Connect 5

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION ON MENTAL WELLBEING

Module 3
Participant Guide

V4-24

Contents

The Aim of Module 3 Learning

Module 3 – Extended Mental Wellbeing Intervention

This module furthers the knowledge and skills developed in Modules 1 & 2. It provides evidence-based techniques to facilitate change and build and maintain mental wellbeing skills.

The objective of this Module is to support you to:

Develop effective coaching skills within Connected Conversations to facilitate positive change.

Apply six self-help tools to support personal and others' mental wellbeing journeys.

Highlight the crucial role of integrating these self-help tools into daily life for sustained mental wellbeing for yourself and others.

The Next Steps after Five Areas Model™ Mapping
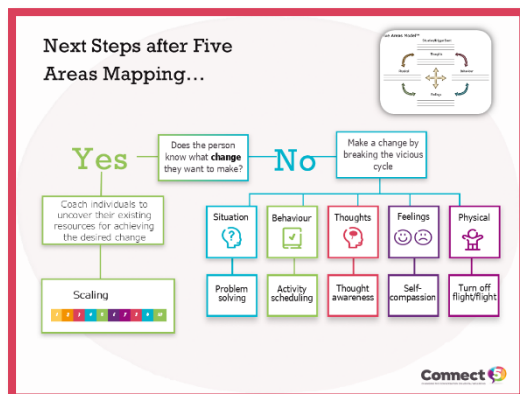
The Five Areas Model™ mapping gives a person insight into why they feel as they do and what they need to change to feel better; it provides the rationale and motivation to make a change.

The first question to explore is whether the mapping process has provided the insight and motivation for a person to make a change they already have in mind. Many of us harbour a desire for change that we somehow never fully realise, mainly because we need more motivation or inspiration to enact it. If that's the case, we can use the Scaling Tool to help someone

focus on their desired state so that they can design the concrete action steps needed to make it a reality.

If the person is still determining what or how to change, we can return to the Five Areas Model ™ mapping to help them decide which area to act on.

The Connect 5 Toolbox has six evidence-based tools to support someone in breaking a vicious cycle by making a change in the here and now. If this knowledge and skill are practised routinely in everyday life, it becomes a skill for wellbeing, i.e., promoting and protecting mental wellbeing.

Understanding Wellbeing and the Skills to Build and Maintain it.

Wellbeing is a product of your everyday habits and routines. The positive feelings associated with wellbeing stem from the skills, routines, and habits you have cultivated and incorporated into your daily life. Importantly, wellbeing is not a fixed trait but rather a set of skills that can be learned and developed over time. A growing body of scientific evidence supports this shift in thinking, highlighting that wellbeing can be practised and refined, much like learning to play an instrument.

So, how do we learn the skills of wellbeing? The key lies in regular practice. Like any skill is honed through consistent action, wellbeing practices are designed to train your mind to nurture positive qualities and reduce negative ones. These practices encompass thoughts, words, and activities that enhance your sense of security, self-worth, resilience, effectiveness, insight, and inner peace.

The brain is the learning organ moulded by your experiences. Daily mental activities, especially intense, prolonged, or repetitive ones, leave a lasting impact on your brain. Focusing on positive events and aspects of life cultivates an optimistic outlook and resilience while dwelling on self-criticism, worries, and stress can lead to a negative view and emotional vulnerabilities.

Our everyday experiences matter not only for their immediate impact but also for the lasting imprints they leave on our brains. The things you pay attention to act like a spotlight or a vacuum cleaner, determining what stays in your mind. Even small wellbeing practices significantly impact over time, like physical exercise for the brain.

Regular wellbeing practice is critical as it empowers us to shape our minds and brains positively. It fosters optimism, resilience, and happiness and diminishes the risk of depression. Engaging in wellbeing practices is an act of kindness towards oneself, treating yourself with the care and consideration you deserve.

In conclusion, you cannot prevent your brain from changing, but through regular wellbeing practices, you can actively encourage positive transformations that support and enhance your overall sense of wellbeing.

Learn More

Watch Rick Hanson talk about wellbeing practices here.

Read more about the wonderful brain here.

Our brains were designed to help us survive -not to be happy. Modern psychology shows us that wellbeing and happiness are skills. The great thing is that this skill, just like driving or dancing, can be learned and can stay with you for a lifetime.

The Connect 5 Toolbox - Scaling

The Scaling Tool originates from the Brief Solution Therapy (BST) school of thought. In BST, it is believed that every individual possesses some knowledge of what would improve their life, even though they may require assistance (sometimes significant) in articulating the specifics of their desired improvements. The BST approach assumes that those seeking help already have the basic skills to develop solutions.

Your role using the Scaling Tool:

As a facilitator of this tool, your primary objective is to keep the individual's energy and focus on rehearsing the solution, not rehashing the problem or dwelling on what isn't working. The goal is to inspire them to practice and refine their chosen solution rather than fixating on the issue. The scaling process is carefully designed to assist the person in pinpointing the techniques, skills, and resources they already possess— resources that may be immediately applicable or have been overlooked. This technique is intended to spotlight these skills, empowering individuals to acknowledge their capacity to devise and implement comprehensive solutions effectively.

How to use the Scaling tool.

Introduce the Scale:

Initiate the conversation using Connected Conversation skills, particularly collaboration and power-sharing. Explain the Scaling Tool to the person and ensure they feel a sense of ownership and engagement -It's crucial to remember you are doing with and not *doing to the person*.

"I'd like to introduce you to the Scaling Tool. It's an effective way to focus on the specific change you want. It will help you recognise the skills and resources you possess and clarify the steps you can take to achieve your desired change. Would you like to have a go and work on it together?"

Determine the Current Position:

Ask the person to evaluate where they are on the scale, with one being the furthest from their desired change and ten being where they would ideally want to be. Assure them that their judgment is subjective by nature, that there is no right or wrong, and that any score, including a low score, is workable.

"When thinking about the desired change you want to make, where would you place yourself on the scale right now? With 1 being no progress towards your desired change and 10 being where you wish to be".

Work from the Platform to Explore Current Efforts.

 This step helps individuals reflect on and recognise their current efforts and actions to achieve their goals or desired outcomes. It encourages thoughtful and comprehensive exploration that can lead to a deeper understanding of their progress and boost their motivation to continue working towards their desired state.

Working from the Platform to Explore Current Efforts helps the person assess or explore their current situation or what they're already doing. It's like starting on a platform (where they are right now) before moving forward.

Open-ended Questions, e.g. "*What are you doing that puts you at that number and not lower?*" This question encourages the person to reflect on the efforts (no matter how small) that have contributed to their progress and identify the actions that have gotten them there.

Continual Exploration by asking 'What else?' encourages the person to go further than their initial response, think deeper, and uncover additional efforts they may not have initially mentioned.

Comprehensive Exploration persists in asking "what else" to examine their current actions comprehensively. This thorough exploration helps the person gain a complete understanding of their efforts. By fully exploring their recent efforts, they may become more aware of their positive actions, which can motivate and boost their confidence.

Allow Silence. It's essential to allow periods of silence during this process. Silence gives the individual the space and time to think deeply and consider their responses more thoroughly. During these moments of reflection, they may uncover additional efforts or insights.

Recall Earlier Success.

This step was designed to help individuals tap into their past successes and the strategies that worked for them when they were closer to their desired state. By doing so, you aim to empower them with a repertoire of effective approaches that can be applied to their current situation, ultimately assisting them in achieving their desired change or goal.

Recollection of a Higher Point: You want the individual to think back to when they were in a better position or closer to achieving their desired goal. This could be when they were more successful or made progress toward their objective.

Recall Strategies and Resources: Using questions like "Was there a time when you were higher on the scale? If so, what did you do that put you higher on the scale?" These questions prompt the person to remember and articulate the strategies, actions, or resources they utilised during that more successful period. In essence, you're asking them to identify what worked for them in the past.

Reconnect with Successful Approaches: By encouraging them to remember what they did during their previous successful phase, you are helping them reconnect with the strategies and resources that proved effective in the past. This can be valuable because these strategies may still be relevant for achieving their desired change.

Exploration of Additional Strategies: The instruction includes "Use 'What else?' to support them in recalling additional successful strategies they may have overlooked." This part emphasises the importance of thorough exploration. After they mention the initial strategies, you encourage them to think deeper and identify any other successful approaches they might have forgotten.

Take a Step Forward

This step aims to help individuals develop a clear and practical action plan grounded in their current situation and capacity. This plan should be motivating and believable, empowering them to take meaningful steps towards their goals. The Scaling Tool aims to provide individuals with the tools and motivation to progress steadily toward their desired changes or objectives.

Formulate an Action Plan: You want the person to take the insights they've gathered from earlier steps and use them to create a tangible action plan for progressing toward their desired state. This action plan should be based on their current capacity and be achievable.

Envision Progress: You encourage the individual to visualise their situation if they were one step up on the scale, moving closer to their desired state. This visualisation helps them connect with their goal and imagine the positive changes that can occur.

Focus on Small, Achievable Steps: Emphasise the importance of setting small, realistic, and attainable goals rather than unrealistic ones. This approach ensures that their planned steps are manageable and align with their current capabilities.

Guiding Questions: use questions like *"How would things look if you were one step up on the scale?"* and *"What would you be doing if you were at the next point?"* These questions prompt the person to think deeply about the specific actions and changes they need to make to progress.

Encourage Thorough Planning: By using "What else?" in the process, you encourage the person to consider all aspects and details of their action plan. This ensures that their strategy is well-defined, comprehensive, and achievable.

Learn More

Read more about <u>Brief Solution Therapy</u> from the Institute for Solution-Focussed Therapy.

Watch this video to learn more about <u>Brief Solution Therapy</u> approaches.

The Connect 5 Toolbox – Problem-Solving

Problem-solving is a structured process that equips individuals with the skills to address complex challenges effectively. In cognitive psychology, problem-solving involves a series of mental steps to identify, analyse, and resolve problems. The problem-solving tool encompasses every stage, starting from problem discovery, decision-making to address the issue, understanding the problem's nuances, researching available options, and taking decisive action to achieve the desired outcomes. As a result, problem-solving emerges as a mentally healthy approach to confront difficulties and setbacks, providing an alternative to worry that often stems from a lack of a problem-solving orientation in life.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that not all problems can be easily solved. Specific issues like terminal illnesses, divorce, or separation may be more formidable or impossible to solve. In such situations, the focus may shift towards managing one's emotional state as part of other

aspects of the Five Areas Model™. Nevertheless, when it is possible to explore and generate solutions for a given situation, problem-solving becomes an immensely effective method to break free from negative cycles and develop a valuable lifelong skill.

Teaching someone to problem-solve successfully offers added benefits beyond resolving their immediate predicament. In addition to becoming disentangled from their problems, individuals cultivate a positive attitude and state of mind while enhancing self-efficacy. This newfound ability to solve problems instils a sense of control and belief in one's capacity to succeed and make positive changes rather than being solely at the mercy of circumstances.

Hope plays a pivotal role in how we think and feel. It encompasses three vital components: setting realistic goals, devising practical strategies to achieve them (including adaptable backup plans), and cultivating self-belief. By fostering problem-solving skills, we nourish hope and empower individuals to tackle life's challenges with optimism and determination.

What is your role as a helper?

To become effective helpers, we must resist the inclination to offer immediate advice and solutions and adopt the coach role. By doing this, we empower individuals to craft their solutions and cultivate valuable problem-solving skills. Mastering this skill enables them to tackle various life challenges independently. Rather than providing quick fixes, our goal is to empower individuals to become proficient problem-solvers in their own right.

How to use the Problem-Solving Tool

Define the Problem or Worry.
This step sets the foundation for effective problem-solving by ensuring that the person understands the problem, its specific aspects, and the desired outcomes. It enables them to approach the problem with greater clarity and focus, increasing the likelihood of finding successful solutions.

You are working with the person to:

Define the Problem: Encourage the individual to identify and articulate the problem, difficulty, or dilemma that is bothering them or causing worry. This involves naming and describing the issue in detail.

Understand the Nature and Extent of the Problem: Help them thoroughly understand the problem by exploring its nature and scope. This means looking at the problem from different angles and assessing its impact.

Specify the Aspect to Address: Guide them in pinpointing a specific aspect of the problem they want to focus on or address. This helps narrow down the issue and makes it more manageable.

Clarify the Desired Change: Ensure they have a clear idea of the change or improvement they aim to achieve regarding the problem. This involves defining what success would look like or what resolution they seek.

You need a clear view of the problem and the change the person wishes to make. A lack of clarity about the problem or the desired change can hinder effective problem-solving. People must be precise about what they are dealing with and what they hope to achieve.

Generate All Possible Solutions.

In this step, you guide the person to think creatively, explore multiple solution options, and collaborate with you to develop and refine these ideas. It's about fostering a creative and open-minded problem-solving process to increase the likelihood of finding effective solutions to the identified problem.

You are working with the person to engage in the following actions:

Think Creatively: Encourage the individual to think outside the box and explore potential solutions to their problem using their creativity. This involves generating a wide range of ideas without immediately dismissing them.

Tap into Knowledge and Experiences: Prompt them to draw upon their existing knowledge, understanding, and personal experiences to generate a list of possible solutions. Their unique insights and perspectives can contribute to creative problem-solving.

Open-Minded Exploration: Stress that no ideas should be ruled in or out at this stage. The focus is on open-minded exploration and generating as many options as possible. The goal is to create a diverse pool of potential solutions.

Collaborative Approach: Work with the person to develop and refine their ideas. You can provide guidance, ask probing questions, and offer suggestions to help them further develop their solutions.

Offer Relevant Knowledge: If you possess relevant knowledge or experience that they do not have, you can offer a solution for consideration. However, emphasise that your input is one of many

possibilities. The primary aim is to encourage their creative thinking and idea generation.

3 Analyse the Advantages and Disadvantages.

In this step, you guide the person to evaluate potential solutions comprehensively, considering their suitability, feasibility, alignment with values, and potential impact on the problem. This analysis helps them make an informed and motivated choice about which solution will effectively address their problem and achieve their goal.

In this step of problem-solving, you are asking the person to engage in the following activities:

Thoroughly Assess Potential Solutions: Encourage the individual to evaluate and analyse each potential solution generated carefully. This involves systematically examining each solution's merits and drawbacks.

Consider Benefits (Pros) and Drawbacks (Cons): Prompt them to identify and weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each proposed solution. This helps in understanding the potential benefits and risks associated with each option.

Feasibility: Encourage them to determine the feasibility of each solution. This includes evaluating whether they have the resources, time, and capacity to implement the solution effectively.

Alignment with Values and Beliefs: Help them assess whether each solution aligns with their values, beliefs, and goals. Solutions that align with their core values and beliefs are more likely to be motivating and sustainable.

Motivation and Energy: This step is critical for generating the motivation and energy required to initiate and maintain change. Understanding the pros and cons of each solution helps individuals make informed decisions and commit to the chosen course of action.

4 Select the Best-fit Solution.

In this step, the person is actively engaged in the decision-making process. They carefully consider their options, weigh the benefits and drawbacks, and ultimately choose the solution that best fits their current situation and aligns with their values, capabilities, and resources. This step marks the transition from planning to action, as they commit to

implementing the chosen solution to address the problem or achieve their desired outcome.

Develop a Concrete Action Plan.

In this step, the person actively creates a detailed action plan for implementing the chosen solution by specifying the how, where, and when of each step, visualising the process, and mentally preparing themselves; they increase their readiness and confidence, which contributes to the successful execution of the plan. This step bridges the gap between planning and action, ensuring they are well-prepared to realise their chosen solution.

Review and Adapt: This step focuses on revisiting and adjusting the action plan as needed. Setting up a follow-up session is suggested to evaluate how the plan progresses and whether it's achieving its intended outcomes. If the plan is working well, offer encouragement and recognition. However, it's also acknowledged that life can be unpredictable, and plans may not always unfold as expected. In such cases, another crucial aspect of problem-solving comes into play: the ability to use setbacks as opportunities to explore alternative solutions or recalibrate the original goal. This adaptability is an integral part of practical problem-solving.

By practising and applying these problem-solving skills, individuals can better address life's challenges, enhance their self-assurance, and develop resilience in successfully navigating and resolving difficulties.

Learn More

Read more: problem-solving from *skills you need*- helping you develop life skills.
Strategies to replace worrying with problem-solving

Problem-Solving at a Self-Help Level

Remember that this tool is intended for self-help, meaning the individual should be able to utilise the knowledge and insights gained from the process and act independently. However, if you notice that the person becomes distressed, upset, or struggles to develop solutions during the process, it may indicate that they require more specialised help and

support. In such cases, your role is to kindly reflect this to them and collaboratively work towards determining their next steps, which may involve seeking professional assistance or guidance.

The Connect 5 Toolbox – Activity Scheduling

The Connection between Actions and Emotions:
As evidenced by the CBT-based Five Areas Model™, psychologists have observed a significant link between our actions and emotional states. When we feel positive, we tend to engage in activities that bring us joy, spend time with people we like and love, take on challenging tasks that promote personal growth, and remain physically active.

These APPS activities (Achievement, Pleasure, Physical activity, Social Connection) have positive feedback effects:

- Challenging ourselves leads to a sense of **achievement,** accomplishment, and mastery.
- Engaging in enjoyable activities brings feelings of **pleasure.**
- **Physical** activity boosts energy and enhances mood.
- Positive relationships and **social connections** foster a sense of belonging and value.

Conversely, the reverse is true as well. Individuals experiencing low mood, depression, or stress (stuck in a vicious cycle) often withdraw from various activities, leading to a diminished opportunity for experiencing pleasure, mastery, social connection, and physical activity – the key elements contributing to a sense of wellbeing. This trap is easy to fall into. Doing less leads to feeling worse and further reduced activity, perpetuating the cycle.

Many of us have yet to naturally learn to reflect on and map the Five Areas of our experience. In this case, we may not pay sufficient attention to ourselves, thereby missing the connection between our actions and emotions. Without this self-awareness, many of us take a passive approach when feeling down or stressed, waiting for external changes to improve our mood. However, this approach can contribute to feeling helpless and dependent on external factors.

A proactive way to break free from the vicious cycle is by consciously and intentionally increasing the level of positive activities, even when we initially don't feel like it. This approach is known as Activity Scheduling. By incorporating this skill, we can take charge of our emotions and actively work towards enhancing our wellbeing, irrespective of our initial emotional state.

What is the Activity Scheduling Tool

The Activity Scheduling tool serves as a valuable aid in directing a person's attention towards the connection between their actions and emotions. It helps them comprehend the significance of incorporating good mood activities (APPS) into their daily routine and enables them to plan and engage in these activities intentionally. By using this tool, individuals become more mindful of how their actions influence their feelings, leading to a proactive approach in prioritising and implementing activities that contribute to their overall wellbeing.

How to use the Activity Scheduling Tool

Activity monitoring – learn about the association between activity and mood.

In this step, the person is encouraged to become more aware of how their daily activities impact their emotional and physical wellbeing. This process of monitoring and reflection is valuable in identifying patterns and connections between their actions and moods. It can provide insights that help them make informed choices about their activities to improve their mental and emotional state.

In this step, you work with the person to:

🔺 Learn About the Association Between Activity and Mood: The primary goal is for the person to focus on and understand the connection

between their activities and how they feel emotionally and physically. This involves recognising how their actions influence their mood.

🔺 Use the Five Areas Model™: Encourage them to utilise the Five Areas Model™ map to visualise and comprehend the relationship between what they have stopped doing, what they are currently doing, and how these activities affect their thoughts and emotions.

🔺 Utilise the Diary: This step provides a diary to document further and explore the connection between their activities and mood. The log serves as a means to track their daily experiences and emotions.

🔺 Ask Exploratory Questions: Pose questions to help them reflect on the association between activity and mood. These questions may include:

"*What activities were associated with your highest mood?*"

"*What were you doing when your mood was at its highest?*"

"*What activities were associated with your lowest mood?*"

"*What were you doing when your mood was at its lowest?*"

"*What patterns or trends do you notice about the relationship between your mood and how active you were?*"

Connect with 'good mood' APPS activities.

In this step, the person is working to connect with activities that give them a sense of pleasure, accomplishment, social connection, and physical movement (APPS). Identifying and engaging in these activities can enhance their overall wellbeing and mental health. Your role is to provide guidance and support in this exploration, recognising the individuality of their preferences.

You are working with a person to:

🔺 Identify APPS Activities: You are helping the person recognise and list activities that bring them pleasure, achievement, social connection, and physical movement.

🔺 Understand the Connection to Wellbeing: You guide them to understand that engaging in these APPS activities contributes positively to their overall wellbeing and mental health. The goal is to help them see the direct link between these activities and their emotional and psychological state.

🔺 Subjective Nature of APPS Activities: You emphasise that APPS activities are personal and can vary from person to person. What

brings one person pleasure and a sense of achievement may differ from what works for another. It is important to acknowledge this subjectivity and tailor the activities to the person's unique preferences and needs.

🔺 Collaborative Exploration: Your role as a helper is to collaborate with the individual. You assist them in identifying and discovering their own set of APPS activities. This involves active listening, asking open-ended questions, and supporting them in exploring different options.

🔺 Unique Balance: You acknowledge that each person will have their unique balance of APPS activities. Some may find joy in creative pursuits, while others may derive satisfaction from physical activities, social interactions, or other sources. Your role is to help them find and maintain the best balance.

Plan for more APPS activities in the coming week.

In this step, you guide the person in creating a practical plan for incorporating APPS activities into their upcoming week. The focus is on helping them develop a balanced schedule that reflects their unique preferences and capacity and to become more aware of how these activities directly impact their mood and overall emotional wellbeing.

In this step, you work with the person to:

🔺 Plan for More APPS Activities: Encourage them to plan and schedule APPS activities for the upcoming week. These activities should be chosen based on the insights and understanding gained in the previous steps.

🔺 Create a Concrete Plan: Guide them in developing a concrete and detailed schedule that outlines when and how they will engage in these APPS activities throughout the week.

🔺 Balance of Activities: Emphasise the importance of creating a balanced schedule of APPS activities. The number and variety of activities they choose should reflect their current capacity and available resources. The goal is to experiment and find a balance that works for them.

🔺 Open-Minded Experimentation: Encourage open-minded experimentation to try different activities and see how each affects their mood and overall wellbeing.

🔺 Personalised Schedule: Help them build a schedule incorporating a mix of activities they have identified as mood-boosting. This schedule should be tailored to their preferences and needs.

🔺 Rate the Impact: Ask them to rate the impact of each activity on their mood. This rating process helps them become more aware of the direct relationship between their actions and emotional wellbeing.

🔺 Develop Valuable Life Skills: Explain that this process fosters the development of valuable life skills. By actively planning and engaging in mood-boosting activities, they learn how to take control of their emotional wellbeing and build resilience.

The goal is to turn the activity scheduling tool into a lifelong skill. This involves helping the person translate the insights they've gained into practical actions and habits. They are encouraged to consistently observe how their actions influence their emotions, use activities to boost and maintain a positive mood and establish daily routines that promote overall wellbeing and satisfaction. This approach empowers them to manage their emotional wellbeing proactively and lead a fulfilling and balanced life.

Learn more

Read about behavioural activation practice and theory.
Watch this video to develop your understanding of the power mood-boosting activity has on wellbeing.

Activity Scheduling at a self-help level.

Remember that this tool is intended for self-help and assumes that the person can utilise the knowledge and insights it provides to act independently. However, if an individual becomes distressed, upset, or finds it challenging to identify activities that bring them a sense of achievement, pleasure, physical activity, or social connection, it may indicate the need for specialised help and support. Your role is to empathetically reflect this to the person and collaboratively work with them to determine what additional or specialist support might benefit their wellbeing.

The Connect 5 Toolbox – Thought Awareness
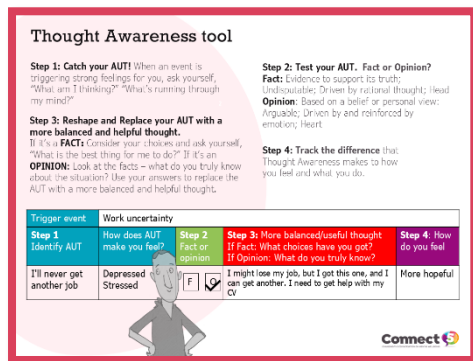
Automatic Unhelpful Thoughts (AUTs) are distorted patterns of thinking that lack factual basis. These thoughts tend to lead us to perceive situations more negatively than they actually are. They are how our minds convince us to believe negative things about ourselves and the world, even if they are inaccurate.

It is a common experience for everyone to fall into these unhelpful thinking patterns from time to time, especially when feeling stressed, sad, or down. However, frequent engagement with AUTs can significantly affect our mood and overall mental wellbeing, gradually eroding our emotional health.

The Five Areas Model™ emphasises the impact of thoughts on our emotions and behaviours. When we treat these negative thoughts as unquestionable facts, we may develop skewed perceptions of ourselves and act based on these faulty assumptions.

An essential life skill involves recognising and identifying our AUTs to discern when our minds are misleading us. Doing so allows us to reframe and redirect these thoughts, reducing their negative impact on our feelings, moods, behaviours, and, ultimately, our lives. Taking control of our thoughts empowers us to cultivate a more positive and balanced mental state.

Why human thinking is prone to bias (AUTs)

Human thinking is naturally prone to bias, especially when interpreting the world around us. While we sometimes perceive things accurately, our minds often take shortcuts, leading to biased thinking. These shortcuts can cause us to make false or overly simplistic assumptions about events and situations. These biased thinking patterns are known as Automatic Unhelpful Thoughts (AUTs).

There are several reasons why we are susceptible to AUTs:

Incorrect information: Early experiences or external influences can shape our beliefs about ourselves and the world, leading to distorted thinking patterns.

Confirmation Bias: We tend to seek evidence that confirms our existing beliefs while ignoring contradictory evidence, reinforcing our biased thinking.

Thinking Fast vs. Thinking Slow: Our brains have two thinking systems, one that operates quickly and intuitively (System 1) and another that requires deliberate and careful thinking (System 2). System 1 is prone to taking shortcuts, leading to biased thinking.

"Laziness is built deep into our nature".

AUTs can negatively impact our mood, behaviours, and mental wellbeing. They may lead us to overgeneralise, minimise or maximise situations, engage in emotional reasoning, and jump to conclusions, among other cognitive distortions.

Recognising and challenging AUTs is an essential life skill. By doing so, we can distinguish between facts and opinions, allowing us to make more balanced and rational decisions. While achieving a permanent state of balanced positive thinking may be unrealistic, developing thought awareness and challenging AUTs can help us navigate life more effectively. Learning to differentiate between facts and opinions is a solid foundation for challenging the validity of AUTs and promoting mental wellbeing.

Thought awareness tool: AUTs – Facts or Opinions?

We often respond to our thought processes as if they reflect facts about the world, whereas they more often represent opinions or assumptions. However, there is a big difference between what we can do if a thought reflects a fact versus an opinion:

If FACT, we can choose the best thing to do.

If OPINION, we can look at the facts – what we know about the situation.

Distinguishing between facts and opinions is a crucial life skill. Unfortunately, our built-in thinking biases (AUTs) make it unrealistic to think we can achieve a permanent state of balanced positive thinking. Instead, we need to develop the ability to 'think about thinking' to challenge AUTs and develop thought awareness. Learning to differentiate

between facts and opinions is a good starting point for helping yourself, and others challenge the validity of AUTs.

Fact	Opinion
Something that can be verified.	A belief or judgement about something
Based on research or observation	Based on a personal view, it cannot be verified
Verification possible	Verification not possible
Universal	Varies from one person to the next
Not debatable	Debatable
Has the power to influence.	Has the power to influence.
Driven by rational thought -Head	Driven by and reinforced by emotion

Put your learning into practice: Try the quiz below.		Fact	Opinion
1	I'm a terrible person.		
2	I've failed my online assessment.		
3	Nothing I do works out.		
4	No one will ever like me.		
5	I'm overweight		
6	There's something wrong with me.		
7	I'm not as attractive as they are		
8	I told my manager I wouldn't work weekends.		
9	My partner shouted at me.		
10	I don't make a good impression on people.		
11	I was late for work most days last week.		
12	My hands are too big.		
13	I'm lazy		
14	I'm selfish		
15	I didn't lend my friend the money she asked for		
16	This will be a disaster.		
17	I will never get better at writing reports.		
18	I don't do enough exercise.		

Answers:
Fact: 2, 5, 8, 9, 11, 15, 18; Opinion: 1, 3, 4,6,7,10,12,13,14,16,17

How to use the Thought Awareness Tool

Your role is to provide guidance, encouragement, and assistance throughout each step of the Thought Awareness Tool, helping the person gain greater control over their thoughts and emotions for improved wellbeing.

Catch the AUT:

At this step, you're helping the person develop the skill of noticing their thoughts. You encourage them to create a mental distance between themselves and their thoughts, enabling them to observe their thoughts objectively rather than become overwhelmed. The goal is to make them aware of their Automatic Unhelpful Thoughts (AUTs) because you can't effectively manage thoughts you're unaware of. You're essentially guiding them to recognise and acknowledge their thoughts. Note the Five Areas mapping has already started this process.
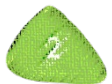
Test the AUT Fact or Opinion:

In this step, you assist the person in examining their AUTs. You encourage them to critically assess whether these thoughts are based on facts or opinions. Help them understand the difference between the two, as it will guide them in effectively managing these thoughts. Your support involves facilitating their exploration of the validity of their thoughts.

Reshape and Replace the AUT:

If the AUT is determined to be a FACT, your task is to help the person consider the best course of action. You encourage them to generate choices, gather more information, make plans, or seek help to address the situation based on facts.

If the AUT is identified as an OPINION, guide the person in examining the facts and seeking a more balanced perspective. Assist them in challenging the accuracy of the opinion and replacing it with a more balanced and constructive thought. Your role is to facilitate this process of cognitive restructuring, which can reduce emotional distress and lead to wiser decisions.

Track the difference Thought Awareness makes:

Here, you are supporting the person in observing and documenting the impact of their thought awareness efforts on their emotions and behaviours. Encourage them to reflect on how their newfound self-awareness affects their mental and emotional state. This self-reflection builds self-knowledge and self-understanding, empowering them to manage their thoughts better in the future. You play a role in guiding them through this reflective process.

Learn More

Listen to Professor Chris williams talk about <u>thought challenging.</u>

Read about <u>thinking bias</u> from psychology tools.

Read more about <u>thought challenges in CBT</u> from positive psychology.

Read the book summary of <u>Thinking Fast and Slow.</u> Watch this video summarising <u>Thinking Fast and Slow.</u>

Thought Awareness at a self-help level.
Remember that this tool is intended for self-help, assuming individuals can take the knowledge and insights it provides and apply them independently. However, suppose a person becomes distressed or upset while working on their thoughts and finds it challenging to reshape their Automatic Unhelpful Thoughts (AUTs). It may indicate the need for more specialised help and support. You must acknowledge this and collaborate with them to determine what additional or specialised support they might require.

The Connect 5 Toolbox – Self-Compassion

Self-Compassion tool
Step 1: Think of a time when a friend felt bad about his/herself or was struggling
What did you do? What did you say? What tone did you use?

Step 2: Think of a time you felt bad or were struggling.
What did you do? What did you say? What tone did you use?

Step 3: Is there a difference?   Step 4: If so, why?
What are the differences?   List the reasons you treat yourself differently.

Step 5: How might things change if you respond to yourself as you do to a friend?
What might be different for you?

The primary objective of the self-compassion tool is to break the harmful cycle of excessive self-criticism. The tool helps us develop the ability to recognise when we are being unkind to ourselves and shift towards a more self-compassionate approach. By cultivating this skill, we become better equipped to manage difficult, negative emotions about ourselves and respond constructively to address them.

Self-compassion involves transforming our relationship with our emotions and showing warmth and understanding towards ourselves during times of suffering, failure, or inadequacy instead of ignoring our pain or resorting to self-criticism. Self-compassion plays a central role in maintaining good mental health and, like any positive habit, can be strengthened through learning and practice.

The three interconnected skills crucial to fostering healthy self-compassion are as follows:

Self-kindness vs. self-judgment: We can learn to treat ourselves with the same kindness and care we extend to those we love and hold dear. This entails being gentle and compassionate towards us rather than being overly critical and judgmental.

Common humanity vs. isolation: We can be aware that suffering is a shared human experience. It's vital to recognise that our struggles are not solely a result of personal failings but are a natural part of being human; everyone faces challenges and makes mistakes.

Mindfulness vs. over-identification: If we ignore ourselves when we feel bad or upset, we tend to think, 'This is who I am', which triggers thoughts that beat and berate ourselves for these personal failings. When we pay more attention to ourselves, we notice when we are suffering and see it for what it is, i.e., part of being human. We can then say, *"I'm feeling bad and treating myself in a way that's making it worse"*, triggering self-care thinking such as, *"What do I need to do to feel better?" "How is it best to care for me now?"*.

Research supports the notion that integrating self-compassion into our lives allows us to cope more effectively with life's struggles and cultivate a more balanced and connected state of mind.

What is the self-compassion tool?

The foundation of the Self-Compassion tool lies in recognising that we often show much more compassion to others than ourselves. Engaging with the tool and following its steps highlights the striking disparity between how we treat others with care and kindness while being harsher and more critical towards ourselves. This process brings our awareness to the profound influence that nurturing self-compassion can have on our thoughts, emotions, and ability to cope with suffering. It empowers us to develop the necessary skills to transition towards a more self-compassionate approach in our way of being.

How to use the self-compassion tool

Your role is to provide support, create a safe and non-judgmental environment, and help people gain insights into their self-compassion practices. Encourage open and honest reflection and be prepared to discuss and address any emotions or realisations that may arise during this self-exploration journey.

Explore how you treat people you care for when they suffer:

Encourage the person to reflect on a situation where a close friend is going through a difficult time. Ask them to imagine how they would respond to their friend's suffering and ask them to write down their compassionate and supportive reactions.

Explore how you treat yourself when you suffer:

Next, the individual should be guided to recall feeling low or facing challenges. Have them jot down their usual responses to their distress, emphasising self-compassion.

Consider the difference:

Prompt the person to compare and contrast their responses in the previous two steps. Ask them to notice the stark contrast between how they typically treat their friends with compassion and understanding versus how they treat themselves, often being more self-critical.

Explore the reasons for the difference:

Delve deeper into these differences by instructing the person to list the reasons behind this varying treatment. You encourage them to explore the factors or fears that lead them to be more critical and less compassionate towards themselves than others.

How would things be different:

Lastly, invite the individual to envision a scenario in which they extend the same level of care and kindness to themselves as they do to a close friend. Instruct them to write down their thoughts on the potential positive impact of responding to themselves with the same compassion they would offer to someone they deeply care about.

"If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion." Dalai Lama

Paul Gilbert points out that there is an interactive flow between self-compassion, compassion for others and receiving compassion from others. Developing a compassionate self involves practice in all domains.

Self-compassion at a self-help level.

Remember that this tool is intended for self-help, assuming individuals can apply the knowledge and insights gained to act independently. However, it's crucial to be aware that if someone becomes distressed or upset while using the tool, it could indicate a need for more specialised help and support. In such cases, your role is to acknowledge their emotions and gently guide them towards considering what steps they should take next to address their needs effectively.

The Connect 5 Toolbox – Switch off the Stress Reaction

The Sympathetic Nervous System: The Fight or Flight Response

Stress and the body

Our stress response is an ancient, involuntary system that protects us from danger. This system, known as the sympathetic nervous system or the "fight or flight" response, readies our bodies for action. It activates all the organs required to prepare us for physical challenges, whether to confront a threat ("fight") or to escape from it ("flight").

Originally evolved to shield us from imminent physical dangers like dangerous animals or threatening individuals, this response can now be triggered by ordinary daily stressors, such as work deadlines, constant phone notifications, microaggressions from co-workers or partners, and feeling overwhelmed by numerous responsibilities. When activated, the stress response redirects the body's focus and energy towards the muscles and brain, preparing us to respond to perceived danger. Non-essential systems like digestion and immunity take a back seat during this process.

Several involuntary changes occur in the body when the sympathetic nervous system is activated:

- 🔺 Heart rate increases.
- 🔺 Breathing becomes fast and shallow.
- 🔺 The brain becomes overloaded, leading to headaches and difficulty concentrating on   anything other than the perceived "danger."
- 🔺 Pupils dilate.
- 🔺 Muscles contract.
- 🔺 Saliva production reduced.
- 🔺 Digestive functions slow down.

The issue with stress lies in how poorly, as a society, we handle it. Despite being well-understood and universally experienced, stress can

contribute to many severe illnesses and long-term health problems. Conditions such as high blood pressure, heart disease, cancer, stroke, obesity, and insomnia can be related to or directly influenced by chronic stress as an environmental factor.

The Parasympathetic Nervous System: Rest and Restore

Running alongside the sympathetic nervous system, the parasympathetic nervous system is known as the "rest and restore" system. It plays a vital role in achieving balance and maintaining the body's internal systems. Both systems are part of the Autonomic Nervous System, governing involuntary and reflexive bodily functions.

When the "rest and restore" system is activated, it returns the body to equilibrium. The heart rate slows, breathing calms and blood flow is redirected to the organs rather than the skeletal muscles. The body now focuses on digestion, hormone production, muscle repair, and strength-building. This state of relaxation allows the body to heal, restore balance, and counteract the effects of stress.

Ways to Trigger the Parasympathetic Nervous System for Immediate Stress Reduction.

- 🔺 Breathing exercises
- 🔺 Exercise

Proven Ways to Cultivate Rest and Restore in Everyday Life.

Learn healthy ways to cope with stress.

- 🔺 Make relaxation a regular habit.
- 🔺 Practice mindfulness.
- 🔺 Find activities that bring you into a state of flow where you feel fully engaged and focused.

Learn more about the stress response.

Read more to understand the <u>stress response and its impact on health</u>.

Watch this video about how stress affects your body.

Below are resources to explore the evidence-based methods that cultivate rest and restoration in daily life that can significantly improve overall wellbeing.

Learn healthy ways to cope with stress.

Learning healthy ways to cope with stress is essential for several reasons:

Physical Health: Chronic stress can harm the body, leading to various health issues such as high blood pressure, heart disease, weakened immune system, digestive problems, and hormonal imbalances. Healthy coping mechanisms help mitigate these physical consequences and promote overall wellbeing.

Mental Health: Prolonged stress can contribute to anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders. Adopting healthy coping strategies helps individuals manage their emotions, reduce feelings of being overwhelmed, and build emotional resilience.

Improved Decision-Making: People may make impulsive or rash decisions under significant stress, leading to undesirable outcomes. Learning healthy coping techniques helps individuals think more clearly and make informed decisions even in challenging situations.

Enhanced Relationships: Stress can strain relationships, causing conflict and misunderstandings. Healthy coping mechanisms enable individuals to communicate effectively, manage conflicts constructively, and maintain healthier relationships with others.

Productivity and Performance: Excessive stress can negatively impact focus, concentration, and productivity. Employing healthy coping methods can boost productivity and enhance performance in both personal and professional domains.

Reduced Substance Abuse: Unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as turning to drugs or alcohol, may temporarily relieve stress but can lead to substance abuse issues. Learning healthy ways to cope can prevent reliance on harmful substances.

Quality of Life: Healthily managing stress contributes to a higher quality of life overall. It allows individuals to experience more joy, satisfaction, and fulfilment in their daily activities.

Resilience: Healthy coping skills build resilience, enabling individuals to bounce back from challenging situations more effectively and easily adapt to change.

Longevity: Chronic stress can contribute to premature ageing and a reduced lifespan. By adopting healthy coping techniques, individuals increase their chances of living longer and healthier lives.

Empowerment: Learning healthy coping strategies gives individuals a sense of empowerment and control over their wellbeing. It allows them to actively manage stress and take charge of their mental and physical health.

Resources for learning to manage stress

NHS Breathing exercises for stress.

Take this Stress Control course and learn excellent skills to fight stress.

Make relaxation a daily habit.

Practising 'relaxation' is paramount to managing stress. When we relax, blood flow increases around our body, giving us more energy. It helps us to have a calmer and clearer mind, which aids positive thinking, concentration, memory, and decision-making. Relaxation slows our heart rate, reduces blood pressure, and relieves tension. It also aids digestion as we absorb essential nutrients more efficiently when relaxed, which helps to fight off disease and infection.

Resources to make relaxation a daily habit

Psychology Today offers this five-step process to change your physiology and make you feel more relaxed quickly.

Read a self-guide to relaxation here.
Explore audio files of relaxation techniques that can help relieve stress and gain a sense of wellbeing. Available in both male and female voices here.

Practice Mindfulness.

Mindfulness has been proven to be highly beneficial for mental health. By cultivating present-moment awareness without judgment, mindfulness helps reduce stress, anxiety, and depression. It enhances emotional regulation, promoting a more positive outlook on life. Regular mindfulness practice fosters resilience, allowing individuals to cope better with life's challenges. It improves attention and concentration, leading to increased productivity and cognitive function. Mindfulness also promotes better sleep quality, further contributing to overall mental wellbeing. By embracing mindfulness, individuals can experience profound improvements in their mental health, leading to greater emotional balance, increased self-awareness, and a sense of inner calm and contentment.

Resources to learn more about mindfulness

Find out more about how to look after your mental health with mindfulness from the Mental Health Foundation or the Oxford Mindfulness Centre, including podcasts and free mindful meditation sessions.

Find your flow.

Flow states offer significant benefits for mental wellbeing. When individuals experience flow, they become fully immersed in an activity, feeling focused, energised, and wholly absorbed in the present moment. This state of optimal experience enhances feelings of happiness and fulfilment, reducing stress and anxiety. Flow promotes a sense of mastery and accomplishment, boosting self-esteem and confidence. By challenging skills and providing clear goals, flow contributes to improved concentration and performance. Regular flow experiences can enhance self-awareness and a greater sense of purpose, ultimately fostering overall mental wellbeing and a more positive outlook.

Resources to support you in finding your flow

Find out more about flow and how to cultivate it.
Read Psychology Today's Process to Finding Your Flow.

Putting it all into Practice: Use the Connect 5 Toolbox.

You have now completed Connect 5 training. We have assembled the tools into your Connect 5 Toolbox to help you use them in your work and everyday lives. Feel free to copy, print, and use them to support you in assisting people to break their vicious cycles and take action to feel better.

Connect5

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION ON MENTAL WELLBEING

Module 3 Toolbox

Scaling tool

Step	Question
Step 1 Introduce the scale	This tool is designed to help you focus on your desired change, recognise your skills, and clarify actionable steps. Would you like us to work on it together?
Step 2 Establish where the person is currently on the scale	When you think about the desired change you want to make, where would you place yourself on the scale right now? With 1 being the furthest away from your desired change and 10 where you would ideally like to be?
Step 3 What are they doing that puts them on that number and not below.	What are you doing that puts you on that step and not below? What else? Anything else? Use silence to give time and space for thinking.
Step 4 Was there a time in their past when they were higher? If so, what were they doing?	Was there a time you were higher on the scale? What was different then? What were you doing? What else?
Step 5 What does the person need to do to be one step higher on their scale	Imagine you were one step higher on the scale. What would you be doing? What would other people see you doing? What else?

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CHANGING THE CONVERSATION ON MENTAL WELLBEING

Problem Solving tool

Step 1: Identify the specific problem or worry and decide what to do about it (the goal).

Step 2: Generate a list of possible solutions – encourage creativity and don't rule anything out.

Step 3: Explore the Pros and Cons of each solution.

Step 4:select the best-fit solution (or the least bad one).

Step 5: Make a detailed action plan to implement the chosen solution.

Step 1: identify the problem and decide what to do (goal)

Step 2 explore options	Step 3: Analyses merits of each		Step 4 Consider best option	Step 5 make a plan: What, where, when
	pro	con		
Possible solution				
Possible solution				
Possible solution				

Activity Scheduling tool

Step 1: Activity monitoring—Learn about the association between activity and mood.

Day	Am	Pm	Evening
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			
Which activities were you doing when your mood was highest?			
Which activities were you doing when your mood was lowest?			

Activity Scheduling tool

Step 2: Connect with your 'good mood' activities. APPS activities = better mood

Explore where you do or could get your APPs	
Achievement	
Pleasure	
Physical	
Social connection	

Step 3: Plan more APPS activities in the coming week. What APPS activities have you stopped doing? What APPS activities can you do more of to supercharge your mood? Do you have a good balance of good-mood activities in your daily life?

Activity (what)	Plan (where, when, who)	How do you feel? Rate 1-10

Turn this tool into a life skill!

Keep tracking the relationship between what you do and how you feel to build and maintain wellbeing in everyday life.

Next time you feel low or stressed, reflect on what you've been doing (not doing) and add an APPS activity into your day – even when you don't feel like doing it.

Thought Awareness tool

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CHANGING THE CONVERSATION ON MENTAL WELLNESS

Step 1: Catch your AUT! When an event is triggering strong feelings for you, ask yourself, "What am I thinking?" "What's running through my mind?"

Step 2: Test your AUT. Fact or Opinion?
Fact: Evidence to support its truth; Undisputable; Driven by rational thought; Head
Opinion: Based on a belief or personal view; Arguable; Driven by and reinforced by emotion; Heart

Step 3: Reshape and Replace your AUT with a more balanced and helpful thought.

If it's a **FACT:** Consider your choices and ask yourself, "What is the best thing for me to do?" If it's an

OPINION: Look at the facts – what do you truly know about the situation? Use your answers to replace the AUT with a more balanced and helpful thought.

Step 4: Track the difference that Thought Awareness makes to how you feel and what you do.

Trigger event	Step 1 Identify AUT	How does AUT make you feel?	Step 2 Fact or opinion	Step 3: More balanced/useful thought If Fact: What choices have you got? If Opinion: What do you truly know?	Step 4: How do you feel
			F ☐ O ☐		
			F ☐ O ☐		
			F ☐ O ☐		

Self-Compassion tool

Step 1: Think of a time when a friend felt bad about his/herself or was struggling

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Step 3: Is there a difference?

What are the differences?

Step 4: If so, why?

List the reasons you treat yourself differently

Step 5: How might things change if you respond to yourself as you do to a friend?

What might be different for you?

Switch off the Stress Reaction

Step 1: Notice the Fight or Flight response and understand how it affects the body

Step 2: Take action to switch off the stress reaction and turn on the Rest and Restore system

In the Moment	Longer Term
Trigger Rest and Restore to immediately reduce feelings of anxiety and stress • Deep Breathing • Brisk Exercise	Build Rest and Restore activities into everyday life • Learn healthy ways to deal with stress (e.g., 5 Areas Mapping) • Make relaxation a habit • Practice mindfulness • Find your flow

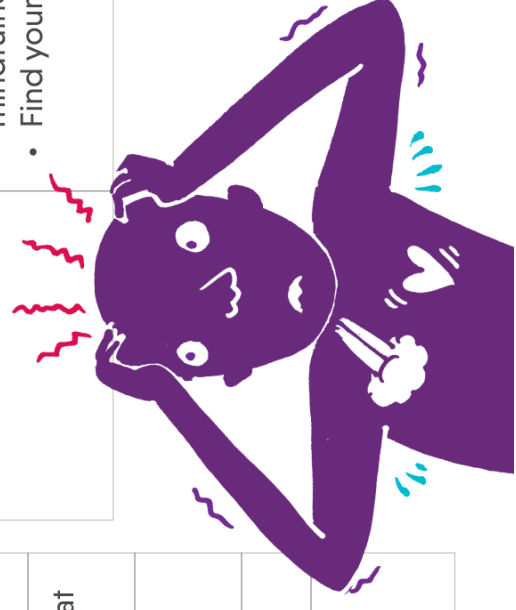| What happens	Why
Heart racing, heart palpitations	Pumping blood to get oxygen and glucose to the arm and leg muscles and the brain.
Breathing fast and shallow. Shortness of breath. Chest pain/tight chest	Body needs more oxygen so the chest muscles are being used a lot.
Headaches	Brain is working overtime. More blood to brain so it is ready for action.
Tense neck & shoulder muscles. Tense leg muscles. Shaky legs and arms.	The body is getting ready for action and more blood is going to muscles.
Butterflies in stomach. Feel sick.	Less blood to stomach and intestines.
Numbness/tingling toes and fingers.	Less blood to fingers and toes
Vomiting. Need to go to the toilet.	Body wants to be lighter for escape.
Dry mouth. Throat tightening.	Body does not want to digest food when running away or fighting.
Sweating. Hot and flushed.	Body getting ready to cool you down. Extra activity will make you hot.
Tired	Nervous system uses up energy even when the body is at rest.
Blurred vision. Pupils dilate.	Pupils get bigger to see surrounding better. Eyes take time to focus close up.
Tearful	Reaction to worry and the physical symptoms of stress.
Can't concentrate. Forgetful. Feel like you are not really there. Can't sleep. Ringing in ears. Strange tastes/smells.	Nervous system is overloaded. The brain is trying to process too much information at once.

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