

**Riverside  
College**

Widnes & Runcorn

# **Relaxation for Wellbeing**



# Relaxation for Wellbeing

*“As a student at Riverside College you will be at the centre of everything we do. We want you to reach your full potential, whilst also enjoying an inclusive and supportive college community where you can thrive.”*



Our mission statement is at the heart of everything we do here at Riverside College. Our Wellbeing Team are here to support you throughout your time at college, ensuring that you feel supported and empowered to reach your full potential.

We hope that your time with our college runs smoothly, however, life can throw unexpected challenges at us from time to time and it can be difficult to focus on studying. The Wellbeing Team offer a bespoke service, providing a safe space to talk, advice and guidance. They can and will also signpost students to trusted resources and services when you need further support.

Being able to relax is an essential skill, allowing us to reset and protect our wellbeing. It is an important life skill to develop, helping with social anxiety, workplace interactions, sleep patterns and more - the benefits are endless. There are lots of different ways in which we can learn relaxation techniques. Mindfulness, for example, is great for improving our mood, lowering stress levels and can even boost cognitive capacity.

Relaxation might not make what you are stressed or worried about go away. However, it can give you a mental break from these feelings and help you refocus – meaning that you are in a better headspace to tackle difficulties which may come your way.

This booklet has been put together by our Wellbeing Team as tool for students to start thinking more consciously about how to relax. It has some useful tips and strategies to help you to relax and is a great starting point on your wellbeing journey, putting you in the best place to focus on your college course.

We hope it you find it useful

# Firstly, take a break!

That's right – you need to take time out to stop and process your day, listen to your body and understand how you are feeling.

Relaxation doesn't have to take up lots of your time. Just stepping away from something stressful for a few minutes or taking time away from your normal routines and thoughts can give you enough space and distance to feel calmer. Have you ever been distracted by social media late into the night, only to stop scrolling and realise just how tired you are? T

The answer to this question is almost certainly, 'yes.' In a time when the news is available 24/7 and social media platforms offer endless streams of videos in the palm of our hand, switching off is not easy. So be disciplined with yourself, tune in to what your body is telling you. Tired? Thirsty? Hungry? It's so easy for us to miss simple signs because we are distracted. Relaxation offers us the opportunity to address how we are feeling, and press reset.

Slow down the pace...

Have a no plans morning or afternoon.

Stop and spoil a pet, they will love your for it.

Stay fully present while you have a cup of tea or coffee, enjoy every mouthful.

Take a long shower or bath, self-care is an essential part of feeling good.

Have a break from your phone...go on, you can do it.

Sit outside in the garden, listen to the sounds around you and take in the colours of the season.

Relaxation doesn't have to mean sitting still. Gentle exercise can help you relax too.

Go for a walk at your own pace. You might choose to go for a longer walk, but even a few minutes of walking can help you feel more relaxed.

Look for a class you'd like to try, such as yoga, Pilates or gentle stretching. Or go for something more energetic if you'd like to but remember to cool down too.

Try some seated exercises, which you may be able to fit into your day more easily if you are busy. They may also help if you have mobility restrictions that make other exercise difficult. The NHS has a selection of sitting exercises you could try.



# And Breathe...

*Focus on your breathing.*

Breathing deeply and slowly can help you feel calmer, it also helps with panic attacks and feeling anxious. It takes just a few minutes and can be done anywhere.

Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to keep your shoulders down and relaxed, and place your hand on your stomach – it should rise as you breathe in and fall as you breathe out.

Count as you breathe. Start by counting 'one, two, three, four' as you breathe in and 'one, two, three, four' as you breathe out. Try to work out what's comfortable for you.

You can find more details about this exercise on the NHS website.



*Spend time in nature.*

Spending time outside and in green spaces can be great for your physical and mental health.

Take a walk in a green space if you can, taking time to notice any trees, flowers, plants and animals you see on the way. See our page on relaxation exercises for a guided mindful moment in nature.

Spend some time taking part in conservation, whether that's digging in your own garden or taking part in a local green project. You can find projects and outdoor activities to suit whatever level of mobility you have. See our pages on nature and mental health for more information about how to find projects in your area. If you live in an area where it is difficult to access nature and green spaces, our page on overcoming barriers may help.



# Listen to music

Music can relax you, connect you to your emotions, lift your mood and sometimes distract you from worrying thoughts.

Listen to your favourite songs. Avoid anything that you feel might feel negatively.

Really listen to the music. Can you pick out different instruments? Can you hear a drum beat or a certain rhythm? Focus on the music, and let other thoughts fade away.

Our Wellbeing Team like Yellow Brick Cinema, their relaxing music is ideal – you can find their music channel on YouTube.



## Get creative

We all have a creative side, if you don't believe this, you have probably not found the right thing for you yet, so why not try some different ways to explore your own creativity?

Try painting, drawing, making crafts, playing a musical instrument, dancing, baking or sewing.

Try not to worry too much about the finished product. Just focus on enjoying yourself, you might even find your hidden talent.

# **Can't escape right now?**

## **Picture yourself somewhere serene**

Even if you can't physically get away, your imagination can transport you to somewhere you feel calm.

Think of somewhere relaxing and peaceful. You might choose a memory of somewhere you've been, or a place you have imagined.

Close your eyes, think about the details of this place. What does it look like? What kind of colours and shapes can you see? Can you hear any sounds? Is it warm or cool? What smells are there?

Let your mind drift and your body relax. Start at your toes, relax each muscle in turn. Watch out for tense shoulders and a clenched jaw allowing the tension to drift away as you imagine yourself somewhere calm.





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**Here's a visual guide to help you with this.**

### Feet

Curl your toes tightly into your feet, then release them.

### Calves

Point or flex your feet, then let them relax.

### Thighs

Squeeze your thighs together tightly, then let them relax.

### Torso

Suck in your abdomen, then release the tension and let it fall.

### Back

Squeeze your shoulder blades together, then release them.

## Shoulders

Lift and squeeze your shoulders toward your ears, then let them drop.

## Arms

Make fists and squeeze them toward your shoulders, then let them drop.

## Hands

Make a fist by curling your fingers into your palm, then relax your fingers.

## Face

Scrunch your facial features to the centre of your face, then relax.

## Full Body

Squeeze all muscles together, then release all tension.

# Reframing

This one can be challenge, however, changing the way we view the everyday stress that we may encounter can be a huge benefit to us; helping us to look at different angles and perspectives. This in turn can help our physical and mental wellbeing.

## Activity - Reframe The Day

Practice being kind to yourself by reframing something from your day. Think about something you did during the day that you might have done differently, reframe it positively and let go of any unwanted feelings, guilt or self-blame. Ask yourself what you would say to a friend who has been in the same position. We are often much harder on ourselves than we are on other people. However, the longest relationship you are going to have, is the one you have with yourself, so be kind.



# Grounding Techniques

The Wellbeing Team really like this one. It's a good way of regaining control of your feelings, by distancing yourself from them for a moment. Focus on yourself and the world around you:



Sometimes we need to take a moment out of a difficult situation to allow us to reset, feel calmer and see things clearer. This technique also works as a good distraction technique if you need to mentally take yourself out of a situation, such as being in the dentist chair.

Choose at least three of the categories below.

Songs	Food	Cars
Flowers	TV Shows	Films
Books	Countries	Football Teams

Name as many items as you can in each one. Spend a few minutes on each category to come up with as many items as possible. If this is too challenging in the moment, you can try reciting the alphabet and nursery rhymes, being mindful of your breathing.



# Body Awareness

The body awareness technique will bring you into the here-and-now by directing your focus to sensations in the body. Pay special attention to the physical sensations created by each step.

## 1.

Take 5 long, deep breaths through your nose, and exhale through puckered lips.

## 2.

Place both feet flat on the floor. Wiggle your toes. Curl and uncurl your toes several times. Spend a moment noticing the sensations in your feet.

## 3.

Stamp your feet on the ground several times. Pay attention to the sensations in your feet and legs as you make contact with the ground.

## 4.

Clench your hands into fists, then release the tension. Repeat this 10 times.

## 5.

Press your palms together. Press them harder and hold this pose for 15 seconds. Pay attention to the feeling of tension in your hands and arms.

## 6.

Rub your palms together briskly. Notice and sound and the feeling of warmth.

## 7.

Reach your hands over your head like you're trying to reach the sky. Stretch like this for 5 seconds. Bring your arms down and let them relax at your sides.

## 8.

Take 5 more deep breaths and notice the feeling of calm in your body.

# Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a great technique you can learn but it can take practice. It involves noticing what's happening in the present moment, without judgement. You might take notice and be aware of your mind, body or surroundings. The technique has roots in Buddhism and meditation, but you don't have to be spiritual, or have any particular beliefs, to try it. There are apps and guidance available to guide you but here is an overview:

Mindfulness aims to help you:

- become more self-aware
- feel calmer and less stressed
- feel more able to choose how to respond to your thoughts and feelings
- cope with difficult or unhelpful thoughts
- be kinder towards yourself.

Many people find practising mindfulness helps them manage their day-to-day wellbeing, but it doesn't always work for everyone. Mindfulness is a skill. It requires work like any therapy and requires practice like any skill. A good starting point would be to find a place where you can sit quietly and undisturbed for a few moments. Start by bringing your attention to the present moment and notice your breathing. Pay attention to your breath as it enters and leaves your body. Your mind will begin to wander, pulling you out of the present moment. It's important you acknowledge this, recognising your thoughts and feelings. Take note and allow yourself to return to your breathing. You might only be able to manage this for a couple of minutes at first. If you keep practicing, it will get easier, and you will be able to concentrate for longer.



# The circle of control

The circle of control is a concept that refers to the things in your life that you have the power to change or influence. It is a way of thinking about your life and responsibilities that helps you to focus on what's within your control and let go of things you can't control.

The circle of control is often represented visually as two circles, with the things that you have control over inside the inner circle and the things that you don't have any control over in the outside circle. This can be a helpful way to think about how to allocate your time and energy and identify the things you spend unnecessary time worrying about.

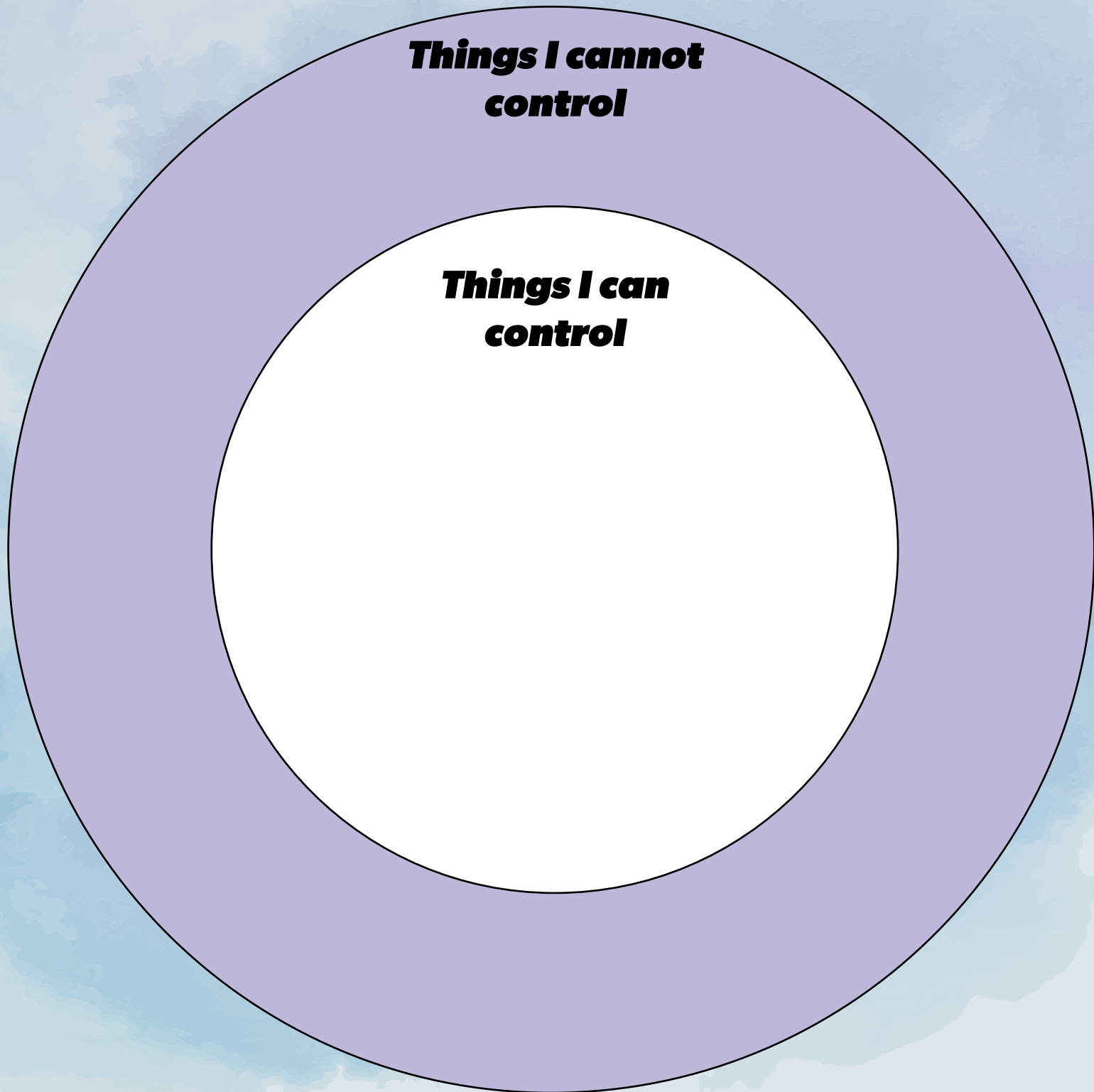
Take a look at the example below:





# Your circle of control

On the blank diagram below, why not create your own circle of control?



# Final Thoughts

As individuals, we all have our own interests, likes and dislikes and with this in mind, relaxation techniques are also a personal journey. You may try a technique and find it successful, others less so, the key thing that we focus on our mental health, just as we do our physical health. Here at Riverside College, we want to support you on your academic, vocational journey, sharing in your success.

