



Mental Fitness Challenge Booklet

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**Black Dog
Institute**

Bite Back



Introduction

Welcome to the Bite Back Mental Fitness Challenge booklet.

NOTE: This booklet is only needed if you're having trouble accessing the online version of the Bite Back Mental Fitness Challenge. This booklet is supported by the Bite Back Mental Fitness Challenge Workbook available from the Youth Educator page of Bite Back at www.biteback.org.au/youtheducators/home

After reading each section of this booklet, complete the activities for that week in your Mental Fitness Challenge workbook. This will help you increase your understanding of how you can build your mental fitness.

We hope you're feeling ready to learn ways to improve your mental fitness.

So, let's get started!



Week One Gratitude

Thankfulness. Gratitude. No doubt you've heard it before. Probably because it's kind of a big deal in the psychology world.

What is gratitude?

Gratitude is the positive feeling you get when you stop to notice and appreciate things in your life. A feeling? Well, yes. Gratitude is not just saying the words 'thank you'; it's actually all about the positive feeling that comes with being grateful.

So, there's a deeper reason why you grew up being told to say "thank you" for almost everything. And it's not just to have manners – it's all about habits. If you get into the habit of noticing the things to be grateful for in your life, you'll begin to see more of the brighter side.

Whether it's something small like a nice sunny day, or something bigger like going on a holiday – the more you appreciate the good, the more you will start to see and feel the good.

What are the benefits?

Apart from the obvious positive and wonderful feelings you'll get from experiencing gratitude, experts have found that it can also improve your overall happiness. So, those feelings aren't just for the warm and fuzzy effect – they're much more powerful than you might think.

When you tap into those positive feelings of gratitude, you can use them to help you become closer with friends and family, lower any negative emotions such as anxiety, and fight off the black dog (depression). You will also find it easier to bounce back from difficult moments, and have space to enjoy the important stuff in life.

How to build gratitude?

It's great to know about all the benefits of practising gratitude, but unless you find a way to build it into your everyday life, it will probably just find its way onto your list of 'things-you-know-you-should-do-but-really-never-get-around-to-doing'.

The trick to becoming more grateful is simply to pay attention to the big AND little things in your life you can be grateful for. It could be a funny moment, hearing your favourite song, a cool breeze or a delicious snack! You might even realise there are more things in your life to be grateful for than you think.

Gratitude journal

One of the easiest ways you can start making a habit of being grateful is by simply writing down a few things a week that you are grateful for. If you're stuck on ideas on what you could put in your gratitude journal, here's a tip: don't overthink it! Remember – you can even be grateful for the smaller things like:

- The sun on your face
- Warm water on your back in the shower
- The comfort and joy from being around your pet

Create a Thank You blog

Share the gratitude love! Make your own space online where you can share what you are grateful for.

Take some grateful photos

If you're not into writing, maybe you could just take a photo each day of something you appreciate. Hailey Bartholomew from the 365 Project, took a photo a day for a whole year and began to notice many things in her everyday life that she otherwise would have missed.

Tell someone!

It's a crazy thought, we know. But if you're grateful for someone, tell them! There is nothing better than being appreciated or even just hearing positive thoughts from someone you know. And when you are generous with what you say to others, it can actually make you feel happier too. And don't worry, if you can't actually reach the person you want to – then you can always write a letter and not send it!



Week Two Mindfulness

What is mindfulness?

Mindfulness is about being in the moment, in the now. Being fully present. It's a way of paying attention and being aware of what's taking place right now, as opposed to getting caught up thinking about the past or the future. Let's take a deeper look:

Mindfulness is intentional.

This means that you're TRYING – and hopefully succeeding – to be mindful. To focus on what's happening to you in that very moment. Being aware of the internal (your thoughts) and the external (sights, smells and sounds). Mindfulness is about being open-minded. Don't question things, don't judge those around you, don't analyse your thoughts. Just be.

Mindfulness – what have you done for me lately?

There are untold benefits to mindfulness. And we're about to tell you all about it. Practising mindfulness gives you a clearer head and trains your brain to slow down. And it's a great way to deal with school stress.

Not only are you calmer and more able to process what's happening around you, but you also get to fully immerse yourself in all the things that happen in day-to-day life.

Mindfulness actually shifts the way your brain and nervous system functions- in a good way! When you practise mindfulness you go into a regenerative phase that relaxes your body and uses less energy so that you can heal, rest and restore yourself. This gives your body and mind a chance to cope with whatever is going on around you.

How to build mindfulness through practise

When you're starting out, mindfulness can be hard. But the key to success is practise, practise, practise (do I sound like an old piano teacher?). Because the more you do it the better you get.

Here are 2 great ways to build a life that includes mindfulness:

- Just breathe – take a couple of minutes and focus on your breathing. Like meditation. If you get distracted or your mind wanders off, that's ok, it happens to all of us. Just bring your attention back to your breath.
- Savour the moment – stop. Look around. Take time to savour the moment and appreciate everything around you. It might be the great meal you're having or the beautiful scenery. It might even be a pair of limited edition Nikes. That's fine too.





Week Three

Connections

As human beings we need connection. By connection, we mean relationships with others. Having solid and dependable relationships with others is vital to your overall wellbeing. Good connections with others can help you learn how to deal with school stress, help you lift low self esteem and bring on a flood of positive thoughts.

What are connections?

In psychology, connections are considered one of the most important things in life. We're talking about relationships or friendships with anyone around you. Family, friends, partners, teachers, even your coach.

3's good company

We're going to say it upfront: you don't need hundreds of friends to feel happy. It's about quality, not quantity. Psychologists suggest that if you have at least 3 friends or family members that are REAL connections, then you have a solid foundation to build happiness.

How Connections can help you

There are so many benefits to having good connections that we don't know where to begin. But begin we must, as you've ended up here wanting to read some good stuff!

So here we go. Connections with others will:

Make you feel good

Pretty simple right? Sharing what's going on in your life with others makes all the difference and nothing feels better than getting along really well with friends and family.

Reveal the secret of how to be happy

Ever wondered how to be happy? Get connected! That's right, research has shown time and time again that those with great friendships and relationships lead happy lives. Oh, and guess what? The happier you are, the more likely you are to attract more quality connections!

Provide solid support

Your connection with others can be the support you need in life to get over the hurdles that will undoubtedly come your way. And that support can come in many forms – from giving you a lift to school, to just listening and offering advice.

Increase your wellbeing

Connecting with others is great for our mental health. Psychologists have found that they give us meaning and can help when it comes to depression and anxiety.

Show you the love!

It is with our personal connections that we experience the greatest feeling of happiness, the emotion known as LOVE. All we need is love, right?

How you build connections

You probably know this already, but creating or keeping good relationships requires effort. Right? Here are a few tips to building or maintaining great connections:

Let them hear your positive thoughts

If you're feeling something positive about your friend or family member...tell them! Say thank you out loud. Do you love them? Shout it from the rooftops (unless after 11pm – you gotta be considerate, right?). Research shows this improves relationships tenfold. So, let them hear the good stuff...it works wonders.

It's about time.

We'll explain. Relationships simply don't work if you don't make the time. So, connect often, create an activity outside of school to do together.

Play (and fight) nicely.

Disagreements, or fights, are inevitable. They'll happen now and then. But fight nicely. That means try and stay calm and listen to their side of things too. If you must agree to disagree that's fine too. Just do so and then move on. Holding grudges can ruin connections, bring on anxiety and leave you feeling sad.



Week Four

Character Strengths

Psychologists have found that every single one of us has certain strengths. In fact, they identified 24 strengths that we all have to varying degrees. We'll be checking those out in the next section (How to build your strengths).

What are strengths?

Now, don't be mistaken. We're not talking about talents. Text messaging at the speed of light isn't a strength (not in this regard anyway). Strengths are what come naturally to us – they're part of who we are.

What are the benefits of knowing and using your strengths?

Want to know how to be happy? How to build confidence? What to do when feeling sad? Identifying what your strengths are, and then using them, is a great way to help boost your happiness, increase self-confidence and succeed at whatever you choose to do.

When you focus on your strengths you're more likely to be more motivated, capable, and up for life's challenges. You're also more likely to experience flow – that feeling of being at your best, being on a roll – because activities that give you flow are usually those in which you are using some of your top strengths.

The combination of all these things means that using your strengths helps boost your wellbeing, happiness and success.

How to build your strengths

The first step is to identify your top strengths. The best way to build your strengths is to use them every day. Simple! Because when you're using your strengths, you're at your best – full of confidence and positivity.

So find your strengths from the list on the next pages, along with various ideas on how to use them (and some inspiration suggestions too!).

Strength	Explanation	Tips to build
Creativity/inality	You are great at thinking of new and creative ways of doing things or solving problems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a drawing, painting, photograph or short film; or get involved in the school performance. • Make a card for a friend. • Think of new, creative ways to solve problems.
Curiosity	You are interested in and curious about the world and love new experiences. You are interested in and curious about the world and love new experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try a new food you've never had before. • Are any of your friends from a different culture? Ask them about it. • Read a book or magazines on a new topic that interests you • Google something you've always wanted to know about. • Watch a movie you wouldn't normally see.
Open-mindedness/ Critical thinking	You think things through and examine issues from all angles before making any decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about a strong opinion that you have from a different point of view; what is the opposing argument? • Talk to someone who follows a different religion or culture, has different taste, or different viewpoint to you. Really listen and try to understand where they're coming from. • Think about the last thing you did that you weren't completely happy with. Brainstorm better ideas for the future.
Love of Learning	You love learning new things and being known for the knowledge you have.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn and use a new word every day • Read a new book. • Follow a global event through TV, newspapers or the Internet • Research a topic on Google Scholar.

Strength	Explanation	Tips to build
Perspective and Wisdom	You have a mature way of looking at the world that makes sense, so you can give other people good advice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to resolve an argument or disagreement you are or have been in. • Think about what motivates you to make the decisions you make. • Give advice (if someone asks for it!).
Honesty/ Integrity	You are honest. You speak the truth and live your life in a genuine way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catch yourself telling a lie; even it's a small one. Try to stop yourself from telling small, white lies to friends and family. Make your list of lies shorter every day. • Try not to get swept up in peer pressure when making decisions. • Mean what you say! Try to act in a way that reflects what you say.
Bravery	You are strong and courageous enough to deal with challenges and take on difficult situations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak up. • Do something that pushes you outside of your comfort zone. If you're scared, give it a shot! • Don't be afraid to become friends with someone who might be a bit different.
Persistence	You finish what you start. You will work towards goals despite the challenges that you might face along the way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a list of things to do and do one thing on the list each day. • Complete all your homework without any interruptions – no phone calls, no emails, no Facebook, no chat, no snacks. • Plant some plants or vegetables. Tend them so that they grow. • Write down some of your goals and plans and put them up around your room so that they can inspire you each day.

Strength	Explanation	Tips to build
Zest	You're energetic and passionate about life. You throw yourself into everything you do.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think of ways to find an assignment exciting and engaging. • Do rigorous physical activity that you've always wanted to do – bike riding, hiking, running, singing, dancing. • Invite friends over, watch a comedy and have a good laugh. • Celebrate your next accomplishment!
Kindness	You are kind and generous and will go out of your way to do nice things for others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do three random acts of kindness each week; secretly do something nice for a family member, a friend, or even a stranger. • Visit someone you know who is in hospital or in a nursing home. Bring them something they'll enjoy – flowers, music, food or books. • Share. • Donate your time as a volunteer or start a project of your own to do random acts of kindness.
Love	You value love and close relationships. You love others and they love you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept a compliment without squirming. Just say "thank you". • Write a note to someone you love and leave it for them to find. • Do something with your best friend that they really love doing. • Tell your family and best friends how much you love them. Find different ways to show them.

Strength	Explanation	Tips to build
Social Intelligence	You have a good understanding of yourself and of other people. You have good insight into your own motives and moods and can judge the motives and moods of others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If someone new joins your school or club, make him or her feel comfortable in your group. • When someone annoys you, try to understand why he or she is doing what they're doing. • Notice when friends do something that is difficult for them and compliment them for it.
Fairness	You treat everyone equally and fairly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to other people without interrupting them. • Admit it if you've made a mistake. • Try to include other people in group activities or conversations. • Write a letter to the editor of a newspaper about an important issue. • Volunteer for an organization that campaigns for human rights. • Stand up for someone who is being treated unfairly.
Leadership	You have vision and are good at making things happen by organising and leading people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise a get together with your friends, or a surprise party for a friend. • Go out of your way to make a new student feel welcome at school. • Lead an activity, assignment or project at school, seeking help from other group members. Encourage people who don't usually speak up to share their opinions.

Strength	Explanation	Tips to build
Teamwork	You work well in a group or in a team. You work hard for the good of the group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play a team sport. • Work on assignments or homework with your friends. See how you can help each other. • Start a social group for people with the same interests.
Forgiveness	If you are wronged, you tend to forgive people for making mistakes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let go of a grudge. • Write a forgiveness letter. You don't have to send it, but read it to yourself each day for a week. • If someone hurts or upsets you, try to understand things from their perspective, then think about whether your reaction is hurting them or you.
Modesty	You don't need to brag about your accomplishments. You let them speak for themselves.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't talk about yourself for a whole day. • Think of something that a friend does better than you and compliment him or her on it. • Concentrate on really listening to other people rather than just waiting for your turn to speak. • Admit your mistakes and apologise to other people.
Prudence	You're a careful person. You think things through and consider all the options before you say or do things.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think twice before saying anything. Do this at least 10 times a week and notice the effects on others. • Next time you need to make a big decision, consult with other people. • Weigh up the pros and cons. • Visualise the consequences of your next five decisions. Consider the impact each decision may have tomorrow, in one year's time or in 10 years' time.

Strength	Explanation	Tips to build
Self-Control	You have discipline. You can keep your feelings and actions in check when you need to.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start an exercise program and do it every day for a week. • Try not to gossip about friends or other people. • Next time you get upset, try to think realistically about the situation. • Have you overreacted? • When you need to focus on your next assignment, try to remove any distractions – phone, internet, TV, magazines – until you get it done. If the assignment is really big, break it down into smaller tasks with breaks in between.
Appreciation of Beauty	You notice and appreciate excellence and the beauty around you. You're one of those people who will stop to smell the roses!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit a gallery. • Take photos of the beautiful things you see. • Stop and notice objects of beauty – sunrise, sunset, clouds, street art – as you go through your day. • Decorate your room. Hang a favourite picture, paint the walls, put up photos of your friends, or maybe create a space to chill out. • For your next assignment, focus on presentation as well as content.
Humour/ Playfulness	You like to laugh and to make other people laugh.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make at least one person smile or laugh each day. • Watch something that makes you laugh out loud! • Surround yourself with funny friends. • Remember the things you loved doing as a young child – dressing up, playing games, going ice-skating – Why not do them now? Be playful.

Strength	Explanation	Tips to build
Gratitude	You notice the good things that happen to you and you don't take them for granted. You thank people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure you say thank you to people through the day. Acknowledge the little things that would usually go unnoticed, as well the big. • Create a blessings journal – Before going to bed each day, write down three things that went well during the day, or check out Thank Tank. • Write a thank you letter to someone you appreciate. • Set aside time each day to savour an experience. For help or ideas, listen to the Amplify tracks on Power Up • Reminisce about good times – recognition you received, an achievement, praise, a connection to someone.
Hope/Optimism	You expect the best for the future and you plan to achieve it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write down 3 goals and your plans for achieving them. • Think about a time in your past when you overcame a difficult situation. • Store it in your memory and bring it to mind next time you face a hard time. If you've gone through it before, you know you can do it again. • List all the bad things that happened to you over the past week. Now write down the positives that came out of those things.
Spirituality	You have strong beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try meditation. For help, listen to some Power Up tracks. • Read a book about an aspect of spirituality that you might be curious about. • Get to know people of different religions.



Week Five

Meaning and Purpose

What's the meaning of meaning?

When your life has meaning you have a purpose in life. And purpose has a wide and loose definition. It can be about feeling connected to others, or be about belonging to or contributing to something bigger than yourself, like your school. It's about discovering what has meaning in YOUR life, so it's something different for everyone.

How do you find it?

You don't necessarily go looking for meaning, because the reality is that you should be looking within. Where exactly? By looking at your strengths. You simply have a bigger chance of finding something meaningful if you are using your strengths to connect with something bigger than yourself. For example, if you're good at, or appreciate art, you might find meaning in working in a gallery.

What can meaning do for you?

Creating meaning in your life gives you purpose, and having a purpose makes you happy. Oh, and when you're happy there's a ripple effect that can transform your wellbeing. How about that? So just by creating meaning you can feel happy and healthy? We know, it sounds crazy, but here's how:

Connecting with others

Lots of us gain some kind of meaning by belonging to something larger than ourselves, like a team or community or a cause. When this happens you tend to spend time with other people who share your values and have the same interests as you. It also helps you to define your identity and makes you feel good about who you are, especially when you spend time with like-minded people.¹

You now have a larger social network, more people to connect with, and this can seriously boost your happiness.²

Motivation

Having a purpose (a direct result of having meaning!) motivates you to achieve your chosen goals.³ Having purpose and goals in your life gives you something to work towards, and totally pays off when you achieve what you're aiming for.⁴ And how do you feel when you achieve goals? Happy as some guy called Larry.

Thinking of Others

Gaining meaning by acknowledging something bigger gives you a reason to focus beyond just yourself. When you're focused on others you gain unique perspectives and you can recognise and appreciate what you have to be grateful for. Now you can see the connection between meaning and wellbeing. In the end, having meaning in your life means you're less likely to feel down or depressed, and more likely to enjoy higher self-esteem and general wellbeing.³

How to create meaning in your life

Whoa. Heavy question right? Well, not if you don't make it one! Creating meaning in your life can be as simple as joining a community or cause that goes beyond your own personal needs.

But it must be directly related to something you're interested in or talented at – it's just much easier that way to find that passion and drive to really commit.

What gives you meaning?

Obviously, you need to first figure out what gives you meaning and purpose in life. And to do that you need to ask yourself some questions like these:

- What are you passionate about?
- Where are your personal strengths?
- Do the above 2 questions have any common answers?
- Are these things truly meaningful to you? How do they give you meaning?
- Do they give you a sense of worth?
- When you're feeling sad, do these things give you a lift?
- What would your life be like without your family? Your friends? Your community?

Finding the above questions tough to answer? You're not alone! They're not meant to be easy so don't be too hard on yourself.

This might help:

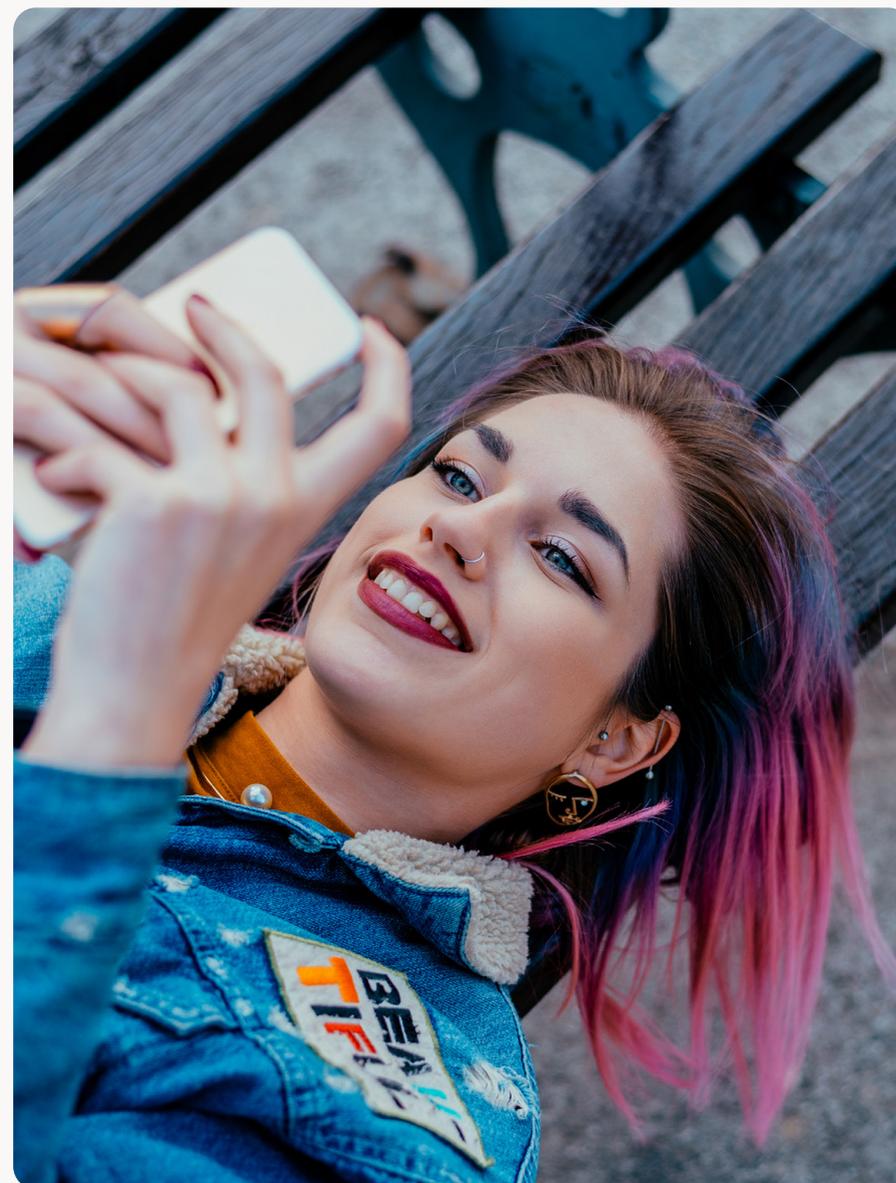
Imagine that you've just been awarded a "lifetime achievement award" and you have to write your acceptance speech. What would you write? Think of all the good things you want to achieve in life and how you'd like to be remembered. Focus on being positive. Go on, give it a go. Just write a one-page speech. You might be surprised by the results...

What they said...

So we wanted to know what gave others meaning and put the question out there on Facebook (where else, right?) Here's what we heard back....

- Relationships with family and friends
- Belonging to a cultural, sporting or creative community
- Doing volunteer work
- Campaigning for a cause (e.g. eradicating poverty, animal cruelty, climate change)
- Travel (increasing awareness and appreciation of other cultures and traditions)
- Nature (noticing that you're part of a bigger picture)
- Bringing positive emotion to others, like making people laugh
- Being creative/creating music or art
- Helping people/having a positive impact on other people's lives
- Meditation
- Spirituality/religion

1. Shearer, L. (2001, September). *When the friendly skies are not so friendly*. *Georgia Magazine*, 80.
2. Tennen, H., and Affleck, G. (1999). *Finding benefits in adversity*. In Snyder, C. R., (ed.), *Coping: The Psychology of What Works* (pp. 279-304). New York: Oxford University Press.
3. Steger, M. F. (in press). *Experiencing meaning in life: Optimal functioning at the nexus of well-being, psychopathology, and spirituality*. In Wong, P. T. P. *The human quest for Meaning (2nd Edition): Theories, Research, and Applications (Personal and Clinical Psychology)*. New York: Routledge.
4. Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). *The How of Happiness: A new approach to getting the life you want*. (p. 231). New York: The Penguin Group.





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