

RAS-DS

WORKBOOK

Version One

Module Two: Looking Forward

A FREE resource to support you in
driving your own mental health recovery



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY



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Suggested citation:

Hancock, N., Everett, G., Honey, A., & Scanlan, J. N. (2016). *Recovery Assessment Scale – Domains and Stages: Workbook. Version 1*. Sydney: The University of Sydney. Available from www.ras-ds.net.au.

~READ THIS FIRST~

Mental health recovery doesn't require reading textbooks full of medical mumbo-jumbo, or placing all your hope in a psychiatrist. In fact, one of the richest sources of knowledge on the subject is other people who have already experienced the same struggles and obstacles. Sure, learning how to wrangle a mental illness so it doesn't interfere with your life may take time and effort, but you are undoubtedly the best person for the job. Simply **wanting** to recover will make all the difference. If you choose to get in the driver's seat and take control, this workbook will be able to help you on your journey.

This workbook assumes only two things:

1. That you are on a mental health recovery journey
2. That you've already filled in the RAS-DS (Recovery Assessment Scale Domains and Stages) questionnaire

Depending on your scores in the questionnaire, some modules in this workbook may be more or less relevant for you at this moment. In order to keep things simple, this workbook has been divided into the same four sections as the RAS-DS. It's worth noting at this point that you don't need to read this entire workbook, or do it in order, either. For example, you may already have an awesome support network, meaning that **Connecting and Belonging** may not be all that relevant to you at this time, but perhaps you've decided that you want to find out how to add more meaning to your life by checking out **Doing Things I Value**. No problem!

NOTE

We'd like to be clear about some basic language issues. You'll find that the workbook will often use terms like "mental illness" or "mental health issues" or "conditions". Depending on your preferences you could easily read them as "your response to trauma" or "difficulties" or whatever else you prefer. We hope the material in this workbook will be relevant in a wide range of situations, whatever language you choose to use.

Four modules, many tools

This workbook is divided into the same four sections as the RAS-DS questionnaire. Here's a brief overview.

Module One: Doing Things I Value

Want to live a satisfying life full of meaning and value? Great! This is the module for you. Because the way we spend our time is critical to our well-being, it's essential that we do things that bring purpose, good health, pleasure, fun and balance to our lives. Doing Things I Value focuses on doing things you value and enjoy, and adding healthy and constructive elements to your routine.

Module Two: Looking Forward

Are you feeling hopeful about your recovery? Do you understand that a mental health issue does not define you? This module can help you to develop the skills and attitudes you will need to play an active role in your own recovery and plan effectively for your future well-being.

Module Three: Mastering my Illness

Understanding how to manage our mental health issues is key to living the life we want. This module doesn't just help you to understand and manage your illness, but to MASTER it. It will help you to become the world's greatest expert in YOU!

Module Four: Connecting and Belonging

We all need people we can trust and depend on. While having the support of mental health workers is important, it's best if they don't make up our entire support network. This module focuses on building friendships, forming community connections, and nurturing the relationships that are most helpful to you.

Why are there so many different boxes?

Here are the different kinds of inserts you'll be dealing with, and a description.

NOTE

We provide all sorts of useful hints in these boxes (like the one about language on the first page of READ THIS FIRST, for instance).

This connects to...

These boxes will connect up the four modules along similar points. Following these suggested links can help you make the most of this workbook.

"Boxes like this will contain quotes from various sources, such as people with a lived experience, famous mental health experts, or other public figures."

-Grant (co-author of this workbook, and an experienced mental health consumer)

● Exercise

Filling in some simple, practical exercises is a great way to take what you've read in this workbook and apply it to your own life. Each exercise is explained in laymen's terms, and we'll often provide clear examples, too.

About the authors

Main author: Grant Everett

Hi guys! My name is Grant, and I've been riding the rollercoaster of mental illness since my tweens. I've spent well over a third of my life in institutions because of schizophrenia, depression and anxiety, and I still have to manage some symptoms to this day. Although I'm not totally free of my illness, I have reached a point where I feel my life is full of meaning and value. It's taken a struggle to reach where I am now, but thanks to some great people who have believed in me and supported me through the darkest of times, I've mastered my illness. I sincerely hope this workbook helps you to feel the same.

I've written two comedy novels about the Australian mental health system under the penname of **Dennis J Pale**, and my ultimate dream is to become a professional author. If you go to www.amazon.com.au and search for "dennis j pale" there are free samples of both books, and the kindle versions only cost a fiver! You can contact me at dennisjpale@gmail.com if you have any questions.

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We are the RAS-DS development team and occupational therapy academics at the University of Sydney. As occupational therapists, our clinical and research interests are in the area of mental health and recovery. As a team, we are committed to enhancing resources and opportunities for consumers to drive their own recovery and to work from a co-production paradigm in our research.



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Acknowledgements

This project was supported by the Australian Government through the Inner West Sydney Partners in Recovery Grants Program IWSPiR Innovative Grant Program and its Lead Agency, New Horizons Inc. Thanks also go to Professor Anita Bundy who is a partner on the project guiding this workbook.



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Module Two:

Looking Forward

MODULE TWO: LOOKING FORWARD

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to module two, *Looking Forward*. There are a total of four things that people always highlight as essential ingredients for a successful recovery. If just one of these things is missing, it can potentially push wellness further out of reach. Although these four things are universal, their details will be unique to each person.

Belief and hope

Simply *believing* that you can recover is an essential foundation for wellness. If you don't currently have all that much hope, then it is important to work on that because hope isn't only important, it's also *realistic*. Why is it realistic to have hope? The answer can be summed up in two words: RECOVERY HAPPENS.

Understanding the complex journey

Although recovery is complex and unique to every person, there are some common features that most people agree on. In this part, you'll find out more about what to expect on your recovery journey, including setbacks, needing support, learning from even negative experiences and, most of all, your own leading role in the process.

Having goals and dreams for the future

As goals are really important, in this part we'll discuss how to set goals that are both practical and achievable. Having dreams is important too, but dreams are a little different from goals, as dreams have no limits. We want to encourage you to keep ahold of your dreams, as they help steer our lives like the rudder on a boat.

I am not an illness!

We all need to keep a clear divide between who we *are* and what illness we *have*, as they are two entirely different things. So rather than defining yourself with a label, we want you to ask yourself a big question: what are the unique things that make me who I am?

NOTE

If you're doing this module then we assume that you have filled in the *Looking Forward* part of the RAS-DS and that you have read the READ THIS FIRST section at the start of the workbook. If you haven't, we suggest that you do that before you continue any further.

Roadmap to Looking Forward

One way to do this module is to simply start at the beginning and continue to the end. However, if you have something specific in mind that you'd like to focus on, here's a quick guide to where each of the RAS-DS statements are addressed.

RAS-DS statement	Section/s in this Module
7. I can handle it if I get unwell again	Part One: <i>Belief and hope</i> Part Two: <i>Understanding the complex journey</i>
8. I can help myself become better	Part One: <i>Belief and hope</i> Part Two: <i>Understanding the complex journey</i>
9. I have the desire to succeed	Part One: <i>Belief and hope</i>
10. I have goals in life that I want to reach	Part Three: <i>Having goals and dreams for the future</i>
11. I believe that I can reach my current personal goals	Part Three: <i>Having goals and dreams for the future</i>
12. I can handle what happens in my life	Part One: <i>Belief and hope</i> Part Two: <i>Understanding the complex journey</i>
13. I like myself	Part Four: <i>I am not an illness!</i>
14. I have a purpose in life	Part Three: <i>Having goals and dreams for the future</i> Part Four: <i>I am not an illness!</i> + Module One, Part Two: Doing things that are Meaningful
15. If people really knew me they would like me	Part Four: <i>I am not an illness!</i>
16. If I keep trying, I will continue to get better	Part One: <i>Belief and hope</i>
17. I have an idea of who I want to become	Part Three: <i>Having goals and dreams for the future</i>

RAS-DS statement	Section/s in this Module
18. Something good will eventually happen	Part One: <i>Belief and hope</i>
19. I am the person most responsible for my own Improvement	Part Two: <i>Understanding the complex journey</i>
20. I am hopeful about my own future	Part One: <i>Belief and hope</i>
21. I know when to ask for help	Part Two: <i>Understanding the complex journey</i> + Module Three covers this too
22. I ask for help, when I need it	Part Two: <i>Understanding the complex journey</i>
23. I know what helps me get better	Part One: <i>Belief and hope</i> Part Two: <i>Understanding the complex journey</i> + Module Three covers this too
24. I can learn from my mistakes	Part Two: <i>Understanding the complex journey</i> + Module Three covers this too

PART ONE: BELIEF AND HOPE

Hope is a key recovery ingredient

We'll start this module on the subject of hope, because that's where all successful recovery journeys **must** begin. Everybody we interviewed about their path to recovery mentioned how important it was to have hope in order to get through the difficult times. However, only a few decades ago, hope was in short supply: it was widely believed that having a mental illness meant no chance of getting better, and it was generally thought that such conditions would only get worse with time. Fortunately, research has shown this assumption to be wrong. The truth is that with the right resources and support, most people WILL recover!

But what do we mean by recovery? To be clear, we're not talking about a cure for mental illness. Although many people will manage to get rid of all their symptoms and no longer need medication, this "medical" understanding of recovery isn't what we are talking about. When we talk about recovery, we mean building a meaningful and satisfying life in which your illness or symptoms might still be present, but no longer interfere with the things you want to do and accomplish. One of the key features of recovery is that it is driven by YOU and not by your doctor or psychologist or anyone else. That is why believing that you can recover is so important.

Here is another definition of recovery:

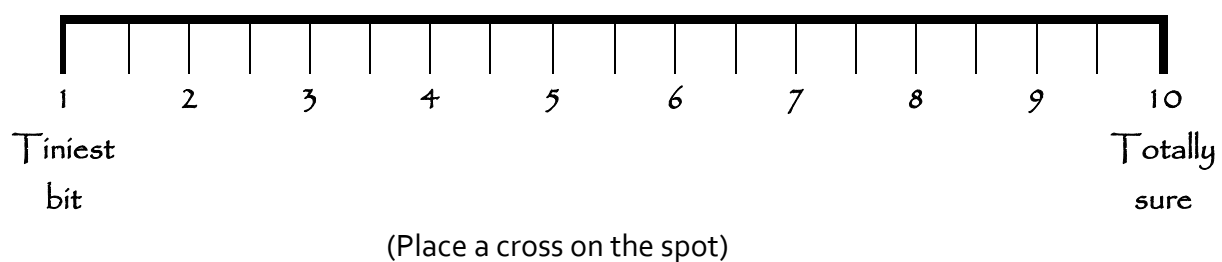
"Recovery is a deeply personal, unique process of changing one's attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills and/or roles. It is a way of living a satisfying, hopeful and contributing life even with the limitations caused by illness. Recovery involves the development of new meaning and purpose in one's life as one grows beyond the catastrophic effects of mental illness."

-Professor William Anthony (award winning psychiatrist)

● Exercise: How much hope do I have?

Recovery is a process that requires you to jump in and accept the challenges ahead. But before we go any further, we have an important question: do you believe that you can recover? Please rate how much you believe this statement on a scale of 1 to 10 by placing a little cross on the scale. The fact that you're reading this workbook proves that you do have some hope.

So: How hopeful am I?



If you were able to rate a perfect 10, then fantastic! Your hope levels are so high that they might technically be classed as a superpower, and your hopefulness will be a fantastic boost to your recovery. If you *didn't* rate a 10, though, please read on, as the following sections are dedicated to trying to move you higher up that scale!

Hope is something that must be topped up regularly. It's important to keep finding sources of hope in our everyday lives in order to **fuel** our recovery. A few simple ways to build up our hope levels can include:

- Noticing and celebrating our milestones and victories
- Noticing and celebrating the milestones and victories of the people around you
- Spending time with people who are also recovering
- Being around people who believe in you, and believe in your chances of recovery

Another way to maintain hope and inspire recovery is to read or listen to other people's recovery stories. While we've already made it quite clear that RECOVERY DOES HAPPEN, these stories prove it. No matter what your diagnosis, there are hundreds of encouraging tales out there about people who have conquered mental health issues and gone on to live lives of joy, accomplishment and fulfilment. We want you to be one of them. On the following pages are examples of a few people who are in recovery for mental health issues and have also managed to reach their goals and dreams despite the obstacles.

Journeys of recovery and hope

These videos are personal stories from people from all walks of life. They tell us about their experiences of recovering from various types of mental distress or illness. Of course, they are all unique individuals, so their recovery battles, plans and triumphs all look very different. None of these people say that they are entirely symptom free, or no longer have any “off” days. But they’ve all learned how to live with the reality of a mental illness while still achieving their goals and dreams.

We’ve given you six stories, but we could have included thousands. For more stories, we suggest you go online to Ted Talks at www.ted.com/talks and go to the MENTAL HEALTH section.

Eleanor Longdon: The Voices in my Head

Eleanor went from being a highly accomplished Honours student at a prestigious university to being trapped in a “psychic civil war” that almost resulted in her drilling a hole in her own head in an attempt to get rid of the voices. However, not only did Eleanor learn how to live with the voices, she returned to her studies and graduated with the highest marks her uni had ever seen in both of her degrees. She’s gone on to great success in her field, and is a prime example of success against the odds.

www.ted.com/talks/eleanor_longden_the_voices_in_my_head?language=en

Pat Deegan: Recovery from Mental Disorders

Pat was written off by the experts as a lost cause as soon as she was diagnosed with schizophrenia in her teens. Not only did Pat prove that she was far more than just a label, she gained a doctorate in psychology and has spent her life improving things for other people with mental health issues.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhK-7DkWaKE

Elyn Saks: A Tale of Mental Illness from the Inside

Elyn was given a “grave” prognosis, with a case of schizophrenia so severe that she spent long periods of time strapped down in mechanical restraints. Now a respected, chaired professor of law and psychiatry, Elyn hasn’t required a hospital stay for over three decades and is at the top of her two professional fields.

www.ted.com/talks/elyn_saks_seeing_mental_illness?language=en

Joshua Walters: On being just crazy enough

Professional comedian Joshua Walters has walked the fine line of bipolar disorder since the age of 16, and in this talk he explains how “just the right amount” of mania can actually be a highly sought-after gift to have (especially for a comedian).

www.ted.com/talks/joshua_walters_on_being_just_crazy_enough

Andrew Solomon: Depression, the secret we share

Political writer Andrew Solomon considered himself tough enough to survive anything...until he descended into a spiral of clinical depression and apathy that lasted for years. Despite the fact that Andrew knew *intellectually* that he had a great life that was worth living, he spent ages bouncing between recovery and relapse, between the “funeral in his brain” and temporary relief. After a bleak time where he lost interest in everything and didn’t even recognise himself anymore, Andrew finally learned to live with his depression.

www.ted.com/talks/andrew_solomon_depression_the_secret_we_share

Kevin Breel: Confessions of a depressed comic

In high school, Kevin Breel was captain of the basketball team, on the Honour roll, got invited to every party, and was funny and confident. But he was living two lives: one was the popular, accomplished winner that people could see, and the other Kevin was so tortured by depression that it made him want to kill himself. This video tells of the night Kevin realised that to save his own life he needed to say four simple, but devastating, words: “I suffer from depression.”

www.ted.com/talks/kevin_breel_confessions_of_a_depressed_comic

Recovery quotes

“I survived because the fire inside me burned brighter than the fire around me.”

“I love the person I've become, because I fought to become her.”

“Healing doesn't mean the damage never existed. It means the damage no longer controls our lives.”

“What’s broken can be mended. What hurts can be healed. And no matter how dark it get, the sun is going to rise again.”

- Various people with lived experience of recovery (from HealthyPlace.com)

PART TWO: UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLEX JOURNEY

Recovery is not a straight line

We're not trying to scare anybody, but what do you think would happen if you got unwell again? Would it be the end of all hope? Would you be unable to make it back to wellness again? The short answer to these questions (thankfully) is a firm "no." The long answer is a bit more complicated...

We all have fears. For people who have survived an episode of acute mental distress, the thought of ever going through that again can be nerve-racking. However, we tend to be a lot more resilient than we may assume, and that includes when it comes to facing psychosis, or depression, or a manic phase, or whatever else our illnesses may throw at us.

There's no secret formula for a perfectly smooth recovery. Our personal journeys are unique, and that means we are likely to need a bit of trial and error to find our own way. Recovery isn't a straightforward line from A to B. It is likely to involve detours, dead ends, obstacles, navigation errors and occasionally going around in circles. It can be frustrating and sometimes even frightening, but with the right support and some time and effort it can be done. It might sound cheesy, but there's a lot that can be learned from any recovery journey, and this knowledge can help to make the path ahead easier and less scary than the path behind.

"Recovery is a process... not a perfectly linear process... The need is to meet the challenges of the disability and to re-establish a new and valued sense of integrity and purpose within and beyond the limits of the disability."

-Dr Patricia Deegan (disability rights activist, psychiatrist, and she also has a lived experience of mental illness)

Doing the following things after you've recovered from a relapse can help you to use that relapse to further your recovery:

1. Congratulate yourself for getting through a hard time. Recognise the courage and determination it took
2. Use your experiences to improve how much you understand yourself, your condition and your strategies. What have you learnt? Did this "stress test" help you to find any weak spots in your wellness strategies?
3. Work out what/who you need in order to make the process go quicker and be more painless next time

This connects to...

Module Three: Mastering my Illness goes into great depth about taking control of our conditions through planning, reflecting and simply surviving the experience of having a mental health issue.

Take the leading role in your own recovery

Mental health recovery is something that we have to do for ourselves. It isn't something that even the best health professional can do for us. However, taking responsibility for ANYTHING takes more effort than simply hoping somebody else will do it for you. This is especially true when it comes to mental health recovery. Getting better is a process that we need to invest in, battle with, and learn from on a daily basis. But the old saying is true here: if you want something done properly, you have to do it yourself. Simply doing this workbook means you've decided to take control, so congratulations!

Many different elements make up our recovery journeys, and we can choose to personally work at them. For example, this list might include taking medication, getting involved with talking therapy, having goals, budgeting our finances, sticking to a healthy routine, having good sleep habits, maintaining your personal hygiene, getting a bit of social contact, and so on.

Use the right side of the table to jot down any ways you could get more involved. We've provided some examples to get you started.

[illegible]

Getting help when you need it

Taking the lead in our recovery doesn't mean we have to do it all ourselves. It means we choose and get the help that's best for us. You may be the pilot of your own flight, but there's nothing that says you can't have a co-pilot, a cabin crew and a control tower! And if things get shaky, the sooner you use them, the better. Getting help early can mean that you get back in the air more quickly. Some people may feel that it's "weak" to ask for assistance, while others may not want to "bother" anyone with their problems. In response to this, we need to clarify two universal things. First, no matter who you are, asking for something that's essential to your health is *never* weak; it's wise and it's part of taking control. Second, all of us are worthy of receiving help from health professionals; that's what they're there for.

This connects to...

We go further into building and using support networks in **Module Four: Connecting and Belonging**. We also deal with making advance plans for the worst case scenario of becoming unwell in **Module Three: Mastering my Illness**.

"Wherever a man turns he can find someone who needs him."

- Albert Schweitzer (theologian, organist, philosopher, physician, Nobel prize winner)

PART THREE: HAVING GOALS AND DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE

Goals and dreams: We need both

Before we go further, we want to point out that dreams and goals are two different things. Dreams are not goals and goals are not dreams, but they are both valuable in many similar ways.

Goals are specific things that you want to achieve. With enough planning and effort, you may very well attain them. They don't have to be easy, but they do have to be realistic and likely to be accomplished. So, completing a TAFE course, getting a job, staying ahead in your rent and keeping out of hospital are all goals (and good ones, at that).

Dreams are the things you desire above all else, a "best case scenario" for your future. Maybe you want to be a bestselling author, a superstar wrestler, or the first astronaut to set foot on Mars? Simply *having* dreams is valuable, as they can keep us going, get us out of bed in the morning, and make us happy to be alive. Having dreams is essential, and we really can't overstate their value.

We'll go into more depth on the subject over the following pages.

"A dream doesn't become reality through magic; it takes sweat, determination and hard work."

-Colin Powell (Former United States Secretary of State)

"All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them."

-Walt Disney

"No one should negotiate their dreams. Dreams must be free to fly high. No government, no legislature, has a right to limit your dreams. You should never agree to surrender your dreams."

-Jesse Jackson (Civil rights activist)

● Exercise: What are my dreams?

Like we've said, dreams are at the very core of who you are. No matter what shape they take, dreams will massively affect how you see the world, and will effectively steer your life like the rudder on a boat. They are the big things that make life exciting.

With dreams, we want you to reach for the moon! Striving for what you want the most will naturally result in a lot of goals and mini-goals being accomplished along the way. As the saying goes: it's about the journey, not the destination.

So what's your dream? If you could go anywhere in life and be anything, where and what would it be? Be wild and honest! Your dreams can be as big as your imagination, and it's crucial that we hold onto our dreams regardless of illness or any other obstacle. So if you could be anywhere, be anything or anyone, what/where/who would it be? Feel free to keep this a secret from other people, if you'd prefer.

And now to goals...

Some of us seem to stumble about randomly, living from paycheque to paycheque and not thinking any further than our next meal, cigarette, or episode of Neighbours. While we don't need to create a comprehensive plan to cover every minute of the next ten years, having goals of some kind is of *critical* importance. They might be for dinnertime tonight (I *will* eat all of my broccoli), a month from now (I *will* increase my hours at work and try for that promotion) or years from now (I *will* save up enough money to put a deposit on a house). Goals can also relate to managing an illness (I *will* take my medication before 9.30pm or I *will* stay away from the dope). It doesn't matter if they are immediate, short-term or long-term, goals will give your life purpose, guidance and hope, all of which are valuable in their own right.

● Exercise: Brainstorming my goals

Brainstorming is when you think of as many things as you can, without worrying about how sensible, suitable or realistic they are. Now's your chance to be spontaneous and think of as many goals as you can. Write them all in the box. Over the next few pages we'll ask you to refine those goals to help you achieve them.

What are SMART goals?

Setting **SMART goals** can greatly increase our chances of succeeding at our plans. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely. We can use SMART goals to help us get on track with our recovery journey and for any other goals we have in mind. Here's a brief summary of what SMART's all about.

Specific

We have a much greater chance of achieving a SPECIFIC goal than a general goal. After all, a target is easier to hit if we can see it, right? To make a general goal into a specific one, we need to ask ourselves the following questions: what *exactly* do I want to accomplish? What's in my way, and what will help me overcome it? Who can help me? And *why* do I want it, exactly?

Measurable

The measurable part of SMART means we'll need some way to gauge whether we are moving in the right direction. Ask yourself the question, "How will I know when I have achieved my goal?"

Attainable

An ATTAINABLE goal is one that is possible for us to reach with our existing talents, skills, and resources. Even though our dreams are allowed to be ambitious, our goals should be broken down into small chunks so that we can be sure to keep working towards them in manageable steps.

Realistic

To be REALISTIC, a goal must be able to fit with in everything else that's crucial in our lives. This means being realistic financially, time-wise, family-wise, effort-wise, and so on. If your goal doesn't seem "realistic", try breaking it down into a few smaller goals.

Timely

All goals need a timeframe. Time frames should be within about six months. If your goal will take longer than 6 months, then maybe it is a good idea to break it down into a series of smaller goals.

● Exercise: Defining my goals

The deeper you dive into the specifics of your goals, the better prepared you'll be to reach them. The following section is a great opportunity to get down to the nuts and bolts of your goals.

1 Define your goal

Choose one of the goals that you brainstormed in the previous exercise. Check it against the SMART criteria. If it doesn't fit, you will need to refine it so that it does. You have to be super specific here. For instance, perhaps you want to get a job. Although this is definitely a worthwhile goal, it's a little too vague. Get a job where? Doing what? Casual, part time, or full time? For how long? If you don't know yet, then perhaps your first goal might relate to figuring it out! An example of a SMART goal might be: "By the end of June, I will have registered with (insert name of Employment Agency) and had at least one meeting with them to discuss my employment options." Write your smart goal below.

2 Why is this important to you?

Like they say, keep your eye on the prize. What value does this goal have? It must have some kind of worth, or you wouldn't want it in the first place. What will you gain?

3 What are the barriers or obstacles, and what can I do to overcome them?

What's in your way? This could be anything or anyone. It could be a lack of time, a great geographical distance, substance abuse, or even just feeling unsure. How will you overcome those barriers?

4 Break the goal down into steps

Before diving in, you might want to test the water with your toe! The more thought you put into the logical progression of exactly what you'll have to go through to reach your goal, the less likely you'll be to hit unexpected brick walls. For example, steps to the employment goal might be: 1. Ask my support worker if she knows if this particular support agency is any good; 2. If so, Google them and get their number. If not, ask her to recommend a better one and get their number instead. 3. Ring them up and make an appointment. Write it in my diary. 4. Make sure I have some clean and ironed clothes ready for the meeting. 5. Write down all the questions I need to ask them. 5. Check the train timetable to make sure I get there on time.

5 What skills or resources do you need?

This could be anything. Time, money, effort, certain skills.

6 Who can help?

There's no point doing something the hard way when you have another option. If somebody you know could make attaining your goal easier, then see if they can help. Who might be able to help you achieve your goal?

● Exercise: A summary of goal setting

In the other Modules, we get you to think about specific things you want to do and achieve. The structure you used above can also be used to set goals in any of these different areas. We hope you find it useful!

My SMART goal

Why is this goal important to me?

What are the barriers or obstacles and what can I do to manage these barriers?

Break the goal into steps

What skills or resources do I need?

Who can help?

PART FOUR: I AM NOT AN ILLNESS!

Labels are for jars, not people

The way we see things can profoundly affect how we deal with them. For instance, while accepting the reality of a mental health issue is a major part of any recovery, it's equally important to remember that none of us are **defined** by this. Who we are as people is formed by our beliefs, our choices, what we find meaningful, and how we treat others (our "neighbours," as the saying goes). We're all far too complex to be reduced to a diagnosis, which is just one reason why labels are for jars, not people. This is something that all the people who shared their success stories in the **Journeys of recovery** section understood. Every one of them knew that they weren't defined purely by their illnesses.



Sure, there are practical reasons for why we need to be able to describe our mental health issues, but the main thing to keep in mind is that YOU are YOU, not some medical diagnosis. Please don't forget all the wonderful, unique things that make you a worthwhile individual.

Reconnecting with ME

Sometimes, if people have labelled us for a long time, we can start to accept or even believe these labels. We have the right not to be labelled by other people, but we also need to be careful not to label ourselves. Labelling, by its nature, stands in the way of helping us to understand ourselves and one another.

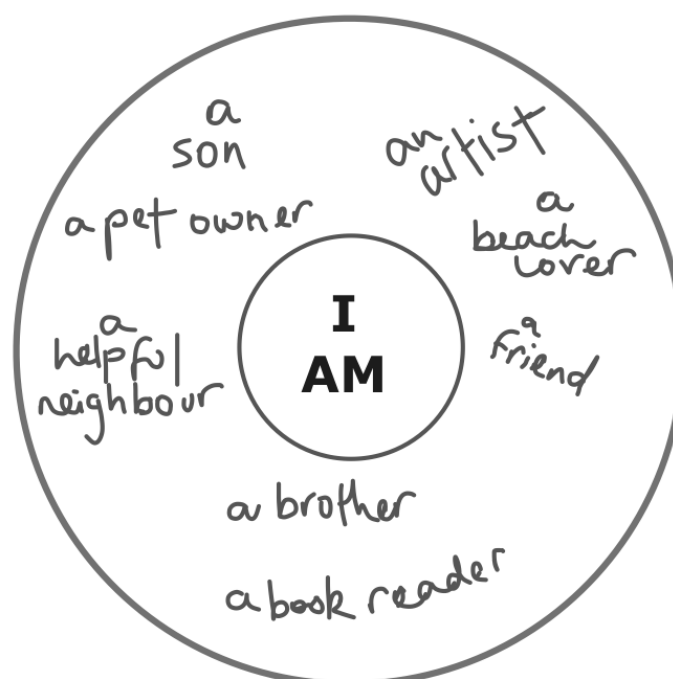
Over time, when we have been battling with our mental health demons, we can begin to lose our sense of who we are, even if we don't start labelling ourselves according to our diagnosis. An important step in our recovery is to start re-connecting with who we are again.

**BELIEVE IN
YOURSELF**

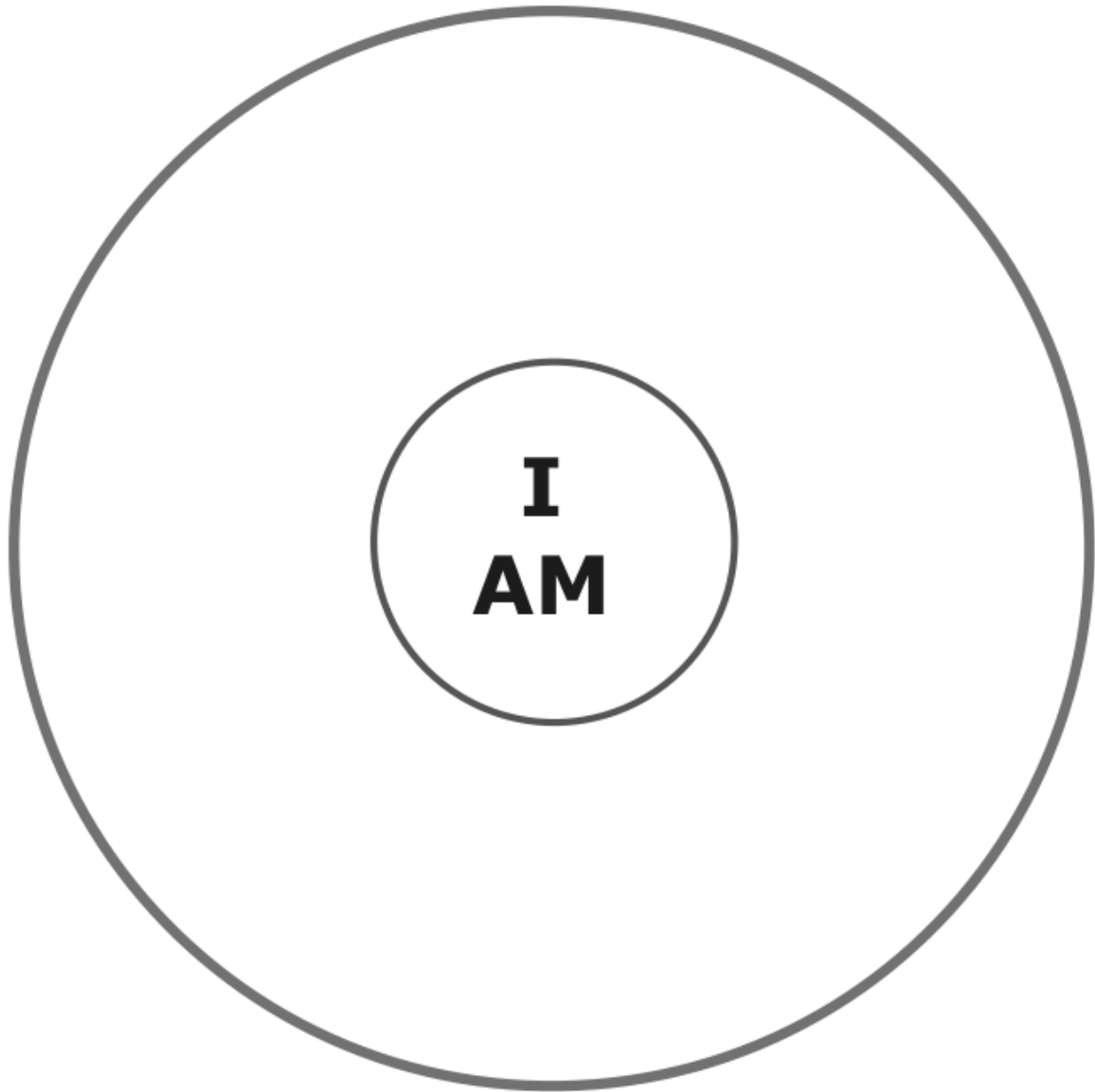
We want you to think about all of the different things that make you who you are. Note that we DON'T want you to write down any medical conditions or symptoms! Simply have a good think about what makes you who you are. For instance: I am a brother, a son, a pet owner, a friend, a helpful neighbour, an artist, I read books, I'm an Australian, somebody who loves the beach...and so on.

We've provided an example of this activity on the right. On the next page is a clear "I AM" ring for you to write all of the things that make you who you are.

Try to fill the entire ring!



● Exercise: Who am I?



Liking myself

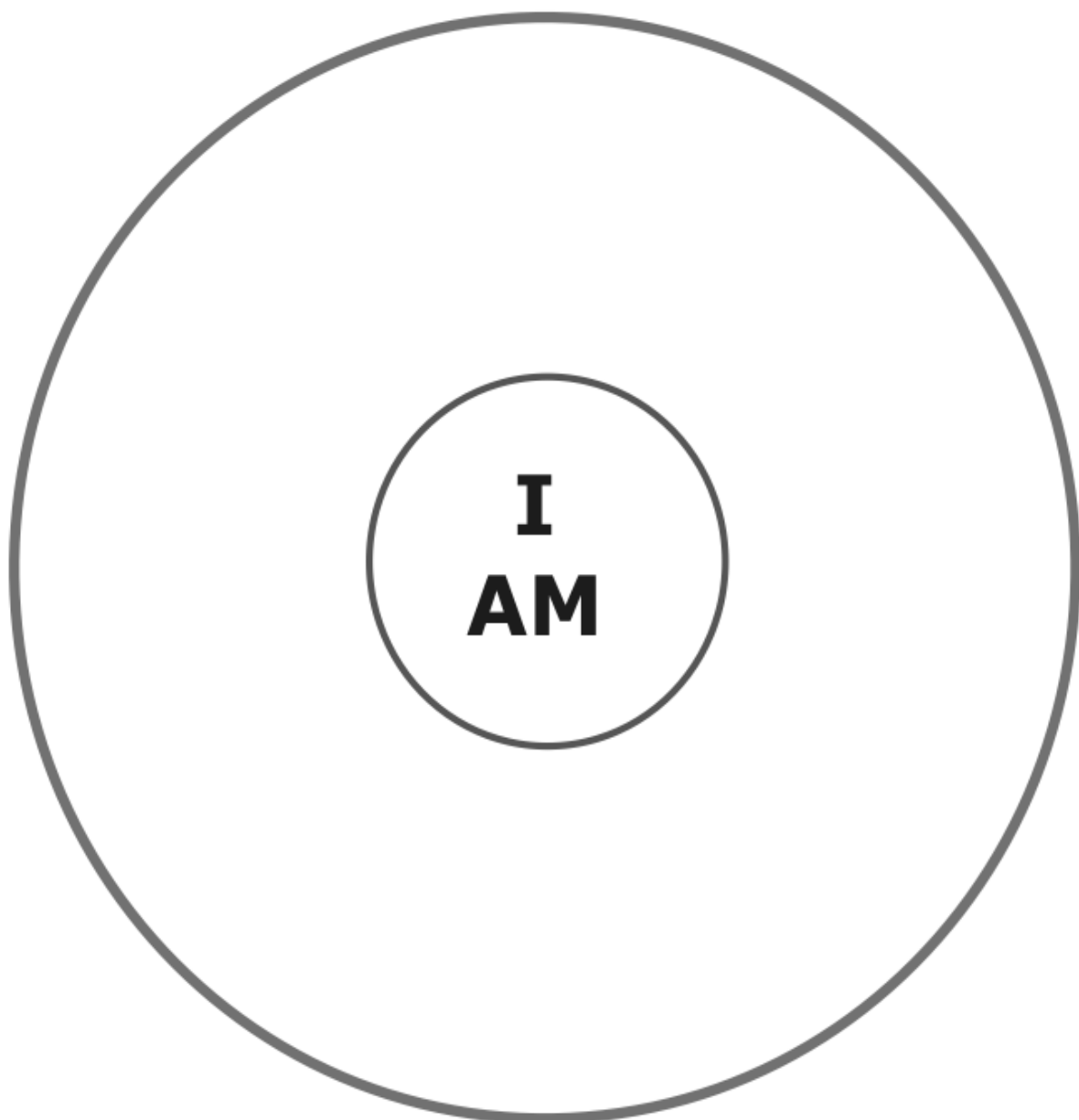
Reconnecting with who we are involves reminding ourselves of all the diverse things we do and how we truly define ourselves (as you have just done in the activity above). It also involves reminding ourselves of the qualities we have, our strengths and the things that we like about ourselves. It's said that for others to like us, first we must like ourselves; this doesn't mean we should be vain or self-absorbed! Liking ourselves simply means being at peace with who we are, being able to look in the mirror and say, "I'm doing my very best, and that's good enough." It's also about being able to recognise our strengths (we all have them!) and what we like about ourselves. Rather than being down on ourselves and always focusing on our problems (we all have those, too), we need to celebrate our strengths and our achievements. A few examples may include: I'm loyal, I work hard, I'm thoughtful, I'm a good listener, I'm generous, I'm quick to forgive, I'm creative, and I like helping people.

What do I like about myself? What are my strengths?

On the next page is another clear "I AM" ring. This time, we want you to write down all of your strengths, what you are good at and what you like about yourself. We've provided an example on the right.



- Exercise: What I like about myself – my strengths



Congratulations!

You have reached the end of *Module Two: Looking Forward*. This workbook has a lot more to offer, so we hope you'll continue reading the other three modules (if you haven't done so already).

Module One: Doing Things I Value

Want to live a satisfying life full of meaning and value? Great! This is the module for you. Because the way we spend our time is critical to our well-being, it's essential that we do things that bring purpose, good health, pleasure, fun and balance to our lives. Doing Things I Value focuses on doing things you value and enjoy, and adding healthy and constructive elements to your routine.

Module Three: Mastering my Illness

Understanding how to manage our mental health issues is key to living the life we want. This module doesn't just help you to understand and manage your illness, but to MASTER it. It will help you to become the world's greatest expert in YOU!

Module Four: Connecting and Belonging

We all need people we can trust and depend on. While having the support of mental health workers is important, it's best if they don't make up our entire support network. This module focuses on building friendships, forming community connections, and nurturing the relationships that are most helpful to you.