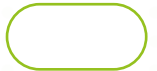


Pause

Mindfulness – an anxiety-calming skill that helps you monitor worried thoughts – is a hard thing to master.

Practicing mindfulness doesn't have to be boring. Pause has been designed to turn mindfulness into a kind of game. Pause gets you to focus on small blobs as they fly across the screen while calming music plays.

tips to deal with stress
and burn out



Before an exam checklist



Use this checklist before an exam to help you prepare and be at your best!

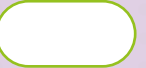


- Have a good breakfast, if you can
- Make sure you know where the exam is being held and what time it starts. Give yourself plenty of time to get there.
- Take all the equipment you need for each exam, including extra pens and pencils.
- Take in a bottle of water and tissues.
- Go to the loo beforehand!



If you're feel really anxious, breathe slowly and deeply while waiting for the exam to start.

- Read the instructions before starting the exam.
- Ask the teacher or exam supervisor if anything is unclear.
- Read through all the questions before starting writing, and make sure you are clear how many questions you are required to answer.
- If there is a choice, start by answering the question you feel you can answer best.
- If you are stuck on a question, go on to the next. You can always come back to it later. If you are really stuck, try to have an intelligent guess anyway.
- Leave time to read through and check your answers before the exam finishes.
- Plan how much time you'll need for each question.



... and Relax

... **you're exam is now over!** Pat yourself on the back – it's time to relax and forget about them.

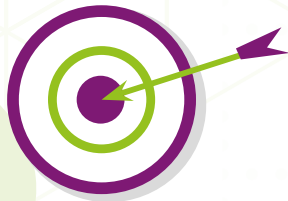
Try to remember...

there's life beyond exam results. Disappointing grades are not the end of the world, even if it does feel that way at the time. You might decide to resit, and there will always be lots of other opportunities to express yourself and succeed later on in life.



If you have the feeling that you have not done as well as you may have hoped, **remember...**

You gave it your best shot!



You worked hard to prepare for your exams, and **you have gained study skills** that will stay with you forever. These skills will be called upon time and time again throughout your life.



‘What success really looks like is a lot of ups and downs, as opposed to the straight line we all imagine. Without failure we cannot grow, and without failure there is no success.’

Ulfa, Activist

www.youngminds.org.uk

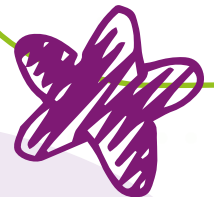
You have **learned how to cope** with a sense or feeling of disappointment.



Even if you scored a low grade or score, **it doesn't mean you're not able to achieve great things.**



Failing an exam **does not mean that you are not clever.**



Life and work experience are also important



Although it might not feel like it now, exam results aren't the only things employers look for



Not everyone processes information in the same way. Some will find academic tests easy and others won't



'I'm not an 'exams' person, I'm a practical person, and there are lots of people like me who can't stand exams but will go far with their practical skills.'

Joel, Activist

www.youngminds.org.uk

Your health is the most important thing. It's a good idea to allow yourself time to relax to make sure you don't get anxious or stressed.



Exam results are not the only measure of success



Exams don't have the power to stop you being who you're going to be



If you are considering re-taking any of your exams again, then a key thing would be to get **feedback and practice to help prepare.**



The fact that you feel stressed is a good thing. It shows that you care. You know that you have worked hard this is the **most important thing!**



There are so many wonderful things about you not determined by exams. **There is a future for you!**



Remember your strengths. You have so many skills and qualities



‘Your mental health is so much more important than how you do in exams, there are always other options if you don’t do as well as you want to’

Alyssa, Service User



Make a list of all the things you want from life which don’t involve exams. **This can help you discover other routes to your goals**



Exam results do not define who you are!

Most importantly remember to **be kind to yourself!**



COVID and exams



Have your exams been affected by the hit of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Many young people have expressed concerns related to their education and exams due to the pandemic.

The most reported worries related to this were:

- Anxiety around taking exams and uncertainty about what will happen to GCSEs and A-Levels next year
- Preparing for mock exams and what impact that will have on their grades
- Concerns about how they would catch up on missed work or an increase in the workload since being back at school
- Pressure to do well in exams or fears that they won't do well

Please use the websites links below for further support during this stressful period:

youngminds.org.uk

www.samaritans.org

www.rethink.org

www.nhs.uk

www.childline.org.uk

www.mind.org.uk

www.themix.org.uk



For further help and information contact:

MyTime Cumbria on

01539 742626

Stricklandgate House,
92 Stricklandgate, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 4PU

**Believe in
children
Barnardo's**

