

RAS-DS

WORKBOOK

Version One

Module One: Doing Things I Value

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



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY



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~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.

Support authors: Nicola Hancock, Anne Honey and Justin Scanlan

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.



Justin

Nicola

Grant

Anne

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Module One:

Doing Things I Value

MODULE ONE: DOING THINGS I VALUE

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to module one, *Doing Things I Value*. This module will focus on the everyday things we do, because how we fill our time is critical to our well-being. Just to be clear, it's not WHAT we do that's most important: what *really* matters is whether the things we do are valuable, meaningful and good for our well-being. In each of the three parts of this module we'll be asking you to think about the activities you do and how they influence your recovery.

Part One: Doing things for fun and pleasure

Having fun is an essential ingredient to a happy life and can contribute to mental health recovery. Those of us who regularly spend our time doing things that we enjoy tend to be more satisfied with life than those who don't. This part is all about adding more fun to your routine.

Part Two: Doing things that are meaningful

In addition to fun stuff, recovery will involve doing activities that bring meaning, purpose and balance to our lives. While employment and study can definitely fall into this category, they aren't our only options.

Part Three: Doing things that are good for my health

Our bodies are intricate machines, and require specific maintenance. The better we look after them, the better our quality (and length) of life. Not only that, better physical health will also help our mental health. We hope this part can help you develop a healthier, happier you without too much effort.

NOTE

If you're doing this module then we assume that you have filled in the *Doing Things I Value* 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 Doing Things I Value

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 questions are addressed.

RAS-DS statement	Section/s in this Module
1. It is important to have fun	Part One: <i>Doing things for fun and pleasure</i>
2. It is important to have healthy habits	Part Three: <i>Doing things that are good for my health</i> Part Two: <i>the end section where we focus on Balancing your time</i>
3. I do things that are meaningful to me	Part Two: <i>Doing things that are meaningful</i>
4. I continue to have new interests	Part One: <i>Doing things for fun and pleasure</i> Part Two: <i>Doing things that are meaningful</i>
5. I do things that are valuable and helpful to others	Part Two: <i>Doing things that are meaningful</i>
6. I do things that give me a feeling of great pleasure	Part One: <i>Doing things for fun and pleasure</i>

PART ONE: DOING THINGS FOR FUN AND PLEASURE

Doing things just for fun or pleasure really matters!

There are some pastimes that we do simply because they're fun or pleasurable. And doing those things is far from a waste of time! Research has found that they can contribute to our mental health recovery.

Doing things we enjoy is very important for our health and well-being, and it's always a good idea to be open to discovering new fun things. One reason for this is because if we overdo the same thing all the time, it's possible that we'll stop finding it fun. Another good reason for having a variety of hobbies is that many pastimes aren't practical to do every day. For instance, say you love golf. Unless you're a multi-millionaire, it would be hard to find the time and money to do eighteen holes every day. It's also crucial to have a range of interests that can be done in different places and at different times. If all our fun things are done outdoors and there's acid rain forecast for the next month, then we're out of luck. As the saying goes, variety is the spice of life.

We all go through phases when it comes to what we do in our spare time, too. Just because we're into something now doesn't mean that we always will be (illustrated by the fact that almost every teenage boy has, at one point or another, played electric guitar for a couple of months). We never know when we'll discover something new that we'll fall in love with and pursue with a passion. But there's only one way to find out: to be brave enough to try out something new. New interests help us expand our horizons, meet new people, develop new skills, and fall in love with life all over again. By the same token, rekindling your interest in something you used to enjoy can also give you a boost.

So if you want to add more fun and pleasure into your life, read on!

"Even though you are grown up, you should never stop having fun."

-Nina Dobrev

● Exercise: Reconnecting with my past interests

What sorts of things did you enjoy doing before you became unwell? Have you stopped doing anything that used to be fun? Why? What are they? Are you interested in taking them up again? If so, what's stopping you?

A part of any recovery journey is reconnecting with things of value, and this includes things we may have enjoyed, but fell by the wayside because of dramas in our lives.

List some of your past interests below. They can be literally anything you have liked doing.

Now go back and circle any of these that you no longer do, but might be interested in taking up again.

On the next page you can develop a plan to get you started with an old interest again. If you are struggling with developing your plan, have a look at the Picking Up New Activities exercise. The strategies suggested there for starting new interests will also work for reconnecting with old ones.

● Exercise: My plan to reconnect with an old interest

Now, take one of the old interests you listed, and use it to fill in the following table.

	Example plan	My plan
Activity I want to start again	<i>Painting</i>	
What's stopping me?	<i>David told me that he didn't like my painting, so I gave up...also, I don't have many paints at home.</i>	
What can I do to overcome these barriers?	<i>Recognise that different people like different things. Buy some paints from the Two Dollar Shop</i>	
What's my plan to start it up again?	What: <i>Join an art class at my local community college</i> When: <i>Class starts next Wednesday at 9am</i> Where: <i>Sydney Community College, 10 Philip Street, Sydney</i> Who with: <i>I'm going to go by myself, but there will be other people there.</i>	What: When: Where: Who with:

● Exercise: Picking up new activities

So far, we've talked about getting involved with activities you used to enjoy and haven't done for a while. Now, we would like you to think about some new activities you might like to do.

It's easy for us to spend all day staring at lame TV shows and complaining "I'm bored," but unless we're locked in a concrete bunker, boredom is something we can change! Even if we have a cash flow situation (as in, having no cash to flow), there are a lot of free activity options out there.

The following table lists a heap of activities, and we hope they'll help get your ideas flowing. Some of these may cost a little bit of money, but most of them are free. There's also plenty of space to add your own ideas at the end, if you'd like.

Read the list of different activities below, and circle the ones that you might be interested in giving a go. Remember that you can add extra activities to this list if you want.

-
- | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| • Listen to music | • Learn about science or nature | • Doing puzzles |
| • Play a musical instrument | • Take a course for fun | • Playing chess or other board games |
| • Write stories or poetry | • Go to museums or art galleries | • Driving |
| • Paint or draw | • Go for a coffee with friends | • Bushwalking, beach walking or even city walking |
| • Photography | • Go to an RSL or a bowling club for a meal | • Swimming |
| • Pottery | • Visit friends | • Go fishing |
| • Dance | • Use social media | • Play sport – soccer, cricket, netball, whatever |
| • Metalwork or leatherwork | • Feed the ducks, or play with your pet | • Do yoga |
| • Model making | • Have people around for dinner | • Bowling (ten-pin or lawn) |
| • Woodworking | • Go to church | • Camping |
| • Knitting, sewing or needlework | • Cook | • Gardening |
| • Movies | • Play cards | • Bike riding |
| • Video games | • Bird-watching | |
| • Read books or comics | • Collecting | |
| • Watch TV, DVDs or YouTube | | |
| • Watch sport | | |
| • Watch current affairs | | |

● Exercise: My plan to start a new interest

Start this activity by writing down one of the new interests you've come up with. Now, figure out what could be stopping you from doing it (the hurdles), and how to jump them. Keep filling in the blanks until you have a complete plan.

Activity I want to start doing	
What might get in the way?	
What can I do to overcome these barriers?	
What's my plan to start it up?	What: When: Where: Who with:

Finding it hard to develop your plan?

Having difficulty finding inspiration? Know what you'd like to do, but just don't know how to get started? If you were struggling to develop your plan for reconnecting with old interests or starting new ones, we have a few ideas that might help.

Talk to people you know

It can be super helpful to find someone you trust to talk to about developing your plan (maybe somebody who you identify in Module Four: Connecting & Belonging). They might have some great suggestions or remember things that you've enjoyed or mentioned in the past. If you're feeling a bit uncertain about going into a new situation, having someone go with you the first couple of times can really help.

You could also talk to your mates about the activity you want to do. You might be surprised by how many people you know might be interested in the same thing, or know someone who is interested, or might have already been doing it for decades! This is a great way to build on your existing relationship with other people, by the way, so that's a definite bonus.

Google it

A quick internet search can provide you with a wealth of information about whatever activity you have in mind, such as where you can go to do it and the sort of cost you'll be looking at (if any). Looking at the websites of your local neighbourhood centre or community centre can be good for activity ideas and finding out what's out there. These places run heaps of free and low cost leisure activities. There are also social groups out there for every fun pastime you can name, and Google can help you find these like-minded people.

Google can also help you with learning how to do new things. You might be surprised at just how many YouTube videos are dedicated to teaching you step-by-step how to do things, from French braiding your hair, to cooking meringues, to building a new computer out of old parts. And if you don't have your own computer or a home Internet connection, you can use the internet at your local public library for free!

Read about it

Your friendly neighbourhood newsagent will stock plenty of different special interest magazines for a huge variety of pastimes. Every local library is loaded to bursting with books, magazines and DVDs you can borrow for free, covering a heap of different activities. Ask the librarian to show you where to find the section you are looking for.

Ask a local

Visit your neighbourhood centre, community centre or drop-in centre, and let them know what you are interested in. These places run all kinds of enjoyable events and groups, and the staff should also know exactly what's happening in the local area and where to find it. Better yet, perhaps you could even start up your own interest group? All you need are a couple of likeminded people, and you're on your way.

"We keep moving forward, opening new doors, and doing new things, because we're curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths."

-Walt Disney

"The most important thing people did for me was to expose me to new things."

-Professor Temple Grandin, autism spokesperson

PART TWO: DOING THINGS THAT ARE MEANINGFUL

So far, we've looked at activities that are valuable because they are fun and bring pleasure. In this section, we'll look at how activities can provide *other* types of purpose and meaning in our lives. These activities don't necessarily need to be fun or pleasurable, but they certainly can be!

If you had to define exactly what is most important to you in life, what would you say? What do you feel passionate about? What principles do you hold highest? Is your life's purpose to help other people? To change the way people think about something? To be a great family member to your loved ones? To get a perfect score on My Kitchen Rules? What really matters to you?

Spending time on meaningful things is essential, as knowing that your life has purpose in it can completely change the way you see the world. This could be something as simple as spending time with family, singing karaoke with friends, getting back to nature in some way, or attending church each week. It could also be learning new things, or creating art or poems.

Different types of meaning are important to different people, and some activities can be meaningful in many different ways. For example, doing the grocery shopping for your Nana might be meaningful to you because it is helpful for her, it gets you out of the house, and it makes you feel good about yourself because you know you are making a difference in her life.

"They may tell you that your goal should be to become normal and achieve valued roles. But a role is empty and valueless unless you fill it with your meaning and your purpose."

-Pat Deegan, PhD, an advocate for people with mental health issues who also has a lived experience of her own

What makes an activity meaningful or valuable?

For an activity to be meaningful or valuable, it needs to provide some sort of benefit to you, to other people, or to the planet. Activities can be meaningful to people for a variety of reasons. Some of these benefits can include:

- Making you feel good about yourself
- Keeping connected with friends or relatives or connecting with new people
- Being useful or valuable to other people
- Contributing something to society
- Giving you routine and structure (even if it is just a reason to get up in the morning)
- Improving yourself, like learning something or gaining a new skill or a qualification
- Simply giving you fun or pleasure

Which of these sources of meaning are most important to you? Do you feel like you are including enough activities in your day that give you these benefits? If your answer is “no”, then you may want to think about changing your activity patterns. Some of the activities you identified a few pages ago in the section on “Doing things for fun and pleasure” might tick other boxes as well, and **Module Four: Connecting and Belonging** might give you ideas for social activities. The next section may be helpful, too.

Making a contribution and helping others

Some types of activities can provide many different sources of meaning all at once. Doing things that benefit other people is a good example, as this can have a flow on effect that can potentially provide you with all the other types of meaning. Better yet, doing these types of activities is seen by many people who experience mental illness as critical to their recovery. However, experiencing a mental illness can sometimes make us feel like we aren't in a position to make a meaningful contribution to the community. This is never true. We all have the potential to make an enormous splash with our relatively tiny pebbles. You don't need to be Bill Gates for your actions and choices to be valuable and helpful to others! Our communities run thanks to billions and billions of tiny contributions all adding up together, and just like how even the smallest cog in a machine will have a profound impact on its workings, your contributions do matter. We can all add value to other people's lives.

Although the list is never-ending, here are a few ideas on how we can contribute to others.

- Share our recovery strategies with other people who are working at the same thing
- Say thanks to the bus driver
- Offer a workmate the last cookie at morning tea
- Offer your seat on the train to an elderly person
- Listen to a friend who's doing it tough
- Open the door for somebody
- Clean the bathroom at home (even if it's your flatmate's turn to do it)
- Smile at somebody
- Babysit for your neighbour while she goes shopping
- Get involved with a mental health advocacy group
- Cook a meal for someone you know who's sick, or who finds it hard to cook
- Join a campaign to raise money for refugees
- Write to your local Member of Parliament about an important local issue
- Visit somebody who's lonely
- Volunteer to take part in a mental health survey or research interview
- Give blood
- Water the garden for the elderly lady across the road
- Volunteer at a local charity

"The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the grandest intention."

-Oscar Wilde (playwright, novelist, essayist, poet, and one of the wittiest men to ever live)

"Great opportunities to help others seldom come, but small ones surround us every day."

-Sally Koch

● Exercise: Things I already do that are helpful to others

Some of the things you already do may be contributing to others in some way. Can you identify a few and write them in the box below? Have a good think, and don't be too modest!

e.g., I hang my flatmate's washing out if she's at work

If you are struggling with what to put here, ask somebody you trust. They might be able to point out some things that you've missed. However, if you'd like to add some more meat to this section, we've got a very useful exercise on the next page.

● Exercise: My plans for making a contribution

Want to increase your impact? The following exercise will help you develop a game plan for having more of an impact on the world around you.

A new way I want to make a contribution	Example: I want to help my landlady, Old Missus Munroe, with her gardening because her arthritis is playing up.
What's stopping me and how can I overcome this?	Example: I feel shy of offering and worried that she might be offended. I'll talk to my grandma (she's about the same age) and figure out a good way suggest it.
How will I do it?	Example: If she agrees, I'll talk to her about what she wants done and do a couple of hours each Tuesday morning, when I don't have anything else on. She has tools in the tool shed, so I'll ask if I can use them.

Volunteering: giving the gift of your time

Volunteering is a good way to help others, and has many benefits for the volunteer, too. Volunteering can make you feel good about yourself, it'll connect you with new people, it's valuable to others, it's worthwhile, it'll provide a good reason to get out of bed, and you'll have a chance to learn some new skills. In case you didn't notice, volunteering ticks all of the "meaningfulness" boxes! Beyond the "money" issue, most people find that volunteering provides all the same benefits as paid work, but with less stress and more choice. In addition, it's good for your resume, especially if you have gaps in your work history.

So what are you interested in? Animals? The environment? Customer service? Assisting the elderly? There are many fantastic community organisations and charities that couldn't run if it wasn't for the contributions of their many volunteers, and they're always on the lookout for more. You could start by looking on volunteering websites (Google the word "volunteering" and your area) or talking to local charities and community health centres. You could also talk to your support worker, occupational therapist or other team members about volunteering opportunities.

"The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others"

-Gandhi

Paid employment

For many people living with mental illness, employment is a highly meaningful activity that we either do or want to do. However, there are a couple of unhelpful stereotypes floating around when it comes to people living with mental illness finding employment. The first stereotype is that having a mental illness means we are unable to be employed. This is clearly untrue, as people with a lived experience are already employed in every walk of life. The second (exact opposite) stereotype is that people living with mental illness will benefit from any kind of employment. This is also untrue.

Employment has the potential to bring us heaps of benefits, including money, purpose, personal growth, social participation, self-image and enhanced mental health. However,

whether you get these benefits depends on the fit between you and your job. The wrong job can quickly become boring, stressful, meaningless, socially isolating and depressing. That's why, if you're thinking about employment, it's a good idea to think about what is important to you in a job. This can help steer you to a job that works for you (so to speak).

● Exercise: What's important to me?

We've spoken to a bunch of people living with mental illness, and they cited the following things as major factors that contribute to whether a job is a positive experience for them or a negative experience. We have to note that most of the following job features aren't good or bad in themselves: it depends on your own unique passions, needs and skillset. For example, some of us like working with people, others prefer to work alone, and a third group really don't care either way.

On the following list, highlight the job features that are MOST important to you.

Hours: how many hours do you need to work per week? How long are the shifts? What time of day are they? Are they regular and predictable? Is there any flexibility for you to vary hours?
Pay: What is the hourly rate after tax? Do you get sick leave and holiday pay?
Stability: Is it a temporary or permanent position? Are you likely to lose your job due to things like redundancy or restructure?
Travel needed: How will you get to work? How long does it take? How much does it cost? Is it stressful (e.g., driving in heavy traffic, or walking through a dodgy area at night)?
Tasks: Is what you do interesting or boring? How complex or difficult are the tasks? How much repetition is there compared to variety? Are you able to use your own skills and qualities? How much concentration is needed? How much responsibility is there? What are the physical demands of the tasks (e.g., heavy lifting, steady hands, speed)?
Performance demands: What targets are you expected to meet? Are they reasonable? How much pressure are you under? How fast do you need to work? Is the pace constant or are there busy and not-so-busy times? Can you take a breather when you need it?
Autonomy: Do you have much choice in what tasks you do, how you do them and when you do them? How much of the time do you work unsupervised?

Supervision: Are supervisors approachable and respectful? Do you get enough training, support and supervision? Do you know who to go to with any questions or issues?
Product and contribution: Can you see a result from your work (e.g., something you have made, a happy customer)? Is that result something that you value? Does the work you do contribute to something larger that you value (e.g., does the organisation benefit the community in some way)?
Physical environment: Is the job outdoors or indoors? Is the work environment clean, pleasant, spacious, private, quiet, or a good temperature? Do you have all the things you need to do your job well, like technology and equipment?
Social environment: Does the job involve working with many people? Are they always different people, or the same ones all the time? Who are those people (e.g., elderly patients, admin staff, customers)? How much interaction is needed and allowed? Are the interactions formal or casual? What is the workplace culture like (e.g., is there enthusiasm, a sense of teamwork, recognition of good work)? What are your individual colleagues like (e.g., friendly, hostile, supportive)?
Flexibility: Can you have time off if you are unwell or have an appointment to attend? Can tasks and schedules be rearranged around your mental health needs if necessary? Is there some tolerance of potential fluctuations in performance and behaviour?
Opportunities: Can you change jobs within the company? Are there prospects for promotion? Does the job help you learn or improve your skills? Will it be good for your future job prospects?

Where to start

As we all know, getting a job isn't as easy as just deciding what sort of work you want to do, but you don't have to go it alone. These days, there are more and more services available to help people living with mental illness who want to get into employment. Googling "mental illness employment services" will give you an idea of what's available, as well as some people to contact. Talking to a mental health worker you trust is another good way to start.

To disclose or not to disclose

For those of us who have a lived experience and work, at some point we may face the dilemma of whether we should disclose our mental illness to our employers or our co-workers. In some situations, disclosure can mean less stress, more support, work adjustments being made to meet our needs, and the security of feeling accepted "as I am".

It also means we won't have to worry about our employer finding out the hard way, like if we get sick. In some circumstances, there's a chance we may be faced with ignorance and negativity, which can result in feeling stigmatized, being watched more closely than before, or even outright discriminated against. The impact really depends on your individual workplace, which is why it can be a complex decision to make. Some people would rather be open from the start and take their chances, while others prefer to let employers and co-workers get to know them and their work first. A third camp simply don't see it as something that's relevant for an employer or co-workers to know. Only *you* can make this decision, but it can be a good idea to talk to someone you trust, like a friend or mental health worker, about the potential risks and benefits.

Keeping it

For many people living with mental illness, the most difficult part of employment isn't getting a job: it's keeping it, in continuing to perform steadily and reliably day after day despite the fluctuations and difficulties that can result from symptoms and medication. Here are some tips that have helped other people living with mental illness to maintain their jobs:

- Finding and connecting with helpful people (friends, family, mental health workers, and colleagues in the workplace) can all be great sources of support to help you through tough times.
- Looking after all of me: If we focus on our job at the expense of everything else, it may well fall apart. Looking after our physical health and stress levels, having a balanced routine, and having stable accommodation make for a strong foundation for managing a job.
- Having a job that fits who I am: See the exercise above! A job that fits with your values, skills and needs will help you stay motivated to continue.
- Having good coping strategies: Your strategies will depend on your needs and your job. Your mental health worker or employment worker (if you have one) can help you develop these. Some examples are:
 - Taking a break or switching between tasks
 - Going for a walk at lunchtime
 - Chatting with colleagues
 - Being assertive if something is not right
 - Making informed decisions about disclosure (see the section above).

The final thing to say about employment is that many people living with mental illness will go through a number of different jobs – as do many people *without* mental illness. This should not be seen as “failure”, but as a valuable experience. If you haven’t had a job for a long time, or if your mental illness hit you before you even got your first job, then experiencing different jobs can be really valuable. How else can you really figure out what does and doesn’t suit you and what will and won’t move you further ahead in your recovery journey?

Balancing your activities

We’ve talked about the value of doing things that give you fun and pleasure and the benefits of getting involved with meaningful activities. However, in addition to identifying these things and doing them, it’s also very important to balance them in the right amounts. The way you arrange your routine can be the difference between being healthy or unhealthy.

No matter who you are, having an unsustainable routine will definitely catch up with you eventually, so (for instance) if you only get three hours of sleep a night, or if you work sixteen-hour days seven days a week, or if you haven’t turned off the PlayStation since last Tuesday, it is probably time to think about the way you’re balancing your routine! If the way we divide our time gets too lopsided in any given area, then our quality of life may begin to suffer.

On the next page is a sample timesheet that’s been filled out to give an example of a whole day for Mr Hypothetical. Following this, we’ve provided a blank timesheet for you to fill in a typical day of your own. This exercise will help you to assess how you spend your time, and it’s also important to note how you feel about this division. When you finish up, you’ll be able to see in black and white exactly how much of your time is spent on things that are:

- Pleasurable or fun
- Meaningful (valuable to me or others)
- Necessary or routine
- Good for my health
- Relaxing

You can compare this to how much time you spend on things that are:

- Unpleasant
- Boring yawnfests
- A waste of time
- Bad for my health
- Stressful

The answers can sometimes be surprising!

Sample 24-hour timesheet

Here's a sample timesheet so you can see how to fill one in for yourself. Although Mr Hypothetical's timesheet covers a business day for somebody who works, has a dog and enjoys cooking, that doesn't mean your day needs to include any of these things.

Time	What was I doing?	Who was I with?	Was it valuable to me or to others?	In hindsight, how did I feel about it?
Midnight to 6am	Wake up	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> By myself <input type="checkbox"/> With others	<input type="checkbox"/> Valuable <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not valuable	Stressful but necessary
7am-7:30am	Getting ready (breakfast, brush teeth, pack lunch)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> By myself <input type="checkbox"/> With others	<input type="checkbox"/> Valuable <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not valuable	Necessary (and I can do it half asleep...)
7:30am-8:30am	Travel to work by train	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> By myself <input type="checkbox"/> With others	<input type="checkbox"/> Valuable <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not valuable	Boring... a waste of time
8:30am-8:45am	First coffee, prepare for workday, chat with workmates	<input type="checkbox"/> By myself <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> With others	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Valuable <input type="checkbox"/> Not valuable	Pleasant, relaxing
8:45-Midday	Start work. Get assigned my tasks for the day, and keep my work area clean	<input type="checkbox"/> By myself <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> With others	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Valuable <input type="checkbox"/> Not valuable	A bit stressful, but very meaningful. (The money enables me to live the life I want.)
Midday-12:45pm	Lunch in park with workmates	<input type="checkbox"/> By myself <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> With others	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Valuable <input type="checkbox"/> Not valuable	Fun
12:45pm-3pm	Afternoon shift	<input type="checkbox"/> By myself <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> With others	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Valuable <input type="checkbox"/> Not valuable	A bit stressful but meaningful

Time	What was I doing?	Who was I with?	Was it valuable to me or to others?	In hindsight, how did I feel about it?
3pm-4pm	Travel home by train	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> By myself <input type="checkbox"/> With others	<input type="checkbox"/> Valuable <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not valuable	A waste of time
4pm-5pm	Walk my dog, Patches, say hi to the neighbours	<input type="checkbox"/> By myself <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> With others	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Valuable <input type="checkbox"/> Not valuable	Healthy, meaningful and fun (Patches loves walks, and I enjoy them, too).
5pm-6pm	Prepare dinner, eat dinner	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> By myself <input type="checkbox"/> With others	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Valuable <input type="checkbox"/> Not valuable	Meaningful and pleasurable. (I love my food and cooking).
6pm-9:30pm	Watch some television, play some video games, phone one or two people for a chat, maybe arrange to meet up later	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> By myself <input type="checkbox"/> With others	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Valuable <input type="checkbox"/> Not valuable	Relaxing and fun
9:30pm-10pm	Brush my teeth, shower, shave, take my medication, get ready for bed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> By myself <input type="checkbox"/> With others	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Valuable <input type="checkbox"/> Not valuable	A bit boring but necessary
10pm-midnight	Read a few chapters of a novel from the library and get ready for bed.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> By myself <input type="checkbox"/> With others	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Valuable <input type="checkbox"/> Not valuable	Relaxing and healthy (it helps me get a good sleep).

[illegible]

● Exercise: Exploring my typical day

Now you've written out the activities you do in a typical day, let's explore how you used your time. For this, you'll need to add up the hours you spent in different types of activities and write the totals in the table below. Take your time to make sure you get the numbers right.

	By myself	With others	Comments / Do you think this is the right balance?
Who was I with?			

	Valuable to me	Not valuable to me	Comments / Do you think this is the right balance?
Was it valuable to me?			

	Valuable to others	Not valuable to others	Comments / Do you think this is the right balance?
Was it valuable to other people?			

You could go through the same exercise to look at the balance between activities that are stressful versus relaxing, or healthy versus unhealthy or any other aspect you think needs to be balanced.

Before we go any further, do you have any other thoughts about the way you use your time? If you'd like, you can write it here.

● Exercise: My balance

Now, using your timesheet again, let's take a look at your overall balance. Examine how often you had other people for company, how often you did things that were valuable for you or for others. Now, think about what you'd need to change to make your TYPICAL day into an IDEAL day. Once you've figured that out, fill in the table.

	I'd like to do this more	I think it's just about right	I'd like to do this less
Spending time with others			
Doing things that are valuable to me			
Doing things that are valuable to others			

If you ticked "I think it's just about right" for everything, that's fantastic (and very unusual) news! Few people are able to live out an ideal day all that often, but we can all try. In order to help you with that, we'd like you to list 3 small changes you could make to a normal day to move it closer to being an ideal day.

PART THREE: DOING THINGS THAT ARE GOOD FOR MY HEALTH

Why are we talking about physical health?

Why are we talking about physical health? While our mental health is the main focus of this workbook, it's important not to neglect our *physical* health along the way. Our mental health can affect our physical health and our physical health can affect our mental health, so looking after one is looking after the other. When we're having a tough time with a mental illness, though, sometimes the last thing we think about is our physical condition. If this sounds like you, we want to help you make your physical health a priority!

People living with mental illness have a life expectancy that's up to twenty-five years shorter than the general population, which is why we need to take special measures. We are far more likely to have diabetes and cardiovascular disease, more likely to smoke, and the majority of us are either overweight or obese. People with mental health stuff also have a tendency to avoid GPs and to simply ignore any worrying signs of bodily illness, and are quite likely to experience uncomfortable physical side effects from medications.

The *good* news, though, is that we can improve our health with some simple lifestyle choices, and this can result in a more physically healthy (and happier) you. We've broken the basic things you can do to look after your physical health into two distinct sections: getting good health care, and having a healthy lifestyle.

*"To keep the body in **good health** is a duty... otherwise we shall not be able to keep our mind **strong and clear**."*

-Budha

"Your body hears everything your mind says."

-Naomi Judd (rags-to-riches singer and musician, and mother of Ashley Judd)

Are you getting the health care you deserve?

Have you ever encountered stigma from a health professional when you were seeking help for a physical problem? Would this make you less likely to seek their help in the future?

Many people who live with a mental illness will continue to receive support from a mental health professional, but it's highly recommended that we all see a separate GP (General Practitioner) for our physical health needs, too. A GP is a medical "jack-of-all-trades" and is usually our first port-of-call for any physical health concerns. It's really important to get to know your personal GP, as seeing the same doctor consistently means that they'll be better placed to notice any changes in your health and will be able to provide a higher quality of treatment as a result. Also, sticking to the same GP means you don't need to keep telling your life story over and over again.

Once a health professional knows that we have a mental health diagnosis, though, some of them may only want to focus on that single part of our wellbeing. It's possible that once a doctor is aware that we have mental health issues, it can colour their judgement when we seek help for other, unrelated problems, and this can affect our treatment. For instance, a doctor may be reluctant to trust our word, or may even write off perfectly reasonable things as being a byproduct of psychosis, or a component of a mood disorder.

All Australians have the right to good healthcare, so we don't have to put up with second rate service like this. If you have a crappy GP, there are many more out there. But a good GP is about more than just a framed degree on a wall: in addition to knowing a lot of medical facts and figures, your GP will also need to have the right attitude and the willingness to build a relationship of trust and openness. In return, you need to trust and be open with your GP.

On the next couple of pages we will help you figure out if your GP is the right one for you, how to choose a good GP, and how to make the most out of the appointments you have with them.

● Exercise: Is your GP the right one for you?

This exercise assumes that you are already seeing a GP. If any of the answers to these questions is “no”, then you may want to think about finding a new GP and getting the treatment you deserve.

Does your GP do all the following things?	Yes	No
Take your health concerns seriously, rather than assuming that it's all in your head?		
Treat your physical health as though it's just as important as your mental health?		
Show a respectful and non-judgemental attitude?		
Take the time to really listen to your concerns and understand your situation?		
Treat you like an individual, and not a number?		
Tell you your options, make recommendations and discuss the benefits and drawbacks, rather than giving you orders?		
Make you feel comfortable, confident and welcome?		
Encourage you to ask questions?		
Give you enough information in language you can understand?		

● Exercise: Choosing the best GP for you

The way that many of us choose a new GP is simple: we find a clinic that's pretty close to where we live, and that's all she wrote. However, finding the *right* GP can be much harder. One option is to speak with people you trust – like family, friends, and mental health workers – and see if they can make any suggestions. Once you've got some names, you'll need to check out the GP for yourself to know for sure. Here are a few things to think about when deciding if a doctor is the right one for you.

	Yes or no?		Yes or no?
Are they accepting new patients?		Will they see me ASAP if it's urgent?	
Do they bulk bill (will I have to pay to see them, in other words)?		Are the staff friendly and professional?	
Do I need to make an appointment to see them?		Do their operating hours suit me?	
Is it difficult for me to physically reach their practice?		Can I always see the same GP at the practice?	

The majority of these questions can be answered simply by ringing the surgery and talking to their receptionist. If a prospective GP ticks most of these boxes, the only way to be sure that they're The One is to book a consultation. Remember that there's no pressure to go back to that particular doctor if you don't feel happy or comfortable with them. You have the right to "shop around" until you find a good fit.

Illness: Don't put it off

Every health issue in the book can be treated more effectively if it's tackled early, so be sure to make an appointment with a GP the moment that anything unusual or worrying makes an appearance. GPs are a major weapon in fighting off the factors that shorten the lives of those of us with a mental illness; however, despite the importance of early intervention in treating illnesses, many of us will put off seeing our GP so we can avoid "wasting" the

doctor's time. Keep in mind that diagnosing problems early on will make things easier for everybody, *including* your GP. GPs can help prevent future problems, too, by performing regular health check-ups, providing dietary advice, giving exercise pointers, and offering assistance in quitting cigarettes and other substances.

As the very true saying goes: "Prevention is better than cure."

Tips for your medical appointments

We all have a role to play in making the most of any doctor's appointment. For the sake of our own health, it's very important to be honest and open whenever we deal with a GP. We all have stuff we aren't too keen on sharing with the whole world, sure, but holding back information about our diet, habits, existing illnesses or substance use means that our GP won't be able to offer us the best possible care. The better a GP knows our history, the more easily they can pick up on clues that might indicate serious problems with our health. Keep in mind that experienced doctors have heard every story under the sun and aren't there to judge you.

Whenever you visit any doctor, whether it's a GP or a specialist, it's good to be prepared. It's extremely annoying to walk out of an appointment and realise you've forgotten to ask about something critical, so here are some ideas on how you can get the most out of any doctor's appointment.

- Write down anything that needs to be discussed, including any questions.
- If another health professional has already been involved with the issue, bring along x-rays, lab results, referrals or anything else along those lines.
- If the GP is new, it's a good idea to let them know about any existing conditions or ongoing medication prescriptions.
- Write down any instructions or information if it's complicated or if you think you might forget.
- If your health complaint is serious or complex, or if you'd just feel more comfortable with somebody else being present, consider bringing along a friend, family member or a mental health support worker.
- If you're planning on making a major decision, such as changing medications or trying to get pregnant, be sure to keep a GP in the loop. You'd be amazed by the sorts of things you may need to watch out for.

Your check-up checklist

Our bodies are such complex machines that one little irregularity can throw the whole thing out of whack. This is why regular check-ups are crucial for good health. Before getting a barrage of tests done, though, your doctor will need to know a lot about you, so expect questions about your lifestyle, smoking status, diet, exercise habits, and perhaps even your sex life. Your GP will then be able to offer some guidance.

Who?	Get what checked and how often?*
Everybody	<p>Regularly: Self-check your skin for new spots (or existing spots that have changed colour or shape).</p> <p>At least yearly: A full physical examination including your pulse, blood pressure, listening to your chest, checking for breast lumps, feeling your thyroid and lymph glands, shining lights in your eyes and ears, checking your reflexes, calculating your Body Mass Index, and a full blood count (cholesterol, triglycerides, blood sugar, and liver function). As people with a mental illness are at a higher risk of cardio issues, we also need to get an ECG done annually. Possible follow-ups: Vision tests, x-rays, colonoscopy, bone scan, lung function test.</p>
If sexually active	Get checked for Sexually Transmitted Infections regularly and when planning on starting a new sexual relationship
Guys	<p>Monthly: Guys need to self-check their testicles for lumps every month after hitting puberty, and should see a GP immediately if they find anything unusual.</p> <p>Annually: Men over 50 need a prostate check each year</p>
Girls	<p>Monthly: Breast self-checks for lumps or other changes.</p> <p>Every two years: a mammogram after the age of 40.</p> <p>Every three years: all women between 21 and 65 should get a pap test done every three years.</p>

* NOTE: These are general suggestions made by non-experts. No one is better than your GP to advise you on exactly what kinds of things you should be getting checked and how frequently you should be doing it.

Living a healthy lifestyle

Although “getting healthy” may seem like a mountain of a job, there are three things we can start on straight away that can make a huge difference for anybody: cut down or quit smoking, exercise a bit more, and eat a bit better. The following pages have some basic pointers on these three factors.

1. Give up the ciggies

If you’re a smoker, the single most important thing you can do to improve your health is to quit. Even if you can’t fully give up, every cigarette you don’t smoke is helping to improve your health.

We have to note that of the four people who contributed to developing this workbook, ALL OF US used to smoke, so we know that it is extremely hard to give up. BUT we also know the **benefits** of giving up. Our chances of dying from smoking-related problems have dramatically reduced, our wallets have way more money in them, and our skin looks younger and healthier than it would if we were still smoking.

We don’t want to get all preachy on you, but please have a think about quitting. If you can’t quite get there, then cutting down is really helpful, too. If you manage to quit smoking, then your body and your wallet will love you forever.

If you want more information, you should be able to find it easily enough (most governments have massive anti-smoking support in place). A Google search should get you the most current and relevant contact details.

2. Move a bit more

Any exercise is good. If it gets your heart pumping and muscles stretching, then it’s worth doing. Half an hour a day of moderate activity five days a week is a great target, and anything beyond that is a bonus. But like we said, even a little bit of exercise is far better than none. You don’t have to be Ian Thorpe or Kathy Freeman, but everyone should take part in some regular moderate activity. In case you don’t know, “moderate activity” is any form of exercise that makes you feel warmer, makes your heart beat faster and increases your breathing, but not to the point where you can’t manage a conversation. A brisk walk is a good example. If half an hour sounds a bit much, you could start with a 5 minute walk around the block before breakfast each day, and steadily increase from there.

Don't sabotage yourself by setting unrealistic goals. If you set out with a plan to jog for two hours a day, chances are it won't even last *one* day, let alone in the long-term. It's better to start with a level of activity that you don't find unpleasant, and that you can see yourself doing forever. For those of us who don't like hanging out at the gym or on a basketball court, with a bit of imagination we can all build exercise into our daily routines in many different ways. This is known as "incidental" exercise, and could mean:

- Walking or cycling to work
- Walking to the café at the other end of the suburb for our morning coffee
- Getting off the bus or train one stop early and walking the rest of the way
- Taking the stairs instead of the lift
- Carrying our groceries instead of getting them delivered

When it comes to exercise, it's worth remembering that the benefits of improving our exercise habits aren't always measured on the bathroom scales. Exercise helps us where it counts: in our cardiovascular fitness, our metabolic functioning, our blood glucose levels, and much more. These improvements will drastically reduce our risks of all sorts of illnesses such as heart problems and diabetes, and lead to a longer, healthier life. And these are just the physical benefits; research increasingly shows that exercising is good for our mental health, too. So don't be put off if your weight doesn't plummet: focus on things like having more energy, sleeping better, getting out of breath less easily, and being able to do more in your day. If you also look better in your shorts, well, that's a bonus!

Are you seriously unfit or have other physical issues? Any GP can offer advice on the safe level of exercise that's right for you. Make sure to tell the GP if exercising causes anything weird to happen, such as pain, dizziness, swelling, tasting blood or an unusual heartbeat.

If you want to develop a plan to add a bit more movement into your day, we've got an exercise on the next page.

● Exercise: My move more plan!

Can you think of some ways to introduce a bit of moderate exercise into your routine? Any activity is better than zero. Maybe you should think about physical activities you used to enjoy, or consider some exercises that your friends have recommended? How about starting with one “move more plan” now, and add more later on when you’re ready?

My one way to add more movement into my day	Example: Get off the bus two stops early.
What’s stopping me and how can I overcome this?	Example: Tiredness. Laziness. Maybe I could get off one stop early, and increase from there?
My plan: Where can I do it? What do I need? Who can I do it with?	Example: On the way to work, or the shops. I just need to push myself a bit.

3. Eat a bit better

Just like with exercise, it's best to make small changes to your diet that you feel you can live with. The human body has evolved in such a way that if you deprive it of food, it won't let you think of much else. That's why if you eat like a rabbit one day, you're likely to binge like a pig the next!

There are plenty of people out there who want to tell you what to eat. Some of their information is complicated, some is aimed at selling you something, and some is just plain silly. In truth, the Australian guidelines about what we should eat each day are both reliable and simple: for starters, it's recommended that we eat a variety of foods from the five food groups (vegetables/legumes; fruit; cereal; protein; dairy) and drink two litres of water each day. And as everyone knows, we're supposed to avoid foods that contain saturated fat and lots of salt (chips, fried and deep fried foods) or large amounts of sugar (cakes, lollies, soft drinks, biscuits). We need to be moderate with our alcohol and caffeine, too, but we don't need to eliminate them altogether.

Here's a simple guide to eating well from the five food groups.

- Eat TONNES of different types of vegetables (it's good to have lots of different colours, too!)
- Eat HEAPS of different kinds of fruit
- Eat A FAIR BIT of healthy carbs, like wholegrain bread, pasta, and rice
- Eat SOME lean protein, such as fish, meat, eggs, tofu, nuts, beans and lentils
- Eat SOME dairy, like milk, yoghurt, cheese (preferably low-fat, if possible)
- Eat VERY LITTLE salt, fat and sugar

Eating healthily can make you feel better, give you more energy, help you think more clearly, and become more resistant to illness.

If you'd like to take your dietary changes a little further, your GP is a good place to start. They can give you some pointers, and may even refer you to a dietician or other expert.

And remember: there's always some new "miracle diet" being hailed as the cure to obesity. History suggests they won't work out for most people in the long-run. It's far better to stick with sustainable healthy eating.

● Exercise: Small changes that I can stick to

Can you think of three diet changes you could stick with for the foreseeable future? For example, you could have a piece of fruit each day instead of a Snickers bar, drink water with your lunch instead of Coke, or buy wholemeal bread instead of the white stuff. Write your ideas below, and keep this page as a reminder.

Positive change	How will I make this change?
<i>Eg: Stop getting burgers with the lot at work</i>	<i>Bring my own ham salad rolls</i>
1.	
2.	
3.	

When you've got used to these 3 changes, maybe you can come up with 3 more?

Congratulations!

You have reached the end of Module One: Doing Things I Value. 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 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.

