Tactical Manoeuves for Life A Resilience Road Map for RAF Teenagers

Written by Jules Mitchell Part of the Cloud Nine book series The content of this book and all of the strategies provided, are not intended to provide medical or diagnostic information or medical advice. If you have a suspected or diagnosed medical condition please consult a medical professional before engaging in any suggested exercises or trying any tools or strategies, to ensure that they are safe and appropriate.

Tactical Manoeuvres for Life is part of the Cloud Nine book series published by the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund and has been written for teenagers aged approximately 12-to-16 years old.

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This book was written by Jules Mitchell.

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ROOTS & WINGS

IF I HAD TWO WISHES, I KNOW WHAT THEY WOULD BE I'D WISH FOR ROOTS TO CLING TO, AND WINGS TO SET ME FREE; Roots of Inner Values, like Rings within a tree, And Wings of Independence to seek my destiny.

ROOTS TO HOLD FOREVER TO KEEP ME SAFE AND STRONG, To let me know you love me, when I've done something wrong; To show me by example, and help me learn to choose, To take those actions every day, to win instead of lose. Just be there when I need you, to tell me it's all right, To face my fear of falling when I test my wings in flight;

DON'T MAKE MY LIFE TOO EASY, IT'S BETTER IF I TRY, AND FAIL AND GET BACK UP MYSELF, SO I CAN LEARN TO FLY. If I had two wishes and two were all I had, And they could just be granted, by my Mum and Dad; I wouldn't ask for money or any store-bought things, The greatest gifts I'd ask for are simply Roots and Wings.

BY DENIS WAITLEY

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Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this book to our younger members of the RAF Family.

As an Honorary Group Captain and the Ambassador for the Air Cadet Organisation, I know only too well the unique opportunities and challenges these amazing, energetic young people face growing up.

Tactical Manoeuvres aims to give its readers the toolkit they need to steer their best way through not only life as a teenager, but also a teenager in a military family. The book details several different strategies teenagers can use to achieve the best they can.

Promoting a positive role model and healthy attitude for young people is something close to my heart, particularly for youngsters who have an RAF background. I hope you will find this book a useful guide as you navigate your teenage years and become the successful, positive young adult you want to be.

Fly high – let your dreams take you to the skies!

Carol Vorderman

INTRODUCTION

If you're reading this book, then odds are it's been handed to you by a parent, a youth leader on camp or a teacher. They may have told you that it comes highly recommended as a great book for helping you to thrive in your teenage years as part of an RAF family.

This book is like an operations manual for RAF teens. It provides a range of simple but effective tools and techniques designed to help you feel more confident, more resilient, less anxious and more self-aware of your automatic reactions and feelings.

We are passionate about helping you to make your life great and, in the pages which follow, you'll find some straightforward tips on how to cultivate a more resilient mindset. Resilience is an inner quality of being able to bounce back quickly when life knocks you down. We call this having 'bounce-back-ability'.

We know that as a teenager living in an RAF family, you probably already possess pretty good bounce-back-ability and this is partly because many of you are used to handling changes in your life, such as parental deployments or moving house or school. However, we also know that some of you will often disguise your worries and lack of confidence behind a smoke screen of bravado and outer confidence, when underneath you might actually be struggling.

Whether you fall into the bracket of struggling in silence or you feel that life is pretty okay right now, we hope that the hints and tips in this book will help you to get a better understanding of **YOU**.

In this book, you will find science-backed information. It is written in plain English and broken down into stand-alone sections so that the information we share is easy to digest. Firstly, we look at the connections between the mind, body and emotions. You will be 'lifting the lid' on your brain and learning how it's reconstructing itself right now. You'll be diving into your emotions and learning how to take control of them. Finally, you will learn techniques that will help you to cultivate an inner strength of selfawareness.

We have affectionately called these techniques **Tactical Manoeuvres**: you'll learn five of them in this book. Each is a practical tool or activity that can help and support you in moments of stress. When used regularly, these Tactical Manoeuvres can also build up your inner strength and resilience, helping you to be more prepared for life's unforeseen bumps in the road.

The book is also fused with images, affirmations and quotes that have been designed to inspire you and lift your mood in a matter of minutes. View it as a mini manual for life, helping you to navigate your journey with more positivity, more confidence and a better understanding of the real you.

There are times in our lives when we could do with a good 'rebooting'. We can sometimes get stuck in a pattern of worry or negative thinking and we may need help to get us out of this – that's when a reboot could be the best thing we could do.

Think about when you reboot a computer: you reset its operating systems to make it quicker and more responsive. When you reboot **yourself**, you can improve your internal operating systems, which might be in urgent need of an upgrade. But rebooting yourself isn't as easy as a computer; you can't just press the power button down or use 'control-alt-delete'. There's more to it than that.

Your overall operating system is actually made up of four components:

The Physical Self

The Mental Self

The Emotional Self

The Spiritual Self

These components are intrinsically linked to one another. In practical terms, this means that what happens within one component will automatically affect the others. When you worry (in your mind, your mental self) it causes your muscles to tense up (your physical self) and it makes you feel anxious or low (your emotional self). This can then affect your overall feeling of balance and harmony within yourself (your spiritual self). While you're already aware that you have all these elements – your body, your mind, your emotions and your connection to the bigger picture – sometimes we can forget to use them all in the way that they were intended.

Finally, we wanted to mention that although we are sharing lots of helpful hints and tips in this book, sometimes there is nothing better than talking through your problems with someone you trust. This can help you to talk it out and process everything better. When you talk to a friend, a teacher, a youth worker or your parents, they can often help you to get a different viewpoint on the problem and can be there to offer words of encouragement and support. There are many people you can go to for help, so don't ever feel that you are on your own.

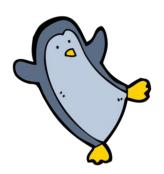




Experts say that you should be getting approximately one hour of physical exercise every day to help you function at your best. When you exercise, you not only help to keep your body in great shape, but it also improves your mood.

Good aerobic fitness boosts your energy levels and allows you to stay physically active for longer periods without getting tired. How much aerobic exercise do you get each week? Do you play football, hockey, basketball or tennis? Or maybe you like swimming, running or biking? Dancing is also a great aerobic workout, so pump up the volume on your favourite music and get dancing!

Physical exercise encourages the body's production of endorphins, which are chemicals that improve your mood. Exercise reduces the risk of depression, increases self-esteem, builds self-confidence and promotes restful sleep. It also enhances thinking and learning skills and may improve your relationships with your family and friends, as well as your performance at school.



BOOSTING YOUR MENTAL SELF

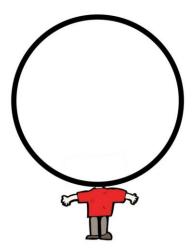
How much do you know about your mind? Are you aware that it has two main processing systems? Firstly, there's the part of your mind that controls the thoughts that you're thinking: this is called the conscious mind. Secondly, there's the part of your mind that you can't consciously control, which runs on auto-pilot and has a heap of automated programmes. This is called the subconscious mind.

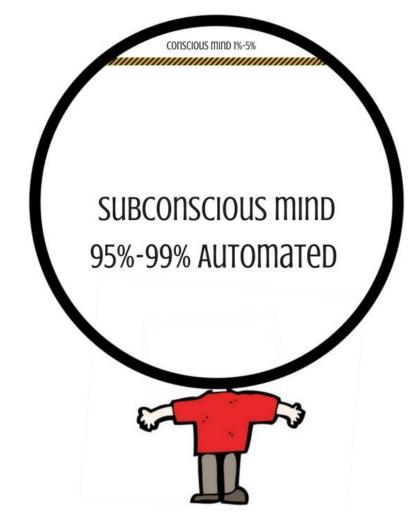
From now on, we want you to be big headed. In this instance, this doesn't mean boasting or bragging about your latest iPhone or how many followers you have on Instagram, but being fully aware of your mind's components and, more importantly, what you've got control over.

Have a look at the picture of your big head below – yes, it's big! What percentage of your thoughts (on a daily basis) do you think are conscious? By conscious, we mean those thoughts that you're very aware that you're thinking; the ones that you actually have control over. Examples might be: *I am going to get out of bed in five minutes*, or *I am really enjoying these chips*.

What do you think?

Before you turn the page to reveal the answer, just think for a minute and get a figure in your mind. Is it 90%, 70%, 30%? Okay, you can turn the page over now.





Are you surprised to see that your conscious thoughts only make up between 1% and 5% of your thoughts? It's such an incredibly low figure, isn't it? This is **all** the control you have over that big head of yours.

Based on the above, the number of subconscious thoughts that we have every day must then be 95% to 99% of our thoughts. So, if our subconscious thoughts are automated and we are not in control of them, then this may explain why so many of us feel like we are living in a world that seems to control us!

Every day, you have between 60,000 to 80,000 thoughts going through your head and 90% of these thoughts are the same thoughts that you had yesterday; we basically regurgitate our thoughts on a never ending loop. Can you see why it's so important to keep your thoughts in check?

A great way of understanding your big head is to liken it to your computer. Your mind is made up of a big chunk of hard drive which is your subconscious mind and a small (but powerful) software programme that is your conscious mind.

Your subconscious mind ticks away under the surface as a fully automated system and controls all of your bodily functions like your breathing, your digestion and your heart beating. It also runs a whole heap of automated thoughts, beliefs and behaviours – basically your daily habits.

CONNECTING TO YOUR EMOTIONAL SELF

THE EMOTIONAL COMPASS #TACTICAL MANOEUVRE NO.1



If you remember from page two, we have four components which make up the human operating system. We've looked at your physical self and your mental self, so now it's the turn of your emotional self. Because your emotions are a massive guiding force in your adolescent years we've designed a tool that can help you map your emotions with more clarity and confidence from now on.

This mapping tool is called The Emotional Compass and it is the first of the five Tactical Manoeuvres we are sharing with you in this book. When you can start to identify and accept your emotions you will, in turn, boost your wellbeing and develop more control of your emotions rather than them having control over you. Have a look at the image of The Emotional Compass below. Where on the compass are you right now?

Using the Emotional Compass is easy and straightforward. You will see that each compass point is an emotional state or feeling. To use the compass, scan the words and feelings listed on the compass points and see if you can work out which state or feeling you currently identify with. You will notice that the better feeling emotions are clustered on the right hand side of the compass (north to south) and the more uncomfortable emotions are found on the left hand side (south to north).

This Tactical Manoeuvre will help you to build more emotional awareness and to distinguish between various emotions. For example, could you tell the difference between frustration and disappointment?

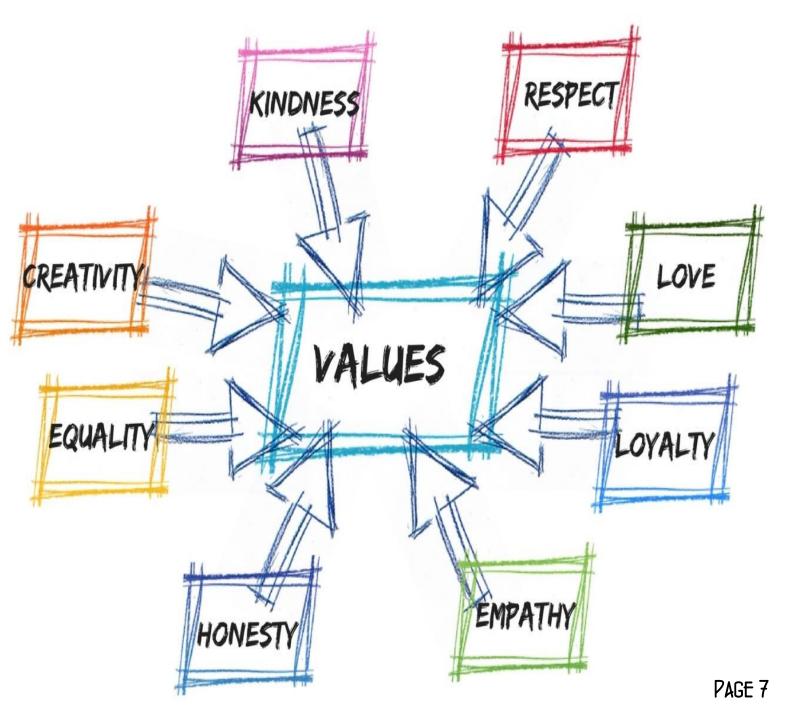
Emotions are at the heart of our wellbeing, health and performance. Emotional intelligence, which is also known as emotional quotient (EQ), is increasingly seen as a desired quality in the workplace and this new tool gives you practical guidance on how to start building your EQ now.

On pages 25-28 you will find further information about emotional intelligence and a more detailed Emotional Compass that you can use to keep track of your emotions. If you've got a younger brother or sister, you may have seen the Feelings Flight Path they received with their Super Dooper You book. If you look carefully, you'll notice that the flight zones are actually very similar to your compass points.



ENHANCING YOUR SPIRITUAL SELF

Spiritual wellness is a very personal matter involving your values and beliefs. Values are those things that are important to you; they guide you and ultimately provide purpose in your life. To nurture your spiritual self, you can spend time getting to know what your values are and how strongly you feel about them. Your focus is then to live each day being faithful to your values and beliefs, so that you are true to yourself, live with integrity and feel content with all your daily decisions.



THE MIND/BODY LINK

Your mind, body and emotions are intrinsically linked with each other. It is this link that we are going to explore in our next Tactical Manoeuvre. Before we explain what this is, let's try a little experiment using your body language.

When you're stressed, angry or upset, you can feel pretty overwhelmed and it can be really difficult to get your head around things. Your stress thoughts start off a chain reaction. The worries (in your mind) trigger your brain to send signals to your body, which then alters the chemical composition of your nervous system and creates tension in your muscles.

This is how the mind links to the body — but did you know you can reverse this mind/body link to work in your favour?

You can interrupt this stress cycle by actively using the body in a positive way. Now, to be clear, we don't mean literally running away from your problems. It's more about how you can use your body to send positive messages to your brain so that it calms down much quicker.







THE POWER POSE

#TACTICAL MANOEUVRE NO.2

If you move your body (your physical self) into a highpower, confident pose, this can lessen the stress in your nervous system, which then calms your mind. We call this a Power Pose. To stand in a Power Pose, just place your hands on your hips, straighten your back and push your chest out. This pose is sometimes referred to as the Superman Pose or Wonder Woman Pose, as these superheroes are often seen standing in this stance.

If you stand in this Power Pose for just two minutes, it will trigger the body to produce testosterone into your bloodstream that will have an immediate effect on your mood.

Why not try this out next time you have a problem or need a confidence boost? Instead of getting stuck in your head thinking about how you can sort things out, why not change your body language? You'll be amazed how simple and effective these changes can be and how much relief they can bring to you.

On the opposite page, you will see details of the Harvard study which proves why standing in a power pose can be so beneficial to your confidence and wellbeing. A Harvard study led by Amy Cuddy found that if you switch from low-power (arms crossed, hunched, closed up, nervous) body language, into a high-power (opened up, tall, relaxed, confident) body language, your hormones will act according to your new posture.

Simply put, two minutes spent in a confident pose increases a persons testosterone levels by 20%, while decreasing the stress hormone (cortisol) by 25%.

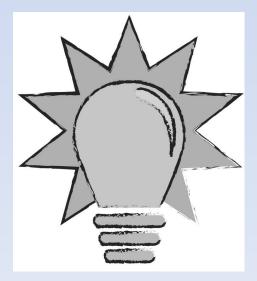
YOUR BODY IN ALARM MODE

When your brain senses any kind of anxiety, such as walking into a youth club on a new camp for the first time, it starts a chemical reaction in the body known as the fight or flight response, which helps your body deal with the problem. Adrenaline is produced which equips your body with the energy to either fight or run away (flight) from the perceived danger.

Your body is actually designed to recover from this stress response quickly by utilising the excess energy produced – by fighting or running to escape the danger. However, in the 21st century, stress reactions can be absorbed by the body (sometimes on a daily basis) as we don't release them with physical exertion as our ancestors did.

The stress chemical, cortisol, is highly toxic to both our bodies and our minds. Cortisol can kill, shrink and stop the generation of new neurons (brain cells) in the hippocampus, the part of your brain that stores memories. Excess cortisol also leads to a host of physical health problems, including weight gain, osteoporosis, digestive problems and hormone imbalances.

So if stress responses are being absorbed by the body, instead of being released, can you imagine the toll this takes on your body and your emotional and mental health?



When the brain reacts to stress, it goes into a kind of alarm mode. A part of your brain called the amygdala recognises the threat and begins the stress response. So let's look at what happens when your alarm brain is activated...

- Your prefrontal cortex the thinking part of your brain gets shut down. For those of you who'd like to know the technical term for this, it is called cortical inhibition.
- Your heart rate increases.
- Blood is diverted to your extremities.
- You produce adrenaline.
- You produce cortisol (the stress hormone).
- Your breathing shallows.
- Your digestive system is flooded with hydrochloric acid and basically shuts down (your body doesn't think you need to digest your pizza if it thinks you're about to die).
- This acid also seeps into your skin.
- Your blood starts to congeal.
- Your vision becomes narrowed and focused purely on the danger.
- Your immune system is put on hold (again, your body doesn't think you need to fight off infection if it thinks you're going to be dead in the next five minutes).

Perhaps you can link some of the physical symptoms with your own experience? Maybe some of these things sound extreme, but if you're feeling stressed, anxious or worried then maybe you pick up more viruses or stomach bugs? This could be because your immune system is not working properly due to stress. Your body is not designed to live in stress; it's designed to react to the stress and then calm down and get back to normal.

YOUR BRAIN OFFLINE

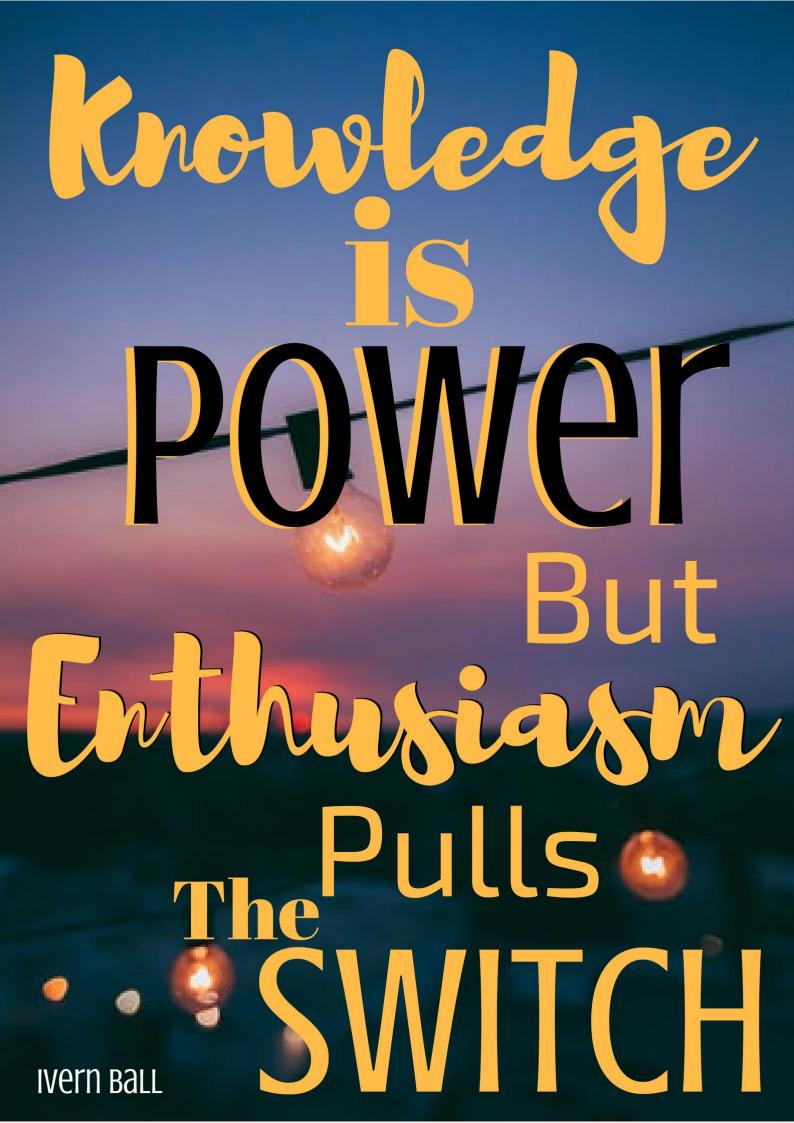
The part of your brain that helps you to think clearly and make rational decisions is called the prefrontal cortex. When you are not in alarm mode, this part of your brain is able to function and support you with wise choices. We refer to this as your calm brain.

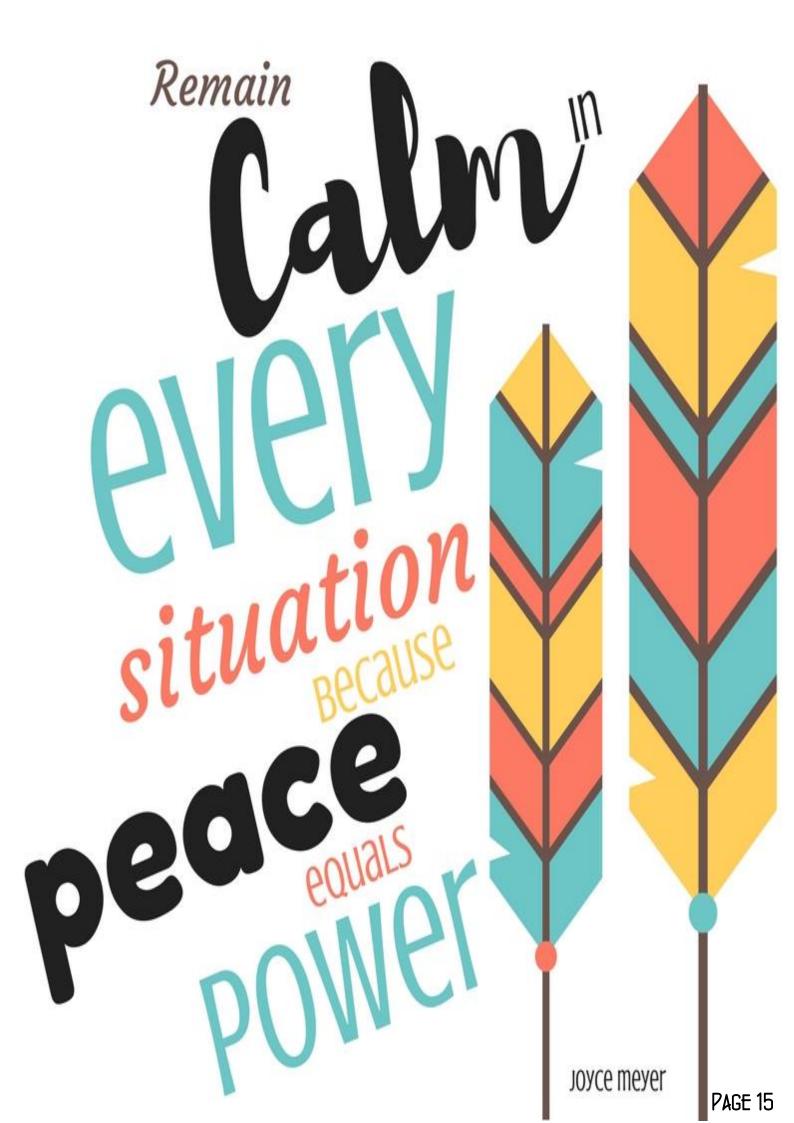
This rational thinking part of your brain helps you to make sensible decisions and to think clearly. However, your calm brain goes offline when you're experiencing high levels of stress (or when your brain thinks you are).

This doesn't seem to make sense, does it? Why would this clever, thinking bit stop working in a crisis? Why on earth would we deactivate our brains at such a crucial time?

To answer this question, we have to think back to prehistoric times when your clever thinking brain was not actually fast enough to get you out of danger in a life-threatening situation. If your ancestors had the time to **think** about which rock to hide behind or which direction to run in, when they were suddenly confronted by a sabre tooth tiger, then you probably wouldn't be here today! The thinking process took far too long, so in order to stop us becoming dinner for the tigers, our amazing brains developed this shutdown mode for our thinking brains.

You now have a new insight into your two brain modes: alarm and calm. So when you next get stressed about something, whether it's your parents deployment or you're hacked off at your best friend's latest post on social media, your reaction or response might be best left for a while, until you've had the time to calm down and take a step back, in order to get the full use of **all** of your brain.





GETTING A HANDLE ON YOUR HABITS

Habits are just thoughts and actions that we've repeated (consciously) over time that have been coded into the subconscious mind (the part of the mind that operates in the background).

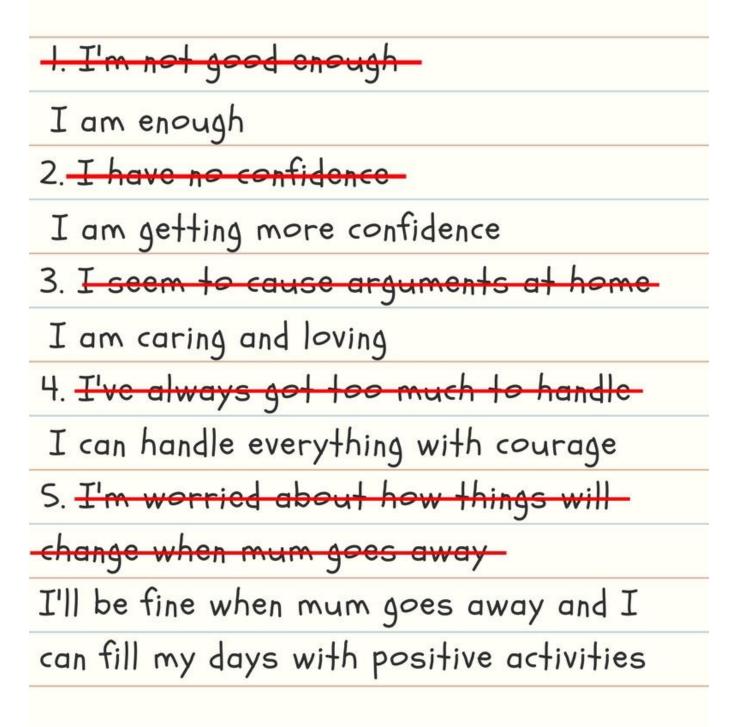
Beliefs are also habits. A belief is a thought that you've kept on thinking until you've believed it to be true. It's actually become so familiar that you identify with it, don't question it and therefore believe it. But beliefs can often be false. To be honest, sometimes they can be total lies, but we still accept them to be true because we're just so used to thinking that way!

Habits can be both good and bad for us. Brushing your teeth is a positive habit and hitting the snooze button and skipping breakfast are negative habits. The same goes for your beliefs. You can believe that you're a fairly confident person (a positive belief) and you can believe that you're rubbish at anything creative (a negative belief).

You can often develop negative habits without even realising you're doing it. This could be the habit of putting yourself down and belittling yourself or constantly telling yourself that you're not good enough, not clever enough, etc. This is your version of negative programming. Using this type of metaphorical software in your teens is very common but also extremely risky to the health of your hard drive!

Do you recognise this negative programming? What sort of thoughts or statements do you repeat about yourself that might be coding your mind for negativity? PAGE 16

Reprogramming



POSITIVE PROGRAMMING

The Bad Thoughts

It's pretty easy to think negative stuff about yourself and put yourself down or sometimes put others down. I'm sure you may have experienced or know of some type of teasing, exclusion or spreading rumours that can take place on camp, at school or on social media.

Such negativity can easily get programmed into your brain and become a habit.

This negativity and heightened awareness of your perceived failings is not, as many adults in your life might have told you, just down to your hormones. Puberty does bring lots of hormonal changes, but adolescence (which happens from around the ages of 12 to 24 years) brings a whole host of brain changes too.

The Good Thoughts

The good news is that if you're able to programme your mind with negativity, then this means that you're also able to start some positive programming.

You can do this by being more aware of the type of thoughts you're programming into your mind. You see, every repeated thought you have will eventually sink into the depths of your subconscious mind and become an automated habit. This knowledge is a powerful thing because it means that you can catch yourself **thinking about what you're thinking about** and start deleting the negative thoughts, replacing them with positive ones!

On page 19, you can find a Tactical Manoeuvre that has been designed to help you start your very own positive programming.



POSITIVITY DIARY #TACTICAL MANOEUVRE NO.3

Have you ever had a time when your stressful thoughts just keep racing? Sometimes it can feel like as soon as you sort one problem out, another one is hot on its heels.

Starting a Positivity Diary can help to retrain your thoughts and reprogramme your mind to start thinking more positively. A Positivity Diary is a record of all the positive things in your life. Why not find yourself a notebook and start writing in it every night before you go to sleep? Write a list of all the positive things that you can recall from your day. Here are a few examples:

- 1. Had fun at youth club tonight.
- 2. I got 82% in my maths test.
- 3. Got invited to Sam's birthday meal at Pizza Hut.
- 4. Had an unexpected call with Dad.
- 5. I looked at the moon and it was beautiful.

Would you prefer to remember your positive or negative thoughts each day?

Why do you think keeping a Positivity Diary helps you to break a pattern of negative thoughts?

Well, it's down to how you are programming your mind. By keeping a Positivity Diary, you are consciously choosing to think about positive things every night before you go to sleep. This helps your brain actively search for the good and in turn helps to form a new, positive habit. This positive habit will eventually become embedded into your subconscious mind — which is pretty cool.



WARNING! BRAIN UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Right now, your brain is undergoing some major reconstruction. It's constantly editing information, habits and beliefs that you've stored over your lifetime and then transferring what it doesn't need into a delete folder. This happens because when you were younger, your brain was like a big squidgy sponge absorbing anything and everything around you. By now, your adolescent brain has accumulated more circuits than it actually needs. It is pruning back the branches of your neural pathways (brain cell pathways) to get rid of any dead wood and make room for the things that are going to really sustain you as an adult.





I am currently under construction. Thank you for your patience. Just be yourself, let people see the real, imperfect , flawed, quirky, weird, beautiful, magical person that you are.

Mandy Hale

DIFFICULT ROADS, OFTEN LEAD TO BEAUTIFUL DESTINATIONS

Understanding Emotions

Have you ever noticed that your emotions can sometimes spill out of you at an embarrassing speed and leave you feeling overwhelmed? Would you like to control your emotions, instead of letting them control you?

First things first, let's be clear, expressing emotion is healthy! Emotions are meant to move and change; they're not designed to be stagnant or stay stuck inside you. You could think of the word emotion as E-Motion or Energy in Motion. Emotions are ever-moving and ever-changing.

There are four things we can do with our emotions.

- 1. Express our emotion: letting it out as it happens.
- 2. Suppress our emotion: bottling it up, holding it in.
- 3. Wallow in our emotion: feeling sorry for ourselves.
- 4. Release our emotion: letting go of buried feelings.

Knowing how to express and release emotions is a skill that you can learn. As mentioned on page six, this is known as emotional intelligence or EQ (emotional quotient). In simple terms, EQ is the ability to be intelligent about emotions. If you score highly in an EQ test, it means that you fully understand each emotion you're feeling and why you're feeling it. You can then use tools (such as the Mindful Breathing Tactical Manoeuvre found on page 32) to respond to the emotion with a level of self-control, thoughtfulness and selfawareness.

The higher your EQ, the more likely you are to have a good understanding of other people's emotions and to have better relationships and more empathy with them as a result.

Emotions are your guidance system, kind of like a compass or sat nav that helps you navigate your way through life. Your emotions are the road signs that indicate how close or how far away you are from your natural state of wellbeing (which is calm, balanced, content, joyful and healthy).









EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IS A WAY OF RECOGNISING, UNDERSTANDING AND CHOOSING HOW WE THINK, FEEL AND ACT. It shapes our interactions with others and OUR UNDERSTANDING OF OURSELVES.

USING YOUR EMOTIONAL COMPASS



EMOTIONS ARE YOUR GUIDANCE SYSTEM Further Use of The Emotional Compass

On the opposite page, you will see that we have expanded the Emotional Compass shown on page six to show the range of feelings that are associated with each compass point. As previously stated, when you look at the Emotional Compass, you'll notice that from north to south (on the right side) the emotions are those that we feel when we're feeling pretty good, then from south to north (on the left side), you'll find the ones that don't feel so great.

This new tool is to help you recognise and accept your emotions – the good, the bad and the ugly – and gain a greater understanding of them. To use the Emotional Compass, scan the compass points to identify your current emotional state or feeling. Look at the words and feelings listed around the compass points and see if you can identify which emotional state you are currently experiencing.

As you explore this new Tactical Manoeuvre, please be honest with yourself. This is a tool for you. It's not something that you have to share with the world, so allow yourself to be true to your own feelings. The more you check in with this Emotional Compass, the easier it will be to identify exactly what it is you're feeling in any particular situation.

This tool can also be used retrospectively. This means that if you experienced some high level emotions earlier in the day, you can check in with the compass later on. Let's look at an example. You may have felt frustrated earlier but when you check in on the compass, you identify the actual feeling as irritation rather than frustration. Understanding this could help you to interpret the situation and your response a whole lot better.

Research shows that those people who can name their emotions can also tame their emotions. So when you use this simple tool to name what you're feeling, you become an emotion tamer!

Have you got your phone handy? Why don't you take a photo of the Emotional Compass? Then you'll have a reference point with you at all times. You could also start to log your feelings on a notes app on your phone, with quick bullet points such as:

- Date Sun 12th Jan
- *Time 4pm*
- Event/circumstance argument with Mum
- How you're feeling frustrated
- Where you feel it stomach and shoulders

Why not start using your Emotional Compass in your day-to-day life? Check in with it every day to navigate your way around those tricky feelings, so that you can start to be in control. This will train your brain to slow down and take notice of not only your own feelings but those of your friends and family too. When you become better at recognising your own emotions, you'll naturally be more aware of what others around you may be feeling too.

FOR EVERY -MOMENT YOU AREANGRY YOU LOSE 60 SECONDS OF HAPPINESS

FEELINGS ARE MUCH LIKE WAVES, WEGAN'T STOP THEM FROM COMING BUT ME CAN CHOOSE WHICH ONES TO SURF

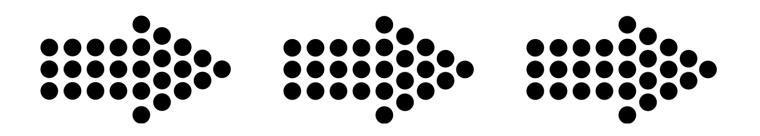
Jonatan mårtensson

REACT OR RESPOND

Have you ever done something in the heat of the moment that you've regretted the second you've done it? Or have you ever said something really hurtful to someone when you're angry or overwhelmed, but didn't really mean what you said?

We suspect that you'll most likely have answered 'yes' to both of these questions because basically, you're human! We can often act before we think, because we're reacting to a feeling that's been triggered inside of us and expressing that feeling to some poor person who happens to be standing in the firing line.

To gain more control over your actions, we need to start reacting differently when we're in the heat of the moment. Well, actually we need to stop reacting and start responding. The two things may seem pretty similar but they're poles apart. Reaction is automatic and there's no thought process involved. But responding involves us thinking about what's happening in that moment and then taking responsibility for what we want to say or do.



MINDFUL BREATHING

What can you do to change your reaction to a response?

BREATHE!

#Tactical Manoeuvre No.4

Simply taking a few extra seconds to do some deep breathing can help calm your alarm brain down and re-connect you to your calm brain.

Mindful breathing is our fourth Tactical Manoeuvre. It is a really simple exercise that calms down the whole body, the nervous system and then the brain! It's a type of mindfulness exercise that trains your mind and body to be calm and more focused in the present moment.

To practise, just take a few seconds to focus on your breathing. Think about your breath, notice your in breath and your out breath. Breathe in through your nose slowly and gently hold that breath for five seconds. Then breathe out slowly through your mouth. Keep repeating this for approximately one minute.

When you do this, you connect to a nerve in your body called the vagus nerve. This runs from your brain straight down through all your vital organs (your throat, your heart, your lungs, etc.), calming down your nervous system steadily through each breath.

This is the most powerful tactical manoeuvre we've given you in this book. It's also the simplest – but don't be fooled by its simplicity. It has the power to hand you back the reins when you're out of control and literally takes just a few seconds to do.

If you want to amp it up a little, then just add a positive statement to the breathing practice. Examples might be: "I am in control" or "I am taking control of this situation". This is known as a positive affirmation and is a great way of programming your mind with positive thoughts.

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YOU ARE ALLOWED TO BE BOTH A master piece AND a work in Drogress

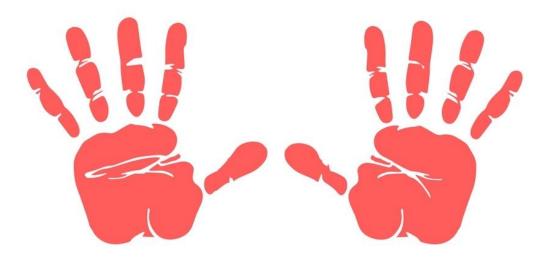
SOPHIA BUSH

You are enough. Let me repeat that. You are enough. Yes You! Got it? Repeat it. Believe it.



Sometimes you can feel that you're just not good enough and can get pulled into a negative pattern of repeating thoughts of self-doubt. A really simple way to escape this damaging thinking pattern is to remind yourself how good you actually are.

Let's try a little experiment. Hold out both your hands in front of you. Start to count ten things that you like about yourself as you go through each finger on each hand. These don't all have to be big things: the small and silly things also count! Maybe you are brilliant at making your friends laugh at just the right moment. Or maybe you're great at doodling! Focusing on things that you like about yourself will help you to break the habit of putting yourself down. Try to do this every week, but think of ten new things each time. You will soon feel your confidence growing and you'll keep those negative thoughts at bay.





Stary Calm in the start of th



#TACTICAL MANOEUVRE NO.5

Like the RAF, which has the Combined Air Operations Centre on call 24/7 to provide resilience to the UK Air Defence System, you too have a control centre. It can help you to gain greater control of your reactions and build up your inner resilience reserves.

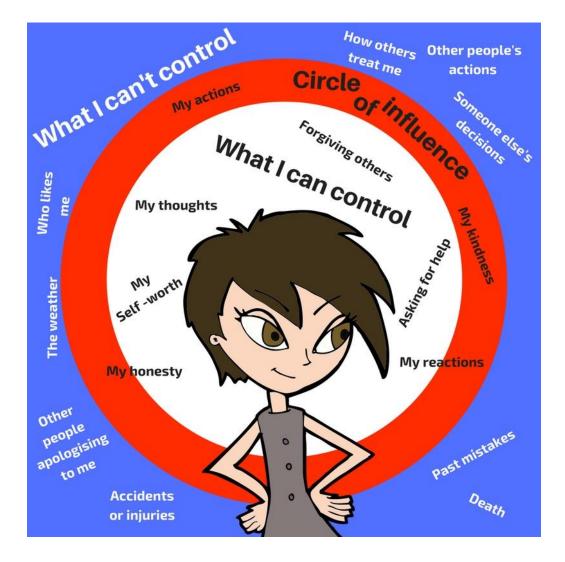
Your Internal Control Centre Tool (on the opposite page) helps you to focus your energy and thoughts on those things that count. It is only when your problem is within the central control centre that it's worthy of your time and energy. This Tactical Manoeuvre helps you identify which zone your problems belong in and whether your actions, words and thoughts will have any impact on the problem in hand.

As you can see, the blue outer area represents the zone in which you have no control. We've called this the Out of My Control Zone. In here belong events and circumstances in your life that you cannot control, along with all the things that other people say, think and do.

The middle red rim represents the zone where you can have a certain level of influence. This is called My Circle of Influence. This area encompasses those things that you have some control over. These are circumstances where you can influence outcomes by what you do and say.

Finally, right at the heart of the matter, is the zone over which you have full control. This is your Control Centre. In this area, you place all the things you can control, such as the way you respond to events, your attitude, your thoughts and your actions.





So let's put this into practice. Is there something that you're worried about?

If you've got a situation or problem that's causing you stress or anxiety, can you think about which zone it belongs in?

Which problems are within your Control Centre?

Which ones are within your Circle of Influence?

And which problems are in your Out of My Control Zone?

REMEMBER THAT YOU ALWAYS HAVE THE ABILITY TO CHOOSE YOUR ATTITUDE AND PERHAPS EVEN TO SMILE IN SPITE OF THE WORLD AROUND YOU.

CHOOSE TO ALWAYS THINK AND SEE THE POSITIVE!

YOUR INNER CRITIC

On any given day, there can be many social pressures swirling around you which can make you particularly susceptible to a damaging inner voice. Are you sometimes judgemental of yourself or do you say things to yourself that you would never say to a friend?

If so, this is because there's often a voice inside your head that's feeding you some pretty false information. It's that inner, negative voice that can say mean things to you, like: "I just looked really stupid when I answered that question in class."

Some people are lucky and they don't give this voice a great deal of air time, but a lot of young people hang on its every word and listen quite intently to what it has to say.



WHO ARE YOU LISTENING TO?



HOW DOES A CRITICAL INNER VOICE AFFECT YOU?

Having a critical inner voice does have its benefits. If you didn't have the ability to be wary of something that might cause you harm, then you could get yourself into all sorts of trouble. However, most of the time, the information that is being fed to you is NONSENSE and you shouldn't believe a word of it! If you do take it at its word, this can cause you to spend your days worrying about things that are most likely never going to happen. Incessant worrying and negative thoughts can lead to feelings of low self-worth, anxiety and low mood.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO CHANGE THAT CRITICAL VOICE?

UNFORTUNATELY, THERE'S NO MAGIC SWITCH TO TURN THIS VOICE OFF, BUT YOU CAN MAKE IT LESS DISRUPTIVE AND GAIN A GREATER LEVEL OF CONTROL OVER IT. YOU CAN DO THIS BY RECOGNISING THAT THIS VOICE IS NOT ACTUALLY YOUR VOICE, BUT RATHER THE VOICE OF YOUR EXTERNAL FEARS GONE HAYWIRE. SOME PEOPLE FIND THAT GIVING THIS VOICE A NAME HELPS TO TAME IT – BY NAMING IT YOU CAN START TAMING IT!

WOULD THIS HELP YOU?

WHAT NAME COULD YOU GIVE THAT INNER CRITIC?

HOW ABOUT BOB?

TIME TO TAKE ACTION

Show support for your inner friend and be more self-compassionate!

The Negativity Bias

You have a negativity bias that causes your mind to notice the negative things in your life before the good. This is the result of your survival instincts dating back hundreds of thousands of years to our cave-dweller days. If you were about to step out of your nice, safe cave to go gathering wood for the fire, then the first thing you had to do was think about your safest route. You always had to be one step ahead of the dangers and how you could best avoid them, so your brain became hardwired to notice things that could potentially go wrong. But thankfully, we're not cave-dwellers anymore, so we don't always have to be in a defensive mode. You can start hardwiring your brain to be naturally happy instead. And by reading this book, you've been doing just that!



As we conclude this book, we'd like to emphasise that we have no doubt you are already an AWESOME INDIVIDUAL. You've got everything you need to be confident and happy in life, but sometimes you can get a little lost. We hope this book will be your road map whenever you need it and that you will thrive in your RAF family.

Don't forget to practise your Tactical Manoeuvres. They genuinely have the power to help you to optimise your life in so many ways! To recap. these were:

- 1. The Emotional Compass
- 2. The Power Pose
- 3. Mindful Breathing
- 4. The Positivity Diary
- 5. Your Internal Control Centre

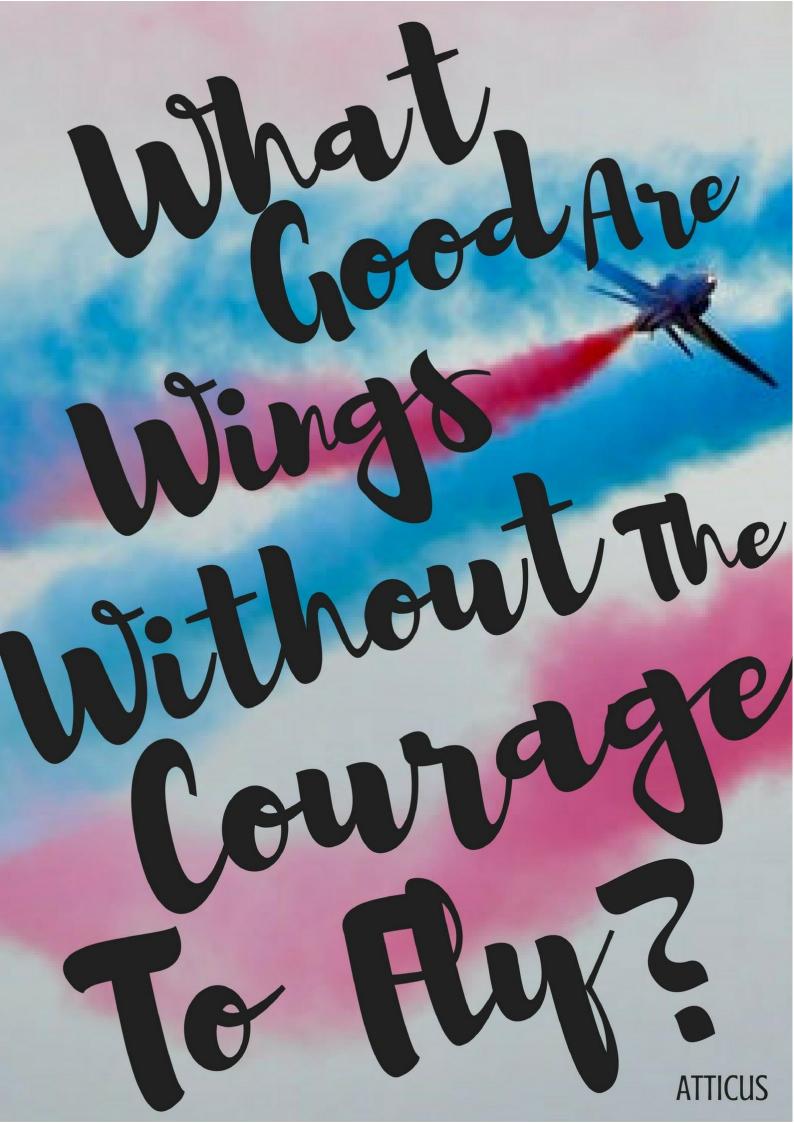
Below is a quick summary of the main ideas we've covered in this book.

- You have human operating systems, a bit like a computer.
- You have four components: physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.
- You can use any one of these four components in any order to impact on your wellbeing.
- You have two mind systems; the subconscious mind and the conscious mind.
- You have the ability to code your mind with positivity to counteract your negativity bias.
- Your brain goes into alarm mode when you're anxious and takes your calm/smart brain hostage until the perceived danger has passed.
- Beliefs aren't always positive and are often not true.
- Your teenage brain is very busy trimming away the neural pathways it no longer needs.
- When you start to name your emotions, you start to tame your emotions.
- If you name your inner critic, you shame your inner critic.

Keep this book close to hand so that you can dip in whenever you feel the need for a quick boost. But remember, in order to change your mindset, to build new positive habits and strengthen your resilience, you will need to persevere and practise the manoeuvres on a regular basis. Over time this new knowledge will start to stick. Please share anything you find useful with others.

Have an amazing life and always fly high – let your dreams take you to the skies.

"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts." Author unknown.



TACTICAL MANOEUVRES IN ACTION

Before we go, we thought you might find it useful to see a few of the Tactical Manoeuvres in action. We haven't used all of them here, but the three examples show how these young people have used some of the new tools and techniques in this book to help them cope with their own challenges.

JAMES' STORY

Let's introduce you to James. He and his family had to move to a new camp last year.

James' dad was being transferred to another base, so they were moving a few hundred miles away. James transferred to a new school, where his classes were on a different part of the curriculum in a few subjects. As a result of this, he had quite a lot to catch up on, as well as having to make new friends. The timing couldn't have been worse as he was also missing his old school's big drama production which he'd been working on for months before the big move. So this was a pretty tough time for James. He was feeling really frustrated about the whole situation and really didn't want to move.

He spent a lot of time worrying about it all and actually felt quite resentful that his dad's job caused such disruption in the family. The logical and caring part of him totally understood that this was just the nature of the game and that they'd all be fine once they had settled in. But right then, in the middle of everything, he was totally fed up with life and all the changes that lay ahead. He was also feeling really angry that he'd miss the play he'd practised so hard for. I'm sure you can understand how James felt and perhaps you've had similar stresses in your life. While James was going through this transition in his life, he learned about the Tactical Manoeuvres and decided to give them a shot. The first tool he found really useful was The Emotional Compass. When he got overwhelmed with negative feelings, he looked at the picture of the compass that he had stored on his phone. He actually did this most days as it helped him unravel exactly what he was feeling and in turn, this helped him to feel more in control. Understanding his feelings helped him to process things a little better, making it easier for him to talk it through with his friends and family. He also used the Mindful Breathing to calm himself down a few times and was pleasantly surprised that something so easy and simple could have such a powerful effect.

The final tool he used was the Internal Control Centre. He actually sat down with his drama teacher and together they went through all the things that were stressing him out, slotting them all into the three zones. This helped James to prioritise his energy onto the things that he could control and highlighted how much time and energy he was wasting on circumstances and events that he couldn't change.

James has now moved house and lives on a new camp. He is really enjoying his new school and has made some good friends. He obviously misses a lot about his previous home, especially the drama club as the new one doesn't quite match up, but he likes a girl he has met on camp so things are looking up.

AMELIA'S STORY

Amelia had difficulties getting to sleep because of anxious thoughts and worries.

She's been going through a bit of a tough time because her mum's been suffering with anxiety for the last few months. Amelia now has to help with the shopping and run errands as her mum really struggles to get out of the house. She worries about her mum quite a lot, especially as her dad's away on deployment, so she's been trying her best to help out at home and look after her little brother a bit more. Amelia confided in us that she really struggles getting to sleep at night. As soon as her head hits the pillow her mind goes into overdrive and she just can't seem to switch off. She hasn't told her mum about this because she doesn't want to make her anxiety any worse than it already is, so Amelia's just getting on with it, albeit without much sleep.

We suggested to Amelia that she start a Positivity Diary.

After Amelia had been doing this for about a week, she said that she noticed she was feeling much calmer and happier. She was getting to sleep much quicker as her worries didn't seem to be as big as before. She really started to look forward to writing in her journal and was quite surprised by how many positive things she could actually put in every day.

She told us that this is something that she's continued to do and has also encouraged her mum to start her own diary. This is really helping her mum with her anxiety.

The Positivity Diary has helped Amelia so much because of how she's now programming her mind. She's consciously choosing to think about positive things every night before she goes to sleep. She's forming a new positive habit which will eventually become embedded into her subconscious mind. In essence, she's re-coding her mind. It's pretty cool stuff.

ANDY'S STORY

Andy's mum and dad were both away on deployment at the same time.

Andy lives on camp with his parents and younger sister, Chloe. Both Andy's parents are serving in the RAF. His dad is an aircraft engineer and his mum is an avionics technician. A few months ago, both his mum and dad were away on different deployments that overlapped for three weeks.

This meant that Andy and his sister had to go and stay with their Grandma off camp for a few weeks. Andy wasn't happy about this situation, especially since they couldn't take their dog with them because their Grandma suffered with asthma. Mum had arranged for the dog to stay with one of their friends on camp, but Andy really didn't want to leave him behind.

When Andy first found out that he'd have to go and stay with his Grandma, he stormed out of the house after a blazing row with his mum. He said some pretty hurtful things to her in the heat of the moment because he was so frustrated about how this situation would affect him. After he'd been out of the house for a while, he felt bad about how he'd flown off the handle. He knew that he'd apologise when he went home but he was still fed up about the whole situation.

He said he found the Mindful Breathing Tactical Manoeuvre to be useful as it really helped him calm down. He was also now aware when his alarm brain was taking over and his clever thinking brain was about to go offline. He uses the Mindful Breathing quite a bit to stop himself getting so worked up and has also used the Internal Control Centre to put the things he gets frustrated about into perspective.



Further Support

We hope you have enjoyed reading *Tactical Manoeuvres for Life* and will keep coming back to put the techniques to good use. The RAF Benevolent Fund is here to help all members of the RAF Family, including you.

One of the things we do for young people is to provide our Airplay youth support scheme. Airplay is run at 23 RAF stations nationwide — in fact, chances are you received this book through contact with the station youth worker connected to the scheme.

Airplay is run in the evenings by trained youth workers and is a fun, friendly place for you to go and make new friends or hang out with old ones. There are groups to cater for children and young people from 8-to-18-years old.

It is usually run through the station HIVE and the Community Development Officer (CDO) will be able to tell you more about what's going on. Ask your mum or dad to help you find out what's on in your area.



Navigating your way through your adolescent years can be a bit of a minefield: dealing with uncontrollable emotions, friendship dramas, puberty and changes in family dynamics can all be stressful things to deal with.

Tactical Manoeuvres for Life provides you with a range of simple but effective tools and techniques to strengthen your resilience, build your confidence and nurture your self-worth. You'll be lifting the lid on your brain, you'll learn to take control of your emotions and you'll be cultivating your self-awareness as you find out about what makes you, **yeu!**

This book is packed full with science-backed information, written in plain English and broken down into stand-alone sections so that the information is easy to digest. It's also fused with inspirational images, affirmations and quotes. This is a must-have manual for life, helping you to navigate your journey with more positivity, more confidence and more understanding of the real you.

Tactical Manoeuvres for Life has been written for young people aged 12-years-old to 16-years-old and is part of the Cloud Nine book series which supports RAF families with their mental and emotional wellbeing.



