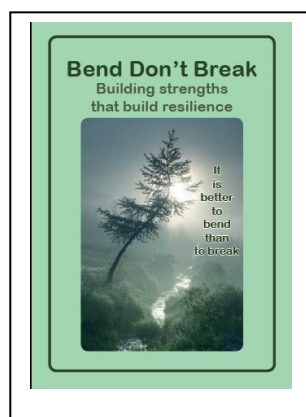
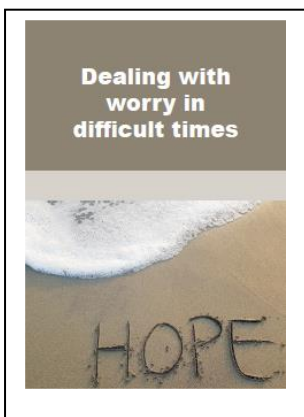




# Daily Habits That Make Regular Deposits into Your Personal Resilience Bank Account

Building on skills to strengthen resilience from booklets that can be downloaded from

[Building a toolkit for change | South Eastern HSC Trust \(hscni.net\)](http://Building a toolkit for change | South Eastern HSC Trust (hscni.net))



## Daily habits that make regular small deposits into your *Personal Resilience Bank Account*

Resilience is not the absence of challenges. It is the *capacity to transcend adversity* (R. Gilligan 1997) To adapt in the face of difficulties. It is a combination of those strengths both inside and outside us that helps us meet the challenges that life throws at us.

These are certainly times we would all benefit from strengthening our resilience.

It is important to say resilience is a process not a trait and is open to influence. That is what we are trying to do with this work: to influence our own resilience. To do that we have drawn from an article *The Resilience Bank Account: Skills for Optimal Performance* by Michael Maddaus, MD.

Despite the harshness life can throw at us, there are several habits that can significantly improve one's resilience and help us thrive.

Dr. Maddaus coined the term resilience bank account as a metaphor for one's personal resilience "bank account" that will help provide the reserves to meet these challenges. A person's commitment to build healthy habits can be thought of as making regular, small deposits. The cumulative effect is similar to interest that grows one's resilience over time.

So, what is in this pack? These activities were discussed in the clip, **Self-Care Now That We Need It Most**. Some of these exercises may help you develop your resilience, while others might make you realize how resilient you already are.

It is up to you what you will find useful. These activities include:

- Relaxed Breathing
- Self-compassion
- Mindfulness
- Getting my daily D.O.S.E
- Using Positive Emotions
- My strengths.
- Gratitude



They are certainly not an exhaustive list of activities and exercises to support resilience, but it is my hope you will find it helpful.

Ed Sipler South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

## Relaxed breathing (try to practice this regularly)

When we get stressed, the body's alarm system turns on.

When we start to think about something stressful, our amygdala, a part of the brain goes into action. The amygdala's job is to filter for danger. It is great for preparing for emergencies but sometimes it kicks in and detects a threat when there really isn't any. Stress hormones run through our body. We breathe faster and shallow from our chest.

Here is an example: we have a negative thought about a situation. Our amygdala says "emergency!" and stress hormones are increased. This changes our body with increased muscle tension and heart breathing quicker.

By turning on the calming part of the brain we can counter this. How? Relaxed breathing can help tell the body that it is safe to relax. Relaxed breathing is slower and deeper than normal breathing. Give it a try.

- Sit or lie comfortably.
- Close your eyes if you can.
- Try to breathe through your nose rather than your mouth.
- **Breath from your belly, not your chest**
- Deliberately slow your breath down. Breathe counting to 4, pause for a moment, then breathe out to a count of 4 or 5.
- Make sure your breaths are smooth, steady, and continuous.
- Pay particular attention to your out breath.



By focusing on our breathing during anxious or difficult times we can calm ourselves down.

Try lying down and put a toy or small object on your stomach. As you breath in and out, (from the pit of your stomach not your chest) focus on the toy, watching it rise and fall as it rides the waves of each breath.

### A few more grounding exercises

#### A safe place in your head

Picture in your mind a relaxing, calming place. (You can make one up). Go there in your mind for a moment.

#### Grounding to Calm You Down **5,4,3,2,1.**

If you start feeling really upset, it is helpful to get grounded using your five senses. You can try holding up your hand and counting: - 5 things you see - 4 things you touch - 3 things you hear - 2 things you smell - 1 thing you taste.

### How do these work for you?

For a useful exercise on breathing visit [Hope in Work - YouTube](#)

# Self-compassion

Do you tend to judge yourself harshly? Are you your own worst critic? If you make a mistake do you mentally beat yourself up for it.

In your head, do these harsh phrases pop up like "I'm so stupid. I'll never get it right?"

All too often in times of stress we focus on the negative. That is actually pretty common.

It would help us all if we worked on being more self-compassionate. This will be an introduction to self-compassion and a link for some further work can be found at the back of this booklet.



When it comes to being self-compassionate, the first thing you need to address is that overly critical voice in your head. Many times, that voice is far too critical. You may beat yourself up for every little mistake. To be more self-compassionate, you need to recognize that voice and correct it.

That does not mean you tell yourself how great you are. Instead, you talk to yourself in a kind, **non-judgmental way**.

## Understanding Self-Compassion

Self-compassion is not the same as self-esteem or self-confidence. It is a way of thinking and treating yourself.

Self-compassion involves treating yourself just like you would treat your friends or family members despite their flaws. Self-compassion involves accepting that you are human and that you make mistakes. It also means you do not dwell on those mistakes or beat yourself up for making them.

Treat yourself in  
the same way  
you would treat a  
good friend.

## 3 Elements of Self-Compassion

Dr. Kristin Neff, a psychologist and pioneering researcher in the area of self-compassion, talks about the three parts of self-compassion:

### 1. Self-kindness

You recognize that all people are imperfect. Every single human being on this planet makes mistakes. You are kind to yourself when things go wrong instead of being critical.

With self-kindness, instead of beating yourself up, you think "well everyone fails once in a while." You acknowledge that everyone has issues and struggles because this is what it means to be human. When you start to think like that, it changes the way you view life's challenges and difficulties. That opens the door for you to grow from the experience.

## 2. Mindfulness

Another part of self-compassion is mindfulness. Practicing self-compassion involves being able to observe our uncomfortable emotions without exaggerating them or ignoring them. Acknowledge our feelings helps us to not become over reactive. Just by naming what we are feeling can help start to turn on the calming part of our brain.

Many people usually want to avoid uncomfortable emotions. It is important that you take the time to be mindful of how those mistakes or failures make you feel and why. When you can do that in a non-judgemental way, you are much more likely to grow and learn from the situation.

## 3. Imperfection and Common Humanity

Once you can accept that it is unrealistic to expect perfection, it will feel like a weight has been lifted from your shoulders. It helps to realize that what you are experiencing is normal and human, and you should not feel bad about it.

Your flaws and setbacks can help you understand yourself better, not making you overly stressed or feeling bad about yourself. Self-compassion is about realizing that all human being makes mistakes including you.

### Benefits of Self-Compassion

- You understand that making bad decisions does not automatically make you a bad person .
- People who practice self-compassion have greater overall satisfaction with life. They also are more caring, supportive, and empathetic towards others.
- Research shows that people who are self-compassionate have less anxiety, have better mood and less fear of failure. Research also shows that self-compassion can be a motivator causing people to improve on their mistakes, failures, or shortcomings because they see them more objectively.

### How self-compassion works.

Why self-compassion works? It activates the “reward centres” of our brain.

Unfortunately, many of us default to blaming, shaming, and bashing ourselves with self-put downs when things happen.

The danger of self-put downs is that the temporary state of a feelings can be seen as a permanent trait. I “feel stupid” is very different from “I am stupid”. It is important to learn that feeling are states, not traits.

### It helps to challenge unhelpful thinking.

You can do this by searching for evidence that dispute beliefs of being worthlessness or failure. **Bend Don't Break** that can help you do this. This can be downloaded at <https://covidwellbeingni.info/assets/pdfs/resources/alcohol/BendDon'tBreak.pdf>





## How to Practice Self-Compassion

Dr. Neff says that some people do not like self-compassion as they see it as being the same as self-indulgent. That is not the case at all. Her research suggests that when we are harshly self-critical, we become discouraged, which leaves us less likely to strive to do better next time.

“The more self-compassionate versus self-critical that people are, the lower their cortisol levels are, the stress hormone our body produces when we are under pressure.” A simple fact according to Dr. Neff. When people are more aware of their feelings, they can maintain better emotional balance when flustered.

There are a variety of exercises that Dr. Neff suggests strengthening our self-compassion :

- **Imagine how you would talk to a friend.** We often extend kind words, hope and encouragement to friends or loved ones when they are struggling. When going through a difficult time, take a moment to consider how you might respond to a close friend if they were going through a similar situation.
- **Become an observer.** During times when we feel challenged or struggling, we are just reacting. By slowing down, we can take a small step back to observe at what is happening. Looking at the bigger picture can help us keep things in perspective and help us see what is important that may have otherwise missed.
- **Change your self-talk.** Notice how you talk to yourself in moments when you are having strong emotions like anger, worry or sadness. Work to rethink your critical self-statements in a more positive, nurturing way like a mentor or coach, rather than a critic or judge.
- **Keep a journal and write it out.** Take time each day to write out some of the challenges you are experiencing. Write down moments your mind tends to wander into critical statements. As you would with self-talk, intentionally rethink any critical statements with a softer, more understanding tone to see how it might feel different.
- **Become clear about what you want.** As you practice ways to rethink critical thoughts into more nurturing self-talk, you can uncover clues as to what you need and want. Focus on where you want to go and what you are working toward.
- **Care for yourself.** Sometimes we take care of others and overlook or ignore the need to take care for ourselves. When practicing self-compassion, you are recognizing that you have needs and are worthy of looking after yourself.

The practice of self-compassion can be quite different than anything you have done before. Be patient with yourself and remember that we cannot control every aspect of our lives, including how quickly we are able to change old, self-critical, habits into new, healthy compassionate habits.



## Becoming More Self Compassionate Some practical exercises

But how do you get there? Here are some exercises.

### How would you treat a friend?

Please take out a sheet of paper and answer the following questions:

1. First, think about times when a close friend feels really bad about themselves or is really struggling. How would you talk to your friend in this situation? Please write down what you typically do, what you say, and note the tone in which you typically talk to your friends.
2. Now think about times when you feel bad about yourself or are struggling. How do you typically respond to yourself in these situations? Please write down what you typically do, what you say, and note the tone in which you talk to yourself.
3. Did you notice a difference? If so, ask yourself why. What factors or fears come into play that led you to treat yourself and others so differently?
4. Please write down how you think things might change if you responded to yourself in the same way you typically respond to a close friend when you are struggling.

Why not try treating yourself like a good friend and see what happens.

### Changing your critical self-talk

This exercise should be done over several weeks and will eventually form the blueprint for changing how you relate to yourself long-term.

Some people find it useful by writing in a journal. Others are more comfortable thinking it through. Do whatever works for you.

- 1) The first step towards changing the way to treat yourself is to notice when you are being self-critical.



It may be that your self-critical voice is so common for you that you do not even notice when it is there.

Whenever you are feeling bad about something, think about what you have just said to yourself. Try to be as accurate as possible, noting your words toward yourself. What words do you actually use when you are self-critical?

Are there key phrases that come up repeatedly? What is the tone of your voice – harsh, cold, angry? Does the voice remind you of any one in your past who was critical of you? You want to be able to get to know the inner self-critic very well, and to become aware of when your inner judge is active.

- 2) Make an active effort to soften the self-critical voice but do so with compassion rather than self-judgment. Something like “I know that is the critic in me talking. Could you let my inner compassionate self say a few words now?”

3) Rethink what you hear from your inner critic in a friendly, positive way. If you are having trouble thinking of what words to use, you might want to imagine what a very compassionate friend would say to you in this situation.

While engaging in this supportive self-talk, you might want to try gently stroking your arm, or holding your face tenderly in your hands (as long as no one's looking).

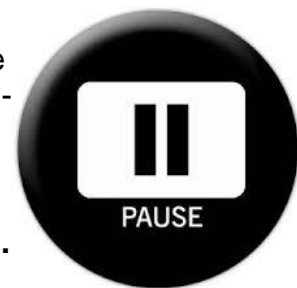
Physical gestures of warmth can tap into the caregiving system even if you are having trouble calling up emotions of kindness at first, releasing oxytocin, the chemical in your body that helps you feel safe and connected.

The important thing is that you start *acting* kindly, and feelings of true warmth and caring will eventually follow.

## Meditation for self-compassion

With the mind's constant chatter, the idea of self-compassion might seem a bit challenging. Meditation can help.

When starting the practice of meditation, one of the goals is to learn to let go of self-judgment and the harsh inner critic to create a softer, gentler mind in which kindness can thrive. A mindful self-compassion meditation can help you tap into this.



**Self-compassion meditation techniques can be found on Apps like Head Space including visualisation and body scan. Here are the links:**

[Visualization technique](#)

[Body scan](#)

## Self-calming

When you notice strong feelings or your body's reactions, it is a signal to turn on the left side or the thinking side of our brain. It is like putting "our thinking cap on."

Name how you feel. This is a way to start controlling those big emotions.

**Use words or phrases that tell you to clear your head.**

If we get into a habit of saying certain things to ourselves, we can learn to link that phrase with a signal to think things through.



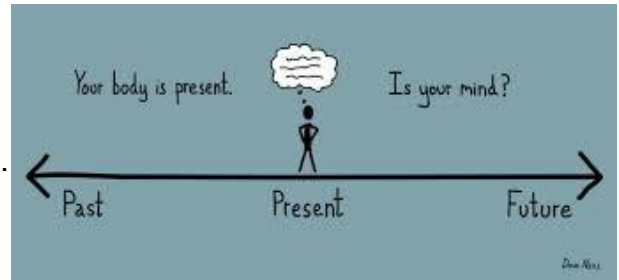
1. I can work this out.
2. Think, think, think.
3. Stop, look, get curious.
4. This won't last forever.



# MINDFULNESS

We have talked about Mindfulness. Mindfulness is like giving your brain a short rest.

Mindfulness is deliberately focusing all your attention on the present moment on one thing. Every time thoughts wander off into the future or the past, gently bring yourself back to the present. It is focusing all your attention on one thing like sounds, smells, and sights while not judging it as good or bad,



**You can begin to get into the habit of mindfulness by:**

- Awareness: Awareness involves focusing attention on one thing at a time like sounds, smells and sights
- Being non-judgmental: Don't judge yourself as good or bad.
- Present Moment: Fully stay in the present without being distracted.
- Open Mind (or Beginner's Mind): An open mind or beginner mind is being open to new experiences and trying new things.

**To get started try these: (these are only a few ways to use mindfulness))**

**Mindful of Breathing:** Mindful breathing involves focused attention on breathing. Notice how you are breathing. Notice slower and fuller breaths. Notice your belly rise and fall as you breathe in and out. When your mind drifts away from your breathing, and it will, simply notice it and gently shift your attention back to your breathing.

**Mindful of Sounds:** Focus your attention on sounds; soft, loud, nearby, or distant sounds. When your attention drifts away to a thought or feeling, notice what thoughts or feelings you were distracted by, and gently return your attention to the sounds.

**Mindful eating:** When eating mindfully, choose a place that is quiet and free of distractions. Before beginning to eat, look at the food. Notice what it looks like, its shape and size and colour. How it smells. Notice any internal sensations; salivation, hunger, urges before you taste the food. Now take a bite. Notice the taste, texture, and sensations in your mouth. Notice your chewing. Notice your swallowing.

**Hold Something and Really Focus on It**

Hold an object in your hand and really bring your full focus to it. It may be a stone with patterns or colors that run through it. Feel how heavy or light it is in your hand and what the surface texture feels like under your fingers.

This can be done with any object you have lying around or if you know you are going into a stressful situation take one of your favorite small objects and put it in your pocket or purse so you can do this calming exercise on the go.



**Getting the benefit from Mindfulness takes practice. From what you tried today, how did it go?**

# Getting Your Daily DOSE: Positive Chemicals We All Need

## What are the chemicals we all need to feel good?

When you feel good, your brain is releasing one of these chemicals. Dopamine, Oxytocin, Serotonin and Endorphins. It is interesting to see how much Take 5 that promotes well-being does this for us.



Building these chemicals improves well-being. There is an evidence base for this. The Broaden-and Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001) would suggest positive emotions increase Dopamine. Do this with consistency, Dopamine pathways and receptors improve, and memory, learning and cognitive flexibility are strengthened.

## What are these chemicals?

**Dopamine** gives a surge of reinforcing pleasure and enables motivation and learning. Overstimulation of dopamine can become a problem because of its addictive nature.

**Oxytocin** gives a feeling of trust; it motivates you to build intimate relationships. It is also known as the “cuddle hormone”. It is the desire to stick together with those you “trust”, which creates a feeling of safety or comfort. It helps your body adapt to several different emotional and social situations. Unlike dopamine, oxytocin gives you a lasting feeling of calm and safety.

**Serotonin** is related to your mood. It is sometimes called the happy chemical because it is related to happiness and well-being.

**Endorphins** release a brief euphoria that masks physical pain. It is a response to pain and stress which helps alleviate anxiety and depression. Physical activity can trigger endorphins. You can get a release of endorphins when you experience “runners high” when you exceed your limits.

## Increase Well-being by Getting Your Daily DOSE

There are natural ways you can increase levels of these chemicals. Getting your daily DOSE of these chemicals may seem simple, but if you struggle with unhelpful thinking patterns, it can be harder to do. Bend Don't Break can help that.

<https://covidwellbeingni.info/assets/pdfs/resources/alcohol/BendDon'tBreak.pdf>

**How to Increase Dopamine Levels Naturally. It is your choice if some of these ideas would work for you.**

- Experience positive emotions: see hand out at the end of this paper.
- meditate regularly (increases dopamine by 65%)
- make a daily to-do list & long-term goals (each time you tick off a task or goal you increase dopamine levels)

- eat foods that are rich in L-Tyrosine (avocados, fish, eggs, cheese, banana, and pumpkin seeds)
- exercise regularly (whichever form of exercise you enjoy the most will give you the most increase in dopamine levels)
- create something such as writing, music, art & crafts!

### How to Increase Oxytocin Levels Naturally

- physical touch, cuddling, hugging, making eye contact, and even shaking hands.
- socializing (connecting or talking with friends and family, reduces cortisol and stimulates your vagus nerve)
- touching your pet (research shows it lowers blood pressure and increases oxytocin levels)
- getting a massage (reduces stress hormones and increases oxytocin)
- acupuncture (elevates oxytocin concentrations)
- listening to music (has a calming effect on the brain, slow-tempo music has also been shown to increase oxytocin and heart-rate variability)
- exercise (stimulates the vagus nerve which increases oxytocin)
- cold showers (stimulates the vagus nerve)
- meditate

### How to Increase Serotonin Levels Naturally

- exercise (increases serotonin and dopamine, but also helps balance them)
- cold showers (2-3 mins of cold showers can be unpleasant but offers great benefits that have longer-lasting effects than compared to caffeine)
- sunshine (10-15 minutes of sunlight a day can increase serotonin and vitamin D)
- eating foods that contain tryptophan could increase serotonin production in the body. Tryptophan is an essential amino acid in many foods, including salmon, chicken, turkey, eggs, spinach, seeds, milk products, soy products, nuts.
- getting a massage (increases serotonin and decreases cortisol linked to stress)

### How to Increase Endorphins Levels Naturally

- laughter: a good belly-up laugh creates similar brain activity as meditation.
- crying
- creating music or art
- eating dark chocolate, spicy foods, Ginseng, Lavender
- exercise or stretching, getting a massage.
- meditate

**Getting your daily DOSE  
does not replace  
treatment.**

**.For a copy of Using positive Emotions to Deal with Stress see**  
<https://twistwest.org/sites/default/files/Ed%20Sipler%20What%20is%20Stress.pdf>

# Using Positive Emotions in the Midst of Stress

## The role of positive emotions, Dopamine and the Broaden-and Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001).

Eight ways to express positive emotion was used by researchers who were working with carers family members with a terminal illness. They found when the carers used these strategies, their worry went down, and their mood stayed up even though their situation did not change.

If these skills can be helpful in such a stressful situation, they have potential to help us all dealing with a range of stresses in our lives, even the daily stress of coping with modern living.

Why does it work? Dopamine pathways are active when you are experiencing positive emotions. Memory, learning, and cognitive flexibility are strengthened.

The Broaden-and Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001) would suggest positive emotions and increased Dopamine builds physical, social, and psychological resources (build component of the theory) and strengthens a broad-minded coping style seeing multiple angles to solve a problem (broaden component).

The handout *Using Positive Emotions to Deal with Stress* presents 8 ways used to experience positive emotions that can be used by anyone.

To download the handout, click [Ed Sipler What is Stress.pdf \(twistwest.org\)](#)

Here are the 8 ways used to experience positive emotions in the handout:

- Notice positive things.
- Express these positive things.
- Gratitude
- Mindfulness
- Positive Rethinking
- Focus on your strengths.
- Attainable goals
- Acts of kindness.



# My Strengths

It will be your strengths that support you in challenging times. Yet in Northern Ireland people are generally not as good at seeing their strengths compared to their weaknesses.

Circle the ones you see in yourself today (or this week)

Accepting	Committed	Flexible	Persevering	Stubborn
Active	Competent	Focused	Persistent	Thankful
Adaptable	Concerned	Forgiving	Positive	Thorough
Adventuresome	Confident	Forward-looking	Powerful	Thoughtful
Affectionate	Considerate	Free	Prayerful	Tough
Affirmative	Courageous	Happy	Quick	Trusting
Alert	Creative	Healthy	Reasonable	Trustworthy
Alive	Decisive	Hopeful	Receptive	Truthful
Ambitious	Dedicated	Imaginative	Relaxed	Understanding
Anchored	Determined	Ingenious	Reliable	Unique
Assertive	Die-hard	Intelligent	Resourceful	Unstoppable
Assured	Diligent	Knowledgeable	Responsible	Vigorous
Attentive	Doer	Loving	Sensible	Visionary
Bold	Eager	Mature	Skilful	Whole
Brave	Earnest	Open	Solid	Willing
Bright	Effective	Optimistic	Spiritual	Winning
Capable	Energetic	Orderly	Stable	Wise
Careful	Experienced	Organized	Steady	Worthy
Cheerful	Faithful	Patient	Straight	Zealous
Clever	Fearless	Perceptive	Strong	Zestful

**See ones you use each day.**

Taken from Motivational Interviewing, Helping People Change by Bill Miller, and Steve Rollnick, 2013

**Which ones do you use a lot?**

- 
- 
-

## Gratitude: A key skill for resilience and well-being

<b>Mon</b>	<p>Something I did well today</p> <p>Today I had fun when....</p> <p>I am grateful for .....</p>	
<b>Tues</b>	<p>I felt good about myself when.....</p> <p>Today was interesting because...</p> <p>I am grateful for .....</p>	
<b>Wed</b>	<p>Something I did for someone today.</p> <p>A nice thing I saw today ....</p> <p>I am grateful for .....</p>	
<b>Thurs</b>	<p>I felt proud when.....</p> <p>Today I achieved.....</p> <p>I am grateful for .....</p>	
<b>Fri</b>	<p>I felt good about myself when....</p> <p>I smiled today because.....</p> <p>am grateful for .....</p>	
<b>Sat</b>	<p>Something I enjoyed today.</p> <p>Something I had a good laugh about.....</p> <p>am grateful for .....</p>	
<b>Sun</b>	<p>Something I did for someone today.</p> <p>A nice thing I saw today ....</p> <p>I am grateful for .....</p>	

At the end of the week how would I describe this week for me?





# Wellbeing worksheet

We talked some skills to support your well being and resilience. How did they work for you?

- Relaxed breathing
- Self-Compassion
- Mindfulness
- My daily D.O.S.E
- Using positive emotions to deal with stress.
- My Strengths
- Gratitude
- Other idea you might have thought of



In the space below, write down the activities you tried.

Rate how helpful they were using the following scale: 1=Not helpful at all; 7=Very helpful.

What did you do?	Day tried	Success Rating (1-7) 1 is lowest	What were the benefits of doing it?

**Thanks for taking a look at this work.**

**If you found it helpful let me know**  
[Ed.sipler@setrust.hscni.net](mailto:Ed.sipler@setrust.hscni.net)

**If you liked it and want to look into it a bit more why not watch**  
[Clapping, Covid and Caring for each other \(SUBTITLED and BSL\) - YouTube](#)

[Dealing with worry by Ed Sipler - YouTube](#)

Some resources on self-compassion  
[Self-Compassion \(self-compassion.org\)](#)

Building our Children's Developing Brain is an effort to help parents build some of these skills with their children.

[Building-Our-Childs-Developing-Brain-V4-1.pdf \(hscni.net\)](#)

Bend Don't Break is a resource to help build resilient thinking.

<https://covidwellbeingni.info/assets/pdfs/resources/alcohol/BendDon'tBreak.pdf>

The five HSC Trusts, Public Health Agency (PHA) and the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) came together with links to key resources to promote positive mental health and wellbeing.

[Promoting Mental Wellbeing 20 - 1 \(pagetiger.com\)](#)

