



Improving your quality of life, one step at a time

Issue #08:

HEALTHY HABITS: ACTIONS TO RECOVERY



When we feel safe, secure and well connected to our families and people within our communities, we develop a sense of belonging and an understanding of who we are. These attributes allow us to have confidence in our actions and enable us to live our lives in ways that are satisfying and meaningful. In short, we create a baseline for what good mental health feels like. In contrast, when we're overwhelmed and/or looking to solidify our relationships and roles, we can experience mental health challenges that create further disconnectedness and detachment. Treatment and therapy are a key component of the critical support needed to re-establish the baseline of feeling well, which leads to healing, but there are also actions we can undertake to compliment and encourage sustainable recovery.

The process of recovering your mental health helps you find the parts of yourself that were lost; helps you learn about what makes you strong and where you are most vulnerable; encourages you to accept support from people who care about you; and shows you ways that you can create a life

focused on positive interactions. Recovery from a period of poor or challenging mental health isn't instant, and it's something that will always be with you: "It is important to remember that recovery is not synonymous with cure."¹ Remember to be kind to yourself along your journey and include, "hope, dignity, self-determination and responsibility."²

What does recovery look like?

For recovery to be successful, you need to embrace actions that will help you heal. The personalized care you receive is going to help you learn about and create a positive sense of self. There is no single service or solution, therapy or treatment that will improve everyone's mental health, because everyone is different. There are however, things you can do to help find what feels right for you:



- Accept and understand that you are receiving personalized care that is going to help you create a “positive identity outside of being a person with [a mental health disorder].”³ Developing an understanding that you are not defined by the labels of any diagnosis you receive: you are a whole person, which embodies all of your characteristics and traits surpassing those tied to your medical diagnosis.
 - Be willing to accept help, recognizing that your current health, your social interactions and quality of life can be improved.
 - Be prepared to trust that the people developing your personalized recovery plan see you as an individual and will be putting supports in place that will help you given your individual situation and needs.
 - Find and hold onto hope. It’s an essential part of recovery that helps to keep you motivated and focused during recovery.
- Recognize you will be involved in making choices that support your best recovery path and allow yourself to take responsibility for as much as you can in your life.
 - Be willing to learn and accept that you will regain control in your life. Part of your treatment may help you identify things that have been harmful in your past and acknowledge how these may not be helpful as a part of your recovery. Instead, you may be encouraged to try new things with the support of the professionals and people who care about you. You’ll enter into the healing process with insight and begin to develop definitions to build self-worth and self-esteem. You will see how you fit into the world, your contributions, and understand how and why you matter.
 - As you recover, you will begin to recognize warning signs that indicate you may be moving backwards or reverting to previous harmful actions and behaviours. Identify your behaviours and moods that signal a shift in how you are thinking. With time, you will learn to see and acknowledge signs that you need to seek help and guidance, which will allow you to avoid risks that may result in a crisis.

Here’s a small list of common warning signs that many people experience when faced with mounting mental health challenges. It’s important to note that warning signs will differ between individuals. The signs noted below may also be attributed to physical health concerns. If you notice things starting to break down, you may want to consult your primary care physician or a counsellor:⁴

1. Being angry at people who you care about
2. Confusion, forgetfulness or thinking that is not clear
3. Crying and not being able to stop
4. Experiencing physical symptoms that are not usually present (excessive tiredness, lack of appetite, heart palpitations)
5. Feeling overwhelmed and that you can’t go on
6. Lack of motivation
7. Wanting to withdraw and avoid people

Recovery doesn’t happen without your input and involvement

Your involvement in defining your recovery journey is key because it is so personalized. The professionals who are supporting you are only one element. Your mental and physical health are often affected in some capacity, and treatment options will look at all aspects of your health. A combination of mental and physical treatments are the best approach to securing and maintaining achievements during recovery. That means your care may involve pharmacological treatment, psychological therapy and physical care (exercise and diet).

- As you acquire knowledge and an understanding of the help being provided, you will contribute to the creation of how you want to define what feeling well means to you, which, in turn, allows you to offer insights and choices about your care.
 - Think about the kinds of activities you enjoy when you are well. Do you like to cook, read or exercise?
 - Determine what feels meaningful with respect to the activities you feel comfortable participating in during your recovery.

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- You may want to work with your caregivers to create a personal plan for mental health to help your caregivers understand when they should intervene, what your care preferences are during a crisis, and how and when to recognize that you feel comfortable in resuming full control. Having a documented plan can make things more transparent for everyone involved and ensure your wishes are articulated during times when you may need more help.
- During recovery, it's important to have the right attitude towards sharing information, communicating and embracing care partnerships.
 - There may be some hesitation; however, sharing relevant information will help the people who are caring for you understand what your wants and needs are during recovery and will ensure synchronized and well executed transitions of your care requirements.
 - Be willing to learn more about yourself, your strengths and vulnerabilities, your family relationships and your friendships. Observe and identify how these interactions relate to your mental health when you are well and when you are in need of more support or are ill. This knowledge creates valuable meaning that can help you address your past and can help you define and reinforce positive choices in your care plan.
- Another important action is your willingness to regularly re-evaluate where you are within your recovery journey with honesty and courage.
 - There are many tools you can explore to help you with this aspect of recovery. Review questions and contemplate scenarios that help you assess how you are feeling and set goals for yourself that allow you to track your progress.

- Realize that your recovery effort is ongoing. The work needed may diminish with time, however it will never finish. Recognize this is a positive thing. Looking at your adversities through a recovery lens will help you find balance and a fulfilling life. As you gain more insight and the ability to recognize your signs of crisis, you will learn when you need to invoke a different degree of care. You can regain control of and manage your mental health.

Some questions you may ask yourself to assess your current mental health and help set goals³

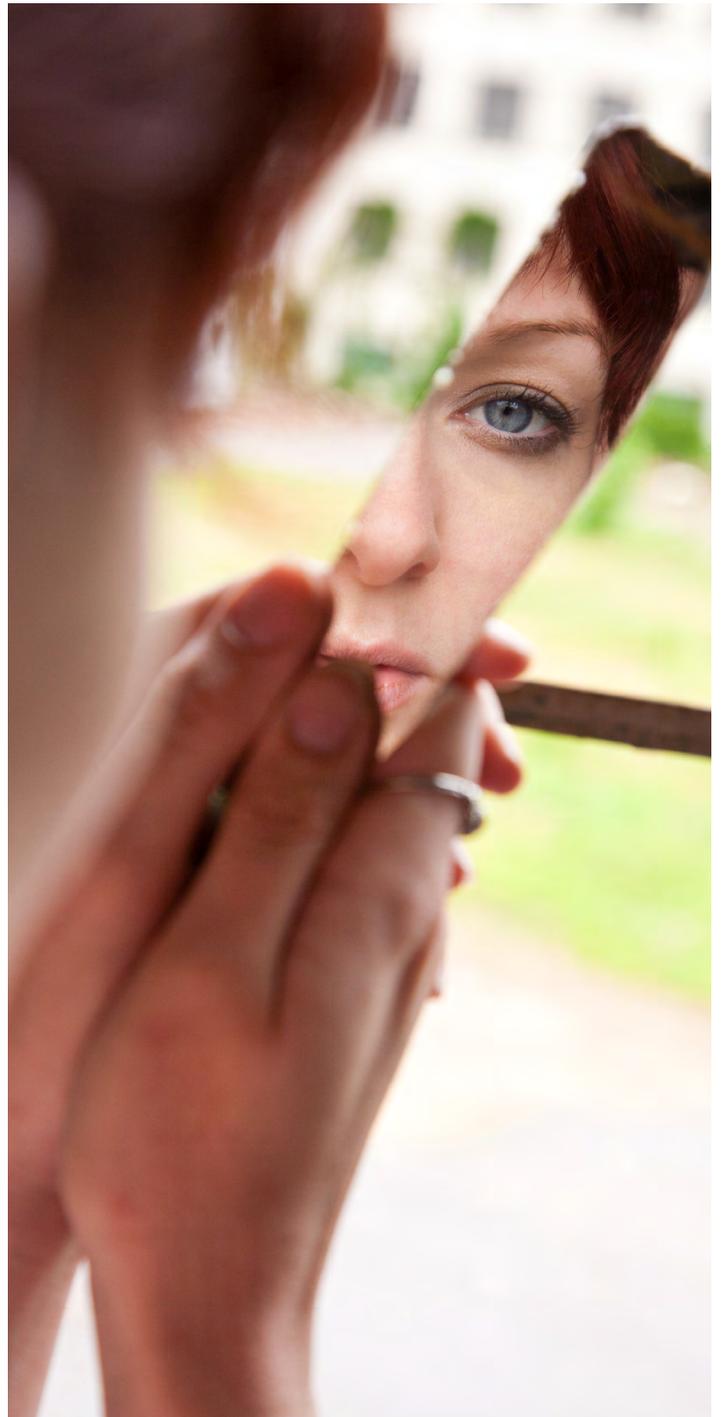
1. What keeps you going?
2. How would you like your life to be different?
3. What are your dreams now? How have they changed?
4. How have you previously moved through tough times in your life? What was helpful? What would you have done differently?
5. What positive ways have you changed or grown as a person?
6. What things have you done or how have you behaved that made you feel really proud of yourself?
7. What would give your life more meaning and make it more enjoyable?
8. When did you last have fun?
9. What would someone who knew you really well say about you? What would you like them to say?

The Principles of Recovery

There aren't a prescribed set of steps to follow for mental health recovery. Instead, it's based on self-discovery, acceptance, personal growth, working through occasional setbacks and learning from all of these experiences. Having a "holistic, person-centered approach to mental health care," where recovery focusses on every aspect of your life is crucial.⁵ That means looking at you (both mind and body), your spirit, and your community. Knowing that "It is possible to recover from a mental health condition and the most effective recovery is patient-directed"⁵ helps provide a framework for how you can live your life fully and successfully. Working to build upon your strengths and define your purpose with respectful, responsible and supportive care, plus receiving positive reinforcement through social relationships, support groups, family and friends will help you develop confidence and become more comfortable over time. Don't rush and don't look at repeating steps as defeat. It's all part of a healthy recovery experience.

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