

A personal health and wellbeing plan for family, friends and carers

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Piloted by Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and local organisations

INTRODUCTION

Supporting someone you care about who has mental health challenges can easily take over your whole life. It is tempting to think only of their needs and ignore your own. If this happens then it is not good for you and not good for the person you love and care about. Your health and wellbeing are important.

Many people find it helpful to draw up a plan for how they can look after themselves while supporting someone they love and care about. The purpose of this booklet is to help you to do this.

It makes some suggestions for things you might want to think about in drawing up a plan to look after yourself, but there is no set formula. Different people choose to develop their plans in different ways. Different people find different things helpful. You can develop the plan to suit you.

You may want to use it by yourself or ask someone to go through the plan with you, for example a friend, someone with similar experience of caring, or a member of the mental health team. Take your time on it and focus on the areas which are helpful for you. You don't need to do it all at once.

There are a number of things you might want to think about:

Your strengths and supports

It can be easy to focus on the negatives and what is stressful. Sometimes it is helpful to get a balance and remember positives. This might include reminders of your own strengths and what you do to support your relative with mental health challenges; and also how other people support you, including the person you care about. It can be helpful to think about who you can turn to about stressful situations.

Your health and well-being maintenance plan

Routines and remembering to look after ourselves or do things we like can help maintain our wellbeing. This might include things that are important to you and making time for these – as well as the things you need to do to keep yourself feeling afloat.

Your health and well-being 'first-aid kit'

Things that you can do to get yourself back on an even keel when you feel upset, angry, discouraged or stressed out. Just like first aid kits for bodily cuts and bruises, we also need

one for the emotional cuts and bruises: the stresses and strains that threaten your mental well-being.

A plan for managing difficulties that arise and things that upset you

Sometimes we can predict the kinds of situations that get to us and think in advance about what to do about them. You can find more information about them; plan strategies to manage them and think about how to cope when things happen that knock you off balance, wear you down, upset or anger you ... to stop them getting to you too much and keep them in perspective.

A plan for what to do when everything is getting too much for you

All of us have our off days when everything seems doubly difficult. At times like this it is easy for things to escalate from bad to worse so it is important to think about how you are going to look after yourself and get things back in balance. All of us sometimes get to the point when we have had enough, feel unable to cope and want to jack it all in. It can be helpful to become aware of the early signs that things are getting too much – sometimes people close to us may notice before we do. It is important to think about what you can do to cope at times like this and this may also be the time to ask for help. Asking for help can be difficult but if you are to carry on being able to support your loved one then it is important that you do so.

A plan for what I can do if you are in a total panic / crisis

Sometimes we can all get to a point where we are in a panic or crisis. It may be that the person you care about is in crisis or that you are now in a panic yourself perhaps because of them or for other reasons. Life can be stressful even without the added caring responsibilities and worries. At these times it is useful to have already thought about who to call, other possible supports and to have all the numbers in one place.

You might find it helpful to talk your plans through with someone you trust, a mental health worker and the person you support. If they know what gets to you and what helps they may be able to assist you in keeping on an even keel.

Particular things I want to communicate with the mental health team or others about how best to support the person I care about

There are probably things only you know about your loved one, including what helps them stay well or early signs of relapse. You may want to write these down and share them with the mental health team so that you do not have to be the only one to remember them.

How the person I care for also helps me sometimes

Often people with mental health challenges also support their relatives and friends e.g. they may offer practical help with chores or caregiving, share specialist knowledge or skills, contribute financially or provide emotional support and be good at listening. Of course opportunities to contribute usually help self-esteem and wellbeing.

How other people help me and what I found helpful about them

For example. partner, friends, neighbours, colleagues, the mental health team.

Who I can talk to when I feel stressed

There may be different people you can talk with about different situations and stresses e.g. the person you care about with a mental health challenges, your partner, other family, friends, other relatives of people with mental health challenges, work colleagues, mental health team.

What other resources do I have

This might include other supports in relation to mental health or other aspects of life - other people, support structures at work, having enough money to take a break, spirituality.

MY HEALTH AND WELL-BEING MAINTENANCE PLAN

Things I need to do every day or week to keep on top of things

For example having a proper breakfast, having an hour to myself for reading, getting some exercise, setting aside time for household chores, speaking to friends.....

Things that are important to me outside my role of supporting the person I love and care about

Think about the things you enjoy and value like leisure activities, hobbies, work / career, religious/ spiritual activities, social activities, 'me' time

HOW AM I GOING TO FIT THESE IN AND WHAT HELP MIGHT I NEED?

	When I will do the things I need to do and the things that are important to me	Do I need any help to do this (what? from whom?) Are there friends or relatives you could ask, or maybe the person you care about could assist, or would be all right on their own for a while?
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

MY HEALTH AND WELL-BEING 'FIRST-AID KIT'

Things I can do to get myself back on an even keel when I feel upset, angry, Discouraged or stressed out.....

For example. Have a cup of tea, get out of the situation (e.g. go out for a walk or even go to the toilet for a bit of peace and quiet), phone a friend, think about something I am looking forward to like my favourite TV programme, listen to music, relaxation exercises, take a long hot bath....

MY PLAN FOR MANAGING DIFFICULTIES AND THINGS THAT UPSET ME

<p>Things that happen which make me feel hurt, angry, discouraged, stressed out</p> <p>a. Things that the person you support does which get to you e.g. being rude, leaving the kitchen in a mess, doing nothing all day; b. the mental health system e.g. stress of attending CPA meetings, ward rounds c. other things e.g. disagreement with your partner, things going wrong in the house; large bills arriving, stress at work.</p>	<p>What I will do to stop it getting to me too much when this happens</p> <p>What things have helped in the past? Maybe there are things in your 'first aid kit' that could help? Maybe more information about mental health symptoms or the system might help. Maybe you could ask someone you trust for suggestions?</p>

MY PLAN FOR WHAT TO DO WHEN EVERYTHING IS GETTING TOO MUCH FOR ME

<p>How I can tell if things are getting too much</p> <p>For example, feeling unusually tired, irritable or over-sensitive; difficulty getting to sleep or waking up in the night; worrying, ruminating, feeling low and dispirited, not feeling hungry or over-eating, drinking more than usual, getting upset about things you usually take in your stride.</p>	<p>Things I can do to stay OK</p> <p>What has been useful before? e.g. confiding in family and friends, arranging to take a break; cutting down on some activities; making a list of things to do; remembering you have got through difficulties in the past, your strengths and what is going OK; giving yourself a treat.</p>	<p>Things other people can do to help - what? who?</p> <p>For example, asking a friend or relative to take on some of your responsibilities, going to see your GP or calling the mental health team for support, asking the person you support for assistance. Other people may also be able to help you tell if things are getting too much.</p>

MY PLAN FOR WHAT I CAN DO IF I AM IN A TOTAL PANIC / CRISIS

When the person I care about is in a crisis

Think about who is there to help and write down their numbers here in the plan e.g. crisis team, GP out of hours; mental health helpline; Samaritans; another person who also has a relative with mental health challenges; or a friend who has said you can phone if you need anything. Do they have a personal recovery plan or crisis or relapse plan?

People I can phone (and their numbers)

Other things I can do

USEFUL CONTACTS

Correct at the time of going to press.

National

Samaritans	http://www.samaritans.org/	08457 90 90 90
MIND	http://www.mind.org.uk	MIND info-line 0300 123 3393
Young Minds	http://www.youngminds.org.uk/	
Alzheimers	http://alzheimers.org.uk/	Helpline: 0300 222 11 22
Re-think	http://www.rethink.org	0300 5000 927
Hearing Voices	http://www.hearing-voices.org/	
NHS Direct	http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/	0845 46 47

Local

The ROCK (Recovery Orientated Community Kit) is a community toolkit for developing and supporting social inclusion and recovery within Sussex. It is a useful tool to signpost you to other organisations and may be more up to date.

<http://www.sussexpartnership.nhs.uk/service-users/wellbeing/rock>

Local carers organisation:
Mental health team supporting your friend or relative:
Mental health line:
Sussex Mental Healthline: 0300 5000 101
Other: