

LIVING LIFE FREELY

MENTAL HEALTH TOOLKIT

“To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.”
— Ralph Waldo Emerson

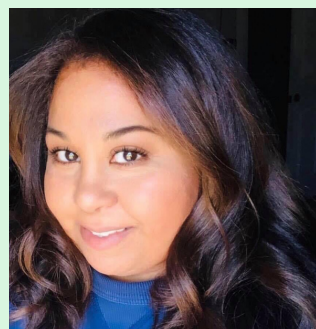


As modern-day humans, we assume many roles and responsibilities and work relentlessly to meet unrealistic expectations that often do not align with our true beliefs and values. When we factor in being a woman, a person of color, or any other minority group, we do not always feel our world is made for us to live the life we are destined to have. This often leads to feelings of low self-worth, inauthenticity, inadequacy, depressed mood, anxiety, and depression. Ultimately, we block our ability to enjoy life and be the best version of ourselves.

We feel a complete lack of control over the direction and quality of our lives as our lives are filled with daily unrelenting stressors. However, we can navigate life's complexities, reduce and better cope with stressors, and negate behaviors preventing us from living the life we want.

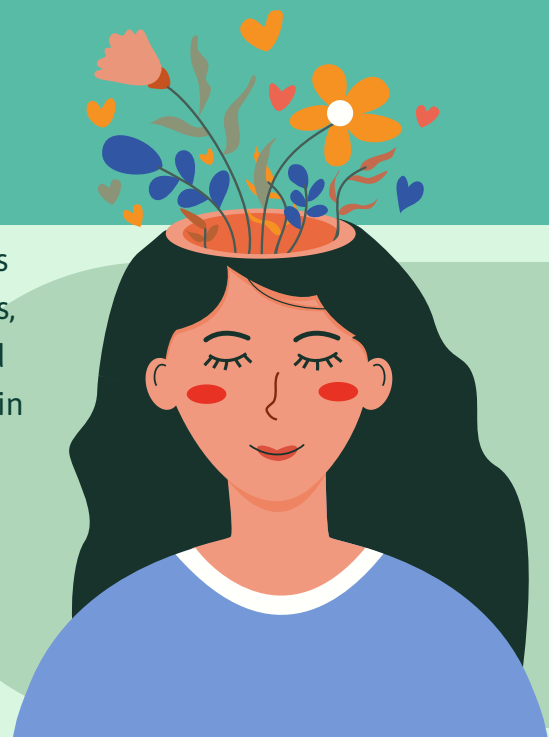
I am Alicia Nino, a licensed occupational therapist (OT). My work as an OT is often not well understood unless one has had a close family member, or themselves, has received OT services. The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) defines the role of OT as using skilled interventions in, “... everyday life activities to promote health, well-being, and your ability to participate in the important activities in your life. This includes any meaningful activity that a person wants to accomplish, including taking care of yourself and your family, working, volunteering, and going to school...”. We primarily work in hospitals, physical rehab facilities, home health, or skilled nursing facilities. We also work in mental health facilities to “... help clients, groups, and communities to manage physical and mental health needs, develop healthy and effective daily routines to promote well-being and learn and utilize strategies to navigate the stresses of life” (AOTA).

“Imagine a new story for your life and start living it!”
-Paulo Coelho



*“...you don't have to be more of anything in order to be **enough**. (You already are.)”*
-Erica Layne

I personally struggled with anxiety, depression, and C-PTSD for decades due to childhood trauma and undiagnosed ADD. In the past seven years, I have had access to great mental health resources, family support, and the guidance of amazing therapists and psychologists to reach a point in my life that I once thought impossible. I created this toolkit to share evidence-based techniques to overcome distorted thinking patterns, create lifestyle changes, and facilitate positive behavioral patterns for your desired life. I also included my own personal examples of how I implemented these strategies in my life to convey how you can easily implement them at any given time to give new meaning to your life.



*“Instead of hustling to build a life that **looks** good, what if you slowed down and cultivated a life that **feels** good?”*

- I want to let you know that you may already know much of this information. I aim to give a broad overview to make it easier for you to create lifetime habits.
- **Know that your existence is as valuable now as it was before and will be in the future.**
- Please be sure to give yourself grace. We are not meant to be perfect humans.
- **You can use any of these tools immediately.**
- Know that you can make progress, regress, and move forward again.
- **You can make a habit of journaling your journey.**
- Be patient and kind to yourself.
- **Click on the hyperlinks for additional information.**

Tips
FOR SUCCESS



5

SIMPLE HABITS FOR A HEALTHIER YOU

Begin by creating a daily routine integrating simple habits to promote a healthier, happier, and less stressed you. Here are five easy ways to take action to improve your overall physical and mental well-being.



Stretch Regularly

Stretching helps increase flexibility and range of motion, prevent injury, and improve circulation. Incorporate a few minutes of stretching into your daily routine to reap these benefits. You can use [adaptive stretching](#) strategies for joint issues or other mobility impairments.

Get Moving

Physical activity reduces the risk of chronic disease, stabilizes and improves mood, promotes better sleep, and decreases stress levels.

- Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity
- Take a walk for 10-15 after a meal
- Take brisk walks during lunchtime at work
- Dance to your favorite music like no one is watching
- Play sports or games requiring physical activity with friends and family (i.e., kickball, basketball, tag, or dodgeball)
- Join a recreation sports league



"Sleep hygiene is one of my biggest struggles. My sleep quality is good. However, I often engage in what has been termed, '[revenge bedtime procrastination](#)'. I must intentionally use strategies to ensure I get enough sleep each night."
-Alicia N.

Sleep

[Sleep](#) is vital for good health, mental clarity, and overall well-being.

- Get 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night
- Keep a consistent bedtime
- Log your sleep hours to ensure you are meeting your sleep goals
- Ditch your phone before [bed](#)

Eat a Balanced Diet

[Eat](#) a variety of [nutrient-dense foods](#), such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins to help fuel your body, boost your immune system and prevent chronic disease.

[Avoid](#) fad diets and foods/drinks with high content of refined sugar, fat, preservatives, [high glycemic index foods](#), artificial sweeteners, and salt.



"Choosing to prepare and eat fresh and nutritious can appear cumbersome. However, it can be one of the best changes you can make that can improve your life significantly. [Help Guide](#) provides great tips to help you achieve this goal."
-Alicia N.



Consume a Variety of Nutritious Foods

The best way to ensure you eat nutrient-dense foods is to refrain from consuming pre-packaged foods and eat self-prepared meals at least 80% of the time. I like to find quick, easy meals with the fewest ingredients. [CleanFoodCrush](#) and [TheCleanEatingCouple](#) are great resources for simple and budget-friendly healthy recipes.

COPING STRATEGIES



We cope by using our thoughts and behaviors to buffer against emotionally-charged events resulting in psychological distress. Often times we exacerbate our stress with maladaptive coping skills we learn incidentally from our family, trauma, hardships, or any number of negative experiences in early life. However, we can unlearn them just as we learned them by practicing effective coping strategies.

Emotioned-focused: seek to decrease negative emotional responses related to a stressful issue

01

- Meditation promotes increased connection and focus, reducing brain chatter to lower stress.
- Journal to allow you to sort through challenging emotions by bringing about awareness without judgment. You can track "mood or emotional changes you experience and any factors contributing to the pattern" ([healthline.com](https://www.healthline.com)).
- Use positive self-talk by recognizing successes, laughing off mistakes, and giving yourself grace.
- Reframe negative thought patterns with cognitive restructuring techniques.

"OTET is a great tool I use to negatenegative emotions. When I feel plagued by a low mood, I get out of the house and place myself in a positive envirovment with other people or palces i typically enjoy. This a great skill to teach your kids as they become moody teenagers."
- Alicia N.



02

Problem-focused: involves addressing the problem creating the distress.

- Please make sure to improve your time management.
- Please ask for help from trusted friends, family, mentors, significant others, or therapists to talk about pressing issues.
- Establish healthy boundaries for self-care and improving relationships.
- Create a daily to-do list...breaking down more significant tasks into smaller ones.
- Leaving unhealthy situations that bring no value to your life and setting boundaries are just not enough.

"I regularly see a trauma counselor and psychologist to manage my mental health struggles, discuss what is going well, and how I work to maintain it. I see therapy as just as important as regularly seeing a medical doctor. It is a lifelong commitment for me."
-Alicia N.



Meaning-focused: drawing on beliefs and values establish the benefits of a stressful situation

03

Positive psychology does a great job delineating meaning-focused strategies:

- Explore benefits that can manifest from stressful situations or misfortune.
- Make an intentional effort to remind yourself of previously discovered benefits.
- Reappraise and adapt your goal processes that reflect where you are now.
- Restructure priorities.
- Give ordinary events and moments positive meaning.

"Too often i would spend time on things or people that truly did not serve a true purpose in my life. I no longer feel pressured to include them as a priority and I have no guilt."
-Alicia N.



04

Social-coping: using the emotional and contributory support of others to decrease stress

- Provide a lending ear for others when they are experiencing stressful events.
- Cook a meal for an elderly neighbor or someone in need.
- Offer others support with a need when they are facing challenges with their mental health.
- Validating other's feelings without judgment and with compassion.
- Volunteer to mentor individuals who would benefit significantly to positively impact their lives.



"The goal isn't to get rid of all your negative thoughts and feelings; that's impossible. The goal is to change the response to them."

-marcadangel



Everyday Mindfulness Habbit You Can Practice

Mindfulness

is an ancient practice to bring about awareness of what's happening in the present—of all that's going on inside and all that's happening around you. Becoming more aware of where you are and what you're doing without becoming overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's happening around you.



Sit in the Morning

Getting up earlier to give time to yourself offers a great opportunity to practice mindfulness. The day is just beginning; it is nice and quiet, and you can talk kind and positive to yourself and manifest an optimistic day.



Spend Time with Nature

Jogging/walking in nature is one of my favorite ways to nurture my body and spirit. Those close to me know my number one local spot is the Cedar Ridge Preserve, with its steep and never-ending steps throughout its numerous trails. The majority of the preserve keeps you shielded from the sun.



Feel Feelings

In being mindful, you don't want to avoid your feelings. Part of it is being in the present moment, just how it is. Put away phones and be fully present for game time with loved ones, an overdue brunch with a close friend, or as you sit on the back porch watching the sunset. Take note of all your emotions and let them be.



Create Something

Practice mindfulness by engaging in creative hobbies you enjoy. I love to drive my family crazy with my various hobbies, from furniture rehabbing, my small balloon decor business, or making all things with my Cricut, make the choice to get lost in the moment!



Listen to Bilateral Stimulation Music

A quick search of your favorite music apps will give you a plethora of playlists. Bilateral stimulation music targets both sides of the brain, decreasing negative responses to anxiety, trauma, or daily stressors. I use this on my way home from work or after an upsetting event. After a long school day, my kids will even ask to play for calming effects.

“Visualize your highest self and start showing up as him/him” [them].

-Ali Owens