

# Present Over Perfect:

## 2023 Wellness Toolkit for Elementary School Students and Parents



**This Toolkit Belongs to:**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Letter to Every CPS Student and Parent Recognizing Mental Health Awareness Month. . . . .	4
Understanding Your Mental Health. . . . .	6
Quick Mental Health Reminders and Tips: . . . . .	6
Healthy Emotional Expression! . . . . .	7
Managing Challenging Emotions . . . . .	7
Emotions Wheel . . . . .	8
Building your Emotional Vocabulary! . . . . .	9
Journaling Activity: Write it Out!. . . . .	10
Feelings Check Point . . . . .	10
Learning About Self-Care . . . . .	11
What are some examples of self-care?. . . . .	11
Building a Self-Care Plan . . . . .	12
Recognizing When You Need Help . . . . .	13
Starting the Conversation about Mental Health . . . . .	13
Taking Care of Your Well-being . . . . .	14
District Resources for CPS Students . . . . .	15
External Resources . . . . .	16

## A Letter to Every CPS Student and Parent Recognizing Mental Health Awareness Month

**In case no one has told you today...you belong HERE. You are APPRECIATED. You are VALUED. Thank you for doing hard things every single day, even when life gets difficult. Thank you for simply being YOU! We are so proud of you.**

The CPS Mental Health Team is always striving to find ways to support the emotional well-being of our CPS community. We understand having good mental health can require tools and coping skills to take on the many challenges that come our way. Sometimes, doing our best simply means showing up, and we are grateful every single time our students do that.

The District's commitment to healing is rooted in equity through a combination of resources that are available to all schools and targeted support for those who need it most.

In this toolkit, we have outlined some of the resources and support CPS is providing to meet the mental health needs of our students, as well as tips and activities to break the mental health stigma and create safe and supportive school environments. We strongly encourage you to talk to your student(s) and collaborate with them on this toolkit. We hope this will be a fun and educational way to start some of these conversations at home.

During Mental Health Awareness Month, we want to simply remind you to focus on being present, not perfect. We will continue working to provide more mental health resources and opportunities to best serve our school communities.

Sincerely,

Office of Student Health and Wellness  
Mental Health Team



STUDENT HEALTH  
AND WELLNESS

“ **Present** is living with your feet firmly grounded in reality, pale and uncertain as it may seem. **Present** is choosing to believe that your own life is worth investing deeply in, instead of waiting for some rare miracle or fairy tale. ”

- *Shauna Niequist*

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

**Your mental health is important! Mental health consists of your social and emotional well-being, and it can impact how you feel, think, and behave.** There are many factors that impact how we feel. Some examples include: our environment, stressful experiences, our physical health, and even genetics. Although there are many factors that can make us feel bad, there are also a lot of ways we can feel better. You are encouraged to review this toolkit with a parent or caregiver in order to learn about mental health together, as well as learn about what resources are available through your school.

### QUICK MENTAL HEALTH REMINDERS AND TIPS:



**It is normal to experience many feelings, and it is okay to not feel okay.** Everyone experiences ups and downs.



**Going outside and soaking up the sun** gives you the Vitamin D you need to help produce serotonin, which can help improve how you feel. Remember to wear sunscreen!



**Exercise can help more than just your physical health.** Exercising regularly can help reduce stress and boost your mood!



**Stay hydrated!** Drinking plenty of water helps reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety.



**Getting plenty of sleep is very important!** Making sure to get a lot of rest can help improve your mood and mental health, so try to get 9-12 hours of sleep every night!



**Share how you feel.** Talking about your feelings can help you process your emotions and help others offer you the help you need to feel better.

Depending on your circumstances, it may be more difficult to meet some basic needs than others, so try your best to take care of yourself in the ways that work for you. Think about your own unique environment and resources to answer the following questions.

**What are some ways you already take care of your mental health through your normal routine?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**How can you develop healthier habits to support your mental well-being?** \_\_\_\_\_

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## HEALTHY EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION!

**It is okay to feel many different types of emotions.** Sharing how you feel is healthy!

**Don't try to bottle up your feelings.** This may only increase stress or prolong upsetting emotions.

**Talk about how you feel.** Go to a friend or family member that you trust and share your thoughts and feelings with them. They can offer to help you and having someone hear you out can make you feel better.

**Building Self-Awareness.** Self-awareness refers to how well you understand yourself. This can include your thoughts, ideas, personality, and emotions. By understanding yourself and your emotions, it will be easier to develop strong coping skills and help you manage difficult situations.

## MANAGING CHALLENGING EMOTIONS

Managing your emotions is important because it can help you make better choices regarding how you react when faced with challenging situations. Your emotions are valid and it is okay to feel them, but you are responsible for how you react toward others.

**Here are some tips you can use when dealing with difficult emotions:**

- Take a moment to reflect on your feelings. How do you feel? Why do you feel that way? What can you do to feel better?
- Practice breathing exercises to calm yourself down. Take a deep breath in and hold it in for three seconds, and then slowly exhale. Repeat this a few more times and feel your body relax.
- Try journaling. Sometimes talking about your emotions isn't easy, and writing them down can help you process them. **Grab a pen and some paper, and start by writing:**

"I feel \_\_\_\_\_ right now." Then, explain why you feel this way.

**What happened? Who made you feel that way?**

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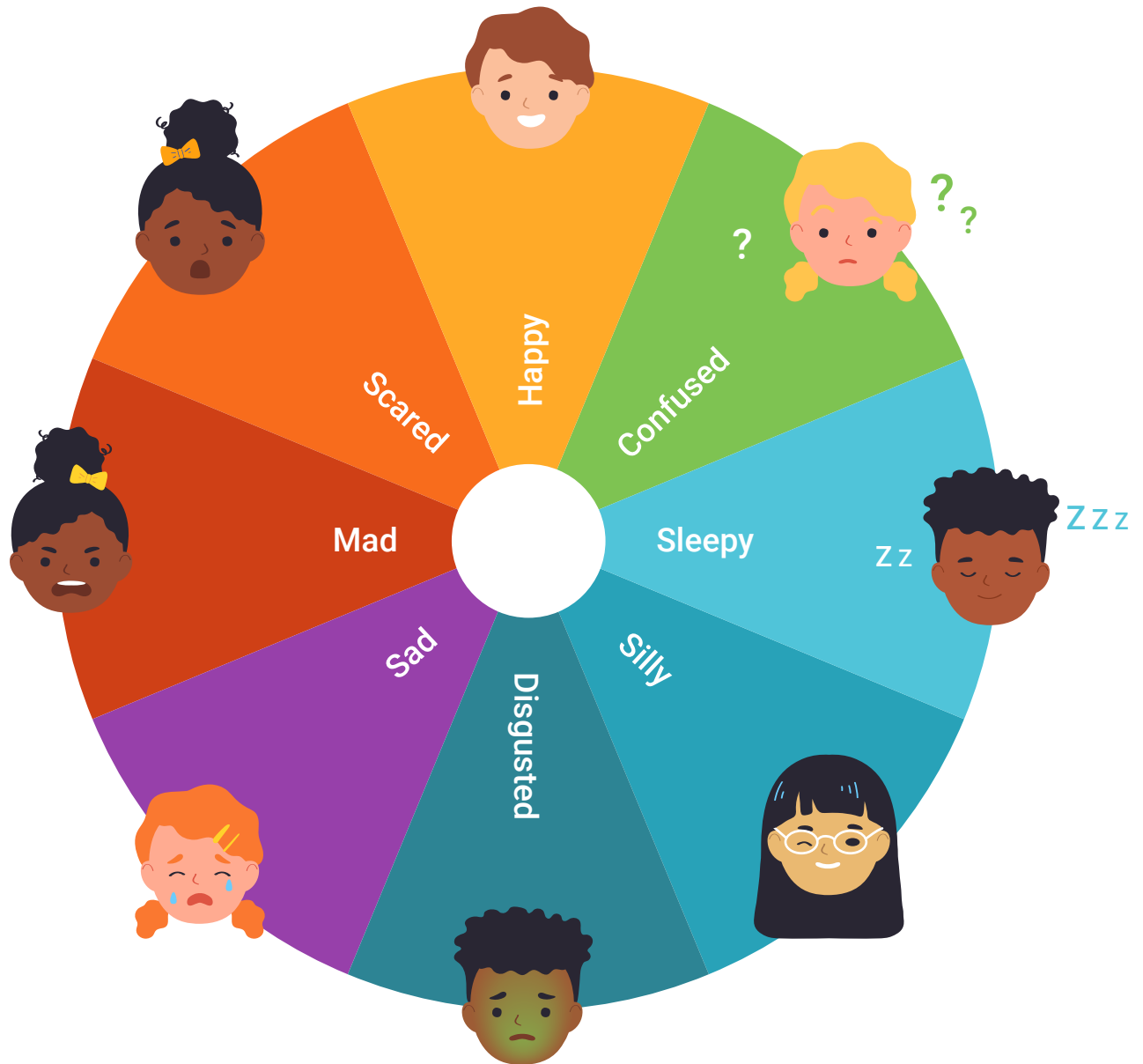
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## EMOTIONS WHEEL

Emotions can be difficult to describe sometimes, and it is not always easy to find the right words to express how we feel. A helpful tool you can use is an emotions wheel! This tool gives you a range of emotions to choose from. With your emotions wheel you can learn to better understand your emotions and communicate them more effectively with others.





## BUILDING YOUR EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY!

S	F	R	U	S	T	R	A	T	E	D	E	A	U
S	A	E	S	U	O	V	R	E	N	E	L	A	A
I	C	F	Y	S	F	S	E	N	B	R	A	V	E
F	L	U	R	E	C	O	N	F	U	S	E	D	D
G	R	S	R	A	L	E	E	D	O	A	F	E	E
C	R	I	D	I	I	R	O	E	R	N	A	S	H
S	E	A	E	A	O	D	S	S	E	G	S	S	S
R	A	R	T	N	S	U	O	S	L	R	C	A	I
C	A	L	M	E	D	O	S	E	A	Y	I	R	N
F	R	N	E	N	F	L	L	R	X	U	N	R	O
U	F	V	Y	E	A	U	Y	T	E	O	A	A	T
D	E	R	O	B	R	T	L	S	D	L	T	B	S
U	E	C	S	T	A	T	I	C	I	T	E	M	A
O	N	S	N	C	L	U	F	Y	O	J	D	E	A

FRIENDLY  
 EMBARRASSED  
 GRATEFUL  
 NERVOUS  
 SAD  
 JOYFUL  
 AFRAID  
 BRAVE  
 CURIOUS  
 CONFUSED

ASTONISHED  
 ANGRY  
 BORED  
 FASCINATED  
 FRUSTRATED  
 RELAXED  
 CALM  
 STRESSED  
 ECSTATIC

“Feelings are something you have; **not** something you are.”

-Shannon L. Alder

## JOURNALING ACTIVITY: WRITE IT OUT!

For this activity, think of an idea, a person, an event, or an experience that made you feel the emotions colored in each question. Write about how and why you felt that way.

Can you think of a time when you felt **joyful**? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Can you remember a moment when you felt **afraid**? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

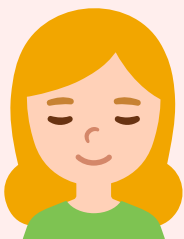
What are some things that you feel **grateful** for? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What is something that has made you feel **nervous**? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

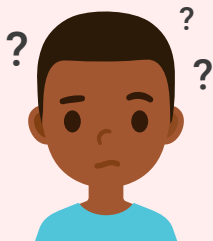
When you are feeling challenging emotions, what are some things you can do to feel better? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## FEELINGS CHECK POINT

Right now I feel: \_\_\_\_\_



Calm



Confused



Happy



Mad



Sad

## LEARNING ABOUT SELF-CARE

### What is self-care?

Self-care means taking care of yourself and your well-being. This can include activities that make you happy, make you feel relaxed, or keep you healthy.

### Why is self-care important?

Self-care is important because it can help keep your mind and body healthy. After dealing with stressors or challenging situations, it can be very beneficial to take time for yourself and focus on feeling better. Introducing self-care activities into your daily routine can help reduce stress, minimize symptoms of anxiety and depression, and even improve your mood!

### What if I don't have time for self-care?

Self-care activities can be simple and easy to do! Even if you don't think you'll have enough time, you can still spend 5-10 minutes of your day doing something to help you feel calm.

## WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF SELF-CARE?



**Go Outside for a Walk**



**Call a Friend**



**Listen to Music**



**Dancing**



**Read a Book**



**Drawing or Coloring**



**Watch a Movie**



**Take Time Alone and Relax**

## BUILDING A SELF-CARE PLAN

What are some of your favorite self-care activities? You can pick from the list or come up with your own!

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

What are some ways you can relax your body and mind? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are some ways you can take care of your physical health? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If you are not feeling well, who can you ask for help? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What activities make you feel happy? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What are some of your hopes and dreams? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

“ **Self-care** is not self-indulgence,  
it is **self-preservation.** ”

- Audre Lorde

## RECOGNIZING WHEN YOU NEED HELP

It's normal to go through difficult emotions, and it's understandable if you don't always feel comfortable talking about what you're going through. However, it is important to remember that you are not alone and there are plenty of people who care about you and want to help you feel better. There is no shame in asking for help! We encourage you to go over this page with a parent or trusted adult so you can start a conversation about the support you might need when experiencing a mental health challenge.

### Recognizing the Signs:

- Feeling very low or sad
- A lot of worrying, fear, or anxiety
- Extreme mood changes
- Avoiding friends or family
- Expressing hopelessness or seeming depressed
- No longer participating in activities they used to enjoy

## STARTING THE CONVERSATION ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

- **It is normal to feel nervous when talking about your mental health.** You can start by figuring out who you can reach out to for help. Think about people that you can trust, such as a parent, guardian, teacher, friend, or your school counselor.
- **If you're too nervous to talk, you can always write about the situation,** your emotions, and your thoughts. When you feel ready, you can read the letter to someone or they can read it.
- **Figure out what will make you feel comfortable.** Find a safe place to bring up the conversation, whether that is your house, the park, or in the car. If you want privacy, ask to go somewhere where you can talk privately.
- **Once you're ready to talk, you can start with these phrases:**
  - There's been something important I've been wanting to talk to you about...
  - I wanted to talk to you about some thoughts I've been having...
  - I have been feeling...
  - I was wondering if you could help with something...

While it's especially important to ask for help when you are struggling, it is always a good idea to check in with a trusted adult about your emotions and experiences! The earlier and more frequently you start talking about your mental health, the easier it'll get over time.



## TAKING CARE OF YOUR WELL-BEING

Who are some **trusted adults** in your life?

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When you **feel sad** who can you **talk to**?

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What do you like **best** about **yourself**?

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When you **feel scared**, who do you **call** or **go to**?

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Who do you **go to** when you **feel excited**?

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What are some **places** where you feel **safe**?

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Who would you feel comfortable talking to about your **mental health**?

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## DISTRICT RESOURCES FOR CPS STUDENTS

This is not a comprehensive list of resources, so please visit the [CPS Health and Wellness Main Web Page](#) to view the available resources at your school. Below we have included some resources from the [CPS Mental Health Page](#) and a few other health-related CPS pages:

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**The Children and Families Benefits Unit (CFBU):** Visit the CFBU Page to learn more about how you can be connected to social services, such as Medicaid and SNAP enrollment. They can also help connect you with free or low-cost food options, healthcare, and other resources.

**LGBTQ+ Supportive Environments:** Visit the LGBTQ+ Supportive Environments Page to learn and review our OUT for Safe Schools campaign, our guidelines for the support of Transgender and Gender Non-conforming Students, and the health and experiences of LGBTQ+ high school students at CPS compiled from the 2019 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

**CPS School Gardens:** Visit the CPS School Gardens Page to learn more about the mental health benefits of gardening. It can reduce stress, improve self-confidence, and foster a sense of belonging when gardening with a team. Gardening can be a bonding activity for a student and their family; if your school has a gardening team, find out how you can get involved!

**Students in Temporary Living Situations (STLS):** Visit the STLS Page to learn about how CPS protects the educational rights of homeless students and connects them to services, resources, and programs that could aid students and their families who do not have permanent housing.

**School-Based Health Centers:** Visit this Student Health Services Page to learn more about the high-quality, accessible, and age-appropriate health care services that the District's 33 School-Based Health Centers provide to students. Some services include immunizations, physicals, chronic condition management, and sexual and reproductive health care.

**CPS Health Data:** Visit the CPS Health Data Page to learn more about student and school health-related data. Data was collected through the Healthy CPS Survey, the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), School Health Profiles, and the Illinois Youth Survey. These data are used by CPS and external partners for research, policy, and advocacy work.

## EXTERNAL RESOURCES

There are non-CPS affiliated non-profits and mutual aids in Chicago that can help meet your mental health and other health-based needs.

- The [CDPH Community Resource Directory](#) is a useful tool that can help identify a mental healthcare provider to fit a student's specific needs.
- **Here are a few examples of non-profits that are directly related to mental health and other health-related services:**
  - **Community Health** provides mental health services, primary and specialty care, and medications at no charge to low-income, uninsured, and underinsured adults in Chicago.
  - **Erie Neighborhood House** provides mental health care, adult education, and other services to low-income and immigrant families; and
  - **Pilsen Wellness Center** provides mental health services, substance use prevention and treatment services, teen mom support, and food pantries.
- **Mutual aid** is a type of solidarity-based support where communities unite against a common struggle and care for one another. Please [click this link](#) to see existing mutual aids and the type of free health-related services they provide.

**Note:** It is recommended to research the non-profit organizations and mutual aids you are seeking services from to see which options work best for you.

**Parents:** If your child or someone else is experiencing suicidality and/or a traumatic event, we encourage them to talk to a trusted source and/or their Behavior Health Team (BHT), which can include a school nurse, psychologist, social worker, and counselor. They can also connect to a CPS Crisis Counselor 24/7. To reach the Crisis Hotline, text HOME to 741741 or call the **National Youth Crisis Hotline** at 1-800-448-3000.

**Here are additional hotlines offering targeted support:**

- **The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline:** 988
- **The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Chicago:** 1-833-626-4244
- **The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:** 1-800-662-4357
- **The National Eating Disorder Association:** 1-800-931-2237
- **The Trevor Project (LGBTQ+ Support):** 1-866-488-7386
- **The National Domestic Violence Hotline:** 1-800-799-7233

**Note:** While hotlines are helpful starting points, we still recommend reaching out to your school's counselor or family doctor, for more personalized support.



# 31 Ways to Take Care of Your Mental Health



SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	<b>1</b> Get at least 15 minutes of natural sunlight a day. Daylight lamps are also great for cloudy days.	<b>2</b> Create a "favorite things" collection of people and things that bring you joy. Keep it on hand for tough days or moments.	<b>3</b> Honor your mind-body connection. Take time to move, stretch, and exercise throughout the day.	<b>4</b> Surround yourself with a community of loved ones either in person or online.	<b>5</b> Write notes and affirmations. Place them in locations you'll see as you go about your day.	<b>6</b> Play music instead of watching TV when you have downtime at home.
<b>7</b> Do some mental health spring cleaning. Remove any objects that might encourage negative thoughts or habits.	<b>8</b> Place photos of loved ones throughout your space to stir positive thoughts and emotions.	<b>9</b> Break unpleasant tasks into 10-minute intervals. Set a timer and see how much you can accomplish.	<b>10</b> Stop and smell the roses...literally. Time in nature is a mood booster and improves cognitive functioning.	<b>11</b> Curl up with a good book. Reading relieves stress by serving as a temporary distraction.	<b>12</b> Pay it forward. Random acts of kindness can release oxytocin – the "feel good" hormone.	<b>13</b> Small steps add up. Take the stairs or park your car farther away. All forms of exercise can decrease tension and improve sleep.
<b>14</b> Add your favorite color into your living space in creative ways – use art, pillows, blankets, or curtains.	<b>15</b> Working from home? Set up a designated workspace that is set apart from your living and sleeping.	<b>16</b> Breathe easy – changing the filter in your furnace regularly, dusting often, using an air purifier, and houseplants can improve air quality.	<b>17</b> Prep lunches and pick out your outfit the night before. You'll save time and reduce your stress in the morning.	<b>18</b> Keep it cool and sleep tight. Between 60 and 67 degrees Fahrenheit is optimal for a good night's sleep.	<b>19</b> Stay crafty. Keep hobby supplies on hand for when stress sets in and you need a creative outlet.	<b>20</b> Shake it off. Dance around while you do housework. You'll get chores done and reduce stress levels.
<b>21</b> Use your good scents. Comforting scents from candles to baked goods can help create calm.	<b>22</b> Block out the background noise. Use headphones or earplugs to create a sound sanctuary.	<b>23</b> Keep it dark. Use blackout curtains or a mask to ensure your sleep environment is as dark as possible.	<b>24</b> Keep primary need nourishment on hand always – snacks, water, blankets, etc.	<b>25</b> Fun and focused. Create a stim box to occupy your hands when you feel anxious and need help focusing.	<b>26</b> Nod off to white noise if you have trouble falling asleep. You can use a sound machine, phone app, or fan.	<b>27</b> Take a break. Just a 10-minute walk each day can improve your ability to deal with stress.
<b>28</b> Disconnect by changing the settings on your phone to "do not disturb" when possible.	<b>29</b> Cut the clutter. Finished with an object? Put it away. A clean and clear space helps reduce stress.	<b>30</b> Keep a journal by your bedside. Write out your thoughts at the end of the day to clear your mind and find rest.	<b>31</b> Make a gratitude list of things you are thankful for, that bring you joy, or positively impact your mental health.			