



# UNDERSTANDING BODY IMAGE

## SUPPORT & SELF CARE

CBT Exercises  
Self Care Ideas  
Journaling  
Movement  
Self Compassion  
Boundaries  
Final Thoughts



# WELCOME BACK!

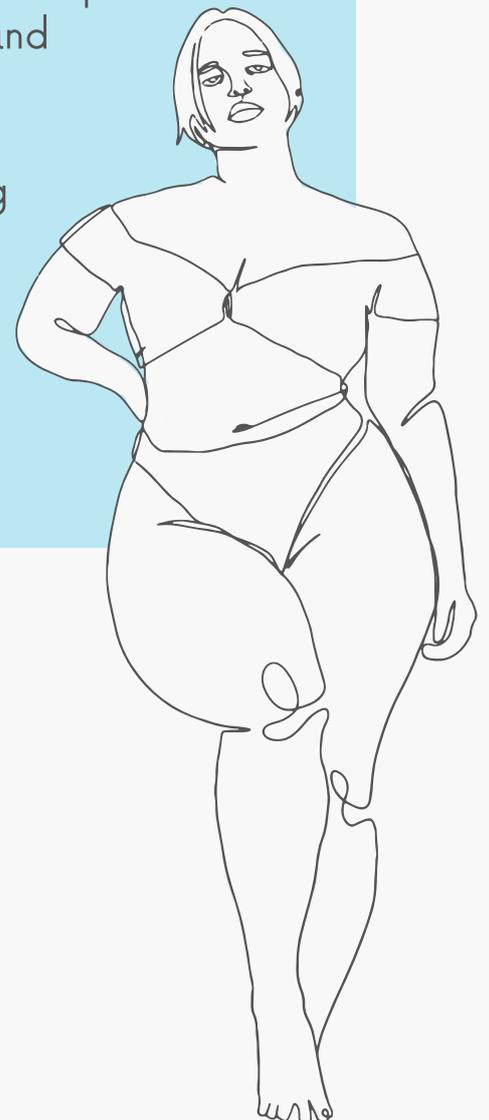
If you haven't already, please have a read through 'The Basics' and 'Causes and Consequences'. These will help you define body image and understand what can influence it.

In this final part, we're going to explore different therapeutic techniques, exercises and self-care activities which can help you with your body image.

We hope you'll find some of the activities and actions within this guide that can help you to build a personal 'Wellbeing Toolkit' to help you to cope and manage your mental health.

Keep an open mind whilst you're reading and once you have worked through the activities, take what works for you. It's your toolkit, your recovery, your healing.

You know what's right for you.



# COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT)

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is one of the most common ways to help a range of mental health difficulties including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, issues with body image and much more.

CBT looks at thoughts and behaviours, and can help you challenge them to start changing the way you think about your body. One of the main ways of doing this is by challenging negative thoughts.

Let's get straight into it, shall we?  
(You might find it helpful to write down your answers, or you can just think it through if that works best for you.)

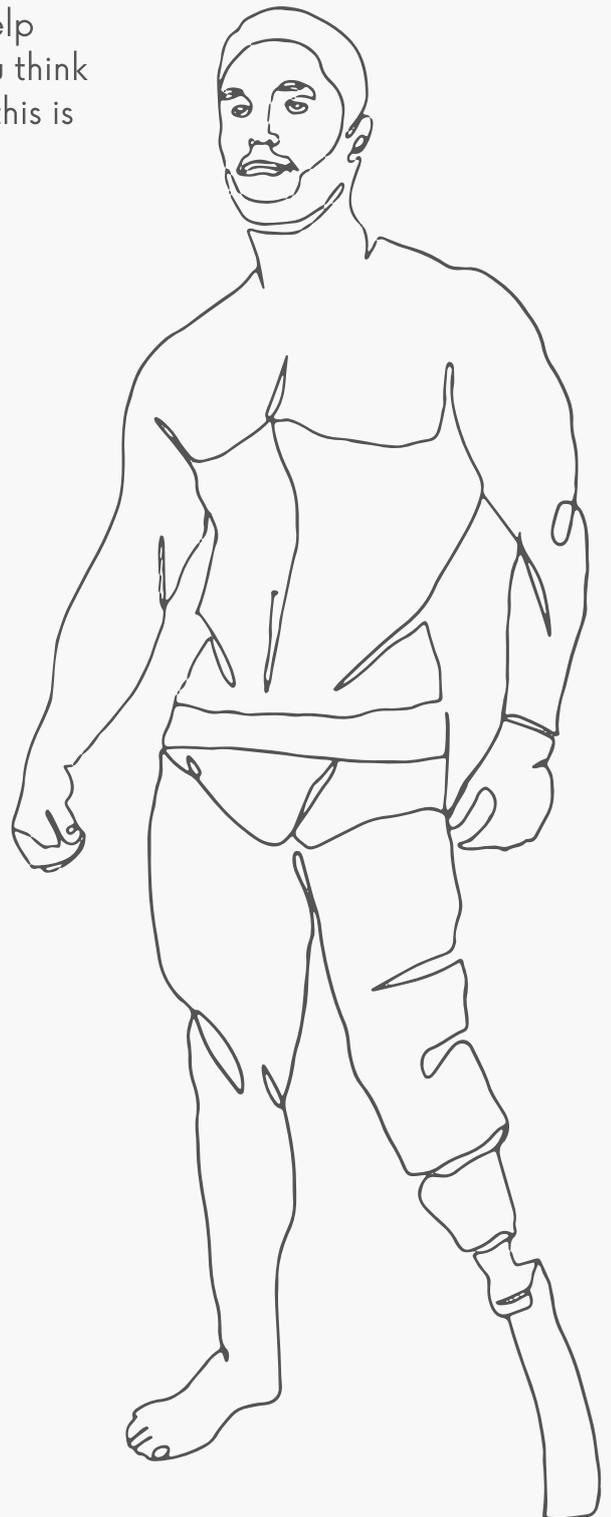
## IDENTIFY A NEGATIVE THOUGHT

This could be any thought about your body at the moment. It could be very specific or more general, for example, 'I hate my body'.

## LET'S UNPACK IT

Ask yourself 'why?' This could help identify the reason or the cause of this thought or where it might come from. So following the example above, it could be something like "I hate my body because it does not look like people I see on social media so I must be ugly".

Next is to challenge and replace these negative thoughts...



## CHALLENGE THESE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

This can be a tricky part so don't worry if you struggle with this (challenging our own thoughts can be incredibly difficult!) You may really believe this is true, but it is important to try and see if there's space for another perspective. If you're really struggling, **imagine what a friend might say**. Here are some prompts to help:

1. If someone doesn't look like everyone else in the media, does that mean they're ugly?
2. Does looking different make you more or less deserving of love and acceptance?
3. Should self-worth be based on appearance?

## REPLACE THE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

Finally, we can now start to work on replacing those negative thoughts with more positive ones.

Sticking with the example we have been using, we can think along the lines of "everyone looks different and that is just not well represented in the media. My self-worth should be based on myself and my character, more than my body or the way I look."

Source: [Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Body Image](#)

## THIS EXERCISE TAKES PRACTICE!

Developing this skill on your own creates a level of independence and control over your own recovery that is critical in creating new and healthy habits.

Once you've got the hang of it, you might want to add this to your own wellbeing toolkit, practised as a part of your own self-care routine or just when you need to as a part of your recovery journey\*.

\*The term "recovery" is often used in relation to eating disorders but is still relevant for body image issues because you're going through a process of healing.

"The first time I tried this exercise I really struggled with it as I felt I wasn't convinced by what I was saying. I almost didn't believe the words coming out of my mouth so I felt like it wasn't going to work or be beneficial for me. But I carried on and tried the exercise again, and the more I did it, the more I understood the exercise and it was starting to make sense. Then it slowly became slightly easier to do and it was taking me less time to self-correct my negative thinking. Over time it became more and more natural and the words coming out became more and more believable"

ANON

**NEGATIVE THOUGHT:** My stomach is too fat

**UNPACK:** I think my stomach is fat as it looks bigger than other people's

**CHALLENGE:** Society prizes flat tummies but is that really realistic? My stomach protects my organs and helps me enjoy yummy food, so surely it can't be flat? There are lots of people on social media who have big bellies and love their bodies, so maybe I can too. Is it even really that important/does anyone care?

**REPLACE:** My worth has nothing to do with the size of my stomach. I don't need a flat stomach for people to love me. I can still appreciate my body, even if I don't love it yet. The size of my stomach isn't anywhere near as important as my character and personality.

# SELF-CARE

Practicing things like self-care and self-compassion can help build a better relationship with yourself and improve your perception of your body image.

## FIND YOUR OWN VERSION OF SELF-CARE

Self-care can be anything that allows you to unwind and spend some time doing things that bring you joy. We all can get swept up in the business of life and need time for ourselves to recharge. Self-care is different for everyone, so you can find what works for you. Our suggestions here are just that - suggestions! Feel free to take what you need from this, but we'd still encourage you to push yourself out of your comfort zone and give things a try, even if it seems like it won't work, or seems a bit silly!



## BE CAREFUL OF USING FOOD AS A REWARD

When practicing self-care, it can be best to keep these activities separate from food, especially if you're experiencing disordered eating (that includes dieting) or have an eating disorder. This is because when we "treat ourselves" with food, we're turning it into a reward, and this reinforces the idea of "good" and "bad" foods. This can keep people in unhelpful cycles of eating, and promote feelings of shame and guilt associated with certain foods. The same goes for "cheat days", and "days off" certain ways of eating, as this only reinforces dieting and restrictive eating patterns. The "diet starts Monday" mentality is not helpful as it keeps you in harmful cycles.

A more intuitive, anti-diet approach to eating can help find a calmer, balanced way of thinking about food and eating. "Intuitive eating" is not a diet, but unfortunately some dieting companies do use these words to sell their brands. Any form of eating with intentional weight loss in mind is not intuitive eating.

# HERE ARE SOME SELF-CARE IDEAS:



In this section:

- Journaling • Nature • Movement • Breathing •
- Muscle Relaxation • Reading & Writing •
- Music & Podcasts • Social Media • Practicing Positivity •

## JOURNALING

Writing things down can have a therapeutic effect as it's a great way to process what's happening and how you're feeling - especially when those emotions are too hard to say. It can be a release, and a place of safety, knowing that nobody else will read it.

By keeping a journal, you can also look back on negative days and negative times and see that they don't last forever. You can also see how your thoughts and feelings change over time, so when it feels like you've grown. Honour the small victories!

Many of us might see keeping a journal as a big task that requires creativity, but remember - it's only for you so it doesn't have to be perfect. Spelling doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what it looks like. Letting go of this pressure to be perfect here may also help us reduce perfectionism towards our bodies.



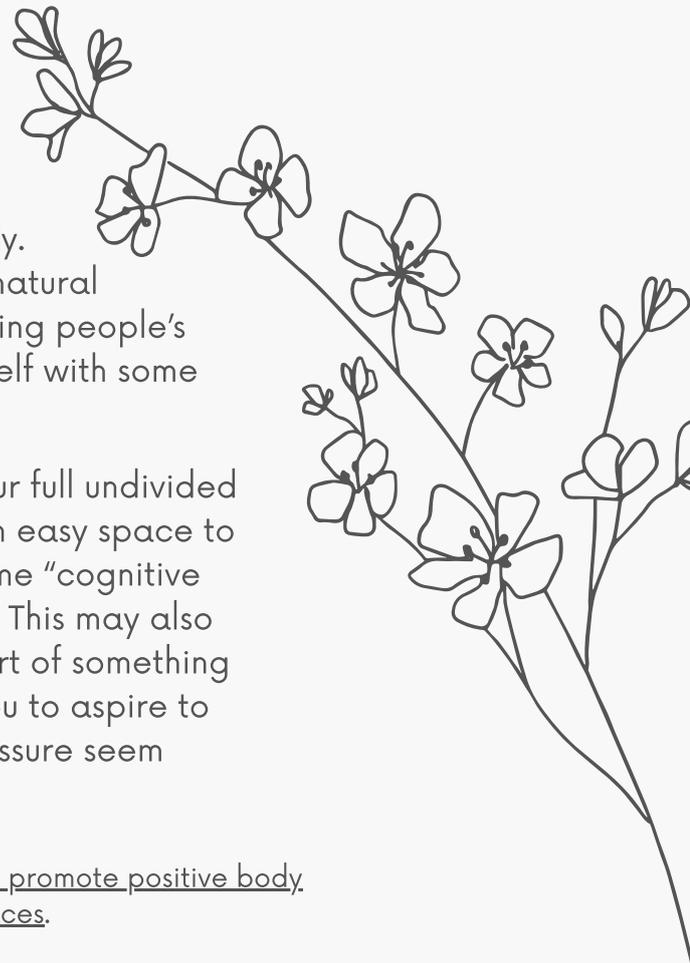
## CONNECT WITH NATURE

Your surroundings can influence how you are feeling, and more specifically towards your body. Research has found that just seeing pictures of natural environments has a positive influence on improving people's body image, so imagine what surrounding yourself with some fresh air and greenery can do!

Being in an environment that doesn't require your full undivided attention, and is calm and quiet, can provide an easy space to relax. Your mind can take a break and have some "cognitive quiet", away from the usual stimuli and thoughts. This may also allow space in your mind to reflect on being part of something bigger than yourself, placing less pressure on you to aspire to society's unrealistic ideals. It can make such pressure seem superficial and trivial.

To read more about this, click here: [Natural environments promote positive body image: New research shows powerful effect of green spaces.](#)

Although not for everybody, activities such as hiking or cycling can help you focus on how your body functions rather than your appearance, as well as boosting your mood. Wild swimming - in the sea or in rivers - can be so invigorating for some people. If it's not possible to do these activities, or if you just don't enjoy them, that's fine too. Sometimes the pressure to be active and "outdoorsy" can take over the tranquility. Appreciating the beauty of nature can be done at home if needed - get some plants, pictures of nature, or watch a nature programme on TV!



“Most people think I'm a bit mad for enjoying swimming in cold water outside in the UK! But I find wild swimming so calming and grounding. It makes me feel so present and alive. My body feels so good after. You can't help but be in the present moment when you step into very cold water! Being present and relaxed helps me to see beyond my negative thoughts about my body. It takes me more into the feeling of the water, and my surroundings. It feels very healing.”

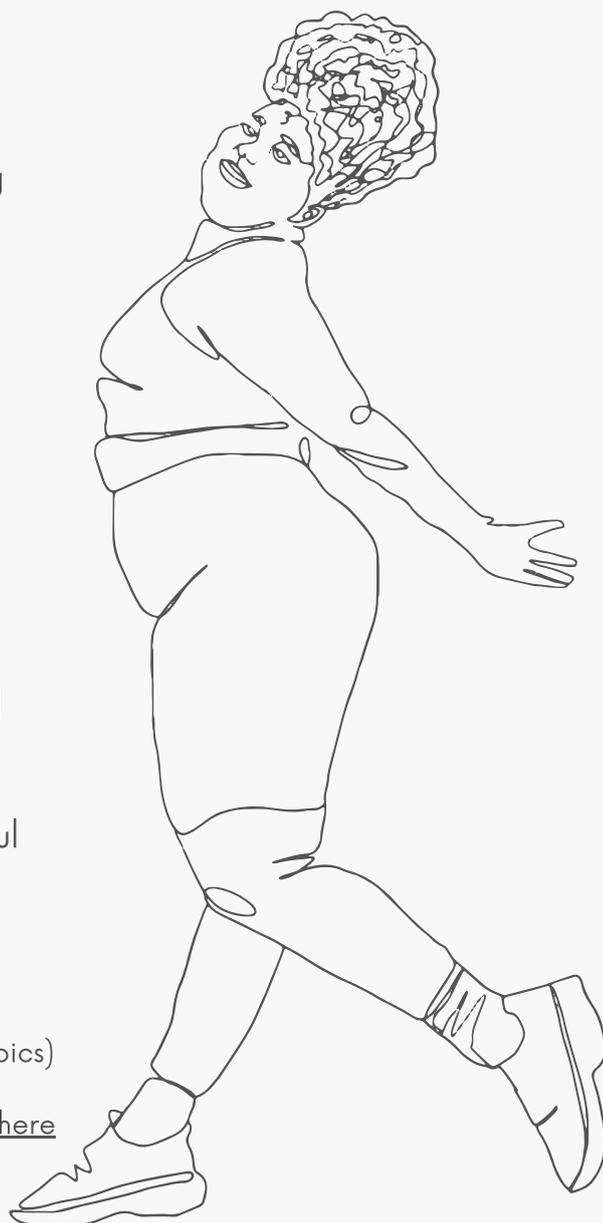
ANON

## MINDFUL MOVEMENT

Exercise is not a punishment. It can be fun and doesn't have to be in the typical ways of working out - it could involve taking a stroll in the park, gardening, playing football with your friends/family, swimming and yoga. It could just be moving to music in any way you like or are able to. Notice if you're tired and need to rest - honouring this feeling will support your overall health and wellbeing. Focus on moving in ways that highlight how much you enjoy it, rather than how you look whilst doing it, or trying to change your body.

If going to exercise classes or to gyms, try to find instructors who don't body shame or encourage weight loss. Comments like "let's burn those calories" or "shape up for Summer" are not helpful and only encourage weight stigma. Find fitness professionals who will help you move your body for enjoyment, not punishment.

Mel Ciavucco had a chat with Carly (who runs Disco Aerobics) and Leah, about exercise and their work around not using fatphobic language, for the "In Conversation" series, [click here](#) to watch.



"I was always anxious about going to exercise classes or to gyms as they're not very friendly places for fat people. There's a lot of fatphobia and pressure to lose weight. So I was delighted when I found Disco Aerobics, run by a really fun body-positive instructor - Carly (aka Project HB) who made it all about fun and joyous movement! She has created a wonderful community through her online classes where people put on their disco lights, dress up in sequins and dance in their lounges or kitchens! It really helped me re-frame exercise as something to look forward to, not to dread, which has helped my mental health greatly during the pandemic."

**ANON**

## BREATHING

Never underestimate the power of breathing! Sometimes when we find ourselves upset or anxious about the way we look, we can start to breathe in a rapid, shallow way. This causes an imbalance in oxygen and carbon dioxide levels, which can raise your heart rate, muscle tension and even cause dizziness. Regulating your breathing will readdress that balance, bringing oxygen back into your blood. Deep breathing stimulates your parasympathetic nervous system, which helps reduce this stress response.

Breathing exercises can be done anytime, not just in a moment of panic. If done regularly then can be preventative, helping you cope with stress going forward.

There are plenty of breathing exercises to try, including:

- Belly breathing
- Alternate nostril breathing
- Box breathing
- 4-7-8 breathing
- Lions breath

For more information on the breathing exercises above, **Very Well Mind** have a great article, [click here](#) to read it! First Steps ED run gentle yoga classes, which include breathing exercises. To learn more, [contact our team!](#)

## MUSCLE RELAXATION

You could also try practicing some progressive muscle relaxation - it's like a meditation that takes just a few minutes. It involves working through the body, bringing relaxation into different areas. This will help build awareness of your body and can also reduce general anxiety.

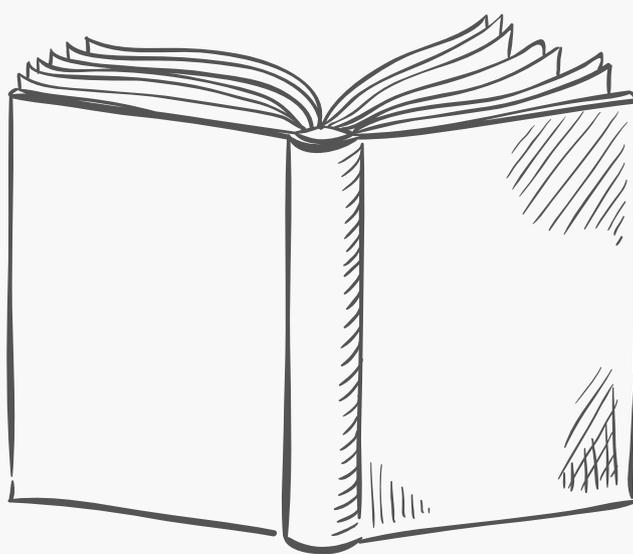
Here is an example of one muscle relaxation exercise: [Progressive Muscle Relaxation - Simple Guided Calming Exercise for Beginners | Hands-On Meditation](#)



## WRITING YOUR OWN STORY

This can be fiction, or non-fiction, in any form you like e.g. a short story, a blog, poetry. It can be very healing to write about your own life, and can potentially help others too. When we write fiction, we are often still writing about aspects of ourselves, even if it doesn't seem like it. Telling your story, be that speaking to a counsellor, and/or writing it down, is an important part of recovery.

As it continues to grow, we hope that our blog can be an extension of the support we offer and help us continue to provide hope, opportunity and choices to lives affected by eating disorders. By sharing service user stories and experiences, we can connect with and inspire those who need hope in recovery. To learn more about how you can write for us, [click here](#).



“I joined a writing group and started writing emotional fictitious stories, saying that they were not at all based on me but of course, they obviously were. I may have made up fictional characters, but I was playing out my emotions through them and re-writing my story. It was a very healing process, in hindsight. After that, I started writing a blog about my experiences and sharing my knowledge to help others going through the same thing. That, and becoming a Befriender through First Steps, was an important final step in recovery for me. It is very important to me to give back and support others.”

ANON

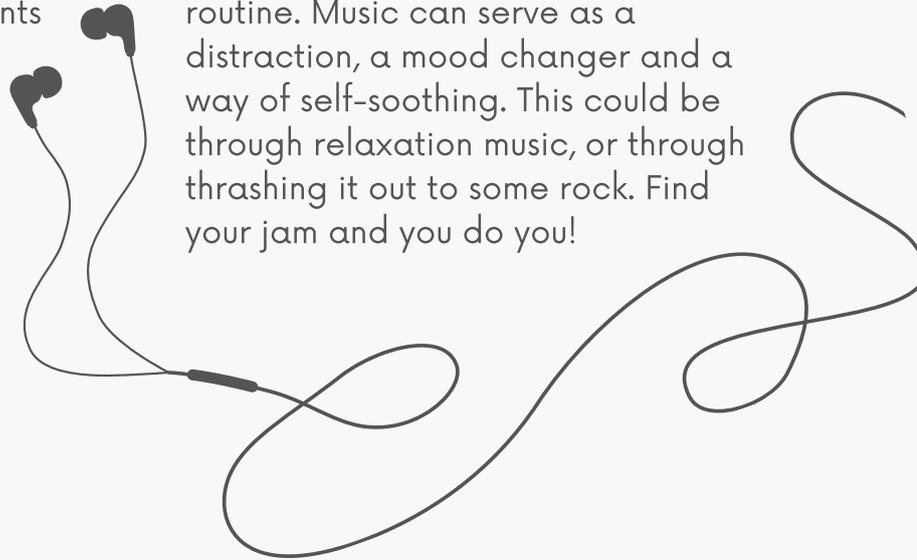
## SOCIAL MEDIA



Social media can be a fun distraction and a way to connect with people. But, as suggested in the previous part of the resource, make sure the accounts you are following are positive for your mental health. Join communities or follow accounts that can help you work on your body image and confidence, such as body acceptance advocates and positive mental health accounts.

## MUSIC

Whether it's playing an instrument you love, learning to play, singing along or just listening, music can be a powerful tool. Learning a new skill can help us stimulate our brains and can give us motivation and often a routine. Music can serve as a distraction, a mood changer and a way of self-soothing. This could be through relaxation music, or through thrashing it out to some rock. Find your jam and you do you!



## READ SOME FICTION

It's not for everyone but reading can distract you from stressful days and can be a source of entertainment and enjoyment, whilst taking a break from screens. If reading is difficult for you, maybe try audiobooks or podcasts. Reading can be a good way of switching off with less focus on appearance than say watching a film or TV. We can often relate to characters on an emotional level too, meaning we might find some healing or reassurance through them. Reading may also bring out your own creativity and you may fancy writing your own fiction!

“I always thought I hated reading because it took so much longer than just watching a movie. But after getting the right recommendations and the right books, I have fallen in love with reading! For me, it's the best way to take a break from the fast pace of life. I often read to relax after a long day or even before to set the right mood for the rest of the day.”

**ANON**

## MAKE A LIST OF YOUR STRENGTHS

Start with just a few if you're unsure, or ask for help from a friend or relative. We often think we have to be an expert at something to be good at it, but that's not true.

By asking yourself these questions regularly you can build your list over time. This can help you look at yourself in a more positive light and recognise the importance of skills and character over appearance.



### HERE ARE SOME PROMPTS TO GET YOU STARTED:

Are you good at problem-solving?

Are you good with tech stuff?

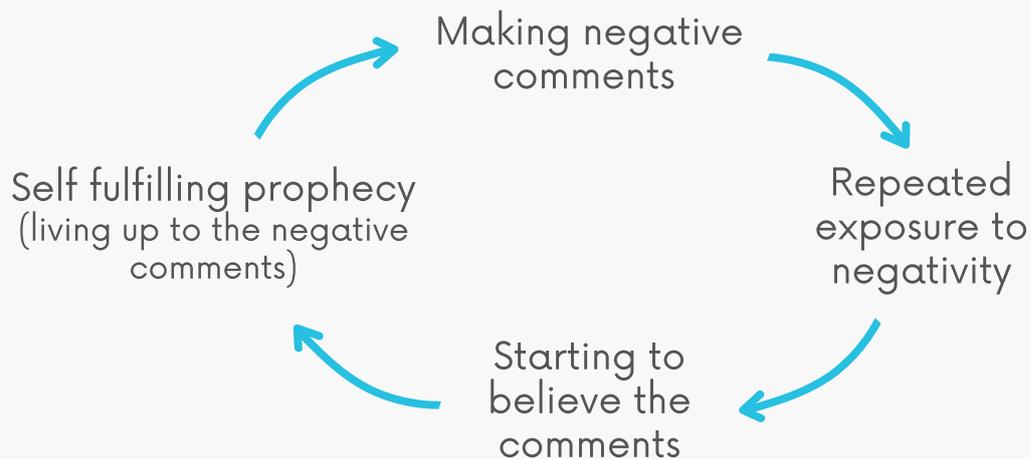
Are you a good listener?

Are you good at caring for others?

Are you good at organising things?

## PRACTICE POSITIVE SELF-TALK

This starts by reducing or stopping the negative way you talk to yourself, in a similar way to the CBT technique used at the start. Sometimes it can become second nature to make negative comments about yourself so actively stopping those comments can help break a vicious cycle:



This can be quite tricky at first because the way you speak to yourself is likely to be the way you always have. When you struggle to think of something more positive to say to yourself, consider what you would say to a friend or loved one. This may help you find a kinder way of speaking to yourself.



“When I started working on the way I spoke to myself, the first thing I noticed was that it had become a habit to take out my frustration on myself. I would say “I hate myself” every time something went wrong or I was angry or frustrated. So every time I would catch myself saying “I hate...” I would stop and say what I was actually annoyed or frustrated at. For example, if I was running late to something and was getting frustrated I would start to say that I hated myself but I would stop and recognise why I was actually frustrated. So instead of “I hate myself”, it was “I hate being rushed, so I will make a mental note to get ready earlier. This takes some of the hatred and blame off myself, so it’s a little kinder.”

**ANON**

# COMPASSION FOCUSSED THERAPY

Compassion Focussed Therapy helps you learn compassionate skills to be kinder to yourself. There are various exercises that activate evolutionary systems in our brain that allow us to experience feelings of safety, security, empowerment and inner peace.

Developed by Paul Gilbert, these systems are "evolutionary" as they're based on how we have evolved over time, with our responses to threats and our methods of survival. This approach is based on three systems dealing with different emotional states:

**The drive and excitement system.** This encourages people to seek food, shelter and social relationships.

**The soothing and contentment system.** This is when a person is fulfilled and at peace, and no longer feels the need to look for outside resources to facilitate this state.

**The threat detection and protection system**

This generates anger, disgust and fear to maintain physical & mental protection.

Gilbert, Paul, (2010) "The Compassionate Mind - Compassion Focused Therapy", Constable, UK

## DRIVE SYSTEM

**Purpose:** Motivates us towards resources



Nuclius accumbens,  
Striatum, Basal ganglia.



Dopamine.

**Motivation:**

Wanting, Seeking,  
Aspiring, Striving.

**Feelings:**

Excitement, Desire,  
Vitality.

**Behaviours:**

Approach,  
Engagement.

## SOOTHING SYSTEM

**Purpose:** Allows social connectedness, bonding, and management of distress



Prefrontal Cortex



Opiates, Oxytocin

**Motivation:**

Kindness, Caring.

**Feelings:**

Soothed,  
Contentment,  
Wellbeing.

**Behaviours:**

Approach,  
Engagement.

## THREAT SYSTEM

**Purpose:** Threat detection & protection



Amygdala



Adrenaline, Cortisol

**Motivation:**

Protection, Safety  
seeking.

**Feelings:**

Anger, Anxiety,  
Disgust, Shame.

**Behaviours:**

Aggression, Avoidance,  
Submission.

It is common for people who struggle with their body image and/or their relationship with food, to experience self-criticism, shame and guilt, and these are often associated with the threat or drive system. It's also likely that the self-soothing system is underdeveloped which means that feeling relaxed and at peace can be difficult.

By developing your compassion skills you will be able to enhance the soothing system, to make sure it's in balance with the threat and drive systems in your body. This can help with feelings of insecurity and hostility by training your mind to become more compassionate with itself and others.

Source: [Compassion Focused Therapy \(CFT\) for Eating Disorders](#)



## **SOOTHING RHYTHM BREATHING**

This can help you access compassion for yourself by using soothing, rhythmical breathing to tone down your threat system whilst maintaining mindful awareness. [Click here](#) to try it out.

## **COMPASSIONATE IMAGERY**

Creating a compassionate image in your mind can help when you notice yourself becoming self-critical or in a time of heightened anxiety. In this exercise, you can come to a place of rest in the breath. You can use the power of your imagination to evoke imagery that promotes feelings of love, warmth, kindness and compassion. Click the link to try the exercise: [Creating a Compassionate Image](#).

## COMPASSIONATE LETTER-WRITING

Another technique that may be helpful to get in touch with your compassionate inner voice is compassionate letter-writing.

Firstly, bring to mind a recent or current source of distress or problem and write it down. Then write a little about each point below:

**1** Validate your feelings (e.g. "It is understandable to feel down about myself when I'm going through a tough time")

**2** Acknowledge the feeling is happening now but will pass (e.g. "Just because I am feeling like this now it doesn't mean I will feel like this forever")

**3** Express care and support for yourself (e.g. "I am going to focus on reaching out to my close friends even though a part of me feels like shutting myself away").

You can do these as often as you like. Perhaps if you find it works, you can write regular letters to yourself, like a self-compassion diary.

## SIMPLE BODY SCAN AND RELAXATION

The following exercise is from [16 Compassion Focused Therapy Training Exercises and Worksheets](#) where you can find more CFT techniques that you might want to try. This exercise might help you connect more with your body and appreciate it whilst engaging in some relaxation too.

To begin, bring yourself to a calm and soothing focus on your breath.

Next, focus on how your legs feel. Imagine that all the tension in your legs is flowing down through your legs, into the floor, and away. Let the tension go. As you breathe in, notice the tension, and as you breathe out, imagine the tension flowing away. Imagine your legs feeling grateful that the tension is leaving. You may find it helpful to slightly tense your leg muscles as you breathe in, and allow them to relax as you breathe out.

Move your focus to your body, and repeat the process of breathing in and noticing the tension, this time in your shoulders, and breathing out and allowing it to flow away into the floor and away. Feel your body's gratitude as you empty it of tension, and enjoy the feeling of being kind to your body.

Focus on the tips of your fingers next. Imagine the tension stored there and allow it to be released, through your hands, your wrists, your arms, elbows, and shoulders, and finally all the way through your body to the floor.

Next, move on to the tension in your head, neck, and forehead. Allow them to relax with each breath, and visualize the tension running down through your shoulders, your stomach and your back, all the way down through your legs and into the floor.

Finally, focus on your whole body. Each time you breathe, focus on the word "Relax." Imagine your body becoming a bit more relaxed with every breath. Practice this breath for a few minutes.

End the exercise by taking a deep breath, moving your body around a little, and notice how your body feels now, especially in comparison to how it felt when you began. Allow yourself to be grateful for your body, and for your body to be grateful for the special attention and release it just received.

When you are ready, get up and go about your day feeling a bit more relaxed.

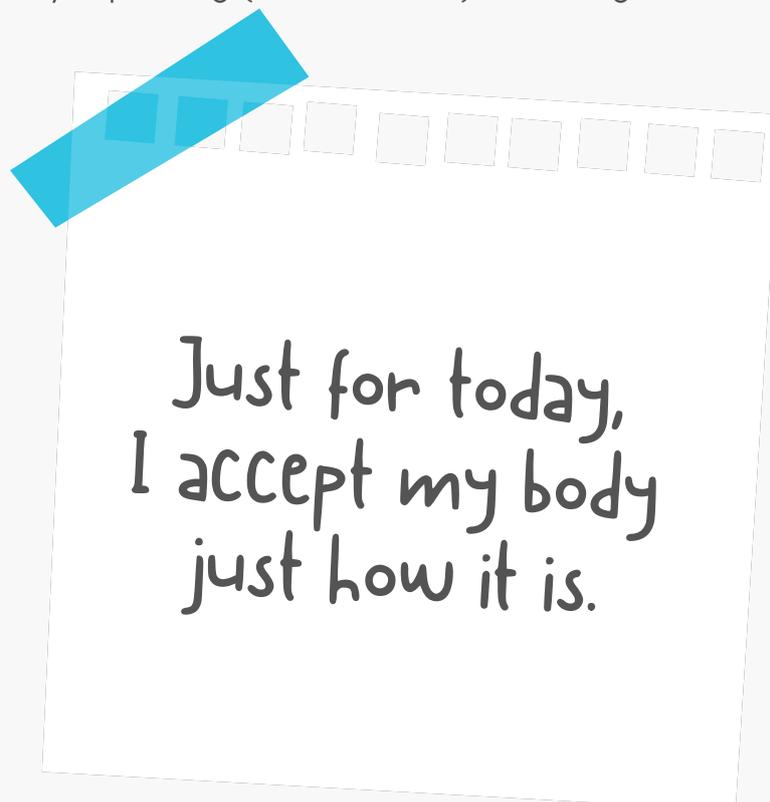
## COMPASSION AND BODY ACCEPTANCE

If you find yourself putting things off until you look a certain way or have lost weight, try to make a list of these things. Consider what it would be like to do them now, and how you might make that happen. For instance, if you think "I can't wear a bikini until I've lost weight", consider why you feel that way. People of all shapes and sizes wear bikinis, which might mean that this is not about your body, but instead about your mindset.

But what if somebody comments on your body? This is where our knowledge of weight stigma comes in (something we learnt about in 'Causes and Consequences') and we set a boundary and use compassionate self-talk. This judgment from another person is part of their own biases which they may be projecting as an issue onto you. Your body is not their business. You can choose to wear what you like, and remember that your worth is not based on their opinion.

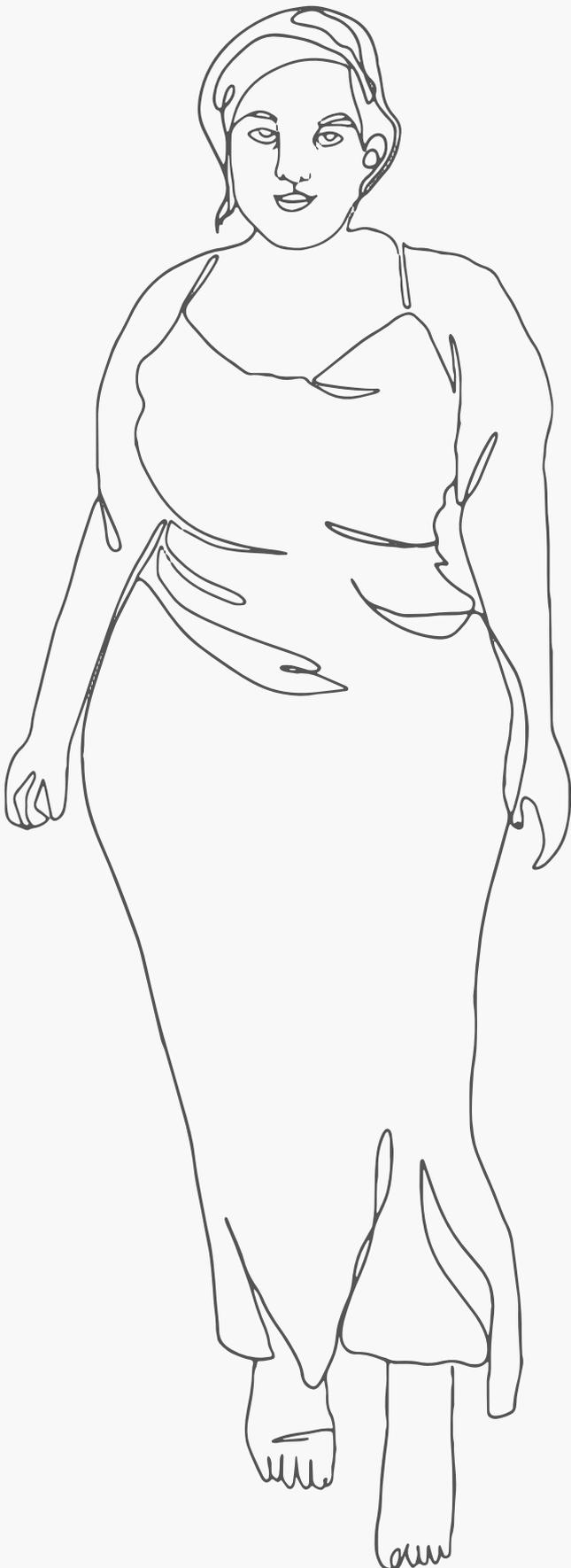
Challenging your mindset can be difficult, so don't worry if you never get to the point of being able to wear a bikini, for example. It's a big jump to go from disliking your own body to loving it, that pressure may not be helpful. Do what feels comfortable for you, and work towards finding a level of body acceptance. You don't have to love your body, you just need to work towards being compassionate to yourself and accepting your body in this moment. **Even the most body-positive people don't love themselves all the time!**

You might like to try repeating (like a mantra) or writing on a sticky note on your mirror:



## SELF-COMPASSION TIPS

Here's some other things you can try to become kinder and more compassionate towards yourself:



**Practise mindfulness.** Calmly notice what is happening - what you're thinking and feeling in this moment. Try not to judge or react to these things, just notice them. If judgemental thoughts appear in your mind, think of them as passing clouds and try not to pay them much attention.

**Be gentle with yourself when things go wrong.** When something goes wrong or you make a mistake, practise talking to yourself like you would to a good friend. You probably wouldn't scold a friend for a mistake they made, you would more likely comfort them, so try to extend that same kindness to yourself. Mistakes are things that help us learn.

**Allow yourself to be imperfect.** Give yourself permission to get things wrong sometimes and to not be perfect. Remind yourself that you can be imperfect and still be a good (in fact, great), worthy person.

**Learn to say 'no'.** If you feel you say 'yes' to people when you don't really want to, practise saying 'no' more often. There are ways to say 'no' and still respect others. You could say, for example, "thank you for asking me, but I'm focusing on making more time for myself at the moment".

**Build good relationships.** Spend time with people who treat you well, who respect you, and who appreciate you as a person. If there are people in your life who make you unhappy, consider telling them how they make you feel and setting some boundaries.

# BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are a way of saying what you need, or don't need, so they're a form of self-care. It's about knowing when to say "no", or drawing a line, saying "enough". Family, friends, co-workers, or anyone can cross a line, and situations may make you feel uncomfortable.

Recognising these feelings - which may be discomfort or anger, or many other emotions - can help you set boundaries. Anger can be a real benefit in helping us realise where our boundaries lie. People can have a lot of opinions on other people's bodies, so boundaries are very important to help you gain a more positive image of your body.

As boundaries are about realising and communicating our needs, they require self-awareness and assertiveness. People who have been socialised as female may particularly struggle as part of traditional femininity often includes being submissive, being nice and polite, looking pretty and being agreeable.

An example of putting in boundaries around food and body image might be if there is diet talk in your workplace or education setting - you can politely ask them not to talk about dieting. You can explain why it is difficult for you if you wish, but you don't have to - you don't owe them an explanation or apology. Diet talk is so normalised but it's not helpful for anyone so you have every right to uphold your stance. It is scary to assert these boundaries, but assertiveness will grow over time, with practice.



"When I was a teenager, people kept telling me to 'be more assertive' and 'get some backbone'. I didn't know what this meant or how to do this. They were telling me this like I just needed to pop to my local supermarket and buy a jar of their finest assertiveness! I wish. I only realise now, many years later, that assertiveness took a long time to build, and I'm still building it. It started with my own self-worth (or rather, lack of), slowly picking apart the ways I'd felt not good enough and gradually building my confidence and self-esteem. Only then could assertiveness start to naturally come out as I started to respect and advocate for myself. It involved a lot of therapy!"

**ANON**

# PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

What were you taught about assertiveness when you were growing up?

Did you know how to assert yourself and set boundaries?

What rules and boundaries would you set now if you didn't have to worry about other people's reactions?



# FINAL THOUGHTS...

As we near the end of these resources, we'd like to share with you some final thoughts from the team. We hope that by sharing our experiences, you'll feel empowered and inspired in your own recovery, working towards body acceptance.



## Practical things I did to help my recovery and body image:

First, I started acknowledging things I'm good at - even though it may seem unrelated to body image, it helped me to start changing the negative perception I had of myself.

I picked out one thing I like about myself every day - this can start off being an "easy" answer, like something others compliment you on, then over time, it becomes easier to think of things yourself. It can start off being skills or traits about yourself and then you can start to move to more physical things when you feel more confident.

I started appreciating parts of my body and acknowledging what they do for me.

I went through my social media and made sure the people and accounts I was following were actually of use to me and I unfollowed anything that may be triggering. This doesn't mean you hate that person or that they are bad, it just means their content is not the right content for you to see when trying to recover and work on building a positive body image.

I talked to people - to my family, to my GP, to friends. It was scary at the time but it led me to First Steps!



To read the full blog, [click here](#).

## “What helped me heal my relationship with my body and food:

- Therapy and Yoga
- Learning about feminism and gender inequalities & diversity
- Learning about Health at Every Size, weight stigma and fatphobia
- Following body positive and body acceptance social media accounts
- Learning about intuitive eating and letting go of trying to lose weight, as well as learning to listen to my body and trust myself
- Pushing myself out of my comfort zone by wearing things I thought I couldn't wear
- Training in eating disorders, understanding more about disordered eating and how blurred the lines are with “clean eating” and other diets

I've had to be patient with myself because it's taken a long time to heal my relationship with my body. I hated my body for so many years, it makes sense that it would take a long time to heal, but sometimes I'm impatient! I don't know if I will ever love my body, but I'm now more confident and have way more self-worth. I know that I can cope when difficult feelings arise, that I'll get through this because I always do and I'm getting stronger by the day. And if I can do that, YOU can too!”

## “Some tips for managing negative thoughts:

**Name the voice.** You may find it helpful to think of your unhelpful thinking as a separate person, or voice, to yourself. Give this person or voice a name (for example, Bob) and practice calling out and naming the unhelpful voice when it appears. For example, when an unhelpful thought comes up you might say (or think) "Ah, this is Bob talking. I'm not going to listen to you right now". This can help remind you that these thoughts aren't the real you, that you don't have to pay them any attention.

**Make them silly.** Imagine your unhelpful thoughts being said by a cartoon character (like Bugs Bunny), or sung to a funny song, or said as part of your favourite comedy film. This can help make unhelpful thoughts feel less serious, less real, and remind you that they're not facts.

**Be generous to yourself.** You deserve to treat yourself well and don't have to feel that you have to 'earn' food or nice things.”



"Recovery to me is knowing there will be some days that are harder than others, but I now have healthy coping skills that I can put into practice. I accessed First Steps years ago as a service user and I dreamed that one day I could be involved with the charity on the other side, helping others. I am so proud to be here now, doing exactly that.

Things that have helped me:

- Seeking help and investing in me has been one of the best things I've ever done in my life.
- Talking and sharing is one of the greatest things I have ever done and I can't stress enough to others to speak up.
- Reaching out. A quick message to say I'm not feeling too good to someone I can trust. This has stopped me going into a self-hatred spiral.
- Reduced body checking. When I stopped doing this regularly, I began to feel better about myself.
- Being careful what I look at on the internet, not comparing my body to others. Unfollowing pages with perfect bodies, blocking pro-eating disorder sites.
- Sensible exercise, not exercising to punish myself. Learning I'm fuelling to run not running to burn calories. Enjoying the journey.
- Being grateful for what my body can do when treated with kindness. Our bodies are amazing
- Practise self-care time and time again. Make the time."



To read the full blog, [click here](#).

“Speak out. Tell people around you what you’re going through. This may be friends or family or people you trust. You don't need to explain the ins and outs of your difficulties if you don't want to, but even mentioning to someone that you’re struggling can really help. It’s important to remember that although people around you may not understand what you’re going through, it doesn’t mean they won’t support you. You do not have to continue fighting this on your own.”

To read the full blog, [click here](#).

That's it! We have reached the end of our body image resource. We'd like to thank you for joining us and for making it through to the end! Congratulations!

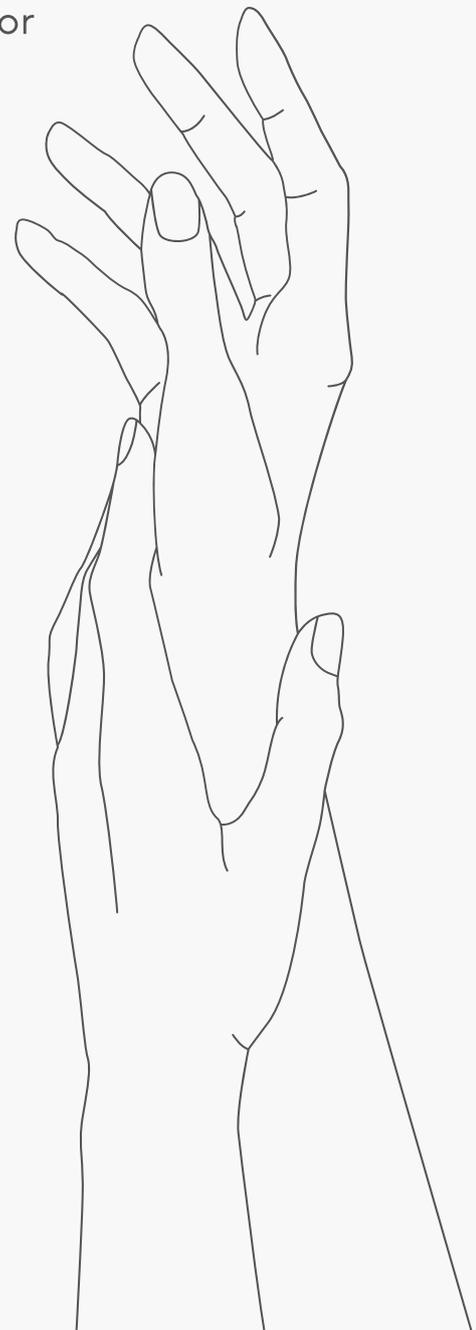
In the three-guide series we have covered a lot, so we hope that it's been helpful and insightful.

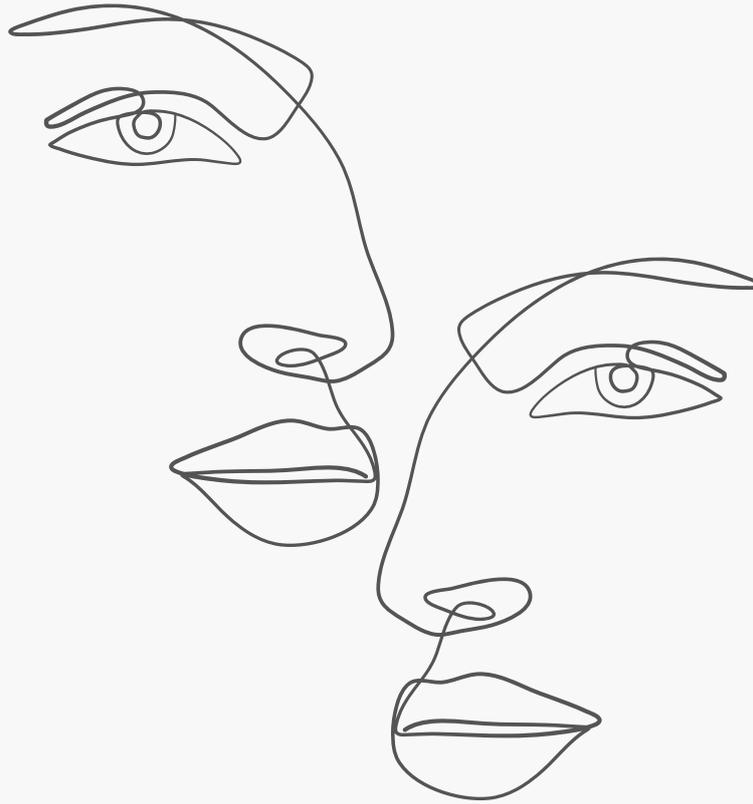
Before you go! Here is a final thinking point (we couldn't resist giving you just one more)...

- How do you feel now, reaching the end?
- What would you say has stuck with you the most from this resource?
- How do you feel about your body now compared to when you started this resource?

Don't worry if you don't love (or even like) your body yet. If you can work towards accepting it, that's enough.

You are enough.





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A massive thank you to the authors, editors and designers who helped to build our Understanding Body Image Resource Pack, you can learn more about the team here.

For support or to learn more about First Steps ED services, please visit [www.firststepsed.co.uk](http://www.firststepsed.co.uk)



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