

The background of the book cover is a blurred, colorful photograph of a crowded city street at night. The scene is filled with streaks of light from neon signs and street lamps, creating a sense of motion and urban energy. A dense crowd of people is visible in the center, appearing as soft, glowing shapes due to the blur.

Life²

The Modern Life Survival Guide

This booklet is one of a series by Life². Our booklets explore important topics and ideas, and provide practical suggestions on ways you can improve your life.

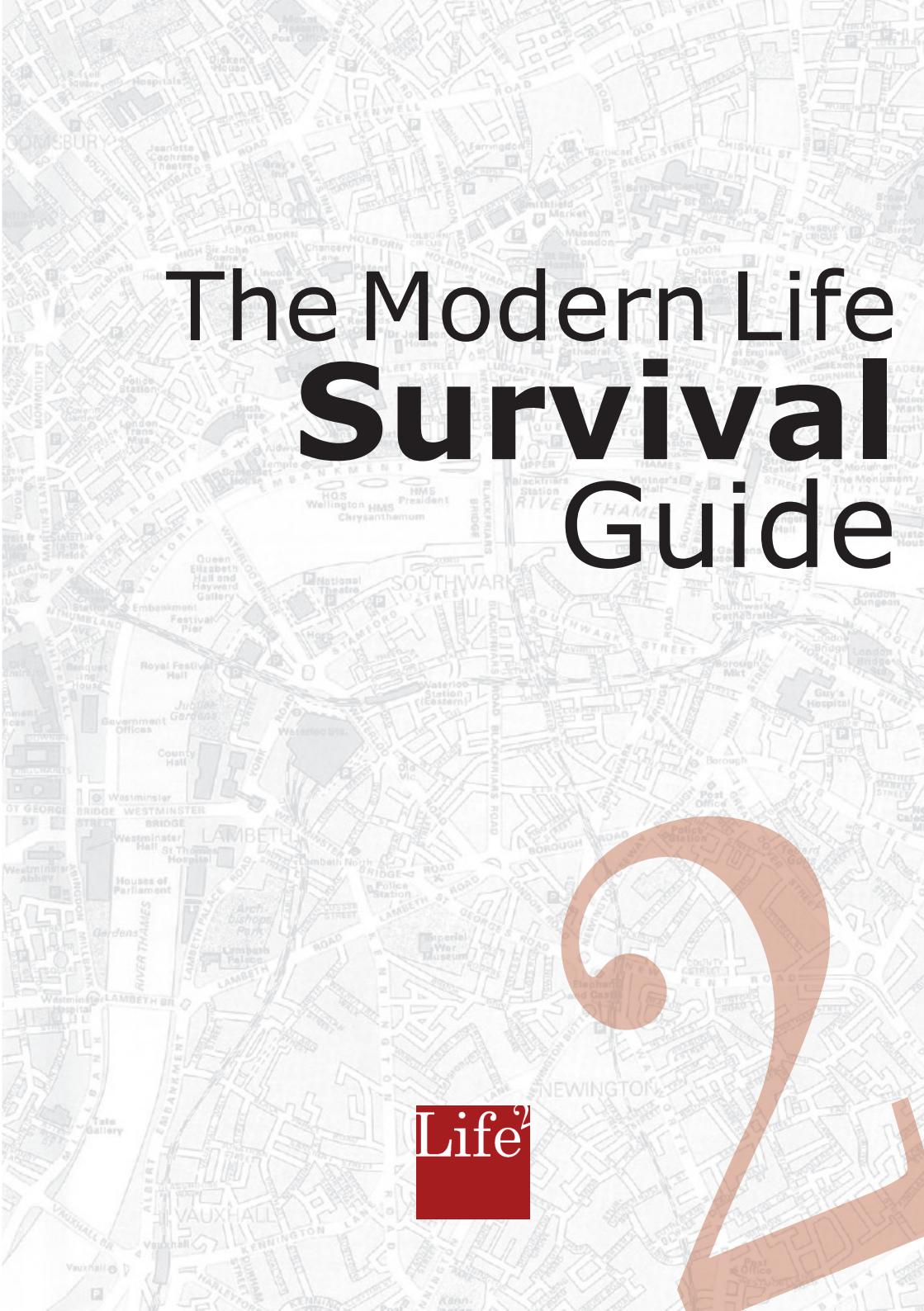
Life² is a not-for-profit organisation that helps people to live well - to live happy, wise and meaningful lives within the pressures and complexity of the modern world. We aim to provide you with ideas, information and tools to help you get more out of life, see things more clearly and live with greater wisdom.

We offer guides, courses, ideas and advice on a wide range of topics, from 'how to get involved in your community' through to 'how to choose your own pace of life', and from 'the problem with consumerism' through to 'how to be happy'.

For more information visit www.lifesquared.org.uk.



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Introduction

Why do we need a survival kit for modern life?

Life in the modern world can be confusing, pressurised and stressful. At the same time however, people living in the developed world have greater material wealth than most other people on the planet, either living now or at any time in history. We have a longer life expectancy than previous generations, access to an abundance of material resources, a great deal of personal freedom and a wide range of opportunities. In short, modern life presents each of us with an unparalleled opportunity to live in the way we choose and to carve out the lives we really want.

In order to take these opportunities however, we need to learn how to deal with the pressures and complexity of modern life, become more aware of the things that really matter to us and have the courage to pursue these, despite pressure from powerful forces around us trying to persuade us to take other paths.

The aim of this booklet is therefore to show you how you can flourish within the pressures and complexity of modern life, including how you can improve your own well-being and live in line with your values.

Along the way, the booklet will show how living in an ethically consistent and informed way can be an intrinsic part of living a life with greater well-being, happiness and

meaning. So, ethical living and happy living are two sides of the same coin.

As we will see, improving our lives is often simply a case of reminding ourselves about the importance of the simple things in life, such as caring for other people, seeking good relationships and having the time to appreciate our experiences.

The sections in this book represent a very brief introduction to some of the topics we cover at Life², and we provide a lot more detail, explanation and practical ideas on each topic in our other guides, courses and output, so please visit www.lifesquared.org.uk to explore these in more detail. Also, feel free to email us at info@lifesquared.org.uk if you want to find out more about a specific topic.

Before we set out some of the things you can do to flourish in the modern world, let us have a brief look at some of the main challenges and pressures we face living at this moment in time.



The Challenges & Pressures of Modern Life

In many ways we're lucky to be living as westerners in the modern world. But in other ways, life has become more pressured and challenging than ever before, and this can cause us problems with both our physical and mental health, as well as our ability to flourish.

Happiness

Evidence (including Layard, 2005) suggests that, although we've generally become richer in the last half century, our increased material wealth has not made us any happier, and many people are searching for more meaning in their lives.

Although we have access to more material goods than ever before, many commentators suggest that, after a certain basic level of material wealth, the things that really give us fulfilment and happiness are non-material goods such as friendships, relationships and a sense of purpose. Sadly, our dominant culture of consumerism only promotes the material goods, so we often forget about the things that are most important to us.

Modern lifestyles and societies present a particular set of challenges to our mental health. In 2007, there were 34 million antidepressant prescription items dispensed in England alone - nearly four times more than in 1991. 1 in 4 people suffer from mental health problems every year.

Pressures on our lives

In our daily lives, we are faced with more influences and pressures on our identities than ever before, including the pressure to look a certain way (thin and beautiful), to achieve a particular type of success (career and material), to be a certain type of person (assertive and always happy) and to live a certain type of lifestyle (a consumerist one in which we constantly seek to acquire more stuff).

These influences are everywhere in our daily lives, and come from a wide range of sources, including television, newspapers, the education system, our workplaces and our family and friends. They are like a bubble surrounding us, feeding us a particular view of how we should live and who we should be, and the constant pressure that they exert on us can have a profound effect on our worldviews. They can make us feel dissatisfied with who we are and what we have, and prevent us from seeing the things that really matter to us and from living the lives we really want. This is one of the most important but least-acknowledged features of modern life.

Complexity

In addition to these pressures, we live in a world that is more complex than ever before, in a number of ways. There's more information, more sources of information, more possibilities to choose from in life, and the systems around us are more complex than ever before. For example, the ingredients of a typical supermarket BLT sandwich may have travelled 31,000 miles before it makes it onto the shelf. There are a huge number of people and processes involved in the production of even a simple thing like this.

Overall, the complexity of the world can cause us a number of problems. For example, it can make us feel unable to make good choices because there are too many options (in every area of life), and make us feel that we're not in control of our lives. We may also feel overwhelmed by the range of information available to us, and unsure of which sources to trust. We may also long for a simpler life, where we know how our goods are produced, and who by.

Global issues

In addition to all these issues, we live in a world with serious environmental and social problems, on which we all have a positive or negative effect through our daily lifestyle choices and actions. We are starting to get a sense of our global interdependence, and the idea that there are very few 'neutral' actions we can take – most decisions and actions we take in daily life have either a positive or negative effect on other people, creatures or environments – whether they

are local to us or on the other side of the world.

This sense of responsibility for the wider world can in itself create a sense of pressure and anxiety in people. This anxiety can be exacerbated (and coupled with guilt) when we don't have easy access to the information or labelling that can tell us what impact each of our actions could actually have – although we may want to 'do the right thing' it can be hard to know what the right thing is.

Conclusions

In conclusion, we live in a world that is vastly different from the one that existed 50 years ago, and this world places a whole new set of pressures and challenges in front of us as individuals. You may find it useful to consider whether any of the factors outlined above have affected your life, and if so, in what ways.

The institutions and systems around us in society that support and educate us (from schools to local advice centres) are not yet adequately geared up to help us respond to these challenges, and don't give us the full range of life skills, guidance and ideas we need to flourish in the modern world.

One of the main aims of Life² is to start to fill this important gap, and provide people with some of the guidance and ideas they need. The remainder of this booklet provides an introductory toolkit to help you deal with these issues in order to live a happier, wiser and more meaningful life.



How to live with greater self-determination

The first item in our survival kit for modern life is one of the most important, and influences how we approach all the other elements. It is our ability to know who we are, be happy in ourselves, interpret the world and carve out our own niche in life – overall, we can call this our capacity for self-determination.

Below are a number of important features of self-determination, and some practical ideas on how you can develop them further in your life.

Get some perspective



Within the rush of everyday life, it can be useful to gain some perspective on our lives and the world around us. It can be easy to lose sight of the big picture – including the fact that we are materially better off than the vast majority of other people, living or dead, the fact that we are simply another member of the animal kingdom and the fact that we are individually just one of nearly 7 billion human beings living on a tiny planet in a vast universe.

So, take some time to stand back from your life and learn about your place in the universe around you. Gaining this type of perspective can help us keep a grip on reality, put a more realistic spin on our problems and worries, make us feel part of a bigger picture (whether it is human beings, the natural world or the universe generally) and give us a more modest sense of our own self-importance.

Perspective is also useful when one is in potentially stressful situation too – just step back from the situation for a few moments and put it into perspective in the great scheme of things, and it may well seem more manageable and less stressful.

Build and protect your identity



Our personal identity is our sense of who we are, what makes us happy and what we want from life. Our ability to build, nurture and protect it has a significant bearing on what we get from life and our experience of it.

This is particularly important when we live in a complex world, full of choices and with many influences acting on us, where it can sometimes be a challenge to maintain a clear sense of our genuine needs and wants, rather than those that other people are trying to instil in us.

Here are some basic ideas on how to protect your identity:

- ***Know yourself*** – try to develop an honest sense of what

you are really about, including what makes you happy and fulfilled, what makes you unhappy or uncomfortable, what your priorities are in life and how you really want to live.

- ***Be happy with yourself*** – an important ingredient in your flourishing is learning to be happy with yourself (or at least accepting who you are). This includes accepting our natural tendencies, qualities and physical features and realising that we are neither perfect nor imperfect – we are just ourselves. It also means seeing the best in ourselves and making the best of ourselves.
- ***Be kind to yourself*** – you have enough to deal with in life, and the last thing you need is to attack yourself with self-doubt, negative thoughts, or other self-destructive thinking, such as dwelling too much on what people think of you. If you find these self-defeating thoughts emerging, remind yourself to be a friend to yourself!
- ***Be yourself*** - trust yourself and be comfortable with your judgements unless you have good reason not to – stay open minded but resist attacks to your identity. This will help you to live on your own terms, rather than feeling you have to follow others, for example in deciding the pace you want to live your life at. Don't be afraid to be yourself and to let yourself flourish.

A strong sense of identity gives you a secure place and point of view from which to evaluate and deal with the world around you – a set of judgements and instincts you can trust.

It is also a place you can always return to in order to remind yourself of who you are, of your qualities and of what makes you happy. It also helps you deal with the complexity of the world, as although you retain an open mind, you have a sense of what makes you happy and what doesn't.

Grow your resilience



We all experience tough times in our lives – whether it's being criticised by other people, going through financial hardship or losing a close relative. Resilience is our ability to deal with setbacks, and how we let them affect us. Developing greater resilience can help all of us to get on in life, as well as gain greater pleasure from the experience of living.



Here are some ways to build your resilience:

- ***Believe in yourself*** – adopt some of the skills outlined in the ‘build your identity’ point above. Also, start to see any adversity you encounter or major challenges you meet in a wider context. Remind yourself that you are not alone in your situation or the goals you are trying to achieve, and that continued effort or ‘never say die’ attitude will eventually pay off – for example, the adversity you are going through may eventually subside and the efforts that you are putting in will make a difference.
- ***Involve yourself in your community*** – as the Young Foundation says, we take our cues from the society around us and learn by mimicry. So, if we are involved in a community that is resilient, trusting and supportive, this will help us to be so too.
- ***Find a pillar of support*** – find a person or organisation that believes in you, makes you feel stronger, and can be responsive and reliable if you need them. This pillar could take many forms – it could be a person such as a mentor, partner, colleague or friend, or an institution or group of people – such as a group of friends, club or a church.

It is also important to recognise when we aren't feeling right, and to do something about it. 1 in 4 people suffer from mental health problems during their lives, and if you feel that you aren't coping with certain parts of life then get in touch with your doctor. Even if you feel your condition is unimportant or difficult to talk about, go and see your GP or



other healthcare provider. We owe it to ourselves to enjoy experience of living as much as our circumstances allow, and our mental health is one of the most important foundations in enabling us to do this.

Think critically



Critical thinking is the art of questioning the messages that we receive from external sources, including friends, newspapers, television and the internet. This doesn't just mean specific messages such as advertisements or conversations but also broader cultural or social beliefs such as the importance of striving for greater material wealth.

With the vast range of communications flying around the modern world, it is important that we each get into the habit of questioning all the external messages we receive, so that we can evaluate whether the sources are reliable, what the purpose of the message is, how we should interpret it and whether it is something to be digested or ignored.

For example, it is useful to be aware of how consumerism touches your life and when people or organisations are trying to manipulate you with commercial messages. You may also be reading newspapers or watching television stations that have a particular political bias, and it is good to be aware of this when interpreting their messages.

When you receive any message, whether it is in a social conversation, at work, in a newspaper, or on television, think

about whether you want to accept it or not. You may decide to ignore a particular message because you don't feel the topic is important or because you feel its view of a topic is too biased. Consider the source it came from and whether it might have a particular agenda.

If you feel a particular message (or source) is too biased, you may want to get a more balanced view of the topic by exploring messages from a few different sources with different perspectives (for example, looking at the same story in other newspapers) or by finding a source you can trust before you make a judgement.

Simplify the world



There are a number of ways we can ensure that the complexity of the world around us doesn't overwhelm us:

- ***Trust your identity*** - developing a strong sense of who you are and what matters to you will give you a reasonable 'filter' for the complexity in the modern world, enabling you to identify which messages and areas of information are relevant to you, without feeling overwhelmed.
- ***Live a simpler life*** - reduce your radius of impact on the world. For example, buying your food locally and buying local produce where possible will reduce the range of processes, transactions and people involved in supplying your food. In general, the simpler and more local you can

make your life, the smaller your radius of impact is likely to be and therefore the less complexity you will find. Consuming less will also reduce your radius of impact.

- ***Find some trusted sources of information*** - no source of information is completely unbiased, but it is possible to build a selection of trusted sources that can summarise and filter some of the complexity in the world for you. By finding these sources and understanding their biases, you can build a useful resource to help you deal with the complexity of the world on an ongoing basis. These may include newspapers, websites and other information resources.
- ***Have some daily reflection time*** - allow yourself some time (as little as ten minutes) each day to sit quietly without disturbance, close your eyes, relax and remove yourself from the rush and complexity of modern life. Activities such as meditation, yoga or walking in the countryside can help this process, but choose the way that suits you best.

Do your life admin



Unless we have a large team of staff at work, most of us have to do some admin. This involves activities like doing our expenses or filing our documents that some people can find boring, but that are important in helping us to work effectively.

It's the same in life. Unless we have the money to employ people to do it for us, we all have to do some admin. This

might include managing our money and managing our time. Like work admin, life admin activities help us to run life more effectively, so that life becomes easier and we can do more of the things we want. If we neglect our life admin too much, it can cause us real problems, and a powerful example of this is the hugely negative effect that debt can have on people's lives. So, it is well worth getting our admin in order before we move on to the exciting stuff in life. Here are a few areas to consider:

- **Time management** – we're not suggesting that you think through how you will use every hour of your time, but it can be useful to reflect regularly on what you are spending your time on in your life and whether this really reflects your priorities. For example, you might regard your family as a big priority, but you might be spending a lot of time working, including travelling to and from work. If this leaves you with little time for your family, it may be worth exploring the possibilities of working fewer hours or working more locally, so that you can give more time to your family.
- **Money management** – money can be an uncomfortable topic for many people. But having enough resources to live on is an essential element of anyone's life, and knowing how to manage these resources can help us to live the life that we want – especially if it is one in which we don't want to be slaves to money. So, learn how to manage your money better and reduce your debt. The book 'Your money or your life' by Vicki Robin is a good place to start this learning process.



How to live as an effective moral agent

Each of us affects the world and people around us in various ways. We can be agents for good, agents for bad and often a bit of both. We live as effective moral agents when we live in a way that is broadly consistent with the values we each hold, and this chapter will explore how we can do this.

But why is living in a morally consistent way important to our flourishing? Some people would argue that we don't have to be good to enjoy life – we can live in destructive, selfish ways and breeze through life without a care.

For most of us though, this simply isn't true. First, social acceptance matters in our lives – most of us want to be liked and accepted by other people, and being a decent person helps to achieve this. Second, the idea of reciprocity has oiled the wheels of human society for millennia – we get on in life by helping each other and by having a reputation for being good to deal with. And third, there is the human capacity for empathy – we have a sense of what it is like to suffer and don't want to see it happening to other people. So, for most of us, a life of selfishness and destruction wouldn't enable us to flourish as we wouldn't get very far in

life, and we wouldn't have much fun living with the feelings we got when we did something bad – we'd feel the anxious pangs of guilt, concern for the wronged party and a sense that we've 'let ourselves down'.

So, living in an ethically consistent way can make us feel more balanced and happy generally. It can however be a challenge to do this in the modern world, because many of our impacts are hidden behind a complex chain of people and events, so we may not be aware of the effects we have – whether good or bad.

To be able to live in an ethically consistent way in the modern world, we therefore have to start educating ourselves about the world around us and in particular the processes and systems that surround our daily actions. We also need to become more aware of what our values are, and how they can influence different areas of our lives.

Below are some initial steps we can take to start living more in line with our values in the modern world.

Think about your values



Many people never go through the process of actually thinking about what their values are. Perhaps it seems unnecessary, as we often feel we instinctively know what is right and wrong. But taking an hour or two to step back and think about your values can be a very useful exercise to make you reflect about how you are living.



All you need to do is to think about your values for an hour or two. You could do this on your own somewhere quiet or you could meet up to discuss it with a group of friends.

Here are some things to consider. Are there some principles for life that you think you should try to live by? Are there particular ways in which you think you should behave or live your life? Make a list of these values.

To get you started, you might want to ask yourself some basic questions. For example, how do you think you should treat other people? Should this differ according to who they are – for example, should you treat your family differently from someone on the other side of the world that you'll never meet? How do you feel you should treat other creatures?

How do you feel you should treat the environment? What do you think a 'good' life consists of? Or a 'bad' life?

It might also help to think about some general categories or principles. For example, how you think you should behave towards other people, animals, the environment or even yourself. Then you can start listing more specific things about how you think you should behave.

Try to come out of this thinking process with a basic list of overall values you have (perhaps 5-10 of them).

Consider how to put them into action



Once you've thought about your values, you can then start to think about how they fit into the different areas of your life. When you do this, it will quickly become clear that our values are involved in almost everything we think, say and do – for example, how friendly we are to strangers, how often we decide to travel by plane, how much we give to charity and whether we keep our promises. It also becomes clear that our actions have consequences at a range of levels, including the local (for example, your family, friends, and neighbours) and the global (including people you've never seen before and are unlikely to ever meet).

To help you think about this, you might find it useful to note a few headings to describe different areas of your life. For example, here are 6 simple categories you could use: 'at home', 'at work', 'shopping', 'leisure', 'travel' and 'people'.

Now, for each of your values, go through each of these areas of your life and list some of the steps you could take to live more in line with your values in each of them.

Let's use an example. You've decided that one of your values is 'caring for the environment'. In the category of 'at home', some of the things you might list to live more in line with your values are using less energy, recycling as much as possible and reducing the amount you consume. Perhaps you've also selected another value - that of 'being kind and considerate towards other people'. In the category of 'work' this might mean making an effort to be nicer to your colleagues but it might also mean working for an organisation that doesn't have a negative impact on people in other parts of the world.

Once you've been through each category of your life for one value, do the same for all the other values you noted. You'll then emerge with a broad idea of how your actions relate to your values, as well as some initial ideas of how you can live more consistently with your values.

When you are going through this process, try to think imaginatively about the range of impacts that each action of yours could have on other people, animals or environments – even for those actions that don't initially seem to have any obvious impacts.

This is reasonably easy to do when we're looking at our most basic interactions on a local level, because we can see many of the effects of our actions. For example, we know whether we're being friendly or unpleasant to strangers we meet – although you do have to be honest with yourself when you

think about this.

As we have already noted however, for many other actions (including some of the simplest, such as shopping) it can be more difficult to know what the effects of our actions are because such complex chains and processes lie behind them. You might therefore need to do a bit of detective work to understand your impacts in these areas of your life. A good starting point for this is to try to think through the possible chains of impact yourself – for example, before you book that holiday in Sri Lanka, what impact might the flight have on the environment? What is the political situation in the country? Where are you planning to stay, and what impact could this have on people and the environment?

Once you start asking these questions, you can start doing some research – perhaps online, perhaps reading product labels or information, or asking the sales assistant some specific questions and asking them to find out if they aren't sure.

Fortunately, there are now some resources appearing which can make this research process easier for us. There are websites (such as www.ethicalconsumer.org.uk and www.goodguide.com) that do some of the investigation for you, and give an ethical rating to different products to help you choose the best ones. There are also resources that help you understand the chain of processes and impacts behind everyday actions – such as www.thestoryofstuff.com. This is a relatively new area though and you will probably still need to do some of your own research if you want to really understand your impact.

Put your values into action



Once you've seen how your values can manifest themselves in your day-to-day actions you can start to take some action to live more consistently with your values. For example, if you care about the environment but use your car a lot, one of the important things you might decide to do is reduce your car use by 50% and use public transport, cycling or walking instead.

A slightly more focussed way to start living more in line with your values is to write yourself a quick 'ethical action plan'. This is simply a list of actions you plan to take to live more in line with your values, and it enables you to prioritise the most important actions and plan when you will do them, to make sure you do them. For example, you might note that in the next week you will start buying only local and seasonal fruit and vegetables to help reduce your environmental impact, and in the week after you will start volunteering for a few hours a week in order to help other people in need.

If you need some ideas on actions you could take, visit the Knowledge Base section of www.lifesquared.org.uk and use some of the resources and links to help you find ideas and inspiration.

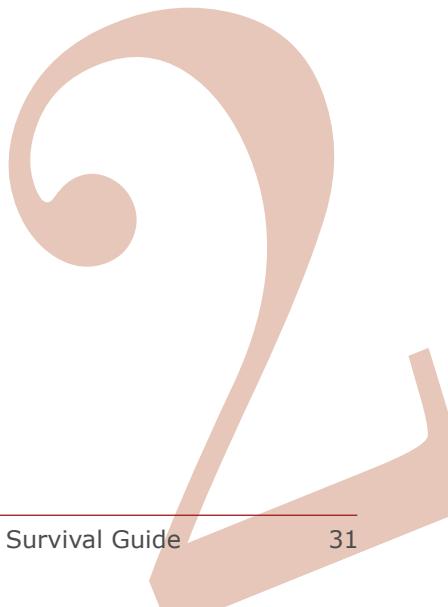
Much of this process of taking action is about getting into new habits, so when you've finished each action for the first time, give yourself a pat on the back and go on to the next one. But remember to keep up each new habit! Review your

action plan every week or two to see what you've achieved and plan some new actions for the coming weeks.

It can sometimes feel like hard work making these changes on our own, so to keep things interesting, why not see if your friends want to set up an informal social group to go through this process together and support each other?

We each have responsibility for our own values, as well as deciding how we'll live in line with them and monitoring how well we are doing this. So make sure you take on this responsibility - it is something that can give us a great sense of fulfilment in our lives and strengthen our sense of our own identity.

Check out our 'How to live ethically' booklet at www.lifesquared.org.uk for a more detailed step-by-step guide to thinking about your values and drawing up a practical plan to live in line with them.





How to find sources of well-being & meaning

Find your own pace of life



Modern life takes place at a frenetic pace. We are surrounded by influences – including the media, employers and even friends - telling us to go faster, take more action and be more productive with our time. It is easy to be swept along by this culture of speed and productivity, and easy to lose sight of the fact that each of us actually has a choice as to the pace of life we adopt.

Some people may enjoy busy, frantic and pressurised lives, but many other people find this way of living extremely stressful, and won't want to reach the end of their lives wishing they'd taken more time to 'enjoy the journey'.

Challenge the modern 'culture of speed', so that you can make an informed choice as to which pace of life suits you best. Here are a couple of things you can do:

- ***Realise you have a choice*** – ignore the influences from friends, the media and wider society telling you how you

should run your relationship with time. It is up to you, and the first thing to do is realise this and take control of this relationship.

- ***Give people more time*** – our relationships with other people are some of the most important things in our lives. Allow yourself the time to chat with your neighbours, call your family or stay on the phone a bit longer with your friends.
- ***Shop locally*** – one of the reasons people shop in huge out-of-town supermarkets is to save time, but if you allow yourself the time to visit your local shops instead, this can be a far more sociable and relaxed experience.

Take time to think



The idea of taking time to stand back, think and reflect tends to be frowned upon in our all-action society. The sooner we realise this is a mistake, the better. Taking some time to reflect can calm us, give us perspective and help us to 'enjoy the journey' of life.



Here are some useful ways we can take time to think and reflect:

- ***Have some daily reflection time*** – as outlined in the 'Simplify the world' point in the 'How to live with greater self determination' chapter earlier.
- ***Remember to appreciate life*** – never lose your appreciation of the amazing fact that you exist in the first place, and savour the experience of being alive, as well as the individual experiences you have. Research has shown that practising awareness of sensations, thoughts and feelings can improve both the knowledge we have about ourselves and our well-being. Be thankful for being alive, and this will give you a positive outlook on life.
- ***Let yourself think*** – if you feel you need time to think about something (whether it's to buy that jumper or what to say to someone), don't be pressured (by others or yourself) into making a snap decision. Give yourself the time to think it through as you want.

Connect with people



The quality of our relationships with other people is one of the most important factors contributing to our well-being – if not the most important. Loneliness and isolation can be bad for our physical and mental health, so it is important to know how to build a sense of connection with other people. Even the simplest and smallest moments of connection –

like saying hello to our neighbours - can make us feel better about ourselves, give us a sense of purpose and give us more opportunities for getting on in life.

Here are just a few ways you can connect further with other people:

Give people time – making time to engage properly with people is the first step to connecting with them better. Allow yourself the time to chat with the local shopkeeper, call your family or to stay on the phone a bit longer with your friends.

Meet your neighbours – go round and introduce yourself. Invite them round. Organise a get-together for the residents of your street.

Shop locally – visiting the shops in your local high street can be a far more sociable and relaxed affair than visiting a huge out-of-town supermarket.

Offer help and ask for help – both of these are useful ways of strengthening ties with people.

Be curious – being interested in the people and world around you should not be a trait that is confined to children. Try to rediscover your sense of interest and curiosity in the people and the world around you.

Start or join a local group – check your local papers and websites for what's on in your area. If none of it interests you, then why not set up a social group yourself?

Unplug your television – TV can give us a sense of connection if we're isolated but it can also stop us from doing other things - like making real connections with people.

Get into nature



Being around nature is one of the great pleasures in life, and provides us with a range of benefits for our well-being. The enjoyment we gain from this experience may be partly due to our appreciation of natural beauty and the wonder of the world around us. Secondly, in nature one finds a sense of peace and a sense of perspective away from the noise and clutter of modern life.

But perhaps the most profound pleasure of all that results from a trip into natural surroundings is the simple experience of just living, and sitting quietly within an environment where hundreds of other creatures and plants are doing the same – going through the various physical processes that constitute being alive. This helps us to realise that, whatever worries, complexities or troubles exist in our hectic human lives and the modern world, ultimately our lives (both as individuals and as a species) are just another part of this natural show playing out around us as we sit in the countryside. When we see ourselves like this, life really becomes quite simple, and this can bring us a profound sense of calm and a reduction in stress.

So, get out into nature – whether it's your garden, the park or the countryside – as often as you can!

Explore your inner world



For many people, exploration of their 'inner lives' (including reflective, experiential and spiritual matters) is one of the most profound and fulfilling aspects of life. For centuries, religions have provided many people with the chance to tackle these questions, but as the West has become less religious, nothing has moved in to take its place in helping people to explore their inner lives.

This has left a big gap in many people's lives. We therefore need new institutions and a new way of talking about our inner lives that is open to everyone - atheists, new age thinkers, religious people and all those sitting somewhere in between. This is a broader social issue and one that Life² aims to help people tackle.

Despite the lack of appropriate institutions and language to help us explore our inner lives, we can each start exploring them now, for example:

- ***Think about the big questions*** – find some quiet time to think about issues such as the meaning of life, what it feels like to exist and your place in the universe. The perspective you gain from this may well make you feel calmer in everyday life. Talk to your friends about these questions and get a discussion going.
- ***Learn*** – read some books on philosophy, the history of thought and religion. Learn how to think in a clear way

about philosophical matters. Learn about some of the issues that thinkers have grappled with over the centuries, think about them for yourself and come to your own conclusions.

- ***Learn to identify and seek out peak experiences*** – these are profound, life-affirming experiences that lift us 'above' everyday life and remind us just what a profound experience it is to exist. Each of us may find them in different activities – from lying in the grass on a summer day to getting absorbed in a great piece of music. Our lives are peppered with such experiences - read our booklet 'The Amazing' for more details on how to identify them and find more of them.
- ***Put your life into context*** – look beyond the rush of daily life and start to see your life in a broader context – as part of a world population, a species, a natural world, a planet and a universe – and see if this changes the way you see your life.

Get involved

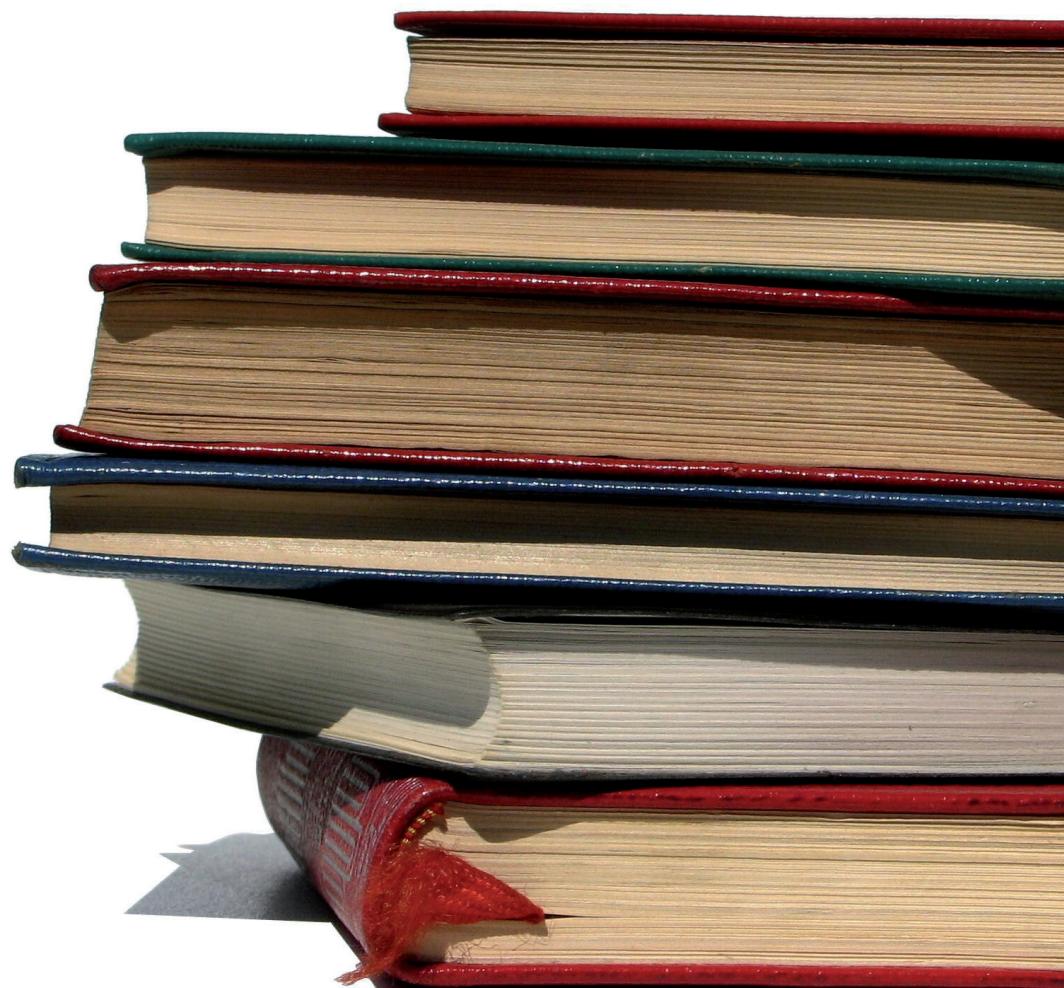


Being an active participant in the world can give us a sense of involvement and connection with other people, as well as a feeling that we have some control over our lives and the systems that govern us. We all have skills, time and energy that we can contribute.

This process of taking part can take place on a number of levels – from helping to fundraise for your local community centre through to emailing your MP about a global issue you particularly care about.

Below are some initial ways you can start to participate more in the world:

- **Volunteer** – offer your time to help other people or groups – locally, nationally or internationally.
- **Learn about politics** – find out how your local and national political systems work so that you can find the most effective ways of taking part in them.
- **Get involved in your community** – the vibrancy of your local community depends on your contribution, so get involved. Keep up with local issues and join groups, attend meetings and contact people to make your contribution.
- **Have your say** – get involved in the issues you care about – whether local or international. If something bothers you, find out who to contact about it and make your case. Take part in campaigns, actions and petitions and contact your MP. Pick the important battles that you care most about.



Keep learning



Learning is one of the great pleasures of life, and should be something we do throughout our lives, rather than simply stopping when we leave school.

There is always something interesting and useful to learn – whether it is learning more about the world around you, researching your family tree, learning how to play an instrument, visiting a museum or art gallery or trying a new language. Learning can also be an inexpensive or free pastime (when you make use of great facilities like public libraries), and is a fulfilling and cheap alternative to buying more stuff.

Learning can keep us feeling young and energetic, give us a challenge and provide us with a sense of purpose in life. As the New Economics Foundation say in their '5 Ways to Well-being' leaflet, learning can also help us to develop new skills, strengthen social networks and feel more able to deal with life's challenges.

Get healthy



In the modern world it is easy to fall into the trap of a sedentary and unhealthy lifestyle – this might be due to the pace and pressure of modern life or the comforts and conveniences provided by modern technology – from televisions to microwaves.

A healthy physical lifestyle – including healthy eating and regular exercise - is however a vital component of our well-being. We just have to look at the benefits of exercise to illustrate this.

Regular exercise is not only good for our physical health – it is also great for our minds. It's amazing how much difference regular exercise can make to your thinking. It can not only make you feel happier and more positive but also more alert and able to think better. You can do it on your own or use it as another way of connecting with people – joining a local sport club or exercise group can not only make you more motivated to do exercise but can also put you in touch with lots of other people with similar interests.

Do the things that matter to you



We have listed a number of factors that could improve your well-being and help you to flourish, but in the end, you know yourself best. Think about what matters to you in life – what are the things that give your life the greatest pleasure and meaning?

Try to think about these things away from the pressures of modern society so that you find your genuine priorities rather than being influenced by the dominant views of society. For example, if spending more time with your family is more important to you than having a high-flying career, trust your views, even if they go against the grain of our status-driven society.

Final thoughts



We hope that this guide has provided you with some useful ideas on how to live a happier, wiser and more meaningful life within the pressures and complexity of the modern world. If you found it useful, please tell your friends and other contacts about it.

For more ideas, advice and detail on many of the points mentioned in this booklet, visit www.lifesquared.org.uk and check out our publications, courses and resources.



www.lifesquared.org.uk



Life²

The Modern Life Survival Guide

How to flourish in the modern world

Modern life can be confusing, pressurised and stressful. But it also presents us with an unparalleled opportunity to live in the way we choose and to carve out the lives we really want.

This booklet shows how you can flourish within the pressures and complexity of modern life, including practical ideas on how you can improve your own well-being, find greater fulfilment and live in line with your values.