

A toolkit for your self-care before, during & after a trip with the Ellen MacArthur Cancer Trust

There isn't a rulebook on mental health, so we need to make time to get to know what our own mental health and wellbeing looks like - when it's both healthy and unhealthy. Understanding what your triggers to creating poor mental health might be and recognising your emotional snapping can give you some control in looking after yourself before it gets too bad. Putting in some helpful coping mechanisms that work for you is the key to self-care and looking after yourself.

You may already be doing some brilliant things to look after your wellbeing. Remember, this isn't about setting unrealistic goals like climbing a mountain. For some people getting out of bed and making it is their biggest goal of the day, and that's ok.

It's good to check in with yourself regularly. How are you in the different roles you play in life? As a volunteer we want to make sure you feel safe and ready before, during and after a trip and so we've created a toolkit for you with some suggestions on what you could do to look after your mental health. Remember, we're all different, so we don't expect you to like all of the ideas, but allow yourself the time to check in. When you begin to understand your mental health, you begin to truly look after your whole self.

Be kind to yourself. Start with asking yourself, what's working and what isn't? Sometimes it can take time to understand what a helpful coping mechanism is for you and what's not so helpful. Celebrate the small wins and embrace all that is your mental health and the joy of self-care!

There is no health without mental health...We all have mental health.

What is Health?

World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as:

'Health is a state of complete, physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.'

What is Mental Health?

'...the emotional and spiritual resilience which allows us to enjoy life and survive pain, disappointment and sadness. It is a positive sense of well-being and an underlying belief in our own and others dignity and worth.' Health Education Authority. Mental Health Promotion: A quality framework. London: Health Education Authority; 1997

Before a trip...

Physical Activity - and exercise can have immediate and long-term health benefits. Most importantly, regular activity can improve your quality of life.

Physical exercise doesn't have to be 90 minutes of football or running a marathon, it's about moving your body. Going for a walk and listening to music, an audio book or just nature and the sounds that are around you...all of this is good for you.



Rest - Rest and relaxation reduces stress and improves overall health. You'll be able to easily work a full day as it improves your focus. An active mind gets tired just like an active body. Including time to quiet your thoughts and letting your mind **rest** is part of the healing process.

Emotions -

Recognizing your **emotions** is important because it is the first step toward dealing with them in healthy ways. Three steps you can take to help you recognize your emotions is to name the emotion you're feeling, determine what triggered the emotion, and think back to past times that you felt the same way.

Preparation -

is as important as planning, maybe even more so. Preparation gets you ready to actually do the work.

Make a list of all the things you need for the trip. Give yourself 2-3 days to work through the list, ticking each thing off as you get it ready. Aim to be packed and ready 24 hours before leaving and allow yourself a final day of rest and mental preparation.



Sleep -

is a vital, often neglected, component of every person's overall health and well-being. Sleep is important because it enables the body to repair and be fit and ready for another day. Getting adequate rest may also help prevent excess weight gain, heart disease, and increased illness duration.

Some top tips: Establish a routine, allow yourself to wind down an hour before going to bed. Avoid eating – especially rich food – at least 2 hours before you go to bed. Check in with yourself - write down any thoughts you're going over in your head so you can deal with them in the morning. Reduce nicotine and caffeine and avoid screens – time to switch off the TV and put the phone and iPad down.

CALM is a brilliant app that offers a variety of sounds, stories and mindfulness – great for getting sleep and can also be used through the day.

During a trip...

Keep checking in with you -

Have you had enough sleep? Have you eaten? Are you feeling anxious? Is there something you need to know in order to do the role you're in? How are you getting on with the people around you? Remember what your emotional triggers look like?

If some of the above are becoming a trigger for you whilst on the trip, make some time to talk to a member of the team. Ask for help, talk and share with someone what you're thinking. This is to protect you, the young people and the team you're working with.



Communication -

Most of us will recognise that communication is the key to effective teamwork. Certainly if communication isn't effective, it will really not help team harmony or what they can achieve. The belief is that 55% of communication is body language, 38% is the tone of voice, and 7% is the actual words spoken (Psychology Today).

Be kind to yourself... And those around you -

We're not born to get on with everyone and that's ok.

Remember, the trip isn't forever - it will end. You are a team, communicate and work together.

Listen -

"We have two ears and one tongue so that we would listen more and talk less." --Diogenes

Like you, everyone has their story and their challenges. The greatest gift you can give a person is to listen to them. To truly listen is to understand. You don't have to fix a person, or have the answers, simply acknowledge what they say and how they're feeling, try not to interrupt, show empathy and try not to judge.

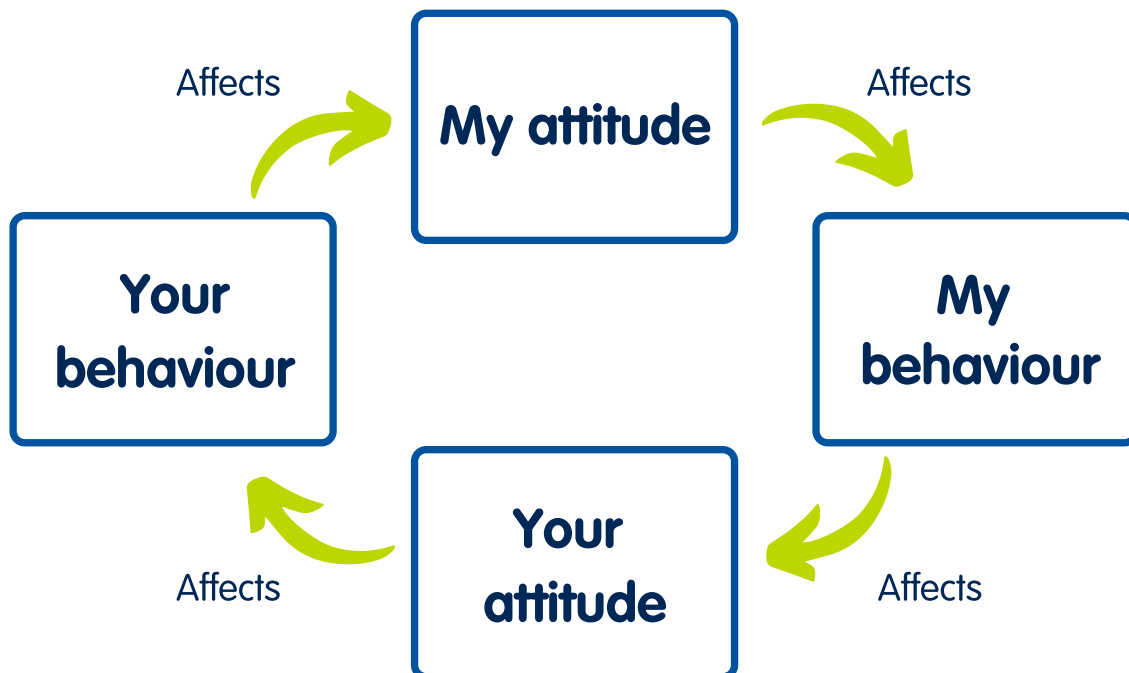
"The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said" --Peter Drucker

Communicating with young people

There are no hard and fast ways to communicate with young people. An approach may work once, but may not work every time or in every situation. Be genuine and authentic and this will come across. If you are getting on particularly well with a young person, it is worth reflecting why this may be. If there is a young person who you feel you are not getting on so well with, it is worth talking to other volunteers and seeking their suggestions on what works best. The Trust staff are always there to talk it through with you as well.

Being a young person is not easy at the best of times. Combine this with cancer and the Covid-19 pandemic and it can be hard for young people to control their developing emotions, at times.

Betari's Box is shown in the model below. You may find this useful to reflect on when communicating with young people:



Remember, you are part of a team

The benefits of being part of a team:

- They help you see things from a different perspective.
- They always have your back.
- They help you hone your skills.
- You have an army of cheerleaders rooting for you.
- They offer constructive criticism.
- They provide unconditional support.
- They keep you accountable to do your best.



Anxiety and panic attacks

We all have anxiety, it's a normal and natural thing, but sometimes anxiety can kick in when we least expect it and start impacting on our day-to-day life. If this happens during a trip, focus on grounding yourself, slowing your breathing down and processing what you're thinking.

Find somewhere quiet (the toilet is always a good place) and breathe in slowly to the count of seven and breathe out slowly to the count of eleven. Repeat this step for as long as you need. A minute or two is often enough to make a difference.

Anyone experiencing a panic attack needs to be re-assured that it will pass, to focus on slowing their breathing down and feeling a sense of calm.

Thoughts are not facts – a lot of anxiety is triggered by our thoughts. If you begin to feel anxious, take a deep breath and ask yourself the following questions:

- What are my thoughts?
- Are my thoughts facts or opinions?
- What can I change?
- What can't I change?
- What is the worst thing that could happen?
- Will I be ok?
- Can anyone help me?

After a trip...

Process, reflect, celebrate and share -

Take time to think about the trip, the people you met and the feelings you experienced. People and events can spark different thoughts and emotions in us all and it's important to acknowledge them.

Write down the feelings you felt during the trip and the reasons you felt them.



Talk -

Find people in your life that you can talk to. You may have different people to talk to about different things. Talk about your time on the trip and how it made you feel - the good bits, the hard days, the challenges you faced as well as the fun times.

It's so important to talk.

Take time out -

Make time for you and switch off from the trip. It can be exhausting, exhilarating and an emotional roller-coaster working with young people.

Make time for what you love doing to relax; binge on Netflix, have a duvet day, go for a long walk, read a book or listen to music.

Re-charge your self-care. It will be needed.

Organisations for support and information

Samaritans

samaritans.org/how-we-can-help
Call: 116 123 Email: jo@Samaritans.org

SHOUT

giveusashout.org
Text 85258

Kooth

kooth.com
(Online free counselling support for young people)

Mind

mind.org.uk
(Information and support)

Young minds

youngminds.org.uk
(Urgent help text 'YM' to 85258)

Childline

childline.org.uk
Call 0800 1111

Papyrus

papyrus-uk.org

Further support for mental health, wellbeing and more can be found here:

<https://www.ellenmacarthurcancertrust.org/signposting>

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