



HOW TO FEEL GOOD

**20
THINGS
TEENS
CAN
DO**

BY TRICIA MANGAN

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BE KIND TO YOUR WHOLE SELF

Pretend that you are an astronaut trying to achieve your mission to keep yourself feeling good. If Mission Control (your mind) keeps sending messages over and over again—saying things like, “This mission is hopeless,” or, “I don’t believe you can accomplish the goal,”—you may not only start to be hurt or sad, but you may become physically ill. You may feel sick to your stomach and or have aches and pains in your body. The reverse is also true. If you stop eating your astronaut meals and don’t do your morning exercise and stretching, your body will not be fit or healthy. As your body weakens, it sends signals to Mission Control that you are not strong and well. Then, your thoughts become more negative.

Your mind and your body make up your whole self. They work in unison, so what one feels, so does the other. When you smile, your body sends a signal to your brain that you are happy. When you are happy, you think positive thoughts. So your brain, emotions, and physical body work in harmony.

What you think affects how you feel and act, and how you behave affects what you think and feel. So, to feel good, it's important to be kind to your whole self.

Eat well. To feel good, it's best to avoid eating too many sugary or processed foods. Processed foods are those that have preservatives, chemicals, or sweeteners added to them to make them taste better or help them last longer. Packaged cookies, crackers, and cakes that you find in the grocery aisle are some common examples. Processed foods and sugar can affect your mood in unhealthy ways. They can also cause you to gain weight and you can develop other health problems if you eat too many of them. If you can, try to eat fresh fruits and vegetables and lean proteins like chicken, fish, and beans to keep your body healthy and full of energy.

Get enough sleep. Getting between 9 and 11 hours of sleep every night is important for kids your age. If you don't get enough sleep, your brain doesn't work as well as when you do get that sleep. You have a harder time learning new things or remembering things. Sleep deprivation can also affect your emotions and make you grouchy and impatient. Your body feels more tired, and it's harder to get moving. Going to bed at the same time every night can help you get in the habit of getting a full night's sleep.

Have good hygiene. Hygiene means cleanliness. Keeping your body clean can prevent you from catching colds and viruses. Brushing your teeth and flossing at least twice a day and taking baths or showers several times a week will keep you clean. One



Pick one healthy thing to do each day for a week.

of the most important things you can do to prevent yourself from getting sick is to wash your hands. Washing your hands every time before you eat and after you use the bathroom can keep you from catching and spreading infections.

Laugh a lot. Did you know that laughing can improve your health? Laughing causes certain chemicals to start flowing through your bloodstream. As those chemicals move through your body, they ease stress and make you happy. They can even relieve physical pain. Laughing with other people—like when you’re playing a game, watching a movie, or telling stories or jokes—is a great way to keep the laughter going and to grow close and connected to others.

Relieve stress. There are lots of different ways to relieve stress. It is a good idea to try different activities and see which one works best for you. Some helpful stress relievers include exercise, deep breathing, blowing bubbles, jumping rope, playing games, putting a puzzle together, listening to music, or engaging in visualization or meditation.

Meditate

Find a quiet spot at home where you won’t be interrupted. Sit on the floor cross-legged. Put a pillow underneath you if it’s more comfortable. Lay your hands in your lap, or rest your wrists on your knees with your hands face-up. Close your eyes. Notice your breath as you inhale and exhale slowly. Clear your mind of thoughts. If thoughts pop into your head—like, “I really want to open my eyes,” or, “I’m worried about the world,”—just let them pass through and try to re-focus yourself on meditating.

Prove to Yourself How Good Healthy Feels

We don't always pay attention to how our choices make us feel. Try to become more aware by linking what you do with what you feel. Pick one healthy thing to do daily for a week. You could pledge to eat vegetables twice a day (maybe once at lunch and again at dinner); to do something active (like go for a walk) once a day, or do yoga, or jumping jacks or to give yourself a strict bedtime to make sure you get enough sleep. Each time you do that healthy thing, write down in a journal how you feel afterward. Do you have more energy? Do you sleep better? Look back at your journal entries to see the positive effects of your new healthy behaviors.

Experiment With Stress Relief

Try out different stress relievers to help you discover what works best for you. Below is a short list of things people sometimes do to relieve stress and clear their minds:

- * Singing or listening to music
- * Deep breathing
- * Meditation
- * Physical exercise
- * Reading a book

Add some more ideas to the list and give them each a try. Before you do that healthy thing, write down how you feel. Then, after you do it, describe how your body feels. Do you feel more relaxed? Is your mind less cloudy?

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happening all around you, and that can make you insecure, overwhelmed, or stressed out.

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Are you ready? Do 1 or learn all 20 skills and take charge of you. You are just a step away from feeling more confident, secure, and GREAT!

Tricia Mangan has a Master's degree in Clinical Psychology from Stony Brook University in New York. She has more than 10 years of diverse clinical, research, and teaching experience. With a background rooted in cognitive-behavioral and positive psychology principles, Tricia is a proponent of a holistic approach to health and is currently focusing her efforts on writing books to educate children and teens on the mind-body connection. Follow @triciaholistic on Twitter.

Magination Press
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Books for Kids From the
American Psychological Association
maginationpress.org

U.S. \$12.99

ISBN 9781433810404



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CONTROL WHAT YOU CAN

Have you ever been really excited to go swimming, but then a big storm with lots of lightning and thunder rolled in and you couldn't go? Or maybe you were supposed to take a weekend trip to an amusement park with your family, but then your brother got sick so you had to put it off. Or maybe someone you thought was your friend didn't invite you to her birthday party. Some things that happen in life are beyond our control. There's nothing you could have done to stop the thunderstorm, keep your brother from getting sick, or make your friend give you an invitation. So, you can't control Mother Nature or illness or what other people say or do. But you can control one very important thing: you. You can control what you think, feel, and do.



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Your Personal Power

The one thing you are in control of is *you*. You decide how you think, feel, and act. It's not always easy to think, feel, and act in ways that make us feel good—it takes a lot of personal awareness and hard work. But if you put in the effort, you will develop self-confidence and become more and more capable of handling difficult situations.

Exercise self-control. Unfortunately, you can't control what other people do. But, by exercising self-control, you can keep yourself safe, out of trouble, and feeling good. Self-control means being able to think before you act. It means that you manage your emotions and actions in effective ways during stressful situations. For example, imagine you are at the park, playing kickball with some friends. Another kid comes up and yells at you to give him the ball. He then pushes you hard and grabs the ball away from you. You are very angry and instinctively want to push him back. But, you don't. You think about the consequences before you act. If you push him, he'll probably push back. Then, you'll probably get into a fight and you'll both get hurt or get in trouble. So, you decide to walk away. You took charge of the situation by controlling what you could—your own response.

Avoid blaming. You can't control a classmate's decision to tease you, but you can control how you respond to it. If you respond by thinking negative thoughts about yourself and avoiding school and your friends, you may then be tempted to blame your classmate for how you're feeling. Similarly, when really difficult things happen—like someone dies or there's a car accident or fire—it is human instinct to want to blame someone or something for it. You want to understand why it happened, so saying it's your friend's fault or your mom or dad's fault is one way of trying to make sense of it. But blaming means you're not taking personal responsibility for what's within your personal power to do. And it's within your personal power to bounce back and not let those types of things steer you away from your goals. That doesn't mean that you aren't sad or upset. It's normal to have those emotions. It just means you know that in order to feel good, you have to work hard to understand those emotions and persevere.

Take responsibility for the consequences of your actions.

Accepting control over your actions also means taking responsibility for mistakes. Mistakes are normal. Everyone makes them. Sometimes you may say things you wish you hadn't. Or, even though you meant well, maybe something you did ended up upsetting someone. For example, maybe you took your older brother to play tennis with you, but when you got home, you found out your younger sister was upset because you didn't take her along, too. At that point you realize that you didn't consider taking her and you wish you would have. Just like it's not helpful to blame others, it's also not helpful to blame yourself. Instead, take responsibility for your actions by admitting your mistake. In this example, you could apologize to your sister, or take other action to make things better (for example, you could take your younger sister to play tennis with you the next day).

The Limits of Your Control and Personal Responsibility

Learning what you can and cannot control is tough. There are two things to understand. First, although you may think you're responsible, certain problems simply aren't your fault. Second, it's not within your personal power to fix every problem.

Imagine a loved one is sick. You think you are responsible for it because, once when you were really mad, you thought something mean in your head. You believe that this person is now getting punished because of your mean wish. But angry thoughts in our heads do not make bad things happen to other people or to you. Unfortunately, sometimes people get sick, have accidents, or suffer other misfortunes. These types of things are not your fault.

Now, imagine your parents are getting divorced. Again, you think you're responsible. You think that you misbehaved too much or didn't finish your chores like you were supposed to and that's what caused your parents to split up. But what happens in your parents' relationship is beyond your personal control. You could get perfect grades, do all your chores, and never get in trouble, but that wouldn't bring your parents back together. What adults say and do is beyond your control, and you are not to blame for their decisions.

What to Do When Things Aren't in Your Control

When something happens that's beyond your control, there are two things you can do. First, instead of worrying about it, focus your thoughts on the things in your life you can control,

like reaching your goals in school or sports. Second, find ways to reduce unhelpful thoughts and emotions related to the thing you can't control.

For example, let's consider the example of having a sick loved one. Although you can't fix the illness, you can show sympathy by doing something kind. You could make a drawing or card, give them a call, or write a nice letter. Focus on providing comfort to the person, rather than trying to fix their illness. Repeat to yourself, "It's not my fault this person is sick and I can't fix it, but I can show them I care by being kind."

Coping with parents arguing isn't easy, so you have to work at it every day. First, combat your unhelpful thoughts. Your inner voice may keep telling you it's your fault, so respond back by repeating, "I'm sad my parents having trouble, but I know it isn't because of me. It's not my responsibility or within my power to control adult relationships." Second, talk with your parents, other family members, or counselor about how you're feeling. They can help reassure you that things will be ok.

There are more strategies to help you learn how to spring back from tough situations. Laughing with others and keeping a positive, optimistic outlook, breathing deeply, and engaging in creative visualization are all great ways to keep you on track.



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Understand the Limits of Your Control

It's important not to blame yourself or take responsibility for fixing problems that are beyond your control. Decide whether each of the following events is in your control or out of your control:

- * Your mom and dad having an argument
- * Your favorite teacher retiring
- * Getting an "incomplete" on your homework assignment
- * Calling a classmate a mean name
- * Your grandfather going to the hospital
- * Moving to another house or town
- * Eating a lot of cake and feeling sick to your stomach

Can you think of any other situations that are beyond your control?

Make Your Life a No-Blame Zone

When someone else says or does something that upsets us and we struggle to bounce back, we may be tempted to blame them. But blaming or bad-mouthing others just takes away your personal power. From this point forward, make a vow not to blame anyone or anything for your problems. Tell your family about your pledge so they can help make sure you're sticking to it.

To get you started on the right track, think of a time you blamed someone for something. What could you have done to control your response to the situation so that you didn't blame anyone?

Take Control of Your Mistakes

Admitting you made a mistake shows that you are confident in yourself and that you have compassion for other people. The next time you make a mistake, commit to apologizing or taking steps to make the problem less of a big deal. Tell a parent that you made a mistake and ask for their help in coming up with a plan to take responsibility for it.

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U.S. \$12.99

ISBN 9781433810404

