

Self Management

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This chapter will briefly introduce the concept of self management and its relationship with Well-being and Recovery.

It will provide some guidance about how, when and why to use this approach and will offer a series of exercises aimed at initiating the process.

A basic self management Recovery plan will be included for use.

There are a number of self management tools available in England and most provide a similar framework. These can include Recovery, wellness, early warning signs, crisis or Recovery action plans. There is a list of useful websites that give links to these resources at the end of this section.

This chapter is aimed at exploring the things affecting a person's general Well-being and takes a 'whole person' approach, taking into account emotional, mental, physical or spiritual Well-being, as all of these aspects are interrelated.

This chapter is aimed at those who wish to use this resource in their own lives and for those who think it may be of use to those they support.

You will need to read this chapter before completing the exercises and it is recommended that you read the chapters on Well-being, Recovery and the principles to give you a good grounding before you begin.

What is self management?
"Self-management entails both a positive mental attitude ... and positive actions that help you get on with living your life the way you want to. [It] includes knowing when to recognise the illness limitations and adjusting your way of life

to accommodate them ... and living your life to the full. ... The more you live your life and achieve goals, no matter how big or small, that is active self-management"
(Research participant's definition, Rethink) (footnote – http://www.rethink.org/living_wit_h_mental_illness/Recovery_and_self_management/selfmanagement/)

Self management is about taking control of your life, and is a means of discovering what helps and what doesn't in managing life's challenges.

It involves you reflecting on what your strengths, needs and goals are yourself and deciding what is of importance to you in your life now.

It does not mean that you have to manage all life's challenges alone, or cope with the symptoms of distress independently, but it does involve an active engagement in the process of learning what you can manage yourself and when and how others can be of help.

Note Self management is about learning to take the driving seat in managing life's challenges.

The difference between self management and care planning

Care plans are a written requirement when working with someone from mental health services. They plan the type of care or service you will require as a user of this service. Part of this may include risk, crisis or even Recovery plans.

The main difference between self management and this type of care planning, is who drives or leads the process and who decides what is important.

In care planning approaches, what is offered is based on what the service provides, how well it

works in partnership with other agencies and whether you meet the criteria for receiving this kind of help or not.

Your mental health team couldn't possibly help support all your needs, support all your dreams and advocate all your behaviours.

In self management approaches, you are the one driving and leading the process and making the decisions. Therefore, this is an active process of reclaiming responsibility for your Recovery and Well-being.

The types of things you put into your self management plan, you may not dream of including in your care plan.

This is your plan that is led and influenced by you and your agenda.

However, it may well be of tremendous benefit to you and your mental health team (if you have one), to involve them in this process. They can be a valuable support to you in this process and it can inform the plans you make together, leading to a much more effective partnership.

Note You are the one deciding what is important and what you need.

Self management and Recovery

Recovery is linked strongly with this process as one common factor in people's Recovery stories is a turning point, where things begin to change and a decision is made to do differently. This is often initiated by a determination to live life as fully as possible and not to let your condition or circumstances rule you.

Reclaiming control of one's life is an essential part of this and involves taking steps to regain one's personal power, by

discovering ways of coping and managing by drawing on one's inner resources and experience.

This is an active process which involves taking personal responsibility for Recovery and involves becoming your own advocate in order to access the information and support you need. This process is led by you and is supported by your self-determination and refusal to accept less than high standards for yourself and your life.

Self-management is all about taking control of your life and being active in your own Recovery. Therefore a decision to self-manage can be a key factor in a person's Recovery journey.

It is important to remember that self management is more than managing moods, symptoms and feelings. It is also about becoming more aware of what you have access to, who you are, what makes you tick and how much control you actually have over your decisions.

Note Recovery and managing your 'self' are inseparable. Both require action!

Self management and Well-being

Any discussion about self management should include a healthy discussion about Well-being as this is something you will draw on daily to support, educate and lead you through your journey.

Well-being is discussed in greater depth, but in this context it can be described as what we all have hardwired into our systems, both physically, emotionally and spiritually. You may choose to call it something else, like health, peace, contentment or self esteem and it is important to use your own language to describe what for you symbolises good emotional, mental, spiritual and physical Well-being. Well-being is what you will draw on to power your Recovery, so it is important to remember that our bodies are hardwired to survive, to heal and to return us to a state of health. This is what our bodies are designed to do. There are no exceptions. Some of us do live with disabilities and limitations, but this does not mean we cannot live healthy, happy lives.

Note Well-being gives us a sense of immunity and it is always

available to us. See 'Wellness plan' and 'Well-being curve'

Supports

One thing repeated time and again in stories of Recovery and Well-being is the importance of others in our life. Some of us only need one significant person, someone who believes in us, but for others, drawing on a wider range of friends, neighbours and relationships is an essential part of our Well-being.

Belonging to a community and being acknowledged in your local corner shop, or school playground all leads to a sense of connection with others.

Friends who can support us in times of need and share in our times of success, as well as offering a good honest opinion, can provide the strength, laughter and love that sustain us.

What you see reflected in the eyes of your friends and supporters provides the basis of knowing who you are in relation to others, and provides the essential source of esteem which comes from feeling needed.

Often, when we are under the weather or not at our best, we can isolate ourself and lose regular contact with our friends.

Maintaining healthy relationships involves communicating how people can help. Sometimes just knowing someone is there is enough of a support, but for others, regular contact is important.

Note No one can exist in isolation. Friends and supporters provide an essential energy source and foundation on which to build. See friendship circle.

Learning about yourself

When we are living in a state of Well-being we think and feel a certain way and this is where our true nature shows itself. This, of course, is highly individual and for some of us, we have never taken the time, or felt we never had the opportunity, to find out what this really means.

'Who we are' involves an awareness of what motivates us, gives us pleasure, purpose and meaning. It also involves 'who we are becoming' as we change and develop as people.

An awareness of 'who we are' and how we think and behave in

a state of Well-being gives us a useful reference point to come back to when we are moving away from this place.

Note Who is the real me? See 'The real me' and 'Well-being curve'.

Hopes and dreams

Everyone has dreams.... We all want to believe deep down that we may have a special gift or purpose. At one time in our life, we all had a vision of how our life could be, but for many of us these dreams become hidden by frustrations, routines and doubt, so much so that we allowed them to fade and dissipate.

But just as a mighty oak sleeps in an acorn, so do the seedlings of achievement sleep in our dreams. To obtain, we first have to desire. To achieve, we have to dream. Part of our 'becoming' involves following the dream of the quality of life we desire and deserve.

Dreams draw us forward and give meaning and purpose to our lives.

By reawakening the dreams we dreamed and identifying the perceived barriers to achieving this, it makes the achievement of them more likely.

Note Believing in your dreams are an important part of believing in you. See 'The real me'.

Journals and diaries

Keeping a journal or diary of your reflections may be a useful way for you to keep in regular touch with yourself and some people find them incredibly beneficial.

A diary offers us a concrete reminder of our thought patterns and processes and a useful resource to draw information from to help complete self management plans. It is also useful to those of us who have a less than ideal memory!

However, this does not suit everyone and some people are better at keeping these reflections in their heads.

Note Journals and diaries show us how far we have come and how our goals and thinking change over time.

Alarm bells and early warning signs

Our bodies naturally provide us with warning signs to alert us when we are moving away from our natural state of health and

Well-being. These come in the form of physical and emotional alarm bells that are unique to each of us.

We may well be familiar with some of these already, but many of us often choose not to take these seriously until we reach a crisis point where our bodies and minds then refuse to play ball. For each of us, this crisis point is different as we all have different strengths and vulnerabilities.

By becoming aware of the things that challenge our Well-being personally, we naturally become more proactive in choosing the things that help rather than hinder us.

A sense of control is an important element in Recovery and Well-being. Becoming more aware of how you feel at any given moment, what affected this and what you can do about it, are wonderful skills that have lasting effects on our sense of self-mastery and confidence.

Note Awareness of our unique warning signs of relapse or getting run down gives us the power to do something to prevent the situation getting worse. See 'Early warning signs', 'Triggers' and 'Well-being curve'

Crisis planning

A crisis plan is a system of planned responses to a pending crisis situation that outlines what you and others can do to help you regain your Well-being.

Crisis planning is useful for those of us that experience periods when we need extra help, support and perhaps time out from our normal environments to regain our Well-being. For some, this may mean extra support, increased medication or assertive support from expert services like crisis teams or inpatient units.

Crisis means different things to different people and it is important to be as clear as you can in its description, so you can get the support you need as soon as possible.

In order to ensure your crisis plan is used by others on your behalf, it is important to make copies easily available and accessible. It may be useful to allow your mental health team and supporters to have a copy, or have a copy somewhere in your home that family and friends can access.

Note Crisis planning gives you a voice, when others may be inclined to override your reasoning. See 'Crisis plan'.

Free will

Free will is the luxury we have as adults to make our own decisions and choices in life. The choices we make for ourselves and others will always have consequences. As we become more aware of the things effecting our health and Well-being, we also become more aware of our ability to make choices that will support or damage our health and Well-being. We will also learn that some decisions and choices may not be ideal, but are ideal for now, knowing that in the future this may change.

Some people are able to make changes in their lives easily and quickly, but for some of us, we are more cautious and choose to take our time, going with our own comfort levels.

Part of this process will involve you choosing what pace is comfortable for you and what you need to retain right now.

Note We are responsible for ourselves and our decisions and in most cases this should be respected. See 'Well-being circle'.

Where and when to start

The first stage of self management involves becoming more aware of some of your processes.

It's important to complete these exercises for yourself and then ask someone you trust and who knows you quite well, to help out. Others' insights can be particularly useful in helping us build up a picture of how we think and act when in our health, or moving away from it, as often someone else can see things that we can't and notice things we don't.

You may feel that you are different and because of your situation, symptoms or circumstances, you cannot achieve a state of Well-being, or that because you have struggled for so long you are not sure of how this would feel.

This should not put you off beginning this process, as you would be surprised how many people feel the same way as you. If you are not in a good state of health right now, it is possible that your thinking may well be putting up unhelpful barriers for you. It may well be useful to ask

someone you trust to support you with this when you are ready.

It is also important to review what you have written after a week or two and see if your thoughts have changed, or need to add things you may have missed out.

Some of the questions may seem very basic or silly, but it is surprising how little we think about these things and how much is revealed when we do. It is important to write things down quickly without thinking too hard about them, as you don't want to push this and become stressed by the process. You can always go back and add things as you remember them.

This is at the very least an awareness raising exercise. You may well be surprised how much or how little you know about yourself and your processes and may not have thought about some of these things before.

There are several potential gains in this process –

1. Becoming more aware of what you've got already – your Well-being, dreams, preferences, skills, strengths and what you have access to.
2. Learning how you look and feel when you are moving away from your Well-being.
3. Learning what you can do about getting back to your Well-being.
4. An awareness of free will and your ability to make your own choices.

When is the best time to do these exercises?

The best time to start this process is when you have a clear mind and time to reflect on some of the exercises. If you are in a crisis situation, you are not as in touch with your Well-being as you could be and perhaps not thinking as clearly as you could.

This may mean you miss out some important perspectives.

A crisis plan is a way of having a voice of wisdom, health or Well-being present when you are in crisis.

Ultimately, only you know what is most helpful to you in crisis, but when in crisis, we are less able to articulate this clearly and credibly. By completing the crisis planning aspect of your self management plan when you are 'well', you are more likely to include more detail

and seek more support from those around you.

It is important to be able to reflect on crisis from a distance.

However, you should decide when to start this process and remember it is a work in action and the answers you give will change with time, circumstances and new experiences and insights.

When completing any of the self management plans offered here and elsewhere, it is important to review and update these regularly to ensure that they are fresh and current.

It is important to remember that you should take your time with this process and not feel under pressure to do this to make others happy. You should do this if you feel it would be useful to you.

Self management plans can be a useful reflection tool, or an important action plan. You decide how you will use them.

Please see the **Whole Life Recovery Plan** featured in the final chapter of this workbook.