



THE SELF-HELPFUL SERIES
WORKBOOK 2

**YOUR SENSORY
SELF CARE
TOOLKIT**

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AND

_____ (YOUR NAME HERE)

This book is going to take you on an adventure through your senses – an exploration that’s personal to you.

There’s no right or wrong answers. When you’ve completed this workbook, it will be a resource that you can come back to whenever you need – your own personal sensory self care toolkit!

Did you know that
we have

8 SENSES ?!

We have the 5 you already know about:

VISUAL **AUDITORY**
SMELL
TASTE **TACTILE / TOUCH**




But we also have another

3






PROPRIOCEPTION

Sensations from our joints and muscles that tell us how our body is positioned. Proprioception makes it possible for us to walk around without looking at our legs the whole time! It also tells us how much force we need to use when we pick up a heavy object or write with a pen.



VESTIBULAR


Our sense of balance and movement. The vestibular system is located in the inner ear, and measures where we are in relation to gravity. This sense tells us if we're upside down, or if we're moving - plus what speed and direction we're going.





INTEROCEPTION

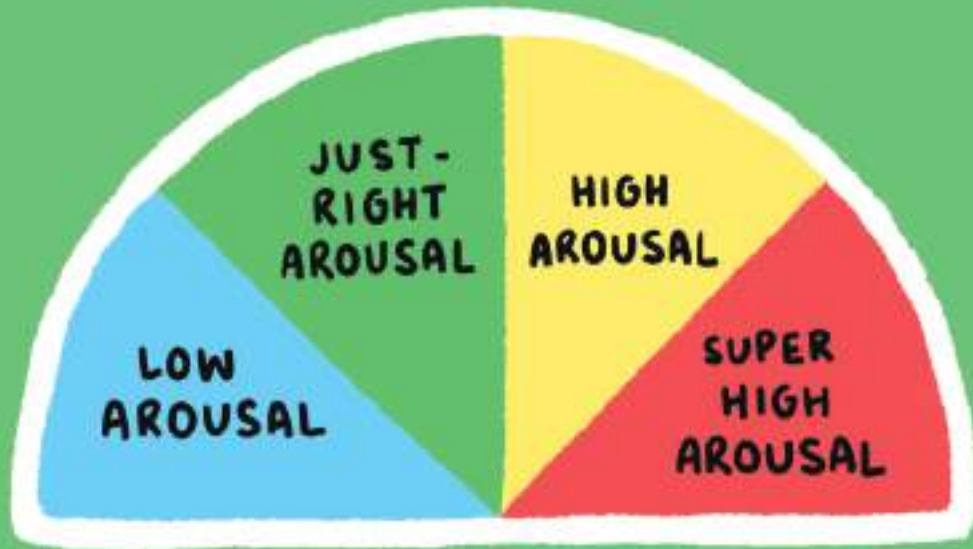
Sensations from our internal organs. Interoception tells us if we're hungry or thirsty, hot or cold, when we're in pain, and when we need to go to the loo. It's also linked to our emotional processing.



Our body receives information from our 8 senses and sends it to our brain. We can use this information to calm and soothe ourselves, or to help us feel alert and energised.

THE AROUSAL CURVE

Everyone has an arousal curve (our energetic state) that we move up and down as we go about our days.



Low arousal:
low energy, sluggish, lethargic, sleepy, tired

Just-right arousal:
calm, awake, attentive, grounded

High arousal:
high energy
can be anxious/edgy/upset/stressed
or excited/joyful

Super high arousal:
loss of control
anger, fear, panic

We can use our senses to boost our arousal if its low, or lower our arousal if its high, and bring ourselves closer to that just-right state.



Try checking in with yourself on your own arousal curve!
Move the arrow to where you think you're at right now.

It's a continuum, not categorical, so your arrow can fall anywhere along the curve. For example, you might be in the green, just-right arousal state, but are you in the middle, or closer to the edge of the yellow or the blue?

This can be a bit tricky to figure out at first, but the more you check in with your curve, the more in tune you'll become with your state of arousal, and the more easily you'll be able to respond to what your body needs.

You'll find more of these little check in reminders as we go – keep your copy of the arousal curve beside you while you work through this book.

sensory PREFERENCES

(put your detective hat on!) 

Sensory self care isn't prescriptive. We all have different sensory preferences! There are lots of ideas in this book, but not all of them will work for you, and some will work differently for different people. When you're thinking about or experimenting with different sensory strategies, try asking yourself these questions:

1. Do I find this sensation pleasant or unpleasant?

If you find it unpleasant, then leave it aside – it doesn't need to go in your sensory toolkit! If you find it pleasant then hooray – now ask yourself...

2. Does this make my arousal higher or lower?

Does this strategy calm you or help you to feel awake?

Keep exploring and experimenting, and you'll build up your own personal sensory self care toolkit.

We're now going to start our
adventure through our 8 senses!

Where are you
on the arousal curve
right now?

CHECK IN!





VISUAL



On the next page are some ideas of visual self care strategies you might use. Some of these will resonate with you, and some won't. There are probably other visual strategies that work for you that aren't on this list too!

Use these ideas as a starting point, and jot down any other ideas that come to mind in the clouds.

LIGHTING ambient lighting (a lamp, a candle, fairy lights...),
bright lighting (fluorescent lights, neon signs, city lights), daylight,
twilight, fireworks, flashing lights, coloured lights...

ARTS & CRAFTS scrapbooking, collage,
decorating something with stickers, colouring in books, embroidery,
crochet, model making, painting...

**PLAYING WITH COLOUR
OR VISUALS**

experimenting with your personal style,
editing photos, doing jigsaw puzzles...

NATURE looking at the night sky,
cloud gazing, looking at nature scenes and views, watching birds or animals...

**OTHER
WATCHING
THINGS** a favourite TV show, fish in an aquarium,
a lava lamp, an egg timer...

What other visual activities
do you enjoy?

Now let's use that brainstorm to start building your sensory self care toolkit!

What visual tools/activities do you already know calm you (lower your arousal)?

What visual tools/activities do you already know alert you (boost your arousal)?



Where are you on the arousal curve right now?

What visual tools/activities would you like to try?



As you experiment with these, check in with your arousal curve and remember our two questions!

1. Do I find this sensation pleasant?
(If yes, it's a good tool for your toolkit!)
2. If yes, did this make my arousal higher, or lower?
Add it to one of your lists on the previous page.



AUDITORY



Let's make some mixtapes! A calming mixtape to listen to when your arousal is high, and an alerting mixtape to listen to when your arousal is low.

Think about what sounds help you to feel calm, and what sounds help you to feel alert and awake.

Here are some example ideas – use these as starting points to think about what sounds help you!

Music — what songs give you energy?
— what songs do you find comforting or soothing?
— what about instrumental music?

Beating drums?

Nature sounds — leaves crunching?
— cat purr?
— water running?
— waves crashing?
— birds chirping?

What other sounds do you like?

Background conversation? laughter?
The sound of a train?
The whirr of machinery?



Fill out the track lists on the next page with some of your favourite sounds.

You can turn these into actual playlists on your phone and listen to them whenever you need them! Most streaming services have a surprising variety of ambient noise tracks too – like train sounds and cats purring. You could also make an audio recording of any favourite sounds that are a bit more unique!



MY CALMING MIXTAPE

(sounds to listen to when my arousal is high)

TRACK LIST:



MY ALERTING MIXTAPE

(sounds to listen to when my arousal is low)

TRACK LIST:





TASTE



Next up, let's explore our taste (gustatory) sense! Have a think about some of your favourite things to eat and drink, and jot them down in the plate and cup on the next page. Have a think about other tastes you like too – maybe a gum you like, or a toothpaste you use!



Let's put your favourite tastes in your sensory self care toolkit!

Which of these tastes **BOOST** your arousal, or help you feel alert & awake?

Which of these tastes **LOWER** your arousal, or help you feel soothed & comforted?



Where are you on the arousal curve right now?



TACTILE



We get so much tactile (touch) input throughout our day, but we don't often think about how it affects us. Use this checklist on the next page to kickstart some ideas for your personal tactile self care. There's no right or wrong answers, and it's okay if you don't know!



Lowers arousal

Boosts arousal

Not sure, but I'd like to try it

Doesn't work for me

TACTILE self care ideas

Wearing soft clothes & socks

Playing with slime

Playing with dough or putty

A snuggly blanket & cushions

Cuddling a pet, or a soft toy

Using a face or body scrub

Using a face or body lotion



Lowers arousal

Boosts arousal

Not sure, but I'd like to try it

Doesn't work for me

Tick the boxes that best match how these tools work for you - there are no wrong answers!

Holding a smooth stone in your hand

Running your hand through water

Walking barefoot on grass or sand

Crunchy food textures

Soft food textures

A squishy fidget toy

A fidget cube or a tangle fidget toy



Transfer any ideas you liked over to these lists
and add any other ideas of your own!

What tactile tools/activities do you already
know calm you (lower your arousal)?

What tactile tools/activities do you already
know alert you (boost your arousal)?

You'll start to notice more tactile sensations that you like or dislike
as you go about your days. You can always come back and add more
to your lists as you keep exploring.

What tactile tools/activities would you like to try?



As you experiment with these, check in with your arousal curve and remember our two questions!

1. Do I find this sensation pleasant?
(If yes, it's a good tool for your toolkit!)
2. If yes, did this make my arousal higher, or lower?
Add it to one of your lists on the previous page.



SMELL
~~~~~

Our smell (olfactory) sense is an interesting one. It's especially good at evoking memory. We can use this to our advantage – smells from a time when we had a pleasant experience are likely to make us feel good in the present!

Use the next page to brainstorm some of your favourite smells. There's no right or wrong. A smell that calms one person might alert a different person! Your favourite smells and how they affect you are unique to you.



What are some of your favourite things to smell in each of these categories?

Nature smells:

Products you use:

Food & drink smells:

Favourite smells from your childhood:

Other favourite smells:



Transfer your favourite smells over to these lists. If you're not sure where it belongs, you can always pull out your arousal curve, and test a smell out!

Which of these smells boost your arousal, and help you feel awake?

Which of these smells lower your arousal, and help you feel soothed or comforted?

Think about ways you could incorporate some of these smells into your everyday life. For example, if you find the smell of vanilla soothing, could you get a vanilla lip balm, or bake some vanilla cookies?



Where are you on the arousal curve right now?



# INTEROCEPTION



Interoception is made up of our internal senses. Tapping into this sense requires a bit more listening to your body. Let's try out some exercises together. Space these exercises out over different times or days – doing them all at once would make things rather confusing!

Move the arrow on your arousal curve to check in with where you're at before and after doing each exercise. Record your findings by drawing arrows on the arousal curves. Did your arousal change? Add any notes about your experience!

Have a hot drink. Notice how it warms your body. Does it change how you feel?



NOTES:  
~~~~~



Have a cold drink. Notice how it cools your body. Does it change how you feel?



NOTES:
~~~~~



Try out some different breathing techniques – Yoga with Adriene on YouTube has some great videos on these! Give alternate nostril breathing, taco breath or breath of fire a go. How does it affect your body? Does it change your breath afterwards? How does it make you feel?

Breathing technique:



NOTES:  
~~~~~

Breathing technique:



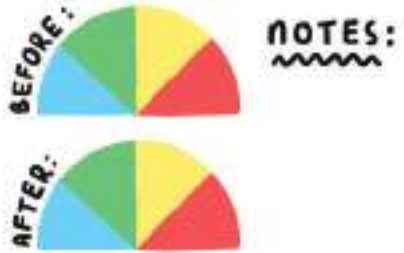
NOTES:
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Breathing technique:

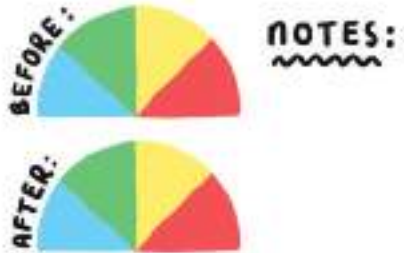


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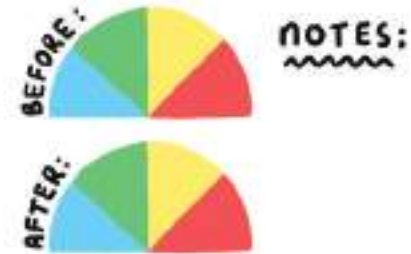
Try a mindfulness meditation online or on an app. Tune in to your breath and the sensations in your body. What do you notice?



Do a couple of minutes of star jumps. Notice how it affects your breath and your heart rate. Does this change where you are on the arousal curve?



Check in with yourself – are there any basic needs you need to attend to right now? Maybe you're thirsty, hungry, hot, cold, or need to go to the loo. Respond to what your body needs and notice how you feel.



Repeat this exercise at another time!





VESTIBULAR



Vestibular is our sense of balance and movement.

Some of us might like a lot of vestibular input during a day, while others of us might not like as much. Some people might find a lot of vestibular input calming, and some people might find a lot of vestibular input to be alerting. There's no right or wrong – we are all unique!

What ways do you like to move? What movements would you like to try? Here are some ideas to start you thinking. Circle any that resonate!

YOGA

SWINGING
on A SWING

RIDING A
BIKE/
SCOOTER

DANCING

JUMPING

SKATEBOARDING/
ROLLER SKATING

GOING FOR
A DRIVE

STAYING
STILL

WALKING

GENTLY
ROCKING

Once we've found some favourite vestibular activities, we can add them into our self care toolkit.

Vestibular activities that LOWER my arousal / calm me :

Vestibular activities that BOOST my arousal / alert me :

Where are you on the arousal curve right now?



Vestibular activities that I'd like to try:



As you experiment with these, check in with your arousal curve and remember our two questions!

1. Do I find this sensation pleasant?
(If yes, it's a good tool for your toolkit!)
2. If yes, did this make my arousal higher, or lower?
Add it to one of your lists on the previous page.



PROPRIOCEPTION

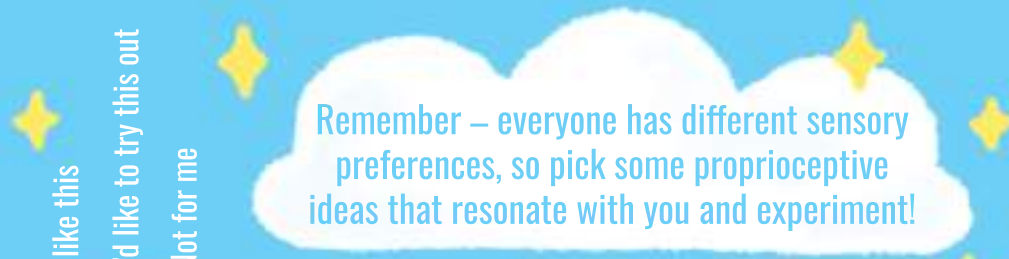
Proprioception is our sense of body position and where we are in space. We get this information from our muscles, joints and ligaments.



Proprioception works a little bit differently to our other senses. It's known as “the organising sense”, because whether our arousal is high or low, proprioceptive strategies often help to bring us back to the centre – the **green, calm state**. This makes them excellent tools in your self care toolkit!



If you can't tell where you are at on the arousal curve, or maybe you find you are **split between the yellow and the blue** (i.e. if you're feeling edgy/anxious/stressed, but also simultaneously sleepy/sluggish/low), you can pull out your favourite proprioceptive strategies to help you feel more grounded and calm.



Remember – everyone has different sensory preferences, so pick some proprioceptive ideas that resonate with you and experiment!

I like this
I'd like to try this out
Not for me

- Lifting weights
- Kneading dough (the bread kind or the play kind!)
- Swimming
- Walking
- Putting something heavy on your lap
- Wrapping yourself tightly in a blanket
- Having a tight hug



I like this
I'd like to try this out
Not for me

- Drinking a thick drink through a straw (uses your mouth muscles!)
- Chewing gum
- Sitting or lying on the floor (gravity does the pressure work!)
- Giving yourself a foot or shoulder massage
- Sweeping or raking leaves
- Stretching or yoga

Are there any other activities you enjoy that involve pulling, pushing, lifting, resistance or pressure? These all give your body proprioceptive input!

Let's put all these tools in your sensory toolkit. Come back to this page and pull out a tool when you're not sure where your arousal is, or not sure what self care your body needs.

Where are you on the arousal curve right now?



Proprioceptive strategies that work for me (bring my arousal back to "just right"):

Proprioceptive strategies I'd like to try:



As you experiment with these, keep checking in with your arousal curve! Did the activity you tried bring you closer to the “just right” state?

EXPLORING YOUR *sensory* WORLD

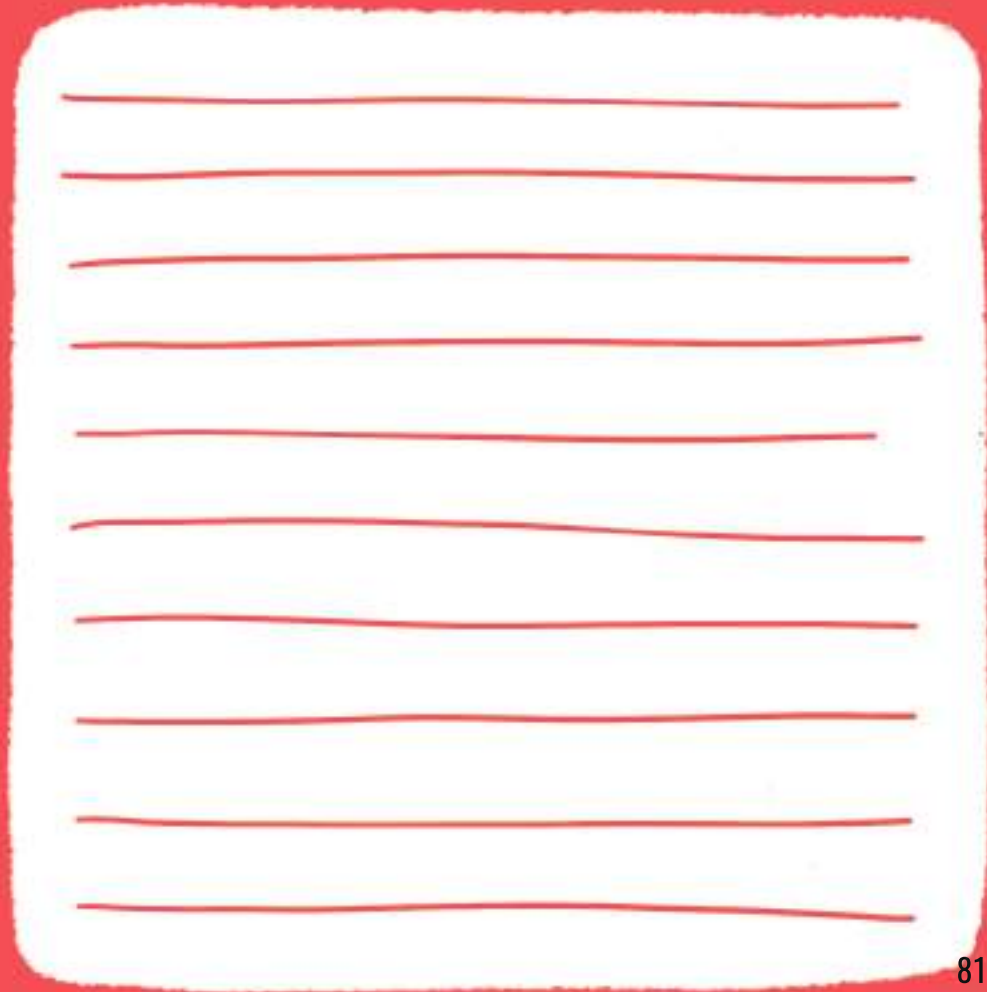
When you come across an experience or activity in everyday life that you really enjoy or really dislike, try going through the 8 senses to figure out any sensory components that might have made the experience enjoyable or not enjoyable for you.

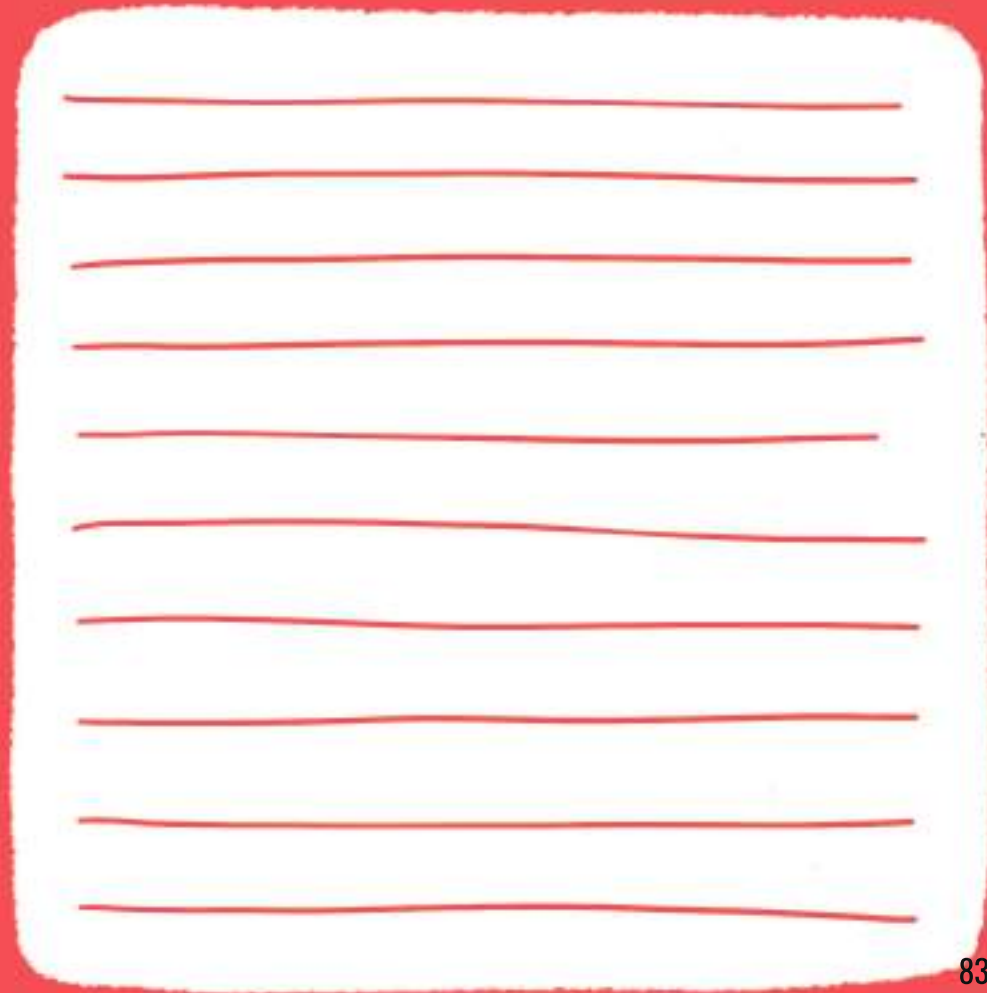
If it was something you really enjoyed, how can you bring those (or similar) sensory components into your self care toolkit?



Life is multisensory. When we can break down what sensory components work for us, that's when the sensory self care magic happens! Use the next few pages to make any notes on your sensory explorations and discoveries.







WOW!

Look at all the wonderful sensory self care tools you just filled your toolbox with, you star! This is a toolkit that is totally, uniquely yours.

The more you practice sensory self care – checking in with your arousal, and using your sensory toolkit to bring you closer to that just right state – the easier and more intuitive it becomes. You can come back to this book whenever you need a reminder of all the strategies you now have up your sleeve!





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