

# HEADS

*CHANGING MINDS ON  
MENTAL HEALTH*

# UP



**MELANIE  
SIEBERT**

*ILLUSTRATIONS BY  
BELLE WUTHRICH*

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ORCA BOOK PUBLISHERS

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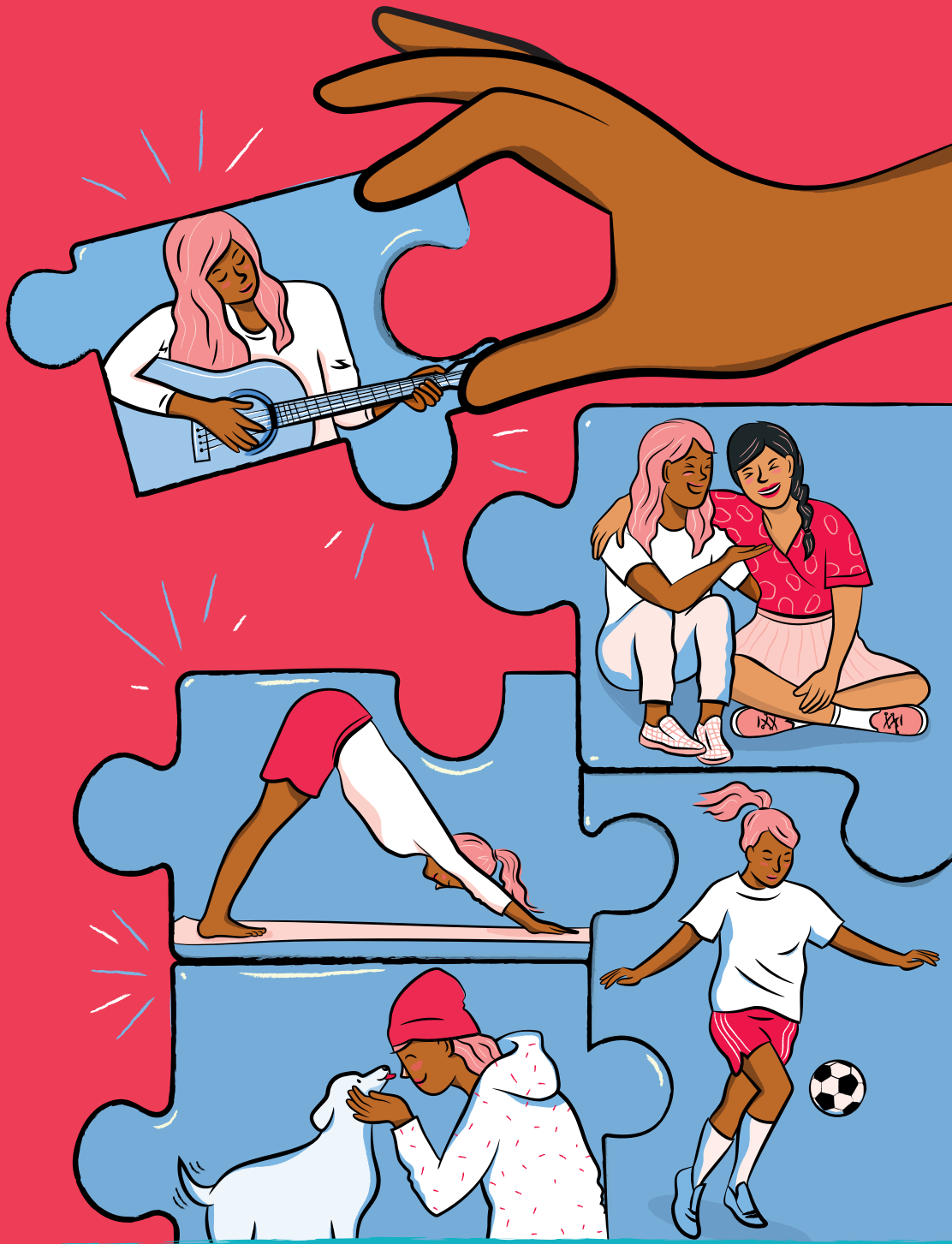
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# THE ROAD TO WELLNESS

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## *ON SURVIVING AND THRIVING*

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**AT ONE TIME**, mental illness was thought to be a life sentence. But patients and survivors have long fought for a more hopeful approach. The recovery movement thinks of recovery as a personal journey, one that each person gets to define for themselves.

Recovery is based on the idea that each person has the right to figure out their own version of wellness and should be supported by society to do this. Recovery does not equal being cured. It isn't necessarily a perfect state of health. It's when a person gets to decide for themselves what a meaningful, dignified life looks like. Even if a person continues to live with symptoms of mental illness, they can still have a good quality of life and experience wellness.

For some people, recovery involves being supported with various treatment services. For others, it's more about a sense of belonging in their community or being able to pursue work and personal interests. For still others, it's freedom from psychiatric labels and treatments. Recovery is about creating a fulfilling life and charting your own road to wellness.

## RESILIENCE

**W**hen emotions get big and hard to handle, you might wonder how you'll ever get through it. Resilience is the ability to cope with challenging experiences and to live a meaningful life even though it's not easy. It doesn't mean it isn't painful or confusing. It just means you are able to get through it.

You wake up feeling down, but you get up anyway, have a shower, eat some breakfast and get out the door. You don't feel great, but you trust that you'll feel better if you do something other than lying in bed all day. That takes some grit.

Resilience isn't something that only amazing, superhero-type people have. It's something we all can learn and practice. Resilience is self-compassion, determination, optimism and the ability to calm yourself, to endure distress, to resist acting impulsively, to put things in perspective and to connect with others.

Resilience also comes from feeling you've got people who care for you and treat you with respect. Some of us are lucky to find this easily in our family or community. Others have to search long and hard.

Each of us needs to feel that we are seen, heard and understood. When you look into the eyes of someone you trust and see kindness and understanding in their face, your nervous system is soothed. Love and belonging builds resilience.





Research shows that loneliness is a major risk factor for dying young. In fact, it rates right up there with smoking in terms of how bad it is for your physical health. Feeling isolated and suffering in silence can also worsen anxiety and depression. Connecting with friends, family or your community is good for your body as well as your sense of well-being.

## BREAKING THROUGH SHAME AND STUFF THAT KEEPS US STUCK

**C**heer up! Don't worry! It will all be okay! Ever heard that? Often people try to say nice things to make us feel better. But sometimes (mostly, maybe) these messages make us feel worse. It can make it seem like it's not okay to be down or stressed out or hurting. Not to mention all the social media that makes it look like everyone else is living 100 percent fantastic lives.

Sometimes we give these messages to ourselves: *What's my problem? It's not that bad, I should be okay! I should suck it up! I should try harder!* "Should-ing on yourself" is not usually helpful. It can make

you feel like crap. It can make you feel guilty even though what you're going through is just human.

Our minds can go haywire with harsh thoughts like *I'm such a loser, I screw everything up, Nobody cares, What's the point?* Often when we try to push feelings away, they just get bigger. It can get into a spin cycle where the more you try to hide or ignore your feelings, the worse they get.

Talking can help untangle difficult feelings. If you let them out and give them some air, they often start to feel more understandable and more workable.

It's not easy to ask for help. If you're experiencing low motivation, anxiety or hopelessness, it can be very hard to walk in the door of a strange place and talk to a new person. People often feel unsure that they are going to be believed or taken seriously. It can even be difficult to talk to someone you know and trust. One of the major things that keeps people from reaching out is shame.

Shame is that crawl-into-a-hole feeling of being unlovable. It's the idea that *I'm not worth it*. Sometimes shame causes us to pretend to be something we're not, or to desperately try to please others. Sometimes it can make us lash out and heap shame on someone else. Sometimes it causes us to withdraw and hide, or to frantically scramble to do things perfectly. Shame is a pretty toxic force.

Shame often comes with a really harsh inner voice: *If people knew my inner muck, they wouldn't love me*. The pressure of keeping up an act in order to be loved and accepted is exhausting. Giving in to the feeling of unworthiness is isolating.

When I'm not doing well, all I want to do is hide. I feel exhausted, fuzzy-headed and shut-down. My body hurts. Things feel impossible.

Shame can make you feel as if you have been coated in some high-tech material that only lets in the bad stuff. Compliments or kindnesses bounce right off, but insensitive or careless comments stab right in.



FEELING ANXIOUS AND  
REVVED UP OR  
REALLY, REALLY LOW

GETTING DOWN  
ON YOURSELF FOR  
HOW YOU FEEL

*There's something  
wrong with me.*

# the SPIN CYCLE

FEELING  
WORSE



IGNORING OR  
HIDING YOUR  
FEELINGS

*Poof!*



Shame is one of the biggest things that keeps us from connecting with others. And yet connecting with others and sharing our pain is actually the best therapy ever.

Brené Brown, a researcher on love and vulnerability, says that belonging is very different from fitting in. Fitting in is figuring out what you need to say, do, look like and so on to be one of the crowd. Belonging is when you get to be yourself—with all your quirks and flaws—and still feel loved and accepted.

Doesn't that sound amazing?

Shame often keeps us from reaching out. But I truly believe that if we can summon the courage to speak the truth about what's going on for us, things can change. We can find connection and belonging.

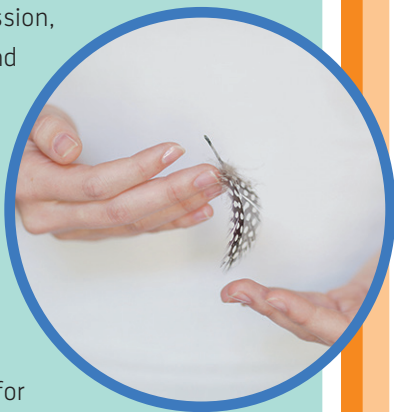
*A recent study shows that being able to forgive yourself and others is linked to better mental health. While more research is needed, this study suggests that people who practice forgiveness decrease their stress levels, which results in greater well-being.*



# SELF-COMPASSION

**EVERY PERSON FEELS** “not enough” in some way. Trust me, you’re not the only one who feels flawed and unlovable. One of the things I’ve found to be the best antidote to shame is practicing self-compassion.

Kristin Neff, a researcher on self-compassion, suggests that we all need to practice being kind to ourselves. Practice means you’ve got to do it over and over again to get better at it. One of the things she suggests is taking little breaks where we just check in with ourselves and try using a kind inside voice instead of a harsh inside voice. Here are four steps she recommends practicing in a quiet moment:



- 1. THINK ABOUT** the thing that’s difficult for you. What’s going on? How is it affecting you? Get in touch with what is hard about it.
- 2. GENTLY GET REAL** with yourself by saying *This is so painful for me. I’m really having a tough time.* Or find your own words to acknowledge how you’re feeling. Let yourself know your feelings matter.
- 3. REMIND YOURSELF** that suffering is a part of being human. You might say something like *It’s understandable to feel this way. I’m not the only one. I’m just human.*
- 4. MAKE A WISH** or a promise to take good care of yourself. Say something like *I’m going to be gentle and kind to myself. I want to treat myself like I would a close friend. I’m going to take good care of myself.*

You can find guided meditations to listen to on Kristin Neff’s website: [selfcompassion.org](http://selfcompassion.org)



*Tunchai*

## ON REACHING OUT

**H**ELLO. MY NAME IS TUNCHAI REDVERS. I'm Dene and Métis from the Northwest Territories. I'm a poet, a social justice warrior and the cofounder of *We Matter*. I'm here to tell you that life is really hard. And there are hardships that we have to experience in life that seem really unfair. And they are really unfair. But I'm here to tell you that you can get through anything that comes your way.

I was 11 years old when I started having suicidal thoughts. And for many years I had suicidal thoughts. I was bullied really badly. I've been in abusive relationships. I've experienced trauma. I have trauma in my family. I have addiction in my family. When I was 15, I took a lot of pills and I ended up in the hospital. What I learned from that experience is that I didn't want to die. I just wanted to stop hurting. I didn't want to be in pain anymore.

At that time, I didn't know that I had other options. I didn't know that all I had to do was reach out and tell somebody how I was feeling. For my whole life I had kept everything inside of me. And it started to feel really lonely. I felt lonely and empty and weak. But once I started to talk about those things, things got easier. I wasn't on my own. There were suddenly people who loved and cared about me, who were there to support me.

We all have a light and nobody can ever steal your light from you. You are the only person who gets to decide who you are. Nobody else can do that. Nobody can take your light from you. So guard your light."

## THE PROS

**S**ometimes it's helpful to get professionals onboard. For starters, it's important that you find someone you feel comfortable with. The more comfortable you are, the more likely you'll be able to just lay out what's going on.

Trust is important for a good relationship, so professionals are bound by confidentiality. This means they keep your story private and only share your information with your permission, unless there is a very serious safety concern. Confidentiality can be especially important for teenagers, because sometimes you may need to talk about something you just don't feel comfortable with your parents or others in your life knowing.

A family doctor or general practitioner (GP) is often a good place to start. A doctor will be able to do a thorough assessment of your mental and physical health and recommend some next steps.

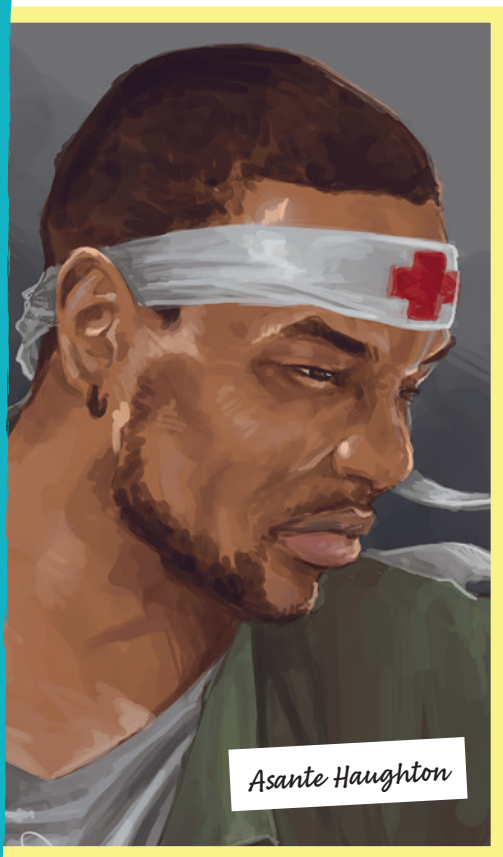
Psychiatrists have a medical degree, just like a GP, plus they have gone on to get specialized training in the diagnosis and treatment of mental illnesses. Psychiatrists are often used as consultants and will work with other mental health professionals to help treat the most complex cases.

Psychologists have a doctorate in psychology and must be registered with a professional association. Psychologists often provide talk therapy, but they can also do more specialized assessments related to emotional disorders, intellectual or developmental impairments and behavioral problems.

Counselors or therapists are professionals who specialize in talk therapy. They usually have an advanced degree in counseling psychology or social work. Registration with a professional association ensures that they meet a high standard of education and ethical practice.

They often specialize in a particular type of therapy, such as cognitive behavioral therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, body-based therapies, narrative therapy, art therapy, family therapy or nature therapy. When you're looking for a counselor, you can ask them to explain the approach they use and see if it's a good fit for you.

Remember, the most important thing is that you find someone you click with. A good, safe connection with another human being is the most healing thing.



## ASANTE'S STORY

**I**n 10th grade Asante Haughton stopped hanging out with friends and stopped enjoying school. He had always been a good student. His mom had taught him to read at age three and being a whiz kid had always been his thing. But he no longer cared. He had no motivation. Nobody knew what was going on at home, and he didn't know who to turn to.

Asante's mom had been going to university and working a bunch of low-paying jobs, trying to support her three kids. She was stressed and irritable, but Asante didn't know how bad things really were.



Then one Sunday morning when he was watching the Euro Cup finals with his brothers, a crisis team knocked on the door. His mom was slumped in the bedroom, pills scattered all around her. Bravely, she had called the crisis line and asked for help. That night she was taken to the hospital, given a prescription for antidepressants and sent home.

“It felt like a wrecking ball hit me,” Asante remembers. How bad was it? Had she come close to dying? Would the pills help? Who could he turn to or call if she wasn’t well?

A few months later, Asante came home from school and found out she was in the hospital again. It hit him that there wasn’t going to be a quick fix. His mom was in the hospital for weeks, and this time the pills stayed scattered on the floor. He just couldn’t look at them.

Asante’s feelings of isolation turned into deep anxiety. He didn’t hang out with friends or date or go to parties. He didn’t really even talk to anyone. He became very self-conscious about his body, thinking he was too skinny, that his head was too big for his body and his teeth were too crowded and jacked up. Eventually he stopped looking in the mirror altogether.

He was worried that people thought he was weird. It got to the point where he could barely leave the house. “I felt like there was something tremendously wrong with me because I couldn’t do what other kids my age were doing,” Asante says. “All I knew was something was wrong with Mom. And something was wrong with me.”

Back then, Asante didn’t understand what was happening. Today, knowing more of his mom’s story has helped him understand his own story. “If I told you all the things my mom has been through,” Asante says, “you wouldn’t believe it.” He speaks of her with warm admiration.

Asante’s mom grew up in Jamaica in a poor family. They never had a stable place to live and they had to scrounge through garbage



for food. When Asante was three years old, his mom moved with her children to Canada to escape violence and build a new life.

But even after the suicide attempts, the worst was yet to come. Asante could tell that his mom was struggling, but he couldn't quite figure out what was wrong. Even though she was holding down two jobs, it was like she was checked out, in a fog. The look on her

face had changed. So had the rhythm of her speech. She started to be afraid that the government and the police were after her for some outstanding student loans. She started forbidding Asante to go certain places and to answer the phone.

“I would try to reason with her but it was just impossible,” Asante says. He soon realized that arguing didn’t help her become more realistic in her thinking.

Asante’s mom started hearing voices and the paranoia increased in intensity. She flushed her reading glasses down the toilet because she thought the authorities could spy on her through them. With a hammer, she destroyed the computer that had her university papers on it. Then she ordered Asante and his brothers to spread the pieces of the computer in random dumpsters across Toronto. Asante rode the bus with a smashed-up computer in his bag, thinking “I’m just going to do this thing that I know doesn’t make sense because it will calm her down.”

The internet got cut off. The TV got cut off. Asante would steal food and ration it through the week. He’d come straight home from school to spend time with his mom. He would make toast or spaghetti and try to coax her to eat. For months she was barely sleeping or eating. She became so thin you could see her heart beating in her chest.

At the same time, Asante slipped into depression. “I was really sad all the time,” he says. “I had no motivation. I stopped doing homework. It was impossible for me to get excited about anything. I didn’t know what it was like to have fun anymore. I was still going to school every day, but I had completely disengaged from life. The switch went off and I was kinda done.”

Asante turned to writing poetry and rap lyrics. Some of the angry and violent emotions coming out on the page scared him. But this outlet also helped him to get through this time.

One night, Asante and his brothers realized they had to get help. Things were getting scary. It was like their mom was a different person. She was angry and scared of everything. Conspiracies were spinning in her head. When they tried to convince her to go to the hospital, she refused. She threatened to jump off a nearby overpass. Quickly they called 9-1-1.

She was in hospital for months. The doctors said she had been only a week away from dying of starvation. This time, when she was released from hospital, she was connected with a team of professionals. She had been diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder and prescribed antipsychotics. She started to learn how to manage her own mental health.

For Asante, the sense of relief was immense. She was finally getting help. This was the beginning of her recovery. And even though Asante would continue to struggle with depression in his university years, it was the beginning of his recovery too.

He started playing basketball morning, noon and night. He had a coach who believed in him, and the school gym was usually open. He started working out and analyzing games on tv. While he had started Grade 12 without much skill, he ended the year as the team's most valuable player. Basketball helped him meet people and make friends. It was a way of feeling alive again.

Eventually Asante went to get help from a therapist. "She was super real with me," Asante says. "She helped me open up to discover things about myself and my life that I hadn't clued in to. All the things that I thought were wrong with me suddenly had an explanation. They made sense. And that was the beginning of the shame lifting."

Asante encourages people to reach out for support—to a teacher, a counselor, a peer worker or some other trusted person. "When I was younger," he says, "I thought that if I talked to a professional it would mean that I was crazy or that something was fractured or



*Stella's Place uses a holistic approach to mental health for young people, combining clinical support with things like employment assistance, opportunities to develop creativity, fitness programs and peer support groups.*

broken, and I didn't want to see myself that way." Now he realizes that having a listening ear and someone to help you understand what is going on can be so helpful.

Today Asante is the leader of the peer support training program at Stella's Place, a hub for youth mental health in Toronto. To stay healthy, he makes smoothies and focuses on turning his eye inward, through writing or through just taking a quiet moment. He pays close attention to how relaxed or stressed he is in his body. He is now a lot better at recognizing how he is feeling in the moment.

He tries to remember that even if what he is feeling is intense, it will probably be less intense in three hours or three days or three weeks. "All pain is temporary," he often reminds the people he works with. "It might be really difficult for a while, but you can get through it."



## INVOLUNTARY TREATMENT

**ONE OF THE MOST EMOTIONALLY** and ethically challenging issues in the treatment of mental illness is involuntary treatment. At times a person's brain can be so incapacitated that they are unable to understand their own situation and unable to seek the help they need. If a person is thought to be a "***danger to self or others.***" there is often a legal justification for doing something to intervene to keep everyone safe.

The law sets out circumstances under which a person may be admitted to a hospital against their own wishes. In many places, a police officer or a doctor can make the decision that someone needs to go to hospital to be further assessed. Or if a family member or friend is concerned about someone, they can ask a judge to issue a warrant for the police to find the person and take them to hospital. Then, once in hospital, if at least two doctors agree that the person needs urgent treatment to prevent them from harming themselves or others, the patient can be held against their will until they have recovered their ability to make sound decisions and act safely.

Having someone involuntarily admitted—or "committed" or "certified"—can be a very difficult decision. It's stressful to see someone you care about in a severe mental health crisis. Sometimes if a person has had bad experiences in the past or is scared of being locked up, they have a lot of good reasons for not wanting to ask for help. When I have been involved in this process, I have always been troubled by forcing treatment on someone. It can feel like such a violation of trust. But sometimes it might be the only way to keep a person alive.

# GOOD HITS

## BASICS FOR SURVIVING AND THRIVING

**H**ere are 10 things you can do to lift your mood. Let's get basic. These are good hits that everybody needs:

**Move it**—When you're feeling sluggish, you might just want to curl up and play dead. But the slugs will take over your body if you let them. To get a jolt of good chemicals, get moving. Even a 10-minute walk can change how you feel. Or put on some music and bop, break-dance or just fling yourself around.

**Get face-to-face**—Connect in person. It's easy to hide away or zone out online, but we all need to hang with other people IRL. Pick someone you feel safe and good with. Sometimes it's enough to just be together.

**Let your feelings flow**—Find someone you can talk to and let it flow. Or pull out a journal and free-write. Or sketch or just mess around with color. Or let yourself have a big cry or beat on a pillow. Surf the wave of your feelings and know they're real and important.



*Writing stuff down can help you calm your body, understand your emotions and get perspective.*

**Feed the life force**—Eat something delicious and healthy. Food can be so comforting. Let your body know you want to take care of it.

**Slow down**—Give yourself the night off and do something soothing. Listen to calming music. Take a hot bath. Cuddle with a pet. For the moment, just focus on something relaxing.

**Get outside**—Find something in nature to stare at. It might be a sunset or a little wild plant growing in the crack of a sidewalk. Hang with it. Notice the light and the feel of the air. Wonder at it. Isn't it amazing how life is tenacious and intricate and flowing around us all the time?

**Conk out**—Sleep is essential because it's when your brain and body heal. Make it your mission to get at least eight hours each night. Devise a bedtime routine to help you wind down. Shut down screens a few hours before bed because they beam blue light into your eyeballs, telling your brain to wake up. Take a hot shower, make a herbal tea, have a little snack, listen to soothing music or a podcast, then tuck in.

**Lighten up**—We all need fun and a few laughs. Even if it's hard to imagine having fun right now, write a list of anything that you enjoyed at some point in your life. Then pick one thing to do each day. Even if you don't feel like it. If you're having trouble thinking of something, google *kittens* or *puppies* or *dancing babies*.

**Do something nice for someone else**—Sometimes a good way to get out of your own head is to think about others. It might be something practical or just a little note to let them know you care. Bet you can't do this without feeling a little better.

**Do what matters**—What is it that you really care about? Do that!



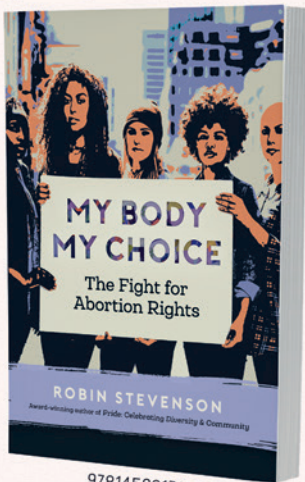


*Science shows that exercise that gets your heart pumping lifts your mood. Aerobic exercise makes the brain release endorphins. Weight lifting has also been proven to boost mood and motivation.*



# CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

ORCA  
ISSUES

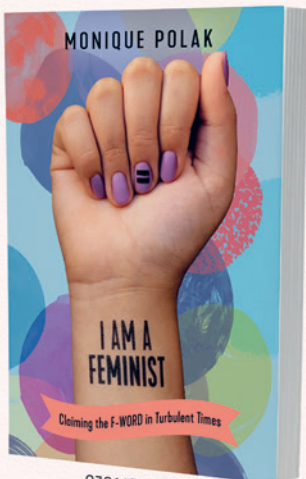


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Kirkus' Best Books of 2019  
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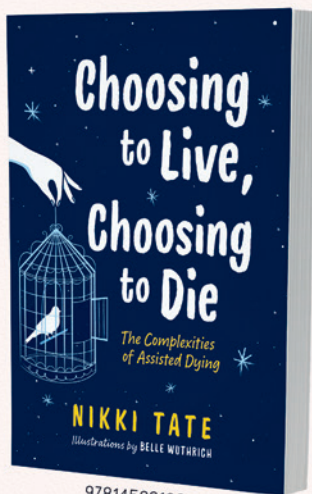
★ "Required reading for teens of every gender."  
—Booklist, starred review

★ "A boon for those seeking clear, comprehensive information."  
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★ "Fascinating and passionately written."  
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★ "A fascinating guide."  
—School Library Journal, starred review

**SUBJECTS THAT ARE AS PERSONAL  
AS THEY ARE POLITICAL.**