



SESSION 2



SESSION 2

MY RECOVERY

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this session is to explore the recovery approach in mental health; examine key concepts in recovery and identify what recovery means personally.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this session students will have:

- A good understanding of recovery and the concepts underpinning it
- A good understanding of the factors that support recovery
- An opportunity to explore their personal experiences of recovery



SUGGESTED LESSON PLAN

ACTIVITY	METHOD	MATERIALS
Introduction	Trainer led	
Connecting up	Group exercise: What makes me hopeful?	
What is mental health recovery?	Group exercise	Post-it notes Flipchart
What helps recovery?	Individual and group exercise: CHIME and my recovery	Handout Film: Rona's story
What does recovery mean to me?	Small group exercise	handout
My recovery journey	Individual exercise	Handout
Reflection	Individual exercise	

INFORMATION

Supporting the recovery process is one of the primary outcomes in the Living e-Motions project.

WHAT IS RECOVERY?

“Recovery is being able to live a meaningful and satisfying life, as defined by the person, in the presence or absence of symptoms. It is about having control over



and input to your own life. Each person’s recovery is a unique and deeply personal process.”

(Scottish Recovery Network)

Before we look in more detail at recovery we should consider two core elements of the recovery approach:

- A fundamental belief that everyone has the potential for recovery – no matter how long-term or serious their mental health problem.
- The recovery approach is based on learning directly from people who are in recovery or who have recovered from mental health problems.

Living e-Motions embeds these core elements by providing a learning opportunity for people to take control of their own recovery and to do so by exploring, understanding and sharing their story – not just of mental health problems but of recovery.

WORLDVIEW AND DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES ON MENTAL HEALTH RECOVERY

It is likely that in any discussions about mental health recovery there will be some differences of opinion about the characteristics of recovery. This should come as no surprise both because recovery is a unique and personal experience and also because we all have slightly different world views. Our world view relates to how we see and understand the world around us. It is influenced by our past experiences, our personal values and our culture. Being aware that we all have slightly different world views on many things including mental health, and being open to this, is important when exploring our and other people’s experiences of recovery.

There are a number of different ways to view mental health.

A **biologically** based understanding of mental health means that we see our biology as determining our behaviour – our genes and instinct drive us. From this



perspective mental health problems develop from physical/biological causes like defects in the functioning of the brain or genetic factors. The methods of dealing with these defects are usually through drug treatment such as the prescribing of anti-depressants to alter the chemical activity of the brain.

A **psychological** perspective suggests the way we behave is as a result of psychological (emotional) problems acquired through learning experiences in our lives. There are two key approaches to understanding these experiences. Psychodynamic perspectives seek to understand by focusing on the individual's feelings and emotions. Behaviourist perspectives argue that behaviour is learnt by observing and modelling others with influence on our lives. For both the preferred treatment is based on talking therapies.

The **social** perspective focuses on our social environment and how this affects our development. It suggests that mental health issues are determined by the social context in which we live and the things that have happened to us in that environment. This includes family, community, school, workplace as well as wider social factors like socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnic identity.

In reality there is a complex interplay between the different perspectives. This coincides with continued debate between those with different worldviews. One of the strengths of the recovery approach is that it can rise above these debates as it is more concerned with the process and outcome of recovery than the underlying causes of mental health problems.

Another way to look at mental health recovery is to consider the different perspectives of clinical and personal recovery.

The **personal recovery** perspective encompasses an individual and nonlinear view on recovery where individuals go through various stages of being stuck, rebuilding and growth (van Weeghel et al., 2019). In the forefront of attention are the many “back and forths” of a person being in recovery (Davidson, O’Connell, Tondora, Staeheli & Evans, 2005). The personal recovery perspective emphasises



that recovery is when the person has a fulfilling, contributing life whether or not they experience symptoms (see Scottish Recovery Network definition).

From a **clinical recovery** viewpoint, recovery is defined “as amelioration of symptoms and other deficits associated with the disorder to a sufficient degree that they no longer interfere with daily functioning, allowing the person to resume personal, social, and vocational activities within what is considered a normal range” (Davidson et al., 2005, p. 481). In this sense, recovery is a final outcome which for some may be reached and for others not.

From a clinical viewpoint, recovery from mental health problems very much resembles the recovery from a medical condition (Davidson et al., 2005; Davidson & Roe, 2007). However, an eradication of symptoms does not necessary lead to a meaningful life and better integration into the community. From a process perspective (which is also adopted in the Living e-Motions project), recovery does not necessary require a person to be symptom free. The recovery process is rather aimed at helping the individual to live well with their mental health problems. This aspect often includes a redefinition on one’s identity and roles and preserving one’s positive view of self, others and life despite the problems.

The sharing of personal recovery stories or narratives has been identified as an approach which supports individuals in their recovery journey. This will be expanded on in Session 4 My story.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RECOVERY

It is impossible to develop a complete list of recovery characteristics but some of the more commonly identified themes are listed below. Remember that recovery is unique and individual so you may not agree with all these points and that is fine.

Recovery is a deeply personal process

One of the most commonly cited definitions of recovery in academic literature views recovery as “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. Recovery



involves the development of new meaning and purpose in one's life as one grows beyond the catastrophic effects of mental illness" (Anthony, 1993) There is no one way to recover. While we can be inspired by and learn from other peoples' recovery journeys we are all different and so what helps our recovery and the path taken will differ.

Recovery is self-defined

It is important to remember that the person in recovery who has recovered defines what a satisfying, hopeful and contributing life means for them. We need to be aware of the danger of defining recovery for people rather than listening to them and supporting their recovery.

Recovery is an active process

This means that people need to feel ready and able to play a part in their recovery. Other people can certainly support and encourage that process but it needs to be led by the person themselves.

Recovery is a journey

Recovery is commonly described as a journey which can have ups and downs. For some people recovery is less about a destination and more about the process or journey. For this reason, some people prefer to describe themselves as being in recovery rather than recovered.

Recovery is about small steps

Recovery should not be portrayed or seen as something big or a 'miracle'. Our recovery journeys are comprised of lots of small steps as well as some leaps. What is important is that each person's recovery happens at a pace that feels right for them at the time. However, while it may be about small steps that doesn't mean we should not celebrate each small step and achievement in our recovery journeys.

Recovery is not always easy or straight forward

Recovery can be a long-term process which takes strength and commitment. Sometimes our recovery gets stuck and we experience mental health problems. This may have traditionally be seen as relapse or evidence that recovery has



ended. However, our new understanding suggests that, while difficult, periods of mental health problems can lead to learning and the growth and development of strengths that contribute to the longer term aim of recovery.

Recovery as a process of discovery

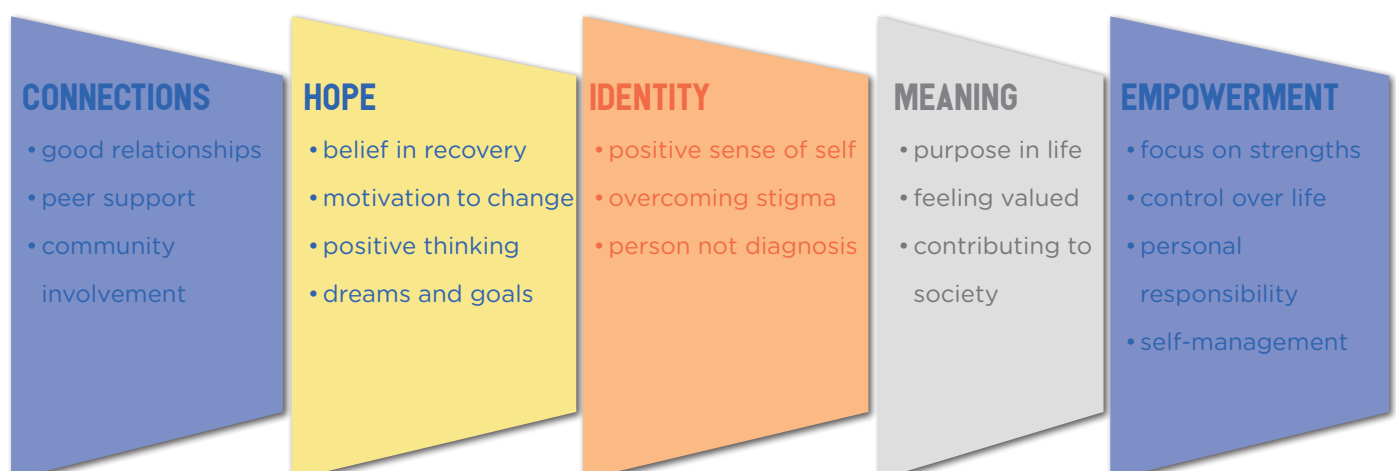
For some people recovery can be a process of personal discovery. This means it might be as much about overcoming the losses experienced as a result of coming unwell as about discovering a new and different life. This is different from getting back to the way things were before becoming unwell which is not always possible or desirable.

Recovery is not something you do on your own

While recovery is a deeply personal and unique journey it is not a journey that has to be undertaken alone. We know that other people can provide encouragement and support. Also sharing experiences of recovery with others can help us to feel less isolated and hearing from others can be informative and inspirational.

WHAT HELPS RECOVERY?

Recently the literature on recovery has shifted from exploring what recovery is to understanding how recovery comes about. This has resulted in more emphasis on the evidence provided by the stories or narratives of people in recovery. A key study looked at a range of narratives studies of recovery and identified CHIME - five key factors which support recovery (Leamy et al., 2011).



CHIME can also be understood a framework of domains of recovery and can be used for facilitating recovery.

Connections can, for instance, be fostered by organized activities where the participants engage in social sharing of emotions, and experiences related to their mental health problems (e.g., storytelling exercise; Nurser, Rushworth, Shakespeare, & Williams, 2018). It can also be fostered by involvement in social and recreational activities.

Hope can be instilled by exercises aimed at thinking about one's life situation in a positive way. The "best possible self" activities where individuals are asked to image that everything has gone as well as it possibly could and write it down can be utilized in that regard (King, 2001). Additionally, systematically thinking about one's life goals and writing down the steps that they can take in order to achieve these goals was found to be efficient (Feldman & Dreher, 2012).

Identity

When rebuilding a positive sense of self reflection of the wide range of a person's role and activities, particularly those which can still be pursued, is extremely helpful. This helps individuals to broaden their thought repertoire by challenging the impression that they are "just their illness". An exercise involving the 20 statement test where individuals simply answer the questions "Who I am" in 20 blank rows starting with "I am..." can be useful in that regard (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954).

Meaning

The same exercise may help to foster meaning in life by turning the participants' attention the meaningful life roles. Finding meaning in different life roles and activities as well as greater quality of life in general can also be encouraged by the classical positive psychology exercise "counting one's blessings" where individuals are encouraged to think about things in their lives that you can be grateful for and how much they appreciate people, events, and situations that have been part of your life story (e.g., Emmons & McCullough, 2003).

Empowerment



Empowerment needs to be secured throughout the whole process as individuals recovering from mental health problems need to experience control over their personal journey. One way to achieve this is by involving participants in decision making regarding their recovery process and allowing/encouraging them to participate in activities which they personally consider as helpful.

Scottish Recovery Network have developed a short animation which looks at what helps recovery using the CHIME Framework. You can find it here

[Scottish Recovery Network - YouTube](#)

Talking about recovery

Some students may already be familiar with the concept of mental health recovery but others may not be. If students are not familiar with the concept and need some more guidance to inform their discussion you could suggest they think about what living a good life means to them. This would allow them to explore the concept of recovery and will emphasise that this is something they are likely to know more about than they may think.

It may also be that some students have concerns about the concepts and/or the use of recovery. The appropriation of the term recovery by the mental health system may have resulted in students being given definitions of recovery by some professionals and services which they do not agree with. This is a useful and interesting discussion and one where you can emphasise that mental health recovery is defined by the person and not by family, friends, professionals and services.

