

Tried and Tested Methods for Regaining Mental Health

Dr. Anil Vartak

English Translation : Dipali Lodh



राष्ट्रीय प्राकृतिक चिकित्सा संस्थान
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF NATUROPATHY

राष्ट्रीय प्राकृतिक चिकित्सा संस्थान

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An MoU is signed between National Institute of Naturopathy, Ministry of Ayush, Govt. of India and Eklavya Foundation, Pune on 03rd July, 2023 to share the wisdom of Mental Health Professionals and to overcome Mental Health Challenges and Stigma.



Five pioneers who played a key role in the formation of 'Eklavya Self Help Group': Smita Godse, Neelima Bapat, Gurudutt Kundapurkar, Anand Godse and Anil Vartak.

Tried and Tested Methods for Regaining Mental Health



Publisher



National Institute of Naturopathy

Ministry of Ayush, Govt. of India

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Tried and Tested Methods for Regaining Mental Health

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English Translation : Dipali Lodh

Publisher:

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF NATUROPATHY

Ministry of Ayush, Govt. of India

'Bapu Bhavan', Matoshree Ramabai Ambedkar Road,

Pune - 411001.

Cover-page design & illustrations:

Shriram Bokil

Revised Edition 2023

Price: 130/-

Dedicated to

my own mental illness, which helped me understand

nothing is 'bad' in this world.

It alone let me to roam the hills

and valleys of my psyche...

gave me a chance, strength,

and inspiration to walk into

a world of balance and peace with others.

And to my father,

whose love of life, whose simple, selfless living

and dedication to work

And to my mother,

Whose curiosity towards life and

'never give up' attitude always inspire me

remain my deepest source of energy

and inspiration to help me move

from mental illness to enrichment !



Foreword

In a world where we strive for progress and advancement, it is disheartening to witness the persistent stigma surrounding mental health. For far too long, individuals grappling with



mental health problems have been silenced, marginalized, and left to suffer in the shadows. It is time to unveil the truth and address the undeniable impact of mental health issues on our lives.

This book, "Tried and Tested Methods for Regaining Mental Health," written by Dr. Anil Vartak, Founder of Eklavya Foundation for Mental Health, serves as a guiding light, illuminating the often misunderstood and stigmatized realm of mental health. By challenging societal norms and fostering understanding, it aims to empower individuals to embrace their struggles, seek help, and find solace in the natural paths towards healing.

Within these pages, you will embark on a journey of discovery, delving into the multifaceted nature of mental health problems. Drawing upon research, personal experiences, and the wisdom of mental health professionals, we unravel the intricacies of these conditions and the impact they have on individuals and society as a whole.

It is a flare of hope, advocating for a natural approach to addressing mental health challenges. We firmly believe that holistic healing lies not only in medical interventions but also in fostering a supportive environment that embraces the uniqueness and inherent worth of every individual.

By shedding light on various natural methods of

addressing mental health, we aim to dismantle the barriers and misconceptions that perpetuate the stigma. From mindfulness and meditation practices to the healing power of art and nature, we explore a myriad of strategies that can be integrated into our daily lives to promote emotional well-being.

Moreover, we recognize that overcoming the stigma surrounding mental health requires collective action. Therefore, we delve into the societal and cultural aspects that contribute to the marginalization of individuals with mental health problems. By fostering compassion, empathy, and education, we seek to create a world where seeking help for mental health issues is met with understanding and support rather than judgment and rejection.

The stories shared within these pages are not only meant to inspire and educate but also to humanize the experience of mental health challenges. Through these narratives, we hope to empower individuals who may be silently suffering, letting them know that they are not alone and that there is a path towards healing and growth.

As you embark on this journey, we invite you to challenge preconceived notions, break free from the chains of stigma, and embrace the power of natural healing. Let us come together as a society to reshape the narrative surrounding mental health, forging a future where no one feels ashamed to seek help, and where compassion and understanding are the cornerstones of our collective well-being.

The time has come to unveil the mind, to embrace our vulnerabilities, and to pave the way towards a world where mental health is treated with the same importance and care as physical health. Let us embark on this transformative journey together.

With unwavering hope,

Prof. Dr. K. Satya Lakshmi
Director
National Institute of Naturopathy, Pune
Ministry of Ayush, Govt. of India

Message

The scenario of mental illness in India is dominated by stigma, ignorance and superstition. Add to it, the huge geographical expanse of the country, the staggeringly large population and dismally small number of trained personnel. Yet we are putting up a brave fight, that too fairly successfully, by consistently trying to expand the treatment & training facilities and, most importantly, by spreading awareness about mental health and disorders amongst the general population.



No matter what attempts are made to expand treatment amenities, the problem of helping the affected persons continues to be vexing. Prevention is one way to mitigate it. But at the common man's level, much relief is offered through awareness. Awareness includes knowledge of the problem and its reliefs. Formal treatment is only a part of it. Much relief comes from various forms of informal self-help. Self-help consists in what the affected persons and their relatives do to cope with the issues and find encouragement to continue their efforts.

In Pune, Maharashtra, the Eklavya Foundation has been cultivating awareness about mental disorders, offering guidance to patients and their families through lectures, workshops, newsletters, films, support groups.

Anil Vartak, (Ph.D. Economics), had founded the Eklavya self-help group. It is operating for the last twenty five years. Prof. Vartak studied strategies of self-help in detail with personal initiative and evolved quite a few of them. The rest are a collection of relief measures actually used by persons with mental illness. The present booklet is a compilation of such practically useful material. He has been a faculty for the

International Diploma at the Centre for Mental Health Law & Policy of the WHO & ILS College, Pune.

This handy booklet gives enough information about the disorder in an objective yet concerned manner. It also dispels many myths and tries to remove stigmas associated with it. Mainly it gives an impetus to build self-confidence of the affected person. "I can do it" is an important empowering statement that improves one's ability of coping. The author gives a fundamentally new orientation by persuading the affected person to become friends with the disorder. Then he reassures that improvement will indeed follow though may be gradually. He urges for regularity of medical compliance, besides the importance of exercise, diet, recreation activities and work. He puts genetic cause in its proper frame of importance. He stresses that any work once undertaken must be completed. Lastly he appeals to join neighbourhood self-help groups for sustaining the benefit one receives and also for reassuring and motivating other struggling families. The book, written in simple language, contains useful information usually sought by a lay person. It will be useful to persons coping with mental illness, their relatives, caregivers and friends. It will be also of interest to social workers and psychologists, family physicians and psychiatrists, too.

Self-help is the best help. It increases Self- confidence that one could surmount problems. Skills of self-help could be had only by trial and error. It gives impetus to keep on trying to recover. Thus, tenacity improves. It adds to self-esteem, thus, gradually doing away with inferiority-feeling. One could learn to hold their head high despite shortcomings, no small achievement indeed.. In usual parlance helper stands on a higher pedestal than the Helped, but not so indeed in self-help, for in this case, the helped is himself the helper.

Gradually a person in difficulty would realize that self-help is the best help.

Dr. V.G. Watve

M.D, D.P.M. Psychiatrist

Past President Indian Psychiatric Society (IPS)2015-16

Message

A Self-Help Pioneer's Musings

For the past twenty five years Dr. Anil Vartak has been helping persons with mental illnesses to overcome their challenges by making use of the forum of a self-help group. Mental illnesses are commonly perceived negatively and are seen as defects of those affected by them. In the booklet's foreword



itself, Dr. Vartak rightly says there is nothing 'bad' about it because what matters is how one perceives things. Though this is an important fact, it is very difficult to acknowledge.

This booklet is based on his experiences and learning while he tried to see things from a different perspective. He has given several easy techniques and strategies that one could use in day-to-day living for overcoming the challenges of mental illness. The mentally ill prefer not to interact with others, and vice versa, leading to their isolation. The author's first suggestion is to learn to make friends. Self-help and help from others definitely lead one gradually towards progress, howsoever slow it may be. There is also a possibility of going down the hill. Importantly Dr. Vartak reminds the reader of the need to be more tolerant of one's initial baby-step progress, because it is a sure way to nurture self-esteem and confidence.

The middle section of the booklet has several practical tips regarding medicines, relatives, caregivers, children, job offers, etc. The penultimate point, the classic spider's persistence, is very important as a role model to climb up after every downward slide! The last point: to be a part of self-help group, is of crucial importance especially for people

with similar issues, to work together. One is reminded of the collective pooling spirit that resulted in the building of the Ram Setu. Eklavya foundation's Eklavya self-help group has been a source of solace and strength to affected families for over 25 years.

I am indeed delighted that the continued demand for this useful book, now offered in Hindi and English, over the years proves the efficacy of self-help in mental health management despite growing access to newer technological resources. May the self-help culture continue to transform more lives everywhere.

Dr. Ulhas Luktike

MBBS, DPM, FIPS, FIC(USA)

Message

It gives me great pleasure to write a preface to this immensely priceless booklet, “Tried and tested methods to regain mental health” by Prof. Anil Vartak. This booklet is meant mainly as a self-help guide for the mentally-ill to regain the stability of their thoughts and emotional life, bring in confidence and peace of mind and provide them with a feeling of well-



being and a capacity to function normally in society. The booklet gives a person with mental health issues “a golden opportunity to improve as a person by converting an adversity to a boon” as the author has aptly called mental disorders; and it also provides comprehensive methods for this.

This booklet contains steps to be taken to recover from mental disorders. These steps have come from the personal experiences of the author, after in-depth introspection about the various aspects of the challenges that one faces while recovering from a mental disorder. It is quite obvious that the author must have had long dialogues with himself to put forth the gems of wisdom contained in all the chapters. “One must objectively look at one’s past without judgment and with compassion as if you were another person”; or “Whether one’s illness is physical or psychological, regular medication may be a necessity”; or “Instead of feeling depressed about what one lacks, the best thing is to make a plan for regaining lost skills”; “You will read about these and other such tips in different chapters of the booklet which are so very important for a person with mental health issues to get over to be a fully

functional and contributing member of the community. The language of the booklet is simple and the author writes from the bottom of his heart. The idea is not only to control the symptoms of mental disorders, but to improve one's feeling of well-being and positive mental health.

As a psychiatrist involved in the treatment and rehabilitation of the mentally ill over five decades and as one involved in creating mental health literacy among the mentally ill, their families and the community over more than four decades; I can say with confidence that this booklet is a blessing to the mentally ill in our country. The literature for patients to know what they have to do to recover from their mental disorders is scarce in India. This booklet certainly fills that void, if the mentally ill use it in the same positive spirit that it has been written in. The booklet needs to be translated into all official Indian languages and made available to all treatment and rehabilitation centres, self-help groups, support and advocacy groups in the community, schools and colleges, health centres, etc. I hope that the Ministry of Health, Government of India or a Non-Governmental Organisation (N.G.O.) or some voluntary organization interested in mental health undertakes this task.

One of the most useful and successful self-help groups in the history of mankind is Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.). Because of A.A. millions of alcoholics all over the world have given up drinking alcohol and have remained sober. Many of them are in the process of remaining sober, taking motivation from the members of local A.A. groups. Mental health professionals in our country would certainly like independent self-help groups and also support groups for the mentally ill to mushroom and flourish in our cities, towns and rural areas so that mental health becomes a mass movement of the whole population and every mentally ill and 'normal' person takes an active part in this movement. Unless this happens,

we will be engulfed by a tsunami of mental, behavioural, neurodevelopmental and neurocognitive disorders with their astronomical disease burden.

Dr. Arun Rukadikar

M.D., D.P.M.

Author of the book “Mental Disorders and YOU” (An illustrated and easy handbook of mental disorders and mental health for the mentally ill, their families and the community; with emphasis on interventions for prevention of mental ill-health and for promotion of mental health) and Senior Consultant Psychiatrist, Healthy & Happy Minds (Mental Health and Rehabilitation Centre, operated by the Qutubuddin Gaibisab Momin Charitable and Welfare Foundation), Siraj Hospital, Miraj.

Preface to the First Edition An Ocean of Strategies...

It is with great pleasure that I present this small collection of writings to all of you. Years ago, while groping through the confusing labyrinth of a mental illness, I luckily stumbled upon the idea of writing a diary. The idea took root and soon I was scribbling pages upon pages. All this writing brought me, by chance, to various strategies to sort out the issues that I was facing. I wrote them down as I thought of them, tried them out and improved them where I felt it was needed. Over the years, these strategies have been of immense help to me to restore my peace of mind as well as my health. During my journey from mental illness to health, I realized that the whole process requires skill. There is no universally defined theory, nor can recovery be guided by stringent measures and precautions. The path is fraught with difficulties.



The problems can be overcome if we adopt logical ways and means of dealing with them. I came across various methods of coping and I intend to present them to you here in these pieces of writing. They are meant to serve as a guide to anyone looking for mental health, so as to avoid wasting time in unnecessary searching. I hope the strategies will serve as stepping stones.

In 2001, at a rather advanced point in my personal journey, I was able to visit the USA as a delegate to the NAMI Convention. While preparing for that trip, through the internet I came to know about the remarkable self-help method of 'Recovery' developed by Dr. Abraham Low in the mid-twentieth century and carried on by his followers till today. (Nowadays, one might call such a well-developed method a

'system'.) By chance, Dot McIntyre (wife of Bob McIntyre, President of Recovery, Inc.) was able to visit Pune at this very time.

Hence, I was able to connect with the organization and visit several groups in the Cleveland area, enjoying their warm hospitality and guidance. On my return to India, I shared this method with my colleagues.

We have found the Recovery method adaptable directly to our Indian urban middle class culture as well as in the Marathi language. It has contributed significantly to our process of growth, and given us a clearer direction. It has changed the nature of our organization and our activities, and given us a way to reach many more people than before. Everything does not need to be *reinvented* by each one of us. I am grateful to Recovery for offering to me and my colleagues an unlimited ocean of strategies to help all of us strive for and attain 'peace, balance and stability'.

We are sure that a lot of you manage to develop your own personal strategies, and are sometimes quite innovative in this. If you send a description to us, we will incorporate it in the next version of our publication. In this way you will help give expression to the trials and tribulations, and to the triumphs of people finding their way to mental health.

Initially I planned to include about twenty topics in these writings. But in the time available I was able to finish only fifteen. This made me hesitant to offer it in print. Then the familiar words of Dr. Low that came to my mind were:

"You can do a task in part acts." and,

Endorse for the effort, not only for outcome." So, with the encouragement and blessings of our 'guru', I am offering you these small pieces as they are, and I hope you find them appealing.

Dr. Anil Vartak

President, Eklavya Foundation For Mental Health, Pune

Preface to the Second Edition

It gives me great pleasure to present the fully revised edition of "TRIED AND TESTED METHODS FOR REGAINING MENTAL HEALTH!" When I was undergoing an extremely critical period in my adolescent life, I fortunately, thought of writing a diary regularly. I wrote about distressing events occurring in my life, the turbulences they created, and whatever little I could do in such situations. I maintained a record of all such things. The diary allowed me to understand the inherent but hidden positivity in me despite being surrounded by a sea of distress and failures. Fortunately, I could cling to this shining ray of Hope and move forward because of my sheer luck and the blessings of my family. Positivity which was vague, foggy, and undefined; gradually gained clarity due to my efforts and unbeatable optimism. This positivity slowly turned into peace, stability of thought, and functionality which is required to survive in a materialistic world.

At a certain stage of development during my journey, I realized that I was fortunate to think of diary writing but many others may not have journeyed in this direction. Despite their struggle and genuine willingness, the lack of direction and guidance would make them spend the rest of their life in a subdued manner. The thought that if "I could do something many other people could also do the same thing" inspired me to write. I kept on writing on several themes and topics and this booklet started taking shape.

When I look back and take a closer look at this booklet I wonder what is so great in this booklet. Is there any proficiency in the thought process or knowledge or depth and richness in the experience? Sometimes I indeed feel that way. But it is also true that I receive positive feedback repeatedly from patients and caregivers. The feeling of hope and happiness on their face motivated me to work again and bring out a revised edition of this booklet.

During my effort-laden journey, I found several methods or strategies that I am putting forward through this booklet. It will be my greatest pleasure if others could save precious years in their lives to find pathways to recovery. I'm also aware that many have previously marched toward mental health recovery. Some of them may be still on the way. Perhaps some of them might have found some more effective steps. If you could write and send them to us, then perhaps we can include those in our next edition. I'm sure this booklet will help people with mental health issues who are struggling and trying to learn through their experience and take steps towards mental health recovery.

Originally this booklet was written in Marathi but it was decided to publish it at Recovery International Annual Conference in Chicago in 2005. My long-time friends Dr. Mira Sadgopal, Rohini Lele, and Dipali Lodh took the responsibility of translating it into English and completed it within the stipulated time. This booklet was released at the hands of Mr. Robert McIntyre the then-president of Recovery International. After that many of our well-wishers expressed their desire to get this booklet published in a revised form in Marathi as well.

Several individuals have contributed to the publication process and to making this booklet a reality. Dipali Lodh took the responsibility of suggesting corrections in the old edition and then translating the additional topics. My close friends Ramesh Dighe, Gurudatt Kundapurkar, and Charuta Khamkar were of great help in the initial stage of the booklet. Mr. Anand and Mrs. Smitha Godse have played a major role in the revised edition. Both of them helped in choosing illustrations and cover pages and then took on numerous responsibilities till the printing of the booklet. They went through the manuscript and several drafts meticulously and with great patience. We were extremely concerned whether any issues would crop up while publishing this booklet. But

Advocate Sumati Atre answered all our queries and concerns and gave us the necessary guidance. Dr. Ulhas Luktuke, Dr. Vidyadhar Watve and Dr. Arun Rukadikar who have written a message for this booklet have been my friends philosophers and guides for several years. They may not like me thanking them and hence I stop by acknowledging their sincere help over all these years.

For Ms. Arti Ghare, senior consultant to Rajhans Prakashan, Pune this booklet is a small task. But she took all the responsibility of editing and converting it into an attractive form. The illustrations which are included under different topics and the cover page have been designed by Shriram Bokil. Mugdha Dandekar took responsibility for the layout and design. I thank all of them for their very efficient work.

I also thank the entire Vartak family. It was not possible to write such a booklet based on my personal experiences without the support and 'go ahead' and 'we are with you' signal of my wife Sandhya and daughter Kalyani.

Thanks to everyone...

Dr. Anil Vartak

President, Eklavya Foundation For Mental Health, Pune

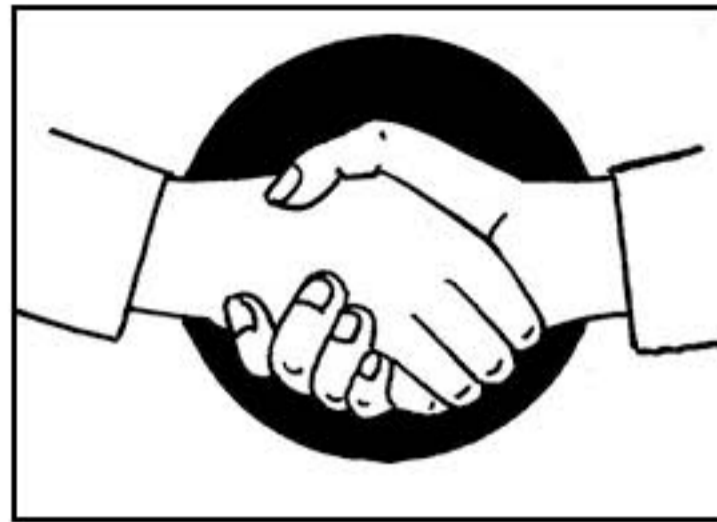
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1.

Being Friends with Your Illness



It is quite natural for those who've had the experience of mental illness to think, "This illness has dealt me a blow! It caused a setback in my life! I couldn't live a normal life. I couldn't complete my education. I could not earn, marry nor have a family....." Many of us have lived through mental illness for 5, 10 or 20 years or probably even more! Can you hate or disown this illness and these years? By hating the illness what will you gain? You might start hating yourself. Your negative thoughts generate constant and extreme stress and become a drag on your progress.

In common experience, often for long periods, one has to interact with and live with people one doesn't like. Somehow, one learns to accept and adjust with them. In a similar way, try to accept your illness as something you couldn't have avoided. In any case, you are not responsible for it, nor are your immediate family members! So, why not accept it and adapt yourself? If you take this approach, you will observe that gradually your stress and restlessness will reduce, and you will get a taste of peace of mind. Once your inner turmoil reduces, you will look at life more positively. You will begin to feel energetic and your concentration will improve. In short, you will begin your journey towards attaining your long-felt but held-back aspirations.

At this point a question may arise, "What does coming out of mental illness mean? How can I straighten out my disturbed life? Can I recapture the happy moments and pleasures I have missed so far?"

There is no readymade formula for 'living'. It is difficult to say what attitude or approach is right or wrong. Whatever reduces your stress and turmoil, whatever brings you happiness and peace of mind, is the right approach. By accepting, adapting and clearing the cobwebs of thoughts and emotions, you would have learnt to look at life afresh with a clear, unbiased mind. All events around you will take on a new meaning. You will develop a new outlook that can become enthusiastic and cheerful. Looking at your past life, the mistakes you made and so on, you will start understanding those around you better. You may see how things could have been otherwise. Better, you may see how the best may still happen if one learns how not to repeat the same old mistakes.

One who has passed through difficult times has a golden opportunity to improve as a person. For adversity to become a boon, one must objectively look at one's past without judgment and with compassion, as if you were another person.



2.

At First, Things Improve in Bits



Depression, intense fears, emotional ups and downs, loss of confidence, delusions, hallucinations, and racing or chaotic thoughts these are part of what we experience in mental illness. When the symptoms are active, they may cause a break in a person's job or studies. With medication, counselling and self-help group support, one can start improving and regaining one's former healthier state. But then, one tends to take a stock of years wasted, and one acutely perceives that friends and siblings have moved on and settled in careers or in married life. Rightfully one wishes to work hard, even overtime, to rapidly catch up to rebuild one's own life.

So, a person starts planning their daily routine, maybe trying to engage in an educational course, or thinking about employment. Beginning to work in this direction, one soon realizes that she or he is unable to cope. Lack of concentration is a big problem and difficulties in maintaining cordial relationships is another. After initially persisting, it soon is clear that most of one's attempts are failures. One is unable to study as much as needed, there is constant restlessness and fidgeting, one's grasping power is weak, and so on. One cannot experience relaxed interactions with others. In these all-too-repetitive situations, one may get engulfed in depression again, and succumb to the attitude that trying anything is of

no use.

If this happens, a life that was shaping up may again take a down-hill path. Why does it happen? One's wish to catch up is quite reasonable. Yet one must remember that the habit of consistent work has been lost nor has one's socializing survived. It is not the person's fault that for past few years s/he was inactive due to symptoms of mental illness. While a person is not to be blamed, the loss of work habit and skill of socializing is a fact. Any personal or interpersonal skill deteriorates if not used. One may notice it in one's own case.

It is wrong to expect to have control over skills that have diminished. One may have to learn them again, the way a child learns. A child looks, imitates, makes mistakes and learns new things. First it crawls, then stands up and finally walks. Its babbling gradually becomes coherent, and then the child learns to talk with people, then in groups. In a limited sense, one may look towards enjoying a childhood that has come back. One can avoid the frustrations by adopting an attitude that reflects in the following thoughts:

If I try hard but can't perform, inaction is better than trying and repeatedly failing - it is better to give up than beating the air.

I can lessen my feeling of dejection by reminding myself that I will retrieve my deteriorated skills only bit by bit.

Simple efforts I make in the right direction are more important than expecting myself to know and do everything at once.

With such patience and understanding, one can again build faith in one's own efforts and regain enthusiasm about tasks. Initially things improve only bit by bit, but later things speed up. Eventually, one's response to the challenge of hard work is as good as that of ordinary people. In fact, one's perseverance during the period of recovery and faith in oneself are a must. Consequent results from such attitude endow one with skills and qualities that are hard to come by otherwise.

3.

Writing a Diary



While living through mental illness, one's mind crowds with confused emotions like restlessness, fear, panic, anger and guilt. Sometimes the negative emotions are so intense that mastering them to think rationally is very difficult. In these circumstances, some way has to be found to dissipate the negative thoughts and clear the mind. Writing down all these negative thoughts and emotions in a regular diary can go a long way to reduce the stress.

What should be written in the diary? Well, write about the confusion in your mind. Write about your restlessness, your ups and downs. Write about all your feelings - and the thoughts that go with them - in detail, as they arise and as you experience them. You know that confusion and distress are not prevalent all the time at the same intensity. They come, stay for some time and go... at times on their own. Observe and try to understand what factors cause them or intensify them. Under what circumstances is their intensity reduced? Write down the results of your own analysis.

If you can reflect, write about the situations you encounter in life... individuals whom you see or meet... about your expectations of them. To what extent do they fulfill those expectations? What disturbances do you experience when they disappoint you? Also, you can write about the goals you set for yourself, how you plan to go about achieving them.

Later, review the changes you made in your goals or in the methods to achieve them. What lessons have you learnt?

All of this- and more-can be written down in your diary. There need not be any fixed format, neither is there any restriction about 'what should' or 'should not be written. Whatever is connected with your own emotional life, your thought processes, and all that affects your own development can and should be written down in the diary.....in your own simple words.

A basic norm needs to be observed when writing a diary, however. Whatever you write has to be an honest version of what you experienced, what you felt about it, what thoughts came to your mind... If you have made a personal mistake and have realized it, be frank -- write about it! Sometimes you may feel that you need to make changes in yourself but you are unable to implement them... also write about this. In short, your diary should mirror your thoughts and emotions.

If you continue to 'observe' them, you will start accepting your inadequacies. Over a period of time, you may be able to overcome these shortcomings. On the other hand, without this frank admission and non-judgmental acceptance, notice that you tend to brush aside unpalatable thoughts and emotions. In that process you may lose a golden opportunity of following the right path. Thus, diary writing is useful not only for those who have lost emotional balance or are mentally unwell; it is just as useful for any person in a 'normal' state. The channelled flow of thoughts brings continuity into one's life. More than mere continuity, however, it is the possibility of change and the actual progress that enriches your life... a veritable revolution for one who is. Some people say if they write down everything - all the good and bad things they feel - and if a family member or someone else happens to lay hands on it, they may get exposed. Well... so what? Let anyone read it! The writings may give food for thought for them also, because even they would have made mistakes in life! Imagining that your case is hopeless and despicable is something that stops

your progress. Thus, to be able to write down everything frankly is the first step towards recovery.

But, if you still feel hesitant, find a way to keep your diary secure so that nobody can get to it. Also you may consider putting the following label on the diary cover page:

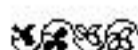
Personal & Confidential.

Thanks for respecting my privacy.

And still, even if someone else is able to lay his or her hands on your diary and reads it, what really is there to be ashamed of? Every one of us - the ill and the normal - lives with our own inner turmoil. What you have done is to write down the turmoil in words. By this action, you would have opened up a new horizon to emerge from your illness. Think about this deeply. You will see that your fears and hesitation about what harm will come if your diary is discovered are misplaced.

While writing a diary, continuity and regularity are important. For example, if you tend to get angry quickly, and if the after-effects last the whole day or even days together, and if it disturbs not only your peace of mind but also others around you, you need to put it down in your diary -- sometimes at frequent intervals. Suppose this anger is one of the major defects in your temperament keep re-reading these pages and keep yourself open to introspection. You might begin to think of ways to get over your hot angry temper. You may come upon strategies to discourage this tendency in yourself. In your self-improvement program, write about where you fail and where you succeed and, of course, the lessons. By doing so, you will have given your efforts a forward direction.

One's diary becomes a mind-mirror and a healing gate for real emotions. It provides points of reference for introspecting and setting aside the negative aspects of your temperament. Thus it aids you in your own personal improvement and appreciation of life.



4.

Medication is a Must



Whether one's illness is physical or psychological, regular medication may be a necessity. A negative attitude towards medication is quite a natural response. No one likes being constantly reminded of one's illness as one swallows pills or bears the discomfort of side effects.

In mentally ill persons, regular medication is even more troublesome. Misunderstandings in society about the disease make it difficult for a person to come to terms with mental illness. One keeps finding excuses to avoid the medicines. Medication of indefinite duration makes it even worse. Some of the side effects like sleepiness, lethargy, tremors, weight gain, vision problems, mouth dryness, constipation and so on are sometimes quite debilitating. Some of the side effects can be reduced with proper diet and exercise, but this may be hard to follow. Depression or fears may discourage us from leaving our house to exercise. Or we may try to stave off our emotional distress through eating. Even with good diet and exercise, some side effects may just have to be endured and taken in one's stride as far as possible.

Whatever reason one might have for not wanting to take medicines regularly, if they are necessary one needs to try and overcome one's reluctance. Social views do not matter on this account - one has to think about caring for oneself.

Furthermore, a positive attitude can actually enhance the medicines' positive effects. If you are one who finds the long duration of medication a problem, think of the many other health conditions that require long-term medication. If you want the overall outcome of your recovery efforts to be positive, then you should take the necessary medicines willingly. Effectiveness is what is important, not the number, dose or duration of medicines. Try to control the side effects by good exercise and diet, even if it requires pushing yourself.

While none of us likes taking medicines, let us reduce our unhappiness over this by combining our thoughts with actions. It is quite certain that the dosages will decrease and benefits will start appearing over a period of time but as decided only by your treating doctor.



5.

Improvement is Not Dosage-Related



Even when we know that medicines can control our symptoms, many of us take medicines unwillingly. If the number of medicines or the dosage is reduced, we tend to think we are improving. On the other hand, an increase in the dosage can send us into a panic.

Fewer medicines and lower dosage is definitely welcome news. Fewer the medicines, lesser the side effects. But is this the only way to measure improvement? No! Improvement depends on our psychological state, on our efforts to sustain emotional balance and to be at peace. If we are not improving at this level, then merely decreased medication is not enough.

When caught in a mesh of mental disorder, how do we feel? Are we happy or sad, or numb? Can we move and function in society? All these are important, not the dosage. If we pay too much attention to that, we might lose our focus on the efforts we must make. After all, our aim is to regain peace and balance in our lives. Without these, a decrease in medicine really does not matter. In fact, it could be riskier to attempt this.

This wholesome approach will ensure that our journey to mental and emotional health is not hampered in any way. Since medication and dosage is the prerogative of medical

professionals, let us leave it to them. When we regain our stability, it is likely that the dosage will be decreased.



6.

Don't Stop Medications on Your Own



Tensions, anger, fears, hopelessness, delusions these are all feelings and symptoms that mentally ill persons experience in constantly varying intensity. If the experience is acutely distressing, however, they can be treated by medication. By helping to control the symptoms, Medications provide a backbone support for one's recovery by helping to control the symptoms

Many of us have experienced that medicines work slowly, and their effect is limited while the side effects are greater. When this happens, it is easy to give up medication... but this can bring back the illness. True, the medicines might not seem to make a drastic difference in one's experience, but they may be working to prevent a worsening of the disease. Lack of obvious results may make an ill person or even a caregiver rethink the necessity of the medication. Some come to feel that 'medicines and doctors are useless, they just keep giving sleep-inducing medicines.' Or, 'they only serve to benefit the drug companies', etc. This rage arises out of frustration, and it is understandable. But, all in all, can we deny the immense research and development of medical knowledge that has taken place in the mental health field? Think like this, perhaps... this branch of medicine has grown from scientific roots, and a lot of people do benefit... so will I. Try to cultivate this attitude.

Some of us undertake efforts to read about the various kinds of medicines, and even to share this knowledge with others like us. You can discuss your medicines with your doctor, and even get a second opinion from another doctor. This effort is commendable and surely can help you in recovery. However, stopping medicine abruptly, without consulting the treating doctor is a big, NO.



Eat and Exercise Well



Since childhood, all of us have heard about exercising regularly and having a balanced diet. It is supposed to keep us in good physical and mental shape. In fact, it is more important for those with mental illness than for others. When a person, recovering from mental illness, starts trying to improve things she or he may consider resuming studies or a job that was interrupted. One may find it possible to control or modify symptoms with the help of medication, counselling and self-help group activity, and in the process, to gain insights into the problems. Proper diet and regular exercise definitely help in all of this.

Those constantly rocked by feelings of anger, fear or restlessness and emotional outbursts may lose control over their eating pattern so that untimely and improper eating becomes a habit. Spicy, fried and sweet foods give momentary pleasure but tend to bring sluggishness and more restlessness. One wants to become active and resume studies or job, but the body does not co-operate. Consistency and concentration in tasks drop due to lethargy and distraction, and work is interrupted.

Improper eating affects one's well-being not only right now, but in future it can lead to physical ill health, as well. For example, becoming overweight can lead to high blood pressure

and heart disease. Thus, we see some people recovering from mental illness but succumbing to the burden of physical ill health. So, for numerous reasons, regular exercise is important to those of us recovering from mental illness.

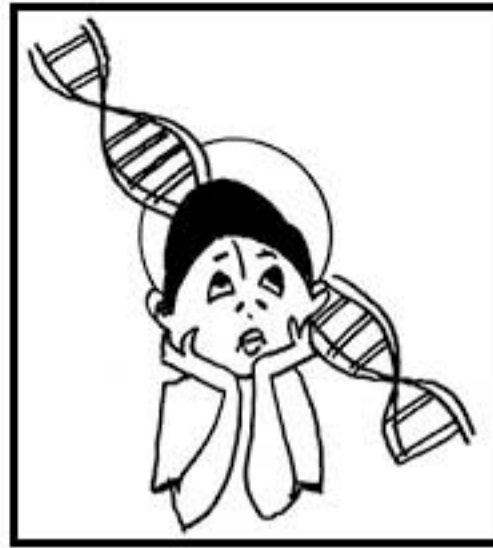
Any kind of exercise will do - walking briskly in open air, jogging, working out at a gym, practicing yoga regularly, or other exercises at home. Any of these forms can also be useful in diverting a mind that is brooding repeatedly over the same old things. You may realize the balance that exercise brings to the whole body naturally diminishes outbursts of emotion and clarifies confusion and perplexity. It brings back order to the body's biochemistry and one starts getting enough restful sleep. All these factors help to improve one's mental state. The body's health in turn activates one's desire to engage in studies or work. While recovering from mental illness or afterwards, at least one is not burdened with needless ailments like heart disease, weight issues and high blood pressure.

No doubt, for a person hoping to recover from mental illness, controlling confusing emotions and thoughts and becoming active should be the top priority. All the same there is equal need to create a conducive bodily state to support and sustain these efforts. Physical well-being maintained by regular exercise and a good diet provide support for mental and emotional rebuilding. Bringing body and mind in line is not easy. Yet, if we set out and discipline our body, which is relatively easier to manage, we cross an important milestone in organizing our mental processes.



8.

Mental Illness and Heredity



One of the great and dominant fears related to mental illness is, 'Is it Hereditary?' We have heard of families in which mental illness has prevailed through many generations. Often these fears plague us when we look into the innocent faces of our children. How susceptible are they? Can the disorder we have suffered come upon them?

We should not be unrealistic about the issue of heredity. None of us should panic. Many diseases are passed on from generation to generation diabetes, heart disease, certain blood disorders - that are clearly more hereditary than mental illness and more of a risk to life. Why are these not considered as serious or dreadful as a mental illness? From childhood the social stigma attached to mental disorders is strongly inculcated in our minds. Perhaps this is why we feel such hatred towards mental illnesses, and why we unnecessarily make 'a mountain out of a molehill'!

Well, it is true that our children, and our nieces and nephews, may be susceptible in varying degrees. Who is responsible for it? Who is responsible for our own illness? It is possible to blame our entire ancestry? However, while heredity may increase our vulnerability to mental disorder, it does not mean this is the only reason for the illness. One's upbringing, the habits one has learned, and the social environment are equally

responsible for one's mental state as an adult.

Isn't heredity a part of nature that passes down both good and bad elements through the generations? Does this imply that one's destiny is bound by nature's rule alone? Still, we should remember that nature offers the opportunity for self-progress. The same tree's seeds can develop differently depending on their potential capacity and the nurturing opportunities that they can take advantage of. Some grow to be huge trees while others remain shrubs. This is applicable to human life also.

Certain people around us seem to be special. May be it is their concentration, their balance, their calm... and we may want to cultivate these qualities in ourselves. Certain qualities of characters in movies or novels may be like that, too. Or even qualities of nature, like its vastness and usual peacefulness. Many creative and successful people in the world are not indebted mainly to the laws of heredity - rather, they have worked their way through it with effort, discipline and dedication.

Why create a fuss over the factor of heredity? Instead we should consider our environment to be our gene pool and seek the path of self-progress through self-efforts.

Looking at it this way, we can achieve a lot, and perhaps we can pass on this characteristic to the next generation, too.



9.

Keep Oneself Occupied



For those of us living with states of mental imbalance, it becomes difficult to work with concentration and consistency. Moreover, we may be handicapped by problems of perception like confusion, delusion and paranoia, and that makes it difficult or almost impossible to maintain a job or studies. This period of disruption can last a few weeks or several months or even years with varying severity in symptoms.

As medication and other treatments help with the symptoms, the recovering person rightly develops a desire to work outside his or her house and contribute to the family income. As one's search for a job goes on, however, he or she finds it impossible to find work that fits one's educational level or experience. For example, a person qualified in engineering is offered job as a computer operator, or one with a Masters degree in Science is offered work as a lab assistant or salesperson. Not ready to accept a 'come down' in status, the person may go on searching in vain. It may lead to losing important years of one's life as one spends time unproductively. Maybe the recovering mind is deprived of the support, self-respect and income that may be derived from outside work.

In order to avoid getting trapped in such a cobweb, it is necessary for us to accept the reality about jobs. There are several reasons why one cannot get a job that is suitable. Some

years may have passed since completing one's education. In the meantime substantial changes might have taken place in one's field of study. Similarly, one may be short of the experience sought by an employer. Moreover, one has to face that tricky question, "Where were you during the gap?" Even so, we might get a job offer but the remuneration is so meagre that we feel ashamed, and rather, we would prefer not to work.

We may have short-comings in our habits and social skills, too. One who has spent good amount of time at home is not able to work with full and consistent concentration. Neither is he or she used to talking and working with others. Like any other skill, that of maintaining social relations needs to be used or it deteriorates. So, even if a person gets a suitable job, it may be difficult to retain it. The social discomfort and frustration on the job substantially affects one's emotional and mental stability.

So, if you are offered a modest job, whatever it is - even if low paid or inconsistent with your qualifications or if only part-time - readily accept it! [There might be an exception when the job is hazardous or otherwise really unsuitable.] If we accept any work opportunity that comes to us then the difficulty of how to spend our time is automatically solved. The vicious cycle of frustration is checked and we are compelled into physical movement which would not happen otherwise. Whatever income we earn leads to enhancing our self-respect. If we work whole-heartedly we will develop a habit of concentrating on our work, and also we may receive greatly-needed praise from others. In brief, whatever the job, we may benefit in a variety of ways.

Even so, many do not find employment for a long time, or the job one finds is only part-time. One should not hesitate to use the time and do household work. This advice is for all, but especially for men, as usually only women are expected to do the household work. It may be gardening, washing and cleaning, or helping in the kitchen. We should willingly do

these chores even for a few hours in a day. There is nothing like high or low status in the matter of keeping oneself engaged. Simple household work gives us tremendous benefit in terms of self-esteem and self-confidence that we need for future progress.

Apart from willingly doing household chores, one can also acquire some skills and use them to earn income by operating from one's home. Workable examples that come to my mind are coaching school students at home in subjects like languages such as vernacular, English and science subjects, offering dry lunch packages to office going people, etc.

To sum up, if we decide to whole-heartedly do whatever work comes to us at a given point of time, then we cross an important step in our development. Doing work consistently and maintaining good relations with people around us will enable us to work for longer hours and do the required work more responsibly.

This is the way one can climb the first step of development, then the second, then the third and so on. Rather than jumping over the steps all at once, give yourself time to adjust at the level of each step. With this, the instability that you have experienced will gradually reduce. In future, it may so happen that you are able to find and do work according to your caliber with a salary matching your qualifications.

To live happily and productively after experiencing mental illness is an art to be cultivated with patience and faith. So why wait for the present situation to change? Let us adjust ourselves now with whatever job or self-employment opportunity is given to us.

This issue used to be discussed very often in Ekalavya Self-help group meetings. Alok who had graduated in computer science, Suresh who cleared the HSC exam, and Kavita who had completed her college education and also have a keen interest in tailoring work. Each one of them had significant gap after completing their last education and lack

of any experience and work habit were problem areas. All these things were unsuitable for getting any job. After taking a total view of the situation all of them decided...

1.No work is of lower status and hence everyone will accept any work that comes to them

2.Initially they will take up a job that has a smaller number of hours. Gradually they will move on to a job with more number of hours. They will try to be consistent with the job.

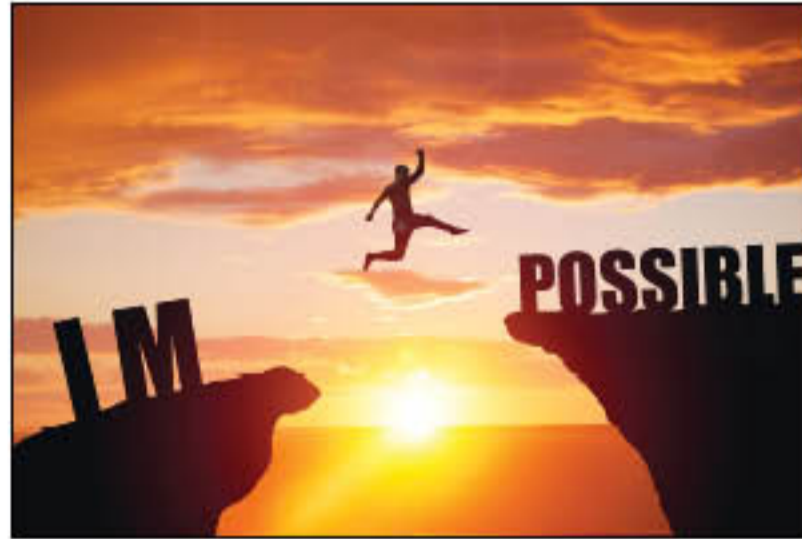
3.They will not insist too much on any specific amount of income from their work. By taking some work they develop habit to work and stay engaged which is an important aspect for them.

4.If they have any difficulty regarding at the job, they will talk freely to their employer and get the particular issue resolved.



10.

Rediscover your Lost Passion



Anger, restlessness, fears, hopelessness, aversion to mixing with people -- these are, some of the symptoms that mentally ill people experience. The intensity of these feelings may differ from person to person. They make it difficult for us to sustain a regular source of income or even to educate ourselves. Not only this, even ordinary activities like chatting with friends, shopping, doing home chores, greeting guests, all become difficult. One may try to avoid it, or do the minimum possible under duress. Non-usage results in the loss of many personal and interpersonal skills. If the illness spans over several years, one might be unable to sustain skills needed even for day-to-day living.

Once we overcome severe mental disability and emotional distress, we realize what we have lost. This is experienced most sharply when we try interacting with our peers. We are unable to communicate easily, we can't work fast, casual conversation just doesn't come to us and we are lost to the current world affairs scenario. So our faith in our own abilities gets a new shock. This, in turn, can push one back into illness.

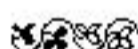
Instead of feeling depressed about what one lacks, the best thing is to make a plan for regaining lost skills. Look around don't the trees shed their leaves with one season and regain their lost splendour with the next? Then, why should this truth

not apply to life as well?

Adopting such an attitude makes it easier to spot your lost skills and find ways of reinstating them. While interacting with peers, try to find topics that you can talk about. If you feel like it, you can even memorize jokes and stories, pulling them out when there's a chance. When you feel the increase in your self-confidence and self-esteem you are likely to think of other ways to overcome your shortcomings and improve your social skills. This may not work for everybody, but there are definitely other ways and methods that may work.

Perhaps interacting with children may help. One can tell stories to them, read to them, play with them. Or maybe spending time talking to the aged or ill may help. This will work to improve self-confidence and finally enable one to interact with one's peers. Even though one may not be familiar with songs, you might try memorizing some and sing in a close gathering. Eventually, even performing in front of strangers might not seem difficult. This process can be utilized for various purposes. Where and how to use it - how to determine the stages, how to incorporate changes in it --- are person-specific and will vary.

For regaining lost mental health there is no definite tried-and-tested theory. There are various ways. What I have illustrated is only one of the rivulets that flow into streams that make up the river to recovery.



11.

Others Too Have Limitations



While recovering from mental illness a person struggles to achieve mental peace and balance. One genuinely wishes to control anger, fear, anxiety or emotional instability. Aware that the emotional resources in one's possession are few, one has to reconstruct this unsettled life. The battle is not easy. The relief that we so dearly want is possible only with profound faith and prolonged persistence.

In one's delicate situation, one expects that others - especially relatives and friends should extend full support. One craves so much for others to understand the emotional outbursts or sudden surges of anger, fear and anxiety. Yes, one's response to something may be uncalled for, and people may not like it. Sometimes out of confusion one forgets or makes mistakes. For instance, out of emotional instability, one may fail to turn up at pre-planned programs.

True, we do want and need understanding from others. But along with this expectation, one needs to try and understand the circumstances of the people around us. Some may not even be aware that you have an illness, and naturally they would not grant any concession to you. They would expect you to work and behave like any other person. If you honestly and politely communicate information about your illness to them their behaviour might change. Even if they are aware,

they are not likely to have a clear idea of the turbulence in your thoughts and emotions, your ups and downs.

For many it takes ages to develop insight into one's own problems, so how likely do you think it is that others would have such insight? Thus there is no point in expecting others to continuously adjust with you. On the whole they may adjust, but you cannot expect others to instantly grasp unexpected emotional outbursts or fluctuations. Bear in mind that people would behave as they usually do. It is not that they do not want to help, support or adjust, but they have their limitations. If one takes note of this, one would not respond with disappointment or anger.

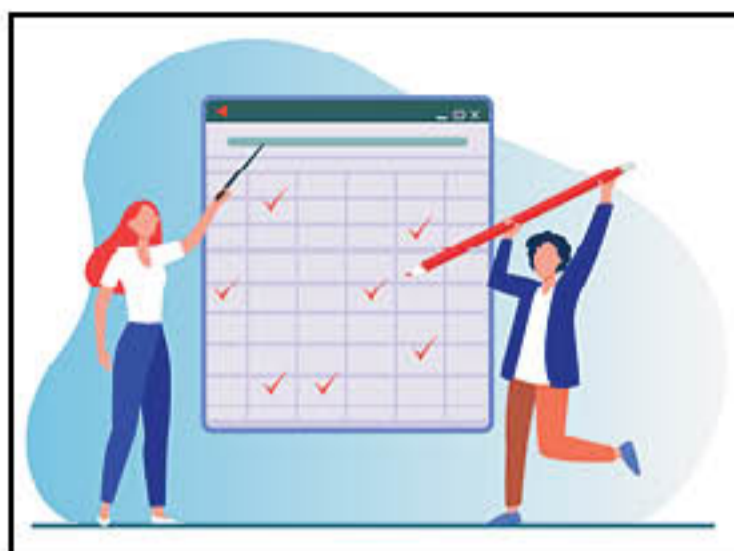
Moreover, though you may be mentally unwell, it is wrong to believe that the others around you are totally healthy, balanced and at peace. They may not be ill or on medication but even their mental processes are working full time. Moderate mental disturbances and mood swings, perhaps not as pronounced as yours, are part of their lives too. They also experience and deal with anger, fear and jealousy. If one bears it in mind that they would genuinely like to be sensitive and to adjust with you. However let us remember they have their limits. One can rid oneself of the futile idea that they do not help or co-operate with you.

If we try and understand other people we can halt the cycle of suffering perpetuated by our anger towards those who do not co-operate fully. When we sense ourselves realizing that others do have their limits - in fact sometimes they themselves need support - we can note that we have reached another milestone in our quest towards our own mental health.



12.

Complete the Tasks at Hand



Mental illness can rob one's interest in daily life. Poor concentration makes one switch tasks often. At times mood swings happen so quickly that one is at a loss to know what is going on. Tasks remain incomplete and so there is more dissatisfaction, disappointment and grief. Unknowingly family members increase the tension by fuelling one's sense of failure.

How do we find a way out of this mental and social conundrum? Some of us find that at the beginning of a task we can concentrate willingly. However, motivation and concentration gradually abate and we just stop our work, preferring to do nothing at all. It sometimes happens to mentally fit people as well. Not finding a task interesting enough they may decide to stop. But in illness no task may occupy our attention for very long and all tasks may seem equally boring and meaningless. *Yet determined mentally ill persons can carry out tasks successfully.* Performing tasks is an inevitable and necessary part of life.

While choosing a task, make sure it is simple and you yourself can do it alone within a short time. If the task happens to be somewhat complicated do a small part at first, but hold on to your determination to complete it. If you see that you are not progressing with the task as you thought you would, stay

with it so that you feel the satisfaction of finishing it. You can divide even a small task into smaller parts to make completing it easier.

Some tasks need to be performed with others. Choose partners according to their capacity for the type of work. If possible, acquaint the others with your capabilities. Working along with others is a wonderful thing. But it is usually more difficult in social terms. Yet, failure does not mean that one should give up hope and efforts. In the meantime, at least, try pursuing small tasks individually.

Instead of bemoaning one's incapability, it is always better to rediscover one's base and work up from that. The things that seem to come easily to others might appear difficult for the mentally ill. We may have to replace an overall approach by a sectional approach, adapted to suit one's individual needs. We need to evolve our own 'art of living'. Life is a game of 'snakes and ladders'. Ups and downs are always part of the game. Instead of feeling bad as we see other people overtaking us, we must learn to set our own standards and live according to them. Our habit of comparing ourselves with how others do things often leads to needless failure in performing tasks at hand. Such comparison can even negatively affect the capacities of normal adjusted individuals. So, let us aim to set standards for ourselves and try to live up to them, step by step.

Mohan, for example, was well educated but unsuccessful in securing a job due to his illness. He became fond of household chores. But he would take on too many things at the same time. While reordering his cupboard, for instance, he would pull out everything. This would generate confusion and discouragement. He would lose interest in the task and abandon it. This cycle would recur constantly, and as his chores piled up his frustration and distress mounted.

When Mohan brought up such an incident in the Eklavya group, members suggested to him that he could clean and rearrange one shelf at a time. This method took time, but Mohan regained confidence in his abilities.

If you have a hard time with completing tasks, consider the following tips. Try learning them by heart and repeating them when appropriate:

Let me choose tasks according to what I know I can do, physically and mentally.

Let others' expectations and qualifications not influence my choice of a task.

Whenever possible let me work with others.

I shall do only as much as I can.

I shall perform a task to my best ability.

I will not leave a task midway, but I will devote the time and effort to finish it.

When it is complete, I will acknowledge my efforts in achieving it.

Tasks are activities aimed towards a goal, and they are varied. Some are recreational, some we might say are for 'maintenance' and other tasks are productive. Some activities we might call spiritual tasks. Naturally, many tasks are of a combined nature. Like exercise-walking, yoga, playing tennis - is recreational and, if regular, it maintains one's body and mental balance.

Artistic tasks-like making a painting or sculpture - may be recreational but they are also productive and can even be spiritual... The kinds of tasks are unending, from playing a game, chatting with someone, narrating a story, reading, writing in a diary, cooking, cleaning, sewing, knitting, and so on.

While choosing a task, ask yourself the following:

1. Am I choosing this task out of my own interest, or because others expect me to?
2. How many times have I tried doing it before?
3. How often have I been successful at it?
4. If I wasn't successful, then where did I fail?
5. Which part can I definitely accomplish now?

13.

Never Give Up



In periods of mental illness the mind's faculties continuously fluctuate. Often tasks cannot be completed within a usual time frame. One cannot predict the time it will take to complete a task. We make lists of jobs and when we fail to complete them, we get frustrated.

Experiencing frustration is natural but getting stuck focusing on one's failures results in loss of enthusiasm and makes it difficult to sustain one's pace and effort. Frustration prevents progress. It proves to be a major obstacle to mental rehabilitation. Ordinarily a person deals easily with the ups and downs of life, taking things in stride. But while recovering from a mental disorder we have to constantly relearn the skills of compromise and adjustment.

At such points, focus on the situation calmly. We just have to accept that our mental faculties are, for the time being, not co-operating with us. We have to re-evaluate our decisions and expectations. Taking our experiences into account, we have to scale down our objectives and restart the entire process. For the present, we must ignore our failures, pretend nothing has gone wrong and rediscover our zest. Once we reach the grassroots level, we have to begin working again.

Let me tell you about Sameer. He was a bright engineering student. His problem of schizophrenia became evident in his

second year and he could not appear for his final exams. The next few years were wasted, but then he recovered enough to appear for exams, encouraged by his family and friends. He did well and wanted to find a job. With luck on his side he got one, but the stress soon got to him and he had to leave it. Staying at home he became depressed and stopped venturing outside.

During a meeting of the Eklavya group, Sameer presented his predicament. The members helped him realize that passing the engineering exam was a very big achievement in itself. But he had overstepped in basing his future expectations on this achievement alone. His expectations for immediate success in a job were not realistic, as he came to see. One must face a mental illness on different levels. Sameer initiated his efforts again on sounder footing, and today he works in a good company. Most importantly, he has mastered skills to deal with situations as they crop up.

- Persons in recovery need to remind themselves:
- Ups and downs are part of every person's life.
- A failure need not stop one from trying again.
- Striking a balance between capacities and expectations is a key to recovery.
- Our mental capacities are not static-they fluctuate.
- Patience and flexibility are tools to overcome mental illness.



Let us Learn to Observe Things around Us



Mental illness acquaints us with constant emotional and mental vicissitudes. Hypersomnia or insomnia, inertia, depression, frustration at the inability to progress in life, friction with family members; all become daily occurrences. Our thoughts revolve around our own issues and the problems that arise in dealing with them. In this state, we tend to forget that there are various events and joyous things happening around us.

These events occur, and also call out to us. Clouds in the sky, the hide and seek of sun and rain in the monsoons, the cool air of hilltops, raindrops on green leaves, and transient dew drops on banana leaves. Not just this, but even at home, the greenery of potted plants, their roots, leaves, flowers, their vivid colours, the seasonal changes they undergo, are all very beautiful. This can bring a lot of peace and calm.

Many such things are present, not only in nature but also in people around us. We just need to be observant. The laughter of young children, the unconditional love that grandparents have for their grandchildren, people with shared experiences and grief supporting each other, couples sharing their lives, the sincerity of workmen as they execute their craft, the love between pets and their owners; are some of the things that

exist around us. We just have to be aware of these things and they can give us immense joy. Many people, even those we think as successful, are at times unable to appreciate or even acknowledge these small things. They believe that there will be time to appreciate these things after earning wealth and fame, maybe after their retirement.

Ample free time is a bonus for persons with mental illness. Despite struggling with the illness, everyone has the capacity to glean joy from our surroundings. This capacity has not been taken away from us. We are all children of nature. So even though the illness takes away certain capacities, it awards others; like time and the urge to look for happiness in things around us. So, even if one door is closed, there are several others that are wide open.

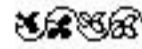
Observing these things can give us a sublime, freeing and innocuous kind of happiness. These observations have the potential to establish mental stability and pave the way to continued mental health. Our minds that have been preoccupied with problems will also breathe free. We will be able to view them from a position of neutrality. We need to remember that nature which has created grief and suffering; has also created sources of pure joy and bliss.

During difficult times, it's important to remember how to deal with issues without troubling others. Although we might not be engaged in things that bring in wealth or fame, the pursuit of joy and satisfaction is also equally merit-worthy. It is a worthwhile contribution to life and a foundation of future improvement. It is the harbinger of a new dawn and we should welcome it with open arms.

Ashok realized that the informal discussions that take place after the group sessions of the 'Eklavya' group echo these very thoughts. Senior participants agreed that the joy of observing the beauty of nature enhances their lives. Ashok also inculcated these habits.

He started sparing some time every day to just sit peacefully, leaving all other tasks aside.

He started spending time in observing his own breathing. He started observing his breathing and the beauty of nature around him.



15.

Let us show Gratitude for All that we have



Mental illness and issues are usually acutely experienced during adolescence and adulthood. Carefree childhood and school days are over the person has set foot in the stressful stage of living. Many of the mental and social skills that are necessary to survive in this competitive world are unfortunately overshadowed by the mental illness. Education and career progress is hampered. In this situation, the person becomes frustrated, angry with the situation and blames their failure on their near and dear ones. They believe that nothing good has happened or is happening in their lives.

Everyone will agree that this frustration, especially against the backdrop of constant failure is valid. But one should not forget that along with failures, there are successes as well. It would be prudent to remember these events. Remembering successes, being aware of them and showing gratitude for them is very important. Actually, from childhood onwards, our lives are dependent on the good will and amiability of the people we meet along the way. From the time we were born, various people have given us their precious time, kept us safe and struggled for our success. We should be grateful for all these things.

Once we cultivate this feeling of gratitude, we realize that our lives are dependent on many others. These could be

family members, friends, colleagues, the society at large or even nature. All these factors play a great role in forming and shaping us. Along with these, our bodies, organs that help us live, our good behaviour with others that has been reciprocated, should all be remembered and gratitude expressed for all these things. Some go to extremes and even express thanks to their mental illness. But this does not imply that we wish these situations to recur in our lives. One should not hate the illness but should instead express gratitude for the challenge that the mental illness has presented and for the strength that is required to combat it. Universal gratitude is a very healthy and happy ideology.

How should gratitude be expressed?

It's not necessary to give gifts or bouquets to show thankfulness. A verbal acknowledgement, or at times, even a mental acknowledgement is adequate. 'Convergence' is a law of nature. The good will and gratitude that you send out into the universe, find their way back to you. This process will gradually help bring stability and peace of mind.

While recovering from a mental illness, it is important to remember two rules or methods. One way is to face the symptoms of mental illness heads-on. To gain control over troublesome thoughts, emotions and to substitute negative feelings with positive ones.. The other method is to strengthen the various aspects of positive mental health that already exist within us. It is important to use a combination of these two methods as per our requirements and capacities.

Recovering from a mental illness is an art, not just a process/ firm resolve. One needs to develop a compatible mentality for the same. Accepting the ups and downs of life is an indivisible part of this process. Encountering failures despite one's best efforts is also an inevitable part of the process. The ever-growing path of gratitude will definitely aid the process of recovery. Let us then, start off on this exhilarating journey.

In the sessions of the Eklavya group, while interacting

with the Shubharthis, this topic always makes its presence felt. This was when Ramesh realized how much time his parents had devoted for him, and the sacrifices they had done. This often made him emotional. Maybe at times, siblings reacted in negative ways, got irritated or lost their temper. But finally, everyone wanted him to recover from his illness. This thought was predominant in Ramesh's mind. Friends, relatives, teachers, neighbours are all well-wishers on this journey. The rage and frustration in his mind gradually gave way to peace and gratitude. Gratitude became a permanent fixture in his behavioural pattern. His struggles decreased and he found the energy to focus on positive things in life.

Ramesh, on his journey towards mental health, inculcated the following habits.

- He started looking for sources of gratitude within himself and in his surroundings.
- Every new source of gratitude brought him a renewed sense of joy.
- He started expressing gratitude wherever possible.
- He started acknowledging those who marked these changes in him.



16.

Raise the Bar



Let us Raise the Bar!

For a lot of people, mental illness is like an avalanche. The ice and snow become unstable at a certain point and large chunks of ice begin to slip and fall; bringing along with them small stones, grass and even trees. When the avalanche stops, the result is a mountainous mass of ice, mud and stones under which entire towns are sometimes trapped. Mental illness also begins with small incidents, but the subsequent events, thoughts, feelings, behavioral patterns and actions and reactions to these incidents; create a mountain out of the seemingly small incident. All the good things which have been painstakingly gathered get trapped underneath this mountain.

Could this avalanche that began with small incidents, not have been arrested at any stage? Were there not stages in between where this could have been stopped, or the effects mitigated?

There are natural preventive measures to counter such natural incidents. The human mind, on the other hand, has several new factors that arise while the mind is trying to cope with already existing issues. We can observe this by minutely analyzing any incident and the action, counter-actions that ensue. Which are the preliminary factors, which are the thoughts, feelings and actions in my nature that make a

mountain out of a small issue- these aspects should be studied in an unbiased manner. Sometimes, our attitude of looking at and dealing with problems is such that the problems get aggravated instead of getting resolved. And we get buried under this avalanche of problems.

Of course, this multiplication of issues does not happen to everyone. But for some, the reaction- counter-reaction to problems, end up in increasing them. Can such persons control their reactions and their problems? Yes, they absolutely can. But the most important thing is that these persons should leave behind their feelings of helplessness and the belief that these actions, counter-actions occur automatically and cannot be controlled.

Once this feeling is abandoned, the path ahead is quite easy. Then all these actions, counter-actions should be carefully analyzed from the beginning. The causes of the emotional avalanche; situations, aspects of our nature, others' natures should be investigated. These can be called incendiary incidents. Once an incident occurs, the elements that propagate the problem should be considered. Are these elements inevitable? A close investigation will reveal that not all things are inevitable. Some can be controlled. This control will not be easy or possible for all events but if sincere efforts are made, changes can occur. A descending order of events in the order of change can be established.

Once this preparation is done, one can choose the simpler elements of the action, counter-actions and try to control them. It is difficult to completely control these elements, but certain changes can definitely be made and some aspects of the problem can be controlled.

Many times it so happens that we let sadness have a free reign over our mind. We allow sorrow to have a free playing field. Due to this, sorrow pervades all the corners of the mind and creates an avalanche.

If all this is to be changed, we should, as mentioned above,

control and change as many factors as possible. Many are disheartened if their efforts at control do not bear fruit and they are unable to control even the smallest factors. The answer to this is that initially, nothing will change; maybe even as time passes, things will remain the same. The important thing is that trying to change the situation will give self-confidence. Failure may seem inevitable, but trying to change will give insight into how efforts should be taken, the direction to take, whose help to seek and how to proceed. This insight will bridge the gap between the problem and the efforts taken to resolve it.

Many feel that their ability to resist has just vanished. They are ready to accept defeat. But once the brain realizes its ability to rebel, all the nooks and corners also become energized. The realization that one can resist grows by leaps and bounds.

Like this, through constant efforts, certain individuals are able to resolve their problems. Many will not be able to overcome their difficulties entirely. But something is better than nothing. Partial resolution of issues is also progress in the right direction. Some disagree because they feel that complete resolution is the only way in which they can regain control of their lives. This seems like a valid point; but if we accept it, don't we deny ourselves of the opportunity to gradually incorporate change? This attitude will be detrimental in the long run. Being satisfied with whatever progress is made is better than no progress.

Some knowledge is acquired beforehand, some comes through experience. For example, a warrior trains for war, but certain knowledge comes only through actually experiencing warfare.

All of this leads to one main point. The journey to overcome mental illness is a convoluted one, like navigating a challenging maze. It is difficult to figure the way out in one go and emerge immediately. So, is there no alternative than to

be buried under this figurative avalanche?

There are ways to combat this. Instead of collapsing or giving up, raise the bar gradually. Deal with the illness in any way possible and in parts. Smaller victories over small problems all contribute to the overall journey of recovery. Instead of trying to conquer the peak, set smaller achievable goals. Every achievement should be given the same importance as the final one. We see so many physically handicapped persons who seem happy despite their troubles. Can we not learn from them and attain happiness?

We are waiting for your reply...



17.

Learn to Face Difficulties



Everyone has to face difficulties in life. But when mental illness is part of it, the difficulties can seem overwhelming and insurmountable. We are faced by so many problems like not being able to concentrate, failure, mood swings between depression and excitement, nagging suspicions ('paranoia'), inability to adapt to society's pressures, and so on. Medicines control only to some extent the persistent delusions and even hallucinations some of us experience.

One feels at times these problems are just impossible to overcome. It is not that we don't try but our failures discourage us from trying again. Rather than facing failures again and again, we prefer not to respond anymore. Further changes that happen to us are then mostly circumstantial due to medication or to pressures from the social environment. While possibly useful and beneficial, these changes are likely to be superficial and transient. Deep and lasting changes come from the 'heart', demanding effort and courage from us. And we have to feel, to recognize and to accept the need for the changes. If one believes that all the world's problems are unsolvable, then nothing can be done. Helen Keller put her belief this way--

*'Although the world is full of suffering,
it is also full of ways of overcoming it.'*

Yes, it's true the world is full of problems but solutions

also abound. So each person should try and solve the problems he or she is faced with. The problem-solving process is educational in itself. It gives us new methods and skills to face life's small and large challenges. One discovers new undreamed of resources within oneself that light up and clear the way towards recovery.

If we learn the skill to view failures with balance of mind these incidents can turn out to be a major source of useful information and inspiration to engage in future attempts. If such an attitude of equanimity in facing disappointments is adopted, the 'failure' fades away and the pride of having attempted takes centre stage. Lots of people say they have tried repeatedly only to fail each and every time. Disheartened, all they want to do is give up. Their insistence does have an element of truth in it, but it also means that the person did not adopt an attitude necessary to resolve the problem. If one expects instant results for one's efforts, then failure is all the more disheartening. So also we will continue to get unsatisfactory outcomes if we do not consider more alternative solutions to the same issues.

Our physical and mental constitution is moulded over many years. How can it change overnight? Gaining social skills is important but remember, it takes time. Change will be gradual and can span a few years. One can be patient and learn to enjoy life even in this condition. This slow process is part of emerging out of the cocoon created by mental illness. Enjoying life strengthens one's healing, reaffirms faith and reinforces one's will to live. Another thing, if we try to solve all our problems at once, failure is inevitable. It is like trying to climb a mountain in one stint - it's just impossible. If we try ascending the mountain in climbable stretches, however, we may eventually scale it even if it takes a longer time to reach the top. Similarly, if we try to overcome a mound of difficulties by traversing a small part at a time, it will be easier and possible to surmount them.

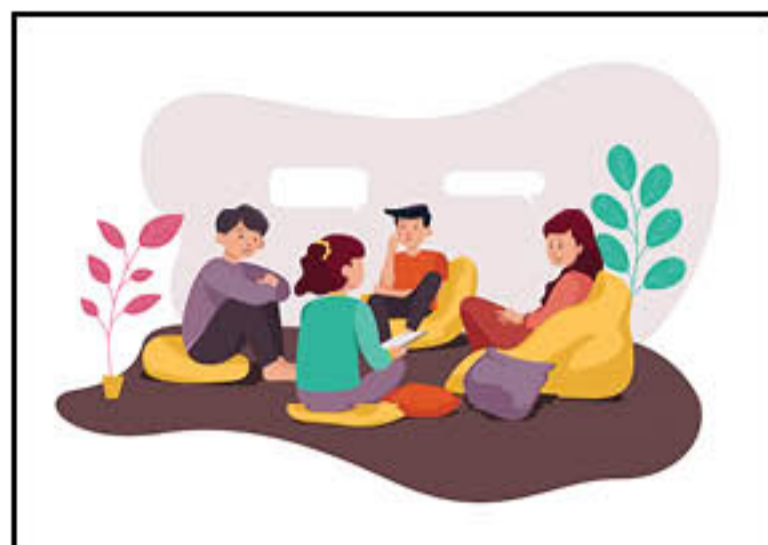
So break a large problem into parts and deal with each part, one by one. Anticipate failure and seek to learn from its lessons. Convert the regret of failure into the joy of learning. Discuss it with others, get their reflections and then try again. Like this we can keep gradually improving, just as the tube in a bicycle tyre inflates steadily as we pump air into it. This air doesn't escape easily - it stays in the tube. Likewise, real improvement may be slow and gradual but it is likely to be permanent. Celebrate the small changes without getting overexcited by them and always remember that there is still a long way to go.

Then, when one's ability and capacity increase, one is tempted to try and accomplish too much. A person who was inactive for years may now rush to meet the backlog of tasks. Such a dash can invite failure again. Changes have to be wrought and to be adapted to gradually. We cannot suddenly alter the body's habits that have been accumulated for years. Every stage calls for careful sustenance and maintenance. After an alteration is sustained for a time you can start to implement the next change, thus maintaining a steady pace of improvement. At first it may seem to you like wasting a lot of time. But as the law of inertia gradually swings into action, the momentum will set the pace.

What is inappropriate is the way we look at our problems of living. That is what leads to failure. The tact and technique of dealing with our problems themselves carry success with them. In a community of others like us, self-help techniques have benefited many in loosening the grip mental illness has upon them. By all of our efforts and by scientific research, newer views and methods keep developing. So... keep on trying and never, ever succumb to failure.



Join a Self-Help Group



Many factors come into play while a person tries to cope with any illness. While availability of medical advice, effective medication and alternative therapies are important, one's efforts towards self-improvement are equally so. A self-help support group is formed by persons facing similar problems to help overcome these with mutual support. There are self-help groups of people who are living with diabetes, with cancer and so on. They inspire members to exert themselves to resolve issues that arise through group sharing. In short, a self-help group motivates us to help ourselves and others like us for mutual benefit.

Mental health self-help support groups are similar. Many wonder about the need and advantage of such groups. Of the many benefits, the first is relief from loneliness. Mentally ill persons are often lonely as other family members are busy at work and friends are involved in their own lives, etc. Many of us lack the social skills needed to interact in society. The resulting loneliness can wipe out painfully wrought improvements, pushing one back into the grip of illness, and it can even be fatal. So, mental health self-help groups play an especially important role in preserving a person's stability and in helping one to cope. In facilitating social interaction among those experiencing mental and emotional disorders, who meet

both in and outside, these groups provide solace from the suffering of social alienation. The hope one discovers here is responsible for one's future efforts.



Let's Practise with Faith & Determination and Forge Ahead in Life!



So, my dear friends, it is time to conclude these sharings for now. From these pieces of writing you must have realized that coping with and overcoming mental illness need not be only hard work, it can also be an art of creative and joyful living.

There can be options of so many strategies. Through your own experience, you can develop some new ones and fine-tune them. What is important is to keep trying, practising, and sharing our success stories while forging ahead. My best wishes for your success in this endeavour of self & collective growth.



Eklavya Self-Help Group

'Self Help Group' is a venue where individuals with similar problems come together to share their experiences and discuss issues with each other. This platform provides the necessary information and clarifies their doubts. Group meetings also facilitate insight, which, in turn, helps present a new direction as an important takeaway.

These group sessions are independently conducted for persons with mental illness (Shubharthi) and their caregivers (Shubhankar). They are platforms to release and let out one's own experiences, feelings, and emotions in a non – judgemental atmosphere. It offers individuals an environment where they express themselves freely and reduces stress. Others in the group are actively attentive with empathetic minds. No one blames the other, nobody advises others but only shares learning from similar experiences.

Family Members in Self Help Groups initially emphasize more on the following:

- Understanding the problems of the person with mental illness
- Identification and handling of the symptoms of illness
- Helping the ill person to improve on his own
- Planning the future of the person with the condition and providing better opportunities
- Self help group supports the caregivers –
- to maintain their own wellbeing
- to reduce their own stress

Group meetings help all stakeholders regain hope and be strong enough to face the future. In addition, experts' guidance is often made available to provide the necessary information.

The self-help group assists persons with mental illness in identifying the symptoms of the affliction and controlling them with the help of Recovery Method techniques formulated by Dr. Abraham Low.

These techniques help individuals reduce their distress. The experiences shared by the Shubharthis on their recovery path motivate other Shubharthis to try and overcome their symptoms and learn to cope with the disturbing events. Such a method of self-help imparts self-confidence and boosts self-esteem. It might help to continue further education, to get a job, and to lead a normal quality of life.

This power of self-help support groups is multi-directionally beneficial and economical too. It provides the help necessary at the root level and towards returning to the mainstream. So, we can say that the role of a self-help support group is to kick-start insight and lead to rehabilitation.

Eklavya Foundation For Mental Health
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Eklavya Foundation for Mental Health, Pune.

A large percentage of the population in India suffers from mental illness, often through neglect. Our society is generally ignorant about these mental disorders and holds many misconceptions. For example, many consider a person suffering from mental instability or condition a 'shame' to the family. The person is labelled with stigma too.

Naturally, the sufferer and his disorder are kept hidden – away from all. Often, the proper guidance and treatment from resourceful experts are denied to the sufferer. Moreover, due to delayed treatment or non-continuity, the severity of the disorder may increase, thus, weakening the possibility of recovery or remission.

Eklavya – a character in Mahabharat, was denied proper learning of techniques and training in archery from masters. However, with the help of persistent self-help techniques and dedication, he mastered the skills to be the finest archer, better than Arjuna. So likewise, a person who has a mental illness and their caregivers can help themselves overcome their disability on their own.

Eklavya foundation aims to empower persons with mental illness and their caregivers to seek help, provide a warm atmosphere, and guide them. It is an initiative that can help build a base to pull out of their condition or distress by their own hence the name – Eklavya Foundation.

Eklavya Foundation was formally established in September 2021, and seven experts from various fields are the founder members of this unique venture. Eklavya foundation is registered under the society Act and Trust Act.

Goal (Vision Statement)

Create an informed, empowered, and enabled society by removing the stigma around mental illness.

Aim (Mission Statement)

- To conduct programs for social awareness about mental illness.
- To undertake activities to remove stigma towards mental in
- To introduce and conduct Self Help Groups to guide persons with mental illness and their family members.

Action Plan

- To prepare reading material in the form of guiding booklets (e.g., Social Awareness, Removal of Stigma, Self-Help techniques, Mental Health)
- To provide practical training in the working field to students of Psychology.
- To establish give-and-take relations with individuals and institutes working in Mental Health.

Eklavya Foundation For Mental Health

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Thanks for the efforts...

Mira Sadgopal and Late Rohini Lele, friends since *Sihaya* days, for translating the first few pieces, for editing, and for their constant encouragement.

Dipali Lodh who not only translated this booklet but several other articles and reports of Eklavya Foundation with the noble intention of giving wider publicity to this cause.

Dr. Vidyadhar Watve, Dr. Ulhas Luktuke and Dr. Arun Rukadikar, imminent psychiatrists but always valued our work and gave encouragement.

Sandhya, my wife, and Kalyani, my daughter, who have always appreciated and lovingly encouraged me for whatever little writing I do and for reading several rough drafts and making suggestions.

Arti Ghare for her overall support in layout and design of the booklet.

Shriram Bokil, veteran artist, who held number of discussions with us to understand the thinking behind writing these pieces and then converting them in picture form.

Mrs. Smita Godse, Anand Godse and Ms. Ojas Kulkarni and Ms. Mohini Savedkar from the Eklavya team for their support and Vishnu Mujumdar and Gurudatta Kundapurkar veteran volunteers for their constant encouragement and guidance.

Anand Chouthai, New Jersey USA, for providing funds for the initial preparation of this booklet.



Your book goes a long way in boosting the morale of the mentally ill. The book not only inspires the mentally ill to lead a meaningful life but serves as a weapon. After reading your book I realised that your pen has the strength to banish psychological disorders from the world at large.

Dr. Girish Kulkarni

Founder, Snehalaya, Ahmednagar

I use the book penned by Prof. Vartak as a guide. Reading at least a page from this book is a part of my morning regimen. This practice has proven immensely useful to me. Throughout my life the book will serve as my constant companion.

Mr. Parag, Pune

The book 'Recovering from a Mental Disorder' is useful not only to the mentally ill but to all around us. While recuperating from a mental illness one needs to practise certain rules. The book provides these rules in an easy- to- practice manner. I use this book as a handy toolkit.

Dr. Pallavi Gambhir, Nigdi

Written in an easy-to-understand manner, this document is a valuable resource for persons with mental illness. It has both tips and information that go a long way in understanding and mitigating the condition. Dr.Vartak's keen insight translates to hope and inspiration for the reader. It is a must read for all stakeholders.

Mr. Ganesh N Rajan, Chennai

Person with lived experience...

BE(EE), M. B. A. (Int. bus), MS (Social and Applied Economics),

Author: God flipped me off, Schizophrenia Chronicle' : A Story



Dr. Anil Vartak

Dr. Anil Vartak is informed by his personal experience of mental illness. In his journey, he realized early that self-help is key to regaining mental health and well-being from an array of mental health problems. Through his perseverance and desire to help others, he decided to take up this cause as his mission.

Anil has been awarded M.A., M. Phil, and Ph.D. in Economics from the prestigious Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune. He retired as Head, Department of Economics from Sir Parshurambhau College, Pune. His Ph.D. focused on mental health economics.

He founded the Eklavya Self-Help group in Pune in 1997. Later, he became Secretary of the Schizophrenia Awareness Association (SAA). Currently, he is President of the Eklavya Foundation for Mental Health, Pune which he founded.

He was associated with several mental health organizations across India as a managing committee member, advisor, or consultant. They are Sangath, Goa, Banyan, Chennai, Movement for Global Mental Health (MGMH), and Essence, Bhopal. He is regularly invited as a speaker to conferences across the world. He is the recipient of the prestigious Sangharsh Sanman Puraskar, Pune (2005), Win Or Win organization, Chennai (WOW) award in 2018, Media for Mental Health Award (SCARF, Chennai) in 2019, and Babu Puraskar (Snehalaya, Ahmednagar) in 2022.

He wishes to replicate the Eklavya community-based model for raising awareness, removing Stigma and for forming self-help groups across communities in India.

When he is not writing, working with Shubhartis or rallying for a mental health cause, Anil loves to take long walks, appreciate nature, watch films and spend time with his family and cat.

Eklavya Foundation For Mental Health, Pune

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