

Lifemaps

*...the youth work journey to
build mental health*



Learning
Intrinsic motivation
Flow
Emotion
Mindful
Accomplishment
Purpose
Social connections

Who this guide is for?

This guide is for adults who are concerned with supporting and building flourishing young people. Workers, volunteers, teachers, classroom assistants, play workers, youth workers, health professionals, counsellors, parents and adults will gain new strategies and new thinking skills which they can use with young people across a range of settings.

Why now?

For too long, the emphasis for mental health policy in Northern Ireland has leaned towards medical responses to mental illness, rather than building mental health. International evidence suggests that, in the long run, this neither promises to be the best strategy for the improvement of young people's mental health, nor is this an cost-effective use of resources. Preventative and early intervention work have yielded the best results and outcomes for young people, whilst also providing best value for money.

Why is it useful?

This guide will lead to more effective methods in building young people's mental health for less cost. The use of the LIFEMAPS approach by workers and volunteers working with young people, is easily adopted but productive for building the resilience and mental well-being of young people.

Where has it come from?

This guide has emerged from the **Right Here** project, a five year mental health pilot project for 16-25 year olds, across four locations – Fermanagh, Sheffield, Newham and Brighton and Hove funded by a partnership of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Mental Health Foundation. Right Here Fermanagh was a nine organisation strong partnership managed by YouthAction Northern Ireland. (See appendix 1 for information on Right Here).

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Introduction and the purpose of this guide

Context

Specific challenges exist for the mental health of a society in conflict (or emerging from conflict), such as Northern Ireland. Data compared across the UK, showed that 'in Northern Ireland, mental health needs are 25% higher than the UK average linked to high levels of deprivation and the impact of the troubles' (DHSSPS, 2004). These crucial environmental factors have been echoed consistently in regional research into the impact of violent conflict on the mental health and suicide rates of the population (Tomlinson, 2007; O'Neill et al, 2014). O'Neill et al (2014) record that of almost 30% of the population who suffer mental health problems, nearly half of those are directly related to the Troubles. The study goes further to emphasise how the trauma transmits across generations, with 'mental health issues and suicidal behaviour likely to be transmitted to future generations' (ibid, 2014).

Research evidence from Northern Ireland shows that around 20% of young people suffer from a mental illness at any one time (Shubotz, 2010). Females are more likely to be affected by mental health problems than males (ibid). However, suicide rates have stubbornly persisted and male suicides have steadily increased over the past two decades (DHSSPS, 2006).

Much of the mental health policy has been dominated by three prominent policy drivers - The Bamford Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability (2007), Promoting Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan (2003-2008) and the 'Protect Life' Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan (2006-2011). The Bamford Review continues to dominate the landscape for those who have mental illnesses. The other two strategies have seen extensions to their lifespans, with new action plans being developed and implemented, to date.

The current policy and practice responses to emerging mental health problems are having a limited impact on young people's lives, costing pain in human terms and costing the NHS in financial terms (Shubotz and McArdle, 2014). More needs to be done and this guide offers one way forward in building young people's mental health.

Young people and mental health

Young and under pressure.

Young people's lives are complex and pressurised. Whilst young people are seen as the generation that 'never had it so good', this view doesn't capture the high levels of apathy, disaffection and disjuncture among young generations. Current research reveals high levels of unhappiness and depression amongst young people, with 1 in 10 young people feeling unable to cope with everyday living (The Princes Trust, 2013). Furthermore, the Nuffield Foundation (2013) found that the number of young people aged 15-16 who have depression had doubled from the 1980s to the 2000s.

There are growing pressures from external sources through life in a digital world of instant communication, with unrealistic expectations arising from comparisons with wide demographics through this on-line life (Hulme, 2009). Young people express their inability to deal with the complexities of everyday living and particularly managing to face and learn through failure. Increasingly social perfectionism offers persistent stress on young lives. The problems for youth are not material in the same way as for previous generations (although poverty persists), yet the peer, social and psychological pressures are heightened for this generation.

Young men and young women.

The lives of young women are different to those of young men, with deeply rooted gender influences and messages for young men and young women from birth onwards. Different lifestyles and interests are pursued following the different influences on young men or young women. Emotions are expressed differently and perceptions of the world can vary greatly. The talents of young women and young men are often pursued along stereotypical lines, with young women and young men encouraged to develop traditional strengths and traditional skills. Leisure pursuits are often gendered from early childhood, with influences of fashion, school, music and media felt at each stage of development.

The traditional messages and expectations of how young men should behave and how young women should behave can pour stress onto young people. Many of the anxieties and strains that weigh heavily

upon young men are different to those most prominent for young women. Young men face issues of masculinity that have mental health impacts – living up to macho actions; not talking about their feelings; a deep aversion to asking for help; sense of loss in terms of identity and the embarrassment they face if they 'look after themselves' in anything other than physique. Young women face fear of embarrassment tied up with fitting in to expectations – not wanting to say the wrong thing, talk to the 'geek', do the wrong thing or look wrong. They obsess over how to act in mixed company and amongst other girls. They obsess over self-image – caught between being like others and being individual. They struggle with the mixed messages from media about sexual and relationship expectations of young women and young men. All of these can lead to self-loathing and hating behaviours which undercuts the mental health of young women.

The pursuit of an 'acceptable' identity can pre-occupy many young men and young women and cause mental health problems. However, when young people receive messages that challenge the stereotype, these provide an alternative way of being for young people, relieving some of the societal expectations and pressures.

School life and mental health.

School occupies a great deal of time and head-space for young people, whether going well or going badly. School is the place of encouragement (when young people feel good about their ability, achievement, peers and future); but equally can be a source of discouragement and distress (when young people feel out-of-their-depth, unhappy about interactions with staff and peers, or not achieving as they would like). The impact is very often that young men and young women feel unable to cope with the daily weight that these feelings bear down. These stressors are well recognised by teachers as de-motivators in academic and social life for those who feel these most severely.

Positive interventions in the school setting can have deeply felt positive changes for young people. The LIFEMAPS approach can be adopted to improve the well-being of the whole school community (teachers, peers and parents).

Young and gifted.

With all the pressures of life for young people, the ability to navigate through is a talent and skill that

can be nurtured. Young people can use creativity, wily ways and optimism to approach complex and difficult situations. The LIFEMAPS model is an assets-based approach that builds on the strengths that young people have and creates new perspective and behaviours that foster good mental health activities.

Methods to build young people's mental health

What is youth work?

Youth work helps young people to discover things about themselves, others and the world around them. A non-formal approach is used to build upon the skills and knowledge young people already own, with a view to them learning ways to enjoy and improve their own lives. Youth work uses games, exercises, interactions, conversations and activities as ways to excite and ignite the talents and motivations of young people. Exploration and liveliness are characteristic of youth work and appeal to some young people who find formal settings overly-restrictive.

The strength of youth work is not just in working to develop the skills of a single individual, without attention to the small and large world around them. Youth work values both the individual and the community. This means that young people can derive both personal and community benefits - reducing an individual's or community's alienation, promoting a sense of belonging, building wider purpose and meaning. It is this cross fertilisation of disciplines which promotes a blend of healthy people and healthy communities.

Some key concepts under-pinning youth work are.....

- Young people are viewed as assets, not problems.
- Young people are valued as young people, not merely for the future populations they may become.
- Young people are capable of making decisions on their own lives and the lives of others.
- Young people are best understood through listening to them and understanding their lives.
- Young people are best nurtured when you begin at their starting point.
- Learning is memorable when it is fun, enjoyable and salient for young people.



These approaches can be embraced across the professions and weaved into other fields such as teaching, health and social care, to improve outcomes for young people.

What is positive psychology?

The field of positive psychology is best described as:

'Psychology is not just the study of weakness and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken, it is nurturing what is best within ourselves.'
(Seligman, 1998)

Positive psychology is a scientific, evidence-based discipline. It is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within them and to enhance the experience of being alive. Happiness and mental well-being are the desired outcomes of positive psychology. Whilst the word 'happiness' can be off-putting to some, there is a growing understanding that feeling good and doing well in life go hand-in-hand. Research and treatment in the realm of mental health has traditionally had a focus on 'what is wrong with people?'; Positive psychology, however asks the question 'What is going right with people and what can be built upon?'

Corey Keyes (2002) has tackled a common misconception about mental health – that idea that mental health is mental illness, with the commonly held belief that only those with mental health problems need to think about their mental health. Keyes work separates mental illness from mental health as two parallel continuums. Within this, people with complete mental health are described as 'flourishing' in life with high levels of well-being and living within an optimal range of human functioning. Research has suggested that approximately 20% of the population can be classified as flourishing (Keyes, 2007; Huppert and So, 2009) while 55% are in moderate mental health, with 15% being understood as 'languishing'. This is a state in which people are described as neither mentally ill nor mentally healthy but rather not functioning well; psychologically, socially or emotionally. To be flourishing then is to be filled with positive emotion and doing well psychologically and socially. People with incomplete mental health are languishing in life with low well-being. There is the potential for much movement between states, either upwards or downwards.

The aim of any work with young people around mental health should, therefore, ensure that a focus of programmes and interventions is around helping them flourish, not simply trying to stop them feeling bad or the prevention of mental illness. This involves working with an individual's cognitive skills set and emotional range; but have further goals to create connections to communities and a sense that you have something to contribute to the world – the skills of 'a meaningful life' (Seligman, 2006).

Skills for all those working with young people.

Many people work with young people across their young lifespan. Those who have successes with young people have a set of skills and approaches that are worthy of note and some attention. The particular success for a young person's mental health is often the creation of a positive adult-young person relationship that offers space for them to learn and grow:

'...to build a more effective relationship in which a thirst for aspiration and achievement will be nurtured'.
(Nicholls, 2012)

When young people were asked to identify elements of positive relationships which they had with adults, their responses included:

'education and challenge... but not teaching...'
'open styles of communication...'
'...personal support...'
'...and empowering experiences'
'...leading to two-way personal relationships'.
(Davies & Merton, 2010)

These comments were about specific relationships with youth workers, but they identify universal skills found in experienced and effective health and social care professionals, teachers and parents who can build flourishing relationships.

LIFEMAPS

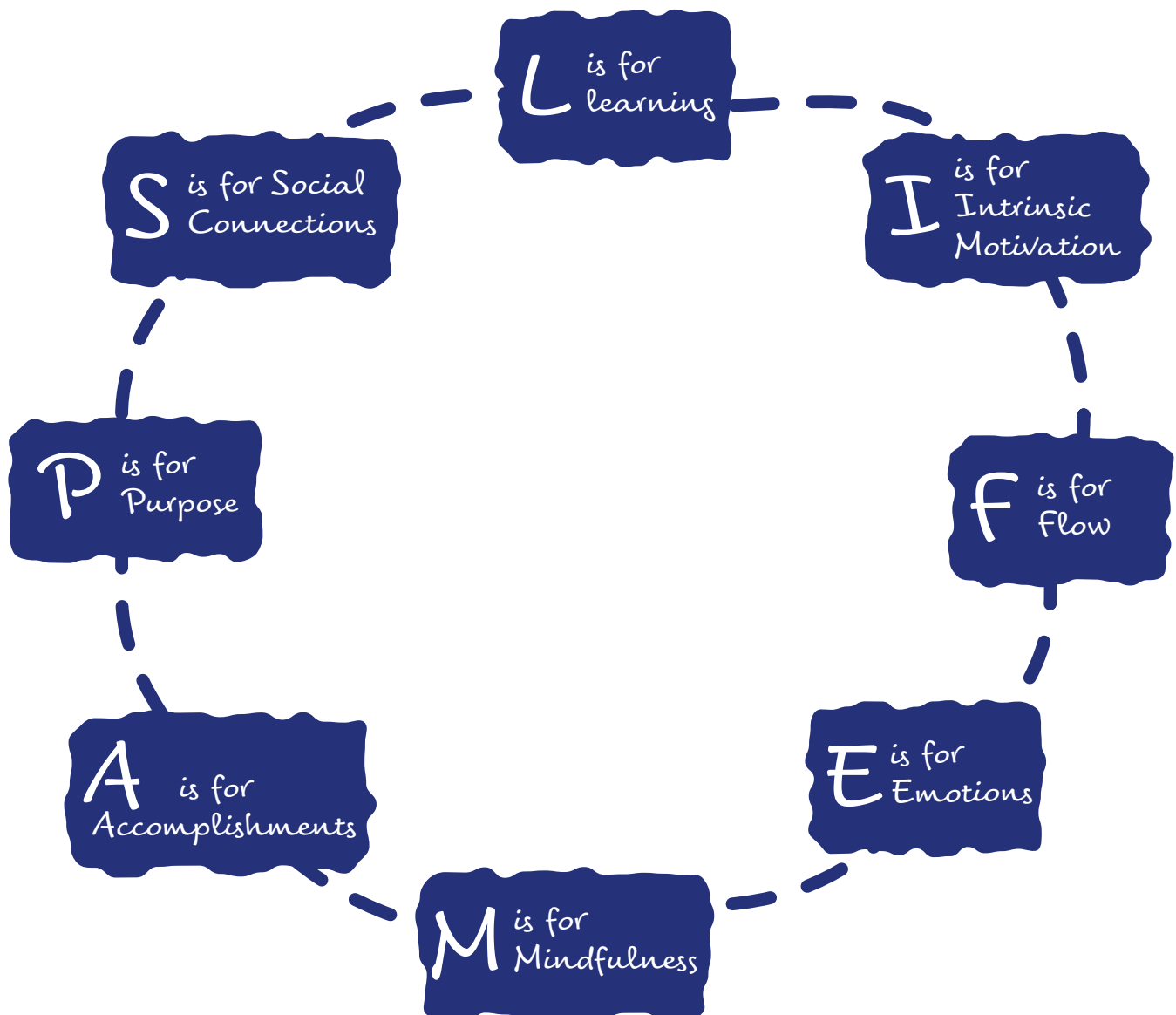
About LIFEMAPS

LIFEMAPS is a new framework which demonstrates how youth work approaches can build the mental health of young people. This has been developed by Simon Ward, educational psychologist, in collaboration with Eliz McArdle, YouthAction Northern Ireland, to illustrate how developmental youth work approaches are effective in building mental health. This model has been developed to work across the mental health continuum; ranging from work with young people who have identified diagnosed mental illnesses to those with moderate mental health and those needing to boost existing flourishing behaviours. This work has emerged from the Right Here Fermanagh project (www.right-here.org). See appendix 1.

LIFEMAPS is used as an acronym for 8 interlinked concepts which describe a full approach to developing young people's mental health. The underpinning principle of LIFEMAPS is that positive mental health is not uncovered, is not a discovery, but is built through action, skills and attitudes, fostered through relationships.

L is for LEARNING

Mental health is not a given or a fixed state. There are large parts of mental health that are under our control. There are different environments that promote positive mental health and different ways that people can make choices to improve their health and well-being regardless of circumstances. Key skills can be learnt, attitudes can be enhanced, which lead to flourishing. Of course, circumstances make a difference – recession and poverty are critical factors





in mental health, as do psychological, social and emotional capacity. As workers, we can have a direct impact on these things, although we still acknowledge the impact of those heavily entrenched, structural factors in people's lives.

LEARNING – What the research tells us.

Mental Health can be learned.

Recent scientific evidence builds on this idea that mental health is somewhat within our control. Taking into account the results of many studies, positive psychologists have created a "happiness formula", identifying the three categories that make up our well-being - **H=S+C+V**

H = Your enduring level of happiness.

S = Your genetic set point. This is determined by your genes, remains relatively stable throughout your life and returns to its original level soon after the majority of significant life events. This accounts for about 50%.

C = The circumstances of your life. These are both things you can change and things you can't, including your environment, your health, age etc. This accounts for about 10% of our well-being.

V = Aspects which are under our voluntary control and account for around 40% of our well-being including our attitudes, intentional and effortful activities.

(Seligman, 2002)

Like physical fitness, you can't just read a book about mental health and expect your well-being to be boosted. The world of the self-help book has convinced a full generation of readers that they know exactly what to do to improve their well-being; but putting these into practice is different to knowing what needs to be done. To develop new skills, attitudes and behaviours for good mental health will require active participation and practice.

New approaches to learning can improve mental health.

Bringing up children has changed vastly within a generation. Safety, protection and encouragement of children and young people have replaced some common-place practices of smacking, punishment and obedience. Children were historically 'seen and not

heard' with a teaching and parenting motto that 'what won't kill you will make you stronger'. The shift in emphasis away from this is understandable as a backlash to the widespread panic from sexual and physical abuse scandals by adults on children. The kickback of these 'new' approaches to children and young people is that children and young people are 'bubble-wrapped' with fewer skills to face struggle or challenge. Bandura (1977) states:

'If people experience only easy successes they come to expect quick results and are easily discouraged by failure. A resilient sense of efficacy requires experience in overcoming obstacles through perseverant effort. Some setbacks and difficulties in human pursuits serve a useful purpose in teaching that success usually requires sustained effort. After people become convinced they have what it takes to succeed, they persevere in the face of adversity and quickly rebound from setbacks. By sticking it out through tough times, they emerge stronger from adversity.'

We can be overly keen to protect young people from the frustration that comes with challenges. Feelings of mastery don't develop from achieving easy tasks, but by facing challenging ones. When we encourage persistence and a need to stick with something challenging (rather than focusing on the young person's feelings in a frustrating moment), they have the chance to develop their self-efficacy (their sense of belief in their own power to achieve).

Recent years have seen an emphasis on self-esteem as opposed to self-efficacy. Young people have been praised for the accomplishment of easy tasks and failure seen as something to be avoided at all costs. Unfortunately, this has prevented young people from being able to generate the feelings of self-efficacy that come with the struggle and the sense of mastery that the achievement gives them.

Learning resilient thoughts, behaviours and actions.

40 -50 years ago, psychologists studying children growing up in high risk environments realised that a proportion of the young people developed well despite the adversity they faced in life. This capacity was termed 'resilience' and researchers began to investigate the factors and processes that seemed to be involved in its development.

Resilience is not a trait that people either have or don't have. It involves behaviours, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed by anyone. Resilience is defined as:

'The human capacity to face, overcome and ultimately be strengthened and even transformed by life's adversities and challenges. ... A complex relationship of psychological inner strengths and environmental social supports throughout a person's life.'

(Masten, 2001)

Early research focussed on those children deemed to be living in high risk environments. Recent studies have indicated that growing up in the modern world puts increasing psychological demands on our children who are virtually all facing stress and pressure. Contemporary resilience theory has moved on to encompass all rather than just those 'at risk.'

Optimistic thinking can encourage learning.

Peterson (2006) describes optimism as similar to Velcro in that it is attached to all the ingredients which promote well-being. His research has found many advantages of adopting an optimistic viewpoint:

- Optimists adapt better to negative events.
- Optimism is conducive to problem-focused coping, using humour, making plans, positive reframing, (putting the situation in the best possible light) and, when the situation is uncontrollable, accepting the situation's reality.
- Optimists exert more continuous effort and tend not to give up.
- Optimists report more health promoting behaviour (e.g. healthy diet, regular medical check-ups) and enjoy better physical health than pessimists.
- Optimists seem to be more productive.
- Optimists are more popular than pessimists with stronger social ties.

(Peterson, 2006)

Although there may well be a genetically inherited component to optimism and early childhood experiences certainly shape optimistic or pessimistic viewpoint, we can use several strategies to counter pessimism. As Reivich suggests:

'I want to stress that these are thinking styles, these are not personality traits and because they are thinking styles, they are changeable.'

(Reivich, 2006)

Optimistic and pessimistic thinking styles can impact on our approach to learning. With a pessimistic thinking style we can view failure as my own fault and something which is permanent and persistent. Therefore, our tendency is not to try again or try to learn. A more likely response is to walk away feeling like a failure. With optimistic thinking, an alternative explanation for failure can be found – related to things that can be changed such as more practice or trying a different approach. Even if an optimistic explanation is not appropriate, then it is worth putting the situation in perspective, identifying whether circumstances are really as catastrophic as initially thought.

LEARNING – Putting it into practice.

Activities and strategies can be put into place to create positive and long lasting changes in levels of well-being.

ACTIVITIES THAT BUILD SKILLS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Programme activities, games and opportunities that match and stretch the skills' levels of young people. This will encourage them to practice some existing skills and face challenges in trying to go a bit further. Whether football, arts and crafts or groupwork, use exercises that will tax the thinking and physical skills to the next level. This promotes challenge with struggle, offering activities that are achievable but stretching. This builds a sense of feeling good and doing well.

APPROACHING FAILURE AND DISAPPOINTMENT

Disappointment is a fact of life for everybody. If workers can use moments of failure or disappointment as a learning point, young people can reflect rather than wallow, think about practicing to improve, and develop persistence and tenacity. Sometimes disappointment can bring very strong emotions. Rather than shutting down these emotions, this can be a chance to talk through why a young person feels the disappointment so deeply and can work through some deeply-held beliefs about themselves or their value in the world. These are core mental health skills.



BUILDING AND ENCOURAGING SUPPORT NETWORKS

Having a strong support network helps face disappointment, failure and success. Having somebody to share good and bad moments takes the sting out of pain and adds to the joy. Workers can programme activities that build new alliances between young people in organising teams for activities and in pairing up young people informally or formally through peer mentoring. Programmed group activities or exercises will promote contact between young people who might not normally be together. Friendships and support can develop, unexpectedly.

BUILDING RESILIENCE

Resilience-building is a central idea in the LIFEMAPS model. Activities can be shaped that will build the composite skills of resilience. This can include exposure to challenging situations, which provide opportunities to develop problem solving skills and build strong emotional coping skills. Resilience is also strengthened through having a strong social network.

- Team-building activities build problem-solving skills. Playing Pictionary, raft-building, getting your team from A to B with only two planks and four pieces of rope all encourage young people to listen and think through what seems at first like a virtually impossible task.
- Competitions build skills, encourage people to stretch themselves and recognise effort and ability. Quizzes, basketball tournaments, dodge-ball, Wii-tennis or writing competitions.
- Volunteering opportunities build a sense of purpose and future mindedness, from community car-wash to fund-raising activities; from trainee leadership training to peer mentoring, young people will respond well to feeling that they have something to offer to others in this world.
- Working with young people on a performance with a deadline can set high expectations with high levels of support available, but with a realistic sense that it can be achieved, working on a play, scene, presentation evening, musical, a junk art or fashion show. The setting and communication of high expectations by supportive others.

PRACTICE OPTIMISM AS A WORKER

Building an optimistic style amongst workers is the first step to promoting an optimistic style to young people. Try to notice when things are going well rather than badly. When things go wrong, workers can look at 'the evidence' in greater detail to explain the 'failure'. This often leads to a discovery that the failure might be due to the actions of others, can be improved with practice and is not always like this. It is only if we practice these skills in our own lives and work that we can pass them on with confidence.

PROMOTE OPTIMISM AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

If young people continually blame themselves for failure and think that failure is permanent and disastrous, workers can encourage young people to look at 'the evidence' in greater detail. For workers, 'disputation' or challenging the evidence is a key tool in challenging pessimistic explanations of when things going wrong. This new language offers the young person a way of re-framing their ability and contributions in the world in a more optimistic style.

I is for INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION – what the research tells us.

Finding the hook that motivates a young person is like the holy grail for many workers – you know it exists but seems impossible to uncover. A range of methods are used to motivate young people across different settings with little thought to the chances of success. Sanctions and punishments are obvious ones, used by teachers and parents often in interactions from early ages, to encourage everything from eating to potty-training; from school attendance, to discipline to homework. 'Carrots' and rewards also form part of the repertoire of 'teaching' children and young people, offering treats and praise for doing and behaving well. The latter and the former fall into the category of extrinsic motivation, whereby the motivation is by external factors - when we do an activity to satisfy something outside ourselves, not just for the fun of it. We feel driven by outside influences, behaving in ways either to obtain a reward or to avoid punishment. Research (Ryan & Deci, 2000) has shown that extrinsic motivation works on a limited basis, with some behaviours improving or showing themselves for a short time, while the reward or punishment is new; but very quickly return to the default position, with motivation slumping quickly.

Watch a young person gaming to understand what intrinsic motivation is. They might show excitement, concentration, persistence, problem-solving skills and tenacity in ways that are not evident in another arena. When we are intrinsically motivated, we do something for the sake of it, simply out of enjoyment or interest. Compared with people who are extrinsically motivated, those who are intrinsically motivated show more interest, excitement and confidence about the tasks they are intrinsically motivated to do. They also show enhanced performance, persistence and creativity in the tasks and more generally report higher subjective well-being.

Motivation is fragile and can be strengthened or weakened rapidly (ibid, 2000). An individual's intrinsic motivation is strengthened by offering them choices about how they approach or complete tasks. If we are relatively free to choose our actions, then it is easier for us to appreciate the reasons for doing something. If we feel forced or coerced, it is harder for us to internalise the motivation. So intrinsic motivation is weakened by punishment, threats of punishment and by imposing goals, directives and deadlines. The surprising finding is that intrinsic motivation is also weakened by giving people rewards for completing interesting tasks, particularly if these rewards are perceived as controlling.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION – putting it into practice.

Workers can seek out and nurture intrinsic motivation where it does not exist, and keep it alive where it does.

OFFER CHOICES

Offering real choices builds a sense of autonomy among young people. This is particularly important for young people who live in home environments that are very controlled and controlling. Within most settings with young people, there are ways that choice is maximised – e.g. the development of a 'members forum' on how a club is run, choice of activities to be run throughout a community centre, choice within games to play for younger children. Where choice is limited, the discussion or negotiation that involves adults and young people still serves to build this sense of autonomy and growing independence.

PURSUE NEW OPPORTUNITIES

This is done through presenting opportunities to try new things that might capture the motivation of

some. Usually this is done through 'away' opportunities – residentials using outdoor pursuits; camping; going to see a musical or a play; visits. However, new opportunities come with new approaches, which might be about doing things that challenging stereotypes – e.g. 'Man with a pan' cooking for boys and young men; fishing project for girls and young women.

NOTICE INTERESTS AND ENGAGEMENT

For a young person, finding something that you are good at can act as a strong hook for their intrinsic motivation to grow. This can be the driving force behind practicing a new skill or activity. But it might take the impetus of a worker to start the ball rolling. A worker might notice a singing voice or leadership skills or comic timing or physical strength. These insights can be used for a young person to take up boxing or singing, and grow their intrinsic motivation through the encouragement of an adult supporter.

PRAISE AND ENCOURAGE WHERE EFFORT IS

As stated above, motivation is fragile, but can be given a boost by words that praise the effort. Encourage the young person to keep practicing and give feedback that is true, identifying ways that their effort can be best placed and how they can build on strengths. Encourage persistence through small rewards. Acknowledge personal milestones through private and public acknowledgements.

F is for FLOW

'Flow' is a term coined by Csikszentmihalyi (1992) as a result of studies he has undertaken for over 30 years on what gives people enjoyment.

FLOW – what the research tells us.

'Flow' happens when we become so absorbed in an activity that we lose ourselves and all sense of time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). There is no way to tell which activities will induce flow as it is different from person to person (one man's meat is another man's poison), with one person reading a book for hours while another is bored within 15 minutes. This points to a key aspect of flow - that it is intrinsically motivating. We are hooked in through our interest and skill in the activity, we do the activity for its own sake and the reward is in the challenge and the sense of self-improvement.



A wide range of activities can induce 'flow'. It can come from gardening, designing software, working out a mathematical problem, playing a sport or painting. Commonly it is something that we find challenging. Too little challenge and too much skill leads to boredom; too much challenge and not enough skill leads to anxiety. Flow occurs when we get the balance just right so that the level of challenge is just on the edge of our skills level. Many people experience flow easily in competitive sports where challenge and feedback are central to the activity. If the skills of the players are not matched – one is a novice footballer and the other plays competitively for a regional team – then neither is likely to experience flow. For one of them there is a lack of challenge and for the other it is too difficult, hence the full absorption in the activity that is needed to achieve flow, is missing.

During the actual process of 'flow' there is an absence of emotions, but afterwards, we experience a surge of positive emotions. Perhaps because of this stream of positive emotions, 'flow' encourages us to persist with challenging tasks, thereby developing skills and leading to personal growth. Flow activities contribute substantially to our feelings of happiness and well-being. But it also requires effort, practice and a risk of failure.

Modern society is less about putting in effort and more about finding short cuts. Feeling good is no different – we do things to make us feel good with minimum input on our part: TV, fast food, reality shows, alcohol or drugs. Indeed, many of the activities that we choose to pursue in our leisure time are passive (e.g. watching TV) and lead to an absence of flow. These activities undermine good mental health.

Flow can lead to mastery action and mastery thinking.

Flow activities can help us feel good and encourage us to develop skills to improve our performance and activity. This practice can lead to 'mastery action', where you take control of a task and your input can affect the result. For a young child, catching the ball can be mastered by trying over and over, with adjustments each time until they have got it. But the impact on mental health is that mastery action can prompt mastery thinking. So, succeeding at something, overcoming an obstacle or achieving a goal can all lead to a boost in self-belief. So nailing the skills and knowledge, can boost self-confidence for this task and to face other tasks. This change in personal narrative encourages further engagement, perseverance and goal striving.

The achievement of mastery action is not always a painless process, but can involve overcoming difficulty and obstacles. As Seligman et al suggests:

'In order for your child to experience mastery, it is necessary for him to fail, to feel bad and to try again repeatedly until success occurs. None of these steps can be circumvented. Failure and feeling bad are necessary building blocks for ultimate success and feeling good.'

(Seligman et al, 1995)

We can place too much emphasis on avoiding negative emotions, which are there for a reason: to inform us that something in our world needs changing and to galvanise us into action.

FLOW – putting it into practice.

SET UP FLOW ACTIVITIES

Setting up flow activities and moments with young people can be game-changers. Cliff jumping, badminton, obstacle courses, projects, public speaking, drama, creative writing or an animation project can all lead to flow moments for different young people. This might be the first time they discover they are good at something. The flow activity can help to change their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. The impact is felt beyond the specific activity and help them to believe that they can develop and succeed in other aspects of life and in wider society.

REFLECT ON FLOW ACTIVITIES

Workers can do mental health programmes without ever mentioning mental health. Reflect with young people on the experiences and emotions that were involved in the 'flow' activities. In discussion, identify with the young people what positive emotions they felt, what sensations they experienced, what they found difficult or uncomfortable in the activity. In reflecting on the experience, they can identify which aspects they would or wouldn't repeat. The ultimate outcome is in being able to identify what activities a young person might do on their own to make them feel good when they are in a slump.

A SENSE OF FUN, HUMOUR AND ADVENTURE

In taking on any new activity, young people can feel a sense of trepidation, fear and excitement. Coupled with self-consciousness of taking on a new activity with other people watching, these can be paralysing.

Workers can cut through some of this anxiety with a sense of humour and a sense of adventure. Workers going first on new activities can give confidence to young people. Even if the worker does badly in the activity, the ability to laugh it off and enjoy the experience will be noticed by young people. Activities such as hide-and-seek or obstacle courses are flow activities that can be fun, but are often written off as being too childish. These activities are valuable as they remind us of times when we were less self-conscious and able to have free-for-all fun. Workers can use their own sense of fun and adventure (try it and see) to sell the idea of these activities to young people.

BUILD FLOW ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE OVER-CRITICAL OF SELF

A number of mental health difficulties are characterized by an inward focus, over thinking and excessive rumination, which is not connected to a realistic perspective. Workers can provide a range of activities to increase full engagement. These can encourage an outward focus of attention and at the very least, can provide a distraction from inner turmoil. Young women can feel intense embarrassment and self-consciousness about taking part in activities where they might be seen by others. It can be a challenge to engage them in flow activities because of this self-consciousness getting in the way of 'flow', but has more powerful impact if it is achieved. More importantly this can encourage young people to discover interests and strengths, develop a sense of control, a sense of purpose and a sense of competency in a range of areas.

E is for EMOTION

Strong emotions scare workers. As teachers, health professionals and youth workers, the expression of strong emotions by young people is met by efforts to dampen these down. Obvious reasons can be presented for why workers might do this, particularly with emotions of pain, anger, melancholy and sadness. There are real concerns that these emotions may lead to behaviour that causes harm to self or others. Fear of contagion is also prominent, with worries that expressing depressive feelings will spread to others. The natural instinct of the worker is to shut this down, before it becomes 'dangerous' and to sanitise emotions until they are 'acceptable'. Similarly, more 'positive' emotions such as exuberance, excitement, joy and curiosity can also elicit the same controlling

response from workers – of being contained, to avoid it spreading and becoming 'unmanageable'. Responses such as these may be the result of managing larger groups, with discipline and maintaining control as the key driver, but this doesn't involve a deeper understanding of the role of emotions in the mental health of young people. The messages this gives to young people about expressing emotions can have long term damaging impacts, reinforcing the idea that strong emotions are to be suppressed. A more considered approach is needed to how workers respond rather than react to emotions expressed by young people.

EMOTION – what the research tells us.

Positive emotions and negative emotions are not opposite. 'Positive' and 'negative' is not a reference to them being either 'good' or 'bad', but whether it is healthy for us to experience these. Positive emotions include interest, contentment, pride, love and zest. Negative emotions include greed, anxiety, envy and destructiveness. But anger, for example, can be a healthy emotion if it spurs us on to stand up for yourself or challenge some injustice. It is too simplistic to assume that emotions, such as frustration, that make us feel bad are ultimately harmful.

Negative emotions are an important fact of life. At important moments they serve to remind people that they have faced a loss; a sadness; a regret or been hurt by someone. It is important to recognize the importance of negative emotions (rather than pretend they don't exist or bottle them up) and to learn how they are triggered and how to manage them. Negative emotions, like anxiety and anger evoke specific behavioural responses which are best understood in evolutionary terms. A clear example of this is the fight, flight, freeze response, with fear leading to an action tendency to run and escape, whilst anger leads to an action tendency to fight. However, negative emotions seem to narrow behavior, by focusing energy on survival rather than flourishing.

Positive emotions have a greater impact than just making us feel good. The snowball effect of positive emotions spreads through our personal, social and emotional life. Work and study performance is enhanced when we feel good; physically our health is boosted; our relationships are strengthened; our view of the world is enhanced; we take more risks with greater certainty and our creativity can be enriched, simply by virtue of experiencing positive emotions. It



also has a contagion effect, with others being 'infected' by laughter, smiling or optimism. Others begin to feed off these behaviours and emotions and are attracted towards these people with strong positive emotions.

The impact of positive emotions is much more powerful than previously considered. Recent research has been making the case for a greater focus on building positive emotions, as a way to counter the negative emotions that young people and adults feel. Prior to this, attention was only paid to joy or happiness as an indicator that an individual wasn't depressed. Fredrickson (2001, 2005, 2007) believes this under-estimates the role of positive emotion in building positive mental health. Her broaden-and-build theory (ibid, 2001) suggests that while negative emotions narrow people's perspective and keep them focused on the specific problem or threat in hand, positive emotions broaden people's thoughts, actions and behaviours. Fredrickson and colleagues (2005) have shown that each time a person experiences a positive emotion, their capacity to think more clearly about problems is increased and their psychological resilience also increases. While this increase is often fleeting, over time it builds up into increased resourcefulness. Her studies reveal that positive emotions broaden the scope of our attention, they cause us to take more information, see connections to other people and things, and to be more creative. Solutions and opportunities are seen and found more easily, as we can see the big picture rather than the small details. This offers a new way out to young people who often feel trapped or stuck and feel that there is 'no way out' of their own internal turmoil or painful life situations they find themselves in.

There is no suggestion here that negative emotions should be quashed or contained, on the contrary space for these can be cathartic. Negative emotions live side by side with positive emotions in all of us. Resilient people experience the same amount of negative emotion as others. But the key difference between more resilient people and those who are less resilient, is the amount of positive emotion that they experience, thus boosting their overall mental well-being.

EMOTION – putting it into practice.

INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES FOR POSITIVE EMOTIONS

It is not enough to focus only on managing and dealing with negative emotions that young people are

experiencing. The impact of trying to make people feel 'less bad' is limited. The approach that will be most effective is in building positive emotions through healthy means, doing things with young people that make them feel happy, proud, curious or full of zest. Workers can encourage young people to behave in different ways that will increase their levels of positivity, through volunteering, through recognising accomplishments, through a positive relationship and through laughter. This can radiate benefits to others in the family and the community.

SPACE FOR NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

Young people are open to the nuances and subtle messages given out by adults and workers. This is no different when it comes to talking about negative emotions. Quickly young people take their cue from the worker about what is 'acceptable' to talk about and will either quit or continue based on this. Expressing emotions can be painful for the young person and difficult for the worker to watch and experience, but may ultimately release the pressure valve for a young person's seemingly unbearable pain. This is a powerful tool for making young people feel understood and feel 'normal'. It can offer reassurance that allowing young people to speak about self destructive feelings will not make these worse.

Training in being a listener can give workers confidence in this process of listening. Workers can tune workers into their own 'taboo' subjects and begin to challenge themselves on how to respond to young people in helpful and healthy ways (showing shock can shut young people down).

BUILDING EMOTIONAL LITERACY

Contemporary society gives more space to identifying thoughts and behaviours rather than feelings. Even when asked how a person feels, we often use the language of thoughts to answer – 'I feel that this is not going well' or 'I feel that he is mad with me'. Adults and young people alike struggle to find language that reflects this complex part of our being. Being able to identify an emotion can help either to understand why this has arisen and/or what actions or behaviours it can lead to. Naming these can also be a release or letting go of something that is annoying us. Use closing circles, evaluation techniques, words or pictures to ask young people to identify how they feel. This can be done at the beginning and end of a session, and is a feedback system for workers as well as building up a new language for young people.

REFLECT ON THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

Workers can use reflection to acknowledge positive emotions that arise from feeling good about ourselves, experiencing pleasure and having fun. Give time for positive and negative feelings. So where a closing circle or circle time identified some negative emotions and positive emotions, we might be more inclined to give space to negative feelings. Find ways to explore what has led to the positive emotions and what might be the outcome of feeling good for the young person. Make the connection in discussions between how a young person feels and then how they might behave. This gives them ways to explain themselves to others.

M is for MINDFUL

MINDFUL – what the research tells us.

Go faster, work harder and play harder – this could be the motto for modern living. The pace of life has been quickened further by technology that gives instant access to work, information and other people. The emphasis is on doing more and doing it faster. The impact of this is that we are going so fast, that we can fail to see or really experience the positive aspects in our lives. The human brain has a tendency to focus on threat or negative aspects of the situation and disregard the positive things that are happening.

This negativity bias (Rozin & Royzman, 2001), or a tendency to notice bad things, bad events and bad people easily, means that we are more likely to remember an insult, a criticism or a piece of negative information or feedback than a compliment or a piece of positive information.

Examples of the negativity bias include:

1. Locating an angry face among happy faces more easily than the other way around.
2. Remembering a bad day more readily than a good day.
3. Negative events can spiral out of control and become more negative in a much more extreme way than positive events can become more positive.
4. Remembering negative things said about them more easily than the nice things.

Noticing and even relishing things going wrong is a common pursuit for many young people. Events are

best if they are fit for Facebook and when life is hum-drum, a sprinkle of over-dramatic expression can add juice. This appreciation of negative activity comes easily, while noticing when the world is right is much more elusive.

If we only notice negative things this gives us a distorted perspective on life. By noticing positive moments and events, we can develop a more honest and realistic viewpoint on life. Similar to emotion, this is not about suppressing negative things that happen, but about building ways of giving positive moments more attention. In counteracting this negativity bias you can increase your well-being. Research suggests that you can obtain more pleasure from routine aspects of daily life by training yourself to notice, reflect on and appreciate simple things (Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Three approaches of *savouring*, *gratitude* and *mindfulness* can combine to challenge this negativity bias.

The way people experience positive events will determine how much positive emotion is generated and how much it will promote their well-being. *Savouring* refers to thoughts or behaviours that can generate, intensify and extend the enjoyment of an event.

There are 5 steps to savouring:

1. Slow down
2. Pay attention to what you are doing
3. Use all your senses
4. Stretch out the experience
5. Reflect on your enjoyment

The ability to savour the positive experiences in life is one of the most important ingredients of happiness and is believed to foster positive emotions and increase well-being (Seligman, 2002).

Gratitude is grounded in the idea of wanting what we already have. This involves being thankful for the good elements of life that make it worth living and a belief that the source of this goodness lies to some degree outside ourselves. Gratitude is directed outside ourselves and is thankful to others (Emmons, 2007).

Developing an attitude of gratitude has a wide range of advantages for well-being. Research has shown that it is associated with increased happiness, satisfaction with life, self-esteem, positive emotions,



optimism, hope, enthusiasm, empathy, vitality, spirituality and forgiveness. Further links are recorded to decreased depression, anxiety, loneliness, envy, neuroticism and materialism.

Gratitude, however, doesn't always come naturally and is a virtue that can be cultivated. A simple task named 'The 3 Good Things exercise' by Seligman (2011) demonstrates this point. He asked research participants to write down, each night, 3 good things that had happened that day and which they felt grateful or thankful for. His research shows that, for many, this simple exercise can increase happiness and even counteract mild to moderate depression. Essentially it works by re-focussing your attention to look for what is good in life.

Mindfulness is paying attention in a particular way, that requires a deliberate awareness of the present moment. Skills of mindfulness help to tune into what is happening in and around us in a conscious way. This practice is part of a range of stress-reduction programmes to improve the mental health of adults and young people (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Some notable results have been recorded, including:

- Less stress, anxiety, worry and depression;
 - Better sleep and capacity for relaxation;
 - Increased self-awareness;
 - Less reactivity, anger and frustration;
 - Increased self-confidence;
 - More positive relationships with peers, teachers and parents;
 - Enhanced capacity for focus and concentration;
- (Zoogman et al, 2014)

MINDFUL – putting it into practice.

This is not about introducing meditation and yoga into the youth club or classroom. Bringing mindfulness to life is best if it is congruent and fits into the environment naturally using existing settings, resources and activities.

EXERCISES TO BUILD APPRECIATION

Building an appreciative style is done through a series of continuous habits. These habits are developed through exercises with young people such as:

- An opening circle and closing circle can be used in groups to notice what you have enjoyed or learned.

- *Ring of Fire* is a groupwork exercise that shares proud, fun and/or serious moments.
- *Flower Petals* exercise asks young people to write their own positive attributes on each petal of a flower.
- *Highways* exercise draws a picture of your life as a map, with all the features of roads, roundabouts, bumps, bridges and signposts.
- Creating a *personal shield*, with crest and motto, to illustrate your identity and character.
- Carrying out a personal skills audit notices the assets a young person has.

ENCOURAGING NOTICING SKILLS

When attention is paid to small things that lift young people, this encourages noticing skills, to identify how they can repeat these phenomenon. In using exercises with roots in mindfulness, workers can use both naturally occurring opportunities and planned moments to generate self-awareness and to slow down the whirring cogs of the mind. Savouring the texture, smell and taste of eating a sweet; pointing out the wind against your face in a bike ride or looking at the happiness of listening to loud music are all moments of being in the present. Come to the end of a football match and use this experience in whatever way is right for the group. Mentally run through the match to reflect; or use the silence for each person to check in with their physical body. Have a discussion as a group about what just happened. All of these things will require the right setting and will take the young people time to get used to a 'new way of doing things', but can add value to the experience for young people.

FOCUS ON PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Mindfulness emphasises a balanced approach to looking at past, present and future. Young people can struggle with this balance. They can worry too much about what might happen or what others might think; be consumed with wanting to 'be somebody'. They can replay the past over and over in their minds, to the point that it mushrooms out of control. Others place themselves firmly in the present, with hedonistic tendencies towards chasing enjoyment for the here-and-now with no sense of consequence. Workers can add new perspectives to these approaches. Where young people seem focused only on the present,

workers can encourage discussions on goals, on consequences, on steps towards achievements to build a more future-minded approach to living. Alternatively, helping young people to focus on past can remind them of long forgotten memories that add to their sense of importance and value, that can be built upon.

Greater balance across past, present and future will lead to a more robust resilient approach to life.

A is for ACCOMPLISHMENT

ACCOMPLISHMENT – what the research tells us.

Accomplishment, recognition and achievement are all ways of boosting self-esteem. They make us feel good if we feel they have been earned and are reflective of our own view of ourselves. Across different settings, accomplishments are measured differently.

For young people, school is the primary place where accomplishments are noticed and seem to count, with certificates for pupil of the month; attendance certificates, prefect badges, exams and academic scholarship recorded and certified. Extra-curricular activities are also recognised in this setting, where winning competitions or public performances are also greeted with joy, pride and awards. 'High-flyers' are recognised more easily for their accomplishments in the school setting. What of the more run-of-the-mill child or young person whose moments to shine are less evident? A lack of recognition of accomplishments can have a deep and lasting impact on motivation, performance and mental health. Therefore, workers need to understand and approach accomplishments differently if we are to attend to the needs of many young people who are not 'high-flyers'.

Accomplishments described above reward the young person for the end product (the performance, the exam, the winning place in the competition). It doesn't recognise personal improvements as an accomplishment. It doesn't reward persistence and tenacity. It doesn't prize those who have taken risks, faced challenges or struggled. It sees only the winning flag, not the skill along the way.

Dweck (2006) makes a distinction between performance goals and learning goals. Performance goals emphasise the size, scale and impact of the *end product*. Learning goals emphasise the process of *improvement and development*, taking into account the starting point and movement of a young person

relative to themselves instead of others. For many young people, setting learning goals opens up greater opportunities for realistic goals. More importantly, it can impact hugely on maintaining and driving the motivation and persistence of a young person.

Valuing and working towards learning goals is not the 'traditional' way of doing things – our culture values the win! More recently this approach is being challenged through ideas such as life long learning or understanding learning styles, which recognizes that one size does not fit all. But a new approach that recognizes the value of achieving learning goals will require an accompanying change of mindset. A fixed mindset is more closely aligned to performance goals, whereas a growth mindset offers greater opportunities for recognizing bite-size accomplishments and personal bests.

Performance goals and a fixed mindset.

Performance goals are about achieving a certain level of performance in comparison to others. Getting an A grade, coming top etc. Performance goals tend to be created by those with a fixed mindset, and in this way, a person's ability or value can be calibrated more easily and then 'fixed' at a measurable point on a scale. Meeting the set criteria means that their talent is validated. If they fall short of the target, however, the reverse is true, they are no longer bright, talented, clever etc. Performance goals are about proving your worth and looking smart. Performance goals are seen as indicating stable characteristics and people adopting them can become over concerned with looking good and proving their ability as opposed to actual learning. Due to the fact that an individual identity can be tied up in achieving performance goals, this can lead to them refusing to take on challenges, avoiding mistakes etc. Failing to reach a set performance goal can result in a person explaining it to themselves as: "I am a failure" rather than "I have failed at this task."

Dweck (2006) has shown that those who hold performance goals are less likely to move out of their comfort zone, or attempt new and challenging tasks. They face the self-limiting belief that they might not do well, meaning they are 'not smart', and that their 'failures' and 'lack of ability' have been exposed to others. For young people, pursuing performance goals can have a detrimental effect on their motivation and can lead to them developing a helpless, rather than a learning, response to failure.



Learning goals and a growth mindset.

Learning goals, in contrast, are those that are created by people with a growth mindset. This means that they are focused on gaining competence in an area and then mastering it. Life is less about winning and losing or passing and failing but more about growing and learning. Those adopting learning goals are keen to develop new skills and see mistakes as feedback and an opportunity to develop. They consider what they can learn from the experience and how this may help them to do better next time. They are also more willing to try new approaches in order to improve. Doing badly in an exam, for example, is not seen as reflecting their innate level of ability but rather indicating how they are doing at that moment in time or how much effort they have invested in the task. Adopting learning goals is shown to increase engagement, persistence and motivation (ibid, 2006).

Mental health is boosted by recognising accomplishments that motivate us to 'keep going'. This approach may buck the trend of solely recognising those who steal the show or are often in the spotlight. But, ultimately, this shift in mindset rewards those with persistence, tenacity and who overcome challenges. These might not be the recognised accomplishments of the school setting, but their value is certainly seen in work settings and in resilient flourishing people.

ACCOMPLISHMENT – putting it into practice.

The role of the worker is two-fold, in recognising the accomplishment when it happens, and in understanding and working with the young person through the pathway that leads to the accomplishment.

RECOGNISE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Recognition of accomplishments often **needs an audience or external validation** – so events that prize young people and present their accomplishments are important in building a sense of self-efficacy.
- Remember that **accomplishment is relative**, that for one person who takes part in a fishing project, catching a big fish is their goal and accomplishment, whereas for another, catching any fish is the challenge and the goal. Where the activity has meaning and relevance for a young person, then they will feel pride and a sense of real accomplishment.

PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES WITH MILESTONES AND GOALS

In designing any work with young people it is worth considering how accomplishment will be measured and celebrated. Project work which has milestones works better than open ended programmes. Every six or eight weeks, a milestone might offer pause for reflection on what has been achieved and learned, what is to come and to celebrate the moment. Recognise improvements as accomplishments rather than always working towards a set performance goal or milestone.

GOALS ARE RELEVANT AND MEANINGFUL TO THE YOUNG PERSON

Workers work with young people to identify goals that will motivate and keep them engaged. These goals can be explored together to identify whether they are healthy or toxic to the well-being of the young person – is it realistic and achievable for that individual, and does it build on their strengths.

MEANINGFUL PRAISE WITH FEEDBACK

Lying is obvious to young people. Where workers are misleading or 'generous' about the achievements of a young person, they can tell and they are unconvinced by it. They may not outwardly confess that they spot the lie, but subconsciously they know it. This 'white lie' can undermine the praise and acknowledgement you are giving. Workers, beware of giving false praise or overstating the role or achievements of a young person. Give meaningful praise where it is due, identify small achievements where large ones have not fully been reached and use these moments to offer feedback that can build new goals in moving forward.

P is for PURPOSE

PURPOSE – what the research tells us.

'What's the point?' This question can torment some young people who struggle to see not only the point of life in general but also to see the point of being alive. Having a sense of purpose is elusive for many young people. On the one hand, they are searching for hits that immediately make you feel good. These make it feel good to be alive for that moment, but there can be a longer term payback for this. Doing things that improve the world or help others can give us a deep sense of well-being, but this requires some get-up-and-go that is lacking where someone is in a

slump. It pre-supposes that you possess some skills or talents that will benefit the world, which many young people have not yet discovered or may have little confidence in. Having an input into the community or the wider world is a high risk strategy for those whose efforts might be rejected or for others, it can take a long time to feel that efforts and input are appreciated by others. The mental and time investment can seem too much and too long, with no guaranteed payback.

This section will not answer the big philosophical or religious questions about the meaning of life. Purpose described here is about feeling important in the world; feeling you have something to give; connection to others and to the world outside yourself. A sense of purpose may not generate immediate happiness, but if we think about well-being as fulfilment, the connections are much clearer. Where a sense of purpose is loose or missing, a sense of fulfilment can be undermined.

Having a clear mission and purpose in life has been widely recognised in building self-worth and self-efficacy. Sometimes the 'purpose' is self-absorbed and about self-promotion, which is less healthy than a 'purpose' which puts the needs of others before your own. For maximum effect, the purpose must have altruistic characteristics, with a goal bigger than yourself... which goes against the dominant trends in our modern consumer culture. Money, fame, cars, beauty, houses, clothes and technology all offer the promise of contentment. As human beings, however, we quickly adapt to new circumstances and soon take them for granted. The accumulation of state of the art belongings and wealth doesn't feed your desires; instead, your expectations rise and the desire expands further.

'The great majority of people in English speaking nations now define their lives through earnings, possessions, appearances and celebrity and those things are making them miserable because they impede the meeting of our fundamental needs.'
(James, 2007)

Signature strengths and a sense of purpose.

Reaching this sense of fulfilment requires attention first to finding and building our signature strengths and character strengths. Signature strengths are those things we enjoy doing and are good at, that are essential to our character. Seligman (2002) has suggested that it is mainly fruitless to devote much

effort to correcting your weaknesses. Rather, the deepest emotional satisfaction comes from building and using your signature strengths. Using and expanding our signature strengths has huge well-being outcomes, including excitement at using the strength; setting challenges to use the strength in new contexts and ways, and ultimately the creation of personal projects around the strength. Fortifying these signature strengths can then lead to a greater sense of purpose, self-efficacy and wish to use this strength for the benefit of others. This process can build the belief that, because of these strengths, there is meaning and purpose to me being alive.

PURPOSE - putting it into practice.

FOCUS ON STRENGTHS, NOT ON WEAKNESSES

The research wholeheartedly advocates a shift from thinking about youth as 'problem' to thinking about youth as 'resource'. This approach understands that the best way to prevent youth problems is through the active development and practicing of skills, attitudes and behaviours. The focus on strengths has many secondary outcomes. Young people can design and take part in projects or services that are based around their strengths; the tendencies of workers to 'nag' young people is reduced as the focus shifts from weaknesses to strengths. Feedback on performance becomes much more positive for the young person when all eyes are on strengths. This, in turn, builds a willingness to hear and take feedback, as improvements to our strengths seems more manageable and constructive.

MORE OF WHAT ANIMATES YOUNG PEOPLE

For young people to build a sense of purpose, workers use their intuitive senses and feedback to work out what captures their imagination. This initial hook is used then to engage their motivation, practice their signature skills and develop projects or behaviours that make the world meaningful. Where workers notice a musical ear, a joker or a singer, this is a good place to start in designing exercises and activities that build upon and exploit these signature strengths.

Too often, a young person has no idea of their signature strengths, and have been given no encouragement to seek them. New experiences can reveal new talents – outdoor pursuits, camping trips or a youth exchange provide a new environment for many young people. Alternatively being given a new chance for a part in a play or to spray-paint a graffiti wall might spark off discoveries that can be amplified.



CONNECT YOUNG PEOPLE TO THE WORLD

Workers can develop planned projects to build connections to the world. Community clean-ups, eco-projects, parents evenings, fund-raising, global discussions all create these connections. Taking part in soccer tournaments with other clubs and communities can also build a sense of pride and loyalty in their own part of this world. Use naturally occurring moments to make the links between what is happening in the media and our own lives – so media coverage of human trafficking in large-scale boats can spark a conversation of human trafficking locally, with the opportunity for local action group to become involved or vice-versa.

Volunteering is more than just work experience. The motivation is not just to build personal or work skills, but through volunteering to have an impact and benefit for others. Workers can foster volunteering amongst young people by recognising the need for early support and encouragement and that one size doesn't fit all. Volunteering on one-off events gives young people a chance to test their skills while not committing long term. These will suit those with strong engagement skills, who are confident in leading a group, handing out information, dealing with the public. Others who are well organised may prefer back-room jobs, which might mean volunteering in the run up to big events. Long term volunteering may follow from these experiences, but are more likely where the young person feels a sense of belonging and has built up their sense of worth to themselves and the organisation or community.

S is for SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS – what the research tells us.

Communication and connection are different. Instant communication is a feature of life for young people, with mobile devices offering access to people, opinion, support and information all day and night. Many young people mistake communication with connection, believing these to be one and the same. The stark reality is that young people can experience greater loneliness, isolation and vulnerability as devices become their best friends rather than real people.

The difference is that social connection involves contact and feelings. The physical elements of building social connections are subtle but powerful.

Hearing a voice and using your own voice; tone of voice; hearing and generating laughter, touch and contact, smell, sharing, the excitement and activity of a few people together, the sense of belonging and identity in groups and crowds, all add to connections and health filled relationships. These extras are left out in texts and e-mails, posts and vlogs, leaving young people with heaps of communication, but left feeling isolated.

Happiness is best predicted by the range and depth of one's social connections (Putnam, 2001). Across all models of well-being, the need to function well socially is a common theme. Humans have a very basic need to belong to groups and interact with others. Deiner & Seligman (2002) conducted a study of the most and least happy people and discovered that the single unifying factor, (the trait that the happy group had in common and on which they differed from the unhappy group), was the breadth and depth of close trusting relationships. We function much better when we are in social networks that offer cooperation, support and enjoyment.

Many of the activities that increase flourishing are done in the company of others: Flow, positivity, gratitude, meaning, a sense of belonging; a sense of contribution and a sense of place, in a reference group who share your values. It is therefore difficult to imagine how mental well-being can be developed and maintained by people who are entirely isolated from others on a prolonged or permanent basis. This is not to suppose that flourishing and resilient people need to have company. On the contrary, their strong sense of belonging, sense of self and identity mean they can endure and blossom when isolated or on their own. But the fundamentals that have given them such strength comes from the relationship.

Human survival has been dependent on being part of a group, with the emotional and practical safety which this provides. The sense of belonging which is generated by being part of this 'community' leads to an increase in positive emotions. However, the converse is also true – that losing that sense of community leads to negative emotions, with no sharing of emotions and the purpose of life feeling less tangible and more distant.

Social relationships within a structure of social networks, contribute not only to our well-being but also our physical health. Social support is the help provided by others in the form of nurturing, friendship, even material support that helps us cope in times of

difficulty. Connected to social support is emotional support, in the form of empathy, caring and trust among two or more parties. Emotional support provides individuals with the opportunities to express their feelings safely, with a cathartic effect as well as a bonding one.

Strong social networks and connections to community are instrumental in building a strong sense of meaning and purpose. Putnam (2001) defines social connections both in terms of the number of connections an individual has and the strength of those connections. Where both measures are great, strong associations have been shown with higher levels of life satisfaction, overall happiness and a decrease in depressive symptoms. Being connected involves being part of something larger than yourself. Putnam builds on this concept of social capital by showing how social networks can build a sense of community identity and solidarity with other members of this community. This then leads to a principle of 'reciprocity' which begins as a guiding principle of 'I'll do this for you if you do that for me'. This idea quickly develops and assumes that similar trust will apply in new relationships also. Therefore the new concept that is created is 'I'll do this for you in the expectation that you may not do something in return for me, but that someone else will do something for me down the road.' (ibid, 2001).

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS – putting it into practice.

WORKING WITH GROUPS TO BUILD SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

A key practice to build on this notion of social connections, is to work with groups of young people and to run groupwork programmes. Groupwork is not used merely to mean 'teamwork', or as an efficiency measure, to maximise the resources of the worker. For Smith (2008) groupwork is more than a technique:

'We explore the process of working with groups both so that they may undertake particular tasks and become environments where people can share in common life, form beneficial relationships and help each other.'

The function of working with groups is to create an environment where young people are mutually responsible for each other and where individuals are of inherent worth. Groupwork builds social connections by helping young people to help each

other, in what Shulman refers to as a 'mutual aid system' (1999). Working with groups holds a careful balance of building individual strengths and creating social networks and social supports for young people to belong to. Ultimately working with groups can build access and practice for more fulfilling lives for young people and their communities.

Workers can act as gatekeepers for young people into groups and experiences that might seem outside a young person's comfort zone. Fear of intimacy or disclosure, fear of embarrassment, worries about saying something stupid or shyness are all barriers that young people consistently experience when faced with new peer interactions. Facilitating entry and welcoming actions is part of the worker's repertoire – 'what about you and Martin working on that together?' or 'why not join us to see if you might enjoy it?' This role can be built into the group process by a 'meet and greet' routine for new members. Setting up and maintaining group contracts is a way for workers to further this facilitative, inclusive approach. This in turn will encourage young people with a more cautious disposition, who can find rich returns from groupwork:

In this safe environment they find allies, are motivated, praised, challenged, confronted and share experiences with their peers. Acknowledging the agency of the individual, in affecting personal change, the group provides opportunities for learning, development and personal growth. (Neill, 2015)

THE RELATIONSHIP IS THE INTERVENTION

The relationship is the intervention. It is not the vehicle towards something else. It is not the means to an end. It is the end of itself. Some young people will have experience of either painful or weak relationships where care, compassion and communication are limited. Even for those who have experience of strong loving relationships, a new relationship with a new adult can be the right person at the right time, whose perspective and attention can be life-changing. For a young person, the power of a positive relationship can have deep and far reaching consequences for their mental health for that immediate moment and for a long time after.

THE PURPOSE OF THE RELATIONSHIP

For the relationship to be a healthy one for the young person, the purpose of the relationship must be



healthy. Drug dealers and groomers may have very strong relationships and connections with young people, but the difference lies in the intent. For workers who are interested in building positive relationships with young people, the intended outcomes for the young person might include a sense of self-worth, self-efficacy, problem solving, sense of purpose, identifying strengths and talents and ultimately empowerment and independence. Where the relationship is serving the worker more than the young person, the motivations of the worker need to be questioned and challenged. This can happen where a worker's self-esteem is boosted by being popular with the young people and that this is the primary focus. Worker popularity is not problematic, as long as the worker can use these features to further the outcomes for the young person.

THE RELATIONSHIP AS A MODEL FOR OTHER RELATIONSHIPS

The relationship is also important in modelling a healthy life. So the young person-adult relationship which is positive can act as an example for future relationships. Its' value is both in itself and in what it can teach a young person. Establishing and negotiating boundaries, reconciling, expressing anger or frustration with each other in appropriate ways, showing kindness and affections in healthy ways, communicating clearly through talking and listening, working through difficult or painful moments together – some or all of these may surface as a feature of healthy relationships that can be relevant for peer or intimate relationships.

Signposts for LIFEMAPS

Mental health material invariably ends with signposting – showing people who need support where to go and how to get help on-line and through other organisations. This signposting information is not to move people onto other places but to encourage workers and policy makers to pause and consider the discussions contained in LIFEMAPS.

The full scope of mental health issues needs resourcing and support. It is not enough to invest in treating only acute and chronic mental illness. The current downward spiral of mental health across full populations of young people will have a crippling effect on the health service.

Investment in early intervention will yield outcomes. As outlined in the final project report from the Foresight Mental Capital and Well-being Project (2008):

'An individual's mental capital and well-being crucially affect their path through life. Moreover, they are vitally important for the healthy functioning of families, communities and society. Together, they fundamentally affect behaviour, social cohesion, social inclusion and our prosperity... childhood and adolescence are particularly crucial stages when important skills are learned which set the trajectory for mental capital and well-being through later years.'

Mental health is not the preserve of mental health professionals, but can be boosted by considered approaches to working with young people. Thinking, reflective workers from across disciplines can use LIFEMAPS approaches in their own setting to compliment other interventions from health professionals.

LIFEMAPS presents mental health as an approach not a theme or a programme. It is built through moments and activities that never mention mental health. It can be woven into everyday life, by workers, parents, volunteers, teachers, classroom assistants, play workers, youth workers, health professionals and counsellors using these new strategies and new thinking skills.

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APPENDIX 1 - RIGHT HERE FERMANAGH

RIGHT HERE FERMANAGH promotes the positive mental health of young men and young women aged 16-25 across Fermanagh. The project challenges the stigma associated with mental illness and mental health, promotes new and innovative ways of improving the mental health of young people across the whole population and influences policy to improve existing mental health services for young people in the area. YouthAction NI is the lead delivery partner, with work with young men and work with young women in single gender groups being as the primary face to face practice.

The project focuses on five themes to build positive mental health for 16-25 year olds:

- Youth-led interventions: young women and young men in rural Fermanagh building decision-making and leadership skills with which they can become active leaders for other young people.
- Building resilience – young women and young men gaining and practicing thinking and action skills which provide them with a more positive approach to the daily challenges of everyday living, to greater life challenges and changes which threaten their stability and identity.
- Building capacity – workers, volunteers, teachers, health professionals, parents and adults gaining new strategies and new thinking skills which they can use with young people in their communities.
- Local campaign – young people from rural Fermanagh will have a greater knowledge of mental health issues for young people and a stronger concept of what constitutes good mental health.
- Strategic partnership & influencing work – building alliances and partnerships across health, education and local government to improve mental health service delivery to and for young people.

Right Here Fermanagh is a partnership across Health, Education and local government.

The 9 partners are Action Mental Health, YouthActionNI; Western Education and Library Board; Public Health Agency; ARC Healthy Living Centre; OAK Healthy Living Centre; Youth Council for Northern Ireland; Fermanagh District Council and Western Health and Social Care Trust.

Right Here Fermanagh is funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Mental Health Foundation, with match funding provided by the Public Health Agency, Western Education & Library Board, Youth Council for Northern Ireland and Fermanagh District Council.

LIFEMAPS MODEL

The LIFEMAPS model has been developed from work with 16-25 year-olds spanning the full range of the mental health continuum; ranging from work with young people who have identified diagnosed mental illnesses to those with moderate mental health and those needing to boost existing flourishing behaviours.

This document accompanies the LIFEMAPS handbook, a practical resource for workers and those interested in building the mental health of young people. Available on www.youthaction.org

Other resources

Other documents from www.right-here.org.uk include:

- **How to promote mental well-being in youth work practice**
This guide is aimed at youth organisations working with young people aged 16–25. Its objective is to help to embed mental well-being improvement practices within the organisations.
- **How to promote mental well-being in primary care**
This guide has been designed to help GPs and other primary care practitioners develop practice that is young person friendly, and better identify and address the mental health needs of the young people who come to see them.
- **How to commission better mental health and well-being services for young people**
This guide is aimed at those with a responsibility for commissioning mental health and well-being services for young people.
- **How to promote youth friendly mental health and well-being services**
This guide has been written to help services address the specific needs of this age group and tackle some of the barriers which prevent them from accessing traditional mental health services.



APPENDIX 2 - MORE OF WHAT THE RESEARCH TELLS US

Mental Health can be learned.

Lyubomirsky et al (2005) suggests that each person has a set point or characteristic level of well-being which is 50% determined by our genes. This follows a body of research into the happiness levels of twins and in particular the work of Lykken and colleagues from the University of Minnesota (1990). This research concludes that aspects of our temperament, our resilience, levels of anxiety, our general disposition are partly determined by our genes. A further suggestion from the research, that seems counterintuitive, is that the circumstances of our life (our income, where we live, level of education, religious beliefs, marital status etc.) contribute only a further 10% towards our sense of well-being. This leaves some 40% of our well-being open to intervention.

As Daniel Kahneman (2002 Nobel laureate) said 'Happiness is a skill.' This means that whilst there are no quick fixes, there are certain attitudes, skills and experiences which increase the likelihood of things working out well. As with any skill, through effort, we can learn it, practice it and improve it.

New approaches to learning can improve mental health.

To be motivated to do something, a person needs to have a high expectation of success and to believe they can do it. The high expectation of success is called self-efficacy. This is important for people to have when they encounter difficulties. If a person has high self-efficacy, they will keep putting in the effort and not be discouraged and such expectations will also drive other behaviours aimed at delivering a goal. A related belief for a person is that of their own competence. A person needs to believe in their ability to do what they want to do. What is particularly important here is having goals which an individual must work hard to achieve but which are ultimately achievable.

Martin Seligman (1995) suggests that this emphasis on self-esteem has contributed to the increase in depression in young people:

'Armies of teachers along with parents are straining to bolster children's self-esteem. That sounds innocuous enough, but the way they do it often erodes children's sense of worth. By emphasising how a child feels at the expense of what the child does – mastery, persistence, overcoming frustration and boredom and meeting a challenge – parents and teachers are making this generation of children more vulnerable to depression.'

Such misguided attempts to boost self-esteem have the effect of making young people feel better, but ultimately does not build mastery and self-efficacy (whereby the young person both feels good and does well).

Learning resilient thoughts, behaviours and actions.

Children and young people vary widely in how they respond to a set of circumstances (Baylis, 2005). Some may do well, even in the most adverse circumstances, whilst others seem to have little capacity to cope with lesser difficulties.

Viewed in terms of their strengths rather than their weaknesses, struggling children were found to develop great inner resources that helped them to learn to adjust and adapt to the changed circumstances of their life.

When surrounded by the right supports (protective factors), they could not only survive descending odds but go on to have productive lives, often made more meaningful by their struggle.

Optimistic thinking can encourage learning.

Seligman, in *Learned Optimism* and *The Optimistic Child* argues that each of us has our own 'explanatory style,' a way of thinking about the causes of things that happen in our lives. He suggests that there are 3 main dimensions that we use to interpret events and these are *permanence*, *pervasiveness* and *personalisation*. He proposes that understanding these perspectives is pivotal to challenging a pessimistic style and building an optimistic one.

PERMANENT vs TEMPORARY (ALWAYS vs NOT ALWAYS)

A person with a pessimistic explanatory style will be assured that when something goes wrong, it will always go wrong. This contrasts those with an optimistic style, who will be firm in their belief that this will be better next time. Permanence vs temporary, e.g. *"I am stupid vs I didn't revise"*

PERVASIVE vs SPECIFIC (EVERYTHING vs NOT EVERYTHING)

An optimist would see failure as a specific setback rather than all pervasive. Pessimists on the other hand may catastrophise and see their failures as global, e.g. *"I'm rubbish at sport vs I didn't play well at the start of the second half."*

PERSONAL vs EXTERNAL (ME vs NOT ME)

When things go wrong, pessimists will often blame themselves, internalising the cause. Optimists on the other hand, consider a greater number of factors, including external events and the actions of others that may have contributed.

(Seligman, 1995, 2006)

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation reflects the inborn human tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to explore the world, to exercise our capacities. Self-determination theory (SDT) points to three basic human needs that are involved in motivating people (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These basic psychological needs are:

- (1) **AUTONOMY**– the need to choose what one is doing, being an agent of one's own life. This is the perception of experiencing a sense of choice and psychological freedom in the initiation and continued engagement in one's actions.
- (2) **COMPETENCE**- the need to feel confident in doing what one is doing and having the perception of being effective in dealing with the environment.
- (3) **RELATEDNESS**– the need to have human connections that are close and secure, whilst still respecting autonomy and facilitating competence. This is the sense of being cared for and connected to other people.

(ibid, 2000)

SDT's prediction that meeting these needs will move motivation from extrinsic to intrinsic has been supported by a large body of research.

Flow.

Csikszentmihalyi (1992) suggested 8 key conditions for flow to occur:

1. The task is challenging and requires skill.
2. We concentrate fully on the activity.
3. There are clear goals.
4. We get immediate feedback.
5. We have deep involvement.
6. There is a sense of control.
7. Our sense of self vanishes.
8. We lose our normal sense of time.

Flow helps us 'feel good' and 'do well'.

Well-being is not simply about *feeling good* but also involves doing well. Flow is the mental state in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. In essence, flow is characterized by complete absorption in what one does. We are so involved in an activity that the rest of the world seems to have disappeared, our mind isn't wandering, and we are totally focused on the activity to the extent that we may not even be aware of ourselves. Flow can only be experienced when we encounter challenges that test our skills, yet our capacities are such that it is just about possible for us to meet the challenge.

Growth mindsets encourage flow.

Dweck's work (2006) has been crucial to our understanding of how mindsets can impact on personal performance and achievement. Her work has identified two distinctive mindsets which are present in the population and the dominance of one or other can have marked effect on how we approach learning and challenging tasks. Essentially, some of us believe that characteristics and abilities are fixed assets, which individuals hold and have innate to themselves. This attitude drives a 'fixed mindset' which attributes accomplishment to an in-built ability that has led to success. This attitude under estimates the role of learning or improvement in performance and achievement. Dweck turns her attention to those who view talents and skills as flexible, with a belief that effort and practice can lead to improved outcomes.



Those people with this attitude to learning have what Dweck calls 'a growth mindset'. The opportunities for learning are viewed positively with a growth mindset. Success and failure are viewed by those with a growth mindset as a reflection not on the innate ability of the individual, but as a commentary on their approach to tasks, improvement and learning.

This theory has been influential in identifying patterns of how children and young people approach challenging tasks. Those who exhibit a growth mindset have a more positive approach to difficult situations, with resilience and tenacity featuring prominently. For those with a fixed mindset the internalization of failure can be personally damaging, as the tendency is towards self-blame. Therefore approaching a challenging task for those with a fixed mindset is fraught with psychological danger – in 'discovering' that they are not as talented or intelligent as they had believed. This mindset aligns failure to an inherent flaw in identity and attributes this failure to personal flaws rather than more flexible explanations e.g. need for more practice or to put in more effort. For many who exhibit a fixed mindset, withdrawal from an activity (which might bring potential failure) is preferable to trying and failing:

The primary cause of disengagement from learning is repeatedly putting failure down to stable, personal, uncontrollable, and global factors that suggest failure is inevitable. Young people with a lethal cocktail of pessimistic explanations of progress, fixed ability ideas, a strong performance attitude to achievement and low competency beliefs are especially vulnerable to a spiral of failure avoidance.

(McLean, 2003)

The mindset theory has relevance for how young people approach and respond to flow activities. For those who seek challenge and new endeavours, they will be easily drawn to flow activities which may encourage persistence, practice and effort, leading to accomplishments. For those who fear failure as a personal slight on their person, flow activities are associated with a hazard of 'being exposed' or 'not being good enough'. So building a growth mindset will result in young people feeling drawn to flow activities and the deep sense of well-being associated with these.

Positive emotions and negative emotions.

Specifically, they have found that it builds into important resources such as wider search patterns, new ways of thinking and new actions. Positive emotions, therefore:

- Increase productivity, motivation, engagement, persistence, creativity, memory, resilience, perception and relationships.
- Help us to remember, to learn and to communicate with others.
- Make us more curious and interested, willing to try new activities and develop new skills.

A particular aspect of resilience researched by Fredrickson was recovery from negative emotions. She found that people who are more positive and who experience more positive emotions recovered more quickly from setbacks. Their blood pressure and heart rates returned to normal faster than for those with less positivity. So positive emotions helped overcome negative ones and restored measurable factors such as heart rate to normal more quickly.

Fredrickson and Losada (2005) found a ratio of positive to negative emotions that is most favourable for efficient functioning. This 'positivity ratio' is important in determining whether a person is languishing or flourishing. The tipping point above which people begin to flourish is a 3:1 ratio of positive to negative emotions and has been named the '*Losada Line*'. This means that we need to experience roughly three times as much positive emotion as negative emotion in order to flourish. Positive psychologists have found that it is the *frequency* of feeling positive emotions that is important to our well-being rather than their *intensity*.

Examples of positive emotion that we can aim to promote include joy, excitement, curiosity, pride, amusement, inspiration, contentment, elevation, vitality, gratitude, serenity, hope, awe, love. All of these emotions broaden our outlook. A meta-analysis of over 300 studies of positivity which collectively tested over 275,000 people, concluded that positivity produces success in life as much as it reflects success. Put simply, positive emotions are not simply the result of things going well but also the cause.

Positive emotions and physical well-being.

Our emotions are connected to our thoughts, behaviours and our physiology. It is no surprise that a large amount of research links good diet, sleep and exercise to well-being.

In his review of research between mood and physical exercise, Argyle (2001) found the benefits of regular exercise were many: lower stress, less tension, less tiredness, lower feelings of anger and depression, increased vigour, higher self esteem, more positive body image and increased reports of positive moods.

This is one of many studies and the data is so strong in the case of exercise and physical and emotional well-being that the conclusion is unavoidable.

Savouring.

Savouring has a past, present and future component. The past can be savoured by thinking about all the good things that have already happened in life. For instance, early childhood, past pets, great holidays, fun times spent with grandparents; good friends at primary school.

The present can be savoured by truly living in it - eating food slowly and with relish, becoming immersed in a book or a movie, truly listening to a friend, getting involved in a project, basking in a friend's accomplishments. The future can be savoured by anticipating future events and getting excited about them. This anticipation is most positive when it involves optimistic thinking – thinking and expecting the best of a future event. Building balance between past, present and future means we avoid being stuck in one state (e.g. the past), leading to unhelpful thoughts and behaviours.

Accomplishment requires three distinct strands of positive psychology to interact to build flourishing behaviours and attitudes:

1. Goals
2. Mindsets
3. Hope

Goals.

Goals which are challenging but achievable and which also serve a wider purpose to the benefit of others, can add to a sense of life satisfaction, a positive frame of mind, perseverance and resilience (Emmons, 2003; Sheldon et al, 2002). Traditional approaches to goal setting often emphasise a person's weaknesses, needs and problems. In this positive psychology approach, greater attention is given to clarifying goals and working towards an accomplishment agenda. Workers can build this approach into their programmes through collaborating with the young person to highlight goals and aspirations and to utilise individual strengths and resources in moving towards achievement. The worker must have a strong understanding of whether the nature of the goal is *healthy* or *toxic* by considering the following characteristics of the goal:

Intrinsic vs extrinsic goals.

Working towards goals that are personally involving and rewarding to you is more likely to lead towards well-being than working towards goals that are not freely chosen. Where goals are extrinsic, i.e. fame, power, feeling good, money, this can be toxic for well-being. It is much better to have intrinsic goals, e.g. to develop better as a person, to contribute to the group/community/ society etc.

Approach vs avoidant goals.

Does the goal involve *approaching a desirable outcome* (eating healthily, taking up a new hobby) as opposed to *avoiding an undesirable outcome* (trying not to feel guilty, avoiding arguing with your partner, not being overweight). A growing number of studies have shown that people who mostly pursue avoidance goals are less happy, more anxious, distressed and unhealthy than people who generally pursue approach goals. Many young people focus on things they do not want or something they want to stop - an unsatisfactory relationship, eating unhealthily. These are called 'avoidance' goals; they are about getting away from something undesirable. To begin to harness motivation, the worker needs to work with the young person to establish an approach or 'towards' goal. This is a goal which expresses what the young person does want and the more specific and vivid this goal can be, the more motivating it will be.



Hope.

Hope Theory (Snyder, Rand and Sigmon, 2002) is now seen as a vital contributor to the positive psychology community. Hope refers to a person's expectations and beliefs in a positive future or a positive outcome to some event or initiative. It also includes an expectation that following identified pathways will lead to desired results. Hope is therefore a crucial component of resilience - if a person does not believe that they will succeed through their efforts then they are less likely to persist when faced with difficulty and may struggle to overcome disappointment.

Hope Theory suggests that hopeful people have three key characteristics:

1. They have desired goals, which motivate and enthuse them.
2. They can find pathways to those goals despite obstacles in the way.
3. They have the motivation to use those pathways.

(Snyder et al, 2002)

Through studies of 'hopeful people', enhanced life outcomes have been recorded such as less tendency towards depression, better health and greater sense of life purpose.

Finding signature strengths.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) worked with their team to develop a classification of character strengths that exist in cultures all around the world. The process resulted in the identification of 24 character strengths which are routes to achieving virtues. Six virtues are outlined by the 'Values in Action' classification (VIA), which have universal resonance and have moral aspects which also feature in the quest for a sense of meaning and purpose.

1. WISDOM - cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge.
2. COURAGE - emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal.
3. HUMANITY – interpersonal strengths that involve taking care of others and building strong relationships.
4. JUSTICE – civic strengths that underlie healthy community life.
5. TEMPERANCE – strengths that protect against excess.
6. TRANSCENDENCE – strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning.

The VIA inventory of strengths is a self-report questionnaire of 240 items which can be completed on-line, at www.authentichappiness.com. An individual gets immediate feedback on his or her top five strengths (a youth version is also available). The discovery of character strengths is the first stage in building our signature strengths and creating a sense of purpose from using these.

Notes

LIFEMAPS has emerged from Right Here Fermanagh (2009-2014), a partnership of nine organisations, lead by YouthAction Northern Ireland and funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Mental Health Foundation.

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A LIFEMAPS handbook accompanies this report.



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