

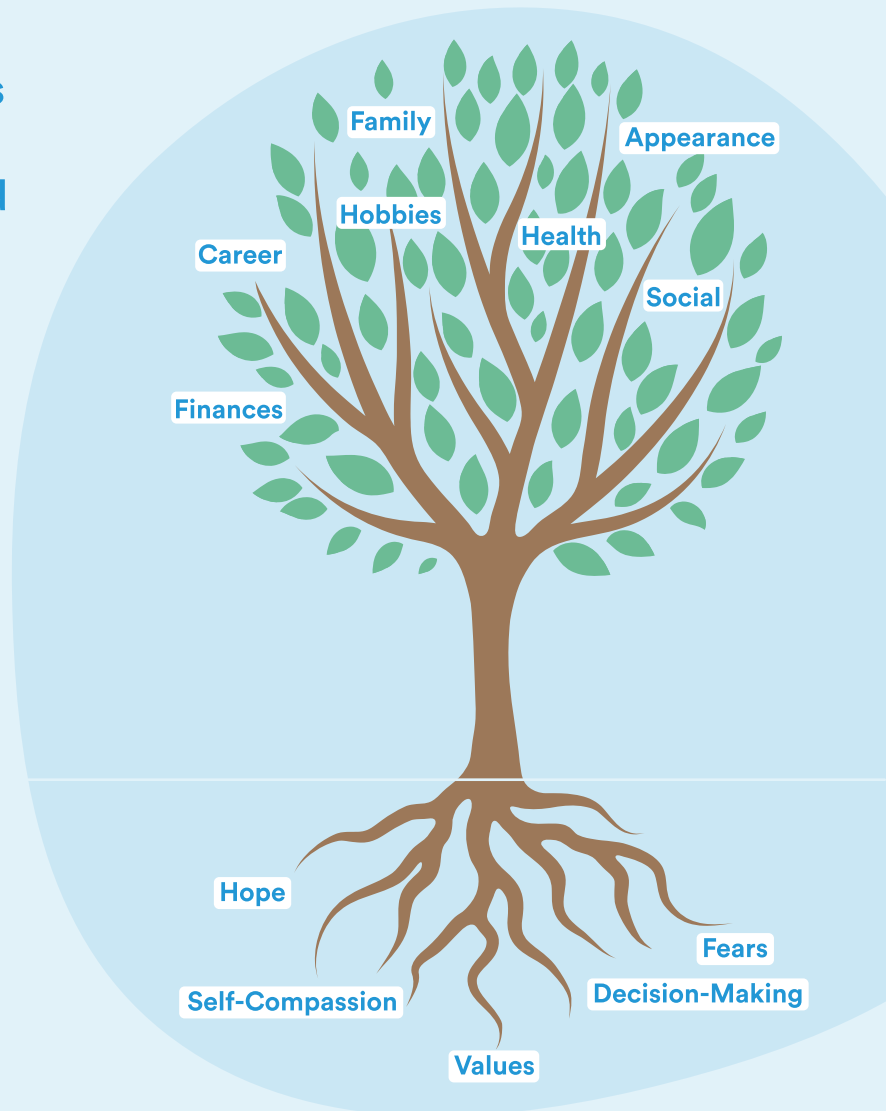
# Mental Health Awareness Week 2021

Mental Health Awareness Week this year looks at the benefits of nature and the environment on our wellbeing.

In celebration, we've chosen a tree as a metaphor for life. A tree is part of a bigger ecosystem that shapes and impacts its growth and development, much like us as humans.

**The branches** represent surface level aspects of life; friends, family, colleagues, work, social life, health.

**The roots** of a tree represent a deeper culture within us, such as our beliefs, values and fears - these are elements that ground us and help nourish our mental health.



However, like the seasons - these aspects are often not static. Frequent changes to our health, careers and social groups force us to adapt in response. But, when we're required to make changes, our focus is often in the wrong place. Whilst "surface culture" is important, we should instead be nurturing our roots by taking action internally. This prevents issues from arising externally.

Each day this week, in light of the event, we are going to focus on our roots

around the following five themes: Values, Fear, Hope, Self-Compassion

and Decision-Making, with a new challenge each day.

# Monday: Values

Our values stem from our **beliefs** and **ideas**. Values can appear in any aspect of our lives, from our **careers** to **relationships**.

## But do we know the difference between extrinsic values and intrinsic values?

An example of an extrinsic value of our career might be earnings or recognition. However, to determine what makes us truly happy, we need to look a bit deeper. Intrinsic values are far more impactful to our overall happiness and wellbeing. These are smaller, and relate to how we feel inside as opposed to how they look on the outside. This might be; to be a great leader, to be a good listener or to perform a task you find particularly challenging. We know and understand that determining our personal values is extremely difficult. Chances are, trying to express your values to others comes with its own set of challenges.

Today, we're setting you a challenge to help identify your own intrinsic values. In a journal, answer the following questions:

1. What's important to you in life?
2. Thinking about your job role, what is your favourite part?
3. When you're reading news stories, what sort of story or behaviour tends to inspire you?
4. What type of story or behaviour makes you angry?
5. What do you want to change about the world or about yourself?
6. What are you most proud of?
7. When were you at your happiest?

## The answers will work as a guide to determine your personal values.

For some, the values will be easy to figure out. If you wrote "a loving relationship" in response to the question about what's important to you, then "love" is an important personal value for you. If you wrote "being happy," then you value happiness.

Others may require a bit more work. For example, if you're inspired by stories of successful entrepreneurs, maybe you value "determination" or "achievement". If you're inspired by activists trying to change the world, maybe you value "courage" or "integrity", "justice" or "peace". When answering the questions, try to determine what exactly it is about those stories or experiences that resonates with you.

You can always turn back to this task at any stage when you're feeling overwhelmed, stressed or stuck, to help you move forward.



## Tuesday: Fear

Every creature on the planet **understands fear**. Dogs are afraid of fireworks whilst cats shy away from dogs. As human beings, **fear comes in many forms**, from running away from danger to taking flight from new challenges that life brings. However, whilst **some fears are accurate** (running from a fire), **others are often clouded** by self-limiting beliefs such as the fear of failure.

### So how can we accept fear, use it to our advantage and shift a fixed mindset to a growth mindset?

Each of us has a failure policy that lives in the back of our subconscious mind. A failure policy represents our attitudes and approach to failure - often showing up as a critical voice. Our failure policy keeps us trapped in a fixed mindset as we are not allowing ourselves to learn and to grow from the experience. Instead, we must learn to embrace fear and fail with courage. Each time you fail in any area of your life, see it as an opportunity to learn more about yourself, to find a better way, to ask for help or to commit more. When you begin to do this, you will begin to see failure as a natural part of life and a process that you can grow and develop from.

Today, we would like you to think about your failure policy. Often, the first step in building a new relationship with fear is to accept it. In a journal answer the following questions:

1. What does failure mean to you?
2. What is your current failure policy?
3. What is your most valuable failure and what did you learn from it?
4. Rewrite your failure policy

**Here's an example of failure policy:** "I fear transmitting stress at work because if I do then I have failed."

**Most valuable failure:** "I started to understand when I became stressed, it wasn't because I was a failure but because I took pride in my work and wanted to express my opinion."

**Rewrite your failure policy:** "If I get stressed, it doesn't mean I have failed, rather I'm showing emotion for something I feel strongly about and it helps me speak openly".

You can revisit this task at any stage, especially when managing a hurdle in life.

The important take away about fear is to challenge the fear in your mind. We often confuse failure with stunted growth, whereas it does the opposite. Next time you feel you've "failed" or might "fail", challenge yourself and see how you can turn it into a positive.



## Wednesday: Hope

**Hopes can be both large or small.**

**But how can hopes turn into opportunities?**

This can only happen with you and by you. Creating opportunities for ourselves differentiates a hope from a wish. Imagine life as a hot air balloon, the balloon represents your hopes. You are the fuel to get the balloon moving - without energy, the balloon won't move. Think of this as a metaphor for the hopes you have in life, without action your hopes aren't going anywhere.

**Today, we want to challenge you to look at short-term, mid-term and long-term hopes for your future.**

### Short-Term

In a journal, write down 3-4 hopes you have for the next six months to one year. Think of them as an intention. Do you want to travel? Do you want to work out more? Or do you want to work harder and get a promotion?

### Mid-Term

Write down a 3-4 hopes you have for the next 3-5 years. Do you want to achieve any artistic goals? Do you want to learn a new language? Or would you like to have a baby?

### Long-Term

Write down 3-4 hopes you have for the next 7-10 years. Are you aiming for career progression? Do you want to make the world a better place? Or do you wish to study more?



You may not have the finances, resources or abilities to reach these intentions just yet but if you focus on the intention, instead of the “ifs” “buts” and “whys”, they become easier to get started. It's really important when looking at your hopes you really think about what you want - goals should be about you and not others.

You can periodically review your hopes and track your progress. Whilst building paths for ourselves in life is important, circumstances change which can alter our course. The idea of this task is to identify what is important to you at this moment and how you can plan for the future, for you.

## Thursday: Self-Compassion

**Having compassion for yourself is no different than having compassion for others. When someone is suffering we have compassion for them to not only understand their suffering but feel moved by it to want to help them.**

Self-compassion works in the same way. Whilst some of us have an innate ability to be self-compassionate, others have to learn it. The good news is that it is something that can be taught. For many of us, we turn to judgement or criticising our shortcomings. Learning self-compassion is knowing that when something happens to us, we accept it, and are able to speak and act kindly towards ourselves.

However, our inner critic can often get in the way. We all have an inner critic, some more than others. This can show up as fear or anxiety or for others it's a critical voice from within. When we recognise our inner critic, we have a stronger understanding when it shows up next and how to tackle it.

**Today, we would like you to pay attention to your inner critic and work on where the thought can lead.**

In your journal, think of something you're overly critical of about yourself. With that critical voice, do the following:

1. Give the voice a name
2. What does it look like? This might be energy or a colour.
3. What tone, volume, voice, and language does it speak with?
4. What is its most dominant thought/inner dialogue?
5. How would you describe it? (Anxious, people-pleasing, angry).
6. Has the critic been a motivator for you in the past?
7. If your inner critic is in first person e.g. "I am not smart enough", remove the "I" from the sentence - it does not define who you are.

This can be practised and revisited anytime, whether you are feeling particularly self-critical or not. Identifying our inner critic helps us speak compassionately to ourselves by understanding the thought is not our reality. Individuals with greater self-compassion tend to have greater happiness, life satisfaction, physical health, motivation and maintain stronger relationships. Self-compassion is particularly important in the workplace, as those who practise it more are more resilient and are able to cope better with stresses of life such as work, divorce, health crises and even trauma.



## Friday: Decision-Making

Decision making is challenging because it rules out one option over another.

### Why do we find decision-making difficult?

Making decisions comes with its own set of challenges because it requires time and energy. This becomes especially difficult when we're faced with stress or feeling fatigued. When our days are psychologically heavy, the input of making a decision becomes greater, for even the smallest of choices.

Flipping a coin or making a choice at random are fine for small decisions. But life decisions often require more critical thinking. When making bigger decisions, be nosy with yourself and ask the following questions: What do I desire? What do I need? Does this serve me? Do I want more of this? Do I want less of this?

**Decision-making occurs more often than we might think, such as, deciding what to order from a menu, deciding what colour to paint the bathroom or choosing where to raise a family. Next time you have to make a decision (whether large or small) do one of the following:**

### Step Outside of Yourself

Often, when we think objectively we're able to think more rationally. Think about how you might help a friend or family member if they were trying to make the decision. Use the advice you'd give them and apply it to you.

### Look Inwards

Ask yourself, if I were to tell someone else the difficulty I am having in making this decision what answer would I hope they'd side with? Often this helps you better understand how to make the best decision for you.

### Two Minute Diversion

In order to think rationally when trying to make a decision, it takes stepping away from the problem. Have a two-minute diversion by engaging in something that causes your mind to think critically, it could be a crossword puzzle or playing a game on your mobile. Whilst you're "distracted" your mind will continue to internalise important details of the decision, so that when you come back to it your mind will be clearer.

Using one of the above, how will decide which theme from this week you'd like to work on the most? Write down your thoughts in a journal.

## To Conclude

**Mental Health Awareness Week exists to banish stigma and to continue the conversation around mental health, around the world. Everymind at Work's passion, and mission, is to do just that, in the workplace.**

We hope you have found our Mental Health Awareness Week challenge worthwhile and that you're able to take away new learnings, practices and mindsets into the future with you.

In hope that you will continue on this journey in normalising mental health in today's society, we would like to invite you to take part in our Everymind Champion course. As we have highlighted this week, it is important to look after yourself - and in doing so we're able to help others. Our course is designed to equip you with the tools to support yourself in the workplace, provide support to others alongside giving you practical suggestions to improve mental health within the business you work for.

**To join others in our community, and become an Everymind Champion, you can sign up [here](#).**

