



A
Companion
Guide
to
Leaving
Hospital



A Recovery Devon Publication
recoverydevon.co.uk



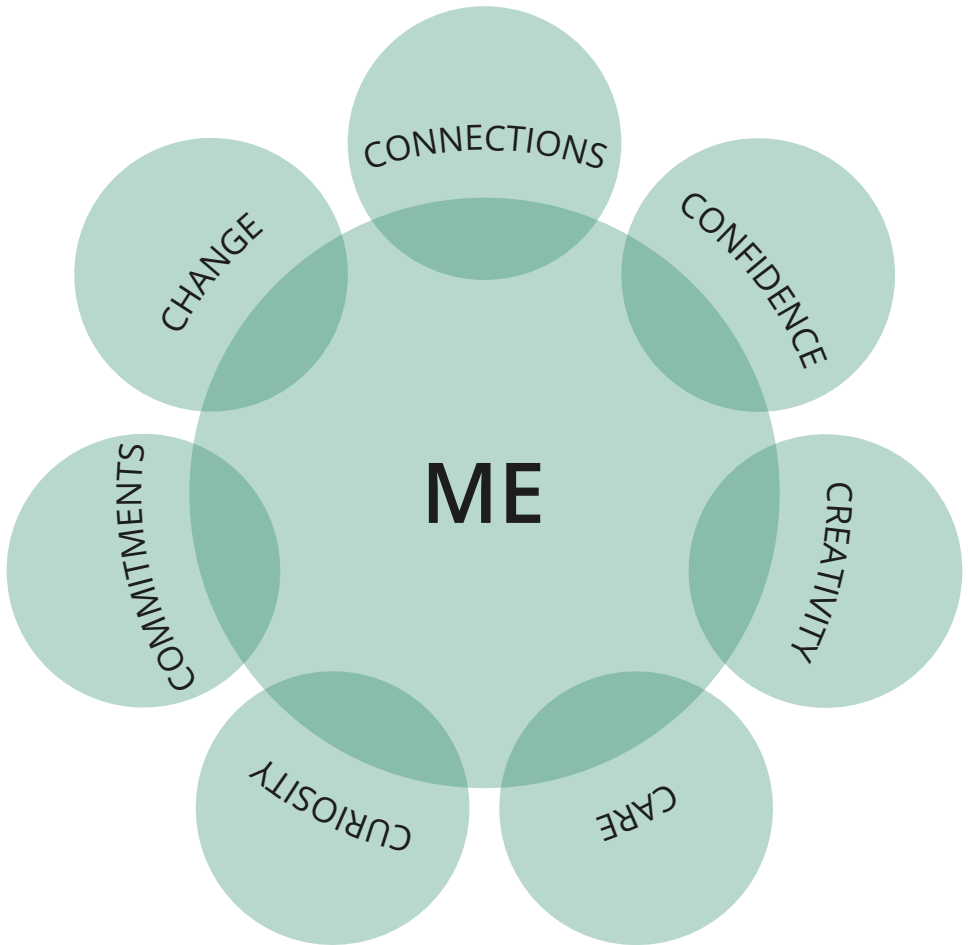
Things that helped us when leaving hospital

This booklet is written by people who have experienced leaving hospital. We know it can be a daunting time of change that brings mixed feelings. It can take time to rebuild your life after the interruption of hospitalisation.

This can be frightening. You may want to stay in hospital for longer than those caring for you say you need. Should you feel this way it is important to speak with staff who will understand. Having firm plans in place for when the day comes will help overcome any fears you may have.

We wish you well and want you to know that you are not alone.

We hope the following pages help you to navigate this transition with courage. We offer a few tips and hints to help you rebuild your confidence and some links to resources that are available locally and nationally.



Care

Looking after yourself is a foundation for everything else. Small things can make a big difference at times like this. Are you getting enough sleep? What helps you to sleep? Are you getting up at a regular time? Eating properly? Getting some fresh air? Why not treat yourself as a little reward for surviving hospitalisation? What do you need to stay well? If you are using medication as part of your recovery are you taking it? Are you making the most of the care and support available through services?

Some people find it helps to have a routine of self-care: getting up at a regular time, doing all the little things that make us feel ready for the day, having a routine for the day that includes caring for our environment. You might also find some form of gentle exercise supports your wellbeing: just going for a walk every day can make a big difference. Joining some form of exercise class that suits you can give you the opportunity to do something alongside other people without too much direct interaction. Be gentle with yourself and look after yourself.

Confidence

A crisis that has resulted in hospitalisation can be a blow to your confidence. It isn't easy to pick yourself up and start again. We found that it is important to remember our strengths as well as being realistic about our vulnerabilities. At this point you might feel shattered by the experiences you have had.

It takes time to get over a crisis. Give yourself that time and don't expect yourself to bounce back immediately. Small steps can take us a long way. It can be difficult to face new things and tempting to hide away from the world. Confidence needs practice. Don't stop trying... There are some free courses available through the Recovery Learning Community which can help with rebuilding confidence. It's an individual thing though, so you need to look at what you can do day to day to challenge yourself in small ways.



Connections

Some people can feel disconnected from themselves, either as a result of their condition or of the hospital experience. Sometimes we need to reconnect with who we are as a part of the adjustment process. A hospital stay can change the way we view our lives. It opens questions about who we are and what we should be doing with our time. Recovery can be a lifelong and sometimes challenging process of reconnecting with ourselves and what we are capable of. You are not alone in this journey.



A community is a network of connections. These can involve family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, peers. A mental health crisis involving a stay in hospital can strain relationships and make you feel cut off from your networks. It can take time to rebuild these relationships. We have found that it is worth taking the time to talk about what might have happened when we were unwell. It is also worth looking out for new connections through the peer support networks available online and in your area. Peer connections between people who have had similar experiences are a powerful source of informal support that can help with processing your thoughts and feelings after a crisis.

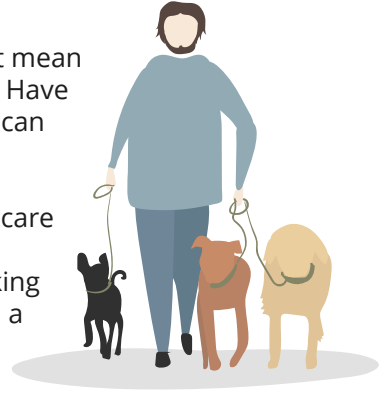


Commitments

It can help to have some commitments to keep you going. Don't give up hope of returning to work or starting something new. Workways offer tailored support for people with mental health challenges looking to find or stay in work.

You might not be ready for a job, but that doesn't mean you're not a valuable member of the community. Have you considered 'involvement' opportunities? You can use your experience to help to improve services.

Sometimes it can help to have something else to care for. Some people find that a pet gives them the impetus they need to get up every day. Even looking after a house plant can help. Regular habits build a structure that gets you through the day. Don't forget you have a commitment to yourself too.



Change

Leaving hospital can be frightening, especially after a long stay. This is a time of change which is unsettling for most people. Hospital isn't fun but it does provide a sort of community and some activities to keep you busy. Going back to being independent and responsible for yourself can be a challenge. How do you respond to change in your life?



Anxiety is a common response. Have you tried writing a journal to keep track of your feelings? It can really help to talk to someone you trust who has been through similar experiences or a professional who is supporting you. This is also an opportunity. Things are different now. You can allow this change to take you in new directions.

Curiosity

What next? What do you want to learn? Where is this experience taking you? What factors contributed to you needing to be in hospital? Have you learnt anything about yourself?

Staying curious about ourselves and the world we live in can be a powerful survival strategy. There are lots of courses available through the Recovery Learning Community and the WEA which can help to boost your skills and feed your curiosity. Is there something you have always wanted to learn? Maybe now is the time to begin that learning journey by signing up for a course, joining the library, doing some research, picking up a musical instrument, joining a club...

Some of us also found it helpful to be curious about our diagnosis and to learn as much as we can about the medication we take.



Creativity



Many people find that creative activity can help to process intense experiences. You might have left that part of yourself behind during your time in hospital. Drawing, painting, writing, singing, dance, playing an instrument, photography, knitting... whatever floats your boat.

The Recovery Learning Community offers a range of free creative courses. Starting a new hobby or returning to creative activities we left behind during a crisis can be a healing experience.



Challenges

Recovery is a messy business. There is no one-size-fits-all model that applies to everyone. You have to find your own way step by step.

Not all steps take us in the best direction, and there are always bad days as well as good days. You may find that you experience another crisis and feel that things are getting out of your control again. Some of us find that it helps to have a crisis plan. This can be a short statement or list of the sorts of things to watch out for in the lead up to a crisis. It is also worth recording what you think helps you when things start to get difficult.

You might like to share your crisis plan with your supporters (professionals working with you and trusted friends or family.) It can be a useful way to open a conversation about how you want to be treated if things become difficult for you again.

It is not uncommon to have suicidal thoughts following a hospital stay. It can help to talk about these thoughts with a supportive professional or with someone who has also had this experience. The Letter of Hope was written by people who have had or have acted upon suicidal thoughts. Don't suffer in silence. There are people who care. Do you know who to contact if you need help? Make a list of important/ helpful phone numbers and keep this somewhere visible.



Helpful Links

Recovery Devon | <https://recoverydevon.co.uk>

Workways | <http://www.workways.org.uk>

DRLC Courses | <https://devonrlc.co.uk>

Together Project | <https://www.thetogetherproject.co.uk/>

The Bridge Collective | <http://www.bridgecollective.org.uk>

Phoenix Arts Centre | <https://www.exeterphoenix.org.uk>

WEA Courses | <https://www.wea.org.uk>

Pinpoint | <https://services.pinpointdevon.co.uk/>

Journaling for Wellbeing |
<https://www.calmhappyhealthy.com/journaling-for-well-being/>

Letter of Hope | <https://recoverydevon.co.uk/2015/letter-of-hope/>

FREE Home Safety Visit from the Fire Service | 0800 0502 999
<http://www.dsfire.gov.uk/YourSafety/SafetyInTheHome/index.cfm?siteCategoryId=1>





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