



I just want
to be...
ME!

“I just want to be...ME!” Workbook

“I Just Want To Be...Me!” - Workbook

It is recommended you read through the book at least once before starting on this workbook.

There are **four** kinds of activities:

- 1) Did you notice?- these questions just ask you to look carefully at a page and think about a part of it (though you might like to discuss it with somebody if you can).
- 2) What do you think?- these questions are about the story itself- for you to think about and to write a response.
- 3) Over to you – these are your chance to respond from your own experience. You might find you have some things in common with Holly.
- 4) Mindfulness Experiments. These are activities to try in your daily life away from the book. You can practice these as often as you like – you will probably notice different effects the more you do them.

This booklet can be printed, or filled in on-line. Just click in the grey area provided and type your answer.

Pages 6 & 7 - Did you notice the colours used at the start of the book compared to later in the story (when Holly finds herself on the boat)? What do you think that is suggesting?



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Over to you – Holly notices a number of unpleasant sensations in her body. Do these ever happen to you? Do you notice any other, different things happening to you? Rate how strongly or how often you experience these, where 10 = “I experience this a lot, very strongly”, 5 = “I experience this one sometimes, pretty strongly”, and 0 = “I don’t experience this feeling”. Don’t forget to rate any extra feelings you add.

Sick in the stomach:

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Lump in the throat :

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Tight chest:

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Heavy tired body:

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

I feel

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

I feel

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

Holly experiences her sensations in the morning before school. At what times or places are you **most** likely to experience yours?

When are yours the **least** likely to show up?

Pages 10-13 – Did you notice monster shapes starting to appear in the background, as Holly gets more and more caught up in her unhelpful thinking?

Hint- check the bushes!



Page 10 – Over to you: Holly has tried to talk to various people about how she feels, but she felt like nobody understood or wanted to listen. Has that been your experience?

No --- A little bit --- A bit --- Quite a lot --- Yes, a lot

This leads to Holly feeling she was the only one having these kinds of feelings.

Have you felt like that sometimes?

No --- A little bit --- A bit --- Quite a lot --- Yes, a lot

Pages 11 - 13 – Did you notice three things Holly didn’t notice on these pages? When we are so caught up in what is happening inside us, we can miss a lot of things in the outside world.

Mindfulness Experiment

Holly arrives at the seaside without knowing how she got there. Have you ever experienced anything like that? Have you been going somewhere, and been so caught up in your thoughts you weren’t “there” for the journey?
Mindfulness Experiment: Going on a Mindful Journey. You could try this next time you’re travelling in a car or bus, or even going for a walk or bike ride. Try to really be “there” on the trip – notice what you can see, hear, smell, touch and taste. See if you can notice when your mind hooks you with a thought – when it does (and it will! Again and again! But don’t worry, that’s normal) just gently unhook and go back to noticing things.

| I tried this on / / when I was | What I noticed |
|--------------------------------|----------------|
| | |



Page 14 – Did you notice? Holly realizes that the thing she did – run away – actually took her further away from the things that are important to her. This was an **urge**, and the thing about urges is they often make us feel a little better straight away when we act on them, but when we look at them in the long term, they aren’t making our lives any better.

Over to you – actually running away or leaving is one urge. Have you ever experienced this urge? Yes /No

What are some other urges people might have, that might make them feel a bit better in the short term, but not really help in the long term?

Page 23 – What do you think? Holly meets the monsters. There are 6 different kinds. Answer the questions below:

- 1) Emotions – what kinds of emotions has Holly been feeling?
- 2) Memories – we don’t get to see what unpleasant memories she is having – but using your imagination, what kind of things might she be remembering?
- 3) Thoughts – what kind of unhelpful thoughts has she been thinking?
- 4) Unpleasant sensations – what has she felt? Where?
- 5) Mental images of the future – what kind of things might she be picturing?
- 6) Strong urges – what urge have we seen her act on?

Do you think these were new things she has been feeling? How long do you think they have probably been turning up?



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Over to you. Have you had similar “monsters” turn up on your boat? Remember, at first Holly felt like she was the only one feeling like this – you might have been thinking the same way. In that case, it might seem hard to actually admit to these and write them down... but remember, it is ok for it to feel hard, let that feeling or thought flap there, make some space for it and do it anyway!

- 1) Emotions I have felt:
- 2) Memories I have had:
- 3) Unhelpful thoughts:
- 4) Unpleasant sensations:
- 5) Mental images:
- 6) Urges:

Did you notice when the monsters turned up? It was as soon as Holly tried to do something, rather than drift. This is very common. When we try something new, that is when a lot of doubt and fear is likely to show up.

Over to you – Have you noticed when some of your monsters have been most likely to show up? **Hint-** think of certain places, people or situations where ‘monsters’ might be lurking such as school, parties, etc.

Pages 24-27 – Over to you. When Holly first meets the monsters, one thing she does is give up for a while, and avoid sailing the boat so the monsters don’t come out for a while (but after a while, drifting doesn’t really help either). Trying to avoid things so we don’t feel bad is a very common thing for most of us – not just Holly! And the things we avoid are often connected to the very things we want in life. For example, we may really value having good friends but avoid going up and talking to new people because we worry they won’t like us (being rejected feels unpleasant) – so we don’t do the very thing that will help us head in the direction we want! How are we likely to feel then? Think about your own life now – are there things you have avoided or not done (even though it was connected to something important) so you hopefully don’t feel bad?



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What do you think? Another thing Holly does is try to fight the monsters. This is like when people struggle with unpleasant thoughts and feelings and try to force them out. What are the problems with that?

Over to you – Have you ever tried to not think about something? Yes/No
If “yes”, how successful was that over time?
Very ----- Kind of ----- Not very ----- Not at all

Some people go to the extreme of using alcohol and other drugs to try to avoid unpleasant thoughts and feelings. They may feel this works in the short term, but what are the long-term costs?

Page 32 Did you notice - the seagull explains to Holly that our minds spend a lot of time comparing us to others – and deciding we are not as good. The other thing our minds do is spend a lot of time going over mistakes from the past, or imagining things going wrong in the future.

Over to you – where does your mind tend to spend a lot of time?

Past mistakes: Not at all — a bit — quite a bit — lot of time

Future problems: Not at all — a bit — quite a bit — lot of time

Judging now: Not at all — a bit — quite a bit — lot of time



****Page 34 This is a very important page, with some very important ideas.**

Mindfulness Experiment. The next time your mind really hooks you with an unpleasant thought, become more **aware** of what is going on. Try repeating the points from this page to yourself:

Thoughts aren't necessarily the truth... we don't have to automatically believe them.

Thoughts aren't always important... if they are helpful, pay attention, but if they aren't, don't.

Thoughts aren't orders... we don't have to obey them.

Thoughts aren't always wise... we don't automatically have to follow their advice.

When you add this to your experience of those thoughts, notice what happens. You may sometimes find that the thoughts lose some of their power. You can add this to your earlier practice – notice what is also going on in the world around you while you are noticing these things about your thoughts.

Page 36 Over to you – the seagull shows Holly that everybody has their own unpleasant thoughts that bother them. She is amazed, because she thought she must be the only one. Did you know this?

I knew everyone is bothered I kind of knew I am also amazed

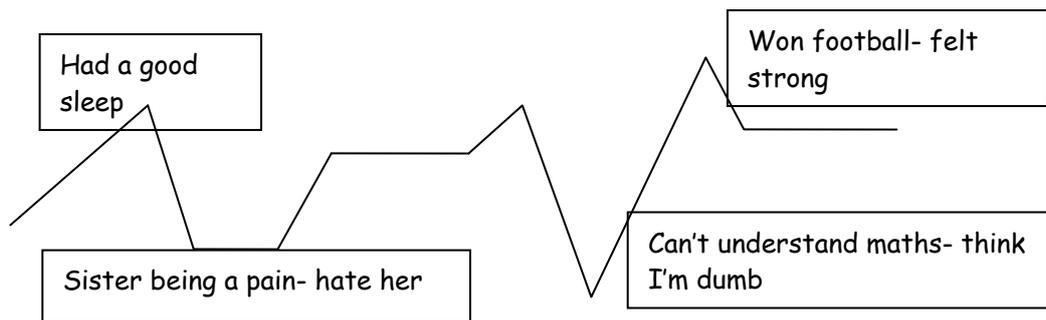
Page 37 What do you think? Why don't people tend to talk to friends or family about these kinds of thoughts and feelings?

Page 38 Did you notice that the seagull said you had to make room for the monsters, and be willing to have them there on the deck while you sail – he didn't say get rid of them.

Page 39 Did you notice that doesn't mean the monsters stay the same size – by following the seagull's advice these thoughts and feelings can get smaller, and some may go – the rest will be easier to handle.



Page 40 Over to you – the seagull talks about life being full of ups and downs. Problems arise when we only pay attention to the “downs”. You could pick a recent day and graph it in terms of ups and downs. Like this:



You can write in things that happened. Notice which monsters turned up. Notice what other kinds of thoughts turned up, too, when things improved. Notice that thoughts come and go.

Draw your day graph here:



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What’s the point? To train ourselves to notice the whole of our lives, not get too caught up just on the unpleasant parts. It is easy as humans to disregard the good things that happen, and the things we are grateful for. Taking time to remember them can help. You might be tempted to pick a day when it seemed like there was nothing but “down”, and we all have days like that. Yet even then, even if your line is just a straight, flat “down” line, there are probably things to be grateful for.

You could write under it “This is how I think I was feeling, but I am still grateful for

(think of at least one person, one thing from the natural world, one thing you own, one quality that you or someone you care about has- e.g. music, my dog, hot chips, my friend’s goofy laugh)

Page 41 [Over to you](#): There are real reasons why we can’t do something, and then there are excuses. Excuses can sometimes seem like they are real reasons. The test? Ask yourself: “If everything and everyone I care about really depended on me doing this, could I still do it, even though there is reason not to?” If the answer is “yes”, then it was just an excuse.

[Over to you](#)

Something I want to do is . A reason I haven’t yet is . Is it just an excuse? [apply the test] If yes, that means I could and also

For example:

Something I want to do is *exercise*. A reason I haven’t yet is *I feel too tired*. Is it just an excuse? [could I exercise, even though I feel tired, if everything I care about depended on it? *Yes*]. That means I could *exercise* and *feel tired*.

Pages 43 & 44 [Over to you](#) – pick an unpleasant thought of your own that comes up a lot, such as “I’m weak”. Notice what it feels like. Now try putting the words “I notice I’m having the thought that...” in front of it, like this:

“I notice I am having the thought that I’m weak”.

Notice how that feels. Was there a difference? Did noticing it was a thought create a bit of a gap between you and the thought? Try adding “Thanks, mind.” at the end, to add to the effect. This will be a skill you may need to keep practicing.

Pages 45 – 47 Many people, like Holly, are troubled by mental images of things going wrong. These “movies” can start to seem so real, but they are really just stories. Stories about the future may or may not be true – the question is, are they helpful to us right now? If not, defuse from them by trying the strategies.

[Over to you](#):



An image I get that bothers me is:

I notice it is a story my mind is telling me. I’m going to name it

“The Story”

(eg, it could be “The Lonely Me Story”, or “The What a Loser Story” etc).

Play around with the image. At least change one small part. (Eg, if there is a particular teacher you worry about getting angry at you, what if you imagined them doing it in a chicken outfit? Does it seem as real then?).

There are lots of other things you can try to get unstuck from unhelpful thoughts – like, imagine the thoughts are clouds, drifting across the sky. Or appearing as words on a computer screen, and you can change the size and colour. Or put the words of the thought to music, the sillier the better. Or imagine the thought being said in the voice of a cartoon character. Or anything else your imagination can come up with!

Pages 48-50 [Over to you](#): Pick a physical sensation you have sometimes that bothers you, like a tight chest, sick stomach, tense shoulders etc.

On the scale below, mark

i) how bad this feeling sometimes gets

0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4 --- 5 --- 6 --- 7 --- 8 --- 9 --- 10

ii) how low it sometimes gets

0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4 --- 5 --- 6 --- 7 --- 8 --- 9 --- 10

iii) how strong it is right now

0 --- 1 --- 2 --- 3 --- 4 --- 5 --- 6 --- 7 --- 8 --- 9 --- 10

(where 0 = not really there, 5 = fairly strong, 10 = very strong)

Now, use your imagination and draw it in the space below. First pick a colour or colours that you think suit it (if you have no colours, you can just use a pen or pencil) and draw what shape it is – is it round? Spiky? Moving or still? Hot or cold? Notice where it starts and stops.

Mindfulness Experiment

Now follow the seagull’s guidance to make some room for the feeling. Remember, you don’t have to like it or want it, this is about **making space** for it so it doesn’t bother you so much and get in the way.



First take a couple of deep, slow breaths, When you breathe out, gently push all the air out of your lungs and let them fill up naturally, with no effort. Next, when you breathe out, imagine your breath pouring around the outside of the sensation you drew. Next, imagine your breath flowing right through the sensation. Keep swapping between these two pictures as you breathe – your breath flows around the sensation, your breath flows through the sensation. Now, keep doing that, but we are going to use your imagination with your in-breath, too. The next time you breathe in, imagine your body opening up around that sensation in all directions. Breathe out. Breathe in again, and again imagine your body opening up and making space for that feeling. More and more space around it. Keep this up for a few minutes – breathing around and through the sensation, body opening up and making space for the feeling to be there.

This is a skill, and like all skills it takes practice. You may have noticed the sensation decreased. You may have noticed no change at all. What is important is continuing to practice – once upon a time you couldn’t walk, or ride a bicycle, but you kept practicing, no matter how often you fell, until you could do it.

Page 51 – The seagull reminds Holly that our minds are really amazing. What do you think? Now is probably a good time to think about some of the things your mind is good at. You could always ask people who know you and care about you what they think your mind is good at, too. Make a list – this is about being grateful again. **Hint-** think school stuff, but also creative, physical, social stuff too.

Pages 52 & 53 – Did you notice? The monsters didn’t all just disappear – some went, but others just got smaller. Can you imagine how life would be for you, if your monsters were all of a more manageable size? We’ll come back to this later.

Page 54 & 55 – Did you notice? The seagull points out to Holly that there will still be times when her family bugs her, or she fights with her friends, or when school is really tough – we can’t easily stop things like these happening, if they are out of our control. But we can be **more aware** of what we think and feel, and what urges these bring, and choose how we want to live in the face of these things happening. Over to you - what are some things outside of your control that will still probably continue to happen, even as you work at living the life you want? **Hint-** How much control do you have over how others behave?



Page 56 – Mindfulness Experiment. On this page, Holly gets into the present moment. We talked before about how we spend a lot of time not actually being where we are... Our minds are often full of memories about the past (often unpleasant), images of the future (again, often unpleasant), or if we are thinking about right now we are often making judgements about how we are going (usually, not good). Here we have Holly using her senses to notice what is going on for her **right now**.

This is a quick and easy mindfulness exercise you can carry out anywhere – outside, in your classroom, on a bus, even right now.

All you have to do is take some time to focus on each sense, and see what you notice.

You can do it this way:

Notice 5 things you can see right now. Take your time to look at them, maybe you notice something different about them, like the way the light plays across them, making it look like the colour changes slightly.

Notice 5 things you can hear. Take time to tune in to sounds nearby – which could even include the sounds of your own breathing – to sounds further away – can you hear distant birds, or traffic?

Notice 5 things you can feel touching you. A good one to start with is the feel of your feet on the ground. Press your feet down and feel that connection with the earth below you. You can also notice the temperature of the air on your skin, or maybe tune in to sensations you have stopped noticing, like the feeling of your shirt or dress across your shoulders.

Finally, take 10 seconds to just be there and try to notice all these things at once. Notice how your attention slips between things, from sounds to sights to feelings and back.

For advanced practice, while you are doing this, also keep an eye out for what thoughts come into your mind. When you notice a thought has hooked you, just notice it and see if you can let it go and come back to just noticing what you can see/hear/feel.

What’s the point? Being present means we can take in more information. Imagine a friend wants to tell you something really important, but you are stuck thinking about something else. Or you are in class about to take a test, but you are



worrying about something. These are examples of times being fully present in the moment would be more helpful, rather than being stuck in our heads.

It also helps you get better at noticing what your mind is doing. You can catch unhelpful thoughts in flight, before they land on you like a blindfold – you can catch them and let them flap at your side instead.

It also means you can enjoy what you are doing more, by being fully involved, rather than half there, half in your head thinking about other things.

Page 62 – [Did you notice?](#) This page is very important. You will notice that the unpleasant thoughts and feelings that were making Holly’s life so difficult are still there, but they don’t have the same impact on her or influence on what she does. She still doesn’t like them being there, but they don’t hold her back from doing what she wants – just being herself.

Notice that she makes some space for the unpleasant things, and also notices what else is going on, to get the full picture. She is in the moment, experiencing everything that is going on, as she lies in bed.

[So, one thing you can remember to try when things aren’t going so well is to notice what else is going on around you.]

Page 63 – [Did you notice?](#) While Holly is free to be herself, there are still monsters in the boat with her. Remember there is no way for any of us to be totally free of these monsters – but notice the difference between how they are shown here compared to when Holly first met them.

[Over to you](#) – what would you like to be doing in life if you weren’t being held back by your monsters?

What would you **start** to do?

What would you **stop** doing?

What would you do **more** of?

What would you do **less** of?

And, most importantly, **why** would you do or not do that? Why does this **matter** to you? [This part of the question is getting at what your values are – that is, the way you want to choose to live your life]



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Consider these areas of your life (you can change them, or add more, to suit you)

| | |
|---------|--------|
| Friends | Family |
| School | Self |

Apply the questions above to each of these areas. Write about what you would like to have happening, *and why*. Be as detailed as possible.

For example, you might write “Spend more time with friends, because that makes me feel good and I value close relationships with my friends”.

But remember, you are focusing on what *you* would do – if the old “well, I’d do *this* if they did *that* first” monster shows up, just notice it and focus back on what *you* can do.

Next:

Choose one area where a change – however small – would have an impact on your life. It has to be a change that **you** choose, that you can do (you’re allowed to ask for help, remember), in the next few days.

Going from feeling stuck to doing what is important to us is like climbing a flight of stairs – you don’t take just one step up to the top. You have to start with the first step.

There is a famous old quote that says “A journey of a thousand miles starts with one step.”

Have a look at the Action Plan on the next page. Filling it out might help you plan what you want to do, and prepare you for the sorts of monsters likely to show up as you do it. Remember, you can choose to find trusted others to help you with this, such as your school counsellor, a teacher etc.



You can use this plan as many times as you like, until doing it becomes something that happens automatically.

ACTION PLAN (based on Dr Russ Harris' Willingness and Action Plan):

GET READY!

- 1) My goal is

- 2) This is important to me because

GET SET!

- 3) Thoughts, feelings, sensations I am WILLING to have in order to achieve this goal are

- 4) People who could support me while I work on this goal

- 5) Things I might need to remember while I work on this goal (e.g. people who might not be so supportive, excuse-making)

GO!

- 6) The steps I can break this goal down into are

- 7) The first, easiest step I can take is

- 8) I'm going to take this step on (day) (date) (time)

- 9) I'm going to check in on how my goal is going on (day) (date) (time)

Signed:

Date:

IMPORTANT! If you check in on how you are going with your goal, and find that you've given up, or slacked off, or become caught in a thought trap about that goal



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(e.g. ‘It’s not really that important to me’, ‘What’s the point’, ‘It’s too hard’ etc), **THAT’S REALLY NORMAL!** Don’t give up- you might just need to readjust your goal and see what’s standing in the way.

Ask yourself these questions, then re-do your Action Plan if you need to.

- Have I set a goal that’s too big?
- Do I need to break this goal down into even smaller steps?
- Do I need some more support in doing this- and who do I choose?
- Be honest- am I getting caught up in thought traps here?! (Thank your mind for that!)
- Be honest again- am I avoiding working on this goal because of some of the uncomfortable thoughts, feelings and sensations I don’t want to have? (In that case, go back over some of the strategies in this workbook, or read the book again!)
- Have I picked a goal that truly is important to me?

Good luck! Tim and Sandra ☺

REMEMBER, if you are feeling like hurting yourself or others, or feeling like you are really confused, or just really worried about what you are feeling, please do ask for help. See your school counsellor, your family doctor, call Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800 (or go to www.kidshelp.com.au) or if things are really bad, go straight to your local hospital’s Accident and Emergency Department. *A workbook like this is no replacement for talking your problems over with someone.*

And remember- **NOTHING** is so bad we can’t talk it over with **SOMEBODY**.