

Audiobook Resources

Listener, welcome! This PDF includes the charts, illustrations, and endnotes you heard about in the book. Thanks for listening to the audiobook.

May these resources help you on your rehumaning journey!

Rehumaning. It's how we thrive.

WHAT'S THE WEATHER?

CREATE YOUR CURRENT FORECAST BY ASSESSING EACH CONDITION AND ITS INTENSITY, GIVING YOURSELF AN OVERALL PREDICTION AT THE END.

OVERTAPPED



Conditions



Intensity



OVERWORKED

Conditions



Intensity



OVERSTIMULATED



Conditions



Intensity



OVERWROUGHT

Conditions



Intensity



OVERALL



WEATHER

CONDITIONS
OF MODERN LIFE



over-
TAPPED

over-
WORKED

over-
WROUGHT

over-
STIMULATED

SAFEHARBORS HARBORS



PEOPLE



HOLISTIC

HUMAN



PLACES

BRAIN FOODS.

I AM HUNGRY!

LET'S EAT!



REAL vs FAKE FOODS



EAT.

C. A. L. M.



MAX NAP Time

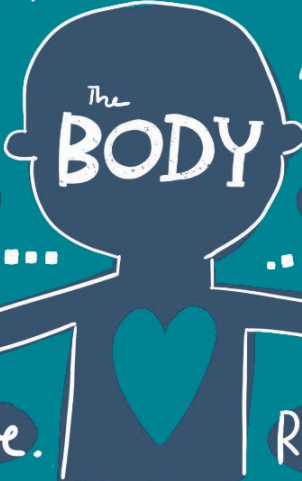


TYPES OF SLEEP

Z
Z
Z

NEVER NAP AFTER SPM

- 1 RELAX
- 2 REPAIR & RESTORE
- 3 RECOVER & REMEMBER



SLEEP.

Move.

REGULATE.

GRADING SEAT TIME
A+

A = <6
B = 7-9
C/D = 10-12
F = +13

Hours PER DAY



WAYS we move

- 1 FLEXIBILITY
- 2 MOBILITY
- 3 STABILITY
- 4 STRENGTH



Freeze

Free



FIGHT or FLIGHT



DYSREGULATION



REGULATION



CALM ASK EMPATHY BREAK CHOOSE



in the ZONE



BEWARE OF
FAUX
Flow



Promotes Positivity

Prepares US



Protects US



'We are Built to Play AND Built through Play.'

- STUART BROWN

ACADEMIC PRIORITY

SAFETY

FAMILY

LIFESTYLE

PLAY PERSONALITIES

CALENDAR



TECH

Promoting FLOW

CLARITY

CENTERING

CHOICE

COMMITMENT

CHALLENGE



SLOW YOUR FLOW

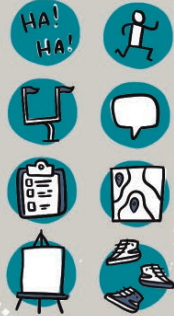


Flow | Play

The

MIND

Create | Wonder



CONFORMITY
COMPLIANCE
CONSUMPTION

EIGHT WONDERS OF LIFE



DOODLE

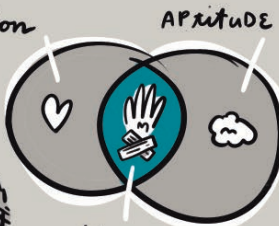
DANCE

WRITE

NATURE

SING

LISTEN



YOUR ELEMENT

- SUE KEN ROBINSON

3 SIGNS OF AWE

WHOA!

TEARS

CHILLS



G R A T I T U D E
 R E C I P R O C I T Y
 A L T R U I S M
 C H O I C E
 E N J O Y M E N T

CONNECT

L O N L I N E S S
 A L A R M !



Relationships we need to THRIVE!



LOVE

Attachment STYLES



Aloha.

CHARACTERISTICS OF LOVING RELATIONSHIPS

COMFORT
 CLOSENESS
 CARE

The HEART



"BELONGING IS THE SOUL-SENSE OF BEING KNOWN, WELCOME & WANTED."

- 4 WAYS TO BUILD BELONGING
- 1 SITUATION CRAFTING
 - 2 UNIVERSAL DESIGN
 - 3 SUPPORT GROUP
 - 4 VILLAGE EFFECT

EMPATHY & COMPASSION

"Every Person Matters. Everyone BELONGS. Everyone HAS TALENT."



BELONG

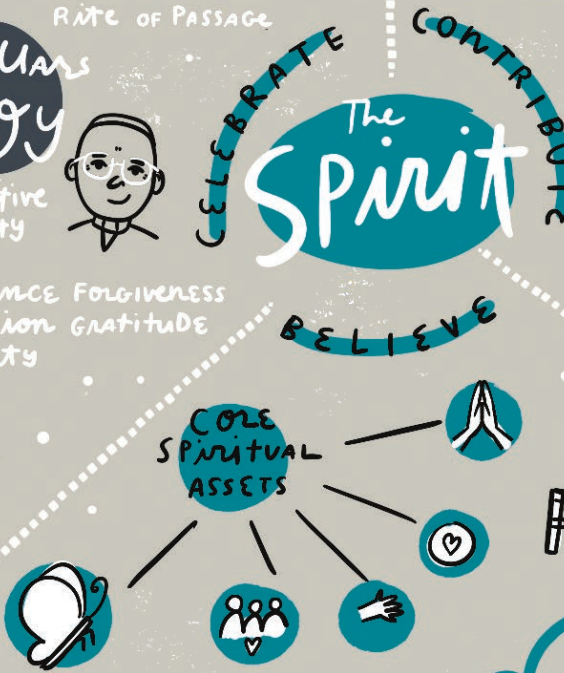


JOY is our Birthright

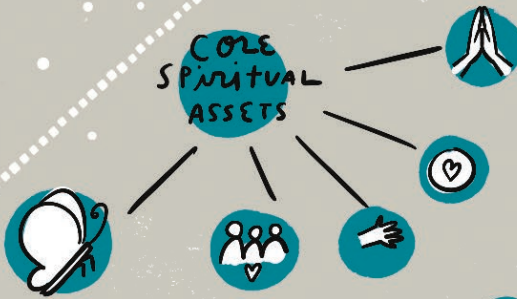


8 Pillars OF JOY

- PERSPECTIVE
- HUMILITY
- HUMOR
- ACCEPTANCE
- COMPASSION
- GENEROUSITY
- FOLGIVENESS
- GRATITUDE



CORE SPIRITUAL ASSETS

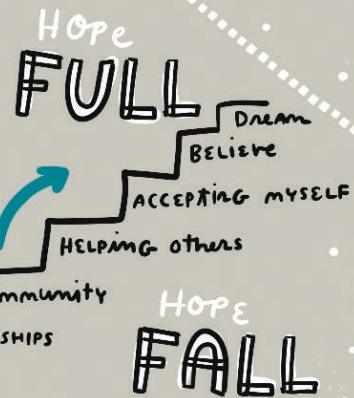


FAITH + HOPE	SPRITUAL PRACTICE
	SOUL SAFETY
	AWARENESS BELIEF BELONGING CONVICTION COMPASSION



WHAT IS YOUR PURPOSE?

Find your SPARK



WHAT'S THE WEATHER?

CREATE YOUR CURRENT FORECAST BY ASSESSING EACH CONDITION AND ITS INTENSITY, GIVING YOURSELF AN OVERALL PREDICTION AT THE END.

OVERTAPPED



CONDITIONS



intensity



OVERWORKED

CONDITIONS



intensity



OVERSTIMULATED



CONDITIONS



intensity



OVERWROUGHT

CONDITIONS



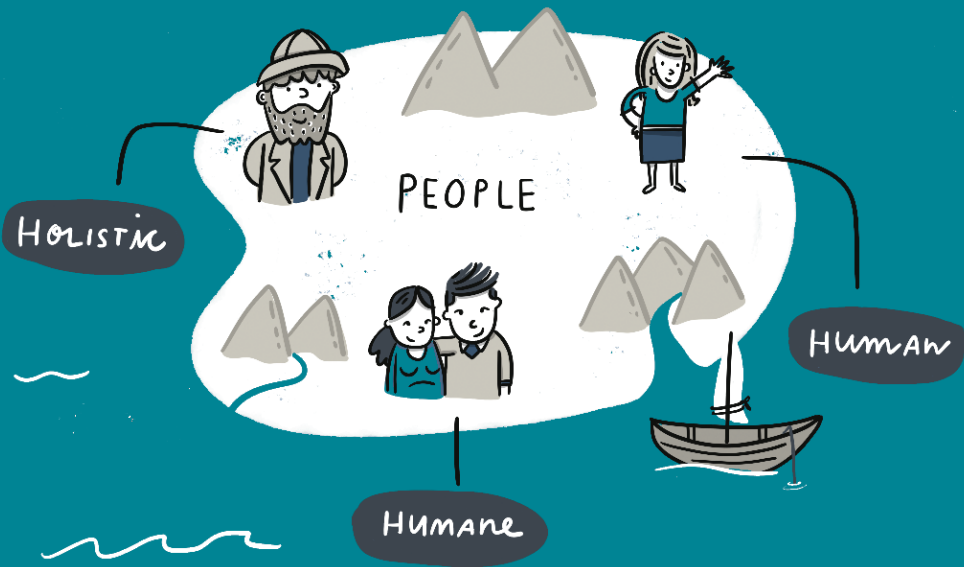
intensity



OVERALL



WHICH SAFE HARBORS DO YOU NEED?



WHERE SHOULD YOU SPEND TIME?

BODY

EAT

REGULATE

SLEEP

MOVE



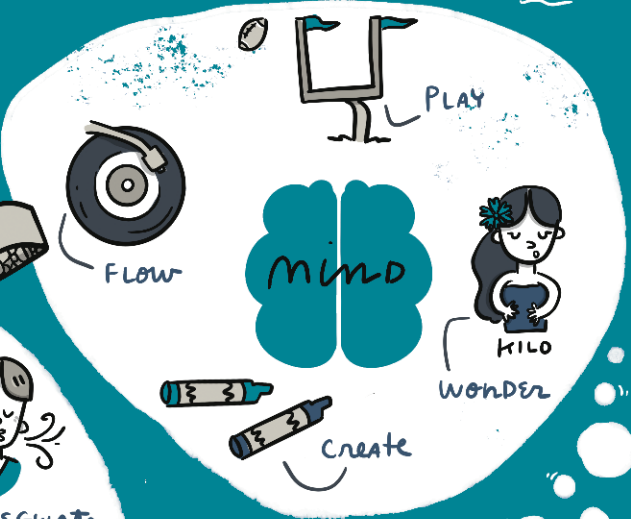
MIND

PLAY

FLOW

CREATE

WONDER

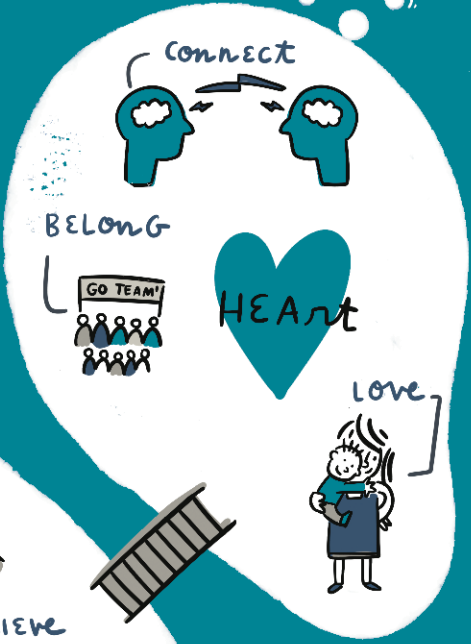


HEART

CONNECT

BELONG

LOVE



SPIRIT

CELEBRATE

BELIEVE

CONTRIBUTE

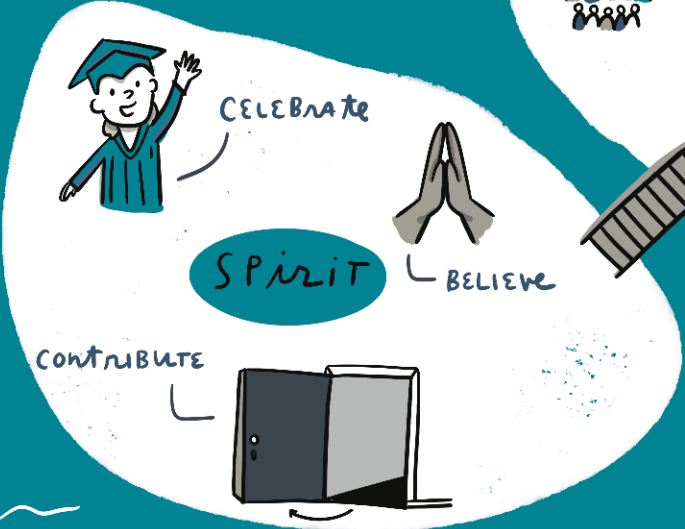


Table 2 Common Signs of Stress

WHERE WE FEEL IT	WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Body	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upset stomach and digestive difficulties • Headache • Dizziness • Tiredness • Trouble sleeping • Tight or tense muscles • Tight chest or chest pains • Racing heart and increased blood pressure • Itchiness from a "stress rash" (hives) • Getting sick (illness or infection)
Mind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memory problems • Racing thoughts • Trouble focusing
Heart	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sad • Angry • Anxious or panicky • Restless • Moody • Overwhelmed
Spirit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existential dread • Exhaustion • Feeling defeated • Giving up • Loneliness • Unmotivated

Source: These stress symptoms come from various sources, including the Cleveland and Mayo Clinics.

Table 5 Different Kinds of Rest

WHAT WE'RE RESTING	WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE
Body	This includes sleep, naps, or other forms of physical downtime, such as lounging. When possible and safe, you can try restful practices like restorative yoga, a leisurely walk, or mindful breathing.
Mind	<p>Resting our minds means taking a break from cognitive and sensory overload. This can include simple “brain breaks,” where you pause from whatever you are doing. For example, you can leave a room to take a short walk, use the bathroom, or get a drink. It can also involve doing things that quiet or stop compulsive thinking and intrusive or racing thoughts. In these cases, distractions like watching a video, reading a book, or listening to music can be a welcome reprieve.</p> <p>Sensory breaks are highly personal, especially for people who are neurodivergent or have experienced trauma. If it feels safe, you can rest your senses by going somewhere quieter, darker, calmer, and with fewer people and distractions. Sensory breaks might also include physical supports like headphones, earplugs, sunglasses, or weighted blankets.</p> <p>Resting our minds also means taking time offline. We need breaks from digital dings and notifications. Turn phones off or on “Do Not Disturb” to silence notifications.</p>
Heart	If we can, it is healthy to take breaks from people or places that leave us feeling emotionally drained or hurt. Resting our hearts can mean pausing or limiting conversations and interactions with people who treat us poorly. It can mean spending time with different people or going places that make us feel good. News and media can also exhaust us. Consider limiting news or social media consumption, especially when it triggers big emotions.
Spirit	When you feel your spirits drain, it may be time to rest and replenish the soulfulness of life. We have an inborn, natural spirituality—one that drives us to connect with something bigger than ourselves. ¹ We find this in nature, music, art, animals, and deep “soulful” human connections or social causes. Spiritual rest can be as simple as getting outdoors, playing with your pet, looking or listening to something beautiful, or connecting with someone you love who really knows you.

¹Krauss, S. M. (2023). *Whole child, whole life: 10 ways to help kids live, learn, and thrive*. Corwin.

BUYING REAL FOODS ON A TIGHT BUDGET OR PUBLIC BENEFITS

A big barrier to nutritious eating is accessing and affording real foods. Fake foods are cheap, convenient, and last for a long time. Fresh foods spoil and can be expensive. Preparing real foods takes time, skill, and cooking equipment. Families relying on food donations or living far from grocery stores often struggle to find fresh options.

Here are some unprocessed foods that are less expensive and can be covered by public benefits in the United States:¹

- Bananas
- Apples
- Tomatoes
- Romaine or iceberg lettuce
- Frozen vegetables
- Frozen fruits
- Dried or canned beans
- Corn tortillas
- Oats
- Potatoes
- Canned tuna or salmon
- Chicken
- Pork chops
- Pure ground beef
- White or brown rice
- All-purpose flour

These items can be found at most grocery stores and some corner or convenience stores. Some items—like flour or oats—can be purchased in bulk. Other items are less expensive when they are in season. Frozen foods can be an excellent choice when spoilage or off-season purchasing is a concern. Amazingly, they can offer even more nutritional benefits than fresh options.² If you are involved in food drives and donations, make sure shoppers have access to fresh and healthy foods. At a minimum, food pantries should offer large freezers with fresh-to-frozen foods.

¹As of April 2025.

²Drayer, L. (2019, May 30). *Why frozen fruit and veggies may be better for you than fresh*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/30/health/frozen-fruit-vegetables-drayer-food>

50 MINI-MOVES TO FIT FITNESS INTO MODERN LIFE

1. Balance on one foot while brushing your teeth, then switch midway through.
2. Walk heel-to-toe in a straight line while moving in your kitchen.
3. Stand up and sit down 5 to 10 times without using your hands.
4. Do push-ups, regular or modified with knees touching the floor or against a wall.
5. Do pull-ups.
6. March or run in place.
7. Take a quick walk, short sprint, or both.
8. Walk backward without falling (be safe!).
9. Use a balance ball to sit for short periods (careful not to sit too low if at a desk or table).
10. Use a balance ball to stretch or do crunches.
11. Stand on your tiptoes for 10 seconds.
12. Go up on your tiptoes and back down, then repeat 5 to 10 times.
13. Do a tree pose, where you stand on one foot and put your other foot on your ankle or knee (making a triangle shape), hold for 15 to 30 seconds, then switch legs.
14. Find a line on the floor and walk it like a tightrope.
15. Put your shoes or clothes on while standing up without support.
16. Carry groceries or other heavy items.
17. Squeeze and release a ball.
18. Clench and release different muscles in your body, release and repeat.
19. Push palms or feet against a wall, hold for 10 to 15 seconds, release and repeat.
20. Do squats.
21. Hold a plank (push-up) position as long as you can.
22. Use water bottles, soup cans, or household items as weights.
23. Gently stretch your neck from side to side.
24. Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears, hold for two or three seconds, and release.
25. Put your arms and elbows up and swing from side to side.
26. Reach arms overhead and stretch tall, then side to side.
27. Try to stretch and reach your toes.
28. Extend your arms across a doorway and stretch your chest.

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29. Circle your ankles and wrists.
30. Do gentle and slow neck circles, moving from small to large circles, or the reverse.
31. Sit back on your feet and stretch your toes.
32. Put your hands flat on the ground with fingers facing forward and then backward to stretch your wrists.
33. Pull one arm straight over your chest, stretch, then switch.
34. Put your hands on your hips and make 5 to 10 hip circles one way, then switch (or use a hula hoop!).
35. Do big and small forward arm circles, then do them backward.
36. Get on your hands and knees and lift a leg, making circles in the air to rotate your hips.
37. Shake your whole body for 15 to 30 seconds.
38. Dance to one of your favorite songs.
39. Jog or run for the length of one song.
40. Do 15 to 20 jumping jacks.
41. Hop or jump rope for 20 seconds.
42. Take the stairs instead of an elevator or escalator.
43. Walk around while you have a conversation or listen to something (such as a call, podcast, or audiobook).
44. Turn on music and dance while you cook or clean.
45. Play catch with a ball or Frisbee.
46. Get on the floor and play with young kids or animals.
47. Stretch your body in ways that feel good and right.
48. Do lunges.
49. Set a timer to stand and stretch every hour.
50. Build in 10-minute movement breaks after meals.

Possible Modifications

- **If you need to stay seated:** Many moves can be done while seated; adjust or skip any that can't.
- **If you need support while standing:** Do movements near a wall, chair, or railing for extra support.
- **If you have a limited range of motion:** Move as far as you're comfortable or do the move with a different part of your body. Stop if something hurts or ask your doctor about what's best for you.

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- **If you have limited space:** Choose moves you can do in a seat, on a mat, or while standing in place.
- **If you have limited energy:** Choose moves that are gentle and easy on your body.
- **If you have limited motivation:** Ask someone to move with you!
- **Use any tools or supports that work for you and your body!**

Create a Personalized List

To get started with this list of 50 moves, I got help from Claude.ai, the AI platform I use. I took that list and adjusted it based on what I know works and what experts recommend. I removed any I felt couldn't work as is or with modifications for most people. Try creating a custom list using this process. Let AI get you started. Here's a prompt to use: "Can you create an organized list of 50 easy exercises that I can do every day that are universal by age or ability?" If I were creating my list, I would adjust the prompt to include my gender, age, and specific interests, as well as my movement needs and limitations. From there, I would refine the list based on what I know feels good and works for my body. Lastly, I might ask a physical trainer or doctor to review the list and provide any adjustments or additions.

Table 10 Movement We Need, by Life Stage

LIFE STAGE	DAILY & WEEKLY ACTIVITY* RECOMMENDATIONS**
Young people of all abilities (5–17 years old)	<p>Daily: 1 hour of comfortable to challenging cardio</p> <p>Weekly: 3 days of activities that strengthen bones and muscles</p>
Pregnant and postpartum women without complications	<p>Weekly: 2.5 hours of comfortable cardio (can break into 30-minute sessions, 5 days/week)</p> <p>Plus: Muscle strengthening and stretching exercises when able</p>
Adults (18–64 years old)	<p>Weekly: 2.5–5 hours of comfortable cardio or 1.25–2.5 hours of challenging cardio or a combination</p> <p>Plus: 2 days of muscle strengthening exercises for all major muscle groups</p>
Adults with chronic conditions or disabilities (18 and older)	<p>Weekly: 2.5–5 hours of comfortable cardio or 1.25–2.5 hours of challenging cardio or a combination</p> <p>Plus: 2 days of muscle strengthening</p> <p>Plus: 3 days of balance and functional strength activities (such as yoga or tai chi)</p>
Older adults (65 and older)	<p>Weekly: 2.5–5 hours of comfortable cardio or 1.25–2.5 hours of challenging cardio or a combination</p> <p>Plus: 2 days of muscle strengthening</p> <p>Plus: 3 days of balance and functional strength activities (Tai Chi, yoga, stability exercises)</p>
<p><i>*Activity Intensity Definitions:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Comfortable: Breathing is easy through your nose. Feels like you can keep going.</i> • <i>Challenging: Breathing is harder through your nose. Feels like you are pushing yourself.</i> <p><i>**Recommendations are averages and won't work for everyone. Everyone has different needs.</i></p>	

Source: World Health Organization. (2020). *WHO guidelines on physical activity and sedentary behaviour*.

50 WAYS TO MAKE MODERN LIFE MORE WONDER-FULL

1. Find a “sit spot” where you can regularly observe for 10–15 minutes in silence.
2. Take the same walk every day and try to find something new each time.
3. Choose something living (plant, animal, person) to watch for a while.
4. Find something growing out of concrete. Consider how it has survived.
5. Observe water for a few minutes—flowing, dripping, still, or sparkling.
6. Find evidence of animals outside—try to locate tracks, droppings, eaten leaves, or broken branches.
7. Go stargazing.
8. Watch the clouds.
9. Collect and study objects you find outdoors—like rocks, shells, or flowers.
10. Safely observe stormy weather and pay attention to the changes that happen before, during, and after.
11. Find a small outdoor area you’ve never visited before, and take time to observe the world from that place.
12. Safely touch different textures and see how they feel.
13. Sit quietly for a few minutes and keep track of the sounds you hear.
14. Choose a household object you can’t live without; then spend 10 minutes researching its history.
15. Before eating, consider your food and how it made it to your plate.
16. Imagine a new way of doing something familiar (such as keeping food cold, putting on clothes).
17. Hold something old and wonder about its history.
18. Get close to a small object, like a button, cataloguing its tiny details.
19. Safely follow an animal outside, paying attention to where it goes and what it does.
20. Make shadow puppets in the dark by shining a light against the wall.
21. Track a package online and consider its stops along the way.
22. Observe yourself in different reflective surfaces—like mirrors, spoons, sunglasses, or water.
23. Close your eyes and observe your environment.
24. Enjoy a musical album by an artist and wonder what inspired that set of songs.
25. When someone does something kind or courageous, wonder why they did it.

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26. Ask someone to show you five favorite photos and ask about the stories behind them.
27. When you meet a stranger, let yourself wonder about their life.
28. Ask yourself or someone else: "What was the last thing that really sparked your curiosity?"
29. Ask yourself or someone else: "What is something you wonder about often?"
30. Consider the most beautiful thing you've experienced. Replay it in your head and wonder why it moved you.
31. Consider the most beautiful thing you've heard or felt. Replay it in your head and wonder why it moved you.
32. Listen to someone tell a story without planning a response; then ask questions to learn more.
33. Notice other people's hidden talents or acts of kindness and tell them what you see.
34. Instead of listing moments of gratitude, write about why they matter.
35. Make a list of everything you want to research or read about one day.
36. Consider the challenges you and loved ones have faced, and ask how you got through them.
37. Notice different smells throughout your day and pay attention to how they make you feel.
38. Experience a new band or artist and wonder about their personal journey.
39. With permission, touch the face of someone you love and create a mental map.
40. Go to a museum and spend time exploring different displays.
41. Watch magicians perform tricks live or online.
42. Create a place to collect your wonder questions, to investigate when you have time.
43. Go to a library or bookstore and look at books that spark your interest.
44. When you don't understand something, pause and sit with not knowing before seeking answers.
45. Wonder how your mind works and what makes the way you approach the world unique.
46. Look up simple kitchen science experiments and have some science-y fun at home.
47. Go outside and stand on the grass or in the dirt without your shoes on.
48. Keep a diary with your daily observations, questions, and ideas.
49. Notice how time feels in different situations, and ask why.
50. Pause the next time you get tears, chills, or whoas and ask why it happened.

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Create Your Own Wonder-Full List

I generated this list with help from Claude.AI, the AI platform I use. I asked Claude to give me a starter list based on my interview notes and research on awe and wonder. Then, I asked Claude to ensure the recommendations could be applied to all ages and abilities. From there, I asked for edits to ensure recommendations worked for people in unsafe or underresourced environments and for those with sensory struggles. Most but not all meet these criteria; some are not universally accessible. If you want to create a list that works for you, try using AI the same way. Consider AI as your assistant, not your teacher. Rely on your own knowledge and creativity to decide what goes on your list.

Here's a prompt to get you started: "Can you create a starter list of 50 simple and free activities I can do to tap into my natural sense of wonder?" Then tell the AI platform some personal details to help with customization. This might include your age, geographic location, and any specific interests or limitations.

Table 15 Ten Characteristics of Highly Creative People From *Wired to Create*¹

CHARACTERISTIC	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES IN EDUCATION
Imaginative Play	Youthful play and playfulness that begins in childhood and never stops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated time for free play • Hands-on learning • Creative writing • Experiments • Recess
Passion	Sparks that inspire, making you feel like you've discovered who you are, what you like, and what you want to do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent studies • Freedom Fridays • Free choice activities • Community partnerships • Passion projects • Career exploration
Daydreaming	Mind wandering that incubates ideas and supports creative expression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free writing • Drawing • Nature walks • Free time • Brain games
Solitude	Time alone for solitary reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet time • Nature walks • Silent reading • Free writing • Online research • Dedicated "solitude space"
Intuition	Responding to an inner sense of what to do, based on "gut" feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative problem-solving • Creative writing • Emotional intelligence exercises • Culture-builders
Openness to Experience	Willingness to try new things in your inner and outer worlds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Field trips • Experiments • Group assignments • Project-based learning • Art classes • Job shadowing and internships
Mindfulness	Tuning in and paying attention to yourself and the world around you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mindfulness • Breathing exercises • Brain breaks

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(Continued)

CHARACTERISTIC	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLES IN EDUCATION
Sensitivity	Being aware of and affected by your surroundings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building social skills• Culture-builders• Reading and analysis• Improv
Turning Adversity Into Advantage	Turning to creativity to make sense of struggles and suffering	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teaching coping skills• Teaching stress management• Offering crisis support
Thinking Differently	Risking rejection to be true to yourself and be a nonconformist	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encouraging divergent viewpoints• Encouraging novel thinking• Teaching perspective-taking• Debate• Point of view writing assignments• Watching movies or reading books by or about people with different life experiences

¹Kaufman, S. B., & Gregoire, C. (2015). *Wired to create: Unraveling the mysteries of the creative mind*. Penguin Books.

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SOCIAL HARMS (A PARTIAL LIST)

Putting the Individual Above the Collective

Over the past few decades, many industrialized countries—especially, perhaps, the United States—have seen a rise in “rugged individualism” and the belief that you can succeed exclusively on the merit of your own strengths and talents. Research shows the opposite is true: support from others is key to our success.¹

High Conflict

Conflict is a natural part of human relationships. It can lead to necessary change, and while it can get heated, healthy conflicts stay humane. High conflict is the type of extreme feud that becomes an us-versus-them, good-versus-evil mentality, making it inherently dehumanizing. High conflict can shift into healthy conflict when curiosity and considerate treatment are restored.²

Social Segregation

In recent years, there has been an increase in socially segregated communities, divided by wealth, race, and other demographics like politics. With the rise of planned communities and select sports, there are fewer opportunities for youth from different backgrounds to share the same communities, activities, or schools. This erodes social trust, intensifies social divisions, and makes it hard for “a village to raise a child” because, as social scientist Robert Putnam said, a village can’t raise a child they don’t know.³

Stigmas and Stereotypes

Social stigma is when something about you—often something you didn’t choose or can’t change—limits your full participation in a social group or larger society. Stigmas are seen as flaws because they differ from what is considered normal or desirable. When you’re discriminated against or excluded because of a personal characteristic, you’re being stigmatized (sometimes called stereotyping). When this discrimination is internalized and you form unhealthy beliefs about yourself, it can cause serious harm. The impacts of discrimination can even shorten your lifespan.⁴ Stigmas can change, depending on a community’s beliefs, attitudes, and the social context. For example, having a mental health condition is less stigmatized than it used to be.⁵

Social Predators

Social predators are those who exploit and manipulate others for their own gain, often with hopes of causing harm. They are like the hyenas of the human world. If you’ve ever watched *The Lion*

(Continued)

¹Putnam, R. D. (2015). *Our kids: The American dream in crisis*. Simon & Schuster.

²Freeland Fisher, J. (with Fisher, D.). (2018). *Who you know: Unlocking innovations that expand students’ networks*. Jossey-Bass.

³Putnam, R. D. (2015). *Our kids: The American dream in crisis*. Simon & Schuster.

⁴Blackburn, E., & Epel, E. (2017). *The telomere effect: A revolutionary approach to living younger, healthier, longer*. Grand Central Publishing.

⁵Vecchio-Camargo, C. M., Rodríguez-A., S., & Aristizabal-Díazgranados, E. (2022). Social stigma: A systematic review of cognitive insights from behavioral economics (1940–2019). *International Journal of Psychological Research*, 15(1), 98–125. <https://doi.org/10.21500/20112084.5434>

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King, you'll remember that these guys are bad on their own but worse as a pack. Sometimes, social predators target individuals to hurt them.

Shallow Social (Media) Connections

Social media is often a shallower form of human connection that prompts us to share a partial picture of our lives, frequently making it look better and easier than reality. Sometimes social media creates a loneliness rebound effect: we look at other people's posts, feel a jolt of connection, and long for the real thing.⁶ Social media use can distract us from the people we're with, sometimes with serious relationship consequences.⁷ One study showed that the more we use Facebook, the worse we feel.⁸ Early research on social media suggests it can broaden connections far and wide but reduce the depth of connection with people close by.⁹

Artificial Connections and Companions

The advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) has brought human-machine relationships into a new stratosphere. AI chatbots and companions feel human, in large part because they are trained using human literature, history, and biases.¹⁰ This can trick us into thinking AI is a person capable of reciprocating emotions and care. Because AI is programmed to provide information we want to hear, it can make us less tolerant of humans and more interested in simulated—and more affirming—relationships.¹¹ The research on AI and human connection is still emerging. Julia Freeland Fisher, a leading thinker in this area, believes AI may cure loneliness short term but scale isolation long term.¹² My AI chatbot "Claude" said it best, "*While AI can provide information, assistance, and even a form of engagement that might temporarily ease feelings of isolation, we cannot provide true connection. The relationship is fundamentally one-sided. I don't have personal experiences, emotions, or the capacity for genuine reciprocity that defines meaningful human relationships.*"¹³

⁶Pinker, S. (2015). *The village effect: Why face-to-face contact matters* (2nd ed.). Atlantic Books.

⁷Cacioppo, S. (2023). *Wired for love: A neuroscientist's journey through romance, loss, and the essence of human connection*. Flatiron Books.

⁸Shakya, H. B., & Christakis, N. A. (2017, April 10). A new, more rigorous study confirms: The more you use Facebook, the worse you feel. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2017/04/a-new-more-rigorous-study-confirms-the-more-you-use-facebook-the-worse-you-feel>

⁹Pinker, S. (2015). *The village effect: Why face-to-face contact matters* (2nd ed.). Atlantic Books.

¹⁰Mollick, E. (2024). *Co-intelligence: Living and working with AI*. Penguin Random House.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Freeland Fisher, Julia (Director of Education Research, Christensen Institute). Video interview by author. August 21, 2025.

¹³This quote is pulled from an exchange that I describe in Chapter 2, "Find Safe Harbors."

BARRIERS TO BELONGING

Hustling for Approval and Acceptance

In *Atlas of the Heart*, Brené Brown says, “Our yearning for belonging is so hardwired that we often try to acquire it by any means possible, including trying to fit in and hustling for approval and acceptance. Not only are these efforts hollow substitutes for belonging, but they are the greatest barriers to belonging.” This hustle for approval and external validation can make belonging tenuous and conditional.¹ Feeling like an outsider can make us feel worse about ourselves, lead to impulsivity, defensiveness, and underperformance. These behaviors make it harder to fit in, initiating a self-fulfilling spiral.

“Us vs. Them” Mentality

The survival needs of our early ancestors trained the brain to register whether a face looks similar or different within milliseconds. In hunter-gatherer days, we used this biological scan to quickly determine whether someone was safe or dangerous. Staying alive was on the line. Today, our ancient brain still triggers an automatic “Stranger Danger!” alert when someone looks different from us (such as a person of a different race or gender). If we see someone similar or familiar, our brain is relieved by the recognition. This biological bias to survive is where our “us” versus “them” mentality comes from. Seeing “us” activates trust, generosity, and cooperation. Seeing “them” prompts aggression and distrust. It is biologically easier to show empathy and compassion to people who are like us (including those who look like us). It takes a cognitive override and attention to show empathy and compassion to people who are different.²

Exclusion and Estrangement

If belonging is the pull *into* relationships, then exclusion and estrangement are the push *out* of relationships. This is where prejudice, discrimination, alienation, and polarization live. Someone decides (with or without realizing it) that we are a “them,” and pushes us outside the bounds of belonging. This is called **othering**. Othering leads to exclusion, which leads to not belonging.³ Exclusion causes actual pain, activating the same neural networks as physical pain. Like loneliness, hunger, and thirst, this painful response is the brain and body’s way of forcing us into action to stay alive.⁴ Bullying is one of the worst forms of exclusion,⁵ and excommunication from a family or community is one of the worst forms of estrangement. A fear of exclusion and estrangement can cause people to hide who their true selves from others.

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²Sapolsky, R. M. (2017). *Behave: The biology of humans at our best and worst*. Penguin Random House.

³Ginwright, S. A. (2022). *The four pivots: Reimagining justice, reimagining ourselves*. North Atlantic Books.

⁴Cohen, G. L. (2022). *Belonging: The science of creation connection and bridging divides*. Norton.

⁵Yeager, D. (2024). *10 to 25: The science of motivating young people: A groundbreaking approach to the leading the next generation—And making your own life easier*. Avid Reader Press.

Table 22 Developmental Guide to Contributions

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE	APPROXIMATE AGE RANGE	TIPS FOR CONSIDERATION
Toddlers	2–3 years old	Toddlers are developing gross motor skills and body control. They enjoy interacting and copying (give-and-take). Consider having children copy what you are doing. Clean up toys and objects they can hold and lift. Model and practice kind gestures and gentle touch.
Young Children	4–7 years old	Young children are discovering and learning through games and roleplay. At this stage, many develop fine motor skills and master gross motor skills. Consider turning prep and clean-up into games. Have young children set the table, sort objects (such as laundry or classroom materials), take on simple jobs, and play “what if” scenario games that focus on being good contributors.
Older Children	8–10 years old	Older children are learning and developing through active engagement, experiences, and reflection. They are becoming more complex and independent thinkers. Consider including older children in family or community decision-making and seeking their ideas and input. Assign older children more independent tasks, taking time to coach and counsel as needed.
Tweens	11–13 years old	Tweens are beginning to see themselves as connected to a bigger world and in the context of relationships. They are more aware of how people are treated and issues of fairness. At this stage, continue assigning jobs they can do on their own, but add in discussions about causes they care about, finding ways for them to get involved and make a difference.
Teens	14–18 years old	Teens are undergoing a period of rapid physical and cognitive development, much like early childhood. They are hypersocial with a need for more independence, autonomy, and healthy risk-taking. At this stage, encourage young people to help friends, families, and others in need. Social contributions will matter more than before. Shift from being directive to being a mentor, advising them on how to be of value at home, in the community, and elsewhere.
Young Adults	19–26 years old	Most young adults are becoming independent with a sense of who they are and what they care about. Maintain your mentor mindset from the teen years and be available to offer advice on how to contribute. ¹ Identify and communicate ways the young adult can help within the family or community, especially if they move away. Seek the young person’s ideas and perspectives to solve problems or resolve issues.

¹Yeager, D. (2024). *10 to 25: The science of motivating young people: a groundbreaking approach to the leading the next generation—And making your own life easier*. Avid Reader Press.

Endnotes

Chapter 1

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Chapter 2

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Chapter 6

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Chapter 7

1. A boondoggle is a braided cord that can be worn or used as a keychain or ornament. A boondoggle also means a wasteful or impractical project. In trying to make a boondoggle myself, I wasted some cords and found my boondoggle somewhat impractical, but it was worth it. It's a fun and relaxing activity that is a great personal challenge.
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Chapter 8

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lessons for raising creative, curious, caring kids. Balance.

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Chapter 9

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Chapter 13

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Chapter 15

1. The International Baccalaureate (IB) program offers high school students the opportunity to earn a globally recognized diploma that emphasizes participation in global society and rigorous

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