

RAS-DS

WORKBOOK

Version One

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

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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 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."

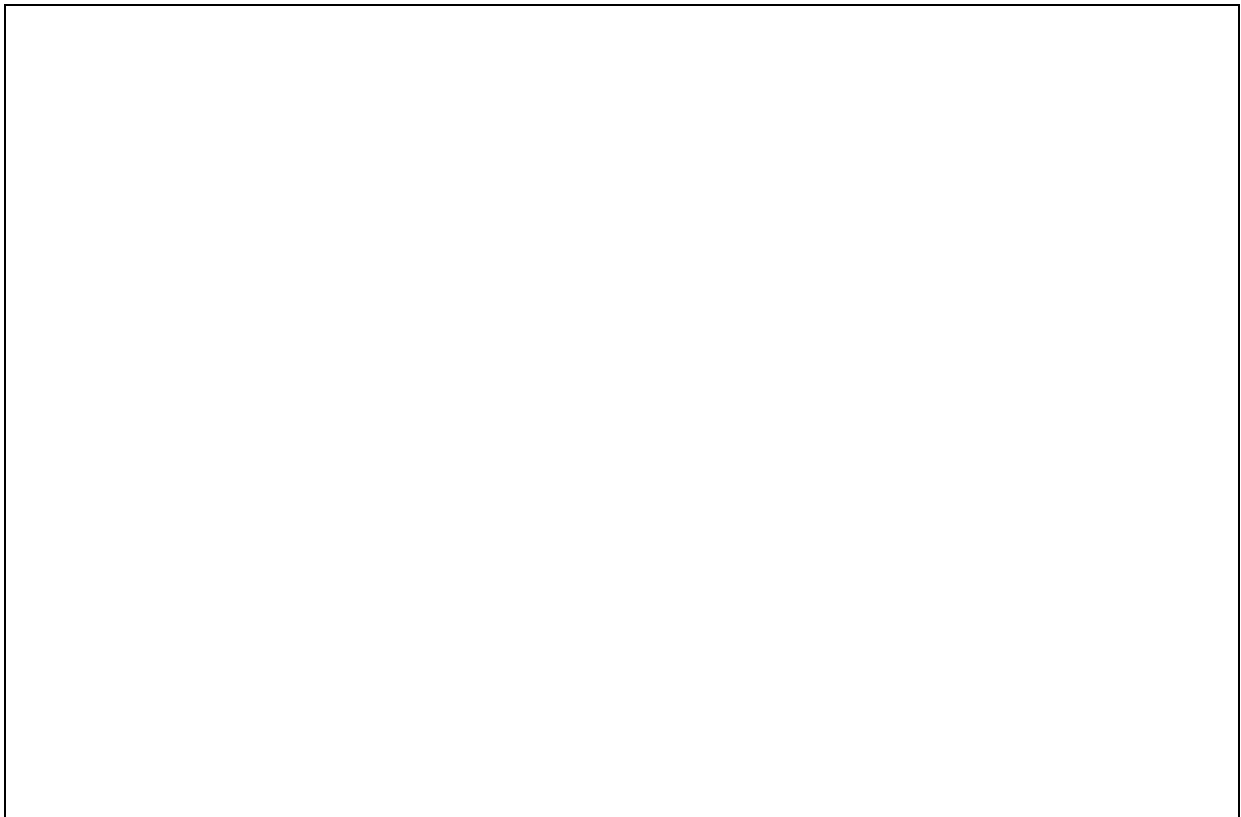
-Nina Dobrev

● 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.

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:

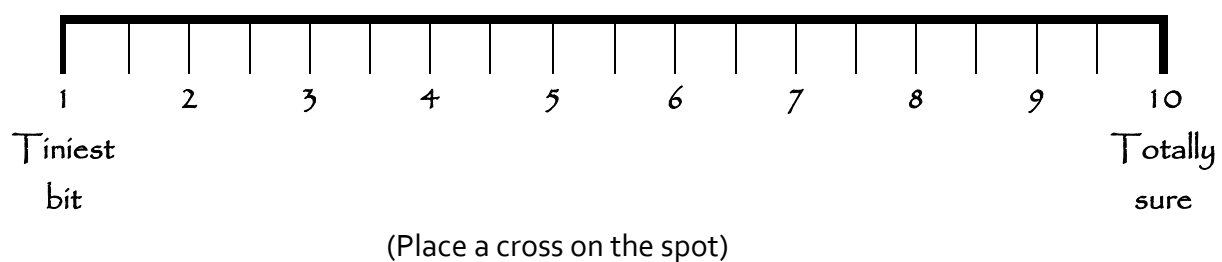
"Recovery is a deeply personal, unique process of changing one's attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills and/or roles. It is a way of living a satisfying, hopeful and contributing life even with the limitations caused by illness. Recovery involves the development of new meaning and purpose in one's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

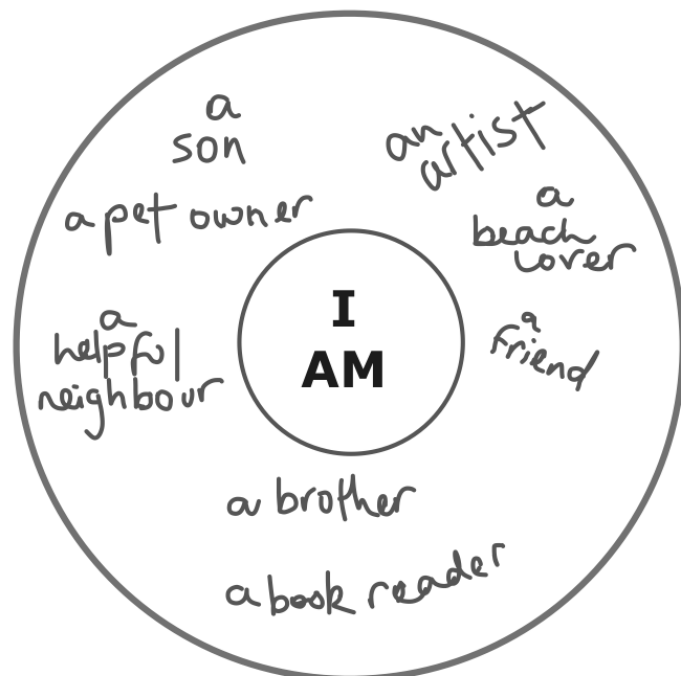
Over time, when we have been battling with our mental health demons, we can begin to lose our sense of who we are, even if we don't start labelling ourselves according to our diagnosis. An important step in our recovery is to start re-connecting with who we are again.

**BELIEVE IN
YOURSELF**

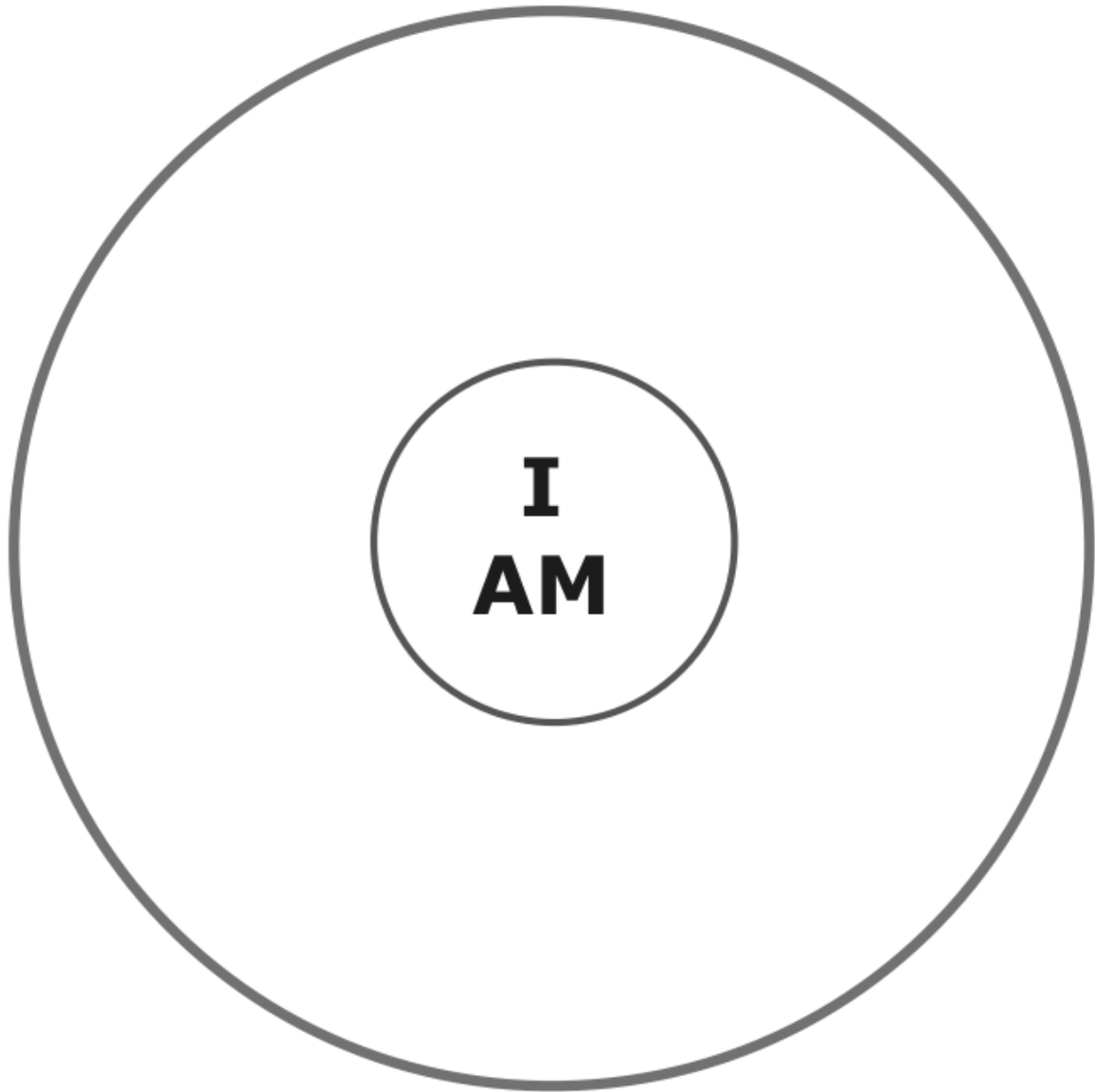
We want you to think about all of the different things that make you who you are. Note that we DON'T want you to write down any medical conditions or symptoms! Simply have a good think about what makes you who you are. For instance: I am a brother, a son, a pet owner, a friend, a helpful neighbour, an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

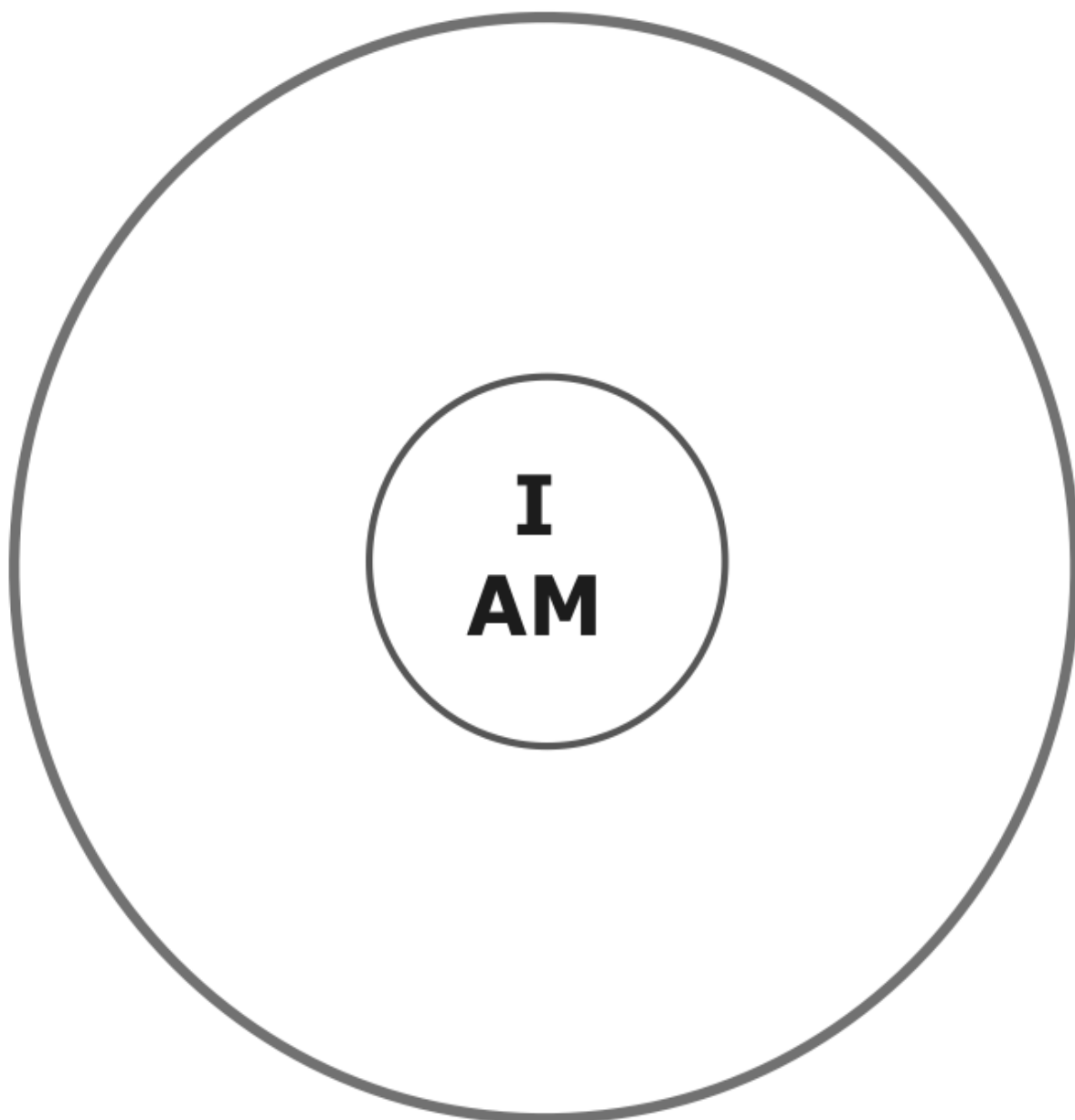
Reconnecting with who we are involves reminding ourselves of all the diverse things we do and how we truly define ourselves (as you have just done in the activity above). It also involves reminding ourselves of the qualities we have, our strengths and the things that we like about ourselves. It's said 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.

Module Three:

Mastering my illness

MODULE THREE: MASTERING MY ILLNESS

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to module three, *Mastering my Illness*. As “mastering” is a verb (a doing word) we’ll be discussing how you can actively take the leading role in your own recovery. This can involve exploring different treatment options to find out what does or doesn’t work for you and using your past experiences to help figure out how you can reduce the risk of future relapses. All the practical sections in this module have been designed to help you better recognise and understand what works best for you so you can use that knowledge to take control of your mental health. Here’s a brief overview of what you’ll learn in this module.

Staying well

Staying well is all about minimising the stressors that put our mental health at risk and maximising our ability to deal with those stressors. In this first part, we’ll help you build a tool kit to do this.

Keeping watch for early warning signs

One of the biggest components of mastering our illnesses is using the wisdom we gained from our past experiences to plan ahead. There are many basic things we can do to avoid relapse (a return of symptoms). We’ll look at active strategies to manage early warning signs and stop them from getting worse.

Advanced planning

Although a lot of people don’t like to think about the idea of a relapse happening, having some clear plans in place (just-in-case) can help to reduce these worries and even help make a relapse less likely. These “advanced plans” involve writing down what needs to get done in the event of a relapse, who you want to do it, and when they are meant to do it. Ultimately, this part will help you develop a unique and effective recovery plan that’s specifically tailored to your strengths, needs and goals.

NOTE

If you’re doing this module then we assume that you have filled in the *Mastering my Illness* 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 Mastering my Illness

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
25. I can identify the early warning signs of becoming sick	Part Two: <i>Keeping watch for early warning signs</i>
26. I have my own plan for how to stay or become well	Part One: <i>Staying Well</i> Part Two: <i>Keeping watch for early warning signs</i> Part Three: <i>Advanced planning</i>
27. There are things that I can do that help me deal with unwanted symptoms	Part Two: <i>Keeping watch for early warning signs</i>
28. I know that there are mental health services that help me	Part Two: <i>Keeping watch for early warning signs</i>
29. Although my symptoms may get worse, I know I can handle it	Part One: <i>Staying Well</i> Part Two: <i>Keeping watch for early warning signs</i>
30. My symptoms interfere less and less with my life	Part One: <i>Staying Well</i> Part Two: <i>Keeping watch for early warning signs</i>
31. My symptoms seem to be a problem for shorter periods of time each time they occur	Part One: <i>Staying Well</i> Part Two: <i>Keeping watch for early warning signs</i> Part Three: <i>Advanced planning</i>

PART ONE: STAYING WELL

The stress vulnerability bucket: a metaphor about mental illness

You will have noticed that staying well is largely about managing your stress. A simple, popular way of thinking about the relationship between stress and mental illness is the **stress-vulnerability bucket**. Because stress is a huge factor when it comes to all mental health issues, this straightforward model can be used to think about nearly all kinds of mental health issues. Here's how it works.

Your vulnerability: The bucket

Some people are more vulnerable to developing symptoms of mental illness than others. How vulnerable we are depends on a whole lot of risk factors we can't change. Some of the more common "unchangeable" risk factors are:

- Previous experience of trauma / abuse
- Coming from a disadvantaged background
- A family history of mental illness
- Experiencing a physical or developmental / intellectual disability
- Belonging to a minority group that experiences discrimination (for example, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer)

People who have fewer of these risk factors are like very large buckets that can hold a lot of water (stress) before they overflow (experience symptoms). People who have more risk factors are like smaller buckets, so the amount of water (stress) they can hold is less.

For people with many risk factors even small amounts of stress may lead to unwanted symptoms. This means that minimising the effect of stress through positive, active strategies is even more important.



Stressors: the water

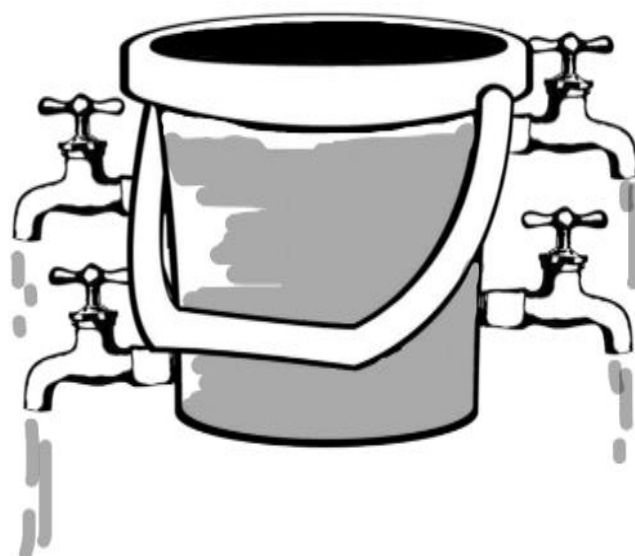
Everyday stressors play a big role in bringing on relapses. Stress is represented by water that fills up the bucket. The bigger the stressors, and the more of them there are in your life, the more water goes into the bucket. Once the water reaches a critical level, the bucket will overflow and a relapse may enter the picture.



Things that can raise your water levels (increase stress)		
Isolation	Not getting enough sleep	Moving house
Not meeting your own expectations of yourself	Difficulties at work, or school	Starting a new relationship
Using substances	Financial difficulties	Relationship difficulties
Unemployment	Housing instability	Poor family relationships
Mixing with people who have a "bad influence" on you and your behaviour	Being a victim of abuse	Not taking essential medications
Starting a new job	Experiencing stigma	Legal difficulties
Getting married	Arguments / conflict	Grief / loss

Things that reduce stress: taps in the bucket

Even though we all have stressors, there are also many things that can help us to release or manage stress. These things are like taps that you can turn on to reduce the water levels in your bucket. These taps are positive coping strategies and good life choices that help lower your stress levels. Many different strategies can add taps to your bucket and keep your water (stress) levels as low as possible. The trick is working out the best strategies for you!



Below is a short list of a few things that can be helpful in reducing your stress and in creating a well-balanced life. You can probably think of a lot more that are relevant to you.

Things that can lower your water levels (reduce stress)		
Reducing/stopping drug use	Balancing work/leisure/sleep routines	Using online self-help websites
Taking helpful medications consistently	Leaving abusive relationships	Yoga/meditation/tai chi
Talking to people you trust	Forgiving others	Forgiving yourself
Being honest with your doctor/therapist	Having realistic expectations of yourself	Maintaining your appearance (look good, feel good)
Doing worthwhile things	Managing your money properly	Keeping a daily routine
Working in gainful employment	Having enough alone time	Giving yourself "time out"
Paying bills on time	Having enough social contact	Learning for pleasure – reading books/watching documentaries
Removing bad influences from your life	Having a life made up of a variety of interests/activities	Having patience and maturity
Getting enough sleep	Having rewarding hobbies	Exercise
Being able to express your needs	Challenging yourself	Remembering you have a condition
Being able to say "no" when you need to	Being flexible	A healthy diet
Keeping a positive attitude – replace negative thoughts with positive ones	Be kind to strangers	Spending time in nature. Take time to appreciate the beauty of the world around you.

And again, the list goes on. In the next exercise we ask you to think about your own "taps" or stress reduction strategies.

Things that raise my water levels (increase stress)

[illegible]

● Exercise: Improving your stress reduction strategies

If your list of stressors on the previous page was longer than your list of things that reduce your stress, then it's a good time to think about starting to improve your range of stress reduction activities. Even if you have lots of these strategies already, you can never have too many!

Think about 5 stress reduction strategies that you can start doing to improve your overall wellbeing. Write them down in the table below and start doing them... today. There's no better time than right now to start doing things that help to minimise your stress!

You can use the list of stress reduction strategies on the previous page if you can't think of any, and there's also a huge table in the **Identifying effective strategies** section on pages 23 to 26 that can help you come up with ideas that will suit you.

5 strategies I can start <u>today</u> to reduce my stress	
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

● Exercise: My main stressors

Stress reduction strategies will help release or manage your stress. But it's even better if you can avoid the stressors in the first place! Prevention is *always* quicker and easier than cure, which is why it's essential that we take steps to remain well BEFORE life throws a spanner in the works. Taking action now can make all the difference.

From your list of stressors, what would you consider to be the **main** ones that are likely to affect your health? Be as specific as you can.

My biggest stressors are...

Conquering some of the big stressors

Now that you've identified some of your most important stressors, think about how you can remove their influence from your life. Some sources of stress can be cut out or avoided altogether. If the source of a stressor can't be simply removed from your life or is proving to be very hard to get rid of, then your next best option is to figure out how you can stop it from having a negative effect on your health. This can mean discussing your lifestyle changes with somebody, joining a self-help group, or asking for specific assistance from your support network.

Thankfully, nearly all stressors can either be reduced or dodged altogether if we employ the right strategy at the right time. Identifying specific strategies to reduce the impact of stressors has a "trickle-down" effect on our long term mental health. Dealing with stressors now can profoundly affect our well-being in the future.

Here's an example of some stressors, as well as some strategies that can be used to manage them.

Stressor	Strategy
Drug use (marijuana)	Start attending narcotics anonymous, or another group that can help me with drug abstinence
Only getting a few hours of sleep a night	Take my medication early and turn off all my lights and electronics by 10:30pm
Forgetting to take my medication	Set alarms on my phone to remind me to take my pills
Thinking into things so deeply that it makes me feel paranoid	Reality-check myself, don't overthink things, and discuss my fixations with people I trust.

● Exercise: My plan to reduce my water levels

So what strategies can you use to avoid these stressors, or at least take away their power?

My Stressor	Strategy

"Remember that stress doesn't come from what's going on in your life. It comes from your thoughts about what's going on in your life."

-Andrew J. Bernstein (music promoter and recording industry bigwig)

PART TWO: KEEPING WATCH FOR EARLY WARNING SIGNS

What are early warning signs?

Early warning signs are the first hints that we might need to take extra care with our mental health. They can be a result of a negative life event or a bad choice we've made, but they can also just appear on their own for no apparent reason. To use the stress vulnerability bucket analogy, early warning signs are the first drops of water spilling over the brim of our buckets.

For those of us who have experienced a mental health condition at some point in our lives it's very important to be able to identify our early warning signs. They'll be the first red flag that we need to take action. Early warning signs tend to get worse if nothing is done about them, so paying attention to them straight away can make all the difference.

There has been a lot of research on the subject of relapse, and it's been clearly shown that how long and how bad a relapse is can be greatly reduced (and even avoided entirely) if people recognise and do something about their early warning signs. To use a war metaphor, actively watching for early warning signs is like posting sentries to be on the lookout for the approach of enemy troops. Being forewarned about trouble *before* it arrives will give you a much better chance in the upcoming battle.

As early warning signs will always make an appearance before the return of an episode of mental illness, the most important question you can ask about early warning signs is: "Would I know it if I experienced one?"

Common early warning signs

Before we dive into a list of common early warning signs, it's worth remembering that experiencing **any** of the individual items on this list doesn't necessarily mean that you are at risk of relapse. We all have some days that are better than others, and most people will experience many of these things in moderate amounts at different times in their lives. The important thing here is to identify the specific early warning signs that have led to relapse for YOU in the past. We have tried to list as many as possible to be most useful in helping you to think through what your own specific set of early warning signs might be.

Early warning signs can be tricky to spot by the untrained eye due to the fact they rarely have any obvious connection with mental health issues. For instance, if the average person on the street had a few days where they had trouble getting out of bed, weren't as well organised as usual or forgot to brush their teeth, it wouldn't be enough for a diagnosis of a mental illness, would it? Early warning signs are highly specific to each person, and identifying them before they become actual **symptoms** will give you a better chance of averting a crash.

NOTE

It can sometimes be unpleasant to think about what was happening for us when we have been unwell in the past, but this is all part of the process of getting to know ourselves better. The better we know ourselves, the more able we will be to spot and stop early warning signs before they turn into a full episode / relapse.

● Exercise: My early warning signs

If you've ever experienced any of the following things before a relapse, **CIRCLE** them. If you'd like, you can add other early warning signs you have experienced to this list as well.

Early Warning Signs
Talking or smiling to myself
Difficulty sleeping
Difficulty sitting still
Eating or drinking until sick
Isolating myself from friends and family
Getting angry easily
Neglecting personal hygiene
Thinking people are against me
Forgetting to brush my teeth
Can't stop talking
Losing my ability to get along with people
Negative thinking
Feeling increasingly religious
Thinking people are talking about me
Movements are slow
Feeling helpless or useless
Thinking unusual / bizarre thoughts
Having difficulty making decisions
Feeling like I am being punished
Feeling despondent
Smoking more
Feeling less hungry
Feeling heaps of guilt
Feeling like I am being watched

Early Warning Signs
Behaving aggressively
Feeling suspicious
Chewing my nails
Cleaning or washing excessively
Crying more than usual
Cutting or burning myself
Damaging your home or possessions
Drastically changing my appearance
Everything becoming an effort
Extreme emotions
Feeling "on edge"
Feeling afraid for no reason
Feeling confused or puzzled
Feeling forgetful or far away
Feeling in another world
Feeling irritable
Feeling isolated
Feeling like I am being watched
Feeling like I cannot trust other people
Feeling like my emotions have stopped
Feeling like I do not need to sleep
Feeling nauseous
Feeling overwhelmed by life
Feeling sad or low

Early Warning Signs
Experiencing strange sensations
Trouble with motivation
Speech comes out jumbled
Feeling tired for no good reason
Having a disordered, cluttered home
Thinking I can read other people's minds
Not enjoying things I usually enjoy
Feeling afraid of going crazy
Increased energy
Thinking my thoughts are controlled
Lack of organisation
Communication difficulties
Losing my budgeting skills
Coming up with many new ideas
Feeling guilty
Decreased libido / sex drive
Feeling anxious
Being late for everything
Playing video games or gambling for days at a time
Mood swings
Anxiety when you're out of the house
Senses seem sharper
Feeling worthless
Feeling unusually angry
Too much or too little sleep
Thoughts are racing

Early Warning Signs
Feeling strong or powerful
Feeling things won't get better
Feeling unable to cope with everyday tasks
Fixating on something specific
Grinding my teeth
Having difficulties concentrating
Having less patience with people
Having more nightmares
Having trouble getting dressed
Hearing voices
Inappropriate laughter
Increased substance use
Losing my train of thought
Mind slows down
Neglecting my appearance
Not enjoying previously enjoyable activities
Not talking much
Only feeling better by using substances
Putting on (or losing) a large amount of weight in a short time
Racing thoughts
Rapid, rambling speech
Receiving personal messages from the computer / TV or radio
Repeating behaviours or words a lot
Senses "shut down"
Spending large amounts of money
Spending time alone

Early Warning Signs
Having a sense of restlessness
Being preoccupied about one or two things
Behaving oddly for no reason
Feeling tired or lacking in energy
Headaches
An inability to concentrate
Feeling more hungry
Increased libido / sex drive

Early Warning Signs
Taking on many new things
Thinking a part of me has changed shape
Thinking I have special powers
Thinking people are against me
Trembling / shaking
Trouble getting out of bed
Troubles falling asleep
Waking up too early in the morning

● Exercise: What do people I trust notice when I'm getting unwell?

Often the people who are closest to us can notice changes in us that we don't even notice ourselves. Asking people we trust about what they notice can be a really useful way to help us understand our unique pattern of early warning signs. Below is space to record what three people you trust have noticed when you were becoming unwell in the past. It can be helpful to explain to them why you are doing this process and ask them questions like, "What are the very first things you notice that make you worry about my mental health?"

Ideas from Person I trust 1

Very first early warning signs they notice	
Other changes they notice later on	

Ideas from Person I trust 2

Very first early warning signs they notice	
Other changes they notice later on	

Ideas from Person I trust 3

Very first early warning signs they notice	
Other changes they notice later on	

This connects to...

The **Connecting and Belonging** section of this workbook will help you to identify who you trust, who is an active part of your recovery journey, and the roles of different support people. If you have trouble with the section above, perhaps going through the **Connecting and Belonging** section may make this easier.

Ordering early warning signs

So far you've identified what your early warning signs are, and hopefully other people you trust have given you their ideas. Now we would like you to try and figure out the order in which your early warning signs are most likely to appear, from those first mild tickles to full-on alarm bells. Figuring out their sequence means that when things get stormy you'll be able to know just how close to the brink you actually are. This can provide more in the way of options and increase your chances of preventing a relapse. Some early warning signs may indicate that you need immediate help, while others just mean you should get a couple of early nights. Try to group your early warning signs into stages:

FIRST STAGE: the first things you notice, and things you can probably manage on your own. This is actually the hardest and, in some ways, the most important stage to notice!

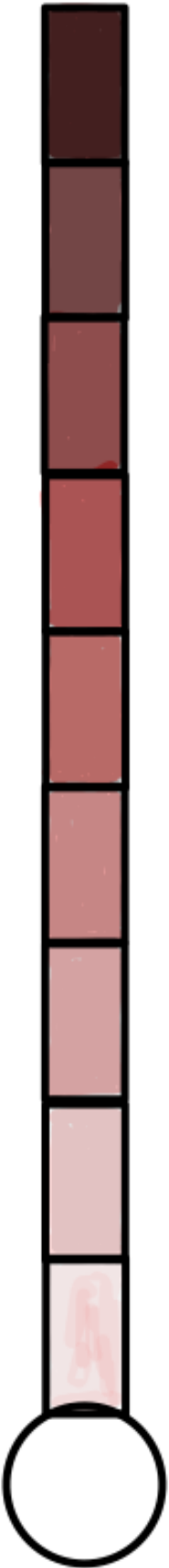
MIDDLE STAGE: more serious warning signs that might indicate that you need to seek help or support.

LATER STAGE: things that suggest that you are nearing crisis point and you definitely need help or support.

We have used the idea of a **thermometer** for this exercise (this is a pretty common metaphor). The first stage signs are at the lowest temperature. As things "hot" up, your middle stage signs will start showing themselves. At close to "boiling point" your later stage signs will make their appearance.

Use the thermometer on the next page to order your early warning signs into early, middle and later signs. To do this, use the signs you circled in the last exercise and the information about changes that your support people noticed. The idea of the thermometer is useful because it lets you see where you are and can help you to decide what kind of actions you need to take to stay well – we will get onto the strategies part next.

● Exercise: My early warning sign thermometer

	Late stage early warning signs	
	Middle stage early warning signs	
	Very first early warning signs	

- Exercise: What strategies are effective for me?

[illegible]

● Exercise: Discovering new strategies for managing early warning signs

Over the next few pages, there are a huge range of suggestions of strategies that can be used to combat early warning signs. Go through the list of strategies to see which ones you think might be most helpful for you to use.

How you use this list is completely up to you, but you might like to use the following symbols to “rate” each strategy in terms of how well you think it might work for you.

- ✓✓ I have used this strategy and I know it is very helpful for me.
- ✓ I have used this strategy and I know it is helpful for me.
- ? I haven’t used this strategy and I think it might be helpful for me to try
- ✗ I haven’t used this strategy, but I don’t think it would be very helpful for me
- ✗✗ I have used this strategy and I definitely know that it is NOT helpful for me

Read through each strategy and mark whether this has been / might be useful for you or whether you think it won’t be helpful for you. You can add your own at the end.

Strategies	Helpful?
Appreciating myself	
Arranging not to be alone	
Avoiding caffeine and sugar	
Avoiding drugs or alcohol	
Avoiding long periods of doing nothing	
Avoiding long periods of isolation	
Avoiding stimulating environments	
Being good and gentle to myself	
Being held by someone I love	

Strategies	Helpful?
Booking an urgent appointment with my therapist	
Changing negative thoughts into positive ones	
Cleaning	
Dancing	
Doing activities that I enjoy	
Doing things that distract me from my symptoms	
Focusing on the “here and now” rather than worrying about the future	
Forcing myself to get out of the house at least once a day	
Forcing myself to get up in the morning	
Gardening	
Get help with household chores	
Getting emotional support from people I trust	
Getting in touch with my spirituality	
Giving my credit and debit cards to a trusted support person	
Giving myself positive praise	
Go for a walk in nature	
Going for long drives	
Going on bus rides / train rides	
Going on day trips	
Going to a support group	
Going to church	
Going to the gym	
Helping others	
Keeping a list of enjoyable activities that I can do that don’t take much effort	

Strategies	Helpful?
Keeping a list of things to use up excess energy (e.g., weeding, washing, cleaning)	
Keeping away from people who stress me out	
Keeping regular sleeping / waking cycles. Go to bed on time and get out of bed on time	
Keeping busy	
Keeping to a timetable for my day	
Knitting / crochet / cross stitching	
Laughing	
Letting my support people know how I'm feeling	
Listening to music	
Long hot baths	
Looking through photo albums	
Making a list of things to do for the day	
Making love	
Not giving up my usual routine	
Painting / creative expression	
Playing a musical instrument	
Playing sports	
Playing with / caring for pets	
Praying	
Reading	
Recalling the good times	
Refusing to feel guilty	
Relaxing in a natural setting	
Remembering my achievements	
Seeing my friends and support people regularly	
Spending a couple of days living with a parent / friend / relative to avoid becoming isolated	

Strategies	Helpful?
Staying in familiar environments	
Staying away from big groups of people	
Talking to my case manager / support facilitator / mental health worker	
Talking to another person who has experienced similar issues	
Talking to my doctor about options for increasing / changing medications	
Using relaxation techniques like deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation or meditation	
Watching my favourite movie / TV show	
Working with pottery	
Working with wood	
Writing in a journal	
Writing letters / emails to friends	
Yoga	

We will start with an exercise to get you to think about which stage of early warning signs each of your strategies would work best at. Alternatively, you might want to jump to the next exercise where we get you to match a particular strategy or two with each early warning sign.

[illegible]


Matching strategies to early warning signs

Now you have identified a range of strategies that might be useful to manage early warning signs and you have ordered them into early, middle and later strategies, it's time to match strategies to specific early warning signs. There's an endless number of ways that you could do this: some people like to put their strategies on the same page as the thermometer, others like to have a separate page that lists their strategies by different stages. To help you, we have provided an example of the "thermometer" version below. On the next pages, there is a template for you to use, but feel free to create your own!

Early warning signs		Strategies	
Late stage early warning signs	Withdrawing socially: During both of my past admissions this behaviour transformed into outright paranoia, so I know this is a red flag.	Talk to my support people straight away. Try to avoid isolating myself entirely. Talk to my doctor or mental health worker about possible changes in treatment.	
	Feeling crummy: feeling crummy for no reason isn't like me. Also, this can lead to not being able to enjoy the things in life that usually bring me pleasure.	Talk to my support people. Talk to my doctor and mental health worker so they can keep an eye on the situation with me. I might need to consider additional medication.	
Middle stage early warning signs			
	Letting my house get messy: Sometimes I stop caring about the upkeep of my house...and then my own upkeep.	Set aside a time to clean up. But this could be more than a messy house: struggling with hygiene is a common issue with my particular mental health issues. If this goes on for a while, I may need to make an appointment with my doctor.	
	Not wanting to get out of bed: This minor issue can quickly grow to the point where I stop caring about things like my hygiene and my responsibilities	Give some thought to my routine. It could just mean that I'm overloaded and need to reduce my obligations, OR they could be early warning signs.	
Very first early warning signs			
	Losing my train of thought: We all get distracted. But wandering about all day in la-la land is a worry. It may indicate the early stages of thought disorder.	I might just need a break and a coffee before getting back to what I was doing. However, if this issue persists and disrupts my capacity to work, I may need a day off.	
	Difficulty concentrating: I may be working too hard and not getting enough sleep. Also, my job can be boring at times.	Have a couple of early nights and see if that helps. Assess my workload and, if necessary, temporarily reduce it.	

● Exercise: My Early Warning Signs and Strategies Thermometer

Early warning signs		Strategies	
Late stage early warning signs			
Middle stage early warning signs			
Very first early warning signs			



Keeping your thermometer up to date

The thermometer exercise doesn't end here! For best results, be sure to use it regularly to monitor your wellbeing. Your thermometer is also intended to be a "living document," something you add to as you get more knowledge and experience.

This is a big job, but it is worth every minute you spend on it. This whole process is about getting to know yourself and your illness in the deepest way possible. As you learn more about yourself, your early warning signs, and the best strategies for you, you'll add new things to your thermometer, change things and reorder things. You might find that you have to delete strategies that don't seem as useful as you first thought. All of this is great, because it demonstrates that you are getting to know yourself so much better. Eventually, your thermometer will become so detailed that you'll probably need to do up a brand new version, so the first thermometer you complete won't be the last.

Don't forget to share your thermometer with people you trust and who support you. It is actually really helpful for all of your support people or trustworthy friends to have a copy of or at least know about your warning signs and strategies! That means you will have others looking out for you. Also, your support people will have more idea of the signs that might suggest you need a helping hand. They may also be able to help you get the ordering right with the way the early warning signs emerge. You have probably included some of these people in your strategy plan, especially for the middle or later stages, so it's important to check that they understand it and are happy to be involved. You could even talk to them about the most helpful ways for them to alert you if they do notice early warning signs.

PART THREE: ADVANCED PLANNING

The value of making advanced plans

So far in this module, we've talked about managing stress to stay well and we've talked about identifying early warning signs. Both of these can help to prevent us from becoming acutely unwell. But, like we said in Module Two, recovery is not a linear journey. So, as the old saying goes, it's wise to hope for the best but also plan for the worst.

"Advanced planning" is a pretty simple concept: it means using what we've learned from our past experiences with mental illness to make effective plans for our future care. If we have a plan in place before we become unwell, then the people who make the decisions about our care and treatment can use our advance plans to do things in the way we want. Although our treating team are not legally obliged to follow our plan if they believe other options will work better for us, having an advanced plan means that they know what our wishes are. When they know what our wishes and preferences are, then they are much more likely to follow them.

Having a plan in place helps our peace of mind now, too! Although many people don't like to think about what should happen if they become unwell again, making advanced plans can actually help to reduce the anxiety we can feel about becoming unwell. In the worst case scenario that we do become unwell again, at least we know that our support network will know what we think is most useful to assist our recovery.

The following five pages provide the opportunity for you to put together a simple advanced plan, and it's highly recommended that all our readers take advantage of this now, rather than later.

● Exercise: My advanced plans

The following five pages give you the opportunity to create a personalised advanced plan, outlining your wishes should you be hospitalised or need assertive treatment. There are a lot of different advanced plan "layouts" around. If you don't like this one, ask your mental health worker what they know about, or search online.

MY ADVANCED PLAN - Page 1

Date:

Full Name	
Date of Birth	
Phone number	
Address	
Signature & date	

If I'm hospitalised, please notify the following person/people as soon as possible. This can include friends, family, a GP, a psychiatrist, a case manager, an advocate, a carer, or other support people.

Who	Relationship	Number

I have the following things in place	Yes	No
Financial guardianship?		
Power of attorney?		
Medical insurance?		
Other (specify)		

MY ADVANCED PLAN - Page 2

Date:

My healthcare history**1. Things that worked**

When it comes to medication and other treatments, in the past I've found the following things helpful.

2. Things that *haven't* worked

The following things haven't worked very well for me, and I'd prefer not to try them again.

3. Existing health issues

I have the following health issues, allergies, or other medical stuff.

Making your Advanced Plan more detailed

Now that those basic things are out of the way, we'll move onto your personalised plan – this will be for page 3 of your plan. This more detailed part needs to include everything you want your treating team to know for the sake of your own wellbeing (and perhaps even your own protection) if you happen to relapse. For instance, somebody who experiences “high” phases can do a lot of financial damage to their bank accounts before they go back down again, so their advanced plan may involve having their credit cards being held by a support person. Using that example, here's a sample advanced plan sheet for a lady who has been hospitalised before due to extreme bipolar phases.

An example:

What	Details
Caring for my children	My two children need to stay with someone (my mother and my sister have looked after them in the past and are pretty familiar with their routines).
I can't have access to my cards	I need to have my keycard and credit cards taken away by the staff so I can't rack up a huge debt
No-go zones	I cannot go to pubs, clubs, casinos or anywhere else that offers poker machines or other forms of gambling. I also can't play card games with the other residents, as there's a high likelihood I'll turn it into an opportunity to gamble
Pocket money only	I cannot carry around large quantities of money. I am also not allowed to borrow money from anybody
Financially vulnerable to others	While I'm in hospital I'm not allowed to give my money or possessions to anybody there, whether it's to patients or to visitors. Some of my family members have taken advantage of my high phases in the past, as have other residents
Kept safe	While “up” I have been known to act physically affectionate towards male residents I don't know that well. Some may take advantage of this. I cannot have male patients in my room or be allowed in their rooms.
Caring for my cat	Someone needs to look after my cat if I am away from home. Mrs Jones from next door (unit 12) has a key to my place and knows how to look after my cat.
Paying rent, electricity and phone	Even though I know I'm not good at managing my money when I'm unwell, I need to check my mail so that I don't miss out on paying any of my bills.

Now that you've seen how it's done, on the next page is your opportunity to spell out what you want to happen in the event that you are hospitalised. Try and include all the things that are important to your care and wellbeing, so your treating team, family and other support people can keep them in mind during a potential stay.

MY ADVANCED PLAN - Page 3

Date:

[illegible]

Getting your advanced plan witnessed

So now you've developed your whole advanced plan, but how can you be sure that it'll be followed? Is it worth the paper it's written on? What can you do to increase its power?

Like any legal document, getting your advanced plan "witnessed" is a good way to boost its value. Getting your plan witnessed means getting somebody to state *in writing* that yes, they were there, and that they acknowledge this plan spells out your wishes. Witnesses can be doctors, psychologists, some other kind of health worker, a lawyer, a justice of the peace, or somebody else. Your witness simply has to sign a short statement confirming your plan, and that you, in their opinion, understand what you are asking for. You also sign this page. To make things easier, on the next page is a form for your witness to fill in. This will be page 4 of your Advanced Plan.

MY ADVANCED PLAN - Page 4

Date:

I have developed this Advanced Plan to ensure my wishes and my knowledge based on previous experiences are listened to and taken into account if at some time in the future my mental state makes it hard for me to clearly express my needs and wants.

Name:

Signature:

I have witnessed (name of person who has developed the advanced directive for themselves) sign this form and in my opinion, at the time this was done, they were well enough to understand and intend the effects of their advanced plan.

Name of witness	
On behalf of	
Witness's role	
Address	
Signature	
Date	

What to do with your completed Advanced Plan

Once your advanced plan has been completed and witnessed, we recommend that you ask your mental health worker to store a copy in your medical records. It's also really important to share your plan with the people you have mentioned in it – or at least the part that is relevant to them. For example, if you have said that you would like your neighbour to be asked to feed the cat, it would make sense to make sure they know that they might be asked to do just that and are also happy to do so! We suggest that some support people or people you trust should also keep backup copies, just to be safe. Within reason, the more people who know about your Advanced Plan and even have a copy, the more likely it is to be followed when the time comes. Be sure to keep a list of everyone who has a copy.

Keeping your Advanced Plan up to date

You can change your advanced plan at any time. All you have to do is say in writing at the top of your new plan that you are withdrawing the older advanced plan, then draw up a new one to replace it. We recommend that you review your advanced plan every 12 months to make sure it stays up to date with where you are in life. If some support people have out-of-date copies of your old plan, you'll need to let them know about the changes and give them copies of the new one.

Congratulations!

You've reached the end of *Module Three: Mastering my Illness*. We hope you've got a better idea of how to take the leading role in your recovery journey. 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 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 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.

Module Four:

Connecting & Belonging

MODULE FOUR: CONNECTING AND BELONGING

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to module four, *Connecting and Belonging*. Humans are social creatures, so connecting with other people is critical for our well-being. Not only is a sense of belonging a basic human need, it's particularly important for those of us on a recovery journey. Just as we wouldn't climb Mount Everest without a back-up crew, we shouldn't face our recovery journeys alone, either. After all, our supplies will be much easier to carry when we're not dragging them on our own. Of course, relationships are a two-way thing, so connecting and belonging also means supporting others in *their* journeys. We focus on four things in this module:

People who believe in me and people I trust

We all deserve to have people we can count on, people who will believe in us through the tough times. This section will help you to think about your existing relationships and how to make sure they're meeting your needs.

My social network

Identifying our support people and figuring out their different roles is really helpful in making sure we have access to the right kind of support. In everyone's life, a variety of people will take on a variety of roles.

Giving back

While it's clearly important to *receive* support from our social networks, it's also important to be able to *offer* support in return. Having a mental illness means that life has automatically qualified us to better understand the struggles of people with a lived experience, so at some point you may have an opportunity to support others in the same way you once required support. Not only is this helpful for whoever we're helping out, but it's amazing for our own feelings of purpose and meaning, too.

Tweaking, trimming and tolerating

Most of us have some relationships that are less than ideal. This section will help you think about how to "trim" those that undermine us, "tweak" those that can be improved, and "tolerate" those that can't be changed.

NOTE

If you're doing this module then we assume that you have filled in the *Connecting and Belonging* 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 Connecting and Belonging

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
32. I have people who I can count on	Part One: <i>People who believe in me and people I trust</i> Part Two: <i>My social network</i> Part Four: <i>Trimming, Tweaking and Tolerating</i>
33. Even when I don't believe in myself, other people do	Part One: <i>People who believe in me and people I trust</i> Part Three: <i>Giving back</i>
34. It is important to have a variety of friends	Part Two: <i>My social network</i> Part Three: <i>Giving back</i>
35. I have friends who have also experienced mental illness	Part Two: <i>My social network</i> Part Three: <i>Giving back</i>
36. I have friends without mental illness	Part Two: <i>My social network</i> Part Three: <i>Giving back</i>
37. I have friends who can depend on me	Part Three: <i>Giving back</i>
38. I feel OK about my family situation	Part Four: <i>Trimming, Tweaking and Tolerating</i>

PART ONE: PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE IN ME AND PEOPLE I TRUST

The value of having people who believe in us

When people believe in us, it helps us to believe in ourselves, especially when times are tough. These people are like our own personal cheerleading squad. They don't have to worship the ground we walk on, but they must be positive, support us through our tough times, encourage us to keep going, and celebrate all our successes both small and large. We all need these kinds of people in our lives if we want to recover and achieve our goals and dreams.

We want you to think about the people you know, especially the ones you've had in your life for a long time, and try and figure out who *really* believes in you. This might mean they've played a major role in making you who you are today, encouraged you, believed you would get better again even when things were tough, or helped you to focus on your strengths and abilities. These are the sorts of people we WANT and NEED to be around.

They could be:

- a parent, sibling, a grandparent, cousin, aunty or uncle
- an old school teacher
- a lifelong friend
- somebody you know from church, a sport, a shared interest or a hobby group
- a mental health worker

● Exercise: My cheerleaders

Have you got anybody who cheers you on like this? Write them in the box below.

Who do I trust, and why?

When somebody believes in us and actively encourages our recovery, they will do things like ask if we're okay, offer reassurance, give some well-deserved praise for our milestones, and just simply be there for us. However, for them to be people we really trust, this support needs to be balanced by honesty, and perhaps even by some well-deserved (but helpful!) criticism from time to time. A true and trustworthy friend doesn't always tell us what we want to hear, but what we *need* to hear, and this honesty makes somebody more deserving of our trust. It's all about their intent, and about whether the person really has our best interests at heart. These people are more than cheerleaders. They are like our coaches: people who encourage and support us, but also challenge us and help us to improve ourselves and to be the best we can be.

Some of the ways people might earn our trust include:

- Listening to us
- Giving us their honest opinion if we ask for it
- Treating us the same way they treat their other friends
- Visiting or calling when we're in hospital
- Supporting us to do all those things that keep us well
- Asking "Are you OK?" if they notice anything out of the ordinary
- Watching for our early warning signs

"To be trusted is a greater compliment than being loved."

-George MacDonald (pioneering fantasy author and mentor of fellow writer Lewis Carroll)

● Exercise: My coaches

Think about some of the people who you trust. Place their names in the left column of the table below. Now, go through the columns and mark whatever boxes these trustworthy people tick. The more boxes any given person ticks, the more trust they've earned, and the closer you should hold them.

Name of person I trust	I trust them because they...				
	really listen to me	give me their honest opinion	make time for me	ask if I'm doing okay	Other reasons

This connects to...

Do you want to involve the people you trust in your relapse prevention plan? Go to page 31 to 38 of **Module Three: Mastering my Illness**.

Couldn't think of anyone?

If you couldn't come up with anybody who believes in you or who you trust and rely on, then read on. Part Two will give you some suggestions for increasing your social network, and Part Four will help you to make your existing social network more supportive.

PART TWO: MY SOCIAL NETWORK

We all need friends

Not everyone in our lives has to be our coaches and cheerleaders. There's room in our lives for a whole variety of people.

The tough reality is that many of us may have lost friends (and even family members) because of the effects of mental illness, the stigma attached to it, and others' lack of understanding.

Mental illness can make forming new friendships more difficult, too, as it's tough to make new friends when we're in the middle of a really tough episode in life. Lots of people living with a mental illness feel as though they don't have enough friendships or social connections.

But we don't need to just accept being isolated or lonely. Plenty of other people out there are also looking for connection and belonging – so we might be just the person to bring it to them!

First, really think about your existing friends. They don't have to be super-close to you – just people whose company you enjoy. You might find you have more than you thought.

"Never give up on someone with a mental illness. When "I" is replaced by "WE", ILLNESS becomes WELLNESS.

-Shannon L Alder (author of several books and over 1,200 inspirational quotes)

"One of the most beautiful qualities of true friendship is to understand and to be understood."

-Lucius Annaeus Seneca (ancient Roman philosopher)

● Exercise: My mates

Write down everyone you consider to be your friend. Work friends, old school friends who have stuck by you, next door neighbours, people you've joined for coffee, all of them!

Variety is the spice of life

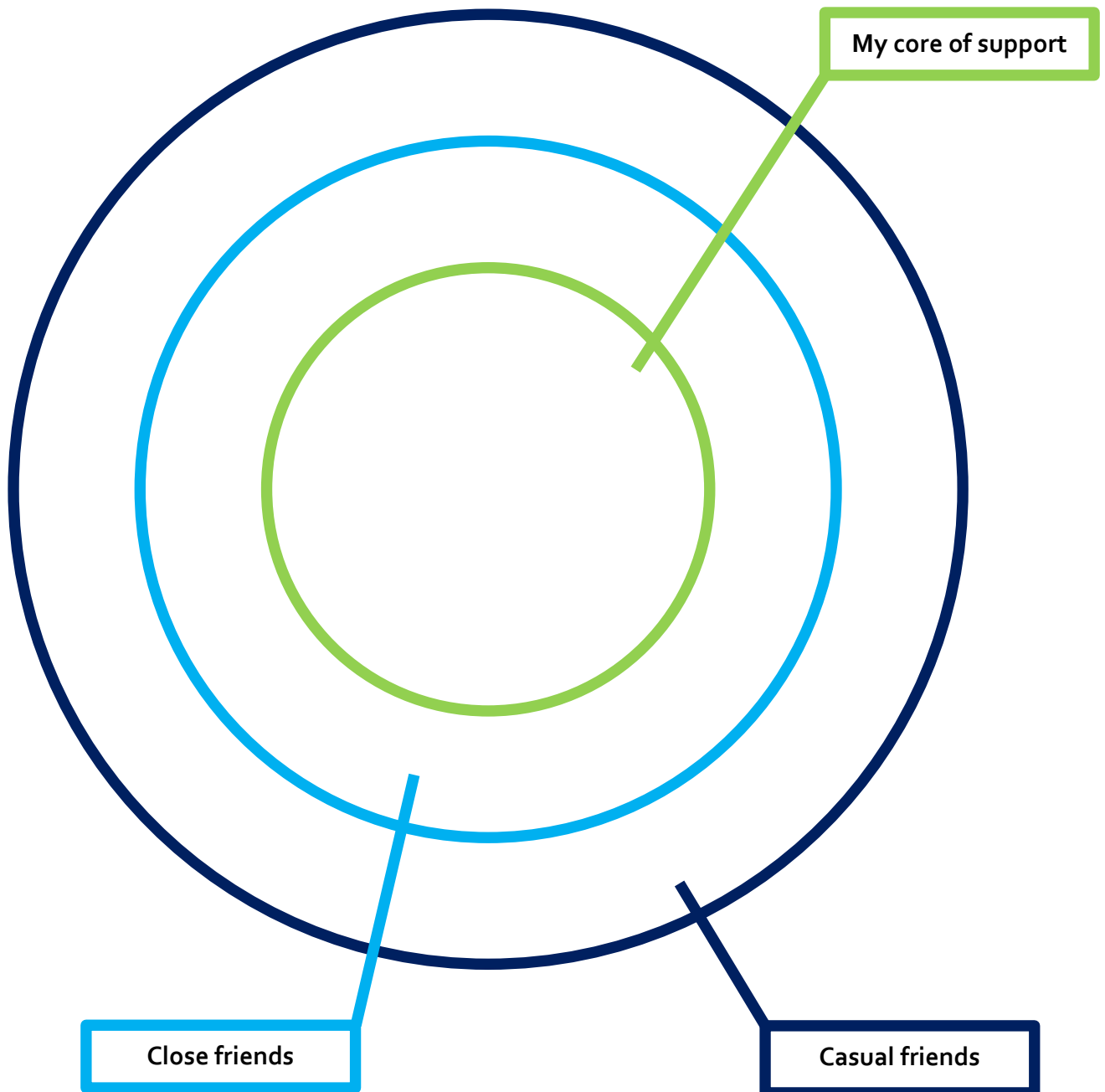
We all need a **variety** of friendships. First off, we all need a **core** of support. These are people we can rely on to help us no matter what - the sort of mates who we could wake up at 3 in the morning if we really needed to! These people will also often be those we see as our "coaches". We also need other close friends (even though we probably wouldn't wake them up in the middle of the night), the sort who we can share our thoughts, dreams and worries with. Some of these people will also be our "cheerleaders".

The third type of friends are the "casual" ones, the sort you enjoy being around and doing things with, and who will often share some common interests. These are the friends who you wouldn't necessarily share your personal stuff with. Generally, any new friends will start as "casual friends", but over time they might become closer to us until they are "close friends", or maybe even "core of support" friends.

We'd like you to think about whether you have a good mix of these types of friends, and some activities on the next couple of pages will help you to do this.

● Exercise: My network of friends

Knowing how important it is to have a mixture of friends, the following exercise will help you really figure out your personal network. Look at the list of all your friends and think about what sort of friends they are. Are they your core of support, your close friends or your casual friends? Write down their names in the target below.



● Exercise: Friends with and without an experience of mental illness

Now that you've filled in the circles, have a good look at your work and think about the balance. Do you feel like you have enough people in each ring? Is there a type of friendship that you need more of? If you would like to build your network of friends there are some great suggestions in the next few sections that might be useful.

Another way to look at your friendship mix is to see if you have mates with and without an experience of mental illness. People have told us that being friends with somebody with a mental illness (a fellow traveller) is different to being friends with somebody who *doesn't* have that sort of shared experience. It's not a matter of somebody being better or worse due to this one factor, but having friends on both sides of the line is really important in many different ways.

Now, go back to the circles of friendships on the previous page. Circle the mates who have a mental illness of some kind. Once you've done that, have a good look at the balance between the number of your friends who HAVE a lived experience compared to those WITHOUT a lived experience. How do you feel about the way they're balanced? Would you prefer to develop more friends in one of these particular groups? If you want to work on developing more friendships in either group, keep reading for some thoughts and suggestions.

Making more "fellow traveller" friends

So why is it important to have friends WITH a mental illness? Firstly, many of us will tend to hide our mental health histories from new people, as we may fear they'll be weirded out, or perhaps even avoid us altogether. So while we may be reluctant to discuss this stuff with people we don't know all that well, having friends with a similar condition can provide a great opportunity to explore the realities of illness without having to censor ourselves (you could think of it as "sharing notes," if you'd like). People often feel at their most open and honest when they are with friends who are "fellow travellers," which is one term for people who have their own experiences with mental illness. Having these friends helps us feel understood. While we shouldn't expect a friend to fulfill the role of "therapist" in a relationship, having mutual experiences means there's a lot we can share: the usefulness of different medications, experiences with side effects, what strategies or services we find most helpful when things get tough, or even just discussing which hospital dinners were the

worst ones of all! A shared experience also qualifies these friends to better understand what we're going through when we are having a rough time. Of course, the risk of encountering stigma from such friends is much less likely.

Of course, if you're inviting a friend with a lived experience into your support network, they may ask YOU to be a part of THEIR network, too!

It kinda goes without saying that there are people living with a mental illness everywhere we go! At some places though, they will be easier to find and connect with! Here are a few good places where you might meet other people with their own experience with mental illness.

- Drop-in centres or local community centres
- Group programs run by local mental health services or local community organisations
- While you are waiting for appointments
- Peer support groups
- Friends-of-friends
- Hospital
- On-line mental health support groups

Friends WITHOUT a mental illness

Even though having "fellow traveller" friends is really helpful, having friends who **don't** have an experience of mental illness can be a positive sign that we are "getting back out there" and re-connecting with our community. All of us have lots to offer potential new friends, and it's not good to be "cut off" from other people for too long.

Depending on where we meet people, it can be surprising just how understanding the average Joe or Jill can really be. And with mental illness affecting one in five people, it's likely that we won't be the first person with lived experience they've met. Having said that, if our medical stuff doesn't directly affect another person, then it's up to us whether and when we want to share. Nobody is expected to share everything about themselves with people they have just met. Just like there's no need to immediately tell them about our pet budgie, our preference for dark chocolate or our enjoyment of Rick Astley records.

When we are seeking to make friends with people who don't have a lived experience, it's a good idea to look for people who share something else with us. For example, there isn't much point going to a Greek Orthodox Church if you don't have an interest in that religion, or to a football game if you hate sport!

Listed below are just a few ideas of where you might start connecting with new people who are not necessarily "fellow travellers," but that doesn't mean somebody with a lived experience wouldn't go to these places, too!

- Places of worship
- Local events (check your local community centre and local papers)
- Sport events
- Clubs or groups related to your interests or hobbies you have
- Work
- Places you study
- Friends-of-friends
- And the list goes on...

This connects to Module One: Doing Things I Value

If we want to meet new people, then one of the best ways to do this is to connect up with activities that we enjoy. This will involve interacting with a range of new people who enjoy the same things as us, and can be the best of foundations for a new friendship.

But striking up new friendships just isn't that easy!

Some people are natural extroverts. They can talk to anyone, anywhere, anytime. Others are the exact opposite. And feeling stigmatised by mental illness, or having been burnt by previous relationships, can really knock your confidence in starting new friendships. So making new friends isn't always as easy as just turning up at places where other people hang out. Approaching and talking to people for the first time can take a lot of courage. Here are some tips for when it's not easy.

- Get involved in activities (see Module One for ideas). Doing activities alongside other people not only brings you together with people with similar interests, but because the focus is on the activity, you're not put on the spot to come up with sparkling conversation from the very first moment.
- Try to smile and look open, interested and friendly. This will make other people more likely to approach you.
- Practice striking up brief conversations with people around you. For example, if you see someone walking their dog at the park, tell them how cute the dog is (dog owners love this) and ask what kind it is. Or ask the check-out girl how her day has been. When you walk away, give yourself a pat on the back for making that effort. If you do this sort of thing regularly, it'll get easier and easier.
- Find something in the environment or about the person that you can comment on or ask a question about. For example, "Where did you get those great shoes?" (everyone loves a compliment) or "It's clouding over, I wonder if it's going to rain?"
- Ask questions that invite a story, like "how do you know (mutual friend)?"
- Really listen to what people tell you, and encourage them to tell you more. Many people love to talk and everyone loves a good listener.
- If you find socialising exhausting, be sure to plan it in small doses, with time alone to recharge afterward.
- Make use of social media. Sending someone a Facebook friend request or following them on Instagram can be a good, non-threatening way to get to know each other a bit.

- Instead of concentrating on how you appear to others or how uncomfortable you feel, think about how to make other people feel good. For example, you might smile at them, give them a compliment ("great t-shirt!"), or offer to give them a hand carrying their stroller up the stairs. This can help you feel less self-conscious.
- If you've met someone that you seem to get along with and would like to become friends with, invite them out. For the first time, doing something relatively brief and casual is good, like coffee somewhere local or maybe going to see a band you know they like. This step can be really hard, because there's always the possibility they'll say no. But it's critical if you want the relationship to move beyond "acquaintance" and toward "friend".
- Remember that other people have their own concerns, and are therefore unlikely to be judging your social skills. A little social awkwardness on your part is unlikely to even be noticed.
- Not all social interactions will go as planned. Sometimes you might approach someone who doesn't want to start a conversation or be friends. This happens to everyone, so don't give yourself a hard time about it. It will often be more about what's going on for them rather than about you.
- Remember that feeling shy or awkward amongst strangers doesn't make you a less valuable friend. Those of us who don't make friends easily tend to make *excellent* friends because we choose well and really value the ones we have.

PART THREE: GIVING BACK

We all need to be needed

All of us have a natural drive to contribute to the world around us in our own way. Psychologically, we need to feel needed. But perhaps you don't feel like there are other people who need you or depend on you? If so, turning this situation around is an important part of any mental health recovery. No matter who you are, you have plenty to offer the world, especially to the people you already know and care about.

It can be tough for us to give our time, effort and energy to other people when we have so much going on in our own head, but as we grow and recover, we'll eventually reach the stage where we are ready to be an active part of other people's support networks and to give back to our local community.

Being a person who supports and helps others is a big indicator of recovery for a lot of people. So...how do we start this process?

Giving back to your friends (or family)

The way we help others doesn't have to be massive. We don't have to donate a kidney to be making an impact. In fact, some ways we can help others don't take much effort at all. Simple acts like listening and offering some genuine encouragement when a friend is struggling can have a profound effect. And we don't need to offer pie-in-the-sky optimism, like telling someone they'll be the next DaVinci or DiCaprio! Just standing by somebody as they go through life's challenges (and not ditching them at the first speed bump) can be a precious thing. The best place we can have an impact is within our own circle of friends and family. You might want to conquer the lounge room before trying to take on the world!

Simple ways to help our friends can include:

- Calling them or texting them if we haven't heard from them in a while
- Providing practical assistance like going along with someone to a new activity as "moral support" or helping out with the housework or the gardening
- Meeting up with them when and where you promised

- Reminding them things will get better in time
- Encouraging them to give their new medication a chance
- Telling them that they are capable of a lot more than they may believe
- Sharing your experiences of what helped you in a similar situation
- Organizing get-togethers
- Connecting friends with other friends
- Asking them to tell you about what's bothering them, or just about their day
- Being a great listener

What we do for the people around us doesn't have to be the same as anybody else. This difference is a good thing, as each person needs many different things, and no single person could possibly provide all of it. Our contributions might be drops going into an ocean, but each drop matters and we don't need to do huge things to make a splash in someone else's life!

There are many ways that we can help others. "Giving back" to our friends and the wider community can have a very powerful impact on how we see ourselves, so it's highly recommended.

A suggestion from Grant:

Try being the glue

Got a bunch of friends who you think would hit it off? Know a couple of people who might like to increase their social networks? Perhaps you could plan a group activity! Coffee at a local café is a good, easy, cheap option, and so is lunch or dinner somewhere affordable (firstly, be sure to check that the restaurant does split bills if you want to save drama).

Larger scale plans will require more time and effort, but they are easier than they sound if you take it one detail at a time. If everyone is strapped for cash, then watching a movie at someone's house and cooking dinner together is a better option. When you meet up, make sure you introduce everybody, and be sure to have fun! It might sound like a lot of effort, but it's a truly wonderful experience to see a big group of people enjoying themselves, especially if you were the one who connected them all together.

Who might benefit from your support?

So what practical support can we offer to other people? This could be doing almost anything for almost anyone, and can be as involved as you like. Here are a few examples of practical things that any of us can do for the people around us.

- Inviting a lonely friend (or potential friend) out to coffee
- Helping people who are worse off by working at a charity shop or soup kitchen
- Calling a friend while they're in hospital
- Offering to do the grocery shopping for a sick friend or neighbour
- Listening to a friend who's struggling with depression
- Carrying groceries for your ninety-seven-year-old neighbour
- Babysitting your mate's kids

● Exercise: Who do I already help?

Ask yourself: Who do I already help out? Who already depends on me? How do they depend on me?

Friend/person	How I help/support them

● Exercise: Who else could I offer assistance to?

Can you identify somebody else who's in need who may appreciate your help? How could you help them?

Friend/person	What could I do to help/support them

This connects to...

Module One: Doing Things I Value. In particular, **Part Two: Doing things that are meaningful** goes into a lot more depth about making plans to do things that contribute to or help other people.

"Lots of people want to ride with you in the limo, but what you want is someone who will take the bus with you when the limo breaks down."

-Oprah Winfrey

PART FOUR: TRIMMING, TWEAKING AND TOLERATING

Dealing with difficult relationships

Some relationships are like a great home-cooked meal – healthy, enjoyable and satisfying. Others are like a pizza without cheese – still pretty good, but could definitely be improved. Still others are like bad fast food – they leave you feeling a bit queasy. If you have difficulty or feel uncomfortable in a relationship, or can see that it is not good for your well-being, you can either trim it (end the relationships or reduce its impact), tweak it (make changes to the relationship to make it better), or tolerate it (learn to live with it in a way that doesn't harm you).

Trimming: Are there “friendships” you need to end?

We've talked about people who believe in us and people we trust. Now we need to think about the other side of the coin – are there people who we don't trust, and who are unhelpful to us and our recovery journey? Even if we like somebody or enjoy their company, we still need to think about whether those relationships are healthy and helpful. It makes life so much easier if the people in our circles are supportive of our wellness, or at the very least aren't a destructive influence. As we've said, we all deserve friends we can count on, friends who build us up, not people who tear us down and make life more of a struggle.

Some examples of how people can tear us down include:

- Pushing you to take substances that you've told them are bad for you
- Calling you offensive names like crazy, lunatic, schizo, mental, that sort of thing
- Touching you or doing things to you that you don't like
- Physically hurting you
- Teasing you or making fun of you
- Encouraging you to stop taking medications that you know are helpful
- Always asking you for money or other things
- Treating you like you're dangerous
- Treating you like you're stupid
- Sharing your private stuff with other people without your permission

We don't need people like this in our lives. The people we spend time with should make our lives richer and happier, not worse! If somebody wants to continue being a turkey, then you have the right to leave them behind and hang out with somebody better.

If you are wondering about whether you might be better off without certain people, perhaps the exercise on the next page can help?

● Exercise: What won't I accept from "friends"?

We all need to set boundaries that people are not allowed to cross. If people don't respect your boundaries, then they aren't respecting you. If they don't respect you, then they aren't your friend.

You are the gatekeeper when it comes to the influence that other people have over you. After all, if you don't want to associate with somebody, it's your right to make that choice. If somebody in your life is dragging you down, making life hard and generally not fitting the definition of a friend, then are they really somebody you want to spend your precious time with? It's good to know where you draw the line on what you will not tolerate from other people. Write down the things that are not okay for friends to do in this box. Our list above might help you get started.

"There is nothing wrong with avoiding people who hurt you."

-Taylor Swift (mega-successful musician)

"Life is too short to spend with people who suck the happiness out of you."

-Anonymous

Things I don't tolerate...

Hopefully you can now look at these things and think about whether there are people in your life that you might want to leave behind. It's not always easy to ditch people, especially if they are in your life because you are involved in the same things or activities. If you are struggling with how to get them out of your life, we suggest you sit down and talk to a person you trust and develop a plan together.

Tweaking: Changing aspects of my relationships

Some relationships can be mostly good, but a particular aspect might bother us. Of course, no relationship is perfect, and we all have to put up with other people's foibles, but some things, like those you identified above, just don't seem right. In the same way, sometimes our friends and family try to support us in ways that actually aren't the best for us. We can choose to just go along with these things, but then the situation will continue to bother and stress us out. Our support people will never know how they could be supporting us better if we don't say something.

The alternative is to do something to shape your relationships and the support you get. Say you have a good friend who you enjoy being with, but they occasionally make jokes about your mental illness, which embarrasses and upsets you. If you pretend not to notice and laugh along, they will understandably think you don't mind. So ask yourself a question: if they knew they were upsetting you, would they care? If the answer is no, perhaps they fall into the "trimming" category. If the answer is yes, then perhaps some "tweaking" on your part is needed. Say your mum is a great support to you, but she phones you all the time when you're out with your friends and it drives you crazy. Again, some tweaking might be needed.

There are lots of different ways that people living with mental illness shape the support they get. Some of these are pretty ambiguous. For example, we might give non-verbal signals that we're not happy with the way things are going, for example, by going quiet, acting grumpy or even avoiding the person. The person might correctly interpret these things, but then again they may just think we're having a bad day.

In general, if you want something to change, it's best to communicate this openly and assertively. Assertive communication means telling the person what you need clearly, but respectfully and with consideration for their feelings and needs as well.

Tips for communicating assertively include:

- Choose a time when you are both calm and on good terms
- Acknowledge that you value the person and the relationship
- Say what you would like to change about your relationship clearly and honestly (for example, "I would like you not to ask me to lend you money anymore")
- Keep your voice at a normal volume and confident tone – not aggressive, but not apologetic either
- Make eye contact and keep a calm expression
- State the facts. Don't exaggerate or use words like "never" or "always" (for example, "you never pay it back")
- Use "I" statements, like "I feel uncomfortable and pressured when you do that"
- Listen respectfully to the other person's point of view. Be prepared to compromise, but make sure it's in a way you're truly happy with - don't cave in

Sometimes we might feel reluctant to suggest ways that our support people can better support us; maybe we feel ungrateful or are concerned about hurting their feelings or worrying them. Maybe we're not used to talking about our feelings, or have trouble finding the right words to explain things. Maybe we think they won't understand or it won't make a difference or maybe we just haven't thought about trying to change things. A lot of these things can be overcome by thinking carefully about how to approach them in a kind and respectful way. Talk to someone you trust about how to do this. If it's something that might seriously affect your recovery and the person is a close family member, you might even consider including them in a conversation with your mental health worker. A trusted mental health worker who understands the situation may be able to help you to get your point across clearly and unemotionally.

Tolerating: When you can't change things

Some relationships cannot be changed and cannot be erased from your life either. In particular, relationships with family members can fit into this category. As the final part of Connecting and Belonging, we think it's really important to talk about these relationships.

Family members have a critical impact on people with lived experience of mental illness. For many of us, family are our "core of support" – the people we can trust and rely on throughout our recovery journey.

However, our family members also have the power to hurt us far worse than anybody else in our lives. Sadly, some people haven't been supported by their families, and may have even been betrayed or harmed by a family member or somebody else who was very close to them, whether verbally, physically, emotionally or sexually. The people who have unhelpful (and sometimes harmful) family relationships have all told us the same thing: even if they cannot forgive certain family members, they needed to reach a point where they were able to stop allowing the hatred and anger they felt from getting in the way of their recovery and their future happiness. They described how essential it was for them to at least feel "okay" about their family situation, to reach a level of acceptance that things are what they are, and not allow these hurts to continue harming them any further.

If you have experienced (or still experience) unhelpful or harmful family relationships and the hurt is getting in the way of your recovery journey, you shouldn't try to ignore or put up with it. Please seek out the support you both need and deserve to be able to move forwards with your recovery.

There are plenty of specific trauma services and family counselling services out there. They can help you to reach a place where your past experiences of family conflict stop getting in the way of your recovery. You deserve this! Mental health services will be able to connect you with these specialist services. We also suggest you seek the support of people you trust.

Congratulations!

You have reached the end of Module Four: Connecting and Belonging. 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 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!