



Wellness and Recovery Newsletter

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Community
Resource
Connections

of Toronto

Welcome to the Wellness and Recovery Newsletter

Here for your perusal is another issue of the Wellness and Recovery Newsletter, produced by the Health Promotion Program of Community Resource Connections of Toronto, and distributed by the Consumer/Survivor Information Resource Centre of Toronto.

This issue of the Newsletter has a wide variety of information and articles; hopefully something for all our readers. We have another new, interesting philosophical article by Mel Starkman. We have included excerpts from a booklet, “Developing a Recovery and Wellness Lifestyle: A Self-Help Guide” prepared by Mary Ellen Copeland.

I have jotted down an article to point interested people toward some of the popular books available about CBT (Cognitive Behavior Therapy). Rather than to say that CBT is the right treatment for any person, this is just to make people aware of it so they can consider using it.

On November 30, 2009 the Mental Health Commission released its framework for mental health strategy, *Toward Recovery and Well-Being* (129 pages). This can be downloaded from their web site www.mentalhealthcommission.ca. There is also a 10-page summary document available there.

- G. Dewar

Developing A Recovery And Wellness Lifestyle A Self-Help Guide

Introduction

Every aspect of your life — the place you live, the people you live with, your friends and acquaintances, the things you do or don't do, the things you own, your work, even things like pets, music, and color affect how you feel. If you are concerned about your mental health or the quality of your life, you can do many things and make changes in your life that will help you to feel much better. This booklet will help you think about those areas of your life that may need to be changed and possible changes you could make.

Creating Change-Taking Action

It is not always easy to take the action necessary to create change. However, without taking some action, you cannot make changes in your life that may be necessary to help you feel better. Every time you take a positive step in creating change in your life, give yourself a pat on the back or reward yourself by doing something nice for yourself like taking a warm bath, going for a walk, or spending some time with a friend. You also may want to keep a written record of the change you are creating in your life in a notebook or journal.

Change takes time and may be difficult. You may have to overcome many obstacles. Take small steps. Don't give up. Be persistent. Keep working toward whatever it is that will help you to feel better and enjoy your life more. Making change is being able to see beyond yourself to what the solution might be.

Creating change is something you need to do for yourself. No one else can do it for you. Others can help you and support you as you create change but it is up to you to do what needs to be done. You will be the one that benefits from successful change.

Taking Charge-Regaining Control of Your Life

If you feel you have control over your own life, you have gotten over the first hurdle to creating change in your circumstances. If you don't feel you have control over your life, it is important that you take back control. It is very difficult to feel well when you are not in charge of your own life. Answering the following questions and making the suggested lists could help you figure out how to regain control of your life.

- Do you feel that you have control over your own life?
- Or do you feel other people control your life and you can't do anything about the way your life is?

- What controls your life? List things such as your children, your spouse, a disability, lack of money, etc.

 - List things you could do to take back control over your life.
For instance, you could —
 - talk with your spouse about issues related to control
 - perhaps the two of you could see a counselor together
 - ask your children to take care of some of their own needs and help out with chores
 - get a part- or full-time job doing something your enjoy
 - attend a class on money management
 - learn sign language

 - List what you think is keeping you from doing the things you need to do to take back control over your life.
For instance, you —
 - have lack of motivation
 - have low self-esteem
 - feel like its too much trouble
 - feel scared
 - do not want to upset others
 - want to avoid the anger of family members

 - List the benefits of taking back control over your life.
For instance, you would —
 - feel better physically and emotionally
 - have less stress
 - have more time to do the things you enjoy
 - have time to take good care of yourself
 - feel more fulfilled
 - improve the quality of your life
-

Lifestyle

The space where you live, your home, can affect how you feel. Perhaps you need to make some changes in your living space or living arrangement or find a different place to call home. The following questions may help you decide if you need to make some changes in living space.

- Think about your lifestyle. Do you try to do too much every day?
- Do you take on more than you should?
- Do you often find yourself rushing from one thing to another and not enjoying anything?
- If you answered “yes” to some or all of these questions, what makes your life this way?
- What could you do to make your life more peaceful and calm (for example, take a relaxation course, take two days off every week, save time for yourself in the evening, ask others to take over your responsibilities from time to time, set aside time every day to do things you enjoy)?
- You can't take good care of someone else until you first take good care of yourself. However, you may be like people who focus their attention on others and don't take very good care of themselves. You may find that you are so busy taking care of others that you don't have time to address your own issues. You may be so busy taking care of others that you neglect personal hygiene tasks that would make you feel better—things like a regular shower or bath, washing and styling your hair, trimming your nails, brushing and flossing your teeth, changing your clothes, or even getting dressed (you may feel so badly about yourself some days that you never get out of your night clothes). Are you always taking care of others and not taking care of yourself?
- If so, why?
- What could you do to be sure that you take good care of yourself (for example, say "no" from time to time, ask others to take over your care-taking responsibilities from time to time, put yourself first, make a list of things you need to do for yourself everyday and do the things on the list)?
- You may have more things than you need. All these things may make your life difficult to manage. If you have too many things, you will lose things more easily, your space will be cluttered, and maintaining these things may take time and energy that you would prefer to use in other ways. Do you have so many things that it makes your life difficult to manage?

If so, describe the problem.

- What could you do to resolve this problem (for example, throw things away, give things away, have a tag sale, clean out one space at a time keeping only what you need, enlist the help of other people you live with, have a moratorium on getting new things)?

- There may be people in your life, at home, at work, or in the community, who make your life difficult—who seem to rob you of your serenity. For instance, when they are around everything feels hectic and chaotic, or very loud. Do you have people in your life who make your life difficult in some way?
- If so, who are they?
- What could you do to change this situation?
- Like everyone else, you need time alone to do the things you want to do and be the way you want to be. Do you have enough time alone to just "be" and to do the things you enjoy doing by yourself?
- If not, how could you arrange to get some time alone?
- Doing things that are fun and creative will improve the quality of your life and enhance your sense of well-being. These are the kinds of things you "get lost in"—like reading a good book, doing a craft project, or playing with your children. What kinds of things do you enjoy doing?
- Do you spend enough time doing these things you enjoy?
- If not, how could you arrange to spend more time doing these things?
- You need time to relax and to relieve stress. Sometimes the events and circumstances of our lives make it hard to do this. If you are unable to relax, you may notice that you feel badly. This can cause physical and emotional health problems. Do you take time to relax every day?
- If not, what could you do to relax (for example, listen to a relaxation tape, take a relaxation and stress reduction course, read a book on relaxation and do some of the exercises, set aside time each day to sit quietly and think about pleasant things)?
- Do you feel that you are getting good health care?
- If not, what are you going to do about it?

The above is excerpted from the booklet "Developing A Recovery And Wellness Lifestyle: A Self-Help Guide" prepared by Mary Ellen Copeland. This is one in a series of booklets which are available on the web at <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov>, the web site of the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

The Myth of Sanity

Mel Starkman August 15, 2009

Most of those with a critical eye on society see this as a terrible world to live in, but persevere with hope and resilience to make it better. However we are faced with the stereotypical Myth of Sanity. The subject doing the observing is confused with the object of perception, the sick society in which (s)he lives. The onus of responsibility is put on the victim. Daily disasters dominate the headlines. Through the media the public are swamped with human interest stories, especially about the marginalized being the perpetrators of their own malaise. Particularly is this evident in the case of psychiatric survivors who have been seen in history and the present as lacking in sanity. The violence myth is only one aspect of how they are viewed in the instance when validated studies gainsay the relevance of such a perception.

Myths are the seed bed of our civilization, whether constructive or destructive. They have evolved into the norms we identify with, to the benefit or loss of the mores of our times and place. What does the Myth of Sanity consist of? Balance, moderation, tolerance, freedom and the rights to exercise these. But it can also connote social control, behaviour modification, colonization and the denial of freedom for others. By and large in the media and in public forums, psychiatric survivors are affected by negative myths, including not partaking of the Myth of Sanity. They are seen as evocative, bizarre, and attention seeking or on the other hand embittered, isolated and not indulging in the conventional wisdom of a conspicuously consumptive society.

Particularly are survivors seen as suffering. All sorts of charitable oversight is recommended for them by the "They" coming into contact with the "I," the two entities being poles apart in the self and other perceptions. It is not seen that suffering is the natural lot of woman/man, short of utopia on earth. When a young woman or man indicates that s(h)e is not happy or is suffering the whole weight of the psychiatric establishment inveighs against them. Nietzsche, who despite going insane himself, had many useful insights.

The discipline of suffering, of *great* suffering-do you not know that it is *this* discipline alone which has created every elevation of mankind hitherto? (*Beyond Good and Evil* p. 136)

Rather most psychiatrists offer pills and more invasive nostrums like shock to alleviate their clients of daily life responsibilities. They may victimize their clients with iatrogenic conditions from side effects and also label, stigmatize and render hopeless where there could have been hope.

Wellness is a relative term. It does not necessarily connote comfort, happiness or satisfaction. It does connote self-acceptance. Recovery is a dubious concept of returning to wellness since self-acceptance means realizing that whatever condition you might find yourself in at a particular time and place is the best that it can be for you if you go along with your inner instincts and drive for authenticity. But our society, besides itself being sick, is suffused with dissatisfaction that the hegemony of psychiatry calls out for remedying with the quick fix of short visits and pills to make up the gap. Is that the way to wellness and what is the philosophy of recovery that underpins that?

It could be argued that recovery to wellness is itself a myth although we survivors are very familiar with the literature of recovery that highlight many people who have seen themselves as recovering in the mental health system and becoming a beacon of hope to others. Too often recovery highlights that the system itself led to their self-incarceration or even incarceration in a psychiatric facility or prison, and it was only their deviance from the norm that led them there. The Myth of Sanity pervades the mental health system such that the occasional positive change agent is lost in the morass of simplistic, conventional answers to individual growth and development. Surely along that road to change there are bumps and sideroads but the system is lost in these to the loss of seeing each person as a means in themselves to worthwhile ends. If recovery to wellness is an accepted perception and works well so much to the good. But sometimes it is taken as a paradigm whose time has come, and is seen as having truth or universal validity.

The societal dynamics of the potential myth of the recovery of wellness depend on the recognition of the social determinants of health in their entirety: health, poverty, housing, education, employment, geography, recreational opportunities and kinship and friendship networks. To facilitate a more perfect society we have to take these all into account and we each have to be responsible to ourselves and the rest of the world. As the Jewish sage Hillel said.

If I am not for myself, who will be? If I am not for others, what am I? If not now, when?

The locus of responsibility is on ourselves and in a democratic community it is incumbent on us to elect representatives who will each put into action for the betterment of all the beneficial myths that guide our best laid hopes. However, to return to the Myth of Sanity it does our society no good, and as long as it is proffered as wisdom, so long will many lights be hidden under the bushel of pills and quick fixes. Even in the days of belt tightening it cannot be said that our rich society, with sagacity and true bottom line thinking and not just niggardliness and destructive myths about the invalid citizen, makes demands of those of us who have been psychiatrized. It demands that the psychiatrized solve a myriad of problems and even throw out the old mental health system, replacing it with fresh ideas and community based strategies so long called for by the better minds in our midst. Also, calling on survivors themselves, who are the purpose and focus of change, would be refreshing, innovative and full of promise.

By conventional wisdom we cannot measure sanity. The mote in the other's eye could just as easily be seen in your own, and as Robbie Burns put it, we are not blessed with the ability to see ourselves as others see us. By putting the measurement of sanity in the hands of those trained to assess behaviour, there being no verifiable scientific test for sanity, we are in danger of putting too many irons in the hands of those influenced by middle class morality. If there is a line that clients cross when they ask for help, let it be by their own choice and met with the arts not science of the professional and with tact and understanding and in true congruence with the wishes of the client.

Books for Self-Help in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

CBT is a useful approach to know about, especially if you are experiencing a mood disorder. Although it may be best worked at with the support of a trained professional such as a psychiatrist, social worker or psychologist, you may be able to benefit from this form of treatment using the books listed here (as well as others) by yourself as a self-help project or in conjunction with professional support.

CBT has been around for a number of decades so it is not exactly a new technique on the leading edge of recovery thinking. It has been around long enough that many clinicians in the mental health field are trained in it. You can work with someone in private practice or someone who practices in a hospital mental health department.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (or **cognitive behavior therapy, CBT**) is a [psychotherapeutic](#) approach that aims to influence problematic and dysfunctional emotions, behaviors and cognitions through a goal-oriented, systematic procedure (according to Wikipedia, the Internet encyclopedia).

Perhaps the first prominent book about CBT was “Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy, The Clinically Proven Drug-free Treatment for Depression”, by David Burns, M.D. This book was originally published in 1980 and has continued to be a best-seller ever since. He has also published several related books: “The Feeling Good Handbook” (1989) and “Ten Days to Self-Esteem” (1993).

Another extremely popular CBT book is “Mind Over Mood: Change How You Feel by Changing the Way You Think”, by Dennis Greenberger, Ph.D., and Christine A. Padesky, Ph.D. (1995).

CBT is based on the assumption that some mental illnesses are due to errors in thinking. The CBT training works to reveal and correct these erroneous, or “distorted”, thoughts. It also has procedures for tackling problem beliefs which may underlie thinking errors. CBT is heavily dependent on the client doing reading and “homework” between the therapy sessions (or on one’s own if one is undertaking CBT on a self-help basis). CBT is also different from many earlier therapies in that it is “time-limited” i.e. by doing it for a fixed number of months it is expected that the problem will be resolved. It is also “evidence-based” in that its effectiveness has been verified through research studies.

There are several fairly new “Dummies” series books on the market now about CBT. They are: “Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Dummies” by Rob Wilson, and “Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Workbook for Dummies” by Rhena Branch.

Books and CDs on Stress Management

The Everything Stress Management Book: Practical ways to relax, be healthy, and maintain your sanity, by Eve Adamson. Avon, MA: Adams Media (an F + W Company), 2002, 323 p.

10 Simple Solutions to Stress: How to Tame Tension & Start Enjoying Your Life, by Claire Michaels Wheeler, MD, PH.D. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2007, 185 p.

Meditainment Stress Relief for a clear and calm mind. Audio CD.

Meditainment Self Belief guided meditations. Audio CD.

www.meditainment.com

Many bookstores now have a section especially for books on stress management. Stress management is especially important for many of the readers of the Wellness and Recovery Newsletter, as stress usually makes mental health issues even more problematic. Also, a stressor can set off an episode.

I looked over the stress management section at several bookstores and picked out these two books which seemed to be easily understood, and to contain useful practical information. Others who are familiar with various experts on stress management might prefer to purchase a book by one of those experts, which gives details of the author's approach.

Both books start with an interactive exercise early on. The "Everything" book guides you through constructing your personal stress profile and stress management portfolio. The "10 Simple Solutions" book starts with stress self-assessment and coping skills self-assessments.

The "10 Simple Solutions" book has no index, and the table of contents has no detail about exactly what is in each of the 10 chapters. However, this helps to make the book smaller and more portable.

The "Everything" book, on the other hand, has a quite detailed Table of Contents, has an index, and even has an appendix "Stress Management Tools Reference Guide."

Guided Meditation CDs You may have heard how crisis line staff sometimes recommend to callers that they put a humorous movie in the DVD player to help them deal with their crisis. Perhaps an alternative to this might be to play one of these CDs. They are extremely relaxing, and you don't have to practise with guided meditation as you do with some other forms of meditation.

Quality of Life Much Worse for Some Groups, Says New Institute Report

People with low incomes, Aboriginal peoples, racialized groups and youth are falling behind on key quality of life indicators, says a report released today by the Institute of Wellbeing, **How are Canadians Really Doing? A Closer Look at Select Groups**. Women in poor neighbourhoods have 25% higher odds of having a premature birth; Aboriginal people are almost four times more likely to live in a crowded dwelling; visible minority or racialized groups are three times more likely to be poor due to low wages, social exclusion and racialization in the labour market; and earnings of young adults relative to other earners have been falling over the past 20 years. [Click here](#) for a fact sheet or [download the full report](#) (PDF 320KB).

The web site of the Institute of Well-Being is www.ciw.ca.

How to Subscribe to the Wellness and Recovery Newsletter

The Wellness and Recovery Newsletter is available by Canada Post and by email. To subscribe, contact the C/S Info Centre by phone at 416-595-2882 or by email at csinfo@camh.net. The Newsletter is published quarterly ie. Four times a year. Subscriptions are free.

This Newsletter is a joint effort by the Consumer/Survivor Information Resource Centre of Toronto and the Health Promotion Program of Community Resource Connections of Toronto (CRCT). The C/S Info Centre has for many years published its Bulletin which twice a month brings information of interest to consumers and stakeholders in the mental health system. CRCT works to encourage wellness and recovery of consumers through its Health Promotion Program, Community Support Program, Hostel Outreach Program, COPE Program, and Mental Health Court Support Program. Visit CRCT's web site at www.crct.org for information about its programs as well as current information about mental health-related resources, news and events.

Current and past issues of the Wellness and Recovery Newsletter, as well as a Cumulative Table of Contents, are available on CRCT's web site: www.crct.org. Just enter 'Wellness and Recovery Newsletter' (without the quotes) in the site-wide search box at the top of any page on CRCT's web site. Feel free to photocopy, post and otherwise distribute copies of the Wellness and Recovery Newsletter. Usually it is alright to further reproduce individual articles from the newsletter for nonprofit purposes, but please be sure to include the acknowledgement for the original source of the article.

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