

Self Care Strategies



A workbook to help promote
emotional wellbeing



Introduction

This workbook has been prepared to assist individuals who are interested in learning strategies that promote good mental health and wellbeing. It is a collection of a range of information and work sheets that may help in becoming more aware of your emotional health, and/or improving symptoms. You are welcome to use and copy this workbook as you need to, or pass it on to other people. However, if you are reproducing any part of the workbook, it would be appreciated if the source (General Practice Alliance South Gippsland) could be acknowledged.

If you or someone you know is at risk of harming themselves or someone else, it is important that you get help immediately. You can:

- Speak to your doctor (General Practitioner or psychiatrist);
- Telephone the local Mental Health Service Team on 1300 363 322; or
- Telephone Lifeline on 13 11 14, Suicide Helpline (Victoria only) on 1300 651 251, or Suicide Helpline Callback Service on 1300 659 467.

For more information about this document, or other activities under the *Mental Health Support for Drought Affected Communities* Initiative, please contact:

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The bottom line of wellbeing: five ways to enhance wellbeing

Connect...be active...take notice...keep learning...give...

Wellbeing is about feeling good and functioning well. Prioritising these key actions into everyday life and increasing time spent in these activities will help to enhance wellbeing.

Connect

With the people around you – with family, friends, neighbours. At home, school, or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

Be active

Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy, one that suits your level of mobility and fitness.

Take notice

Be curious. Notice the changing seasons.
Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual.
Savour the moment, whether you're on a train, eating lunch or talking with friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling.
Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you.

Keep learning

Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work or school. Fix a bike.
Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident, as well as being fun to do.

Give

Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile.
Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself and your happiness linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and will create connections with the people around you.

Adapted from "Five ways to wellbeing" in Auseinetter Issue 32 – December – No 3/2008
ISSN 1329-8720. Pages 8-13. www.auseineter.com

Daily activity and mood rating form

The first place to start with improving wellbeing is being aware of your mood and how you are coping. This worksheet allows you to record your mood over the days of the week, and link mood with the activities you are doing. You can copy the worksheet to continue monitoring your mood over time. Rate your mood for each day (how good or bad you felt) using the nine-point scale shown. A low number means that you felt bad and a high number means that you felt good.

Very low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 Very happy 9

worst I ever felt worse than so-so so-so better than so-so best I ever felt

Day and date	Mood score	Activities
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

Pleasant activity ideas

One of the best ways to lift mood is to get active. Doing things we enjoy is important to feeling good and reinforces helpful thinking processes. There are countless activities that you could do that you find pleasant and/or rewarding. Here is a list of some ideas, with space at the bottom for your own.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking deep breaths of clean country air. • Meeting someone new. • Planning trips or holidays. • Reading a book. • Having a relaxing bath. • Laughing. • Being with animals. • Talking openly with someone. • Going to a party. • Being with friends. • Gardening. • Wearing new clothes. • Sitting in the sun. • Making food or crafts. • Going to a museum. • Getting letters or cards. • Getting a massage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doing a job well. • Going for a swim or spa. • Learning a new skill. • Being with family. • Writing in a diary. • Reading the newspaper. • Listening to music. • Shopping. • Being with someone I love. • Watching people. • Going to a park. • Having coffee or tea in a café. • Receiving a compliment. • Seeing old friends. • Dancing. • Eating good food. • Cooking nice meals. • Planning a fun activity.
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My own ideas.....

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • • • • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • • • • •
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Coping with negative emotions

What is a negative emotion?

- A negative emotion can be described as any emotion that causes you to feel sad, upset, or angry. It can shake your confidence, and can also cause you to feel negatively towards yourself or to others.
- Negative emotions are not always bad. For example, it is natural to feel sad when someone we love has died. However, it is how we express our emotions that can cause problems.
- Strong negative emotions can upset the balance in a person's life, and can impair a person from thinking rationally and realistically.
- The longer a negative emotion goes on, the more it becomes entrenched in a pattern of thinking, and this then becomes harder to change.
- If not dealt with, prolonged negative emotions can lead to illness, such as depression, and may require more intense treatment.

Why are negative emotions so hard to cope with?

- Emotions have a physical component. Our brain responds to our emotional state by releasing chemicals and hormones, leading to an increased arousal state. This state can be pleasant or unpleasant depending on the nature of the related emotions.
- So, emotions are made up of what we think (psychological) and what we feel (physical), and this is an extremely complex relationship.
- We often lack the appropriate coping skills to deal with negative emotions, but these skills can be learned and developed.

What can we do to cope with negative emotions?

There are lots of things we can do to cope with negative emotions. Some ideas are listed on the next page.

The most important message is to get help if negative emotions go on for a long time, and you feel unable to control them yourself. Some telephone numbers, which may be useful, are listed on page 26 of this workbook.

TIPS for coping with negative emotions

Look at your self-talk

Constantly telling yourself that you're a bad person, or that you're a failure can keep you feeling bad. There are lots of different ways we use negative self-talk, but none of them are helpful. Try to be rational and realistic about things. Where possible, look at what you are saying to yourself, and try to alter this to a more rational and helpful form of self-talk.

Learn how to express emotions appropriately

Learn assertiveness and effective communication skills. Being assertive means that you stand up for yourself, you are polite but firm, you have respect for yourself and others, you try to control your feelings and act rationally, you see choices and don't look at the world in a black and white way, you face up to situations and problem-solve, you have good eye contact with other people and talk in a strong, steady tone of voice, you don't blame other people for how you feel, you use phrases like "I feel", "I think" and "I would like", you are co-operative and consult others in problem-solving.

Learn a relaxation technique

This could be as simple as a breathing technique, or a more complex technique like progressive muscle relaxation. Some people like yoga, meditation, relaxation tapes, or visual imagery. The key is finding something that suits your personality and lifestyle.

Get some physical exercise

Exercising briskly for about 20 minutes at least three times a week can help lift your mood. This is because regular aerobic exercise releases chemicals in your brain called 'endogenous' opiates. This might take a couple of weeks before you notice a significant change, but you will gradually start to feel better. Also, walking every day is a great way to get some fresh air and give you some space to think and be alone.

Take time out for yourself

Doing activities that make us feel good is a great way to banish negative emotions. This might include things like going for a walk, listening to music, having a bath, reading a book, or learning a new skill.

Don't be embarrassed to ask for help

If things are starting to overwhelm you, don't be embarrassed to ask for help. Depression and anxiety are quite common, more than people think, and it's much wiser to seek help earlier rather than later.

Adapted from Mental Health Foundation of Australia (2002). *Dealing with negative emotions*. Melbourne: Author. www.mentalhealthvic.org.au/factsheets.asp

Relaxation on the run

Relaxation is an important way to reduce stress and tension levels, and to cope with negative emotions. Sometimes making time for relaxation is difficult. Here are some ideas for “quick” relaxation:

- Taking deep breaths, focus attention on breathing rather than your thoughts
- Repeating a key word you associate with relaxation
- Have a shower or bath
- Scanning your body for tense spots and relaxing them
- Put a picture of a relaxing place where you can see it
- Imagining your safe place and remembering how you feel there
- Ringing a friend or other supportive person
- Time out
- Practising yoga or tai chi techniques
- Crying as a release
- Reminding yourself “I’m not alone”
- Positive, helpful affirmations (e.g., “I’m calm and relaxed”, “I can do this”)
- Thought-stopping (see below)
- A breathing exercise, such as Benson’s Relaxation Technique (see next page)

THOUGHT STOPPING

This might be helpful in getting rid of worrying thoughts (e.g., when you’re trying to sleep or when negative thoughts won’t go away):

1. Say “stop” to yourself firmly.
2. Write out in your mind the letters “S.T.O.P.”
3. Switch your thoughts to something pleasant or take some deep breaths (focus on breathing rather than thoughts).

Benson's Relaxation Technique

Herbert Benson developed The Relaxation Response about 50 years ago, and it is a well recognised breathing and visualisation exercise that works. Benson recommended that the exercise should be practised for 20 minutes per day, but research has found that even 10 minutes per day is effective in reducing stress. It may take daily practice over 2-3 weeks before you recognise changes. It can also help to relax you for sleep. It is a simple exercise that can be done almost anywhere and anytime.

Step 1.

Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes.

Step 2.

Concentrate on your breathing.

Step 3.

To help you concentrate, visualise something that goes in and out (opens and closes, moves backwards and forwards) in rhythm with your breathing (e.g., a curtain flowing in a slight breeze, a child's swing).

Step 4.

Concentrate on breathing through focusing on the image. As your thoughts wander, bring yourself back by increasing your focus on the breath and the image you are visualising.

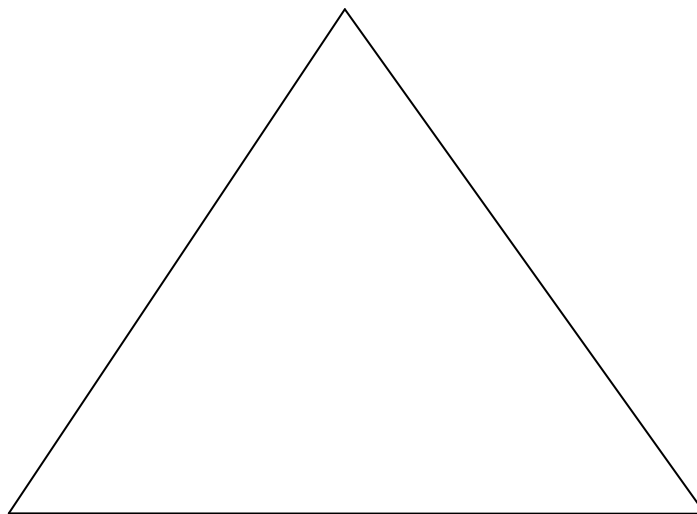
Step 5.

The final step is to say silently to yourself, the word "relax" on the outward breath. Use another word (e.g., "calm" or "one") if this is not suitable.

Relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviour

Behaviour, thoughts and feelings all influence each other. If you are feeling sad or low, it is impossible to change this feeling without somehow changing your thoughts and behaviour. For example, if you feel low, instead of withdrawing, engage in a pleasant activity (e.g., talk to a friend, practise a relaxation technique). Also, instead of thinking in unhelpful ways (e.g., I never get anything done, I'm stupid), replace with more helpful thoughts (e.g., This is a passing phase, I've succeeded in many areas, I can help myself to improve my mood).

Feelings e.g. low mood



Behaviour

*e.g. withdrawal,
lack of self-care*

Thinking

*e.g. unhelpful
thoughts*

Thoughts and feelings worksheet

Once we recognise the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviour, we can become more active in recognising how particular situations can influence our thoughts and feelings. This helps us to become more aware of our thinking patterns, which in turn then helps us to change faulty or unhelpful thinking. Try this exercise yourself to help build awareness.

Situation	Feelings	Thoughts
Example: Being criticised	Angry, hurt, tearful	I never get things right, I'm stupid

High stress and tension times

Now you can work through identifying specific situations that cause high levels of stress, and alter how you behave at these times to reduce the stress level. Explore alternative options to behaving differently when filling in this worksheet.

High Stress & Tension Times	Warning Signs	What can I do differently to reduce these times?	Relaxation Tips
e.g. dinner time with family	e.g. yelling, overwhelmed	e.g.	e.g.

Decreasing unhelpful thoughts

The aims of challenging your thinking are to create responses to your negative thoughts. This will:

- Reduce your level of distress, and
- Reduce the amount of time you spend feeling distressed.

Challenging your thinking involves:

- Putting your worries and concerns into perspective;
- Looking for shades of grey, rather than the black and white extremes;
- Debating and reasoning with your negative thoughts (gathering evidence for and against);
- Correcting any thinking errors you are making; and
- Acknowledging difficulties where they exist.

Remember that challenging your thinking is not positive thinking.

It aims to help you make realistic judgments based on accurate assumptions and beliefs.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF WHEN CHALLENGING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

- Is the negative thought consistent with the evidence?
- What is another way of looking at the situation?
- Is this alternative view more consistent with the evidence?
- What would you say to a friend who had this concern?
- What is the worst thing that could happen?
- How likely is it that this will happen?
- How would you deal with it if it happened?
- How much time and attention is this thought taking?

Increasing helpful thoughts

Ways to decrease unhelpful thoughts

- Thought interruption (e.g., “S.T.O.P. STOP! I’m not going to think that now”).
- Worrying time schedule. If you need to think about certain negative thoughts, then schedule a time to do so (no more than 30 minutes per day). Limit your negative thoughts to that time period.
- Blow-up technique. Take your negative thought to a ridiculous extreme. What is the worst that you can imagine?
- 0-100 scale. Determine what would be the 100% terrible event that may happen in your life. Then, determine what would be 50% terrible and 25% terrible. Now, place your current concern in context. You will probably find that it is not 100% terrible.
- If I can’t change it, I can learn to accept it. As previously discussed, point out the importance of developing acceptance of events, habits etc. that one cannot change.

Ways to increase helpful thoughts

- Carry cards with helpful self-statements written on them. Review them frequently throughout the day.
- Notice what you accomplish rather than what you do not accomplish, by making a list of daily successes.
- Reward yourself with helpful thoughts (e.g., “I did well to finish my homework tonight”).
- Review positives in your life.
- Make a list of your achievements.
- Compliment yourself.

Cognitive distortions

Many of the thoughts we have about situations in our lives are non-constructive and unhelpful in improving emotional wellbeing. These are called “cognitive (or thinking) distortions”. Using words like “must” or “should”, using catastrophising phrases such as “it’s awful”, or overgeneralising by using words such as “never” or “always” are examples of cognitive distortions. The next page will look at some ways of challenging these thinking patterns, but for now, the definitions of cognitive distortions are listed.

1. All or nothing thinking

You see things in black and white categories. If your performance falls short of ‘perfect’, you see yourself as a total failure.

2. Overgeneralisation

You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.

3. Mental filter

You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively so that your vision of all reality becomes darkened, like the drop of ink that discolours the entire beaker of water.

4. Disqualifying the positive

You reject positive experiences by insisting they ‘don’t count’ for some reason or other. In this way you can maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by our everyday experiences.

5. Jumping to conclusions

You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion.

- a) Mind Reading: You arbitrarily conclude that someone is reacting negatively to you, and you don’t bother to check this out.
- b) The Fortune Teller Error: you anticipate that things will turn out badly, and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already established fact.

Cognitive distortions (continued)

6. Magnification (catastrophising) or minimisation

You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your mistake or someone else's achievement), or you inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny (your own desirable qualities or the other fellow's imperfections). This is also called the 'binocular trick'.

7. Emotional reasoning

You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things are: "I feel it, therefore it must be true".

8. "Should" statements

You try to motivate yourself with "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts", as if you had to be whipped and punished before you could be expected to do anything. "Musts" and "oughts" are also offenders. The emotional consequence is guilt. When you direct "should" statements toward others, you can feel anger, resentment and frustration.

9. Labelling and mislabelling

This is an extreme form of overgeneralisation. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself: "I'm a loser". When someone else's behaviour rubs you the wrong way, you attach a negative label to him: "He's a pain in the neck". Mislabelling involves describing an event with language that is highly coloured and emotionally loaded.

10. Personalisation

You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event which in fact you were not primarily responsible for.

Adapted from Burns, D. D. (1980). *Feeling good: The new mood therapy*. New York: Signet/New American Library.

Challenging unhelpful thinking patterns

This exercise demonstrates the link between a situation, the associated thoughts, consequent feelings and outcomes. Use the example as a guide to generate some of your own personal examples.

<u>EXAMPLE</u>	
<i>Situation</i>	Work supervisor helps you to finish your report.
<i>Thoughts</i>	"I can't stand it. That just proves I'm hopeless at everything."
<i>Feelings</i>	Defeated, hurt, sad.
<i>What I say or do</i>	"All right then, if you're so good at this, you can take over my work too. I clearly can't do it properly."
<i>Outcomes</i>	Supervisor mistakenly believes you don't want support.

<u>ALTERNATIVE EXAMPLE</u>	
<i>Situation</i>	Work supervisor helps you to finish your report.
<i>Alternative thoughts</i>	"Thank goodness that report is finally done."
<i>New feelings</i>	Relieved, less anxious.
<i>What I say or do</i>	"That's great, thanks."
<i>Outcomes</i>	Supervisor offers help more often.

Once you become aware of unhelpful thinking patterns, it is important to practise disputing these thoughts and replace them with more helpful thoughts, as below.

1. For "shoulds" and "musts" (e.g., "I should be more organised")

REPLACE WITH:

"Why should I or the other person behave in this particular way?"
"Why must an event occur just the way I wanted it?"

2. For "terribles" and "awfuls" (e.g., "It's awful the way my mother-in-law drops in all the time")

REPLACE WITH:

"I would have liked this person to do or say this, but is there any good reason why he (or she) must do or say what I'd like?"

3. For "overgeneralisations" (e.g., "No one ever takes any notice of me")

REPLACE WITH:

"Just because this didn't work out the way I wanted, is there any good evidence that it can't work out better another time?"

Communication styles

Recognising the communication style of yourself and others can help you become more aware of how communication can contribute to your wellbeing. It can also help you to start practising strategies that encourage assertive communication.

	PASSIVE	ASSERTIVE	INDIRECT	AGGRESSIVE
BASIC ATTITUDE	I'm not okay	I'm okay and you're okay	You're not okay but I'll let you think you are	You're not okay
PHILOSOPHY	Take care of others' rights and needs without regard to one's own	Take care of own and others' rights and needs	Take care of own rights and needs while letting others think you care about their rights/needs	Own rights and needs are met at the expense of others
BEHAVIOUR	Retreating Giving up Resenting situation	Confrontation Honesty Negotiation	Manipulating Sarcasm	Nasty comments Put-downs Screaming
RESPONSE FROM OTHERS	Attention Sympathy	Respect Acceptance Comfort	Suspicion Confusion Feels manipulated	Fear Hurt Humiliation Defensiveness Aggression

Strategies to support assertive communication

Assertive listening

The main goals of assertive listening are:

- to let the other know that you want to understand his/her point of view;
- to understand accurately what another is saying; and
- to let the other know that he/she has been understood.

This is different from agreement – you can understand what someone else is saying, but still disagree with him/her. Examples of how you could show wintere interest in hearing and understanding another person’s point of view include:

- I’d like to hear your views on.....
- I think we’re approaching this from two different perspectives
- I’d like to hear thoughts on.....

Summarising

Use summarising to relay back what you have heard. This indicates that you have been listening and understood what has been said. It also allows you to check that you have understood correctly, and clarify any confusing points.

Use phrases such as:

- I heard you say..... Is that correct?
- If I understand you correctly, you’re saying that.....

Body language

Looking directly at the other person shows you are giving your full attention. Maintain eye contact, lean forward slightly, and maintain a relaxed open posture (no crossed arms/legs) to indicate interest and willingness to listen.

“I” statements

See next page.

Time out

If you are unable to communicate assertively due to anger or because the other person is angry, time out may be required. This gives both parties the space to process their thoughts and calm down before addressing the issue again. It’s important when using time out to also schedule a time when you can both get together and address the issue. Using the following phrase may be helpful:

- I’m feeling angry/frustrated/overwhelmed (name the emotion) at the moment. Can we agree to take some time out to consider this issue, and schedule to discuss this later?
- How about tonight after the kids are in bed we sit down and listen to what each other has to say?

“I” statements

“I” statements are a great way to communicate assertively, as they allow you to express how you are feeling about a situation or event without placing blame. They also allow you to offer an alternative to the situation which would encourage a “win-win”.

I feel (describe the feeling you had as a result of the situation)

When you (describe the activating event or situation)

Because (explain what message you got from this, the self-talk that it linked into)

I would rather (give an alternative action or response)

Example:

I feel stupid and incompetent

When you criticise me for making a mistake

Because it doesn't seem like I ever get things right

I would rather you noticed and commented on the good things I do instead of the mistakes I make

Problem solving worksheet

Often we can feel overwhelmed by the number of issues creating stress in our lives, and these problems can mount up because we don't have the energy or skills to address them. An exercise in structured problem solving (such as this worksheet), can help to separate issues and generate realistic solutions.

1. List **all** the problems that are currently bothering you.

2. Select **one** problem to work on.

3. Brainstorm and list **all** possible solutions, including the most unrealistic ones. Do **not** judge whether these approaches are good or bad. Just brainstorm.

4. Now look at the pros and cons for each of the above possible solutions. Thinking of the consequences of each solution, list arguments for and against it.

Solution	For	Against

Solution	For	Against

Solution	For	Against

Solution	For	Against

Solution	For	Against

5. Looking at the balance of pros and cons, select the solution that has the most arguments 'for' and the least arguments 'against'.

6. Describe the individual steps that you need to take in order to carry out this solution. Be realistic about what needs to happen, how long it will take, and what resources you might need.

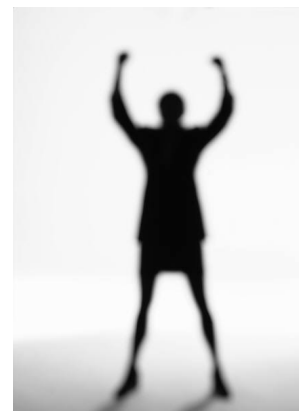
7. Take the first step at the first available opportunity.

Well done! And good luck!

Focusing on my strengths

A great way to build self-esteem and promote helpful thinking, is to remind yourself of your good qualities, your successes, your strengths, the good aspects of your life, and so on. Writing a letter to yourself, or simply making a list, is a good place to start. You can then put this in a special place and remind yourself often, or read it over when you are feeling down.

Dear Me



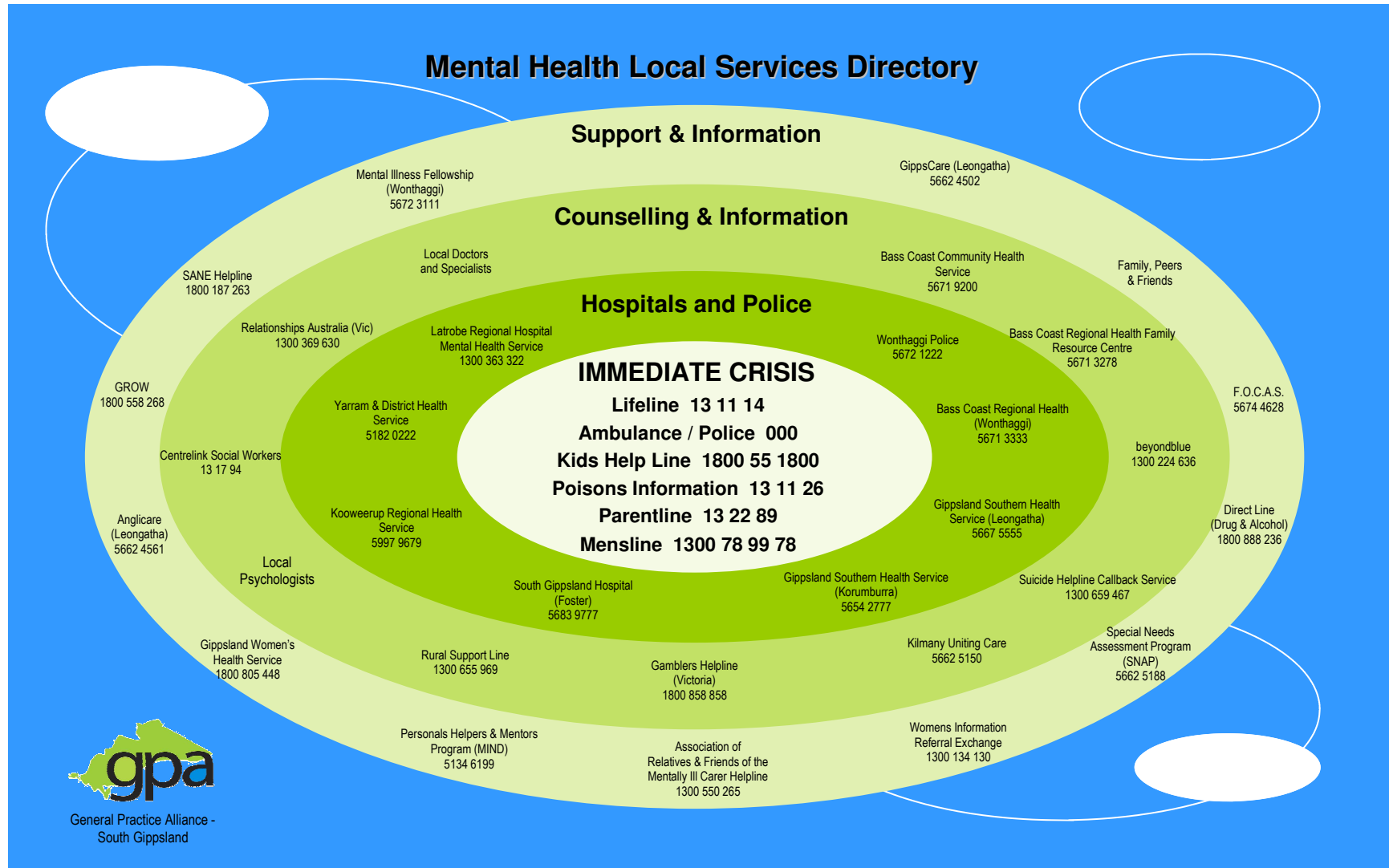
Goal setting and action planning worksheet

You can photocopy this worksheet to use with any issue that you want to change or something you want to achieve. Simply fill in the issue you have chosen (e.g., I starting a new hobby), then work through the sections, identifying your goals (e.g., identify things I like doing, identify local hobby groups), the strategies you will use (e.g., look through local paper and phone book, look through books at library, make a list of my skills and interests etc.), the timelines (e.g., start hobby within 3 months), and any specific resources you might need (e.g., library). Good luck!

Issue	
Goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3.
Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
Timelines	
Resources	



Support services contact details



My notes.....