

12 Week Gratitude Journal



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“I urge you to please notice when you are happy, and exclaim or murmur or thank at some point, ‘If this isn’t nice, I don’t know what is.’”

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

WHY GRATITUDE JOURNALING?

There is a huge amount of research around gratitude and how helpful it is for our mental well-being. Examples of how gratitude is helpful include: building more positive relationships, reduces depression, increases resilience, demonstrates improvement in physical health (as correlated to an increase in exercise and go to the doctor which leads to better physical health outcomes), reduces internal toxic emotions (increases empathy, decreases depression), and improves quality and quantity of sleep (to name just a few research findings).

How so? Gratitude journaling activates two different parts of the brain, the hypothalamus (stress regulator) and the ventral tegmental area (the reward system activator). So at the same time we are reducing stress, we are creating the sensation of winning a (little, tiny) lottery by increasing serotonin and dopamine (which is why some gratitude researchers call gratitude a “natural antidepressant.”

WHY THIS TYPE OF GRATITUDE JOURNALING?

Probably the best known researcher studying the psychology of gratitude is Robert Emmons. He runs GratitudeWorks at UC Davis, so is obviously pro-gratitude. But some of his work showed a diminished effect of gratitude journaling over time when done daily, so many therapists suggest gratitude journaling once or twice a week so the brain doesn't “habituate” to the practice.

Like I love ginger cookies. But if I had them every day, the theory is that I would eventually not get the same kick out of them. Though FWIW, I would be down to attempt this experiment.

Ahem. Anyway.

I've found this to be true of my clients who did daily gratitude journaling. They kept it up for a month or so, noticed a difference, but fell off after some time. So his findings make total sense, cookies aside.

But research also demonstrates, that daily practice over time makes healthy habits more likely to “stick.” That’s because deliberative motivational processes is a secondary system process, and doing things daily makes them an automatic (primary system) process. Which is to say, when we create the pathway for something being “the thing we do” it occurs naturally, rather than the thing we have to force.

So how would we a daily AND long-term benefit from gratitude journaling? I think nerdy thoughts, and was thinking on that one when I had an idea.

What if the focus of our gratitude journaling every week was a different topic? The gratitude practice is daily and continuous, but with different topics the whiney toddler brain doesn't break in with “I'm booooooored” after a few weeks and the benefit dissipates.

And THEN what if we built the questions to be more reflexive as the weeks go on? Focusing on our own inner wellness work and healthy relational patterns? Then it sets a reminder of everything we are doing to be and do better.

So I'm starting with this. A 12 week program. If people dig it, I may expand it out to 52 weeks. But y'all are my test run. So tell me what you think.

Gratitude journaling activates two parts of the brain that help alleviate stress and increase a sense of happiness.

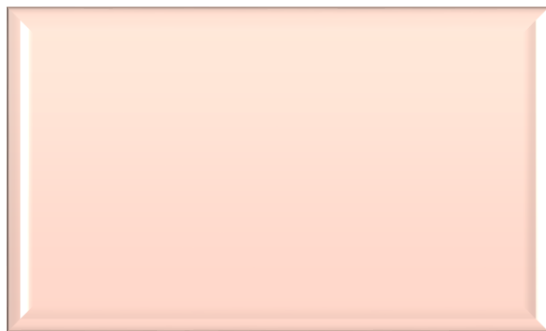
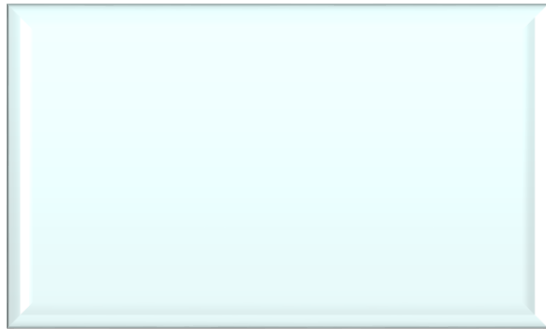
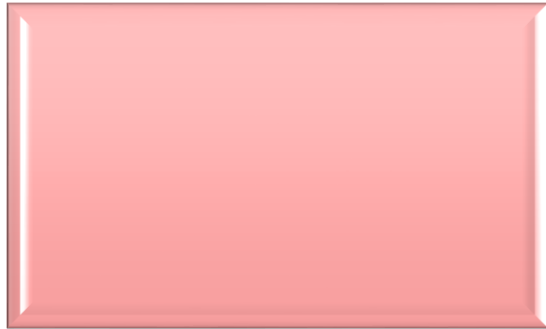
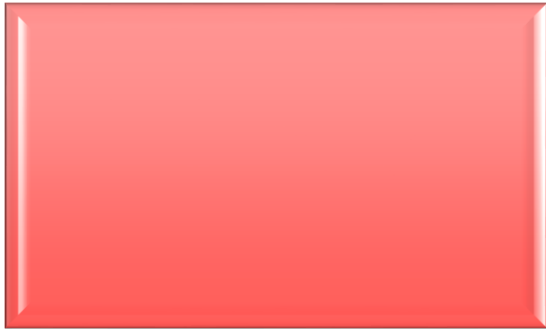
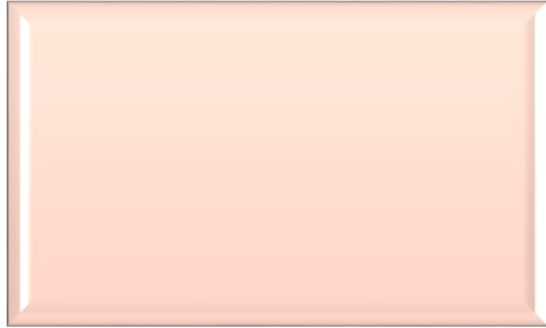
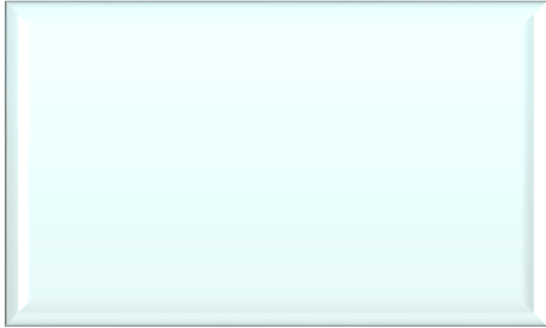
None of this is to say that things can't be awful, and work needs to be done to make them unlawful. Gratitude doesn't replace social justice movements, advocacy, boundaries, and voice.

It's about re-aligning ourselves with what is important. A remembrance of what we are fighting for, if we are in the midst of such a fight (and we kinda almost always are, right?)

Keeping our brains healthy and holding center is a radical act of self-care. And you will see as you continue through these exercises, that this type of gratitude work is not just "I'm grateful for my morning coffee" (although I am 100% behind being grateful for morning coffee). Positive Psychology isn't designed to lull us into cultural obedience, but to help us stay strong to keep fighting whatever we need to fight for.

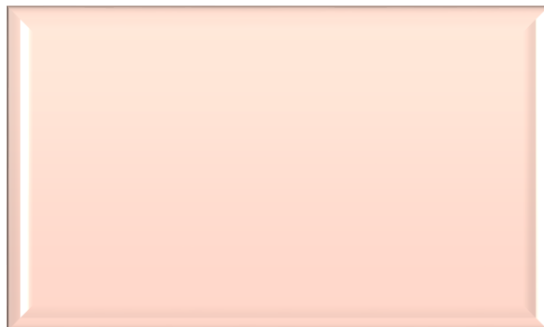
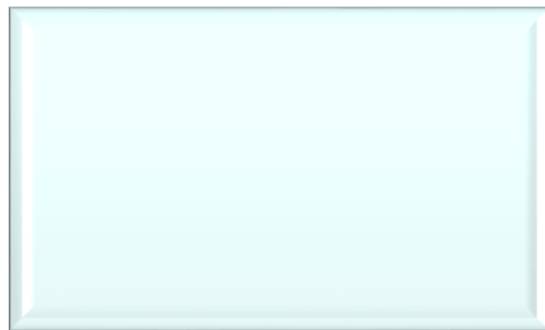
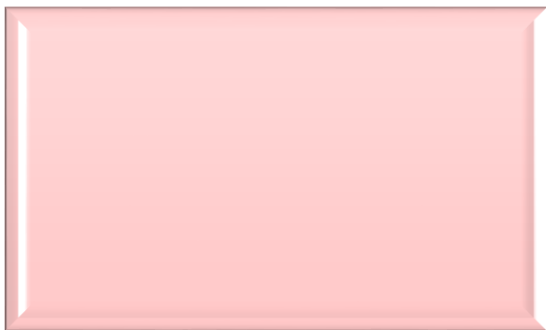
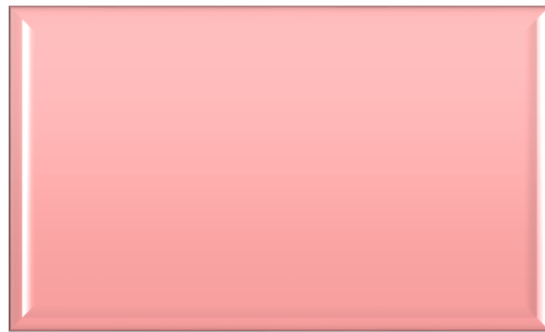
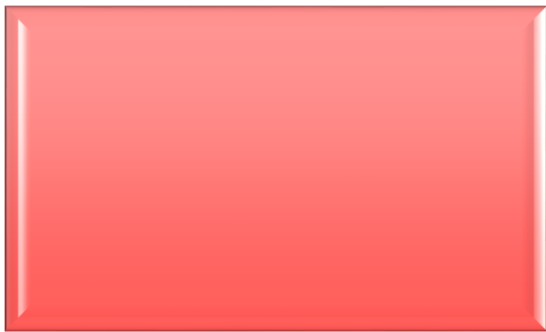
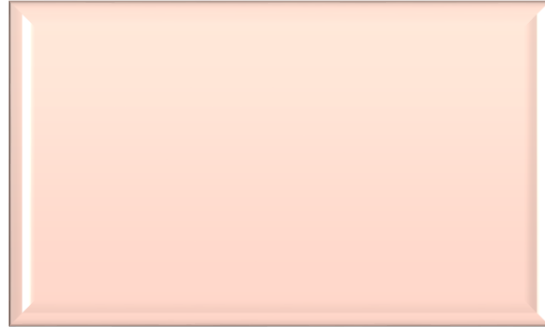
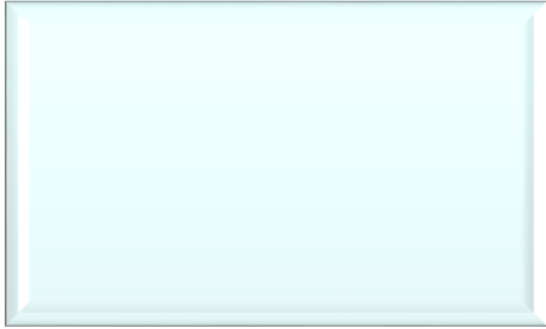
WEEK ONE

The small, daily comforts I am grateful for.



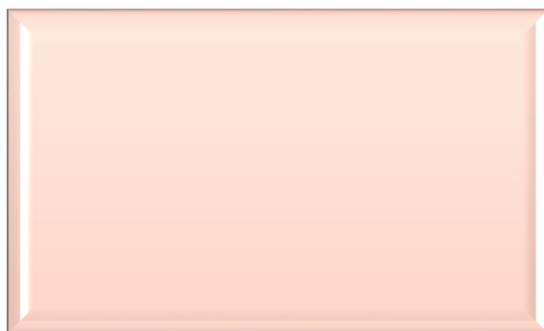
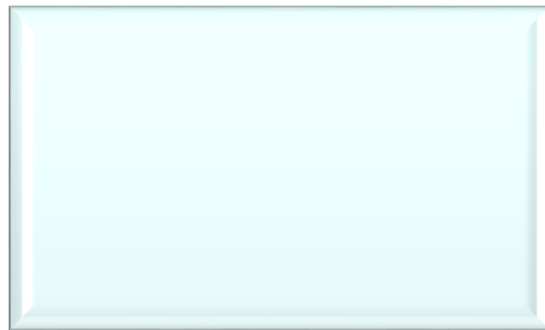
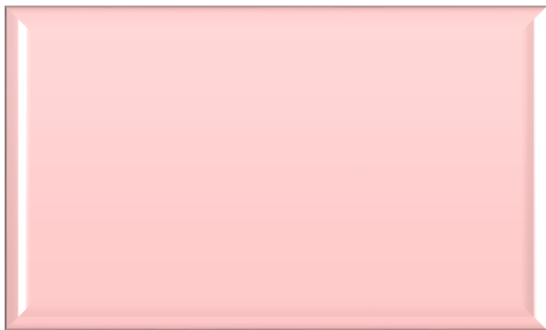
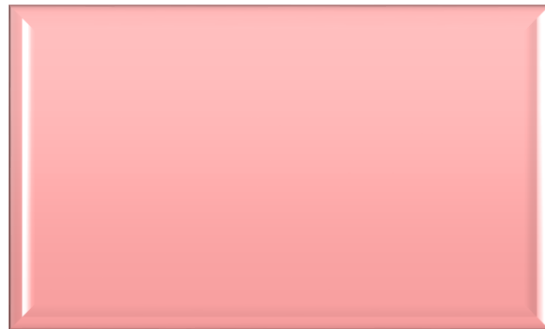
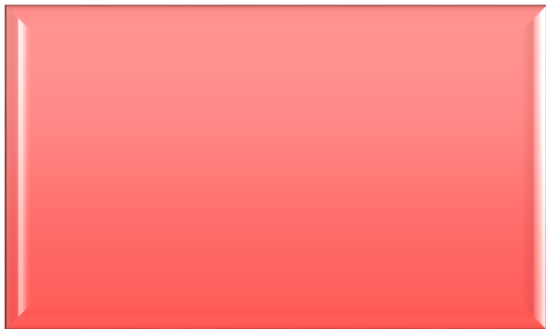
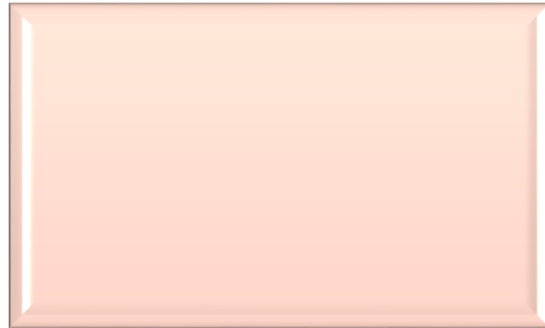
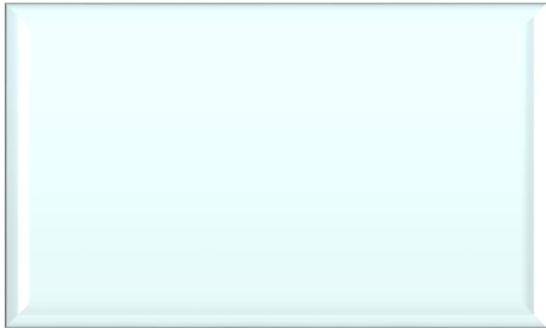
WEEK TWO

The material items that make my life easier that I am grateful for.



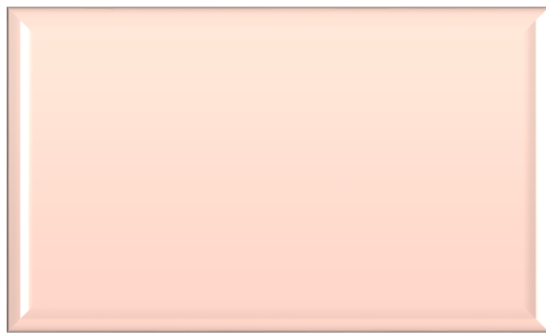
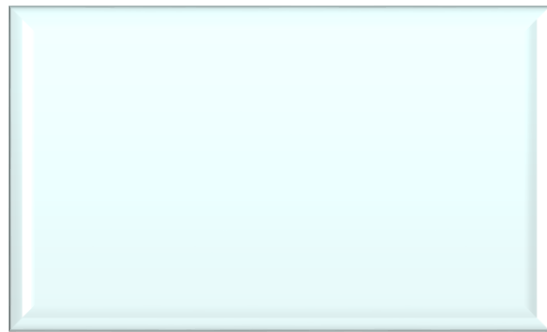
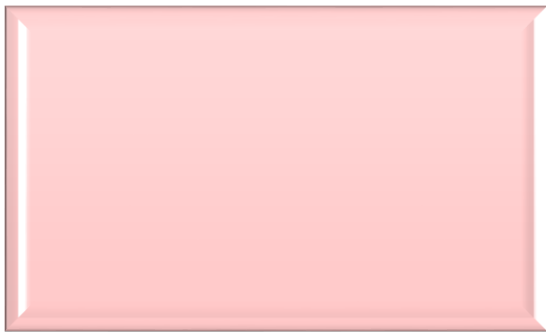
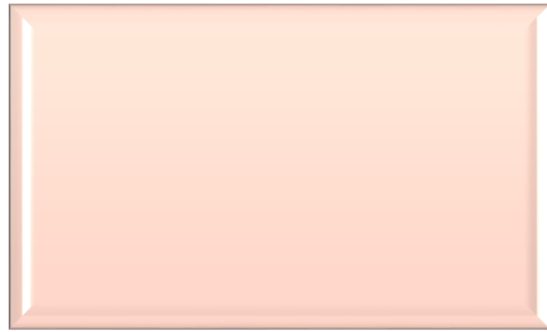
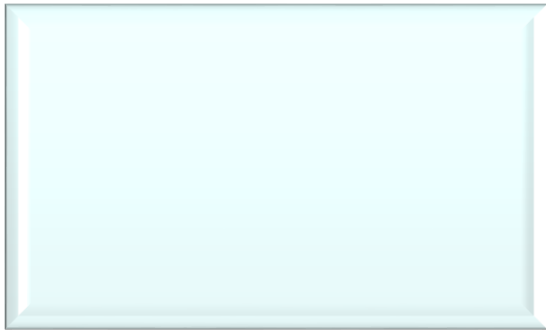
WEEK THREE

The beauty in the world that I am grateful for.



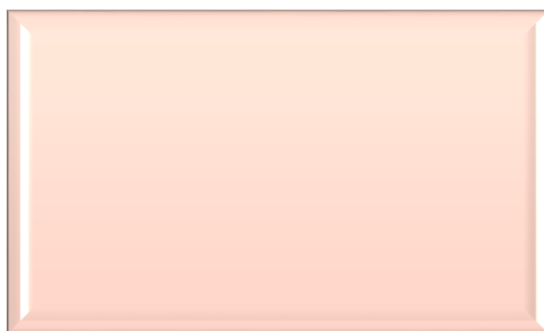
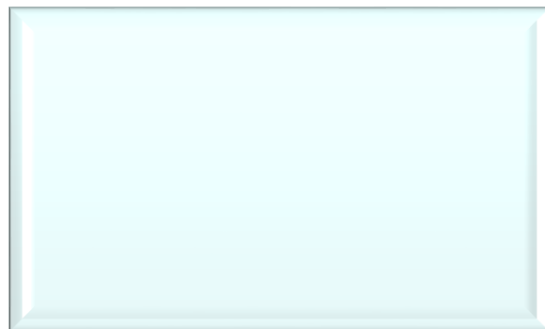
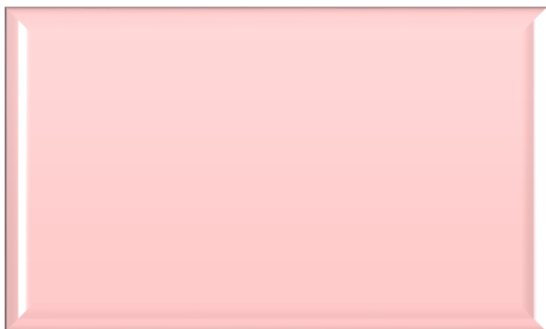
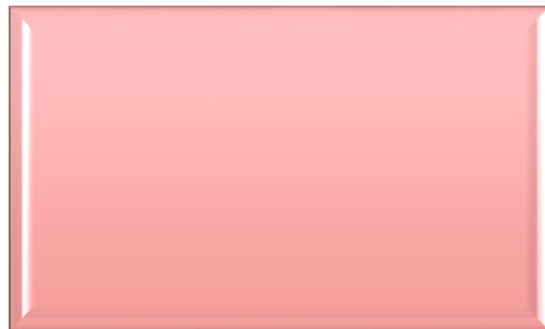
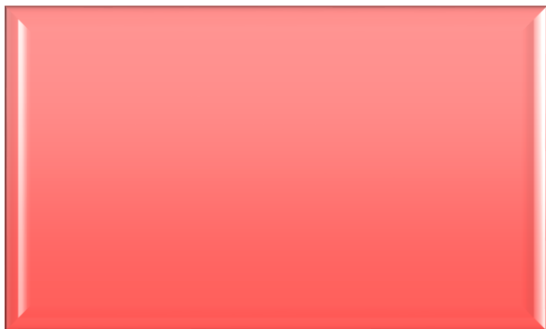
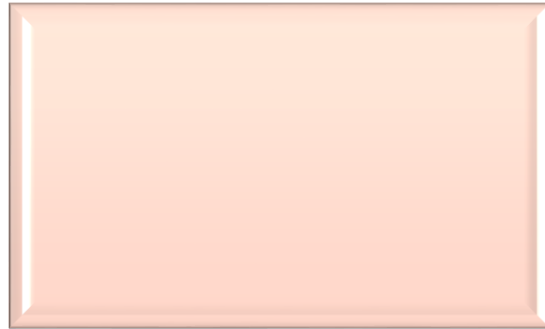
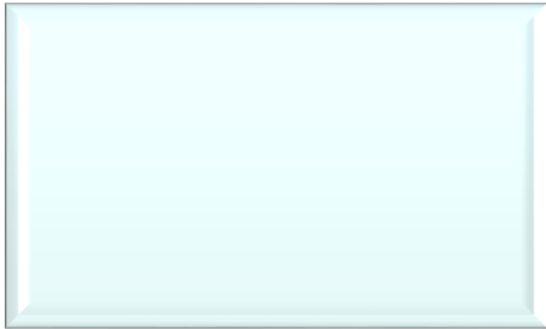
WEEK FOUR

The kindness of others that I am grateful for.



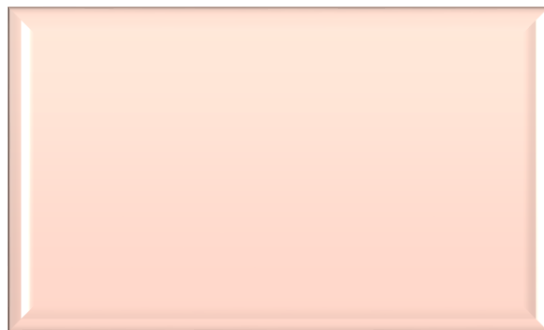
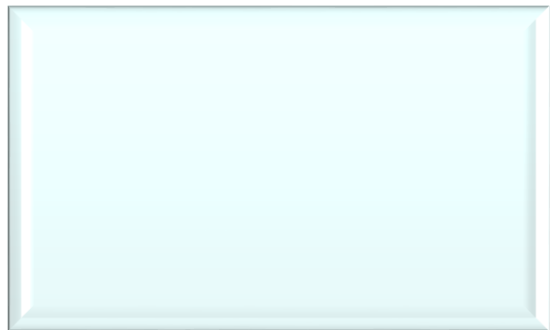
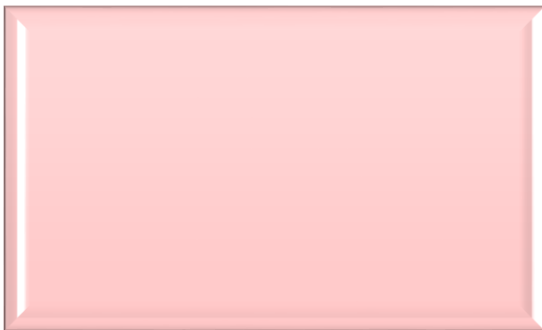
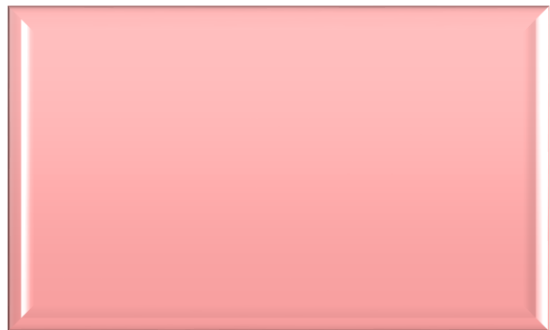
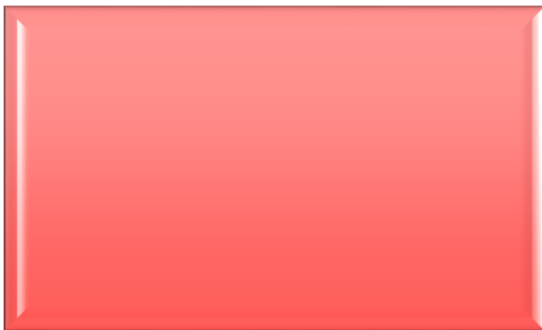
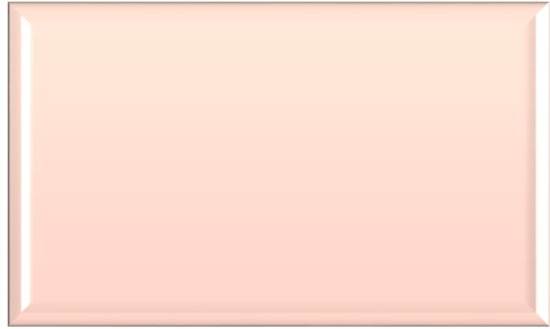
WEEK FIVE

The healthy stress management skills I have that I am grateful for.



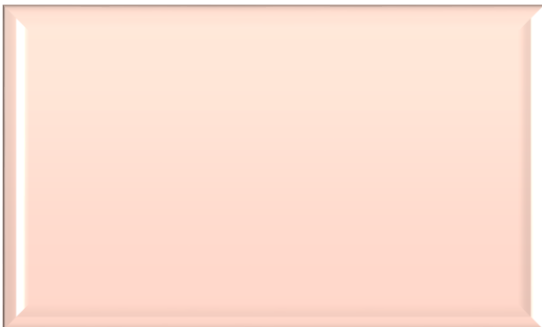
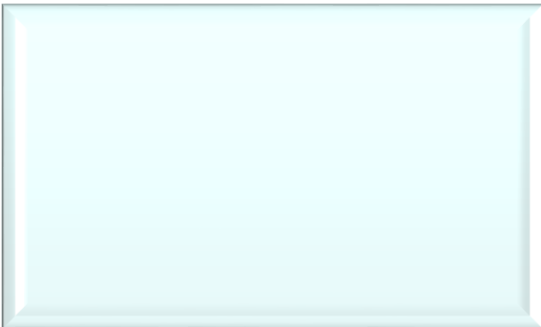
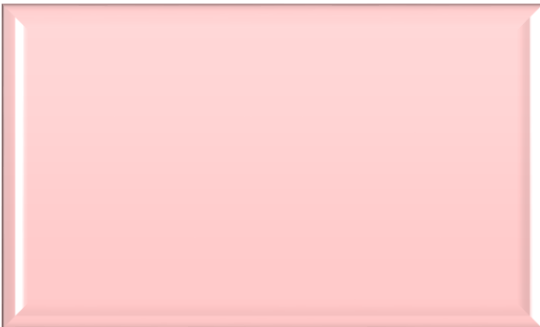
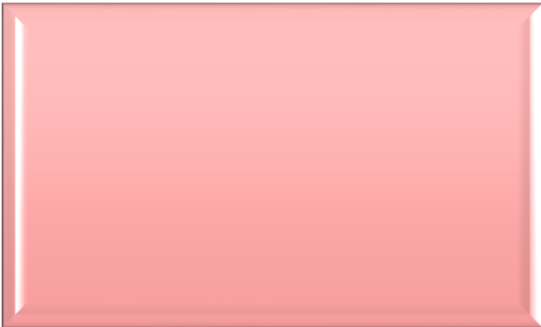
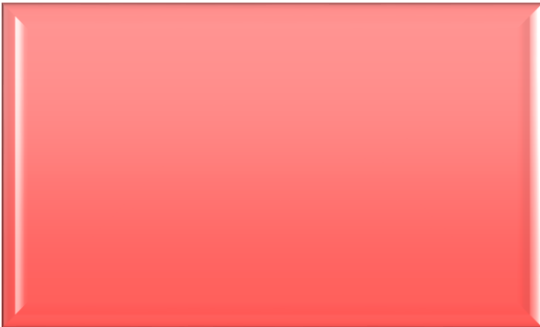
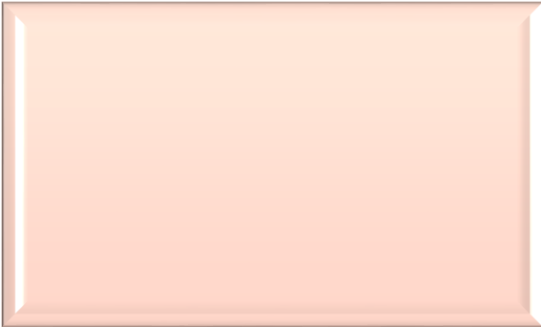
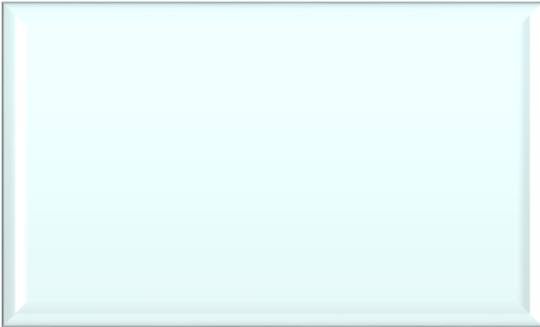
WEEK SIX

The new skills I learned that I am grateful for.



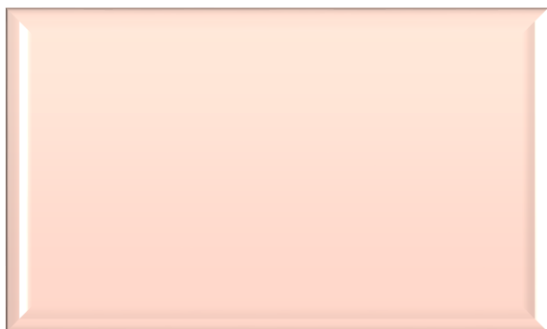
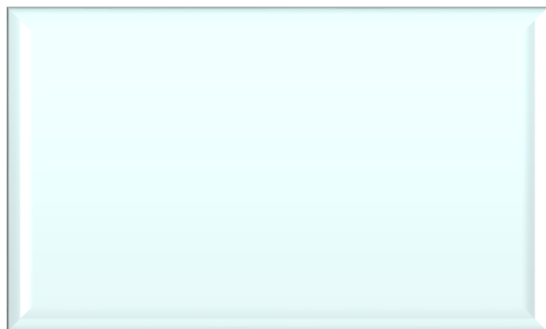
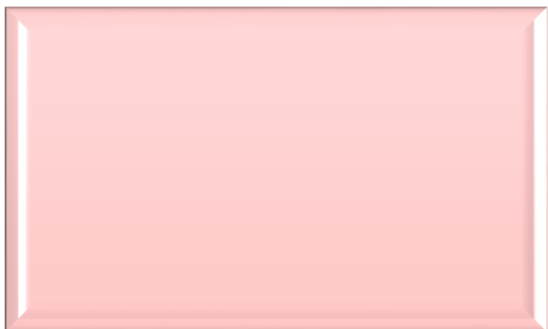
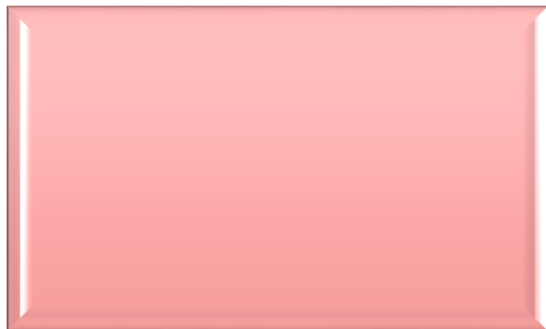
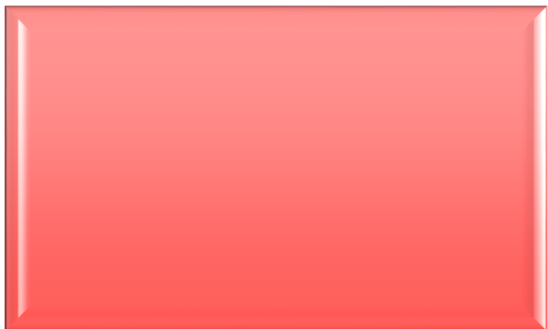
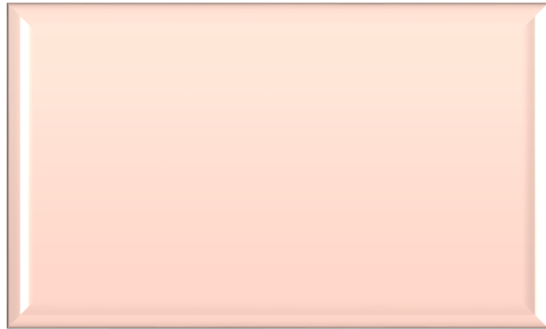
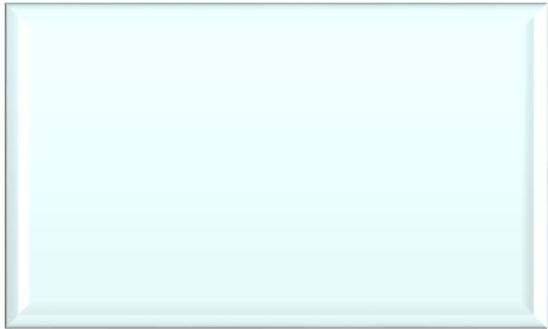
WEEK SEVEN

The tasks that I accomplished that I am grateful for.



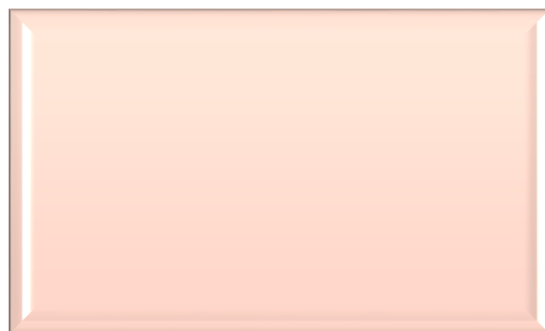
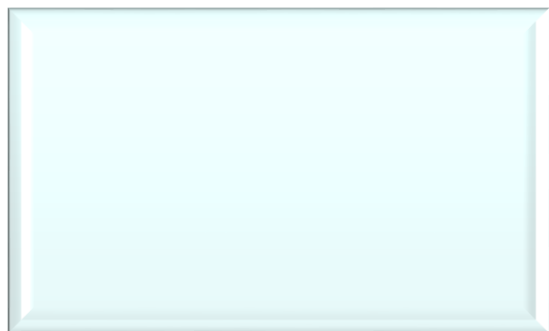
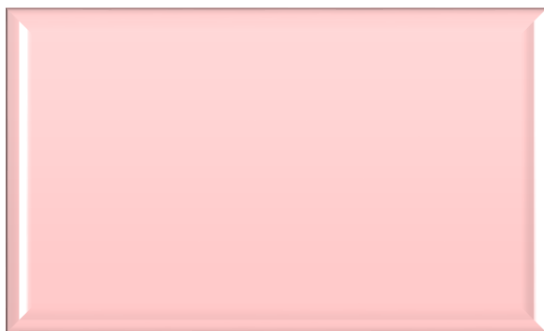
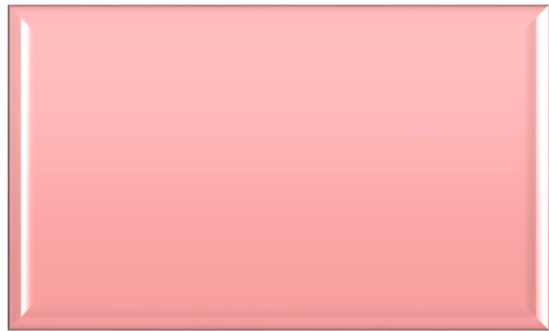
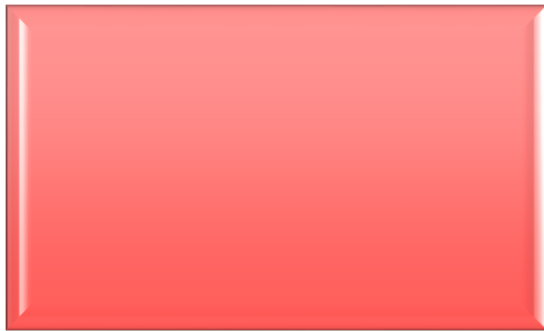
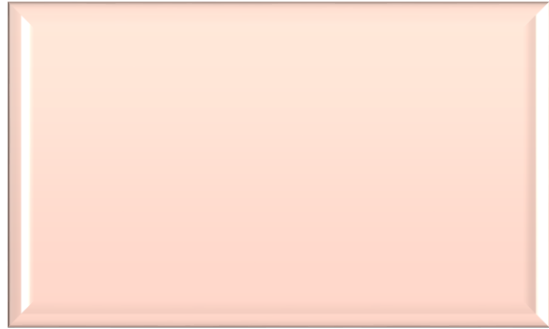
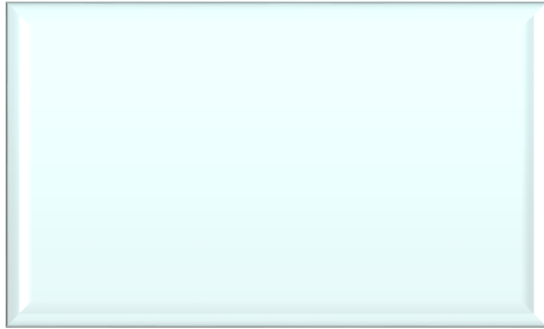
WEEK EIGHT

The future plans that I created that I am grateful for.



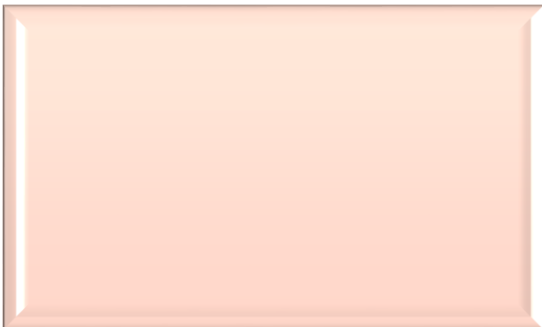
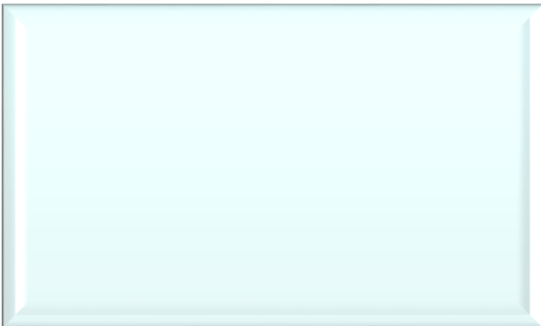
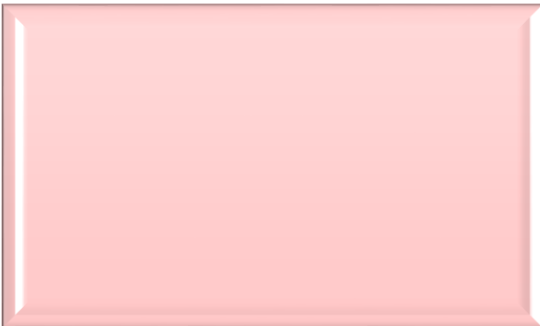
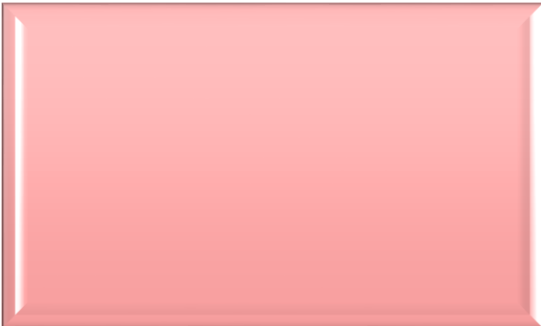
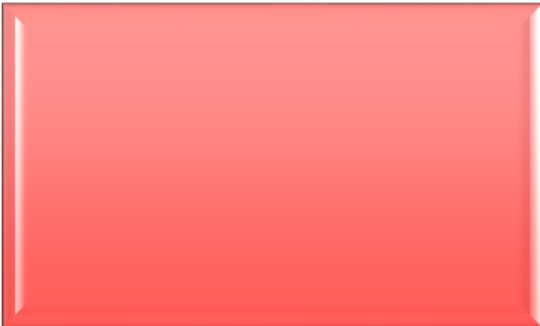
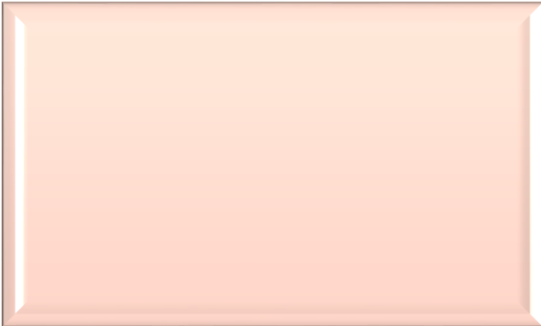
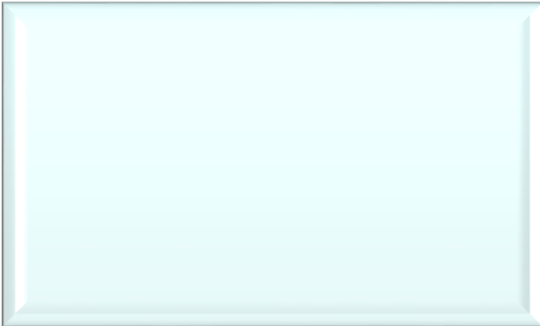
WEEK NINE

The ways I demonstrated compassion for others that I am grateful for.



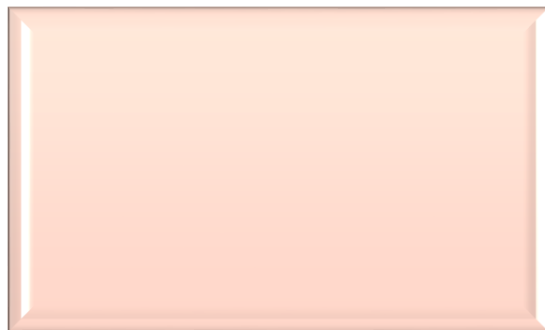
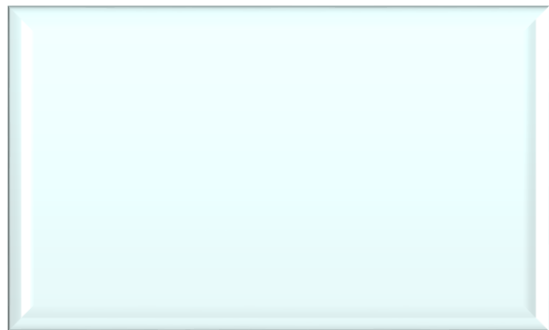
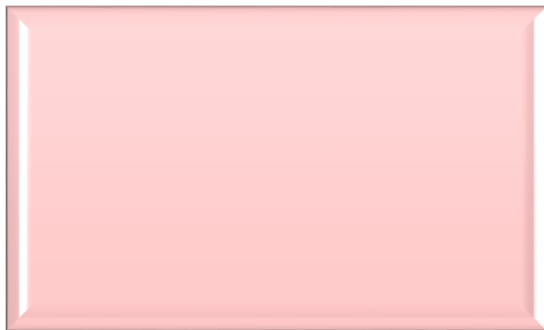
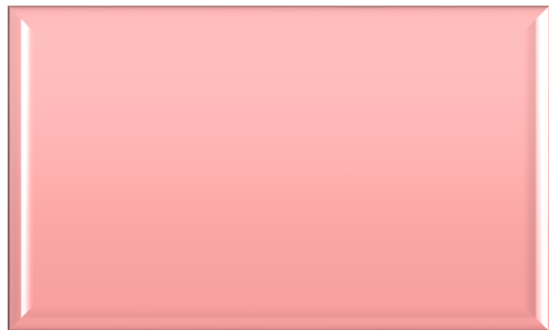
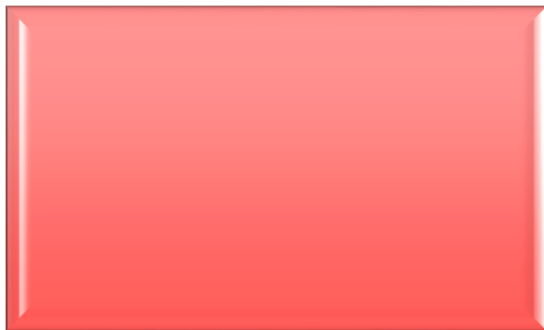
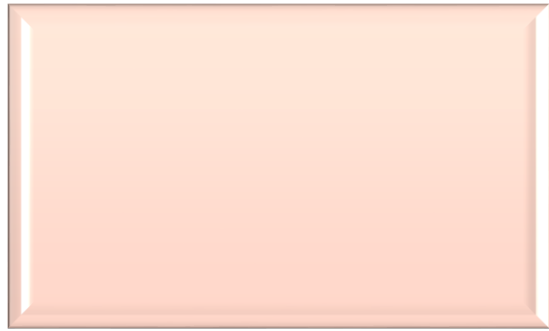
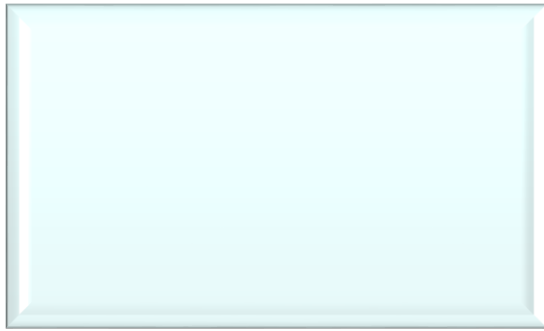
WEEK TEN

The self-care strategies that I utilized that I am grateful for.



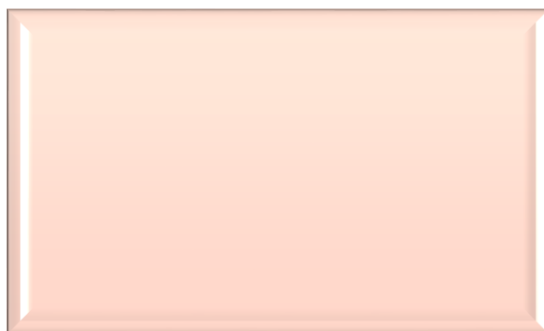
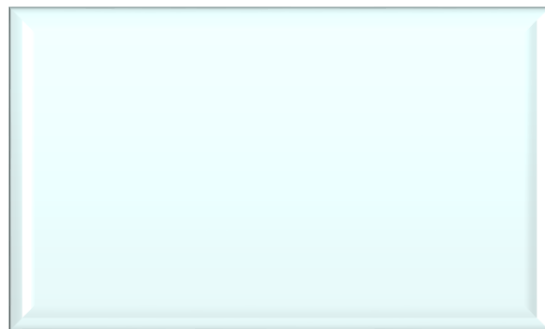
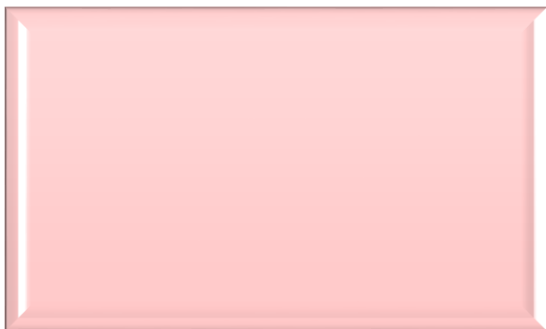
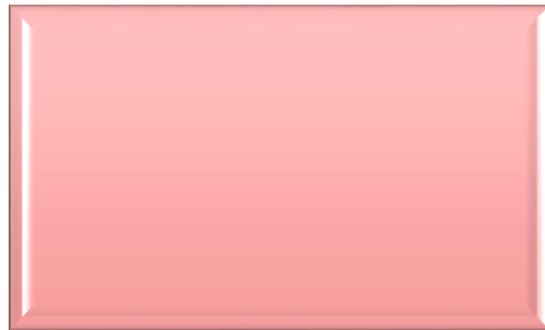
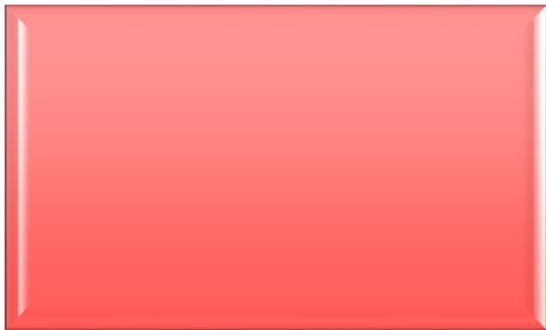
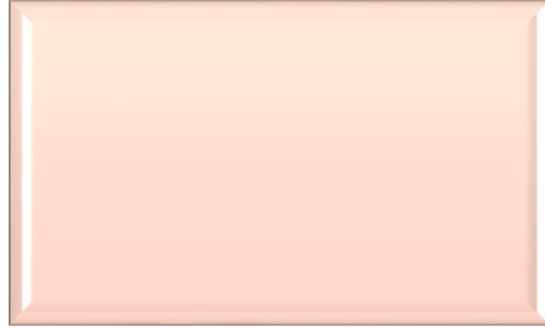
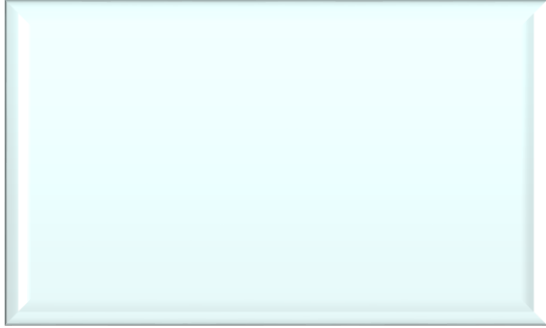
WEEK ELEVEN

The positive cognitive shifts (thinking changes) that I am grateful for.



WEEK TWELVE

The healthy boundaries that I have developed that I am grateful for.



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