

Antonina Mitlosh

**MENTAL HEALTH IN WARTIME:
SURVIVING AND RECOVERING**



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This book is aimed for a wide readership and contains information about the most common requests psychologists have been receiving since the beginning of the full-scale military invasion of Ukraine. Readers are given the tools to better understand what is happening to them and use cognitive behavioral therapy methods for self-help in certain conditions and situations they may experience during war.

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INTRODUCTION

This book contains answers to some of the most common questions and requests that people come with to specialists in the field of mental health since the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It aims to raise psychological awareness and offers cognitive behavioral therapy techniques and exercises.

The material is organized in such a way that the reader can understand and get answers to various questions concerning mental health. The book also describes self-help techniques for various psychological and mental issues. It is about how you can cope on your own, but it is worth remembering that these techniques need adapting for each person individually.

In the book's first section, you learn about the techniques that help you cope with stress and stabilize your condition. The second chapter describes how to develop psychological resilience. The third one is devoted to the issue of depression: in particular, it explains how to recognize it and what signs indicate that it is time to contact a specialist. The next three chapters are

devoted to issues of interpersonal interaction, conflict, anger regulation, and emotional tension. In the seventh, you will find step-by-step recommendations and techniques for working with anxiety. The eighth chapter is devoted to the issue of panic attacks, their symptoms and techniques that help you distract and cope with panic states in the most effective ways. In the ninth chapter, you will find recommendations for addressing rumination (working with thoughts that prevent you from falling asleep and swirling in your head). The tenth contains information on how to deal with feelings of guilt. The eleventh chapter is devoted to the problem of “getting stuck” in social media.

Good luck in your steps and efforts!

1. Collecting a toolbox of psychological techniques: how to help yourself in times of stress

Every day, we are faced with triggers that provoke the body's stress reaction. So, to understand how to help oneself in this situation is really crucial.

According to the Ministry of Health of Ukraine, today about 15 million Ukrainians need psychological support, otherwise up to 4 million of our fellow citizens are at risk of developing psychiatric disorders. Therefore, it is important to learn the skills of psychological support and to help the population establish a culture of psychological self-help during the war.

To provide yourself with effective help during a stress reaction, you should first understand what is happening to our body.

In general, stress is our body's non-specific reaction to stress factors. Usually, these factors are excessive, and there is an imbalance between our body's ability to cope with this pressure and the stress itself.

Stress manifests itself at the physical (that is, what we feel in the body), mental, and behavioral levels. In the body, we

experience an elevated heart rate, shallow and frequent breathing, which leads to hyperventilation, dizziness (resulting from hyperventilation), dry mouth, cold extremities, sweating, muscle pain, nausea. During stress, our body produces a number of hormones (cortisol, adrenaline, etc.). Why does this happen? This is our organism's evolutionary reaction to help us adapt to new conditions, to help us survive. In extreme situations, our ability to think is suppressed. The autonomic nervous system, which consists of the sympathetic and parasympathetic parts, is activated. It is precisely the sympathetic nervous system that triggers the body's response to stress.

Usually, stress does not last long, but in times of war, it can become chronic and lead to disorder. So let us discuss first the situations of acute stress and self-help techniques to cope with them. Together with you, we will collect a toolbox of psychological stabilization techniques.

The scientists learned that the sympathetic nervous system triggers the stress response, and the parasympathetic system promotes relaxation. So, we need to learn to activate the parasympathetic nervous system. How do we do it? Studies have

shown that to activate the parasympathetic nervous system, one has to stimulate the vagus nerve. How? The vagus nerve connects with the parasympathetic fiber of the oculomotor nucleus in our eye, descends to the heart, lungs, stomach, intestines. There are many vagus nerve fibers in the lungs, and scientists have found out that the steady breathing helps stimulate the vagus nerve and activate the parasympathetic nervous system. This is why, first, we need to learn to slowly inhale and exhale air, focusing on exhalation.

The first **breathing technique** requires that the exhalation should be twice as long as the inhalation. That is, if we inhale for count of 4, then we need to exhale for 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8. And, accordingly, if we inhale for 5, we exhale for 10.

The second technique is called **“square breathing”** (inhale for count of 4, pause for count of 4, exhale for count of 4 and pause again for count of 4). At this time, we draw a square with our eyes: inhale (count to 4) and draw the vertical side of the square with our eyes, then on the count of 4 we pause and draw the horizontal side of the square, exhale for four and draw the other vertical side of the square with our eyes, and again pause for

count of 4 and draw the horizontal side of the square.

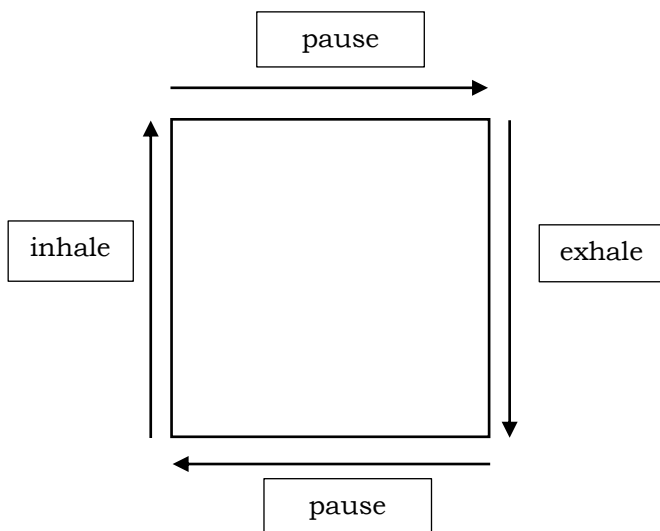


Fig. 1. *Square breathing*

You can also try the **“belly breathing” technique**. To do this, sit comfortably, put your hands on your stomach and try to breathe with your stomach, not with your chest (as we are used to). Feel how the abdomen expands during inhalation and decreases during exhalation.

During a stress reaction, it is important for us to maximally even out our breathing and stabilize it. So choose and practice the

breathing technique that is most comfortable for you.

You can also pat yourself with your hands, firmly press your feet into the floor, take a firm hold of something, bounce on your feet several times, alternately tense and relax your muscles, drink water. All these techniques will help you **physically ground yourself**.

As for alternating muscle tension and relaxation, this technique helps relieve muscle tension. It was proposed by Edmund Jacobson, an American psychiatrist and physiologist. **Progressive muscle relaxation** means alternating tension and relaxation of body muscles. This technique is useful for both adults and children.

Children can use the metaphor of “hard and cooked spaghetti”. First, you need to tense your body’s muscles for a few seconds (7 sec) so that they are like hard spaghetti, and then relax them for the same amount of time, like cooked spaghetti. Usually, children like such metaphors, and they love to perform this technique. It can be performed both for the whole body at once (that is, first tense and then relax all the muscles of the body at once), or use separate muscle groups in a sequence (first the feet, then the lower

legs, hips, stomach, arms, chest, back, neck and head muscles).

Stretching the body will be useful for children. You can offer the child to reach for the sun with her or his hands (and do it together with her or him), to feel like a spring toy. You can imagine shaking the water from your hands, or say to the child, “Come on, let's shake the water off the body like a dog that got caught in the rain”.

If the child is anxious during an air alert or in a shelter, all these techniques will be helpful. You can also add a rhythm and step count while moving.

Sensory and intellectual (cognitive) grounding techniques can also be added to our toolbox of psychological techniques.

Sensory grounding techniques engage the senses and aim to activate the parasympathetic nervous system. The “5, 4, 3, 2, 1” technique works well. Its gist is that first, you name 5 objects that you see next to you by one feature (color or shape). Then you need to take 4 objects in your hands that you can feel with your palms. Next, you need to focus on the sounds and try to hear 3 sounds (tapping of fingers, sounds of music, sound of a car). Then you need to try to feel two smells. And the last thing to focus on is taste. For

example, you can recall the taste of lemon or any other taste that you would like to experience.

Cognitive (intellectual) grounding techniques help engage the frontal cortex, which is responsible for thought processes.

For example, play a game of “categories” and remember the breeds of dogs, rock musicians or rock bands. Or count to 100 in 8s, starting with 8s. You can also think of male or female names that begin with the letter “A”. This will help calm the amygdala and maximally activate our cerebral cortex, which is suppressed in times of stress.

2. Cultivating resilience to endure wartime

The war has been going on for a long time, and many turn in exhausted due to the long-term effects of stress on the body.

High alertness of the body (a state of constant readiness) and prolonged hormonal impact during chronic stress lead to lower immunity, as well as to physical and psychological exhaustion.

As research shows, psychological recovery skills can help us maintain both physical and mental health in wartime. Today, we should all take care of the development of psychological stability or, as they say, resilience. So this chapter will focus on self-help and recovery skills during prolonged exposure to stress.

Being resilient is really a choice. After all, it is up to each of us to decide how to think, in what way to experience emotions, what activities to engage in during the day, how to build relationships and whether to live life in accordance with those values that are really important to us (and not postpone it for later).

Psychologists metaphorically compare psychological stability (resilience) with a ball that bounces off the floor, when thrown. It does not break, but bounces back. Likewise, resilience is the ability to flexibly withstand stressful factors, overcome obstacles and problems.

Ukrainian psychologist and psychotherapist Oleh Romanchuk notes that in order to be psychologically more stable, it is worth developing the following components of resilience:

1. Useful thoughts. I will give such an example. It is raining in the morning. One person gets up and goes to the window, and thinks, "How terrible, what terrible weather, what is this rain for, now I am in a bad mood..." And another person reacts differently to this rain, "Rain! What a good reason to put on my rubber boots, raincoat and umbrella to go for a walk". The situation is the same, but the responses are different. That is, every person would react differently to each situation. So, it is our response that matters. After all, we ourselves assign a certain meaning to the situation (negative, positive, useful, useless...). It is worth thinking about it and this is really our choice, whether to allow certain thoughts to nestle in

our head or not. These thoughts, in turn, lead to prevalence of matching emotions. Sad thoughts – sad emotions. So now, in times of war, it is important to make sure that the thoughts are useful and constructive. Most often, we are driven to negative thinking by cognitive filters (errors and distortions of our thinking). Such as catastrophizing, when a person tends to excessively catastrophize the consequences of certain events and even a single event is seen as a disaster movie. During our life, many disasters can happen in our heads, but in real life, they may never happen. However, our body reacts as if this is happening in reality. Therefore, it is worth making an effort to concentrate on good thoughts.

2. **Resilient actions** (our activities). It is our behavior and habitual activities during war that give us strength and resilience. Let's plan the day, do useful and important things, and not hang around all day on social media, on the phone, engaging in empty chatter about someone and someone's life. It is worth limiting useless and harmful activities and habits that take up the whole day. Clear planning helps in this, setting limits on those activities that you want to reduce (for example, scrolling on social media that

consume a lot of time; empty chats on the phone). Instead, spend more time on things that are important and useful.

3. Realization of values. It's about how we want to live and what we want to be, about our life compass. On the one hand, it may seem that values are something so vague, general, something that is difficult to feel and hold. But this is only at first glance. Let's think. What is most important to you in life? What would you like to be, and what would you not give up for anything? To be in love? In care? To be healthy? What values are most important to you? It is worth thinking about it. Now think about what you did today, yesterday, last week to realize each of these values? How much time and what exactly did you do in order to be in love, in care, to be healthy? Sometimes we think that health is the most important thing for us, but if we carefully analyze our lifestyle, it turns out that in order to realize the value of health, we only brush our teeth, for example, because there is no time for anything else. The question then becomes, do we realize this value and do we really live according to the values? It is important that our most important values are realized in various spheres of our life. After all, if love is valuable

for us, then it is important to be in love at home, in the family, at work, in relationships with friends and with ourselves. And then we truly live our lives.

4. **Self-care.** An extremely important component of psychological stability. These are our positive resource activities that improve mood, bring pleasure and positive emotions. Someone likes to read, someone listens to music, go to the cinema, meet friends, walk in the park, be in nature, engage in creativity, sports, cook something delicious... These positive activities help us relax and recover, and this is especially relevant in wartime. It is important to think, identify these activities and include them in your schedule. These days, many people do not allow themselves to rest, believing that during the war it is unacceptable. Behind this may be a feeling of guilt, which is worth paying attention to and, if necessary, turning to a specialist to work with this problem. Otherwise, there is a high risk of exhaustion and burnout.

In the previous chapter, we looked at stabilization techniques and gathered a toolkit of psychological techniques. This section offers the “Palm” technique, which is used to activate sensory resources that help

us have a good mood and emotions. To visually represent the sensory resources that we can draw through each sense, you need to draw your palm (outline it on a piece of paper). Write our feelings on each finger. Little finger – taste, ring finger – smell, middle finger – sight, index finger – hearing and thumb – tactile sensations. When you draw your palm, on each finger, which represents a certain sense in your picture, write what exactly you like to taste (for example, coffee, tea, your favorite dish...), what smells you like (for example, perfume, essential oils, spices: cinnamon, the smell of the sea, flowers...), what you like to look at (nature, the sea, it can be some place in our imagination from our memory...), what you like to listen to (music: your favorite band, singing birds, the sounds of the sea...), things you like to touch (stroking a kitten, feeling water with your palms or taking a shower...). *This technique helps not only to stabilize our condition, but also to fill us with pleasant positive emotions.* This palm can be placed on the refrigerator, or somewhere in the room, so that it reminds us of those sensory resources that will help us receive positive emotions. It is advisable to use something from this palm every day for yourself.

5. Relationships with others. This is collective resilience, our relationships with friends, colleagues, relatives, acquaintances: those to whom we can turn for support, as well as those whom we can help. Therefore, it is important to take care of good relationships, because this is also a component of our psychological stability.

And let's remember that being stable or resilient is our choice: the choice to think resiliently, the choice to be active (having useful activities), to take care about ourselves, the choice to nurture good relationships. So, we make a choice and act in such a way as to strengthen our stress resistance.

3. Recognizing depression

The previous chapter discussed chronic stress and ways to restore and nurture resilience. Prolonged stress exhausts our body, and it significantly increases the risk of developing depression.

In a state of chronic stress, our frontal cortex thins. This part of the brain is where we analyze information and make decisions. Changes also occur in the hippocampus, the part of the brain responsible for the transition from short-term memory to long-term memory. Therefore, people in a state of chronic stress often complain of memory impairment. Changes also occur in the amygdala, which regulates behavior in situations of danger (“fight, flight or freeze”). After all, we need to survive. And the amygdala is associated with the formation of emotions (anger, anxiety). All these changes in our brain can contribute to the development of depressive disorder. It is interesting that scientists observed that it is precisely in these areas that changes occur in development of dementia.

So now let us talk about depression and how to recognize it. After all, it is important to

identify the problem in time and contact a specialist.

When you feel depressed it does not always mean that you actually have a severe depression and should seek treatment. You can just feel down from several hours to several days and this state passes by itself without treatment.

When should you contact specialists?

A specialist should be consulted if you experience discomfort and symptoms characteristic for depression persistently for a long time.

Namely:

- sadness, desolation, depression;
- irritability;
- loss of meaning, thoughts that everything is very bad, feelings of hopelessness;
- indifference;
- inhibition;
- restless sleep (difficulties with falling asleep, insufficient or, conversely, excessive sleep);
- weight change, appetite problems;
- feeling of own worthlessness;
- loss of sexual interest;
- problems with memory and concentration;
- constant feeling of fatigue and exhaustion;

- decreased activity (sometimes even up to lying in bed motionlessly throughout the day);
- thoughts about death.

The emergence of five or more such symptoms that last almost all day and almost every day for two weeks and cause significant discomfort, disrupt or impair one's quality of life and functioning, indicates the onset of clinical depression, as well as the need for such a person to seek the help of a doctor. In this situation, one should not engage in self-medicating, especially if experiencing thoughts of death.

The doctor will be able to establish the correct diagnosis and recommend treatment. You should not be ashamed of this diagnosis, it is a disease, like other diseases of our body.

Today, depression is considered a fairly common phenomenon.

There are certain factors that provoke this disease.

Studies show that one in every six inhabitants of the planet suffers from depression at some point in their life. The risk of having depression increases if one of your parents had depression. After all, the tendency to develop depression can be inherited. Depression can be caused by the endogenous (internal) factors, like improper

functioning of neurotransmitters in the brain, and the development of the disease does not depend on a person's lifestyle, because it is caused genetically. Depression can also have a psychogenic origin, that is, caused by external factors, say, when life circumstances accumulate a large amount of negativity, in particular, job loss, family problems, betrayal, divorce, death or illness of a loved one, financial problems, unpleasant events such as war. It also happens that there are both external and internal factors causing depression, for example, if there is a predisposition to a disorder and the circumstances are contributing to the development of a depression disorder.

Urban residents, as well as women, suffer from depression more often, especially when caring for small children.

Depression can also vary by the degree of severity. Light, moderate and severe forms are singled out.

Mild depression can sometimes be mistaken for a character trait. A person may not know that she or he has mild depression. With the mild form of this disorder, there is usually no good mood, there is dissatisfaction, fatigue, or sleep problems, irritability may occur. Although in general everything is good in life, a person can feel unhappy for

years. With mild depression, a person generally functions well, goes to work, does household chores, but she or he does not enjoy life. In this case, it is worth contacting a specialist to try to understand the reasons and restore the quality of life.

Moderate depression is easier to notice, it is more pronounced in symptoms. A person understands that it is bad and difficult for her to him to do something. They stop talking to friends, reduce their activity, and get no pleasure from those things they used to love. In this state, it is difficult to maintain attention, there may be problems with memorization. It becomes difficult to perform usual tasks at work. In this case, you should consult a psychotherapist.

If it is severe, pronounced depression, you need to see a doctor! This is a serious disease. With severe depression, a person cannot get out of bed in the morning. The disorder is so pronounced that there is no motivation to do anything. And it's not about laziness. This is a disease that has all the signs that we have already discussed in this section above. A person feels exhausted and has no resources for full functioning. Suicidal thoughts may appear. And I will emphasize again that you should not be ashamed of this condition, but you should consult a doctor!

4. Why is it difficult for us to understand and reach an agreement with someone?

Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, questions and requests to psychologists on the topic of interaction, communication and relationships have increased. People want to figure out how to communicate with people who, in their opinion, behave strangely, aggressively and intolerably. Many also note that mutual understanding with relatives and friends has worsened. And in general, a lot of such communicative destructiveness can be seen in social media as well. Why does this happen, and what to do about it?

In this section, we will try to understand a little why it is difficult for us to understand and reach an agreement with someone. In general, the topic of communication and interpersonal relations is quite broad and requires a detailed analysis.

So why during the war, many people say and write about the fact that relations with acquaintances, colleagues, relatives and close people worsened and became more intense? Here again, it is worth mentioning the

peculiarities of our brain during chronic stress or in a situation of threat (which a daily reality of war is). Remember how it was already mentioned that our prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for analyzing information and making decisions, is suppressed during stress or threat? This feature of our brain is also relevant to the topic of relationships. After all, in a state of chronic fatigue, it is much more difficult to control your emotions. In addition, during the war, our values rose to the surface. And if any of them were not fully realized before in the family, at work, in relationships with friends, and people tolerated it, now, in wartime, there is much less willingness to tolerate it. Because people are now more inclined to a simplified division into black and white.

So let's delve into the causes of intolerable behavior in more detail.

For a better and easier understanding of what happens when two people talk, we will use metaphors offered by American psychiatrist Mark Goulston, who deals with the topic of relationships, and psychologist Daniel Goleman.

So how many brains do we have? If we take into account the features of the development of our brain over millions of

years, then we have as many as three of them! Our brain consists of three layers that have evolved over a long period of time: the first layer is the primitive reptilian level, the slightly more developed mammalian layer, and the most developed primate layer (our cerebral cortex). All three layers are connected, but function as three separate brains – and are often at war with each other. So what behavior is characteristic of each of them?

The lowest layer – the reptilian brain – is the part of the brain responsible for fight, flight or freeze behavior. That is, these are the reactions that help us survive and that do not require a lot of time to think about. So, if a threat situation appears, we choose one of three options to survive. Although, now some scientists supplement these three classical reactions with other behavioral reactions.

The middle layer, which Mark Goulston calls the mammalian brain, is the receptacle of our emotions. It is here that strong emotions of love, joy, envy, pleasure, grief arise.

And the highest layer is the primate brain – with this layer, we analyze and evaluate the situation and make a well-thought-out plan of our actions and steps.

This top intelligent layer collects all the information from the two lower layers, carefully analyzes it and makes a smart and ethical decision. So, when we talk about ethical behavior, it is also about our brain's cortex!

In the process of evolution, these parts of the brain have been layered on top of each other, and each layer has an influence on how we behave. I think that you can already guess what the scientists are hinting at and what the point of communication and understanding with other people is.

In order for us to be able to establish good contact with another person, we should appeal to her or his highest layer, to the human brain (the cerebral cortex), and not to the reptilian or mammalian layer. But if a person, for example, is angry or scared, then it is unlikely that we will be able to establish good contact. After all, maybe we are dealing with a lizard or a crocodile, or maybe, as Mark Goulston says, with a frightened rabbit. And here, in fact, it is important to learn how to reach the brain of an intelligent person.

You must be wondering why the lower parts of the brain still take over? The whole secret is in the amygdala, a part of the brain that I already mentioned in the sections on

stress and depression. In a situation of threat, the amygdala is activated. Moreover, it is not necessarily about a physical threat, it can be a verbal provocation (unpleasant words spoken in our direction), or a threat to self-love, or certain risk situations.

Our frontal cortex, which is responsible for analyzing information and making decisions, also goes into an alert mode in a situation of threat or verbal provocation. It tries to analyze what is happening, but sometimes there is not enough time for this. Therefore, at a certain moment the amygdala can reduce the activity of our frontal cortex. Sometimes in situations of high threat, when we are very scared, the amygdala turns off the higher functions of our brain, and then we are guided by primitive instincts. With it, reasonable behavior stops. But this does not always happen. In most cases, the amygdala does assess the situation before turning off our cortex.

Mark Goulston compares the process of the amygdala activating to boiling a pot of water on the stove. While the pot is slowly simmering, we can count on higher brain functions. But when the water boils and begins to pour over the top, the amygdala seizes control. This means that at this point,

the rational part of the brain has lost control of the brain and we begin to behave like a reptile. In this case, it is already difficult for a person to think and analyze information and make reasonable decisions. Our body produces adrenaline, which prevents sober thinking, and it may take us some time to recover.

Therefore, it is very important to learn the methods that will help to interact with angry, frightened or stubborn people. These techniques are aimed at preventing the amygdala from taking over and dealing with the intelligent brain that helps you listen.

Of course, in times of war, when we are under chronic stress, cases of amygdala takeover become more frequent. Therefore, it is worth practicing the psychological recovery skills described above to take care of your mental health and nurture resilience. And in the next section, we will review the methods that can help us prevent the process of amygdala takeover, both for us and our partner.

5. Regulating emotional tension during interaction with others

It is important to learn techniques that aim to prevent us from behaving like a reptile, to prevent the amygdala from taking over and to deal with the intelligent brain. Remember how we talked about the amygdala in our brain, which is activated in a situation of threat? And such a situation can be verbal provocation (unpleasant words spoken to us). Therefore, I suggest learning techniques for regulating emotional tension during interaction. Using these techniques will help you develop constructive interaction skills and manage your emotions.

In a relationship, we seek to fulfill our two basic needs:

the first need is a sense of connection, closeness and acceptance, that is, we are talking about secure attachment,

and at the same time

the second need is a sense of autonomy, competence and identity, that is, to be oneself.

So in relationships, we strive to be in touch with others, and at the same time remain ourselves. This is what every

interaction partner strives for. And this should be remembered.

So let's consider the first technique. A common phenomenon in interaction between people is ignoring emotions, both one's own and the partner's.

Participants begin to feel irritation or anger, and this is manifested in non-verbal behavior (facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice). And partners can even scold each other for these emotions. For instance, "Why are you angry?..." or "You shouldn't be so angry..."

In fact, there is nothing wrong with the emotions we experience. Another question is how (properly or poorly) we express these emotions both to ourselves and to our partner. That is, whether we know how to accept these emotions, whether we allow them to be and express them in such a way as not to harm either ourselves or others. We have the right to be angry (and this is one of our five basic emotions), and sad, and happy, and afraid... But here it is important to learn to manage our emotions.

Sometimes, children are told "Oh, don't cry, you're already a grown-up, boys don't cry" or "How dare you still be angry, you ingrate!", and thus they seem to convey to

children the message that it's not normal to be sad, angry or afraid, because this is a manifestation of something not very acceptable. In this way, children that later grow up and become adults do not know how to accept their emotions, do not know how to live and express them in a good way, or they may be ashamed of these emotions, and this is an extremely important point. It is important to learn to talk about emotions, voice your own state and the state of another person. After all, when we talk about our emotions, we allow them to be and accept them; at the same time, we activate our frontal intelligent cortex, which begins to think and put words into sentences, and thus the emotional excitement in the brain subsides.

So, when we talk with a child about her or his emotions or with a partner about her or his condition, we are using our mirror neurons. These neurons allow us to feel what another person is experiencing, that is, to mirror their feelings. Now let us have a closer look at what mirror neurons are. Many of you probably felt joy when the heroes of the movie get married at the end, or you can cringe, grimace, when you see someone eating a lemon, or when you look at photos of people

injured by shelling, you feel anger, sadness or fear. It's about mirror neurons.

Many years ago, scientists studying specific neurons in the prefrontal cortex of macaques noticed that these cells are activated when the monkey eats a banana or plays with a ball. But the scientists were in for a surprise and a discovery: the same cells were activated when the macaques saw another monkey playing or eating. That is, when the first monkey watched the second animal throw a ball, the first monkey's brain reacted as if the monkey was playing itself. These neurons are called mirror neurons, because they can mirror another's behavior in their brain. These neurons are one of the ways nature makes us care for each other. However, many experts note that today there is a "lack of mirror neurons". In particular, psychiatrist Mark Goulston insists that it is worth learning those methods that will help us mirror the emotions and feelings of other people. That is, it is worth learning empathy.

When we DO NOT ignore our own or our partner's emotional state, when we express it, talk about it, it reduces emotional tension and significantly slows down the amygdala takeover process. We can apply the technique of empathic attachment to our partner (using

our mirror neurons). We can say, "I see that you are worried, I know that it is not easy... Maybe you want to talk about it..."

The same should be said to a child. You can say, "I see that you are upset..." or "I see that you are scared..." and discuss it. This technique is a good way to teach a child to deal with her or his emotions in a productive way, and at the same time, to be parents who accept the child in different emotional states.

Let's consider the second technique. It is often possible to notice how somebody tries to humiliate their partner, evaluate him or her negatively, minimize the partner's contribution to the joint endeavor or family and exaggerate his own. Is this picture familiar? Of course. It is disheartening when someone tries to tell you that he is doing something more important, more difficult and many times more, and your work is worthless, insignificant and not as useful for the common cause or for the family as his work or contribution. This is a kind of devaluation of the partner. Of course, such behavior does not contribute to good and healthy relationships and significantly increases emotional tension.

Remember that we tend to underestimate the contribution of other people to the

common cause and overestimate our own. On the other hand, when we emphasize the importance of the partner, her or his contribution to the common cause, express gratitude or emphasize the importance of her or his opinion for us, this helps us reduce tension during interaction. Then the partner feels in touch with us, and at the same time feels competent and important (because she or he was not devalued and humiliated). So, instead of devaluing the partner, we emphasize her or his significance and the importance of her or his work, or contribution, or opinion. For example, we can say, "Your opinion is important to me..." or "What you have done (or are doing) is an extremely important cause (or contribution to the cause)...", or "Thanks to your care and help, I can take time for doing the things I love".

Let's move on to the consideration of the third technique. I think that many of you have been in situations where one of the participants emphasized the difference between himself and his partner. For example, "What are you saying there? I know how to do it, but you are offering something incomprehensible", or "I've lived my whole life, so maybe I know better! And you still lack experience". That is, in these examples,

a message like “I’m smart, and you’re not so much...” This type of statements also does not contribute to building good relationships. The tension will increase, and the amygdala will advance towards the boiling point.

Instead, it is better to emphasize what you and your partner have in common: it is worth emphasizing similar goals, interests, opinions, and personality traits. For example, “You and I are both developing and studying, albeit in different programs, but this gives us the opportunity to consider the problem much more broadly. We will both benefit from this...”, or “We both make a lot of effort to make our family and our children feel good”.

So let’s remember that we can reduce tension and prevent the process of amygdala takeover by expressing our emotions. You can also apply the technique of empathic attachment to a partner. It is important to emphasize the importance of the partner and his or her opinion, and to acknowledge what we have in common with our partner.

There are many other effective techniques that we will look at in the following sections. After all, during the war, people keep noticing the fact that destructiveness in interaction has increased significantly.

6. Conflict interaction: Dealing with anger

In the previous chapter, we mentioned that in relationships, we strive to be in touch with others, and at the same time to remain ourselves. And if we fail to realize these aspirations during interaction with a partner, then the balance is disturbed and a destructive conflict begins.

Take a moment to think about what associations you have when you hear the word “conflict”. Among these associations, you probably had various glimpses – a quarrel, a contradiction, and a bad feeling, and a clash of different opinions, and new opportunities, and a search for truth... In fact, you can see many different images, and they are related to our life experience. Someone is convinced that conflict is bad, and someone believes that it is good. Everything depends on what consequences the conflict has for you and me and in what way we conflict.

Conflicts occur every day and are a normal phenomenon in our lives, so it is worth learning to conflict. And scientists have found out that our attitude towards the conflict is crucial, as, after all, it affects our

behavior. If we perceive the conflict as a negative phenomenon and see our counterpart negatively, then our behavior will be appropriate. We will not be ready to hear the partner. And if we are in a constructive position in relation to our partner and consider both ourselves and him or her from the position of “we are both happy”, i.e. “I am happy” and “you are happy”, then our behavior in the conflict will be constructive. Then we will be ready to listen to our partner and respond in a kind way.

Therefore, you should not be afraid of conflicts, but you should learn to conflict. After all, constructive conflicts contribute to development (both our personal development and the development of groups and teams). Also, conflict promotes innovation and learning new things (because we hear different opinions and views); in conflicts, we unite and gather around a common problem or a common enemy, such as in a military armed conflict, but this is already about conflicts at the level of states. Also, in conflict, we realize and get to know ourselves.

So, there are a lot of positive aspects to conflict, but we haven't mentioned everything, but I will emphasize once again that there will be positive consequences in case of

the participants' constructive behavior. And in the previous section, we have already analyzed some techniques that help address the frontal cortex and promote good interaction.

At the same time, if we fail to engage the frontal cortex and the amygdala takes over, the conflict becomes destructive. Relations and interaction deteriorate, confrontation grows to prove one's position at any cost and destroy the opponent. And such destructive conflicts in our life, unfortunately, constitute the majority.

Scientists have found that the circumstances determine the nature of the conflict by only 10 %, and the remaining 90 % depends on you and me. After all, we are talking about our individual characteristics: character, temperament, interests, communication skills, and the level of culture. So let's remember that if we want to have constructive conflicts, then everyone should start with themselves.

Thus, let's summarize: conflict is a normal phenomenon in our lives. What matters is how we treat the conflict and our partner. Constructive behavior contributes to the possibility of the conflict having positive results, while destructive behavior leads to negative consequences.

Now let's talk about our limits. Should I stand up for my opinion and my boundaries? Of course. It can be done in different ways. You can belittle your partner, devalue, interrupt, ignore, blame, be insincere, get personal, use categorical words like “always”, “never”, “all”, “everything” and say something like “You have sunk to the lowest level”. Still, it is possible to conduct a discussion without humiliating your counterpart, not to turn to personalities. For this, it is enough to turn to the essence of the problem and to the facts, to look for ways and means of solving it.

The manner of communication is related to the life experience that a person began to receive in childhood. If during childhood, parents or other significant adults helped the child in a good way to manage his or her emotions and cope with anger, listened to the child, treated them and their needs with respect, then the child adopts the appropriate behavior. And if the parents interrupted, ignored and devalued the child's emotions and said something like “What are you doing there, you're still small to open your mouth”, or said “Don't cry, don't get angry” and other similar phrases, then there is a high probability that, having become an adult, a person will behave in the same way in

communication with others. After all, in childhood, she or he adopted this manner from their significant adults and learned that this way of devaluing, humiliating and interrupting a partner gives a significant advantage during a conflict interaction.

When we talk about anger, it is important to identify such features. There are acquired reactions when there was no good example in a person's life, that we just discussed. And there is a genetically determined tendency to feel angry. We are all different, we have different sensitivity thresholds and reactions to anger. It is about the fact that someone quickly flares up and his dissatisfaction quickly turns into anger.

But there is good news. You can learn to deal with your anger yourself, and teach it to your children. Having emotions is normal. And anger is one of our five basic emotions. And the way we behave, that is, manifestations of aggression in our behavior, when anger gets out of control, matters and affects our interaction with others. Because aggression is aimed at causing harm. After all, we can shout, that is, show verbal aggression, and sometimes it can even lead to a fight – physical aggression. And this is about our lower layers of the brain – reptilian or mammalian.

In general, anger is a key emotion in relationships. And it signals to us that some of our needs are not satisfied, and lets others know that something is wrong. Anger also mobilizes our body to fight, and our consciousness to focus attention on the threat. This gives us speed and courage in reactions. However, anger becomes a problem when it gets out of control (that is, when it does not protect, but harms). When it does not correspond to a real threat, it interferes with thinking and solving problems and affects the quality of life. Let's remember that when anger controls us, it can destroy what we have.

In addition, being in a state of anger for a long time is not useful for us, because with prolonged anger, glucocorticoids are released in the body, and this affects our health and immunity. So it is worth learning to regulate anger. And I mean, to regulate, not let it loose at someone or something. Sometimes you can see advice that when angry, you should shout or punch a pillow. But this theory of catharsis is no longer used in modern psychology, it has not been confirmed. After all, in this case, our brain does NOT learn to regulate anger, and this is dangerous. Because in the long run, a person fails to

respond constructively in situations of interaction. As a result, this type of behavior alienates people from us.

Where to start? There is a good technique called “Anger Thermometer”. Try to measure your anger from 0 to 100. And when you feel that it is getting hot, that is, more than 50, then you should take a break. After all, the higher the degree of anger, the less active is our cortex and more active is the limbic system (our lower layers of the brain). After 50 points, the amygdala begins to take over, and intelligent behavior ends.

How to take a break? Another good technique, the time-out, will help us in this. The essence of the technique is that when you feel that you reached 50 degrees on the anger thermometer, you can tell your partner that you need a break and you will return to the conversation later. But in order to use time-out, you should agree in advance with your partner that this technique will be used in your relationship. So that the partner understands what is happening. Otherwise, the conflict may flare up even more. After a pause (and our brain needs about half an hour to reduce anger indicators), you can return to the conversation and try to talk to your partner.

If you feel that you are slightly irritated, and the anger thermometer has moderate indicators (that is, less than 40), then you can use the technique of empathic joining, when we express and share our partner's emotions and experiences, that is, when we do not ignore them (this technique is described in one of previous chapters).

You can also ask your partner to change their behavior and tell you about your limits. For example, "I hate being yelled at, please don't do that anymore". Or if someone gets personal, you can suggest turning to the facts and getting to the bottom of the problem. Here it is important to talk about yourself and your emotions and feelings, and not to describe your partner. That is, we use the "I-message". This is an important rule in interpersonal interaction. And this is a good way to defend your boundaries.

Let's remember that it depends on each of us whether the conflict will have positive consequences. We can learn to regulate our anger, to assert our boundaries in a kind way, to spot a hot moment on our thermometer in time to prevent amygdala takeover.

7. Dealing with anxiety

The topic of anxiety was also relevant in pre-war times, and now it is even more in demand, because anxiety increases significantly during wartime.

During the war, we have had many emotions, feelings and reactions: sadness, anxiety, and hatred. And such responses are normal to abnormal events that occur during war. Sometimes people ask how to get rid of anxiety. But it is impossible to get rid of anxiety, because it signals us about danger and mobilizes our inner strength so that we can cope with what is threatening. If there was no anxiety, we would not be able to survive. We wouldn't react to a red traffic light when crossing the road. Basic safety rules would be neglected. Therefore, it is worth learning to live with anxiety and cope with anxious thoughts.

There are biological and psychological factors that affect the level of anxiety. The biological factors include a temperament with a particularly sensitive security system in the brain. We are born with varying levels of anxiety and propensity for anxiety. It is passed down to us genetically. So some

people are more anxious and others less anxious. We are all different.

Psychological factors include traumatic experiences and stressful situations, lack of secure attachment in childhood, and hypervigilance on the part of parents (when there was excessive parental control and the child did not gain experience and does not know how to cope with obstacles and dangers). Also, psychological factors include a high level of anxiety among parents (when the family discussed the topic of danger and said that it would be necessary to be very careful and avoid those situations in which one is not 100 % sure). So, these are basically the major factors of anxiety.

Now I suggest we take a look at how our brain works and provides an anxiety response. As we discussed earlier, in our brain, the amygdala is responsible for our safety: it responds to dangerous situations and activates our body's fight-flight-freeze response (although some modern studies indicate that there are more than three of these types of responses). It is located in the lower part of our brain. When danger arises, the amygdala instantly activates the sympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for mobilizing our body's resources in the body and mind.

Our frontal cortex balances the response system and analyzes information. It makes a conclusion about the urgency of the threat and makes a decision: either to take safety measures, or to deny the amygdala's reaction. Perhaps, some of you are familiar with everyday situations that can cause anxiety. Let's recall an example from life unrelated to war: you are at home and you hear a strange rustling noise in the corridor or another room in your apartment. You listen for a moment and try to focus on these sounds, while your brain generates different thoughts and scenarios of what it could be. Among the thoughts, for example, this one may emerge, "Perhaps it is a thief who broke into the apartment". You slowly walk into the hallway, then you approach the kitchen, where the rustling is coming from, and you try to see, what's going on. And you see that it's your pet cat Coco jumped on the kitchen cabinet and dropped a box that was on it. So, you are now sure there is no danger, and you gradually calm down. That is, your security system worked well and harmoniously.

But it can happen that throughout one's life their frontal cortex received a lot of instructions and information about dangers in the environment, when one's family constantly broadcasts ideas that the world is

dangerous and one should be suspicious and avoid everything, or when a person did not receive adequate support in difficult life circumstances from significant adults. And then there is excessive anxiety. Here, it is important to understand that if anxiety prevents you from living and functioning normally, and at the same time there are no real reasons to worry, then you should seek help from specialists, because these can be symptoms of an anxiety disorder.

So let's summarize. Anxiety is normal. Genetically, we have different predispositions to anxiety, but when anxiety prevents us from performing our functions normally in various spheres of life and there are no reasons for its manifestation, then it is worth seeking help.

Next, let us talk about anxiety within the norm. During war, anxiety increases, so there is a need to learn how to deal with it, that is, learn to cope with it productively. Let us recall what we already considered in one of the previous sections – about the connection of our thoughts with emotions and behavior. Sad thoughts cause sad emotions, and anxious thoughts cause anxious emotions. Our current situation is a war, and we cannot influence it. This is our reality. Therefore, we have a lot of thoughts about

the situation, and we attach a certain meaning to the events. These thoughts trigger corresponding emotions in us, and emotion affects behavior. And if you notice that there are a lot of troubling thoughts, then you should start organizing them.

How to do it? You can start writing them down. Write down the thoughts that pop into your head every day in a notebook or in a notepad on your mobile phone. For example, “I’m afraid that our city may be taken over by orcs”, “I’m afraid for my family”, “The country’s economy will collapse” ... And write all these thoughts every day. As you hear them in your mind, write them down. This will help to organize those thoughts that are floating chaotically in our head. Also, across from each thought, try to write down the emotions that arise, and the percentage of expression for each emotion. From 0 to 100, where zero is no emotion at all, 100 is its maximum expression. Such self-reflection helps us organize our thoughts and emotions and not deny them.

Next, you can use the “Tree of Troubles” technique to work with the thoughts you wrote down. To do this, you need to evaluate each scenario for its probability. That is, to what extent is it likely to happen or is it

rather a hypothetical and unlikely turn of events? Evaluate the scenario from the position of the current time, that is, as of now. And think if there is anything you can do to solve this problem. That is, how much influence do you have over it? And then try to articulate a more useful and constructive opinion for yourself. For example, “Currently, our city is relatively safe, and the situation is under the constant control and observation of the relevant services and the Armed Forces of Ukraine. I follow the security measures, my to-go backpack is packed. In the event of an emergency, I know what to do and what safety rules to follow”. Such work with thoughts will help to cope with anxiety.

If you see that the thought is realistic, that is, related to a real problem, then think about what you can do. That is, develop an action plan and think about what can be done to implement this plan. After all, the specific steps we take to solve the problem not only address it, but also allow us to cope with anxiety.

If the thought is realistic, but we can't do anything about it (or we did, but the anxiety persists, because we can't influence everything), then here the recommendation can be: let the anxiety be. To do this, try to sit

in a chair, get a good feel for the chair that holds your body and the floor on which your feet stand, and try to “scan” your body and feel anxiety in it and just be with it for a while. Just let it be.

There are very good words that are used in spiritual recovery practices, and they go like this, “I ask for the humility to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to distinguish one from the other”. And it is about our choice. We cannot know when the war ends, but we can learn to live in the time of war, and this is our choice. There is a very good book by psychotherapist Edith Eva Eger, “The Choice”. I recommend reading it. At the age of 16, Edith Eva Eger was sent to Auschwitz, where she lost her parents. She survived. The author writes that no one can avoid suffering in their life, but everyone has a choice how to get out of such situations.

8. Panic attacks: what happens to the body and how to cope

Many requests to specialists in the field of mental health concern the problem of panic attacks. With the beginning of the full-scale invasion, the number of people seeking counseling with this problem increased. We will consider what exactly happens to our body during a panic attack, why these changes occur and how to deal with panic.

What is a panic attack? It's a brief fit of dread. It usually lasts from 3–5 to 30 minutes, and sometimes it can last up to an hour.

What is characteristic of a panic attack?

1. During a panic attack, there is intense anxiety and fear.
2. The attack begins suddenly and unexpectedly
3. It lasts for a relatively short time and the sensations are quite intense.

During a panic attack, it feels like something terrible is about to happen. People in this state have various fears. For example, it may seem that a person is going to die or lose their mind.

Panic attacks themselves are quite common. Approximately one in every ten

persons has experienced a panic attack at least once in their life. For some, panic attacks disappear after a while, for others, this phenomenon can last a long time. That is, panic attacks can happen for quite a long period of time.

It is worth remembering that panic attacks by themselves do not cause us serious harm, we do not die from them. At the same time, you should not neglect this problem. After all, if the problem does not disappear and bothers you, then it is still worth turning to specialists for help.

Panic attacks manifest in our body, in our thoughts, and in our behavior.

What bodily sensations arise? Among the symptoms in the body, the most common are:

- A feeling of strong rapid heartbeat;
- Frequent breathing (hyperventilation occurs);
- Feeling of lack of air and inability to take a full breath;
- Pain in different parts of the body, most often in the chest;
- Nausea;
- Unpleasant sensations in the throat;
- Dizziness and a feeling that you might pass out;

- Sensation of tingling;
- Trembling;
- Flushes of blood to the face and sweating;
- A feeling of unreality and distance from everything around;
- Feeling of losing control over the situation.

In addition to physical symptoms, a person has anxious thoughts that a heart attack may happen, that she would fall or suffocate, or that he would fall sick, and many other thoughts that something terrible will happen. These thoughts seem real during a panic attack but they do not come true, they only increase fear.

We also said that panic attacks can manifest at the behavioral level. So how does a person most often behave during a panic episode? She or he usually tries to escape to a place they considers safer. In general, avoidance behavior is quite common in such situations. Also, during panic, people try to take actions that can help them feel safe. For example, they try to grab onto something so as not to lose consciousness, or lie down so as not to have a heart attack, or run outside so as not to suffocate.

Panic episodes are unpleasant, but they are an extreme expression of a normal fear reaction. And fear helps us survive, because the “fight-flight-freeze” reaction is activated, which we already mentioned several times in the previous chapters. During a panic attack, this system is activated, although there is no real threat. That is, there is a misfire.

British psychotherapist David Westbrook compared this process to a car alarm. The alarm performs the function of protection against thieves. And when there is a threat, for example, someone wants to steal a car or do harm, then it is triggered. However, sometimes it misfires: the alarm goes off when there is no real threat. For example, another car drove by your car, or a cat jumped on the car, or it was bad weather outside, and the alarm went off due to a strong gust of wind. Something similar happens during panic attacks. In addition, sensitive activation of the alarm does not break the car, just like our body, which is able to cope with fear. And we need fear in order to protect ourselves and survive, not harm ourselves.

Why do panic attacks occur? Little is known about the causes, and there is currently no clear answer. But scientists

have noticed that people who worry about their health more than others, as well as people who are under stress or experiencing certain life difficulties or have depression, get panic attacks more often.

So what do you do if panic attacks occur? If you have had one panic attack, you do not need to go to the doctor. However, if panic attacks are regular and last more than 15 minutes, and there is a fear that the panic attack will happen again, and this fear begins to produce an excessive amount of anxiety inside, then you should consult a doctor. After all, then we are already talking about panic disorder, which significantly affects the quality of life. A specialist will run tests to find out whether these symptoms are related to the physiological manifestations of other diseases or not, and will prescribe treatment. It can be both drug and therapy. Cognitive behavioral therapy usually works well with this.

How to deal with the attack? Among the official recommendations is to try to shift the focus of attention from internal sensations in the body to external objects and stimuli. For example, do exercise 5-4-3-2-1. Count 5 objects surrounding you that share one attribute, feel 4 objects by touch, focus on

3 sounds that you can hear around us, try to feel 2 smells and one taste (for example, maybe you have lollipops with you). You can also remember your favorite smell (spices, perfume or essential oil). You can carry it with you if you know you have occasional attacks. It is also good to remind yourself that this is a temporary episode and it will end soon. After all, scientists have found out that working with thoughts is one of the key elements of preventing panic in the future. And the tendency to catastrophize, when we wind ourselves up, significantly increases anxiety. So it is worth trying to cope with our thoughts. It is also advisable to stabilize your breathing, breathe slowly and calmly, focusing on exhaling. This will help prevent hyperventilation and the resulting dizziness. So try to find your effective stabilization methods that suit you.

Let's remember that a panic attack is a short fit of a feeling of terror. The episode manifests itself in bodily sensations, thoughts, and behavior. The attacks themselves do not harm the person and are part of the defense mechanism. Working with thoughts is one of the most effective ways to deal with panic attacks in the future.

9. Dealing with thoughts that prevent you from falling asleep

In this section, let's consider recommendations to help you cope with thoughts and fantasies that interfere with your sleep and crowd in your head. We will also focus on some habits that can contribute to good sleep.

We all know that the quality of sleep affects our physical and mental health, so the topic is relevant.

In childhood, many of us did not like to sleep and stayed up late. Someone stays up late even in adulthood, and there can be many reasons.

It is sometimes very difficult for parents to convince their children to go to bed on time. Attempts to put the child to sleep turn into a real struggle. Well, daytime sleep in kindergarten is a separate story. For example, I did not like to sleep in kindergarten and considered this time as wasted hours of life. After all, there are so many interesting things and games around, and the teacher says to fall asleep. As we age, our attitude towards sleep changes. In adulthood, we remember the days of kindergarten and

think, “Now we would have loved to sleep”, and we laugh at children's protests against sleep.

Most often, people complain that it is difficult to get rid of thoughts, and instead of sleep, the process of thinking and “solving problems” begins: the process of thinking or fantasizing interferes with falling asleep. In such cases, it is advised to use techniques of working with thoughts to identify and distance from them, as well as mindfulness techniques. So let's have a look at what kind of techniques these are.

Mindfulness helps us learn how to consciously live our life “here and now”. Probably many people can say that they have a lot of thoughts in their head and are constantly thinking about something. Our brain actually produces about 60,000 thoughts every day. That is, it is normal to think a lot. But it is important to learn to think in such a way that this process does not take us to another reality. After all, it is also not useful to be constantly in thoughts. Many of us have noticed that sometimes on the way to work, instead of consciously directing our attention to what is happening around us, we think about what we haven't done yet or what we have to do.

And because of this habit, we fail to notice how the leaves on the trees have changed (turned yellow, if it is autumn, or blossomed, if it is spring). And instead of being in the “here and now” we drive ourselves into a parallel reality and contribute to the development of chronic stress. We are constantly running somewhere and thinking about something, instead of being in the present moment. The same applies to sleep. The habit of mentally solving situations and problems and thinking in bed at night about how something could be done differently robs us of sleep. As a result, there is no sleep, and the problem is not solved.

Here, it is important to learn to distance yourself from thoughts and move on to the practice of breathing. Shifting attention to breathing helps relax the body in bed before going to sleep and be in the “here and now”, not in thoughts and fantasies.

To begin with, you should learn to simply notice thoughts, and not “follow” thoughts. After all, when we “follow” thoughts, we develop a theme or an internal dialogue. And when we simply try to notice the thought and look at it from the side, the chances for the development of this thought decrease. Let's try to use a metaphor. Imagine a river. You

stand on the bank of this river and watch the water flow. There are leaves and twigs in the water, and they float with the flow of water, and you just watch the process. Our thoughts are like those leaves and twigs in the river water, they just float and we just watch them on the shore. We do not deny thoughts and do not reject them. We notice thoughts, but we do not develop them. And this is our choice: to learn to simply notice thoughts and distance ourselves from them – or to develop a topic and immerse ourselves in it, as in river water, and follow the leaves floating in it.

After noticing a thought and letting it float in the river water, shift your attention to the here and now and your body. Focus your attention on your breath. With your eyes closed, observe how you inhale and exhale. Inhalation and exhalation should be calm. If the thoughts come back, and they can come back, and that's normal, then try to just notice them like leaves in water and switch back to the breath.

These techniques need to be practiced over a long period of time to learn your relationship with your thoughts.

If we talk about preparing for sleep in general, then it is worth forming several

habits and rituals. They will help our brain better prepare for falling asleep. What we usually do 2–3 hours before bedtime can significantly affect falling asleep and the quality of our sleep.

The sunset should be added to good habits. Try to capture the moment when the sun sets and focus on that picture. Watch the colors of the sunset if possible. Try to enjoy this moment. This will help you calm down at the end of the day. And our brain will send a signal to the pineal gland. One of the functions of the pineal gland is the synthesis of melatonin. The neurohormone melatonin promotes relaxation and ensures a good quality of sleep. So the habit of admiring the sunset can help our body better prepare for sleep. If it is not possible to watch the sunset, then take care of warm artificial lighting in the house. We are talking about yellow lighting, which helps reduce the cold range of colors. Research shows that warm colors help our brain produce the necessary dose of melatonin a few hours before sleep. By the way, our gadgets also have the option in their settings to set a warm colored background.

If it is difficult to cope with sleep problems yourself, then it is better to contact

doctors who specialize in disorders of circadian rhythm (that is, in various biological processes associated with the change of day and night). The doctor will conduct a diagnosis and help find the cause of the sleep disorder. And if the doctor conducts an examination and advises you to turn to a therapist, then cognitive behavioral therapy works with insomnia.

I can also recommend a good book about sleep by authors Olga Maslova and Nika Bielska, called "When will I finally sleep? How to fall asleep and wake up with pleasure". These biologists describe how circadian rhythms work, what chronotypes are there, what sleep disorders are like, when to see a doctor, how insomnia affects our brain, and how to adjust sleep patterns in adults and children. The book is easy to read, contains effective techniques and advice.

10. Dealing with guilt

Many of us felt guilty during the war. Ukrainians have been scolding and criticizing themselves for every single thing possible – for staying in Ukraine and not taking the children to a safer place; for taking the children away and betraying the country; for allowing themselves to rest; and even for contributing to the war effort way too little, while others contribute a lot. In the fall of 2022 and the winter of 2023, there was a trend of scolding oneself for having light at home, while someone else has no electricity, or for not having light and daring to complain about it, because someone has it worse. “Someone has been without light and heat for half a year, and you're still whining here!” Does this sound familiar? Of course. So let's figure out what guilt is and how to deal with it.

In childhood, many people heard criticism from adults. These were parents, grandparents, and teachers. The significant adults were telling the children all kinds of unkind words, be it about children's drawings, or about their manner of dancing, or about grades and achievements at school.

For example, “You have no talent”, or “Look at your picture! Have you ever seen a yellow elephant? Did you not think at all?”, or “What kind of hairstyle is this? Should have just shaved your head, while you were at it!” This criticism is regularly addressed to the child, and this contributes to the formation of one's own internal critic, who in adulthood continues to criticize and condemn, but now only oneself. Internal criticism can sound something like this, “You have it warm and nice here, while other people in Ukraine are overcoming all the difficulties of the war”, or “You don't deserve a promotion at work!” or “It's your own fault! So bear with it now”, or “You're not a good enough mother”. And these thoughts come every day. Our inner critic devalues us. If you constantly listen to it, you can quickly get exhausted and fall. After all, whatever we do is never enough for the inner critic. But for us, it is crucial to persevere in this war. This is why it is so important to remember to restore your resources so that you can be productive next day.

Feelings of guilt can strike at different targets. For example, we may feel guilty about not putting in enough effort. And our inner critic will tell us that we are not

working hard enough or volunteering enough. Or today, during the war, many people feel another kind of guilt, like survivor's guilt. And we will talk a little now about this type of guilt.

Research into survivor's guilt began as early as the 1950s. Scientists turned their attention to the feelings that arose in those people who survived the Nazi concentration camps. In the 1960s, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Willem Guglielmo Nederland introduced the concept of "survivor's guilt syndrome". What are the reasons that most often contribute to the emergence of this toxic feeling today? It is life in an atmosphere of constant threat, it is a person's physical and mental exhaustion, it is the threat of death, life in conditions of lawlessness, excessive pressure, slander and abuse without being able to defend oneself. And if a person managed to leave for a safer territory, or he or she lives in a conditionally safer region since the beginning of the war (although, as the experience of the war has shown, there are no safe regions in Ukraine today), then this type of guilt may arise.

It is important to remember that guilt can turn into aggression, both towards oneself and towards others. If we talk about

self-aggression, it can be self-sacrifice, for example, neglecting safety. That is, there are destructive ways to cope with one's emotions.

And if you believe and listen to the inner critic, then the feeling of guilt will grow: after all, every time our critic tells us, for example, that what we have done is not enough. Therefore, it is important to develop an adult constructive opinion: a constructive look at things will help us have a good and helpful view. So to deal with guilt, it is best to turn to the control of thoughts and behavior.

A few more words about external criticism, and then we will move on to ways of self-help in case of feelings of guilt. External criticism (that is, criticism from other people) is known to increase feelings of guilt. Phrases such as "You should be thankful that you are not dead" or "You haven't yet sat in the basement for several days in a row" and similar other statements devalue the person's problem. Such reproaches do not solve the problem, and destructive conflicts escalate. In such situations, it is appropriate to apply the technique of empathic attachment, not depreciation. And in the previous chapters, we have already discussed this technique, which helps us engage the mirror neurons of our brain.

Now let's look at techniques that help us cope with feelings of guilt.

Working with thoughts. We can list those aspects of the problem that allow us to look at it from a different angle. Example: you moved with your family to a safer place, but you chastise yourself for leaving many others in danger, and you are doing relatively well, so you feel like a traitor. Therefore, it is worth analyzing the problem and writing down the main positions regarding what happened. Try asking yourself questions about the benefits of your decision to leave and about advantages in a broad sense and list these advantages.

Example,

1 – You took care of children's physical and mental health. Children are not constantly under fire. After all, this is a parent's mission. We are responsible for the life and safety of our children. Our children are the future of the country.

2 – You took care of yourself. This is also important. After all, in the event of a critical phase, the resources of volunteers and military personnel will not be spent on evacuating civilians from the city, and they will be able to focus more on other matters.

3 – You made sure that in the event of a humanitarian disaster in the city, a smaller number of people will need resources (water, food).

4 – You made sure not to overload the medical system of the city during the war...

And this is how we give constructive helpful thoughts. We can see that the decision we made helped us take care not only of our family, but also of the system (to reduce the burden on the relevant services in the country). That is, the essence of the technique is to move from the position of an internal critic to an adult constructive extended explanation.

When we have finished working with thoughts, we can move on to behavior. If we continue with the example we just discussed, then think about what exactly you are ready and able to do for the people who remained in those territories. Maybe join volunteer work. It is possible to donate to some fund to help the Armed Forces, and so on. That is, clear steps that will help you feel your involvement in the cause. And let's remember that the fact that we work and pay taxes is also help to our country. Such actions partially allow you to regain a sense of control and cope with feelings of guilt.

If you feel guilty about the fact that you have electricity and water, and someone else does not, then again think about specific steps that you can take to help resolve the situation. For example, reduce the use of electrical appliances during peak hours, as requested by the relevant services. Offer help to friends, colleagues and relatives who are in a difficult situation. For example, maybe someone needs water, and you can bring it... This is what helps us to at least somehow influence the situation and overcome guilt.

Guilt is toxic, so don't listen to it or try to appease it. After all, what we do will always be not enough. And trying to please guilt only exhausts us. So don't beat yourself up. We can overcome the inner critic by reviewing our thoughts from the position of an adult, mature part and through behavioral activation in the form of specific steps that can help regain a sense of control.

11. What motivates us to turn to social media and why people “get stuck” in the virtual environment

Each person has certain motives for turning to social communities. And we will consider general trends and reasons that encourage people to use online social media.

Quite often, people spend hours on social media and, out of curiosity, watch people and what they are posting. They actually gather information about the lives of others, and this becomes a habit over time. There are many reasons for such interest and long scrolling. And it is worth dealing with each case separately. For example, one of the possible reasons may be the reluctance to take responsibility for certain things and do them, and then a person looks for opportunities to procrastinate, that is, he or she tries to avoid and postpone these tasks for later, and this can last for weeks. Instead of doing the necessary things, one spends days online. It is easier and more comfortable to passively observe others than to take responsibility for your life and actively create it.

Sometimes it turns into an addiction and becomes a problem for the person himself or

herself. And if a person experiences such a problem, it is best to contact a specialist and try to understand the deeper factors.

Scientists discuss a lot the connection between such a neurotransmitter as dopamine and 'likes' reactions under posts on the social network. Dopamine makes people want to seek pleasure and reward. We are talking about the anticipation for this award. And this process of finding pleasure and anticipating it is what prompts people to constantly turn to social media. And you should be careful with this. After all, getting hooked on the dopamine effect is simple. And it is not only about likes, but also about the expectation of enjoyment from viewing content.

For many, social media are a space for recreation and entertainment. People try to distract themselves and recharge their emotions by watching short videos. By the way, experts in mass communications found out that the videos rated the highest are the ones evoke intense emotions. And this is also used by advertising specialists.

Virtual communication makes it possible to realize some motives in a specific way, while in real life, this is much more difficult to achieve. Well, for example, the possibility

of a person's self-presentation increases in the social network, because the user can choose what to show to others and what to hide. That is, we actually construct our image according to our own choice (we present ourselves as we want to be seen). It helps the user to achieve the desired positions in the virtual environment. However, achieving such a status is impossible in real groups.

Facilitating self-presentation provides an opportunity to focus, think through an answer, or adjust it. As for the video, you can prepare, shoot several times, choose the best angle, add filters. In real communication, there is no such opportunity, time is short, we respond and behave situationally and often too emotionally.

Let us take, for example, the need for security. In the social network, we can use not our real name or leave the page when we feel discomfort, that is, a person can feel more protected than in real life.

Some people like to comment a lot, because it contributes to self-realization.

There are also people who use online social media for practical professional purposes. That is, to spread information about services, products, events, or promotions.

The information we receive from the social media also serves for us as a guide

about what is happening in society in general, what sentiments prevail, and we can also use it for social comparison.

If you notice that you spend too much time on social media, try to limit the number of visits to the network and the time spent there (by setting a reminder signal when the time is up). Remember that there are many other options for useful pastime and enjoyment. If social media is a way to procrastinate from certain tasks, then try to break these tasks into small steps so that they do not seem so difficult. Completing these tasks will give you a sense of accomplishment (“Well done, I managed it!”), and accordingly, satisfaction. And it will be “long” dopamine. If you feel it is difficult to cope with the problem of “getting stuck” in the social network, then seek the help of a psychologist to find out the reasons and think of ways to solve the problem.

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For notes

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Методичне видання

Мітлош Антоніна

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