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Surrey and Borders
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Recovery College Newsletter

Week 5: Take Notice

22nd April 2020





OUR MESSAGE FOR THIS WEEK

Welcome to this week's Recovery College newsletter. This week is all about ways to **TAKE NOTICE**, which is another one of the 5 ways to wellbeing, and is linked to mindfulness.

Life can feel so busy and stressful sometimes, it's as though it is all rushing by without the time for us to properly pay attention to it. At other times, we choose to push unpleasant thoughts, experiences or emotions away, to try to distance ourselves from them. We spend an awful lot of time not really paying attention to ourselves and our surroundings. It can sometimes feel helpful; to escape difficulty by just avoiding it. You may have noticed though, that it then often snowballs.

By choosing to take notice, we can teach our brains (all that neuroplasticity stuff again from last week!) to take in more information about ourselves and our surroundings. We can train ourselves to become more connected with ourselves, our senses and our environment. With more information on board, we can better weigh up and manage ourselves and our surroundings.

Often our brains seek out the negative, as once that would have kept us safe from predators. Now our stressors are very different, we are more likely to experience anxiety, depression or stress as an outcome of our brains seeking the information it thinks will keep us safe.

Increasing the opportunity for positives in our lives reduces the impact of the negatives.

India and Colette
(Senior Clinician) (Senior Recovery Coach)

"Mindfulness, by helping us notice our impulses before we act, gives us the opportunity to decide whether to act and how to act." Gil Fronsdal



FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING

Over previous weeks we have been learning about a recovery model called **the FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING** which helps us to focus on wellness instead of illness. Here is a diagram that summarises the 5 areas.



In previous newsletters, we have learned about **CONNECT** and **BE ACTIVE**; this week it is **TAKE NOTICE**.

You may find that you are very busy, moving from task to task and making plans. This can mean that you don't stop and **TAKE NOTICE** of what is going on around you.

This can also happen when we are not busy but we are still distracted by our worries, about our future, our past, leading to unhealthy thoughts and negative feelings.

In both situations we are not paying attention to the present moment – the here and now.

Building in time where you **TAKE NOTICE** can increase our sense of wellbeing and improve our mental health.

Click [here](#) to find out more about the Five Ways to Wellbeing



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO 'TAKE NOTICE?'

TAKING NOTICE means that we need to actively bring our attention to the present. We need to give our full attention to what is going on around us. Take a moment now to just stop and observe something, anything. It could be a pen, or your finger or the sky or a flower. Spend a moment to look at it so closely, as if you had never seen it before. Notice something you hadn't noticed before. Perhaps you could add what you noticed to our Facebook or our twitter feed.

You might notice that your mind wanders and you get distracted. But that is fine and perfectly normal. Just **TAKE NOTICE** of these thoughts and let them slip away like a river running by, or a conveyor belt, and return your focus to what you are observing. Being able to take notice needs practice.

WHY IS TAKING NOTICE SO IMPORTANT FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING?

If we spend a lot of time worrying about the future or focusing on past events we can find that our sense of wellbeing can decline. By **TAKING NOTICE** we can give our brains a chance to have a break and just focus on the present moment. This can then lead to a reduction in levels of anxiety and depression.

WAYS TO 'TAKE NOTICE'

Here are some ways to help you **TAKE NOTICE** in your everyday life:

Spend time in nature, being aware of your surroundings, the smells and sounds.

Listen to some music and notice the different instruments, the voices, the way it makes you feel.

Take a camera and get snapping

Try a 'body scan' exercise – there are lots of scripts and recordings online to follow

Walk around your neighbourhood, noticing colours, textures and shapes

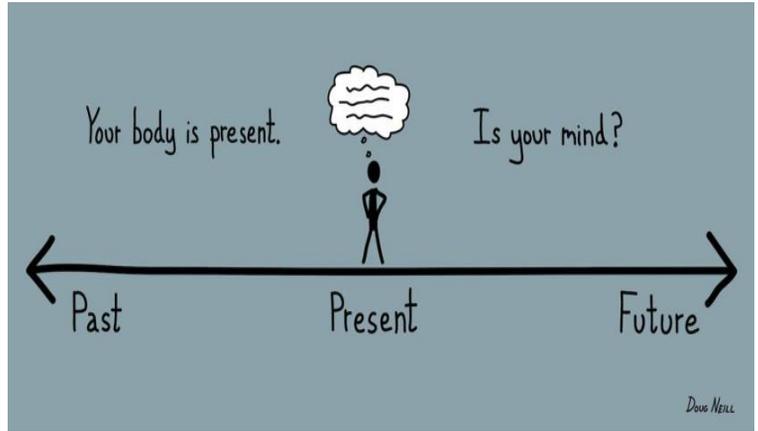


MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness is a useful skill for us all. It is not about trying to *get* somewhere – but to *be* somewhere, right here, right now.

It involves:

- 'Stopping'
- Noticing
- Accepting
- Not judging
- Keeping things simple
- Letting go
- Not living life on autopilot



Mindfulness is not meant to:

- Relax you
- Stop your mind from wandering
- Turn negative experiences into positive ones
- Enable you to avoid difficulty



What mindfulness can provide:

- It steadies and grounds us
- A safe platform from which to *observe*
- It brings us closer to difficulties but without getting caught up in our reactions to them
- It is a means of being present to our experience, however upsetting it might be
- It allows us to slowly and gently come to grips with who we are

Taken from SABP Recovery College course "Recovery in ACTION"



SHOULD I PRACTISE **MINDFULNESS** ?

Mindfulness is not as easy as it sounds. In order to become an expert at using it you will need to practice it. Mindfulness doesn't have to be used only when experiencing unpleasant thoughts and feelings, it can be useful to practice it as often as possible, by simply noticing what you are thinking and feeling, accepting these experiences, and letting them go. Try using mindfulness before you go to sleep. Concentrate on your breath and use mindfulness with the thoughts that pop into your head. Each time you notice a thought distracting you from your breath, notice it, accept it, and let it go. Then focus on your breath once again. Continue this process until you have fallen asleep

Taken from SABP Recovery College course "Recovery in ACTION"

WAYS TO PRACTICE **MINDFULNESS** AT HOME

The Recovery College team are recording mindfulness exercises that you can do at home. These will be added to over time so keep an eye on the Surrey and Borders YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/user/surreyandborders>

Click [here](#) for 6 simple mindfulness exercises you could try

There are lots of websites where you can find mindfulness exercises – Click [here](#) for one with lots of different examples

WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU...

Why not share your experiences of mindfulness and mindfulness exercises that have helped you on our Facebook page.

<https://www.facebook.com/recoverycollege.nehantsfarnham/>



INDIA'S EXPERIENCE OF MINDFULNESS

“For a long time I never really “got” mindfulness. I understood the concept and that it could help some people, but I had a very ‘noisy brain’ that didn’t seem to allow it to work.

Even after I started at the Recovery College, I would quietly get on with mindfulness exercises, happily writing lists in my head and turning over a million thoughts while everyone else got on with it. By this stage I had decided it clearly helped some people, but that I was just one of those people who had too many things going on in my head. It seemed unreasonable and impossible to be able to turn all of that off.

The turning point for me was when I attended Recovery in ACTION as a student. There is a mindfulness exercise called “Leaves on a Stream” which is an imaginative mindfulness practice. I started out as disengaged from the exercise as always.

Something about that exercise clicked something on (or maybe off?) in my head. I was able to genuinely participate and use it to successfully pass on things I was ruminating over. It was like someone had just handed me the key to my mindful brain.

I now find external mindfulness (focusing on our environment) and internal mindfulness (focus on the body) a lot easier. Imaginative mindfulness is still what I find helpful to lean on to manage ruminations and emotional intensity. I actually practice daily now; when I go walking, when I exercise; frequently when I am carrying out “boring” chores and weirdly, I find my brain feels better organised and even a bit quieter (and I do a better job of the chores). I think a large part of it is giving your brain permission and space to take on more than just the negatives of the world.

I really want to reiterate the idea that we can all use mindfulness, we just have to find our own way in. It does take practice, and I suspect it is easier to get into if you don’t approach it in the sceptical and defiant way I did; it is an incredibly helpful tool when you get the hang of it.”

Our Recovery Colleges in Surrey and North East Hampshire & Farnham help people improve their health and wellbeing through courses on a range of mental and physical health conditions.

You don't have to be referred to become a student at the Recovery Colleges. We are open to everyone and all you need to do is enrol, which is really easy to do.

To become a student simply complete and return an enrolment form which you can get by contacting us.

We would be delighted to see you at one of our courses and look forward to meeting you.

If you have any questions or need guidance on completing the enrolment form please get in touch and one of our team will be happy to help.

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH THE RECOVERY COLLEGE

Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/recoverycollege.nehantsfarnham/>

Webpage <https://www.sabp.nhs.uk/our-services/recovery/recovery-college/>

Email recovery.college@sabp.nhs.uk

Text 07920 207046

OUR COURSES

Courses are not currently running, but we are looking at new exciting ways to run courses remotely if the current situation continues for an extended period of time.

When our courses are back up and running, you can learn more about **TAKE NOTICE** on the following courses:

- Recovery in ACTION
- Energise and Relax
- Discovering Self-Compassion

We'll let you know as soon as we have dates for running these courses again.