



Mental Health for creative freelancers



Mental Health For Creative Freelancers ©2022

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Mental Health For Creative Freelancers

All stories written by Edward Ross

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INTRODUCTION

IT'S TAKEN A GLOBAL PANDEMIC and barely-precedented upheaval to notice that the most important contributions to society do not necessarily come from those who are the best rewarded. Despite the vast cultural industries built upon the work of creators, those who do the actual creative work 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 the 'before times' of 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 creators; and *c)* we need you to keep creating. Sincerely. When you create, you make the world a better, more inspiring place. We could really use that right now.

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
2022



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



First thing's first: planning! Look at your incomes 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.



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.



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!

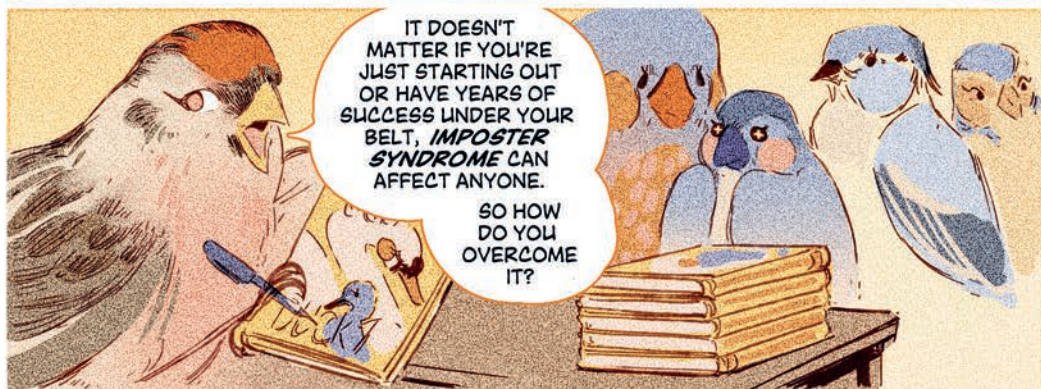


When you're ready, start looking to the future. Worried about sick days? Consider sickness insurance or setting aside money for rainy days. And the sooner you start paying into a pension, the better!



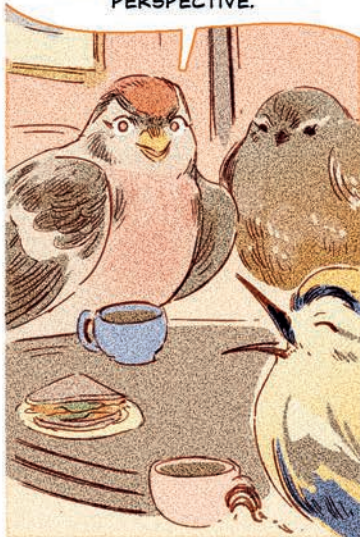
The reality is, it can take time to build up your artistic business, and some years will be harder than others. But by planning ahead and taking care with your time and money, you can start to alleviate some of that stress.





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

Art by Graham Johnson

"... Having read your manuscript '*Hedge & Hedgeability*' we regret to inform you that it is not the right fit for us at this time..."

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...

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!

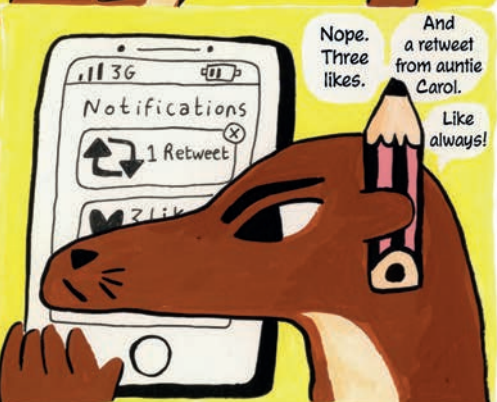
Exactly!
Rejections are often
about things other than
the quality of the work.

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!





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.



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.



If social media is damaging your mental health, consider setting limits.

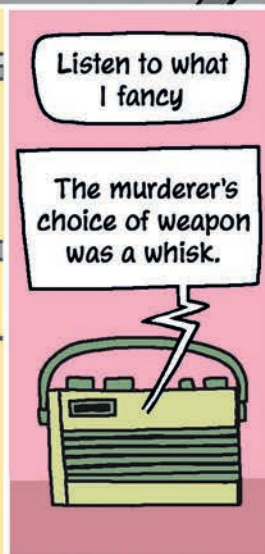
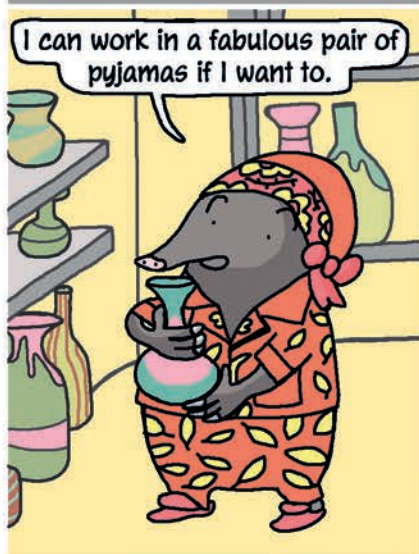
You could set up separate professional and personal accounts, take a break from social media...

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.





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?!

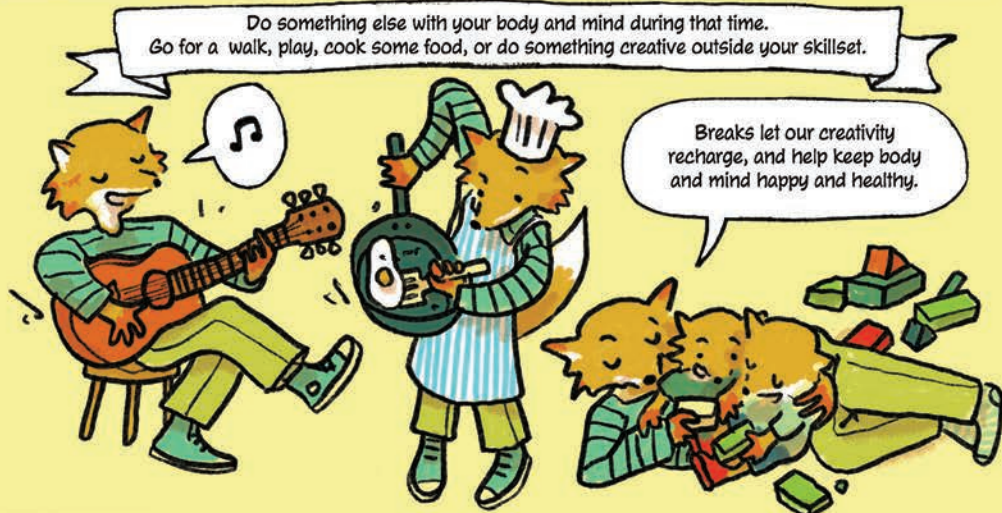
STEP 1

Create separation
between work and
home life.



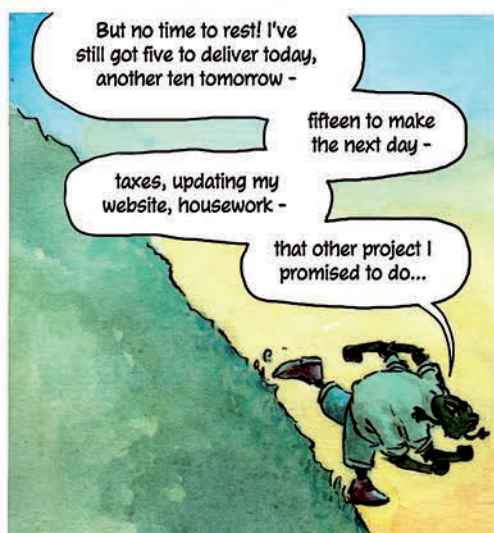
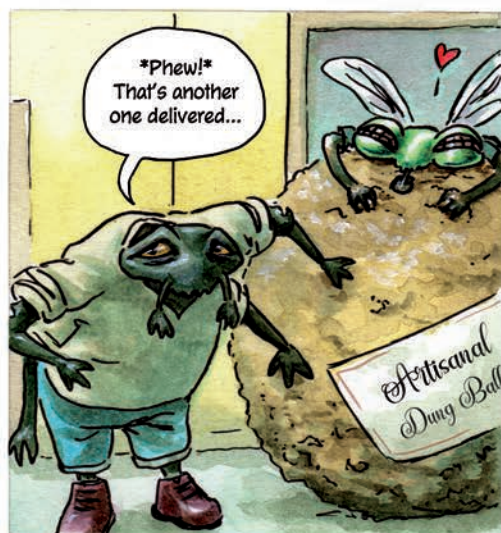
A separate working space,
even just a corner of your room,
can work wonders to keep your
responsibilities separate.

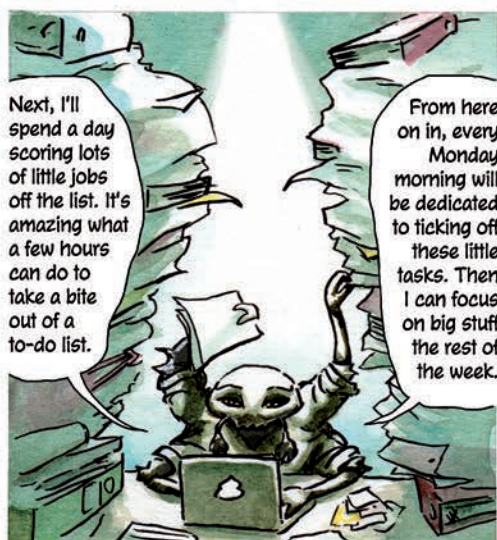
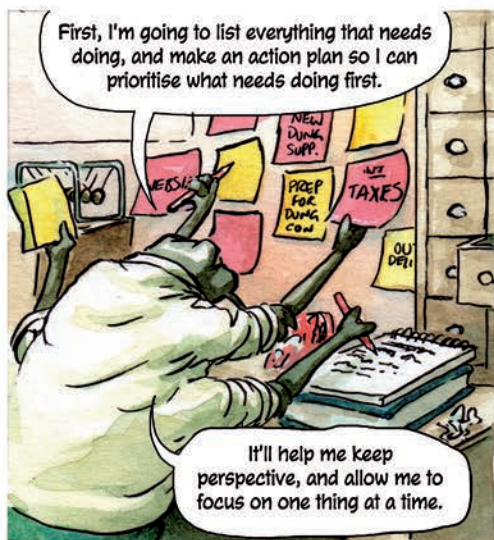


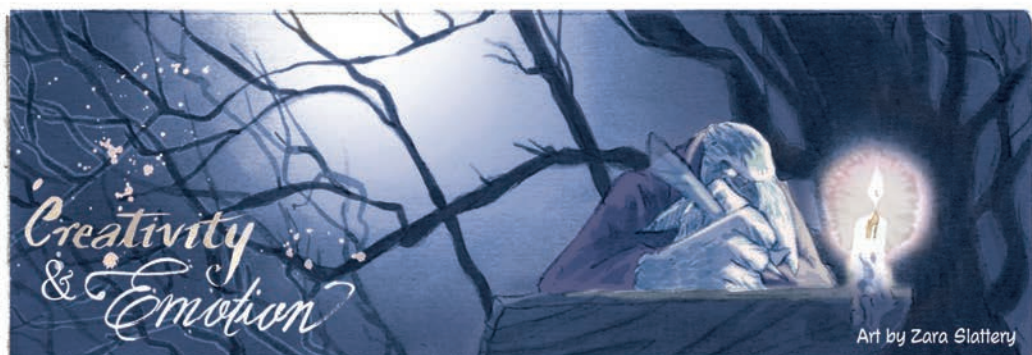



FEELING OVERWHELMED

ART BY
HANNAH
BERRY



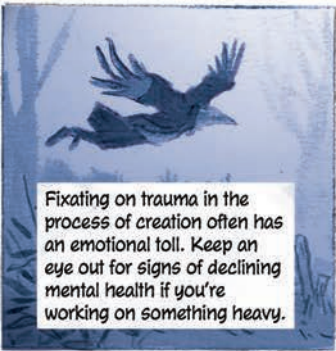







Many artists channel their emotions into their creativity. It can be an amazing way to process our feelings, and can help us make art that resonates with others.

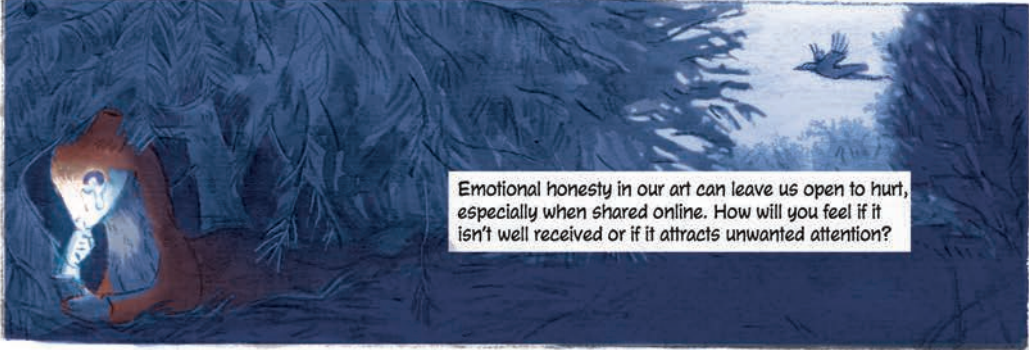
But there's a dark side to all this...




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.



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 HA HA HA HA

CREATIVE BLOCK

art by NORM KONYU



FIRST, YA GOTTA BE
KIND TO YOURSELF.
OVERWORK CAN
GRIND CREATIVITY
TO A HALT.

GET SOME *SLEEP*
HAVE SOME *FUN*,
GO *OUTDOORS*,
OR *CATCH UP* WITH
SOME *FRIENDS*!



TAKING TIME AWAY WILL
FEED YOUR CREATIVITY
AND GIVE YOUR MIND A
CHANCE TO WORK AT
THE BLOCK BEHIND THE
SCENES.

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?

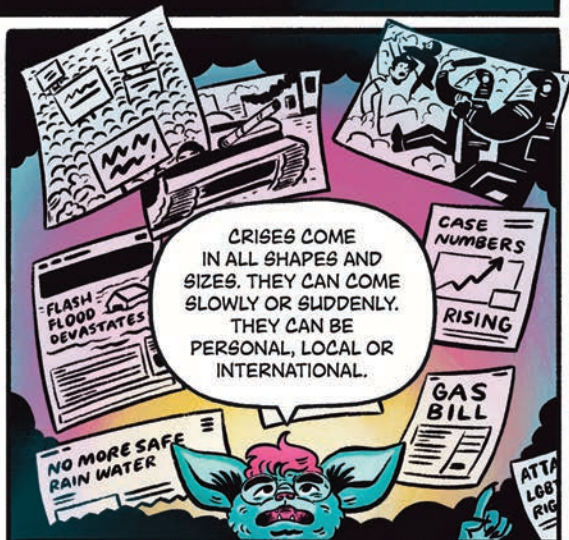
WORKING
THIS OUT
CAN BE THE
START OF
THE
SOLUTION.

THANKS,
HERON!

CREATIVE
BLOCK--
UNBLOCKED!

UNBLOCKED
RIVER--
BLOCKED!





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.



IF YOU'RE FEELING HELPLESS, VOLUNTEERING A LITTLE TIME EACH WEEK TO REAL-WORLD EFFORTS IS INFINITELY MORE USEFUL THAN ONLINE ACTIVISM.



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

COMICS20

for a 20% discount on your first year

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

As a member, whether you are just starting out or already established, we'll help you with unlimited advice, contract vetting, helplines and professional training, discounts on books, insurance and more.

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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