

BREATHING SPACE

The Little Book of Caring Ways



Ways to promote kindness for better mental health in Scotland

Compassion

Appreciation

Random acts
of kindness

Empowerment

Challenging
times

The pursuit of happiness

We all want to be happy. Happiness not only feels good but actually improves other aspects of our lives. Positive benefits can include improved heart health, coping with stress more effectively and even living longer.¹ It is unclear whether feeling happier directly leads to better health outcomes, so further research is underway to explore these connections.

Some psychologists suggest that happiness consists of three areas, as outlined opposite (Figure 1).²

The happiest people tend to combine all of these elements³, suggesting the key to happiness doesn't just lie within yourself but in your connections and interactions with others.



Figure 1. Three paths of happiness

Caring about others, running the risk of feeling, and leaving an impact on people, brings happiness.

Harold Kushner

We know that not smoking, drinking in moderation, eating healthily and exercising are good for both our physical and mental health. We are told so regularly. But we don't hear nearly enough about the deep impact of building and maintaining good relationships and how to do that. *Mental Health Foundation*⁴

You Matter, We Care

The 'You Matter, We Care' campaign by Breathing Space, Scotland's mental health phone service, is about promoting kindness and everyday positive relationships for better mental wellbeing.

Over 9,000 people phone Breathing Space each month with feelings of stress, anxiety and low mood. Mental wellbeing is linked to the quality of our relationships with family, friends and the wider groups and communities we belong to. Indeed, Scotland's first national strategy to tackle social isolation and loneliness encourages us to build stronger social connections for a more connected Scotland.⁵

Caring relationships matter, particularly in times of change and challenge. This booklet looks at four elements to building these relationships, through the acronym 'care' (Figure 2).

The more closely connected we feel to the people in our lives, the greater our happiness and satisfaction.⁶



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Figure 2

Compassion

The word compassion means 'suffering together'; noticing someone's emotional pain and acting to relieve this through kindness and support. Compassion is a natural response that has ensured our survival. Practising compassion can lead to an increase in positive emotions and a calm state of mind, putting you in a better emotional state for making decisions.^{7,8}

Cultivating Compassion

Kindness to self

Compassion for others begins with kindness to yourself. When you are able to forgive yourself, it's easier to forgive others. See 'Empowerment' tab.

Friends and family

Stillness – being with someone when they're hurting can make all the difference. This means learning to be aware and 'with' the person who is suffering, without wanting to solve the problem.

Empathy to strangers

Research shows that compassion is easiest to feel when you have a sense of commonality with someone else.⁹ Learning to accept one another in terms of what we have in common would create more understanding among us all.



It's okay...

...to make mistakes

...to have bad days

...to be less than perfect

...to do what's best for you

...to be yourself

Creating healthy boundaries

It can sometimes be hard to say 'no', 'I can't' or 'I don't agree'. Knowing ourselves well enough to be able to assess whether an action is likely to make us feel stressed, hurt or angry is not always easy. But to practise compassion we need to set healthy boundaries to protect and care for ourselves. You don't always have to explain the boundary to the other person, but setting the boundary itself is important.

1 Learn what's really important to you – this will help you choose a path which mirrors the experiences you want

2 Take responsibility for yourself – know what needs to be done for yourself and remember that whatever you say goes

3 Develop a healthy self-respect – no one besides you can define you or control who you are. Expect others to show that same level of respect

4 Pay attention to warning signs – distance yourself from anyone who is invading your space for their own end

5 Avoid trying to fix people – fixing others is self-serving and can be seen as a way to get attention or validation

6 You are in charge – you can change your mind and walk away at any time

7 Separate yourself from others – understand your boundaries are different to others; gain a healthy perspective of others without creating conflict with your own beliefs

7 Top Tips¹⁰

“You can be a good person with a kind heart and still say no.”

“ We tend to forget that happiness doesn't come as a result of getting something we don't have, but rather of recognising and appreciating what we do have. Friedrich Koenig ”

Appreciation

Researchers have found that giving thanks can make you happier.¹¹ When we feel grateful, people tend to have more positive emotions, enjoy experiences, face adversity and maintain healthy relationships – this in turn increases happiness. So how can we increase feelings of gratitude?

Encouraging more gratitude day-to-day¹²

Appreciate the small things

Getting into the habit of feeling grateful could be as simple as appreciating better weather

Keeping a journal

Writing down positive thoughts can focus your attention on them and distract from negative experiences

Spending time with loved ones

Supporting those around you that you care about can help you to feel 'in the moment'

Expressing thanks

Not only can it brighten someone's day, studies show that expressing thanks can increase our own happiness levels¹³

Practising mindfulness

Think of five things you're grateful for each day. Training your brain towards being 'in the moment' and feeling thankful, helps it come more easily with practise

Improve happiness levels

Activities such as exercise can help to improve your mood and put you in the mindset of being thankful

Find gratitude in challenges

Thinking about difficult situations and how they've shaped you can help with focussing on what to be thankful for

Giving back

Volunteering and giving back to your community has many positive benefits, find out opportunities in your area at:

volunteerscotland.net or readyscotland.org

Lasting positive impact

Gratitude can have a lasting positive impact if we work towards including it into our daily lives. The more gratitude we display, the more our feelings of wellbeing and resistance to negativity increases, and the more grateful we are likely to be.¹⁴

“ Appreciation can make a day, even change a life. Your willingness to put it into words is all that is necessary. Margaret Cousins ”

“Never worry about numbers. Help one person at a time and always start with the person nearest you. Mother Teresa”

Random acts of kindness

Kindness creates and strengthens connections between people.^{15, 16}

Studies have also suggested that feelings of connection don't just make us feel good; they also make us do good – thus creating a positive feedback loop.¹⁷



Quantifying kindness in Scotland¹⁸

A study published by the Carnegie UK Trust in 2018* showed:

People in Scotland report higher levels of kindness – both giving and receiving – than any other jurisdiction in the UK and Ireland.

Respondents in Scotland were also the most likely to experience kindness when using public libraries, social care services, police services and public transport.



*data relates to 1,050 adults in Scotland over the age of 16 – surveys were conducted by Ipsos MORI with representative random sampling for approx. 1000 people in each of the five legislative jurisdictions in the UK and Ireland.

Importance to wellbeing

So why are random acts of kindness important to our wellbeing? Random acts of kindness not only benefit the receiver but also the giver.



So whether it's sending a text to someone who might need it, doing the shopping for a vulnerable neighbour or checking in with a friend, it helps to play your part in your community.

“Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it. Ferris Bueller”

Empowerment

Kristin Neff, a leading expert in this area, believes that self-compassion is at the heart of empowerment, learning and inner strength. As a society, we place importance on 'achieving', often criticising our performance as a way of motivating ourselves.

Self-compassion is not about judging how we perform; it's about being kind to ourselves — so recognising suffering, responding with kindness and accepting our faults.²³

“...when self-compassionate people don't reach a goal, they're much more likely to pick themselves up, dust themselves off, and re-engage in a new goal.” *Kristin Neff*

Empowering yourself²³



Self-kindness

having a warm and supportive 'inner voice' which actively soothes rather than being cold and judgemental to ourselves.



Common humanity

we wrongly believe everyone else has perfect lives — you are not alone if you fail. Recognising that personal failures are what makes us human can help us feel more connected to others.

Mindfulness

if you're just ignoring pain you can't give yourself compassion. It's ok to say, 'this is really difficult', without getting caught up and swept away by negativity.



Using mindfulness in everyday life

Mindfulness is a way of slowing down, standing back from our thoughts and noticing the world around us. It can help us to interrupt unhelpful behaviours and choose to respond rather than react to situations.

Digital resources

Mind.org.uk

search 'mindfulness' for information and helpful resources

NHSinform.scot

includes a calming breathing exercise and relaxation exercises for stress

Insight Timer

learn meditation with this free app, available on android and iOS

@mindfuleveryday

twitter account for everyday mindfulness

How to be more mindful²⁴

- 1 Notice the everyday** — interrupt the 'autopilot' mode we are often in day-to-day and notice sensations
- 2 Keep it regular** — pick a regular time (e.g. on the way to work) to decide to be more aware of your environment
- 3 Try something new** — for instance, go somewhere new at lunchtime to help you notice the world in a new way
- 4 Watch your thoughts** — see thoughts as 'thought buses' which come and go without you having to get on them
- 5 Name thoughts and feelings** — develop an awareness, it can help to name them when they occur, 'This is anxiety'
- 6 Free yourself from the past and future** — take a mindful approach if you find yourself reliving past problems or 'pre-living' future ones

“Compassion and kindness to oneself are intrinsically woven into mindfulness.” *Jon Kabat-Zinn*

Challenging times

Whether it's clapping and cheering for NHS staff, supporting one another through work and schooling, or looking out for a vulnerable neighbour – we have shown that, even in very difficult circumstances, we can all choose to be kind.

Kindness is a big part of resilience – without kindness and support, dealing with difficult situations becomes harder.



The Scottish Recovery Network held online conversation cafés on staying well during and after the COVID-19 lockdown.

Discussions in the cafés showed many people were able to draw on their experiences of mental health crisis and recovery to support their wellbeing during this challenging period.²⁵

It's a tough thing to accept when we are going through a time when there are so many things out of our own control.

We must accept finite disappointment, but we must never lose infinite hope.

Martin Luther King, Jr

The activity on the next page is from the British Red Cross, who suggest one way to help develop resilience and kindness is through managing our goals more effectively.²⁶

Circles of Control²⁶

Think about elements of your life which you can and can't control

In the outside circle...

write down the things you are concerned about but can't control here

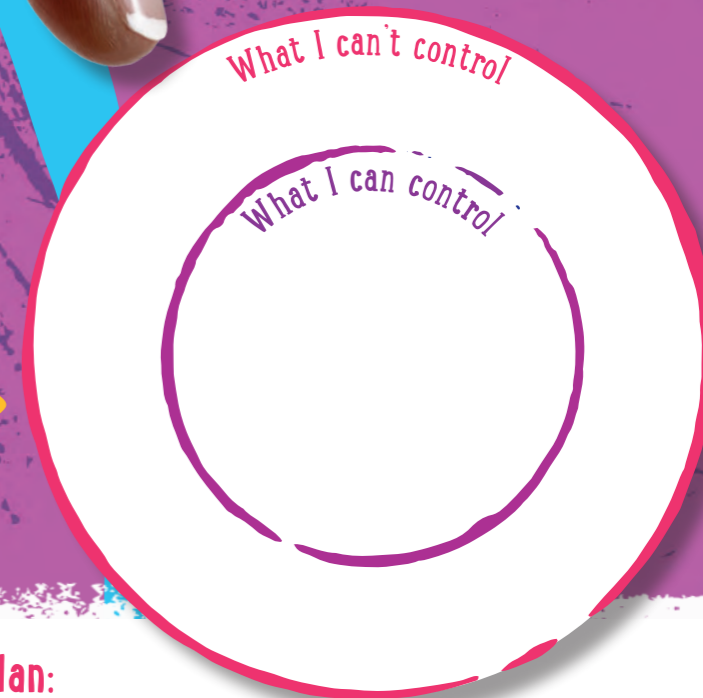
In the central circle...

write down the things you can control here

Pick a central worry and think of a plan for how to ease this – work on one problem at a time

Remember!!!

Being kind to yourself is as important as being kind to others



My Plan:

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Breathing Space provides:

- an alternative and easily accessible 'first stop' service
- assistance at an early stage in order to stop problems escalating
- empathy, understanding and advice through active listening
- hope when none exists
- direction for those who do not know where to seek help.

You are not alone, talking about how you feel is a positive first step in getting help.

To take some Breathing Space, call 0800 83 85 87.

