

Managing Stress Workbook

'It's not the load that breaks you down, it's the way you carry it' - Lou Holtz

The stress response is an inbuilt system within us that is designed to keep us safe from dangers in our environment. It creates the state in our body to allow us to save ourselves from a dangerous situation.

In the modern world the stress response is no longer required to keep us safe from things like wild animals but the system remains the same.

This means that the stresses that exist in our daily life are creating the same physical reaction within us as if we were having to fight or run for our lives.

Common modern day stressors are things like deadlines, problems at work, too many things to do, putting pressure on yourself, not feeling good enough, something on Facebook etc.

Many people feel the stresses build up as the day goes on but then go home and dwell on what has happened which then creates more stress on the body. You then get up the next day, full of stress and expecting negative things to happen. This creates yet more stress and sets you up for what is likely to be another stressful day and the cycle continues.

We have to learn how to intervene in the stress cycle and then purposefully choose to do it.

There are 5 steps to effectively managing your stress:

Step 1 - Identify what is happening

Step 2 - Turn on the relaxation response

Step 3 - Reassess

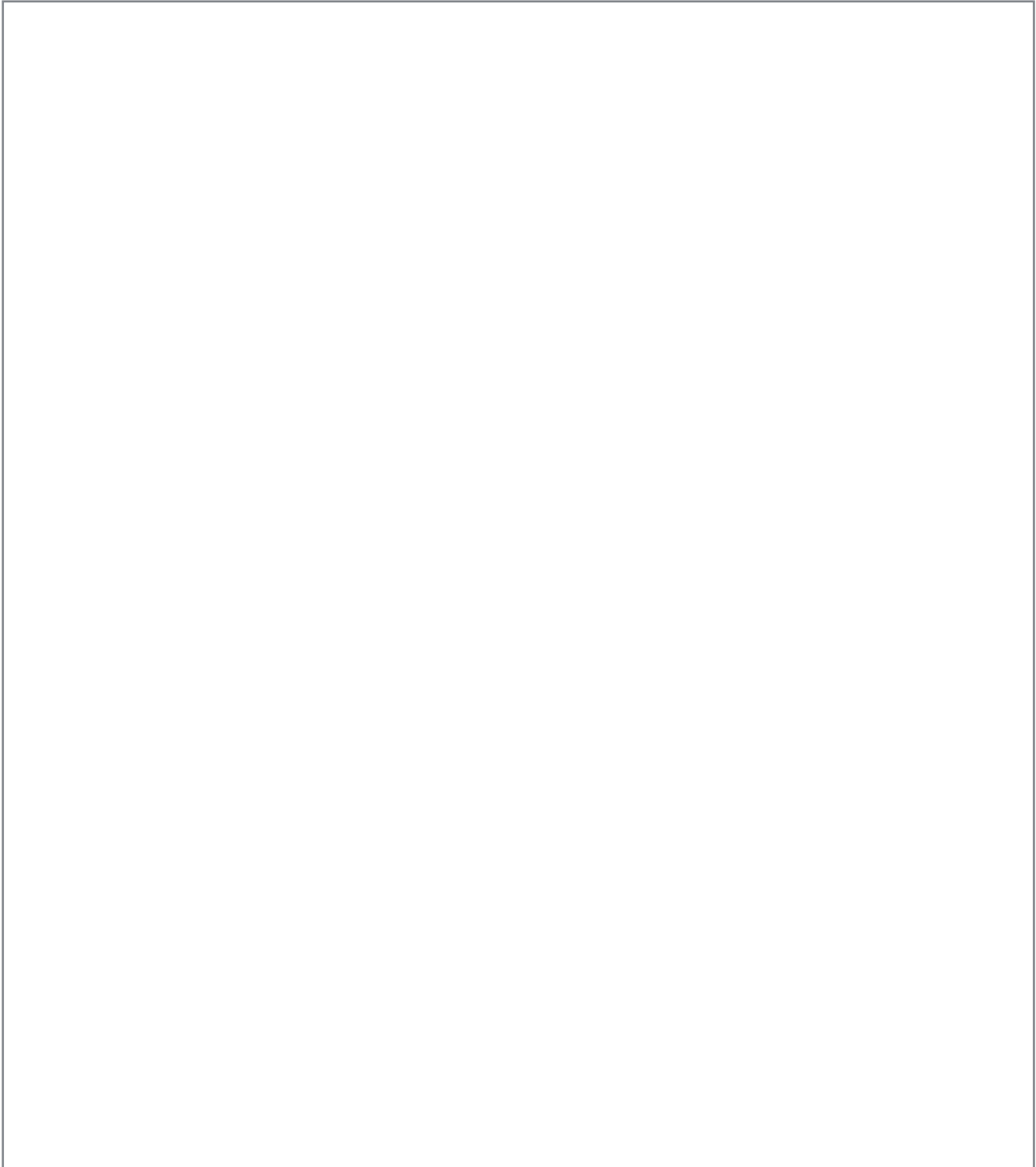
Step 4 - Get your mindset in order

Step 5 - Work on prevention

'If you don't like something change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude to it' - Maya Angelou

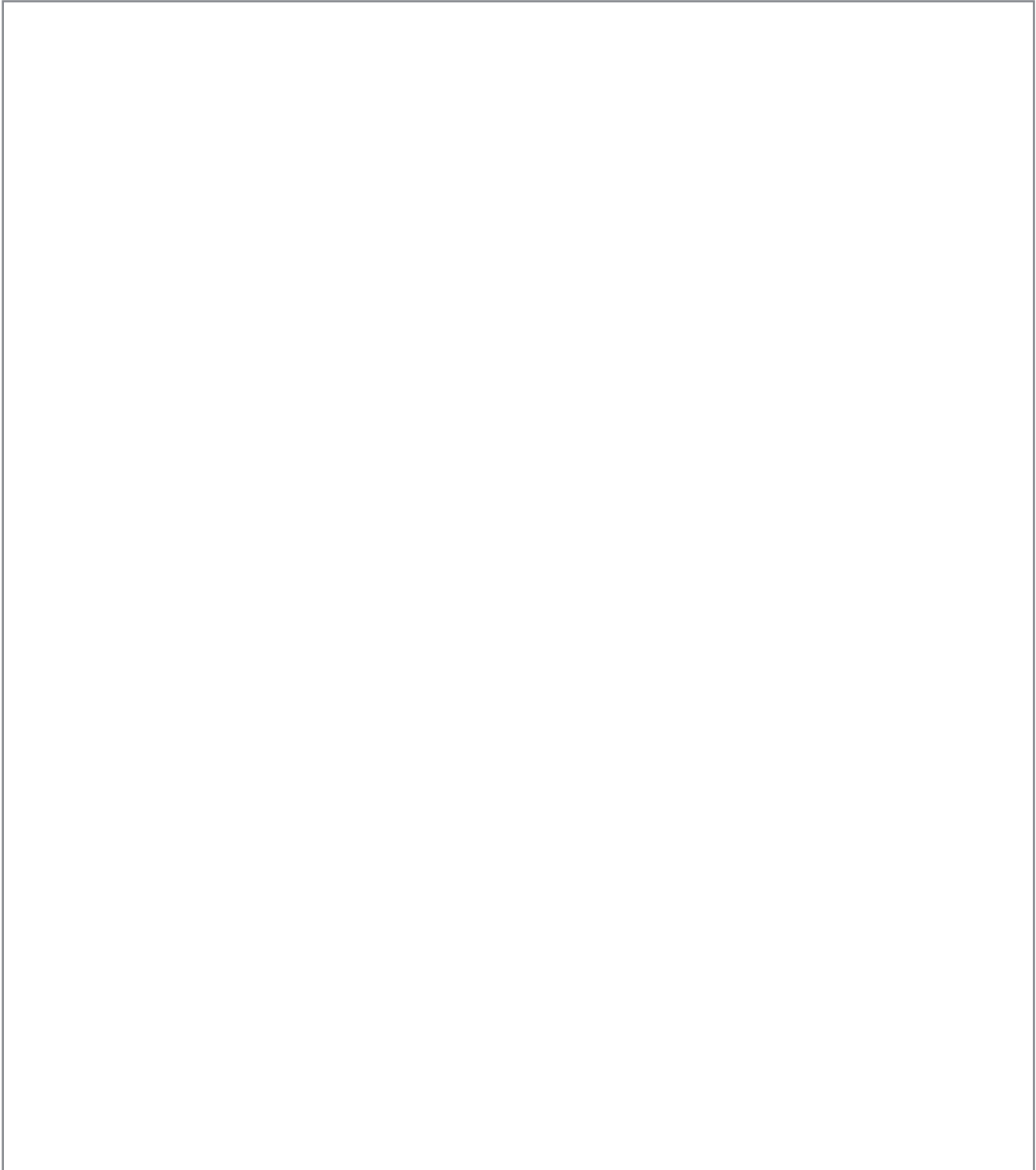
Step 1 - Identify what is happening

Have a think about the things you do on a daily or weekly basis.
What things regularly contribute to your stress levels?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their answers to the questions above.

'Dear stress, let's break up'

Now use this page to do a brain dump of everything that is on your mind the moment. Don't feel that you need to edit any of it - just keep writing things down until you feel you have emptied the contents of your mind onto the page.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a brain dump of thoughts.

Remember that all the things you have written down in step one have turned on your stress response and you are coping with the physical and mental effects of this.

'Stress management is about changing the stressful situation when you can, change your reaction when you cant, taking care of yourself and making time for rest and relaxation'

Step 2 - Turn on the relaxation response

Now it's time to leave all of the above to one side for a while and instead of focusing on the problem, focus on switching on your relaxation response which will then take over from the stress response.

When we focus on relaxation, our adrenalin reduces and all the symptoms of stress begin to reduce until they are no longer a problem.

One of the most effective ways to switch on the relaxation response is through breathing - when you choose to control your breath you are sending a signal to your brain that you are safe and everything is ok.

A simple breath technique

Don't worry if this feels difficult at first. You might have thoughts running around telling you that you are not doing it right. Just recognise those thoughts and carry on anyway. The more you practice breathing this way, the easier it will become.

Place one hand on your chest and the other on your stomach.
Breathe in - you are aiming for the hand on your stomach to be pushed out and the hand on your chest should not move.
Breathe out - you are aiming for the hand on your stomach to pull in and the hand on your chest should not move.

Try taking the in breath in through your nose and breathing out slowly through your mouth through pursed lips.

Once you have got the rhythm of breathing in this way try thinking '1' as you breathe in, then 'relax' as you breath out. '2' as you breathe in, 'relax' as you breathe out and so forth up to 10.

'It's all about finding the calm in the chaos' - Donna Karan

Other ways of turning on the relaxation response include

- * Tensing and relaxing muscles or focusing on each part of your body at a time and consciously relaxing the muscles there
- * Listening to a guided visualisation
- * Practicing meditation or mindfulness
- * Using an affirmation such as 'I am in control'

The things that work for me are...

'Give your stress wings and let it fly away'

Step 3 - Reassess

Now you will have a clearer head and an ability to get a greater perspective on your situation.

Go back and look at what you wrote down in step 1.

Take 3 different coloured pens and identify the following:

- * In one colour, what things could you get rid of to reduce your stress? (For example, a project that is not urgent or a commitment you don't enjoy).
- * In another colour, what things could you change to reduce your stress? (For example, if you have been preparing a fresh meal every night leaving you little time in the evening, try making bigger portions one night to eat the leftovers another night thereby creating more time one evening).

- * In the third colour, what things do you need to change your mindset on in order to reduce your stress? (For example, you can't do anything about getting stuck in traffic so changing your mindset is the only thing you can do to reduce your stress levels. Stresses created by your own thoughts and beliefs would also benefit from changes in mindset).

Then think about:

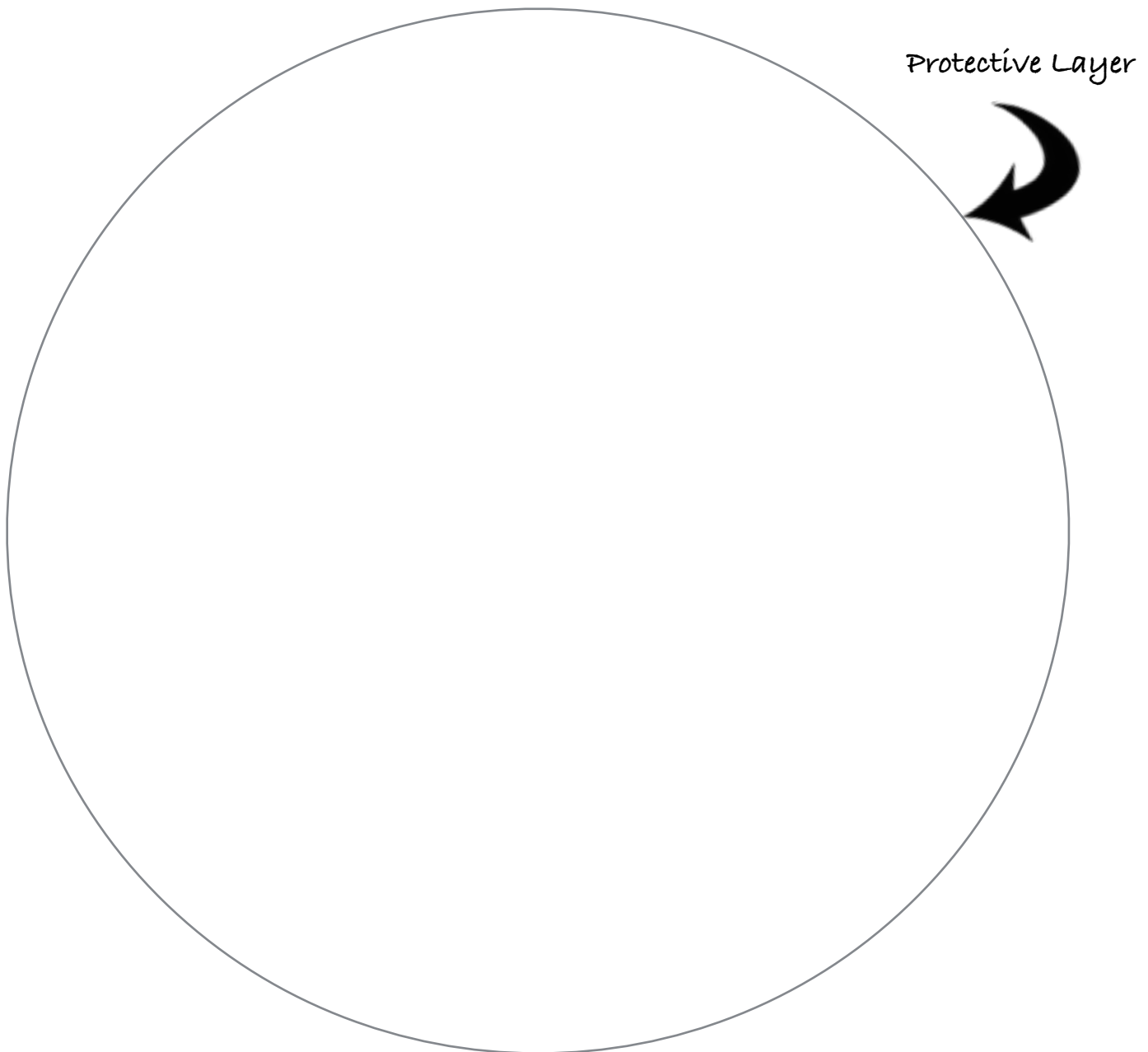
- * Are there any tasks you need to prioritise above others?
- * How can you break down tasks into smaller chunks to make them more manageable?
- * If I could make my life look easy, what would be different?

Make some notes here. The more organised and realistic you can be about what you have to do, the more relaxed you will feel about it.

'Stop worrying about the potholes in the road and enjoy the journey'

Step 4 - Get your mindset in order

Think about what your priorities are (eg, time with children, travel, to spend time on hobbies) and how you want to feel in your life? Write it all down in the circle surrounded by the protective layer. These are the most important things that should be protected against the stresses of every day life. Very few things are important enough to interfere with these priorities. All stresses, including your own unhelpful thoughts should remain outside your protective layer. It is important to uphold this mindset. Use the visualisation audio to help you with this.



'The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another' - William James

Step 5 - Work on prevention

It is really important to take care of yourself in order to create resilience against stress.

Work on:

- * Maintaining a good level of self care (go back to the materials on self care)
- * Uphold the strong mindset of not allowing unimportant things to penetrate your priorities
- * Maintain an awareness of your thoughts in order to recognise them as just thoughts - they cant take control of you unless you let them (go back to the materials on mindfulness)
- * Try to be realistic in your expectations of yourself and be kind to yourself - you deserve it!
- * Plan ahead on how to cope with stressors:

Trigger	Planned Behaviour
eg, getting stuck in traffic	Use as an opportunity to breathe deeply and enjoy the peace.

'I am no longer afraid of the storms as I am learning how to sail my ship'
- Louisa May Alcott