

# FAST Pathways

*Unlock your life*



*with Sue Evans*

## *Welcome to FAST Pathways – Easing Away Worry and Overload*

How often do you start your day wishing it wasn't time to get up yet? The alarm goes off while you're lying there, warm and comfy. You ease your mind forwards into what the day holds, and quickly wish you hadn't, cos it's not much to look forward to. You end up dragging yourself out of bed because you have to, carried along on a tidal wave of stuff to do.

In this course, we're going to explore having less of those days, and more of the ones when things come together. You've a spring in your step – ready for what's ahead. Now I know that seems idealistic. But I'm going to introduce you to some skills that you may never have experienced before.

You might have an idea of some topics we could explore: Making sure you don't get overloaded, so you've got that bit of spare time and energy to deal with the unexpected. Leaning a little on the people who love you enough let you vent – getting some of it off your chest can feel sooooo much better.

Proven ways of managing what's going on. But the thing about managing, is that you have to keep on doing it. Slacken off the effort, and that discomfort builds right back up again. Whether that's frustrated, upset, stressed, panicky.... It's not nice. Now I don't know about you, but if there's an easier way, I like to explore it. So let's explore together.

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## *Easing Away Worry and Overload*

Have you ever wondered why so much of what goes on in your mind, doesn't seem to make sense? Why you keep on worrying about things that probably won't happen, or why you might still feel bad about something that happened ages ago, that everyone else has forgotten about. These kinds of things are so natural that we just take them for granted, even if they don't make much sense.

Logic and sense are the domain of your conscious thinking – the thinking which you do on purpose, like planning and making decisions. This thinking is rational and structured, and it does like to think it's in charge; but it's not much capacity. Researchers have found that we can only hold around seven pieces of information consciously active at once – and there's way more going on around you than that.

So the rest of your thinking happens outside your deliberate awareness, on auto-pilot. That's important - it lets you do really complicated things, like walking. Simply taking a few steps forwards uses over 200 muscles. I've no idea what they're all called, and no conscious awareness of how to use them to stay balanced and moving forwards; but I take walking for granted. I decide to set off, then my on-purpose thinking moves on to something else while I'm getting there.

It wasn't always that way. When you were little it took months of practice and falling over, to really learn that pattern – but once you have it, you never forget.

But as well as the patterns which you set on purpose, your mind picks them up by accident too – some of them by repetition, some of them by a single event. And they can run just as automatically, even when they're not helping.

So if you've had an experience which went badly, you're more likely to worry about similar things going wrong in the future. If there's someone who's upset you, you're more likely to feel intimidated or uneasy around similar people. It doesn't make sense – you might not even be aware of the connection at a conscious level. You just notice its effects. It's part of your operating system.

In this section of FAST Pathways, we'll add to the skills which you learned in the Foundations; exploring new ways to make sure your operating system (that automatic thinking) is running more of the patterns which help, and less of those which get in the way.

## *Breaking Down the Overwhelm*

So with all those patterns, running automatically, your thinking's really complicated. And it's not the only thing – so is stress. It can take many different forms, because 'stress' is actually more of an umbrella term for lots of different experiences.

It could be frustrated – something isn't right, and you just don't seem to be able to get it working the way you want. It could be something big, like being overlooked for another promotion; or smaller, like always choosing the one queue that ends up not

moving. And there you are, stuck, churning it over and over in your mind; feeling powerless, as the discomfort builds.

It could be anxious, worrying about something that you know you've got to face, but wish you didn't. Every time you think of it, your stomach lurches and your muscles tense. You keep trying to put it out of your mind, or reassure yourself that it'll be fine, but that reaction's still there. That heightened alert, taking up your energy and attention.

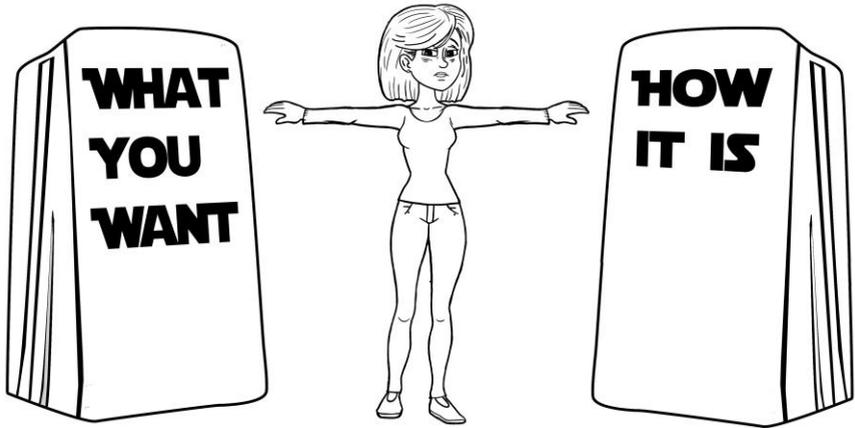
It could be upset – something's not gone the way you wanted, and you keep playing it over and over in your mind. The hurtful comment, the loss of something special. You know it's done and gone, there's nothing you can do to change it; but that replay carries on, draining away your energy.

Those are just three of the many different experiences which we'd call stress. And the more of them you have going on, the more that stress builds up, and starts to feel overwhelming. The more all those different causes start to blend, amplifying each other, and the more unpleasant it becomes. So let's start teasing that apart into something that's easier to live with, and to resolve...

Though they may seem very different, every one of those stressful experiences has something in common....

There's a gap

Between what you want, and how it is



When you're trying to stretch across that gap, it's uncomfortable. And the more of these gaps you're stretching across, the more uncomfortable it gets. Starting to build up and blend together, so you might not even be aware any more of individual gaps. It becomes a formless mess, of life not going the way you'd like.

I can guarantee, you have thousands (maybe millions) of these gaps, between what you want, and how it is. But only a few of them stress you out. Now of course, those are the ones that you notice, because that stress is unpleasant. But what's different between those gaps, and the rest. The ones which don't bother you?

Imagine that you've a few minutes to catch up on the news. There's a story in the headlines which really grabs your attention,

gets you fired up – perhaps the latest political policy, which goes completely against what you believe should happen.

You might pick over it in your mind, pointing out what’s wrong with it, and what should be done instead. You might discuss it with friends or colleagues, trading opinions and ideas. But the chances are, it doesn’t keep you up at night. While you’re thinking about it, it engages your emotions; and when you choose to stop, it goes away.

The gap between what you want and how it is, is only a problem while it has your attention. Stop thinking about it, and the discomfort goes away. But what about when that gap keeps getting your attention – when you want to stop thinking about it, but those thoughts keep on coming anyway? When there’s a pattern running in your not-on-purpose thinking, which keeps on making you feel bad. Well, that’s what this section of FAST Pathways is designed to resolve.

That gap between what you want and how it is, isn’t always a bad thing. The discomfort it creates can be hugely energising, getting you to take action, to close it. History is deliciously packed with people who’ve made it their life’s mission to close a gap, and our lives are the richer for it: Martin Luther King, Marie Curie, Mahatma Ghandi, Thomas Edison, Nelson Mandela....

Your gap might not be about world politics or a scientific breakthrough. It could be something as simple as a presentation or difficult conversation – something you’d rather not face, but you know you have to. That discomfort makes you pay attention,

makes you prepare well, makes you much more likely to get the outcome you want.

## *One Stress at a Time...*

So if it feels like those stresses are building up, the first thing to do, is take a step back and start to recognise individual gaps. Teasing apart the mass of things which might be bothering you, and looking at just one, for now. It doesn't even have to be a big one...

Acknowledge that gap, and what's on either side of it. Both how it is, and what you want. How does that gap align with what really matters to you? Because if it didn't matter, it wouldn't be getting your attention...

Recognising how that gap's related to your values can help you to get more creative about how to approach it, better harnessing the motivation it creates. It also helps you notice more of the stresses which are helping you to learn and grow. Because remember, not all stress is bad. As long as you have the resources for dealing with it, it can bring out your best (even if it's a situation you'd prefer not to have experienced). And throughout this module, we'll be building up those resources even further.

So keeping that specific gap in mind, think about what you could do to close it – and be prepared to dig a little. It might be that really, closing that gap is someone else's responsibility. You

shouldn't have to be the one taking action. But it's not someone else feeling bad about it.

Where I used to work, we had big shared printers and photocopiers. They were always jamming and running out of paper, and I've seen people spend ages congregated round the thing, bemoaning the state it'd been left in, then walking away to find another one in working condition. Leaving it in that exact same state for someone else to complain about. Collectively, those printers must have lost us hours of productive time each week – those people walked away, looking utterly dejected; their energy drained away by something not being as it should.

Even when the gap's not your responsibility, doing something to close it, can make it feel better. Making that conscious choice to act, can evict it from your constant attention, so that it stops making you feel bad.

I hate litter – it annoys me when people disrespect the space we share. I'd love for that gap not to be there, but I can't single-handedly change people's attitudes and behaviour (or at least, not with the amount of time and effort I'm prepared to invest – the gap doesn't bother me that much!). But I can pick up some of that litter; so whenever I can, I do. I draw the line at dog mess (that one I'll still seethe about on my way past). Taking that small action to close a gap does make me feel better.

So as you recognise a gap – a frustration, worry, upset.... Take a few moments to consider what you could do to close it, even if only a little. Making that deliberate choice, being responsible for your reaction, gives you back your power.

## *Changing your Thinking*

But what if there's nothing you can (or are prepared) to do, to close that gap? Well, then it's time to start looking at changing things on the inside, to stop that gap from making you feel so bad.

It doesn't matter which gap you start with. It doesn't have to be the biggest, or scariest, or the one which is having the biggest effect. Because just like we did in the Foundations, we're going to explore some new ways for your auto-pilot to do things; switching to more helpful patterns.

Your outside-awareness thinking is astoundingly good at recognising patterns – it's one of the ways it can handle such huge volumes of information efficiently. This is a double-edged sword:

It can generalise one unpleasant experience to all sorts of other situations; building it up so it really gets in the way of what you want. I worked with a lady whose ego-driven manager had once put her down for a suggestion she'd made in a team meeting. It was a one-off, but it really hurt.

Your not-on-purpose thinking is protective, and though it may seem misguided, a lot of what it does is aiming to keep you safe. To protect her from similar hurt, her mind generalised that unpleasant experience, setting a new pattern. By the time we met, she found herself unable to speak up for what she wanted any more.

She knew it didn't make sense – the combined effects of holding back were far worse than that one unpleasant put down; and she was really frustrated at not being able to rationalise it away. Because every time she thought of speaking up, she felt a huge weight pressing on her, her mind began racing with doubts, and her stomach knotted up. And she kept quiet.

Maybe you recognise something similar – where your auto-thinking has started to apply a particular pattern all over the place; even if you're not aware of what event originally started it. It can be intensely frustrating, but it really isn't doing it to make life difficult – it's just a misguided effort to protect you from perceived harm. With a little guidance, she replaced that accidental pattern, and returned to her confidently assertive self.

That's where your auto-thinking's pattern-spotting skills become really useful. Because it can generalise a helpful pattern just as easily, applying it to anything that it recognises as similar. So by neutralising the effects of one specific worry or frustration, your mind can automatically apply that same learning to all the others – and things can take a huge leap into better, just by having deliberately worked on one, small gap.

So as we progress through the exercises and skills, make sure that for each one, you're thinking of one specific response you want to change; one specific situation about which you want to feel better. Whether that's something which has already happened, with effects you want to neutralise, or something in the future about which you want to feel more positive.

The more detail you can create the better, stepping into the situation as if it was happening, seeing what you'd see and hearing what you'd hear. It doesn't have to be exactly lifelike – you're just giving your mind the clearest instructions you can, on how you want the pattern changing. Your not-on-purpose thinking is hugely powerful, and responsive; but it doesn't do so well with ambiguity. So get specific.

## *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.

When exploring the audio-guided exercises, it's best to use headphones. Each contains hypnotic content, so please don't listen while driving, as a passenger in a car, or when doing anything else that requires your attention.

## *The FAST Pathways Case Stories*

Over the years, I've worked with a lot of people - each facing challenges (and quite a few of them seeing me as a last resort). But no matter how many people I've supported and seen blossom, our minds' power never ceases to amaze me: The power to create problems and obstacles, by running patterns which serve no useful purpose; but also to resolve even long standing issues, smoothly.

Every person who's chosen to share their story, has achieved more than they thought possible – easing their thinking into feeling so much better.

My aim in sharing these stories is to celebrate the breadth and flexibility of real-life applications for FAST Pathways. To celebrate the mind's power to change.

Each of the case stories is shown in green

## *Noticing the Differences*

As we explored in the Foundations, noticing matters. What you notice, has made it through your mind's unconscious filters. Your outside-awareness thinking has deemed it important enough to bring it to your attention; and what you notice strongly influences what you get more of.

So I hope you've carried on noticing what's already working - the change you want seems less of a tall order when it's already happening some of the time. How have you been celebrating?

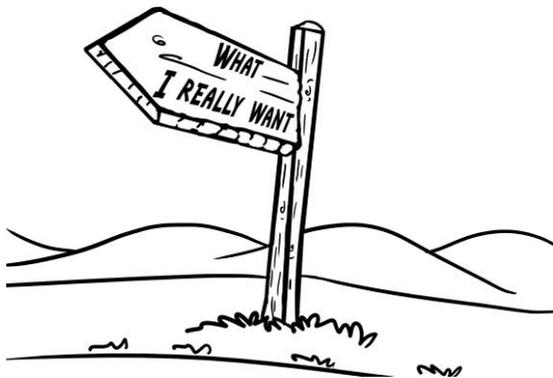
Spotting your mind's new, helpful patterns, and saying "Good job".....

If it's been a while since you really thought about what you want, it's worth exploring again; making sure that you've done a thorough job of setting your direction.

## *Setting your Direction – a Reminder*

### **What do you really want?**

Make sure it's what you do want, rather than what you don't; keeping all the parts of your thinking aligned and working at their best together.



### **Is it within your control?**

This is big – because no matter how much you wish you had less work to get through each day, or that your boss or partner was less of a git; you're not responsible for the whole of the world around you. Your responsibility is for the world inside...

Maybe there are things you can change on the outside too; and you're far more effective acting from comfortable, rather than when you're feeling pressured or cornered. So aim your 'wants' towards what's fully within your power to change. A few examples of good 'wants' are

- *I want to comfortably change my plans if something unexpected comes up – knowing that I can deal with it*
- *I want to re-connect with what I love about my work, so that I look forward to every day*
- *I want to give the same energy to me-time that I give to everyone else's*

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

Explore this in all its glorious detail. What will you see? What will you hear? How will it feel? It's easy to skip over it, thinking 'well, that's obvious'; but by taking your time to imagine the details, you're cleaning those filters – telling your outside-awareness thinking what you want to notice more of.

When you have what you want, how will you know? What will it be, specifically, that tells you? 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?

Remember, even when your ‘want’ makes logical sense, that isn’t always enough to bring your emotions on board. So imagine how it’ll really feel to have what you want.

You don’t have to believe it’s possible, or to know yet the steps you’re going to take. You’re simply exploring how you’ll recognise what you want, as it starts to show up.

And by being thorough, you’re making sure that want is really your own, not a legacy of someone else’s expectations.

### **What’s already working?**

There’s no need to go re-inventing the wheel. Chances are, there are already times when you act and feel just the way you want to. Maybe not as often (yet) as you’d like, maybe not in all the situations you’d like. But by actively looking for what’s working, you’re positively reinforcing your mind’s more helpful patterns.

You’re changing your outside-awareness thinking: Just like your mind doesn’t make you aware every time it adjusts your body temperature or breathing; it might not make you aware of the other things it’s doing, just as automatically.

So keep checking. What’s different – what’s working? Perhaps as you explored the FAST Pathways Foundations, you made some notes or a video diary to keep track and recognise your progress. It’s a good habit. Little and often, let yourself celebrate, and really enjoy what you’re achieving.

## *How to Use FAST Pathways*

The guide book and exercises are designed to be used together; at your own pace, to get the best results. Like those in the Foundations, most of the exercises take around 10 minutes; so you don't need bags of time to get results.

For those few minutes, give each exercise your full attention, where it's safe to let your mind wander; and let yourself immerse. You wouldn't expect to learn a practical skill just by reading a manual, and changing your thinking's no different. By doing each exercise (rather than just listening), you're giving your mind those clear instructions for how you want things done.

And because your brain learns by repetition, as you set each new mind-pattern, run through it a few times. So you might try a few different changes to find which works best, then run that exact sequence three or four times. As time passes and your skills embed more deeply, you may want to re-visit some exercises, developing them to work even better.

By exploring with playful curiosity, you're giving your imagination permission to find your own ways to change – the suggestions in the exercises are to get you started; and there's no right and wrong. So if you find your mind suggests other variations, embrace them – you might be surprised.