

# All Be Alright

**A compilation of mental well-being stories  
for youths, by youths**

# Foreword

The pandemic has brought to the fore concerns about our nation's mental health and wellness. The National Council of Social Service (NCSS) conducted a dipstick study on the impact of COVID-19 on the general population from April 2020 to May 2021. The study found that people experienced more psychological distress during the Circuit Breaker period. A National Youth Council survey conducted last year also found mental health to be a consistent challenge that youths face since the onset of the pandemic.

It has not been an easy period for everyone, from the young to the seniors among us. For some, they faced job uncertainties, sudden changes to lifestyle and habits and strained relationships. For others, they had their dreams derailed, have concerns about their future, or faced an existential crisis. All these issues could bring about negative feelings which are exacerbated by the isolating effects of Covid-19.

However, many have also risen to the challenge, overcoming negative thoughts, and encouraging themselves to make the best out of the situation and develop the grit to carry on. *Project: It'll be Alright* was borne out of a desire to collate stories of hope and resilience, in particular from our youths in school or our young people who were just going into the workforce. We recognize that adulthood brings challenges, some unique to the times, and that if we want to help our young, we need stories that they can relate to.

*Project: It'll be Alright* hopes to bring together these stories from youths, for youths so that they can learn from each other and help society understand them better. These stories are also important as they are a channel for those amongst us with mental health struggles to be seen, heard and understood. This will, in turn, help pave the way for a society that is accepting and compassionate towards those struggling with mental health conditions in our society.

*I hope that our readers will be able to relate to some of the experiences shared and realise that you are not alone in your struggles. There are also help channels available to those of us who want to learn more about mental health issues or who want to seek help.*

*Finally to those who have a story to share, please reach out to the Project: It'll Be Alright team. We all can draw strength from the journeys of others and know that there are people who care and who want to help.*

Thank you

*Sun Xueling*

Minister of State  
Ministry of Education  
Ministry of Social and Family Development  
Advisor and Mentor to *Project: It'll be Alright*



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# About

Mental health issues are often considered taboo topics within households, swept under the table during meetings and hidden beneath seemingly genuine smiles.

*Project: It'll Be Alright* is a volunteer group made up of youths from all walks of life. We aim to break down societal stigmas and offer opportunities to understand mental health through a compilation of stories in an e-book presenting the lived experiences of the youths of today.

The project is part of the Youth Mental Well-being Network, which is supported by the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), Ministry of Health (MOH), and Ministry of Education (MOE).

**Disclaimer:**

The stories in this e-book have been edited for clarity.

# Building Our Resilience to Overcome

Life is full of opportunities and possibilities. As we navigate and find our own path in life, there are times when things go wonderfully as planned. There are other times when we encounter setbacks, challenges, failures and disappointments. When things get tough, it is easy to feel disheartened and lose hope in the possibility that things could get better.

Stories of resilience help to bring light to those who are still going through a dark tunnel and let them know that eventually, It'll Be Alright. Within all of us are strengths that we have built up over the years - strengths that we can tap on to overcome our current difficulties. These strengths take the form of values, beliefs and attitudes (I Am), skills and strategies (I Can), and the caring and supportive environment (I Have), which prepare us to withstand, adapt and progress in the face of adversities. This strength-based approach to resilience building was first pioneered by Dr Edith Grotberg, a psychologist and researcher on promoting resilience in children. It has been adapted for use by Singapore's Ministry of Education in the Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) curriculum, to build resilience among our children and youths.

## Our values, beliefs & attitudes

### I Am

- grateful
- confident in myself
- learning from failure
- improving with practice
- hopeful for the future
- living out my values

## Our skills & strategies

### I Can

- think flexibly
- problem-solve
- manage my emotions
- cope positively
- seek help

## Care and support from trusted adults & peers

### I Have

- parents/ family/caregivers
- teachers
- school counsellors
- friends

As you read the stories of resilience in this e-book, take a moment to reflect more deeply on the ones that resonated with you using the following questions.

- What values, beliefs and positive attitudes have helped you overcome your past challenges?
- What are the helpful strategies or skills you have used in your past to resolve problems?
- How did you tap on your available resources (e.g. family, teachers, school counsellors and friends) for help, support and encouragement?
- What is something new you would like to try, to help you deal with future challenges?

Some difficulties are beyond our ability to resolve alone. Help-seeking is one of the key resilience skills. It takes tremendous courage to open up and ask for support. If you find yourself in need of a listening ear, you may find the following resources useful:

<p><b>E-Counselling Centre (eC2)</b></p>	<p>eC2 is an online counselling service by Fei Yue Community Services for youth who require mental wellness support. You can talk to a trained counsellor about the issues you are facing, right where you are. Find out more: <a href="http://www.ec2.sg">www.ec2.sg</a> [Monday to Friday (Excluding Public Holidays): 1000 – 1200 &amp; 1400 – 1700]</p>
<p><b>Help123 Cyber Wellness Hotline</b></p>	<p>Help123 is a service for youth to reach out to someone for cyber wellness issues (from cyber bullying to having your social media account hacked or having an addiction to the Internet). Find out more: <a href="http://www.help123.sg">www.help123.sg</a> Call: 1800 6123 123 [Monday to Friday (Excluding Public Holidays): 0900 – 1800]</p>
<p><b>Mindline.sg</b></p>	<p>Mindline.sg is an online platform that provides tools, tips and resources to help you manage your health and well-being. Explore and find out how you can improve your mental well-being and support your friends too. Find out more: <a href="http://www.mindline.sg">www.mindline.sg</a></p>
<p><b>Samaritans of Singapore (SOS)</b></p>	<p>SOS provides round the clock emotional support for those in distress, thinking of suicide or affected by suicide. This service is manned by trained volunteers. Call: 1-767 (24-hour helpline)</p> <p>There is also a text-based service that provides emotional support for those in distress via Facebook Messenger. Care Text Messenger (Live Chat): <a href="http://www.sos.org.sg">www.sos.org.sg</a> [Monday to Thursday: 1800 – 0600 and Friday: 1800 – 2359]</p> <p>For those who prefer to write, here is an alternative avenue of emotional support. Response time for this service is within 48 hours, excluding weekends and public holidays. CAREmail: <a href="mailto:pat@sos.org.sg">pat@sos.org.sg</a></p>
<p><b>TOUCHline</b></p>	<p>TOUCHline is a helpline to provide youths with emotional support and practical advice. Call: 1800 377 2252 [Monday to Friday (Excluding Public Holidays): 0900 – 1800]</p>
<p><b>Youth Mental Well-being Network</b></p>	<p>The Youth Mental Well-being Network, supported by Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF), Ministry of Health (MOH) and Ministry of Education (MOE), was set up for individuals who are passionate about supporting youth mental well-being to work together to drive change in this area. Find out more: <a href="http://www.reach.gov.sg/youth-mental-well-being">www.reach.gov.sg/youth-mental-well-being</a></p> <p>Here is an abbreviated list of mental well-being resources. <a href="http://go.gov.sg/ywmwn-mental-well-being-resources">go.gov.sg/ywmwn-mental-well-being-resources</a></p>

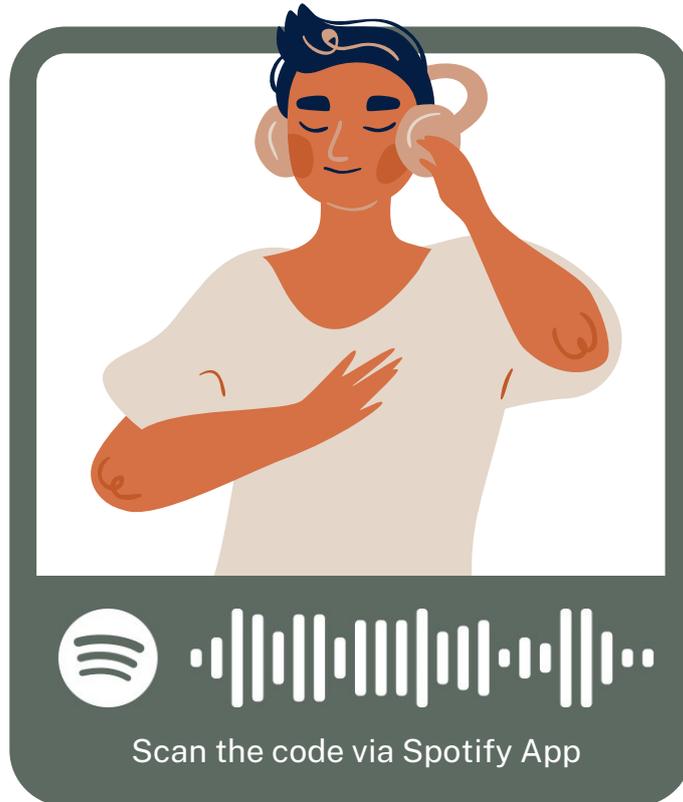




# *Education*



# Fight Song



## Fight Song

Rachhl Platten



0:00

-3:24



*When all the odds seem to be against you, remember that you can always count on your friends and family who will be behind you, giving you support and comfort.*

*I will not forget my teachers, who were always there to help when I struggled academically or in other aspects.*



*I may still feel stressed at times but I have learned much better ways to cope with it*

As a youth and a student, we may seem to find ourselves struggling with our mental health frequently. Personally, my studies had played a big role in the deterioration of my mental health. The fear of failing and thoughts of not being good enough and being a disappointment ran through my mind constantly.

Especially in polytechnic where consistency is important in achieving good grades, this added to my stress. Back when I struggled, I picked up unhealthy habits to escape my reality. I would smoke a pack of cigarettes daily just to take my mind off my troubles. Despite being well aware of the harmful effects of smoking, I still did it because it was the only coping mechanism that could bring me short-term relief. I was emotionally and mentally numb with school, and additional relationship problems had added on to the burden I was shouldering.

After a while, I decided that I needed to put a stop to this cycle. I did not want to overthink anymore. I did not want to be an emotional wreck among my friends. I was tired of my own self-destructive behaviour. So, I decided to put in effort into improving myself and I started working. I channelled my energy into activities that benefited me - such as working out and reading whenever I needed to get my mind off negative thoughts. Fortunately, after half a year, I am as happy as I can be. I may still feel stressed at times but I have learned much better ways to cope with it. At the end of the day, I know that it will always get better.

**Anonymous, 20, Student**



# *You are your only competition*

Looking back, I guess it all started in Junior College (JC) after my J1 promotional examination. I remembered studying around 10-12 hours every day to be promoted to my second year. Once the holidays started, I didn't spend much time studying because I felt like I deserved and needed the break. But as I entered J2, I began to lose momentum. I was still fixated by the fact that I had the luxury of time and at the same time, I felt that a month's break was not enough.

I did the bare minimum at the start of J2 and started to study harder only when my March exams were nearing. Even so, I did not feel motivated and studying became a repetitive process. I kept pushing through, but I soon realised that I was just studying for the sake of it and was not retaining any of the knowledge from my study sessions. I eventually did not attain good grades and at this point, I felt emotionally exhausted. Ever since, I told myself I needed to clock in more hours of studying during the holidays as we were only about 8 months away from GCE 'A' levels. However, every time I decided to pick up my pen to do some revision, it just didn't feel right. Nothing was going into my brain, I felt like I wasn't in the right state of mind and I constantly felt tired. Instead of studying, I ended up not doing anything for an entire week during the holidays. I thought I needed a full week of break to regain my motivation and get back on track, but I was wrong. For some reason, I felt worse. I started to panic as I felt guilty for not having achieved anything the entire week. I started to study at all hours of the day and slept for only 3 hours each night to make up for lost time.

I began to question if I was on the verge of a burnout. I searched up on the symptoms, did some research on it and established that I was experiencing emotional exhaustion. At first, I refused to admit this as I've always been motivated in my studies and would do whatever it took to succeed. But after looking at my recent grades, I acknowledged the fact that I was experiencing burnout. With 5 months to 'A' levels, I knew I wanted to overcome this the soonest. I had many hurdles along the way and experienced moments where I felt stagnated as my classmates were swiftly moving ahead.

"You are your only competition" - I told myself to stop comparing myself to other classmates and that I had to take things at my own pace. The feeling of relief I had when I handed in the last paper for 'A' levels was indescribable. I knew that I had done the best I could and that even though it wasn't an easy journey, I was proud of how far I've come. I'm glad that I didn't give up on myself. I am thankful for the support of my friends who never failed to answer my school-related queries and my family, who always assured me and never contributed to my stress.

While my old self would have been devastated with my grades, my current self is proud of the journey I had taken to get me to where I am now. 2020 felt horrible, so for 2021, I was determined to treat myself better. I now feel more alive, motivated, and most importantly, happier. I managed to get into the university course that I aimed for, I got my driving license and I can't wait to get started in university. If 2020 was a year of self-doubt, 2021 is a year of self-care & self-love.

***Anonymous, 18, JC Student***





## *The most challenging step that I had to take though, was acknowledging that I needed help*

Imagine yourself in the middle of the big ocean. The water is freezing and there is nothing as far as the eye can see, no landmarks, no ships, no black shapes, nothing. You time your breaths with each wave crashing over you. You see the impending wave, take a deep breath and hold it while the wave crashes over you. You resurface and gasp for breath.

The cycle repeats.

This is a metaphor I often use when describing how panic attacks felt when I was in university - pretty agonising. To cope with these attacks, I sought help and received counselling from the school and this has helped me in my recovery journey. At first, I was utterly clueless, not knowing why I was experiencing them nor how to go about dealing with them. I just "sucked it up" and continued on, finding temporary coping mechanisms such as distracting myself using social media (YouTube) and alcohol.

The most challenging step that I had to take though, was acknowledging that I needed help. Just like how we visit a doctor for a lump in our throat, we visit a counsellor for this rock in our heart. The first time a friend suggested visiting a counsellor, I resisted vehemently. It did not take long to realise that I had done all I could to figure out the nature and reasons for the panic attacks, but had made no headway into coping with it. And so, I saw a counsellor, and it was the best step to take for my personal journey.

Since then, I have grown as a person, a friend and a daughter. I would definitely not be who I am today without that experience. For anybody still struggling through this, I encourage you to seek help. Just try it out! And always know that you are not alone.

**Zheng Yi, 25, Civil Servant**



## *If I can change for the better, anyone can!*

At one point of my life, I was under probation for gang-related offences and my future was under a very dark cloud. However, in a few years; I embarked on a diploma course in one of the polytechnics and captained the triumphant SINDA Lions football team.

I was initially treated as if I was too young to make decisions for myself and it made me feel small, but it was also an impetus for me to prove myself to everyone. Fortunately, my family never gave up on me, as such I changed my ways, and started to make amends for everything I've put them through during my turbulent times.

Determined to change, I turned to SINDA Lions and found not just solace in football, but empowerment. I was grateful for the opportunity to earn my team's respect. They did not distant themselves as if I was a bad influence but kept me occupied so I wouldn't revert to my old ways. When I was appointed as captain, I was reluctant at first but eventually discovered leadership qualities and strength within which helped me lead the team to two consecutive youth league championships.

Gradually I was spurred to do well in ITE and improved my GPA from 2.4 to 3.6. It seemed ridiculous at first for a NITEC student to try to get into a polytechnic, but once I realised it was possible, I worked hard and had my friends and lecturers helping me. If I can change for the better, anyone can!

**Mohd Haashrol, 24, Polytechnic Student**



# 4 tips to boost your **MENTAL WELL-BEING**

🔍 Start your day with your favorite drink

🔍 Do something you're good at

🔍 Give something to someone you love

🔍 Hang out with a funny friend



*Growing and getting out of a dark place  
requires not just support, but your own  
willingness to be supported as well*

I went overseas and lived alone when I was 17 and being in an international community, it took me very long to adapt to the culture and environment. I struggled with finding my identity as a young Asian woman in America and I questioned my own values for a long time before finding my voice.

There were many people I confided in and nothing seemed to help until I realised that even though I was reaching out to others for help, I was not mentally prepared in allowing myself to be helped.

Growing and getting out of a dark place requires not just support, but your own willingness to be supported as well. I had to take more time for myself to understand what I needed, what helped me, before reaching out to my peers. Sometimes, it is useful to evaluate and reflect so that the process of growing and overcoming can be smoother. It's never easy to be honest with yourself but talking to your friends and loved ones can help.

**Anonymous, 21, University Student**





## *No Perfect Scenario*

There were lots of ups and downs in my academic journey - I went from being one of the lowest PSLE scorers in Singapore, to becoming the first in my polytechnic batch to win the Lee Hsien Loong Interactive Digital Media Smart Nation Award.

During my secondary school days, I often found myself in gang fights. However, my time in ITE was a turning point in my life. I found a group of friends who shared a similar goal of getting a diploma and we pushed each other to work hard. There were times I broke down from stress and societal pressures.

When my parents did not share my passion for design, and wanted me to get a public sector job, I did not give up and continued pursuing my passion. I eventually went to Nanyang Polytechnic and then to LASALLE, where I obtained a degree in design communications.

There are a couple of times I wondered why I had to go through this long journey, why didn't I study harder and follow the system. But there is no perfect scenario. I might have fallen out of this system and tested another kind of system. I definitely have had regrets, but I moved on. If I did not go through this, I won't be where I am today.

***Jerome Yap, 30, Senior Creative***



## *You're better than what you think you are*

During the 'A' Levels period, it was extremely stressful and it felt like it was never going to end. While I was pushing myself to do my best, I also realised that it was important to recognize my limits too - this helped me to find that delicate balance.

Planning will help. While striving for consistency, do not forget to also listen to your mind and your body. Remember, as long as you are moving every day, you are still doing something.

***Anonymous, 22, University Student***







## *The most impressionable memory in Primary One was Art lesson*

Perhaps you recall a time when a teacher asked you to draw your ambition with crayons on an A3 drawing block with the prompt “When I grow up, I want to be ...”. Most of my peers would end up with illustrations of lawyers, doctors, teachers, pilots, firemen, and policemen. Maybe the odd astronaut or soldier. My teacher was flabbergasted when she saw my caricature of a chicken rice shop uncle — replete with the prototypical “Good Morning” towel wrapped around his neck. I genuinely thought being a chicken rice seller was perfectly acceptable in my world.

Fast forward six years, it wasn’t surprising that I ended up in the Normal Technical stream in secondary school with a dismal 110 T-score for my Primary School Leaving Examination. I was devoid of focus, mentorship and purpose, and so my primary school years were a mere blur. A significant portion of each lesson would entail the teacher telling us off. While feeling remorseful, some of us were secretly happy because this meant less homework for us as the teacher would not be able to complete the topic or chapter of the day.

My turning point came when an Express stream friend from my co-curricular activity “challenged” me to pay attention during class. Unwilling to subdue my ego, I took him on. That was my first time paying attention during a Mathematics lesson. The lesson was about the area of circles and I was intrigued by the formula,  $\pi r^2$  because  $\pi$  looked visually foreign. Midway through the lesson, I realised that if I could replace the variables with the right values, the correct answer would follow. After a few more tries, the rare taste of success led me to believe I wasn’t that bad at Mathematics.

Towards the year-end examinations, some friends asked if I could teach them Mathematics given my remarkable academic turnaround for the subject. I explained how I answered each question with considerable effort, and there was a sense of satisfaction when my friends understood what I shared. It was then I thought to myself I would ditch my chicken rice uncle aspirations for teaching.

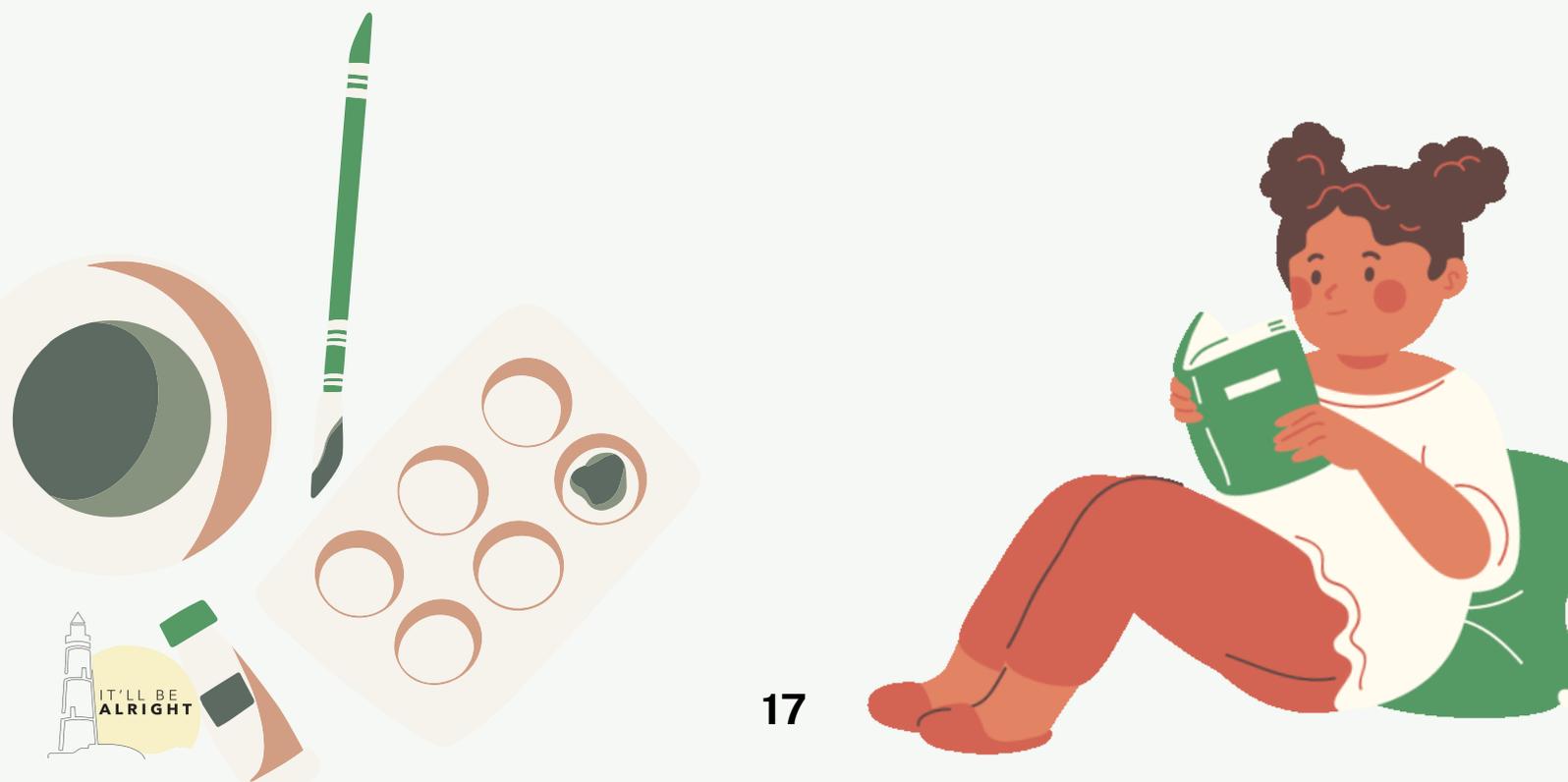
Armed with Yahoo! Search and a 56k dial-up modem, I searched “How to be a teacher in Singapore?”. It didn’t take me too long to be disappointed. I realised that regardless of what tertiary qualifications I attained, I could never be a teacher because I would not have had a GCE O-Level certificate which is a prerequisite for teachers. But with a healthy dose of serendipity — including an appeal to the Education Minister — and opportunity, I managed to complete my 'O' Levels after spending two more years in secondary school.

These experiences made me realise that while most of us were not stellar in our academics and struggled to pass regardless of how hard we tried, there were still things I excelled at such as street soccer or basketball.

Perhaps, we could have excelled in other areas, but most of us lacked access to opportunities. And accessing opportunities is largely contingent on both academic performance (which places you in schools with more resources or even having a higher chance of being selected for programmes to represent the school), and socio-economic capital of his or her family (which means access to a host of resources outside of school).

Most Normal Technical students are unfortunately not endowed with either. As for me, I was fortunate to get into a Junior College and eventually secured a teaching scholarship for my university course in economics. After graduation, I finally got to realise my aspiration of being a teacher and taught in a school for three and half years before transferring to the Education Ministry headquarters to support work areas relating to disadvantaged students. I am only able to be where I am today as an education officer because opportunities were serendipitously presented to me.

***David Hoe, 33, Ex-teacher, who is a current Business Analyst***



# Self-Esteem

*You're on your own journey,  
one that's one-of-a-kind*

It's so easy to look to your left and to your right and allow yourself to feel bad about how you don't measure up to others' greatness. I know it is for me, especially when it comes to my personality, accomplishments, etc.

Eventually I get reminded of this:

You're gifted differently from everyone else, and you're on your own journey, one that's one-of-a-kind. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses, and yours are simply different, not worse. So run in your lane, experience, discover, learn from mistakes and grow, at the unique pace and in the unique way you were meant to.

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*You're a work in progress  
and you always will be,  
and that's okay.*

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**Emma, 18, Student**





## *On My Road to Recovery*

At the age of 15, I suffered from anorexia and bulimia. Many commented on my weight and physique back when I was in secondary school, especially because at that time, I was considered big-sized.

When I was starving myself, not many around me were concerned about the weight loss for they saw it as a normal effect of trying to lose weight. I received compliments on losing weight, with some even asking for tips on how to do so. Nobody questioned my methods of weight loss except for my parents who knew of my fainting spells. Yet, they were unsure of what those symptoms exactly entailed.

It was only when I was 21, after a breakup which was the triggering point, that I sought professional help. My husband, parents and friends have been really supportive of me in this process. My parents are always there for me, always checking that I have taken my medication. My friends keep an eye on me while not being intrusive - making sure that I eat and am not rushing to the toilet after eating. My husband constantly encourages me to go for psychotherapy sessions, accompanying me to each session and ensuring that I make a new appointment if I missed one.

Through the years, I have seen a few therapists and have made amazing progress even though I have relapses at times like postpartum depression. Although I still have the urge to binge or purge at times, I am on my road to recovery.

***Rashyr, 28***





## *I was over 80kg, standing at 160cm, my appearance took a toll on my self-esteem when things took a change*

Back in the days where I was still in primary school, I can vividly remember that I dreaded going to school as I was bullied and unhappy. I did not have many friends back then either.

At over 80kg and standing at 160cm, I was considered obese and reeked of body odour. I often became the subject of ridicule and there was never a day that I was not laughed at. I especially hated height and weight measuring sessions, because those were the times when my classmates were able to see my weight. I was given unpleasant nicknames which included “fattybombom”, “fattie” and more. To make things worse, I also had severe eczema which made me itch really badly - exercising was a chore. This condition resulted in me being excused from taking National Physical Fitness Award (NAPFA) tests, and I eventually gained more weight which made me feel worse. All of these took a hit on my confidence.

Halfway into Secondary 1, things started to change when I began to realise that I could not tolerate this any longer. Albeit it was a really tough time of my life - where people did not believe in me, where fellow schoolmates still laughed at me for attempting to lose weight and even when the condition of my eczema was hard to battle, I told myself that I must not give up. I started to pick up running and reduced my calorie intake. The first 2.4km I ever did was clocked at 17 minutes 49 seconds, double compared to my current record. Even though the entire journey to lose weight had taken me a year, things became better from that point. I made many more friends, developed self-confidence. More importantly, I realised that it is important to never give up. At a healthy weight of 68kg and standing at 163cm, I still work out daily and organise sports events for individuals as I believe that sports brings people together and makes our lives happier.

*“A note to everyone - remember, what we do and say to others may sometimes be really hurtful. While we cannot control what others say, we have control over our own words.”*

With more people coming together, embracing positivity and caring for others, we will be able to make this place a better one for all. I hope my personal life story has helped you to know that there will always be tough times. However, it is through these times that we cannot give up, and at the end of the day, these tough times will turn beautiful. There will be people with you on this, believing in you, and you must also believe in yourself. One day, you will also be that someone who will help others to overcome their hardship.

**Javier, 24, Public Servant**





## *You can be loved, and you are worthy of all the things you have achieved*

I have talked myself out of many situations that I deemed myself unworthy of. For instance, a praise, a promotion, friends and sometimes my family.

I constantly tell myself that someday the other shoe will drop, that I will get 'caught' by these self-doubts and anxieties which may spiral and turn into depression. It worsened when I became a parent and I was afraid that I may pass this on to my daughters, and that they would see the 'fake' within me. I kept it to myself and hid it from my family, until I picked up a book about Imposter Syndrome - I was finally able to name and identify what I have been feeling for years.

A reminder to all of us:

You are not alone, you have worked hard, you can be loved, and you are worthy of all the things you have achieved. Speak to a loved one or a therapist to understand the triggers of your feelings and learn to overcome it. Mindfulness meditation, reading and listening to podcasts have helped me a lot and I hope it does for you too.

**Ling, 34, Brand Manager**



*Let it out, share your problems with  
someone and you'll somewhat feel at peace*

As someone with anxiety disorder and confidence issues, the biggest challenge for me going through my daily life is waking up in the morning and having to go to school. The dread you feel when you wake up and think of everything that could go wrong whether it be the fear of teachers or having a social interaction go wrong in any way, thinking you've failed your parents.

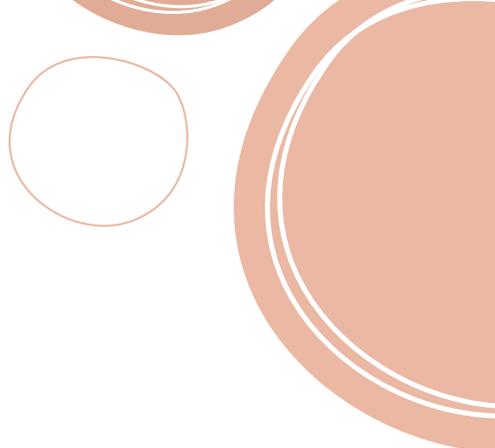
It was my teachers who motivated and vouched for me at my lowest point even though I didn't see anything in me, no purpose or a drive for anything.

Slowly I started to enjoy doing things again like playing video games, geeking out and talking to people I know. Things are a lot better for me now, than when I was in secondary school. Though certain things like the relationship with my parents could be improved, or I am still having a sense of looming dread every day, I can put those things behind me now because even if I still don't know what I want to do in life, I'm fine with that as long as I continue to enjoy life like how I'm doing now. I may be gaming for long hours at a time but at least in return I put the same amount of effort into my current studies and I'm fine with that lifestyle because I'm happy with it.

The most important thing I've learned so far is that bottling things up always ends in the worst possible way. Secondly, there is always someone out there who is trustworthy and is also willing to hear your cries. Let it out, share your problems with someone and you'll feel somewhat at peace.

**Anonymous, 17, Student**





## *What matters most is the process and not the ending*

I've always been a very target-oriented & competitive person so I feel stressed when things are not in place or when I'm not sure what I'm working towards. When I graduated, I felt lost because I felt like I didn't have a target board to aim at. It felt so hard to uncover what are my strengths & weaknesses, to identify my potential.

Over a long period of time, it was very demoralising because you see people take off and yet you're at the same point. The environment sometimes makes you feel like being lost is not ok, it's not normal. It's as if everyone needed to know what they want in life after they graduate.

I overcame it by building a strong support group (friends), they encouraged me to take the first step. Whatever step it was, good or bad, at least try so I can have some sort of progress. I also volunteered to make myself feel more "useful" to society. In fact, volunteering helped me more than the people I have helped.

After much processing, I've learnt to accept the fact that it's ok to feel lost, it's ok to work without an end goal in mind because what matters most is the process and not the ending. I've also learnt to be less hard on myself and am still learning. I need to call myself out when I slip into that mindset - comparing myself with others. It's always easier said than done because sometimes I can't help but make comparisons. It has become a feeling or need.

It is important for me to catch myself while I'm doing it (comparing), so that I can re-frame my thoughts - and remind myself that I only need to focus on my own journey. At the end of the day, everyone is running in their own lane, so the runner gets to decide on his/her pace.

***Anonymous, 26, Search Engine Optimisation Analyst***

# Covid-19

*I had very supportive  
bosses, friends, and family members*

I had started work in the public sector just before the Circuit Breaker commenced. While I felt excited to be embarking on a new chapter in my career, working in this pandemic also meant that I had to adapt to the "new normal" of working.

It was tough not being able to see who your colleagues are, face to face. Learning the ropes through virtual means can be extremely frustrating too. One of the opportunities that was given to me by my agency was to coordinate one of the COVID-19 responses. As much as it was a learning opportunity, it also came with challenges as the stakeholders involved included senior leaders across agencies. I barely even knew the faces of the people in my own agency, let alone the inter-agencies processes. And on top of that, losing a family member during the same period had only added to the stress I was already facing.

Thankfully, I had very supportive bosses, friends, and family members, who were there for me during this stressful period. I de-stressed through music, games, and walks in the park. I feel relieved and happy to have overcome this great challenge.

***Anonymous, 27, Public Servant***



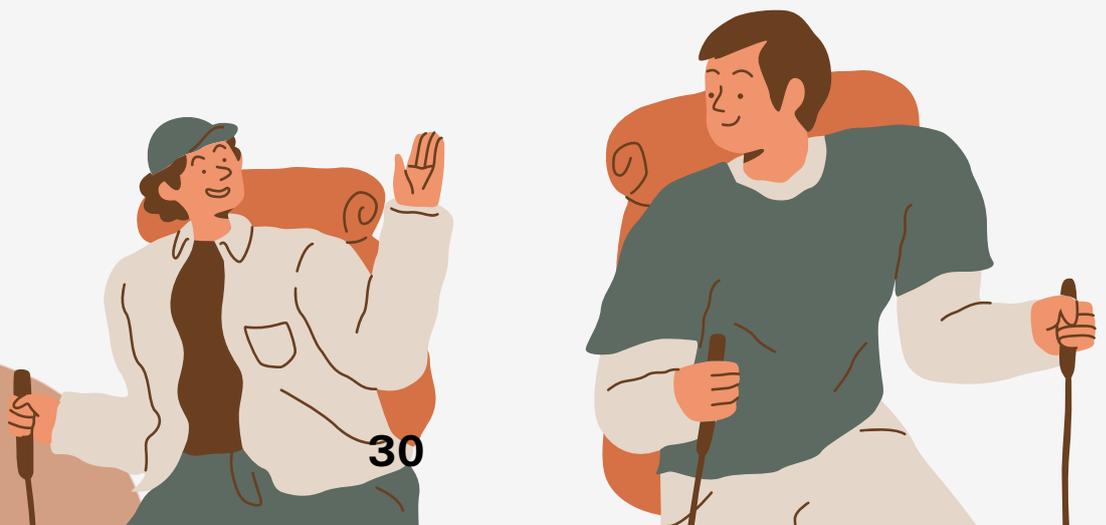
*When you're backed into a corner,  
the only way ahead is forward*

Last year's Circuit Breaker was the time I felt like I had lost myself and when complacency started to kick in. Gyms were made to close and that affected my earnings substantially. When my friends asked me, "What do I want to do in five years' time?" I had no answers to that. I didn't want to remain as I was and decided to do something about it during that period. I picked myself up by starting my own IGTV Series called "The Norm Breakers" to document the activities that I once used to love before COVID hits.

I did an early morning hike, took up a new martial arts discipline called "Wing Chun", ran my first half marathon, and also broke my fear of heights by taking on the Bungy jump. What started out as a personal exploration, became a pet project for me in wanting to reach out to like-minded people who might have gone through similar circumstances as me.

Through the sharing of my journey and how I overcame my problems, I want to share with others that there are many ways to pick yourself up.

***Jerry Fong, 31, Fitness Trainer***



## *You are deserving and your problems are not insignificant*

I have been struggling with anxiety and depression that crept up on me ever since the Circuit Breaker period last year. I would get anxiety attacks at least twice a week and was stuck in a constant loop of stagnancy. The holiday periods were the worst, I no longer had school to keep my mind off overthinking anymore. I would lay in bed every day, wouldn't eat, sleep or bathe. All I did was binge watch TV shows.

Upon watching an episode of Euphoria, "*The Trials and Tribulations of Trying to Pee While Depressed*" and relating to the character, I realised that something was wrong. I needed to do something about it. Being aware that I needed to stop this cycle was the first step to my recovery. I decided that every day, I would make an effort to get up from bed to shower, make myself breakfast, and do something productive. It could be washing the dishes, watering the plants or hanging out clothes to dry.

The simplest things that many deemed easy, was immensely difficult for me, so I needed to do it in order to break the cycle of depression. For those who are struggling mentally, do seek help. It can be in the form of a therapist, school counsellor, or just doing a set of mundane tasks to help get out of the cycle. You are deserving and your problems are not insignificant.

***Anonymous, 19, Polytechnic Student***

*I was encouraged to take baby steps, celebrate mini wins and to write down the things I am thankful for*

Coming out of Circuit Breaker was extremely tough for me. During Circuit Breaker last year, I had become used to being alone and had lived in my own bubble, where I had minimal interactions with anyone.

Once Circuit Breaker ended and when school had resumed, it was mentally exhausting and having to interact with my peers made me feel distressed. As this felt like a “first-world problem”, I felt that no one could ever comprehend how I was feeling. As such, I found it hard to confide in my close friends or family members. To cope with this struggle, I started to binge eat and often cried myself to sleep. It was as though I was living on an auto-pilot mode as I just wanted my days to pass by quickly.

It was not long until my close friend felt like there was something amiss with me. I was feeling extremely vulnerable, broke down and told him about how I had been feeling. It was comforting to have a listening ear and to know that there is someone truly there for you. I was encouraged to take baby steps, celebrate mini wins and to write down the things I am thankful for. Soon enough, I started to regain the happiness I was missing and did not feel as overwhelmed as before.

Though I may have taken longer than others to adapt back to our usual lifestyle, I was happy that I have finally learnt how to cope with this anxiety and stress. Today, I remind myself to not be so hard on myself and that I am doing such a great job every single day.

**Anonymous, 24, Supply Chain Planner**





LOVE  
YOURSELF

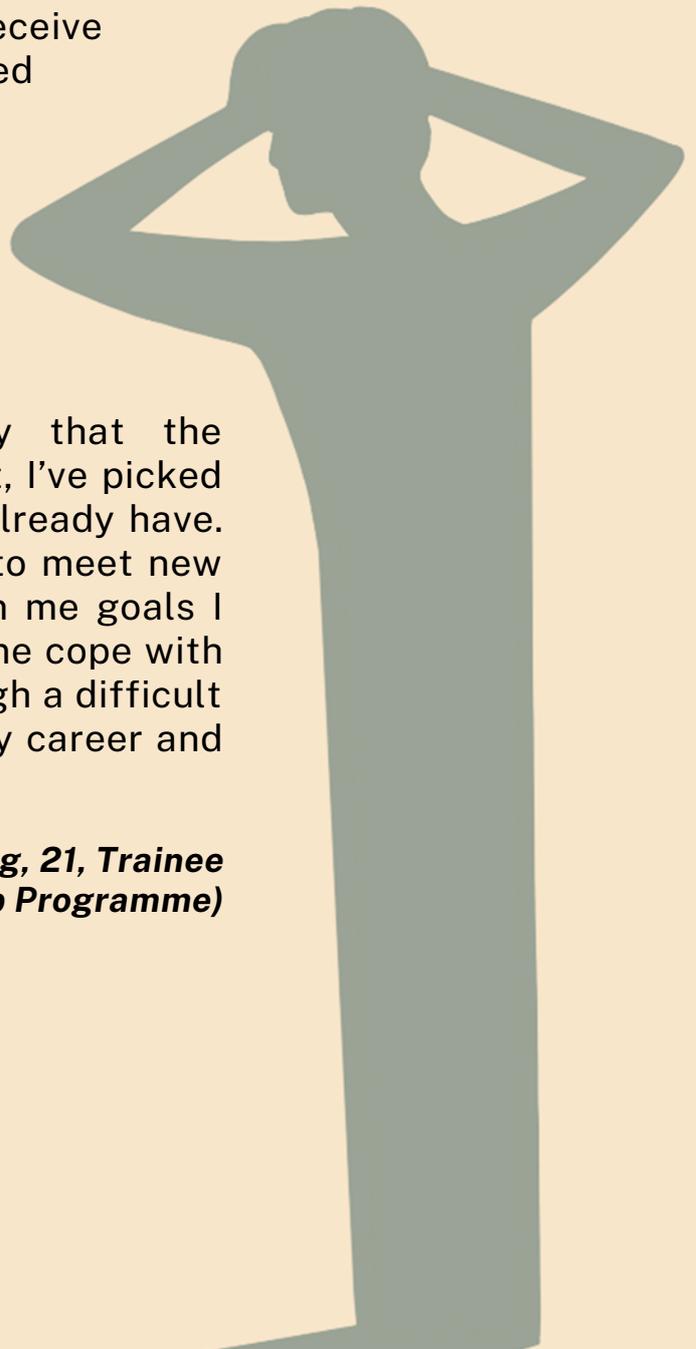
# Leap of Faith

When I chose to take a gap year before continuing my education, I didn't expect COVID-19 to turn into a worldwide pandemic. The plans I originally had, to take some time off studying to travel were suddenly scrapped and I found myself stuck at home most of the time. As a person who thrived in the company of others, I had a tough time adapting to the Circuit Breaker measures last year. At times, I felt directionless and didn't know what to do with all the time I had to spend at home.

With encouragement from my family, I applied for jobs despite the plummeting job market and received rejections from companies. Eventually, I managed to receive an offer as a trainee under the SGUnited Traineeship Programme. Though many people thought that taking up a traineeship was not ideal since it provided lower pay and recognition, I chose to take a chance and accept the traineeship position.

Right now, I can confidently say that the traineeship was a blessing. Through it, I've picked up new skills and refined the ones I already have. It has also given me the opportunity to meet new people, albeit virtually, and has given me goals I can work towards, which has helped me cope with the pandemic. I was able to pull through a difficult time by choosing to take charge of my career and taking a leap of faith.

**Johanna Yeang, 21, Trainee  
(SGUnited Traineeship Programme)**



## *We shouldn't be afraid to take the path less travelled for our own happiness*

After the initial excitement of starting my journey in polytechnic, I found that the course I chose was not what I thought it would be. Transitioning from secondary school which is of a more sheltered environment, the idea of polytechnics was different from what I had in mind. I felt that the environment was incredibly competitive and that many students had an "everyone for themselves" mindset. As such, I often struggled alone for my modules and projects. Academics aside, people around me were taking on and rising to positions in the committees such as the faculty council while I was left feeling stagnated and grew doubtful of my abilities.

The Circuit Breaker in 2020 had reduced interaction further and that prevented me from seeking help from school and ended up pulling down my grades drastically, which had led to my teachers informing my parents. It amplified my feelings of isolation and I no longer enjoyed what I was doing. There were many instances during this period where I was overwhelmed with schoolwork and had absolutely no one to turn to for help. After considering many factors, I felt like there was no other choice but to leave the course. I am so grateful for my understanding parents who supported me in changing paths in my education. I felt determined to prove myself to them that I could succeed in JC.

Now that I'm in JC, I have made the conscious effort to put myself out there and keep busy in school. I ran for multiple leadership roles and through that, I made a lot more friends. With my friends in place, I had a much better support system and felt better motivated to study. I found that the environment in JC is much more suitable for me. Teachers in JC also frequently checked up on us to assess how we were doing in school and I am appreciative of that. I think that even though I did not finish my final year, my time in polytechnic gave me the motivation and mindset to succeed in JC now. I learnt that there is no fixed route in education, and you can still succeed if you go the unconventional way. I believe trusting your intuition is important and we shouldn't be afraid to take the path less travelled for our own happiness.

**Sheryl Goh, 19, JC1 Student**





## *I needed to see the positives of the long-distance relationships*

We first met while I was on a vacation together in Perth, Australia. Pre-covid period, I had the luxury to travel down twice a year, but this stopped abruptly in 2020. I remember it clearly - just 2 days after my return flight, Circuit Breaker was announced. Even though it was uncertain at the start, I never expected that leisure travel would be banned for long.

Initially, I felt ok thinking the lockdown would be lifted in a couple of months, in time for my next trip. I was wrong. In October, things worsened gradually, and I found myself to be worrying over issues like flight resumption dates, air ticket prices and the travel bubbles that eventually did not happen.

Together for 4 years, my boyfriend makes up an important part of my life and has been one of my biggest pillars of support. While the distance from lockdown may have worked for many local couples, it went against mine. Limited by the miles, we only had video calls to work with, which soon turned into arguments. It was mentally exhausting for us, to the point where we had even considered parting ways.

I knew I had to think of better ways to cope, and that we had to be strong to keep this long-distance relationship working. We soon realised that the pandemic was just an external factor which was beyond mine, his and our control. So what I did was to start reading self-help books, such as a book called "*Maybe you should talk to someone*". Adjustment and huge teamwork was required, and I went into a routine whereby I needed to see the positives of the long-distance relationship. We explored virtual options, planned digital date nights, Netflix Parties, remote painting activities etc.

**Natasha H, 23, Digital Marketing Specialist**

*One important lesson - Avoid overloading yourself with work and communicate with others about your problems*

Generally, I am someone who views a lot of situations positively. Whenever I feel stressed, I tend to keep these feelings to myself. In the past, these feelings did not really affect me because I have never felt overburdened with school commitments and other obligations.

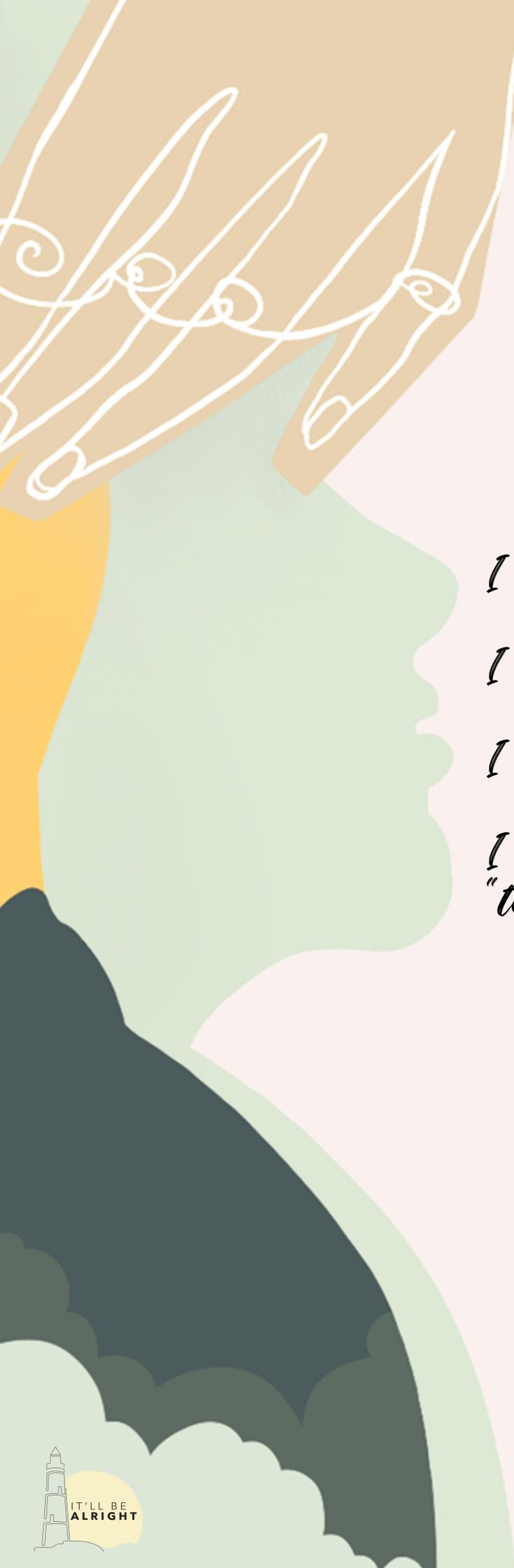
However, this changed as I grew older where more problems begin to surface. At times, I do feel overwhelmed. And one of the most significant setbacks was probably when I was determining my career path. Initially, the plan I had in mind was to finish school, complete an internship, and then enter the workforce. But when I saw how my peers began to build their portfolios through courses and certifications, it made me wonder if I had to do the same.

Whenever I felt that there was no one to turn to for comfort, I went running as a way to relieve stress. That, I believe, was what had helped me during that period. I also started sharing my troubles with my partner, and it was then when I realized that sharing your troubles with others will make you feel better instead of keeping them to yourself.

I had enrolled in three courses during Circuit Breaker, all while juggling schoolwork. It was difficult, but ultimately rewarding. The courses aided me significantly in both my academic and professional endeavors. As a result, I was able to secure an internship as a data analyst with several companies. One important lesson, I believe, is to avoid overloading yourself with work and to communicate with others about your problems. Keeping it inside can be oppressive and have a detrimental effect on one's mental health.

**Zhen Yuen, 24, University Student**





*I felt stuck.*

*I was breathless all the time.*

*I had difficulties sleeping every day.*

*I felt like I had no choice but to  
"tough it out" since I was bonded.*

I graduated from Australia in 2019 studying occupational therapy. Starting my first job as a foreign graduate in 2020, people had warned me that there would be a culture shock; that it would be a steep learning curve working in an acute hospital in Singapore - it was all true. Alongside all the changes that COVID-19 brought when it first struck, I felt stuck. I was breathless all the time (with or without my mask). I had difficulties sleeping every day. I felt like I had no choice but to “tough it out” since I was bonded.

Everyone told me it was normal since it was my first job, and it would go away. But weeks passed, then months. I had more gastric issues, I became more withdrawn, I didn't feel like socialising - online or offline. In fact, I didn't feel like doing anything at all, not even the things I used to enjoy doing. I didn't even want to get out of bed. I started having panic attacks, where I would be uncontrollably fearful and breathless, clenching my fists, crying and shaking. My senses were overly stimulated. Everything was overwhelming. I thought I was dying.

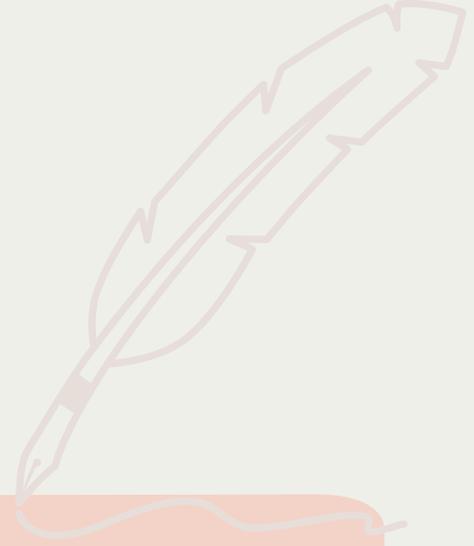
In August 2020, I broke down before work started. I couldn't stop crying. I felt so miserable and just wanted a way out of all this, like an immediate escape. At my wit's end, the idea of suicide crept in my head unsuspectingly. My superiors were very concerned and told my family to bring me to seek medical advice immediately and that was when I agreed to be voluntarily admitted to an inpatient psychiatric ward where I stayed for two weeks. When you feel so desperate, you could either kill yourself or find the courage to admit yourself. An admission is always an option. With all the things that I'd heard and seen in movies, I was terrified at the idea of staying in a psychiatric ward. However, I learnt that you only fear because you may not understand. Head banging could be a symptom of an illness. People wandering around with blank looks in their eyes could be a side effect of medications. People screaming while being tied down and injected with sedatives - that only happens when you pose a serious threat to yourself or to others. The people there would turn out to be some of the most empathetic and genuine people I've met.

Being admitted provided me with a safe space and a well-needed respite away from all the external stressors and to receive the appropriate support from a multi-disciplinary team. The medical team explored the causes of my persistent symptoms and behaviour and managed my medications. It was then I was diagnosed with adjustment disorder. The psychologist in the ward was able to provide me with new perspectives on the issues I was struggling with and challenge some of the unhealthy thought patterns I had. The mental health occupational therapist helped me to brainstorm different strategies to calm myself when I'm feeling distressed, such as using a weighted blanket or essential oils, and encouraged me to go back to my leisure activities, like writing and playing the piano. I felt more like myself again when I found myself returning to a healthier routine and enjoying my usual hobbies again.

***Belle, 25, Occupational Therapist***



# How am I feeling?



## Things that make me happy

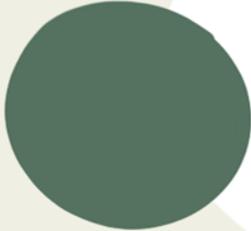
1. ....
2. ....
3. ....

## Things that make me grateful

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....

## My positive experiences





# General Stories



# Daily Reminder

You are amazing  
and can do anything  
you set your mind to.  
Take action today.

**Yes!**

**Heck yes!**

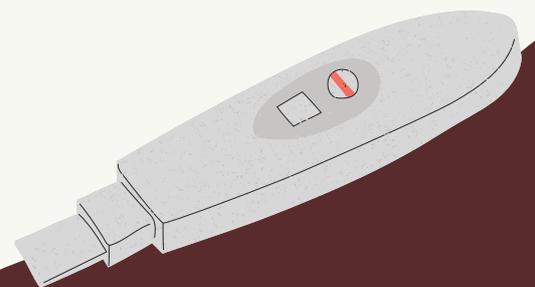
*I had an ectopic pregnancy and lost both the 6-week-old baby, and one of my fallopian tubes*

I didn't know I was pregnant until I went for a regular check-up with my gynaecologist, which ended in an emergency surgery to remove the baby, as it was life-threatening. Needless to say, it was quite a traumatizing experience.

Since then, I've struggled with feeling good about myself as my body had changed a little - I had three scars on my lower stomach. I felt 'broken' and hated that my body was unable to carry a baby, when other women seem to be able to do so easily. I fell into depression and going back to work brought about anxiety. I would experience heart palpitations, and it was very hard to get out of bed in the morning.

Things took a turn for the better when I started spending more of my free time volunteering in my community, putting my energy into doing good and working on meaningful projects. Sharing my story with friends and family have really helped as well. I've also spoken with other women who've experienced similar issues to conceiving, and their stories made me feel less alone. I'm happy to say that I'm finally in a good place, and I'm thankful for everything that I have and am today.

**Cheyenne, 27, Social Media Executive**



## *I grew up in an abusive and violent family*

The environment I grew up in, paired with genetics, resulted in me being diagnosed with eight mental disorders - depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, mild bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, dissociative identity disorder, and mild psychosis.

In my early teens, I knew I had problems but due to financial concerns, I was unable to seek help. At age 21, I experienced anxiety at a private clinic which led the doctor to believe that I had a thyroid problem. I then went through the process of being referred to the hospital through a polyclinic, where I met a psychiatrist and a counsellor. In the beginning, the psychiatrist did not give me any diagnosis as they did not want to label me. After two years of counselling, the psychiatrist told me of my diagnosis, but it took me around six years to fully identify with all my mental disorders.

Throughout this entire journey, I have tried to take my life a few times and was once admitted into the Institute of Mental Health. Nevertheless, my will to live and recover is strong, and I have been improving over the past few years.

To those who are going through a tough time, please don't give up. Life is like a game, relapsing allows you to restart the game so hold on to hope. Try to communicate your worries and stresses to professionals and find the help that you require. Do not be afraid to change therapists if you need to, they should be someone you are comfortable with.

***Jessica Ho, 29, Creative Director***





# *When you reach the lowest low, the only way forward was up*

I've been working for three years now. Most of my struggles and mental health issues surfaced after graduating from University. Leading up to graduation, a series of events, including breaking up with my long-term partner, came crashing down on me. I struggled as I was clueless about life and did not know how to make money or find meaning in life.

During this period, I was constantly in a state of depression, contemplating suicide and utterly directionless. I realised my life (and myself) was gradually going downhill, and I would spend many nights crying silently to myself. To distract myself, I would go out with friends for drinks, visit clubs and ultimately, I reached rock bottom. I felt lonely, doubtful and depressed. But one thing I've learnt is that when you hit the lowest low, the only way forward is up.

I told myself that I didn't want a miserable life. Bit by bit, I started to pick myself up. I dived into self-development, started listening to podcasts, reading books, attended different classes and workshops, and began following the habits of people whom I admire.

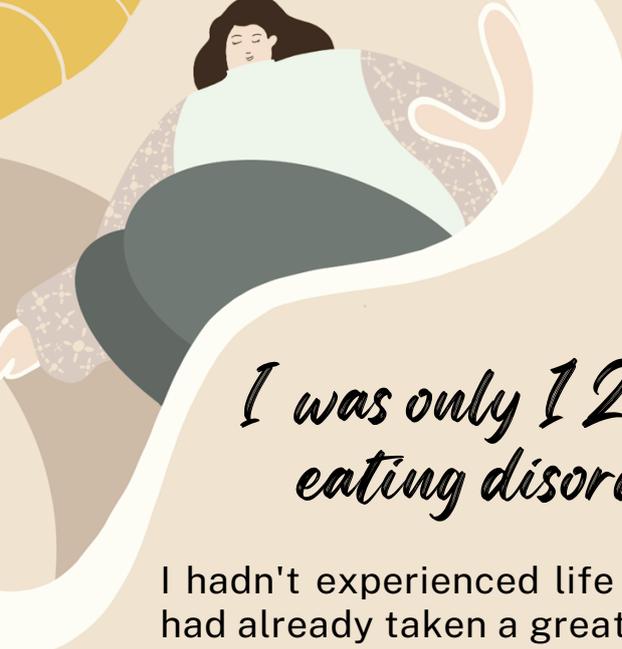
***Little by little, through trial and error, I started to find my own coping mechanisms, things that ground me and make me feel whole.***

Activities such as yoga, mindfulness meditation, deepening my spiritual practices and attending self-development workshops have helped me to be more self-aware, discovering and understanding myself better. One of the best pieces of advice that I have received is that healing is not a linear journey (it's often a messy one) and, on that path, I managed to love myself and care for myself more. Honouring my sacred yes and sacred no, speaking my whole truth, listening deeply to my needs, all of that allowed me to cherish myself and life so much more.

To anyone out there who feels like they're all alone, remember that you're not. The healing is in the doing; as long as you show up for yourself bit by bit, that's okay, and that's good enough. I would like to remind you that it's up to you to create the life you want. As D.T. Suzuki said, "*I am an artist at living, my work of art is my life.*"

**M Tang, 26, Marketer**





## *I was only 12 when my struggle with my eating disorder and depression began*

I hadn't experienced life to its fullest yet, but my past with bullying had already taken a great toll on my mental health. When I was young, I was unable to get help immediately and only saw my first psychiatrist three years later, to cope with unhealthy eating and negative thinking habits I was having.

During my recovery process, there were many things I struggled with. Not only did I have to struggle with the wide array of problems that came with my depression, I also had to take even harder steps to learn how to counter them. I definitely faced periods when I relapsed - I was perceived to be attention-seeking when people saw cuts on my arms and automatically concluded that I was the "over-emotional one". It did not help in the earlier parts of my recovery journey to know that in addition to everything, I was being misunderstood. So, I spent most of my earlier recovery journey alone. Despite feeling lonely, I don't think my experience is especially unique or that I was ever alone, to begin with.

Seven years and many obstacles later, I've learnt to deal with my problems, instead of running away from them. I've learnt the importance of taking care of my mental health and have found a good network of friends who I know will always have my back. Yes, it is still always going to be a work in progress, but knowing that more people are becoming aware of the struggles associated with mental health issues has made my journey of recovery less lonely. I now go to bed at night knowing I am not alone, and I never will be.

***Anonymous, 19, Polytechnic Student***

## *At least give yourself a chance to try*

I saw this quote online a few years back and it really motivated me to seek a psychiatrist for therapy when I was going through a very difficult phase a few years back. The prescribed medication caused me to have very high levels of energy - I couldn't sleep, was talking a lot, having a lot of ideas etc. I also started seeing things like mistaking a mannequin for a person. After communicating this with my psychiatrist, I was diagnosed with Bipolar Type 2.

During an episode, in the higher mood phase, I would have unusually high levels of energy where I could still go about my daily life even after not sleeping for long stretches of time. I would research the many ideas I had in my head and have many racing thoughts that caused me to talk a lot more, jumping from one thing to another, and sometimes the words that came out of my mouth would be disorganized. This would continue over a few days.

During the low mood phase, when I start crashing, I would have trouble getting out of bed because I see no point in life. Hence, upkeeping my hygiene becomes difficult and I gradually lose motivation to do things I usually enjoy. That is when I would start crying a lot and harbouring suicidal thoughts. During these episodes, my medication would help stabilise my mood greatly, such that I do not feel the highs or lows as much, and just feel "ok" throughout.

To maintain my mental well-being, I rely a lot on listening to music and writing in my journal. My hobbies include gardening and reading as well. All these keep me grounded, especially since I do not like a lot of loud noises. As for the uncomfortable emotions, I accept them and embrace them instead of sweeping them away. I remind myself that it is only a temporary feeling and that I just need to take care of myself. There is no need to force myself to be happy.

***Mia, 28, Arts Student***





*family & Social  
Relationships*

## *Though I am still healing, that's okay because good things take time*

I lost my Dad back in 2019 on the first day of Ramadhan and one week before my Secondary 3 mid-year examinations.

I could not focus on my studies, but I knew I needed to be strong to do well. All I had on my mind was my late dad which then turned into a form of motivation for me to do well in my studies. I initially thought this was it, but then the challenges kept coming. A month later, my grandfather was admitted to the hospital for a month and just a few days after that, my first brother was involved in a motorcycle accident.

During those few months, it was hard. I was not sure if I had any will to live anymore. I almost wanted to give up because of my circumstances and everything that was not going well. At the same time, I also felt that I was losing friendships too. This continued throughout September 2019, just a few weeks before my end-of-year examinations.

Now, whenever I feel like giving up, I find strength by looking at my mom or thinking about my late dad. I also constantly reassure myself that I am a strong person. Despite the endless nights of overthinking, sleepless nights and many tears, I am glad that there were people around me who had helped me during my struggles. I am super thankful that most of them are still here in my life. Though I am still healing, that's okay because good things take time.

**Anonymous, 17, Polytechnic Student**



*I kept faith that there will always be light at the end of the tunnel, but I will not reach there unless I continue moving forward*

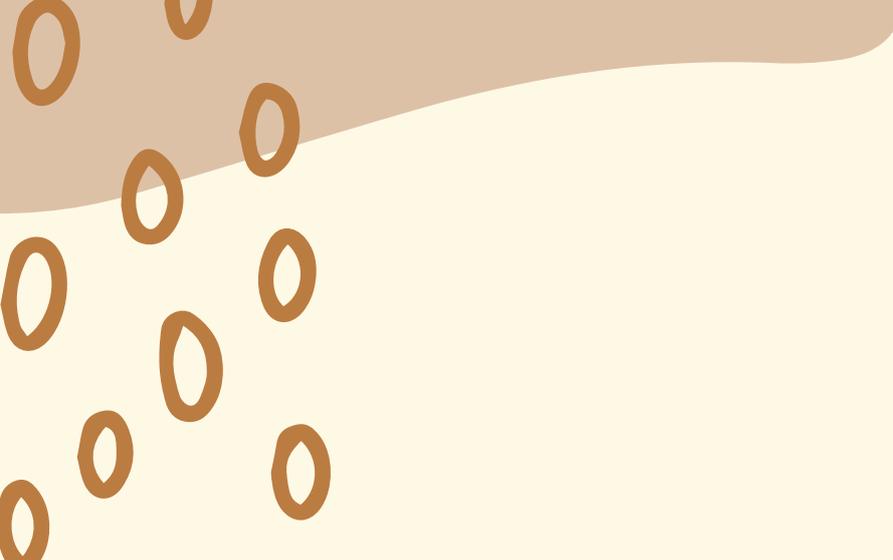
During the first few months of my full-time National Service, I received unfortunate news that my mother had been hospitalised. When I rushed to the hospital, I was informed that she had been diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukemia. If left untreated, she would only have two weeks to live. Not wasting any moment, we signed plenty of documents to begin the treatment. The lives of our family changed drastically, having to adjust to the new reality thrust into our lives. The hospital became our second home. We witnessed our mother, who used to be tough and independent, gradually becoming weak and frail; she required assistance to perform even basic functions such as eating and going to the bathroom.

Being in an Asian family, sharing of our feelings does not come naturally. However, I believe we were all coping with it in our ways, trying our best to make one another worry less. My father was taking on extra jobs while juggling his time between bringing nourishing soup to my mother and travelling to different agencies to apply for government grants. Because I was an NSF, it meant that I had to be away from my family during the weekdays. During training, I would be distracted and would constantly worry about my family and fear losing my mother at anytime. Even though I was always surrounded by my NS buddies, I always felt alone because I thought no one would understand what I was going through, even if they tried. Other thoughts soon filled my head and thinking about worst possible scenarios was sometimes quite paralysing.

The road to my mother's recovery was long and not smooth sailing. There were many obstacles, such as the cancer spreading to other parts of the body, or the lack of a suitable bone marrow donor. But through it all, my mother demonstrated resilience and strength, overcoming each obstacle at every stage. She never cried nor even contemplated the worst outcome. Watching her win the little battles gradually woke me up from this mental slumber. I realised that as a healthy individual, I ought to be stronger and doing much more than my mother. I gradually found my footing and became more focused during trainings. I kept faith that there will always be light at the end of the tunnel, but I will not reach there unless I continue moving forward. I knew that I had to be ready to support my family emotionally should anything bad happen. Because of this, I was motivated to keep a clear head and be strong for my family. I learned to take mental breaks and rest more often, so that I can be mentally and physically fit every day. Today, I feel ready to overcome any adversities.

**Andy Chan, 28, Data Scientist**





## *Be slow to speak and quick to listen*

I realised that some of the things I said out of frustration can be quite hurtful and upsetting to some of my peers. This has resulted in many conflicts and misunderstandings. I reflected on such experiences when my peers expressed their displeasure towards my choice of words, and I thought that it was because I could not communicate well with them.

Through my attempts, while trying to mend the hearts that I had broken, I learnt that I could perhaps try to be more mindful of the things I say; to be slow to speak and quick to listen. And if I ever got myself into an intense conflict with my peers, I would distance myself, to be in the space that we can cool down before we try to resolve our conflict rationally.

However, it could be challenging to try to resolve conflicts with my peers who have hardened their hearts as they fear that I would break them again. But with the support of our mutual friends who help to mediate, I am hopeful that we can mend our relationships and reconcile with one another.

***Blue, 17, Polytechnic Student***

## *It was an existential crisis, a trifecta of hurts from love, work and family*

I had been processing it for a long while, telling myself to think out every thought, cry every tear to ride it out, and cry over every happy, sad, or angry thing I did. I didn't like who I was. I missed my old energy. I wanted to be better. And I just wanted to get out of that cycle, so I sought help.

With counselling, I learned that:

**1. I had overlooked one main emotion the tears stemmed from - fear.**

Fear of myself, fear of letting myself down, fear of becoming a monster. Despite all the journalling and self-help articles, I needed a professional to help me understand this. And so, I am working on it right now.

**2. I had not been breathing properly and was in a mild fight-or-flight mode for months on end.**

What weighs heavily on your mind and heart will affect your physical body.

**3. Love yourself by parenting yourself.**

Be disciplined by eating well, sleeping well, drinking plain water & exercising. Allow yourself to cry and learn to soothe yourself.

**4. Get help.**

You're not alone. After you get over the initial fear, shame or "paisehness", ask for help.

**5. Lastly, tune in to your favourite songs.**

**G, 25, Communications**



*Know that not everything is permanent and let yourself be comforted by change instead of being afraid of it*

As a child, I was not allowed to show certain feelings at home, and for the large part of my childhood and formative years, I just stamped them out when they started leaking out in my writing, my personality, my art, and through my thoughts, which I felt was toxic and scary. I have been officially diagnosed with mild depression, but I don't dwell on that diagnosis. I feel it doesn't really help me to deal with my mental health issues.

I officially started seeing a psychotherapist for behavioural and cognitive talk therapy in early 2018. Since then, I've been through three therapists and am currently in the process of switching back to my first therapist who has since gone into private practice. I am also on medication for my depression (prescribed by IMH). My diagnosis only came long into my therapy sessions - because my first therapist didn't think I would benefit from having a proper diagnosis. He said it was a label and given how much we had talked, and how much he knew me, he kind of hinted that it wasn't necessary, which I totally agree. However, I was facing mounting pressure and insensitive comments from my family about my visits to IMH, and I needed to hit them with an official diagnosis to let them know that I was in this therapy/depression thing for the long run, and that I wasn't suddenly going to "get better" and be "cured" forever.

Some things that really helped me throughout my journey include my first therapist, a few of my very close friends, music and writing. I am grateful for the friends who talk to me about my mental health and state of mind as if I wasn't clinically depressed but just as routine conversations. I am also very thankful for the safe spaces they have provided me with. Music and writing has also helped me dig up and process these emotions, but the recovery and healing comes after.

Honestly, the recovery and healing process can be as difficult and unpleasant as the depression. But someone told me things get better when you turn 30, and when I turn 30 I hope someone will tell me things start changing when I turn 35 - just know that not everything is permanent and let yourself be comforted by change instead of being afraid of it.

**Viven, Singer-songwriter,  
Digital Marketing Freelancer**





*I felt like I was living in a real-life hourglass, sifting each grain of sand with my own fingers, yet unable to control how much exactly slipped away*

In March, my younger brother and I had found out that our mom had been diagnosed with Stage 4 cancer. The physical effects were - and still are - borne painfully and unfortunately by her, but the emotional and psychological impact affected everyone in our family.

My dad, already a hero in our family, had to polish off his superman cape further and become a caregiver to my mom; my brother and I took care of the household chores, ran errands, and provided as much emotional and physical support as we could.

For me, I have always feared the prospect of terminal illnesses and the harm it could bring to my family. Living in my university hall made each night away from home worse, as I had constant nightmares about the terrible cancer attacking my lovely mother. The cancerous cells seemed to reach over and eat away at my mental state too, as I began to lose motivation to do things like eating and sleeping properly, as well as work on things I enjoyed.

I threw myself into projects and work, scheduling appointments with friends (pre-P2HA) be it for work or to listen to them, to run away from the situation at hand: that my family was, together, battling a terrifying illness.

I felt helpless because I wasn't a doctor, and because I couldn't control time: how much was left? I felt like I was living in a real-life hourglass, sifting each grain of sand with my own fingers, yet unable to control how much exactly slipped away.

One day when I rushed back home after a week of school, I found myself unable to fall asleep because of nightmares, and the sequence that I knew would follow: tears, a bout of insomnia, and an inability to do anything the next day as I would be drained of energy. I got up and went to my desk and began to clear out a bunch of papers and books I hadn't touched since moving to stay at the university hall.

JC notes, letters from friends, and finally, a small white book. The book was a notebook with the title printed on the cover: 'THREE GOOD THINGS'. Its lined paper had prompts; I could fill in 3 things/names that made me happy each day. I flipped through half the journal; I'd already filled in half. And not a single thing was listed: I had always written names. Names of people, my dad, mom, brother, cousins and friends. I realised then that when all hope was lost and it was extremely dark, I could still do what I did best: appreciating the people around me. That night, before I tried heading back to sleep, I put on some music and gave myself back some lost time: I wrote down the names of at least fifty people, filling up many pages in the journal. I have a quarter more.

The next day I woke up and realised that I was feeling happy — happy to be with those around me. Happy to be in the time frame, the magical window of days that I was with my mom. I sleep a little differently now, armed with the knowledge that their presence is a present. That has helped me regain a lot of mental strength: because I am always reminded that what gives me life and joy are the people around me, the living and breathing entities who are so strong and made of wonderful things.

*My mom's condition improved. She is still on the path to recovery, and so is my family.*

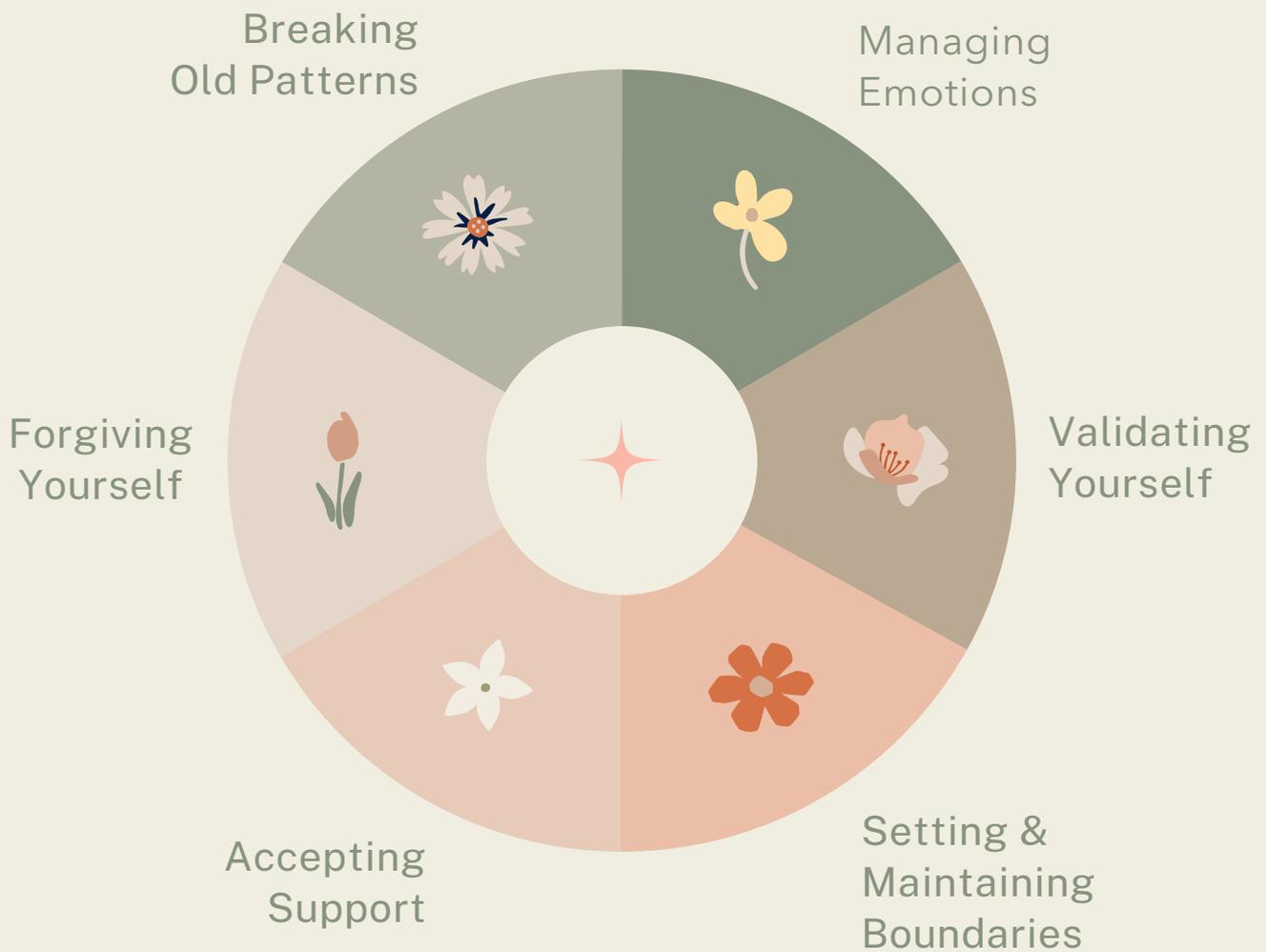
**Athena, 20, Student**





# Career

# Love yourself



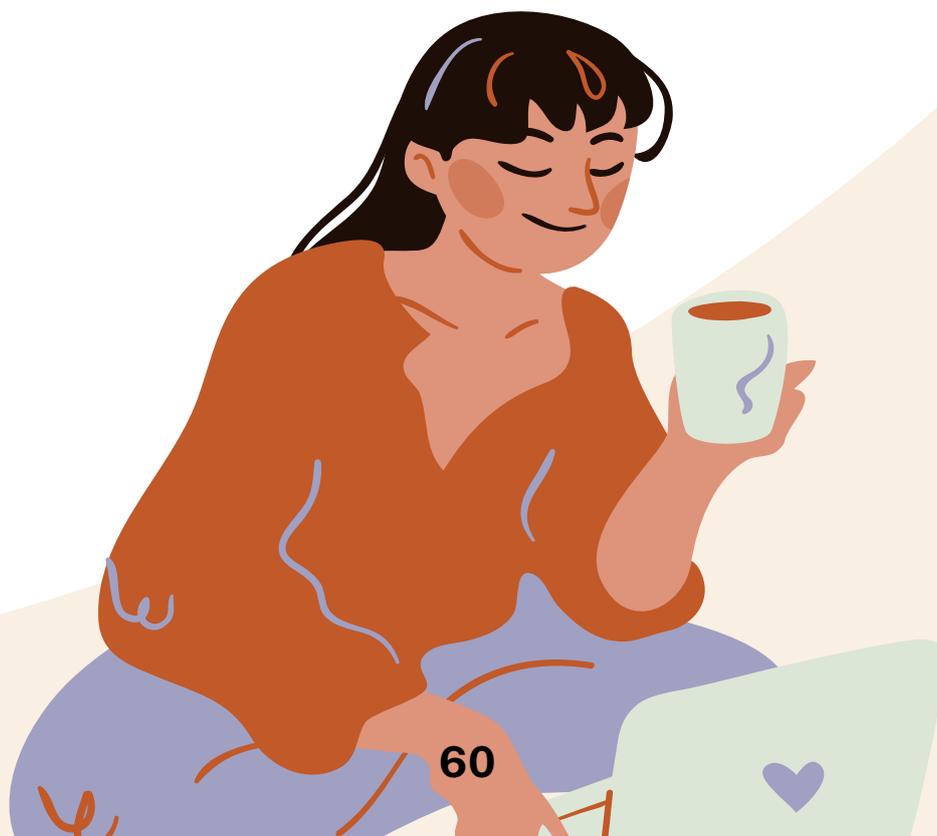
## *I have not missed out on what was meant for me*

This is a quote that I hold very close to my heart because it constantly reassures me that I'm doing okay, that it's alright to be where I am.

I have a tendency to compare myself with others, whether to check on how my progress is relative to the rest or looking to others for some direction I'm seeking. Sometimes it helps, but oftentimes, this leaves me feeling worse about myself and getting more stressed out, especially when I feel like I'm lagging behind. But I've come to accept that, everyone moves at different speeds on different paths, each with their unique journey, so there's really no point in comparing apple to an orange.

Having faith and trusting that I have not missed out on what was meant for me helps reassure me that as long as I'm doing my best right now, I'll eventually get to where I need to be, someday.

**Jia Hui, 24**





*I recognised that circumstances were beyond my control and the ball was in my court to determine my response*

Many Singaporeans are perfectionists. Many of us might have adopted this mindset from our parents that the path to success is linear - we need to score good grades, enrol into a good school, be employed in a stable job.

When things do not go according to plan, we feel like a failure.

My plan was to build towards my career and peak in my 20s. I did not expect to get retrenched! When it happened, I was at a loss and a lot of self-doubts came into the picture – why me. While I allowed myself the space to embrace my emotions, I did not wallow in self-pity. I recognised that circumstances were beyond my control and the ball was in my court to determine my response. I chose to be resilient; to keep calm and carry on. Many paths lead to Rome.

I will need to unlearn some things and relearn new skills. Having that growth mindset is important. Resources are abundant hence there is no excuse not to upskill. There are also peer support communities that I can join and grow together. Help is always there if I look for it.

**Anonymous**

*Being in a healthy state of mind is more crucial -  
as this will definitely help me shine brighter*

Every day, we keep ourselves occupied with tasks we need to do, deadlines we have to meet and responsibilities we must fulfil. Like many, I too have expectations and I want to soar in my career and be the best version of myself. Growing up, I have always had this mindset of wanting to achieve the best in whatever I do. I sought perfection and I provided no room for mistakes. So naturally, when I grew older, I had hoped the same for my career. But amidst all this "hustle first" journey, I had possibly ended up neglecting the state of my own mental health and even forgetting the importance of self-love.

Some of the signs which signalled high stress and anxiety include constant nightmares about unpleasant work experiences, loss of appetite and hallucinations about notifications. I kept checking my emails on my mobile phone, even when there were no notifications - it truly became some sort of an addiction towards work. My family members were the first to point out the changes in my behaviour - my lack of patience and physical absence from social interactions. In the pursuit of work success, I was becoming the person I did not want to be. To survive in my workplace, I was actually willing to give up on being my authentic self because I did not want to appear "weak".

At this point, I realised that I wanted to become a better version of myself. I wanted to change my ways. This whole journey of self-love only began after I met two similar-aged colleagues who were also facing similar struggles with the stress from work. We came from different teams, had different managers, and were from different batches. Having faced similar struggles at work, we could relate to each other and soon enough, we had become each other's pillars of support. Slowly, we tried to find healthier ways to release the negative energy and this included mindfulness exercises.

My colleagues taught me the need for self-love and the significance of having the right mindset towards the work I am doing. While work is important, being in a healthy state of mind is more crucial - as this will definitely help me shine brighter.

**SJ, 24, Account Manager**

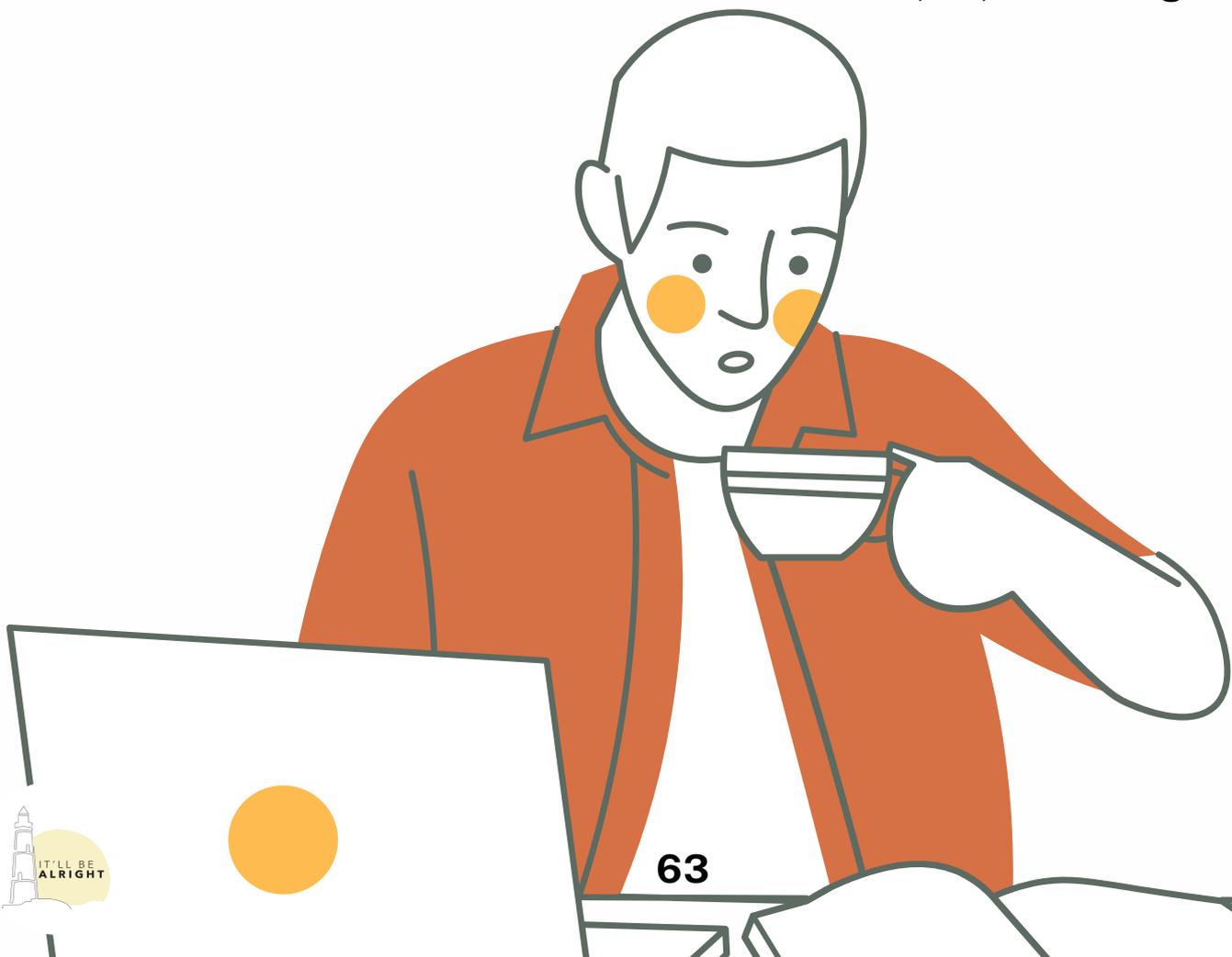


*Live as if you were to die tomorrow.  
Learn as if you were to live forever*

Years back, after spending five years in my job, this quote by Mahatma Gandhi changed my life and helped me turn around my stalled career. Although I was working hard and doing my work with complete honesty, something was amiss. Peers were climbing career ladders while I felt that juniors were more talented than me. Day in, day out, it seemed like things were not moving and my life was stuck at the same place.

After reading this quote, I found the missing piece in my life puzzle. I used to be confused about what would happen in the future - "Should I develop this skill or learn that tech?"; I now started taking it one day at a time. Instead of thinking what I should or should not learn, I started reading and learning from whichever book or knowledge source I found. My confidence was back, my career accelerated, and life slowly felt much more enjoyable. To all fresh graduates and students, never let the fear of missing out take over you. Just read, learn and wait for your moment to arrive. If you follow your heart honestly, your time to shine will come.

**Devesh, 32, Senior Engineer**



## *It is okay to choose me first*

I have always grown up with everyone having high expectations of me. Being the eldest in the family, there was the expectation that I need to set a good example for my siblings. Whether it was by being the first to apologise in fights, making good academic and career decisions, or even in everyday things, I was raised to believe that it was my responsibility to be the bigger person. Always.

As I matured, the expectations of my household expanded to that of my community. Being a minority in Singapore, people had high hopes for me to be a role model for the rest of my community.

However, I've always brushed aside these feelings, convinced that these were first world problems of a privileged young adult. What I didn't realise was the adverse impact it was having on me - I was never living for myself. Whether in relationships or in my career, I always felt that my own personal needs would rank lowest. As long as people were happy, I was happy. Or so I thought.

A "people pleaser". That's what I realised I was. But if everyone's feelings are always important, then what about mine? That's when I realised, that sometimes, no matter what people may think, no matter what society may think, sometimes, it is also okay to live for myself. Sometimes, it is okay to choose me first.

**Syafiq, 27, Associate Product Marketing Manager**

*I am competent and much stronger  
than I give myself credit for*

I did well in school and landed a good job, everything was going as well as it could.

I was always a strong believer of this quote "If you try hard enough, you will always succeed". That is until I found myself working more than 100 hours a week and still felt like I was not on par with my colleagues, and that I should be doing better. After a few months, I had a nervous breakdown at work, was referred to a psychiatrist and a psychologist and was diagnosed with panic disorder.

I was on a downward spiral - fears of having another panic attack would trigger an attack instantly. I was at war with my own mind, and at some point, I was convinced that I would never be able to win. I tried my best to be "normal" for fear that if my colleagues found out, I would be seen as incompetent. My loved ones encouraged me to quit, and every day I fought the urge to resign.

"Just get through today and we'll think about quitting tomorrow" I would plead with myself. I stayed on and I finally won the battle that was in my head. I proved all my self-doubts wrong - I am competent and much stronger than I give myself credit for.

**Anonymous, 25, Consultant**





# Breathe

When we talk about teachers, society generally thinks of us as role models for our students, human beings who should not make mistakes, and adults who should be supervising their children almost 24/7 (even beyond Mon-Fri).

I have been working as a full-time teacher for almost 4 years. At first, it was manageable. Over time, this added pressure slowly became overwhelming when the responsibility of monitoring the child's behaviour, even outside of school, seem to fall on teachers too. Responsibilities out of school are not compulsory, but many teachers do go the extra mile simply because we care for our students. We know that external stressors will impact their learning but often, that line is not drawn. Mid-career, I found myself burning out, picking up parents calls at all hours of the day, as I was afraid that it may potentially be a case of emergency.

The pressure increased exponentially and the next thing I knew, I began to experience signs of anxiety - trembling hands, heart palpitation, random tears even when I thought I felt "ok". I kept thinking to myself, "I am a teacher, and I need to put up my best front for my students. I need to teach, and I don't have time for these feelings." I realised I was not okay, but I did not want to acknowledge it.

What helped me most was reaching out to my trusted ones and talking to my family members about the issues I was facing. I felt embarrassed at first, but I eventually felt better letting it out. The best advice I have ever gotten is to "Breathe". No matter how hard the situation is, take deep breaths before we move on to the next step. My family members constantly check in on me, and that's when I realise I am not alone. I have people around me who care about me and I know I can count on them.

***Anonymous, 27, Teacher***





# Today's Reflections

**I am grateful for:**

Blank white space for writing a reflection on gratitude.

**I am looking forward to:**

Blank white space for writing a reflection on things to look forward to.

**My goal for today is:**

Blank white space for writing a reflection on today's goal.





*End*

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# The Team



**Not pictured:**  
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# References

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