



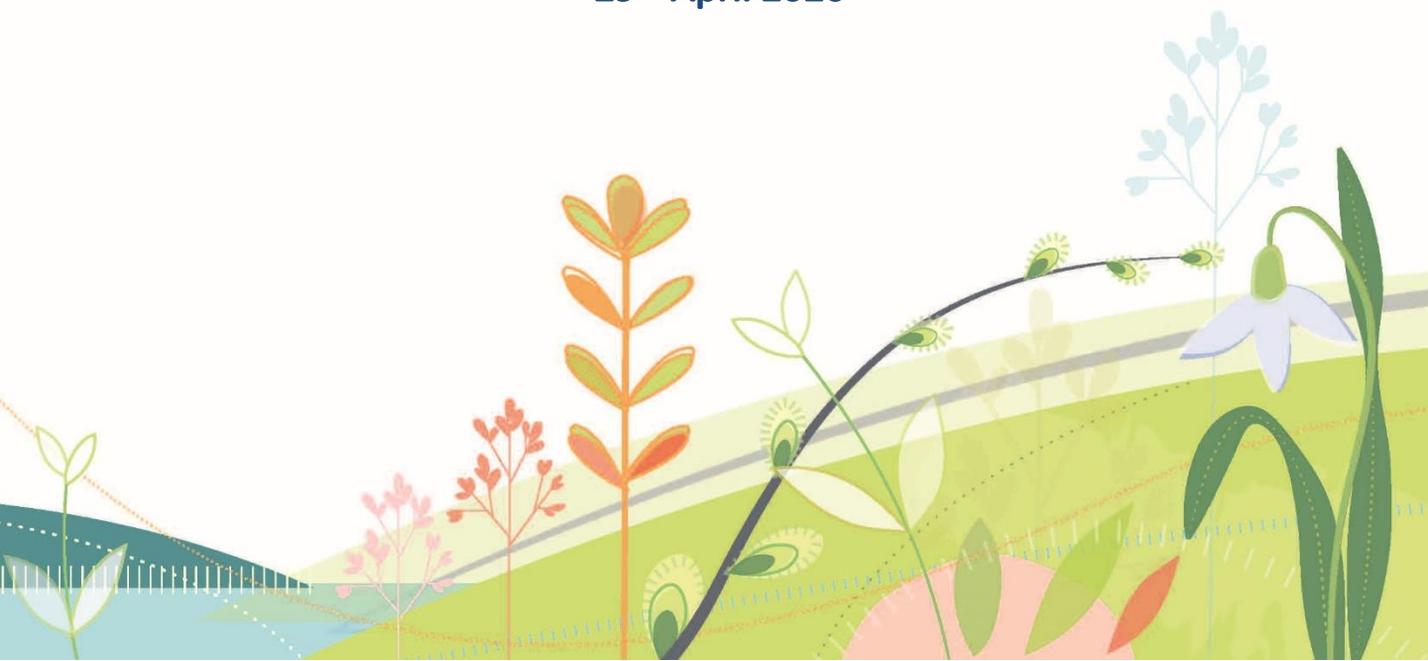
NHS

**Surrey and Borders
Partnership**
NHS Foundation Trust

Recovery College Newsletter

Week 6: Learn

29th April 2020





OUR MESSAGE FOR THE WEEK

Welcome to this week's Recovery College newsletter.

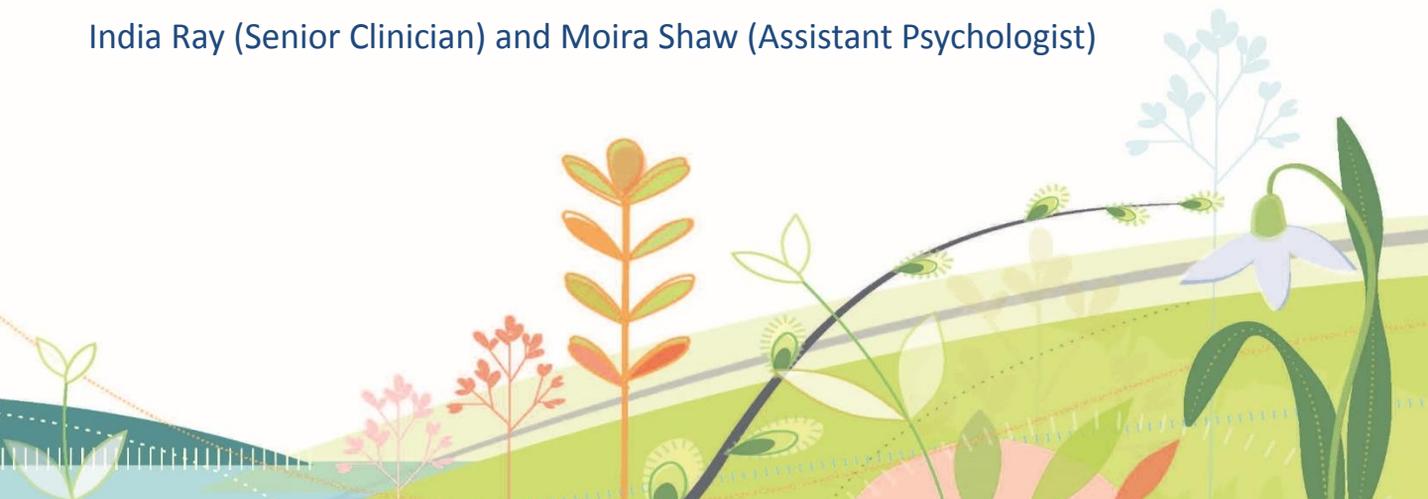
We can't believe this is the 6th newsletter already!! This week we are looking at the topic of learning.... We can almost hear the groans from here as for some this brings up memories of school, homework, exams.... But, learning really is good for you! And the great thing is that we as adults get to choose what to learn, how to learn and how much to learn. Whether we learn on our own at home, online, part of a group (soon I hope!), in a classroom...there are endless possibilities.

Changing how we may think about learning opens up a whole world of excitement. This week we're looking at why learning is good for you, how it improves and maintains wellbeing and how it fundamentally changes your brain, firing off new neural pathways and strengthening ones already there....our brains are amazing! We'll give you some ideas, some links and some thoughts to overcoming barriers you may have to getting started, and of course balancing out being a perfectionist with starting something new – it's okay to make mistakes. As Bob Ross (he's fab – look for his [videos](#) on YouTube) said

“As long as you're learning, you're not failing”.

Whatever you decide to learn or do to keep your brain active, choose something you enjoy and above all, HAVE FUN!

India Ray (Senior Clinician) and Moira Shaw (Assistant Psychologist)



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF LEARNING?



Ready for a little more neuroscience? Buckle up, here we go....or if this isn't your thing, give yourself permission to just skip this bit!

Did you know that:

- There are **86 billion** neurons (brain cells) in the human brain with each neuron connecting to up to **10,000** other neurons which leads to a staggering estimate of **1,000 trillion** synaptic connections – **that's a lot of 000s!**
- During pregnancy the developing baby grows brain cells at a rate of 250,000 neurons per minute and that some of these neurons will last you a lifetime
- If you lined up all the neurons in a human body, this would stretch to 1000km (that's the same as from London to the south coast of France)

There you go – You've been learning!

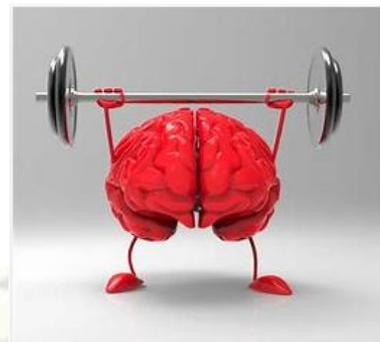


Research has shown that any kind of learning involves a change in neural structure and function. New pathways between neurons in the brain are created and existing pathways are strengthened. The speed of communication between neurons is also improved as the density of white matter increases (think of our neurons, the grey matter, as a computer and the white matter as the cables connecting everything and transmitting the signals).

Likewise, pruning will also occur to remove neural pathways that are not used often. This is all neuroplasticity in action. Throw in some involvement of the neurotransmitter (a chemical that communicates across neurons) dopamine that is involved in motivation and reward and there is a lot going on in our brains. Amazing. And.....relax...

Okay, so that's all going on in your brain but what benefits do I see? It has been shown that learning:

- Boosts self-confidence and self-esteem
- Helps to build a sense of purpose
- Makes you feel better about yourself
- Improves and maintains wellbeing
- Promotes greater ability to cope with stress
- Generates positive feelings of accomplishment
- Fosters connections with others
- Increases motivation to do more



It has also been found that life-long learners are likely to be more optimistic, better satisfied and are likely to cope with stressful situations better and get the most out of their lives. So what's stopping you?

WHAT'S STOPPING US LEARN?

Time

As adults we tend to have more responsibilities, more commitments and less time. But we can get creative – maybe listen to a podcast whilst doing the housework or walking the dog; how about trying out a new recipe or just taking 15 minutes at the end of the day to watch a TED talk.

Motivation

This is key and is the difference between doing something or not. When learning something new as an adult, we need to find something that inspires or interests you. The choice is yours!

I hated school

Learning as an adult is not the same. It is now on your terms. You get to choose what you want to do and what mode of learning will suit you. No more detentions for not doing your homework!

Finances

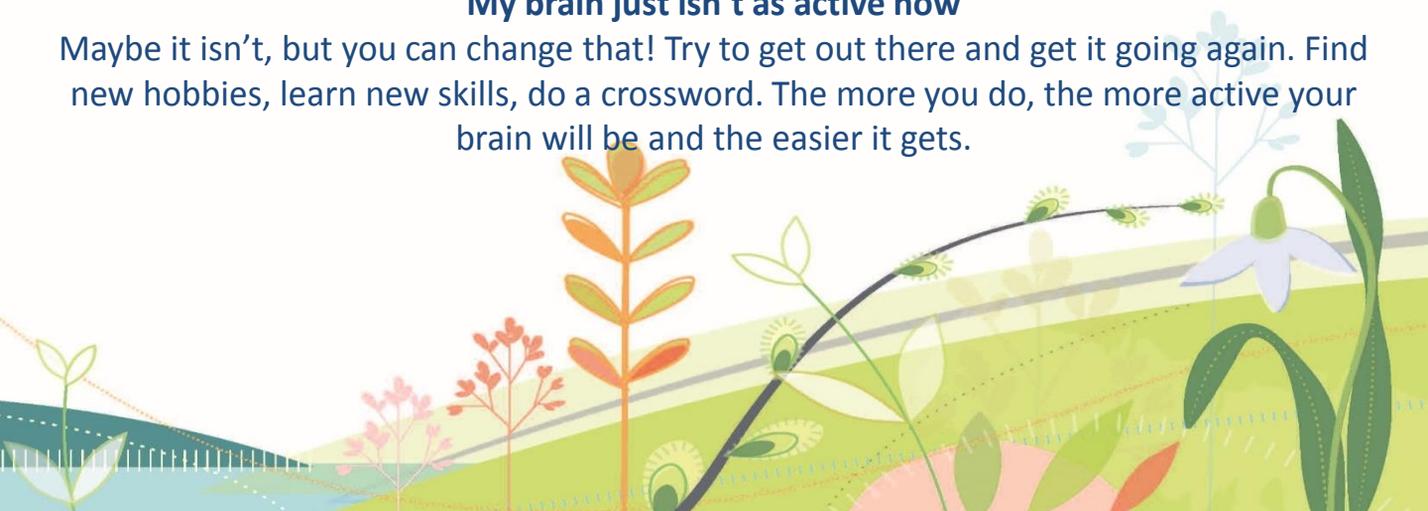
It's true that long courses leading to qualifications can cost but if this is your dream and money is tight, explore some funding options and you may even be surprised that some courses will be offered at a reduced rate or for free. And don't forget there are thousands of things you can do with no cost attached at all!

I'm too old

Are you really? The key to successful studying as an adult is motivation not age. Adult learners typically want to learn so they are winning there! Also don't forget all that neuroplasticity stuff – the brain will form new connections and pathways when you learn and research shows that older brains are generally just as capable of this as younger brains – you really can teach an old dog new tricks!

My brain just isn't as active now

Maybe it isn't, but you can change that! Try to get out there and get it going again. Find new hobbies, learn new skills, do a crossword. The more you do, the more active your brain will be and the easier it gets.





I don't like making mistakes

A lot of us have “Perfectionist Drivers” which can really get in the way of learning something new. Sometimes the need for perfection can cause us to freeze; we end up doing nothing rather than risk doing badly at something.

This is an unhelpful thought pattern – of course we won't do as well at something if we have been too frozen to practice, have been frustrated through it, or attacked ourselves for the outcomes.

We all know it is really difficult to learn in a harsh environment – so be kind to yourself! Practicing Acceptance and embracing “mistakes” can go a long way in challenging a perfectionist driver and motivating you.

Challenging your perfectionist nature

When you find yourself being negative about your work consider:-

- What would you say to your friend if this was their art / piece / practice?
- If you hadn't made / produced this, how would it look to you?
- What have you learned from the process?

“I have a NO PERFECTION poster on my desk; I try to “embrace my mistakes” - to accept them and move on - I get ALOT of practice at this!!” – Colette

“I have a work/recovery journal that I write and draw in pen only – no pencil, corrections or tippex allowed!” – India

“I'm having to challenge my perfectionist driver whilst working from home - I'm trying to be on top of work, kids homework, laundry, meal planning, shopping etc & it's exhausting. Sometimes, enough is enough!” – Nina

“It helps me to step off the high expectation ladder and focus on what I can actually do.” – Rebecca I-S

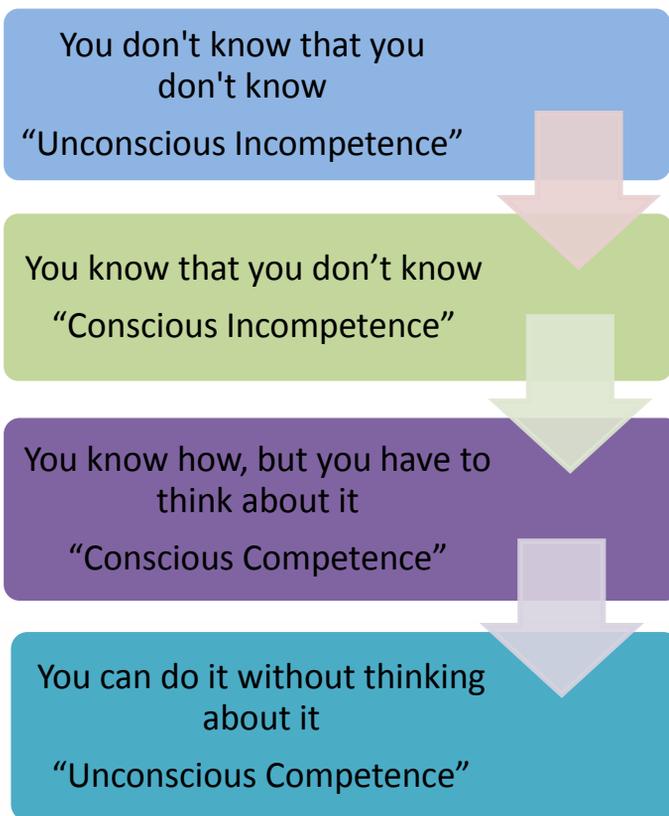


THE STAGES OF LEARNING

The stages of learning can be a helpful way to think about our skills. Most of the skills we have, we are “consciously competent” or “unconsciously competent” at.

We make steps forward each time we practice or contribute to our learning around a topic. We can change our competence or understanding of a topic by doing things like reading an article, watching a documentary or listening to a podcast, as well as practicing practical skills

Think laterally, there are millions of things you can learn – either linked to things you already know, or completely new things. There is a huge scope of things you could look into.



- Photography
- Painting
- Yoga
- Pilates
- Learn a [song](#)
- Learn a language (Klingon or Elvish?)
- How to draw characters
- Calligraphy
- Basic sign language
- Dance steps (maybe Lindy Bop or Swing?)
- Baking
- Knitting or crochet
- Learn to Code
- Editing
- Computer aided design
- Macramé
- Plant care
- Learn a word or fact a day
- Test your knowledge quiz's

When we are learning a skill, the breaks we take from it are as important as practicing itself. Often when we push ourselves too hard we can find we get to a stage of brain-block or making mistakes. If this happens, take a break. Our brains can only take in so much in one sitting; sometimes we need to sleep on something for our brains to process it. Practicing a skill little and often is usually the most effective approach.



LINKS AND IDEAS



Crash Courses on YouTube – simplified short overviews on a number of subjects.



Youtube
Thousands of different videos on many subjects



Future Learn – free online learning covering a wide range of subjects.



Wikipedia
How to do things, made simple



Surrey Adult Learning



Watch a documentary



TED talks – more than 3,400 talks available to stir your curiosity



How stuff works – reliable easy to understand explanations of how the world actually works

Swap teach! Offer to teach someone else a skill you know in return for them teaching you

An Inspiring Rumour

Jack Johnson surfed long before he played music. When he was young he taught a friend to surf and in return the friend taught him to play guitar. Not a bad start for an award winning Musician!

Next time you ask someone for practical help, get them to teach you how to do it, rather than just doing it for you

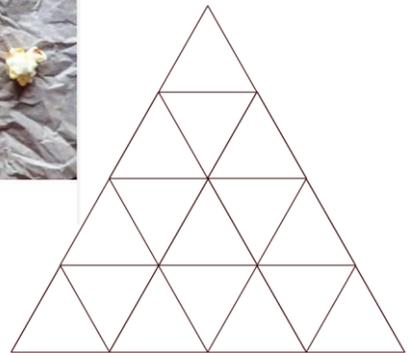


PUZZLES TO GET YOUR BRAIN GOING



Spot the 7 differences

What can you hear but not touch or see?



What has four legs and a body but cannot walk?

How many triangles can you count?

OUR COURSES

Courses are not currently running, but we are looking at new and 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 come along and do some learning with us! Good courses to start with include:

- Introduction to the Recovery College
- Any of our Understanding Courses
- Why not take a creative courses, or learn to play the ukulele

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

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/>

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