

ROOTS and WINGS

A Parent's Handbook

Practical Strategies to Help
You and Your Children to
Develop Emotional Stability
and Resilience for Life



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.

Roots and Wings: A Parents Handbook is part of the Cloud Nine book series published by the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund and has been written for parents within the RAF.

The Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund has commissioned The Big Happiness Experiment to write the Cloud Nine book series on their behalf.

This book was written by Jules Mitchell.

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Preface

Who we are and why we wrote these books:

The Big Happiness Experiment is a company that is nationally recognised for its programmes and training on mental health, emotional resilience, wellbeing and education. We have been providing training and consultancy to schools, businesses, organisations, charities and individuals for more than 15 years, both in the UK and globally. We have appeared on the BBC and ITV on numerous occasions and have been featured in various publications including *The Sunday Telegraph*, *Psychologies* and *Woman*.

The Cloud Nine book series is unique to the RAF and has been designed for you and your family to not only cope during times of stress but to nurture good mental health habits using a different approach to wellbeing, mental health and emotional resilience.

Childhood and adolescence are when mental health is developed and habits and patterns are set for the future. A young person with good mental habits is much more likely to have good wellbeing, mental health and emotional resilience as an adult, to take on their growing responsibilities and to fulfil their potential.

Reading the Cloud Nine book series:

These books provide an opportunity to learn key life skills which help build and foster resilience from a young age. In each of the books, there are simple everyday practices that will benefit all family members — from youngsters through to parents — whether things are going well for them or whether they are experiencing difficulties and stress. We recommend that you take an active role in reading the books with younger children (aged 12 and under) and invest some time in helping your children to practise the new tools and activities found in all of the books.

Living with stress can be harmful for people of all ages and so we are passionate about sharing *why* it is so important to implement new happiness and resilience habits and support structures that can be practised for life.

The RAF Benevolent Fund is also committed to supporting your welfare, which is why they have commissioned us to create these books and resources for you. The RAF Benevolent Fund already provides a number of welfare services to support the whole of the RAF Family, which you can find out more about in the final chapter of this book.

Acknowledgements

We are truly grateful to Meg Wickett at RAF Benson for her enthusiasm, help and guidance on this project.

Our sincere thanks also go to Clare, Debbie and all the families at RAF Benson who provided not only insight into military life, but also valued feedback on the books throughout the writing process.

We would like to give special thanks to Lee Mitchell for his expertise and valued contributions in these books, especially in respect of the mental and emotional health of serving personnel, their families and veterans.

Special thanks also goes to Jodie May, our talented illustrator, for her wonderful imagery and contribution to the Cloud Nine book series.

Our gratitude also goes to Francesca Walker for her font of knowledge of the English language, her patience and her editorial skills.

Finally, we would like to thank the whole team at the RAF Benevolent Fund, with special mention to Air Commodore Paul Hughesdon, Alison Wyman, Irene Greenwood and Jemma Jones, for their enthusiasm, support and continued commitment to our vision.

We truly hope you enjoy reading these books and have fun practising the daily activities with your children. It is our hope that this series brings your family members more happiness, more connection and more harmony in your everyday lives.

Jules Mitchell, Susan Barnes and The Big Happiness Experiment Team.

Roots and 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 helps 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 Mom 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



Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this Parent's Handbook to you.

As an RAF wife for over 30 years and an RAF mum, I have some insight into the challenges you and your family may face while growing up within the RAF community, dealing with deployments and short notice postings, and the reality of frequently moving house with associated concerns about schooling. I also appreciate that some families have greater challenges than others, and that many of us are fiercely independent so we don't always feel able to ask for help.

This Handbook is written to accompany all three of the Cloud Nine children's books to offer extra support and a more in-depth explanation of the tools used. I hope you find the mindfulness, mental wellbeing techniques and advice contained within it useful for both you and your children. If you do find it helpful, please share it with friends and neighbours....it could make all the difference!

Air Vice-Marshal Elaine West, RAF Benevolent Fund Trustee

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Welcome to the Cloud Nine family!

“It is easier to build *strong children* **than to repair *broken men*.” — Frederick Douglass**

In the 21st century, we live in a fast-paced, hectic society which has created new and different pressures for parents. Parenting has never been easy — there have always been challenges and as you know, when you become a parent, you don't get handed a one-size-fits-all parenting manual. But 21st century parents now face the combined challenges of such things as new technology, rapidly changing family dynamics, a 24/7 news cycle, social media and an overwhelmed educational system. Of course, being part of an RAF family also adds even more dynamics to parenting.

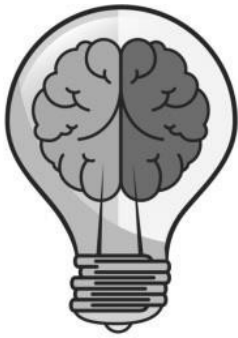
This book is not a 'perfect parenting' manual but it has been designed as a handbook to help you in many of the challenges you may face along the way. We sincerely hope that you will embrace the new resources found within the pages of the Cloud Nine books and that you will connect to other RAF families who are reading this series, so that you can support each other in this new Cloud Nine family.

We strongly believe that every individual should have a much greater understanding of their own inner workings. Only then can they take control of their life and steer it in the direction that they wish to travel, instead of living a life of reactivity and constant firefighting. As you start this journey inwards into your mind, brain and body, be gentle on yourself and patient with the accumulation of knowledge. This knowledge will ultimately underpin and strengthen all the tools and techniques that you will be learning alongside your children.

The children's books in this series offer a fun, informative, creative and unique approach to inspire RAF families to come together with a newfound curiosity and zest for life. The tools we provide offer a softer approach to changing behaviours as they are delivered in practical ways that help to build new neural structures in the brain. In time, these neural structures, commonly known as habits, have long-lasting effects on your family's health and wellbeing.

We feel it's important for you to know that there is a science behind this series and that this is the foundation upon which we have built all of our books, including the one you currently have in your hands. All of the tools found in this series are based on studies from fields such as behavioural

science, emotional intelligence, positive psychology, neuroscience and mindfulness.



Over many years of sharing these types of strategies with people, we've found that when an individual understands how new practices are having an impact on their mind and body and what potential results they can bring, they are then more open and eager to practise the techniques on a regular basis.

We have divided your handbook into three modules to make it user-friendly and easily accessible when you need to refer to it for guidance.

In the first module, **Lifting the Lid**, you will find a guide to the human operating systems. We will be lifting the lid on the brain, developing your understanding of the mind and body and learning how you and your children can positively influence these operating systems. This has two benefits: not only will it support your family's mental and emotional health, but it can also help to nurture better relationships between you all. When you understand the reasons *why* your loved ones (and indeed, you, yourself) react and behave in certain ways, you can feel more equipped to deal with the ups and downs of RAF family life.

In the second module, **The Roots and Wings Toolbox**, we introduce the 18 tools that are found across the three children's books: *A Day in the Clouds* (4-7 years), *SuperDoooper You* (8-12 years) and *Tactical Manoeuvres for Life* (12-16 years). In this section, you will be able to identify why the tools and techniques have been recommended to the children, based on the knowledge you gained in the first module. This will give you a solid foundation for supporting them in their daily practice.

Such daily practice is then discussed in the third module, **Positivity in Practice**. In this module, you will find a chapter that suggest practical ways to introduce new daily habits that can positively impact your family.

In our final chapter, we offer guidance on the many support structures in place within the RAF for individuals and families. We provide you with information on the practical help that is available to you and how you might go about connecting to these support networks. We hope that this will make it easier for you to reach out if you feel the need for more specialised support and guidance with parenting, social issues, mental health, emotional health and wellbeing for you and your family.

Module One: Lifting the Lid

“The HUMAN BRAIN is probably one of the **most complex** single objects on the FACE of the EARTH; **I think it is, quite honestly.**” — Billy Viola

This first module is packed with information about your brain, your mind, your habits, your beliefs and your behaviours. This module is the foundation for the rest of this book — and indeed the entire Cloud Nine series.

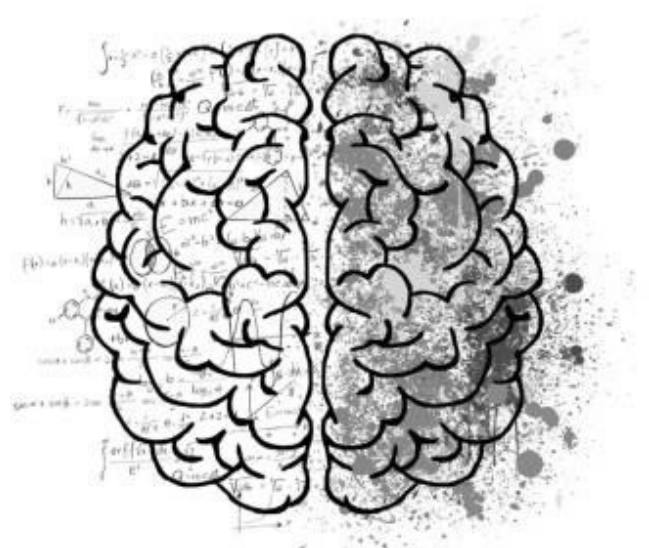


Chapter One: Understanding the Brain

In this first chapter, we will focus on the physiology of your brain (how it functions), its interaction with your body and *why* you react to situations in the way that you do. We will briefly explore your brain's evolution and get a better understanding of what it is wired for.

The Two Operating Modes of the Brain:

To keep things simple, we have categorised your brain into two modes: alarm brain and calm brain. This is just for ease of explanation; your brain is actually a very complex entity and has many different systems that we don't need to cover in this book. At any one time, your brain is either in a state of calm brain (also known as smart brain) or alarm brain. When you're feeling calm, content and happy, you can access your calm/smart brain and make rational decisions. This thinking brain is where all your executive functions (i.e. working memory, paying attention, organising/planning, regulating emotions, reflecting) take place and is called the prefrontal cortex.



Your brain has an in-built reaction system which automatically shuts down your calm, thinking brain and switches on your alarm brain mode whenever it perceives danger or a threat. This triggers the release of chemicals (neurotransmitters) into your body, which help you to react to the perceived danger. This is known as the fight or flight response or acute stress response.

The reason your thinking brain gets turned off when you experience high levels of stress is simply because thinking is just too slow a reaction. If you waste time thinking how to escape the danger (such as whether to climb a tree or hide behind a rock when a hungry bear has clapped eyes on you), then this could be the difference between surviving the threat or not.

Time is of the essence when it comes to survival, so our brains developed this clever trick to shut down the slower, problem-solving brain to allow our survival mechanisms to shine in a crisis.

This stress response is initiated by a part of your brain whose main purpose is to detect fear. This fear detector is called the amygdala (pronounced uh-mig-dullah). When the amygdala senses a threat or danger, it sets off a chain reaction in the body. This is the alarm part of your brain.

Below is a description of what happens when your brain is triggered into alarm mode, otherwise known as the fight or flight mode. Your body produces adrenaline and the stress chemical, cortisol.



When the amygdala senses danger, it sends a warning signal to another part of your brain called the hypothalamus. This then activates the production of the hormone adrenaline. The adrenaline causes a range of physiological changes:

1. Your heart beats faster than normal.
2. Blood is pumped to your muscles, heart and other vital organs.
3. Your blood pressure increases.
4. Your vision narrows to focus on the threat (tunnel vision).
5. Your senses, such as your sight and your hearing, become sharper and more focused.
6. You breathe more rapidly.
7. Small airways in the lungs open wide to allow more oxygen to be absorbed with each breath.
8. Extra oxygen is sent to your brain to increase alertness.
9. Blood sugar (glucose) gets released into the bloodstream, supplying energy to all parts of your body.

All of these changes happen so quickly that you most likely aren't aware of them most of the time.

Anything that causes stress to the body will trigger a fight or flight response. This might be an argument, deadlines at work, your children losing their temper, illness, road rage, a car accident, etc. Understanding what can trigger this automatic stress reaction is very useful information. When you can become more aware of your own stress triggers, then you can start to interrupt the reactions and stop your stress from escalating. It's also helpful to understand that generally when you feel threatened, anxious, nervous or worried, you tend to do one of the following things:

1. **Freeze:** you might literally freeze still and not be able to move or you avoid the problem by burying your head in the sand.
2. **Fight:** you may lash out in self-defence or anger, either physically or with words.
3. **Flight:** you run away from the danger or stressful situation and don't want to deal with it.
4. **Faint:** an extreme, self-explanatory stress reaction which can sometimes occur.

We're sure that you can identify times when you freeze, fight or flee. Moving forwards, it is our hope that you will be more able to recognise both your own responses and your children's in times of worry or stress.

Our Evolutionary Throwback

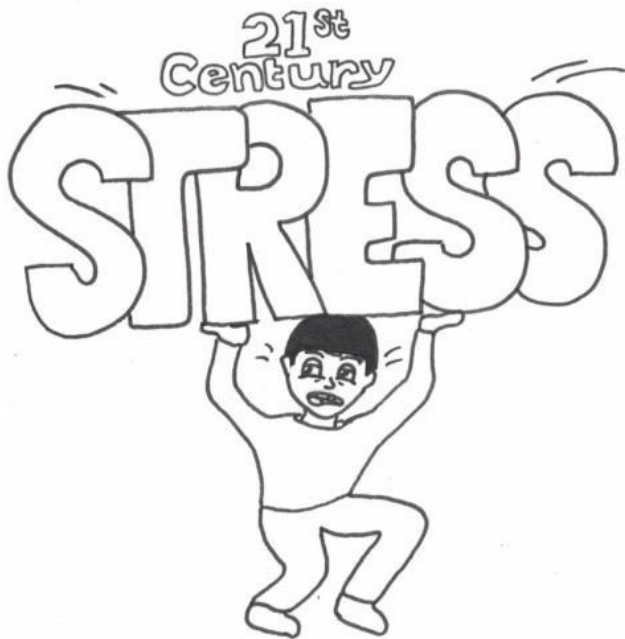
The fight or flight response is a 200,000-year-old model that was designed to protect our ancestors when they were confronted with life-threatening situations, such as being confronted by a sabre-toothed tiger. This gave them the necessary energy (in the heat of the moment) to deal with danger by either running away or fighting the tiger. In most cases, the emergency was resolved very quickly when one of the following three scenarios took place:

1. They killed the tiger and took it home to cook and feast on.
2. They fought, but the tiger won the battle and they effectively became the tiger's lunch.
3. They escaped and survived to live another day.

Our ancestors' bodies were designed to utilise the excess energy they produced in this fight or flight mode by either running away from the danger or standing their ground and fighting for their survival. Once the danger had passed, their bodies would then return to a normal, healthy, balanced state within a fairly short period of time.



The 21st Century Reaction to Stress



Our response to stressful situations in the 21st century is still governed by the same fight or flight response as our ancestors. However, we now often *absorb* the stress instead of releasing it with physical exertion.

Our amygdala is still our fear detector, so we still get triggered into an immediate stress response. But since we are no longer physically fighting tigers, we do not quickly recover from these episodes like our ancestors did.

In fact, our amygdala essentially hijacks our nervous system and blocks out our prefrontal cortex (the rational thinking part of the brain). It automates the fight, flight or freeze reaction in our body, stimulating the production of adrenaline and cortisol.

We also have another problem that adds to our 21st century stress. This is the evolution and growth of our rational thinking brain: the prefrontal cortex.

This has grown in size over the centuries and has resulted in us now having a smarter thinking brain. This thinking brain does have some drawbacks, since it is now the place where our worries begin and where our habit of overthinking situations resides.

So, we now have the ability to imagine stressful situations and overthink our problems with our evolved brain, but we then react to this stress with our prehistoric brain. These two brains together can, unfortunately, cause us to get stuck in an unhealthy level of stress in the modern world.

Life in the 21st century is far more complex than it was 200,000 years ago. Many of our stressors today are far removed from our ancestral fears for survival. We now have many anxieties, worries and mental illnesses which can become chronic, lasting days, weeks, months or, in some cases, even years.

These worries could be relationship problems, difficult neighbours, work related problems or any number of other things. Within the RAF, you can also experience other stressful events, such as transitions, including relocation, moving schools, new communities, pre-deployment, a partner being deployed, changes in family dynamics, post-deployment, financial problems, health worries, etc.

None of these situations can be resolved by fighting or running away like our ancestors did. These psychological stressors still trigger the fight or flight response but, as we've seen, this stress is now absorbed by the body instead of being released.

Can you imagine the toll this could be taking on your physical health and your mental and emotional wellbeing?

Such stress responses can be toxic to both your body and your mind. This is why it's important to learn how to handle your reactions to lessen the impact on your health.

In the second module of this book, we will be exploring practical ways for you and your children to calm down the alarm brain, once it's been triggered, by using various tools and techniques that are found in the children's books.



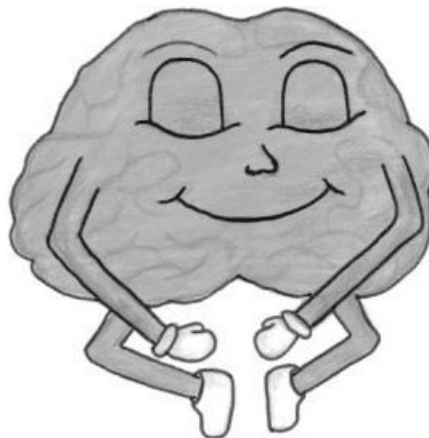
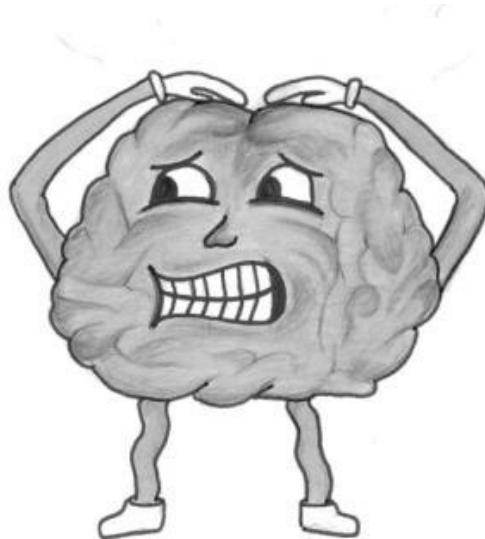
Final Thoughts



- When your alarm brain is activated, it stops your calm, rational brain from thinking.
- You may say and do things in the heat of the moment that you would not otherwise do.
- The same goes for your children: when their alarm brain kicks in, they are not able to think rationally or listen to the things you are telling them. We're sure you can recall times when you've tried reasoning with your child after they've got angry or lashed out and your words of advice just seem to fall on deaf ears. Well, now you know that it's not their ears that aren't working — it's their brain! Hopefully, you can see that any form of ordinary reasoning, while your child is in alarm mode,

is futile as they are unable to understand you while their thinking capabilities have been temporarily frozen.

- Noticing when either you or your children are in a state of alarm brain or calm brain will help you to make sense of all the tools and techniques we share in the Cloud Ninebooks.



Chapter Two: The Mini Mind Manual

“The energy of the mind is the essence of life.”

— Aristotle

Just like your brain, your mind can be divided into two simple modes: the conscious mind and the subconscious mind.

Your Conscious Mind

Your conscious mind is the place where you have control over your thoughts and actions. Your conscious mind is, in effect, your purposeful mind: the mental space where you can think with purpose and awareness.

Your Subconscious Mind

The other mode your mind operates in is the subconscious. This is an automated system of thoughts, behaviours and habits that operate under the surface of your conscious mind — hence the prefix ‘sub’. This is the part of your mind that you can’t consciously control: it functions on autopilot and has a huge range of automated programmes and behaviours, such as breathing, blinking, heart beating, brushing your teeth, changing gear when driving the car, etc. It’s also in control of your habits, such as the way you put your socks on in the morning. You really don’t have to consciously think about these things to make them happen — they happen subconsciously.

These automated thoughts have developed over time through a process of repetition in your conscious mind and eventually form habits, beliefs and behaviours that are accepted into the subconscious. When you start a new way of thinking or behaving, such as learning a new language or learning to ride a bike, these new thoughts and actions — operating above the surface in your conscious mind — must be repeated continually before they too can become automatic and accepted into this programmed mind.

The Facts & Figures

So, how much of your mind is conscious and how much of it runs on autopilot every day?

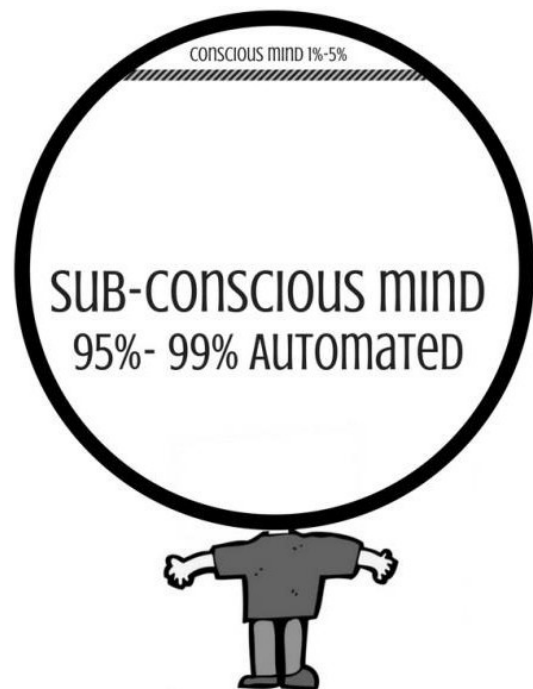
Amazingly, the level of control we have over our thoughts is at best 5% and on average just 1%! This leaves your subconscious mind and all its automated thoughts and behaviours to occupy a massive 95% to 99%.

In *Tactical Manoeuvres for Life* (our book written for teenagers), we introduce the concept of The Big Head. On pages four and five of that book, we show a diagram of The Big Head, which highlights the small amount of control we have over everyday thoughts. We've reproduced this diagram for you here.

Every day, we have thousands of thoughts — research suggests that we have between 60,000 to 80,000 thoughts every day. This equates to between 2,500 and 3,000 thoughts per hour.¹ However, many of these are regurgitated thought loops from previous days, weeks and years. We can let the experts decide on the exact figures, but in the meantime, we know we have a large number of thoughts going on in our minds every day.

If we only have control over a maximum of 5% of our thoughts, then surely, we should be making sure that they're as positive as possible! If we consciously think and repeat positive thoughts, then these will weigh in our favour and will eventually sink into our subconscious mind as automated positive thoughts and behaviours, replacing old thoughts and joining our ongoing thought loops.

Obviously, the opposite is also true. If we allow negativity and worry to be repeated every day, then we run the risk of becoming automatically negative, worried and stressed. The truth is, we humans are pretty good at negative thinking — it comes very naturally to us. In fact, this is such an important topic that we've dedicated a whole chapter to this subject in Chapter Five.



We have shared this information with you in order to highlight how important it is for you to be aware of the thoughts that you are thinking. If you spend your thought rations on constant stressing and worrying, instead of positive, happy thoughts, you could be missing out on the opportunity to make your life more peaceful, content and happy.



Final Thoughts

We all have two main mind modes: conscious and subconscious.

- Your subconscious mind is fully automatic and runs your entire autopilot system of behaviours and habits such as breathing, blinking or riding a bike. You do not think about these — they happen subconsciously.
- Your subconscious mind is greatly affected by your repeated conscious thoughts. It is these that sink into your subconscious mind and ultimately become automated. So repeated positive conscious thoughts will result in automatic positive thinking.
- Your conscious mind is therefore the gatekeeper of your subconscious mind, so be aware of the thoughts that you're letting in. Every repeated thought pattern that you have in your conscious mind will eventually permeate itself into your programmed subconscious mind and will become an automated habit.
- ***Think about what you're thinking about*** and ensure that you're getting the good in. Think positive thoughts.

Chapter Three: Habits and Beliefs

“Some rules are nothing but old habits **that people are afraid to change.**” — Therese Anne Fowler

In this chapter, we will be exploring your habits and beliefs.

The Oxford English dictionary states that a belief is ‘an acceptance that something exists or is true, especially one without proof’.

So, as it states, a belief is not necessarily founded on truth or proof. Rather, it is purely a thought that you’ve kept on thinking until you have believed it to be true. It has become so familiar that you identify with it and don’t question its origin.

Beliefs can often be false but we still accept them to be true.

The other thoughts and behaviours that fill up your subconscious mind are habits. Similarly, habits are thoughts and actions that you’ve repeated consciously over time that have eventually been absorbed into your subconscious.

Now, habits can be all sorts of things — from the way you always use your left hand to squeeze the toothpaste to the way you over-analyse your faults. Some habits are neutral, which means they don’t have any harmful or helpful implications; some habits are helpful (drinking lots of water throughout the day, for example, is healthy); and some habits are harmful (like eating a full packet of chocolate digestives with your cup of tea when you’ve had a bad day. Hands up?)



So, the big question here is: if you have a harmful habit, how do you stop?

To explain this simply, we need to refer to the automated subconscious mind.

In essence, your hardwiring can be reprogrammed with new positive habits and states of mind which build new neural pathways in your brain.

Neuroscience has proven that the brain is capable of constant change and the



science of neuroplasticity (or brain training) describes and shows the brain's ability to change — to rewire itself in response to experience. Where historically the brain was thought of as a machine, preset for life at around the age of six, modern science has shown that we have the capacity to rewire our brain circuits by growing new neural pathways.

Swapping Your Harmful Habits for Helpful Habits

Because of the brain's rewiring capabilities, when you practise new techniques and ways of thinking, you can form new habits. We all have the ability to change our patterns of behaviour when we become aware of negative reactions.

To help you understand this topic a little better, let's look at a real life example of a negative habit and the steps taken to change this to a positive one.

Many people struggle with getting to sleep at night or wake up in the early hours and are unable to get back to sleep. Maybe you identify with this? It might be because as soon as your head hits the pillow, your mind starts to race with all the worries and stresses in your life and you just can't switch off.

This is a harmful habit. The reason that it's so difficult to sleep is because when you worry, you stimulate the production of those stress chemicals we

mentioned earlier in the book, adrenaline and cortisol. These chemicals are released into your bloodstream, keeping you awake. So, how do you break this habit and get a decent night's sleep?



Well, this is where the magic happens. You can choose to start a new routine and form a new helpful habit.

The new helpful habit we recommend is to take time every night, to write down positive things from your day and think about what you're grateful for. This list need not be extensive: just writing down three good things from your day would be a helpful habit — a practice of gratitude. To do

this, however, you will need to use your conscious mind every night to remember to do this new gratitude practice until it becomes second nature (a habit in your subconscious mind) and you don't have to think about it at all.

By consciously and consistently repeating this process for a period of between 21 and 60 days, you will be forming new neural pathways in your brain. All habits take different amounts of time to stick and this will vary from person to person.

To help you understand how habit formation works, we can use a metaphor of a field of grass.

Imagine you are standing at the edge of a large field of grass. Through the centre of the field is a defined pathway, a clear route through the field. You've walked this pathway many times over, so many times, in fact, that the grass no longer grows there.

This field is a metaphor for your current harmful habit of worrying before you go to sleep. The path represents a neural pathway in your brain that is deeply entrenched because of regular and repeated thought. This thought or practice is now an automated habit and is very difficult to stop — in fact, it's an involuntary action (like your heart pumping).



However, tonight you decide to start a new practice of gratitude before you sleep. You begin to write a journal about the best parts of your day and write down three good things that you have to be grateful for.

So, let's take you back to that field. Tonight, as you stand at the edge of the field, you make a conscious choice not to take the well-trodden path which represents the worrying thoughts and you consciously choose to start pushing down the long, tall blades of grass to start a new pathway through the field. This isn't easy and you can't really see where you're going, but you manage to get through to the other side. Starting your gratitude journal is like pushing down the tall grass. It's not familiar and can be tough to keep going. However, you manage it and tomorrow night you consciously choose to write in your gratitude journal again. Back at the field, this means that this second night of choosing the more difficult path is very slightly easier, as

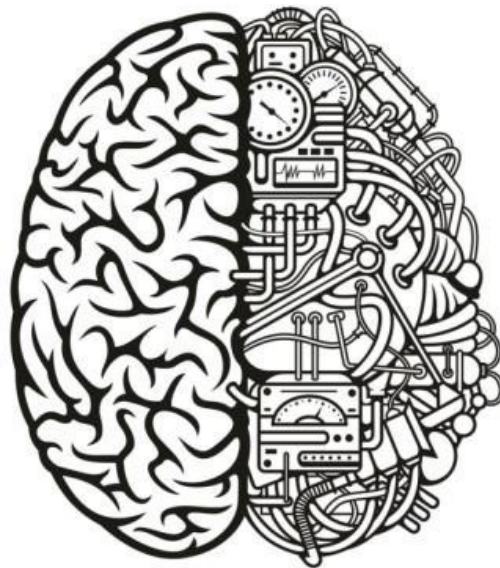
you can see where you pushed the blades of grass down yesterday. For 30 or more nights, you consciously choose to write in your gratitude journal and keep choosing the new pathway in the field, until one night you realise that you are journaling automatically. This is when you know you've formed a new habit, a new neural pathway.

One other important point to mention here is that the old path through the field has been lying dormant, so the grass has started to grow back over and there's no longer a path. Which, in brain terms, means that the old neural pathway is no longer active.

Final Thoughts



Your mind is programmed to find the familiar. It rejects the unfamiliar and looks for what it knows and feels safe with. If you want to make positive changes, you've got to make those life harming patterns unfamiliar and those life healing patterns familiar. For example, saying: "I love myself and I am enough" every morning when you wake up might be *unfamiliar* at first — it will feel odd and you might feel really uncomfortable saying it. At first, your subconscious mind may reject it as a false statement and throw it out. But if you push past this and keep repeating the words over and over again, every morning, then these words will eventually become familiar and will be accepted as truth by your subconscious mind.



We will be revisiting this topic in Chapter Five: Stop Being a Negativity Ninja.

Chapter Four: There's a Google in Your Brain

“We are a// now connected by the Internet, like neurons in a giant brain.” — Stephen Hawking

Now that we've given you a whistle stop tour of what's happening in your head, we thought it would be useful to share one more vital piece of information about your brain. Did you know that there's a search engine in your brain? There's a mechanism in your brain called the Reticular Activating System—let's call it the RAS for short. This amazing piece of kit follows your thought commands on a subconscious level. For instance, if you focus your thoughts on the fear that everyone is talking about you behind your back, then your RAS will scan your world very closely and show you whatever it can that matches that focus. It may highlight the groups of friends chatting together in a corner. But this is most likely harmless and in all likelihood no one is talking about you at all.



The knowledge we want to share with you here is that whatever you consciously choose to focus on will become the subject of your RAS's attention. So, if you're focusing on negative things, then guess what? Your RAS will find lots of negative things for you to see. But if we flip this over and you start focusing on happy, positive things, then your RAS will search for happy and positive things that make you feel good.

Another way of looking at this is to use the metaphor of having a search engine in your brain. If you activate a search at the start of the day for things that make you feel calm and content, then your internal search engine (your RAS) will provide you with a list of things in your day that will make you feel calm.

The trick here is to remember your RAS. It's always working on your behalf, bringing to your attention whatever it is you're focusing your thoughts on. It's important that you try to focus on positive and happy things because if your

focus is on worry and negativity, then you'll be showered with more things to worry about.

Another helpful analogy is to think of online shopping. Have you ever noticed that when you've been browsing through the internet at things you might like to buy (or even things you've decided you do not want), these items start popping up on your social media feeds? This is a marketing technique that keeps reminding you about these amazing products in the hope that you will take the bait and decide to make a purchase.

Your RAS acts in a similar way. It will keep reminding you of the things you are placing your attention on, not differentiating between the things you want (the good things) and the things you don't (the bad things). If your energy and focus is strong on any subject, then your RAS will do its job and find everything related to that subject — be it good or bad!

Final Thoughts



Although you may never have realised this before, your mind is always scanning your world on a subconscious level. It's really helpful to start checking in with your thoughts to ensure that your mind is on the lookout for positives and not looking for more things to ruin your day.

“Once you replace negative thoughts with positive ones, you'll start having positive results.” — Willie Nelson

Chapter Five: Stop Being a Negativity Ninja

“Tell the negative committee that meets inside your head to sit down and shut up.” — Ann Bradford

To start this chapter off, we'd like to invite you to take part in a little exercise. Please take a few minutes to do this. Take a piece of paper and write a list of all the things that you don't like about yourself, the things that you're no good at and the things that you would like to improve upon.

How did you find this exercise? Was it easy to think of things to write about?

We're now going to ask you to repeat the exercise, but this time we would like you write a list of all the things that you like about yourself, your best qualities, the things that you are really good at and all the things you've accomplished in the last few weeks. Even if this doesn't sound like your thing, please do try to give it a go as it will really help you to understand the concept of this chapter.

Which list was the easiest to write? Was it the list of all the negative things or the list of the positives?

We're pretty sure that you were able to complete the negative list far more easily than the positive.

So, why is it that we can reel off a long list of things we don't like about ourselves, but struggle to find the good things? Well, the simple answer is that it's the way that we're wired. Every human being is born with an inherent negativity bias, which means that we are hardwired to look out for danger first. We have inbuilt mechanisms in our brain whose sole purpose is to look for danger and keep us alive. As a species, we are arguably here today because of this survival hardwiring in our brains. Remember the amygdala that triggers the fight or flight response? That is part of this mechanism. The human race is not actually hardwired to be happy: it's hardwired to survive.

In fact, our mind is like Teflon for the good and Velcro for the bad. It really does take conscious, purposeful effort to get the good to stick.



Our tendency to automatically think the worst and jump to a negative response goes all the way back to our days as cavemen and cavewomen. When our ancestors ventured out of their caves for food, they had to be on high alert for danger. They had to think about which was the safest route through the forest or whether the berries they were choosing were poisonous or not.

Despite living in the 21st century, you have the same brain as that of your ancestors (apart from a more

developed prefrontal cortex — see Chapter One). Therefore, you too have this inbuilt need to look for the negatives and potential pitfalls. Obviously, the fears and concerns that you have are quite different from those of your ancestors but the same automated fight or flight response is triggered. The amount of stress we feel is also heightened because our rational thinking brain, the prefrontal cortex, is now much more advanced and can worry about things not only in the present, but also in our past and future.

So, there you have it — you're kind of off the hook for being a 'negativity ninja'!



In all seriousness, this automatic stress response has a major impact on our health in the modern world. As you know, stress is a fact of modern human life and we sometimes need it to motivate and protect us. But the levels of stress we are now living with are extremely harmful to both our minds and bodies.

Negative Behaviours and Thoughts

If you are prone to negative thoughts or are habitually pessimistic and would like to change this, then we'd like to suggest that you could use the tools we share in the Cloud Nine series to help you to develop a more positive outlook.

Yes, we are all human and worrying and stressing are dominant habits for us. However, this doesn't mean to say that we should let these habits continue if they are detrimental to our wellbeing. We can start checking in on our

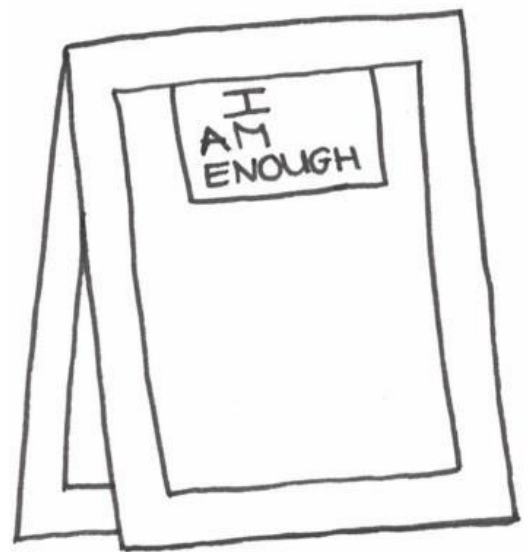
thoughts more regularly and when we're conscious of a negative thought pattern we can redirect our attention to something more positive instead.

Familiar Isn't Always Positive

You may wish to start considering how many of the behaviours and beliefs that are familiar to you (which mean they are firmly embedded in your subconscious mind) are actually harming you. For instance, do you think negatively about yourself? Or do you have self-limiting belief systems about what you can and can't do? What about your resentments for things and people from the past, worries concerning things in the future or fear of certain situations in the present?

Let's return to your beliefs. Your beliefs start to be formed when you are a small child. One common belief that affects many people is: "I'm not good enough". This can often form at a young age, when a child regularly receives criticism but gets little praise when they do well. This belief can impact heavily on the overall wellbeing of every person who holds it.

One simple way to reverse this negative belief is to write the words: "I am enough", on notes and pin them up where they can be seen every day. The use of a positive affirmation repeated out loud ("I am enough, I am enough") is also a brilliant antidote. When these statements are repeated often enough, the subconscious mind recognises them as familiar and will ultimately accept them as the new belief.



Negative thoughts are particularly draining. Certain words such as can't, never, but and should are notable culprits. Complaining, moaning and thinking negative thoughts about ourselves can deplete not only our mental clarity, but also our physical energy, by producing chemicals such as cortisol that weaken our physiology. So, if you are prone to being a Negativity Ninja, it's no wonder you're exhausted at the end of the day.

“F.O.W.O.T.”

While we are on the subject of negative thinking, let's introduce F.O.W.O.T. This stands for Fear Of What Others Think.

Many people can spend hours worrying about what other people think of them. This is something that can be especially prevalent in teenagers: they can become consumed by the fear of judgement and not fitting in. Many constantly compare themselves to others, both in real life and on social media or regularly put themselves down.

Overcoming F.O.W.O.T. is a process of increasing self-resilience, growing inner confidence and feeling good about yourself, alongside the knowledge that most people are so consumed by their own fear of other people's judgement they are unlikely to spend time judging you.

“What other people **think about me is none of my business, **one of the highest places** you can get to *is being independent* of the good opinions of other people.”** — Wayne Dyer

The 5:1 Magic Relationship Ratio

Having spent some time exploring our relationship with ourselves, perhaps now would be a good time to mention our relationships with others.

A large, bold, black graphic of the number '5:1'. The '5' is thick and blocky, with a small circle at the top. The colon is a simple vertical line. The '1' is also thick and blocky, with a small circle at the top. The overall style is modern and minimalist.

Professor John M. Gottman, who started to study human relationships in the 1970s, discovered in his research with married couples that there was a formula to a happy, successful marriage. This is referred to as the Magic Relationship Ratio.

Gottman's research showed that for every ONE negative interaction between partners, there must be FIVE positive interactions to neutralise the negativity.²

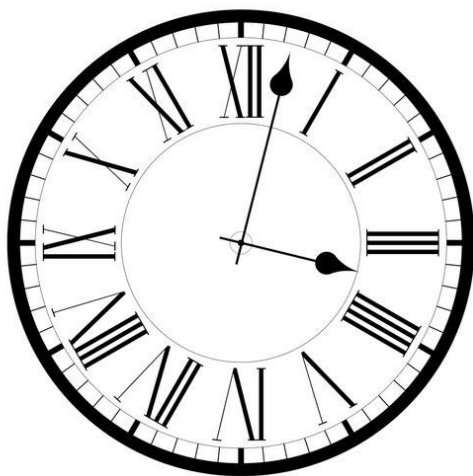
This is an extremely interesting study and one which proves how vitally important positive emotions and interactions are in our daily lives. So, next time you feel like moaning to your partner or child about something that's quite trivial, think carefully.

Cultivate a Positivity Bias

Do you find that if you have just one negative interaction in a day that has been filled with lots of positive and neutral interactions, come bedtime, you dwell on that one bad experience? This is the negativity bias at work. We naturally give more weight to the negative elements of our lives and we spend more energy avoiding negative experiences than we do seeking positive ones.

But what if we could reverse this? Rick Hanson, a psychologist at the University of California, Berkeley, believes we can. The mind-body connection is so strong that not only can we influence our health through our outlook, but we can rewire our brains to respond and think in more positive and productive ways. Hanson says that we should be “marinating in every good moment”.³ We call this permeating the positive. Every time you have a pleasant experience, take time to savour it and let the good feelings permeate your mind. This could be a hug from your child, a joke shared or running into an old friend in town. Whatever the pleasant experience, however brief it may have been, take time to savour the interaction afterward.

12 SECONDS



Try to stay with this good moment for some time. It is recommended that you spend 12 seconds or more focusing on it to ensure that it transfers from your short-term memory to the long-term storage in your brain. By doing this a few times a day, you encourage the encoding process that will translate that ordinary positive experience into a bit of lasting neural structure and gradually weave these positive resources into the fabric of your brain. In other words, chip away at your negativity biases until you can

focus on the positive without effort. Just as our neuroplasticity (the brain's ability to change) allows us to learn to eat with chopsticks or ride a bike and

then do both without thinking (although perhaps not at the same time), we can train ourselves to think more positively.

This can be really effective. Before and after brain scans that have been taken of people who practise this exercise even show physiological changes that reflect the shift away from the negativity bias.

Neutralise Your Negativity Ninja

When you start to recognise a negative or limiting thought, you can consciously choose to change it. Instead of saying: “I can’t cope with my husband being away again for months,” you could try: “I know it’s not so great that he’ll be away again, but I know we can still speak most days and I’ve got lots of support on camp to help me get through.” The chemicals produced by the body as a response to this kind of thought are more likely to support you in fulfilling your potential to cope.

Sometimes we ask ourselves questions like: “Why am I so hopeless at talking to new people?” or “Why do I feel lonely?” These are often actually complaints disguised as questions and therefore have no real answer. However, we can train ourselves to ask more positively loaded questions, such as: “How can I be more confident in talking to new people?” Approaching the questions we ask ourselves in this way is much better for our wellbeing. It links back to the RAS or Google in our brains: whatever we consciously choose to focus on — be it positive or negative — will become the subject of our mind’s attention.

Final Thoughts



The brain that we possess is still running on prehistoric hardware that has not yet had an upgrade. We are not hardwired to be happy but to survive. This brings along with it a negativity bias that, if left unchecked, can cause us to become expert negativity ninjas. However, every day, we can make conscious choices to think more positively and savour the moments which can hardwire our brains for happiness.




Chapter Six: Emotion Coaching

“A good coach CAN CHANGE A GAME. A *great* coach can change a life.” — John Wooden

In this chapter, we will be sharing some vital information with you about how you and your children can form a deeper understanding of one another. It is our hope that the insights and tools we share will help to turn any conflicts you have into moments for connection and reflection between you. We will look at how you can keep a strong emotional connection with your child, especially when they are experiencing challenges or changes in their life.

Keeping Your Emotional Connection — Emotion Coaching



Young children are like big sponges: they absorb absolutely everything around them, including the emotions of their parents and siblings. However, even though they absorb these emotions, they can struggle to process them or identify them, as sometimes these emotions are just too big for them to handle. We're sure you spend lots of time teaching your children important things such as reading, writing and tying up their shoe laces, but taking the time to help them understand their feelings is important too.

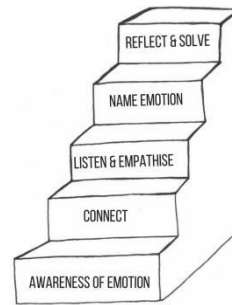
Research shows that children who understand their feelings and learn about their emotions have the following advantages:

- They calm themselves down more quickly when they get upset.
- They handle their moods better and have fewer negative emotions.
- They perform better in school.
- They form stronger friendships with other children.
- They get sick less often.

The subject of this chapter is emotion coaching. This is a parenting technique that helps children understand their feelings and it's the key to raising happy, resilient and well-adjusted children. There is now 30 years' worth of research (by the Gottman Institute) that suggests that it is not always enough to be a warm, engaged and loving parent. We can also learn to emotion coach our children.

Emotion coaching can be broken down into five key steps, which we discuss below. These are adapted from Gottman's work. (If you are interested, you can find out more about his work in the further reading section at the end of this book.)

The Five Steps of Emotion Coaching



Step 1: Awareness of Emotion

It's important to be aware of the emotions of your family members. Tune in to your child's feelings and your own. In order to develop your emotional awareness:

- Pay attention to your own emotions, from happiness to sadness to anger.
- Understand that emotions are a natural and valuable part of life.
- Observe, listen and learn how your child expresses different emotions.
- Watch for changes in facial expressions, body language, posture and tone of voice.

Step 2: Connect

There are a number of things you can do to help to connect with your child:

- Use emotional moments as opportunities to connect.
- Pay close attention to your child's emotions.
- Try not to dismiss or avoid the emotions of the child.
- See emotional moments as opportunities for teaching.
- Recognise feelings and encourage your child to talk about his or her emotions.
- Provide guidance before emotions escalate into misbehaviour.

Step 3: Listen and Empathise

Listening sounds like a really simple thing but it's actually quite a skill to listen to others well. You may want to consider the following when you listen to your child:

- Respect your child's feelings by taking time to listen carefully.
- Take your child's emotions seriously.
- Show your child that you understand what he or she is feeling, especially when they feel misunderstood, upset or frustrated.
- Use the phrase: "I understand that you might be feeling..."
- Avoid judging or criticising your child's emotions.



Step 4: Name Emotions

Naming emotions helps children to tame emotions. You can help your child to identify and name their emotions in the following ways:

- Identify the emotions your child is experiencing instead of telling your child how he or she should feel. Please see emotion mapping at the end of this section for details on how you can do this.
- Set a good example by naming your own emotions and talking about them.
- Help your child build a vocabulary for different feelings.

(For more insight on this subject, we'd also recommend the books of Dan Siegel. You can find details in the Further Reading section at the back of this book.)



Step 5: Reflect and Solve

Having helped your child to identify what it is they are feeling, you can then help them to resolve the situation. There are a number of things you can do here:

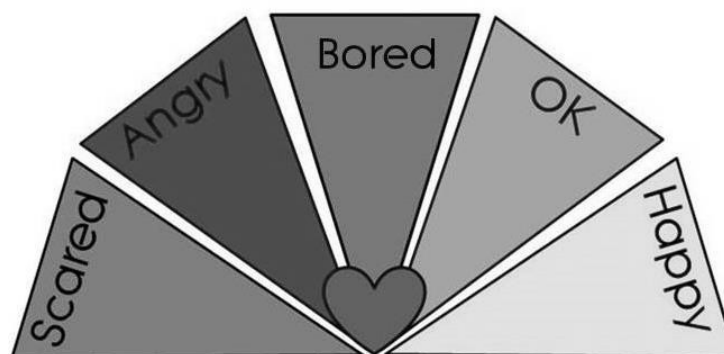
- Explore solutions to problems together: help them to think through possible solutions.
- Show your child that you respect their attempts to solve problems and guide them with trust and affection.
- Show your child respect and understanding in moments when they feel misunderstood, upset or frustrated. Talk through their feelings with them and try to understand the source of the upset.
- Encourage emotional expression but set clear limits on behaviour.
- If they have misbehaved, help them to identify their feelings and explain why their behaviour was inappropriate.
- Create situations where your child can explore without hearing lots of 'don'ts'.
- Notice when your child is doing lots of things right and give praise. Avoid telling them they are a brilliant at something (such as playing football), but instead praise their effort and skills. This will help them to develop a positive mindset that is based on their efforts rather than innate abilities.

These strategies have many benefits, but be aware of your child's responses to your new way of engaging with them as you work through their emotions. When you begin this process of emotion coaching, it may take both you and your children some time to get used to this new way of interacting. However, it is an invaluable way of connecting on a new level with your child and

helping them to develop crucial emotional intelligence and awareness. In difficult interactions, such as a temper tantrum or a heated argument, make sure your child feels your empathy by patiently validating their feelings and getting to the root of their emotion.

For those of you with children who have read *SuperDooper You* or *Tactical Manoeuvres for Life*, the resources in these books, The Feelings Flight Path and The Emotional Compass, are helpful, easy-to-use tools designed especially for the purpose of helping you and your children to navigate your feelings. You can find details of these resources and how to use them in Module Two.

However, we are aware that some of our readers may have younger children and therefore may not have access to these resources. We would therefore like to provide you with a simple tool that you can use with your younger children.



The diagram above shows a Feelings Flag, which you can use with your children to flag what mood or emotional state they are experiencing at a given moment. This is a tool that can develop your child's own emotional awareness, which will help them to tame those big emotions as and when they occur.

This new tool, like the two provided in the other books, is very simple to use. Whenever your child is getting angry or upset, suggest to them that they could look at the mapping tool to identify exactly what the feeling is they are experiencing in that moment. This will help them to identify what they are experiencing with better clarity and this, in turn, will help them to understand themselves and the situation better.

We have designed the Feelings Flag for children aged three to five. We would recommend that you copy this on to a sheet of paper; it's simple for you to draw and label. Once you've done this, you could then encourage your children to colour it in. It would be good to discuss with them what colours they feel would be best for each individual flag. We have listed an example of

the colours below, but let your children think about what colours they feel would be best for them and why.

Scared = Grey

Angry = Red

Bored = Blue

OK = Green

Happy = Yellow

This tool, along with the Feelings Flight Path and The Emotional Compass, will be most useful in the Reflect and Solve step of emotion coaching. When a child is in the middle of a crisis, they have an emotional charge and are more likely to be in alarm mode, which, if you remember, shuts down access to their calm, thinking brain.

In this instance, it is better to help your child to calm down first (using one of the tools we'll discuss in Module Two) and then use the mapping tools to reflect on the feelings that they were experiencing in the middle of the problem.

Naming our emotions is an important first step in dealing with them effectively, but it's harder than it sounds. Many of us struggle to identify what we are feeling and often the most obvious label isn't actually the most accurate.



There are a variety of reasons why this is so difficult. Perhaps chief among them is that we've been trained to believe that strong emotions should be suppressed and that negative emotions should not be expressed. Anger and stress are two of the emotions we see most often — or at least those are the terms we use for them most frequently. Yet they are often masks for deeper feelings that we could access if we had the right tools to do so.

Having a scale of emotions, like in the three mapping tools we have given you in this series of books, can help you and your children to describe your feelings in more precise ways. This nurtures greater levels of emotional agility, which enables us to more successfully understand ourselves and interact with the world around us.

These emotional scales provide you with the tools to become HEARTSMART. This is a term we use to remind parents and children to follow the HEART method, which we outline below:

H = Honour

E = Emotions

A = All of them. And

R = Respond

T = Thoughtfully

When you start to use the mapping systems for recognising emotions, you start to practise emotional integrity. You stop masking so-called negative emotions with group terms, such as stress and start understanding the full range of emotions you experience every day.

Final Thoughts



When you become your child's emotion coach, they can learn how emotions work and how to react to feelings in healthy and resilient ways. This is especially important as children are very much driven by the emotional centre of their brains. The rational, thinking part of the brain that would help them to process these feelings is not yet fully developed in childhood, so the support and guidance you can provide is all the more significant.

Unfortunately, we have neither the time nor the space in this handbook to share all of the good practices for emotion coaching, so we would encourage you to research this topic further. We would particularly recommend the work of Dr Laura Markham and the free resources on her blog, AHA parenting and the book *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child* by John Gottman, whose institute has invested 30 years of research into this area of child development. These, along with other further reading suggestions, are listed at the back of this book.

Chapter Seven: The Adolescent Brain

“Shaped a little like a loaf of French country bread, our brain is a crowded chemistry lab, bustling with nonstop neural conversations.” —

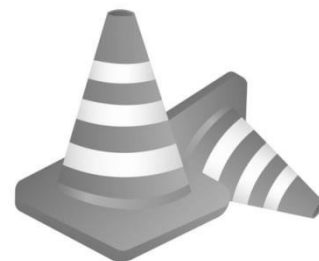
Diane Ackerman

In this section, we explore the teenage brain, the fascinating changes taking place in adolescence and how you can help your teenager to thrive during this exciting time in their life.

We will help you to gain a greater understanding of the inner workings of an adolescent. Even the word adolescent often carries a negative stigma and we feel this does our young people a huge disservice. We are sure you've come to realise, as you've progressed through this book, that the brain is an extremely complex organ that warrants more attention than we usually afford it. This is especially true of the adolescent brain. We generally associate this period with the teenage years, but adolescence typically stretches from the age of 12 years to 24 years old.

In this period, the brain changes in important and surprising ways and brain development has real effects on teenagers' behaviour and relationships. If you, as a parent, can understand how your teenager's brain functions during what Siegel refers to as “an incredibly positive period of growth, change and experimentation”, then this will inevitably make the transition to adulthood a much smoother ride for all parties concerned.

Your child's brain is still very much under construction. The brain doesn't stop growing until a young adult reaches the age of 24. (Technically speaking, neuroplasticity means that the brain never stops growing, but that's beyond the scope of this book.) We also live in a society that has led us to believe that our children's angry outbursts and unstable emotional swings are pretty much entirely down to puberty-driven hormones. While puberty and increased hormones do have a hand to play in the life of your teenager, it is likely that their brain development is affecting their behaviour more



than you might realise.

The adolescent brain is basically undergoing major re-modelling, trimming down all the old habits, beliefs and behaviours that it no longer needs and strengthening those that it wants to keep and develop into adulthood. At approximately 12 or 13 years of age, the brain naturally starts to prune away the excess brain cells and neural pathways which have been laid down through childhood but which are no longer required.

In the next stage of the reconstruction, the brain lays down myelin, a protective coating that strengthens the neurons that have survived the chop. This makes the remaining neural pathways 3,000 times more effective at communicating with each other. The remaining neural structures will be habits and behaviours that have been most frequently used and have stood the test of time.

Alongside this neural redevelopment are some quite hefty chemical changes that can cause changes in behaviour during the adolescent period. One such chemical is dopamine.

Dopamine is the chemical that is released when people engage with the unknown, novelty, the unfamiliar and the uncertain — which all add up to risk. During adolescence, there is an increase in the activity of the neural circuits using dopamine. Starting in early adolescence and peaking midway through, this enhanced dopamine release causes teens to gravitate toward risk-taking and thrilling experiences. Research even suggests that their baseline level of dopamine is lower, but its release in response to experience is higher — which can explain why teens feel more restless and bored with the familiar home environment. They thus become more inclined to take risks and look for excitement in something new.

Hopefully this makes it a little clearer why teenage risk-taking is so prevalent.

Final Thoughts



As we have seen in this chapter, there's more to changes in adolescent behaviour than a simple cocktail of hormones. Ultimately, these changes are taking place because the brain of a child must radically change to prepare him/her for the transition into adult life. Something fundamental must change in a young person to make them mentally prepared to leave the safety and security of a loving, childhood home. For this to happen, the brain needs to change in such a way that it becomes drawn to the unfamiliar.

Sharing this knowledge can be a helpful way of showing compassion and empathy with your teenager. A little knowledge can go a long way.

Module Two: The Roots and Wings Toolbox

“There are two gifts *THAT* we should give our children, **one is roots and the other is **wings**.” — Hodding Carter**

When we were first asked to write the Cloud Nine book series for RAF families, the quote above gave us the inspiration for not only the content of the books but their overall ethos. We shared a poem at the beginning of this book, which we feel perfectly explains what it is that children need to learn from their parents or carers. They need the **roots** of safety and the **wings** of confidence in their own abilities.

In this module, we will be look at the 18 practical tools that we have shared across the three children’s books and explain how each one has been categorised as either a tool that supports your children’s roots or one that gives them wings.

The former, those techniques which support your children’s roots, are designed to help them feel safe and secure, even when there may be chaos around them. The tools which give them wings are those that are designed to instil self-confidence, to help them to feel free and fly.

It is our sincere hope that you personally practise and experiment with all of these new ideas and activities together with your children. For each tool and technique, we also consider the why, marrying the theory we have covered in Module One with the activity in question, which we hope will demonstrate the effectiveness of each technique.

Chapter Eight: The 18 Tools

“If you want to teach people a new way of thinking, don't bother trying to teach them. Instead, give them a tool, the use of which will lead to new ways of thinking.” —

Buckmaster Fuller

To fully explain the 18 tools that are shared in the Cloud Nine books, we shall be considering each book in turn. Please feel free to read only the sections that are relevant to your children's age group, although, you may decide to read further sections in order to enhance your own knowledge and understanding. The choice is yours.

A Day in the Clouds

This book has been written especially for younger children, aged approximately four-to-seven years old. It features our Cloud Nine mascot, Raphael, a unicorn who spends the day with his friend Ben Elephant (the RAF Benevolent Fund's mascot). Through the book, Raphael shares four special practices with Ben to help him to keep calm, be happier, let his worries go and be more present in each moment.

In *A Day in the Clouds*, children are introduced to the following techniques: Treasure Chest Breathing, the Happy Jar, Worry Balloons and Mindful Eating, which we'll be discussing in more detail below.

Treasure Chest Breathing (Root)

This is a root tool that's especially useful when your children (or indeed, you) are feeling worried or scared.

Here is the book extract:

Your heart is your Treasure Chest, so by placing your hands on your heart, closing your eyes and taking a big deep breath, you can help your body to be calm, relaxed and filled with treasure. This treasure could be feelings such as happiness or joy or feeling calm and peaceful.

Let us show you how to do Treasure Chest breathing like Raf and Ben. It's very easy and fun to do and it helps us when we are worried or scared.

Here's how to practise a Treasure Breath:

1. Think of a feeling you would like to feel, such as calm, safe or happy.
2. Place both your hands on your heart (your Treasure Chest).
3. Close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose. Hold that breath for five seconds and then breathe out slowly through your mouth. Really feel that feeling while you are doing this. In your mind, say the words "I am calm; I am safe," or whatever feeling you would like to feel. See how your body feels.
4. Keep doing these special breaths until you feel calm and relaxed.

Do you feel more relaxed and calm now?



When you perform purposeful, controlled breathing, this connects to a nerve called the vagus nerve, which connects your brain to all your vital organs, such as your heart and your lungs. Controlled breathing is therefore a way for you to consciously control your nervous system using the power of your breath. This is the most powerful tool shared in any of the three books but it's also the simplest. Don't be fooled by its simplicity: it has the power to hand your child back the reins when they're out of control and literally takes just a few seconds to do.

Adding positive statements to the breathing practice engages the conscious mind so that intentional positive programming can take place at the same time.

There is a version of mindful breathing in all our books because it is a core practice for helping your children calm their whole nervous system quickly and efficiently. In *SuperDoooper You*, it's called the Silver Breath Magic Minute and in *Tactical Manoeuvres*, it is Mindful Breathing.

The Happy Jar (Root)

This is a root tool designed to help your child to focus their attention on the good, positive things in their life.

Here is the book extract:

Once a day (teatime at the table is good), get together with your family and ask everyone to share one thing that has either made them happy, made them smile or that they can really be thankful for that day. Then write these comments down (or draw a picture) on a piece of paper, add the date and pop it in the Happy Jar.

When you start to do this with your family on a daily basis, you will be amazed at how many wonderful, positive things start happening in your life that you can't wait to share at Happy Jar Time. Or maybe these things have always been happening, but you didn't take the time to notice them before!



Teaching your children from a young age to purposefully look for the good in their days will support their positive brain and mind development. Such practices have an impact on children's emotional and mental health and overall happiness: studies show that those people who practise gratitude are 25% happier than those people who don't.⁴

The use of a Happy Jar activates your child's reticular activating system (RAS, see Chapter Four). When using the Happy Jar every day, your child's mind will begin to subconsciously look for positive things to remember in preparation for using the jar later in the day. If this is a consistent practice (i.e. they are using the jar daily), your child will be laying down new neural pathways, hardwiring more happiness directly into their brains.

One again, there are versions of this gratitude practice in all of the books. In *SuperDooper You*, it's called the Gratitude Goggles Magic Minute, while in *Tactical Manoeuvres*, it's the Positivity Diary.

Worry Balloons (Roots & Wings)

This activity is a root tool to help your child to feel safer by sending their worries away. However, it is also a wings tool which helps them to feel lighter and free from worries.

Here is the book extract:

"When children are worried or scared about something, they breathe their worries into a magical balloon and send it here to Cloud Nine. Then the happy air pops the balloon and helps take the worries away."

"Wow!" said Ben. "I like that idea, but how do I breathe worries into a balloon? That sounds really hard to do."

"It's really very easy, Ben. I'll teach you how to do it now, if you like?" said Raf, with a big smile on his face.

"Oh, yes please!" said Ben, clapping his hands eagerly.

Get yourself nice and comfortable, Ben. Sit in a chair, close your eyes and just relax. Breathe in and out slowly. Now think about what is bothering you. Imagine you are holding a big colourful balloon and when you breathe out, you are blowing your worries into the balloon. Keep your breaths slow and steady and think of the worries that you want to let go of. When you are ready and your worries are safely inside, imagine letting go of your balloon and watching it float gently up into the sky.

“Feel your worries get smaller as it rises. Enjoy the feeling of happiness as your worries move further and further away. Stay still and relaxed and enjoy your worry-free moments. It’s nice to feel lighter and happier without your worries. The good news is that you can never run out of Worry Balloons, so use them anytime you want. Remember to keep practising your breathing. It’s also a good idea to say to yourself ‘I am calm, I am relaxed,’ — this really helps.



The technical term for this technique is guided imagery or guided visualisation. It can help reduce feelings of stress because it helps you use your imagination to take you to a calm, peaceful place.

Because of the way the mind and body are connected, guided imagery can make you feel like you are experiencing something just by imagining it.

This technique is a lovely way for younger children to use their imagination to release their worries.

A great phrase to share with your children is: “there’s nothing a worry hates more than being seen.” This is taken from a book called *The Huge Bag of Worries* by Virginia Ironside, which we highly recommend. You’ll find this in the further reading guide at the end of this book.

Mindful Eating (Root)

This activity is a root tool designed to help your child to feel more present in the moment and to nurture their ability to be calm and still.

Here is the book extract:

“I’m just trying out a new way of eating that the Cloud Nine Squadron use. Some of the recruits told me about it yesterday, so I wanted to give it a go. It’s called Mindful Eating, and it’s amazing how much better the food tastes when you slow down to really touch, smell and taste the food,” Raf replied.

“Wow, that sounds fun,” said Ben. “Can I try? What do I have to do?”

“It’s really quite easy. You choose a piece of food; let’s use this piece of fruit, for example. Now, before you eat it, take a minute to look at the bright red colour, feel the little bumps on the skin, hold it with its stalk and now breathe in the smell of it. As you take a bite, savour the taste and eat it really slowly to enjoy all the flavours in your mouth. It’s amazing how different food tastes when we stop to enjoy it properly,” Raf explained.”



This Mindful Eating practice is a way of helping your child to be more focused and still. It connects them to their surroundings and quiets their mind. There is another version of a mindful practice in *SuperDooper You* called Silver Sounds, which helps children to explore mindfulness through their sense of sound.

The Oxford Dictionary describes mindfulness this way: “Mindfulness can be described as a mental state achieved by focusing one’s awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one’s feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations.”

Mindfulness relaxation is helpful for your children (and you) because it has been shown to improve attention, increase sleep quality and reduce stress.⁵ It also can increase a child’s empathy, ability to regulate emotions, effective communication skills and feelings of compassion.⁶

SuperDooper You

The second book in the Cloud Nine book series has been written for children aged approximately 8-to-12 years old.

In this book, readers are introduced to Squadron Leader SuperDooper, who shares nine Magic Minutes as part of the Cloud Nine recruit training. These Magic Minutes are exercises, tools and techniques that can help children to stay calm and in control. Some help children to calm down when they are worried, some help them to focus, some develop inner confidence and some help them feel more energised.

Magic Minutes are referred to as navigation tools because they help children to navigate their way out of problems.

These are the nine Magic Minutes, which we’ll be discussing in turn:

1. The Silver Breath
2. Confidence Cuffs
3. Super Safe Selfies
4. Take Flight
5. The Silver Stop Button
6. Gratitude Goggles
7. Silver Sounds
8. The Positivity Planner
9. Jump for Joy

The Silver Breath (Root)

This practice is a root tool that's especially useful when your children are feeling worried or scared. It also helps when they need to focus, gain confidence or inject some positive energy into their bodies.

Here is the book extract:

The Silver Breath is a big deep breath that can take you from alarm brain to calm brain in a matter of seconds. It's a state of deep breathing that's controlled by a large muscle in your tummy called the diaphragm (pronounced dye-a-fram). To practise this breath, imagine you are wearing a belt with a big, shiny, silver buckle. Have a look at my belt here.

Place your hands on your buckle (roughly where your belly button is) and with your mouth closed, let's take a big, deep breath in through your nose, until you feel the air passing down into your tummy. Can you feel the buckle rising? That's brilliant.

Hold the air here for the count of four.

Now slowly release all the air from your tummy through your mouth until your buckle is flat again."



This activity is another version of mindful breathing, similar to the Treasure Chest Breathing in *A Day in the Clouds*. In this instance, the activity teaches children how to belly breathe, which is a core practice for helping them to calm their whole nervous system quickly and efficiently.

Confidence Cuffs (Roots & Wings)

This technique is a root tool, as it is a great way to boost your child's inner confidence, which can make them feel happier and more able to cope. However, it is also a wings tool because the confidence that it instils can help your child to feel ready to take on new challenges and experiences.

Here is the book extract:

Firstly, imagine you have a set of bright, shiny, silver cuffs on each wrist — these are your imaginary confidence cuffs. Now place your hands on your hips, feet slightly apart, chest out, chin up and stand proud like this for as long as you can. This is a power pose and it sends messages to your brain to tell it that you're feeling powerful on the inside! It makes you feel confident from the inside out.

So, how confident do you feel right now? I know! How awesome is this?

To make this Magic Minute even more powerful, close your eyes whilst doing it and add a few Silver Breaths. Here at Cloud Nine, we all put our Confidence Cuffs on every morning before we start the day and say out loud our squadron's motto: "I Think, I Feel and I Am in Control".



When you place the body in a high-power pose, it sends signals to the brain that the body is feeling confident. In turn, this starts a reaction in the brain that releases testosterone into the bloodstream. This hormone is our confidence chemical, making us feel confident from the inside out! Get your children to practise this technique frequently and see if they can stand in the pose for two minutes, as this will trigger the body to produce testosterone into the bloodstream and have an immediate effect on their mood. An advantage of producing testosterone is that this hormone is brilliant at neutralising cortisol, the chemical we produce when we're stressed, worried, anxious or scared. This is a particularly useful tool to use when your child is nervous, such as before a test or on their first day at a new school. It is also great for adults (as are all our tools) as a quick way to boost your confidence at any time. There is another version of this tool in *Tactical Manoeuvres*.

Super Safe Selfies (Root)

This technique — which, to clarify, has nothing to do with taking a selfie photograph — is a brilliant root tool that helps your child calm down when they get worried or anxious.

Here is the book extract:

Imagine you're holding a beautiful silver velvet cloak. Now, take this magic cloak and wrap it tightly around your body by crossing your arms over your chest and giving yourself a big squeeze. Don't let go of your squeeze! Now close your eyes, gently stroke up and down your arms and think of a place where you feel most peaceful and happy. Hug that moment tight so it stays in your heart. How does that feel?

Whenever you feel scared, you can always use this Magic Minute to help you feel safe, calm and peaceful — this is a Super Safe Selfie to comfort you.



As you may have noticed, the tools we are sharing with your children in these books are ones that they can practise and use on their own. They are designed to show the children how to self-regulate their emotions and calm themselves at times when either their alarm brain has started to take over or when they are feeling uncertain or scared. The Super Safe Selfie is no exception. In fact, this is probably one of the best tools for self-calming when your child is scared because of the two physiological changes it brings to the body.

Firstly, when your child gives himself or herself a self-hug, the brain recognises this hug and triggers the production of the cuddle chemical, oxytocin, which creates a happy, fuzzy feeling. The mind does not register that the hug is not from someone else: a hug is a hug and the brain will release the oxytocin regardless!

Secondly, the simple, soothing sensation that your child feels as they stroke their arms is beneficial for a separate reason. When the body reacts to stress, our brain waves get much faster. As your child soothes himself or herself with this calming motion, the brainwaves are slowed, reducing the levels of stress that they feel.

Take Flight (Roots & Wings)

This activity is a root tool which is designed to help your child to let go of their worries or things that make them anxious or angry. However, it is also a wings tool because it helps him/her feel lighter and free from worries.

Here is the book extract:

Have you got any niggly thoughts that you want to send flying?

A really good way to do this is to write these worries down onto paper so that they're out of your head... but here at the Cloud Nine Squadron we go one step further. We use our special Worry Planes to send those thoughts far, far away!

So, now it's your turn.

On the next page, you'll find your very own Worry Plane template. Take a piece of paper and follow the guidelines to fold it into a plane. Write down any worries you may have on this paper plane and when you've finished, send your worries flying far, far away! Have fun and notice how light it feels to let them go!



This technique is another version of the Worry Balloons in the younger children's book. For a full explanation of why this technique is so effective, please refer back to that section.

The Silver Stop Button (Root)

This technique is a root tool that can help your child to delete any worries that they may have before they have time to stick.

Here is the book extract:

This Magic Minute is so simple to do and can be practised anytime and anywhere. The next time you get a worried or angry thought, you can use your Silver Button to delete it quickly, before it has time to get stuck in your head.

All you need to do is pop your index finger on the soft spot between your eyebrows (where your frown muscle is) and press firmly three times, just like you're pressing a button and repeat the words 'STOP, STOP, STOP'. This is great for calming you down and refocusing your mind. This stops the worry from reaching your brain and causing more problems.



Research has shown that we have mirror neurons that pick up the feelings and facial expression of others. This is called emotional contagion. When your child hits their stop button (or, perhaps, says the words ‘stop, stop, stop’), this interrupts the flow of negative emotional data from the facial muscles to the brain and sends different data to the brain instead. In plain English, this means that it stops the negative message getting through to the brain and triggering the alarm brain.

One final bit of technical information here is the name of our frown muscle. It’s called the corrugator supercilli — why don’t you share this with your children? It may well make them smile.

Gratitude Goggles (Root)

This is a root tool which will help to train your child’s brain to focus on the positive things in their life.

Here is the book extract:

Let’s get your imagination flowing again. This time, we’re going to pop on a Super Dooper pair of Gratitude Goggles. Looking through these magic goggles helps us to notice the silver lining (positive thing) in every cloud (sticky situation).

Now you’ve got a new lens to look through, which helps you easily find all the things that make you happy or that you’re thankful for!

On the next page are some activities to do while you’re wearing your new set of Gratitude Goggles.

Have fun!

Can you look around the room and find something you like? This could be your new trainers, your homework that’s finished well before it’s due, a yummy sandwich that been made for you or even your annoying little brother!

How many things can you find?

Can you write them down in a special book?

Why not make a list of all the things that you’re grateful for every day for the next week? You’ll be amazed at how many things you’ll find and how happy this makes you feel.



This technique is another version of the Happy Jar found in *A Day in the Clouds*. Essentially, this activity trains your child's subconscious to look for more positives in their lives.

Silver Sounds (Root)

This activity is a root tool which helps your child to feel more present in the moment and nurtures their ability to be calm and still.

Here is the book extract:

Because you are focusing your attention on one thing at a time, this Magic Minute helps to give your mind a rest.

It's time to go outside — whatever the weather. If it's raining, then find a nice sheltered spot; if it's a bit chilly, then put on some nice warm clothes.

Are you outside now and sitting comfortably?

Now I'd like you to close your eyes and sit in silence for a while. Yes, you heard me, just sit in silence. I want you to listen to the sounds around you. What can you hear?

On the other page, you'll find a big, fluffy, white cloud. Copy this out on a piece of paper. In your cloud, I want you to draw, or write, all the things you could hear when you were outside.

Training your brain to concentrate on specific sounds helps you in lots of positive ways. Another way to practise this Magic Minute is to listen out for a particular sound for 30 seconds, such as the ticking of a clock. What other sounds do you suggest listening for?



This technique is another mindfulness practice, quite like the mindful eating practice found in *A Day in the Clouds*. In short, mindfulness involves becoming more aware of and engaged in the present moment and helps people to experience afresh things that they may have previously taken for granted, promoting a sense of mental wellbeing.

The Positivity Planner (Roots & Wings)

This activity is both a root tool and a wings tool. It helps your child to focus on positive activities and experiences that they can plan ahead of time.

Here is the book extract:

The best thing you can do with your worries (after you've accepted them) is to IGNORE them!

But how do you do this?

Well, here at Cloud Nine, we use our Positivity Planner. This is a really fun way to plan your day.

On the other page, you'll find a picture of Sam's planner, which you can see is full of lots of fun things. In your training pack, you'll find your very own blank Positivity Planner that's ready for you to complete. It's time to start planning positive things to do every day, so that you don't have time to let those worries in.

Could you play football outside?

Or walk the dog?

Helping around the house would make the grown-ups happy too...

Or how about reading your favourite book?

It's time to stop paying attention to your worries. There are so many positive things you can do from now on, so find your planner and start filling it up with positive activities.



This technique offers your child's mind some distraction therapy. Packing their days with positivity in this way will lessen the time a worry has to develop, which is especially useful if your child tends to worry and ruminate over problems or fears or even get anxious.

The aim is to focus their mind on the exciting, fun activities they have planned, rather than allowing it to wander to possible worries or anxieties. This tool is especially helpful for children who worry a lot or get anxious about situations which are out of their control. This might be a worry about a

parent being away on deployment or the post deployment re-settle. (Incidentally, we'd also say that it's a great idea for you to fill your own diary with positive things to help yourself if you notice you are getting anxious.)

Technically, anxiety is apprehension over an upcoming event. We can anticipate the future with sometimes scary predictions that don't necessarily have any basis in truth. In everyday life, anxiety's physical and emotional symptoms can mean an increased heart rate, poor concentration at work or school and sleeping problems.

Note: If you feel like you or your child might be dealing with an anxiety disorder, please do speak to a medical professional to seek help. There are lots of options available to manage your symptoms.

Jump for Joy (Roots)

This technique is a roots tool. When your child energises their body, it helps them to feel in control and ready for action.

Here is the book extract:

This Magic Minute is all about energising your body to keep you fit and healthy. By doing this Magic Minute at least once a day, you'll feel energised and always be ready if called into action!

Just like other squadrons on camp who have training manoeuvres to keep their bodies fit and healthy, here at Cloud Nine we also like to keep in tip-top condition.

It's time to practise the three simple exercises on the following page to get your body moving and literally jumping for joy.

By doing this set of exercises at least once a day, you'll be pumping your body with feel-good chemicals that reward you for doing such a good job. This will keep your calm, happy brain switched on!



Physical activity helps to release any pent up emotion that your child may be feeling. If you remember the explanation of the fight or flight response in Chapter One, you may recall that we explained how 21st century humans absorb far too much stress in the body. This is among the reasons why exercise is so good for us: it burns up the excess emotional energy and has the added advantage of triggering the release of endorphins, our happy

hormones. If you're a regular exerciser yourself, you'll know how effective physical activity can be for reducing your stress levels and making you feel good.

In this Magic Minute, we encourage the children to exercise every day to ensure their calm/happy brain stays switched on and they get the best out of their bodies.

We have now shared all the Magic Minutes that were offered in *SuperDoooper You* and hope that you can see why each of these tools or activities are beneficial to your child's mental and emotional wellbeing. The final tool we'll share here is the Feelings Flight Path, which is not a Magic Minute but a standalone resource that is provided in the Cloud Nine Training Pack which accompanies *SuperDoooper You*.

The Feelings Flight Path

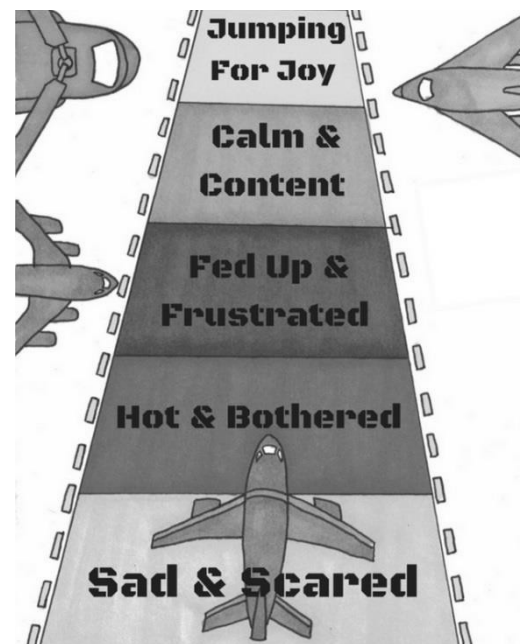
The Feelings Flight Path is a comprehensive mapping tool for children to use to help them to identify their current emotional state.

What the Feelings Flight Path is for:

Back in Chapter Six, when we introduced the concept of emotion coaching, we used the phrase 'name your emotions to tame your emotions'. The Feelings Flight Path is designed to enable your child to do just that. In the children's training pack that came with the book, your child will have a poster of the Feelings Flight Path and a sheet with a choice of vehicles that they can cut out and use to mark their current position on the flight path.

There are three vehicles to choose from on the sheet, so if you have more than one child, they can of course all use the Flight Path and all have their own vehicle. We also recommend that you use this Feelings Flight Path too, if you think it would be helpful to explore this tool with your children.

This is a simple way to help your children to navigate their way through the minefield of emotions that they can feel each day. It is our



intention that using this tool will positively impact not only on your child's emotional and mental health but also on the connection that you have with them.

How to use this tool with your child:

When you are discussing the particular emotion that your child has identified with on the Feelings Flight Path that day, it is worth asking them how it feels in their mind and body to be experiencing this emotion. For example, if your child places themselves in the red zone (Hot & Bothered) and they tell you that they are feeling guilty, you can ask them how guilty feels in their body and where can they feel it. Is it in their tummy? Is it in their shoulders? How does it physically feel to feel guilty?

There is one final point we'd like to stress on this matter. When you are discussing feelings and emotions with your children, please be careful not to use the terms bad feelings and good feelings or negative feelings and positive feelings. There is no such thing as a bad emotion! All emotions are purely a guidance system for us to identify how close we are to or how far away we are from, our natural state of wellbeing.

If we attach the label bad to a feeling such as shame, guilt or fear, then children can begin to judge themselves for having these perfectly natural emotions. Simply put, all emotions just *are*.

Tactical Manoeuvres for Life: A Resilience Road Map for RAF Teenagers

The third book in the Cloud Nine series has been written for children between the ages of 12 and 16.

Tactical Manoeuvres are tools and life hacks to help teenagers to cope with difficult situations with more 'bounce-back-ability', which is our term for resilience when they feel like life knocks them down.

This book is more like an operation manual for teens which has been designed to help strengthen their resilience, build their confidence and nurture their sense of self-worth.

There are five Tactical Manoeuvres discussed in the book:

1. The Power Pose
2. The Positivity Diary
3. The Emotional Compass
4. Mindful Breathing

5. The Internal Control Centre

The Power Pose (Roots & Wings)

This technique is a root tool as it's a great way to boost your teen's inner confidence, which can make them feel happier and more able to cope. However, it is also a wings tool because the confidence that it instils can help them to feel ready to take on new challenges and experiences.

Here is the book extract:

If you move your body (your physical self) into a high-power, confident pose, this can lessen the stress in your nervous system, which then calms the 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 found standing in this stance. If you stand in this Power Pose for just two minutes, it will trigger the body to release 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."



This technique is an upscaled version of Confidence Cuffs found in *SuperDooper You*. A full explanation of why this method is so effective can be found in that section, but in short, the Power Pose causes the body to send signals to the brain that it is feeling confident, releasing the confidence chemical, testosterone and thereby creating a feeling of confidence in the brain.

The Positivity Diary (Root)

This is a root tool which will help to train your teenager's mind to focus on the positive things in their life. This is an especially helpful pursuit at this stage in the growth of their adolescent brain.

Here is the book extract:

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. In writing 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.



This technique is very similar to the Gratitude Goggles found in *SuperDooper You* and the Happy Jar in *A Day in the Clouds*, which you can refer to for a full explanation of why this technique works so well. As a reminder, this is essentially because it uses your child's reticular activating system to lay down new neural pathways which subconsciously look for positive things in their day-to-day life, boosting their overall feelings of wellbeing and happiness.

The Emotional Compass (Root)

This is a root tool which helps your teenager to map out their emotions on a daily basis.

Here is the book extract:

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.



This Emotional Compass is a more detailed version of the Feelings Flight Path found in *SuperDooper You*. You can refer to this section and to Chapter Six on emotion coaching for a detailed explanation of why the technique is effective. In short, however, it is because the tool helps teenagers to successfully identify their feelings, ultimately helping them to gain a greater understanding of themselves and improving their ability to self-regulate their emotions.

Mindful Breathing (Roots & Wings)

This practice is both a roots and wings tool. It is especially useful when your teenager is feeling worried or anxious or when they need to focus, gain confidence or inject some positive energy into the body.

Here is the book extract:

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

Breathe!

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, which 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.



We have covered mindful breathing in both Treasure Chest Breathing in *A Day in the Clouds* and The Silver Breath in *SuperDoooper You*. As mentioned previously, this is a core practice for helping your teenagers to calm their whole nervous system quickly and efficiently and for filling them with confidence from the inside out.

The Internal Control Centre (Roots & Wings)

This tool is both a roots and wings tool. It is a useful technique to call upon when your teen is feeling overwhelmed by a situation and is spending time getting worried or stressed.

Here is the book extract:

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 that happen 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!"



When we get stuck in the heat of the moment, it is often difficult to see the best solution to the problem or indeed, whether the problem is anything we can actually fix. This tool is designed to help your teenager to take a step back from their situation and look at their problem through the lens of their Control Centre.

By demonstrating what is and is not something they have the capacity to control, the tool gives them a sense of control over their attitude and response in every situation and ultimately, gives them the power to make their own wise choices.

Final Thoughts



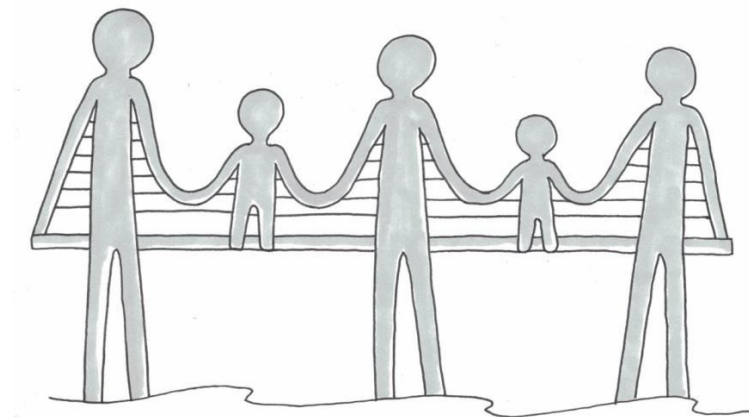
You have now reached the end of the toolbox module. We hope that this has helped you to understand each practical tool, technique and activity from all three children's books. Our mission for this module was to marry up the theory that we shared with you in Module One with the practical application of the tools, to give you an understanding of how, why and when to use this vast array of techniques. We sincerely hope that this handbook, along with the children's books, will be used by your whole family and become a resource to refer to whenever you feel your children are struggling with something or indeed you, yourself, need help.



Module Three: Positivity in Practice

“A positive attitude causes a chain reaction of positive thoughts, events and outcomes. It is a catalyst and it sparks extraordinary results.” — Wade Boggs

In our third and final module, we provide practical suggestions for utilising the knowledge, tools and techniques that have been shared in the Cloud Nine book series. In Chapter Nine, we offer ideas for ways of introducing some new regimes into your home that have the potential to enhance your family's wellbeing, mental health and emotional resilience. In our closing chapter, we discuss how you can utilise and access a range of support structures that are available to you, both within the RAF Family and in the wider community.



Chapter Nine: Daily Operations

“MOTIVATION is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going.” — Jim Ryun

Now that you have lifted the lid on the brain, the mind and the body and you and your family have in your possession an extensive toolkit of techniques, it's time to sit down with your children once again, to formulate a plan for putting all this positivity into practice.

As we saw in Module One, none of us are automatically happy. We're not hardwired for happiness: we're hardwired for survival. This can mean that we easily get distracted by the stresses and strains of day-to-day life.

So, we have a proposal for you. Could you and your family put together a positivity plan? You could see it a bit like the government's 'five-a-day' incentive for healthy eating, but instead of fruit and vegetables, this would be a five-a-day for positivity.



You and your family could sit together to agree a series of daily operations to ensure that your positivity is both planned and practised. These daily operations can be taken from the toolkit we discussed in Module Two and you and your children can set the intention to perform these nominated activities every day. Practising these techniques every day will ensure that you and your family are developing new positive neural pathways, making you happier and healthier.

To get started, your family will need to decide on the activities that you would all like to start practising and then put a definite plan together. You could also chat to other families on base to discuss what they have put in their positivity plan, share ideas with each other and support each other in your new regimes. Of course, each family and their respective needs are unique, so your positivity plan may well look quite different to anyone else's.

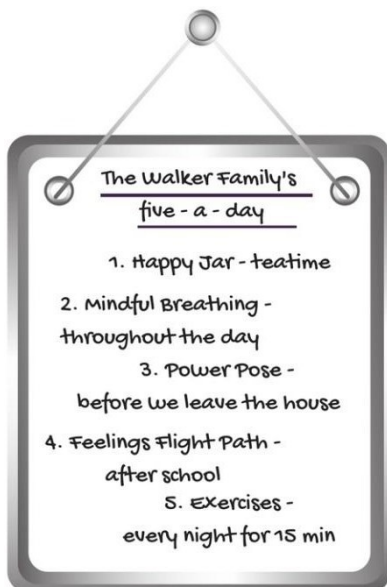
We would recommend that you try and put at least three things in your plan, but it would be even better to put five.

Your new five-a-day positivity plan could look something like this:

What	When
1. HAPPY JAR	Every evening, AT dinner time
2. Mindful Breathing/ Silver BREATH/TREASURE Chest BREATHING	Every morning, before you get out of bed; throughout the DAY (such AS every time you boil the kettle); And every evening, before you go to sleep
3. Power Pose/ Confidence Cuffs	Every DAY, just before you WALK out of the front door
4. Feelings Flight PATH/ EMOTIONAL COMPASS	Every DAY, when the children come home from school, AND Any other time you think it might be needed
5. Jump for Joy	Every evening

Of course, this is just an example: you should pick the activities and timings that will work best for your family. What activities do you think you and your family will choose as your core daily operations?

It might be a nice idea for your children to make a poster or chart to be put up on the wall or the fridge, to help you all to remember this new happiness regime.



If you or your partner are working away, going on deployment or already on deployment, you can still be included in the decision-making process and could watch or even take part in the five-a-day with the children via Skype, FaceTime or a video call. For example, you could agree ahead of time that the parent on deployment also shares something to go in the family Happy Jar and that one of the children can write this down and put it in the pot.

We hope you're feeling ready and motivated to start your new positivity plan. We have made the toolkit as varied as possible so that it appeals to a wide range of personalities but all of the techniques are built on the same foundational purposes: enhancing your family's happiness, strengthening family bonds, nurturing independence, increasing confidence and cultivating emotional and mental resilience.

Chapter Ten: Support Structures

“Saying yes to happiness means learning to say no to the things AND people that stress you out.” — Thema Davis

In this final chapter, we want to talk about support structures and how vital they can be for your wellbeing. It's often been said that there's one thing in life that's certain: change. Life is all about experiencing that change, whether you see it as good or bad and adapting to it.

However, when the change is uncomfortable or challenging, we cope best when we have people around us who understand us and can be depended upon during tough times. We need people who will listen to us — without judgement — and give us honest feedback.

You can't expect to do everything on your own.



Research has proved that having a support system in place has many positive benefits. When you are supported, you cope better, you have higher levels of wellbeing and a longer and healthier life. A healthy social support structure is also known to reduce depression and anxiety. When you have positive people around you, this can lift your mood and enhance your wellbeing.

Outside of your social circles, there are also lots of other support structures you can access. The level and type of support that works best for you will depend on your own needs and preferences. For example, you may enjoy a large support group, while others may thrive with a small network of people they can trust.

Connection to others and the giving and receiving of support is a basic human need. Support comes in many forms and it is helpful to have a variety of different resources to lean on.

Because of this, the RAF Benevolent Fund provides a number of other welfare services to support the serving RAF Family, details of which are

below. If you would like to find out more about any of the support options available, please log on to the website rafbf.org/help or call 0800 1692942.

Airplay and Ben Clubs Youth Support

The Airplay youth support scheme is run at 23 RAF stations nationwide. Chances are that you received this book through contact with the station youth worker. The youth scheme includes youth club sessions for children aged eight and upwards. Check with your Community Development Officer (CDO) to find out what's going on near you. For younger children (aged five-to-seven), many RAF stations host the Ben Club. Other parent and child support clubs include: Who Let the Dads Out, baby yoga and massage, parenting education classes and Stay and Play sessions. Contact your CDO or HIVE staff to find out more.

Relationship and Family Support

This service is run in partnership with Relate and provides access to free relationship or family counselling (up to six sessions), as well as subsidised mediation sessions for those going through a marriage/relationship breakdown. There is also a free online course, Building Stronger Families, aimed at enhancing family relationships within the serving RAF community.

Mental Wellbeing Support

Through the fund's partnership with Anxiety UK, support is available to help with mental wellbeing. The service includes a dedicated helpline and email support, self-help materials and subsidised membership to Anxiety UK (which includes Headspace membership). For those dealing with anxiety and/or depression, free therapy sessions (up to six) can also be accessed. Please note, however, that currently serving Regulars are not able to access the therapy sessions, as provision should be available through RAF medical care. Reservists and family members of Regulars/Reservists are still eligible for the therapy.

Note: This service is not currently available to minors. If you think your child may be struggling with their mental health, get in touch with a medical professional.

Bereavement Support

This free service provides support to those dealing with bereavement in partnership with Cruse Bereavement Care. The service provides access to a dedicated helpline and email support, as well as ongoing telephone or face-

to-face support sessions, where needed.

Serving personnel dealing with bereavement are also advised to make contact with their Station Welfare Team to access additional support that might be available to them.

References and Further Reading

Throughout this book, we have made reference to other organisations and resources that we feel may support you further. We have listed the links to these in the References and Further Reading pages that follow the conclusion of this book.



*Self Confidence is a
superpower. Once you
start to believe in
yourself, magic starts
to happen.*

Author Unknown

Conclusion

“You’re braver than you believe, ~~s~~tronger than you may seem, AND SMARTER than you think.” – A.A. Milne

Our intention for this parents’ book was to support you as you support your children. We are acutely aware of the stress that many adults experience in their daily lives and unfortunately stress and mental ill health is on a steady increase in our children's lives.



Good mental health habits and a positive exploration of emotions can help to build healthy, happy, resilient and confident children and young adults. This series of books and their tools and techniques can help you to help your children — and you, yourself — to do this.

We genuinely hope that you will keep this book as a long-term resource that you can refer back to at any time.

Please remember the ethos of this book: roots and wings. We sincerely hope that we have contributed to helping you grow strong roots to support you and your family on your life’s journey, whilst also giving you the confidence to fly towards your highest dreams and ambitions.

Glossary

Adrenaline — A stress hormone that plays an important role in the fight or flight response by increasing blood flow to muscles, output of the heart etc.

Alarm Brain — The brain in defence mode, which shuts down smart brain and uses autopilot to protect you from danger.

Amygdala — A section of the brain that is responsible for detecting fear and preparing the body for emergency events.

Autopilot — Thinking, reacting and behaving automatically without engaging your smart brain.

Calm / Smart Brain — The brain when you're feeling calm and content, in full working order and fully present and correct.

Cortisol — A stress hormone produced when the body experiences a stress response.

Flight Zones — Five feeling zones that help children, using the Feelings Flight Path, to understand their feelings in each moment.

Magic Minutes — (8-12 years) Practices that help children to take control of your thoughts and emotions.

Neuroplasticity — The muscle building part of the brain, the things we do repeatedly form new pathways in the brain.

Oxytocin — The so-called cuddle hormone that releases happy feelings.

Piloting — Terminology used in the children's books to describe taking control of thoughts and behaviours using a range of navigation tools, such as Magic Minutes.

Sticky Situations — Terminology used in the children's books to denote moments of anger, frustration, worry, anxiety, feeling lost, etc. These are often hanging around when we're in autopilot mode.

SuperDooper You — When you have control and your smart brain or calm brain is ticking along nicely. You at your very best.

Switched Off You — When your alarm brain has taken over and is ruling the show, making you do silly things.

Tactical Manoeuvres — (12-16 years) Tools and techniques to help you take control of your thoughts and emotions.

The Emotional Compass — (12-16 years) A navigation tool for your feelings to check in and understand what emotions you're feeling.

The Feelings Flight Path — (8-12 years) A navigation tool for your feelings to check in as to which emotions you're feeling.

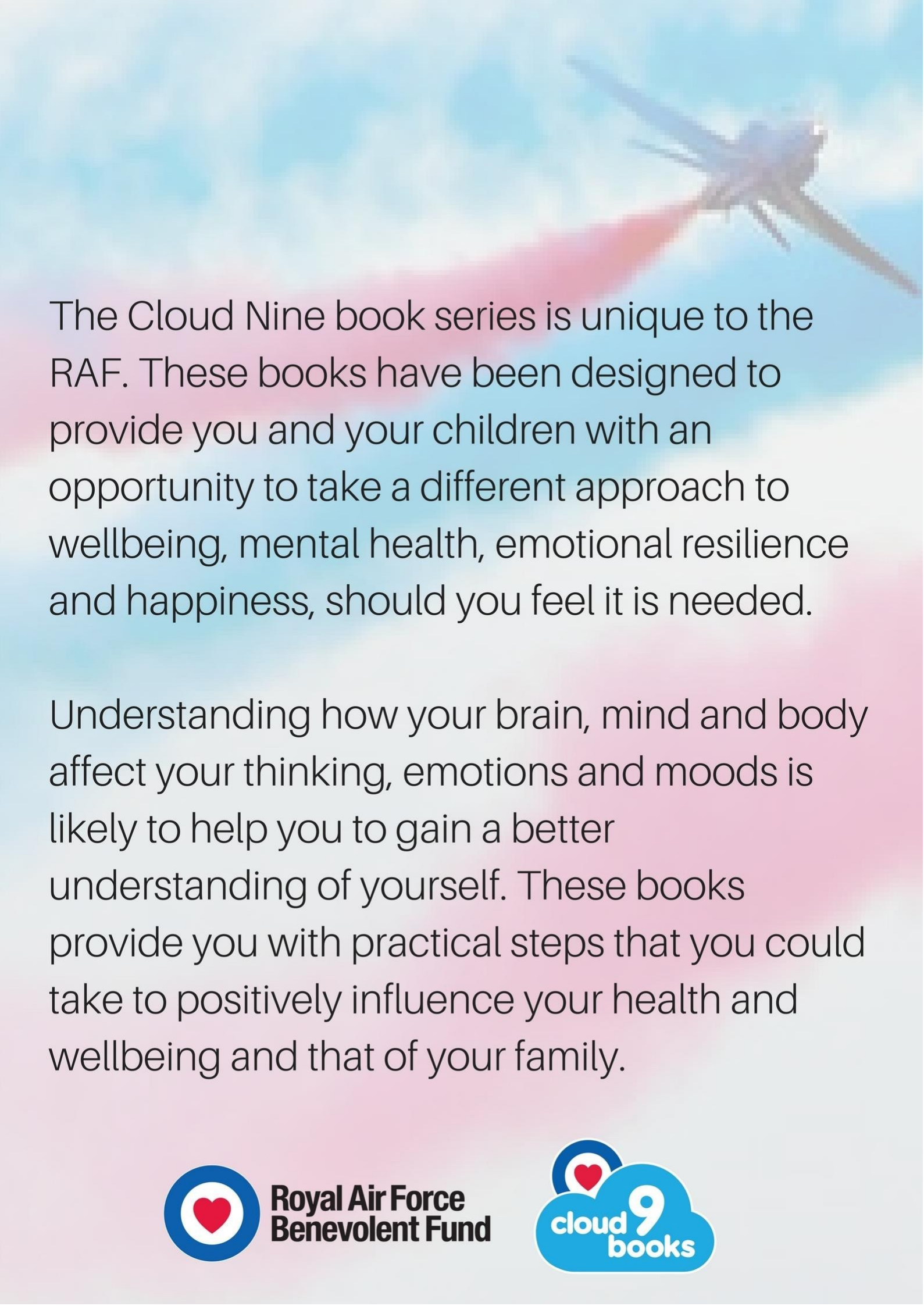
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Further Reading:

There are a few authors whose work we'd really recommend. You can find their names and details of where to find out more below.

- **Dan Siegel** is an internationally recognised educator, practising child psychiatrist and author of several books on parenting and child development. These include the New York Times Bestseller, *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain* (Penguin Random House, 2013). For more information, you can find his website at: www.drdansiegel.com.
- **John Gottman** is world-renowned researcher and writer, the author or co-author of over 200 published academic articles and more than 40 books, including the bestselling: *Raising An Emotionally Intelligent Child* (Simon & Schuster, 2011). For more information, you can find his website at: www.gottman.com/parents/products/?fwp_parenting_products=books-and-video-programs
- **Laura Markham** is the founder of Aha! Parenting. She trained as a Clinical Psychologist at Columbia University — but she's also a mom, so she understands kids and how tough it is to be a parent. For more information, you can find their website at: www.ahaparenting.com.
- **Virginia Ironside** is a British journalist, agony aunt and author. Her storybook, *The Huge Bag of Worries* (Hodder Children's Books, 2011), is a really helpful resource designed to help children confide their worries in other people.



The Cloud Nine book series is unique to the RAF. These books have been designed to provide you and your children with an opportunity to take a different approach to wellbeing, mental health, emotional resilience and happiness, should you feel it is needed.

Understanding how your brain, mind and body affect your thinking, emotions and moods is likely to help you to gain a better understanding of yourself. These books provide you with practical steps that you could take to positively influence your health and wellbeing and that of your family.



**Royal Air Force
Benevolent Fund**

