

Mental Health for creative freelancers

SOCIETY OF AUTHORS ual: university of the arts london ARTQUEST DACS AOI AOP



Mental Health For Creative Freelancers
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Mental Health For Creative Freelancers

All stories written by Edward Ross

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INTRODUCTION

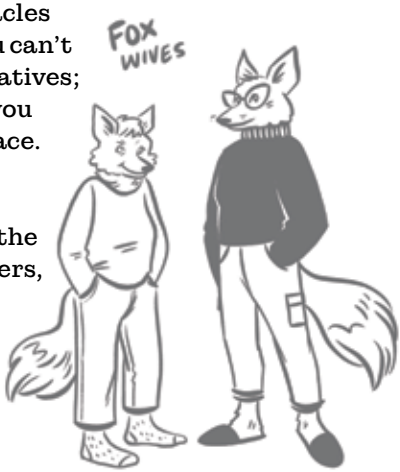


THESE LAST FEW YEARS it feels like we're lurching from crisis to crisis, doesn't it? But still we persist.

The value of art to society is undeniable, but in spite of the vast industries built upon the work of creators, those who do the actual creating somehow number among the most undervalued and least supported. Many of us work independently, under our own steam, battling daily to further our own careers, or at least to keep them ticking along. The weight of responsibility and the sheer volume of spinning plates can relegate mental wellbeing to an afterthought, yet the negative impact on our work is undeniable. Fostering the headspace to be creative can be, all too readily, a flipping nightmare.

In early 2020, the Association of Illustrators, Society of Authors and Association of Photographers created the brilliant resource WORKING WELL: Mental Health and Creative Freelancers to address common issues experienced by their members and other creatives, offering practical strategies to help deal with them. This anthology is based on the original resource, at their request, in order to further increase the reach, impact, and recall of the information within. We have revised and updated the contents to reflect evolving challenges, including a sadly relevant new chapter: Working Through a Crisis.

Everyone who contributed to this anthology is a working comics creator, representing a cross-section of society and a broad range in terms of, shall we say, 'extra obstacles navigated'. We made this because a) it's work! And you can't turn that down!; b) we believe in supporting other creatives; and c) we need you to keep creating. Sincerely. When you create, you make the world a better, more inspiring place. And we could all really use that.



We hope you find this anthology useful and enjoy it in the spirit in which it was made: we don't have all the answers, but we do have some solutions, and we do our best communicating in comics format.

Hannah Berry
2026

RESOURCES



Advice UK maintains a list of charity, government and other resources to help you navigate the welfare system –– **adviceuk.org.uk**

CALM: the Campaign Against Living Miserably is leading a movement against suicide, the single biggest killer of men under 45 in the UK and the cause of 18 deaths every day. They have a dedicated support line and online webchat for men who are experiencing emotional distress or who are in crisis –– **thecalmzone.net**

Citizens Advice offers free, independent, confidential and impartial advice to everyone on their rights and responsibilities in relation to money and other issues –– **citizensadvice.org.uk**

HOPELineUK for the prevention of young suicide – 0800 068 41 41. Specialist telephone service run by suicide prevention charity **Papyrus**, staffed by trained professionals who give non-judgemental support, practical advice and information to children, teenagers and young people up to the age of 35 who are worried about how they are feeling, and to anyone who is concerned about a young person –– **papyrus-uk.org**

Mind Infoline 0300 123 3393 or text 86463. Mind Infoline can talk to you about where you can find help, and about medication and treatments, and more. They can also provide legal information and general advice on mental health-related law. The line is open 9am to 6pm Monday to Friday –– **mind.org.uk**

Refuge 0808 2000 247. Provider of specialist domestic violence services – supporting more than 4,600 women, children and men each day –– **refuge.org.uk**

Relate 0300 100 1234. Provider of relationship support, supporting more than a million people each year of all ages, backgrounds and sexual orientations to strengthen their relationships –– **relate.org.uk**

Side by Side Forum Mind's online community. It's a powerful thing to connect with someone else over shared experiences. Side by Side is an online community where you can listen, share and be heard –– **sidebyside.mind.org.uk**

StepChange is the UK's leading debt management charity. They offer help, resources and information about services that can directly help you manage problem debt –– **stepchange.org**

Shelterline If you are homeless or at risk of losing your home. Run by housing charity **Shelter,** their housing experts can advise you, no matter what your housing situation on 0808 800 4444. Shelterline is open 365 days of the year from 8am to 8pm throughout the week and 8am to 5pm at weekends –– **england.shelter.org.uk**

StreetLink if you are facing homelessness or if you or someone you know is sleeping rough in England or Wales. There is also an app. Provide as much information as you can and StreetLink's national team will put you in touch with local support services –– **streetlink.org.uk**

Support for the Film & TV industry If you work in film or TV, you can call the Film and TV Charity Support Line on 0800 054 0000 or send an email to **support@filmtvcharity.co.uk**

The Samaritans The free Samaritans phone line is available 24 hours a day throughout the year on 116 123. They're there to give you the time and space to talk things through, to try and find a way through your problems, and to explore the options so you can make decisions that are right for you –– **samaritans.org**

Toastmasters do you want to practice public speaking, improve your communication and build leadership skills? With Toastmasters, you can break barriers, not your budget –– **toastmasters.org**

Turn2us helps people in financial hardship gain access to welfare benefits, charitable grants and support services. They also maintain a list of organisations offering grants to help pay for household appliances etc –– **turn2us.org.uk**


MONEY
ARTWORK BY ALEX ASSAN
Looking fabulous!
Hold that pose!
click
Oh, I love it!
Thank you for such quick payment!
FOR SALE
SOLD
Hmph. All the other squirrels are saving up nuts for winter, and here I am, living hand to mouth.
nom nom Literally!
Money worries are dragging me dowwwn. I'm always worrying about the next job, I'm scared about getting sick, and my future... pah, forget about it!
ANDY WALRUS
Oh! But there's no point in burying your head in the sand, is there.
Sure, it can be hard making a living off of creative work... But there must be ways to make it less stressful...


First thing's first: planning! Look at your incomings and outgoings. Are there ways to make savings? Are you setting aside money for your tax bill? Make sure nothing is sneaking up on you, like a yearly subscription renewal!
By demystifying your expenses you'll feel more in control, and know exactly how much you need to make going forward.
FOOD
BILLS
RENT
There's nothing wrong with finding part-time work to help pay the bills. Not everyone can rely on rich benefactors to fund their art!
I'm working in the local cinema while I write my screenplay about a pigeon caught up in case of mistaken identity and international intrigue.
Man-Pigeon: Home To Roost
Sure, a coffee shop isn't my dream job, but after work I rock out with my band!
Accountant by day, drag queen by night!
When you're ready, start looking to the future. Worried about sick days? Consider sickness insurance or setting aside money for rainy days. And the sooner you start paying into a pension, the better!
The reality is, it can take time to build up your artistic business, and some years will be harder than others. But by planning ahead and taking care with your time and money you can start to alleviate some of that stress.


IMPOSTER SYNDROME
ILLUSTRATED BY SHAZLEEN KHAN
I'M THE DARK VOICE OF DOUBT MANY ARTISTS HEAR...
YOU KNOW, YOU'RE NOT A *PROPER* ARTIST!
YOU'RE A *FRAUD*!
YOU'RE NOT *NEARLY* AS TALENTED AS ALL THE OTHER SONGBIRDS. YOU DON'T *DESERVE* THE SUCCESS!
IT'S ONLY A *MATTER OF TIME* BEFORE THEY ALL FIGURE IT OUT! YOU'RE A FAKE!
IT DOESN'T MATTER IF YOU'RE JUST STARTING OUT OR HAVE YEARS OF SUCCESS UNDER YOUR BELT, *IMPOSTER SYNDROME* CAN AFFECT ANYONE.
SO HOW DO YOU OVERCOME IT?

KNOW THAT YOU'RE NOT ALONE IN FEELING THIS WAY. REACH OUT TO FRIENDS AT SIMILAR STAGES IN THEIR CAREER.

SHARING YOUR SUCCESSES AND YOUR DOUBTS CAN BE REASSURING AND GIVE YOU A MUCH-NEEDED OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE.



REALISE THAT LOW SELF ESTEEM IS VERY COMMON AND CAN SOMETIMES HAVE ROOTS IN TRAUMA.

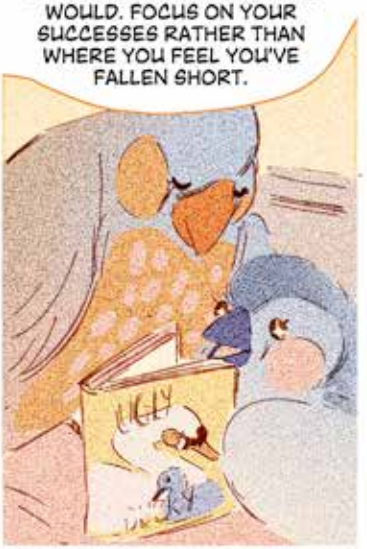
THE NEGATIVE FEELINGS WE HAVE ABOUT OURSELVES ARE NOT ***FACTS***- THEY ARE ***OPINIONS*** WE HOLD OVER OURSELVES, CONVINCED THEY ARE THE ***WHOLE TRUTH.***



FEELING LIKE A ***FRAUD*** IS A PRODUCT OF THE MEDIATED WAY WE SEE OTHER PEOPLE'S SUCCESSES. ARTISTS WE ADMIRE MAY LOOK LIKE THEY HAVE IT TOGETHER, BUT BEHIND-THE-SCENES THEY FACE THE SAME DOUBTS AND STRUGGLES AS YOU.



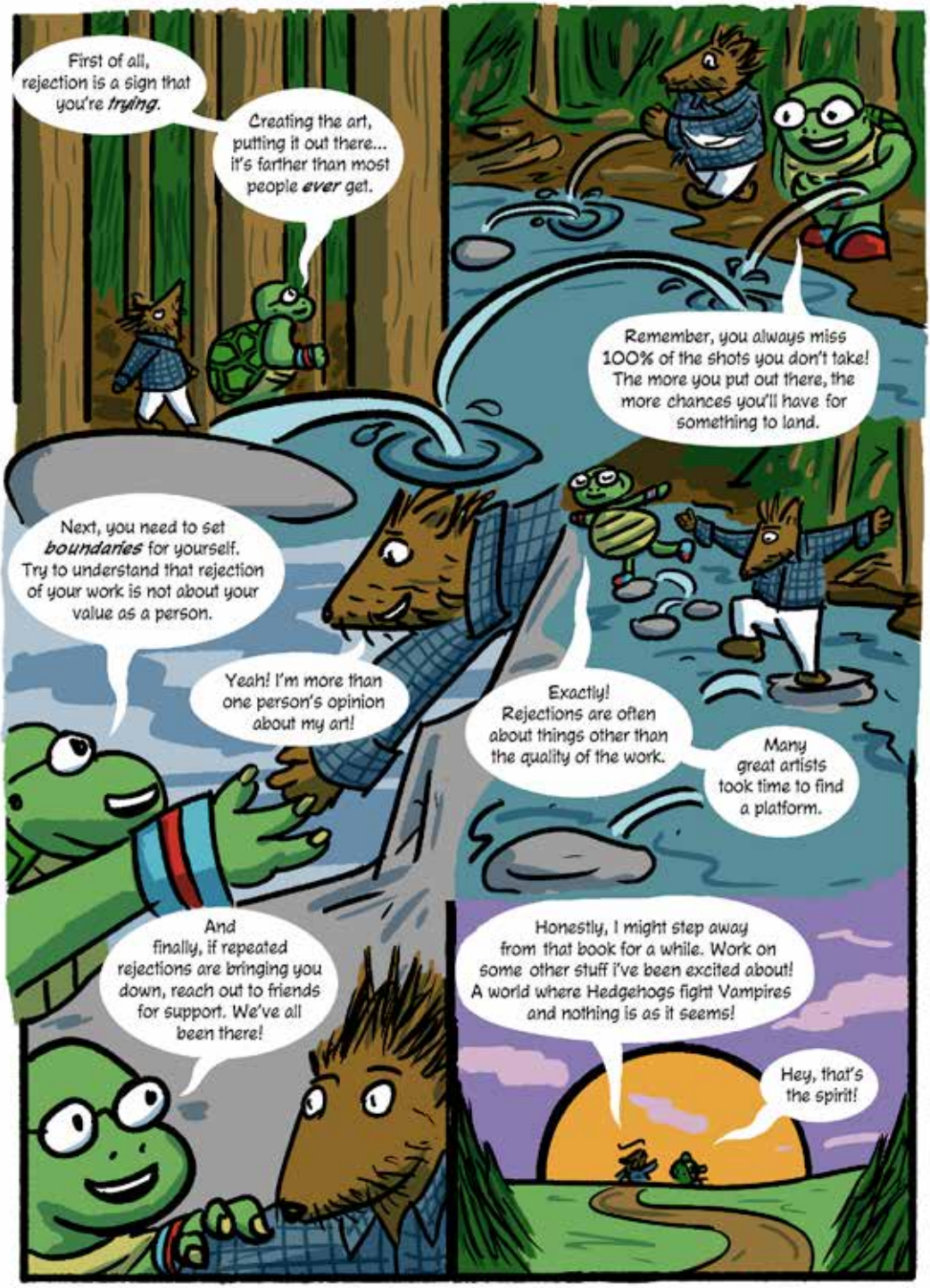
WE TEND TO BE OUR OWN ***HARSHEST CRITICS*** AND ARE THE MOST ATTUNED TO SPOTTING THE FLAWS IN OUR OWN WORK. TRY AND LOOK AT YOUR WORK THE WAY A ***FAN*** WOULD. FOCUS ON YOUR SUCCESSES RATHER THAN WHERE YOU FEEL YOU'VE FALLEN SHORT.



FINALLY, CRINGING AT OLD WORK IS ONLY A SIGN THAT YOU'VE ***IMPROVED*** AS AN ARTIST. WHEN ABILITY IMPROVES, SO TOO DOES OUR CAPACITY TO ***SEE*** THE FLAWS IN OLDER WORK. RIDE THAT WAVE KNOWING YOU'RE GETTING BETTER.



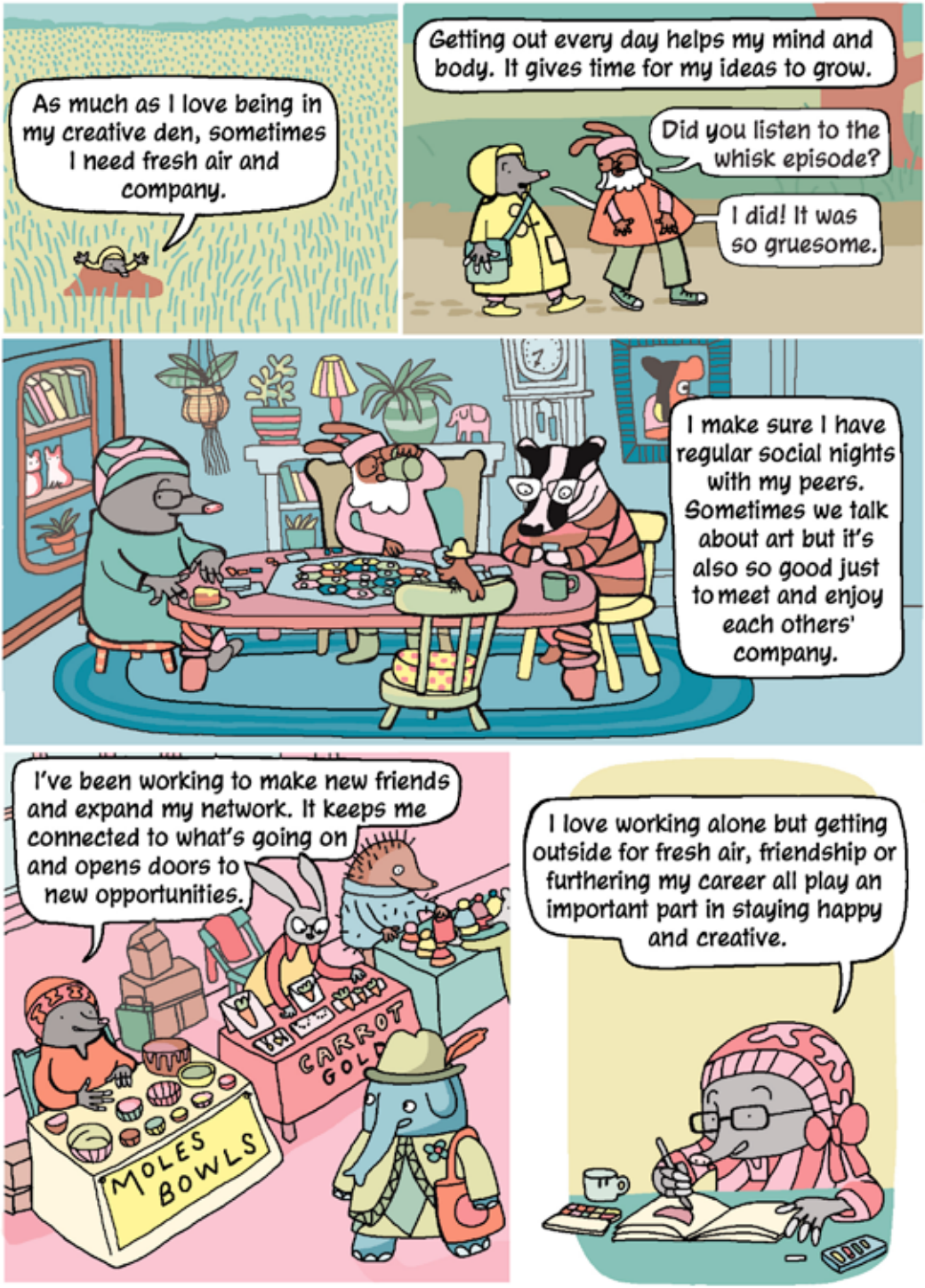

REJECTION
"... Having read your manuscript *'Hedge & Hedgeability'* we regret to inform you that it is not the right fit for us at this time..."
Art by Graham Johnson
What am I even *doing* with my life!
Hey, listen, I've been there too. It's hard!
Some people say you need a thick skin in this business...
But take it from me... *it doesn't help*!
Sure, *rejection* is an inevitable part of being an artist...
The Watering Hole
But we can make it easier to deal with by *reframing* how we see rejection!


First of all, rejection is a sign that you're *trying*.
Creating the art, putting it out there... it's farther than most people *ever* get.
Remember, you always miss 100% of the shots you don't take! The more you put out there, the more chances you'll have for something to land.
Next, you need to set *boundaries* for yourself. Try to understand that rejection of your work is not about your value as a person.
Yeah! I'm more than one person's opinion about my art!
Exactly! Rejections are often about things other than the quality of the work.
Many great artists took time to find a platform.
And finally, if repeated rejections are bringing you down, reach out to friends for support. We've all been there!
Honestly, I might step away from that book for a while. Work on some other stuff I've been excited about! A world where Hedgehogs fight Vampires and nothing is as it seems!
Hey, that's the spirit!


SOCIAL MEDIA
ARTWORK BY JAYDE PERKIN
A few finishing touches, and...
there!
Ready to show the world!
Maybe this time I'll go viral!
New Post
Share
Get some new followers, drive some traffic to my shop, maybe even catch the attention of some publishers!
PING
3G
Notifications
1 Retweet
Nope. Three likes.
And a retweet from auntie Carol.
Like always!
Urgh. Branding! Engagement! Content! The trolls and constant stream of bad news whenever I go online...
I hate it!
You could throw your phone in the river and run away to the mountains?
Or... could you work to improve your relationship with social media?
I dunno, the choice is yours.


It *is possible* to make a living out of your online presence, but a big social media presence *is not equal* to financial or artistic success.
Likes don't always translate into income.
Try to separate your value as a person or artist from your reception online. Some work just doesn't fit in that space, and that's *okay.*
You could consider other ways to reach your audience, like in-person events or email newsletters.
PLEASE TAKE A CARD
Remember: online systems and social media are *not made for your wellbeing!* They're made to capture attention and sell advertising.
Social media seduces us to share a lot of ourselves online, but remember that these are public spaces that can bring unwanted attention.
If you're feeling vulnerable or riled up, try talking privately with a trusted friend first.
spicy crisps
If social media is damaging your mental health, consider setting limits.
You could set up separate professional and personal accounts, take a break from social media...
or if you want to, it's okay to leave entirely.
Leave entirely?! I'd never dream of it!
Whatever works for *you.* By engaging with social media on *your own terms,* it becomes easier to take advantage of it as a tool to promote your art and connect with others.
THE END

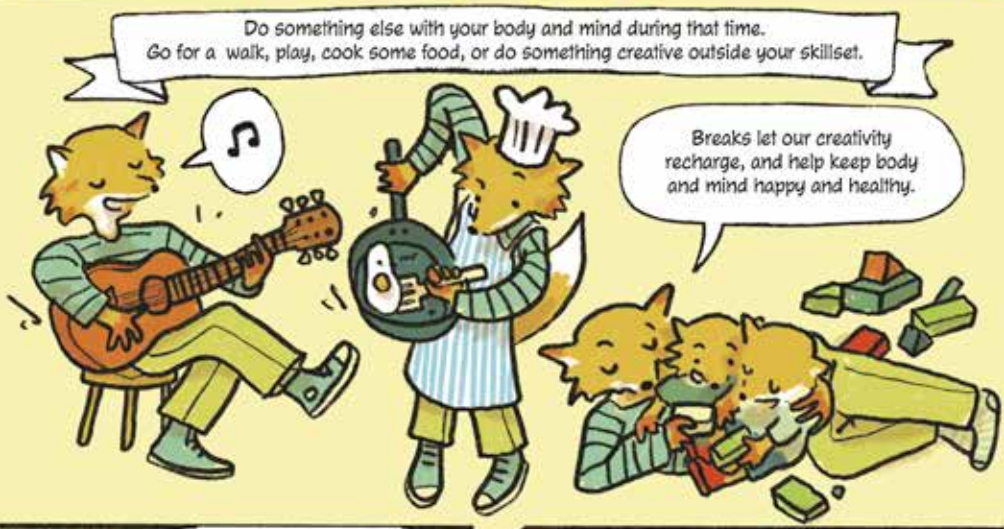

WORKING ALONE
DRAWN BY SIMONE LIA
This is the best choice I've ever made. So much freedom.
Whirr
I can work in a fabulous pair of pyjamas if I want to.
Listen to what I fancy
The murderer's choice of weapon was a whisk.
Do things my way,set my own hours, have conversations with um...myself.
Sometimes though it does feel a bit... lonely down here.
No one to bounce ideas off of, no one to share my success with.
Or my struggles.

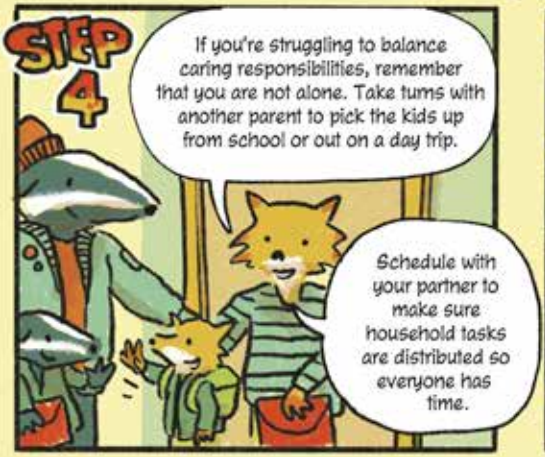

As much as I love being in my creative den, sometimes I need fresh air and company.
Getting out every day helps my mind and body. It gives time for my ideas to grow.
Did you listen to the whisk episode?
I did! It was so gruesome.
I make sure I have regular social nights with my peers. Sometimes we talk about art but it's also so good just to meet and enjoy each others' company.
I've been working to make new friends and expand my network. It keeps me connected to what's going on and opens doors to new opportunities.
MOLES BOWLS
I love working alone but getting outside for fresh air, friendship or furthering my career all play an important part in staying happy and creative.


WORK LIFE BALANCE
WILL YOU CUBS CUT IT OUT?!
Deadlines! Professional development! Paperwork! Childcare! Housework! Social Life! Exercise!
How's a fox meant to balance all that?!
STEP 1
Create separation between work and home life.
A separate working space, even just a corner of your room, can work wonders to keep your responsibilities separate.


STEP 2
Make sure you have clear working hours or targets.
TAP TAP TAP
Make sure they are achievable, and be kind to yourself if you fall short.


STEP 3
Structure your working day to include plenty of breaks away from your desk.
Work smarter, not harder!
SHUT

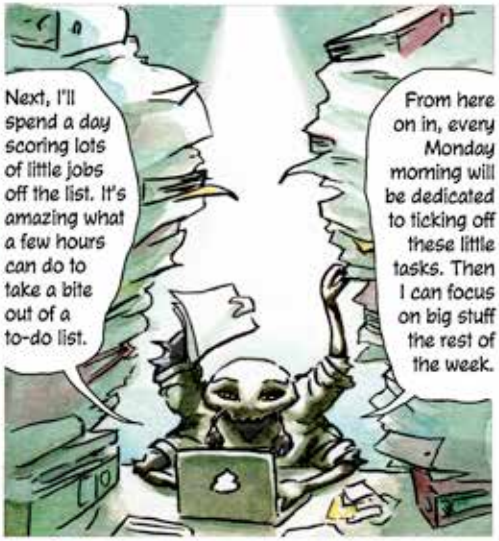

Do something else with your body and mind during that time.
Go for a walk, play, cook some food, or do something creative outside your skillset.
Breaks let our creativity recharge, and help keep body and mind happy and healthy.


STEP 4
If you're struggling to balance caring responsibilities, remember that you are not alone. Take turns with another parent to pick the kids up from school or out on a day trip.
Schedule with your partner to make sure household tasks are distributed so everyone has time.

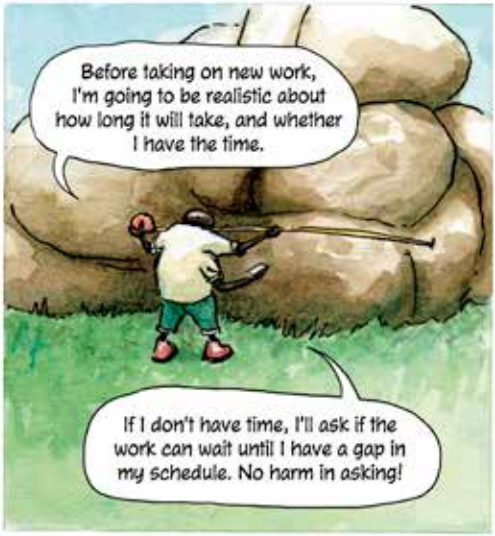

And when you've left work behind - at the end of the day or during a break - leave that work behind! Enjoy those moments. Let them recharge you. Finding balance takes time, but it's worth it.
Can you be quiet? I'm trying to watch this!


FEELING OVERWHELMED
Hnnng!
puff
puff
ART BY HANNAH BERRY
Phew! That's another one delivered...
Artisanal Dung Ball
But no time to rest! I've still got five to deliver today, another ten tomorrow -
fifteen to make the next day -
taxes, updating my website, housework -
that other project I promised to do...
It's... too much.
I'm at breaking point here! I can barely keep all these plates spinning. And there's always something else coming in.
Ok, calm down. You can afford some time to take stock.

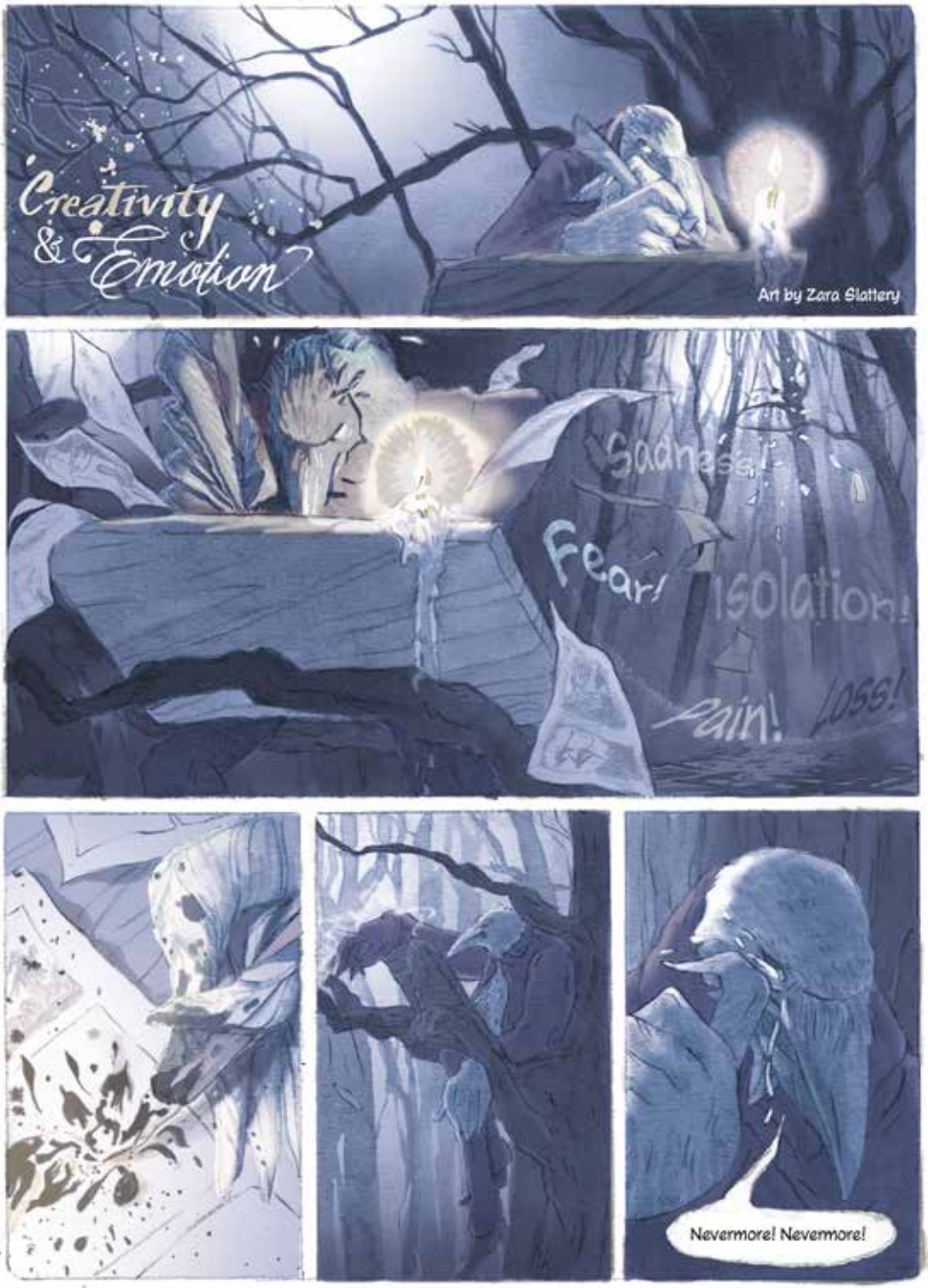

First, I'm going to list everything that needs doing, and make an action plan so I can prioritise what needs doing first.
TAXES
It'll help me keep perspective, and allow me to focus on one thing at a time.


Next, I'll spend a day scoring lots of little jobs off the list. It's amazing what a few hours can do to take a bite out of a to-do list.
From here on in, every Monday morning will be dedicated to ticking off these little tasks. Then I can focus on big stuff the rest of the week.


Sometimes you just need to ask for help! A mutually supportive agreement with a friend or partner means help from them now can be paid back when they need support.
Any time, babes!


Before taking on new work, I'm going to be realistic about how long it will take, and whether I have the time.
If I don't have time, I'll ask if the work can wait until I have a gap in my schedule. No harm in asking!


At the end of the day, you've got to make sure you're staying well while working. A good schedule will account for breaks and days off.
Making a plan that works for me will put me on good footing when my workload increases!


Creativity & Emotion
Art by Zara Slattery
Sadness!
Fear!
Isolation!
Pain!
Loss!
Nevermore! Nevermore!


Many artists chanel their emotions into their creativity. It can be an amazing way to process our feelings, and can help us make art that resonates with others.
But there's a dark side to all this...
Fixating on trauma in the process of creation often has an emotional toll. Keep an eye out for signs of declining mental health if you're working on something heavy.
And don't be afraid to ask others to check in on you from time to time, too.
Emotional honesty in our art can leave us open to hurt, especially when shared online. How will you feel if it isn't well received or if it attracts unwanted attention?
Some get the wrong impression that they can only be creative if they're miserable, which can lead to self-destructive spirals of behaviour.
Good sleep, eating well, personal time and exercise will help keep you happy, healthy and creative.
In fact, for many artists, difficult emotional circumstances make creativity *harder!* Be forgiving of yourself, creativity will return when you're ready.
In the end, it's up to *you*. Just remember that you're not obliged to share all of yourself through your art. Therapy or some form of self-care may be a better route to dealing with your emotions.

Performance Anxiety

ART BY S.K. SCHÄFER




Work with the organisers to make sure the event suits you.
READY SET GO
OUT NOW!
When I launched my book I made sure it was an interview as I wasn't comfortable giving a talk.
Ask to see the space beforehand. Pacing the stage and trying out equipment can help to demystify the experience for you.
I find that having a public persona helps. A costume that I feel confident in and that I only use for events.
I can step into the persona and when I'm done I can take it off and be me again.
Strategies like deep breathing can help control your anxiety. It gets easier the more you do it.
And remember...
...The audience wants me to be comfortable because *they* want to be comfortable watching me.
I got this.
What's the *deal* with springboks?! Can't they bok in winter?!
And don't get me started on gazelles.
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

CREATIVE BLOCK

art by NORM KONYU

















YOU CAN UNLOCK NEW IDEAS BY GETTING PLAYFUL WITH YOUR CREATIVITY.

GET CREATIVE IN WAYS YOU NORMALLY WOULDN'T...



TRY OUT DIFFERENT MATERIALS, WORK ON SOMETHING NEW, OR USE PLAYFUL TECHNIQUES LIKE EXQUISITE CORPSE OR STORY DICE TO GIVE YOUR CREATIVITY A JUMP START!

WITH YOUR CREATIVITY RECHARGED, YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY THE BLOCK.

IS IT LOGISTICAL OR IMAGINATIVE?

STRUCTURAL OR AESTHETIC?

A PROBLEM CREATED IN THE PAST OR A PROBLEM OF WHERE TO GO NEXT?

WORKING THIS OUT CAN BE THE START OF THE SOLUTION.



THANKS, HERON!

CREATIVE BLOCK-- UNBLOCKED!

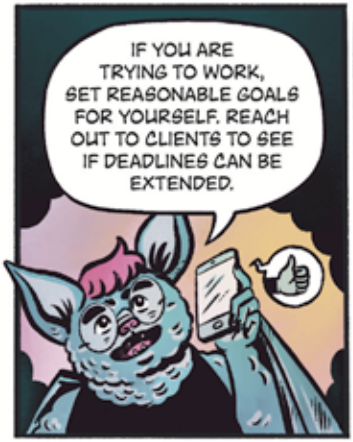
UNBLOCKED RIVER-- BLOCKED!

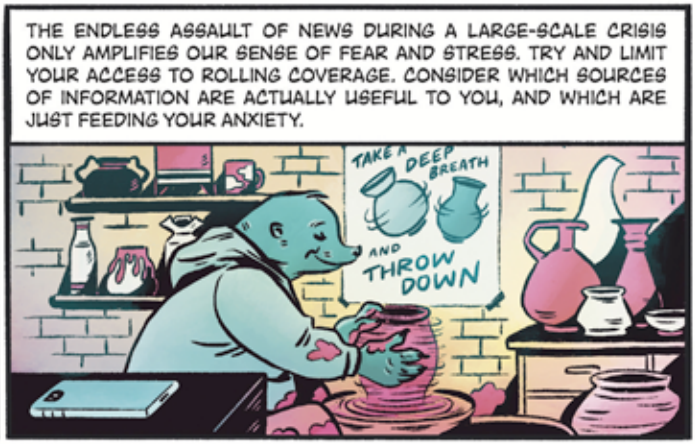



WORKING THROUGH A CRISIS
ART BY JULES SCHEELE
WE ALL FACE THIS PROSPECT AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER.
CRISES COME IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES. THEY CAN COME SLOWLY OR SUDDENLY. THEY CAN BE PERSONAL, LOCAL OR INTERNATIONAL.
FLASH FLOOD DEVASTATES
CASE NUMBERS
RISING
GAS BILL
NO MORE SAFE RAIN WATER
WHATEVER IT IS, A CRISIS UPENDS THE STABILITY NORMALLY NEEDED FOR CREATIVITY AND CONCENTRATION. IT PUTS NEW PRESSURES ON US, AND CAN MAKE NORMALLY EASY TASKS MUCH HARDER.
BUT THERE ARE WAYS OF GETTING THROUGH A CRISIS...


FIRST, ACCEPT THAT IT *ISN'T EASY* WORKING THROUGH A CRISIS. ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT IS HAPPENING. GIVE YOURSELF GRACE, AND KNOW YOU WILL FIND YOUR FOOTING AGAIN.


IF A CRISIS IS DIRECTLY AFFECTING YOU, TAKE SOME TIME TO MAKE A *PRIORITY LIST* OF THINGS THAT NEED DOING TO SEE YOU THROUGH THE CRISIS.
THIS MIGHT INCLUDE PRIORITISING THE HEALTH AND MENTAL WELLBEING OF YOU AND YOUR FAMILY, MAKING PLANS FOR HOW YOU ARE GOING TO ACT IN RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS, AND DECIDING WHAT YOU WILL NEED, TO ESTABLISH SOME SECURITY DURING THE CRISIS.


IF YOU ARE TRYING TO WORK, SET REASONABLE GOALS FOR YOURSELF. REACH OUT TO CLIENTS TO SEE IF DEADLINES CAN BE EXTENDED.


THE ENDLESS ASSAULT OF NEWS DURING A LARGE-SCALE CRISIS ONLY AMPLIFIES OUR SENSE OF FEAR AND STRESS. TRY AND LIMIT YOUR ACCESS TO ROLLING COVERAGE. CONSIDER WHICH SOURCES OF INFORMATION ARE ACTUALLY USEFUL TO YOU, AND WHICH ARE JUST FEEDING YOUR ANXIETY.
TAKE A DEEP BREATH
AND THROW DOWN


IF YOU'RE FEELING HELPLESS, VOLUNTEERING A LITTLE TIME EACH WEEK TO REAL-WORLD EFFORTS IS INFINITELY MORE USEFUL THAN ONLINE ACTIVISM.
FOOD COLLECTION POINT
NO PERISHABLES


REMEMBER YOU ARE NOT ALONE. FIND COMMUNITY DURING A CRISIS BY REACHING OUT TO FRIENDS FOR MORAL AND PASTORAL SUPPORT. SEE IF THERE ARE PROFESSIONAL FUNDS TO HELP YOU THROUGH THE CRISIS. MENTAL HEALTH HELPLINES ARE THERE FOR TIMES OF STRUGGLE DURING PERSONAL CRISIS.



The UK's largest trade union for all types of writers, illustrators and literary translators

The Society of Authors advises and speaks out for creative freelancers at every stage of their careers.
We support professional and emerging authors of all kinds, from Illustrators and comics creators to novelists and poets, and from literary translators and travel writers to graphic novelists and journalists.
We run a wide range of professional communities – free to members – including the Comics Creators Network and the Children's Writers and Illustrators Group.

Join the SoA today with the code

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Have I mentioned lately how much I really bloody love the Society of Authors and all that you do? I do. A lot.
–Hannah Berry FRSL

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And you'll become part of a growing community of professionals, with year-round opportunities to network with your peers both online and at our events and workshops across the UK.

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