

Wellness Recovery Action Plans

The Wellness Recovery Action Plan is a self-help wellness tool developed by Mary Ellen Copeland. Mary Ellen Copeland is a consumer herself, diagnosed with bipolar disorder. She is an internationally known speaker and the author of many books and self-help resources. The WRAP can be used for both mental and physical health conditions. There are specific WRAP resources for people who have fibromyalgia, people in the military, for kids, for those who have dual diagnoses and it also has been translated into Spanish.

The Wellness Toolbox

It's important to get a Personal Wellness Vision in mind. Before starting to write your plan, think about this question: What am I like when I'm well? This is what we're after – however you define it, you deserve to feel good.

Then, brainstorm all the ways you take care of yourself – all the things that you know help you cope, stay well and feel great. These two things stay at the front of your WRAP.

The Wellness Recovery Action Plan

The WRAP helps people identify the most important components of staying well and is organized in five sections:

1. The Daily Maintenance Plan
2. Triggers
3. Early Warning Signs
4. When Things are Breaking Down
5. The Crisis Plan

The Daily Maintenance Plan

So what does it take, every single day, for you to feel this good? It's important to identify all the core components of your daily regimen to be well and stay well. Most people have a food component to their WRAP – eating three times a day, for example. Sleep is also a core piece of wellness – how many hours are optimal for you to be well? This is different from those New Year's resolutions that we do each year – this is not what you know is good for you but have a hard time really doing. This is a big commitment. It's what you agree is necessary AND that you commit to doing on a daily basis. In addition, write out a daily schedule that includes what you're putting on the plan. It helps to see where these important activities are going to fit in to busy schedules and busy lives.

Triggers

Triggers are those things that throw you off balance. They aren't there all the time – they're intermittent - and can be situations or people or seasons of the year. Triggers can be things that remind you of people or events from your past, which though gone, can

create the same old negative feelings and responses in you. Some people are triggered by criticism, others by the anniversary of the death of a loved one, or some by the holidays. One possibility to deal with triggers is to avoid them. This can be a perfectly healthy response. But sometimes, triggers happen. This section of the WRAP asks you to name your triggers and how you will avoid them, or ways to cope when they happen.

Early Warning Signs

Early warning signs are the first indicators that you are not feeling well. These are the subtle changes that point to the need for action in order to get back on track with your wellness. It's important to look at what the first clues are – this empowers you to take steps that will correct the problem. Some examples of EWS are starting to isolate (not leaving the house or not taking phone calls), problems with sleep (waking up too early or having difficulty getting to sleep), skipping an appointment with a healthcare professional, feeling angry at little things... each person will have a different set of signs. The key is that they are the earliest indications – this plan asks that people not suffer so long before acting on their own behalf.

Once your EWS are identified, your next step is to create action steps that will help you get back to feeling well.

When Things Are Breaking Down

Even when your symptoms are getting worse, there is still time to act – time to get back to feeling well. This section asks you to identify the moderate signs of not feeling well. This is usually an increase in the early warning signs, such as having a whole week of isolating or feeling angry all day for a few days. Each person defines what the next level is. This section also asks that you come up with action steps – what would help you turn the tide here and get you back to feeling well.

The Crisis Plan

Sometimes, despite our efforts, we may need to take care of ourselves by letting others care for us, or by being hospitalized. This section identifies what you want to have happen when you are unable to care for yourself. It is an Advance Directive: durable power of attorney for mental healthcare.

Resources

Network of Care (click on the heart entitled WRAP)

<http://sanmateo.networkofcare.org/mh/home/index.cfm>

This site has an electronic version of the plan, along with a video presentation by Mary Ellen Copeland, walking you through the basics of the plan.

Mary Ellen Copeland's website

<http://www.mentalhealthrecovery.com/shop/index.php>

