

# FAST Pathways

*Unlock your life*



*with Sue Evans*

## *Welcome to the FAST Pathways Foundations*

There's a common myth that real change has to take time, willpower, and effort – that to get rid of stress, fear or anxiety you have to delve into understanding where they came from, or face them head on to get to the freedom that awaits beyond. FAST Pathways is designed to bust that myth for good.

This comprehensive programme is carefully crafted to resolve and prevent disruptive Fear, Anxiety, Stress and Trauma (FAST), by re-setting your neurological Pathways – your brain's coding. These skills have changed thousands of lives. They're flexible and adaptable, because one thing that we all do a lot, is think. Most of your experience of life comes from that thinking (rather than directly from what's happening), so it's a powerful place to make changes.

Take a few moments now, to imagine how different your life could be, if you didn't give yourself a hard time. If you didn't keep worrying about stuff that'll probably never happen. If you didn't replay the things which went badly, picking it over, and feeling uuuurgh all over again. If you didn't create obstacles, or keep putting things off. If you never felt overwhelmed by what's expected of you.....

FAST Pathways works by making small adjustments to your thinking, to take life more smoothly in your stride. To adjust more easily to challenges, and stay at your best. To get the results you want, quickly and for good.

Imagine that even when things are going wrong, you'll always know, without absolute certainty, that you're OK. You'll get

through it, and emerge, maybe, as an even better you. How different could your life be?

Now all that might seem far-fetched or naïve – might even seem so far away, to be almost impossible. But it's not. It is absolutely within your power. Because I'm going to share with you some deceptively simple ways to get more of what you want from life, and less of what you don't. So that all of those things can happen, and far more easily than you might ever have imagined possible. And you don't even have to believe me for it to work.

Because step by step, you're going to learn how to re-code your mind's stressed, anxious or fearful patterns; easing away their unpleasant effects. Building instead the patterns that you want, to create a more resilient, confident, happier you.

## *Where to Find It*

Introducing the FAST Pathways Exercises	p5
Introducing FAST Pathways	p6
What Are Stress and Anxiety	p11
Two Kinds of Thinking	p18
How to Use FAST Pathways	p32
Setting your Direction	p37
Quick Re-Set	p49
Changing Your Thinking	p58
Changing Your Mind's Pictures	p65
Changing the Way You Talk to Yourself	p71
Changing the Feeling	p76
Your Control Room	p82
Changing your Chemistry	p87
Havening® Away Discomfort	p90

Sue Evans is a certified practitioner of Havening Techniques. Havening Techniques is a registered trade mark of Ronald Ruden, 15 East 91st Street, New York. [www.havening.org](http://www.havening.org)

## *Introducing the FAST Pathways Exercises*

FAST Pathways is hands-on, and doing the exercises is essential to getting results – most take around 10 minutes, so they're easy to fit in; and you might be surprised at how quickly you start to notice big differences. Choose somewhere suitable, and give yourself time to make the best of each experience.

Each is marked with one of the following:



*Audio-guided*



*Video-guided*

The exercise outlines, presented in grey, are intended as a quick reminder – there to help you refer back and refresh an exercise. There's no substitute for using the exercise audio or video-guidance the first time you explore.

It's best to use the audio-guided exercises with headphones. All of the exercises contain hypnotic content, so please don't listen while driving, as a passenger in a car, or when doing anything else that requires your attention – listen only when it's safe to let your mind wander.

## *Introducing FAST Pathways*

FAST Pathways began by accident, when I signed myself up for a training course about communication. I was a Change Manager, with a background in Engineering - I loved my work, and apart from the usual bumps along the way, I was fairly content with life.

What I saw and experienced that week completely blew me away – the simplicity and elegance with which even long-standing, deep-rooted issues were resolved, in minutes. Everything I saw demonstrated, I resolved to learn to do.... Phobias cured, limitations left behind, procrastination obliterated, potential unleashed, and wellbeing starting to blossom all around me.

Personal change wasn't my intention for being there, but I started to discover that by changing my own thinking, life could get even better – that a few little tweaks could switch off unhelpful worries, so they stopped bothering me. That the constant internal chatter (which could get so distracting!) wasn't hard-wired into me as I'd always assumed. I discovered so many simple new ways to respond differently, and just started to feel so much better.

It got under my skin, so I trained some more, and more. And the more I experienced life getting even better, the more the momentum built. What had begun as a mild curiosity, quickly became a new passion.

The more I experienced, the more curious I became about what else is possible. I discovered choices that I'd never realised I had, abilities which had always been there, but I'd never learned to

use. Building on what was already working, and improving what wasn't. Once you have them, these are skills that you can't not use – it becomes so natural.

A few months into this discovering, life threw a huge obstacle in my path – one of the toughest challenges I've ever faced. It was unpleasant, but with these new skills, I got through it far more smoothly than I could ever have imagined I would. And I've never looked back.

One of the things which particularly appeals (perhaps to the Engineer in me!) is the speed and simplicity with which these amazing changes can happen. There's no need to unpackage any history, or to understand why you'd been struggling with something; and the change lasts. There's no need to keep deliberately doing techniques over and over to keep on getting the benefits, because as your mind learns new ways to do things, it becomes automatic.

On that initial training, the very first guy who volunteered for a demonstration, did so because he had an upsetting memory – something which had happened in his past, which still made him feel bad every time he thought of it. And apparently, that happened a lot. It was written all over his face as he spoke.....

Before he started the demo, the trainer said "I don't want to know what the memory is". 'Interesting', I thought (feeling more than a little cynical).... 'How on earth is he going to fix it, when he doesn't even know what it is?' But he did.

He asked the volunteer to 'Think of the thing....', and walked him through a series of changes to the way that thing showed up in his thoughts. Within minutes, the volunteer was transformed –

the slumped shoulders and downcast expression, replaced by a broad smile, and animated gestures. He could still fully remember whatever had happened (we never did find out what it was); but without the unpleasant emotions, which only a few minutes earlier had been so apparent.

I was hooked.

I soon started trying things out with friends and colleagues, sharing these awesome skills – and they got great results too. Within a year, I'd left my career to freelance, dedicating myself to this new path. The FAST Pathways skills are flexible and adaptable, because your thinking is at the heart of everything you experience. These are the skills to think differently.

Have you noticed how much of your thinking actually isn't very helpful? How much you worry, talk yourself down, give yourself a hard time, get anxious about things which should be a breeze.... It's easy to take on too much, believing that it's what's expected; feeling further and further out of control. Stress is so integral to modern life, that its problems are seen as inevitable.

But not all stress is bad... It becomes a problem when the total amount you're facing exceeds your resources for dealing with it. Below that threshold, you're able to take the stresses you face in your stride (even if they're annoying, upsetting or inconvenient). And some of those stresses can bring out your very best. The challenges you rise to and grow from, like getting your next promotion, mastering a new skill, or supporting someone you love through their tough times.

So by topping up your resources from the inside, the FAST Pathways skills raise that threshold, allowing you to breeze

through more of life's stresses, and really harness those which bring out your best.

FAST Pathways is not about trying to manage the stress. Firstly because managing focuses your attention on the problem stresses, and what you focus on, you naturally notice more of (thankfully, that's also the case as you start to notice more of the useful stresses as well).

But there's an even bigger drawback to managing. Whatever method you choose, whether it's prioritising and delegating more, exercising more regularly or taking time out to practise mindfulness; managing requires you to do something differently, consistently. And we don't always do what's good for us.

If you're not convinced, take a few moments to think of all the people you know. How many of them eat healthily, exercise regularly, always drink at least six glasses of water a day, and never exceed the recommended amounts of alcohol? I'd be surprised if it's many. And managing stress can become yet another one of those things we know we should be doing, but never quite get to, or can't maintain (especially when we're already stressed and anxious, with little spare capacity)...

By embedding inside your thinking, the FAST Pathways skills carry on delivering their benefits without you having to find the time, energy or willpower to keep on doing things differently. They're powerful, both for resolving problem stress and anxiety that you're already experiencing, and for preventing it from building up in the first place.

FAST Pathways is not a replacement for medical advice, which you should seek if you're experiencing physical symptoms. It can

be used on its own, or alongside other approaches which you're already using - therapies, counselling, meditation and / or medication, so that you can find the right combination of what works best for you.

I'm often asked why these skills, when they're so universally useful, aren't taught as standard. The honest answer is, I don't know. I could suggest all sorts of reasons..... The bottom line, in my opinion, is that although science is fast catching up, we can't yet prove exactly how they work. Does it matter? Few of us understand exactly how electricity works, or microwaves; but we happily rely on them to make life easier.

## *What are Stress and Anxiety?*

Stress and anxiety are a natural part of your emotional landscape. A little can be good for you, keeping you out of danger. Helping to keep you focused on important activities, and making you pay attention to preparing and performing at your best. So it's only a problem if it's a problem.

I've a big anxiety around roller coasters and fairground rides – I only have to look at one to feel slightly sick. It was embarrassing that even at six years old, my daughter was braver than me; and I've thought a few times that I really ought to fix it, if only to prove that I can. But prove to who? I'm really not bothered, I'm not missing out on anything which matters to me. So I've left it alone.

When it does become a problem, is when it's no longer a choice; either because you can't switch off its effects, or because you can't avoid the things which are causing it (or at least, not without really missing out on something that you want). When you start to anticipate unpleasant experiences, and avoid the associated situations just in case.

Your body's response to the most extreme stresses has its origins in our survival mechanism of flight, fight or freeze – the three most viable responses to a physical threat: Freeze, in the hope that the predator won't notice you; fight, to take on the predator, or flight to run away.



In preparation, hormones including adrenaline increase your heart rate, and the blood flow is diverted away from non-essential functions like digestion, and into your muscles. Your breathing speeds up, and you might sweat more, ready to cool the muscles as they spring into action. You might notice your thoughts starting to race, as your mind considers all your available options.

All of these effects can be useful when you're confronted by a genuine physical threat: If you're in a building when the fire alarm goes off, then flight – getting out of there - is just the right response.

Those effects can be less useful when the threat is an unpleasant colleague, an approaching deadline, a bill to be paid, an exam to sit... or any of the other countless sources of stresses in our modern lives. Your neurology can't distinguish very well between a physical threat, and an emotional one – so it can kick off the same reaction, even when it's not the most helpful.

But that's not the whole story...

## *There's More to Stress than Fight or Flight*

That bit of extra adrenaline can be energising, it can give you an edge when there's more to be done. Physically, there's very little difference between the response to a low-level stress, and excited anticipation. The shift in your body chemistry can be useful.

The first research into this response's effects on the body was by Hans Selye in the 1930s. He subjected rats to a number of extreme stresses, with less-than-great effects on their life expectancy. But the assumption that humans would experience exactly the same damaging physical effects was never validated.

Selye defined stress as “the response of the body to any demand made on it”... A massive generalisation, since the ‘demands’ used in his experiments were all of the near-death variety. And so we began to see all stress as potentially harmful. <sup>(1)</sup>

Perhaps you've experienced the exhilaration of watching your favourite team in a really close game, of pulling off a big negotiation or performance, of falling in love...? The adrenaline-fuelled symptoms are very similar to fight-or-flight (sweaty palms, increased heart rate, your mind more sharply focused....), yet these are experiences which we actively seek out. They make life more vibrant.

Sometimes, the most stressful activities, like raising children or campaigning for political change, can also be those which bring the greatest sense of purpose, value and achievement.

(1) “The Upside of Stress” Kelly McGonigal – a highly recommended read

So thankfully, our bodies have evolved beyond the primitive one-size-fits-all stress response, and the latest scientific research is revealing how.

The Challenge Response to stress has subtle differences to fight-flight. Your heart still speeds up, and your senses are heightened. But your heart also beats more strongly, and your blood vessels stay more open, so your whole system gets more oxygen, which increases your physical energy. It feels focused rather than fearful. This response is particularly strong in top performers and sports people, who are able to perform at their best, even under extreme pressure; and it helps each of us to learn and grow from a stressful experience.

Stress can also lead us to reach out to others, forming connections and collaborations: On Boxing Day 2015 the River Irwell in Lancashire burst its banks, flooding homes across the area, and leaving a trail of mud, sewage and devastation. <sup>(2)</sup>

What followed was one of the greatest displays of community support and neighbourly help ever witnessed in the area. Hundreds of volunteers gave their time to help flooded residents get back on their feet. Hundreds more donated cleaning products, household goods, furniture, or money. Local businesses came out in force to help, and two of my close friends gave up weeks of their time to co-ordinate the effort.

Having seen first-hand a little of what went on, I was both deeply moved and impressed at the commitment and dedication of those who chose to get involved. These catastrophic events brought the community closer together, and forged a number of

lasting friendships. It was a great example of the Connection response to stress.

(2) “The Boxing Day Flood 2015 – A Community Brought Together” edited by Lucy Houghton-Burnett

That Connection response needn’t be on such a large scale as giving up weeks of your time – it can be as simple as reaching out to a supportive friend, to talk through what you’re experiencing.

What’s your current relationship with stress?

Think back over the last year, or further if you like. What stresses have stretched you, what challenges have you faced? Think of five – they don’t have to be the biggest, just whatever comes to mind. You might even take a little time to write them down. Then for each one, think of at least one thing which you learned from it, a new connection which you made, or a way in which you grew from it.

Even if it’s an experience which you’d still prefer not to have gone through, or one you hope never to repeat; that learning is part of who you are. Part of your resources for dealing with future challenges (even if it’s just knowing how not to do it). Part of your rich experience of being alive.

What I’ve found over the years of coaching clients, is that it’s often the strongest people who suffer the most – they know they can manage stress, so they carry on, sometimes even thriving on it; until one day, they can’t any more. And that can be catastrophic.

I’ve found similar habits when I’m supporting change in organisations. Firefighting is common, busy-ness as usual. It

absorbs huge amounts of energy and attention, so it's often difficult to create space for change. To put out some of the 'fires', the recurring problems, for good. But resolving the first few, creates more time and space to sort out the next, and the next; until the whole thing eases into being much happier, and more effective.

When it escalates, the disruptive effects of stress are almost as diverse as the potential causes: Poor concentration, impaired decision making, reduced motivation, short temper, feeling overwhelmed, headaches, over eating or loss of appetite, interrupted sleep, loss of interest in hobbies or social activities, dizziness or nausea.....

It can lead to feeling detached, turning life into a spectator sport, made for little more than coping; rather than for full-on participation..... and of course, if it persists over longer periods, it can increase the risk of many chronic medical conditions, including heart disease, and digestive disorders such as IBS.

Escalating stress is at the heart of so many other problems. For most of the people who I coach to stop smoking or lose weight, once we sort out the stress, the damaging behaviours (the ones which they know are no good for them, but couldn't seem to stop) clear up too. They might not have realised that stress was the underlying cause, or they'd assumed it to be so inevitable that they'd just accepted it.

When that background stress is always there, after a while, you stop noticing – your mind stops drawing it to your attention; like ignoring the feeling of the clothes against your skin, unless there's something uncomfortable (like a scratchy label) to bring

back your attention. But the higher that background stress or anxiety level, the more your natural resources are being used up in just keeping going; and the easier it is for anything extra to tip it over that threshold, becoming really disruptive.

So the traffic queue becomes a big deal – getting into such a flap about it making you late, that you arrive worn out. The dirty clothes which your kids left lying around, can feel like a personal insult. You may feel more sensitive and vulnerable, or become more withdrawn, as your energy gets tied up with just managing. Just keeping going. But it doesn't have to be like that.

In the UK, problems involving stress and anxiety are behind one in five visits to the doctor, and stress-related hospital admissions have risen by 7% in just 12 months. 40% of work absences result from stress; and generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) is believed to affect one in every 20 UK adults, at some time in their life.

Yet a recent Mental Health Foundation survey said that only 6% of people would consider visiting a medical professional for their stress and related issues – people were three times more likely to drink alcohol to deal with it instead. Except that, of course, it doesn't deal with it.....

FAST Pathways is not about switching off any of these emotions – it's designed to give you the skills to choose. To adjust the stress down to a useful level, resolve it where it's not, and prevent it from coming back.

## *Two Kinds of Thinking*

Our minds are amazingly complex, and many models have been proposed to simplify our understanding of how we think. My favourite is Jonathan Haidt's elephant and rider: The rider is equivalent to the conscious mind, your awareness, the thinking which you do on purpose.



It's the rider who evaluates and makes decisions, who likes structure and reason. This conscious thinking, though incredibly powerful, has quite limited capacity. You're able to hold around seven items of information consciously active at any given time. Start adding more, and you quickly lose awareness of the first ones.

The elephant is equivalent to all the rest of the thinking – everything that goes on outside the deliberate awareness. Your emotions, intuition, inspiration and creativity; and all of the

automatic routines which keep you functioning. These auto-routines are very important – they may be things which took you a while to learn, like walking or reading; but once you have them, you can take them for granted.

So why an elephant? It's far bigger and more powerful than the rider, and if it decides you're going in a particular direction, you usually will. People experience this when dieting, or making any change based on willpower – it's a huge effort for the rider to keep everything moving in the chosen direction, when the most powerful parts of the thinking (which are generally more interested in an easy path, and short-term gain) are heading a different way. The rider may be thinking "Size 12 by Summer", but the elephant's thinking "Mmm. Chocolate cake....".

Mostly, the two parts of the thinking work well together, complimenting, and making the most of each other's abilities. So if you decide to get up from wherever you are and move to somewhere else, perhaps into the next room; your conscious mind makes the decision. It hands it over to your auto-routine to actually move you there. Taking a simple step forward uses around 200 muscles, and if you had to consciously figure out exactly what to do with them, you wouldn't move about much.

You learned many of your auto-routines when you were very young, so you probably don't remember what life was like without them. Learning to walk, to communicate, to fasten buttons and shoe laces, to open doors.... Some deliberate programming and pattern-setting which comes much later, and so tends to be easier to remember, is learning to drive a car.

There's a lot to think about – the steering, brakes, mirrors, traffic lights and road signs; let alone pedestrians, other road users, and the directions to where you're going. At first it feels like overload, but parts of it soon start to become familiar. We set new auto-routines, which our rider can hand over to the elephant.

As more and more of the activities of driving become automatic, it frees up your awareness for other things, like talking with a passenger, singing along with the radio, or planning how to spend your evening. It can become so automatic that you develop a kind of sixth sense – intuitively knowing when a driver's going to pull out unsafely, or a pedestrian's going to step off the kerb; and this early anticipation allows you to avoid the danger. You might not be consciously aware of how you knew, but it kept you (and them) safe.

Many of your auto-routines are essential for daily life, keeping your awareness available for the things which only it can do. But unfortunately, you sometimes pick up routines or patterns which are a lot less helpful, and run just as automatically – like panicking at the thought of public speaking, feeling overwhelmed with each new demand on your time, or worrying about every possible outcome of a new experience. That's where the parts of your thinking start to fall out with each other, and an internal struggle develops.

Your rider knows that the response doesn't make sense – there's nothing unsafe or threatening about the situation, and you ought to be taking it in your stride (particularly if it's a step towards something you really want, like a promotion or your dream date). So you might try to talk yourself round, using reason and logic;

but that's the language of the rider, and the elephant doesn't understand.

You can pick up new patterns very easily, and the rider finds it even more frustrating if you don't even remember where they came from. Some of them originate in direct experience – perhaps being trapped in a lift, leading to a fear of all confined spaces; but they can also be learned.

Most of the people who I've supported past their terror of public speaking, have always avoided it – they haven't had any personal experience of standing up to speak, let alone of it going wrong. So where does the fear come from? It's been learned from those around them. Most young children are completely unafraid of spiders, but by about age four, many of them have started to copy the fearful behaviour which they see in so many adults.

One of my coaching clients had learned her phobia from her Mum: When she was only five years old, they returned home from the park to find a frog on the doorstep. Her Mum screamed and ran off (as it turns out, to get a neighbour to come and move the frog, but the little girl didn't know that) – leaving her daughter unattended for the first time ever, in the presence of a creature so fearful, it had caused her Mum to run in terror.

She remembered little more about that initial event, but her fear of frogs was powerful. She came to see me after nearly crashing her car because she thought she'd seen one in the road. Even if there had been one there (and she wasn't sure), logic says that small frog in road vs large person in car, has the odds firmly stacked in the person's favour; but logic wasn't getting a look in.

Autumn was particularly traumatic for her: With leaves on the ground, her auto-routine constantly reminded her that a frog could be lurking anywhere. On several occasions she'd had to stay in the house, because she couldn't bear the possibility that a hiding frog might run at her (even knowing that's not how frogs behave). A life-limiting fear, all because of one simple event she'd witnessed as a child.

I'd still underestimated how easily these unhelpful patterns can get set, until my daughter (then also 5 years old) was preparing for her first dance exam. For weeks, she was really excited about it, then two weeks before, it flipped to the polar opposite. We had tears, she didn't want to do it, she was scared. She couldn't explain why, or what had changed, but it was very real.

After much exploring, it turned out that she'd told someone in school that she was having an exam. "Aren't you scared?" they said - and in those few words, they'd accidentally passed that reality to her. She hadn't chosen it, she hadn't agreed to it, but it had gone straight into her own auto-routines. Thankfully we were able to get it swiftly and smoothly back out, and she thoroughly enjoyed the exam.

## *Believing*

These are examples of where the auto-routine is easily recognised as flawed and unhelpful, making it easier to direct attention towards change. But what about when it's less obvious? When the pattern hides below the surface, and gets accepted, unquestioningly, as fact? Here we venture into the territory of beliefs – the auto-routines which powerfully shape

our choices and behaviour, the basis of the elephant's view of the world.

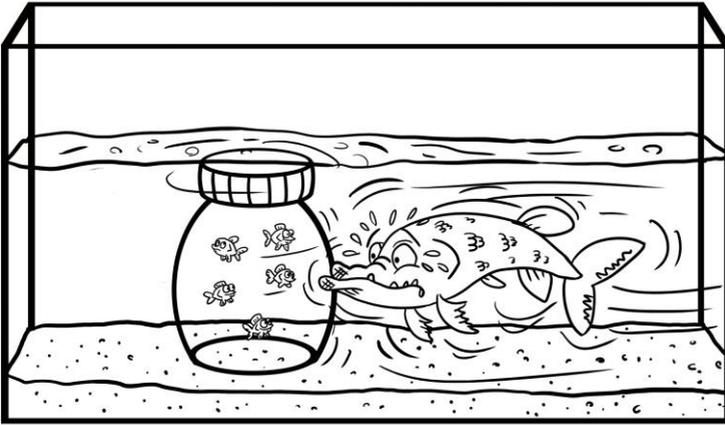
Like other auto-routines, your beliefs help you to be more efficient. They provide shortcuts, so you don't have to figure out every situation from scratch. The belief that traffic is dangerous makes you pay attention when crossing the road, and keeps you safe. But even the less factual beliefs can have just as powerful an effect in shaping your perceptions of what's possible, and the choices you make.

For a long time, everyone believed it was impossible to run a four minute mile, and that the attempt could generate actual physical harm. When Roger Banister finally dispelled the myth, the new record he set lasted for only 46 days – within a year it had been broken 7 times. The world had changed.

Our beliefs might have had rational origins in something we experienced; but once they've been set, we rarely re-visit them to check out if they're still valid, as our environment changes.

Many years ago, I saw a video of a behavioural experiment with fish. It began by showing a large pike, a freshwater fish with a big appetite. They introduced a shoal of tiny minnows into his tank, and within minutes, he'd eaten the lot.

Then they introduced a second shoal of minnows, but this time, they were inside a large glass jar. Glass is invisible under water, so the pike could see the minnows, but every time he swam to catch them, he surprised himself with a bump to the head. Within a day or so, he'd stopped trying.



After a few more days, they removed the jar. Now the minnows were swimming all around the tank instead of just one small area, but the pike didn't notice. He'd learned to stop going after them. Apparently, he starved to death – surrounded by food which he'd learned to ignore.

We're a lot smarter than fish, but sometimes we still fail to update our beliefs as the world changes: In one of my manufacturing change projects, the front-line staff wouldn't make decisions, saying that people got shouted at if they got things wrong. New to the organisation, that didn't stack up with what I'd experienced, so I asked when that had last happened.

After much discussion, they agreed it was about eight years ago. They'd had two changes of management since then, but that 'fact' was still shaping everyone's behaviour (even the people who weren't there eight years ago!). Brought out for scrutiny, they realised it wasn't true any more, but they'd never examined it until I asked.

And as well as not updating our beliefs, we actively ignore anything which contradicts them, sometimes being quite creative about why a particular contradiction doesn't count. So if you believe that you're not a confident person, you might brush off the time when you spoke up for yourself, saying 'that was different because....'. If you believe that life is inherently stressful, you might persevere in a situation which isn't good for you, without even considering alternatives; believing that nothing else would be any better, so why look.

In the same way that we can pick up auto-routines (like being scared of spiders) from those around us, we can also pick up beliefs, which then shape the way we respond to a situation. A while ago, I took my daughter to the local playground. It was one of the first sunny days of the year, so it was packed – and as you'd expect with lots of excited children running around, there were quite a few trips and falls.

And I started to notice something.... When a kid falls over, what do you think determines how much it cries? and surprisingly, it's not how hard they fall....

It was the way the parents reacted. A couple of times, kids went absolutely flying, and a parent came over with a "Whoops! Up you get". There was a brief check for damage, then the kid shrugged it off and carried on playing. And yet the kids who'd barely hit the deck, whose parents came rushing over full of concern, howled for ages.... The parents' belief about the potential pain of the fall, shaped the way the kids reacted.

How have your beliefs about stress been shaped by other people?

## *What You Believe About Stress Matters*

As we explored earlier, that first research into the physical effects of stress (and the sweeping generalisations made from the results) led to a widespread belief that stress is harmful. One of the resulting problems, is that when you're convinced of something, your brain and body can be very obedient in making it happen.

If you were terrified of public speaking, convinced that you'll stutter or your mind will go blank, then those things are much more likely to happen, no matter how much you tried to reassure yourself and be brave. And unhelpful beliefs can have much deeper effects than simply stuttering through a presentation.

In a recent US study<sup>(3)</sup>, over 28,000 participants were asked how much stress they'd experienced in the previous year, and whether they believed that stress was harmful to health. Then 8 years later, the study tracked how many participants had died. It wasn't the most cheerful of studies...

Taking only the people who said they'd experienced high stress, those who also believed the stress to be harmful were up to 4 times more likely to also report being in ill health at the time of the survey, and had a 43% higher mortality rate within the 8 years.

It seems that it's not only the level of stress doing the damage, but the underlying beliefs about its effects.

(3) "Does the Perception That Stress Affects Health Matter? The Association With Health and Mortality" Keller, Litzelman, Wisk et al, 2012

So should you just be telling yourself a different story? No – firstly because beliefs run deep, so trying to veneer over the top is hard work, and isn't very effective. And secondly because the one about stress being harmful isn't entirely untrue.

What does help, is to recognise that not EVERY stress is harmful. Stress can be your body's way of drawing your attention to something which is not as you'd like it, something which matters to you, getting you to take action – triggering your Challenge, Connect or Learning responses. This puts you back in charge, seeing the stress as something to harness, rather than to passively endure. Even if it's something you wouldn't have chosen to experience.

The skills of FAST Pathways are designed to complement and add to the strategies you already have for dealing with stress. To stop the discomfort from building up to disruptive, keeping you comfortably resourceful, so that you have more choice about how best to respond. Because once you're feeling calmer and more creative, you're better able to act to resolve the situation (or at least to deal more smoothly with its consequences). Giving your more evolved stress responses the space to kick in, and work their magic.

As you develop your own FAST Pathways skills, you might notice some long-held beliefs surfacing, and holding you back. "BUT" often precedes a belief, so keep an ear open for when you start to say it to yourself. When you find yourself embroiled in a story, and it might be one you've been telling yourself for a long time, ask "Do I absolutely know that to be true? Are there ever times when it isn't?"

Even if those times when it isn't are rare, it helps to recognise them as real; rather than discounting them or taking them for granted. There will always be times when you're OK. Even if that's only a fraction of the day, it's not nothing. There'll be some of life's stresses which you can ignore or comfortably deal with, even when there are others which feel overwhelming (which, of course, are the ones which absorb your attention).

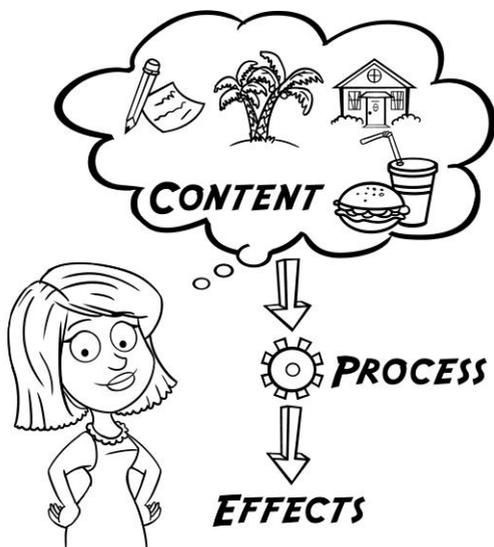
We're naturally far better at noticing where things aren't yet working, than we are at giving ourselves credit for what is. But by noticing what's already working, it makes the whole thing less daunting, and comfortably possible. You're already on your way, and giving yourself that recognition is a great place to start.

Some good news is that you don't have to believe in these skills for them to work – you just have to do them. So there's no need to invest effort in trying to tell yourself a new story, to over-write the old one. The believing can come later, once you've built up a little proof, and started noticing for yourself what's different.

And even better, to enjoy the benefits, you don't have to know why you've been experiencing discomfort; or exactly how and why that's changed as you learn. You can leave that to your elephant, your automatic; so your rider can concentrate on where you want to go.

## *Your Thinking Process*

Most people don't realise there's a process to thinking. We pay attention to the content (what we're thinking about), and the effects (our emotional response); ignoring the bit in the middle.



Your thinking process is the sequence of steps which converts inputs to outcomes. A decision emerges from a process of evaluating the options. An event you've experienced goes through a process of coding to get stored as a memory, and another to retrieve it. There's no universal blueprint – we each have our own particular processes, but it's how we work.

Learning to recognise and change those process steps is like being able to hack into your own auto-routines, and re-write them to get the results you want; which can then run just as automatically as the pattern you replaced.

As an Engineer, I find this particularly appealing. With these really simple changes, you can achieve amazing results, without delving into history or stories about why things became as they were. Problems or difficulties you've been experiencing are not who you are (however much it might feel like it) – they're things you've been doing. And when you do things that little bit differently, your life can transform.

As you explore FAST Pathways, you'll often be using your imagination to access the parts of your thinking outside what you normally notice. The parts which generate the majority of what you experience, and which originate lasting change.

Kids' imaginations are amazing – and we don't lose that by growing up. Though we do often learn to ignore it, and sometimes lose touch with its capabilities, as our conscious awareness gets more used to being in charge.

You might not think that you have a good imagination – but it's just as good as it needs to be. Anyone who worries is great at imagining. Unfortunately, great at imagining things going wrong; but with a little re-direction, that imagination can generate amazing changes.



## *The Power of your Imagination - Exercise*

Throughout FAST Pathways, I invite you to experiment, and enjoy finding ways to change your processes, to get the outcomes you really want.

## *The FAST Pathways Case Stories*

FAST Pathways is a collection of tried-and-tested approaches, crafted and refined over the years from what people were already doing, how people were already thinking, which worked.

Throughout, there's a selection of stories of real experiences of the rapid, easy and permanent changes which result from putting these skills into practice.

Many of the people who've chosen to share their stories had been experiencing their issues for a long time – for some, this was a last resort. Every one of them got the results they sought, and for many, much more besides.

Some of their stories will resonate with your own experiences. They illustrate the breadth and flexibility of real-life applications for FAST Pathways.

Each of the case stories is shown in green

## *How to Use FAST Pathways*

Like learning to drive a car, it's much more effective hands-on. If you simply read through or listen along to the exercises, you'll gain insights, and perhaps things will change a little. The real learning, and all its magic, come when you do it. Really dive in.

The guide book gives you background and context, helping you to integrate FAST Pathways smoothly; and reminders of the exercises.

It helps to check in on your progress as you go – taking a few notes, or keeping an audio / video diary of how you're getting on; noting whatever you like, just for you.

It's lovely to re-visit, and remind yourself of where you were. As your changes can so quickly become automatic, it's easy to forget where you started - so it's good to look back and recognise your progress.

The exercises themselves are designed to be done with the audio and video guidance, allowing you to relax, close your eyes if you wish, and gently focus your attention on following the steps. When using the audio-guidance, it's best to use headphones. It's also best to do each of the exercises at a time and in a place where you can give them your full attention – most take around 10 minutes.

FAST Pathways is designed to be bite-sized, one exercise at a time. If you make it into a big undertaking, or create unnecessary pressure for yourself, you're more likely to encounter resistance somewhere in your thinking. Little and often is most effective. By integrating these skills into your normal routines, they become natural and intuitive.

Your brain learns by patterns and repetition. As you begin each exercise, allow yourself enough time to follow the steps a few times – enough to set each new pattern to auto. As time passes and your skills embed more deeply, you may want to re-visit some exercises, refining and developing them to work even better as your thinking evolves.

Within the first couple of exercises, you may have all the results you'd initially set out for.... Keep going, and carry on building. As

your baseline improves, and your 'wants' evolve, the extra skills will serve you well.

Your brain loves patterns and familiarity, so you might find yourself comparing the skills you're developing with what you've already experienced, and this can help you to integrate the skills. But listen to every exercise afresh, approaching each with an open mind. Otherwise, you might accidentally filter out just what you need.

If you're not used to deliberately imagining, pausing your conscious logic, you may find you're venturing a little outside your comfort zone. That's good – because a comfort zone isn't always that comfortable. You can take it at your own pace, in your own way.

There's no right and wrong, and I invite you to create your own ways to do the exercises. No one knows you as well as your unconscious mind, and you might be surprised at how creative and effective it can be. Throughout this process, you have complete control. Maintain a spirit of healthy curiosity, even when things feel unfamiliar. You're teaching the parts of your thinking to get along better together.

### *Jean's Escape from Old Patterns*

Jean had a long history of anxiety and depression. When she discovered FAST Pathways, she was getting over bereavement from her partner, and although she'd been pushing herself to keep going, she realised that she wasn't coping as well as she'd thought.

She noticed the symptoms escalating again – she couldn't concentrate, she'd had to stop looking after her grandchildren, and was struggling to function at all normally. She felt rising panic at the prospect of sliding back into the worst of her symptoms.

As she started to explore FAST Pathways, a revelation hit her – that she could, quite literally, change her mind; and that the downwards slide she'd experienced so many times before, wasn't inevitable.

She immersed in practising her new skills, little and often, and soon resumed her active involvement as a Grandma. She began sleeping better, comfortably getting out and about; and quite some time later, she's still enjoying the benefits.

Be gentle with yourself. I remember Supercoach Michael Neill talking about how self-critical we can be, particularly when we've set our expectations. When a toddler's learning to walk, they start to pull themselves around on the furniture, and they often stumble and topple. But their parents actively encourage them. Picking up the child time after time, praising every move they make in the right direction, and every step they master; motivating the child to keep going.

On the first stumble, you never hear a parent exclaim "No, this one's not going to be a walker", and give up.... How can you encourage yourself as you learn? You can't not change – it's a fact of life, just like the child learning, eventually, to walk. Even Olympic gold began once, with a few tentative steps.



Preferences differ, and we all learn in slightly different ways. You'll notice more of a difference using some of these techniques than others. FAST Pathways is a comprehensive mix, so that within it, you'll find exactly what's right for you. You'll find some exercises naturally easier than others, and there can be a tendency to focus just on those – the elephant likes the path of least resistance. But the exercises which are less intuitive may create the biggest changes, taking you to where you really want to be.



### *Getting the Best from FAST Pathways*

The first of our audio-guided exercises is simply to help you to start to relax. Partly, because it's deliciously indulgent, and partly because it's a good foundation on which to build your new skills.

It doesn't have any specific instructions, so there are no accompanying notes; and you can use the recording as often as you like. Perhaps you'll listen before you go to sleep at night, or take out a little time during the day to kick back and chill out.

Take about 20 minutes, somewhere quiet, to immerse and enjoy.



## *Relaxing into FAST Pathways*

## *Setting your Direction*

Let's begin to lay the foundations for your life as you want it.

The first thing to do at the start of any lasting change, is to decide what you really want. I know that sounds obvious; and when I'm working with someone for the first time, I always ask 'What do you want?' It's surprising how often they answer with what they don't want, without realising that's not what I asked.

They don't want to worry so much, they don't want to feel uncomfortable about going out, they don't want to feel panicky any more.... Taking it for granted that what they want is the opposite.

But your brain doesn't hear the 'don't'. When I ask you not to think of an orange balloon – you have to think of one to understand what I'm asking - and it's the same when the 'don't' or the 'not to' is embedded in your thinking. (It's also the same with kids – which is one reason why telling them not to do something often leads to exactly the opposite).

So if you're thinking about 'don't', you're inadvertently tuning in your mind to notice the exact opposite of what you want. Now you might wonder why that's a problem, and to the awareness parts of your thinking, it's not – your conscious mind knows that it's just a word, and will try to ignore its effects. But as we're exploring, there's much more to your thinking than you're aware of. And to the parts outside your awareness, there is no 'don't'.

It took me a while to experience the real power of noticing, and tuning it in. I'd heard people talk about ordering a new car,

thinking it was a really unusual colour or style - until they'd ordered theirs, and they started seeing them everywhere. But it wasn't something I'd experienced for myself.

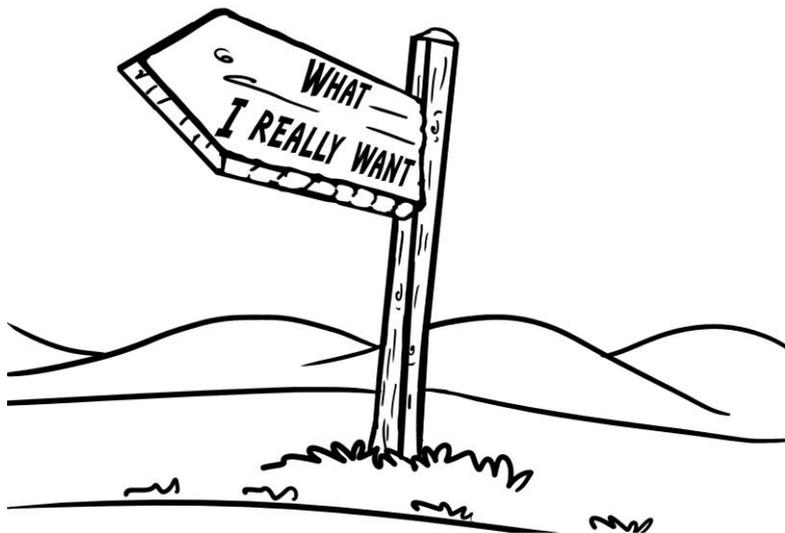
Until I got pregnant – then there were bumps and babies absolutely everywhere. I was convinced we were having a national baby boom. Of course, we weren't, but it made it clear, how our minds tune in to pick up on certain things. My mind was directed by what I was experiencing at the time – something that was important to me; but rather than waiting for circumstance to do it for us, we can deliberately set our noticing too.

### *What do you really want?*

If you've been thinking about everything you don't want, now's the time to stop. To let that go, and start to think about what you really want instead, which is altogether pleasanter. Some people find it easier than others – being quite a structured thinker, I sometimes find that if I can't work out how I'm going to get there, I stop myself from exploring what it would be like if I did. Maybe you've experienced something similar. You might have talked yourself out of something, because you didn't know the whole path, right from the start.

Ask yourself “What would it be like if...?” A simple, and amazingly powerful question, which helps you suspend reality while you explore. ‘If’ takes away any of the pressure of how, and when. It takes away the need to get it right, because it's just ‘if’. It gives you the space to try out different possibilities, and find which ones really appeal.

It doesn't matter if you don't yet believe that you can have what you want. It doesn't matter if you don't know yet how to get there – the steps to take, the knowledge you'll need. All that can come later. And it's not about making yourself feel bad that you don't have it yet – that doesn't matter either.



All that you're doing just now, is imagining something that you want, and your mind knows just how to do that. It might be a big change, it might be something smaller like being able to enjoy a night out with friends, completely absorbed in enjoying their company. However big or small that want, take a little time to immerse and explore.

Step into it, as if it's real, as if it's happening right there around you, right now; and notice all the details. What do you see around you, what do you hear? What's happening, and how do you feel? What are you saying to yourself? It might feel a little

strange at first – you’re starting to exercise parts of your thinking that perhaps you’re not used to deliberately directing.

There’s no right or wrong – there’s simply what is, for you. The more clearly you can set these details within your thinking, the more specifically you’re instructing your automatic thinking to take you there. And with the new skills that you’ll learn within FAST Pathways, that’s a powerful combination.

And as you start to explore this future, take some time to make a few notes or record your thoughts – as little or as much as comes to mind. As you move through the different parts of this programme, you can add to those notes whenever you like, to continue to focus your noticing on what you want.

Here are a few examples: What I really want is.....

- To switch off from work easily when I come home in the evening, enjoying my time with my family
- To feel comfortable and relaxed in new situations, meeting new people
- To deliver my presentation smoothly, confidently and with charisma

### *Is it within your control?*

Even for the most easy-going of us, control is still important; even if that need is outside our awareness: Participants in a behavioural study were asked to perform a number of tasks

requiring concentration, like proof reading, and completing puzzles.

The test environment was interrupted with a series of random, distracting noises. Half of the participants were given a button, which they were told would turn off the sound, while the other half weren't. The group with the button performed significantly better – yet none of them actually pressed it.... The simple knowledge that they had the choice, the control, made the difference.

So it's important as you're exploring, to make sure that what you want, where you're aiming your noticing, is something that's within your control. If it's winning the lottery, or marrying a film star, then this might not work so well. So make sure the 'want' you're aiming towards is something that's yours to create.

For example, you might want your spouse to stop being argumentative: You can't control their behaviour, however much you'd like to – but that doesn't mean you have to give up on changing what's not working. What can you control? Instead your 'want' could be

"I want to be able to recognise when my partner is tired and crabby, and keep whatever they say in that context"

"I want to be able to express how upsetting I find these arguments, calmly and confidently"

You might want your presentation to go so well that it generates rapturous applause and an instant promotion – but those are dependent on other people's responses, which you can't control. How about

“I want to prepare and deliver my presentation clearly and compellingly. There may be questions which I can’t answer on the spot – I want to feel calm and comfortable that I can deal effectively with whatever comes up”

So take another look at your ‘wants’, and make sure it’s something for which you can be wholly responsible.

*When you have what you want, what does that get for you? What’s important about that?*

By exploring this extra dimension, you’re connecting that ‘want’ to your deeper values. You’re starting to hard-wire it in, building a compelling case, to all the parts of your thinking, for it to happen. Tap into the emotion, because when you fully engage emotionally as well as logically, the change becomes so much smoother. You’re building that desire, from the inside out.

When you have what you want, how will you know? What will it be, specifically, that tells you you’re there? What difference will that make in your life? What will it enable you to do that perhaps you haven’t yet? Or what will you be able to do differently from how it is now? And if you find some doubts creeping back in again; remember, I’m not asking you to believe in it – simply to keep on exploring ‘what if?’, and ‘what else?’.....

This can also start to flush out whether that ‘want’ is really yours. Other people’s expectations can have a far greater influence than we realise: By exploring this question, you’re making sure that your ‘want’ is genuinely yours, not something that’s expected of you, or that you ‘should’. Because if you’re pursuing something

which at a deeper level doesn't align, your mind can find all sorts of ways to make it difficult.

I worked with a client who came to me for help with overcoming her nerves about performing music in public. She learnt the skills to switch off the anxiety, giving her the choice to perform if she wished – but when she started to explore, she realised that she didn't actually want to at all.

She was quite happy having music as a hobby which she pursued at home – the performances were an expectation which she'd picked up from her Mum, without even realising it. By switching off her nerves, she'd opened up the choice to perform, making it her own; a choice which she was then fully comfortable to make.

### *What's already working?*

Left to its own devices, our thinking seems to head far more naturally towards where things are not working, not yet as we'd like. This was starkly illustrated for me when I sat my first set of public exams (a very long time ago!).... My eagerly awaited results were all A grades, apart from one B.

Over the following few weeks, almost a hundred people asked how I'd done (and yes, I did find myself counting....). Every single person apart from one, then immediately asked "What was the B?". Maybe you even found yourself wondering.....?

Out of all those people, there was only one who didn't immediately ask about what had gone less well. They weren't doing it on purpose, and but for the sheer volume of numbers, I probably wouldn't have noticed. It was valuable learning.

Now that you've spent a little time exploring what you really want – giving it depth and context, it's time to start putting your noticing into practice. When you want to change something, concentrating your attention and energy on what's not working, can make the change seem daunting or even overwhelming; and perhaps even fuels you giving yourself a hard time about it.

Your brain will put its effort into whatever's most in your thoughts, so here's how to keep your thinking in the right direction.

***Start to notice where in your life that 'want' is already showing up. Actively look for it***

If your 'want' is confident presentations, start to notice where you're already communicating confidently. That might be chatting with friends, or catching up with a colleague who you haven't seen in a while. It doesn't matter that it's in a different context – there's somewhere it's already working – and it's easier to transfer that into a new situation, than to invent it from scratch.

If you want to feel relaxed in new situations, notice where you're already relaxed – even if that's in simple tasks like making a cup of tea or coffee at home. You might be surprised about how many different situations you already encounter with ease. Directing your attention to what's already working helps you give clearer instructions to all the parts of your thinking, aiming you towards what you want, effortlessly.



## *Noticing your New Patterns*

One of the most enlightening books I've read in a long time is 'Switch', by Chip and Dan Heath. They talk of the importance of shrinking the change, by finding what's already working. They quote the example of a car wash loyalty points scheme. You know the kind of thing – get a stamp each time you buy one, then get one free. Simple enough.



Half the customers were given a card with 8 spaces, and the other half got a card with 10 spaces, with 2 already stamped. Either way, they needed to have 8 washes to get a free one. The number of 10-stamp card holders claiming their free wash was almost double that of the 8-stamp card holders - the only difference between the 2 groups was that for those with 2 spaces already stamped, they were on the way from the off.

Now they probably weren't aware of that effect consciously, yet it influenced their behaviour - another example of how our behaviour and choices are shaped, by the thinking which goes on outside our awareness.

As you progress through FAST Pathways, learning the powerful thinking skills it contains; check back in on these questions every now and again. Add any new details that come to mind – because it may be that as you learn, what you want develops, or even changes completely. That's a natural part of incorporating these skills into your automatic operating system, for good.

### *A reminder of the questions for setting your direction*

What do you really want?

Is it within your control?

When you have what you want, what does that get for you?  
What's important about that?

What's already working?

### *Peter's Recovery*

It was about sixteen years since Peter first sought help for health issues, which were impacting on his work and social life. His GP prescribed anti-depressants, and after a few weeks, he was back to his usual self.

Some time later, whilst working overseas, the symptoms arose again. Lethargy, lack of enthusiasm, panic - all the signs of depression, according to his new GP. Once again, more prescriptions.

When Peter began deteriorating, his GP referred him to a psychiatrist; who prescribed more anti-depressive and anti-psychotic medications. Peter's old coping mechanisms kicked in - using cannabis to escape the misery. This provided short term relief, but he wasn't aware of the damage it was doing.

Fast forward and the damage was clear...no career, no job, no motivation, no confidence.....

Two psychotherapists, one yoga specialist, a reiki specialist, and four years later: Still the issues remained unsolved, and the problems continued... He was told that he'd had enough psychotropic medicine to knock out an elephant. He returned to the UK a wreck, and headed to yet another GP.

After six months with a CBT specialist, the best he could offer was more medication. His GP sent him to a ME/CFS clinic, and he was found to be suffering from ME resulting from over work and occupational stress. The clinic's neurologist concluded that he needed tricyclic medication. His enthusiasm for life was slowly evaporating away.

After four one-hour FAST Pathways sessions, Peter's panic attacks became much more manageable - all the nasty things don't have the same intensity. The tools he learned really do work, and his outlook now has purpose. He says "FAST Pathways has been life changing, and I've new belief for the future."

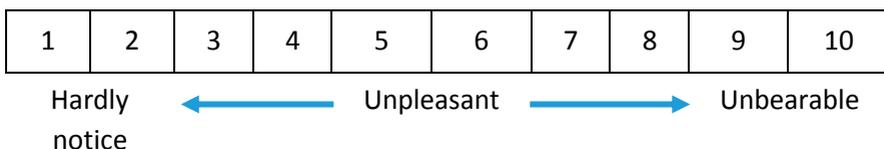
## FAST Pathways - Starting Out

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

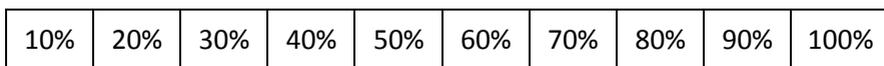
Here's a little guidance on how to record where you're starting out from, to help you check back and notice how you're changing.

What are you currently experiencing that you'd like to change; and what are its effects?

At its very worst, how bad does it get?



For what percentage of your waking time is it at its worst?



What's working well in your life?

What will it be like when you have what you really want?

How will you know when you have it? What's the first thing that you'll notice?