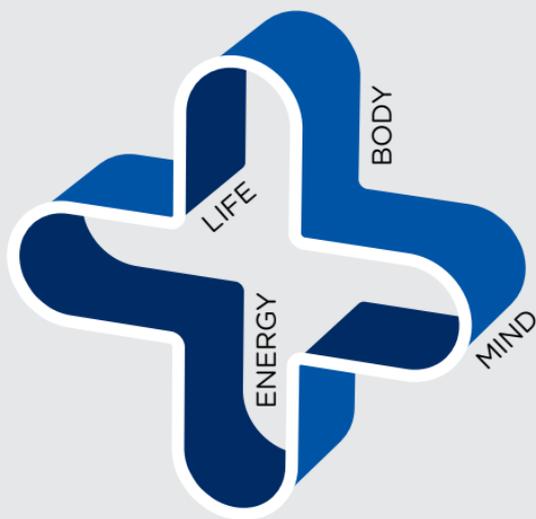


POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

OVERCOMING MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS



DR SHAUN DAVIS
& ANDREW KINDER



STEPS TO BECOMING MORE RESILIENT

In becoming more resilient it's important to nurture and develop behaviours that enable you to better manage pressure and promote physical and mental wellbeing. Here are a few suggestions on the steps you can take to become more resilient.

- **Build your inner toughness:** This includes the confidence to believe that you will survive and come through hard times, nurturing a sense of optimism and engagement with life and work.
- **Make sure you practice supportive thinking:** This is the ability to think in a reflective and rational way, noticing the effect of your thoughts on your own wellbeing, as well as listening to others and allowing and accommodating for differences in your personality and performance.
- **Find solutions:** Build the capacity to identify problems, set goals and apply solutions to maintain your mental and physical effectiveness in the face of possible difficulties or outcomes.

- **Create connections:** Be aware of the need for emotional support and think about how you can access this, making the most of feedback and support from a range of different people and sources, including co-workers and mentors.
- **Self-regulate your emotions:** Find a way to return to a calm state after feeling upset or emotional. Think about and analyse the potential consequences of your actions and your ability to switch off and refresh.
- **Implement positive life habits:** Commit to eating regularly and eating well, as well as relaxing and making time to refresh your mind and body.

Combined with these steps, there are some strategies that you can employ to deal with the triggers that impact our ability to cope:

- **Identify your vulnerabilities:** Before creating strategies that can boost resilience, you need to know what you are up against. Try to become more emotionally aware, noting the times and situations when you feel stressed and overwhelmed to better understand your trigger points and create strategies to address them. This is the opposite to being like an ostrich, which sticks its head in the ground and ignores what's going on around it.

- **Challenge negative thoughts:** It is easy to let pessimism become a habit. But fortunately, like any habit, this can be changed with a bit of effort and a lot of perseverance. As with identifying vulnerabilities, make note of any negative thoughts, challenge yourself when they are recognized and reflect on how reasonable they are. Is there a way to reframe your thinking and consider your thoughts in a more positive and logical way?
- **Accept what you can't change:** If you are resilient you will understand that a situation, good or bad, has to be accepted before it can be changed. Sitting in silence for a few minutes each day, breathing steadily and simply observing your thoughts and emotions is a great way to cultivate acceptance and boost resilience.
- **Get some exercise:** Regular exercise works off stress hormones, promotes a sense of positive wellbeing and prepares you for the next challenge. If you find it hard to get a regular exercise programme going, start small with a regular walk during your lunch break. Even a little bit of exercise will make all the difference. In fact, even having a lunch break and getting out and about away from a sedentary, desk-based lifestyle is a great start.
- **Make sure you have social support:** Studies on resilience often show that social support is vital to maintaining solid emotional resilience. If you have good friends or colleagues to talk to, reach out to them regularly. If you feel deeply cut off and isolated from those around you, it could be time to get a bit of outside help.

- **Create some positive habits:** Whether it's exercising, spending time with friends and loved ones, or just making time for quiet reflection, it gets a lot easier to do something once it becomes a habit. Regularly setting aside short periods of time for resilience-boosting activities saves a lot of mental and physical energy and will make a dramatic difference to your life in the long term.

“As easy and as strong the pull is to retreat from people, I have found that being around others boosts your mental wellbeing.”

ALCOHOL AND MENTAL HEALTH

Approximately 24% of adults in England and Scotland regularly drink over the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines,⁴ which increases their long-term risk of becoming ill, and even more (27%) drinkers in Great Britain binge drink on their heaviest drinking days.⁵

It's easy for these drinking habits to transform our mental health and whilst alcohol can have a temporary positive impact on our mood and perceived levels of happiness, it can have a hugely negative impact on our mental health in the longer term.

Alcohol use and misuse is linked to a wide range of mental health issues, including depression, insomnia, anxiety and it's even a factor in suicide rates. Ultimately, alcohol is a depressant and it changes the chemical balance of the brain. The more we drink, the more damage we can do and if we drink heavily and regularly we start to develop symptoms of depression. In fact, people who experience anxiety or depression are more likely to be heavy or problem drinkers.⁶

Alongside contributing to feelings of depression, alcohol can affect mental health in a number of other ways:

- **Memory loss:** Alcohol slows down the processes in the brain, which means we can forget the things we get up to when drunk. Frequently drinking too much can cause more permanent damage to the brain.
- **Suicide and self-harm:** Research shows that more than half of people admitted to hospital because of deliberate self-harm and injury confessed to drinking immediately before or while they'd done it.⁷
- **Relationship breakdown:** Although alcohol can help to build relationships, it can also lead to arguments and bad behaviour that contributes to relationship breakdown.
- **Poor sleeping habits:** Whilst some people claim to sleep better when they've had a drink or two, alcohol disrupts the regular sleep cycle so we feel tired, irritable and dehydrated the following day, often craving unhealthy foods.



SOME POSITIVE STEPS TO TAKE WHEN ALCOHOL IS AFFECTING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH:

- If you're drinking to manage stress, try something different such as going for a walk or taking an exercise class to reduce stress levels. And if you're drinking to mask a specific problem, consider trying to talk with a friend, relative, counsellor or healthcare professional about it
- Be a more mindful drinker, taking time to think why you're having a drink. Is it to mask a feeling? Or is it a habit? You could also keep an honest record of how much you're drinking in a week; the results will show if you have a problem
- Review if you're drinking every day and if you are, why? Can you incorporate a few alcohol-free days into your schedule to help ensure you're not becoming addicted? Or offer to drive if you're going out socially so you're not tempted to have a drink?

MOVEMENT, EXERCISE AND MENTAL HEALTH

It's no secret that regular exercise is good for our bodies, but it's easy to forget that it's also a fantastic way to keep our minds in tip top shape, improving our wellbeing and helping to overcome some of the most common mental health challenges and problems.

Even the smallest amount of activity can start to improve your mood; beginning with a walk around the block and extending this out to a longer walk every few days as your stamina, motivation and energy levels begin to build.



Did you know that about one-third of adults in England are damaging their health because of a lack of physical activity?

Or that one in four women and one in five men in England are defined as inactive because they're doing less than 30 minutes of moderate physical activity every week?⁸

As you start to move more, you'll begin to feel more energetic throughout the day, more relaxed and generally more positive about yourself and your life. You'll also start to see some of the other mental health benefits of exercise:

- It can help to improve concentration and memory, as well as stimulating the growth of new brain cells
- It can help you to sleep better and build a routine, particularly by incorporating regular exercise into your life and making exercise a positive habit
- It relieves tension and stress and boosts wellbeing through the release of endorphins, those fabulous chemicals in your brain that make you feel good

- It provides a distraction to how you're feeling, helping to break a cycle of negative thinking and giving you something different to focus on

As well as getting in the right 'head space' for wanting to move more and incorporate some exercise and physical activity into your life, there is plenty you can do to make sure that you're ready to move and stay motivated.

- **Do what you enjoy:** It sounds great to have a goal of running a marathon or completing a triathlon, but that type of endurance activity isn't for everyone. Think about what activity makes you happy – it might be walking the dog, jogging with a friend, gardening, swimming, playing Frisbee or soccer with your children or friends, taking a class at a local gym or even walking around a local shopping centre. The key is to find something that you enjoy and once you've started moving, challenge yourself to do something new and different.
- **Reward your achievements:** As well as improving your mental health, you might want to think about a reward or treat for achievements. It could be a bath, a massage, a meal with your partner or a 15-minute nap on the sofa, something that acknowledges the investment you're making in your physical and mental health.

- **Remember you don't have to do it alone!** Making exercise a social activity, whether with friends, family or a class, is a great way to keep motivated. It can help to have someone that encourages you out of the door on the days when you don't feel like exercising, as well as having someone to celebrate achievements with.
- **Incorporate activity into your daily life:** You could get off the bus or train one stop ahead of your destination and walk the rest of the way, take the stairs rather than the lift or escalator, set a reminder to stand up regularly throughout the day. Think about how you can add extra activities into your regular routine to keep your motivation levels high.

“The best exercise for my mental health is walking; this supports my mindfulness practice and allows me to be outdoors where I feel most at ease. This is important as I know when I feel at my most anxious, going for a walk is a great coping mechanism and doing it regularly helps me maintain a healthy mind.”

HELP YOURSELF TO MANAGE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA USE

If you're spending too much time on social media and not enough in the real world, now might be the time to try to manage this addiction.

1. Acknowledge that you've got a problem!

The first step, of course, to solving a problem is admitting that there is one.

Are you checking your Facebook feed from the moment you wake up, or finding that you're taking a photo of every single thing you eat and posting it on Instagram? When out with a friend, do you find yourself constantly checking your social media accounts on your phone? Are you scrolling through your phone while you're sat on the sofa with your partner, supposedly watching television or listening to their day? Have you developed a 'fear of missing out' if you can't get to your phone to see what's been going on?

If you find yourself nodding in agreement in response to any of these questions, then it's a good moment to acknowledge you may have a problem.

2. Remove the temptation from your home screen

Receiving push notifications for recent activity on social media platforms is just too tempting and can immediately encourage scrolling to see what is going on. By disabling push notifications you'll help to cut the time you spend online. You can also 'snooze' some of the traffic on news feeds by opting to temporarily stop seeing posts from some groups and pages.

3. Reflect on what else you could be doing

As tempting as social media is, consider what you're really getting from it and the value it adds to your life. Could you be reading a book, watching a film, catching up with friends, taking up a new hobby or spending more time with your partner? Are you brave enough to put the phone down and do something different?

4. Ask yourself how many social channels do you really need?

There always seems to be something new when it comes to social media such as new, enticing platforms. But do you really need another way to view a news feed? Reviewing the accounts that you have and resisting the lure of opening new accounts, however trendy, is a positive way to manage social media usage.

5. Make your social media contributions matter

Before posting your latest thoughts, take a moment to make your contribution matter. Is it really important and necessary to share? Who are you really talking to and, hand on heart, are they that interested? By thinking twice about posting you will better analyse your social media use and cut back on time spent on it.

6. Nurture real-world relationships and experiences

Today, it's second nature to take a photo of an experience or video your favourite song at a concert, rather than enjoying the moment in real time. How often do we really look back on these once captured and posted? How many people really watch them? So, if the answer is, 'not that many', why do we bother? Surely it's better to enjoy relationships and experiences in the real world?

7. Are you brave enough to take a break?

Maybe taking a break for a week seems like a really long, unmanageable, time. But how about taking a break from social media for an evening to start with and then a day? It'll still be there when you pop back on it and, surely, if it's really important news, your friends and family will pick up the phone or pop around to tell you what's happening? If not, then perhaps they need to read this book!

MINIMIZING THE IMPACT OF MONEY ON MENTAL HEALTH

Money and mental health have a very close relationship. Worrying about money will affect your mental health and poor mental health can make managing money very challenging. According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, one in four people with a mental health problem is also in debt.¹⁷

Research by the Money and Mental Health Policy Institute found a clear link between financial difficulties and mental health, reporting that 41% of employees who identified themselves as ‘financially comfortable’ reported at least one sign of poor mental health.¹⁸ This figure rises to 51% for people who say they’re ‘just about managing’ and 67% for those ‘in financial difficulty’.

This study also identified that an individual’s ability to work is compromised because of financial worries, with people struggling to concentrate, losing sleep, lacking motivation and feeling under pressure.

Debt and money worries can make many aspects of life feel out of control. If financial issues are affecting your mental health – or, just as easily, vice versa – there are positive steps that can improve your financial wellbeing and minimize the impact that money issues have on your mental health.

- **Think about how your mental health affects your money management**

How do you spend money? Why do you spend it on what you do? For example, do you spend money to make yourself feel better when things are tough? Or have you had to take time off work, which has affected your income?

Is there a part of managing your money that affects your mental health? For example, do you get anxious when you open a letter from the bank or a credit card company? Or are you struggling with debt, but feel unable to pick up the phone to talk with someone about it?

Having a better understanding of your behaviour when it comes to money will help you to identify the best things to do to get back on track.

- **Talk to someone you trust about the situation you find yourself in**

Although it can be hard to start a conversation about money (and how it's making you feel), it can be helpful to talk with someone you trust, whether it's a friend, a family member, your doctor or another health professional.

Give some consideration to the impact that your money problems are or could be having on your relationships. It can be hard to talk to a partner about money or debt issues, and you might find it hard to open up to them if you need to rely on them for financial support whilst you are struggling with your mental health.

- **Get your paperwork in order**

Find a regular time to look at account statements, bills and tax notices so you're on top of what is happening and there aren't any surprises waiting for you. It is good practice to keep all financial paperwork and important documents together, so that if you need to check something, you can go straight to what you need.

Procrastination is definitely a potential problem here; it's tempting to put off working through tedious paperwork so a 'little and often' approach will help avoid an unmanageable crunch down the road. However, if your paperwork is a mess, it pays to get a handle on it today so that it will be better next time.

- **Make the most of the experts that are out there**

If you are finding it hard to manage your money and it's affecting your day-to-day life and mental health, seek advice from an expert. This could be an advisor at your bank, a debt management charity or your EAP helpline, which can direct you to someone who can help you work through the situation.

There are also fabulous (and freely accessible) websites, such as MoneySavingExpert.com which has information, action plans, advice and tips, as well as forums where you can learn from the experiences and successes of other people who have been in the same position.

It is easy to underestimate just how much money worries can affect your mood, behaviour, performance at work and overall wellbeing, so it's something best tackled as soon as it's recognized that money – or a lack of it – is affecting your mental health.



On a practical level, why not consider some of these simple tactics to help with day-to-day money management?

- Recognize you have an issue with money – it's very common, many people do – but accept that by sorting out these issue(s) your mental health will improve
- Avoid the temptation of spending and take positive action to do something else. Go for a walk, chat with a friend or clean out a cupboard at home, perhaps?

- De-register your credit or debit card details from on-line stores that you purchase from. This makes impulse purchases more difficult if temptation does strike
- Use online banking and web chat services if you find it hard to talk with your bank face-to-face or on the phone about money troubles. Most banks have a policy to help customers who proactively come forward with financial worries and they will be supportive
- If you are self-employed, get strict with saving for tax that you'll owe at some point down the line, perhaps by putting it in a different account so you don't get a false sense of security with your bank account balance

“You can only control the things within your power. Let go of the things that you can't influence as they will never change. You can only deal with one issue at a time, especially related to money, so make a list and work your way through it. Visual lists of what you have to do are a lot easier to comprehend and manage than the feeling of dread in your mind because there's so much going on. There is always someone to help, whether it be family, friends or something more established.”

NURTURING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH FOLLOWING BEREAVEMENT

Reactions to loss and bereavement can vary greatly; there really is no right or wrong way to respond to this sad, troubling and often unexpected situation. The way you feel following the death of a loved one, friend, family member or colleague, whatever your reaction might be, is perfectly normal and doesn't mean that there's anything wrong with you.

Some common feelings you might experience include anger, denial and disbelief, fear, depression, guilt, numbness, mood swings, sadness, shock, lack of confidence and reliving memories. You may even experience a sense of guilt if you never expressed how you really felt about the person, or if there was a misunderstanding that was never cleared up before they passed away.

It is important to give yourself permission to feel the way you do rather than the way you think you should. Nonetheless, there are things you can do to help overcome the emotional pain being experienced.

- **Give yourself time to grieve:** It can take a long time, probably longer than you initially think, to adjust to a major bereavement.
- **It can help to talk:** Talking things through, sharing memories and expressing how feelings can help process your emotional reaction to the loss suffered.
- **It's also OK not to talk:** If you don't feel like talking, that is perfectly OK as well, but make sure that you talk to someone at some point to avoid becoming too isolated and withdrawn.
- **Take things slowly:** When recently bereaved, you will naturally feel anxious and worried and you might be struggling to concentrate. Be aware of the stress that you are under and take things slowly to avoid having an unnecessary accident or increasing your stress levels.
- **Don't feel guilty about moving on:** There will be a time when it is right to start rebuilding your life, so don't feel guilty when that happens. You're not being disloyal to the one who passed away.
- **Prepare yourself for the future:** There will be birthdays, anniversaries and other significant days that you will want to mark, especially during the first year after a bereavement. Think about how you can celebrate and commemorate these days, perhaps taking time off work or planning a special event with friends and family.

- **Keep keepsakes and memories around you:** Use photographs and other treasured possessions to keep the memories of your loved one alive. At some point you may be more able to celebrate their life, rather than dwelling on a visual memory of how they were when they passed away. Photos or videos of good times with them can help in this process.
- **Eat well, drink less and keep moving:** It is tempting to rely on alcohol or other drugs to try and numb the pain of bereavement, but in the longer term they can create other health problems, so it's best to avoid them or moderate your intake. Eating a balanced diet, getting some light exercise and taking plenty of rest will also help you to manage this difficult time.

Alongside the emotional pain of loss or bereavement, there are practical consequences associated with losing someone close, including housing and legal issues, childcare and support difficulties, as well as financial pressures. Arranging the funeral can create complications, especially if family members are dispersed or if there are tensions between people.

Talking with your doctor is a great starting point, especially if your distress is overwhelming. They may be able to recommend a counsellor who can help you to adjust to what has happened and help minimize the impact of your bereavement on your mental health.

SUPPORTING A COLLEAGUE'S MENTAL HEALTH

We spend a lot of time with work colleagues and as such we have an opportunity to play an important role if we suspect that they may be struggling with their mental health. But the sensitive nature of mental health means that it can be difficult for a colleague to open up, so we should be careful about how we approach it.

Sometimes, it might be immediately obvious when someone is struggling with mental health issues and you can take swift action to help them. Other times you might gradually spot the signs and symptoms, perhaps over a period of weeks or months.

When the time feels right to approach a co-worker about your concern for them and their mental health, it's important that the conversation is proactive, positive and supportive. Here are some tips to help ensure that it is:

- **Choose the right place to talk:** Where you decide to talk about mental health needs should be quiet and private, so the person feels comfortable and equal.

A location outside the workplace may work well, and if they work from home, you might want to meet with them there, on their territory.

- **Encourage people to talk with you:** People can find it difficult to talk about their mental health, but they are likely to feel less reluctant if workplace conversations about these matters are normalized, seen and heard on a regular basis.
- **Use simple, open and non-judgemental questions:** These will enable people to explain what they think the problem is, how it manifests itself, what the triggers are, how it affects their work and home life, and what support would help them overcome these challenges.
- **Don't be tempted to make assumptions:** It's easy to guess the symptoms a colleague might have and how these are affecting their ability to do their job. But don't assume anything! Let them tell you how they can best manage their mental health and the support they would like from you.
- **Listen to what you're told:** Everyone's experience with a mental health problem is different, so don't be tempted to think there's a 'one size fits all' solution. Have a flexible approach to offering help and advice, remembering that what might be right for you won't always be right for someone else.

- **Assure the employee of confidentiality:** People need to be reassured that what they have shared will be treated with confidence. Discuss precisely what information they want to be shared and be sure that any subsequent third-party conversations are in line with the latest data protection legislation.
- **Encourage them to get professional advice and support:** Encourage them to talk with their doctor about the struggles they're having, as well as other support services, such as EAP or Occupational Health services.

Continue to reassure the colleague that your concern is sincere and that you're ready, willing and able to talk with them. If the time for the conversation arrives and the person decides that the moment isn't right, assure them that you'll be ready to help whenever they need you.

PRACTICAL TIPS TO OVERCOME MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Too often we can be guilty of taking our mental health for granted. This book will help you to take charge of your mental health by improving your understanding of mental health conditions and will explain how to manage these in challenging times and everyday life.

DR SHAUN DAVIS & ANDREW KINDER are leading practitioners in the field of mental health with over 50 years' experience between them. They have been widely published and are often interviewed in the areas of mental health, stress, wellbeing and organizational resilience.

"Mental health is a broad term, but this book gives the reader specific and tangible help and insights. The plain English format helps the reader to access the material quickly, and the book is also helpful to coaches and counsellors who want to find ways to support their clients with self-help material. I warmly recommend this."

David Weaver, Senior Partner, David Weaver Consulting, and President, British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

"*Positive Mental Health* is a book full of information about how to enhance your mental health and wellbeing. It is an outstanding toolkit for life and a must-read for anybody suffering from poor mental health or who wants to prevent it."

Professor Sir Cary Cooper, 50th Anniversary Professor of Organizational Psychology and Health, ALLIANCE Manchester Business School at University of Manchester, and President, CIPD Institute of Welfare

"It is great to see mental health issues championed in this useful book. People with mental health issues need to be supported as early as possible with an evidence-based approach and I welcome Davis and Kinder leading the way in this area."

Nick Pahl, CEO, Society of Occupational Medicine

LIDpublishing
.com

£9.99 IN UK / \$14.95 IN US

