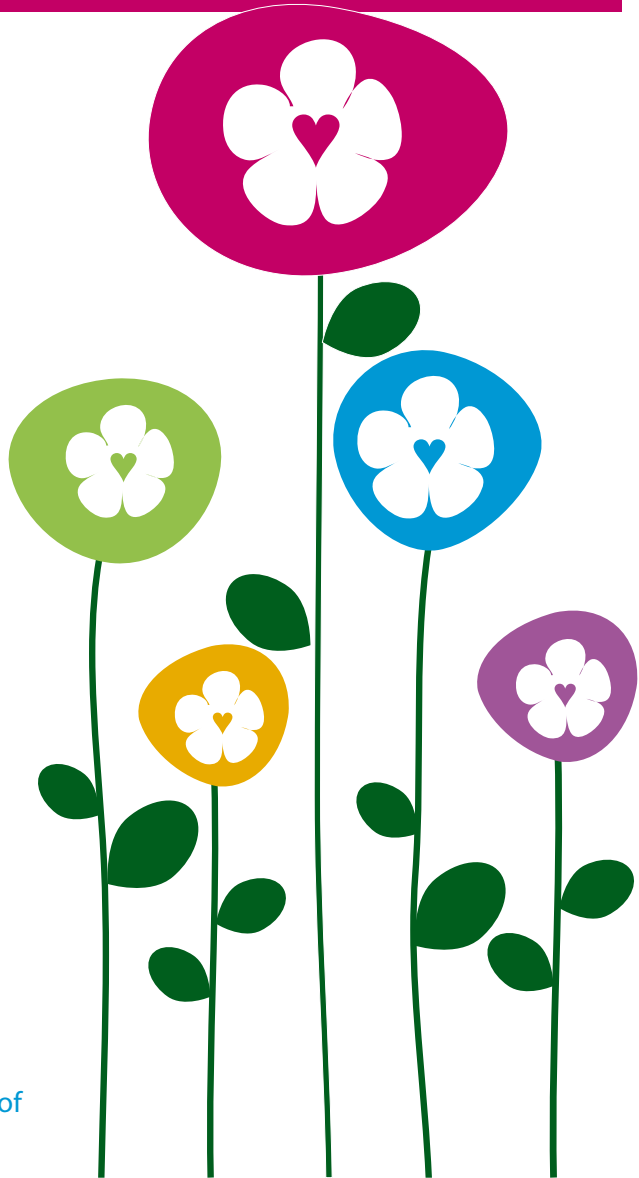


# Taking steps towards living well

A personal guide to: The 5 ways to wellbeing



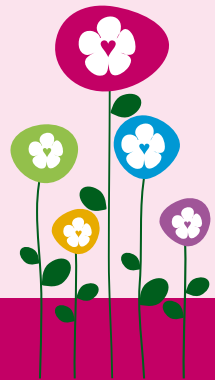
This booklet has been designed to support people in taking action to have a healthier and more satisfying life.

The '5 ways to wellbeing' have been identified through extensive reviews of research and expert opinion as simple actions that anyone can take that will have a positive impact on their day to day wellbeing. There is nothing new or surprising in these messages other than knowing that there is substantial evidence to support their value in living well and that small changes can make a big difference. This workbook guides you through the '5 ways to wellbeing' and invites you to consider what they mean for you and what action and changes you would like to make in your own life.

Project sponsored by the Devon Recovery Research and Development Group

The '5 ways to wellbeing' were developed as evidence-based mental health promotion messages by the new economics foundation at the request of the Government's Department of Science for the Foresight Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project (2008)

For further information see [www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org)



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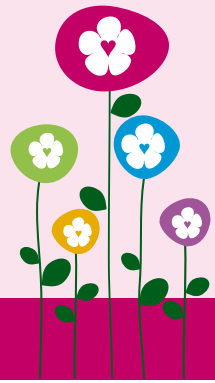
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# Introduction

## What can you do to take some simple but reliable steps towards living well?

Everyone faces challenges in life. How big or difficult these challenges are will be different for each of us but we all know what it's like to feel drained and struggling to cope. This booklet is about ways to build on our strengths and to increase our resilience in order to meet the challenges we all encounter from time to time. It is also about going further than coping and surviving and realising that there is good evidence that a range of simple actions are strongly linked to people feeling happier and more satisfied with their lives. It is about knowing that there are actions you can take that will build up your health and wellbeing and then doing something about it yourself – taking small steps to living well.

It's all about choice and we make choices all the time. However most of the time we are not even aware of the choices we are making because we think we do not have a choice.

Consider this for a moment – what happens when someone gives us a compliment. We can choose to feel good about it or choose to feel annoyed or not even notice. Similarly when someone shouts at us, we can make a choice to shout back and feel very angry or we can choose to remain calm and forgive

the person. The event does not have to determine our experience – we can choose what to make of it and how to respond.

The '5 ways to wellbeing' are about taking action and making conscious and deliberate choices to look after our wellbeing. The ideas that follow are simple evidence-based actions that are applicable to people from all walks of life. The important thing is what do they mean to you?

# So – what are the 5 ways?

Although not same order used by their originators, we found it useful to remember them as 'CLANG'. This booklet will guide you through thinking about these one at a time as follows

## 1. Connect...

With the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

## 2. keep Learning...

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.

## 3. be Active...

Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

## 4. take Notice...

Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

## 5. Give ...

Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, as linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you.

# How to use this guide

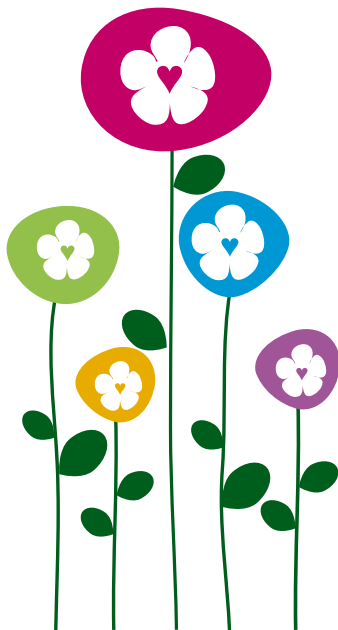
This booklet is intended to be useful to anyone. It arose from the Devon '5 ways to wellbeing in the workplace' project<sup>1</sup>

You can download and print it and read through each section, pausing to reflect on suggestions for action and maybe making notes for yourself before moving on to the next one.

We have included some questions at the end of each chapter to help you. It will be worthwhile responding to these as honestly as you can. You don't have to share this with anyone but you may find it helpful to discuss it with a friend or supporter.

The '5 ways' approach will work well with a Wellness Recovery Action Plan if you have one and it offers another source of good ideas to support your self-management.

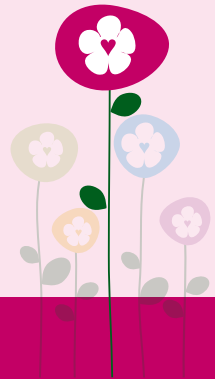
This booklet can also be used to support a team or group exercise (see appendix).



<sup>1</sup> '5 ways to wellbeing': how do you get the message across? A report for Devon Partnership NHS Trust Clinical Cabinet. Authors Glenn Roberts, Rani Bora, Emma Hoerning, Ann Ley, Melanie Long. 7th June 2011

## Connect...

With the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.



# 1. Connect

## Being well connected is associated with increased mental health and wellbeing

When we talk about connecting, we usually think of connecting with other people.

- Connecting with self and having quiet moments
- Connecting with nature, pets and animals
- Connecting with God or one's spiritual needs

Sometimes, connecting with people's distress can leave us feeling challenged and drained and too many contacts can make us feel we are not properly connected with anyone.

As with all things in life, a balance is needed. You may also want to seek out "positive" connections in your life to balance time spent with distress and suffering. By making choices and consciously attending to the connections we make we can be more in control of our lives, take up the driving seat and become committed to working on living well.

Since engaging with the '5 ways':

"Tried to improve contact with neighbours"

"Spent a little more time being sociable"

"Connecting more with family and friends"

"Concerted effort to speak to people I don't know when I am out"

"Going out more with friends"

"Cycling with family"

"I have been really stressed over the last few days but through a conversation with my family – I connected with them and this enabled a connection with myself – with a broader 'me' – not just the work 'me' and I felt much better".

## Questions to aid reflection

1. How would you know if you were connecting or just making contact?  
What makes the difference?

2. If being well connected is good for your mental wellbeing

- Is there anything you'd like to do more of?
- Is there anything you'd like to do less of?

3. Can you think of connections that you would like to make, or remake?



## keep Learning

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident as well as being fun.



## 2. keep Learning

A life-style that includes valuing learning is positively associated with mental health and wellbeing

It can be hard though to feel motivated to learn all the time, especially if because of our work or roles we are told we have to learn specific things whether we are interested in them or not, whether we value them or not. Learning can come to feel more like a chore and a 'tick box exercise'. If this has been part of your experience and your interested in learning has been 'spoiled' it can be reconsidered and rediscovered. Engaging with the '5 ways' is about learning what you can do to be more satisfied and fulfilled in your life and the very act of learning is part of that.

How we think about learning and what we say to ourselves about it will make it more possible and satisfying or more of a struggle or even obstacle. Everyone can learn.

Learning new skills and practicing and refining old ones are key to both personal

and professional growth. It keeps us interested and focused, breaking the monotony of life and opening us to new possibilities.

We don't necessarily have to sign up for a college course degree or complete masters degree, simple daily opportunities really count. We could learn how to cook a new recipe, play a new sport or find out about something we are curious about. We can also learn something new about the people we meet. For example, we may wish to learn more about the other person's hopes and wishes, what makes them smile, what they value in life, their strengths and inner resources etc. Or the environment we are living in – what's going on that may be interesting to visit or take part in?

What we learn and how much effort we put into learning something new will be different for different people. As long as we pursue learning for our interest and gain satisfaction out of doing so, it will enhance our wellbeing.

Since engaging with the '5 ways':

"More conscious of learning"

"Looking into hobbies/courses"

"Keep learning"

"Learning for my job"

"Being more aware that I am learning"

"More prepared to seek out the answers to questions that interests me"

## Questions to aid reflection

1. What do I think about 'Learning'? Would I like to learn something new each day?

2. What would I like to learn about? What interests me, what do I value, what would be useful?

3. What do I need to do to make learning fun and something I look forward to?

## be Active

Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy and that suits your level of mobility and fitness.



# 3. be Active

## People who are active have improved mental health and wellbeing

Different people engage in different forms and different levels of activities. Being active is important for both our physical and mental health. Small changes in levels of activity can make a big difference. Just ten minutes of physical activity has been shown to be beneficial for mental wellbeing<sup>4</sup>.

We need to consciously make an effort to be a little more active. Sometimes we may complain that we don't have enough time or we are too busy to take on activities. The reality is we all get 24 hours in a day. It is up to us to be willing to make slight adjustments to our lifestyle or our daily routine thereby creating a bit more space to be more active. It all comes back to choice and how we set our personal priorities.

Sometimes it may feel as if we have been very active during the day as we feel exhausted and drained towards the later part of the day.

When we reflect back on the day, we may find that although our mind has been very active, we have not been that physically active. Mental fatigue can be overcome by keeping our physical health in good shape and the key to this is committing to some form of physical activities as part of our routine.

When we take even a five minute break to positively refresh ourselves we can end up being in a more resourceful state and then use our time more productively.

<sup>4</sup> [www.neweconomics.org/publications/five-ways-well-being-evidence](http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/five-ways-well-being-evidence)

Since engaging with the '5 ways':

"I walk half an hour every morning"

"I started Morris dancing"

"Horse riding"

"Cycling"

"I am less aware that I don't go to the gym and more aware of the exercise I do"

"More walking instead of driving and taking in the scenery"

## Questions to aid reflection

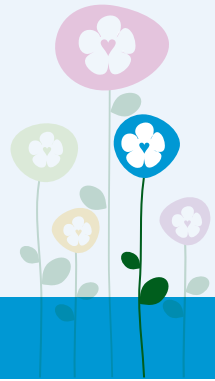
1. What activities do I engage in on a regular basis? How would I like to develop this?

2. Who can support me to be more active at home/work? What can we do together?

3. Are there any minor adjustments I can make in my life that can help me be more active? (Remember, 'small changes can make a big difference')

## take Notice

Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are walking to work, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.



# 4. take Notice

## Taking notice, being aware and mindful is associated with mental health and wellbeing

Most of us are fairly busy. Our mind is active throughout the day. We constantly seem to be doing something. We focus on the next step and the next task in hand. More often than not, we focus on the various things that need to be sorted, project deadlines that need to be met, unpaid bills, the various phone calls we need to make, the appointments we need to keep etc. When we complete all the things on our 'to do' list or our chores, we then may switch on the TV or read the paper. The contrary can also be true. We may not be doing much but we may be lost in our thoughts, focusing on all the things that are not working in our life – we can be busy doing nothing.

Most importantly we forget to take notice, to be aware and mindful of our surroundings, to be alert and awake rather than lost in thought or forgetful of where we are and what is happening around us.

To take notice is to pause, even if for a brief period, to spend some time in silence and reflect on our experiences, to look up and give time and attention to being aware of where we are and what is before us.

To take notice is to be in the present, in the 'here and now' and tune in not only to our bodily sensations, our breathing and our experiences but also to what is going on around us, in our surroundings.

Remember, the value of taking action – doing something – in response to all of these suggested 'ways to wellbeing' may be amplified by noticing what we are doing and being thoughtful, attentive and appreciative of our actions:

It may not be enough to 'connect'- notice that you are connecting and choose to feel good about the connections you are making and your positive experiences from them.

It may not be enough to 'learn'- notice that you are learning something new and choose to feel good about it.

It may not be enough to be 'active'- notice that you are physically active and choose to feel good that you are keeping yourself fit and healthy.

It may not be enough to 'give'- notice that you are giving and choose to feel good that you are contributing in some way, however small it might seem to you.

Since engaging with the '5 ways':

"Have taken more notice of my surroundings"

"Enjoy the environment when out dog walking"

"Taking in more around me and discussing it with others"

"Noticing things when I am out"

"Looking/noticing beautiful pleasant things"

"Make time to stop and notice and enjoy"

## Questions to aid reflection

1. If noticing enhances wellbeing, what opportunities can I take or make to take notice more often?

2. How can I practice slowing down and pausing more often?

3. What difference will incorporating this in my day to day life make?

## Give...

Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, as linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and creates connections with the people around you.



# 5. Give

People who enjoy giving and are open to receiving have improved mental health and wellbeing

Every relationship is one of give and take. 'The more we give the more we receive' is a wise old saying. Giving is associated with mental wellbeing.

There is a difference though in giving for the sake of politeness, obligation or duty and giving because your intention is to feel good and make the other person feel good. When you are in a frame of mind in which you feel good in the very act of giving, this is going to enhance your wellbeing and can also contribute to the wellbeing of the person whose life you touch.

When you give, give openly and from the heart. There are many opportunities to give in small ways every day

For example:

- Giving a smile, a compliment, encouragement
- Giving a hand, giving way to other car drivers

- Giving your time, a silent wish or prayer
- Give yourself the gift of connecting, of being active, of noticing
- Giving thanks i.e. being grateful for whatever good is happening in your life.

Some people say that they find giving easy, but that they don't feel as comfortable to receive. This is especially true when it comes to receiving compliments. They may murmur a quick 'thank you' but don't really accept the compliment or are dismissive. Giving is a two way process – your acceptance of what someone else gives is good for them as well as for you. By becoming more comfortable with the 'give and take' of everyday life we build ourselves up as well as give opportunities to others.

Since engaging with the '5 ways':

"Volunteering and checking on elderly neighbours"

"More tolerant to other drivers"

"Smiling at people"

"Trying to help others which helps you"

"Smiling more – it is free to give"

"Tried to be more helpful and considerate"

## Questions to aid reflection

1. What do you give others on a regular basis? Do you notice what it's like for you when you give to others?

2. What else could you give others that you hadn't thought of before? What small gifts can you offer that you will feel good about?

3. What do you give yourself? How can you be more generous and appreciative to yourself? What 'treats' would really improve your experience of life?



You are what you repeatedly do.  
Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.  
Aristotle

## Building the

### '5 ways to wellbeing' into a healthy lifestyle

The '5 ways to wellbeing' were designed as a mental health equivalent to the dietary advice to have '5 a day' fruit and vegetables for physical health. The '5 ways' are based on an extensive review of the actions people can take that are positively associated with mental health and wellbeing (see ref 4). In effect they describe some of the key components of a healthy emotional or social 'diet'. All 5 of these suggestions are free, easily achievable and applicable to anyone's life regardless of their circumstances. Many of us will in some measure be already doing some of the '5 ways' some of the time without even being aware of it. Hence this may come across as common sense. However, as we know, common sense is not necessarily common practice and choosing to change our habits can be hard work.

It may also be helpful when thinking of the '5 ways' to focus on what we're doing least of.

So if you are already implementing some of the '5 ways' in your life, you may wish to focus on what you can do more of to gain a better balance.

When we decide to change our behaviour or learn new skills, we need to put them into practice and make conscious attempts to keep doing them regularly. Making anything part of our life needs commitment and perseverance. It is just so easy to slip back to previous lifestyle patterns and not make and sustain changes. We know that we will not get fit just going to the gym once or twice. We need to keep exercising. We won't have a healthy diet by incorporating the '5 a day' fruit and veg. for just a couple of weeks. Similarly the power and value of this simple concept lies in us finding ways that work for us, consistently taking action and noticing the difference. It then becomes possible to sustain our commitment to living a healthier and more satisfying life. As we develop our strengths and resources we will also be more resilient and be more able to deal with challenges as and when they arise.

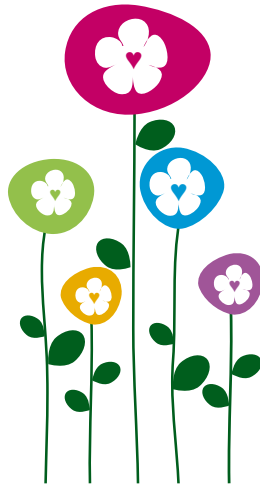
## Questions to aid reflection

1. How could using the '5 ways' have a positive impact in my life?

2. What measures can I put in place to prompt me to use the '5 ways' consciously?

3. Is there anyone I'd like to ask to support me in this or share this with?





## Five ways to wellbeing

Due July 2011, 'Five ways to wellbeing: New applications, new ways of thinking', in which this project features as a 'case study'.

[www.neweconomics.org](http://www.neweconomics.org)

This Devon Partnership NHS Trust initiative is part of the national Foresight campaign to promote mental health and personal wellbeing

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Designed by sumographics: [info@sumographics.co.uk](mailto:info@sumographics.co.uk)