



Mental Health  
Ireland

# Recovery

*A Short Co-produced  
Guide to Recovery in  
Mental Health.*



# | Who is recovery for?

*Recovery is everyone's business. It is unique to each individual, family, group and mental health service. A common part of recovery is the presence of people who believe in your potential to recover. These are people who are there for you and understand you. It will be helpful to have more than one source of support as you will have lots of different needs.*



## What is Recovery in Mental Health?

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**Recovery is described as a journey and with any journey, there is planning, preparation, roadmaps, signposts, pit stops and roadblocks.**

A clear definition of recovery is still emerging but we believe the most powerful definition is the one that you identify for yourself. When approaching the literature, it is important to differentiate between clinical recovery and personal recovery. Clinical recovery is an idea that has emerged from the expertise of mental health professionals and involves the alleviation of symptoms, a restoration of social functioning and a return to what is considered “normal”.



**Personal recovery, on the other hand, is an idea that has emerged from the expertise of people with lived experience of a mental health challenge (Slade M. 2009).**

Anthony (1993) describes personal recovery as ‘a deeply personal, unique process of changing one’s attitudes, values, feelings, goals, skills, and/ or roles. It is a way of living a satisfying, hopeful and contributing life, even within the limitations caused by illness.’ It is important to note that not everyone in recovery will relate to the concept of mental illness. Recovery is for anyone who has experience of psychological distress, trauma, stigma or any other challenge to their mental health and well-being.



Recovery can be likened to a process of discovery, wherein the individual discovers new strengths and insights and of rediscovery whereby the individual reclaims aspects of themselves and their lives which they thought they had lost. Studies and personal recovery narratives have shown that recovery is nurtured between people through healing and positive relationships. (Higgins A. 2017, Deegan P. 1995, Coleman R. 2004, Kennedy M. 1995). These can be supportive peer or professional relationships, family connections or close friendships. It can also represent a re-enchantment and reconnection with life, whereby the light at the end of the tunnel becomes closer, brighter, more perceptible. Recovery is possible and is something to work on every day.





These are exciting times with new understandings of recovery emerging. The value of lived experience is becoming recognised as a valid form of knowledge. The recovery movement is led by people around the world standing in their own truth, sharing their stories and being the change they want to see in mental health. In the past, mental health services put the emphasis on what was wrong with the person but now many wish instead to focus on what is right.

What works well is people working together towards a common goal in partnership, sharing knowledge, expertise and learning from each other. We call this Co-production. Recovery should not be the exception but the rule.

## Principles of Recovery



A systematic literature review by Leamy et al (2011) revealed five complementary processes that were considered instrumental to recovery.

These are:

- **Connectedness** - This describes the sense of being positively connected to other people. This can occur through peer support or within the community. A sense of connectedness can also be fostered through positive healing relationships with health professionals.



- **Hope** - The importance of hope in recovery cannot be understated. There can be no change without the belief that a better life is both possible and achievable. This can often require a leap of faith and belief that recovery is possible.
- **Identity** - This refers to the maintenance or construction of a positive sense of self. It necessitates a rejection of stigma and stigmatising beliefs. It challenges us to see beyond the identity of service user.
- **Meaning** - We all find meaning and purpose in different ways so this can be deeply personal. For some it may overlap with their sense of connectedness, for others it may relate to their faith. Many find it when they begin to feel recognised as a valued and valuable piece of our common tapestry.
- **Empowerment** - This refers to one's belief in one's own capacity to take the wheel in recovery. Supporters can also empower us by emphasising choice, autonomy, and strength. We can empower ourselves by fostering what is known as a growth mindset - the belief that abilities are developed through dedication and hard work. This mindset is associated with a love of learning, growth and resilience.

## What am I recovering from?

Initially your focus may be on feeling better and understanding what has happened to you. It can be a confusing, complex and a demanding time where the impact can be felt in every area of your life.

We may need to recover from:

- **The physical and emotional effects of unresolved trauma such as abuse, bereavement, poverty, betrayal, abandonment, unemployment.**
- **The effects of living with difficult emotions.**
- **Loss of hope.**
- **Learned habits of thinking and acting which lead to alienation from self and others and a tendency towards isolation.**



Recovery may also involve gaining an understanding or dealing with:

- **stigma - self stigma, social stigma.**
- **discrimination, deeply embedded social myths, media sensationalism, employment opportunities.**
- **taking new medications that may have side effects.**
- **the impact of a diagnosis which may drain hope and eclipse more positive identities.**
- **the effects of negotiating services that may fail to see your uniqueness, strengths and potential.**
- **a medical approach which may limit recovery to a medical understanding only.**
- **A mental health system that is slow to adopt an approach of shared responsibility and positive risk taking\*.**

\*positive risk taking – weighing up the potential benefits and harms of exercising ones choice of action over another e.g seeking social involvement.



## What can I do to help myself?

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- 1.** Ask yourself the question - What do I need to do to help myself get better?
- 2.** Realising the vulnerabilities associated with a mental health challenge.
- 3.** Knowing that recovery cannot be done for you and cannot happen without you. 'You alone can do it but you cannot do it alone'. (Helen Keller or GROW).
- 4.** Realising and accepting that there are many people who want to support you, family members, carer, supporter, friends, peers including professional supports.



**5.** Getting to know and working together with a range of care providers. It can be quite overwhelming when a lot of new information is being discussed. It might be a good idea to bring a notebook and pen. Ask questions and ask for clarification or explanations where there are things discussed that you don't fully understand. Maybe prepare a list of questions before you attend a meeting.



**6.** Finding out and learning what works for you, through education, peer support, community resources and professional supports.

**7.** Developing a personal plan of recovery for yourself together with your supporters and your clinical team. This recovery plan may support you in your wellness. Resources like WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Plan), Recovery Education, Peer support networks and groups can help you develop a plan.

**8.** Working with your care providers to resolve past issues. Exploring new possibilities, identities and goals in your life.

## Will I get better?

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**People do get better and do recover. We are all different and experience our mental health challenges in an individual way. It depends on you.**

What does “better” mean to you? Better means different things to different people. It could be, no longer having a diagnosis, no longer experiencing the challenges associated with your mental health or it could be feeling better living with mental health challenges.

## How long does it take to recover?

There is no defined time and everyone’s recovery journey is individual and personal. It is a journey and not a destination. Like life, Recovery is not a straight path. Set backs can and do happen. What’s important is that you stay focussed, believe in yourself, work together with your family, friends, supporters and care providers to help you on the way.

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## **How do I tell others what happened to me?**

**Make sure you are comfortable with your own story before telling it to others. Writing down your personal experience and story is a good way to begin, before telling it to another person. You choose to share your story, what to share and with whom. Practice this with a person you trust and until you are comfortable with. Listening to recovery stories and experiences may help you in telling your story.**

However, work was the most commonly cited aspect impacting on mental health and wellbeing (Mental Health Ireland, 2018). Feeling unhappy about the amount of time you spend at work and neglecting other aspects of life because of work may increase your vulnerability to anxiety.

## **What kind of choices do I have to support my recovery?**

**There is no one approach and one size does not fit all. Your recovery plan will help you know what works best for you.**

Some examples of options include: peer support, talking therapies, recovery education, recovery colleges, exercise, nutrition, meditations, mindfulness, music, art, creative therapies, CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy), medication, open dialogue, & friendly support.

## As a Family member, professional or supporter what can I do?

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The person you are supporting may be going through a unique process where old attitudes, meanings, goals, skills and roles are changing.

This is an important journey for them. This change can be challenging for family and supporters. It is important to try to create room for these changes. This may mean you need to make some adjustments too. It can be easy to yearn for the 'way things were' but try to avoid asking that of the person you are supporting. This can be very difficult and painful for the person you are caring for as they are re-building a life that may look a little different.





This may be an area where you need external support. Try to remember that you too are on a journey of recovery with the person you care for. It may not be exactly the path you envisioned or expected, but there is hope. Recovery is possible for both of you. All the information in this document will be relevant and useful to you too.



## Some of the ways you can take care of yourself during these times are:

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**Educate yourself** on mental health, recovery, treatments and self-care. Many community and government organisations provide this type of training. Your library can also be a great resource. The internet can be very useful but make sure to look for trusted sites. With the permission of the person you are supporting, speak with key workers and other relevant staff. Speak with the person experiencing mental health difficulties. Many family members and carers are afraid to say the wrong thing. The person who means so much to you is still there.



**Keep those lines of communication open.**

## **Seek out a Family Peer Support Worker.**

**This is a family member or carer with lived experience of supporting an individual who has had mental health difficulties. They can give you emotional support, information and practical tips on navigating services.**

It is really important to keep up your life as best you can. Try to continue with activities that interest you, work commitments and social activities. Try to look after your physical health. Get regular exercise and make sure to eat well. It can be very easy to forget these little things but they are essential to your wellbeing.

## **Take breaks when you can and try to do so without feeling guilty.**

**It is not selfish to do this. It is essential. Reach out to friends and family. Reach out for professional support if you feel this would help.**

Your local GP can refer you to one to one supports. There are also a number of group supports available to families and carers of those experiencing mental health difficulties.

**We hope that this short guide provides you with information to support your recovery journey.**

## References

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### References and resources

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**For more information on services, recovery education and supports see:**

[www.yourmentalhealth.ie](http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie)

[www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/advancingrecoveryireland/recoverycolleges/](http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/advancingrecoveryireland/recoverycolleges/)

[www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/mentalhealthengagement/](http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/mentalhealthengagement/)

Mental Health Ireland is a national voluntary organisation whose aim is to promote positive mental health and wellbeing to all individuals and communities in Ireland.

## OUR VISION

Mental Health Ireland's vision is for an Ireland where mental health is valued as being an essential part of personal wellbeing and the health of the nation. Mental Health Ireland will lead the way in informing Irish society's understanding of mental health and fostering a culture where people with mental health difficulties are respected and supported.

## TEXT TO DONATE

Text MHI to 50300 to donate €4 to Mental Health Ireland.

100% of your donations goes to Mental Health Ireland across most network operators. Some operators apply VAT which means that a minimum of €3.25 will go to Mental Health Ireland.

Service provider: LikeCharity's helpline is **076 680 5278**.

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