

The Black Spots

I came across 'The Black Dot Experiment' by Bill Rogers, an Educational Consultant, a few years back. The model was intended for use in teams and classrooms, but let's remodel it and adapt it for using to aid our mental health.

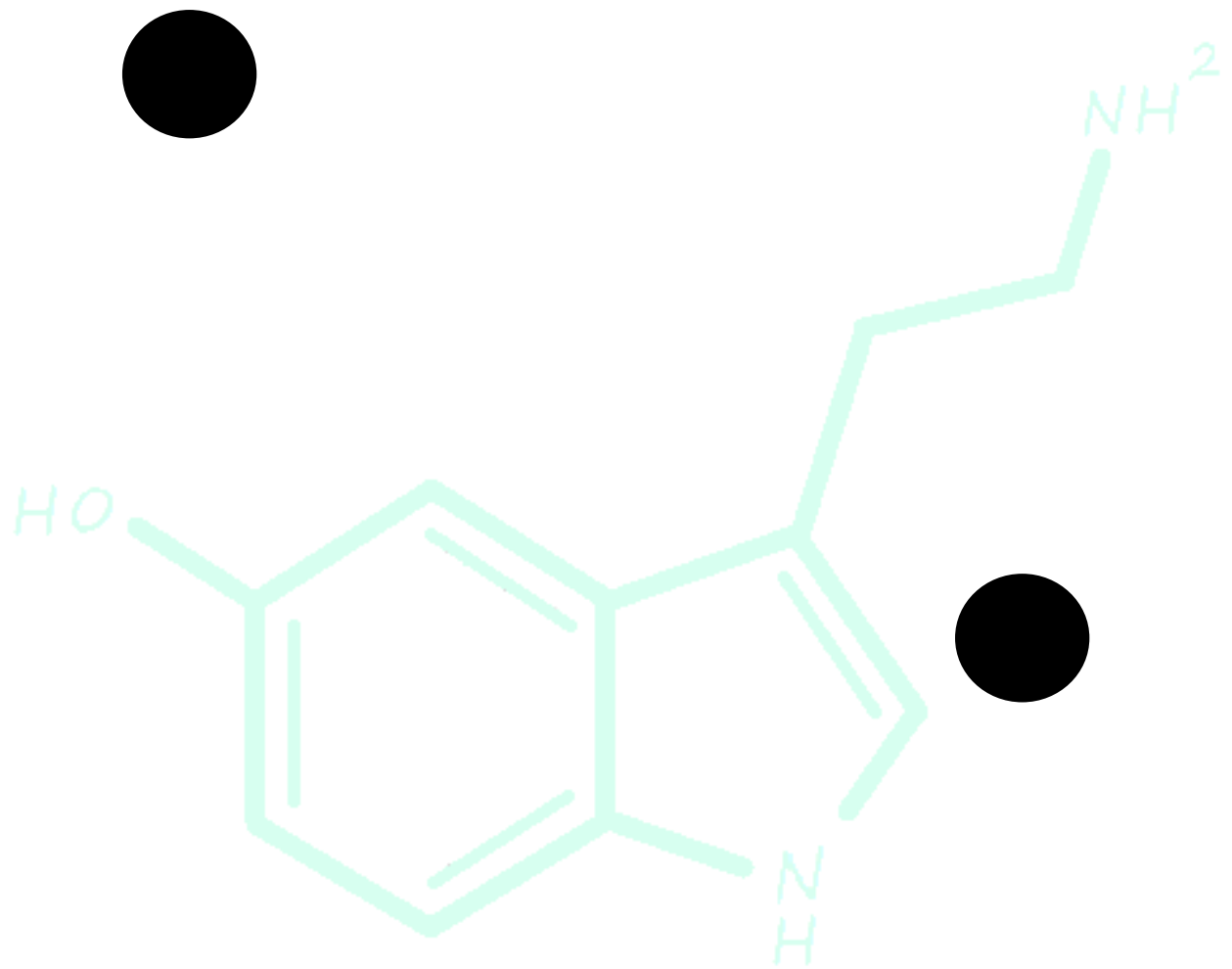
The aim of this worksheet is to help you shift your focus from the one or two negative experiences/thoughts/feelings/circumstances that are present in your mind.

We will also try to reinforce the positives in your life and make you aware of even the smallest achievements that should be appreciated. We will look at what might at first seem trivial and use it to strengthen your self-worth and appreciation for yourself and the life you're living.

"Positive anything is better than negative nothing."

Elbert Hubbard, American Writer

Look at the following page. I want you to write what you see (please ignore the watermark in the background, unfortunately plagiarism is a thing.) Don't overthink it, look at the page and simply write what you see on a scrap piece of paper.



There are two things you could have written. It is more likely that you have written the first thing and not the second.

1. Black Dots / Three Black Dots / Black Spots / Black Circles.
2. White Space / Blank Areas.

Did you write anything about the white space or empty room on the page? Most people don't. In the workshop I delivered in a group of 11, only 1 commented on the white space.

What can we take from this? Let's look at these black spots from a different perspective.

Relating it to our mental health and mindset, we can make the following comparison:

- *The Black Spots* represent Negative Situations/Feelings/Memories/Circumstances
- *The White Space* represents the Opportunities, Positive Experiences, Happy Memories and Achievements.

When something negative happens to us or something goes wrong, we tend to zone in on it and forget everything else in the bigger picture. It isn't an individual problem, but in fact a natural feature of human nature.

Physically, when we see something as a threat, we try to protect ourselves. You see a bear, you run (or I'd hope you would, I'd highly recommend it!) Your house starts burning to the ground, you leave.

Our *defensive mechanisms* to zone in on the danger until we are *safe*. You run away from the bear, but you will not stop thinking about it until you know you are far away from it and *safe*. You get out of your burning house, but you will not stop thinking about it until the fire is out and you are, yes, *safe*.

Our basic instinct to stay safe from danger, which was installed in us from an incredibly early stage in our time, also carries through *emotionally*. Today, we don't really have to worry about staying safe from bears on a daily basis. Instead, our time is spent on more *emotionally* involved tasks such as relationships, work, financial stability etc.

The faulty part of this is that physical dangers are vastly *different* to emotional stressors. You can run away from bears, but you can't run away from a traumatic memory or stressful circumstances.

BUT IT'S NOT ALL DOOM AND GLOOM!

This exercise is a great way for you to refocus and remember all the positives despite those emotional stressors.

In the beginning, this exercise can be done on paper but eventually, it will become part of the way you think and deal with negativity. You will train your brain into thinking positively and this will in turn, help you deal with situations that don't go to plan and other stress that life throws your way.

Using This Exercise

On the next page, you will see the same black spots, but they are hollow. Write down your negative feeling/experience/memory inside the hollow spots, preferably with a black pen (if you don't wish to use all of the black spots, colour them in black.)

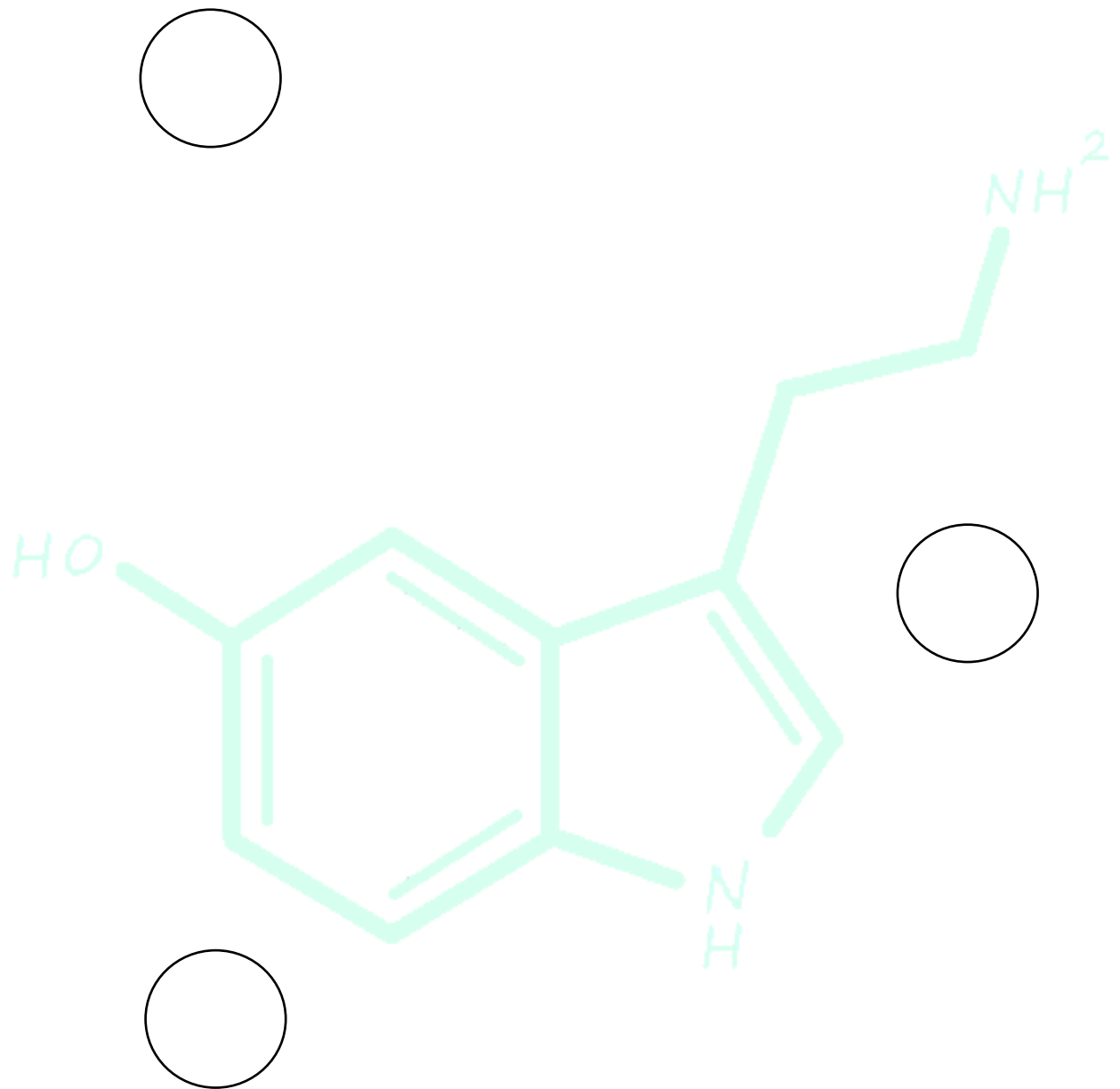
Once they are put on the page, I want you to ignore them. They are no longer what you should be focusing on, you have put them on the page and given them their time to be thought about. It's now time to focus on the white space.

Using a coloured pen (preferably) write down all the good memories, experiences, achievements, and things you love.

If you are struggling for inspiration, think of the following questions:

- What are your hobbies?
- Who are the people in your support network?
- What are you proud of?
- What are you thankful for?
- What do you like about yourself?
- What are your best traits?
- Ask your loved ones, "What do you like about me?"

Take your time to fill out as much of the page as possible. Start by spacing each word(s) out around the page then work on filling in the remainder of the page. (If you are still struggling for inspiration, see the example list.)



Now that you are looking at this page, I am going to boldly presume that you have finished the exercise. (If you still have space, jump to the example list for some inspiration to make sure you have a full page!)

Ready? Now you should have lots of different positives written on the page. Do you see how many there are compared to the negative spots? If they aren't already feeling outnumbered, let's make them vanish!

Take your black pen and colour in those black spots, scribbling out those negative feelings/experiences/memories.

Did that feel good? I hope it did!

When you change your focus from the negative to the positive and continue to take this mindset and carry it on throughout all areas of your life, when you are met with a negative experience in the future, it will be less likely to impact on your life. The black spots will become smaller and smaller, and you will continue to see more white space, more positive memories, and thoughts.

Hopefully, this tool has helped you create a more positive mindset. This was created with inspiration from Bill Rogers' 'The Black Dot Experiment' and has been adapted as an exercise for improving your mental health.

Please feel free to share this with your friends, family, and workplace!

Feel free to follow me on YouTube and Instagram; Stabilising Serotonin for updates, blog posts and more downloadable content.

Examples for The White Space

It can be difficult at times to see the positives that are in your life, whether this is due to stress, mental illness or feeling generally low. In the beginning, I mentioned that we would talk about the smaller, seemingly trivial tasks that we would typically do out of habit. These can be overlooked and should not be taken for granted.

On the next page are some categories and examples to help you generate your own ideas. You can start by writing one of the examples and relating it more to yourself. The more personal it is to you, the more you will connect with the exercise.

For example, 'I walk the dog' should be changed to 'I walk *insert dog name here*'. Or 'I text my friend every day' should be changed to 'I text *insert your friend's name here*'.

Categories for examples:

Memories

Achievements / Accomplishments

People and Pets

All The Small Things

- I had a great holiday to _____
- I went to a _____ concert / I went to the _____ festival and seen _____
- I had a great day trip to _____
- I met _____
- I had a fun day when I _____.
- I love watching the movie _____.
- My favourite band / artist _____ cheers me up when I am down.
- I remember my first job at _____.
- I was in fits of laughter when _____.
- I have my favourite photograph from _____.
- I remember the time I stayed up late to _____.
- _____ makes me laugh so much!
- I spent the whole day _____ and it was great!
- I miss _____ but my best memories is when we _____.

- I responded to a situation calmly / managed a tough situation.
- I finished a course in _____.
- I spoke up for something I believed in.
- I passed my _____ exam.
- I listened to someone when they needed to talk.
- I cooked _____ for the first time.
- I've learned from my own mistakes.
- I did a random act of kindness.
- I make my own decisions.
- I hit a savings goal / I don't have any debt.
- I donated to the charity _____ / I did charity work for _____.
- I faced my fear of _____ and did _____.
- I am proud of myself!

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- I speak to ____ on a daily / weekly / monthly basis.
 - I have a good relationship with my mum / dad / sibling.
 - I have great friends.
 - I have a loving boyfriend / girlfriend.
 - I have a great support network.
 - I have my care team including my ____.
 - I get on great with my colleagues / peers.
 - I have a good relationship with my boss / teacher.
 - I have my pet called ____.
 - I remember that time when my pet ____.
 - I don't speak to my family, but I know that's the best way for me.
 - According to my friend ____, I am ____ (ask your friends what they think!)
 - I remember my amazing childhood friend / pet ____.

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- I got out of bed today.
 - I showered today.
 - I took a self-care day.
 - I looked after myself by ____.
 - I said no to something/someone.
 - I forgive myself.
 - I kept going when I wanted to quit.
 - I am alive.
 - I am healthy.
 - I ate today / I stayed I hydrated today.
 - I prioritised myself before others.
 - I gave myself space when I needed it.
 - I have learned to love myself.
 - I know tomorrow is coming.