

Midlands Mental Health Clinic
presents...

Simple Steps to Better Mental Health



**Tips on stress, anxiety,
depression, anger,
relationships, and addiction**

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Introduction

My name is Seamus Sheedy, I am the founder and Clinical Director of the Midlands Mental Health Clinic.

Firstly, I would like to thank you for downloading our Simple Steps to Better Mental Health guide. In this booklet, I will address the most common mental health issues and how to deal with them.

90 per cent of those who attend our clinic are struggling with these four issues:

- Stress, anxiety, and/or depression - I've grouped these three issues together as they're often interlinked
- Anger management issues
- Relationship difficulties
- Addiction issues

Often the biggest problem is the lack of understanding surrounding each of these issues, and the symptoms that come with them. This often leaves sufferers, and their loved ones, confused as where to start looking for the best treatment.

It can be very difficult to tell what the core problem affecting your well-being is and, as a result, find a workable solution for you. This is often because, while symptoms can be similar, each case usually requires a tailored treatment plan.

The good news is: I can help you, no matter what your mental health issue is. I have been assisting people, just like you, to overcome a wide range of mental health issues for nearly 20 years. Through this free guide, you'll learn about what I have found to work for many of the individuals that I've treated over the last two decades.

Séamus Sheedy,

MA, MIACP, ACI, EAC

Email: seamus@midlandsmentalhealth.com

Phone: 087 292 3368

Website: www.midlandsmentalhealth.com

Stress Management

Stress is a normal part of everyday life. However, too much of it can lead to myriad difficulties, including anxiety and depression.

When you're feeling stressed, these simple steps will help you cope:

- **1. Take Time Out** – Everyone needs to take time out on a daily basis to look after their mental health. Helpful activities can include practising mindfulness, breathing exercises,

meditation, yoga, listening to music, or simply finding time to do something for yourself.

- **2. Examine Diet** – Our diet plays a large role in how we feel. It is important to remember the following: Eating a well-balanced diet is very important to our physical and mental health.

Skipping meals should be avoided.

Limit alcohol and caffeine, both of which can aggravate anxiety and trigger panic attacks.

Mental Health Ireland provide more tips and advice about your improving diet [here](#).

- **3. Try to Get More Sleep** – What kind of sleep are you getting? When stressed, your body needs additional sleep and rest. Disrupted sleep is common in many emotional disorders, and it's difficult to know which started first — stress or poor sleep. A lack of sleep can prevent our brain from producing the necessary chemicals to feel happiness.

Small alterations to our habits around bedtime can greatly help our quality of sleep, such as: avoiding caffeine and nicotine for several hours before you try to sleep; avoiding screens like your phone or laptop; and reading something in bed, this can be a great way to take your mind off things and also tire your

brain out so that it switches off more easily.

[There is some more helpful advice on improving your quality of sleep here.](#)

- **4. Try to get more exercise** – Most of us know that daily exercise helps us feel good and maintain our health. Pick an exercise you enjoy such as jogging, walking, cycling or even dancing

for 30 minutes, three to five times a week. This will reduce stress, improve your mood, enhance your self-esteem and increase your energy levels.

- **5. Find the funny aide** – A good laugh goes a long way; so if you're feeling stressed, try watching a funny film, go to see a comedian or simply find fun things to do with friends. Laughter improves blood flow and keeps negative emotions under control. It is a great way to increase your mood and energy through increase of endorphins, memory, alertness and learning. It's as good as medical treatment with no negative side effects.
- **6. Learn how to think more positively** – Try giving yourself reassuring and positive thoughts. When anxious, practice phrases such as: 'This feeling will pass.'

'I will get through this.' 'I am safe right now.'

'I am feeling anxious now, but I have the power make myself calm.' 'I can feel my heart rate slowing down.'

- **7. Learn muscle relaxation** – Stress causes our muscles to tighten and become tense. To increase a relaxed state and physical comfort, tighten and release muscles beginning with the largest muscles and work down to smaller ones.
- **8. Try another perspective** – Accept that you cannot control everything. Put your stress in perspective: is it really as bad as you think? Make an effort to replace negative thoughts with positive ones.

Anxiety

Anxiety is feeling of nervousness or unease about a situation. It is a completely natural response to many of life's challenges, but when it gets out of control, it can leave a person feeling

emotionally paralysed and, as a result, unable to complete the simplest tasks. Sufferers can even try to totally avoid certain things that induce anxiety and even mention of them.

What are the factors that cause anxiety?

Family history, life's various stresses, personality type and attitude, resilience levels, and the strength of a person's support network all play their part in anxiety levels.

These simple steps can help you deal with anxiety:

Take stock by figuring out which of your current strategies work; taking a walk; clearing your mind; reading; facing your fears head on; unwinding with friends; exercise; being assertive; enlist support of family and friends; be realistic; discover what triggers your anxiety, keep record of times you're feeling worried and look for patterns; controlled breathing and relaxation; finding worthwhile distractions from your thoughts; set realistic targets.

In short, try to think outside the box in addressing anxiety, pace yourself, anticipate setbacks, be compassionate with yourself, and don't put off facing your fears.

Try to avoid:

Eating too much, staying in bed too long, self-medicating with alcohol etc., ignoring the problem, being overly critical of yourself.

There is a lot of overlap with stress here in terms of combatting anxiety, so for more information see pages 4-5.

Depression

Depression is just not the occasional feeling of sadness that we all experience from time to time. Instead, it's a persistent feeling of overwhelming sadness for at least two weeks and usually

much longer.

It's the inability to take pleasure in almost any of life's activities, and feeling run down or lacking the normal energy you had before depression set in. People with clinical depression also often suffer from problems with sleeping and eating — physical symptoms that have been going on for as long as the depression itself.

The causes of depression are many and varied. In the current climate, where doom and gloom is everywhere, we look either to the TV or papers; it can be hard not to be depressed. There are many causes for depression from financial issues to bereavement, the break-up of a relationship, the loss of a job or home, low self-esteem or illness.

When you're feeling depressed, these are the things you should consider:

- **1.Consult your doctor** – This is a good start, but it should only be the start. If you are in need of specialist help from a mental health professional, they will refer you to one.
- **2.Are your relationships — or the lack of them - healthy?** Do you have people in your life that you can turn to? Relationships just don't fall into our laps, but when we're depressed, we tend to isolate ourselves. Strong relationships can help you out of the deepest throes of depression. Finding ways to build your relationship skills and engage with those around us is one key way to overcome depression.
- **3.Our thoughts shape our lives-** How and what we think directly impacts how we behave and feel. However, you can't just stop having depressing

thoughts overnight, but you can learn to identify them and deal with them as they occur. As you track your thoughts, you can learn how to evaluate them, and fight against them back when they are unhealthy or irrational.

- **4. Build coping skills-** These include combatting negative thinking or coping with negative thoughts in more positive ways. People aren't born with these skills in place, and most of us never formally learn how to do these things successfully — such as enhancing our relationships and nurturing our positive emotions. That's okay, because these things can be easily learned, as long as you open your mind up to the possibilities. This includes the need for real change in your life, such as building a healthy relationship with a family member or loved one, finding new friends, or how to stop isolating yourself. You can find skills-building exercises in many self-help books written about depression as well. Is there a support group in your area where you can share skills with others like yourself?
- **5. Take baby steps -** Try new things out slowly, and experiment with change one step at a time. As you take these steps, trying out new behaviour strategies or relationship skills, reward yourself for your successes and learn from any failures.
- **6. Journeys do not happen in a straight line -** There will be setbacks in your journey recovering from depression. Take the setbacks in your stride, and keep them in perspective. Depression recovery is a process that will take time, but as long as you stick with the goal of change, you can overcome depression in due time
- **7. Try to feel hopeful -** Remember that hope is one of the things that deserts us when we're depressed. However, hope can be reignited through the small victories we have along the way, reminding us of better times. Remember these times that can be just around the corner as you begin your battle against depression.

Anger Management

An ability to control one's temper is a crucial life-skill. If you find yourself snapping regularly or internalising anger, we can help you find practical ways to overcome it.

What is anger costing you? At the very least, it can cost you to lose relationships and destroy your career.

The cause of a person's anger is often rooted in their life experiences. Anger is often a natural response to things out of our control, but an inability to deal with it properly can lead to rash decisions and, oftentimes, has negative consequences for a person's physical health - alongside their mental health.

Things to remember when managing your anger:

- 1.It is really important to get to the bottom of your anger, i.e. understand where it comes from and what triggers it. It may be a symptom of another problem, such as stress or anxiety.
- 2.Focus on what's being said, avoid interruptions, and try to listen fully to what the other person has to say.
- 3.Avoid wanting to be right all the time.
- 4.Avoid making assumptions or jumping to conclusions about a situation or something somebody says. Check what was meant before you respond.
- 5.If you're in a heated discussion, slow down and think through your responses. Don't say the first thing that comes into your head, but slow down and think carefully about what you want to say. Remain respectful regardless of someone else's reactions.

10 Ten Steps to a Calmer Life:

- **1.Change Your Environment** - Sometimes it's our immediate surroundings that give us cause for irritation. If so, try to figure out why and change it.
- **2.Give yourself a break** - Make sure to take some personal time every day, especially when things are particularly stressful.
- **3.Timing** - When you deal with conflict is crucial. For example, if you and your spouse tend to fight when you discuss things at night - perhaps you're tired, or distracted, or maybe it's just habit - try changing when you talk about important matters, so these discussions don't turn into arguments.
- **4.Avoid** - If there are things or people in your life that constantly make you angry, sometimes walking away and ignoring them can be the best option.
- **5.Reflect** - If you need to calm down mid-argument, state calmly that you'd like a little time out. Agree on a time limit for the break and use this to try take stock of the situation and the best way to resolve it.
- **6.Take a deep breath** - If you feel like you're losing your temper, simply take some deep breaths – breathe in slowly, then breathe out slowly at least 10 times.
- **7.Divert your attention** - If you're in an anger-inducing situation, do something else, e.g. read, plan, talk to someone else.
- **8.Don't try to justify anger** - Avoid rehearsing your reasons for being angry.
- **9.Give yourself a chance to calm down** - If you do become angry, allow your mind and body to calm down before you react; at least 20 minutes, if possible.
- **10.Empathy** - Consider the situation from the other person's perspective.

Relationship Difficulties

Most of us need relationships with others to feel happy - be it family, friends, colleagues, or partners. However, poor relationships can make us feel stressed, anxious, or depressed.

Below are some simple steps to help you get a relationship back on track:

- 1. The first thing is to understand, and be honest about, what the problem is about. This will give you a realistic perspective on what's going on and how to solve ongoing issues.
- 2. Calmly communicate about what you want in your relationship. If you portray calmness with your voice and body language while you communicate, it will be far more effective.
- 3. Try not to criticise. And if you must criticise, try to make it constructive or frame it in a way that doesn't offend the other person.
- 4. Try to stay positive. If things start to go badly with a relationship in our life, it's easy to feel things are sliding downwards into a negative spiral. Instead, try to focus on what the person is doing well at, rather than the negative stuff, and let the other person know that you appreciate their efforts.
- 5. Try looking at things from each other's point of view. If you're not sure what they're thinking, ask them.
- 6. Talk to each other as equals. If you come across as patronising, it will immediately make the other person defensive and any attempt at resolving the issue will likely be futile.
- 7. If you live with somebody or spend a lot of time with them, it's important to do things separately from time to time. Set aside a healthy amount of time apart pursuing your own interests

and social lives. If you're happier as individuals, you'll be happier in your relationship.

- 8. There is no 'should' when it comes to relationships. It's a big mistake to compare your relationship with other peoples' relationships. Every single relationship is different. You should treat them as such.

Addiction

Addiction is one of the most destructive human traits - whether it's drugs, alcohol, gambling or just about anything, it can ruin lives. One of the most important things to do is understand

the underlying cause.

Below are important steps needed to overcome an addiction:

Accepting - The first step in overcoming addiction is being honest with yourself by acknowledging that the problem exists. Then you can ask the underlying cause? Is it to help you deal with anxiety and stress? If you're drinking too much or smoking too much, there is a reason; it may be to numb the pain or help you get over shyness.

Avoid people, places and things that bring you trouble - For most addictions, there are people, times and places that trigger their addictive behaviour. For example, a bar for someone with an alcohol addiction or, something more subtle, like a break at work that makes you reach for a cigarette. Whatever the trigger, think ahead and avoid putting yourself in that position. Make simple lifestyle changes. You have to set your life up for success if you're going to break your addiction

Replace the addiction - It is difficult to break habits and form new ones. You can successfully replace your negative addiction with something positive and uplifting, such as exercising, learning a new instrument etc. .

Deal with denial and try thinking rationally - Most people caught up in addiction understand on some level that it is unhealthy, yet the behaviour continues. This happens because the addict is usually in denial, minimising or trivialising the effect it's having on their lives and on those around them. Addicts often need support from others to help them think rationally about what they're doing.

Be accountable and have a support system - Being accountable to someone means they can support you and, if necessary, help you refocus when it gets tough. It can be beneficial

to get your family and friends involved in your efforts rid yourself of a harmful habit.

Telling people you trust about your addiction lets them know you have a problem. This means they can then give you advice along the way, keep you motivated by checking in on your progress, and also avoid tempting you with whatever your vice is. Addicts need to surround themselves with people that support them and embraces their decision to be healthier during this time.

Reward yourself - Overcoming an addiction can be difficult. When you see yourself making progress, even small steps, you have to motivate yourself to keep going. Reward yourself for every milestone with something that you enjoy in your new addiction-free life.

Try meditation or mindfulness - Addictions often centre around impulsive actions taken with very little conscious thought. An addict is often stuck in a cycle of thoughts that simply repeat themselves from day to day with their actions following suit.

The practice of meditation or mindfulness can break these patterns and allow them to see the world from a new perspective. Meditation and mindfulness are both known to produce endorphins, much like physical exercise. This natural 'high' is a healthy and safe alternative to the ones that are sought through various addictions.