L is for Learning

Learning is one of the '7 steps to wellbeing'. Pursuing our interests, maintaining curiosity about the world and learning new skills can help us feel proud of ourselves, more confident and positive. It also brings a whole host of other wellbeing benefits.

Research shows that lifelong learning in any form can increase wellbeing as it adds meaning to our lives. So, whether you take up an art-based hobby or pursue a course to learn a new skill you will be helping yourself feel better.

Classroom learning can enhance the wellbeing of adults with moderate to severe mental health problems (according to a UCL Institute of Education (IOE) study). Further Education courses helped the study participants by enhancing their confidence, hope, social participation and sense of achievement, amongst other things.

They experienced a sense of purpose and how this could open up new possibilities for the future. Some participants got a sense of accomplishment from committing to weekly actions plus learning new skills within a group.

The study showed that classroom learning can reduce the impact of long term mental health problems. The participants were able to get absorbed in learning to the extent that they found this a helpful distraction and their mental health improved.

The challenges they came across by taking on a course was outweighed by the benefits of the positive relationships they forged whilst learning. This is particularly important as people with mental health issues can become socially isolated.

As we grow older…

Anecdotal evidence suggests that engaging in work or educational activities particularly helps to lift older people out of depression. This could be true for anyone who is learning a new skill that depends on interacting with other people regularly through group participation and conversations. So, if you can find something that gets you out of your comfort zone socially this can bring additional benefits.

Harmony4Life Therapy ~ since 2006
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What are the benefits?

Here are some of the benefits you may see when you commit to learning:

- Increased hope

- More social interaction

- A sense of achievement

- Reduced low mood/ depression

- More confidence

- Increased self-esteem

- A more active life

- Overall increased mental wellbeing

- Increased happiness

- More to talk about when you see people

- Improved quality of life

- Deeper and stronger relationships

- A sense of purpose

- The release of the 'feel-good' chemical dopamine in the brain

- Better ability to cope with the stresses and strains of everyday life

- Higher energy levels and immunity

- Distraction from stress

- Headspace to reassess your problems, detach and gain perspective

Use the Mindful Mermaids Action Plan

Goal setting is linked with adult learning and this has been strongly associated with higher levels of wellbeing. So, if you have ideas about what you would like to learn or would like to pursue any of the below make sure you use the Mindful Mermaids Action Planning Template. This will help you define your goal(s) and the associated actions more clearly. It can also further enhance confidence by helping you to persevere and overcome any challenges.

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Some ideas to help you keep learning

The following ideas are all ways that we can keep learning and growing. Classes and formal courses are great ways to learn new things, but there are lots of other ways too.

- Be the quiz master –there are loads of sites, apps and games that you can use to test you and your friends/ family e.g. Sporcle, Quiz Up, Kahoot, Quizlet and Memrise; once you've had a go at these why not try writing your own and host a quiz night
- Book yourself onto a wellbeing course or training session (if you're already doing the online CBT programme linked to Mindful Mermaids that's great).
- Do a crossword, wordsearch or sudoku
- Fix something that's broken, e.g. a bike or garden gate; once you've done that you could set yourself a more challenging DIY project (there are lots of free video tutorials on Youtube)
- Get crafty- have a go at arts and crafts that you've never tried before, e.g.origami, knitting, pottery or upcycling
- Learn a language – apps like Babbel and Duolingo are great
- Learn a new word
- Learn about your loved ones/ colleagues/ neighbours, e.g. ask your family about their lives and you might be surprised by all the things you never knew
- Learn to cook something new, e.g. a favourite dish that you've never eaten at home
- Pick a podcast - there's a podcast out there for everyone and they can be a great way to keep your brain active while going about your day, e.g. Just One Thing by Michael Moseley, Happy Place by Fern Cotton, Rangan Chatterjee
- Play along - if you have a musical instrument there are lots of video tutorials online so that you can try to learn your favourite songs
- Read around - whether it's a newspaper article, blog post, novel, short story or poem, reading can open up our world so find someting that appeals to you and make regular time for this.
- Rediscover an old hobby that challenges you, e.g. making model aeroplanes, writing stories, sewing or knitting
- Register for a free online course, e.g. Future Learn offers some great ones
- Research something you've always wondered about

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- Set up a book club

- Sign up for a course, e.g. learn a new language or musical instrument, try something practical, such as plumbing, book keeping, coding, web design, social media marketing or do an online course on counselling etc

- Take on a new responsibility at work, such as learning to use an IT system or understanding the monthly reports

- Take up bird watching

- Try a new sport, e.g. kayaking, outdoor swimming, paddleboarding

- Visit a gallery or museum and learn about a person or period in history that interests you

- Visit virtually – lots of the world's most famous museums offer free online tours of their collections so you can see their treasures from your home

- Watch and learn – documentaries can be a great way to discover new things and there are lots of interesting ones on streaming sites e.g. 'Explained' series on Netflix.