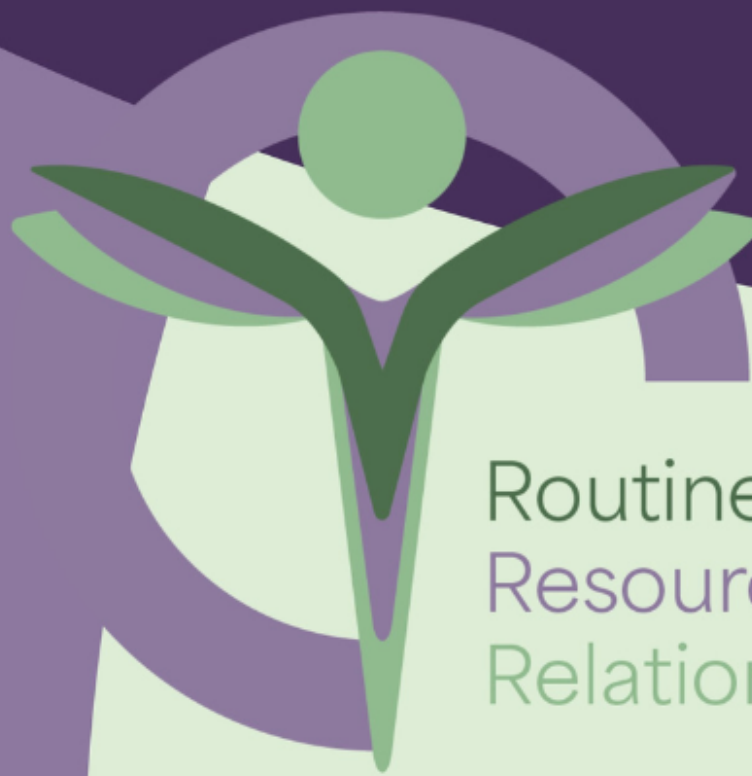


# Cultivating Resilience and Flourishing

Workbook Worksheets



Routines  
Resources  
Relationships

Suzanne Tough, PhD



Cultivating Resilience and Flourishing: A Workbook V2.0 (c) 2025 by Suzanne Tough, PhD is licensed under CC BY-ND 4.0.  
To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>

# Acknowledgments

## Author

**Suzanne Tough, PhD**  
Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary  
Max Bell Burns Policy Fellow

## Contributing Authors

**Jessica-Lynn Walsh, MBCh MSc**  
Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary

**Zahra Clayborne, PhD**  
Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary

**Anjola Adeboye, BHSc**  
Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary

**Sheila McDonald, PhD**  
Alberta Health Services  
Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary

## Branding, Layout & Creative Design

**Adam Ford**  
Casual Design Studio  
[www.casualdesign.studio](http://www.casualdesign.studio)  
[casualdesignstudio@gmail.com](mailto:casualdesignstudio@gmail.com)

## Illustrations

**Eve Higgins**  
[evemhiggins@outlook.com](mailto:evemhiggins@outlook.com)  
[www.emhiggins.ca](http://www.emhiggins.ca)

Access the workbook here:



The 3Rs are

# Routines Resources Relationships

*“Your little choices become habits that affect  
the bigger decisions you make in life.”*

- Elizabeth George

### Routines: What are they?

Routines are actions or thought processes that we regularly follow and repeat. They are frequently used, sometimes daily, with common tasks or duties in any place.<sup>64</sup> These activities or thoughts differ depending on our work, home life, culture, interests, hobbies and lifestyles.

Routines, also known as habits, maintain structure and organization. Routines are important because they help us use time efficiently and reduce the need to make a ‘new decision’ around activities of daily living that can be simplified.

Rituals are routines that have a symbolic meaning and a sense of purpose. Rituals recognize important milestones and accomplishments. **Both routines and rituals help in skill development, establish traditions, and create emotional bonds.**

### Examples of routines

- Having the same foods for breakfast
- Dog walking at the same time each day
- Using the same wind-down activities before bed each night (*e.g., reading, meditation, reducing the use of screens, praying*)
- Deciding which events you will celebrate together with family and friends, such as birthdays or achievements

### Did you know?

**Routines have a pattern — a cue, an action, and a reward.**

The reward is, generally, that we feel better and a task is accomplished. For example, many of us try to decrease screen time before bed to help improve the quality of our sleep.

**The cue** could be the time – we shut off all screens by 9 p.m.

**The action** would be ensuring we have set our alarms, checked our emails, saved our work and shut all computers, phones, tablets, etc. off by 9 p.m. We then walk, take a shower, write in our journal, or read a book before sleep.

**The reward** would be that we fall asleep easily and wake up feeling refreshed the next day.

### Why does this work?

- Routines free up energy and ‘brain power’ for more important decisions.<sup>65</sup>
- Routines help organize our lives and reduce decision fatigue,<sup>66</sup> especially when we are experiencing time-crunch stress.
- Decision fatigue can result in lessened thinking, memory, and behaviour.
- Decision fatigue also increases the chances of reactive decision-making (i.e., thinking too fast and not slowing down enough to consider our frame of mind) and making decisions we later regret.<sup>66</sup>
- Good routines are protective for positive mental health, especially in challenging times.<sup>67,68</sup>
- Rituals and celebrations can bring us together for a shared experience of joy or sorrow and can provide support and build connections.

Lived  
experience

### Healthy girl walks - A Recently Graduated Masters Student

A routine that does wonders for my mental health is what I (and some sectors of the internet) have dubbed, “healthy girl walks”. These are long walks (at least 45 minutes) that I go on every day. I do not do it at a consistent time, but it is a habit for me to do it when I am particularly stuck on a challenge, am transitioning between locations (walking between meetings), need some time to think, or am about to go to bed and need to wind down. I have been doing this consistently for about a year and a half - barring any bad weather. It has been amazing for my mental health.

## Activity – Routines

**Brainstorming:** Use the space below each question to brainstorm your ideas.

Are there activities that I do every day or frequently? What are some of the more common ones?

Can I think of a routine I want to create? What is the cue? The action? What would be the reward? *E.g., I always put my cell phone in the same place when I come home so I don't spend time looking for it.*

What are some routines that would enhance or simplify my life?

What celebration or tradition would I like to protect? Is there a tradition I could modify, give up or share with someone else so I feel less pressured?

Am I time crunched? Do I have some routines or rituals that no longer serve me? Can I let go of some routines? Can I modify some of the rituals to meet my current needs?

## Activity – Routines

**How will I do this?** Use these questions to think about what you do currently, and how you can build on these activities.

How can I develop activities that I do every day or frequently into a routine to make one less decision today?

Routines can be built on existing habits. Do I have existing habits I can add to, or routine stack<sup>69</sup>? *E.g., If I am forgetful about taking my vitamins, can I add that as something I do before brushing my teeth?*

What traditions or rituals hold meaning that I will protect or allocate time for? How will I protect this time? *E.g., I can share the responsibility of the ritual or tradition with someone.*

What strategies will I use to incorporate these routines? *E.g., set a timer on my phone as a cue.*

## Activity – Routines

**My routines:** Using your thoughts above, what would you like your average day to look like?

### Morning:

*E.g., I will only look at my work emails after I exercise and eat my breakfast.*

### Lunch time:

*E.g., After I eat my lunch, I will go for a ten-minute walk.*

### Afternoon:

*E.g., I will pick up my child from school and drop them off at their sports club Tuesday and Thursday afternoons.*

### Dinner time:

*E.g., Our family leaves our phones in our bedrooms during dinner time and we each take turns sharing something good that happened in our day.*

### Evening:

*E.g., After tucking my kids into bed, I lay out the clothes I will wear tomorrow.*

### Bedtime:

*E.g., I shut all screens off by 9:30 p.m. and start my wind-down of brushing my teeth, setting my alarm and reading a book.*



### **Resources:** What are they?

**Resources in this workbook refer to our communities and other places where we spend our time.**

Communities can refer to the places where we live, but also include groups of people who share similar interests, culture, faith, employment or values.<sup>70</sup> Examples of communities include walking or hiking groups, online gaming groups, book clubs, music groups, school councils, yoga groups, craft/art group activities, and neighbourhoods.

In addition to these active or structural resources, communities also consist of "third places", or surroundings that differ from our home environments and workplaces. Third places are locations where we can meet our needs for companionship and emotional support, and include cafés, libraries, parks, gyms, green spaces, community centres and faith-based settings.<sup>71</sup> Resources also include opportunities, events and places to go to that allow us to build knowledge and skills, exercise, participate in improvement and civic engagement projects, volunteer, connect, and help others.

**When we engage with places that include nature, we prevent or reduce stress from the attention-related weariness that develops through everyday life.<sup>72</sup>**

### Why this works?

- With sufficient resources, we are less likely to be over-secreting stress hormones and are able to use our brain and energy for more complex tasks.<sup>56,57</sup>
- Adequate resources and support help us meet our needs and feel safe in our communities and environments.<sup>56,57</sup>
- Participating in activities can enable skill development and become a way for us to meet new people, learn and connect.
- Engaging with local resources, such as greeting our neighbor or participating in a local event, builds knowledge about our environment and increases our sense of community and sense of belonging. This sense of belonging creates a feeling of connection and purpose and increases the release of ‘feel good’ hormones.
- When we are focused on something else, even briefly, we cannot focus on our own concerns. This reduces feelings of stress, even for a short time.
- Activities that bring us together on a common issue increases the sense of empowerment and connection and the release of oxytocin, a ‘feel good’ hormone.

Lived  
experience

### Examples of resources:

- Community centres
- Libraries
- Museums
- Childcare
- Parks
- Music
- Nature
- Free internet access
- Special interest groups
- Gathering spaces such as cafes, and public spaces

**Our shared spaces provide a sense of community** - Early-career communications support staff

I am fortunate to live next to some amazing paths in Calgary along the reservoir. As I follow a routine with running and walking, I see some of the same people walking the path every day and it gives me a sense of community.

## Activity – Resources

**Brainstorm:** Use the space below each question to brainstorm some of your ideas.

What does community mean to me?

What communities am I currently a part of?

How does participating in my community/communities make me feel?

What are some examples of third spaces that are close to where I live or where I spend my time?

Are there communities that I have heard of that I want to be a part of?

## Activity – Resources

**How will I do this?** Use these questions to think about what you do currently, and how you can build on these activities.

Am I aware of third spaces in my communities? If not, what can I do to become aware of them?

Have I read my community newsletter or heard of community events, get-togethers, fundraisers, volunteering, etc.? Is it a good time for me to participate or volunteer?

Do I and my family have places to go in our community/communities that provide free and comfortable spaces? If not, is there community leadership or representatives that we can connect with to learn more about these spaces? *E.g., community centres, schools, local shops or cafés.*

Do I feel welcome enough to participate in my community or go to third places? Is there another community that I can join where I would feel welcome and safe, and would enjoy participating?

What is one small thing that I can do once a week or once a month to learn more about what my community/communities offer?

### Close relationships: What are they?

Close relationships include our family, friends and romantic partners. These are the individuals and groups we problem-solve with and celebrate accomplishments with.

Close relationships can provide us with emotional support where we share concerns, seek advice, find comfort; tangible support where we have help with tasks; and interaction support where we have someone to have fun or share experiences with.<sup>26,75</sup> The quality of these relationships matter and higher-quality close relationships (e.g., responsive, give-and-take, trustworthy, hopeful, compassionate, respectful) provide us with health, mental, and emotional benefits.<sup>76</sup>

Close relationships are fundamental to human society and involve the exchange of knowledge and feelings, and the sharing of our mind and hearts. These relationships are often reciprocal, develop over time, and bring a sense of meaning to our life as we share good times and bad times. All relationships benefit from acceptance and tolerance, as well as seeing the intrinsic worth of each person.

### Hint

Build a positive relationship through “TAC”:

T  
ime

+

A  
ttention

↓

C  
onnection

### How to get more support out of our relationships

People are often eager to help, but they may not know what we need. Reach out and ask for help; be specific for the type of support we need; branch out and add more of the type of support we need to our close relationship circle.<sup>82</sup>

### Why this works?

- When we engage in close relationships, we boost the delivery of feel-good hormones in our brain and body, such as oxytocin, dopamine, endorphins, and serotonin.<sup>58,63,77-79</sup>
- These hormones and neurochemicals reduce inflammation, decrease pain, reduce stress hormone levels and inhibit our body's "fight or flight" response.<sup>58,63</sup>
- These hormones also promote a sense of trustworthiness, belonging, and positive social behaviours, which are essential for building relationships.<sup>77,78,80</sup>
  - More frequent release of these hormones from relationships provides greater health benefits and builds well-being.<sup>81</sup>
  - We need different types of support from our close relationships in different situations to help us develop skills, cope, and strengthen self-esteem.<sup>82</sup>

### Quick tip

There are many resources to help us learn how to have a difficult conversation. Sometimes work places have resources to help in this area, and the skills work elsewhere too! We can also role-play the difficult conversation with someone we trust to practice.

### Examples of close relationships

- Immediate or extended family
- Friends and/or those with shared interests
- Partners
- Found family (those without any relation to us that support and care for us the same way a family member would)

## Activity #1 – Close relationships

**Brainstorming:** Use the space below each question to brainstorm some of your ideas.

Who do I turn to when celebrating an accomplishment?

Who do I turn to when experiencing a challenge?

What do I notice about ‘who I turn to’?

What can I do to prioritize my most important relationships?

*(clue; connection= time + attention)*

Is there something different I would like to see in my close relationships? If so, what will I try to achieve this? *E.g., how will I approach it, what will I change?*

Do I need or want more emotional, tangible or interactive support? If so, what steps can I take to acquire this support?

## Activity #2 – Close relationships

**How will I do this?** Use these questions to think about what you do currently, and how you can build on these activities.

What can I do to prioritize my most important relationships?

What would I like to see in my close relationships? *E.g., time, activity, behaviour, or conversation?*

What will I try to enhance the type of support I need in my close relationships? *E.g., how will I talk about it?*

What approaches will help to avoid defensiveness in conversations in my close relationship?



## The 3Rs – Informal relationships

### What are informal relationships?

Informal relationships include connections with neighbours, community groups, interest groups, local businesses and mentorship. Participating in brief, positive interactions, such as those with a coffee barista at the local café or a fellow commuter on public transit, are an important part of our social diet as they help us feel happier.<sup>87,88</sup> These types of relationships are fundamental to human society and, just like close relationships, involve the exchange of knowledge and feelings. Informal relationships often involve shared experiences and build a sense of connection, such as watching a sporting event, receiving help from a salesclerk, or lining up at a food truck. Informal relationships at any level benefit from acceptance and tolerance, as well as seeing the intrinsic worth of each person. We demonstrate respect when we have regard for the feelings, wishes, rights, or traditions of ourselves and others.<sup>89</sup>

Lived  
experience

#### Adult routines & love maps - Early career clinical specialist with children under age 10

When my partner was travelling every week for work, I found it really hard for us to maintain connection. One thing that we always tried to do was have a wind-down routine at the end of the week where we got to reconnect. The expectations were low. We would let the kids have a movie night and then we would decide on something for the adults to eat that would feel special after they went to bed.

Over the years, we have also made a point of repeating activities, revisiting places, or doing things that we have done in our relationship in the past. Re-experiencing things on our love map has helped us to keep connected, even when things were hard.

### Why this works?

- Brief, positive social interactions benefit the sender and receiver's brain chemistry - both get an oxytocin boost. We call this 'social snacking'.<sup>90</sup> Oxytocin promotes a sense of connection and decreases feelings of stress.<sup>80</sup>
- These brief connections also release other hormones and neurochemicals that build trust, familiarity, and belonging.<sup>77,78,80</sup>
- Participating in groups with shared interests, such as gardening groups, choirs, and/or book clubs, increase a sense of connection and provide opportunity for learning and skill development.
- Brief repetitive interactions with neighbours and others we frequently come across can increase a sense of belonging and trust, and feelings of safety in our communities.<sup>91</sup> Repeated interactions over time may cause informal connections to become stronger, which can lead to increased appreciation of those around us.
- Relationships allow us to share in the human condition. Through relationships, such as mentoring, we learn from one another, normalize new or unfamiliar experiences, and problem solve.

Lived  
experience

### **Online gaming community** - Early career knowledge translation specialist with two cats

I am a part of an online gaming community. It's nice to know that I can log-on at any time of day and there is always someone I can talk to or complete activities with. Even if we don't talk, I appreciate the camaraderie of working together towards a shared achievement or goal. It gives me a sense of community that is flexible to my needs and daily demands.

### **Examples of informal relationships**

- Neighbours
- People in local businesses or organizations
- Work or volunteer colleagues
- Community leadership
- Local café owners or employees
- Other parents at the local park or at your child's school
- Fellow passengers of local transit
- People you often see in your building
- Teachers
- Mentors

To learn more about social snacking,  
please see Appendix 4 on page 76  
in the full workbook:



## Activity – Informal relationships

**Brainstorming:** Use the space below each question to brainstorm some of your ideas.

Are there people I come across on a daily or frequent basis? Can I wave, smile or say hello to them?

What are some examples of simple actions that I can do to social snack?

Who in my home community can I reach out to in an emergency?

Do I know the names of my neighbours? Community leadership?

## Activity – Informal relationships

**How will I do this?** Use these questions to think about what you do currently, and how you can build on these activities.

Where can I go to meet people around my interests?

What is one simple thing I can do each day to participate in social snacking?

Where can I practice social snacking? e.g., the grocery store or coffee shop or smiling at those passing by?

What can I do to get to know my neighbours or members of my community/communities better?

### Breaking the cycle of stress word search

Word search for activities to help break the cycle of stress.

*Words can go in any direction.*

*Words can share letters as they cross over each other.*

F	S	X	L	Z	F	Q	P	W	A	S	V	C	G	F
E	L	A	U	G	H	P	G	I	A	V	H	M	R	O
R	S	W	I	D	U	R	E	Q	G	J	K	U	A	R
D	E	S	O	C	I	A	L	I	Z	E	J	S	T	G
T	E	B	I	N	P	Y	U	U	N	Z	O	I	I	I
I	C	L	T	D	A	E	J	W	Y	P	U	C	T	V
S	U	O	E	S	C	T	X	Z	C	E	R	P	U	E
B	D	L	N	G	U	H	U	E	H	T	N	L	D	M
R	W	S	C	N	A	N	O	R	R	S	A	A	E	E
E	A	T	O	W	E	T	S	C	E	C	L	Y	B	D
A	T	R	E	A	D	C	E	H	O	Y	I	E	W	I
T	E	E	R	L	G	E	T	T	I	L	R	S	D	T
H	R	T	E	K	Z	W	X	B	M	N	A	W	E	A
E	Z	C	S	H	O	B	B	I	E	S	E	T	G	T
F	G	H	T	R	E	F	R	A	M	E	O	I	E	E

gratitude  
delegate  
meditate  
sunshine  
music  
water

chocolate  
exercise  
reframe  
connect  
journal  
stretch

socialize  
breathe  
hobbies  
nature  
laugh  
forgive

read  
pets  
play  
rest  
pray  
walk

*For the word search answer key see Appendix 6.*

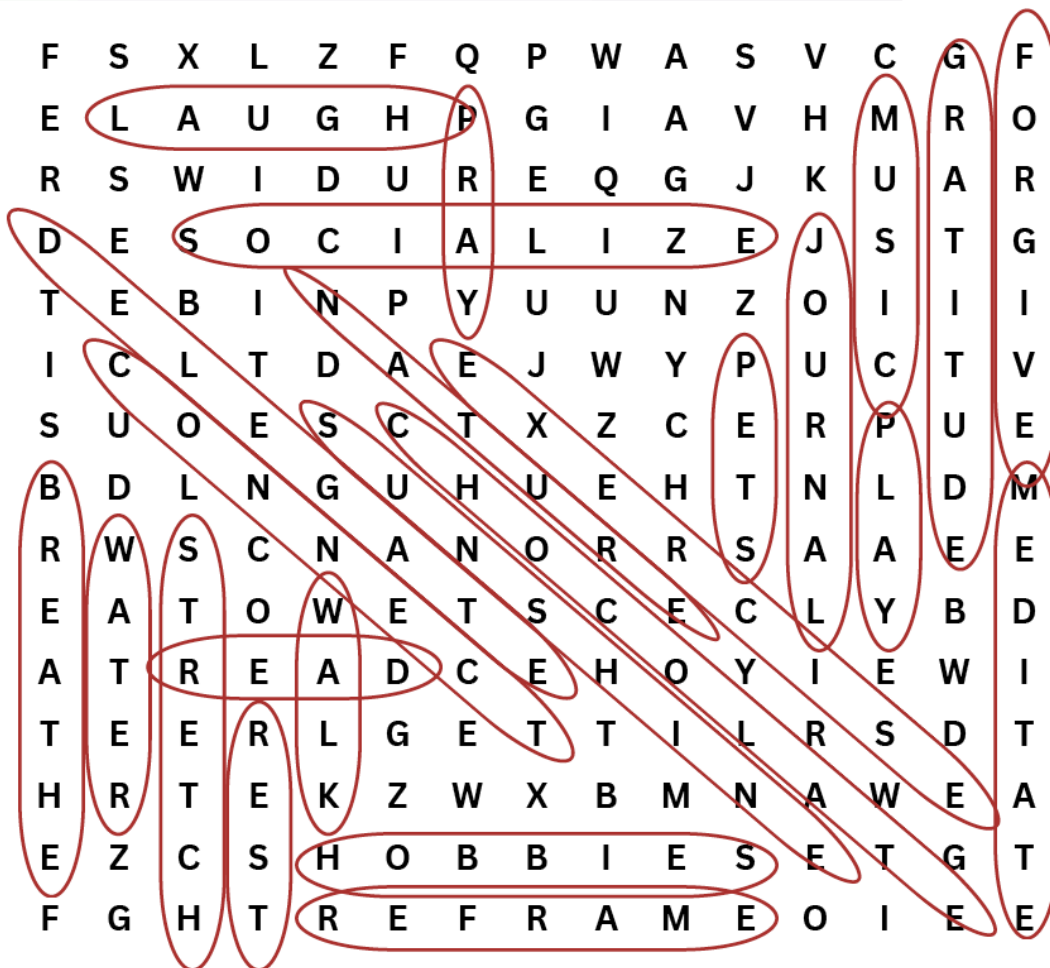
### Word search answer key

The following is the answer key for the word search in Appendix 1.

**Remember:**

*Words can go in any direction.*

*Words can share letters as they cross over each other.*



gratitude  
delegate  
meditate  
sunshine  
music  
water

chocolate  
exercise  
reframe  
connect  
journal  
stretch

socialize  
breathe  
hobbies  
nature  
laugh  
forgive

read  
pets  
play  
rest  
pray  
walk

## Selected resources

### All Our Families Study:

An ongoing Canadian longitudinal cohort on pregnancy, caregiving, and child and youth development.

[www.ucalgary.ca/allourfamilies](http://www.ucalgary.ca/allourfamilies)

### Connections First

A hub for natural support work in Alberta and resources and guides for communities and organizations to promote social connections and natural supports approaches.

[www.connectionsfirst.ca](http://www.connectionsfirst.ca)

### Resilience Research Centre

A collaboration of leading researchers, led by Dr. Michael Ungar, that explore cultural, community, program, family, child, youth, workplace, and individual resilience.

[resilienceresearch.org/](http://resilienceresearch.org/)

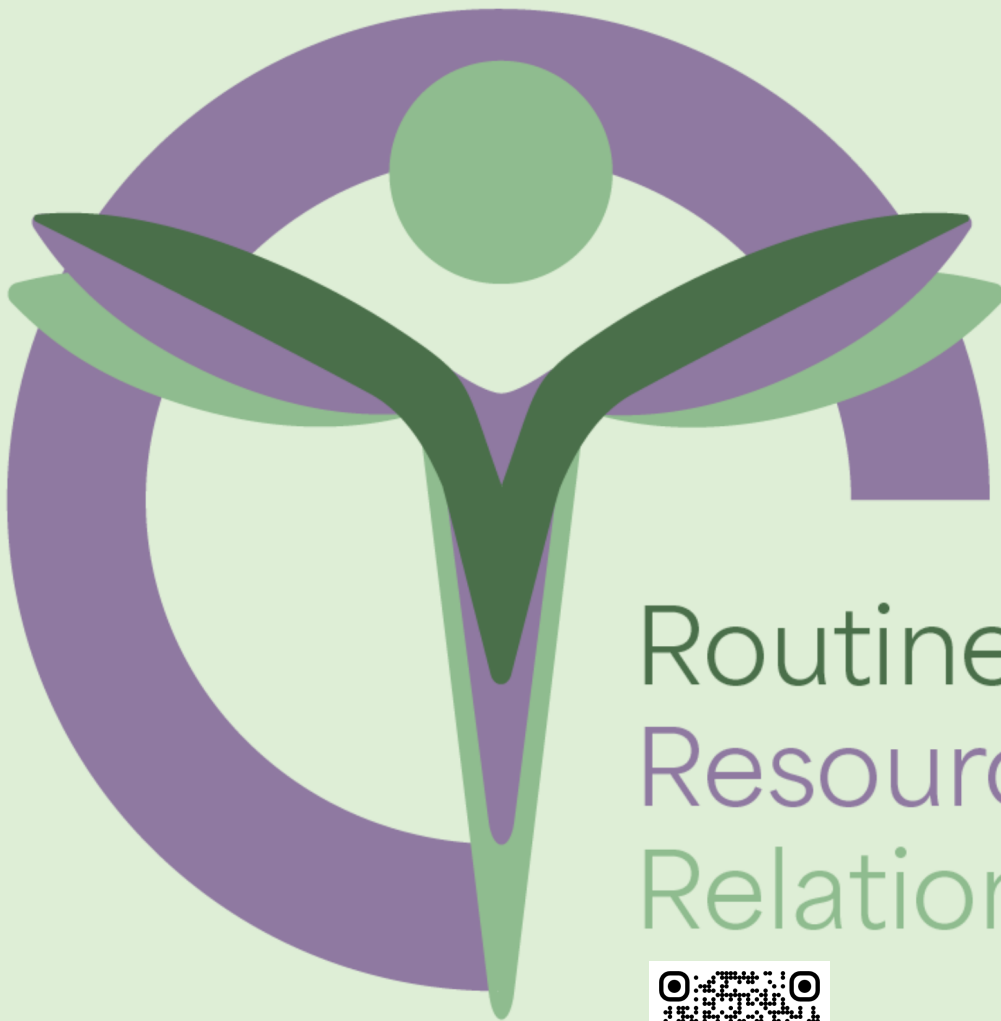
### Alberta Family Wellness Initiative

An organization that makes and mobilizes scientific knowledge about brain development so that it is easy to understand and use for policy, practice, and the public to help improve Albertan's health and well-being.

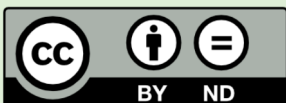
[www.albertafamilywellness.org/](http://www.albertafamilywellness.org/)

Where can you find this workbook?





# Routines Resources Relationships



Cultivating Resilience and Flourishing: A Workbook V2.0 (c) 2025 by Sierranne Tough, PhD is licensed under CC BY-ND 4.0.  
To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/>