



Section 3a: Noticing the good stuff and increasing positive experiences.

The quick fixes

Section three uses aspects of positive psychology theory and the 'wellbeing recovery action plan' model to build a practical inventory of things that make us feel good. In essence the key to wellbeing is to find the things that make us feel good and do them again and again, so that we build wellbeing habits and positive behaviour. Considering this, section three should be dipped into with individuals. There is a lot in there and the aim is not to take it all on in one go. Not everything in section three will be right for every individual you are supporting, if you pick something to work on and you can tell they are not into it, move on to find something else that might work better. Get them to flick through the different ideas and note the aspects that most appeal to them first. Work through key activities together and most importantly help them to **timetable** practices into their daily lives, which build resilience and support wellbeing growth. Only work on one or two activities at a time, because trying to put too many new things into your day can lead to becoming overwhelmed and giving up.

Quick fixes

What makes you most happy?

Explore with the person you are supporting what makes them most happy. Ask them: What do you love to do? What bring you joy? What makes you smile when you just think about it? What makes you feel good? How would you ideally spend your free time if you could? Can you think of a time when you were really happy? What were you doing? Encourage them to keep this activity ticking along in the back of their mind for a while, as it can be tricky to remember everything we like straight away.

Encourage them to add new things to the list as they remember or discover them. You could even challenge them to remember or discover something new each day for a week and then explore how they could fit them regularly into their life.

Explore the barriers (no time, no money, no motivation etc) that they might have to doing the fun things they enjoy. Here you can ask: What fun things have you stopped doing and why? You can challenge each barrier by asking: What would you like to happen? And then: What needs to happen for **that** to happen? to help drill down into any solutions.

Laughing and having fun

Because experiencing periods of low moods, stress and anxiety can lead to having a pessimistic and negative outlook on life, this activity focuses specifically on what makes you laugh and how you can find ways to take life less seriously. But essentially it is an extension of 'what makes you most happy' above.

You could ask: What makes you laugh most in life? How do you like to have fun? What made you laugh recently? When did you last laugh so much it hurt? Did you used to laugh a lot more than you do now? If so, what happened? And most importantly: How can you get more fun and laughter into your day?

Moving to feel good

Discuss with them how moving the body is good for helping us to feel well and keep positive. Explore questions around: How do they normally feel after different types of exercising? Do they like vigorous exercise or are they more suited to gentler activity? What works best for them? Do they like to dance, cycle, swim or walk etc? What stops them doing exercise? How can this be worked through? Did they used to get enjoyment from some form of exercise but now they just don't do this anymore, why is this? Is there anything you could change in your life to fit more movement back into their day?

Work through what moods they experience in their day that make them want to be sedentary. These can be addressed in section 3b when looking at changing states.

Using music to regulate moods

Some people respond more emotionally to music than others, so this might only be an exercise for those that do. Explore with the person you are supporting what feeling they would most benefit from having more of. For example, would they like to feel more relaxed, energised, confident or motivated? If so, can they find the music that helps their body get there.

Help them to explore events from their memories of when a particular song has been linked to the mood or state they are looking for. Get them to play the music and focus on the positive feelings that it creates. Explore the practicalities of making playlists and using them to support their mood. Help them to timetable into their day when they could listen to certain songs. Using music like this, can help to set the tone of the day or help them to prepare for an event. Or they can use it to shift a mood like a paracetamol is used to shift a headache. Help them to recognise that when they feel like then the best songs to play are

How to wake up well

If someone is experiencing stress, anxiety or low moods, set them the task to notice what they start thinking about and what stories they are believing, in those first few moments they wake up. As this can set the mood for the day. Explore with them alternative ideas and what would work best for them? Do they respond well to mindfulness activities? If so, could they spend a few moments in the morning focusing on their breath or the sounds outside their window. Would certain music be a good way to start the day or listing things they are grateful for. Can they remember a time when they used to wake up feeling energised and positive? If so, can they use that memory to help them develop those same feelings in the body now? (You can use the activity in 3b for 'creating the states we desire' here)

We are all so different, so what works for one-person won't work for another, so people need to experiment with this for a while to find what works for them. You could set someone a challenge to try a different approach each day for a week and then report back which one worked best.

Being kind to others

Doing a kind act for someone else can help you to feel more valued and useful, which both increase positivity. Explore how someone feels about being kind to others: What do they feel when people are kind to them? What kind things have they done for others in the past, that have left them feeling good? What types of kind gestures do they feel comfortable doing? Is there resistance? If so, do they know why and can they see simple solutions. Look here for any unhelpful ideals that they might be carrying of how the world 'should' be. These ideals can be explored further in the ideal's activity lower down.

Remind them that kindness doesn't have to be a grand gesture, encourage them to think small, like leaving little notes for others. All small acts of kindness can build up to increase one's mood.

Gratitude

Gratitude should be on the top of any wellbeing list. As an experiment, ask them to rate their mood from 1-10, then think of 10 things they are grateful for and then get them to recalibrate their mood and see if it has changed. Ensure they take their time over this, they should think about each item in detail, as a rushed list won't be as effective.

As with all these wellbeing aspects it will be important to explore what resistance there is to feeling grateful and work through any resolutions. Going forward, explore how they can build gratitude practices into their day. Could they benefit from keeping a gratitude journal to keep them focused on the activity? Or would having a gratitude buddy that they message at the end of the day, with a few things they were grateful for, help better?

A powerful exercise is to work on feeling grateful for the challenging things in life. For each tough thing that we have to experience, there will be something learnt, that can benefit us moving forward. Discuss with them how focuses on these benefits and being grateful for the opportunity to have learnt them, can help them to move on from experiences more positively.

What went well

In a similar way to gratitude, encourage them to get into a habit of listing the three things that went well today, at the end of each day. It is important here to then focus on: Why did this thing go well? What skills and strengths did **they** bring to the situation, that meant it went well? The idea here is to see our day going well because we helped it too, rather than thinking that it was because of luck or fate. Attributing positive experiences to our personal efforts and skills, can increase feelings of self-worth and confidence.

Discuss how being tired at the end of the day can make it much easier to feed unhelpful negative storytelling and encourage them to notice when it's time to switch off and rest. Discuss how things that need working on, thinking through or sorting out, will all be there in the morning.

Knowing our negative stories

If they can get to know what some of their most common negative story telling habits are, then they can recognise them quicker when they come. This way they'll have a better chance of diverting their attention away from them and any potential unhappiness that they bring. Discuss what stories they are already aware of, that are in their top five. For example, "I'm not good enough." "Life is not fair" "People don't like me" etc.

Discuss what the tell-tale signs are that they are telling one of these stories. What are the thoughts, emotions and sensations in the body? Do they display certain behaviour patterns when some of these stories are in full flow? Could this behaviour help them to notice the story running? Encourage them to spot their top negative stories throughout the day and add more to the list as they notice them showing up.

Then explore with them how each story serves them. What do they get from the story? How does it help them? Would their life be diminished at all if the story wasn't there? Is there a different story that could be told? Are the stories true? If not, what is it about the story that makes it feel real?

They might have their own ideas of how to take the power out of these stories, but also explore:

Mindfulness: Practise using mindfulness skills to recognise and notice their unhelpful story lines and then divert their attentions away from them repeatedly. This is a simple and effective way to stop feeding a story and discuss with them how over time the neural pathways linked to it will get weaker.

Acceptance: Explore how they can accept situations without resisting them, so that they can put the brakes on unhelpful storylines. Encourage them to say things in their head like, "Well so what, if..... happens, so be it, it just is what it is" (ensure this is said with a peace and not anger). To help manage uncomfortable feelings they can say things like: "I accept and allow these uncomfortable feelings" Or "Hello old friend, come on in, you are welcome to stay for a while". As always explore different phrases that come from them, as they will work best.

Discuss how uncomfortable feelings and stories always move on, if we don't feed them. But also, how it can take a little while, so it is important to learn how to become comfortable with feeling uncomfortable.

Knowing our ideals

Explore with them whether they are holding onto any ideals that are not serving them well.

Get them to spot when they use the word 'should'. "They **should** be doing this, or I **should** be doing that" etc. Explore with them where this belief came from and how it serves them today. Have they had this belief since they were a child? Did their parents have the same belief and it just got passed

down? Or is this something they have picked up from peers or the media? When we work out the ideals that we could benefit from dropping, the key is to spotting the stories triggered by them and bring our attention away, so that we can avoid feeding them. Return to mindfulness skills here.

Savouring

Savouring is an activity that some people can relate to and others won't, so it's worth experimenting with. Learning to savour is all about practise. We often rush through life, so explore ways that they can slow down. Chose sensory activities like eating, listening or looking at a beautiful image and explore slowing down to allow their senses to fully experience it.

Using your inner voice

Becoming familiar with using our inner voice to aid, rather than hinder us, can make a big difference to someone's wellbeing.

Firstly, help them to notice when they use their inner voice to criticise themselves or others and encourage them to take their attention away from those stories using mindfulness skills. They can use their inner voice to help notice these stories by saying things like, "I am thinking about how frustrated I am with this situation and how it is not how I wanted it to be. But I am choosing not to feed this story right now, as it won't change anything, and it doesn't make me feel good". Or something along those lines.

Secondly, explore with them how to use their inner voice to help in other ways. Explain that for good wellbeing your inner voice should talk to yourself as though you were your best friend. As mentioned before, they can use their inner voice to help them accept situations: "Oh well, I guess it just is what it is". See if they can experiment with this and notice how it helps them to put the brakes on a negative story. Explore other phrases that might work also.

Encourage them to explore finding the statements that change their mood positively. You can start with statements like – "May I be happy, may I be calm, etc", or "Why do I feel so calm, why do I feel so confident, or why do I feel so happy," which work in a slightly different way. But really a useful inner voice statement should come from them to work best.

Acting calm

When we are stressed or anxious for a while, these feelings can start to become a habit and our ability to relax becomes harder to achieve. Explore with them if this activity makes a difference.

Acting calm:

- Sit in a comfortable position and close or lower your eyes.
- Encourage the muscles around your eyes to soften and your gaze to widen, as if you are looking across a horizon.
- Encourage your mouth to lift at the corners to a slight smile.
- Scan through your muscles and encourage anywhere that feels tight and tense to relax a little.
- Instead of tight shallow breathing, can you encourage your breath to deepen and lengthen.

Doing all or any of these things, sends a message to our body that we are not under threat, there is nothing wrong and they can move back towards a natural calm and relaxed mode. If this is going to be a useful exercise, work with them how they can fit it into their day, at the points where they need it most.

Using the breath to calm the body

Explore with them different breathing practices that can help calm the mind and body.

A good place to start is to breathe in for a slow count of 5 and breathe out for a slow count of 5, as this can really relax both body and mind. You could also experiment with a longer outbreath than inbreath: Breathe in for the count of 4, and out for the count of 6 etc. Get them to find a relaxing breath that

works well for them and then work with them to plan, when in the day it would be a good idea to timetable in moments of deeper breathing.

You can also experiment with linking positive statements to deeper breathing. So, if someone has benefited from a statement like, "May I be happy?" they could mentally say this on the slow inbreath and again on the outbreath. You can search on the internet for lots of different breathing practices and experiment with what works best for the individual. There are also lots of apps out there to help with this, so, you could set them the task of exploring techniques or apps that look good to them and see if they can get into a habit of breathing a little deeper and calmer throughout the day.

Letting life flow

It's common when trying to find ways to manage stress, anxiety and low moods to feel better for a while but then feel that things are getting worse again. So, it is really important to press home that managing wellbeing is a lifelong journey and that going backwards is perfectly normal and will only be temporary. Helping them to look back on previous wellbeing improvement successes can help and scaling down activities to smaller and more frequent ones, can support someone who is feeling overwhelmed. Alternatively suggest they work on just one thing that they find particularly useful, until they feel ready to build more activities back onto their day.

Remind them that you can't fail at wellbeing and at the end of the day it's all about balance and finding what works for them, as they change.