

EMOTIONAL EATING WORKBOOK

A 16-page mini workbook to assist you in the process of recovery from emotional eating. Written by Andrea Clares Montero, Specialist Eating Disorder nutritionist at The London Centre for Eating Disorders and Body Image





ABOUT US

We are a psychology led service, consisting of clinical and counselling psychologists, dietitians, family therapists and occupational therapists. We have extensive training and experience in treating the full range of eating, body image and self-esteem disorders.

At the London Centre we believe that it's important to find not only the right clinician, but also the right treatment for you. So whilst we make sure we use evidence based therapies, we also make sure that we listen to what you want, to help find the right therapist and the right approach for you. We pride ourselves on our ability to provide highly specialist, holistic and effective evidence based treatments to all of our clients.



HELLO!

This guide will help you become familiar with the concept of emotional eating. We aim to support you in developing your understanding around what emotional eating may look like for you and in exploring your emotional eating triggers.

We know how difficult and distressing emotional eating can be so at the end of this booklet we have included some coping skills to get you started in expanding your coping toolbox.

ONE STEP AT A TIME

EMOTIONAL EATING QUESTIONNAIRE

TICK THE BOXES THAT APPLY

- ☐ I eat when I am frustrated, stressed or upset with myself
- ☐ I find myself eating to avoid my problems
- ☐ It feels like I have no control over my life
- ☐ When I am confronted with a problem I am unable to make a plan and follow through
- ☐ I struggle to say "no" when I need to
- ☐ I feel guilty reaching out to my friends and family when I have a problem
- ☐ I find it difficult to speak about my feelings
- ☐ I tend to react impulsively
- ☐ I am constantly conscious of what others may think of me
- ☐ I feel the need to please other people
- ☐ I struggle coping with stressful situations
- ☐ I often feel out of control around food, especially when I am feeling stressed out
- ☐ I don't trust myself around food
- ☐ I struggle to know when I am full, and often eat past fullness
- ☐ I tend to eat certain foods (e.g. chocolate) in secret

GOALS

In the space below, I invite you to visualise what a peaceful relationship with food may look like to you. It may be helpful to consider different aspects of your life like your relationship, hobbies, career and health.

GOAL

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TO DO LIST

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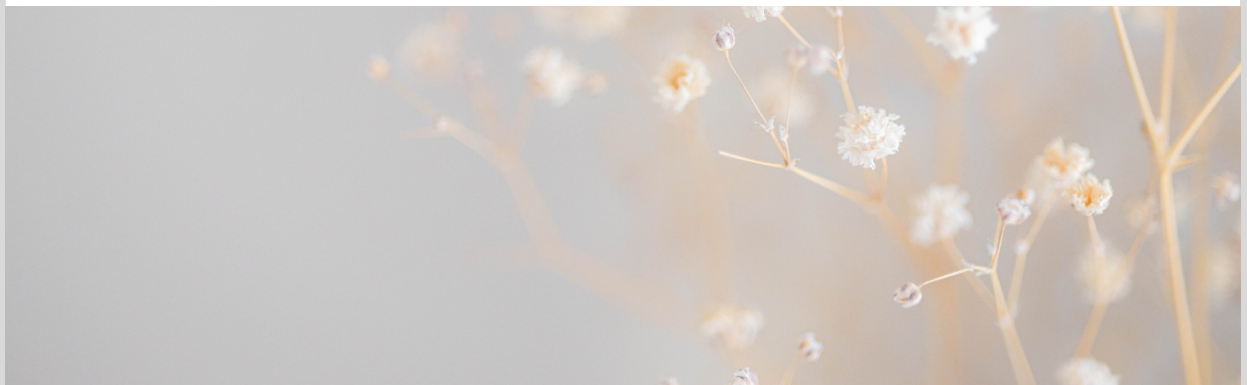
"Emotional eating is a temporary escape that leaves a lasting impact on your well-being; it's a silent conversation between your emotions and the food you choose, but the true nourishment lies in understanding and addressing the underlying emotions, not in the fleeting comfort of the plate."



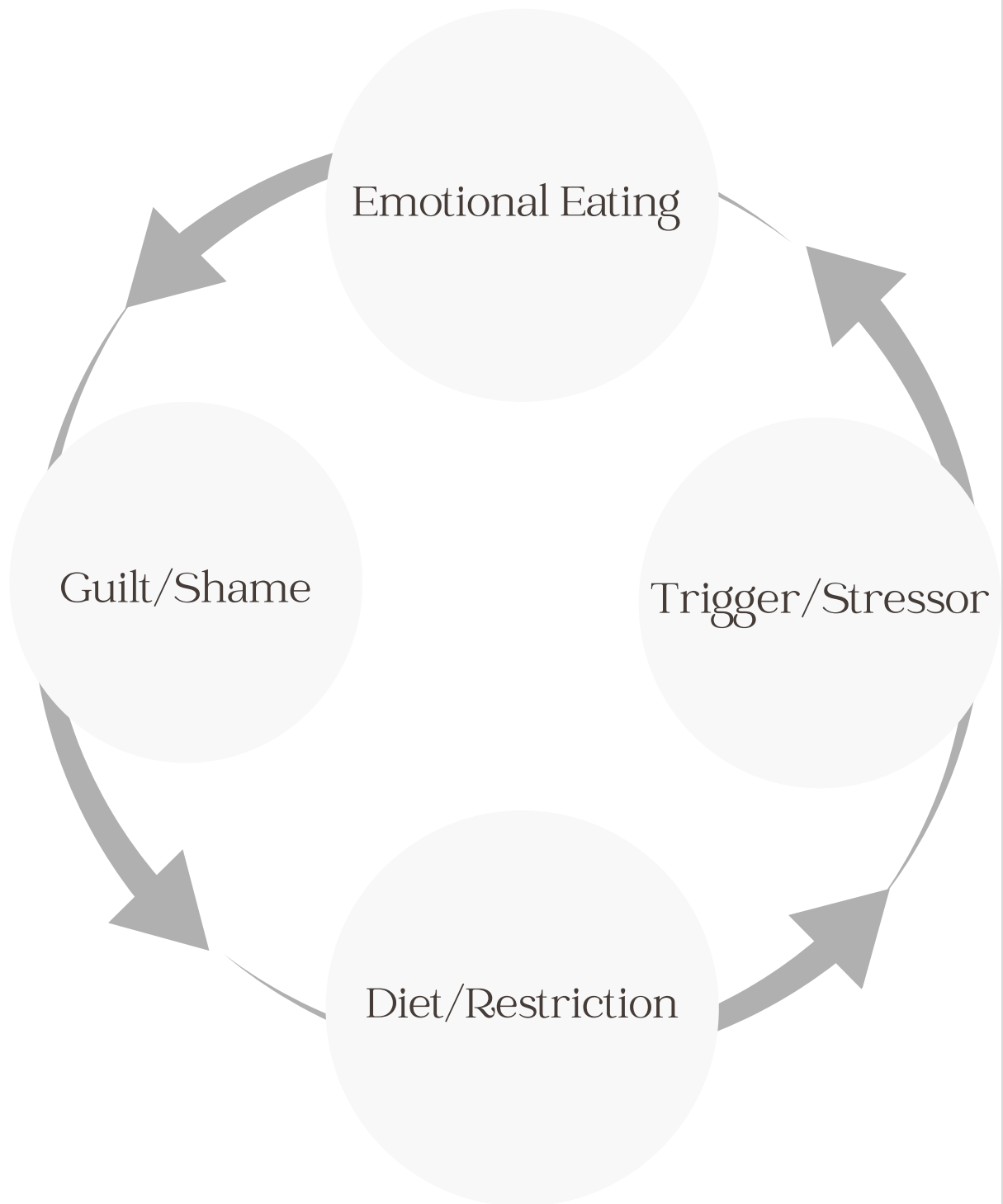
WHAT IS EMOTIONAL EATING?

Emotional eating is a mechanism people use to cope with their emotions. Eating, in this case, is triggered by a feeling rather than by physical hunger.

In our current society many eating behaviours get demonised and emotional eating is often one of them. Nonetheless, emotional eating can be a part of normal eating. Food can be a source of comfort and pleasure, it may also be used as reward and celebration or as an outlet to soothe and calm ourselves. Thus, emotional eating isn't inherently a bad thing, however, it can become a source of distress and suffering for many people. When food is the only tool in our coping toolbox, we may well find ourselves always turning to food to cope. You may find that food temporarily soothes or comforts you, however, it may not be as effective in the long run. You may be asking yourself, how do I stop reaching out for food then? The first and most important step in addressing emotional eating is becoming familiar with what is that may be triggering it.



THE EMOTIONAL EATING CYCLE





THE TRIGGERS

PHYSICAL TRIGGERS

Uncomfortable emotions such as sadness, stress, anxiety, boredom or loneliness can all be triggers to emotional eating. Identifying how you are feeling in that specific moment is the first step in tackling emotional eating. Use the wheel of emotions below to help you in identifying your emotional triggers.

STEP

1

Restricting our food intake will result in our bodies feeling energy deprived making us more susceptible to using food in response to difficult emotions.

STEP

2

EMOTIONAL TRIGGERS

Diet culture promotes restrictive behaviours with the sole aim of attaining the unrealistic “thin ideal”. It further disconnects us from our bodies’ needs and supplies us with a set of dos and don’ts of what we can and cannot eat. This further maintains a “deprivation mindset” where we feel guilty and shameful if we eat a food from the forbidden list. We may observe that these are the very foods we use to cope when we emotionally eat.

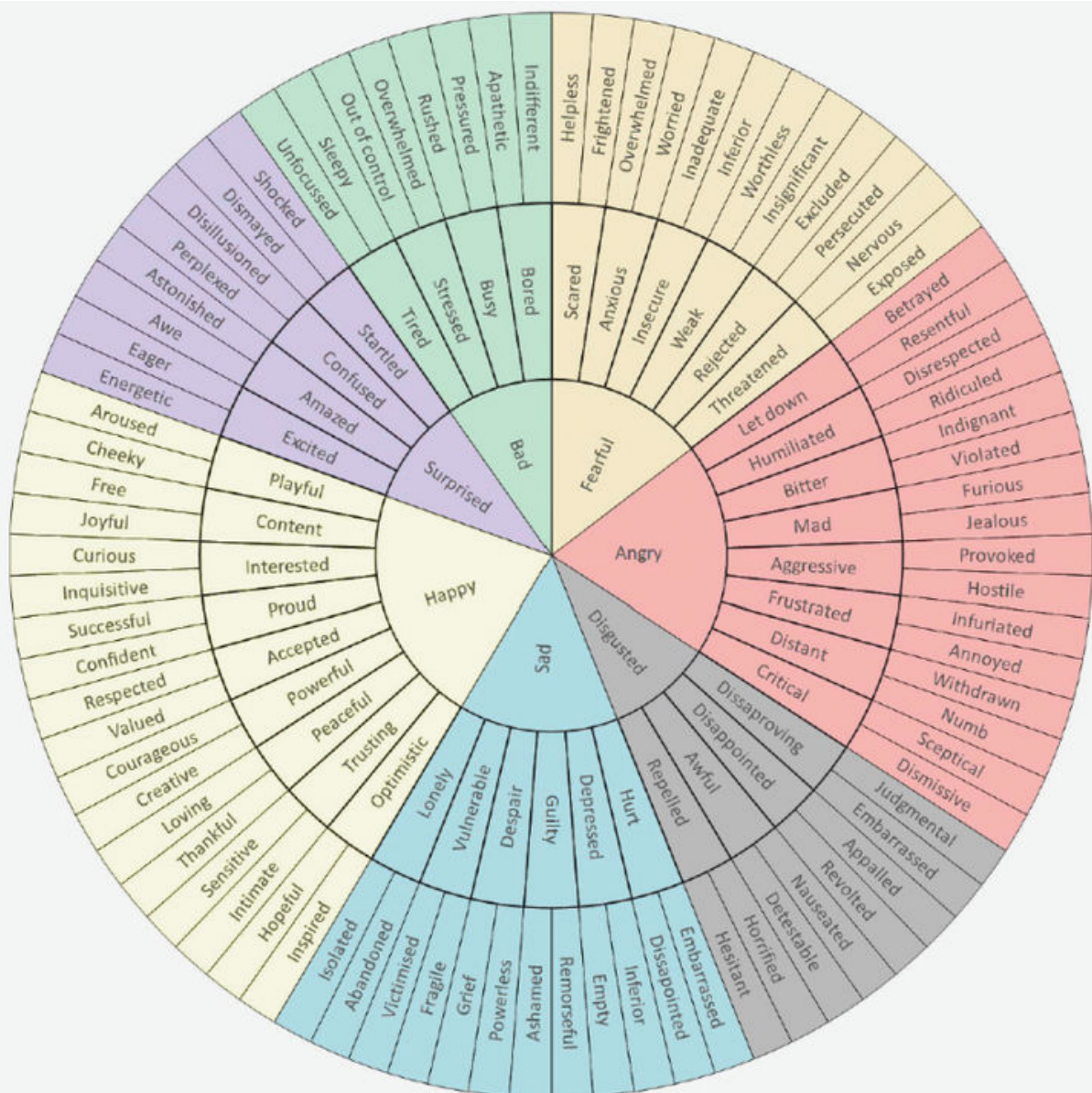
SOCIAL TRIGGERS

STEP

3

COPING SKILLS

WHAT AM I FEELING?



COPING SKILLS TO BREAK THE CYCLE

After exploring and becoming familiar with your unique triggers (note that this may take time and practice, we encourage you to be patient with yourself in this process), we want to help you develop new skills to add into your coping toolbox, so that food isn't your only way of managing emotions.

I like to use the question "What do I need right now?" to encourage people to take a pause and create some space before quickly delving into all the tools that may be available to them.

NOTES:

COPING SKILLS

If not eating, then what?



PAUSING NOT REACTING

Taking a moment to reflect and create some space between you and your trigger will help you better identify what coping skills may be more effective for you in this very moment. While all coping mechanisms may be helpful they may not all be effective at all times. Learning what works for you in different situations will help you become more in tuned with your emotional needs.

At the start of this process, I recommend setting a 10-15 minutes timer to help you make a conscious decision to pause and reflect.



COPING SKILLS



KINDNESS NOT JUDGEMENT

Emotional eating is often met with a great deal of judgment and self-hatred. You may be feeling guilt, shame, regret or spiralling in a critical inner dialogue. This loud critic is unlikely going to help with finding helpful and nurturing coping tools to deal with your emotions.

Instead, I invite you to think about how you would be speaking back to a friend or loved one who is experiencing difficult emotions. What words would you use? How would your tone of voice sound like? Take all the time you need to think and put these words onto paper.



COPING SKILLS



ASKING FOR SUPPORT

Most people struggling with emotional eating experience feelings of shame and guilt that drive them to secretly eat and hide their difficulties from others. Reaching out to a trusted loved one, family member or professional can be a scary and uncomfortable step to take. However, sharing your struggles and having people you can lean on during difficult times can provide you with the tools to break free from the emotional eating cycle.

We want to remind you that you don't have to go through this journey on your own, and that you deserve the right support.





BUILDING YOUR TOOLBOX



REFLECTION

- Journaling
- Writing a letter
- Pausing and sitting with your feelings
- Reframing your thoughts for more neutral/positive ones
- Listening to a playlist that matches your feelings
- Talking to a therapist



SOCIAL

- Speaking with a friend
- Messaging family
- Joining a support group
- Talking with a therapist
- Facetiming a loved one
- Talking with a spiritual advisor
e.g. priest, rabbi



DISTRACTION

- Taking a shower
- Watching a “feel good” movie
- Playing music
- Drawing
- Sewing
- Going out to a cafe
- Painting your nails
- Skincare routine
- Taking a warm bath



SELF-CARE

- Setting boundaries
- Saying “no” when you need to
- Resting
- Going for a gentle stroll
- Turning off your phone
- Writing in a journal
- Eating regularly throughout the day



FINDING SUPPORT: WHERE TO START?

THE EMOTIONAL EATING 8 WEEK PROGRAMME

Here at The London Centre for Eating Disorders and Body Image, we recognise the serious impact emotional eating can have on both your physical and mental wellbeing, and as such we have specifically devised a one to one course, to be tailored to you by your clinician, which will not only help you understand your eating patterns and identify your triggers, but will also supply you with the right toolkit to manage your emotions without turning to food. Your clinician will also offer you a compassionate, motivational and judgement-free space to support you through the ebbs and flows of this journey.

If you are interested in our 8-week emotional eating programme, and either have further questions, or would like to book the initial assessment session, please do contact us at info@thelondoncentre.co.uk and we will gladly answer any of your questions.