



POSITIVE SCHEMA COACHING

Positive Schema Toolkit

— with Dr Rob Szymanek, Ph.D.

Schema Coaching Techniques to Help Bring More Calm,
Creativity and Joy to Your Music-Making.

About the Toolkit

Here are some Positive Schema Coaching techniques and approaches that can be integrated into playing, singing or composing.

They have been designed in collaboration with psychologists. The aim is to help improve wellbeing, enjoyment, creativity and even technical facility in music over time.

The techniques function to meet core emotional needs and cultivate positive schemas and healthy modes, which are key to more fulfilling work in music. You can read more about the background theory in the accompanying document.

There are three categories of techniques: **Relational Tools**, **Healthy Adult Tools**, and **Happy Child Tools**. I have offered one from each as an example.



What Works for You?

If you want to try these out, choose what feels right for you, and feel free to adapt it to suit you better. If something doesn't feel good, you can stop. If you don't want to do any of it, that's fine too. These techniques are not the be-all and end-all, but they could be helpful if you like the sound of them.

If you do try them out, see if there are any positive effects on your playing. That is a sign that something's helpful. You might also wish to gently observe how that positivity shows up for you:

Positive Thoughts

What helpful thoughts are present?

What beliefs feel supportive right now?

How has your mindset shifted for the better?

Positive Feelings

Where do you notice comfort in your body?

What pleasant sensations are present?

What positive emotions do you notice?

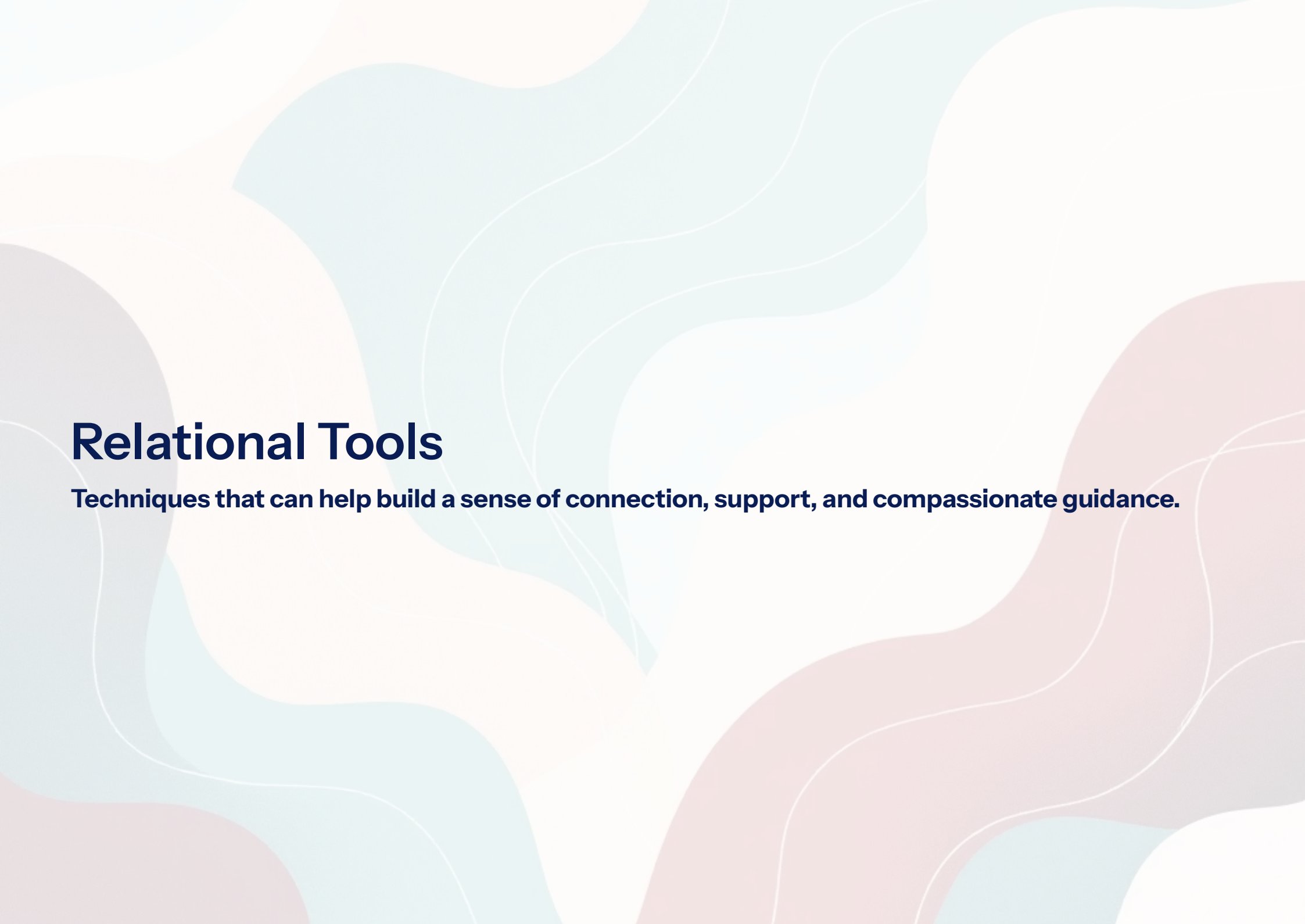
Positive Playing

What sounds good to you?

What feels easier or more natural?

What are you enjoying about your music?

Anything that doesn't make you feel good or isn't helpful, you can put it to one side.



Relational Tools

Techniques that can help build a sense of connection, support, and compassionate guidance.

A Friendly Face in the Audience

In this coaching model, emotional needs such as feeling **Emotional Nurturance and Unconditional Support** are seen as important to helping us feel free and able to express ourselves through our music. This can help us feel more fulfilled or satisfied in our work.

This technique aims to meet that need through positive imagery.

It's about imagining practising or performing (or composing!) to a welcoming, friendly, encouraging, and supportive presence. It can help our nervous system, muscles, and mind relax, ready for making music.

I often think of my friend Jean sitting behind me as I practise the piano. I notice I feel more calm and free just thinking of her presence. I think it's because she's always been so supportive. She shows she is listening, never focuses on my mistakes, and encourages me to express myself as I wish.

Plus, she has a friendly smile that helps me feel at ease. It's interesting to notice how my focus and creativity improve just imagining her and others sitting on the sofa behind me, listening.

Who could be that friendly face for you?

Someone from your family, from work, or just out and about? A good friend?

Someone online? A famous person, or a character from a film?

You actually don't need to know them. Just anyone (or anything) that helps you feel at ease.

If you like, you can also have a go at imagining their comforting presence in the background as you practise and perform.

You might like to reflect on some nice things they'd say to you or you'd like to hear from them.

Does it have an effect on your music? See what you notice.

Healthy Adult Tools

Techniques that can help cultivate stability, compassion and mindful balance in your practice.



Be Your Own Good Teacher

Just as we might imagine playing to a supportive person, we can learn to be that person for ourselves. We can cultivate the part of us that's like a **'Good Teacher' to our 'Inner Student'**.

To me, that 'Good Teacher' is someone who really nurtures us — as a whole person — along our path:

A kind observer, gently noticing how we're showing up, with lots of space to talk about what we're thinking and feeling.

Validating and understanding how we feel, especially through challenges and difficulties. Helping our experience make sense so we don't feel alone.

Soothing and consoling when we're upset.

Shielding us from unhelpful or harmful criticism, pressure, or mistreatment.

Encouraging us to express ourselves, explore, try things out, lean into our preferences, and helping us design our own path.

Guiding us at a pace that feels comfortable. Someone who tells us when we're off track, but always in a kind way.

We can cultivate these qualities in a variety of ways. Again, one way is through positive imagery.

So, how can we be that Good Teacher to ourselves? What do you think? Here are some ideas:

Through Our Posture

How would a Good Teacher come across in their body?

Tall? Open? Relaxed?

Can you take on that posture at any point in your practice?

How We Pace Ourselves

How would a Good Teacher guide and pace your learning in order to really nurture your musicianship?

Depending on the situation, maybe they'd help you focus and nudge you along, or help you relax or take a break.

What pace feels good for you right now?

How We Talk To Ourselves

What positive or helpful things might a Good Teacher say?

Sometimes a simple 'well done' can be helpful. Or a recognition of any progress, no matter how small: "Bar 27 feels easier." "That is progress." What helpful things might you say to yourself?

Using our imagination in these ways can help us meet a variety of emotional needs, including **Emotional Nurturance and Unconditional Support, Intrinsic Worth, Autonomy, and Playfulness.**

I also use this technique myself. What I've found is that there are certain subtle changes of posture or pacing I can take on, or short phrases I can say to myself that induce more stability. It's like I'm becoming more of that 'Good Teacher' to myself in that moment.

For example, when I'm nervous in the heat of the moment, this technique can help me feel more assured and free. I like to:

Slightly open out in my posture and movements, activating that more grounded 'Good Teacher.'

Take a moment to pause just a little at the ends of phrases. It seems to give me some space to gather my thoughts.

Say things to myself like: "You can go at a comfortable pace" or "It's normal to make mistakes" or "This is a journey, not the end."

Give it a Try

How could you be a Good Teacher to yourself? What does it mean to you? How can you embody it or take on that mindset? What's the impact on your music-making, on your experience of playing?



Happy Child Tools

Techniques can help access more playfulness, spontaneity, and joyful expression in music.

Tapping into Joy

What is it that you like or love about music? What brings you joy?

As we strive to produce, achieve and succeed, we can sometimes forget about our joy for music. I relate to that! For me, when I push my joy to the side, it can make the journey of musicianship more tiring, more of an endurance test. It also seems to hamper my creativity and personal expression.

So this technique is about consciously putting enjoyment at the forefront of our experience, bringing out some of our inner Happy Child quality. I think it not only helps to sustain motivation but can also help us relax in body and mind. This, in turn, can bring more fluidity to our movements, and free up our technical facility. It might also help us connect with the music in a new way.

Here are some reflective questions for you to explore:

What brings you joy in music? What lifts you up? What ignites your curiosity, interest or wonder? What do you find interesting? What do you like to play? How do you like to go about it?

Maybe joy has been put aside for a long time, so it feels hard to access. I also relate to that. If so, can you remember: what got you into this? What grabbed your attention all those years ago?

Or: how might a Happy Child show up and play music for you? How would they play? What would they like? Can you tap into some of that for yourself?

Here are a few ideas from myself and people I've worked with:

The sound itself. Instrumental timbres.

Melody, phrasing or structure of the music.

Harmonies, chord structures.

Pulse, rhythm and metre.

The touch or tactile aspects of playing.

Our felt sense: inner feelings and emotions.

Moving or dancing to the music.

Imagery: colours, shapes, scenes, landscapes, animals, people...

Connecting with mood, character or narrative.

The human connection: playing for or with other people.

Social, cultural or historical connections.

Personal aspirations or goals.

Amplifying the Good

As you play, see if you can keep tuning in to things you like about the music, kind of like you're amplifying it. Does it help your experience of the music or your playing in any way?

When we tap into joy like this, we can meet needs not only for **Playfulness and Spontaneity**, but also **Autonomy, Intrinsic Worth, and Emotional Nurturing and Unconditional Support**.

This can activate positive schemas, including positive beliefs about ourselves, our abilities, and our relationship with music. This might not only induce more wellbeing and fulfilment, but also help us practise and perform at our best.

Your Journey Forward

The ideas we've explored are a few entry points. It can take time to discover what truly resonates with your unique musicianship and personality. You can keep exploring.

Experiment & Adapt

Play with these ideas, twist them, and make them your own.

Notice Any Positive Shifts

As you incorporate these tools, take a moment to observe: What feels good? What helps? If it works, add it to your Toolkit.

If you'd like to explore these concepts further, feel free to get in touch.

Visit My Website:

www.feelgoodplaygreat.com

Get in Touch:

rob@feelgoodplaygreat.com