



**A Readers Guide to Kindness:
for Positive Mental Wellbeing of Self and Others**

By

Mind in Barnet

For Mental Health Awareness Week, 18-24 May 2020



“Three things in human life are important,” wrote novelist Henry James in the early 20th century. “The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. The third is to be kind.”

1. Welcome to the Guide

Mind in Barnet has produced this guide to highlight the power of kindness and reading – particularly helpful in times of challenge. As you will see it is as much for the individual as those around them. We hope this guide and suggested practice will have a positive ripple effect for the mental wellbeing of the reader and their community.

2. What is Positive Mental Wellbeing?

If someone has positive mental wellbeing they generally:

- feel relatively confident in themselves and have positive self-esteem
- feel and express a range of emotions
- build and maintains good relationships with others
- feel engaged with the world around them
- live and work productively
- cope with the stresses of daily life
- adapt and manage in times of change and uncertainty

There are ways to promote and maintain positive mental wellbeing. One of these is to develop and practice the 5 Ways to Wellbeing.

3. The 5 Ways to Wellbeing

The 'Five ways to wellbeing' have been researched and developed by the New Economics Foundation. A combination of all of these 5 behaviours help to enhance individual well-being and may have the potential to reduce the total number of people who develop mental health disorders in the longer term.

The 5 Ways are:

Connect

There is strong evidence that indicates that feeling close to, and valued by, other people is a fundamental human need and one that contributes to functioning well in the world.

It's clear that social relationships are critical for promoting wellbeing and for acting as a buffer against mental ill health for people of all ages.

Be active

Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety across all age groups.

Exercise is essential for slowing age-related cognitive decline and for promoting well-being.

But it doesn't need to be particularly intense for you to feel good - slower-paced activities, such as walking, can have the benefit of encouraging social interactions as well providing some level of exercise.

Take notice

Reminding yourself to 'take notice' can strengthen and broaden awareness.

Studies have shown that being aware of what is taking place in the present directly enhances your well-being and savouring 'the moment' can help to reaffirm your life priorities.

Heightened awareness also enhances your self-understanding and allows you to make positive choices based on your own values and motivations.

Take some time to enjoy the moment and the environment around you.

Learn

Continued learning through life enhances self-esteem and encourages social interaction and a more active life.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the opportunity to engage in work or educational activities particularly helps to lift older people out of depression.

The practice of setting goals, which is related to adult learning in particular, has been strongly associated with higher levels of wellbeing.

Why not learn something new today?

Give

Participation in social and community life has attracted a lot of attention in the field of wellbeing research.

Individuals who report a greater interest in helping others are more likely to rate themselves as happy.

Research into actions for promoting happiness has shown that committing an act of kindness once a week over a six-week period is associated with an increase in wellbeing.

More information can be found at:

<https://neweconomics.org/2008/10/five-ways-to-wellbeing>

Mind has practical ideas about these are done by working people:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/workplace/mental-health-at-work/taking-care-of-yourself/five-ways-to-wellbeing/>

The New Economics Foundation have also written 'The Five Ways To Wellbeing at a Time of Social Distancing':

<https://neweconomics.org/2020/03/five-ways-to-wellbeing-at-a-time-of-social-distancing>

4. Ideas of Kindness

Kindness can link to the 5 Ways to Wellbeing as follows:

- It is central to making connections
- It is needed to truly observe
- It is at the heart of truly giving

Eva Wiseman in the Guardian

(<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/apr/01/the-cult-of-being-kind>) wrote that kindness is replacing mindfulness as the buzzword for how we should live.

She reminds us that kindness is not new. Aristotle said: “It is the characteristic of the magnanimous man to ask no favour but to be ready to do kindness to others.” Kindness is mankind’s “greatest delight,” said Roman philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius.

Earlier, Piero Ferrucci (who wrote *The Power of Kindness*, 2006) said:

- Life goes on because we are kind to one another
- Kindness is making less effort, it’s the most economic attitude
- Kindness has to do with what is most intimate to us, often not expressed by men or women
- Kindness requires us to be in the present which is a gift
- Kindness requires patience, which is not as heavy or tedious as we may think
- Time is an illusion, a mental construct
- Gratefulness is easily forgotten, but also easily evoked

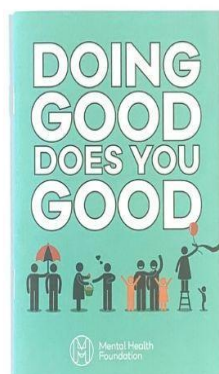
A pdf extract of Piero’s book can be found at:

<http://pieroferucci.it/pdf/The%20Power%20of%20Kindness%20-%202006.pdf>

The practice of kindness can benefit a person’s mental health in a number of ways.

5. Kindness and Positive Mental Health

**The Mental Health
Foundation (MHF) has
published ‘Doing Good Does
You Good’**



Available from: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/doing-good-does-you-good>

The MHF guide shows that helping others is actually beneficial for our own mental health and wellbeing. It can help reduce stress, improve our emotional wellbeing and even benefit our physical health, as follows:

Helping others feels good

There is some evidence to suggest that when you help others, it can promote physiological changes in the brain linked with happiness.¹

Helping others can also improve our support networks and encourage us to be more active.⁴ This in turn can improve our self-esteem.³

It creates a sense of belonging and reduces isolation

Volunteering and helping others can also help us feel a sense of belonging, make new friends and connect with our community.^{3,4} Face-to-face activities such as volunteering at a food bank can help reduce loneliness and isolation.⁴

It helps keep things in perspective

Many people don't realise the impact that a different perspective can have on their outlook on life.

Helping others, especially those who are less fortunate than yourself, can help to put things into perspective and make you feel more positive. There is some evidence that being aware of your own acts of kindness, as well as the things you are grateful for, can increase feelings of happiness, optimism, and satisfaction.^{5,6} Doing good may help you to have a more positive outlook about your own circumstances.

It helps make the world a happier place – it's contagious!

Acts of kindness have the potential to make the world a happier place. An act of kindness can improve feelings of confidence, being in control, happiness and optimism.⁶

It may also encourage others to repeat the good deed that they've experienced themselves – contributing to a more positive community.⁷

The more you do for others, the more you do for yourself

The benefits of helping others can last long after the act itself, both for you and them.

6. Kindness - Start with Yourself

According to Maarianna Pogosyan in Psychology Today, Cousineau (a psychotherapist) has observed how remarkably unkind people can be towards themselves when they talk about their lives. "If we would tune into our internal dialogue, most likely we wouldn't say those same words to someone we love: I am not good enough, I'm not smart enough, I am not *something* enough. We are mired in regrets from the past or worries about the future. We compare and despair," she says. Naturally, it may be easier to be kind to others than to ourselves, so it may take some intention and effort to befriend ourselves, too.

The key to learning to be kinder to ourselves lies in self-compassion. Self-compassion stands upon three pillars: self-kindness (treating yourself with the kindness and understanding you would show to someone you love), common humanity (recognizing that you are not alone in your pain and that suffering is a shared human experience), and mindfulness (holding your negative experiences as they are – without suppressing them or over-identifying with them). As a bonus, self-compassion comes with a wealth of well-being benefits: from building resilience, optimism and healthier stress response, to reducing depression, anxiety and rumination.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/between-cultures/201904/why-choose-kindness>

7. Acts of Kindness for Self and Others

World Kindness Day takes place on 13 November. Here are some ideas of kindness from the Mental Health Foundation you can try for yourself and others:

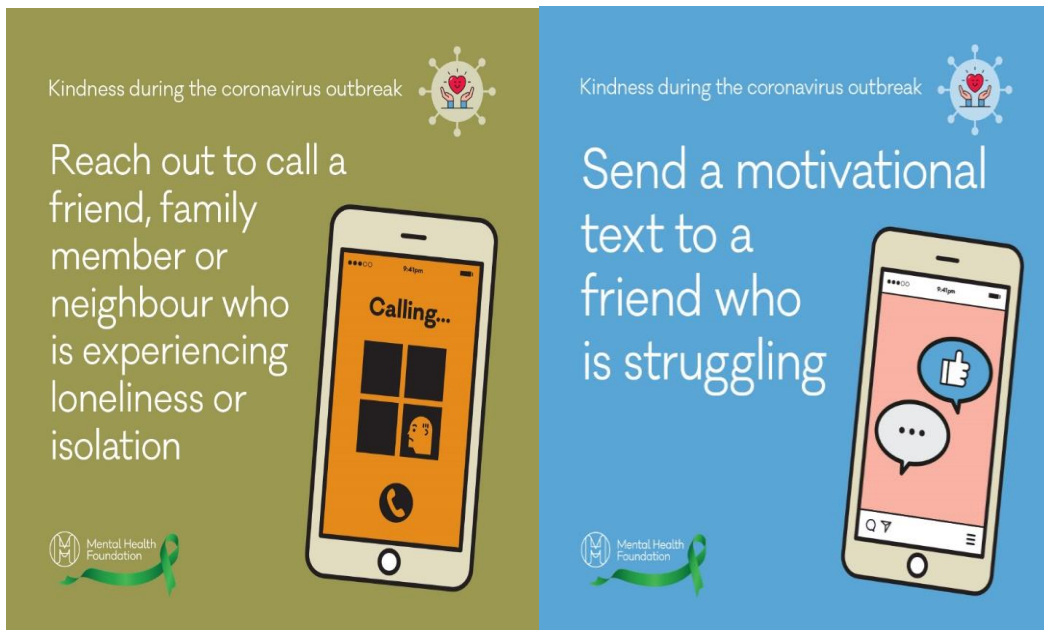
Being kind to yourself

- Read more about why it's important to find time for self-care
- Prioritise some "me" time so you can relax and reflect.
- Treat yourself to something small like buying or planting yourself some flowers
- Do something you enjoy like reading, or listening to a favourite song or piece of music
- Spend some time in nature, which is good for your wellbeing

Being kind at home and in your community

- Call a friend that you haven't spoken to for a while
- Post a card or letter to someone you are out of touch with
- Send flowers to a friend out of the blue
- Find out if a neighbour needs any help with shopping
- Help a friend pack for a move
- Send someone a handwritten thank you note

- Offer to babysit for a friend
- Walk your friend's dog
- Tell your family members how much you love and appreciate them
- Help with household chores
- Shovel snow for an elderly neighbour
- Check on someone you know who is going through a tough time
- Help a friend who wants to get active



8. Why Reading can be Good for Mental Health

Sydney Timmins writer and founder of the Mental Health Book Club Podcast is a mental ill health survivor after being diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, anxiety and depression, as well as fighting relapsing remitting multiple sclerosis. Here are her top eight mental health benefits of reading:

Reading is pleasurable

When you start to read a really good book it is often hard to put it down, the story captivates you and time disappears as you become absorbed. When you reach the end, you feel sad because it is over, or you are so eager to get the next book in the series you are emailing the author daily! It is a magical feeling and choosing to read a book can provide a number of other benefits.

Reading can reduce stress

Losing yourself in a good book has been shown to reduce your levels of stress. Research by Dr David Lewis showed that reading as little as six minutes a day can reduce stress levels by 60% by reducing your heart rate, easing muscle tension and altering your state of mind.

That same study showed that reading was better at reducing stress than music, drinking a cup of tea, going for a walk and playing video games.

Reading can provide an escape from the 'real world'

Closely linked to reducing stress levels when you read is the ability to escape from the real world. I did this a lot as a child as a coping mechanism to dealing with the emotional hurt I experienced from my family. I often become immersed in that world and helped me to forget my worries. Research has shown that escapism is more complex than just reading for light-hearted entertainment, but it did show that people found the process transformative changing the way people interact with the world and others.

Reading helps you develop empathy for others

People who read fiction have been shown to improve your level of empathy, the ability for you to understand someone else's beliefs, feelings and thoughts. Known as the theory of mind. Research has shown that people exposed to fiction predicted the results of an empathy task and even positively correlated with social support (but remember correlation does not mean causation!). Further research into the impact of fiction on empathy showed that it was temporarily enhanced after reading fiction.

Reading works your brain and prevents memory loss

Participating in cognitive activities, such as reading over your life-time (both early and later in life) was shown to slow down memory loss when compared to those who didn't participate in mentally stimulating activities. The same study also found that the rate of mental decline was reduced by 32% when people participated in reading, writing and other activities later on in life. While those with infrequent stimulating activity found that their decline was 48% faster than those with average activity.

Reading groups help to treat mental health issues

There is scientific research that shows that reading and then talking about what you have read could be beneficial to mental health and well-being. There is something called bibliotherapy and it has a profound effect on people suffering with depression. Liverpool Health Inequalities Research Institute examined a two weekly reading group program for people diagnosed with depression over a 12-month period and reported a significant improvement to mental health. Participants reported improved concentration, better emotional understanding, increased self-awareness, and the ability to discuss meaningful issues related to self and being.

Reading helps teenagers develop insights into being an adult

Research has shown that reading for pleasure in teenagers has three key benefits, reading was shown to enhance academic performance, social engagement and personal development. Fiction helped teens by providing significant insights into mature relationships, personal values and cultural identity all of which are important in the transition from being a child to becoming an adult.

Reading can make you smarter

Research has shown that reading does in fact make us smarter. Cognitive differences have been seen between those who read a lot and those who read a little. People who are

exposed to more written information are associated with higher vocabulary, general knowledge, and verbal skills.

The MHBC podcast (www.mentalhealthbookclub.com) looks at books, media and speaks to people who think mental health is important. It also identifies books that represent people in a positive and realistic way supporting the mental health community.

9. Reading Well and Barnet Libraries

Reading Well schemes provide practical, self-help books that offer techniques and strategies for successfully managing your health and wellbeing and helping overcome mental health problems.

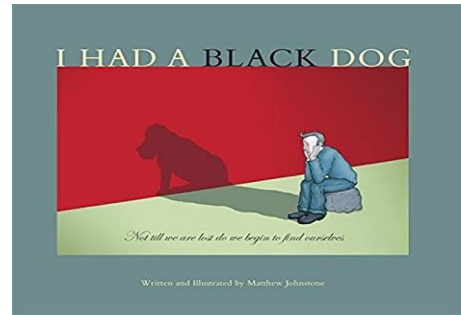
Your GP may prescribe one of these books to help you with your condition.

Books from the scheme are available at Chipping Barnet, Edgware, Hendon and North Finchley libraries, but other Barnet libraries also hold a selection of the recommended titles for Adults, Young people and Children.

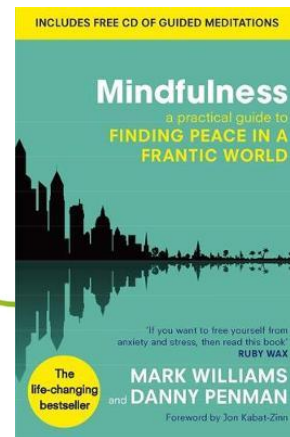
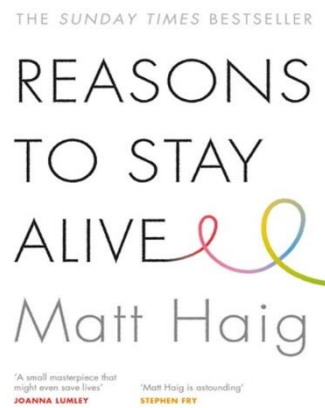
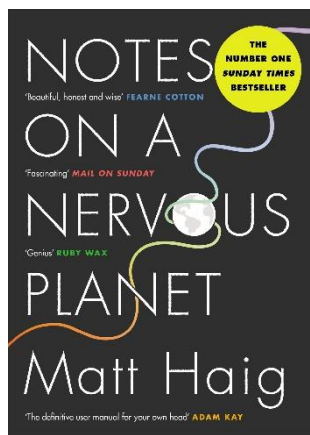
**READING
WELL**

Recommended Reads

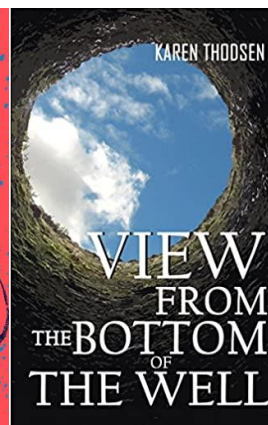
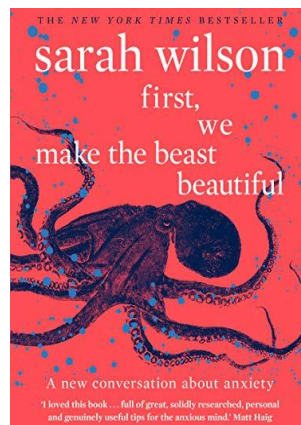
Below are some Books on Mental Health that you can access via the Barnet Library Service



- **Mindfulness: A practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world** by Mark Williams and Dr Danny Penman
- **Reasons to Stay Alive** by Matt Haig
- **Notes on a Nervous Planet** by Matt Haig
- **I Had a Black Dog** by Matthew Johnstone
- **Night Shift** by Debi Gliori



- **View from the Bottom of the Well** by Karen Thodsen
- **Mindfulness on the Go** by Padraig O'Morain
- **First, we Make the Beast Beautiful** by Sarah Wilson



...and finally:



Support for Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing in Barnet

A. How to Improve Mental Wellbeing

To improve and maintain mental wellbeing, whether there is a diagnosis of a mental health condition or not people can:

- Think about what is affecting their wellbeing
- Build positive relationships
- Take time for themselves
- Look after their mental health
- Look after their physical health
- Ask for help if they need it

A Mind guide covering these ideas can be found at:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/wellbeing/wellbeing/>

B. To Find Out More About Mental Health Conditions

If you've been diagnosed with a mental health problem you might be looking for information on your diagnosis, treatment options and where to go for support. Our information pages will help you learn more.

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/>

C. Mind in Barnet Support for Positive Mental Health

We have 3 departments for: Advocacy, Counselling and Wellbeing. All run when our building is open, or continue where possible remotely if we are working from home. For full details of what we provide visit: www.mindinbarnet.org.uk

How to Contact Mind in Barnet Services

Advocacy: E: advocacy@mindinbarnet.org.uk T: 0208 906 7500

Counselling: E: counselling@mindinbarnet.org.uk T: 0208 343 5700

Wellbeing: Art: E: Rebekah.dean@barnetsouthgate.ac.uk

Comedy: tash@headheldhigh.org.uk T: 07826 183 405

Social Groups: E: sambrown@mindinbarnet.org.uk T: 0208 906 7506

If people are not sure of what help they need but think Mind in Barnet may be able to support in some way, then they can call Reception on T: 0208 906 7504: Mon-Fri 10am-4pm (leave a message outside those times).