

Free

Issue 8 - 2022

**Lived Experience Telephone Support Service
(LETSS)**

LETSS BE OURSELVES

A mag by peers for peers



Articles | Recipes | Worksheets | Reviews & more!

**Links to
Wellbeing**

Links to Wellbeing

Counselling and
Mental Health Support
Across Central
Southern Adelaide



Links to Wellbeing is a consortium commissioned by the Adelaide PHN and run in partnership between Neami National, Mind Australia, Skylight Mental Health and Uniting Care Wesley Bowden.



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LETSS BE OURSELVES

Self-growth is a beautiful thing. However, in a world that is so focused on self-improvement we are often automatically tuned to think about the future and what we need to do next. As such, we often forget the present.

However, the present is important too and for a brief moment we just wanted to pause and focus on that. We wanted to bring attention to all the wonderful things you have already achieved, the hard-work you have put in, the lessons you have learnt, and the challenges you have overcome. As such, this issue is about celebrating what you have achieved so far and for simply being you! So thank you to all our callers for being your amazing, unequivocal, unforgettable and resilient self!

No one is you, and that is your power - Dave Grohl

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NEW
SECTION



LETSSAus



letssaus



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INTERVIEW WITH A PEER WORKER.....

WITH A LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

Thank you for sitting down with me today.

Could you please share what you feel comfortable with, your experience with mental health?

It's tricky to give a brief explanation but I guess the easiest way to summarise is to say that I've experienced anxiety and depression at points throughout my life.

How has your experience changed your perception or views on mental illness?

I think most notably having my own experiences of mental health struggles has always driven me to approach any conversation around mental health struggles/personal experiences in a way that's non-judgemental and open-minded. In particular, it's helped me understand that for many people there is far more going on under the surface than they might let on, and there's always value in, where possible, holding space for bigger conversations.

What kind of challenges have you faced on your path to recovery?

I think there's always new experiences and challenges that come up. I guess something that I've always found to be difficult is openly and honestly talking about my experiences. This is something that I've been actively working on recently, which is positive, but has also made me realise just how tricky I find this.

What kind of support/advice/tips have you found helpful along the way?

In terms of the support I have received myself, I think when someone is just willing to listen and validate my experiences, this can be the biggest help, without necessarily trying to offer a solution immediately (or at all). As well as this, some specific advice that was very helpful for me was to do my own research around the kind of therapists that were available and seek out one based on my own values and what I was hoping to get out of therapy.



What did you find not so helpful?

Trying to do all the things at once. Let me elaborate, there's plenty of things that I know are helpful for my mental health and in times where I've been struggling I have tried to start doing just about all these things at once (e.g. get enough sleep, exercise, eat healthy, practice mindfulness, journal, the list goes on....). However, when I've been doing none (or just a couple) of these things, suddenly attempting to do all them rarely goes well (it lasts a couple weeks at best and then I end up feeling even more burnt out). In my experience, taking a more 'slow and steady' approach has worked far better!

What kind of strategies have you used?

Journaling is probably the most consistent strategy that I use, I also tend to try and incorporate a bit of mindfulness into my day-to-day life. Exercise is also a big one, though I sometimes drop off with this one a little, I find that when I do a bit of exercise regularly everything else feels a little better too! Not sure if this is considered a strategy, but time in nature is also a very important one for me.

Do you think society is changing with the way that it comes to view mental illness? Is there any progress being made? Why/why not?

Hmm this is a tricky question to answer. It feels that there are a lot more conversations happening about mental health and a push for people to speak more openly about their experiences. There is undoubtedly still stigma and misconceptions and misunderstanding around people's experiences of mental illness, I don't want to invalidate how difficult it is and continues to be to seek help and be heard when experiencing mental health struggles. However, from my perspective, it does feel that this topic is gaining more attention and traction, and that attitudes are (slowly but surely) shifting.

People easily seek help for physical health conditions such as a broken leg or fractured arm. Why do you think it is much more difficult for people to seek support for mental illness?

I think in part it's due to the stigma that does still surround mental illness. Although things are shifting, there are still persistent attitudes and messages that experiencing mental health struggles is a 'weakness' (just want to emphasise that this is not true). Additionally, the way to seek mental health support can feel more complicated, many people haven't been told and don't know what the first steps are or where to even begin.

“

I think when someone is just willing to listen and validate my experiences, this can be the biggest help, without necessarily trying to offer a solution immediately

If there was one thing you could tell people with mental illness, what might that be?

Whatever experiences you are having, no matter what they have been labelled, are a valid response to what you're going through. It can be so difficult to feel heard and listened to when it comes to mental health struggles, by peers and even by professionals, but this doesn't make your experience any less valid. Continue exploring your experiences and different avenues for support, and sharing what you're going through in spaces where it feels safe to do so.

If there was one thing you could tell your past self, what might that be?

It's a bit cheesy but I think I'd just tell her that both the really bad and really good experiences come and go, and that there's things to be learnt in both of them.

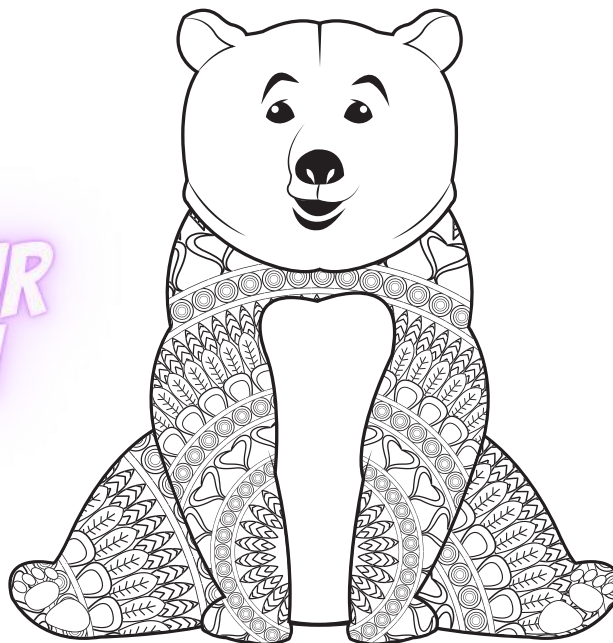
Have an interview topic idea you would like to read about? We would love to hear it! Please let us know at letss@skylight.org.au

THE MINDFULNESS CORNER



Take a moment to yourself and relax with our series of mindful activities

COLOUR ME IN

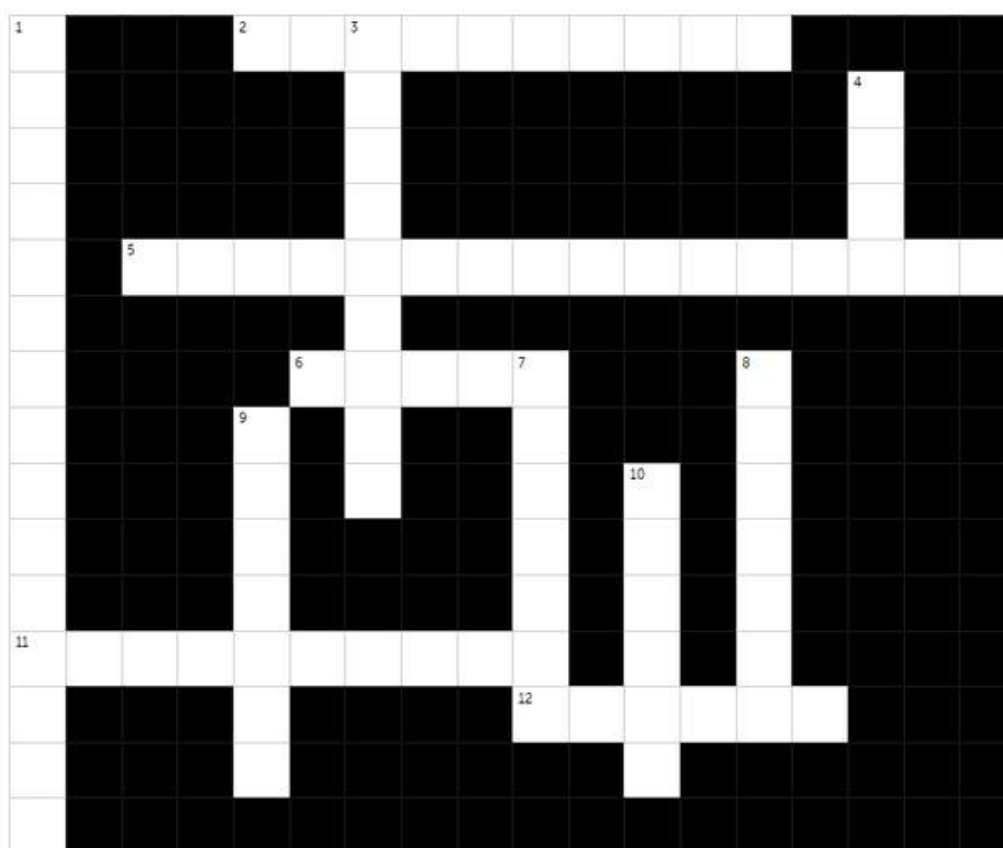


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Find the answers on page 10



Across

- 2. The capacity to bounce back from hardship
- 5. To let go of feelings of anger or resentment towards yourself
- 6. To trust that something will occur
- 11. To engage in reflection or contemplation
- 12. The process of developing emotionally, mentally, or spiritually

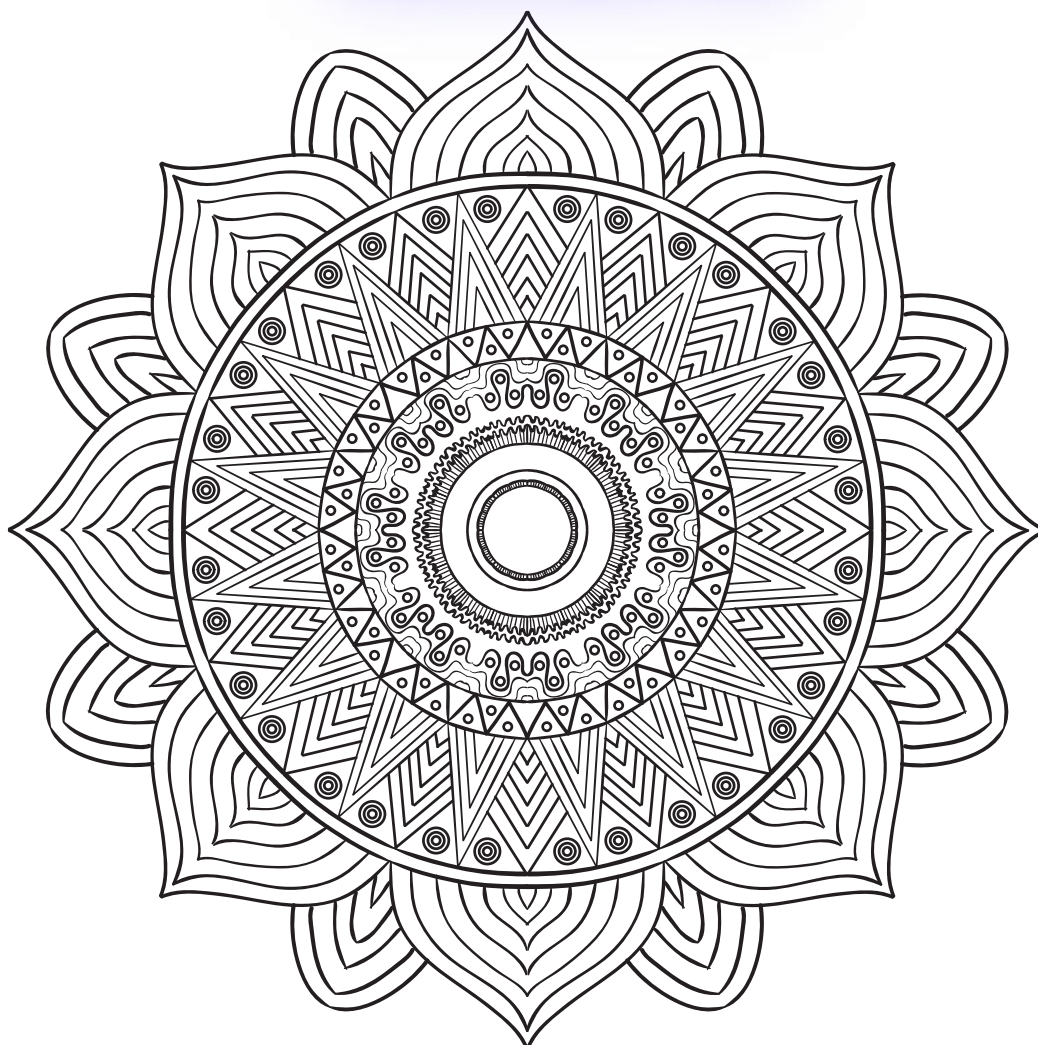
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Down

- 1.To recognise and appreciate the importance of something
- 3.The practice of investing in time to look after and nurture your physical and emotional wellbeing
- 4.The desire for something to happen
- 7.To assist someone
- 8.To give encouragement, approval, and comfort
- 9.The ability to share and understand feelings with someone else
- 10.The process of doing something to achieve a goal

Find the answers on page 10

COLOUR IN



1. Acknowledgement, 2. Resilience, 3. Self-care, 4. Hope, 5. Self-forgiveness, 6. Faith, 7. Helping, 8. Support, 9. Empathy, 10. Action, 11. Meditation, 12. Growth

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SELF COMPASSION

What is it, why is it important, and how do we practice it?

When people speak of self-compassion, it can be fair to think that it sounds great in theory and is definitely important, but it is also hard to know how to put it into practice every day. When we give ourselves the same kindness and care we'd give a good friend, this is how we extend self-compassion to ourselves. In the context of a friend, this could involve noticing that our friend is suffering, feeling moved by their suffering, and responding with warmth, care and a desire to help. It can also mean extending understanding and kindness to our friend when they fail or make a mistake, rather than responding with harsh judgement.

The realisation that suffering, failure, and imperfection is part of the shared human experience can contribute to offering compassion for another when we notice they are experiencing it. Self-compassion is about treating yourself the same way when you are having a difficult time, fail, or notice something about yourself you don't particularly like.

It's about responding to these experiences and feelings with kindness and understanding rather than mercilessly judging and criticising yourself for various inadequacies or shortcomings. Who said you were supposed to be perfect? Is anyone ever perfect? No, so the question is: why do you feel you should be? Extending self-compassion to yourself is an act of honouring and accepting your humanness.

The three elements of self-compassion:

1)Self-kindness vs self-judgment:

The very essence of being self-compassionate is practicing warmth and understanding toward ourselves, as opposed to self-criticism or anger, when we are experiencing life difficulties such as suffering, feelings of failure or inadequacy.



2)Common humanity vs isolation:

When we experience something difficult it can be common to feel that we are the only one going through this or the only one who is failing etc. This form of thinking can very much isolate us and add to an already troubling time. We are all "human" in that we are mortal, vulnerable and imperfect. Self-compassion is about noticing the suffering and feelings of inadequacy and reminding ourselves that these experiences are part of the shared human experience. In other words, we are not alone.

3)Mindfulness vs identification:

Mindfulness, as it does in many situations, has a place in self-compassion too. When we are practicing self-compassion, it is important to be able to observe our thoughts and feelings as they are, without judgement and without trying to suppress or deny them. Self-compassion requires a balanced approach, we cannot feel compassion for ourselves if we ignore our pain.



Self-compassion is not:

Self-pity:

Many of us who are beginning to practice self-compassion can feel a sense of uncomfortableness and have thoughts that we are becoming self-pitying. To be clear, self-compassion is not self-pity. When we self-pity we tend to emphasise egocentric feelings and exaggerate the extent of personal suffering. Self-compassion on the other hand is a practice of noticing the links between experiences we have and the experiences of others as a means to avoid feelings of isolation and disconnection

Self-indulgence:

Often we can see being harsh with ourselves as self-motivation, and by being self-compassionate we may feel we are "letting ourselves go" or becoming self-indulgent. This couldn't be further from the truth. By caring for ourselves and extending warmth and kindness, this can provide a powerful motivating force for growth and change, as well as creating a feeling of safety for us to see ourselves clearly without fear of self-punishment.



Tips for practice:

Self-compassion is not a practice of controlling the way things are, it is a supportive stance on alleviating feelings of suffering. By denying the pain we are experiencing or trying to suppress it through use of self-compassion, we risk making things worse for ourselves.

Sometimes, through practicing self-compassion, we may feel our pain increase in the first instance; this is a very normal effect of self-compassion and has been termed "backdraft". Backdraft is a term that has its origins in firefighting, and describes the phenomenon of oxygen going in and flames rushing out when the door of a burning house is opened.

When put into context with self-compassion, it may be likely that we experience great pain when we extend kindness and love to ourselves, when in the past it has been denied or conditional. One saying that well describes this experience is: "when we give ourselves unconditional love, we discover the conditions under which we were unloved".

Keeping this in mind, when we begin learning to extend self-compassion we should be mindful of taking it slow, and when things do become overwhelming or difficult, perhaps it is the most self-compassionate response to notice and seek extra support with unpacking these feelings.



MAKE MIRACLES HAPPEN!



If only my parents / boss / partner /
children would stop / start / try /
remember...

Everyone has some version of an "if only"
statement: Something life-changing that
seems sort of...out of reach. A stressor that
if resolved, would make everything (or at
least, a lot of the things) all better.

What's yours?

Now imagine for a moment, that while
you are asleep tonight, a miracle
happens! You don't know about it, of
course - because you are asleep
(hopefully). But your problem, your 'if
only', has been fixed. Just like that.

In the morning, what will be the first thing
that tells you a miracle has occurred?

Imagine the sounds, sights, and feelings. What do you notice? How are you different?

This is the Miracle Question. Drawn from a Solutions-Focused approach to therapy, the Miracle Question is a kind of 'thought-experiment' which asks us to imagine a different future. It asks us to free ourselves for just a moment, from 'impossibilities' or hopelessness; and to think about how our life looks without this problem.

But how does pretending a miracle has happened help? The problem still exists. So, doesn't that just make us feel worse?

The key is the way the Miracle Question gets us to imagine the miracle experience in close detail. It focuses our attention on after the problem is resolved; jumping straight into the way life feels if the stressor or stressors have been dealt with.



For example, suppose you are weighed down by a very stressful family situation over which you have no control – it would be a miracle if this just resolved or disappeared, right? "If I didn't wake up with a knot in my stomach, I might think a miracle had occurred", you say.

This tells us that waking up each day free of the physical symptoms of stress might be a reasonable goal.

It might be complicated to fix the family situation if your family are not on board with fixing it – but there are ways you can independently work to overcome a knotted, stressful stomach. You get to wake up without a knot in your stomach, after all.

From here, it is much easier to devise goals that support your future life - the one you live after the Miracle has happened. It's a little hypnotic and requires a little creativity. And you may need support to work out how to achieve the goals you identify. But now that you've been able to decide what you want and visualise it clearly, you will be in the best position of all to achieve it.





LETSS BREAK THE STIGMA

The idea of 'recovery-oriented' language is something that has been gaining a lot of attention and traction in the mental health space. It may seem like something that isn't particularly important however in reality the words that we use carry a lot of weight. The principles behind 'recovery-oriented' language go beyond avoiding terms that are discriminatory and offensive (although this is undoubtedly extremely important), it highlights the way that the words we use can completely shape our experience of something. Using language that conveys hope, understanding and support, can over time shift attitudes and cultural experiences to be reflective of this as well. So let's get into the specifics, how exactly do we shift our language to be 'recovery-oriented'? We've put together a bit of a guide below of some examples of what recovery-oriented language and Do's and Don'ts to consider.

OUTDATED WORDS

TRY INSTEAD

Emma is schizoprehnic



Emma has a lived experience of schizoprehnia

Emma is difficult



It is sometimes difficult for me to work with Emma

Emma rejects help and advice



Emma is used to be being independent and struggles to accept support

Emma will never get better



So far, Emma has not found something that has been helpful for her or has found the right supports

Emma is uncooperative



We need to ask Emma what she needs

Emma is paranoid



Emma is experiencing confusion and fear

Emma is abusive and dangerous



When Emma is upset or angry she may exhibit the following behaviours.....



Take an insight look into our world....

With one final quick check to ensure my packaged dinner is in my bag and the car is locked, I stride across the car park and towards the staff entrance. Usually the car park is busy but as it nears 4pm, it is quickly emptying out. While many people's day is ending, the LETSS team's is only beginning. I tag my FOB pass and with a slight click, the door is unlocked and I swing it open, quickly making my way up the stairs and into the office.

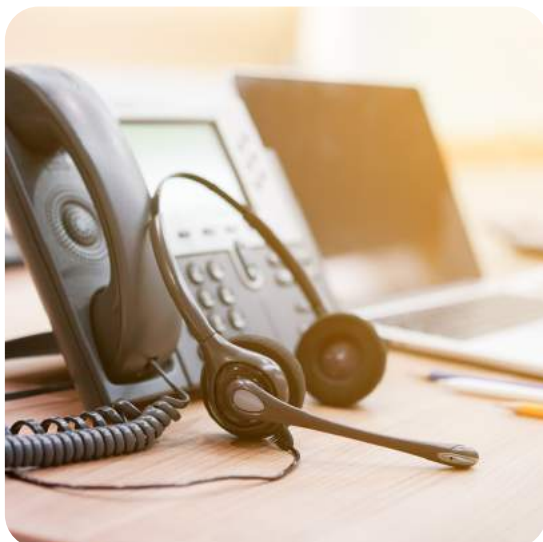
By now, it is 4pm and although the LETSS service only opens at 5pm, there is a lot of preparation in that hour beforehand. I greet, chat, and laugh with the other peer workers on shift and as I do I mentally check off the list of things that need to be done. The call system activated – *check*, the chat system activated – *check*, emails checked and responded to – *check*, wellbeing calls booked in – *check*, phone calls returned – *check, check, check!* I am relieved – no tech issues today. Phew.

It is 5:03pm when the first call comes ringing through and when that call ends another call comes through straightaway. It is a busy night already but that is not always the case. Sometimes we may not receive calls for over an hour of time. Other times, we may have six calls waiting in the queue by the time it even hits 6 pm. The nights are always unpredictable but that is what it makes it all the more exciting.

It is 8pm and by that time, all the peer workers on shift have taken a wide range of calls. Some people are seeking information about services or supports, some people are looking for strategies or wellbeing plans, and some simply need a compassionate ear and a safe space to share. Sometimes, we get people who are intrigued about us and want to know how we became peer workers. Sometimes we have people who become angry or upset at us because we are unable to provide the kind of support that they need in the moment. While we are trained to remain professional and not take it personally this doesn't make us feel good inside. After all we are just human like everyone else!

However, for the most part we often feel feelings of hope, admiration, and empowerment as we listen to our caller's stories and the hardships and challenges they have faced and overcome. It brings a smile to our face when we hear our callers share that they have achieved a goal they have set out to do or have had a good day. Sometimes we share a laugh with our callers as they highlight a humorous aspect to an odd situation. Sometimes we sit with our callers in silence and share the pain of a truly difficult time or challenge they are going through. So often when people ask what I love about working at LETSS that is what I tell them – it is a really cool and special thing to truly connect and be present with someone in a moment. We are honoured to be invited into someone's world like that.

It is 9pm now and I take my 30-minute break and eat dinner. When I come back, one of the other peer workers is on a phone call to emergency services. It does not happen often but it does happen occasionally where we may need to seek further support for our callers to ensure that they get the support they deserve. However, the rest of the night goes quietly and this is when we work on all our additional tasks such as preparing social media posts, writing blogs, doing research, and liaising with other services. In addition, we may scour the snack draw to see what goodies hide within.



At 11:30pm, the service closes and the button switches from available to unavailable and just like that, the night is completed. We finish our case notes, send off our final emails, and pack up our equipment. However, just because our night finishes this does not mean that the need for mental health support stops. And for that, we say a quick mental thank you to all the services that are still out there working late and continuing to support the community such as emergency services, Mental Health Triage, Lifeline, and many more.

Yet, for us the night is completed. We say our goodbyes and we drive away from the office back home often tired and dreaming of bed. Still despite the tiredness and late nights we all always think to ourselves - if I at least helped one person tonight it is all worth it.

Peer Worker, A.



BEING AN ALLY TO LGBTIQA+ COMMUNITIES

What does being an ally mean?

Being an ally means supporting, standing up for those around you and encouraging others to do the same. In the context of LGBTIQA+ communities this refers to someone who is heterosexual and/or cisgender (does not identify as being part of the LGBTIQA+ community) who supports and advocates for LGBTIQA+ people. A big part of being an ally also means listening to and prioritizing the voices of LGBTIQA+ people allowing, not speaking for, but rather doing what you can to amplify the voices of the community to have the power to lead and direct the fight for equality.

How can you be an ally to LGBTIQ+ communities?

➔ **Learn** about key issues that are important and affecting LGBTIQA+ communities. You can do this by talking to LGBTIQA+ people, reading books, listening to podcasts, visiting websites that are run by people who are a part of the community

➔ **Show up** and support the LGBTIQA+ community at events. This could mean going to rallies/protests or supporting businesses, charities and initiatives run by members of the LGBTIQA+ community

➔ **Be mindful of the space you take up**, always try to prioritize the voices of those who identify as LGBTIQA+. This doesn't mean staying silent – rather using your voice to direct others to information and experiences shared by those in the community, allowing everyone to hear LGBTIQA+ people speak for themselves

➔ **Talk to those around you** about how they can be an ally too. Speak to friends and family about the importance of showing support. Call out comments that are discriminatory and/or disrespectful.

➔ **Support and listen with empathy.** You don't need to be a trained professional to offer someone support, sometimes simply taking the time to sit and listen non-judgmentally and compassionately is all that you need to do

EASY OVERNIGHT OATS

Ingredients:

- ½ cup oats
- ½ cup milk of choice (e.g. cow, almond etc)
- 2x tablespoons of Greek yoghurt
- Squeeze of honey
- Sprinkle of cinnamon

Method:

1. Pop all in a jar or tupperware container with a lid, and shake.
2. Place in the fridge overnight (can make up to 5 days in advance).
3. Add toppings to serve if you want, e.g. nuts, peanut butter, dried fruit, banana



BANANA & FIG LOAF

Ingredients:

- 4-5 ripe bananas
- 6 Medjool dates, pitted and roughly chopped
- 4 dried figs, roughly chopped
- 1 ½ Cups fresh apple juice
- 1/3 Coconut oil, in liquid form
- 1 egg
- Pinch of salt
- 1 Cup dried shredded coconut
- 2 ½ Cups Spelt flour
- 3 Teaspoons baking powder

*pssst.....its
freezer
friendly*

Method:

1. Line a 30cm loaf tin with greaseproof paper
2. Preheat the oven to 180 C
3. Place all the ingredients except the flour and baking powder into a food processor and pulse until the bananas are well combined
4. In a separate bowl mix together the flour and baking powder, then add to the wet mixture and mix until just combined (do not over-mix or the loaf will be tough)
5. Spoon the mixture into the prepared tin and bake in the centre rack of the oven for 30 minutes, then rotate the tin and back for a further 30 minutes until a skewer inserted into the centre of the loaf comes out clean.
6. Remove from the oven, tip the loaf out onto a wire rack and leave to cool slightly.
7. Serve warm with a drizzle of pure honey or some almond butter, banana and preferred seeds (eg sunflower, pumpkin, etc)

My Protective Factors Worksheet

Protective factors help you be resilient when faced with challenges. Fill in the below areas to help identify strengths in your life.

Supports

List two people in your life that you can talk to about your problems.

Skills

Describe at least one thing you are good at, or have knowledge on.

Coping Strategies

Describe a time when you've overcome a challenge.

Personal Identity

Describe something you are proud of, relating to your personal identity.

Community

List any interests or activities you are engaged in.