



CULTURE CARE CONNECT

Selfcare Guide

*To support positive mental health and
wellbeing*



NACCHO
National Aboriginal Community
Controlled Health Organisation

What is in this guide?

Your mental health is **important**, which is why this guide is focused on skills and strategies that you can use to care for yourself **first**, so you can care for your peers and your community.

This guide contains information on positive mental health and wellbeing, strategies for developing mental health skills, and checklists so you can check in on yourself regularly. It is only for informational and educational purposes and is not therapy or any form of treatment.

How do I use this guide?

So, what is here? In this guide you'll find information on mental health, tips about how to develop self-compassion, ideas for everyday mindfulness, different kinds of coping skills, a mental health check-in for yourself, and a guide to help you identify the unique support pathways around you. There are also links to more resources on the back page of this guide.

Care for self,
care for others



Make this guide your own

You'll notice that some of the pages have spots for you to write in. We encourage you to screenshot these pages, mark them up on your phone, and save them so you have them on hand when you need them. You can use these pages as they are or edit them to include strategies you find useful too.

You can also share with your friends and family, as they can help you look after your mental health.



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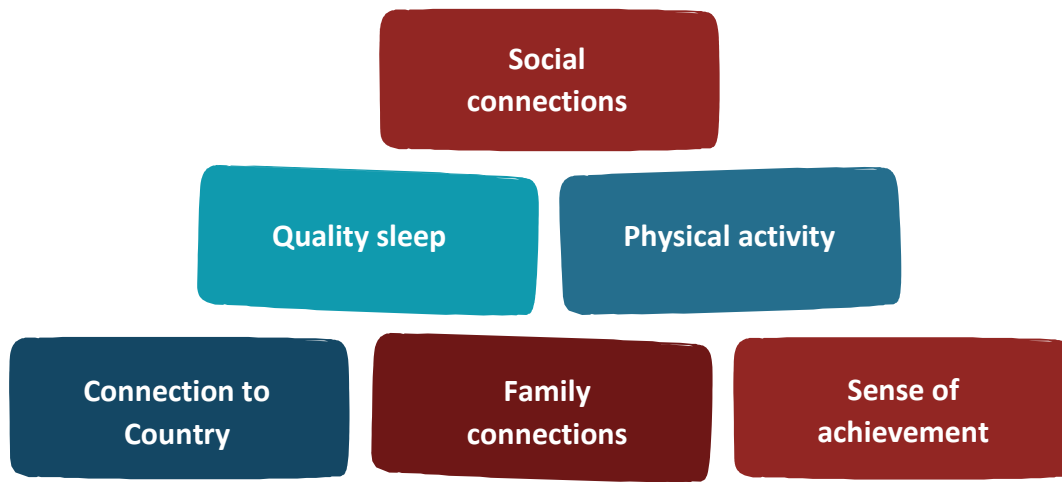
Positive mental health and wellbeing

What is mental health?

Mental health is about more than just the absence of mental illness. Instead, mental health is a state of wellbeing where a person is able to cope with normal stresses in their lives and function well at work, with friends and family and make a contribution to their community.

Of course, part of mental health is also noticing the signs that you may be experiencing difficulty and getting help when needed.

Many experts suggest that wellbeing is built from multiple elements, or building blocks. Some of these are personal factors, or things you can build, that include:



Some of the skills in this self care guide have also been linked to wellbeing.

This is why it is important to identify your wellbeing building blocks, develop mental health skills to deal with problems as they arise, and know how to identify signs that you may need to seek help and support for your mental health.

The next pages introduce some skills that can help support your mental health to help you care for yourself so you can care for others

What are some examples of the building blocks in your life that enhance your sense of wellbeing?



Protecting your mental health

Mental health impacts

Those experiences in relation to your role that may be associated with risk for mental health impacts include:

- Exposure to incidents or events that involve significant injury or loss of life
- Where there is personal relevance to the incident or event (e.g., a victim is known to you)
- Experiencing an injury yourself during a response to an incident or event
- Experiencing dangerous situations such as becoming trapped yourself when attending an incident or event
- Ongoing exposure to repeated events over time (known as cumulative trauma)

It is normal to be impacted by traumatic or distressing events. Research has shown that the best way to avoid long-term impacts is to discuss your feelings and experiences with someone you trust. If necessary, seek help promptly if you notice changes in your behaviour or feelings or impacts on your relationships with others.

Reducing the impact

Factors that may help to reduce the impact of potentially traumatising events include:

- Talking with others about your experiences in your emergency services role
- Social support (receiving support AND giving it to others)
- Keeping physically healthy and engaging in physical activity
- Getting enough sleep and eating well
- Engaging with supports and counselling
- Reducing stress in other parts of your life
- Keeping alcohol intake within recommended limits

Your mental health and wellbeing is important

To be able to function effectively in your role and contribute to your workplace and community, learning and maintaining skills for your mental health and wellbeing is just as important as the operational skills you develop.

Some of the skills to help support mental health, along with tips for how to practice these skills, are included in the next pages of this guide.



Skill spotlight 1 – Mindfulness

Mindfulness is more than breathing

Mindfulness is about maintaining a present moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, sensations, and environment, without judgement. Mindfulness has been linked to positive outcomes like better mental health.

Here are a few simple and quick mindfulness exercises that you can do as you go about your day. You don't need to be sitting in silence, or in a particular position to do these mindful activities. You can do them while waiting in a queue, preparing meals, sitting at your desk at work; or just about anywhere. This skill spotlight covers three simple techniques to being more in tune with your body and your mind.

Scan your body

Body scans are a way for us to pay **mindful attention** to all parts of our body and notice how we feel in the moment. You can do this activity wherever you are standing, sitting, or lying down. You can do this with lots of different activities in your everyday life, try these!

Starting from your feet, notice the way they **feel**. Are they touching the ground? Feel the points of contact and pressure that your feet create.

Allow your attention to move upwards to focus on your legs and observe the **sensation** in your legs.

Bring your **awareness** up higher in your body, to your stomach, your chest, and your back. Pay attention to how each part of your body feels.

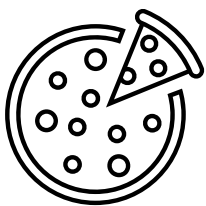
Notice how your shoulders feel, and notice the sensations in your neck, head, and face. If you notice your **thoughts** wandering, bring your awareness back to your body scan.

Lastly, notice your **breath** as you breathe in and out.

Once you have scanned from your toes to the tip of your head, take a **moment** to notice any differences in how you feel in your body.

Everyday mindfulness

Try activities that you do in your everyday life, but do them 'mindfully'. This means to focus on the activity and the sensation, moment to moment, as you do them. Let's try mindful eating...



Pay attention to the aroma of the food

Notice how your hand and arm knows to bring the food just to the right spot

Notice how the food tastes in your mouth

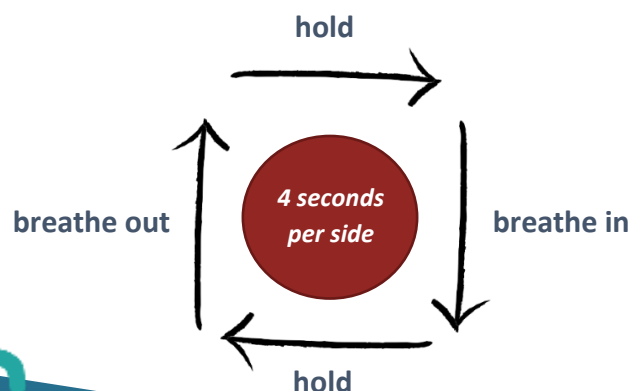
Pay close attention to how that changes as you chew

Notice the intention to swallow

Mindful slow breathing

This exercise is something you are already great at – breathing. The aim is to slow and regulate your breathing through **square breathing**. Each side of the square should take four seconds.

Notice the sensations in your chest, stomach, and nostrils as you breathe.



Skill spotlight 2 – Self Compassion

Treat yourself as you would treat a friend

Caring for yourself is an important part of helping you care for others in your role. Practicing care and compassion for yourself helps you to have the emotional resources you need to support and care for others, including in your program role – think of it like putting the oxygen mask on yourself in an aeroplane before helping others.

Research shows that self compassion was connected to higher wellbeing as well as lower levels of psychological distress.

But self compassion is more than just being nice to yourself! An important part of self compassion is practicing skills to help ourselves during difficult times and struggles. In fact, self compassion is itself a skill that can be developed with practice.

So, what is self compassion?



Try this self compassion check

There are lots of ways to practice self compassion, but one example is to do a brief self compassion check when you notice difficult thoughts or feelings coming up. This takes three steps.

1. Notice the difficult thought or feeling and that this is a moment of suffering
2. Remember that you are not alone in suffering, many people in the world are suffering at any point in time.
3. Consider what you can do to express warmth and understanding to yourself in this moment. What would you say to a friend who is struggling?



Skill Spotlight 3 – Checking In

Mental health self check-in

Everyone is different and reacts in different ways, but some signs that you might need to seek support are:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Not wanting to do things you usually enjoy
- Avoiding social events and social interactions
- Distressing thoughts or memories about incidents or experiences coming up
- Feeling teary more often than usual
- Feeling on edge more often than usual
- Feeling irritable or acting in irritable ways
- On the look out for reminders of past stressful events

Stress check pit stop

Take a moment to notice your heart rate, your muscle tension, and your breathing rate.

Do you notice you are tense?



Actively relax your muscles

Heart racing, or breathing fast?



Slow down your breathing with slow mindful breathing

If you have check off some of these signs, and would like to seek support, please engage with your support pathways.

You can identify the supports available to you and your unique support pathways on the next page.



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My Support Pathways

A self-care plan can help you enhance your health and wellbeing and manage your stress.

Here you can identify your support pathways that will help you to sustain positive self-care in the long-term.

My friends, family and kin <i>Who are your immediate social supports in your family and friends?</i>
Peers in my work group/network <i>Who are your social supports at work?</i>
People in my Community <i>How about the broader Community?</i>
Leaders in your wider organisation and networks <i>How about leaders and other people in your wider organisation?</i>
Formal peer support <i>How do you access your formal peer support contacts?</i>
Support phone numbers <i>What about other agency supports and support phone numbers?</i>
Healers, natural helpers, psychologists, employee assistance <i>Where can you seek cultural or clinical treatment?</i>



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