



PhD Survival Kit



Things I wish I knew on Day 1

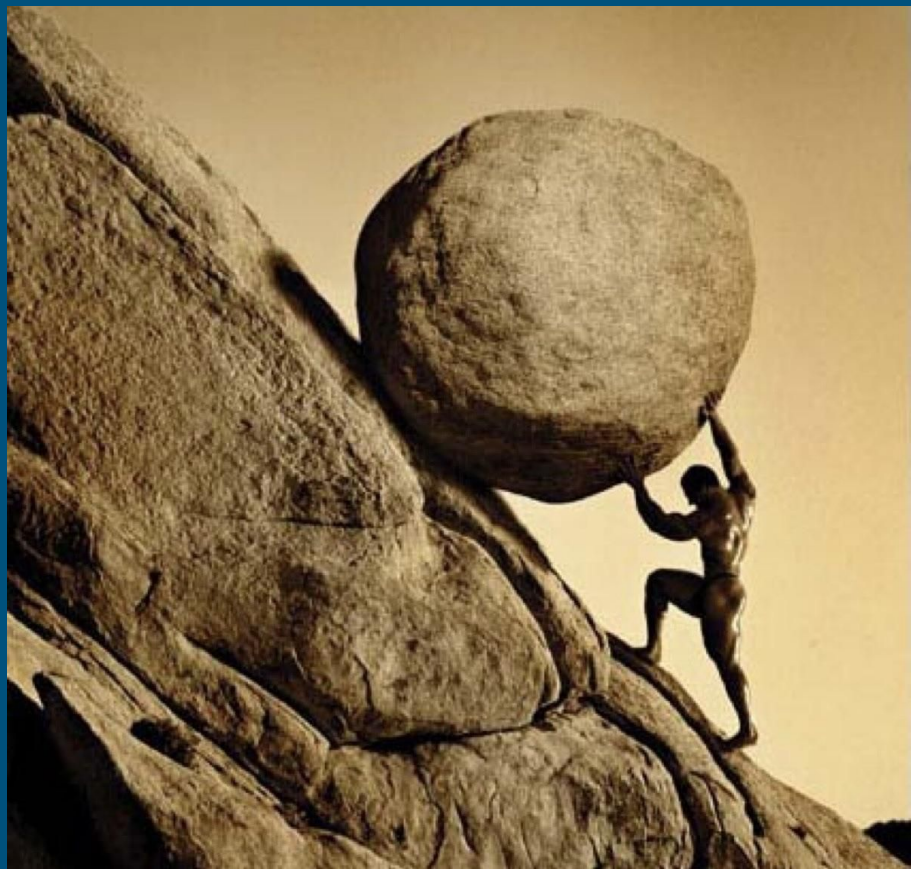


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Harvard University

2024

Why do we need to talk
about PhD Survival?



Because it is hard.

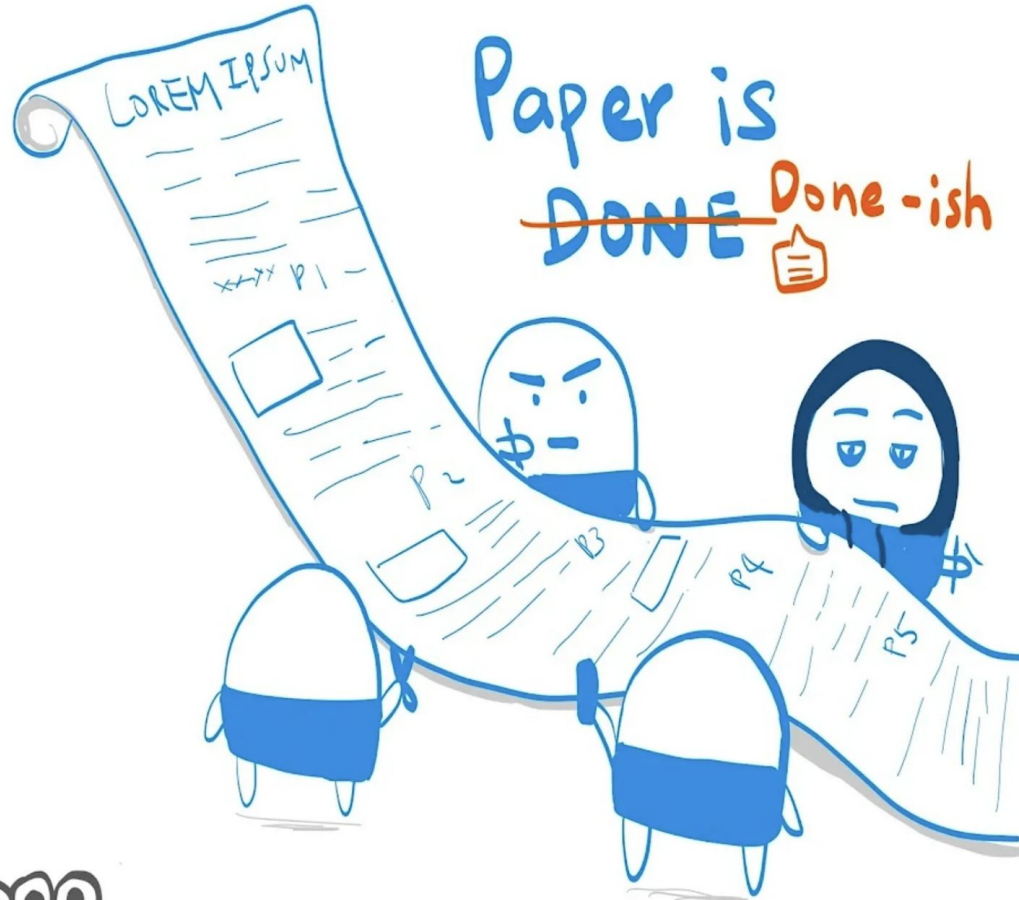
What is a PhD?

Doctor of Philosophy

“A PhD, or Doctor of Philosophy, is an academic degree that is considered the **highest level of postgraduate achievement**. It is awarded to students who have conducted original research in a specific field and produced a thesis or dissertation.”

Where does stress
come from?

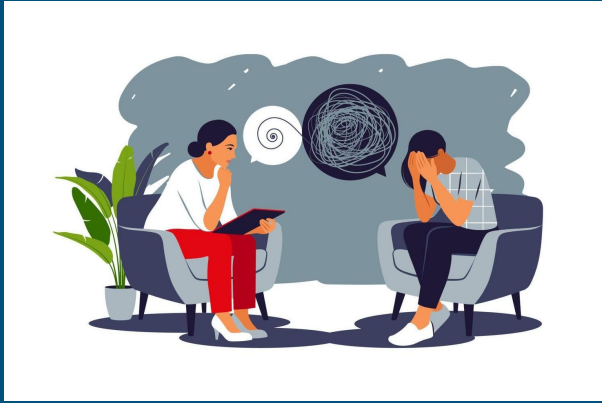
Positive happy Doodles for PhD life



888 REASONS TO BE POSITIVE

Academic Pressure
Uncertainty in research
Workload
Long working hours
Financial strain
Isolation
Health
Advisor relationship
Family
Cultural barrier
Job market anxiety
...





41%

PhD students experienced symptoms of **anxiety**

39%

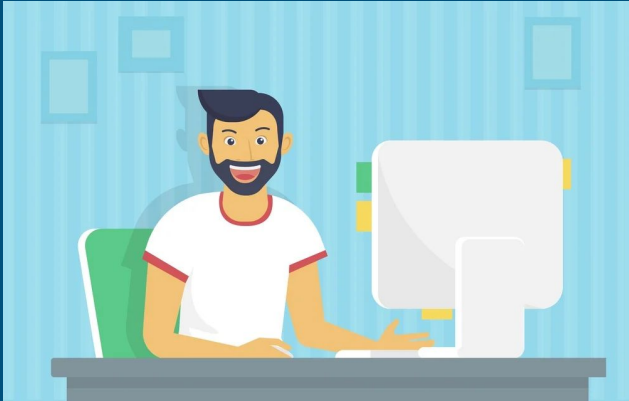
PhD students experienced symptoms of **depression**



Origin of Stress

Gaps between expectation and reality

Expected things



People respond to your email



Clear guidelines to resources

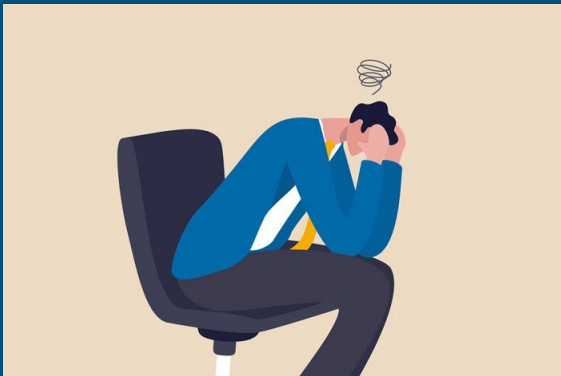


Supportive teamwork

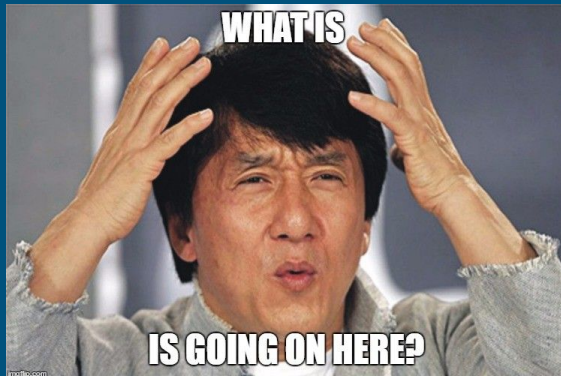
Gaps between expectation and reality

Reality

People don't always respond to your email. Everyone is busy. It's YOUR responsibility to follow up.



There was no guideline to every question. You need to figure things out on your own.



A PhD is more like an entrepreneur. The journey can feel lonely as you work to realize your vision.



Gaps between expectation and reality

Reality

People don't
your emotions
YOUR reality

an entrepreneur.
lonely as you
vision.

FRUSTRATION



Constant uncertainty

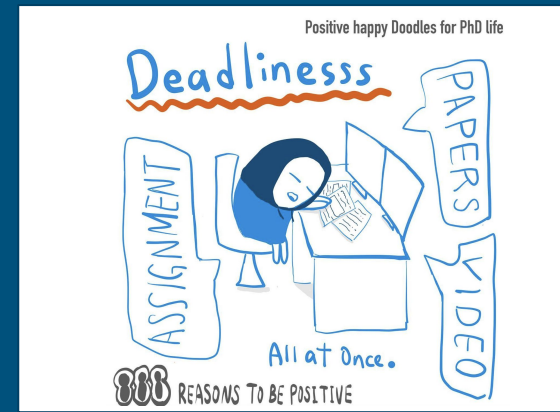
While pursuing novel research...



Unclear which direction is better



Self-doubt whether I can make it




Accumulate work stress and emotional burdens

Constant uncertainty


While pursuing novel research




ANXIETY



Unclear which direction is better



Self-doubt whether I can make it



Accumulate work stress and emotional burdens

Frustration + Anxiety: Feeling Lack of Control

Every PhD journey is different

- No objective measures
 - Paper numbers/Impact factors
 - Timeline
- Individual differences
 - Life phases and conditions
 - Diverse background
- Variability in publication process
 - Inconsistency in review outcomes
 - Luck factors



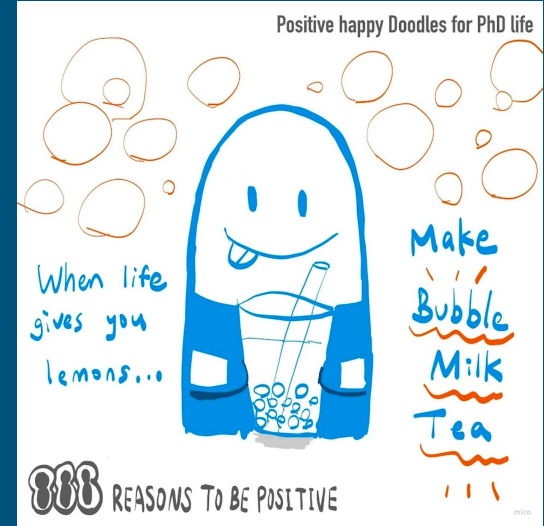
What can you do to alleviate these stress?

I have decided that
your PhD stands for
Pretty Huge Deal.



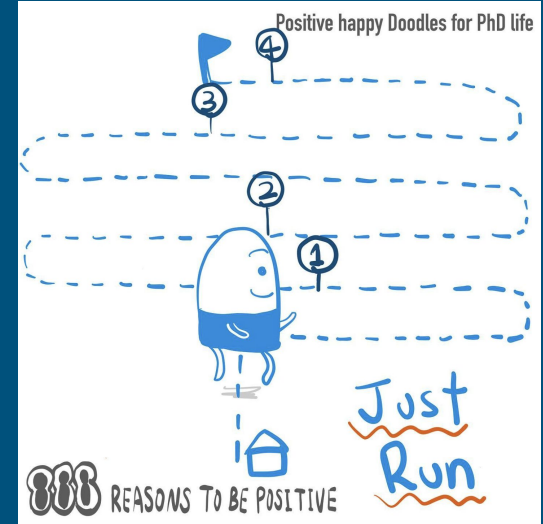
someecards
user card

Establish workflow and feedback loop to keep the mind resilient.



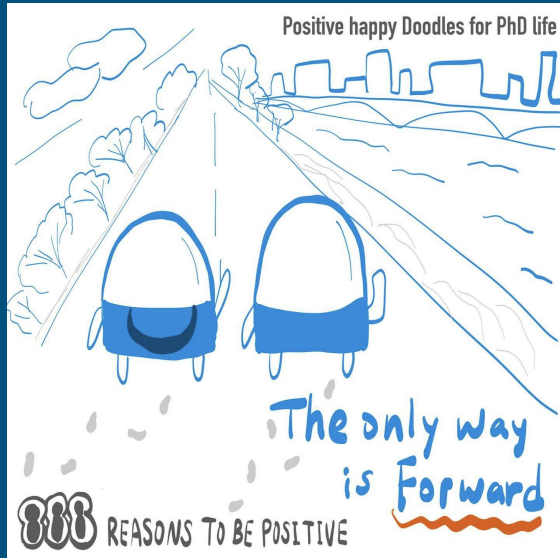
Trained myself to focus on work and build mental resilience to come back from the negative feelings

Cultivate new hobbies detaching from PhD work entirely.



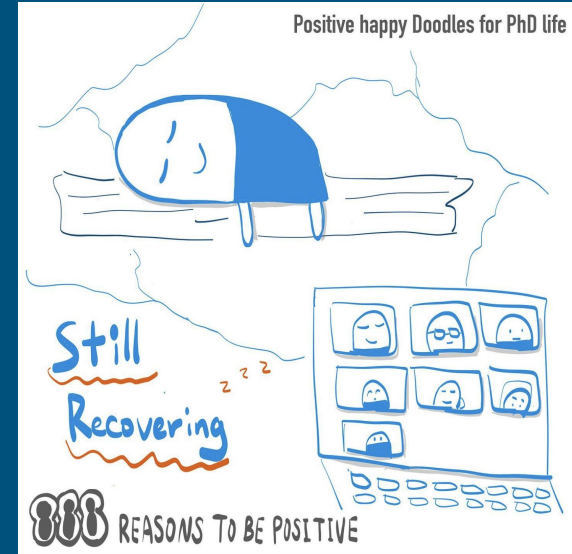
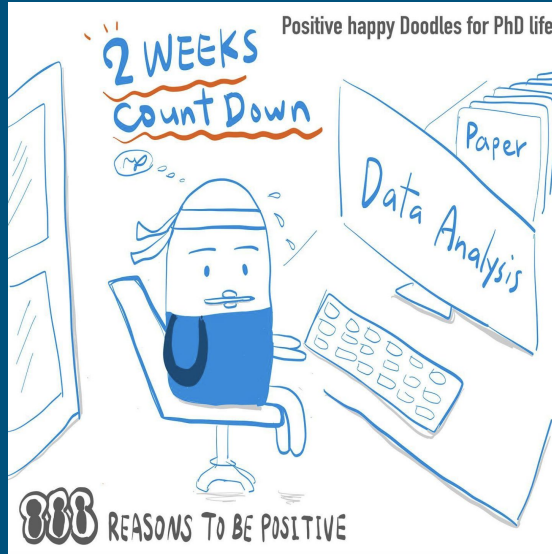
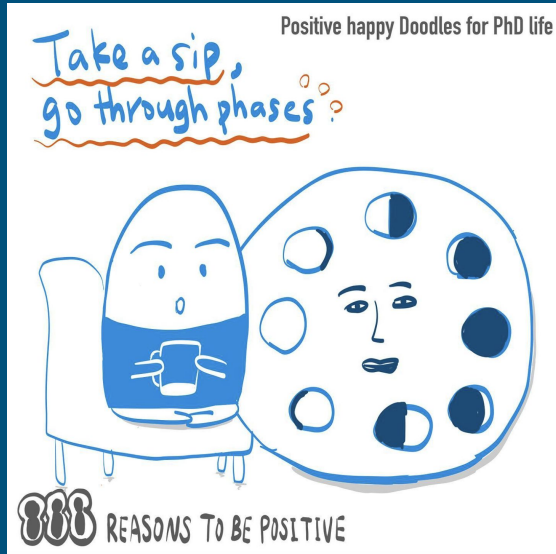
Hobbies allow attentive practices similar to meditation when you are actively learning and engaging in these hobbies.

Talk it out with friends.



Chatting with other PhD students helps you feel understood and re-energized because many experiences are shared.

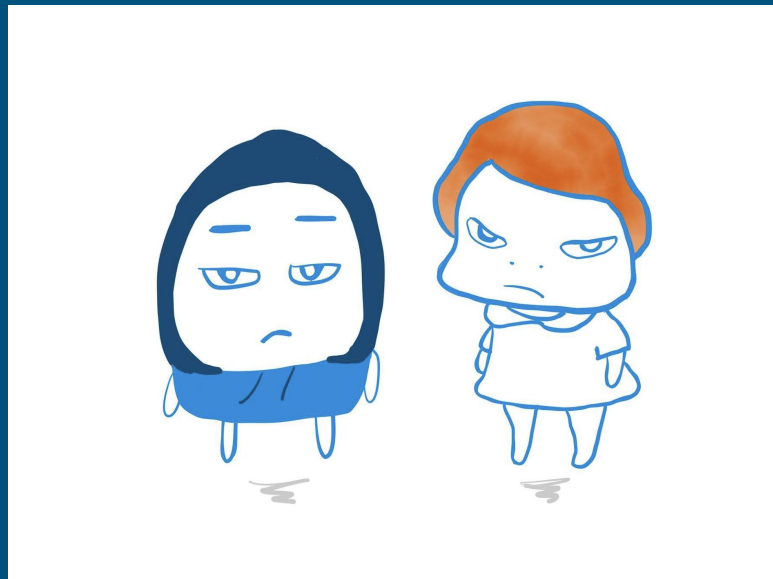
Be aware of the mental cycle and put extra care on the hardship.



Stress is periodic based on the research cycle and highly dependent on the outcome of the work.

Positive Workflow + Hobby + Friendship

What if it still doesn't work?



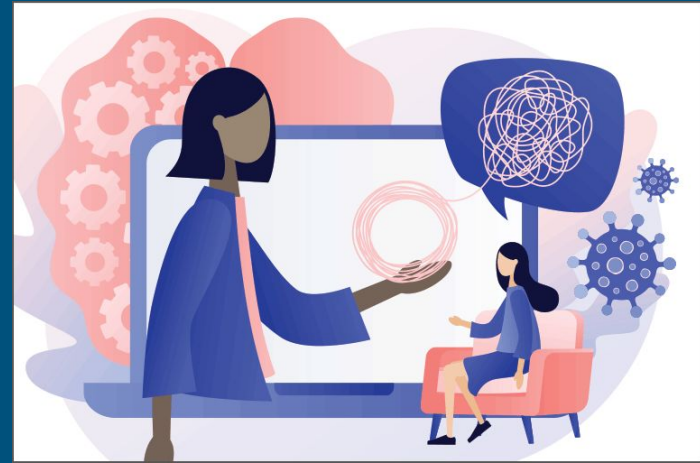
PhD Survival Kit

<https://www.instagram.com/888phoodle/>

I was in an abyss of deep stress...



Less than 2 months before the paper deadline, with stressful work still unfinished.



The therapist is only available in 2+ months.

Doodling Meditation

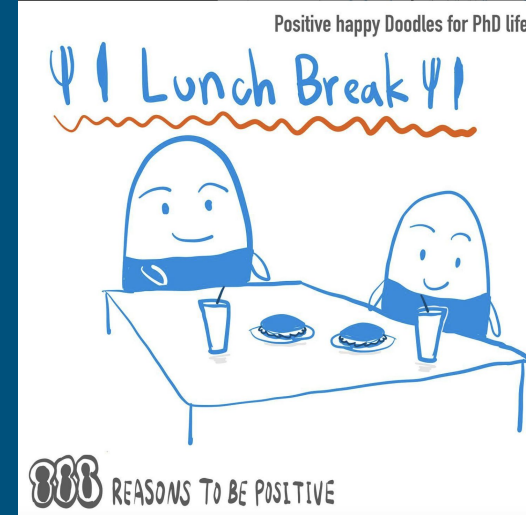
- Free-form doodling to promote relaxation and being present in the moment
- Reflect on happy moments in the day, reinforcing positive thinking
- Enhance creativity and regulate emotion
- Clear the mind to reduce stress
- Enter a state of flow



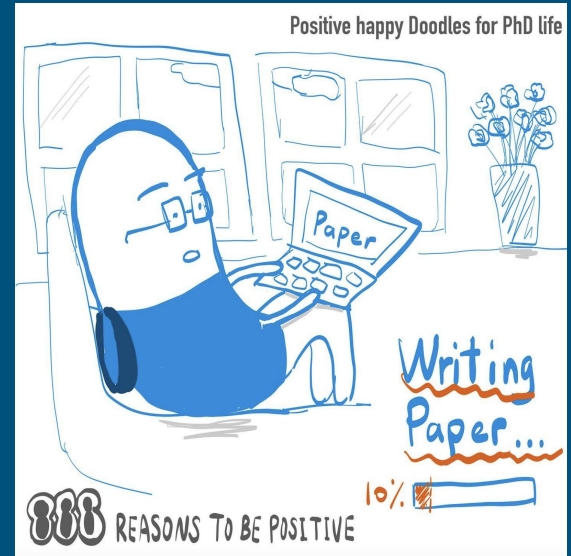
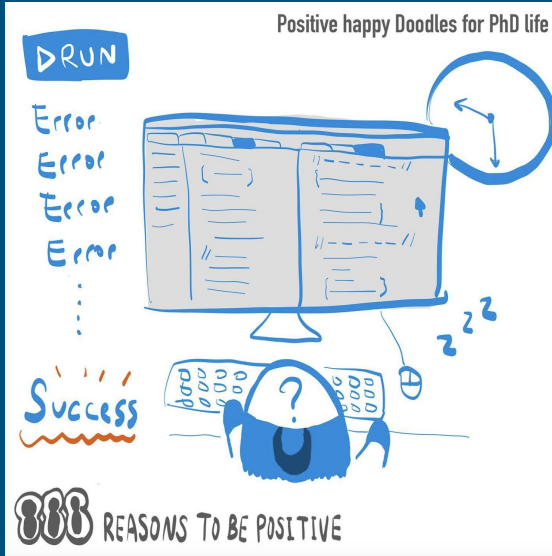


“I doodle one reason to be
happy each day 🗨️”

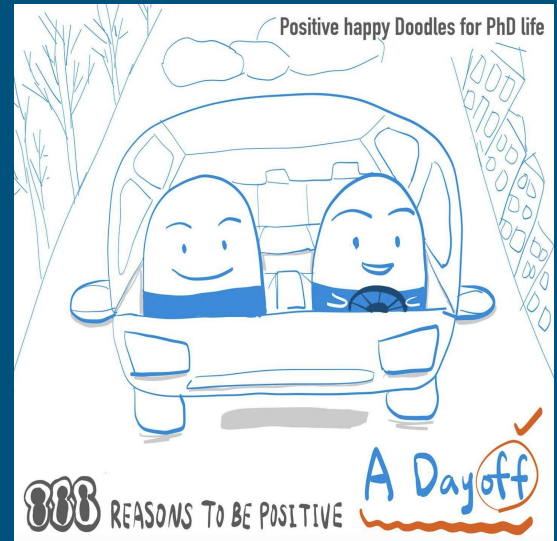
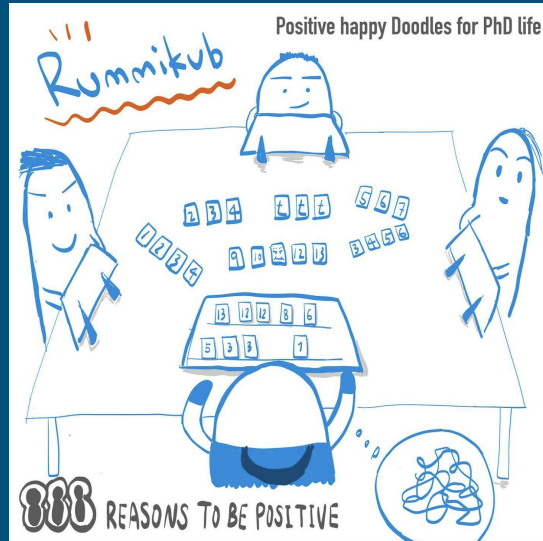
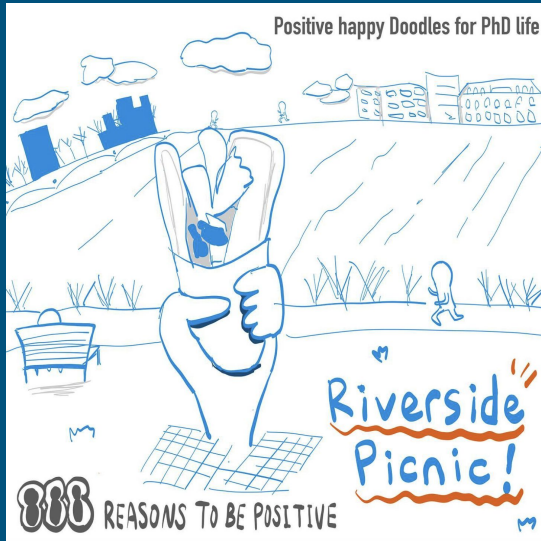
PhD - Positive Happy Doodles for PhD life



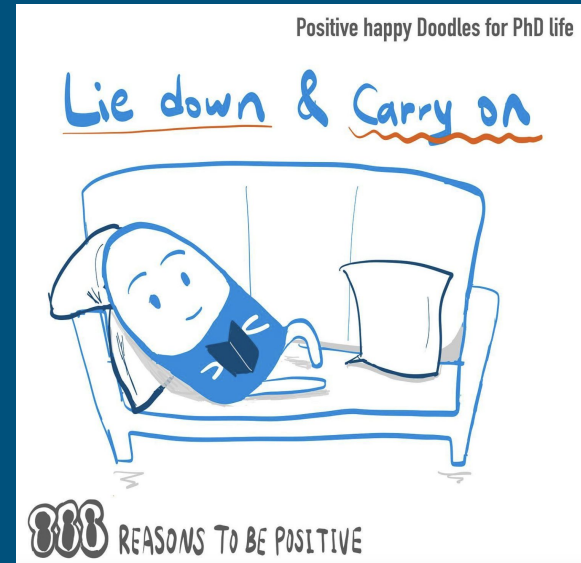
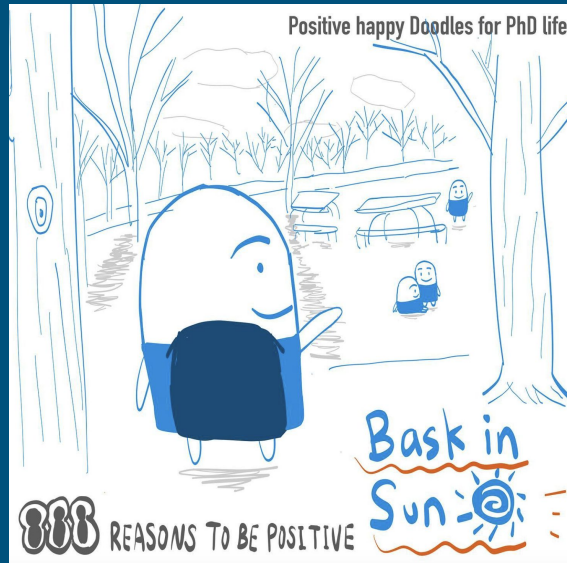
Celebrate small moments



Take some rest



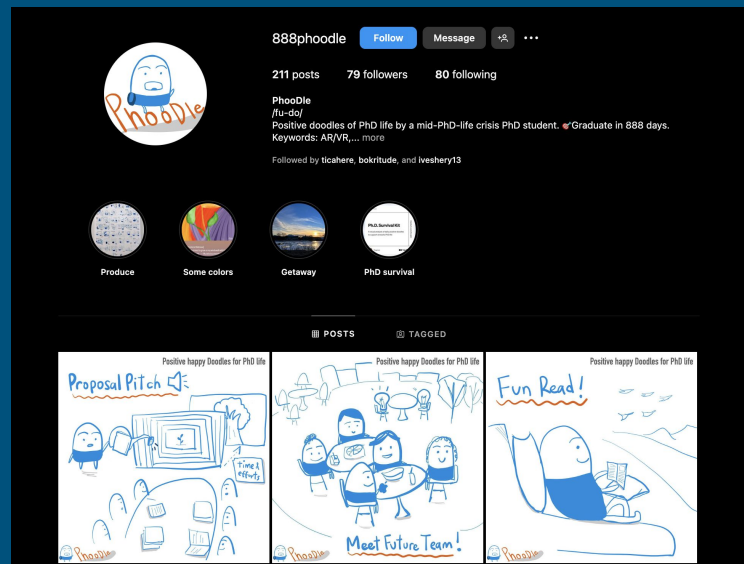
Find inspiration in life if nothing else...



After 52 doodles

- Establish a new hobby
- Show appreciation for life
- Pay attention to your own mental status

It became 200+ doodles



TAKES ONLY 20 MINUTES PER DAY!

work progress



positive feedback



nature



food



entertainment



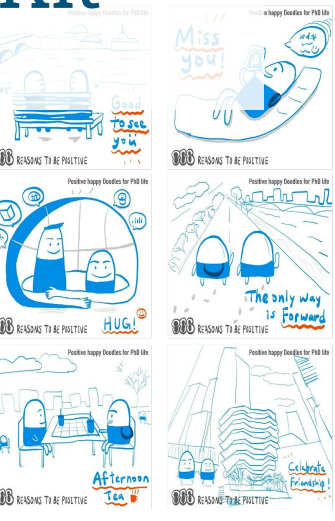
rest



Personalized Survival Kit

friend chat

friend support



Apply research to life

**Personal Data
Collection**



Qualitative Analysis
- Affinity Mapping



Insights

Visual Analysis of Daily Positive Doodles

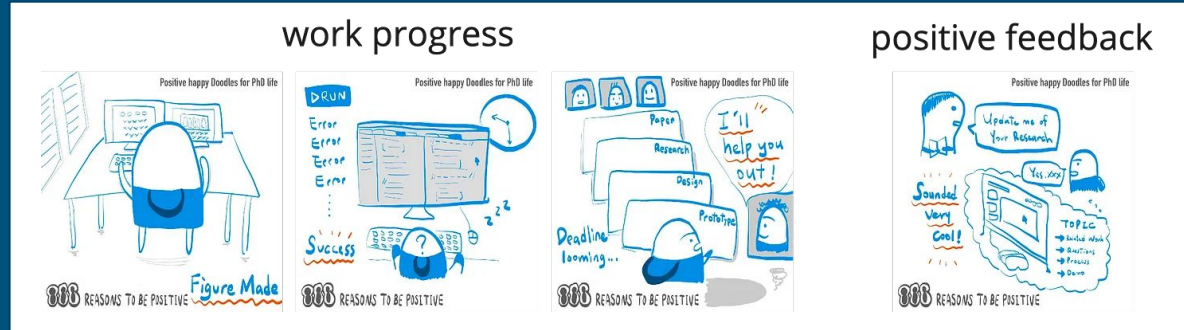


No 1. Take pride in the progress made



16 out of 52

were about the progress I made in research.



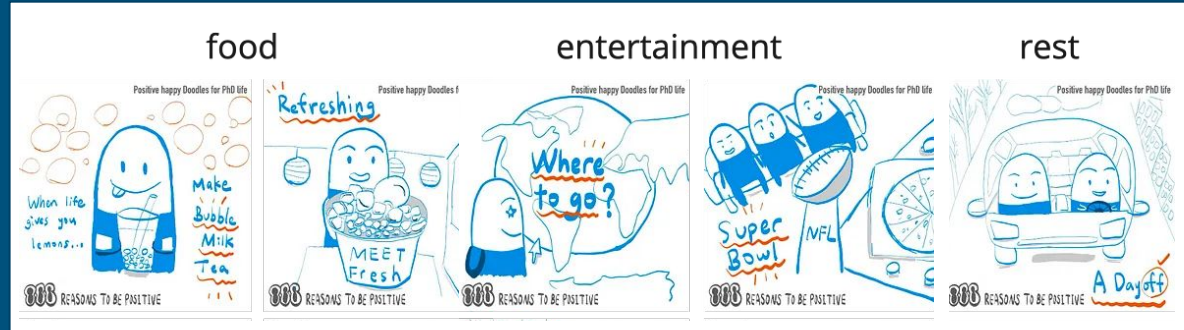
Taking pride in the work you do is a very helpful practice to cope with stress.

No 2. Give yourself positive rewards



15 out of 52

Positive rewards motivate
me under stress.



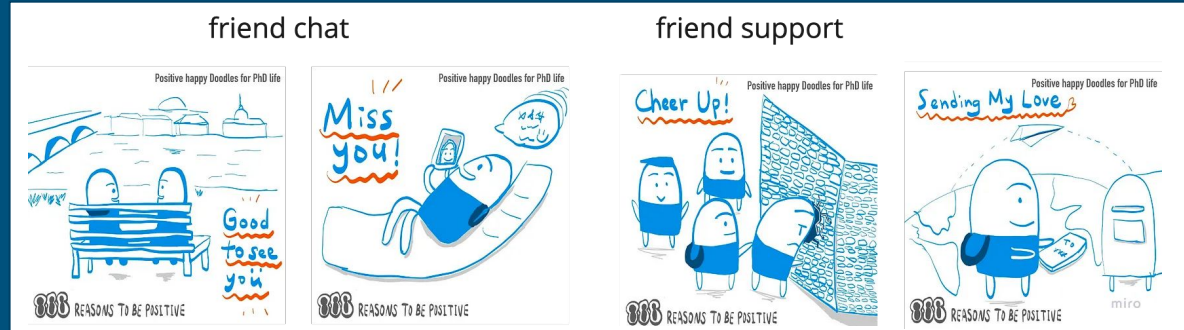
Give yourself the right rewards
as a positive motivation!

No 3. Get inspiration from friends



9 out of 52

Friends and family helps
me feel connected and
stay positive



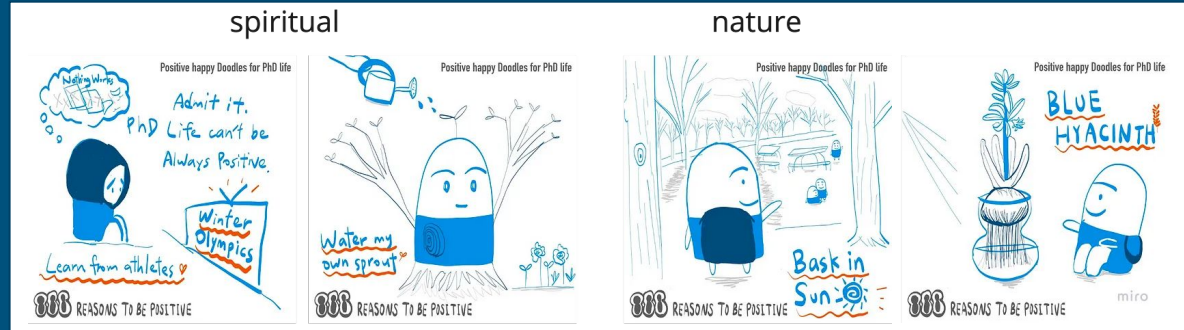
Caring and supporting each other create a
two-way inspiration in life.

No 4. Get inspiration from the world around



6 out of 52

random stuff I chose to
draw when nothing else
really inspired my day



Paying attention to the surrounding world
provides positive inspiration to direct our
focus from stress.

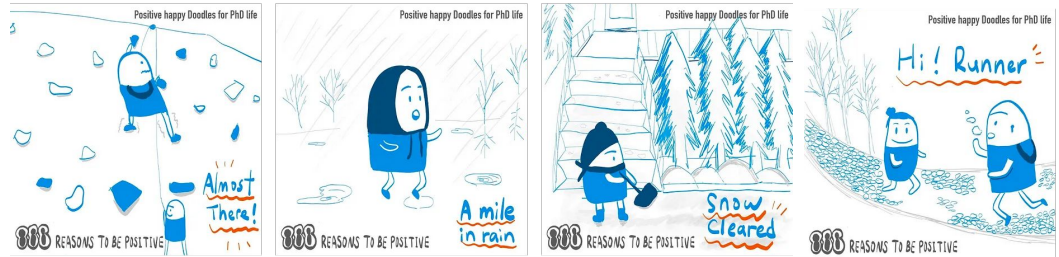
No 5. Hold on to the hobby



6 out of 52

Regular hobbies have helped me greatly to stay healthy and positive

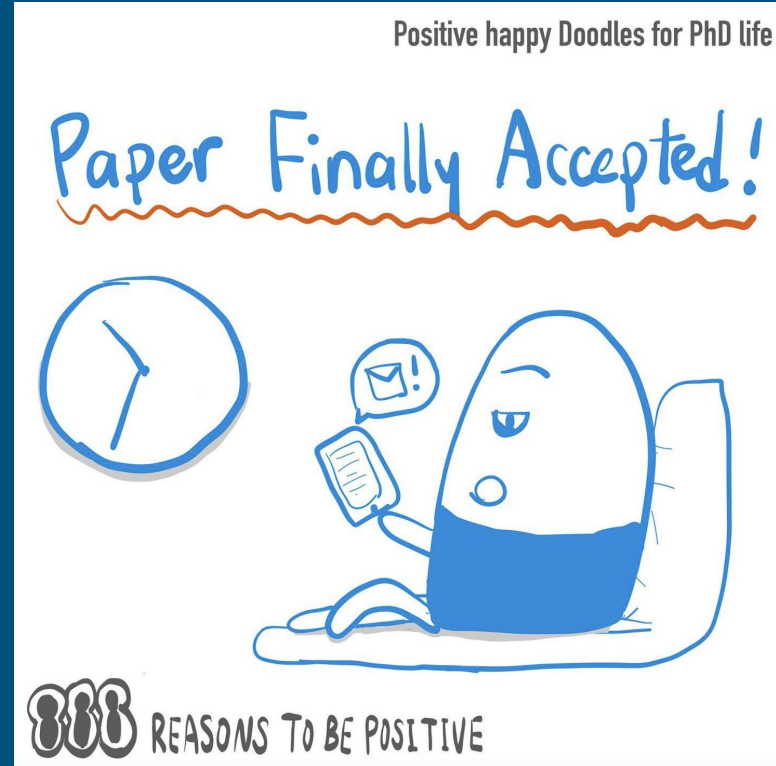
exercise



Hobbies keep a good routine and help make relevant connections in life.

Remarks

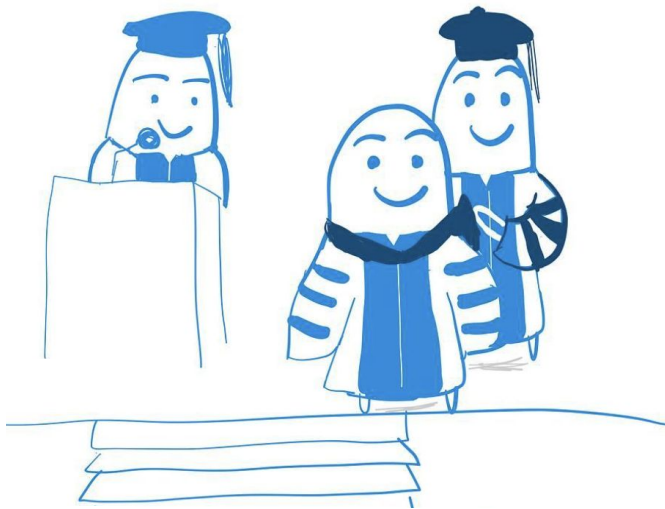
- Understand your origin of stress
- Know that PhD is hard, but worth it
- Learn skills to mitigate your stress
- Develop your personal survival kit



Thank you!

Every PhD journey is different.
What's important is that all PhD students
should take care of themselves as they
accomplish this **Pretty Huge Deal!**

← Ph.D.



Ph.D. Survival Kit

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