

“Learning to Value Ourselves in the Presence of Stress and Distress.”

Recovery means that we are trying to find ways to value ourselves, even in the presence of stress, distress, anger and upsets. This involves learning how to cope with these responses, so they do not overwhelm us or stop us from living a life we find meaningful. There are heaps of online resources, supports and therapies around to help.

Recovery also involves doing things to make your body resilient to distress and engaging with situations that build us up to deal with distress, like connecting with friends on a regular basis.

For some people, medication can help control symptoms so they can address the situations, thoughts, behaviours, feelings and physical responses that are causing their mental-health problems.

Two Tips

Be flexible and creative: Be prepared to adapt things to suit yourself, you're in charge, recovery is your exploration of what works for you. Don't be afraid to change things to suit you or invent something new. A good rule of thumb is to follow negative emotion with positive action. But how you actually do that is up to you. The options are endless.

Be Patient: Give things long enough to find out what works for you. If something is new to you, then it probably won't do much until you've practiced it quite a few times and have become comfortable with it. We recommend putting aside a few minutes every day to practice new strategies at first. When you start to feel stressed, it will be harder to do the strategy if it is still unfamiliar to you. It can be hard to change habits like the way we cope. Therapies like CBT, ACT or DBT and support groups can be a huge help.

The Coping Kete

The Coping Kete is an online collection of over 150 different coping strategies. You can sign on for updates and get a new strategy in your email inbox whenever they are added. Use The Coping Kete to find new strategies to experiment with in your daily life and then add what works to your Personal Coping Kete for times of stress and distress.

More Recovery Tools Live at www.engagenz.co.nz

Engage Aotearoa is a CMHRT project to make it easy for Kiwis to find what they need to recover. Resources were created by Engage Aotearoa Ltd and gifted to CMHRT so they can be freely available for all who need them.



What is Recovery?

Recovery is the journey to wellbeing when we have experienced a mental-health problem. There are heaps of ways to change the experiences that make up mental-health problems or learn to live well in their presence. Recovery is the journey to find those ways of thriving. Most people who experience mental-health problems go on to do just that.

Mental-health problems involve our situations, actions, thoughts, bodies and moods, so recovery involves all of these things too. There isn't just one answer for everyone, because we are all different. So recovery is something different for us all.

Recovery isn't like re-covering an old couch or healing a broken leg. Rather than being about going back to an old way of being, recovery is about growth and moving forward.

This is an ongoing journey to recover hidden treasure (skills, resources and insights) from the ocean of life, so we can value ourselves even in the presence of distress.

Sometimes the treasure is hidden within us all along and sometimes we need to search out new treasures in unexplored territories.

How Do I Get There?

Start with the basics; make a commitment to nurture yourself for a while. Spend the next couple of weeks making sure you've got all the nutrients you need to be resilient to stress.

Another way to speed your recovery is to link in with your communities. Research shows us that people who have social support networks and resources (and actually use them) tend to have better mental health than people who do not.

We are social beings; in the cave-man days of our evolution, survival depended upon our ability to be part of a group and we are still 'wired' that way.

Social connection is a crucial part of wellness, when we don't have it our minds automatically go into survival mode when we encounter stress and this puts us at risk of a whole host of difficulties. So get connected.

There are heaps of people out there whose job it is to help you. Support workers can help with goals and navigating the system. Therapists can help with addressing underlying causes. Medical doctors can help with physical health and referrals. Psychiatrists can help with medication and referrals. And your community is full of recovery resources if you think creatively.

As you become more and more skilled at effective communication, balanced thinking, pro-active problem-solving, accessing support and repairing your moods, you will experience more and more wellness and less and less unwellness.

The important thing to remember is that you will get through it. Life is a process not an end-point. Try looking at the messy areas and mistakes as works in progress and learning areas to ease the pressure to be able to get there straight away or stay there always.

Coping for Recovery

Coping is anything you do to get you through a challenging moment. Sometimes our coping strategies are purposeful choices and sometimes they are habits that we do without even thinking.

Some coping strategies seem to help in the moment but set us up to feel worse later (like drinking or taking drugs), or have negative effects when they are used too often, like suppression (trying not to feel it/think it/show it) or avoidance (staying away from certain things) or withdrawal (keeping to yourself). These coping strategies may be the wisest thing to do in some situations but they are unhelpful when relied on long-term because they limit us; they stop us from learning what we can do; they stop us from building connections or new skills and make us closed systems.

Other coping strategies have positive or neutral effects on us in the long-term. These strategies help us improve the moment and at the same time allow us to engage with a life that enriches us. The key to effective coping is having different tools for different moments.

Kinds of Coping

There are four main kinds of coping that help recovery. We call these: (1) Expression & Support, (2) Mindful Distraction, (3) Self-Soothing, and (4) Engagement. Each kind of coping can be practiced using techniques that work via our situations, thoughts, behaviour and physical responses to change the way we feel, give us space before responding to things and build resiliency to distress. Coping is vital no matter what our situation, but there's no substitute for having or building a safe and healthy environment to live in. If there are aspects of your life you genuinely do not like, we suggest accessing some of the support out there to help you change it. Engagement strategies offer some good ways of coping with challenges by addressing the situations we are responding to.

Expression and Support

These two go together because you can't get support without talking to someone in some way first. Simply being allowed to express how we feel calms the body's stress responses and the number of distressing thoughts people have. It is also helpful to have some private expression strategies, for when you want to sort through your reactions yourself before talking to someone else.

Mindful Distraction

Mindful distraction is using your awareness to turn your attention towards something else. It doesn't mean that we try to push distressing thoughts away, it means that we let them come and go without judgement and without chasing them. We notice, then we bring our minds back to the present moment. Thinking over the same things for long periods is called 'rumination' and it is this kind of unhelpful thinking that mindful distraction is good for.

Self-Soothing

Self-soothing is treating yourself as you would a loved friend in times of distress. Self-soothing is using your mind, your behaviour, your body and your environment to give you comfort and create positive emotions. Self-soothing not only repairs our mood in the moment, it also helps us to learn how to value, accept and respect ourselves when we are stressed.

Engagement

Engagement is doing stuff that lets you manage your experiences by changing what you can about the situations you face. Instead of avoiding the things that make us feel bad, we can change them so they don't anymore. Examples include doing things that give you the chance to learn what you don't know, achieve goals, make friends, be informed, have support available, belong to something, and feel strong inside. Sometimes it is as simple as feeling the fear and doing it anyway