

# WELLBEING GUIDE

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Photo by Theresa Harrison

# A note before we begin.

This is a wellbeing guide designed specifically to help Fringe artists maintain good mental health and self-care during their Fringe journey. It includes many ideas that could be helpful to anyone working in the arts who is interested in maintaining good mental health. It has been written by Chris Cheers, a psychologist who specialises in working with artists, in consultation with Melbourne Fringe staff.

Research has shown that Australian entertainment industry workers have levels of moderate and severe anxiety symptoms that are 10 times higher, and level of depression that are 5 times higher, than in the general population (Entertainment Assist). If you are an artist and are experiencing depression or anxiety symptoms, know that you are not alone and support is available.

The ideas presented in this guide should be understood as general advice to maintain wellbeing. If you feel you are experiencing mental health difficulties, please talk to your GP, or refer to the end of guide for advice on seeking help from a psychologist or other mental health professional. If you need immediate support, feel unsafe, or require crisis care please instead contact: [Beyond Blue](#) (1300 22 46 36) or [Lifeline](#) (13 11 14).



This kit was written by [Chris Cheers](#) (AHPRA Reg. PSY0001129849, [chrischeers.com](http://chrischeers.com)) in consultation with Melbourne Fringe staff.

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# Getting through COVID



Photo by Anna Nalpanitidis

As we continue to move through this challenging time, the ideas for support suggested throughout this manual will be more important than ever. The most important idea for artists during this time is not to have expectations on yourself, or anyone else, about how you should be acting right now, or what the ‘right thing to do is.’ Some artists will be able to pivot and adapt quickly and successfully, others will need more time to work out how their practice can work during this time. Others may choose to take a break from art altogether and work on other parts of their life that are meaningful right now.

## **All of these experiences are equally valid and worthy.**

Perhaps you’re new to this  
wonderful world.

Perhaps you’ve been doing it  
for a while.

Perhaps you’ve only just dipped your toes in, or you’re fully  
submerged in it all and can’t quite find the surface and your lungs  
are ready to burst.

**Wherever you’re at, welcome.**

**It’s all going to be ok.**

Now take a moment and turn your attention inward. Think about putting on a show at Melbourne Fringe Festival.

## How do you feel?

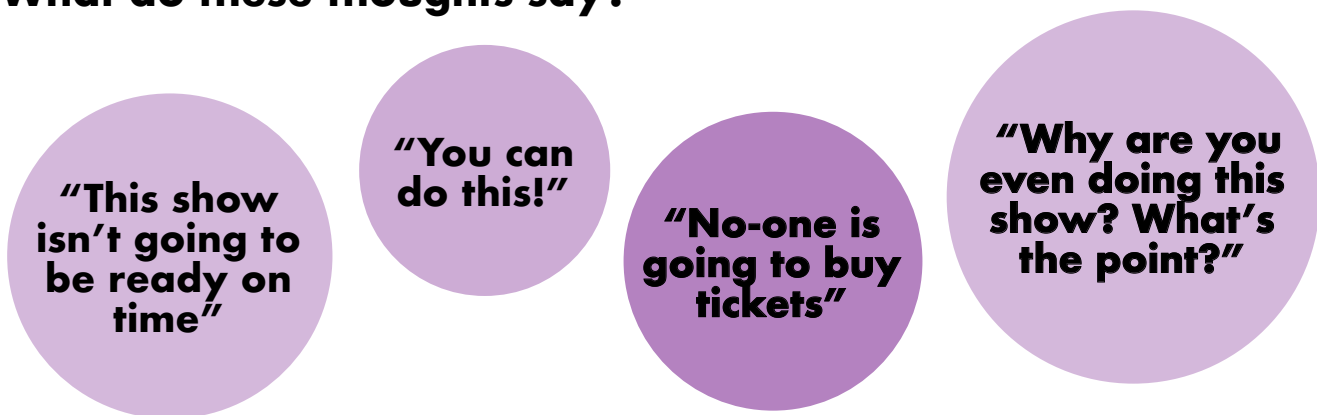


## Let's call these your **Fringe Feelings**.

As unpleasant as they can be, let me tell you, they are normal, and there are a long line of Fringe artists and performers who have come before you that have felt all these feelings. And then some. And we understand for artists that are already encountering systemic barriers - including disabled people, people of colour, LGBTIQ+ people – that these feelings can be heightened or look different.

Now, let's check in with your thoughts, the language of your mind. Let your mind wander as you think about your show. Just notice those thoughts, all popping up, one by one. Now write some of the thoughts down, or imagine them written in front of you.

## What do these thoughts say?



## Let's call these your **Fringe Thoughts**.

It would be great if our minds only put up helpful, positive thoughts but it's likely you've got a mind that throws up a million unhelpful thoughts, and only a couple of helpful ones in the background. This is totally normal.

Over a few hundred thousand years or so, our minds have evolved to focus on threats and problems, all in the name of survival. If you weren't conscious to the nearby wolf pack or the dangers of a lightning storm, you weren't going to make it.

That's why in contemporary life, you've got a mind that is sensitive to threat. Which is great when there is a real threat nearby, but less helpful when there is no real threat to your safety. Your mind is really good at imagining and predicting threats. It perceives threats even when they aren't there. But once the threat is perceived, real or imagined, your body reacts as if it's real.

This is why your **Fringe Thoughts** can be so unhelpful. They focus on finding threats and problems in the environment. Your thoughts are predicting an empty audience and perceiving this as a threat to your safety. And your body responds as if there is a wolf coming toward you... even though there is a big difference between a hungry wolf and an empty house on opening night!

Here is something you need to know but not be defeated by: **no matter what you do, you can't get rid of them.** Independent artists face the same thoughts and feelings every year, stretching back generations. The truth is, they will ebb and flow, shift and change throughout the creative and production process.



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That doesn't stop any of us from trying to push them away, pretend they aren't there, avoid situations that might bring them on. But, with every bad day in rehearsal, average review, or artist mate with the sold-out show or 5-star review ("Why them and not me?!?!") – you, unhelpfully but understandably scream) these feelings and thoughts come crashing into your mind like a drunk latecomer. Because these **Fringe Feelings** and **Fringe Thoughts** are an unavoidable and normal part of putting on a show.

"Great, so my thoughts are normal. Awesome, but how on earth is this manual going to be helpful if you aren't going to get rid of my anxiety or stress?" – you say. If you can't get rid of these thoughts that tell you you're a failure, should you just give up? Well here's the thing: this manual is going to give you strategies that will help you manage these **Fringe Feelings** and **Fringe Thoughts** so that they can be there, while you put on an awesome show.

We know different things will work for different people, so we have presented many different strategies and resources, so you can find what works for you. This manual is here to give you practical tips and tricks to help make you Fringe Fit. That way, when feelings and thoughts come up, you hopefully won't struggle with them, take them too seriously, or pay them much attention. We will build these skills so these thoughts and feelings become *part* of your Fringe, but not *all* of your Fringe.

# Mindfulness



Photo by Anna Nalpanitidis

Yep, here's that word again. But stay with us, because mindfulness is the number one strategy that can help you manage those **Fringe Feelings** and **Fringe Thoughts**. Think of it as a skill to build. Like all skills, Mindfulness takes practice. What we're working towards is the ability to control attention so you can move it from your thoughts, and your feelings, to be completely present in the current moment.

So, how would this work in practice to help you and your Fringe festival experience? Well let's imagine some thoughts that may come up for you during the Festival. Often, these are focused on the past, or predictions of the future. Especially at times of stress, they tend to be focused on the negative:

"I can't do this, I have no idea what I'm doing."

"Everyone is so much better at this than me."

"My ticket sales are terrible, no one is coming"

"There's just too many emails and production tasks, I just can't even look at my inbox"

From these thoughts spring a range of feelings that can cause us to spiral, panic, and even feel defeated, driving us towards a place of wanting to give up on our Fringe journey.

Using Mindfulness in moments like these would look something like this:

- Notice your thoughts, acknowledge that they are not necessarily true.
- Allow space for your feelings, acknowledge that they make sense.
- Mindfully direct your attention away from your thoughts and feelings toward the present.
- Become completely engaged with actions that are in our control.
- Hopefully, you can see that Mindfulness is not about relaxation, or about getting rid of stress. It's about moving your attention to the present. This skill that takes effort and practice. Here's a few ideas to help you learn the skill, so you can use it when the **Fringe Feelings** and **Fringe Thoughts** begin to take hold.

## Mindfulness Apps

A helpful way to work on your mindfulness skills is by using apps. Smiling Mind is free, and Headspace has some free elements to it. Both are excellent, evidence-based, and perfect for managing mindfulness in the context of your Fringe adventure. All it takes is 10 minutes a day, which is perfect for your commute to rehearsals or productions meetings, or even on the way to your Fringe venue.

## Incidental Mindfulness

Sometimes, adding Mindfulness to your to-do list can feel like another thing to have to “tick off” on your already busy day. Self-care should never feel like a task you ‘have to get done.’ If this is where you are at right now, here are some tips for how you can incorporate self-care and mindfulness into your normal routine:

### Mindful Music

Streaming services means we can go through our day with a permanent soundtrack. Take 10-15 minutes, put on your headphones and put on a favourite song. It doesn't have to be whale songs or Enya. Now really listen to it. Can you pick out the different instruments and voices? Move your attention between the vocal and the bass line. ‘Your brain on music’ is amazing.

### Mindful Showers

Attend to all the senses for those three minutes of an environmentally-conscious shower. Smell that shampoo, feel the water on your back, really listen to the water. Everyday luxuries are vital!

### Mindful Breathing

You do it all the time, but when you move your attention towards the breath, it can be an incredibly effective way to centre yourself. Just try ten long, deep, slow breaths. Really attend to the air across your lips and as it fills up your lungs. Start with emptying your lungs first of all that expired air and then fill it with the good stuff.

### Mindful Drinking and Eating

Whether it be your morning coffee, the banana bread you just baked (the cuisine of corona) or a favourite wine (see Beginner's Guide to Mindful Drinking), aim to really focus on the experience. If we know a meal is special, we savour it. Approach that same sense of sensory appreciation to your everyday culinary moments and attend to all your senses. Notice the temperature on your fingers and the taste on different parts of your tongue.

Try to stay mindful for three minutes, then the next day, try five minutes, then keep building the skill. It takes effort, but these skills will get stronger with time. Remember how long it took to get your pen license, memorise a script, or juggle? New skills take time. You've got this.



## Dropping Anchor

OK, here's where we get a little touchy-feely. The idea of Mindfulness might sound great in theory, but sometimes our **Fringe Thoughts** and **Fringe Feelings** are so heightened or overwhelming, it seems impossible to move our attention. At times like this, the most important thing you can do is drop an anchor of kindness and wait for the storm to pass. Sounds wanky? Well, this is Fringe, baby!

Imagine your **Fringe Thoughts** and **Fringe Feelings** as a whirling storm around you. Your storm may be thunder claps of anxiety, lightning bolts of anger, or looming dark clouds of hopelessness. If you were on a ship in the middle of this storm, what would you do?

Would you scream at the storm and try to fight it? Would you pretend the storm wasn't happening? You could try, but it wouldn't work. Nothing you can do is going to change the storm. All you can do is try to batten down the hatches, drop anchor and wait for the storm to pass.

So, if your powerful **Fringe Thoughts** and **Fringe Feelings** are the storm, what would it look like to just allow the feelings to be there and drop anchor? You are a creative, imaginative person. Treat the following like a rehearsal exercise, but for your mental health:

1. Notice how your body is being supported. Imagine this as your anchor, stabilising you.
2. Really notice where you are being supported. If you're standing, put your energy into your feet. Push down into them. If you're in a chair, relax your energy into that chair's support.
3. Notice the energy flow through your body, the feelings of gravity flowing down through your head, spine, and legs into your feet.
4. Now you are anchored, name some of the feelings you are having. Become interested in them. Notice why they make sense.
5. Take 10 deep breaths and just allow the feelings space to be there.
6. Now, show yourself some kindness and self-compassion. Think about a kind and supportive friend. What's one thing would they say to you right now? Say it to yourself.
7. Now look around, and notice what you can see and hear around you. Notice where you are and what you're doing. Notice you can do it, while you allow space for the feelings to be there while they pass. As all feelings do.

“ Self-care means **being aware of ourselves**, where we are rooted, aware of what is around us and evolving from the lessons we learn in order to survive and thrive ”

– Naomi Ortiz

# Communication



Photo by Theresa Harrison

We're constantly communicating with people during Fringe. We're trying to reach audiences through media and social media, we're collaborating with other artists, and we're talking about our Fringe show with other Fringe artists.

Sometimes, we can feel as though we have to be "on" at all times, telling the world how great rehearsals are going, how promising tickets sales are, or what an amazing audience we had the other night. Sometimes, we want to break down and have a big old cry in the middle of Club Fringe because it's hard, we feel alone, and we feel like everyone else is having a great Fringe. Keeping communication authentic during The Festival is a challenge, but an important one.

Good communication starts with your fellow artists as you make work together. It's likely as you approach the festival, and feelings turn up a notch, that you and your team will start to have some differences of opinion. There could also be some workplace issues that need to be addressed, like lateness or what feels like a lack of commitment from someone.

Although the conversation is hard, avoiding it may lead to even more difficult issues in the future. No change comes from being comfortable; change comes from being uncomfortable. Try not to view it as a conflict to avoid, but rather a conversation that will lead to a better on-going relationship, and a better show.

If you're avoiding conflict in the rehearsal room, you are also avoiding all the possible positive change that can come from the difficult conversations. Try and keep these ideas in mind when having these conversations with your creative collaborators:

- Show understanding by paraphrasing back what you've heard, in a way that asks if you have understood them properly. If you get it wrong, see that as a great opportunity for learning.
- If there are external forces affecting your ability to do your work, find a time to talk to people you work with about what is happening for you. It will give them the opportunity to understand and act with compassion. Be mindful of reaching for excuses vs. being honest and open.
- Use "I" statements vs. "You" or "We" statements.
- Try to focus on behaviour and avoid personal judgements. Be as specific as possible.
- E.g. "Why would you let those latecomers in?" vs "When people enter the audience late, the artists find it really difficult to stay focused on their performances. I want to understand how it happened." Rather than "You are just not fitting in with the team," try, "At rehearsal today I noticed you weren't speaking as much as others."

**“ Be honest.** It sounds counterintuitive in a stressful environment, but being honest and open with your cast mates, or your producer, venue tech is so important. If you feel able to, it gives those people a chance to reassess their reactions to you and next time you act out of character because of where your mind is at, they can react with compassion or understanding. It also works the other way - if someone you're working with during Fringe says they're struggling **- try to be as open as you can and just listen to them.** Sometimes that's all that we need. ”

- Ro Hudson, Performer (Fringe Wives Club).  
Melbourne Fringe Artist.

# During your Melbourne Fringe Festival season



Photo by Anna Nalpartidis

Look out for signs that you need to prioritise self-care – know what the early signs are that tell you that things aren't the best they can be. Does your sleep cycle go out the window? Do you endlessly scroll through social media, or binge-watch TV? Do you start picking fights with inanimate objects? Check in regularly with yourself, and notice when it's time to take some sweet self-care action and get Fringe Fit.

## Getting Fringe Fit

Here's some ideas on keeping both physically and mentally well during Fringe Festival.

Like all fitness, getting Fringe Fit takes work. A lot of the ideas below will be nothing new for many of you, however keep in mind the new skill of mindfulness that you now have. When your **Fringe Thoughts** and **Fringe Feelings** are taking you to places that aren't Fringe Fit e.g. "I just don't have time for dinner," or "I'll just have one more drink post-show" or you notice feelings of hopelessness or stress, use your mindfulness skills to move your attention toward actions that look more like these below:

## EXERCISE

- We are not asking you to sign up to a gym just before Fringe starts! Think about achievable goals, and a form of exercise that fits into your hectic Fringe life.
- Organize active cast warm-ups, stretch breaks, and dance moments.
- For those who can, walk or ride your bike part of the way to the venue.
- Connect your mindfulness to exercise. Stretching, yoga, boxercise.

## SLEEP

- Netflix is not chill. Social media is not relaxing.
- Light from screens keeps you awake and alert. Limit screen time, less than two hours before bed. But if you must, turn the brightness down or use 'night shift' modes to its easier on the eyes and less stimulating.
- Don't go to bed until you are tired. If you are still awake after 10 mins, get up, and go and do something (not on a screen!) until you are sleepy.
- Go for quality, not quantity i.e. don't focus on 8 hours, focus on quality sleep.
- Put on 'Do Not Disturb' mode on your phone before you sleep.
- Keep your bed as a place of rest. This is hard in Fringe time as our bedrooms become de-facto production offices or costume workshops but holding space for rest is essential.
- Try to get up at the same time each day. Consistency is key in creating a sleep cycle.

## EAT WELL

- If it's hard to make time for dinner because you're in show mode, prioritise healthy breakfasts and lunches. Take time to ensure your fridge is stocked and ready for grab and go options, because you know you're busy.
- Make besties with fruit, nuts, and yoghurt (be it dairy or vegan).
- We get it. Post-show, you're probably starving. Avoid eating a big meal less than 2 hours before sleep, your gut is not designed for that.
- Commit to giving yourself a good meal at home, two times a week during Fringe.

## MAKE HEALTHY DRINKING CHOICES

- Try and encourage a wind down moment with the cast that doesn't involve drinking, (e.g. take turns in theming a post-show cuppa, mocktail, meal, or dessert.)
- Be mindful of your drinking. Have the most expensive one first, savor it, taste it.
- Be conscious of why you are drinking, and what you want your limit to be that night.
- Seek alternatives – fancy soft drinks, teas, and your best friend water.
- Have your last coffee at least six hours before sleep. Even if you fall asleep, it's not as restorative with coffee in your system. Same goes for alcohol.
- Green tea, peppermint and Dandelion root tea are fabulous alternatives that also increase alertness, and act as liver tonics.

“

As cliché as it is, **exercise** has been a huge help in maintaining my mental health, especially during busy production times. It helps keep body and mind in balance.

”

- Daniel Lammin, Director. Melbourne Fringe Artist.

“

Get quality sleep **before, during and after Fringe**. It took me years (and good therapy!) to realise that quality not quantity is key here - at least for short periods of busy times. Get into the habit of good sleep hygiene - which basically means turning off your phone / putting it on Do Not Disturb or turning off the data for the night. Anything to stop you endlessly scrolling. Find small rituals you can perform regularly - no matter what time you're going to bed - to indicate to your brain that you are preparing for sleep. Drink a herbal tea, curl up in bed and read a book, clean your teeth, wash your face etc. etc. If you get into the habit of doing a few small actions every night before bed, then when it comes to Fringe time, you'll be able to help your brain unwind for bed without too much stress.

**Use Apps!** There are loads of great sleep apps out there that you can listen to before, or while you're going to bed. They can really, really help you switch your brain off from all those niggling post-show "I shoulda done" thoughts.

”

- Ro Hudson, Performer (Fringe Wives Club).  
Melbourne Fringe Artist.

## Preventing Burn-out

- Schedule the hours of your workday and take breaks.
- Actually take breaks.
- TAKE BREAKS!
- Prioritize rest and go home when you can.
- Focus on ridiculously achievable goals, and then when they don't happen be kind to yourself and start again.
- Change the way your day works, don't just take days off and return to the same problems that led you to burn out.
- Be open and honest with people if you're struggling, feeling lonely and need help.
- Connect with the outside world. You are never too busy to call someone or send a message.
- Keep in mind that if your feelings become too difficult to manage with the strategies in this manual and the support of friends and family, it may be useful for you to seek professional help. Check out the support and resources section at the end of this manual for ideas of where to go.



I think there's definitely something to be said for **managing your expectations of yourself**. It becomes about removing yourself from Fringe hype and accepting you might miss some events, and that that's ok - that you'll probably have a better practice out of it because you'll have more mental and physical energy. Fringe is so much "the done thing" that it's easy for participants to forget it's really a huge thing to self produce and show up night after night. It's ok to have a different set of expectations for yourself when you're doing that.



- Christopher Bryant, Playwright and Performer. Melbourne Fringe Artist.

# After your Melbourne Fringe Festival season

Photo by Theresa Harrison

## Post-show wind down

### Slow Down

- Wind down to the parasympathetic system (rest and digest).
- Focus on ten slow, deep breaths and some stretching.



### Process

- Empty the brain: process the day through 15 minutes of writing. Reflect on how the show went, ensure you focus not only on what you need to work on, but also on the parts that went well. Research shows that ending every journal entry with something you are grateful for can also have a positive impact on your mental health.



### De-roll

- Have a shower and imagine the show wash off you.
- Get out of character by engaging with 'you stuff' e.g. listen to your favourite music or eat your favourite food.



### Re-connect

- Call friends and family.
- Connect with people outside of Fringe bubble.



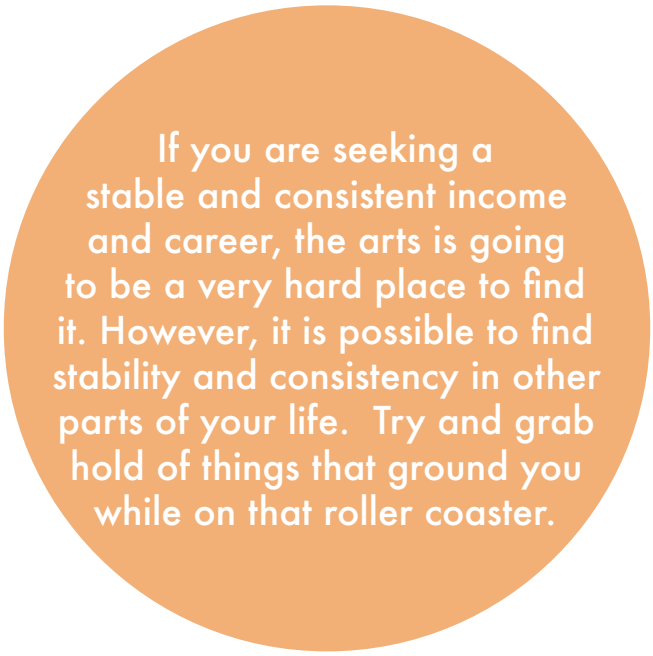
## Post Festival

One of the most challenging parts of working in the arts is the instability and cyclic nature of the work. Often your work life will resemble a kind of roller coaster of high highs and low lows. With the end of every show or festival, often comes feelings of loss, fear of where the next work will come, or hopelessness wondering if new work will ever come.

If you are seeking a stable and consistent income and career, the arts is going to be a very hard place to find it. However, it is possible to find stability and consistency in other parts of your life. Try and grab hold of things that ground you while on that roller coaster. For you this may look like yoga, baking, calling old friends, seeing family or meditation. Often following values and things that are important to you outside of the arts will be key. And ironically, maintaining connection to things outside of the arts, will go a long way to giving you the stability of mental health to keep a career in the arts possible.

Here are some other tips for dealing with the Post Festival period:

- Imagine you are a really compassionate friend and write a letter to yourself reflecting on the festival. This means focusing on what you did well and the enormous amount of work you put in to the festival, but also on what you have learnt and can work on. Make sure to use a voice that is kind and helpful.
- Try to step outside of all the external factors that you feel pressure to judge the success of your show on (e.g. ticket sales, awards) and sit down and write down how you want to judge the success of your show and festival. Focus on your values, and what is meaningful to you. Avoid comparison. Remember you get to decide how you choose to define success.
- It is important to acknowledge that this show was part of your life, but it is not all of who you are. Think about what else makes up you and put some time and energy into focusing on those parts of you.



If you are seeking a stable and consistent income and career, the arts is going to be a very hard place to find it. However, it is possible to find stability and consistency in other parts of your life. Try and grab hold of things that ground you while on that roller coaster.

An illustration of a spiderweb on a wooden surface. The web is light blue and is positioned on the left side of the image. The wooden surface is brown and has a diagonal grain. The web is attached to a thin wooden stick on the left. The background is a dark, textured surface.

# Big Dangerous Ideas to help you for Fringe and a life in the Arts

Illustration by Astrid Mulder

## **Art is something you do; this does not mean it is who you are.**

One of the most powerful ideas to learn is how to view your art as part of who you are, but not all of who you are, and therefore not the only thing that defines your value and worth. For many artists this can be challenging to think about, as often they have grown up in a world that defines them by their art.

Think about when in your life people began identifying you as a “musician” or a “producer” or an “actor”. Think about the impact that had on how you viewed yourself... how much of your self-worth became attached to your success as an artist? This can continue as you put more and more work into your art, and it can feel like it’s the only thing that matters: “it’s the only thing I want to do, it’s who I am.”

For many artists, the very nature of their work makes it hard to separate themselves from their artistic practice. The making and performance of art is often very personal. And the nature of the work often requires constant judgement. With every audition and every performance, it can be very difficult to not take these judgements personally, as it can feel like it is you, not your work, that is being judged. And therefore, it can feel like it is your self-worth, not your practice as an artist, that is being defined.

So what is the way out? For many artists, **the secret is about developing the belief that art is something you do, it is not who you are.** A starting point to developing this belief, is taking a moment to think about why you do what you do. Values reflect what you want to do, and how you want to do it. So ask yourself the question... Why do you make your art? What makes it meaningful? Authenticity? Honesty? Beauty? Curiosity? Connection?

Now notice how you enact these values in your life. Hopefully you can notice that your art is one way you live by these values, but it is not the only way. Art is a way you enact what is important to you, it is not what IS important to you. The more you can connect to what is important outside of your artistic practice, the easier it will be to deal with challenges you face in your work and to maintain a consistent sense of self-worth.

“ If you think of yourself as an actor, or a dancer, or a singer, and you’re not singing, and you’re not acting, or you’re not dancing, what are you? Most people are between jobs, what are you between jobs? And if think of yourself as an actor, and you’re not actually acting, you’re kind of no one. This is how it’s possible to see yourself. The way out of that is to actually separate yourself from your profession. That’s what I do, that’s not what I am. I do acting but I am not an actor. I don’t think of myself as an actor actually.”

- Sam Neill, from an Interview in the documentary *The Show Must Go On.*

## **Making bad choices**

Often choices associated with anxiety and a high chance of failure are avoided, and not seen a good choice. We need to lean into rather than avoid vulnerability. Plenty of artists have talent, but it is often artists who are OK with being vulnerable, and have the courage to be imperfect, that find great success.

Perfection is protection. Research has shown perfectionism hampers achievement. Perfectionism is correlated with depression, anxiety, addiction, and life paralysis or missed opportunities. Think what you have avoided in your life because of a fear of failing, making mistakes, not meeting people’s expectations, or being criticized. Imagine where these choices might have ended up.



I think as dangerous and daunting and scary as vulnerability can be, I don't think it's ever as dangerous, daunting, or scary as reflecting back on moments in our lives where we wonder what would have happened if I would have shown up.



- Brene Brown

## Stop setting goals

Woah, what on earth is wrong with setting a goal and working toward achieving it?!?!?

Well perhaps I overstated it a little there for dramatic effect. We're not saying all goals are unhelpful, but I am suggesting some goals are. And often these are the goals we hold nearest to our being.

Lets examine this more closely. When is a goal unhelpful?

Think about a long-term goal you have set for yourself, or some of the goals you have set for Fringe. Perhaps write them down. Now let's look at them. How many of them depend on things that are outside your control? Get rid of them. You're setting yourself up for a world of pain, with little to gain.

Second, let's have a look, how many of the goals are a little vague?

For example, "I want to have a successful Fringe show." Awesome. But how will you know you have achieved this. How will you judge success? Ticket sales (whoops, out of your control), good reviews (also out of your control) or you'll just feel it (feel what?). Often goals that are not specific and measurable become a problem because you never know you've achieved them.

So what's the alternative? Well we'd suggest focusing on SMART goals:

**S** Specific - Be as clear and specific as possible with what you want to achieve. For example, compare "I want to win a Fringe Award" to "I want to make sure judges have been invited to the show".

**M** Measurable - What evidence will prove you are making progress toward your goal?

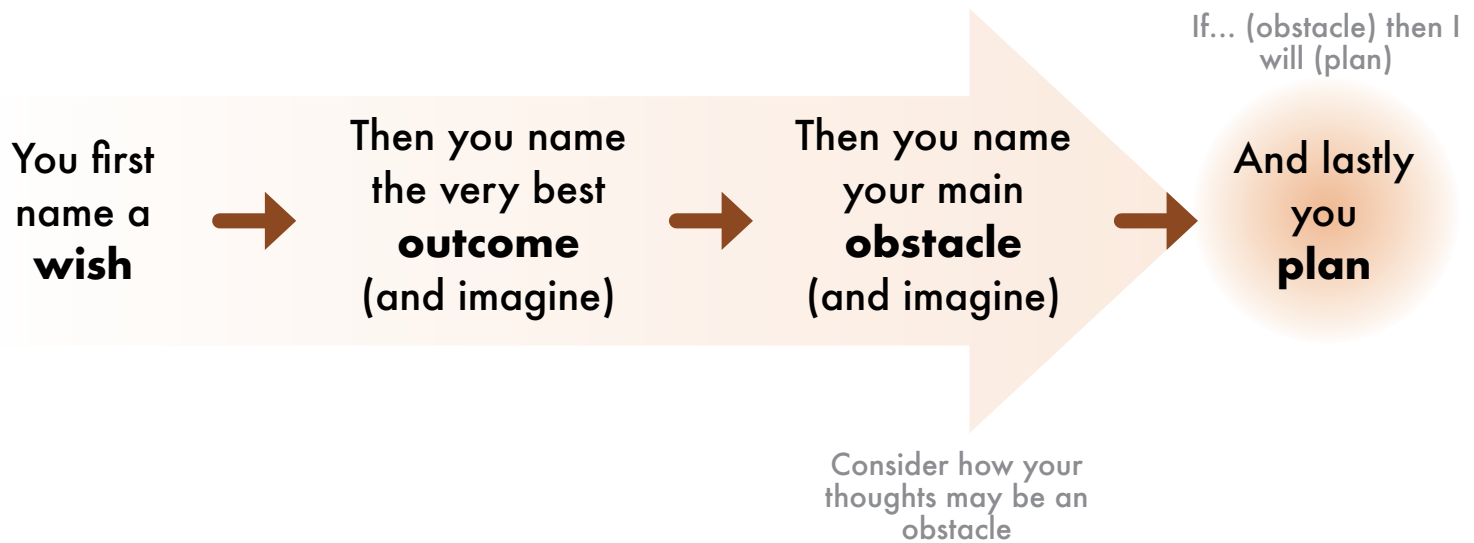
**A** Achievable – set ridiculously achievable goals. Keep in mind, you can always set another goal once you've achieved this one, so why not start small and feel the rush of achievement of goals along the way?

**R** Relevant – ensure the goals have meaning to you, and you can relate them to what matters to you in life.

**T** Time bound - What is your goal time-frame? If your goals don't have a clear end date, you can always just keep putting it off. A specific time-frame will promote motivation and help you prioritise your goals.

## Plan to fail

Sometimes a focus on positive thinking, and that ‘everything is going to work out’, may mean you miss the opportunity to plan what you will do when things go wrong. Gabrielle Ottenigen (Rethinking Positive Thinking) describes a process of WOOP (wish, outcome, obstacle, plan) which when followed has been shown across multiple studies to improve numerous life factors, including health, physical activity, overcoming disappointment, and time management:



“ The solution isn’t to do away with dreaming and positive thinking. Rather, it’s making the most of our fantasies by brushing them up against the very thing most of us are taught to ignore or diminish: the obstacles that stand in our way. ”

- Gabrielle Ottingen

# Seeking Professional Help and Mental Health Care Plans

Photo by Anna Nalpaantidis

If working through this manual has got you thinking it would be helpful to talk to a professional about your mental health, it is useful to first start with your GP. Often your GP can provide an initial assessment and referral to a Psychologist, or you can advise your GP of a Psychologist you would like to see. This referral may include a Mental Health Care Plan (MHCP). This is a document you present to your Psychologist which provides you with 10 Medicare subsidised sessions per calendar year. Unless you are seeing a bulk-billing Psychologist, this will mean the payment of a gap for each session. The amount of this gap will differ between Psychologists, so just enquire when booking your first appointment about the cost. [Beyond Blue](#) offers helpful information about this process and [how much it will cost](#) and ideas on how to [find a professional](#).

After six sessions, your Psychologist is required to send a letter to your GP about your progress. At this point you will also need to have an appointment with your GP to obtain what is known as a MHCP Review which you will need to provide to your Psychologist to obtain your final 4 sessions. It is important to understand that with each new year, you are eligible for another 10 subsidised sessions. Further, recently the government has introduced up to 10 additional sessions a year for people impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. Please talk to your GP for further information about these sessions and your eligibility.

## Where to get support

### BEYOND BLUE

Coronavirus Mental Health Support: [Online](#) or 1800 512 348 (24/7)

Trained counsellors available to support you, online resources to help you through COVID-19.

### LIFELINE

[Online](#) or 13 11 14 (24/7)

Trained counsellors offering crisis support and suicide prevention.

### SUPPORT ACT

[Online](#) or 1800 959 500 (24/7)

The Support Act Wellbeing Helpline is a free, confidential counselling service that is available to anyone working in Australian music (all genres), or the Australian Performing Arts, who needs to talk to someone about any aspect of their wellbeing.

### QLIFE AUSTRALIA/SWITCHBOARD VICTORIA

[Online](#) (3pm – midnight, everyday) or 1800 184 527 (6pm to 10pm)

Provides peer-driven support services, counselling and referral for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender diverse, intersex, queer and asexual (LGBTIQ+) people, their families, allies and communities.

### WITH RESPECT

[Online](#) or 1800 LGBTIQ (1800 542 847). See website for times.

Provides support, telecounselling and referral for those in the LGBTIQ community experiencing difficulty in their relationships, including family and intimate partner violence. Also provides resources, tips and advice on having and maintaining healthy relationships.

### 1800 RESPECT

[Online](#) or 1800 737 732 (24/7)

Confidential phone and online counselling to support people impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse.

### DIRECTLINE

[Online](#) or 1800 888 236 (24/7)

Confidential alcohol & drug counselling and referral in Victoria

## Arts Wellbeing Collective

In 2018, our friends at Arts Centre Melbourne started the [Arts Wellbeing Collective](#), an initiative delivered in partnership with Entertainment Assist. The Collective comprises a consortium of Victorian arts and cultural organisations whose shared vision is to effect better mental health and wellbeing for Victorian arts workers. We recommend checking out The Arts Wellbeing Collective's resources – including podcasts, mediation audios and information about upcoming workshops.

## Resources

[Entertainment Assist](#) provides a range of resources available to assist you with your wellbeing and mental health.

[Fringe Festival Support](#) is a YouTube channel from Edinburgh Fringe Festival featuring interviews with artists about wellbeing and strategies for making it through a festival.

[Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance \(MEAA\) Equity Health Database](#) provides a useful list of GPs, Psychiatrists and Psychologists who have self-identified as having a special interest in or affiliation with the arts and/or artists.

[Artshub](#) is a great resource for the arts and offer some helpful articles to help navigate a life in the arts. Here's a few to get you started:

- [50 Ways to take care of yourself in the arts](#)
- [Anti-burnout advice for freelancers](#)

## Mindfulness and Meditation

[Smiling Mind](#) – a free app developed by psychologists to help bring balance to your life. Practice your daily meditation and mindfulness exercises from any device.

[Headspace](#) – a meditation app that teaches you the skills of meditation and mindfulness in just a few minutes a day.

[Self-Compassion Meditations](#) – guided meditations grounded in the science of self-compassion.

[Insight Timer](#) – this app provides an extensive library of free meditation and mindfulness exercises for sleep, anxiety and stress.

## The Happiness Trap

Many of the ideas about dropping anchor, mindfulness and managing thoughts and feelings, are based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. You can learn more about these skills and ways to manage anxiety in [The Happiness Trap](#) by Russ Harris. Also the website [Act Mindfully](#) has plenty of free resources, including videos and audios, free Chapters from the book, so is a great place to start.

## Self-care reads

- [Self-care for artists of colour](#)
- [Self-care during COVID-19](#)
- [Self-care and disability](#)
- [Self-care in the time of COVID-talk](#)
- [6 creatives on how to make self-care more inclusive](#)
- [Sustaining Spirit: Self Care for Social Justice by Naomi Ortiz](#)



“ I love you dearly: You’re a smart and sweet man, but you are so wrong about what matters and where the eyes should visit. The things you find so important--the attention, the prizes, the approval--yes, they matter, and never so much than when they disappear. But I’m old now, and I’ve walked a long and rocky road, and what really mattered, what should matter most to you, is the rare and gorgeous experience of reaching out through your work and your actions and connecting to others. A message in the bottle thrown toward another frightened, loveless queer; a confused mother; a recently dejected man who can’t see his way home. We get people home; we let them know that we’re here for them. **This is what art can do.** Art should be the arm and the shoulder and the kind eyes – all of which let others know you deserve to live and to be loved. That is what matters, baby. **Bringing people home.**”

-Tennessee Williams