R e S T
Resiliency Skills Training
FACILITATOR’S MANUAL

JESSICA S. GIFFORD
INTRODUCTION

This guide offers step-by-step outlines to lead a four-session, in-person resiliency skills training, as well as instructions on how to implement the ReST curriculum online. ReST can be implemented in high schools, colleges, and workplaces, or offered as a psychoeducational group by therapists or coaches.
MY STORY AND THE CREATION OF ReST

I have spent my professional life—and much of my personal life—focusing on the question of how to improve mental health and well-being ... both my own, and that of the people I work with. For me this is a deeply personal question. I have struggled with depression and anxiety at several points in my life, and many of my family members share this struggle. My father lost his battle with depression and took his own life during my first year in college. In the aftermath of his death—while I was grappling with shock and grief, and trying to make sense of this senseless loss—my father’s therapist told our family that his illness was genetic, and that each of his four children had a fifty percent chance of inheriting it. This gave enormous significance to the question of how one changes, how one recovers from depression and learns to live well. I knew that I wanted to center my life around helping others lead full, happy lives, and work to prevent future suicides. I also wanted to do everything possible to make sure that I would not follow in my father’s footsteps.

After earning my Master’s in Social Work, I spent the first few years out of graduate school providing counseling in a variety of clinical settings. Hearing daily stories of intense trauma, and unable to have the kind of impact I had hoped for within the limitations of the medical, legal and insurance systems, led to severe burnout. A combination of self-preservation and the drive to have a greater impact led me to broaden my focus from individual counseling to larger-scale preventative strategies and interventions.

Five years into my clinical career, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to move into the field of college mental health and wellness promotion. For the last 13 years I have focused on identifying and implementing strategies to improve mental health and well-being in the student community as a whole. I have immersed myself in research in positive psychology, social psychology, behavior change, organizational change, economics, and any other field that might offer up effective practices to improve mental health and build individual and community resiliency. I enjoy the challenge of developing innovative methods to deliver—and encourage the adoption of—these practices.

The ReST curriculum is the result of several iterations of “testing” and refining a program that introduces participants to a collection of resiliency strategies. I have implemented ReST several times with college students and professionals, both as an in-person group and as an online program. Results from pre-, post-, and follow up surveys demonstrate that participation in ReST leads to significant reductions in symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression. Participants also report that the experience increases feelings of social connection and student/employee satisfaction. These benefits were maintained at a seven-week follow-up, while the symptoms of stress, depression and anxiety in the student comparison group rose. (The follow-up survey landed during the most stressful part of the semester, immediately before finals). This finding suggests that engaging in the ReST exercises not only improves well-being in the short-term, it also acts as a buffer against future stressors. I have personally tried every single exercise outlined in ReST and continue to use several on a regular basis. Although it is hard to determine cause and effect, I credit these practices with helping me become emotionally stronger, happier, and more resilient.
Witnessing the impact that ReST has had on others has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my professional life. I hope that you too find the curriculum useful, and find ways to implement it—or some small piece of it—in your own setting, or pass it along to others. I would love to hear your feedback and experiences with ReST. It is my hope that the ReST curriculum will help contribute to the widespread adoption of resiliency-building practices and to a healthier future.

WHAT IS ReST?
ReST is a 4-week curriculum that offers a careful selection of evidence-based exercises to build coping skills and promote thriving. The ReST philosophy is that there are many routes to achieving greater resiliency. Each week participants choose from a menu of six exercises in the areas of goal-setting, emotional skills, social connection, health, meaning, and self-talk. The ability to choose exercises that fit their specific goals, interests, and schedules is important, because the most effective strategies are the ones that people actually do, which tend to be the ones that are most enjoyable and personally relevant. No single practice is going to work for everyone regardless of its proven benefits. ReST makes improving well-being accessible, manageable and fun, by introducing a variety of bite-sized, 15-minute exercises that participants can experiment with and find what works for them. The ReST curriculum may be delivered as an in-person workshop, training, or group, or as an online program. The pros and cons of each format are described at the beginning of each curriculum.

WHY IT Works
ReST is based on the simple premise that by increasing our engagement in resiliency-building activities we will increase our capacity to thrive. Advances in neuroscience research have established that the brain is “plastic,” or changeable, throughout the lifespan. Our thoughts and actions influence brain chemistry and create new neural pathways, which in turn influence mood and behavior. With practice, the exercises in ReST can create and strengthen neural pathways that promote well-being and support thriving. ReST can be thought of as an emotional fitness program, helping the brain become stronger, healthier and more resilient.

“I found new ways to feel better about myself, some of which I had never considered before. I do feel less anxious and restless, as I now know methods to help me get out of that state once I am in it.”
— 2016 Participant
EXPECTED BENEFITS

ReST provides participants with a toolbox of resiliency exercises that can be practiced regularly, or called upon during times of stress. Each individual exercise has been selected because of its demonstrated effectiveness in helping people:

- Improve physical and emotional health
- Strengthen relationships and social connection
- Reduce stress, anxiety and depression
- Increase academic and work performance
- Manage challenges and difficulties
- Achieve goals

ReST participants who spent as little as 15-30 minutes per week on the exercises experienced substantial benefits at the end of the four weeks. These gains were largely maintained, and sometimes even grew, at the follow-up seven weeks later. Benefits included significant reductions in stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness, and increased belonging, connection, and greater student/employee satisfaction.

“I now feel I have a great set of tools to help reduce stress and increase happiness in my life.” — 2016 Participant

ASSESSMENT TOOLS

If you would like to evaluate the impact of participating in ReST, you may choose to design your own assessment tool and/or narrative evaluation questions that target the areas you are interested in. There are also a number of excellent pre-existing assessment tools, many of which can be used for free. These include:

- The PHQ-9 (9-item Patient Health Questionnaire) - a widely used instrument for screening and measuring the severity of depression.
- The GAD-7 (7-item Generalized Anxiety Disorder scale) - a widely used instrument for screening and measuring the severity of anxiety.
- The Flourishing Scale (FS) – a scale that measures psychological well-being and flourishing.
- The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) – a scale that measures psychological resilience (note that there is a fee associated with its use).

You may also wish to use scales that evaluate specific areas you are working to address, such as substance use or social connection.
REST WORKSHOP OR GROUP

Curriculum for Four Meetings

“I used the ‘Four Weeks to Wellness’ workbook in my summer Personal Health class. The students loved it and gave me great feedback about how the activities helped them have a more positive daily attitude. They enjoyed the activities and the flexibility to choose which ones would be best for them. I will be using the book again this semester and look forward to the discussions it generates in my classroom.”

— Jen Quinn, Health Promotion Specialist, Worcester State University.

Holding an in-person training or group provides the opportunity to delve more deeply into the practices, and introduces a few exercises that work well in person that are not included in the online program. A group format helps to normalize struggle, facilitates social connection, and provides shared accountability and support. Facilitating a group requires a higher investment of professional time and reaches a smaller audience (ideally 6-12 participants), but can have a more profound impact. Participants report how much they value the space to have conversations about well-being and get to know one another in a deeper way than occurs in most of their interactions.

“I got a lot of perspective on what I value and how I want to live my life going forward” — 2018 participant

“I’m taking away how to be vulnerable with a group, how to positively self-talk, and how to understand what I’m feeling.” — 2018 participant
NOTE TO FACILITATORS

This curriculum is designed to be used in conjunction with the workbook *Four Weeks to Wellness: Evidence-based exercises to cultivate health and happiness in your life*. The workbook helps participants follow along, monitor progress, stay engaged, and most importantly, return to the exercises again in the future. The workbook can be purchased from Amazon, or orders of 35 or more can be purchased at a discount directly from my website [http://www.growingwellness.life/](http://www.growingwellness.life/). If you do not have a budget to purchase workbooks for participants, it is possible to implement the curriculum with just one copy for the facilitator(s). In this case it may be helpful to email participants a weekly menu of activities, which can be copied and pasted from the online curriculum outlines below.

Before implementing ReST, think about how to offer the program in a way that best suits your setting and audience. For example, you may decide to change the name to *Grit and Resiliency Training; Self-Care Skills; or Workshop on Wellness*, to resonate with your audience and draw more participants. I have advertised ReST through all the available channels, but have had the most success using specifically targeted listservs, referrals, and word of mouth. Once you have recruited participants, it is helpful to send them email or text reminders of group meeting times, locations, and session topics a day or two in advance of each session.

The session outlines are 90 minutes each, but may be shortened or extended to meet the needs of your group. The noted times are rough estimates only, and will vary from group to group. In each session an activity has been identified that can be dropped if you find you are running out of time. The curriculum is designed for groups of 6-12 members to encourage discussion, interaction, and the development of a group connection. If you choose to offer ReST to smaller or larger groups, you may need to adapt some of the exercises. I have found that the group works best when the facilitators also participate in the activities, such as checking in and checking out, to role model appropriate self-disclosure and engagement. I hope you enjoy ReST!
MEETING #1: Connecting to a Larger Purpose

Materials: workbooks, name tags, shrinkydinks, permanent markers, scissors
If there is no chalkboard or whiteboard, bring newsprint and markers

Orientation to the Group: (15 minutes)
- Welcome people as they come in, and distribute workbooks.
- Introductions:
  - Facilitator introductions
  - Group member introductions: name, year or role
- Training overview:
  - The focus of this training is on building resiliency and promoting well-being.
  - We’ll be using these workbooks to do one or two activities when we meet, and you’ll also choose another activity to do between meetings. Please bring the workbooks with you to each meeting.
  - The activities are meant to be short and enjoyable, so it should not feel burdensome!
  - The meetings will also provide a space to have conversations about different aspects of resiliency and wellness, and to offer each other support and encouragement.
- Invite group members to go around a second time, and share what brought them to the training, and what they hope to get out of it.

Guidelines (10 minutes)
- Pair Share: talk with your partner for 1 minute each about the role you usually take in groups. Do you tend to listen? To speak up? To organize? Etc. How does this role impact your experience? How can you challenge yourself to get the most out of this group?
- Invite the group to generate guidelines or norms for the meetings. Write responses on the board/newsprint. If the group does not come up with these responses, you may wish to include:
  - Keep personal information confidential
  - Be respectful
  - Share talking time
- Stretch yourself a little to get the most out of the group, for example, if you tend to feel uncomfortable speaking in front of a group, challenge yourself to ask a question or share something (simply adding this guideline helps people open up more quickly).

**What are Grit and Resiliency? (10 minutes)**

- Grit = passion and persistence toward long-term goals. It’s about pursuing—and developing the ability to achieve—what is important to you.

- Resiliency = the ability to recover—or bounce back—from stress and difficulty. Building resiliency is like developing a strong emotional “immune system.” In addition to helping us recover quickly, it also acts as a buffer, so that our reaction to negative events isn’t as strong in the first place.

- Discussion: Why do you think grit and resiliency are important? How do they affect your life?

  - Make the point that happiness has been getting a lot of attention in the last few years. Resilience, while less talked about, is the foundation of happiness: everyone experiences difficult, painful, and challenging experiences, and without the skills to navigate and recuperate from them, we would be stuck in negative emotional states a lot of the time.

**Writing Exercise: Think Big (15 minutes) pages 5-8 in the workbook.**

- One of the things that contributes to grit and resiliency is getting in touch with what is important and meaningful to you. Connecting to a sense of purpose can help sustain us through challenges.

- We’re going to do a writing exercise that is about reflecting on a sense of purpose by thinking about the kind of impact you want to have on other people, and on society in general. It is a way to look at your big picture hopes, that go beyond personal gain.

- Purpose can change over time—do not feel like you have to identify your entire life’s purpose in the next fifteen minutes! It can be helpful to check in with yourself periodically about what is important to you and the direction you want to be moving in.

- We’re going to spend about 10 minutes on the writing exercise.

- If you finish before other people, you can use the permanent markers to write or draw something on the shrinkydinks to remind yourself of your larger-than-self purpose. These will shrink to about one third the size and can be cut to any shape.

  - Note: if participants don’t have access to an oven or toaster oven, you will need to collect the shrinkydinks to shrink, and return them at the following session.

- Please turn to page 5 and complete the ‘Think Big’ writing exercise, pages 5-8.

- This exercise is for your own reflection—any sharing will be completely voluntary.
Share Out (10 minutes)
- What it was like to do this exercise and spend time thinking about larger-than-self purpose?
- Would anyone would like to share what you wrote about?
- How can you keep this purpose in mind, particularly when things get busy or stressful?

Discussion: Overcoming Obstacles (10 minutes – this section may be dropped if you are running behind)
- What makes it difficult at times to prioritize what’s most important to you, including your health and well-being?
- What challenges might come up, either to participating in this group, or to completing the weekly exercises?
- How can you overcome these challenges?

Weekly Goal-setting Pair Share (10 minutes)
- Give a brief overview of each of the activities listed in the Week 1 Menu of Activities, page 11 (if you are not using the workbook, please refer to the Week 1 activities in the online curriculum)
- Ask participants to choose one activity to complete before the next meeting, and fill out page 11 in their book.
  - Note that the book suggests choosing 1-3 activities. Encourage focusing on just one for the purpose of this exercise.
- Break into pairs to discuss:
  - Which activity did you choose?
  - What made you choose that particular activity?
  - When, where and how do you plan to do it?
  - What might get in the way, and how will you address these obstacles?
- Invite sharing out with the larger group

Check-out (10 minutes)
- Let’s wrap-up with a check-out. You can share a couple of sentences about how you’re feeling, or what you’re taking away from today’s group. Go around the circle and make sure everyone has the chance to check out.
- Express appreciation for everyone showing up and sharing.
MEETING #2: Self-Talk

Materials: name tags
If there is no chalkboard or whiteboard, bring newsprint and markers

Check-in (15 minutes)
- Welcome people as they come in.
- Let’s start with a check-in. You can share a highlight and lowlight from the past week if you like, or just let us know how you’re doing in general.

Review of Exercises (10 min)
- If the group is quiet, this can be done as a pair share rather than as a large group exercise.
- At the end of last week’s meeting everyone chose an activity to do during the week.
  - Who would like to share what you did, or talk about what it was like to do the exercises?
  - Have you noticed any impact, or changes, from doing the exercises?
  - If you did not complete the exercises, what came up or got in the way?

Discussion: Self-Talk (15 minutes)
- We have constant mental commentary—or self-talk—going on all the time. We may be making evaluations about what is going on around us, how we’re doing, how other people are perceiving us, and so on. Self-talk is so constant that we may tune it out, and may not even be consciously aware that we are engaging in negative self-talk.
- How we talk to ourselves has a huge impact on grit (our ability to pursue what is important to us), resiliency (our ability to recover from challenges, and to stay emotionally healthy), and our overall well-being.
- What are some examples of critical, judgmental or negative self-talk?
  - Ask for specific language, and note that it doesn’t have to be their own self-talk, just general examples.
  - Write the responses on the board or newsprint, so the group can see them.
  - If the group is quiet, or members aren’t comfortable being vulnerable with each other yet, you can ask participants to write examples of negative thoughts anonymously on index cards, collect them, and write the on the board.
- To generate more specific comments, ask what negative self-talk comes up in these situations:
  - When trying something new, taking a risk, or pursuing a challenging goal?
  - After experiencing a disappointment, failure, or mistake?
- After an uncomfortable or awkward social interaction?

Discussion:
- What is it like to look at all these statements on the board?
- What is the impact of this kind of self-talk?
- Why do you think we talk to ourselves this way?
- What do you think would happen—good or bad—if you were to treat yourself kindly?

Writing Exercise: Write Yourself a Letter (20 minutes) pages 50-54 in the workbook.
- People often think that being self-critical is motivating, and will make them try harder, or do better, but the opposite is true. The more self-critical people are, the less willing they are to take risks and pursue goals.
- One way to change negative self-talk is to practice self-compassion.
- We’re going to do a writing exercise to help bring self-compassion to something you are struggling with or feeling stressed about.
- First we’ll start with a very short meditation in order to identify or create a positive voice or perspective from which to write from. This meditation is similar to the Find a Positive Voice exercise from week 1 in the workbook, so some of you may have already done it, but reinforcement is always helpful! This will help you get into a positive perspective. Note: read the meditation script slowly, with pauses between each sentence.
  - Please get into a comfortable position.
  - If you’re comfortable, close your eyes, or if you’d rather you can pick a spot on the floor to gaze at.
  - Take a deep breath. If you’re able to, inhale and exhale slowly through your nose.
  - Notice how your body feels. If you need to, you can shift around to get into a more comfortable position. If there are areas of tension, breathe directly into those areas, and allow the tension to release on the exhale.
  - Now turn your attention to reflect on what you need to feel supported and cared for, particularly during times of stress. Maybe you can recall a specific time when someone supported you in a way that felt validating, caring, and encouraging—or you can think more broadly about what you would like during stressful times.
- You will be choosing a positive voice or perspective that you can write from, and that you can use with yourself when you are going through difficulty.

- Take a moment to think about whether you’d like this voice to be the voice of someone you are close with, or perhaps someone you admire but have never met. Or you may prefer to choose a fictional character from a book or movie, or an animal, a superhero, or any other perspective that is meaningful to you.

- Once you have chosen this positive voice, spend a moment feeling what it is like to be them, to look out of their eyes, and to understand things from their perspective.

- How do they talk with you—and interact with you—that makes you feel supported and cared for?

- Now turn your attention back to your breath, inhale and exhale deeply, and notice the sounds in the room and your feet on the floor.

- When you are ready, open your eyes

- Please turn to page 50 and do the ‘Write Yourself a Letter’ exercise (pages 50 -54). We’ll take about 10 minutes to complete this. This exercise is for you – it will be completely up to you if you want to share.

- Invite reflections:
  - What it was like to do the meditation and/or the writing exercise?
  - How did it feel practice self-compassion?

**What Went Well and Why Pair Share (10 minutes– this section may be dropped if you are running behind)**

- Another way to shift negative self-talk is to focus on what went well, to help counter our natural tendency to focus on what is going wrong.

- Find a partner you haven’t talked to yet and take turns sharing what went well this past week, and why it went well.

- After 5 minutes, ask members to return to the group.

- Invite sharing with the larger group.

**Weekly Goal-setting (10 minutes)**

- Give a brief overview of each of the activities listed in the Week 2 Menu of Activities, page 31.
- Ask participants to choose one activity to complete before the next meeting, and fill out page 31 in their book. Note that the book suggests choosing 1-3 activities. Encourage focusing on one for the purpose of this exercise.

- If there is time, invite participants to share the activity they chose with the larger group.

**Check-out (10 minutes)**

- Let's wrap-up with a check-out. You can share a couple of sentences about how you’re feeling, or what you’re taking away from today. Go around the circle and make sure everyone has the chance to check out.
MEETING #3: Managing Stress, time and energy

Materials: name tags, blank paper, small pieces of colored paper about 1X2 inches, pens
If there is no chalkboard or whiteboard, bring newsprint and markers

Check-in (15 minutes)
- Welcome people as they come in.
- Let’s start with a check-in. You can share a highlight and lowlight from the past week if you like, or just let us know how you’re doing in general.

Review of Exercises (10 min)
- If the group is quiet, this can be done as a pair share rather than as a large group exercise.
- At the end of last week’s meeting everyone chose an activity to do during the week.
  - Who would like to share what you did, or talk about what it was like to do the exercises?
  - Have you noticed any impact, or changes, from doing the exercises?
  - If you did not complete the exercises, what came up or got in the way?

Priorities Exercise (10 minutes)
- Take a moment to reflect on what your priorities are for the next couple of months. What is most important to you? What do you want to spend your time and energy on?
- On a piece of paper, create a pie chart of how you want to spend your time over the next few months. If you prefer, you can create a list instead.
- Assign each thing a rough percentage of how much of your time/energy you want to dedicate to it so that everything adds up to 100%.
- When everyone is finished ask participants to make a second pie chart or list of how they spent their time over the last week, and assign rough percentages to each item.
- Discuss
  - How do the two lists compare?
  - Are you spending your time on the things that are most important to you? Why or why not?
  - Are there any changes you’d like to make?

Stress, busyness, and overwhelm (10 minutes – this section may be dropped if you are running behind)
- Stress and busyness often get in the way of being able to focus on what we care about most.
- What contributes to busyness, stress, and overwhelm – in your setting and in the larger culture?
- What impact does this have?
- What ideas do you have for combatting busyness/stress culture to make time to invest in your priorities?

**Replenishing Energy vs. Managing Time (20 minutes)**

- When we think about how to accomplish all the things we need to accomplish, we often think about how to manage our time and fit everything in.

- Instead of managing time, it can be helpful to think about how to sustain and replenish energy.

  - If you study for 3 hours straight, you'll experience diminishing returns on your time investment, because your energy and focus decrease over time. You might accomplish twice as much in the first hour as in the last.

- To maximize your time, you can:
  - Schedule tasks that require mental focus during high energy times
  - Take regular breaks to replenish energy, especially if you notice that your attention is flagging
  - Mono-task and eliminate interruptions. Unless you are doing something that doesn't require much attention (e.g. folding laundry), multi-tasking and interruptions require shifting your attention away from the task at hand and then returning to it. Recovery time is needed during each attentional shift to regain focus, making multi-tasking grossly inefficient.

- Brainstorm: What are your favorite energy-replenishment activities? Write on board.
  - What are things you can do during a work break in 10 minutes or less?

- Create a personalized self-care kit, or an emotional first aid kit
  - Take a handful of the colored pieces of paper and a pen. On each slip of paper, write down one activity to replenish your energy or boost your spirits.
  - You can also write down reassuring or empowering words or short phrases to help you through difficult times.
  - These will create a collection that you can draw from when you are struggling or need to replenish your energy. They can be put in a wallet, jar or bowl. You may color code phrases and activities, or keep them random.
  - You can take ideas from the board, or generate your own.
- When done: is there anything you’d like to share from your personal self-care kit that’s wasn’t in the brainstorm?

**Tell yourself a different story about stress (5 minutes)**
- Some stress is inevitable, and we can feel stress about positive things in our lives as well as negative things.

- Strategies that can help shift how we feel about what is causing us stress include:
  - Taking a moment to think about what is important to you in the situation … what do you value in this situation that makes the stress meaningful?
  - Reflect on what aspects of the situation you have control over, and what you are choosing to do. For example, it can be helpful to remind ourselves that we choose to—rather than have to—do something stressful, such as give a presentation, and reflect on the reasons we choose to do it. Feeling a sense of choice and control can reduce stress.
  - In certain situations, such as before an interview, a performance, or sports match, it can be helpful to reframe stress as excitement. There are instructions on how to do this on page 59 of the workbook.
  - The benefit finding exercise on page 94 helps us recover and learn from difficult situations by looking for the value in them.

**Weekly Goal-setting (10 minutes)**
- Give a brief overview of each of the activities listed in the Week 3 Menu of Activities, page 59.

- Ask participants to choose one activity to complete before the next meeting, and fill out page 59 in their book. Note that the book suggests choosing 1-3 activities. Encourage focusing on one for the purpose of this exercise.

- If there is time, invite participants to share the activity they chose with the larger group.

**Check-out (10 minutes)**
- Let’s wrap-up with a check-out. You can share a couple of sentences about how you’re doing, or what you’re taking away from today. Go around the circle and make sure everyone has the chance to check out.

- Remind the group that the next session is the last session.
MEETING #4: Looking Forward

Materials: name tags, evaluations, pens

Check-in (15 minutes)
- Welcome people as they come in.
- Let’s start with a check-in. You can share a highlight and lowlight from the past week if you like, or just let us know how you’re doing in general.

Review of Exercises (10 min)
- If the group is quiet, this can be done as a pair share rather than as a large group exercise.
- At the end of last week’s meeting everyone chose an activity to do during the week.
  - Who would like to share what you did, or talk about what it was like to do the exercises?
  - Have you noticed any impact, or changes, from doing the exercises?
  - If you did not complete the exercises, what came up or got in the way?

Discussion: Looking back, looking forward (10 minutes)
- This is our last session. What practices did you try out in the group, or between groups that you enjoyed or found helpful?
- What would you like to continue to work on after the group ends?
- Note: this is a good time to feel out whether or not group members would like to stay in touch with each other, and facilitate sharing contact information.

Best possible future visualization (20 minutes)
- We’re going to do a visualization of a resilient future. During the visualization please think optimistically, but also keep it realistic. Note: read the script slowly, pausing between sentences.
  - Please get into a comfortable position, and close your eyes, or if you would rather, you can choose a spot on the floor to look at.
  - Take a deep, slow breath, and as you exhale, allow your body to release tension. If you are able to, inhale and exhale through your nose, and focus on making your breathing as smooth and even as possible, cycling gently from inhale to exhale.
  - Now imagine that you are stepping into a time machine. You see a large dial before you that allows you to choose the number of years you would like to travel into the future. Take the dial in your hands and turn it to the number of years in the future that you want to visit.
- As you are traveling to meet the future you, you are aware that your life could take many different paths that lead to many different possible futures. You are also aware that the trajectory you are taking in the time machine is to the best possible version of your future.

- This is an optimistic, but realistic, version of the future, in which things have gone as well as they possibly could for you. You have pursued the things that you care about, and have stretched yourself to your fullest potential.

- Picture the time machine arriving at your future home. Step out, walk up to the door, and knock.

- Your future self greets you and welcomes you in, maybe offering you something to eat or drink as you sit down to together.

- Take a moment to notice what this older, wiser version of yourself is like.

- How does it feel to be in their presence?

- How have you grown and developed to become this person?

- Slowly look around you at your future home.

- What does it tell you about what your future self’s life is like? What are their interests, and how do they spend their time?

- Is there a question you would like to ask your future self, or a message that they have to give you?

- As your visit comes to an end, your future self tells you they want to give you a gift to remind you of your visit, until you meet again.

- At the door, your future self gives you a hug, and offers you a gift to take home with you.

- You say goodbye, and step back into the time machine.

- As you travel back to the present, you reflect on your visit. What did you learn?

- How can this visit help inform how you live your life now?

- The time machine lands back in your current life, and you step out.

- Gradually bring your attention back to the noises around you, and your feet on the floor. Take another deep breath, and when you are ready, open your eyes.

- Share out

  - What was is like to visit with your future self?

  - What surprised you?
- What insights or realizations did you have?

- How can you remind yourself of your Best Possible Future when things get tough?

**Writing Exercise: Moving Forward (10 minutes)**

- Please think about something you would like to prioritize or focus on in the next couple of months—something that you would like to expand, build on, or invest your energy in.

- It may be something you did from the workbook, something we discussed in the group, the meditation we just did, or anything that feels important to you right now.

- In the back of the book on page 113 there are a couple of blank pages. Please write for a few minutes about what you’d like to carry forward.

**Check-Out: (15 minutes)**

- Invite everyone to check out using the Rose, Bud, Thorn exercise. This involves sharing a “rose,” or something positive, a “thorn,” or something challenging or negative, and a “bud,” or the beginning of a new idea or practice - something that they’d like to build on in the future.

**Evaluations (10 minutes)**

- Thank everyone for participating, and say goodbye.
SAMPLE EVALUATION

What aspects of the training was most helpful to you?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What aspects of the training was least helpful to you?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What suggestions do you have to improve the training?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Overall, what did you get out of participating/what are you taking away from this experience?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Would you recommend this training to a friend? Yes_____ No_____ Unsure_____
REST ONLINE
Curriculum for a Four-Week Program

“While the various activities were incredibly helpful in their own ways, the act of taking care of myself is a clear signal to myself that I’m worth something—which is incredibly powerful.” — 2015 Participant

Implementing ReST as an online program will enable you to reach an unlimited audience – I have had hundreds of students and professionals go through the program at one time. This format appeals to participants because they are able to select and complete the exercises at their convenience, offering greater flexibility and a smaller time commitment than an in-person group. However, the online format lacks the sense of community, deeper engagement, and opportunity for reflection that a group provides.

SUSTAINING ENGAGEMENT

Completing the four-week online program requires self-motivation and follow-through. To decrease attrition and increase engagement it helps to: communicate regularly with participants, use the companion workbooks, and include a social component such as group activities, or the ability to participate in teams. You may want to offer participants the option to sign up in pairs or teams—such as a sports team, a student club, or a department—or to join a randomly assigned team. Participating as part of a team increases the fun, companionship and accountability. However, it also increases the administrative work! It may be helpful to ask for volunteer team leaders, who will take responsibility for sending their team regular texts or other messages of encouragement, and possibly hosting informal weekly get-togethers to check in about how it is going.

NOTE TO FACILITATORS

This curriculum is designed to be used in conjunction with the workbook Four Weeks to Wellness: Evidence-based exercises to cultivate health and happiness in your life. The workbook helps participants follow along, monitor progress, stay engaged, and most importantly, return to the exercises again in the future. The workbook can be purchased from Amazon, or orders of 35 or more can be purchased at a discount directly from my website http://www.growingwellness.life/. If you do not have a budget to purchase workbooks for participants, it is possible to implement the curriculum without it.

Before implementing ReST, think about how to promote the program in a way that best suits your setting and audience. For example, you may decide to change the name to Wellness Challenge, Self-Care Challenge, or something else that will resonate with your audience and draw more participants. It is helpful to advertise the program through all the available channels including posters, announcements, relevant groups and listservs, referrals, and word of mouth.
CHOOSING A DELIVERY PLATFORM

My hope is to someday develop ReST into an app or game, to make it more interactive and dynamic, and to offer personalized feedback and motivational reinforcement. In the meantime, the ReST activities can be delivered through email. I have used the survey platform Qualtrics, which makes it easy to administer pre-, post- and follow-up surveys, collect and analyze data. If you do not plan to evaluate the program this intensively, you may use another platform such as Mailchimp, or even a simple listserv. Whatever delivery method you choose, you can set up a simple sign-up form (on Google forms, Qualtrics, or another platform) to capture participants’ names and email addresses, and convert these into a mailing list.

COMMUNICATION WITH PARTICIPANTS

Once participants have signed up, it is important to communicate regularly to help them stay engaged. I typically send:

1. An introductory email before the start date, to provide a brief overview of the program and some of the benefits. This email is intended to get participants excited and encourage them to invite friends to join.

2. A get started email on the first day, with a link to an informed consent form (this is only necessary if you are collecting data), the pre-assessment, and the week 1 menu of activities.
   - I set up a “trigger” through Qualtrics so that participants receive an email copy of the weekly menu, as well as being able to view it online.
   - I send 1-2 reminder emails to participants who have not yet completed the pre-assessment (Qualtrics tracks this).

3. A mid-week encouragement email, which may include a participant quote and a reminder of the weekly community event.

4. An end-of-week email with a link to a quick survey asking participants to record the activities they completed along with brief reflective comments, followed by the week 2 menu of activities.

5. Emails 2 through 4 are sent weekly

6. At the end of program, I send a final email with a link to the post-assessment and narrative question to gather qualitative feedback about their experience.

The emails with each week’s menu of activities are below.
WEEK #1: Menu of Activities

Welcome to ReST! Please choose what you’d like to do this week from the menu below. You may choose one exercise to practice throughout the week, or pick a few to try out once each. Aim to engage in ReST exercises at least 3 times this week, in addition to your usual routine. To increase your chances of following through, you may want to schedule your activities on your calendar, or set up reminders. Have fun!

“I found that my stress levels have decreased significantly and that I am able to focus much better on my work. This experience has taught me that self-care is extremely beneficial to being happier and more productive.” — 2017 Participant

1. Set a Mini Goal (pages 12-14 in your workbook)
   - Setting a mini-goal helps prioritize what is important to you, and generates momentum and positive emotion. Please identify one thing that you would like to do this week, that can be completed in 30 minutes or less. If you have a larger goal in mind, choose one small step that you can work on this week. Ideas include: making time for self-care, tackling a minor task you’ve been procrastinating, or reconnecting with a friend you haven’t been in touch with. Please write down your goal, why you chose it, and when and how you’ll complete it.

2. Emotional Skills: Mindful Noting Practice (pages 15-17 in your workbook)
   - Noting practice makes difficult thoughts and emotions pass more quickly, improves mood, and decreases anxiety and depression. Please choose a day to practice the following steps whenever you’re experiencing difficult thoughts or emotions.
     i. Notice: as soon as you notice you are having negative thoughts, or a negative emotional reaction, take a deep breath, and bring your attention to what you are thinking and feeling.
     ii. Accept: rather than ignoring, resisting, or otherwise trying to change your thoughts and emotions, accept them.
     iii. Narrate: name whatever you are thinking and feeling, “noting” your experience to yourself, e.g. “You’re feeling tense and angry and you’re thinking this isn’t fair.” If it’s helpful, you can imagine a compassionate observer in the role of narrator.

3. Social Connection: Smile! (pages 18-20 in your workbook)
   - Smiling generates positive emotions in yourself and those around you, and improves social connection. Please choose a day to make a special effort to smile and greet the people you see or interact with. Try to convey warmth and friendliness with your body language as well as your words.
4. Health: Improve Your Sleep (pages 21-23 in your workbook)
- Getting enough quality sleep improves mood, attention, productivity and health. To improve the quality and/or quantity of your sleep, choose 2-3 nights this week to try one or more of these suggestions:
  i. Give your room a sleep makeover by covering all light sources at night. Use earplugs or a sound machine.
  ii. Give yourself eight or more hours to sleep each night. If this is too big a step, increase the time you allot to sleep by 30 minutes.
  iii. Develop a sleep routine. Practice going to bed and getting up at the same time, and establish a bedtime ritual (for example, getting into PJs and reading for 15 minutes).
  iv. Avoid PM stimulants including caffeine, nicotine, bright light, or adrenaline-boosting Netflix shows.
  v. Regulate your biological clock by getting outside in the morning.

- Spending time in nature relieves stress, anxiety, depression, and ADHD symptoms, restores mental energy and focus, and boosts the immune system. Please set aside at least 15 minutes to spend time outside in a natural setting. Leave your phone behind, and really take in your surroundings. See what you can notice by focusing in turn on your sense of sight, sound, smell, and touch.

- Engaging in positive self-talk improves mood and well-being, helps people achieve their goals. Please set aside 10 minutes to write or reflect on a positive, supportive, compassionate and encouraging voice for yourself. This could be:
  i. A friend, relative or mentor who consistently sees the best in you
  ii. An inspirational figure whom you respect and admire, whether alive or deceased
  iii. An imaginary or mythical figure, such as a superhero, spirit guide, or the character of a book or movie
- What is the owner of the positive voice like? What is it about them that makes you trust them to be supportive, caring, and to always have your best interests at heart? Over the next few days, practice bringing this voice to mind whenever you feel stressed or down on yourself, and think about what they would tell you in this situation.
7. Community Engagement
   - Facilitators: This is an optional opportunity to plan an event or activity where participants can get together in person. Ideas include inviting a speaker on a wellness topic, holding a “de-stress with dogs” or other pet event, hosting a craft night, teaching a cooking class, etc.

WEEK #2: Menu of Activities
Welcome to week #2 of ReST! Please choose what you’d like to do this week from the menu below. You may choose one exercise to practice throughout the week, or pick a few to try out once each. Aim to engage in ReST exercises at least 3 times this week, in addition to your usual routine. To increase your chances of following through, you may want to schedule your activities on your calendar, or set up reminders. Have fun!

“The self-compassion writing exercise [“write yourself a letter”] has been an incredible check for my anxiety—I know exactly what I would say to a friend in the same situation, and learning to say it to myself has been a huge stride in getting me closer to being the person I want to be.” — 2016 Participant

1. Set a Mini Goal (pages 32-34 in your workbook)
   - Setting a mini-goal helps prioritize what is important to you, and generates momentum and positive emotion. Please identify one thing that you would like to do this week, that can be completed in 30 minutes or less. If you have a larger goal in mind, choose one small step that you can work on this week. Ideas include: making time for self-care, tackling a minor task you’ve been procrastinating, or reconnecting with a friend you haven’t been in touch with. Please write down your goal, why you chose it, and when and how you’ll complete it.

   - This practice improves health, happiness, and relationships. It trains your brain to seek out the positive and to notice your own and others’ contributions. Please spend a few minutes at the end of each day reflecting on 1-3 things that went well during the day, and why it went well. Write about each thing in detail.

   - Engaging in acts of kindness strengthens social connections, improves self-image, and boosts happiness. Please choose one day this week to perform 3-5 acts of kindness or generosity. You can find kindness ideas here https://www.randomactsofkindness.org/kindness-ideas.

4. Health: Exercise (pages 41-43 in your workbook)
   - Regular exercise improves physical health, focus, memory, productivity and mood. Choose one of these types of exercise to try at least 3 days this week.
i. Get your heart pounding for at least 5 minutes a day, ideally at the start of the day. For example, go for a run or swim, or throw yourself a solo dance party.

ii. Go for a 15-minute walk.

iii. Reduce sitting time and take a movement break every 90-minutes.

5. Meaning: Explore Your Values (pages 44-49 in your workbook)
   - Writing about your values has been shown to improve mental and physical health, boost academic performance, make people feel more connected, and increase persistence toward goals. Please take a moment to reflect on the 3 values that are most important to you at this time. If you like, you can refer to this list of 50 core values [https://jamesclear.com/core-values](https://jamesclear.com/core-values). Choose one value, and write freely for 10-15 minutes about why it is important to you and how you express it in your daily life.

   - Engaging in positive self-talk, especially when done regularly, quiets self-criticism, improves mood and well-being, and helps people achieve their goals. Please set aside 10 minutes to write yourself a letter, responding to the following prompts:

   iv. Choose a specific situation to write about that is causing you stress or suffering. Bring mindful awareness to this experience. Write to yourself as you would to a friend or loved one, and name all of your feelings and thoughts as thoroughly as possible.

   v. Remind yourself that what you are going through is part of the human experience, and that many other people have had similar experiences and emotions.

   vi. Offer yourself words of support, kindness and guidance.

7. Community Engagement
   - Facilitators: This is an optional opportunity to plan an event or activity where participants can get together in person. Ideas include inviting a speaker on a wellness topic, holding a “de-stress with dogs” or other pet event, hosting a craft night, teaching a cooking class, etc.

WEEK #3: Menu of Activities
Welcome to Week #3 of ReST! Please choose what you’d like to do this week from the menu below. You may choose one exercise to practice throughout the week, or pick a few to try out once each. Aim to engage in ReST exercises at least 3 times this week, in addition to your usual routine. To increase your chances of following through, you may want to schedule your activities on your calendar, or set up reminders. Have fun!

“This experience was incredibly helpful with putting things in perspective and reminding myself of my self-worth.” —2018 Participant
1. Set a Mini Goal (pages 60-62 in your workbook)
   - Setting a mini-goal helps prioritize what is important to you, and generates momentum and positive emotion. Please identify one thing that you would like to do this week, that can be completed in 30 minutes or less. If you have a larger goal in mind, choose one small step that you can work on this week. Ideas include: making time for self-care, tackling a minor task you’ve been procrastinating, or reconnecting with a friend you haven’t been in touch with. Please write down your goal, why you chose it, and when and how you’ll complete it.

2. Emotional Skills: Give Yourself a Break (pages 63-65 in your workbook)
   - Engaging in self-care and taking regular breaks improves focus, memory and learning, and helps you recuperate from stress. Please write down 5 activities that replenish your energy or boost your mood. Choose one to focus on, either by engaging in it during short breaks throughout the day, or dedicating one longer period of time to it.

3. Social Connection: Really Listen (pages 66-68 in your workbook)
   - Active listening builds empathy and connection, and can boost the well-being of the recipient as well as the listener. This activity involves offering someone your full, undivided attention, empathy, and support. Turn off your electronics and really listen! Try to understand and validate their experience before offering advice or possible solutions.

4. Health: Get in Touch (pages 69-71 in your workbook)
   - Healthy touch reduces stress, anxiety, and pain, and improves physical health. Please choose how you would like to increase safe, healthy touch this week. This could include anything from cuddling with a pet, to offering hugs, or giving yourself a hand massage.

5. Meaning: Explore/Affirm Your Beliefs (pages 72-75 in your workbook)
   - Belief in something larger yourself, whether secular, spiritual, or religious, contributes to positive physical and mental health. You may choose to attend a service, talk to a friend, family member, or spiritual advisor about your beliefs, practices and values. Alternatively, please write for 10 minutes about what you believe in and the guiding principles that you live by.

6. Self-Talk for Stressful Situations (pages 76-78 in your workbook)
   - This practice helps build confidence and improve performance when you are facing a challenging situation that triggers a stress response, such as a presentation, final, or interview. At the first sign of nerves, tell yourself, “I'm excited!” and remind yourself that the stress response is adaptive, and gives you energy to rise to the challenge. Try to channel that energy into the task at hand. This practice is more effective than trying to “calm down,” as excitement and nervousness are more physiologically similar states than nervousness and calm.
7. Community Engagement
   - Facilitators: This is an optional opportunity to plan an event or activity where participants can get together in person. Ideas include inviting a speaker on a wellness topic, holding a “de-stress with dogs” or other pet event, hosting a craft night, teaching a cooking class, etc.

WEEK #4: Menu of Activities

Congratulations, you’ve made it to the final week of ReST! Please choose what you’d like to do this week from the menu below. You may choose one exercise to practice throughout the week, or pick a few to try out once each. Aim to engage in ReST exercises at least 3 times this week, in addition to your usual routine. To increase your chances of following through, you may want to schedule your activities on your calendar, or set up reminders. Have fun!

“Telling my friends how much I appreciate them was not only beneficial to their wellness, but reaffirmed to me why I value human connection, especially in trying times.”
— 2017 Participant

1. Set a Mini Goal (pages 82-84 in your workbook)
   - Setting a mini-goal helps prioritize what is important to you, and generates momentum and positive emotion. Please identify one thing that you would like to do this week, that can be completed in 30 minutes or less. If you have a larger goal in mind, choose one small step that you can work on this week. Ideas include: making time for self-care, tackling a minor task you’ve been procrastinating, or reconnecting with a friend you haven’t been in touch with. Please write down your goal, why you chose it, and when and how you’ll complete it.

2. Emotional Skills: Watch Your Mental Diet (pages 85-87 in your workbook)
   - Limiting your use of specific types of media, including social media, pornography and talk shows, reduces anxiety and depression, and improves social connection. To do this practice, choose one day to record the amount of time you spend consuming various types of media (social media, programs you watch, internet searches, what you read, etc.) and notice how each makes you feel. At the end of the day, reflect on whether or not you want to make changes to your media use.

3. Social Connection: Express Appreciation (pages 88-91 in your workbook)
   - Expressing appreciation strengthens relationships and boosts the happiness of the giver and receiver. This activity involves letting the people in your life know what you appreciate about them, and how they’ve positively affected you. Go beyond, “I think you’re great,” to describe what you appreciate about their values, behaviors, or aspects of their personality. How have they made a positive impact on you?
4. Health: Breathe! (pages 92-93 in your workbook)
- Slow, deep breathing helps reduce stress and anxiety and improves mental and physical functioning. At several points throughout the day, turn your attention to your breath, and focus on breathing slowly, deeply, and as smoothly as possible.

5. Meaning: Benefit-Finding (pages 94-97 in your workbook)
- Finding the meaning in difficult situations has been shown to improve physical health, reduce depression, build confidence, and strengthen relationships. Please choose a difficult experience that has affected you deeply, and write freely for 10-15 minutes, noting your feelings, and the impact this event or situation has had on you, both positive and negative. Have you changed in positive ways, or is your life better as a result of this experience?

6. Self-Talk: Create an Effective Affirmation (pages 98-100 in your workbook)
- An effective affirmation can improve your self-image and motivate you to persist through challenges and accomplish important goals. Please choose a goal or area you’d like to work on. Next create 1-sentence affirmation that is believable and highlights a value, quality, or behavior that will help you toward this goal, such as, “You are courageous.” Affirmations that you don’t believe can undermine confidence, so choose something that you can live up to, and repeat it to yourself a few times a day.

7. Community Engagement
- Facilitators: This is an optional opportunity to plan an event or activity where participants can get together in person. Ideas include inviting a speaker on a wellness topic, holding a “de-stress with dogs” or other pet event, hosting a craft night, teaching a cooking class, etc.

FINAL NOTE
If you have questions, feedback, or would like more information, please get in touch! I am happy to share templates of program descriptions, participant emails, or IRB application sample if you plan to study the impact of the program. If you want to learn about each exercise and why it works, more information and a full list of references are included in the Four Weeks to Wellness workbook.

Jessica Gifford
Thrive: growing wellness
www.growingwellness.life
jessica@growingwellness.life