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S t r e s s L e s s

Blueprint

First steps to become a calmer,
more relaxed and happier you.



Hello!

Women are taking on more at work and home than ever before. Many of us feel we must be 'strong' or 'perfect', so we hide our stress, anxiety, and overwhelm. For some of us, burnout isn't that far away, but we keep pushing on and on, and stress takes a toll on our health and well-being.

With this guide, you can plan a new way forward so that you stress less from today. Use it to bring some stress-busting strategies into your life. And the more you practice and learn what works for you, the more they'll become second nature and part of your everyday routine.

Please remember, you don't need to do everything all at once. Start with the easiest thing or the thing that'll make the biggest difference, and then build from there.

You can make you, and your health and well-being, a priority from today!

Gilly x

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What is stress?

The flight-or-flight response is a survival mechanism that prepares your body to either stay and deal with a threat or to run away to safety. The response activates your body's **sympathetic nervous system** and triggers the release of hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones make your heart beat faster, change your digestive processes and divert energy to what your body thinks is an emergency. After the threat has gone, the **parasympathetic nervous system**, in charge of rest and digest, helps calm your body and return it to pre-threat levels.

The right amount of stress can be helpful. By gearing your body for action, you are better prepared to perform under pressure. However, constantly being in a state of flight-or-fright and facing repeated stressors over prolonged periods of time can be harmful to your health and well-being. It can increase your risk of high blood pressure, fatigue, headaches and migraines, body aches, insomnia, and irritability.

Both real and imaginary threats can trigger the fight-or-flight response. Today, we face major and many more micro stressors than our ancestors ever did. Instead of preparing to run from a dinosaur, we have reports to write, presentations to prepare for, roadworks and traffic to navigate, and kids' arguments to resolve.

We find it hard to relax and feel constantly 'wound up.' Does this sound familiar? **The good news is that understanding your body's natural fight-or-flight response means you can become more aware and start looking for ways to calm and relax your body when you start to feel stressed.**

Your thoughts

The symptoms of stress

Beyond a certain point, stress stops being helpful and starts to cause damage to your health, your mood, your productivity, your relationships and your overall quality of life.

The symptoms are wide and varied and vary from person to person. Have a look at the four areas below and tick which of the symptoms you've had over the last few weeks.

Physical symptoms

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Aches and pains | ☐ Stomach upsets |
| ☐ Nausea or dizziness | ☐ Chest pains, rapid heart beat |
| ☐ Loss of sex drive | ☐ Frequent colds |

Emotional symptoms:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Moodiness | ☐ Irritability or short temper |
| ☐ Agitation, hard to relax | ☐ Feeling overwhelmed |
| ☐ Sense of loneliness | ☐ General unhappiness |

Cognitive symptoms:

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Memory problems | ☐ Difficulty concentrating |
| ☐ Poor judgement | ☐ Seeing only the negative |
| ☐ Constant worries | ☐ Anxious or racing thoughts |

Behavioural symptoms:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Eating more or less | ☐ Sleeping too much or too little |
| ☐ Procrastination | ☐ Nervous habits or pacing |
| ☐ Isolating from others | ☐ Using alcohol, drugs or smoking to relax |

Five signs you're experiencing stress

1 - Insomnia

Do you struggle to get to sleep? Or stay asleep? Do you have a racing mind and you wish you could flick 'the off switch'? Do you wake up feeling groggy or with a foggy mind?

Write down how insomnia may be impacting you...

2 - Digestion and tummy issues

Do you feel like your stomach is in knots? Do you get an upset tummy whenever something goes wrong? Does your digestion feel irregular, uncomfortable or emotional?

Write down how your digestion issues present for you...

3 - Irritability and mood swings

Do you snap easily at the people around you? Do you feel like you could cry at any moment and your moods feel unpredictable? Are you grumpy and short tempered?

Write down how irritability and mood swings may be affecting you...

4 - Tension in your neck and shoulders

Do your neck and shoulders feel tight and pinched, and do they need to be massaged or stretched out constantly? Do you find yourself raising your shoulders, clenching your jaw or tongue?

Write down when you feel like this and what you're doing when it happens...

5 - Racing thoughts

Do you feel like you can't switch your brain off? Is your mind constantly racing with thoughts? Do you feel like your mind is always on? Are you having worrying thoughts or imagining what will go wrong?

Write down how your racing thoughts are affecting you...

Anything else?

What causes stress?

Stressors are situations and pressures that create stress. They can be anything that puts high demands on you or forces you to adjust. Stressors can be negative, like an exhausting work schedule or a rocky relationship, or positive, like getting married, buying a house, going to college, or receiving a promotion.

External factors can cause stress or be self-generated, for example, when you worry excessively about something that may or may not happen or have irrational and pessimistic thoughts about life.

Common external stressors:

- Major life changes
- Work or school
- Relationship difficulties
- Financial problems
- Being too busy
- Children and family

Common internal stressors:

- Chronic worry
- Pessimism
- Negative self-talk
- Unrealistic expectations or perfectionism
- Rigid thinking, lack of flexibility
- All-or-nothing attitude

The body doesn't distinguish between physical or psychological threats. When you're stressed over a busy work schedule, an argument, a traffic jam, or a mountain of bills, your body reacts as strongly as if you were facing a life-or-death situation. If you have a lot of micro stressors, your fight-or-flight stress response may be "on" most of the time. Experts say micro stressors accumulate over time and can have a greater impact on our overall well-being than major or chronic stresses. The more your body's stress system is activated, the harder it is to shut off. Long-term exposure to stress can lead to serious health problems. It can raise blood pressure, suppress the immune system, increase the risk of heart attack and stroke, contribute to infertility, and speed up the aging process. Long-term stress can even rewire the brain, leaving you more vulnerable to anxiety and depression.

What are your stressors?

Managing stress

You may think the stress in your life is out of your control, but you can control the most important thing – how you respond.

Managing stress is about taking control: taking charge of your thoughts, your emotions, your schedule, your environment, and the way you deal with problems. Stress management involves changing the stressful situation when you can, changing your reaction when you can't, taking care of yourself, and making time for rest and relaxation.

Implementing a blend of daily practices and habits across eight different areas of life can calm the flight-or-fight response. These strategies are backed by science and research but are often overlooked because they are considered indulgent, selfish, or even woo-woo.

The intentional care of your physical, mental or emotional health through everyday practices and activities will look and feel different for everyone. And you are probably already making lots of positive choices that support your well-being every day. Many women do not want to prioritise themselves ahead of their loved ones or their daily commitments, but you can make changes to allow you to become an equal priority. You may not feel comfortable putting yourself first, but you should also not accept putting yourself last.

Too much of anything is unhealthy, so you should consider the balance in your actions, words and behaviours. It'll be the overall balance and small but impactful intentions which will help keep you energised, gratified, and able to show up for others.

To help you understand which areas you might want to focus more or less on, score each on a scale of 1 to 10 on where you are today, with 1 being very low / not a current priority and 10 being very high / a strong priority for you.

The aim isn't to avoid or
remove all stress from
our lives.

**That's not something we
can control.**

The aim is to manage
stress well and choose
how we respond to stress.

**That is within our
control.**

The eight strategies

To help you understand which areas you could focus more or less on, score each area on a scale of 1 to 10 for where you are today – with 1 being very low / not a current priority and 10 being very high / a key priority for you.

1 Physical strategies

There are many ways to care for your physical self. Taking care of our physical body is essential because when we're constantly unwell and run down, we can't help or support anyone else. Strategies include:

- Eating a healthy and nutritious meal
- Moving your body every day – whether it's exercising, walking, dancing or something else
- Supplement your diet by taking vitamins or probiotics (if it feels right to you) or sitting in the sun when you can for more Vitamin D
- Drinking water to hydrate yourself, not just because you're thirsty
- Get the right amount of sleep for you
- Spend time in nature because it has so many health benefits
- Enjoy a soothing bath or shower

Your score out of 10 for your current physical strategies:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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What could you change?

2 Mental strategies

A healthy mind helps us process information more easily, think creatively, turn a setback into an advantage, and gain a clearer perspective of ourselves, our lives, and others. Strategies include:

- Challenging ourselves to learn something new – a language, skill, recipes, facts or something else
- Set intentions, goals or personal achievements to help us grow and push ourselves out of our comfort zone
- Learn from others through self-help books or personal growth podcasts
- Practice gratitude
- Enjoy a social media detox if you need to break away from your phone or 'online life'
- Play a game of chess or a strategy game or do a puzzle

Your score out of 10 for your current mental strategies:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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What could you change?

3 Emotional strategies

When we make time for our emotional well-being we learn how to love and accept ourselves truly. Our emotional state helps us manage how we express our thoughts and feelings to others and impacts our behaviours.

We can build on our emotional intelligence and resilience by:

- Creating or reestablishing clear boundaries of what we will and will not tolerate in our life
- Making time to be alone without distractions
- Journalling and / or using positive affirmations
- Speaking to others, a friend or a coach about your feelings and learning to talk about your emotions
- Asking for help when you need it

3 *Emotional strategies – continued*

Your score out of 10 for your current emotional strategies:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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What could you change?

4 **Recreational strategies**

This is about making time for things you enjoy (and, when possible, things that don't rely on someone else) because those with the lowest stress levels always have something they do for enjoyment. Doing something enjoyable regularly can boost your mood and improve your emotional well-being and cognitive state. The strategies will be unique to you and may include:

- Watching a favourite movie or TV show
- Pampering yourself with a luxury treatment at a spa
- Getting creative – painting, flower arranging or changing a space
- Spending time outdoors
- Swimming or exercising
- Reading books
- Listening to your favourite music

Your score out of 10 for your current recreational strategies:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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What could you change?

5 Spiritual strategies

Spiritual strategies focus on your inner being, which may include working on your deeper purpose, bringing more meaning into your life, and living as your highest or best self. Many people feel this area is about what makes their heart sing or what makes you, YOU. For others, it's about creating an internal state of calm and peace to return to at any time. It can include:

- Meditating or practising breathwork
- Spending time in nature
- Going to a place of worship
- Yoga and other forms of mindful exercise
- Dedicating time for self-reflection
- Practising positive affirmations
- Practising abundance and manifestation

Your score out of 10 for your current spiritual strategies:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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What could you change?

6 Social strategies

Social strategies include building and maintaining healthy relationships with others because who we choose to spend time with dramatically affects our health and well-being. Social connections are essential for happiness; good relationships help us feel loved and valued and aid us in developing and improving communication skills. Social strategies can also involve creating space with people (when space is needed) to maintain boundaries and support your energy levels. The practice might focus on:

- Creating new professional or personal relationships and staying connected to people who matter in your life
- Creating space for you and a friend to have a 'no distraction zone'
- Messaging or writing to a friend to let them know you appreciate them
- Limiting time with people who drain your energy or being brave enough to end relationships with toxic people

6 Social strategies – continued

Your score out of 10 for your current social strategies:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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What could you change?

7 Financial strategies

A healthy relationship with money is essential for our mental health to prevent excess stress and anxiety even when times are hard. Improving our financial position might mean creating a more positive mindset around money so we feel more clued up about our own finances or even less resentful to others who have it. Financial strategies might take some work, but also some consideration about what is needed, and may involve:

- Budgeting more strictly and dealing with any debt head-on
- Learning more about finances and banking
- Investing more for your future and setting financial mini-goals
- Using a money app to track your spending
- Being honest with yourself about spending habits
- Allowing yourself money to have fun without feeling guilty

Your score out of 10 for your current financial strategies:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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What could you change?

8 Environmental strategies

Our environment greatly impacts our mood and energy levels, and to truly thrive, we need to be in the right environment for us. Your environment should be a place of inspiration that benefits you rather than somewhere that distracts you or makes you feel depressed. It can include a variety of activities, such as:

- Making your bed every morning
- Travelling simply for a change of scenery
- Tidying or organising areas around you
- Decluttering your spaces or donating old clothes
- Rearranging your desk space or moving to a different work zone
- Exploring somewhere new
- Playing music in your environment or cutting down on background sounds when possible
- Changing your evening routine to create a calm time before sleeping

Your score out of 10 for your current environmental strategies:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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What could you change?

Your thoughts

Control what you can

Remember, managing stress is about taking control – about taking charge of your thoughts and how you deal with problems. To help you achieve this, you can use the four A's: avoid, alter, adapt, or accept.

Avoid

Avoid unnecessary stress.

Not all stress can be avoided, but you can eliminate many daily stressors by learning to say no, distinguishing between 'should' and 'must' on your to-do list, and steering clear of people or situations that stress you out.

Alter

Alter the situation.

If you can't avoid a stressful situation, try to alter it. Be more assertive and deal with problems head-on. Instead of bottling up your feelings, respectfully let others know about your concerns. Or be more willing to compromise and try meeting others halfway on an issue.

Adapt

Adapt to the stressor.

When you can't change the stressor, try changing yourself. Reframe problems or focus on the positive things in your life. If a task at work has you stressed, focus on the aspects of your job you do enjoy. And always look at the big picture: is this really something worth getting upset about?

Accept

Accept the things you can't change.

There will always be stressors in life that you can't do anything about. Learn to accept the inevitable rather than rail against a situation, making it more stressful. Look for the upside in a situation – even the most stressful circumstances can be an opportunity for learning or personal growth.

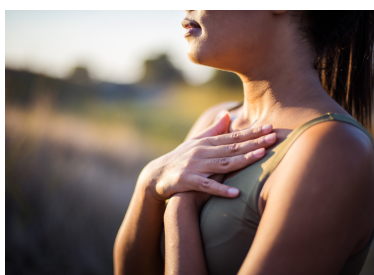
Some more tips...

Stress affects everyone in different ways and will likely impact most of us at some point in our lives. It can be overwhelming, and we tend to bottle it up and keep it all to ourselves.

- **Ask for help:** A useful way to help manage stress is to share your concerns and ask for help. It might be uncomfortable to share what's bothering you, but you'll probably feel better simply talking to someone. With the right support, you won't be on your own.
- **The impact of stress on menopause symptoms:** Yes, stress makes the symptoms of menopause worse. When stressed, the body becomes primed for attack, and the adrenal glands produce cortisol and adrenaline over oestrogen and progesterone. This is bad news for menopausal women because we need these hormones for our health and emotional well-being. The body pumps out stress hormones because it will always choose survival over fertility. Don't ignore the signs of stress impacting your menopause symptoms. Try to avoid processed food, eat more protein, and watch your sugar intake. Learn what helps you unwind and relax – and do it regularly. Change your lifestyle and prioritise your mental and emotional well-being.
- **Eat and drink well to naturally reduce stress:** What we eat and drink has a major impact on our stress levels. Alcohol has a big impact – it's like pouring gasoline on your stress. Sugar and coffee can also have a major impact on our mood and make us irritable, anxious and edgy. Cut back on caffeine and sugar to a maximum of one coffee and 20g of sugar a day. Our bodies make serotonin from amino acids found in protein. Try to add more protein to your diet with nuts, seeds, tofu, fish, chicken, eggs, soy and yoghurt. The health of your gut has a major impact on your mood and ability to cope with stress. Add gut-loving fermented food to your diet every day, like kimchi, kombucha, sauerkraut, tempeh and miso.
- **Improve the quality of your sleep to reduce stress:** Not enough or poor quality sleep dramatically increases stress and impacts your emotional well-being. Rule out low thyroid, low progesterone, low melatonin and sleep apnea. Fall asleep before 10pm and before the cortisol 'second wind' hits. Set up a good sleep environment – temperature, darkness, and sound. Try listening to a sleep meditation, use a pillow spray, and wear a soft snoozeband. Try using supplements, including lemon balm, 5-HTP, Zinc, L-Theanine, B-vitamins and Magnesium.

Some resources...

Many free resources are available online – try YouTube or Insight Timer and bookmark your favourites. I love doing a Yoga Nidra before bed. Here are some simple breathing and meditation practices you could also try.



Square breathing

Breathe in for four seconds.

Hold your breath for four seconds.

Breathe out for four seconds.

Hold empty for four seconds.

Repeat for a few minutes or rounds.



Mindful relaxation

Breathe deeply into each area of the body. Assign a word to each area, say the area and the word out loud. Work from the head down to your toes. Repeat a few times and slow your breathing as you progress through each cycle.

- Head ... Relaxed
- Neck ... Tall
- Shoulders ... Strong
- Chest ... Proud
- Back ... Easy
- etc.



Belly breathing

Belly breathing engages the diaphragm, intercostal, abdominal, and pelvic floor muscles. It involves actively pushing the diaphragm down and out with each inhale and allowing them to relax as you exhale. Breathing this way fills the lungs more efficiently, aids digestion and allows your whole body to benefit from larger breaths.

For more resources, check out my Instagram [@gillybaker.coach](https://www.instagram.com/gillybaker.coach)

100 things you could do to help reduce stress

We're all beautifully different and unique. What works for me might not work for you. Here are 100 ideas you might try. Start by reviewing the list, tick the ones that appeal to you and see what works for you.

It's better to be consistent rather than perfect. The more you practice, the easier it will become. Ideally, do something for a short time every day rather than every week or month for a few hours.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Laughing | ☐ Meditating |
| ☐ Having a cup of peppermint or herbal tea | ☐ Talking to someone |
| ☐ Breathing deeply and consciously for five minutes | ☐ Walking the dog |
| ☐ Creating a morning routine | ☐ Setting yourself goals or challenges |
| ☐ Creating an evening routine | ☐ Getting more quality sleep |
| ☐ Moving your body and being active | ☐ Practising ETF (Emotional Freedom Technique) tapping |
| ☐ Taking 10 minutes a day to relax / collect your thoughts | ☐ Praying |
| ☐ Listening to relaxing music | ☐ Reading a book - fictional or personal development |
| ☐ Meeting a friend | ☐ Doing something nice for someone else |
| ☐ Taking a walk outside (even if it's raining) | ☐ Writing a letter to someone to vent (but don't actually send it) |
| ☐ Going to the gym | ☐ Switching off your phone or putting it away to get some 'me time' |

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|---|--|
| ☐ Having a massage or facial | ☐ Writing a to do list - and rank them in order of importance and urgency |
| ☐ Doing something you really enjoy (work out what that is) | ☐ Watching a musical - my favourite is The Greatest Showman |
| ☐ Dancing to your favourite song | ☐ Playing a musical instrument |
| ☐ Singing your favourite song - the louder the better | ☐ Playing with a pet |
| ☐ Eating a healthy and nourishing meal | ☐ Going window shopping |
| ☐ Cleaning or decluttering (yes, some people love this) | ☐ Doing Sudoku, a crossword or a puzzle |
| ☐ Sitting on a park bench and watching the world go by | ☐ Getting, or giving, a hug |
| ☐ Journalling | ☐ Taking a nap |
| ☐ Putting on your PJs or comfy clothes | ☐ Chatting to your friends on FaceTime or WhatsApp video |
| ☐ Practising the Havening Technique | ☐ Joining a choir |
| ☐ Doing yoga | ☐ Going for a walk at lunchtime |
| ☐ Making something, like knitting or building a model | ☐ Writing poetry |
| ☐ Baking a cake | ☐ Writing short stories |
| ☐ Watching funny movies | ☐ Practising CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) |
| ☐ Sitting in a cafe with a cup of tea and some magazines | ☐ Getting closer to nature - standing on the grass barefoot or hugging a tree |
| ☐ Avoiding or reducing caffeine, smoking and alcohol | ☐ Finding a quiet place and trying to visualise a happy memory |

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Taking a break – even a short one can make a difference | ☐ Having reflexology |
| ☐ Looking at photos of happy times | ☐ Going to an Aquafit class |
| ☐ Calling a loved one | ☐ Getting some fresh air |
| ☐ Practising Tai Chi | ☐ Writing down your thoughts |
| ☐ Writing a list of the reasons you have to be happy with life | ☐ Doing a favour for someone – holding the door or a coffee pick up |
| ☐ Taking a few minutes to stretch your body | ☐ Playing games on the computer |
| ☐ Volunteering for a local community group or charity | ☐ Avoiding putting things off |
| ☐ Playing with your children | ☐ Spending more time with positive people who make you happy |
| ☐ Using a room fragrance or scented candle to create calm | ☐ Reading some gossip magazines |
| ☐ Playing board games with your family | ☐ Going to a Salsa or line dancing class |
| ☐ Going to the cinema | ☐ Cheering up someone who is feeling down |
| ☐ Moving or rearranging the furniture in your house | ☐ Being kind and gentle to yourself |
| ☐ Going to bed early with a great book | ☐ Talking to a stranger |
| ☐ Going for a bike ride | ☐ Going to a friend's house and putting the world to rights |
| ☐ Listening to bird song or water running | ☐ Having a change of scenery |
| ☐ Practising calligraphy | ☐ Going out and meeting new people |

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Expressing your feelings and emotions | ☐ Writing down three things you're grateful for at the end of each day |
| ☐ Thinking about something you're looking forward to | ☐ Going easy on yourself and accepting that you don't need to be perfect |
| ☐ Soaking in the bath with lavender oil or a bubble bath | ☐ Painting or drawing |
| ☐ Watching your favourite TV programme | ☐ Spending time doing fun things with family and friends |
| ☐ Going for a cold water dip or swim or having a cold shower | ☐ Thinking about what you HAVE achieved in a day rather than what you haven't |
| ☐ Writing a letter to a loved one or someone you admire | ☐ Giving yourself 'me time' with no guilt |
| ☐ Going for a run in the park or join your local parkrun | ☐ Asking for help when you need it - it's more than OK and a sign of strength to reach out and ask for help when you need it! |

What else could you do to help reduce stress?

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Thank-you!

Thank you for using my Stress Less Blueprint. The information in this guide is just the start. If you'd like to learn more and work with me to become a calmer, more relaxed and happier you, I'd love to hear from you.

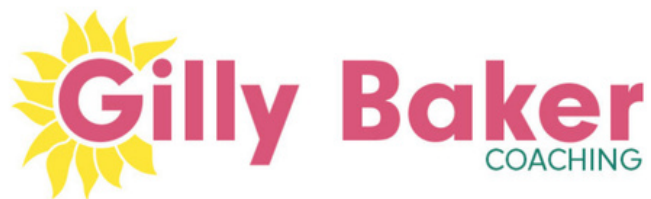
Now is the perfect time to invest in you, begin your stress management journey, and create a life you love waking up to. Send me a message to book your free discovery call and explore how personalised life coaching can help you take control of stress and overwhelm.



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As such, Gilly Baker is not and will not be liable or responsible for any actions or inaction, or for any direct or indirect result of any information provided.

Coaching is a comprehensive process that may involve different areas of your life, including work, finances, health, relationships, education and recreation. Deciding how to handle these issues, incorporate coaching principles into those areas and implementing choices is exclusively your responsibility.

Coaching is not therapy and does not substitute for therapy if needed and does not prevent, cure, or treat any mental disorder or medical disease.

Coaching does not involve the diagnosis or treatment of mental disorders and is not to be used as a substitute for counselling, psychotherapy, psychoanalysis, mental health care, substance abuse treatment or other professional advice by legal, medical or other qualified professional as needed. NB: if you are currently under the care of a mental health professional, it is recommended that you promptly consult the provider before you make any changes.