RIVALSHOT ACADEMY · COURSE BOOK

Under Pressure: Attention, Stress and Decisions

A companion book to the RivalShot Academy course

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Foreword: How to use this book

This book goes with the six-lesson RivalShot Academy course Under Pressure: Attention, Stress and Decisions. The lessons give you the core ideas in a few minutes each. This book gives those ideas more room: more explanation, more everyday examples, and space to think about how they fit your own life.

It is written for members who train, for staff and volunteers who work front desks and events, for people who compete in any kind of sport or contest, and for anyone curious about why smart, careful people still miss things. You don't need any background in psychology. Where research is mentioned, it is described in plain language and listed in the Sources section at the back, with the date each source was checked.

Each chapter matches one lesson and has the same parts:

- **The ideas**, developed further than in the lesson.
- **In practice**: two short fictional cases. The people and places are invented. They are not real people, real businesses or real events.
- **Checklist**: a short list you can come back to.
- **Key terms**: the words worth knowing.
- **Talk it through**: three questions for a study group, a team meeting or a conversation with a friend.
- **Journal prompt**: one question to write about. The course's learner journal has more.

A few promises about what this book is and isn't. It contains no combat framing, weapon handling, tactics or drills. It is not medical or mental-health treatment, and it does not diagnose anyone.

It does not make legal determinations; where rules matter, laws and venue procedures vary, so check the official source for your place. It never asks you to confront anyone. Leaving, asking staff and calling for help are always valid choices. This is an educational reading course, with no saved completion. It is not a certificate, qualification or license.

You can read the chapters in any order and pause whenever you like. If a topic brings up something painful, it is fine to skip it. If stress or anxiety is hard to cope with or isn't lifting, talk with a health professional; in the United States you can call or text 988 to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

Chapter 1. Attention is a spotlight, not a floodlight

You have almost certainly had this experience. A friend says, "I waved at you across the street," or a colleague asks, "Did you see the new sign by the door?" and you realize that you were looking right at it and saw nothing. It can feel embarrassing, even a little unsettling. This chapter explains why it happens to everyone and what you can sensibly do about it.

What reaches your eyes, and what reaches you

Your eyes take in a wide, detailed scene all the time. Your awareness holds far less. At any moment you are actively attending to a small part of what is in front of you: the menu, the face of the person speaking, the screen in your hand. Everything else is still there, and some of it is processed in a rough way, but much of it never becomes something you could later describe.

Most of the time you don't notice this gap, because the world is fairly stable and what you expect to be there usually is. The gap becomes visible when something unexpected appears, or when something changes while you were looking elsewhere. Psychologists have studied both situations for decades, and they have given us two useful names.

Inattentional blindness, plainly

Inattentional blindness is failing to notice something that is fully visible but unexpected while your attention is busy with a task. The best-known demonstration involves a short video of people

passing a ball. Viewers are asked to count the passes. Partway through, a person in a gorilla suit walks through the scene. A 2024 research review by Hults and colleagues, which uses this definition, notes that about half of people in that classic study failed to notice the gorilla.

The same review describes patterns that are useful in everyday life:

- **What you are looking for shapes what you notice.** Unexpected things that resemble what you are attending to are noticed more often than things that resemble what you are ignoring. If you are scanning a parking lot for a red car, red things jump out. A blue van, however close, may not register.
- **A harder task means more misses.** When researchers kept the scene exactly the same but made the main task harder, more people missed the unexpected object. Your spotlight gets narrower when the task in front of you gets heavier.
- **Expertise is not a guarantee.** The review found that whether experts notice more than beginners is still uncertain. Experience helps you know where to look; it does not make you see everything.

The point is not that people are careless. It is that attention is selective by design. If you noticed everything equally, you would never get anything done.

Change blindness, plainly

Change blindness is missing a change from one moment to the next, even a large one. In their 2005 overview, psychologists Daniel Simons and Ronald Rensink describe how people often fail to notice big changes to a scene when the change happens during an eye movement, a blink, a brief interruption, or a cut in a

film. In real-world studies, many people did not notice when the stranger they were talking to was replaced by a different person partway through the conversation.

Their central conclusion is simple: **attention is needed to see change.** If you never attended to a detail, it was never stored well enough to be compared with what came after. That is why, when someone asks, "Was the side door open when you came in?", the honest answer is often "I don't know." It is also why it is wise to be cautious about details you "remember" but never actually looked at; your mind may be filling the gap with what usually happens.

Why it surprises us

Simons and Rensink point out something important: most people firmly believe they would notice large changes like these. That belief is part of the problem. They suggest it may help explain "looked but didn't see" collisions on the road, where a driver was looking in the right direction and still failed to see a cyclist or another car.

CDC describes three kinds of distraction for drivers:

- **Visual**: taking your eyes off the road.
- **Manual**: taking your hands off the wheel.
- **Cognitive**: taking your mind off driving.

The third kind is easy to underestimate. You can be looking straight ahead while your attention is in a phone conversation, a worry about work or a plan for dinner. Your eyes are in the room; your spotlight is not.

Where attention is easy to move

If attention is a spotlight, the useful question is not "How do I see everything?" but "When should I point the spotlight at the room?" The answer is: at transitions. Doorways, stairwells, the moment you step off a bus, the first minute of a shift, the moment you arrive at a check-in desk. These are natural pauses when you are between tasks, and redirecting attention costs very little.

The course calls this the **transition pass**. When you step into a new space, stop for one breath just inside and look wide before you look at your task. Ask three questions:

1. Where did I come in, and where else could I leave?
2. Where is the person whose job is to help here?
3. What is different from what I expected?

Then get on with your task. The whole thing takes about five seconds. It won't catch everything. It simply gives the room a moment of your spotlight before the job takes it back.

To build the habit, attach it to something you already do. Some people do it whenever they put their phone in a pocket at a door. Staff and volunteers can do it as the first thing on arriving for a shift. Families can make it a game with children: "Spot the exit signs before we sit down."

What noticing is not

None of this is about scanning everything all the time. Constant scanning is exhausting, and tired attention misses more. It is also not about watching people with suspicion. Noticing a room means noticing its layout, its exits, who is there to help, and what

has changed. It never means judging people by their appearance, age, disability, background or clothing. Behavior and context matter; appearance does not.

The aim is modest: a few well-placed wide looks, honest uncertainty about what you didn't see, and humility about how much any one person can take in. Turning an observation into a calm next step is a related topic worth exploring further.

In practice

The moved bus stop. A nurse finishing a night shift walks to her usual bus shelter, eyes on a transit app that says her bus is four minutes away. She waits. The bus does not come. A man waiting nearby mentions that the stop has moved around the corner this week because of roadwork; there is a paper notice taped to the shelter. She had stood beside it for ten minutes. Her app had been her spotlight, and the notice was exactly the kind of unexpected detail that slips past a busy mind. The next week she adds a transition pass to her routine: before opening the app, she looks at the shelter itself for one breath. Two weeks later, that habit catches a notice about a holiday timetable.

The first minute of a shift. A receptionist at a community swim center starts each shift with a transition pass of the lobby before logging in. One morning she notices that the light on the automatic door button isn't on. She presses it; nothing happens. It is a small thing, but she knows several regular swimmers use mobility aids. She tells the duty manager, who props the door safely open and calls maintenance before the first early swimmers arrive. Nothing dramatic happened. A five-second look, at a moment when looking was cheap, prevented a frustrating start to someone's day.

Checklist

- Treat attention as a spotlight: bright where it points, dim elsewhere.
- Expect to miss unexpected things when you're busy, and more of them when the task is hard.
- Remember that attention is needed to see a change; "I don't know" is often the honest answer.
- Notice cognitive distraction as well as visual distraction: your mind can be elsewhere while your eyes are open.
- Use transitions (doorways, arrivals, the start of a shift) for a five-second wide look.
- Ask: Where are the ways in and out? Who helps here? What's different?
- Never use appearance as a cue; notice layout, exits, help points and changes.

Key terms

- **Attention**: the limited capacity to focus on some information at the expense of other information.
- **Inattentional blindness**: failing to notice something fully visible but unexpected while attention is on a task.
- **Change blindness**: failing to notice a change between one moment and the next, even a large one.
- **Cognitive distraction**: attention taken away from a task by thoughts, conversations or worries, even when the eyes are on the task.
- **Transition pass**: a brief, deliberate wide look at a natural pause, such as a doorway or an arrival.

Talk it through

1. Share a time you missed something in plain view. What was your spotlight on, and how did you find out?
2. Where in your regular week are the natural transitions where a five-second wide look would cost almost nothing?
3. Why might people who are very confident in their attention be more surprised by what they miss? How could a team talk about this without anyone feeling blamed?

Journal prompt

Think of a place you visit every week. Without going there, write down what you can remember about its exits, its help points and anything that has recently changed. Next time you visit, do a transition pass and compare. What did your memory get right, and what did it fill in?

Chapter 2. What stress does to seeing, remembering and doing

Stress has a reputation as something to be avoided at all costs. It is more useful to understand it as a response your body and mind make to a demand, one that changes how you see, think and move in fairly predictable ways. Once you know those ways, you can expect them and design around them.

A response, not a verdict

The National Institute of Mental Health describes stress as the physical or mental response to an external cause, such as a lot of work or an illness. The cause may be brief, like a missed connection, or it may repeat over a long time. NIMH also notes that a short burst of stress can help you, for example by motivating you to meet a deadline. It adds that anxiety, the body's reaction to stress, can occur even when there is no current threat. That is why your heart can race before a friendly match, a presentation or the first visit to a new place.

At work, NIOSH (the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health) describes job stress as harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of a job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker. That definition is helpful well beyond the workplace. Stress tends to rise when what is being asked of you outstrips what you have available in that moment: time, information, help, skill or energy. It also points to the fix. You can sometimes lower the demand, but you can often raise the resources: a plan made earlier, a colleague, a simpler step, a few seconds to think.

Seeing: the loudest thing wins

Under pressure, attention tends to be grabbed by whatever is loudest, brightest, fastest or most alarming, and it gets harder to steer it where you choose.

A 2016 review by Samuel Vine, Lee Moore and Mark Wilson describes two attention systems that normally work together. One is goal-directed: it keeps your attention on what you have decided matters. The other is stimulus-driven: it pulls your attention toward whatever catches the eye or ear. The authors argue that when a situation is appraised as a threat, the stimulus-driven system tends to dominate, so people become more distractible. Neuroscientist Amy Arnsten's 2009 review describes a similar shift in the brain: stress moves control of attention away from deliberate, top-down focus and toward whatever is most salient.

In daily life, this means the flashing screen, the shouted announcement or the alarming text tends to win, and the quiet but important detail (the child tugging your sleeve, the sign saying "use other door") tends to lose.

Thinking and remembering: the notepad shrinks

Arnsten's review explains that the prefrontal cortex, a region at the front of the brain that holds information "online" while you use it, is especially sensitive to stress. That online holding is called **working memory**: the mental notepad that keeps a four-digit code, a platform number or a three-step plan in mind for a few seconds. According to the review, even mild stress that feels uncontrollable can weaken this, while faster, more habitual responses get stronger.

You will recognize the signs:

- You read a code and forget it before you type it.
- You ask the same question twice.
- You do the familiar thing instead of the right thing, like heading for the usual exit even though it's closed today.
- You find it hard to weigh options; one choice just seems to "happen".

CDC's guidance on managing stress lists difficulty focusing and making choices among common effects. None of this means your thinking is broken. It means the part of thinking that juggles new information is temporarily running with less room.

There is a hopeful detail in Arnsten's review. A sense of control reduces the effect. When people feel they have some control over a stressful situation, their thinking holds up better. That is one reason Chapter 5 is about deciding some things in advance: a plan you made yourself is a real, honest source of control.

Doing: when hands won't cooperate

Stress also shows up in fine, precise movements, especially ones guided by the eyes. The Vine review describes studies in which people under threat held their gaze for shorter, less steady moments before a precise movement and controlled those movements less well. Keys, zips, small buttons, pins, card readers and touchscreens all get harder exactly when you most need them.

The same review is careful to say this is not inevitable. People can keep performing well by putting in extra effort, and how a situation is appraised matters. When people see a demanding situation as a **challenge** they have the resources to meet, rather than a **threat** they don't, they generally do better. The review de-

scribes one study in which people who were encouraged to see their nerves as excitement performed better. This is not a magic trick, and it won't work for every situation, but it is a reminder that your interpretation of a racing heart is part of the story.

Expect the dip, then design around it

Because these effects are predictable, you can prepare for them while you are calm:

- **Fixed places.** Keep keys, wallet or card, and phone in the same pocket or pouch every time. A stressed mind searches badly; a habit doesn't need to search.
- **Saved, not remembered.** Save important numbers and addresses in your phone instead of relying on memory. Write a short procedure on a card instead of trusting yourself to recall it.
- **One step, said aloud.** When hands fumble, slow to one action at a time and say each step quietly: "Ticket. Card. Confirm." Saying steps aloud gives working memory some outside help.
- **Name the true size of the problem.** "If I miss this train, the next one is in twenty minutes." "If this form is late, I'll call and explain." Time squeezes often feel like emergencies when they aren't.
- **Buy a moment.** "Give me a second" is almost always available and almost always acceptable.

Stress over the long run

This course is mostly about short bursts of pressure. Long-running stress is different. NIMH notes that persistent anxiety can disrupt sleep and affect several body systems, and that ongoing anxiety that doesn't lift can raise the risk of an anxiety disorder

or depression. CDC's stress guidance notes that long-term stress can lead to worsening health problems. If coping is hard, or symptoms persist, NIMH's advice is plain: it may be time to talk to a professional. Anyone in the US who is in immediate distress can call or text 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org.

What this is not

These are tendencies, not predictions. Plenty of people do careful, kind and competent work with a pounding heart. This chapter is not a diagnosis of anyone, and it is not medical advice. Stress is not weakness, and it is not a sign that you shouldn't be doing something. Often it comes with the things most worth doing.

In practice

The first day at the front desk. A new receptionist at a dental clinic is shown the visitor sign-in process at 8:55. At 9:02, with three patients at the counter and the phone ringing, she cannot remember the second step. Her supervisor doesn't sigh; she writes the four steps on an index card and tapes it beside the screen. "Nobody remembers this on day one," she says. By Friday the card is barely needed, but it stays there for the next new starter. The supervisor designed around the dip instead of expecting a stressed brain to hold new steps it had seen once.

The race-day pins. A first-time runner arrives at a community 10K with fifteen minutes to spare. Her hands are shaking so much she can't pin her number to her shirt, and she starts to think, "I'm a mess; I shouldn't be here." Then she remembers something a friend said: "Nerves are your body getting ready." She tells herself,

“This is my body getting ready,” asks a volunteer at the table to help with the pins, and walks to the start line still nervous, but treating the nerves as part of the day rather than a verdict on it.

Checklist

- Stress is a response to a demand, not a character flaw; a short burst can help.
- Expect attention to be grabbed by the loudest, brightest thing.
- Expect working memory to hold less: write it down, save it, say it aloud.
- Expect fine movements to get clumsier: slow to one step at a time.
- Keep essentials in fixed places so habits can find them.
- Raise your resources: a plan, a person, a simpler step, a moment.
- Notice long-running stress, and talk to a professional if it doesn’t lift; in the US, call or text 988 in a crisis.

Key terms

- **Stress**: the physical or mental response to an external cause or demand.
- **Anxiety**: the body’s reaction to stress, which can occur even without a current threat.
- **Working memory**: the mental notepad that holds information for a few seconds while you use it.
- **Stimulus-driven attention**: attention pulled by whatever is most noticeable, rather than by your goals.

- **Challenge and threat appraisal**: seeing a demand as something you have the resources to meet (challenge) or not (threat).

Talk it through

1. What does stress do to your body first? How do you usually notice it?
2. Which of your everyday tasks would be hardest with shaky hands and a crowded mind? How could you make them easier in advance?
3. How could a workplace or club raise people's resources during busy moments, rather than only asking them to "stay calm"?

Journal prompt

Write about a recent time pressure. What did you notice in your body, what did you forget or fumble, and what grabbed your attention? Then choose one item to keep in a fixed place from now on, and say where.

Chapter 3. Tunnel vision: when focus becomes a trap

Focus is one of the most valuable things a mind can do. It lets you read, repair, write, listen and learn. But under pressure, focus can narrow so far that it starts to work against you. This chapter is about recognizing that narrowing and widening the frame again.

One glowing rectangle

Picture a community workshop's open house. The host at the front counter is trying to fix a sign-in tablet that has frozen. She taps, restarts, types the password again. Four minutes pass. When she finally looks up, the line reaches the door, a guest using a walker is waiting behind a folding sign that has drifted in front of the low section of the counter, and a colleague has been standing beside her holding a clipboard of paper sign-in sheets. All of it was in plain view. Her attention had narrowed to one glowing rectangle.

People call this **tunnel vision**: pressure, strong emotion or a stubborn problem pulls attention onto one thing, and everything else fades.

Narrowing in the mind, not just the eyes

The phrase sounds like it is about eyesight, but it is mostly about attention and working memory. Chapter 2 described how stress tends to let the most urgent-seeming thing grab attention, and how working memory holds less under pressure. Chapter 1 de-

scribed how a harder task makes unexpected things easier to miss, even when the scene is unchanged. Put those together and you get tunnel vision: a full notepad, a single problem taking every slot, and the rest of the world slipping out of view.

From the inside, tunnel vision may not feel like narrowing. It feels like being very, very focused on the one thing that matters. That is what makes it hard to catch.

The plan that won't let go

Tunnel vision has a thinking version too: sticking with a plan after it has stopped working. The host had a plan, fix the tablet, and every minute she spent on it made it harder to drop. You have probably seen this elsewhere:

- A driver keeps following the navigation app toward a road that is plainly closed.
- A shopper stays in the slowest line because they have already waited so long.
- A volunteer keeps searching one box for a missing item instead of asking whether anyone has seen it.

Arnsten's review explains that under stress the brain leans toward faster, habitual responses and away from the slower checking that would ask, "Is this still the right plan?" The plan becomes the habit, and the habit runs on.

When the tunnel is a feeling

Not every tunnel is a device or a task. Strong feelings narrow attention too. In a heated conversation, attention can lock onto one goal (being understood, being right, getting the last word) and everything else fades: the line of people behind you, the staff mem-

ber trying to help, your own plan for the afternoon, even the simple option of leaving. Worry can do the same thing more quietly. If you are anxious about a phone call later, you may walk through a whole shopping trip without registering much of it.

The signals and the remedy are the same as for any other tunnel. Notice the narrowing, change your body, breathe out, and ask the three questions below. In a disagreement, "What's my other option?" often has a simple answer: stop explaining, ask someone whose role it is to sort it out, or walk away. Walking away is always a valid choice.

Signals from the inside

Because tunnel vision is hard to see from inside, it helps to learn its signals in advance. Any one of these is a cue to widen:

- You have repeated the same action several times with the same result.
- You realize you didn't hear what someone just said.
- You feel a jolt of surprise when you look up: "When did the line get so long?"
- Time seems to have jumped.
- Your voice has gotten faster or louder without your deciding it should.
- Your body is braced: shoulders up, jaw tight, breath held.

You don't need all of them, and you don't need to be sure. A ten-second check costs very little compared with four lost minutes.

Widen the frame

The course teaches a three-part move that takes about ten seconds:

1. **Change your body.** Step back half a pace, sit back in your chair, or lift your eyes from the screen. It is easier to look wide when you aren't hunched over the problem.
2. **Breathe out slowly.** One long exhale is enough to start.
3. **Ask three questions.** What else is happening around me? Who else could help? What is my other option?

For the host, the answers were obvious the moment she asked them: a long line, a colleague with paper sheets, a guest who needed the low counter. The tablet could wait.

The third question can help loosen the "plan that won't let go." Asking "What's my other option?" gives your mind permission to drop the current plan without feeling that you have failed.

Two spotlights are better than one

If you work or volunteer with others, you have a built-in remedy: another person whose attention is pointed somewhere else. The trick is making it easy to offer and accept help without anyone feeling judged.

Agree on a plain phrase in advance, while everyone is calm, such as "Want a second pair of eyes?", "Fresh eyes?" or "I'll take the line." When the words are agreed ahead of time, they can land as a routine offer rather than a criticism. Some teams also agree a simple rule, like "If you've restarted it twice, call someone." Handing over a stuck task is a skill, not a defeat.

If you are on your own, a habit can play the same role. Some people look up and do a quick wide look every time they restart a device or reload a page. Others set a short timer when they start troubleshooting anything.

Focus is still your friend

None of this means focus is bad. Deep focus is how good work gets done, and you don't need to scan the room every minute. Tunnel vision is focus that has stopped serving your goal. Widening the frame is a brief check, not a permanent state.

Widening the frame also does not make you responsible for everything you notice. Seeing a blocked counter or a long line may simply mean telling the person in charge. Noticing a tense exchange never obliges you to step into it, and stepping away is always valid. And if what you notice is an emergency, getting yourself to safety and calling for help come first.

In practice

The jammed grinder. It is the morning rush at a small café. The shift lead is fighting a jammed coffee grinder, and she has cleared it and restarted it three times. Behind her, the order tickets are piling up and a regular is holding up a hand to ask whether the oat milk is out. Her colleague at the register uses the phrase the team agreed at their last meeting: "Fresh eyes?" She steps back, breathes out, and asks the three questions. What else is happening? Eight tickets, a question at the counter. Who else could help? Her colleague can try the grinder. What's my other option? The second grinder is slower but works. She switches, answers

the regular, and lets her colleague take a calm look at the jam. It turns out to need the manager's key. Nobody was blamed, and the line moved again within two minutes.

The closed road. A man is driving his elderly mother home after a family dinner, following his navigation app on an unfamiliar route. The app keeps sending him toward a road with "Road Closed" barriers. Twice he loops around and tries again, getting more frustrated each time, while his mother says, "There was a detour sign back there." On the third loop he notices his jaw is clenched and he didn't really hear her. He pulls into a well-lit gas station, stops, and breathes out. What else is happening? There are orange detour signs. Who else could help? His mother saw one, and the station attendant might know the route. What's my other option? Follow the signs instead of the app. They are home fifteen minutes later. Stopping somewhere safe gave him back the attention he needed.

Checklist

- Expect focus to narrow under pressure; it will feel like "just concentrating."
- Learn your signals: repeated actions, missed words, surprise on looking up, jumped time, a braced body.
- When you catch one, change your body, breathe out and ask the three questions.
- Ask "What's my other option?" to loosen a plan that has stopped working.
- Agree blame-free phrases with your team in advance.
- Use a habit or timer as a "second spotlight" when you're alone.

- Remember that noticing something doesn't oblige you to fix it alone or confront anyone.

Key terms

- **Tunnel vision**: attention narrowing onto one thing under pressure so that other important things fade from view.
- **Plan continuation**: sticking with a plan after it has stopped working, often because of effort already spent.
- **Widening the frame**: a brief, deliberate move to take in the wider situation: body, breath, three questions.
- **Second spotlight**: another person, or a habit, that points attention somewhere you aren't looking.

Talk it through

1. What kinds of problems tend to pull you into a tunnel: devices, conversations, deadlines, something else?
2. Which tunnel-vision signal do you think you'd notice first in yourself? Which would others notice first in you?
3. What phrase would feel respectful in your team, club or family for offering a fresh look?

Journal prompt

Describe a time you got stuck on one problem while something else needed your attention. Which signal could have warned you earlier, and which of the three questions would have helped most? Write the phrase you'd like someone to use with you next time.

Chapter 4. Reset habits: breathe out, name it, pause

Chapters 2 and 3 described what pressure does. This chapter is about a small, practical response: a reset short enough to use in a line, at a desk or in a parked car, and familiar enough that you can remember it when your mind is crowded.

Why the body is the way back

Stress starts as a body response: faster breathing, a racing heart, tense muscles. That is good news, because it means the body also offers a way back. The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health describes the **relaxation response**, with slower breathing, lower blood pressure and a slower heart rate, as the opposite of the stress response. NCCIH lists breathing exercises among the ways people try to bring it on.

A reset is not about forcing yourself to be calm. It is about giving your thinking a little more room, so the slower, more flexible part of your mind can catch up with the fast part.

Breathe out

NCCIH describes **diaphragmatic breathing** as slow, deep breathing that moves your belly rather than only your chest. A simple version:

1. Breathe in gently through your nose for a count of about four.
2. Breathe out more slowly, for a count of about six, as if fogging a cold window.

3. Repeat two or three times.

The longer out-breath is the part to remember. If counting feels like one more thing to do, just make the out-breath a little longer than the in-breath.

NCCIH is honest that the evidence here is preliminary: one review it describes found early evidence that diaphragmatic breathing may help reduce stress, but much of the research is small or of limited quality. NIMH's stress fact sheet also suggests trying deep breathing (it mentions relaxation apps for breathing, visualization and mindfulness) along with regular exercise, sleep and journaling. CDC's stress guidance lists deep breathing among healthy ways to cope. Treat breathing as a useful tool, not a guaranteed fix.

Name it

Labeling means putting your state into a few plain words. "Rushed." "Annoyed at this machine." "Worried I'll miss it." "Embarrassed." In a 2007 brain-imaging study, Matthew Lieberman and colleagues found that labeling the emotion in a picture, compared with other ways of processing it, reduced the response of the amygdala, a brain area involved in emotional reactions. The authors suggest that putting feelings into words may reduce emotional reactivity.

Naming doesn't argue with a feeling or pretend it isn't there. It turns the feeling into information:

- "Rushed, so I'll check the platform number before I start walking."
- "Angry, so I won't reply to that email until after lunch."

- "Embarrassed, so I'll step aside and let the next person go first."

You can also name the situation: "This is a time squeeze, not an emergency." "This is a frozen app, not a disaster." Naming the true size of a problem can help too.

Pause

A **pause** is a short, deliberate gap between a feeling and an action. Sometimes it is invisible: one breath before answering. Sometimes it uses words:

- "Give me a moment."
- "Let me check and come back to you."
- "I'll step aside so others can go ahead."
- "Can I call you back in ten minutes?"

Pausing is not freezing. Freezing happens to you; pausing is something you choose. It buys a few seconds, or a few minutes, for your thinking to catch up.

There is one important exception. If waiting would make things worse, such as an alarm, smoke, or someone hurt, the pause comes later. Your pre-decided action (Chapter 5) comes first: follow staff and posted plans to get to safety, and call for help. Then reset.

Building the routine

Put the three parts together as one small routine: **breathe out, name it, pause, then choose the next single step.**

A few things make it stick:

- **Practice when it's easy.** Use it at a red light, while the kettle boils, in a slow line, or before opening a difficult message. The goal is for the routine to feel familiar before you need it.
- **Use an anchor.** Some people tie the reset to a small physical action: pressing their feet into the floor, touching a ring, resting a hand on the counter.
- **Keep it short.** A reset you can't remember under pressure isn't a reset. Three words on a sticky note inside a locker door or a phone case is a perfectly good reminder.
- **Make it yours.** Your words, your breath, your phrase. The best reset is the one you actually use.

Resets that fit the moment

A reset has to fit where you are and who you are. A few variations:

- **The invisible reset.** In a meeting, at a counter or on a crowded train, nobody needs to know you are resetting. Breathe out slowly through your nose, name the feeling silently, and pause by resting your eyes on one fixed point for a moment before you answer.
- **The moving reset.** If you are walking, you don't need to stop. Let your out-breath last for two or three steps, name the feeling, and choose your next step at the next doorway or corner.
- **The driving reset.** Never close your eyes or look away from the road to reset. Keep it to a longer out-breath and a silent label, and if you need more than that, pull into the next safe place to stop.

- **The reset for someone else.** Children often respond to simple images: "Smell the soup, then blow on it to cool it down." For a friend who is flustered, offering a pause can help more than advice: "There's no rush. Take a second."
- **The reset that suits your body.** If slow breathing is difficult for you, for any reason, skip it. Naming and pausing can still help on their own, and so can a small physical anchor such as pressing your palms together or feeling the weight of your feet.

After the reset: one next step

A reset isn't the end of the story. Its job is to make the next decision a little better. So finish every reset with one small, concrete step: "Check the jacket pocket." "Ask the desk." "Switch to the paper sheets." "Text that I'll be late." One step is enough. Once it's done, the next one is usually easier to see.

When a reset isn't right

A reset is not therapy, a medical treatment or a way to push down feelings that need attention. It won't make every situation calm. And it is never a reason to stay somewhere you want to leave; walking away is a valid reset too.

NCCIH notes that relaxation techniques are generally considered safe for healthy people, but that occasionally people report increased anxiety, intrusive thoughts or fear of losing control, and that people with certain conditions, including some psychiatric conditions or a history of abuse or trauma, should talk with a health care provider first. If a breathing exercise makes you feel worse, stop. Try something else: naming five things you can see, feeling your feet on the floor, stepping outside, or talking to

someone you trust. If stress or low mood is lasting or overwhelming, talk with a professional, and in the US call or text 988 for immediate support.

In practice

The email before the meeting. A father is sitting in his car outside his daughter's school, five minutes before a parent-teacher meeting, when a curt email from his manager arrives. He feels his face go hot and starts typing a reply. Then he stops, puts the phone face-down on the passenger seat, and breathes out slowly, twice. "Defensive," he says quietly. "And worried about the meeting." He pauses, decides the email can wait until tomorrow morning, and walks in thinking about his daughter instead of his manager. The next morning, his reply is two calm sentences.

The upset caller. A front-desk worker at a community gym answers a call from a member who is upset about a billing error. The member's voice is loud and fast. The worker notices her own shoulders rising and her answers getting clipped. She breathes out, names it silently ("defensive, and rushed"), and uses her pause phrase: "I want to get this right for you. Can I look into it properly and call you back within fifteen minutes?" The member agrees. She checks the account, finds the error, and calls back with an answer. If the caller had become abusive instead, her workplace's procedure was to end the call politely and pass it to a manager; a reset is never a reason to keep taking abuse.

Checklist

- Remember the order: breathe out, name it, pause, then the next single step.
- Make the out-breath longer than the in-breath.

- Name the feeling in a few plain words, and name the true size of the problem.
- Keep a pause phrase ready: “Give me a moment.”
- Practice when the stakes are low so it’s familiar when they’re high.
- In an emergency, act first (safety, call for help), reset after.
- If breathing makes you feel worse, stop and use another grounding habit.

Key terms

- **Relaxation response**: slower breathing, lower blood pressure and slower heart rate; the opposite of the stress response.
- **Diaphragmatic breathing**: slow, deep breathing that moves the belly.
- **Labeling (affect labeling)**: putting a feeling into words.
- **Pause phrase**: a short, ready sentence that buys time, such as “Let me check and come back to you.”
- **Reset**: a short, practiced routine that gives thinking room to work under pressure.

Talk it through

1. Which part of the reset (breathing, naming or pausing) comes most naturally to you, and which is hardest?
2. What pause phrases would sound natural in your workplace, club or family?
3. How could a team support someone who needs a moment to reset, without drawing attention to them?

Journal prompt

Write your own reset in three lines: the breath, the words you might use to name a feeling you often have under pressure, and your pause phrase. Then choose one low-stakes moment this week to practice it, and afterwards note what you noticed.

Chapter 5. Decide before the pressure arrives

If stress shrinks working memory and strengthens habits, then the worst time to work out a plan is the moment you need it. The best time is now, while you're calm. This chapter is about **pre-deciding**: choosing a few responses in advance, writing them in plain words and practicing them lightly, so that when pressure arrives the decision is already made.

Why deciding early works

Chapter 2 described two findings from Arnsten's review that point straight to this habit. First, under stress, the brain leans toward fast, habitual responses and away from slow, flexible thinking. If you have decided in advance, the habit that shows up can be the one you chose. Second, a sense of control reduces the effect of stress on thinking. A plan you made yourself is an honest source of that sense of control.

There is a resource argument too. NIOSH's description of job stress, a mismatch between what a job requires and the worker's capabilities, resources or needs, applies to many tense moments. A plan made in advance is a resource you bring with you. It reduces what you have to work out on the spot.

The Vine review adds one more piece: successful past performances become a resource for future stressful moments. Each time you rehearse a plan calmly, even just by looking at an exit or saying a meeting point aloud, you store a small piece of evidence that you know what to do.

If-then plans

The simplest form of pre-deciding is an **if-then plan**: "If this happens, then I will do that." Good ones are short enough to remember with a racing heart. Some examples:

- "If our family gets separated at the station, we meet at the information desk."
- "If the alarm sounds during evening class, I follow staff directions and leave by the nearest marked exit, even if it isn't the way I came in."
- "If someone at the counter starts shouting, I say, 'I'm going to get my manager,' and step back."
- "If I feel rushed while driving, I pull into the next safe place to stop before I touch my phone."
- "If I'm asked something I don't know at the desk, I say, 'Let me find someone who knows.'"
- "If I feel unwell away from home, I tell staff and sit down before I try to get anywhere."

Notice what these have in common. Each one names a situation clearly. Each action is concrete. And each action is something you can do yourself, without arguing, without waiting for permission, and without confronting anyone.

Choosing which plans to make

You can't plan for everything, and you shouldn't try. Three to five plans is a manageable number; a long list won't survive stress. Choose situations that are either **likely** (getting separated in a crowd, getting lost, a heated conversation at work) or that **matter a lot** if they happen (an alarm, someone hurt, feeling unwell away from home).

Make the actions ones that are always available:

- **Leave** by the nearest safe route.
- **Ask a staff member** or the person whose role is to help.
- **Call for help**, using the local emergency number when there is an emergency.
- **Go to a meeting point** that everyone knows.

None of these require you to confront anyone. Planning for particular situations, including plans for people who staff counters and reception areas, is a related topic of its own. This chapter is about the habit of deciding early, wherever you use it.

Testing and improving a plan

Before you rely on a plan, test it with two questions:

1. **Could I remember this with my heart pounding?** If it has more than one "and", several places or a condition inside a condition, it is probably too complicated.
2. **Can I do the action on my own?** If it depends on arguing, persuading someone, getting permission or a phone signal, it may fail exactly when you need it.

Here is how a weak plan can become a strong one:

- Weak: "If something goes wrong at the concert, we'll call each other and figure out where to meet depending on where we are." Strong: "If we get separated, we meet at the merchandise stand by the main entrance."
- Weak: "If a customer gets angry, I'll calm them down." Strong: "If a customer raises their voice, I say, 'I'm going to get my manager,' and step back."

- Weak: “If there’s an emergency at work, I’ll do whatever makes sense.” Strong: “If the alarm sounds, I follow staff directions and leave by the nearest marked exit and go to the meeting point by the front gate.”

The strong versions are shorter, more concrete and fully in your control. They also give you something to say or do in the first few seconds, which is when a stressed mind most needs a script.

Making plans stick

It can help to walk a plan, not only write it. Light rehearsal is enough:

- **Look.** When you visit a building you use often, actually look once at the marked exits and the help desk.
- **Say.** Say your family meeting point out loud in the car on the way to a big event.
- **Read.** Read your if–then card at the start of a shift or before a busy day.
- **Walk.** If it’s easy and appropriate, walk the route to your meeting point once.

Rehearsal here means looking, saying and walking, not acting out emergencies or picturing the worst. If thinking about a situation leaves you more anxious, keep the plan and lighten the practice. A single calm look is better than a vivid imagined disaster.

Plans for families and teams

Plans need to be shared with everyone involved. A family meeting point only works if the children know it. A team’s “If the system goes down, we switch to paper” only works if the paper is where everyone expects it.

Some tips:

- Decide plans together where possible, so people understand and own them.
- Keep the words identical every time you say them.
- For children, point out the meeting point together on arrival; that turns it into a quick rehearsal.
- For teams, agree who does what: who calls for help, who tells the manager, who keeps people back.
- Revisit plans when something changes: a new job, a new building, a child old enough for their own phone.

Flexible, not rigid

A plan is a starting point, not a script. If the facts are different from what you imagined, for example the meeting point is closed, or the marked exit is blocked, you adapt. Pre-deciding doesn't replace a venue's own emergency procedures, and it doesn't replace instructions from staff or responders. When they give instructions, follow them.

And a plan is not a promise that nothing will go wrong. It is a way of being kind to your future, stressed self.

In practice

The first solo trip. A thirteen-year-old is taking the bus across town alone for the first time to visit his grandmother. The evening before, he and his mother agree three if-then plans: "If I miss my stop, I get off at the next one and text you." "If my phone dies, I ask the driver or a staff member at the station to help me call." "If anything feels wrong, I go to the driver or into a shop with staff." On the day, he misses his stop because he is absorbed in a game.

He feels a jolt of panic, then remembers: next stop, text. He gets off, sends the text, and his grandmother walks over to meet him. Afterwards, he says the best part was not having to think about what to do.

The open-day huddle. Before a busy open day at a community sports club, the front-desk team spends ten minutes agreeing three plans. "If a child is separated from their adult, they wait with the desk and we make one announcement." "If the fire alarm sounds, we follow the club's posted plan: everyone leaves by the nearest marked exit and meets at the far end of the parking lot, and the desk lead brings the visitor list." "If a visitor becomes very upset, we say, 'Let me get the manager for you,' and step back." Halfway through the afternoon, a six-year-old appears at the desk looking for her dad. The volunteer doesn't need to decide what to do; she smiles, says, "Let's wait right here together," and the desk lead makes the announcement. The dad arrives within two minutes.

Checklist

- Make plans while calm; stress is the worst time to decide.
- Write each one as "If this happens, then I will do that."
- Keep to three to five plans for likely or important situations.
- Choose actions you can always do yourself: leave, ask staff, call for help, go to a meeting point.
- Rehearse lightly: look, say, read, walk.
- Share plans with the people they involve, and revisit them when things change.
- Adapt when facts differ, and follow staff and responders' instructions.

Key terms

- **Pre-deciding**: choosing a response in advance so it is ready under pressure.
- **If-then plan**: a short plan linking a situation to a concrete action.
- **Meeting point**: an agreed, easy-to-find place to regroup if separated.
- **Light rehearsal**: looking at, saying or walking a plan calmly, without acting out an emergency.

Talk it through

1. Which situations in your life are likely enough, or important enough, to deserve an if-then plan?
2. What makes a plan easy to remember with a racing heart? Look at one of yours and simplify it.
3. How could a team or family agree plans together without making anyone anxious?

Journal prompt

Write three if-then plans for places you go often, one sentence each. For each, note who else needs to know it and when you'll share it. Describe places by role or landmark, such as "the information desk", not by address.

Chapter 6. Review your own habits honestly, without blame

The final skill in this course is looking back. Not to judge yourself, but to learn from what actually happened so the next time goes a little better.

Why our picture of ourselves is flattering

Simons and Rensink note that most people firmly believe they would notice large changes that, in experiments, they often miss. In other words, our sense of how attentive we are is more generous than reality. The same may be true of habits. Ask yourself how often you check your phone while walking through a parking garage; the honest number may be higher than your guess.

This isn't a moral failing. It's just how memory works: we remember our intentions and our best moments more easily than our autopilot. The fix is not harsh self-criticism. It's a short, curious, regular look at what actually happened.

Habits that use up attention

Start with the habits that quietly take your attention. The phone is the obvious one. CDC describes distracted driving as doing another activity that takes the driver's attention away from driving: visual (eyes off the road), manual (hands off the wheel) or cognitive (mind off driving). CDC reports that about nine people in the United States are killed each day in crashes reported to involve a distracted driver. Not everyone killed in such crashes is in a vehicle; some are walking or cycling.

The same three kinds of distraction apply when you are on foot:

- Texting while walking through a garage or across a parking lot.
- Scrolling while waiting at a busy counter or platform edge.
- Wearing both earbuds, volume up, in an unfamiliar station.

You don't have to give any of these up everywhere. Headphones on a quiet park path are a different choice from headphones in a busy garage. The point is to notice when you are making the choice, and to make it on purpose.

The four-question review

The course teaches a short review you can use for small moments or big ones, at home or at work:

1. **What happened?** Write it in order, as facts, as if describing it to someone who wasn't there.
2. **What did I notice, and when?** Separate what you actually observed from what you assumed or filled in later.
3. **What helped?** Name what went right: a habit, another person, luck, a plan.
4. **What will I change?** Choose one change, small enough to try next time.

The third question matters more than it seems. A review that only lists mistakes teaches you to dread reviewing, and a dreaded habit doesn't last. Naming what helped also tells you what to keep doing.

The fourth question should produce one change, not ten. "Phone in pocket from the stairwell to the street" is a change. "Be more aware" is not.

Facts first: observation versus assumption

The second question is where reviews can easily go wrong. After an event, memory blends what you saw with what you assumed, guessed or heard later. A useful exercise is to write two short columns:

What I actually observed	What I assumed or filled in
The reversing lights came on as I stepped off the curb.	"The driver wasn't looking." (I couldn't see the driver.)
I had both earbuds in.	"I'd have heard the engine anyway." (I don't know that.)
I looked up when the brakes squealed.	"I always look before crossing." (Not this time.)

The left column is what you can learn from. The right column is where unfair blame, of yourself or others, tends to hide. Chapter 1's lesson applies here too: if you didn't attend to something, it is honest to say you don't know.

Making one change stick

A change can be easier to remember if you attach it to something you already do. "When I reach the stairwell door, the phone goes in my pocket." "When I sit down at the desk, I look at both entrances before I log in." "When I park, I note the level and letter before I take out my phone." The existing moment becomes the reminder.

There is no fixed timetable, so give the change time before judging it, and expect to forget sometimes. Forgetting isn't failure; it's a chance to run the four questions again. When the change has become automatic, you can choose another.

Careful with hindsight

After an event, the important detail often looks obvious, because you now know it was important. At the time, it was one of a hundred things competing for your attention. Inattentional blindness research shows that unexpected things are easy to miss even when they are in full view. So "I should have seen it" is often unfair.

A better question is: "What would make it more likely that I'd notice next time?" The answer is usually a habit: a transition pass, a phone rule, a reset, a plan decided in advance. Habits are things you can actually change.

The attention diary

For a fuller picture, try a one-week **attention diary**. Each evening, write two lines:

- One moment when your attention was somewhere else, and what that was like.
- One moment when a habit helped.

After a week, look for patterns. People may find their attention drifts most at particular times (late afternoon, the end of a long shift), in particular places (familiar routes they could walk "on autopilot"), in particular moods (tired, worried, rushed) or with particular devices. NIMH suggests keeping a journal as one way of coping with stress. Here it does double duty, showing you where your spotlight tends to drift.

At the end of the week, choose a single change to keep. Then bring your plans together on the course worksheet.

Reviewing as a team

Teams can do the same review after a busy shift, an event or a near miss. Keep it short and blame-free:

- What did we see?
- What helped?
- What will we try next time?

The aim is shared learning, not finding someone at fault. If people expect blame, they stop sharing what they noticed, and the team loses its second spotlights. Leaders can set the tone by going first with something they missed themselves.

What review is not

Reviewing your habits is never the same as blaming yourself for what someone else did. If another person harms, threatens or frightens you, the responsibility for their actions is theirs, not yours for missing a sign.

Review is also not a reason to replay painful events again and again. If a memory keeps intruding, or a review leaves you distressed, set it aside. Talk with someone you trust or a professional. In the US, call or text 988 for immediate support.

Honest review is curious, specific and kind. The goal isn't to become someone who never misses anything, because no one is. It's to become someone who learns a little from each day.

In practice

After the open house. At the end of a busy open house, a volunteer coordinator gathers her four volunteers for ten minutes. She starts by sharing her own miss: "I was so focused on the demo

room that I didn't notice we'd run out of sign-in sheets until someone told me." Then she asks each person the team's three questions. One volunteer mentions that the side entrance had a guest waiting for several minutes before anyone saw. Another says the sticky note with the "tablet down, use paper" plan saved them twice. They agree one change: next time, a volunteer will do a wide look at both entrances every fifteen minutes. Nobody leaves feeling blamed, and everyone leaves knowing what worked.

The crosswalk habit. A retired bus driver notices she nearly stepped into a crosswalk against the signal while reading a text. She isn't hurt, but it unsettles her. Instead of telling herself she's getting careless, she starts a one-week attention diary. By Friday, a pattern is clear: her drifting moments cluster around 5 p.m., when she's tired and messaging her grandchildren about dinner plans. She picks one change: at crossings, the phone goes in her bag until she's on the other side. She also writes down what helped that first day: a driver who waited. She thinks of that driver now every time she puts the phone away.

Checklist

- Assume your picture of your own attention is a little flattering, and check it gently.
- Notice the habits that use up attention, especially phones and earbuds in busy places.
- Use the four questions: what happened, what I noticed and when, what helped, one change.
- Keep facts separate from assumptions.
- Watch for hindsight; ask what would help next time instead.
- Try a one-week attention diary to find patterns.

- Never blame yourself for someone else's actions, and step back from reviews that cause distress.

Key terms

- **Four-question review**: a short, blame-free look back: what happened, what I noticed, what helped, one change.
- **Hindsight bias**: the tendency for events to seem more predictable after they have happened.
- **Attention diary**: a brief daily note of where attention drifted and where a habit helped.
- **Blame-free review**: a review focused on learning and better habits, not on fault.

Talk it through

1. What is one attention habit you suspect you underestimate in yourself?
2. How could your team, club or family make reviews feel safe enough that people share what they missed?
3. Where is the line between useful review and unhelpful replaying? How would you know you'd crossed it?

Journal prompt

Use the four questions on one recent moment when your attention was somewhere else. Keep to facts about your own actions, without other people's names or private details, and finish with one sentence of kindness to yourself.

Glossary

- **Affect labeling**: putting a feeling into words, such as “rushed” or “embarrassed”.
- **Anxiety**: the body’s reaction to stress, which can occur even without a current threat.
- **Attention**: the limited capacity to focus on some information at the expense of other information.
- **Attention diary**: a brief daily note of where attention drifted and where a habit helped.
- **Blame-free review**: a review focused on learning and better habits rather than fault.
- **Challenge and threat appraisal**: seeing a demand as something you can meet (challenge) or not (threat).
- **Change blindness**: failing to notice a change between one moment and the next, even a large one.
- **Cognitive distraction**: attention taken away from a task by thoughts or conversations, even when the eyes are on it.
- **Diaphragmatic breathing**: slow, deep breathing that moves the belly.
- **Four-question review**: what happened, what I noticed and when, what helped, one change.
- **Hindsight bias**: the tendency for events to seem more predictable after they have happened.
- **If-then plan**: a short plan linking a situation to a concrete action.
- **Inattentional blindness**: failing to notice something fully visible but unexpected while attention is on a task.

- **Light rehearsal**: looking at, saying or walking a plan calmly, without acting out an emergency.
- **Pause phrase**: a short, ready sentence that buys time.
- **Plan continuation**: sticking with a plan after it has stopped working.
- **Pre-deciding**: choosing a response in advance so it is ready under pressure.
- **Prefrontal cortex**: the front part of the brain involved in holding information in mind and flexible thinking.
- **Relaxation response**: slower breathing, lower blood pressure and slower heart rate; the opposite of the stress response.
- **Reset**: a short, practiced routine (breathe out, name it, pause) that gives thinking room under pressure.
- **Stress**: the physical or mental response to an external cause or demand.
- **Stimulus-driven attention**: attention pulled by whatever is most noticeable rather than by your goals.
- **Transition pass**: a brief, deliberate wide look at a natural pause such as a doorway or arrival.
- **Tunnel vision**: attention narrowing onto one thing under pressure so that other important things fade.
- **Working memory**: the mental notepad that holds information for a few seconds while you use it.

Where to go next

Finding qualified hands-on training

This book and its course are reading and reflection. Some skills are best learned in person, with a qualified instructor:

- **First aid and emergency response.** If you want to be ready to help when someone is hurt, take a hands-on first-aid course from a recognized provider in your area. Reading cannot replace supervised practice. In any emergency, check that the scene is safe for you, call for help, and follow the instructions of the emergency service.
- **Workplace procedures.** If you staff a front desk, a venue or an event, ask your employer or organizer for the actual emergency procedures, exits, meeting points and reporting routes for your site, and for any training they provide. Laws and venue requirements vary; check the official source for your place.
- **Stress and mental health.** If stress, anxiety or low mood is lasting or hard to manage, talk with a primary care provider or a licensed mental-health professional. In the United States, call or text 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org, for immediate support.
- **Relaxation and mind-body practices.** If you want to go deeper into breathing or relaxation practices, look for a qualified teacher, and talk with your health care provider first if you have a health condition or a history of trauma, as NCCIH advises.

When choosing any course, ask who teaches it, what their qualifications are, what the course does and does not cover, and how you can stop or step out if something is uncomfortable.

Official resources

- National Institute of Mental Health: the I'm So Stressed Out! fact sheet.
- CDC: Managing Stress and Distracted Driving.
- NIOSH: Stress and Work, and its Stress...At Work booklet (NIOSH Publication No. 99-101).
- National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health: Relaxation Techniques: What You Need To Know.

Related topics

These are topics worth exploring further; they are not courses offered with this book.

- Situational awareness: turning observations into calm next steps.
- De-escalation and disengagement: stepping away from a heated exchange.
- Exits, help and recovery, and personal safety planning for home, vehicle and routine: planning for specific situations.
- Front-desk safety: noticing concerning behavior, for people who staff counters and reception areas.
- Bystander choices: offering help respectfully when someone needs it.
- Travel, transit and parking safety: habits for garages, stations and unfamiliar places.

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