

ON HAPPINESS

*A*Mag lifestyle guru Lucille Howe on why colouring-in keeps you cool, calm and collected



I am back in Grade 2 at primary school and Mrs Osbourne has a surprise for 'rest time' – a stack

of psychedelic colouring books, full of kaleidoscopic mandala designs. I'm especially thrilled because I have the Rolex of art sets; the Caran d'Ache watercolour pencil mega-tin. Pencils that are Swiss, sharpened and ready to lose their virginity.

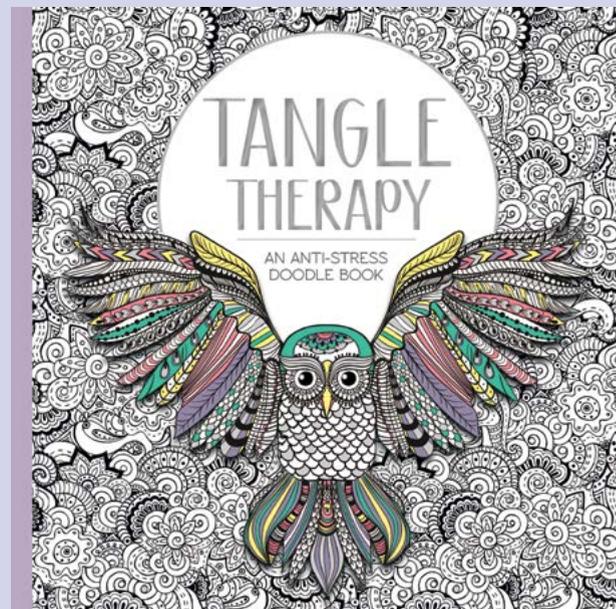
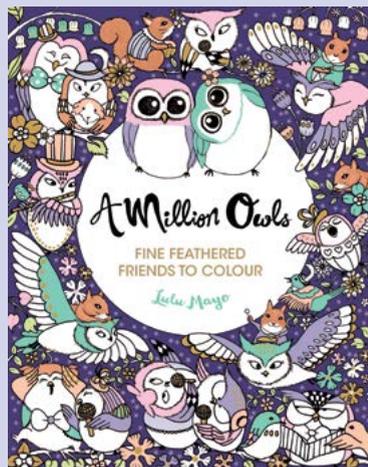
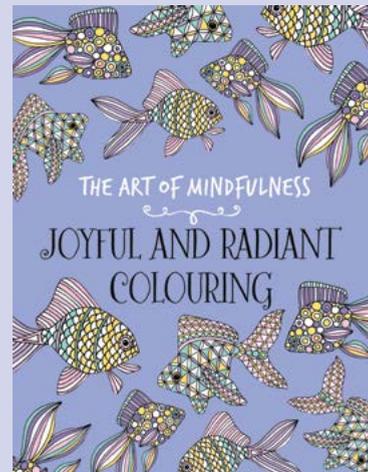
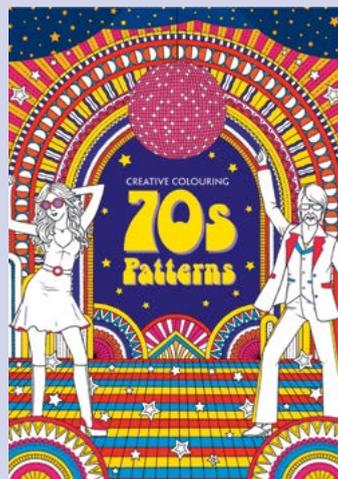
Boy, did my BFF want to be me that afternoon. I was Gandhi, I was Mother Teresa, I was Picasso! I'd never been so Zen, so rainbow-bright or so focused on staying inside the lines.

Today, too many years to count later, that set is missing the pink and the blue, the dog chewed the black to pieces, and I haven't done anything 'inside the lines' – metaphorically speaking – for about 20 years.

But colouring books are the latest weapon in the fight against anxiety and depression, and we can largely thank a UK publishing house called Michael O'Mara for that. Scan their shelves and you will find titles like *Joyful and Radiant Colouring*, *Tangle Therapy* and *The Golden Ratio Colouring Book*. There's also *The Stoner's Colouring Book*, billed as, 'featuring grams upon ounces of mind-altering illustrations... a must-have for the cannabis connoisseur'

Philippa Wingate, the editorial director, says: "We also did *Colour in Kate* [the Duchess of Cambridge]. We sourced pictures of her, places she's been, on her honeymoon etc. Then we did *Colour in One Direction*."

If you're not sure how much calm can come from turning Harry Styles a deep purple, there's a blog that will tell you called inthemidstofmadness.wordpress.com. It



rates a whole range of colouring books in impressive detail, from the stitching quality of the spine, to the biography of the illustrator and the paper stock – genius!

"Colouring books work like other mindfulness techniques, such as yoga and meditation," says clinical psychologist Craig Sawchuk. "Colouring can help slow down heart rate and respiration, loosen muscles and stimulate the brain. [It] has a grounding effect that can be amplified with deliberate focus on the process — the gentle pressing of the crayon or pencil on the page, the texture of the paper across

your hand, and the soft sounds of the colouring instrument moving back and forth in a rhythmic fashion."

An hour colouring, and stress and anxiety are now drowned out by a spike in my OCD, as I micro-manage colour coordination and the kind of staying within borders that would make US President Donald Trump very pleased. But if I give up on perfection – a lesson in itself – I find I've enjoyed an arty meditation, and have a slightly whacky interpretation of a peacock to boot.