



SUPPORTING AND  
EMPOWERING  
REFUGEES

# Moments for Mindfulness

A SELF-HELP GUIDE TO MANAGING STRESS AND  
UNCERTAINTY BY REFUGEE COUNCIL



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## About Refugee Council's mental health support

Refugee Council has 20 years' of experience providing mental health support to refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK.

People seeking safety are often deeply traumatised, have endured terrible experiences and suffered awful losses.

Our team of mental health professionals provides one-to-one counselling, workshops and psychosocial support groups.

**Last year we supported 10,870 refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK**



**We provided mental health support to 660 people**

With the global Covid-19 pandemic putting pressure on everyone in different ways, our therapeutic team has adapted some of their professional advice for refugees to provide general information for anyone who needs a little bit of extra support in these challenging circumstances.



Refugee Council is not a medical organisation, and this guide is provided as information rather than advice. If you need further information, advice or support please contact an appropriate medical professional.



## Daily structure

If you aren't working, are working from home, or your usual routine has been disturbed in some other way, it can be helpful to build your day around a structure.

## Beginning of the day.

### Mindfulness practice

Starting your day with a mindfulness practice can help charge your batteries with energy that you can draw on throughout the day.

Spend time focusing inwards and connecting with yourself to charge yourself up.

It has been demonstrated that mindfulness meditation can improve your energy levels.

Choose from one of our mindfulness practices on pages 14-16.

This practice needn't be long, even a few seconds to take some deep breaths can be helpful.





## Reflection

Write down any concerns you have. Note which of these concerns you are able to do something about and those which are out of your control.

Take some time to reflect on any concerns you really can't do anything about.

Acknowledge that there isn't anything you can do about them today and then 'park' them.

You can come back to these things the next morning if they are still concerning you.

## Planning

Make a plan for the day ahead including a range of different activities.

For those concerns that you can do something about, include some actions in your plan for the day.

We encourage you to include some of the activities detailed on the following pages, but they are all just options.

If you feel that some activities will increase your stress, just leave them, there is no pressure.





# Daily activities

## Exercise

It can be helpful to distinguish between two different types of exercise – strenuous exercise and gentle exercise.

- If you are feeling anxious and stressed, plan a strenuous exercise that matches the high energy level of your anxiety. This could be running, an aerobics video or something else that gets your heart pumping.
- If you are feeling sad or low, a strenuous exercise might feel like too much. Plan a gentle exercise that gets you moving in a way that is considerate of your mood. You could try a mindful walk or stretching.





## Creative activities

If you can, take some time to focus on a creative activity, for example

- cooking;
- colouring; or
- gardening.

If you don't have a garden, you could grow a plant in a pot. Nurturing a plant and creating life can bring a great sense of wellbeing.

Try to carry out your creative activity mindfully. You could try focusing on one particular sense. For example, whilst cooking you could try and stay connected with your sense of smell or the sounds you can hear.

Focusing on one sense calms your body down if you are experiencing stress and can help get you out of 'fight or flight' mode.



## Achievements

Try to include something that gives you a sense of achievement, this should be something that feels right for you.

Whilst some people might benefit from an online course, others may feel that the added pressure will increase stress levels.

## Get outside

If possible, get outside each day. For example, take a mindful walk, go for a cycle, sit in the garden to eat your lunch, read a book or meditate under a tree.



## Work

If your work environment and home environment have become one and the same, it can be helpful to have clear boundaries.

For example, you might plan a short walk, or some simple stretches at the beginning and end of your working day to separate it from your personal time.

If it is possible, have a designated space in your home where you work that is separate from your sleeping space.

If you work in your bedroom it is more likely that you won't be able to stop thinking about work when it is time to go to sleep.

If you can't use a separate space for your work, perhaps there is something symbolic you can do to mark the beginning and of the working day, such as clearing all your work things away and putting a pot plant in the middle of your desk.

## **End of the day.**

Make sure you don't have your work belongings around you as you try to go to sleep.

If you exercise near the end of the day, choose something gentle as opposed to vigorous.

In the run up to bedtime try to slow things down and carry out one of the mindfulness activities on pages 14-16 so that your head isn't racing when it is time to go to sleep.



## **Moments for mindfulness**

### **01** **Count your breaths when making drinks**

If you make a hot drink, use the time while the kettle boils to do a simple breath meditation – count each breath into and out of your body for five breaths in and out.

### **02** **Notice moments of transition**

When one task has been achieved give yourself a mindful pause, acknowledging that you have finished a task before you dash to the next.

### **03** **Use natural gaps**

Use little gaps in your day, such as your computer starting up, or waiting for a video call to start to do a mindful check in (see page 15).



[Photo Credit: Stephen Yang / The Solutions Project 100% Campaign](#)

## Mindfulness practices

Choose from one of these mindfulness practices to start and end your day, to help deal with challenging emotions, or anytime you have a spare moment.

### Three minute breathing space

Take one minute in turn for each of the following activities:

- One minute for **ACKNOWLEDGING** what is happening and how you are feeling.
- One minute for **GATHERING** your awareness around your breath.
- One minute for **EXPANDING** awareness of your breath into your body – notice where you feel your breath most in your body.

## Mindful check-in

- Whilst either sitting down or standing up, start to focus on your breath.
- Once you feel comfortable focusing on your breath, move your focus into your body.
- Notice any physical sensations you have.
- If any of these sensations are overwhelming, move your focus to the feet – the feet aren't affected by stress.
- Go on to notice any thoughts, feelings or emotions you are having. There is no need to engage with them, just notice they are there.
- Finally, return to your breath for the last few moments.





## Settling the Mind Practice



This Settling the Mind Practice offers a short introduction to mindfulness using a breath counting technique, breath awareness and grounding techniques to connect you to your body and the present moment.

# Normalisation

When facing difficulties, it is normal to become upset, anxious or irritable.

It is also common to get upset with yourself for feeling those things, compounding the distress. 2020 has been a very challenging year so far.

It is very normal to feel fearful, anxious, low or irritable.

If you are having worrisome feelings, give yourself time to reflect on them and accept that they are normal reactions.

Humans are programmed to respond to things that are threatening.



If you can give yourself time to stay with your feelings for 60 seconds it will help them dissipate.

Instead of getting upset by your own emotions, try to be kind to yourself and accepting of your emotional reactions.



We hope you find this self-help guide useful.

The content has been contributed by Paul Cilia la Corte, London Therapeutic Services Manager and Psychological Therapist for Refugee Council and Becky Ridgewell, Therapeutic Services Coordinator for Refugee Council and Mindfulness Teacher.

Paul's book 'A Practical Guide to Therapeutic Work with Asylum Seekers and Refugees' is available online.

You can find out more about Becky's work at <https://thismindfullife.net/>.

**“After leaving my homeland I felt so sad and was filled with guilt and shame. Thanks to being able to talk about this with you and practicing the mindfulness exercises you provided I have been able to sleep properly for the first time in months.”**

**– Refugee Council therapeutic client**

**Last year we provided 372 individual adults, 206 individual children and 30 families with therapeutic support. During the pandemic we continued to provide mental health support to refugees over the phone and online.**



**If you would like to support refugees and the work of  
Refugee Council, you can make a donation on our  
website <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk>, or call us on  
020 7346 1205**



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