



Forensic
Psychology
Consultancy UK

Managing Emotions and Self-harm



Content

- 01** The Window of Tolerance
- 02** Mindfulness
- 03** Grounding skills
- 04** Managing urges to harm yourself
- 05** Use your senses to self-soothe
- 06** Feeling more in control
- 07** Activities to feel in control
- 08** Points of contact



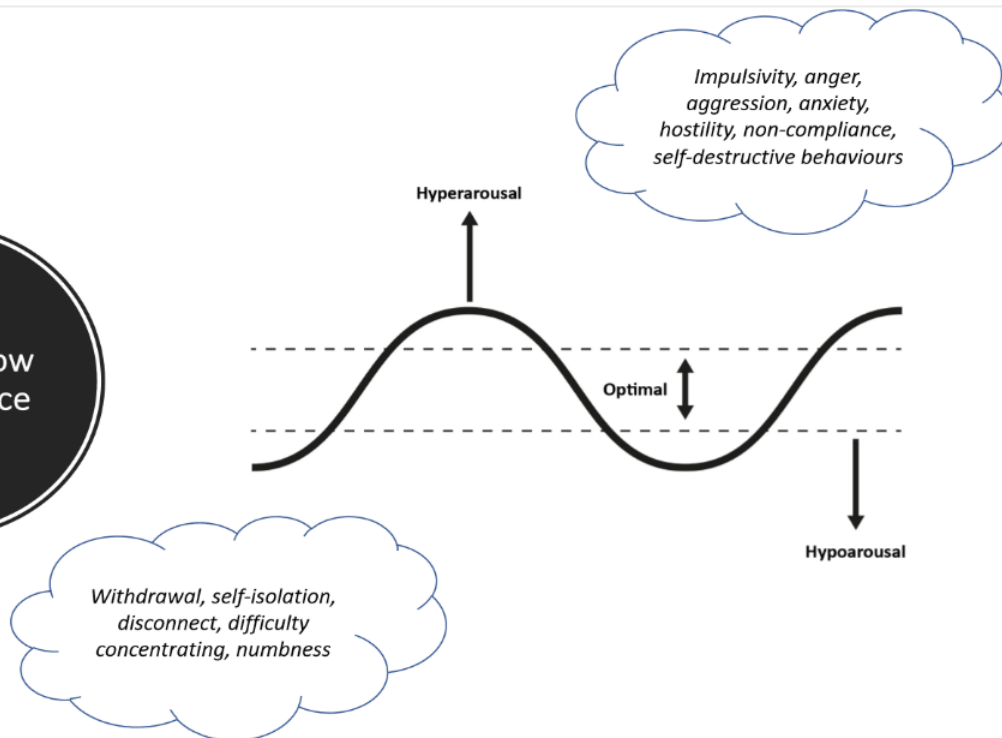
During times of uncertainty, stress levels can rise and it can be difficult to manage emotions. This booklet contains some ideas and strategies to help.

01 The Window of Tolerance

Emotional regulation is our ability to manage when difficult emotions arise. Everybody has a 'window of tolerance' - this is the range of emotion we are able to feel on a daily basis and still function with few problems.

When you are within your 'window' you feel like you can deal with whatever is happening in your life. This is the ideal place to be.

If our emotions become too 'high' we reach a state of hyperarousal. We might feel angry, stress, overwhelmed. Our body goes into 'fight or flight' mode.



Sometimes when faced with problems or worries we shut off from our emotions and go into 'hypoarousal'

We become spaced-out, numb, frozen.

This is our body freezing or shutting down.

02

Mindfulness

To manage our emotions, we can become more aware of where we are within our **window of tolerance**. Mindfulness can help us identify this. It can also help us to bring ourselves back within our window.






Mindfulness is the practice of being in the present moment. You can practice mindfulness by “dropping an anchor” into the present moment. A good way to do this is by focussing on your breath.

A breathing exercise has been provided for you on the next page.

Practical Mindfulness



If you prefer practical skills, try mindfully eating by following the script below:

-  As you are eating your food focus on what you can **see**. Think about the colours, textures, patterns.
-  What textures can you **touch** as you eat your food. Do they match the patterns that you saw?
-  Can you notice any **smells** as you eat the food? What does this do to your taste buds?
-  As you are eating, are there any **sounds**?
-  Take a moment to reflect on everything that you noticed.

02

Mindfulness

Breathing exercise



When practicing mindfulness, the aim is to be non-judgemental.

Recognise that thoughts and feelings may pop into your mind, but try not to get caught up in them, and allow them to leave.

- Make sure you are sitting or lying comfortably. If you feel safe to then close your eyes. Rest your hands wherever they feel comfortable.
- Notice any tension in your body and allow the muscles to relax. Paying attention to the sensations that you feel as you do so. You may notice where your body is connected to the chair, floor or wherever you lay. Relax any areas of tension, relaxing the space between your eyebrows.
- Bring your awareness to your breath. Just feel the natural flow of breath, you don't need to change it. Pay attention to where you feel your breath in your body. It may be in your abdomen, in your chest or in your throat. You may notice the breath in your nostrils.
- As you do this, your mind may wander. This is okay, just notice that this has happened, and bring your attention back to your breath. Do not judge yourself for this, allow your mind to just drift back to your breath.
- Spend around five minutes doing this, or however long feels comfortable.
- When you are ready, bring your awareness back to your body. Let yourself relax more deeply, and acknowledge the time you have taken for yourself and for your mindfulness practice today.

03

Grounding skills

Grounding skills are helpful skills when you feel yourself outside of your **window of tolerance**.

They can help in moments of distress. It is good to practice these skills when you are feeling well. They are then easier to do when you are feeling more distressed.

Grounding skills can be **physical, mental or soothing**.

Here are some ideas:

Physical grounding skills



Take deep breaths

Tense and relax your hands

Notice your feet connecting with the floor

Splash your face with cold water

Take a shower

Listen to a song you enjoy

Mental grounding skills



Category games – choose a category such as food or names and go through the alphabet

Count backwards from 100 in 3's

Recite the lyrics from a song that you know well

Work through a recipe of your favourite food in your mind

Visualise your favourite place, spend some time describing this scene in your mind

Soothing grounding skills



Place your hand on your heart and focus on your breath

Call a friend that you trust

Remind yourself that you are in the present moment, "I am at home, I am safe"

Repeat a positive statement to yourself

04 Managing urges to harm yourself

Many people harm themselves in some way. Some people do it many times each day, it may feel that they are addicted to that behaviour. Others may harm themselves when they are under emotional distress.

This may feel more difficult to manage if you are worried, uncertain or unable to practice your usual coping strategies because of social distancing or self-isolation.

If you are thinking of taking your life, it is important that you share this with somebody who can help you. During an intense urge to harm yourself, it can feel that there is no other option. However, there are things you can do to distract yourself in the moment from this urge. There may be things that have worked for you in the past.

Use the space on the next page to write/draw things that have worked for you in the past.

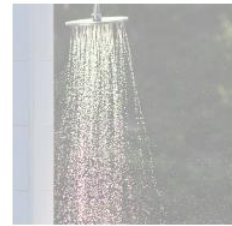
Try to do this when you are feeling okay, so that you can remind yourself of these when you need them. It can be good to share this with other people, they may have suggestions, or may want to help distract you in times of need.

04 Managing urges to harm yourself

05 Use your senses to self-soothe

You may find that you are unable to use some of your usual coping strategies due to limits on where you can go or who you can see at the moment. We have gathered some ideas below for you to try out.

If you usually harm yourself when you experience overwhelming emotions, using your senses is a quick and effective way to calm down



Lower the lighting

Mindful colouring

Sleeping mask

Warm drink

Strong flavours e.g. mint

Eat slowly and mindfully

Comforting smells – fresh laundry

Smell the fresh air

Scented body wash

Splash cold water on your face

Hot/cold shower

Wrap yourself in a blanket

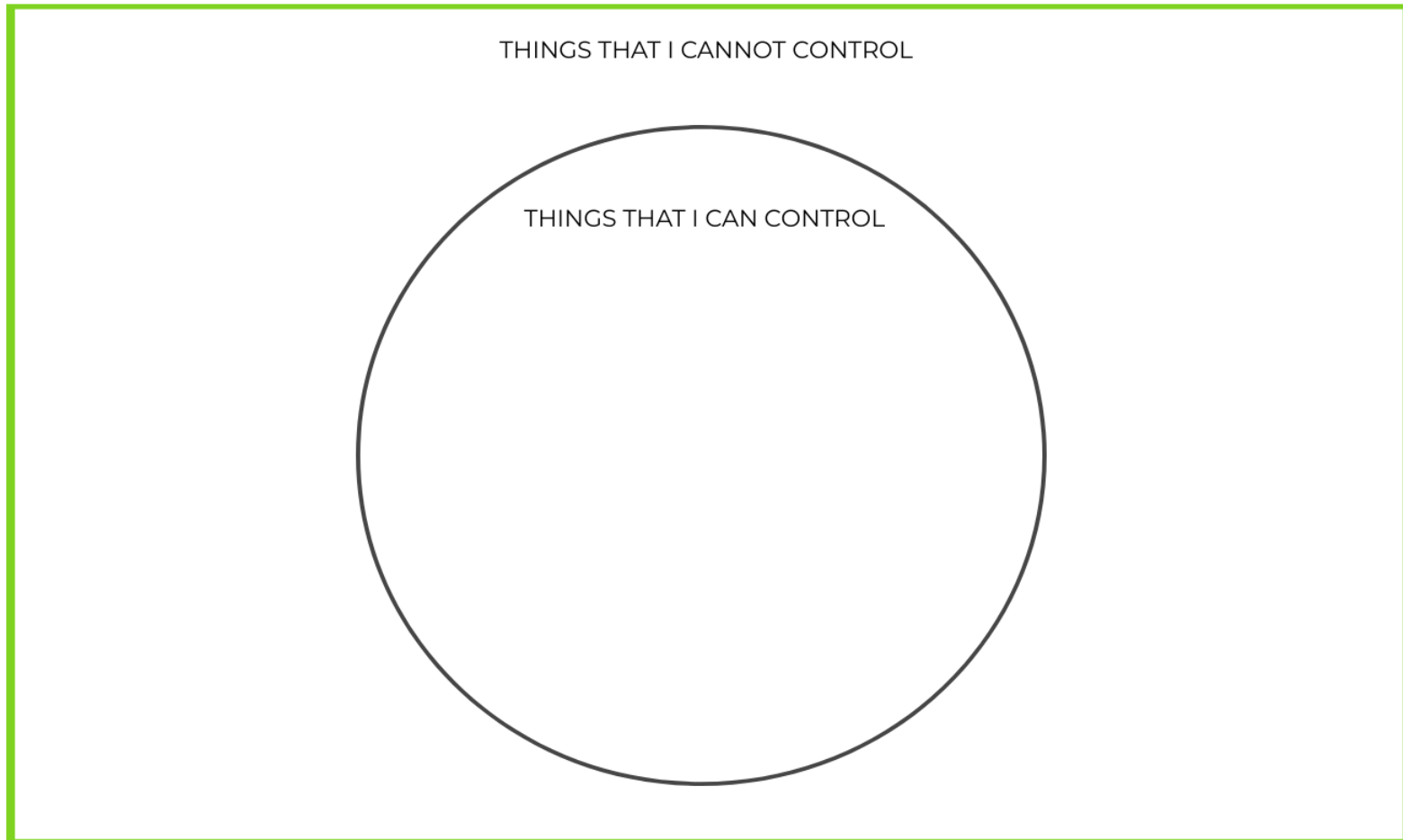
Practice a hand massage

Calming music

Sing a song

06 Feeling more in control

You may be feeling like there are lots of things out of your control at the moment. Some people harm themselves to regain a sense of control. It can help to sort through things that you are unable to control, and things that you are able to control. Use the diagram below to think about the things you can and cannot control



06

Below is an exercise to help you develop a plan to manage the things you **CAN** control. Individually write down each of the things you can control and then think of steps you can take to manage your plan.

An example is provided below.

| |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>Thing I can control: Staying in bed all morning</p> <p>Plan to manage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Go to bed at the same time every night- Shower and get dressed in the morning- Have a conversation with someone after breakfast |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

| |
|-----------------------------|
| <p>Thing I can control:</p> |
|-----------------------------|

| |
|-----------------------------|
| <p>Thing I can control:</p> |
|-----------------------------|

| |
|-----------------------------|
| <p>Thing I can control:</p> |
|-----------------------------|

07 Activities to feel in control

It may help to plan activities that you can do that help to bring a sense of control. Some ideas are:



Write a letter or draw a picture about how you are feeling. Some people find it satisfying to rip this up afterwards

Tidy up or sort things out, throwing things away can help to feel more in control



Developing a daily routine. Write a timetable for how your day / week would look.

08

Points of contact

Points of contact:

999 if you are thinking of taking your life

National Self Harm Network

www.nhsn.co.uk

An online support forum providing crisis support, information and resources, advice, discussions, and distractions.

Samaritans

Tel: 116 123 (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week) www.samaritans.org

Provides confidential support for anyone in a crisis.

Rethink

Helpline: 0300 500 0927

www.rethink.org

Provides information and a helpline for anyone affected by mental health problems.

Useful Downloads

www.headspace.com - a free taster of mindfulness, with an opt-in to buy further sessions.

www.freemindfulness.org - a collection of free meditations.

www.ntw.nhs.uk/pic/re;ax/php - a collection of free relaxation audio files.

Every Mind Matters

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters>

Within prison:

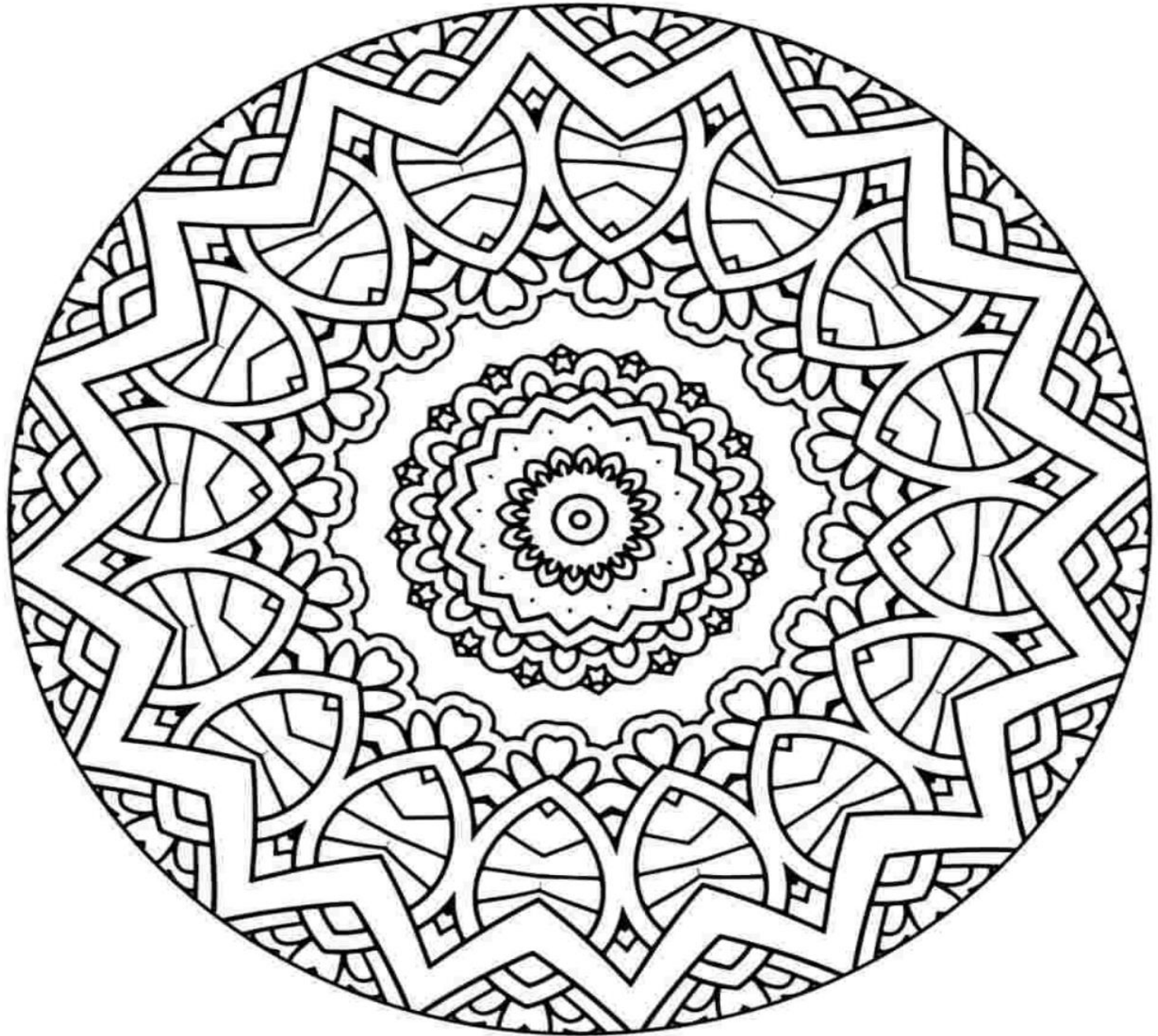
Prison officers

Keyworker

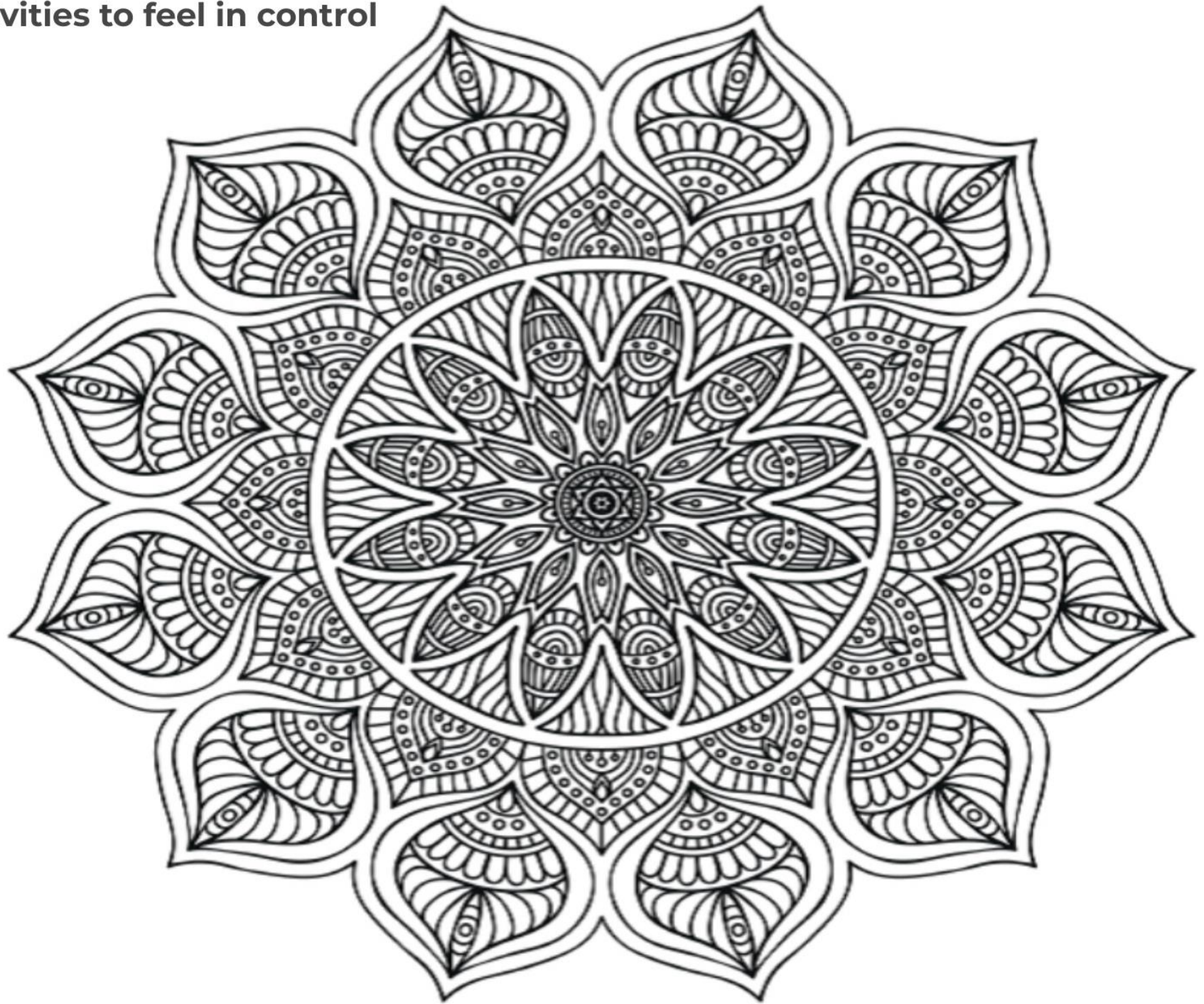
Listeners/Samaritans

GP/Mental health team

Activities to feel in control



Activities to feel in control



Activities to feel in control

