

TAKING ACTION: An Evidence-Based
Self-Help and Peer Support Approach
to Wellness and Recovery

Part 1: Essential Elements Workbook



DOORS TO
WELLBEING
A Program of the Copeland Center

Acknowledgments

The Doors to Wellbeing Technical Assistance Center is funded in part by SAMHSA National Consumer and Consumer Supporter Technical Assistance Centers grant award H79SM082653 at Doors to Wellbeing.

Taking Action: *An Evidence-Based Self-Help and Peer Support Approach to Wellness and Recovery, Part 1: Essential Elements Workbook* is adapted from the original document Taking Action: A Mental Health Recovery Self-Help Educational Program, HHS Pub. No. 14-4857 prepared for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), under contract number 03M00027201D with SAMHSA, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014.

The authors wish to thank the following individuals for their contributions:

Editorial and production support was provided in part by SAMHSA contract number 75S20322D00041/75S20323F42001, the SAMHSA Program to Advance Recovery Knowledge. CAPT Wanda Finch, MSW, M.Ed., LICSW, CAS, served as contracting officer representative. Audene Watson, LCSW-C, served as the alternative contracting officer representative.

Additional product contributors and reviewers, including:

- Alliance for Rights and Recovery
- Bay State Community Services
- C4 Innovations
- Faces and Voices of Recovery
- On Our Own of Maryland
- South Florida Wellness Network

Most importantly, the many individuals in recovery that contributed their stories and have been involved over the past 30 years of this work's development.

Disclaimer

Nothing in this document constitutes a direct or indirect endorsement by SAMHSA or HHS of any non-federal entity's products, services, or policies. The views, opinions, and content of this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of CMHS, SAMHSA, or HHS.

Public Domain Notice

This publication is in the public domain and may be reproduced or copied without permission from SAMHSA. Citation of the source is appreciated. However, this publication may not be reproduced or distributed for a fee without the specific, written authorization of the Office of Communications, SAMHSA, HHS.

The images used on this publication are licensed stock photography images that are not in the public domain and may not be utilized by others. The photographs feature model(s) for illustrative purposes only that have no affiliation with SAMHSA.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome	4
Foundational Concepts	7
Peer Support	7
Recovery	7
Introduction	10
Essential Elements	12
Self-Care, Self-Compassion, and Self-Esteem	12
Hope.....	20
Self-Determination, Empowerment, and Self-Advocacy	21
Connection	26
Education and Research	28
Building Support	29
Community Inclusion.....	31
The Wellness Toolbox	36
Peer Support	41
Glossary	44
References.....	46

WELCOME

Congratulations on taking this step to learn more about **Taking Action!**

Taking Action is a self-care, wellness, and recovery educational program for individuals seeking or in recovery from mental health and substance use conditions. This includes anyone at any age, with different experiences, or from any community. You can use the program safely along with other healthcare treatment, medical programs, or recovery support services. It is not a replacement for any of these resources.

Who Is Taking Action for?

Taking Action is for anyone working on their recovery and wellness related to mental health and substance use conditions. Many of the strategies and tools in **Taking Action** could also help those of us who are seeking positive change, wellness, recovery, or improved health more generally. The **Taking Action** workbook and action planning resources work to support your learning and engagement. These include self-help concepts, skills, and strategies to help you achieve your goals and address your interests.

Below, take a look at what's included in **Taking Action**.

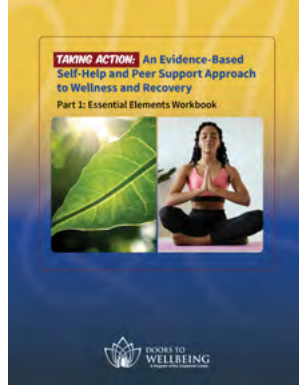
Taking Action: A Proactive Strategy to Begin Recovery, Get Well Through a Crisis, and Sustain Wellness

While designing **Taking Action**, we tapped into the experiences and collective knowledge of people with lived and living experience with mental health and substance use conditions. We also used our personal expertise in dealing with and overcoming multiple health and life challenges. This graphic illustrates the key elements that we'll introduce in the **Taking Action** workbook.



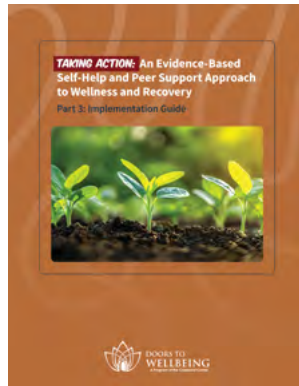
Taking Action resources now feature these recently updated and improved materials:

Part 1: Essential Elements Workbook. This workbook reviews key concepts and essential elements for **Taking Action** and invites participants to develop their own Wellness Toolbox.



Part 2: Action Planning Workbook. This workbook includes information and prompts to guide you in developing a personal Action Plan to support your recovery and wellness. You'll also be able to plan for times when you may need additional support. The planning process includes these steps: creating a daily maintenance plan, forming action plans for difficult times, and preparing for crisis and post-crisis.

Part 3: Implementation Guide. This guide helps **Taking Action** planners, facilitators, and supporters to successfully plan and implement **Taking Action**, while ensuring fidelity to best practices proven to produce superior results.



Taking Action resources include information, ideas, and strategies that people from across the country have found to enhance wellness and recovery. The concepts, activities, and systematic approaches incorporated into **Taking Action** are research-based. This means that studies show these strategies relieve and prevent troubling feelings and reduce feelings that can lead to a crisis.¹

How to Participate in Taking Action

You can use these versatile resources in several ways:


- in a group setting with a trained facilitator
- on an individual basis
- one-to-one with a peer supporter
- in grassroots peer-to-peer and mutual aid groups

We've found that **Taking Action** works best, however, in a peer-led group using the concepts and approaches in this material with a trained peer facilitator.

Participation in Taking Action should always be completely voluntary. Even though **Taking Action** might look different from community to community, participation in a facilitated group must always be voluntary and self-directed. This means that we decide how, when, and for what we're **taking action** to improve our own well-being. Someone else should never require,



Part 4: Taking Action To Go— Brief Action Plan. This concise planning tool is for use by those of us who may be unable to participate in a full **Taking Action** group support process. It features key information and prompts for basic **Taking Action** planning.



**“WE BELIEVE THAT IT IS NECESSARY TO
RECOGNIZE THAT EMPOWERMENT DOES
NOT OCCUR TO THE INDIVIDUAL ALONE, BUT
HAS TO DO WITH EXPERIENCING A SENSE OF
CONNECTEDNESS WITH OTHER PEOPLE.”**

—JUDI CHAMBERLIN²



FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS

Taking Action includes many helpful concepts and strategies for recovery and well-being. Two concepts that are foundational to all parts of **Taking Action** are **peer support and recovery**. Over the course of 30 years, the concepts, values, and system for **Taking Action** were developed through the process of **peer support** and by people with lived experiences in **recovery**. This section of the workbook briefly describes both concepts.

Peer Support

Peer support is a relationship based in mutuality, shared experiences, and mutual respect. There is reciprocity in the relationship, meaning that each person both contributes and benefits. Peer support can be between two or more people. Each person values the other as being a supporter in the relationship.³

Using this program along with peer support is highly recommended. **Taking Action** is most useful when we can be with one or more individuals with common experiences and interests for wellness and recovery. Together and through the process of peer support, we can explore, discuss, and exchange ideas around each topic. Different people will have different solutions to offer the group for consideration.

Recovery

Taking Action reflects years of input from thousands of people in recovery. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, known by the abbreviation SAMHSA, worked with peer leaders with lived experience of recovery, family members, and care providers to create this shared definition of recovery:

“Recovery is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.”⁴

There are multiple pathways to recovery. Recovery is highly individualized and incorporates our unique interests, culture, supporters, and resources. Even with these individual differences, there are core, guiding principles that reflect different generations, geographies, cultures, and disability challenges. Below and on the following pages, you can learn more about key recovery principles that inform **Taking Action**.⁵

RECOVERY PRINCIPLES

Ten recovery principles ground SAMHSA’s concept and definition of recovery. **Taking Action** incorporates each of these principles, and our workbook defines and explores many of them in Parts 1 and 2. To learn more about the principles and the process SAMHSA used to create its definition, download the brochure [SAMHSA’s Working Definition of Recovery](#).⁶



SAMHSA's Ten Guiding Principles of Recovery

1

Recovery emerges from hope. The belief that recovery is real provides the essential and motivating message of a better future—that people can and do overcome the internal and external challenges, barriers, and obstacles that confront them. Hope is internalized and can be fostered by peers, families, providers, allies, and others. Hope is the catalyst of the recovery process.

2

Recovery is person-driven. Self-determination and self-direction are the foundations for recovery as individuals define their own life goals and design their unique path(s) towards those goals. Individuals optimize their autonomy and independence to the greatest extent possible by leading, controlling, and exercising choice over the services and supports that assist their recovery and resilience. In so doing, they are empowered and provided the resources to make informed decisions, initiate recovery, build on their strengths, and gain or regain control over their lives.

3

Recovery occurs via many pathways. Individuals are unique with distinct needs, strengths, preferences, goals, culture, and backgrounds—including trauma experience—that affect and determine their pathway(s) to recovery. Recovery is built on the multiple capacities, strengths, talents, coping abilities, resources, and inherent value of each individual. Recovery pathways are highly personalized. They may include professional clinical treatment; use of medications; support from families and in schools; faith-based approaches; peer support; and other approaches. Recovery is non-linear, characterized by continual growth and improved functioning that may involve setbacks. Because setbacks are a natural, though not inevitable, part of the recovery process, it is essential to foster resilience for all individuals and families. Abstinence from the use of alcohol, illicit drugs, and non-prescribed medications is the goal for those with addictions. Use of tobacco and non-prescribed or illicit drugs is not safe for anyone. In some cases, recovery pathways can be enabled by creating a supportive environment. This is especially true for children, who may not have the legal or developmental capacity to set their own course.

4

Recovery is holistic. Recovery encompasses an individual's whole life, including mind, body, spirit, and community. This includes addressing: self-care practices, family, housing, employment, transportation, education, clinical treatment for mental disorders and substance use disorders, services and supports, primary healthcare, dental care, complementary and alternative services, faith, spirituality, creativity, social networks, and community participation. The array of services and supports available should be integrated and coordinated.



5

Recovery is supported by peers and allies. Mutual support and mutual aid groups, including the sharing of experiential knowledge and skills, as well as social learning, play an invaluable role in recovery. Peers encourage and engage other peers and provide each other with a vital sense of belonging, supportive relationships, valued roles, and community. Through helping others and giving back to the community, one helps one's self. Peer-operated supports and services provide important resources to assist people along their journeys of recovery and wellness. Professionals can also play an important role in the recovery process by providing clinical treatment and other services that support individuals in their chosen recovery paths. While peers and allies play an important role for many in recovery, their role for children and youth may be slightly different. Peer supports for families are very important for children with behavioral health problems and can also play a supportive role for youth in recovery.

6

Recovery is supported through relationship and social networks. An important factor in the recovery process is the presence and involvement of people who believe in the person's ability to recover; who offer hope, support, and encouragement; and who also suggest strategies and resources for change. Family members, peers, providers, faith groups, community members, and other allies form vital support networks. Through these relationships, people leave unhealthy and/or unfulfilling life roles behind and engage in new roles (e.g., partner, caregiver, friend, student, employee) that lead to a greater sense of belonging, personhood, empowerment, autonomy, social inclusion, and community participation.

7

Recovery is culturally-based and influenced. Culture and cultural background in all of its diverse representations—including values, traditions, and beliefs—are keys in determining a person's journey and unique pathway to recovery. Services should be culturally grounded, attuned, sensitive, congruent, and competent, as well as personalized to meet each individual's unique needs.

8

Recovery is supported by addressing trauma. The experience of trauma (such as physical or sexual abuse, domestic violence, war, disaster, and others) is often a precursor to or associated with alcohol and drug use, mental health problems, and related issues. Services and supports should be trauma-informed to foster safety (physical and emotional) and trust, as well as promote choice, empowerment, and collaboration.

9

Recovery involves individual, family, and community strengths and responsibility. Individuals, families, and communities have strengths and resources that serve as a foundation for recovery. In addition, individuals have a personal responsibility for their own self-care and journeys of recovery. Individuals should be supported in speaking for themselves. Families and significant others have responsibilities to support their loved ones, especially for children and youth in recovery. Communities have responsibilities to provide opportunities and resources to address discrimination and to foster social inclusion and recovery. Individuals in recovery also have a social responsibility and should have the ability to join with peers to speak collectively about their strengths, needs, wants, desires, and aspirations.

10

Recovery is based on respect. Community, systems, and societal acceptance and appreciation for people affected by mental health and substance use problems—including protecting their rights and eliminating discrimination—are crucial in achieving recovery. There is a need to acknowledge that taking steps towards recovery may require great courage. Self-acceptance, developing a positive and meaningful sense of identity, and regaining belief in one's self are particularly important.



INTRODUCTION

Everyone has upsetting and disruptive experiences sometimes. These experiences may keep us from being the way we want to be and from doing the things we want to do.

Many of us have experienced troubling emotional, cognitive, or physical challenges at times. This can include challenges with addictions, such as substance use, gambling, food, sex, and work. Working together, we've made great advances in learning how to support ourselves to get well and stay well.

***Taking Action* is a powerful tool that reflects this wisdom of lived experience.**

Researchers studied the elements of ***Taking Action*** and found that when combined with peer support, the program's individual strategies and practices are *evidence-based*. This means simply that they are practical approaches based on our best available current knowledge.

The Power of Planning and ***Taking Action*** for Recovery and Wellness

One frustrating stage of recovering our wellness is when we realize that while we can help ourselves stay well, it's not easy doing everything that we need to do.⁷ Especially when we're under stress or experiencing challenges from a medical, mental health, or substance use condition, it's easy to forget simple things that we know.

Research tells us that recovery is often defined by our acceptance and the actions we take to overcome the challenges of mental health conditions and addiction. This includes actively working to rebuild a positive self-image and identity as we take action to reclaim control of our lives.⁸

We also know from lived experience that *taking action*—making a change—is one of the most important steps in the process and stages of recovery.⁹ Everything—from making changes in our lives and lifestyles to finding and forming strong support systems with peers and programs—can be part of this change process.

Taking Action is the process of making positive changes to facilitate the challenging, yet ultimately worthwhile, path that we choose for our recovery journey. Throughout ***Taking Action***, we discuss and explore ways to deal with our need for structure in our lives that supports our wellness, recovery process, and overall health. Our action plans are simple. Over time, you'll be able to change them or add to them to fit a variety of life's challenges.

Anyone can develop and use *Taking Action* plans for any kind of health concern and to sustain or enhance wellness. People using this program report that by being prepared and taking necessary action, they often feel that they have dramatically improved their overall quality of life. One person said, "Finally, there's something I can do to help myself."

To learn more about the research behind *Taking Action*, review the information in our *Taking Action* Implementation Guide (Part 3).

**“FINALLY, THERE'S SOMETHING I
CAN DO TO HELP MYSELF.”**

—TAKING ACTION PARTICIPANT

GETTING READY

As we work on parts of **Taking Action** on our own, we can always go at a self-directed pace. We can work on a portion of the workbook, and then put it aside and come back. We can revisit and revise our **Taking Action** work on a regular basis, whenever we like. This is a process where we learn as we go. As we add more ways to get well and be resilient, we gain new understandings about ourselves.

GATHER MATERIALS

People find all kinds of ways to personalize how they engage with **Taking Action** materials. Many of us find it helpful to journal as we work through the workbook's information and “Reflection” prompts. Journaling is a practice of regularly taking time to write and reflect on our thoughts, feelings, and observations. It provides a way of understanding our life experiences and creates a pathway to healing and transformation.

Others may find it helpful to use photos, video recordings, or other visual or digital materials and make a collage-style summary of what they learned or created for action plans. The beauty of **Taking Action** is that it meets us wherever we are and however we want to participate, and in ways most meaningful to us.

Before we begin, think about how you plan to participate. Take time to gather any resources you might wish to have (for example, journals, notepads, photo albums, audio recording tools, camera, cell phone, magazines, markers, pens). “Reflection” prompts in the workbook welcome us to write, journal, or use other preferred materials. Or you may wish to simply think about a topic and discuss it with your peers.

TAKING CARE WHILE TAKING ACTION

Taking Action explores personal topics that may feel uncomfortable at times. This is an invitation to start exactly where we are and with hope for ourselves. We all start somewhere. We are always welcome to take a break or revisit our wellness tools to help us feel better.





ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Let's begin! In these next sections, we'll have a chance to learn about the essential elements that help us to take action for recovery and well-being.

REFLECTION: SET AN INTENTION

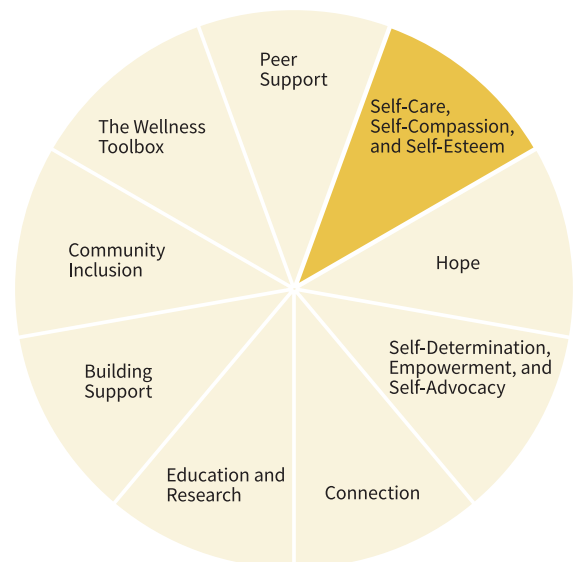
It can be helpful to set an *intention* before beginning a journey such as **Taking Action**. More than setting goals, it's about consciously choosing the direction and focus on what you want to attract into your life. Take a moment and think about your reasons for **Taking Action**. What has brought you to this moment? What do you hope to gain from the process? You could also imagine that you're writing a letter to your past or future self.

Self-Care, Self-Compassion, and Self-Esteem

The belief that we have the capacity and ability for self-care is the foundational concept to **Taking Action**. This idea is also at the heart of the ongoing transformational shift toward recovery-oriented systems and communities.

Although we may occasionally benefit from the support of medical or behavioral health specialists, daily we are the ultimate experts in our wellness, health, and recovery process. We are the only ones who can choose how to take the advice and support that others offer, find our own solutions, and make the changes we want. We choose how to best integrate these tools into our daily lives.

Research also shows that for those of us facing chronic illness, programs that support and promote individual self-care and self-management have the best health outcomes.¹⁰



REFLECTION: SELF-CARE PRACTICES

We each have unique ways to practice self-care. There are also several critical essentials we have in common when it comes to being well. This list includes many of these common examples. Check off the ones that apply to you now as part of your self-care, and add any of your own practices to the list. Add a star or another indicator on areas where you would like to focus more attention.

Sleep	Meditation
Nutrition	Prayer
Exercise	Reading
Exposure to light	Journaling
Outdoor activities	Time with my pet
Social events	Other:
Avoiding or reducing alcohol, nicotine, and other substances	Other:
Music	Other:

Reflecting on this list, think about the self-care practices that you use most often. How do these nurturing practices make you feel? What's missing in your life when you are not practicing self-care?

SELF-COMPASSION

Self-compassion is important to keeping up with our self-care.¹¹ Self-compassion is a way of emotionally relating to ourselves. It allows us time, space, and permission to experience our common humanity.¹²

Sometimes, we give ourselves unkind internal messages when we go through a difficult time. Often, these messages are harsher than we would ever say to a friend. Comments like “toughen up” or “pull yourself together” may be engrained messages from our experiences growing up. These self-criticisms may limit our ability for self-care. They reduce our perceived self-worth and our ability to express compassion for our own lived experience.

Self-compassion, on the other hand, is a means of replacing self-judgment with self-kindness. We can also buffer against isolating thoughts by focusing on a shared sense of humanity or reduce challenging thoughts by practicing mindfulness.¹³

Through self-compassion, we can give ourselves permission and time to feel vulnerability, stress, and other emotional responses. Often, others judge or misunderstand these responses as signs of an illness, pathologies, or weaknesses. In reality, the responses are normal emotions and feelings of vulnerability.

We may also find that by giving compassion to others, we grow our own self-compassion. Self-compassion is treating ourselves with unconditional regard, care, and understanding, much like we

would for a child we love or a best friend.

REFLECTION: PRACTICING COMPASSION FOR OURSELVES

Think of a time when it was hard for you to practice self-compassion. Looking back, what would you say to yourself from a place of compassion?

SELF-ESTEEM

Most of us feel bad about ourselves on occasion. Feelings of low self-esteem can happen for many reasons. For example, the experience of someone treating us poorly, recently or in the past, can lead to low self-esteem. Or these feelings can be a result of when we judge ourselves.¹⁴

These moments of experiencing low self-esteem are very common. Low self-esteem is a constant companion for too many people. It's especially common for those of us who experience depression, anxiety, phobias, psychosis, delusional thinking, or have an illness or a disability. Studies on self-esteem show that over 85 percent of people struggle with low self-esteem.¹⁵

Like hope, what supports and represents our self-esteem is unique to each of us. We can each determine how, when, and in what ways we maintain our self-esteem. We are the experts in our own self-esteem, and only we know when we are practicing thoughts and actions that are raising or lowering our self-esteem.

We all benefit from raising our self-esteem. There are no benefits to participating in thoughts, actions, and relationships that lower our self-esteem.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: TAKING ACTION

Kris Locus (they/she), CPRS, CTTC, is passionate about using their lived experience to highlight the necessity and value of peers in all spaces. Now, Kris works as the Transition Age Youth Coordinator for On Our Own of Maryland. Here, Kris describes the significance of building one's self-esteem in the journey of recovery and wellness:

When I think back to my child self being bullied, I recall what was often said to me: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Well, that wasn't true for me. It wasn't until I started my Recovery journey as an adult that I realized how much I internalized what was said to me and how damaging it was to my self-esteem. I had to do a lot of work disentangling the voices of others from my own true thoughts. Central to this healing was the practice of embodiment, connecting deeply with my body and mind.

There was a time when disengaging from my body was a crucial survival mechanism, and I appreciate my body for that instinctive wisdom. However, as I navigate Recovery, there has been a gracious and tender return to self. With this homecoming, I've been able to sit with gratitude for this body that has weathered every journey with me. Of course this is not an easy journey, but at my core there is an ancestral knowing that I deserve to take up space. So, whenever I need



a reminder, I just return back to that knowing and it always whispers back, “You are enough, always always always.”

REFLECTION: BOOSTING OUR SELF-ESTEEM

Focusing on raising self-esteem is a research-based practice that supports our well-being. This focus has a direct impact on our whole health.¹⁶ Here are examples of things that people have found helpful in raising self-esteem:

- Pay attention to your own needs and wants
- Take care of yourself to the best of your ability
- Keep personal commitments to remain free of alcohol and other drugs
- Eat foods that make you feel well
- Exercise
- Do personal hygiene tasks
- Plan fun activities for yourself
- Take time to do things that you enjoy
- Do something that you have been wanting to do
- Do things that make use of your own special talents and abilities
- Dress in clothes that make you feel good about yourself
- Give yourself rewards
- Give yourself compliments
- Spend time with people who make you feel good about yourself
- Avoid people who treat you badly
- Make your living space a place that honors you
- Learn something or improve your skills
- Do something nice for someone else
- Focus on reasons you may feel grateful

Have you identified ways that help you improve your self-esteem? Are there things that you wish to try?

If you have experience working on self-esteem practices, how do you feel before and after practicing one of these strategies? What difference does it make?

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: TAKING ACTION

Rona McBrierty is an international wellness and recovery educator from Scotland. For over two decades, she has led peer-to-peer facilitator and advanced facilitation training around the world based on her lived experience of recovery. Here, Rona shares her personal journey on the impact and transformation of focusing on self-esteem in her life:



Why the concept of self-esteem resonates so much for me in my wellness is because of things that happened to me at a very young age.

I am now able to reflect and recognize that one way I functioned through life without even knowing, was not being connected to myself. It was not obvious to others; I would still appear to be getting by. I can reflect on key points of my life and see that I had no goals, and I was only a shell of a person. Often people think there is no way you can live and not be connected to yourself for 35 or 40 years, but you can!

At the age of 18 I remember the last day I stepped out of school, and I honestly didn't believe I was going to leave school. It was like, "you mean I have to leave," "I am not coming here tomorrow." I stepped into a life dictated to by other people's expectations.

There was no empowerment or self-determination and unfortunately being disconnected and not intentionally making decisions put me into situations that caused more hurt and despair. This just propelled me into self-loathing, distrusting everyone.

My life then was purely about doing what was expected of me. Although I made a few false starts at adult life and careers I found myself stuck in the mental health system.

Although I hated every minute of being in the hospital and I became a revolving door patient, spending over 10 years of my adult life on acute wards, it served a purpose and there was comfort in the discomfort.

The system gave me what I need, a sense of belonging to other lost souls and to be accepted.

I became stuck and my life became limited by kindness, people doing everything for me. That way of life and that environment didn't create wellness or recovery or encourage me to value myself. I didn't have any self-worth, I hated myself.

I not only hated myself, I hated what life stood for, in fact I hated life.

It became a vicious cycle of pain and dependence that took me further away from being whole.

So, why change? The comfort in the discomfort stopped working.

Without trusting and believing in myself, how could I trust others? How could I really develop those open, honest, authentic relationships? How could I develop a life?

Finding a purpose of helping others, through using my narrative, gave me an important step into creating an alternative vision of who I could be, starting with self-acceptance and hope.

In my previous facilitation and through hard personal work, the other recovery concepts had supported me to navigate and get to a place in my life where I am able to thrive.

Now, focusing and reflecting on my journey to take action for whole health and well-being to build my self-esteem, I have an understanding that has further opened the door. A door whereby I recognize "I am enough," I don't have to be the same as everybody else. How I show up in MY life is my choice. My differences are something that make me who I am and should be celebrated.

Today, wellness and recovery for me is about focusing on building self-esteem and being able to have the confidence and self-worth of holding onto the belief 'I am enough,' even when I get things wrong, feel vulnerable, or don't know how to move forward. I need to challenge myself and recognise habits and destructive internal self-talk.

I am the expert of ME and I know the action I CAN take when my self-esteem dips, for example, utilising positive affirmations, looking at certain photographs.

That's the narrative that I have today that has given me a perspective to understanding my past and it opens a door to my future.

REFLECTION: ASSESSING AND IMPROVING SELF-ESTEEM

During this exercise, you can assess, appreciate, support, and improve the way you feel about yourself.



Assess: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest, how would you rate your self-esteem? If you are undecided, give yourself a 5.

Appreciate: Give yourself credit for the self-esteem that you do have. It can be hard to hold one's own in the world, and you deserve appreciation for every point you've held on to. Forgive yourself for the points that lie between you and a 10. You've done the best that you can. Also, give yourself credit for reading this workbook!

Support: What do you do for yourself that supports your well-being? Write down those things, like eating well, making sure you have fun regularly, or pursuing your goals. Write only the good things you do right now, appreciate yourself for them, and vow to continue.

Improve: Think of something you'd like to change to improve your well-being. It can be just one small thing that's easy for you to stop doing or begin to do, such as exercising more often, signing up for a class, or watching less television. It may even be getting out of bed.



Exercises to Raise Self-Esteem

Here are additional ideas that can help us boost our feelings of self-esteem. You can also create your own ideas and lists.

- **Get together with a trusted friend.** Divide a block of time in half. For instance, 20 minutes divided in half would be 10 minutes for each person. Then, take turns telling the other person everything good about themselves. Just think, 10 minutes of compliments!
- **Go to the library and get a book on building self-esteem.** Try out any of the suggested activities that feel right for you.
- **Repeat the affirmation:** *I am a unique and valuable person. I am worth the effort it takes to advocate for myself, to get what I want and need for myself, to protect my rights and to insist that others treat me well.* Think of other affirmations that you can say to yourself.
- **Set a timer for 5 – 10 minutes or a time that's comfortable for you. Then, write everything good that you can think of about yourself.** After your time is up, read what you have written. Then, fold it up and put it in a convenient place, like in your pocket, purse, or next to your bed. Read it over before you go to bed, when you get up in the morning, and every time you have a spare moment. If you can't think of enough things to write in this exercise, ask your friends for ideas before you begin.
- **Do something nice for someone else or for your community.** Take fresh flowers to a friend, visit a person in the hospital or in a nursing home, or clean up the trash in your neighborhood park.

It can be helpful to experiment with various practices to see what works best for us. Keep in mind that

EXAMPLES OF SELF-ESTEEM BOOSTING LISTS WE CAN MAKE FOR OURSELVES

Try listing:

- Five or more of your strengths (*for example: I am a good listener, I am a talented artist, I am usually kind to others*)
- Five or more things that you admire about yourself
- Five greatest achievements of your life so far
- 10 things you have accomplished
- 10 ways that you can treat or reward yourself
- 10 things that you can do to make yourself laugh
- 10 things that you can do to help someone else
- 10 things that you can do to make you feel good about yourself

what works may change over time or in different situations.

Five or more of your strengths

Five or more things that you admire about yourself

Five greatest achievements of your life so far

10 things you have accomplished

10 ways that you can treat or reward yourself

10 things that you can do to make yourself laugh

10 things that you can do to help someone else

10 things that you can do to make you feel good about yourself





Hope

Hope is a catalyst for change. Recovery emerges from hope. What helps us remain hopeful is what helps us stay well, especially during difficult times. The belief that *recovery is real* provides an essential, motivating message of a better future:

We can and do overcome the internal and external challenges and obstacles that confront us.

While we must internalize hope, our peers, family, friends, loved ones, providers, allies, and other supporters can also encourage hope within us.

We see the concept of hope as being essential to whole health and well-being not just in the peer

recovery movement. Business leadership, athletics, academics, and others also recognize and value hope. Research has shown that promoting hope in our lives increases our cognitive abilities. This is helpful as we problem solve and find solutions for challenges in our lives.¹⁷

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: TAKING ACTION

Jane Winterling, a key pioneer of the peer recovery education movement from Vermont, recalls her experience exploring hope as a key concept to wellness and recovery during the initial grassroots gatherings of peer supporters in the late 1990s:



When I first started this journey of wellness and I heard the concept of Hope, I have to say I had a big attitude (I'm not doing it and you can't make me) but of course while I didn't say anything out loud, I still stayed. What I came to realize was hope was a foreign concept to me. Duty, I understood, with the understanding that if I could do it right everything would work out. Of course, "right" was a moving target. Never feeling or being quite good enough was making my life difficult, very dark and unhappy but I stayed. I wanted what those people had, to learn how to like myself, reach for my dreams despite what others told me.

After many long walks pondering Hope, I came to realize Hope for me was going to be a choice every day. The duty became partaking in those things that gave me hope. Hope for me is like a ray of sunshine bursting through a dark and cloudy day. I know what restores my faith in life—the beauty of flowers, the sound of water moving on the earth, wind blowing through trees and so many more. Hope is loving myself and holding myself in unconditional high regard just like I do for those I love. We all get to shine.

REFLECTION: HOPE IN MY LIFE

Take a moment to reflect on *hope*. Here are ideas to jump start your thinking: Hope means to me When I think of hope What brings me hope in my life is I am hoping for . . . in my life today.

Self-Determination, Empowerment, and Self-Advocacy

Self-determination, empowerment, and self-advocacy are key **Taking Action** concepts. These elements are based on the best available research, and studies show how they are essential to well-being and recovery.¹⁸

SELF-DETERMINATION

Self-determination is the foundation of recovery as an individualized process. This means that within the context of our uniqueness, our life goals define our recovery.¹⁹ We set our own goals and design the paths to achieve them. No one has the same set of goals in life nor the same paths to achievement.

Having autonomy and independence connects us deeply to our sense of well-being and being in charge of our life. Self-determination means having choices and having informed consent over the resources and supports we use, including programs, treatments, and recovery supports.

Self-determination also means that we have **personal responsibility** for the actions we take or don't take on our own behalf. The more we focus on what *we can do* and *what is working*, rather than focusing on what others are doing and what's not working, we can take action to promote our well-being through self-determination.



REFLECTION: SELF-DETERMINATION AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Think of a time when you used self-determination and took personal responsibility in a situation. How did this go for you? Looking back, would you do anything differently?

EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is essential to the recovery process. It is the state of being in control and having self-efficacy.²⁰ This means that we believe in our ability to achieve a goal or to overcome a challenge.²¹ The internalized stigma associated with mental health and substance use conditions can be a significant challenge to empowerment. At one time or another, many of us have faced adverse experiences that caused the feeling of losing control and a lack of self-confidence. We feel empowered, however, when we take personal responsibility for our wellness and recovery. We do this by focusing on the things we *can do* and the things that are in our control to make a difference in our own life.

Research on psychosocial rehabilitation has found that empowerment is something that can be restored. This can lead to significant outcomes in recovery.²²

**“WHEN WE EMPOWER OURSELVES, WE GET TO
DECIDE WHERE WE SPEND OUR ENERGY.”
—JANE WINTERLING**

SELF-ADVOCACY

Self-determination also interconnects with empowerment and *self-advocacy*. Self-determination, self-advocacy, and empowerment intersect around knowing and speaking up for our personal, human, and legal rights.

In upcoming sections, we'll explore how we need to take action to empower ourselves through self-advocacy for our rights. We have the right to set and pursue our own goals. At times, we need to advocate for ourselves and be persistent to reach our goals, wants, and needs. We also have legal rights that can protect us from discrimination and exclusion. Read about three laws protecting your legal rights below.



WHICH LAWS PROTECT MY RIGHTS IN RECOVERY?

Olmstead

The *Olmstead v. L. C.* Supreme Court decision in 1999 upheld the rights of people living with mental health and substance use conditions, and other disabilities, to be able to live, work, and receive services in their own homes and communities of choice.²³

Americans with Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA, prohibits discrimination based on a person's disability, including physical and mental health disabilities. The ADA ensures that people can work, find housing, and utilize various public services without restriction.²⁴

Fair Housing Act

The Fair Housing Act protects people from discrimination related to housing. This Act ensures that people cannot discriminate against others based on disability, demographics, religion, or familial status.²⁵

REFLECTION: PERSONAL RIGHTS

Take a moment to reflect on personal rights that are important to your well-being. We list several examples here. Think about how it was to speak up and protect those personal rights in your own life. Feel free to add any rights that create personal empowerment and support your self-determination.

- I have the right to be treated with dignity, compassion, and respect.
- I have the right to change my mind.
- I have the right to make mistakes.
- I have the right to follow my own values and standards.
- I have the right to express my feelings in a manner that will not intentionally harm others.
- I have the right to be involved in, and sign off on, all plans for my treatment.
- I have the right to say no to anything I feel is unsafe, violates my values, or I am not ready for.
- I have the right to determine my own priorities.
- I have the right to be uniquely myself.
- I have the right to feel scared and say, "I am afraid."
- I have the right to say, "I don't know."
- I have the right to make decisions based on my feelings, beliefs, and values.
- I have the right to my own reality.
- I have the right to my own needs for personal space and time.
- I have the right to be playful and frivolous.
- I have the right to be healthy.
- I have the right to be in a health supportive (non-abusive) environment.
- I have the right to make friends and be comfortable around people.
- I have the right to change and grow.
- I have the right to have my needs and wants respected by others
- I have the right to grieve.
- I have the right to be happy.
- I have the right to my own spiritual beliefs.
- I have the right to seek the services and supports that meet my needs (and refuse services that do not).
- Other:
- Other:
- Other:

What rights are most important to you? In what ways do you advocate for your personal rights? What steps can you take to learn about or protect your rights?

Self-advocacy requires us to use assertive communication. For some of us, the idea of being assertive can feel overwhelming. This is a skill that we can practice and build over time.

REFLECTION: BUILDING ASSERTIVENESS

Before we begin talking about self-advocacy and assertiveness, let's explore these questions:

- What does assertiveness look like for me?
- A time in my life when I was assertive was when
- What are some things that keep me from being assertive?
- How can I overcome these challenges?

SPEAK OUT FOR YOURSELF

The following list is adapted from SAMHSA's *Speaking Out for Yourself: A Self-Help Guide* (SMA-3719). *Speaking Out for Yourself* is a handbook for individuals to reclaim their rights, build self-esteem, and effectively advocate for their needs. Through practical steps and strategies, it empowers readers to take control of their lives and seek the respect and support they deserve.

You are a unique and valuable person. You have the right to advocate for yourself, to protect your rights, and insist that others treat you well.

Steps to Being an **Effective** Self-Advocate

1 Believe in Yourself

- Assess, appreciate, support, and improve your self-esteem.
- Practice exercises such as repeating positive affirmations, listing personal strengths, and engaging in activities that promote self-worth.

2 Decide What You Want or What Needs to Change

- Identify and prioritize your needs and goals.
- Focus on one goal at a time to avoid feeling overwhelmed.

3 Get the Facts

- Gather accurate information from reliable sources to support your advocacy efforts.
- Seek help from trusted individuals if needed.

4 Plan Your Strategy

- Develop a step-by-step plan to achieve your goals.
- Set timelines and small objectives to track progress.
- Give yourself grace when things don't work out exactly as planned.
- Adjust or adapt your strategies if initial plans don't work out.

5

Gather Support

- Build a support network of friends, family, loved ones, healthcare providers, or other supporters.
- Seek mentorship from someone with experience that might help you.
- Join support groups or advocacy organizations.

6

Target Your Efforts

- Identify and communicate with individuals or organizations that can help you achieve your goals.
- Be persistent in seeking the right assistance.

7

Know Your Rights

- Understanding your rights is crucial in advocating for yourself effectively. This includes rights related to treatment, employment, housing, and other areas affecting your life.

8

Address Daily Issues

- Create a Daily Maintenance Plan and Action Plans to enhance your well-being. This includes managing stress, building healthy routines, and staying organized.

LEARN MORE

To learn more about self-advocacy, download your own copy of [Speaking Out for Yourself: A Self-Help Guide](#).

Connection

A sense of connection is essential to our overall health. This includes physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological connection. We know that humans are relational beings. Our relationships and sense of community develop over time and contribute greatly to our overall well-being.²⁶

Recovery from disconnection and social isolation is critical to our well-being.²⁷

Similarly, and particularly with substance use conditions, recovery often means reevaluating our social supports. This can include moving away from some relationships, and developing positive relationships and connections that reinforce our choice to pursue recovery.²⁸

Connection is a process because it involves our ability to disconnect and reconnect. How we experience the process of connection, disconnection, and reconnection is developmentally important as well. Over our lifespan, we experience the process of connection differently.

Adverse early childhood experiences can disrupt our sense of connection. This affects us during important developmental stages of our physical and emotional growth. We can heal from these disruptions by **taking action** to build connection.

The concept of connection in our wellness and recovery is multidimensional. It includes connection to people, places, and things as well as an internal connection to self. These connections offer healing by helping us develop stronger senses of belonging, purpose, and resilience as we connect both with others and ourselves.²⁹

How, when, where, and why we make connections is customized to the individual. The key to our wellness and recovery is that we engage and self-direct how, when, where, and why we connect or disconnect with others. This is essential to how we self-direct our well-being.

REFLECTION: CONNECTION

What are the unique and positive ways that we can experience connection through people, places, things, or activities?



PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: TAKING ACTION

Shared by Michael

My road to recovery has been long and complex, shaped by formal and informal education, personal insights, and a supportive network I didn't know I needed. For years, I lived with addiction. I used drugs to numb internal pain and get through each day. Drugs had taken hold of my life, acting like a crutch to keep me moving without addressing the real pain.

It all started to change one Fourth of July. I got an invite to a sober cookout, and I wasn't sure how it would go. I'd always associated holidays with being high, and I was genuinely worried that the day would feel empty without it. But that day changed my life. There were over 500 people at that event, all in recovery, and all part of Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous. I saw firsthand that life could be joyful and connected even without substances. That was the spark—I realized that my life wasn't over just because I was getting sober.

I made a commitment to learn and grow, starting with college. It had taken me 33 years to get there, but I finally graduated. Then, while working with a nonprofit, a mentor suggested I take a course on action planning. That training laid the foundation for wellness I never expected. I kept pushing, taking courses on whole health and resiliency and many other wellness and recovery related topics. I became a facilitator of some of these courses. But I did it first for myself, because I knew I couldn't help anyone else if I wasn't well.

My mentor taught me that education extends far beyond college. He pushed me to grow and step out of my comfort zone, to build trust and connections. Having struggled with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety, I had spent much of my life isolated, often feeling judged and choosing to avoid interaction. But through the 12-step meetings and connections I made in other trainings, I found a space where I could build relationships without fear of judgment. I learned that we can't do this alone. Having people in your corner who truly understand you makes all the difference.

Learning has become my pathway to staying well. In every course or program, I met people who became part of my support network. They reminded me of the HOW acronym that I hold close: honesty, openness, and willingness. I had to be honest about what was going on in my life, open to new possibilities, and willing to try things outside my comfort zone. This philosophy helped me push past self-doubt and isolation.

Today, I keep educating myself to discover new wellness tools, because the tools I used at one point don't always work down the line. It's an evolving process. Along the way, I found people who embody the qualities and life I want for myself, people I can honestly talk to without judgment. I learn every day through these connections. It's become an inside joke that when I grow up, I want to be just like them. But in truth, they inspire me to keep reaching for something better.



Education and Research

The concept of education in wellness and recovery is the self-directed process of learning as much as we can about all aspects of our lives: health, wellness, lifestyle, vocation, and more. Education may include learning from a training, school, college, or virtual program. There are also many other aspects of our lives and ways that we can continue to grow and learn over time. This includes researching information through peers in our community and exploring community resources. We can also seek information from professional sources about our health, wellness, and lifestyle choices.

Learning new hobbies, recreational activities, or personal skills can lead to better overall health outcomes. For example, learning a new recreational activity may lead to increased activity in our lives. It could also lead us to new people, places, and things that support us in our recovery and well-being. Learning about and taking on a new pet can also have therapeutic qualities, while leading to new social connections that may decrease feelings of loneliness and isolation.

To make good decisions, we must find information on the key questions that can affect our wellness, recovery, or life.

REFLECTION: LEARNING

What is something that you learned in recent years that was meaningful to you? How did it build connection in your life? What is something you would like to learn or try? What is one step that you can take toward this goal?



Building Support

The concept of *building* support is an active process. We play an active role because the act of building is important to how we self-determine and arrange our supports.

Things that support our well-being and whole health can take many forms. Support goes beyond people, places, and things. It can be as simple as the practice of taking a deep breath. What supports our well-being and whole health is as unique as we are. At the same time, we may share many common elements of support with our peers.

How many and what types of support we need are not predetermined. We self-determine what supports our whole health and well-being, and this can change over time.

Our self-determination is based on our willingness and ability to learn about, choose, and experience the people, places, things, and other supports we need. We also determine how we arrange these resources in our lives.

Supportive relationships are one dimension of support involving people. People are not supports in and of themselves. Rather, it is the *relationship* that provides the support. Regardless of the significance of the person's role in our life (parents, roommates, doctors, colleagues), the role doesn't determine if they are a support. It is in the relationship that the support exists or not, and whether the relationship is multidirectional.

In recovery, the most powerful relationship is *mutual support* or peer support. This means that to *receive* support, we also *provide* support. All supportive relationships include a level or degree of mutuality.



PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: TAKING ACTION

Shared by Lynn

In my life, I have had a lot of trouble fitting in. I grew up in the 60's in a military family. I dealt with racism at home and abroad. I started school in Germany in the '60s. I was the only Black person in my school. Eventually, we moved back to the States, and I was sent to an all-Black school. That was a culture shock for me. I did not fit in. The skills and ways that I learned in Germany did not prepare me to rejoin this community. I had to find ways to fit in. My father was strict, so I wasn't allowed to do the things other kids did, like go to parties or date. I started trying to find my place, making friends any way I could, even if it meant "buying" them. I started using substances in high school and by college I was fully immersed in addiction. I spent years in and out of substance use. I had periods of recovery, but each time I slipped back, things got darker. At my lowest, I was using just to survive another day and numb the emotions. My relationships with my family were strained. There were few people I could call on.

When I was in active addiction, the people that were around me made me feel like I fit in. I built some relationships that even survived this time. There are people that have found recovery



before and after me that I still count in my circle of support. I struggled to find my place of belonging, as I numbed my emotions with drugs, and found myself in increasingly troubling situations. My sense of self-worth declined. But through it all, there was one friend who stood by me, without judgment. She was there for me during one of the hardest times in my life—a time when I had lost nearly everything. When I was at my worst, she was like a guardian angel. She didn't agree with the choices I was making, but she never turned her back on me. She gave me a place to go, food to eat, and even basic necessities like clean clothes. Her mother welcomed me in as well. They were always ready with a hot meal and a caring word. They both treated me with respect, even knowing what I was going through.

Even when I had nothing, my friend and her mom made sure I could keep my dignity. I'd sometimes sell stolen items just to get a little money, and they'd buy from me—not to support my habit, but to help me survive without judgment or shaming me. When I'd come to their home, they didn't preach or tell me to stop using. They simply loved me where I was, giving me a glimpse of stability and kindness.

That kind of nonjudgmental support was powerful. Eventually, it became the backbone of my recovery. It showed me that even when I felt worthless, someone still believed I was worth helping. That belief helped me find the strength to go into a recovery program and stay. Today, I'm 15 years in recovery, and that friend is still a part of my life. Her example taught me that support without judgment can be the difference between someone staying lost and someone finding their way back.

Today, I have a sponsor, I work the steps, and I'm part of a recovery community that holds me accountable. I surrounded myself with people who are living in wellness and recovery. I have found love, belonging, and purpose.

REFLECTION: SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Think of a relationship in your life that was supportive when you needed it most. What did this look like? How did it feel? In what ways was the relationship mutual (meaning that you also provided support)?

Describe the attributes—for instance, honest, trustworthy, friendly, warm, supportive—you would like to have in a friend or supporter.

Community Inclusion

Community inclusion is the opportunity to belong and integrate in communities of our choice like anyone else, regardless of individual differences.³⁰

We are all unique in our own way. Yet, many of us have experienced exclusion based on specific types of differences.



“THE OPPORTUNITY TO LIVE IN THE COMMUNITY AND TO BE VALUED FOR ONE’S UNIQUENESS AND ABILITIES LIKE EVERYONE ELSE.”

—MARK SALZER, PHD³¹

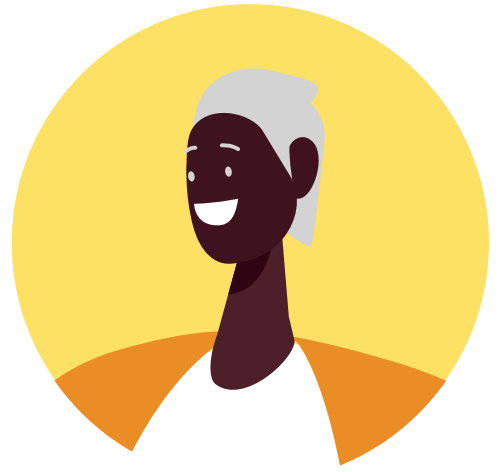
Community inclusion is a sense of belonging and *support* to belong. A sense of belonging is critical to our mental health and whole health. On both a personal and community level, our wellness benefits from the concept of community inclusion.

Central to community inclusion is that we have the ability and opportunity for meaningful and self-directed inclusion. Merely being present in the “community” is not equal to genuine inclusion. We each figure out what community inclusion means for ourselves in life. The communities we join and how we participate in those communities is up to us. We can even create our own community. In this way, the concept of community inclusion interconnects with the concepts of self-determination, education, and hope.

Research led by Dr. Mark Salzer and colleagues at Temple University showed that people receiving traditional mental health services often felt discouraged and faced challenges to participating in the community “like everyone else.”³² Yet, increased self-direction and meaningful community participation are known to contribute to better overall health outcomes, including mental health recovery. Likewise, for those of us in recovery from substance use conditions, reestablishing and finding new ways to participate in the community is key to our wellness.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE: TAKING ACTION

BeaJae North, from California, is a pioneer and leader in the advanced co-facilitation of evidence-based wellness and recovery practices through peer-to-peer training and mentoring for the past two decades. She has led action-planning groups and has mentored thousands of wellness facilitators through personal storytelling and interactive activities. BeaJae speaks to the personal impact of learning about the concept of community inclusion and exploring it with others:



I enjoy connecting with others. I like meeting people. I like doing things that scare me, I like talking in front of groups of people. Especially about myself. I enjoy going out walking and talking to folks along the way. I enjoy sharing an insight about something I've figured out about myself. I love talking about things that inspire me to keep taking action in my life. One of those things that I recently experienced was Community Inclusion. Wow, what an experience that was. I was afraid that I wouldn't have anything to share about that topic. I find myself today in conversation sharing things about my community inclusion that have changed my life. I want to be able to share the moments that matter, and no other moment matters like the moment right now.

When I'm present in the moment, I can take action supporting growth and connection with my leisure time, being involved in the local community, having value for others, creating peer support, and educating myself about how others live. I choose to take action in every moment. The way I do that is to be present in every moment in the choices I make. Recently I learned that when I want to do something different in each moment, I need to take action to figure out what will work. Even something as simple as walking away has been an amazing learning moment.

*I have many stories to share that have supported my growth and connection. I have had many experiences that have helped me to grow and learn. Two of my most recent experiences are learning about Community Inclusion and **Taking Action**. Remember when we are taking action we are moving through to connection. Every moment we decide to take action, it is in taking that action that we learn and grow.*

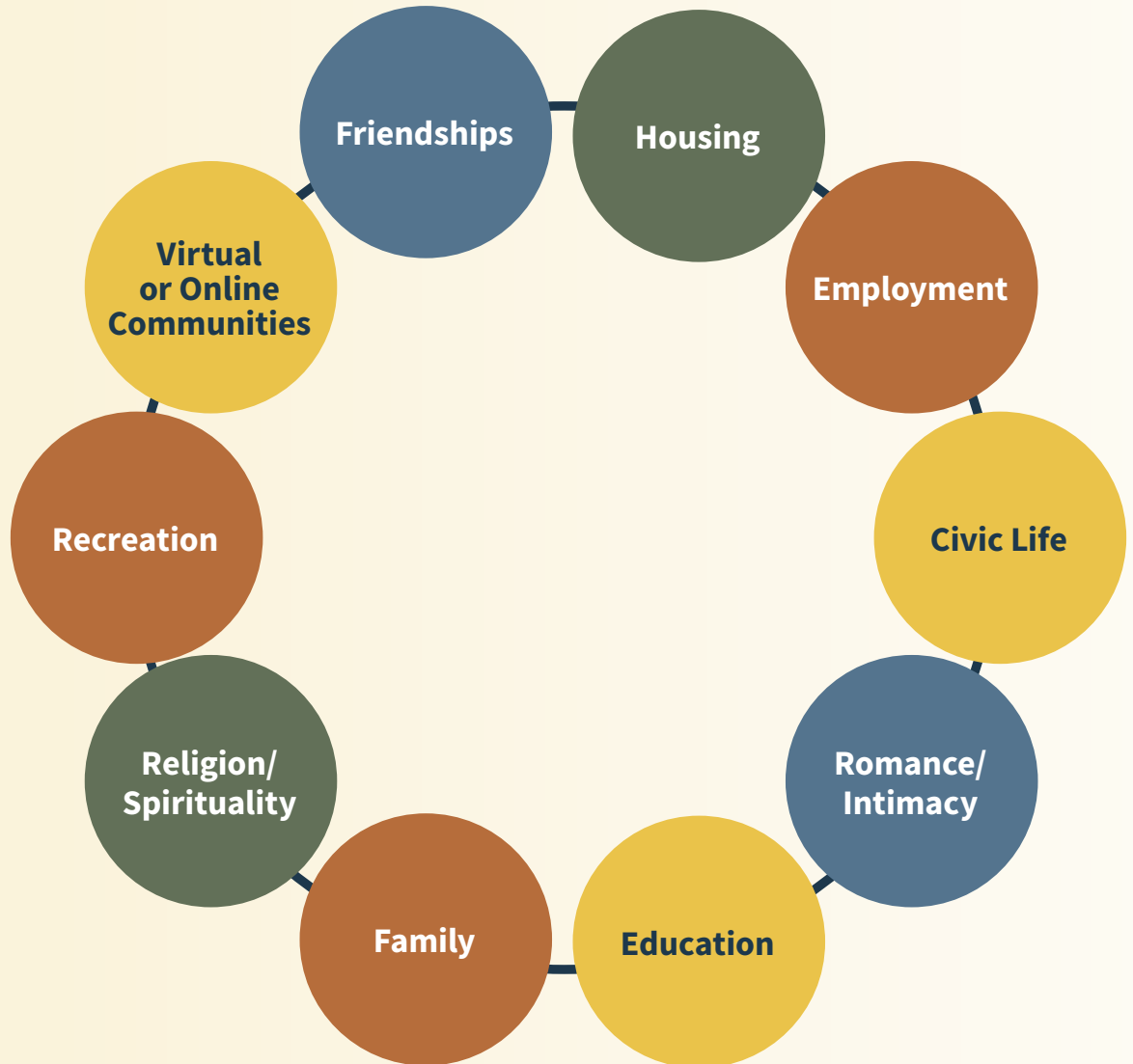


Community Inclusion: It's a Legal Right

The Supreme Court decision *Olmstead v. L. C.* (1999) held that unnecessary institutionalization is a form of discrimination prohibited by the American with Disabilities Act of 1990. Title II of the ADA requires governments to give people with disabilities an equal opportunity to benefit from all programs, services, and activities (for example, education, employment, voting, transportation, recreation). *Olmstead* ensures that people with disabilities can live, work, and receive services and supports in their own homes and communities of choice, rather than in hospitals or institutions. ³³

REFLECTION: COMMUNITY LIFE

Consider the following domains of community life. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 is *very high*, rate how your participation is currently self-directed and if this satisfactory to you.



In any or all these domains, what are some strengths you have in each area? What are some things that stand in the way of increasing your participation? What steps can you take to overcome these challenges and boost your participation? What support do you need?

Housing:

Employment:

Civic Life:

Romance/Intimacy:

Education:

Family:

Religion/Spirituality:

Recreation:

Online/Virtual Communities:

Friendships:



The Wellness Toolbox

Developing a wellness toolbox is an important step before we begin the **Taking Action Part 2, Action Planning Workbook**. This wellness toolbox will be your foundation for creating your action plans and building support for wellness. You can think of your toolbox as the tools, resources, activities, or practices that you can easily take advantage of when needed.

Creating a toolbox helps us put the key concepts we just explored into action, despite life's challenges to getting well and staying well. Research studies show these approaches significantly enhance hope, reduce troubling feelings and challenges, and support us being advocates and attaining better healthcare outcomes for ourselves.

Wellness tools empower us to take action on our own behalf. In earlier sections of this workbook, we may have already identified a few helpful wellness tools that work for us.



"IT IS ALWAYS GOOD TO DEVELOP AND HAVE A PLAN IN OUR LIFE, HOWEVER **TAKING ACTION FOR OUR WELLNESS AND RECOVERY IS SOMETIMES ABOUT WHAT WE DO WHEN WE DIDN'T KNOW IT WAS GOING TO BE LIKE THIS. THESE KEY CONCEPTS AND MY WELLNESS TOOLS SUPPORT ME TO TAKE ACTION AT ANY TIME IN MY LIFE AND RECOVERY."**

—MATTHEW FEDERICI, CEO, COPELAND CENTER FOR WELLNESS AND RECOVERY

DEVELOPING A WELLNESS TOOLBOX

In the following pages, we'll have a chance to think through our wellness tools. Wellness tools are safe, simple, and easily available to us.

How many tools we list is up to us. The list is for us to refer to when **taking action** for our whole health and well-being. Over time, we may find that circumstances and our interests change. We may need to revise and update our wellness toolbox often.

Wellness tools work best when we have a variety of tools listed, so that we feel we have an abundance of choices.

Make a list of general wellness tools that help you to feel good: (For example, attend a support group, listen to music, spend time in nature, talk to a friend, watch a favorite TV show, take a warm bath, write down positive affirmations)

Nutrition, exercise, light, sleep, and other aspects of our **physical health** affect our well-being. Let's explore wellness tools related to these factors. Sometimes, wellness tools can support us in adding a helpful practice or avoiding or reducing things that negatively affect our well-being.

Using the space below, identify one or two wellness tools in each area or create your own areas of physical health and wellness tools that work for you.

Nutrition: (For example: eat three meals a day; drink six or more glasses of water a day; avoid excessive sugar, caffeine, or salt)



Exercise: (For example: spend 10 minutes a day stretching, take a 20-minute walk, climb stairs twice a day, practice chair yoga for 15 minutes once a day, play wheelchair basketball once a week, stand while watching TV)

Sleep: (For example: go to bed at 11 o'clock every night, avoid caffeine, engage in quiet activities for at least a half hour before bed, develop a sleep ritual)

Light: (For example: spend at least a half hour each day outside, sit outside on a bench while having lunch, use a supplemental full spectrum light, put the window shade up every day)

Wellness tools to reduce or eliminate smoking: Many people who wish to stop smoking can benefit from smoking cessation groups. If you are already part of a group, or if this is a new goal for you, it may be helpful to create wellness tools to support your day-to-day efforts to quit.

(For example: limit smoking each day to five or fewer cigarettes, avoid places where people are smoking, think of the health risks, brush teeth or use mouthwash after a meal instead of having a cigarette, replace a cigarette break with chewing gum)

Add your own topics and wellness tools for physical health using the space below.

Wellness tools to

List wellness tools:

Other wellness tools related to physical health might include things like:

- getting regular checkups and preventive care
- abstaining from using alcohol or other drugs
- avoiding people who are using alcohol or other drugs
- practicing safe sex
- avoiding medications that have a negative effect on us

Wellness tools that support our physical health may be things alternative to the traditional medical model. These types of supports are becoming more recognized and valued by medical professionals and may include acupuncture, massage, yoga, aroma therapy, or chiropractic treatment.



ADDITIONAL WELLNESS TOOLS

Relaxation, focusing, diversionary, creative, and expressive arts are important wellness tools for many of us. For example, many find journaling to be an expressive, creative activity. Allowing ourselves to experience a free flow of thought through writing or making a collage using cutout words and pictures can be a fun way to use the wellness tool of journaling.

Learning how to relax and relaxation techniques can have many benefits. Many people use relaxation techniques to help themselves stay well or to feel better when they aren't feeling well. These tools can be especially helpful if we are feeling anxious, agitated, irritable, or overwhelmed. Some of us use relaxation exercises every night to help ourselves fall asleep more easily.

We can take classes and find a wealth of exercises, books, websites, podcasts, and instructions to expand our awareness of alternative types of wellness tools. We can also create our own. One simple practice is to find an accessible space that is relaxing and perhaps has comforting sounds, sights, or smells. Or we may prefer a space that has little stimulation, and reserve that space for quiet time each day or for when we need to get away.

In the space below, list any additional wellness tools that may be relaxing, focusing, diversionary, creative, or expressive and work for you.

Additional wellness tools: (For example: aroma therapy, yoga, massage, quiet space, meditation)

Peer Support

Peer support is a great mutual wellness tool. This can be as simple as having time with another person and discussing a topic that you both agree on. With this time, each person simply shares and listens. This can be all we need to shift our thoughts and feelings, and to enhance or recover our wellness.

We can also combine peer support with other wellness tools. For example, we could plan to take a walk with a peer for 20 minutes or more, once a week. During this time, we can share about a topic like fun things that we're planning for our future or a good book or movie.

The effectiveness of peer support, sometimes referred to as *mutual support*, has been well researched. Repeatedly, research has shown that peer support—both on its own and as a complement to other forms of treatment or therapy—has a clear and significant effect on a person's well-being and recovery.³⁴ Peers draw on their personal lived experiences and help others by modeling hope and resilience, navigating services, engaging people in recovery planning, and exchanging information.³⁵

Peer support can be available both informally and formally, and be part of a service, program, or curriculum. Increasingly, peers are working in a wide variety of settings, from community-based mental health and substance use recovery organizations, to hospitals, schools, prisons and jails, crisis settings, and others.

Within different communities of recovery, we can find many groups and programs grounded in peer support. For example:

- 12-step groups, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Al-Anon Family Groups
- [SMART Recovery](#)
- Faith-based organizations
- [Hearing Voices Network](#)
- Peer-run organizations or recovery community organizations
- Digital and online recovery supports
- Recovery housing
- [NAMI \(National Alliance on Mental Illness\) Peer-to-Peer](#)
- [NAMI Family-to-Family](#)
- Topic-specific support groups related to substance use or other addictions (for example, sex, gambling) or mental health
- Population-specific support groups, such as groups for men or women, LGB individuals, veterans, parents, or youth and young adults

Peer support outside of groups is also a powerful and helpful resource. When working one-on-one with a peer supporter, it can be helpful to meet regularly or aim for a brief, daily phone call.

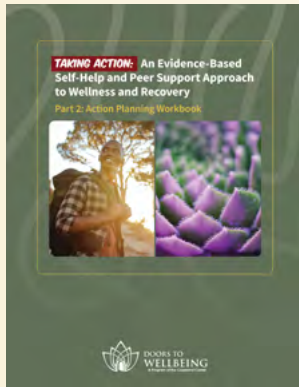


REFLECTION: PEER SUPPORT

What peer supports do you know of in your community? What kinds of peer support are you using? What is one step that you could take to increase peer support in your life?

WHAT'S NEXT?

Now that we've explored the *Taking Action* Essential Elements and stocked a wellness toolbox, we can visit **Part 2: Action Planning**. In Part 2, we'll begin working on our personal *Taking Action* plans for prevention, recovery, and wellness.



Part 2: Action Planning Workbook. This workbook includes information and prompts to guide you in developing a personal Action Plan to support your recovery and wellness. You'll also be able to plan for times when you may need additional support. The planning process includes these steps: creating a daily maintenance plan, forming action plans for difficult times, and preparing for crisis and post-crisis.

GLOSSARY

These brief definitions explain the terms as we use them in **Taking Action** materials. The definitions include **Taking Action** foundational concepts and essential elements, as well as other words.

affirmations: Positive statements about ourselves or others.

addiction: Experiencing persistent physical or mental urges to do something or use something, including but not limited to alcohol or other drugs (for example, this could include addiction to gambling, sex, food, self-harm, social media, etc.).

building support: The process of actively finding and connecting with peers and other people, places, things, and tools that are helpful and supportive to us.

commitment: An agreement to oneself or others to do something.

community inclusion: The ability to be involved and belong to communities we choose, no matter our abilities, disabilities, or any other characteristics.

condition: A person's state of health or circumstances, often used in place of terms such as disorder, disease, or illness (for example, a substance use or mental health condition).

connection: Feeling connected or attached to people, places, things, and ourselves in ways that are meaningful, supportive, and chosen by us.

consistency: Behaving or acting in the same way repeatedly.

crisis: Any situation (medical or personal) where we feel overwhelmed or have a degree of difficulty that we want supporters to step in.

education and research: Finding, learning, and applying information that will help us in our wellness and recovery.

empowerment: The experience of gaining power and freedom to take action for ourselves.

evidence-based practice: An approach supported by strong scientific information and rigorous research studies.

hope: Belief that something that can happen, change, or improve in ways that we wish.

intention: A goal or aim that reflects what we want to do or have happen in our lives.

mindset: Our beliefs, opinions, or attitudes that shape how we view something.

peer support: A relationship between two or more people based in mutuality, shared experiences, and mutual respect, value, and benefit.

peer-run organizations: Organizations staffed and led by people with lived experience of mental health or related conditions.

progress: Any type of forward movement toward a goal or outcome.

recovery: "Recovery is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential."³⁶

self-advocacy: The process of speaking up for ourselves about our needs.

self-determination: The ability to control and take responsibility for our own lives, goals, and decisions.

self-management: Taking responsibility and action day-to-day to maintain our health or control a health condition.

self-care: Actions we take to care for ourselves and our own health, including physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

self-compassion: Feeling kindness, acceptance, understanding, and forgiveness toward ourselves.

self-esteem: How we feel about and value ourselves and our worth.

triggers: People, places, things, or other situations that make us feel physical or emotional discomfort. Some prefer alternative terms such as “at risk for returning to use,” “trauma cues,” “feeling activated,” or “signs or symptoms.”

well-being: “Well-being is a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions. Well-being encompasses quality of life and the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world with a sense of meaning and purpose.”³⁷

wellness: “The active pursuit of activities, choices, and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health.”³⁸



REFERENCES

1. NAMI Illinois. (n.d.). Preserving your mental health: Utilizing all the tools in the toolbox. <https://namiillinois.org/preserving-your-mental-health-utilizing-all-the-tools-in-the-toolbox>; Hawaii Pacific University. (2023, August 29). *Developing a wellness toolbox for your mental health*. <https://online.hpu.edu/blog/wellness-toolbox>
2. Chamberlin, J. (1997). A working definition of empowerment. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 20(4), 43–46.
3. Mead, S., Hilton, D., & Curtis, L. (2001). Peer support: A theoretical perspective. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 25(2), 134–141. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0095032>
4. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA]. (2012). *SAMHSA's working definition of recovery*. <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/pep12-recdef.pdf>
5. SAMHSA. (2012). *SAMHSA's working definition of recovery*. <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/pep12-recdef.pdf>; Laranjeira, C., & Querido, A. (2022). Hope and optimism as an opportunity to improve the “positive mental health” demand. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 827320. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.827320>
6. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2012). *SAMHSA's working definition of recovery*. <https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/pep12-recdef.pdf>
7. Melemis, S. M. (2015). Relapse prevention and the five rules of recovery. *Yale Journal of Biology and Medicine*, 88(3), 325–332. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4553654>; Hinders, D. (2021, September 20). *Coping with frustration in recovery*. Mountain Laurel Recovery Center. <https://mountainlaurelrecoverycenter.com/blog/coping-frustration-recovery>
8. Ventosa-Ruis, A., Moreno-Poyato, A. R., Lluch-Canut, T., Feria-Raposo, I., & Puig-Llobet, M. (2024). The meaning of the recovery process and its stages for people attending a mental health day hospital: A qualitative study. *Health Expectations*, 27(1), e13965. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.13965>
9. The Walker Center. (2023, May 12). *What are the 5 stages of mental health recovery?* <https://www.thewalkercenter.org/blog-posts/what-are-the-5-stages-of-mental-health-recovery>; Casa Recovery. (n.d.). *Stages of mental health recovery*. <https://www.casarecovery.com/stages-of-mental-health-recovery>; Georgetown Behavioral Hospital. (2023). *What are the 5 stages of recovery for mental health?* <https://www.gbhoh.com/what-are-the-5-stages-of-recovery-for-mental-health>
10. Grady, P. A., & Gough, L. L. (2014). Self-management: A comprehensive approach to management of chronic conditions. *American Journal of Public Health*, 104(8), e25–e31. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2014.302041>; Heggdal, K. (2021). Health promotion among individuals facing chronic illness: The unique contribution of the bodyknowledging program. In G. Haugan & M. Eriksson (Eds.), *Health promotion in health care – Vital theories and research* (chapter 16). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-63135-2_16
11. Crego, A., Yela, J. R., Riesco-Matias, P., Gomez-Martinez, M. A., & Vicente-Arruebarrena, A. (2022). The benefits of self-compassion in mental health professionals: A systematic review of empirical research. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 15, 2599–2620. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S359382>
12. Moore, S. K., Okst, K., Smith, L., Fatkin, T., Creedon, T., Fredericksen, A. K., Gawande, R., & Schuman-Olivier, Z. (2022). “Today I can look in the mirror and like myself”: Effects of a trauma-informed mindful recovery program on self-compassion. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 780383. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.780383>

13. Neff, K. D. (2009). The role of self-compassion in development: A healthier way to relate to oneself. *Human Development*, 52(4), 211–214. <https://doi.org/10.1159/000215071>
14. UT Health East Texas. (n.d.) *Finding the source of low self-esteem and breaking the cycle*. <https://uthealtheasttexas.com/news/finding-source-low-self-esteem-and-breaking-cycle>
15. Guttman, J. (2019, June 27). The relationship with yourself. *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sustainable-life-satisfaction/201906/the-relationship-yourself>
16. Orth, U., Robins, R. W., & Widaman, K. F. (2012). Life-span development of self-esteem and its effects on important life outcomes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(6), 1271–1288. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025558>
17. Isen, A. M. (2009). A role for neuropsychology in understanding the facilitating influence of positive affect on social behavior and cognitive processes. In S. J. Lopez & C. R. Snyder (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of positive psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 503–518). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195187243.013.0048>
18. Fawor, J., Hancock, N., Scanlan, J. N., & Hamilton, D. E. (2024). Supporting self-determination in mental health recovery: Strategies employed by occupational therapists. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, 71(1), 88–101. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1440-1630.12913>; Thomas, E. C., Zisman-Ilani, Y., & Salzer, M. S. (2019). Self-determination and choice in mental health: Qualitative insights from a study of self-directed care. *Psychiatric Services*, 70(9), 801–807. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ps.201800544>
19. SAMHSA. (2012). *SAMHSA's working definition of recovery*. <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/pep12-recdef.pdf>
20. Vainauskienė, V., & Vaitkienė, R. (2021). Enablers of patient knowledge empowerment for self-management of chronic disease: An integrative review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(5), 2247. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18052247>; Wu, H.-C., Yang, C.-Y., & Chen, Y.-C. (2021). The role of self-efficacy in the recovery trajectory of mental health consumers. *British Journal of Social Work*, 51(3), 907–926. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcab025>
21. Ackerman, C. E. (2018, 29 May). *What is self-efficacy theory?* Positive Psychology. <https://positivepsychology.com/self-efficacy>
22. Cheng, K.-Y., & Liu, W.-I. (2023). Hu li za zhi [Empowering persons with mental illness to begin the recovery journey: An example of overcoming internalized stigma]. *Journal of Nursing*, 70(1), 23–28. [https://doi.org/10.6224/JN.202302_70\(1\).05](https://doi.org/10.6224/JN.202302_70(1).05)
23. SAMHSA. (2023, April 24). Olmstead v. L. C. resources. <https://www.samhsa.gov/about-us/who-we-are/laws-regulations/olmstead>
24. U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division. (n.d.). *Introduction to the Americans with Disabilities Act*. <https://www.ada.gov/topics/intro-to-ada/#the-ada-protects-people-with-disabilities>
25. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (n.d.). *Housing discrimination under the Fair Housing Act*. https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/fair_housing_equal_opp/fair_housing_act_overview#_Who_Is_Protected?
26. Cognitive Behavior Institute. (2022, July 13). *Significance of social connectedness to mental health*. <https://www.papsychotherapy.org/blog/significance-of-social-connectedness-to-mental-health>

27. Martino, J., Pegg, J., & Frates, E. P. (2015). The connection prescription: Using the power of social interactions and the deep desire for connectedness to empower health and wellness. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*, 11(6), 466–475. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1559827615608788>
28. Pettersen, H., Landheim, A., Skeie, I., Biong, S., Brodahl, M., Oute, J., & Davidson, L. (2019). How social relationships influence substance use disorder recovery: A collaborative narrative study. *Substance Abuse: Research and Treatment*, 13, 1178221819833379. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1178221819833379>
29. Townsend Recovery Center. (2024, March 2). *Connection is critical for recovery*. <https://www.townsendla.com/blog/connection-critical-for-recovery>
30. Community Mainstreaming. (n.d.). *What is community inclusion and why is it a win-win scenario?* <https://www.communitymainstreaming.org/blog/what-is-community-inclusion/#:~:text=Community%20inclusion%20is%20the%20opportunity,Housing>; Illinois Department of Human Services. (2023). *Division of Developmental Disabilities provider training: Module 5 – Community inclusion*. <https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=138620>
31. Salzer, M.S. (2006). Introduction. In M.S. Salzer (ed.), *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Skills in Practice: A CPRP Preparation and Skills Workbook*. Columbia, MD: United States Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association.
32. Salzer, M. S., & Baron, R. C. (2016). *Well Together – A blueprint for community inclusion: Fundamental concepts, theoretical frameworks and evidence*. Wellways Australia Limited. <https://tucollaborative.org/inclusion-foundations/well-together-a-blueprint-for-community-inclusion-fundamental-concepts-theoretical-frameworks-and-evidence>
33. Martone, K., Arienti, F., & Lerch, S. (n.d.). *Olmstead at 20: Using the vision of Olmstead to decriminalize mental illness*. Technical Assistance Collaborative. <https://www.tacinc.org/blog/using-the-vision-of-olmstead-to-decriminalize-mental-illness>
34. Bassuk, E. L., Hanson, J., Greene, R. N., Richard, M., & Laudet, A. (2016). Peer-delivered recovery support services for addictions in the United States: A systematic review. *Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment*, 63(1–9). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsat.2016.01.003>; Moos, R. H., & Moos, B. S. (2004). Long-term influence of duration and frequency of participation in alcoholics anonymous on individuals with alcohol use disorders. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 72(1), 81–90. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.72.1.81>; Fiorentine, R., & Hillhouse, M. P. (2000). Drug treatment and 12-step program participation: the additive effects of integrated recovery activities. *Journal of substance abuse treatment*, 18(1), 65–74. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0740-5472\(99\)00020-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0740-5472(99)00020-3)
35. Thomas, E. C., & Salzer, M. S. (2018). Associations between the peer support relationship, service satisfaction, and recovery-oriented outcomes: A correlational study. *Journal of Mental Health*, 27(4), 352–358. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638237.2017.1417554>
36. SAMHSA. (2012). *SAMHSA's working definition of recovery*. <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/pep12-recdef.pdf>
37. World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Promoting well-being*. <https://www.who.int/activities/promoting-well-being>
38. Global Wellness Institute. (n.d.). *What is wellness?* <https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/what-is-wellness>