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Preface / background

This pamphlet is developed by Taransvar, a Norwegian NGO. It's developed for "Mental Sanctuaries", which is a place in our mind where we can go to find peace of mind. To find this place or state, we may need to get away from destructive triggers. We're working on several ways to help you. As of now, we offer self help groups that we're hoping to spread. We also offer nature walks and working on 24*7 solutions (institution) for those who need to get away for days or longer. Search up our Facebook group page "Mental Health Awareness and Solutions" if you want to know more or contact us.

How can we best cure mental problems? To come up with the best cure, we should first have a good understanding of what mental problems are.

Some 100 years ago, the task of treating mental problems was given to doctors. That seemed like the best option at that time. But science has changed and we question if that would be the obvious choice today. We think mental problems have very much in common with bad habits and skills. Who would bring their bad habit to the doctor and expect to be cured? If the doctor can't cure a bad habit, he may conclude that all he can do is prescribe drugs. It may affect the habit for sure, but only temporarily and it's hardly the best solution.

So as you understand, knowing what mental problems are is very important. We will look into that and how we can provide the best cure.

Whatever project we have in life, our brain will adopt to that. When we're in a dark hole, it may even be impossible to shift focus. But we are working on ways to make it easier. Our staff is primarily based on people who have come out of their own dark holes. We know how you feel and we know it's possible to fix whatever you're struggling with. It may take some time but we'll get there if we stand together. You should give us a chance unless you have a better plan.

For those who have read it before, the latest changes are in the chapters about: "What are mental problems", "Addiction", "Hallucinations" and "Religion" (240716)

Short introduction

(this is written as it is for mental sanctuary hosts (or group leaders) to read it to their guests)

I will now give a very brief introduction about what our mental sanctuary is all about. If you have some questions regarding this, then we will be happy to answer that later. There will be plenty of time.

Our brain has very strong functions that "help" us maintain focus. But when our focus turns dark or diverted from what we should focus on, then that may lead to any kind of mental problem. We know from sport, music and many other activities that if we really focus over long time, then that can take us far. But where do we end if we spend the same amount of energy on destructive thinking? Isn't it obvious?

If we're struggling with mental problems, that becomes our personality. We become "the victim", "the failure", "the anxious", "the depressed", "the addict" or whatever. When you enter this sanctuary, I

want you to put away that personality and enter into another personality. Today you're the "forest walker", "good friend", "encouragement" and many similar things – we will suggest various activities. If you have some problem back home, thinking of that today doesn't help. Destructive over thinking can always wait. You need a place where you can relax from that. And this is the perfect place.

If you find this hard, then maybe you just need to try a little longer or maybe you need someone to talk with. Sometimes, it takes time to get the bad stuff rusty. Just let us know if you want to talk.

How to use this pamphlet

This pamphlet is intended as a training manual for use by mental sanctuaries. The main focus in the sanctuary is to find a better focus and get the destructive skills rusty by warming up better skills. However, we can't be at full intensity all the time, so it's also important to have activities that occupy our focus and at the same time let us rest. Therapy may be such activity. But it's also important that we get a deeper understanding about both how our brain works and also about our own situation. And working together in groups is a golden opportunity for this.

The work may be in fixed groups, self study or as class room teaching. So if you have idle time while in the mental sanctuary, forming formal or informal groups and discuss topics from this pamphlet may be a very good idea. The staff may have a plan for this. If they haven't given info on this, then you're welcome to ask.

Important notes

There are strict legal regulations about what requires medical training and license to conduct. One specific field is about medication. We can't give advice when it comes to medication or related treatment. We can, however, inform about known side effects as published by governments and medical companies. We can also inform about how the medications work – which medical companies often try to downplay. Many medications come with warnings that it leads to addiction and should only be used for a short term.

We are not tapping into the medical industry or even mental health services. We are solely doing mental training or coaching – which is a far less regulated industry. What are the rules and regulations in your country?

"Mental health awareness and solutions" Facebook group page, its owners or anybody related do not accept any responsibility for anything that happens in the group. It's the sole responsibility of the groups members.

Trust is required if you want to help someone with mental problems. Trust is hard to build, but only takes one careless sentence to break. So privacy and other aspects of this should be discussed regularly to ensure that all members execute the required level of caution. Privacy is also a legal matter.

What are mental problems?

We are convinced that mental problems are “destructive skills”. You can also call it bad habits if you like. If you have trouble viewing mental problems as skills or habits, then just think of it as a destructive, yet natural reaction based on repeated thinking or doing. It’s an obvious result of how our brain is constructed. If we’re too much into destructive thinking or acting, then it will have consequences – we’ll see that it can still be fixed. The reason we call it skills, is that if we’re right, then it gives us a very clear indication of what will be the best cure. This because we know that skills have to be warmed up to be top notch. Nobody would hold a concert without warming up. And if you’ve been good at some technical sport like ping pong or skateboarding, then you know that you shouldn’t even try the most advanced tricks before warming up properly.

The good news here is that this means that all mental problems also get rusty if we’re able to replace them with better skills that occupy our mind. Nature is known to be a good place to find peace of mind. When you look at all the trees, your brain is working on full pace to decode all those strange shapes. So it can’t feed you with destructive thoughts at the same time. If you now sit down and close your eyes, the destructive thoughts from back home will come back. Our theory is that that pressure from destructive thought will be less if you’re out in the forest or do other good focus activities for a whole day.. And there will be less if you repeat this tomorrow. Some may need a week or two. But it also depends on you and your abilities to relax – which is of course also a skill that you can optimize.

And this is what our mental sanctuary is all about: We’re helping you replacing destructive skills with better skills both by telling how and by providing a good location to practice – and we’re doing this together.

One thing skills, habits and mental problems have in common is that they provide an automatic reaction to some kind of event. We call this a trigger. Triggers will be handled later in it’s own chapter. Let’s just say that our whole life is ruled by triggers. Most of them are just ignored while others generate an automated response. All mental problems are somehow related to destructive reaction to specific triggers.

When people experience trauma, the memory will always be there. But some people still live in the trauma years later. We think the reason is that their thinking keeps the memory warmed up constantly. What they need is to make it rusty, and that’s best done by warming up other memories, skills and whatever else.

Memories, habits, knowledge, skills and personality are neurologically the same. The main difference is complexity and what kind of reaction it produces. They all consist of connected nerve cells. And the temporary part is mainly controlled by the synapses – which is where all the medications that affect our mental state works. So if you wanna Google, the scientific name for this is “synaptic plasticity”. If you suddenly forget something that you knew very well before, then the change is in your synapses. If you change attitude when you get drunk or tend to yell at family members or friends after having a fight at work, then it’s all the same. And it’s a mental problem. But we can all change.

Doctors use diagnoses. They’ll diagnose you as either depressed or not. But this is all gradual. Mental problems don’t come suddenly, unless it’s drug or trauma induced. And they come in all grades of severity. So by learning how our brain works, we can help both ourselves and others more efficient.

Once acquired, a skill is permanent. If you know how to ride a bike, then you'll know for the rest of your life. But you need to warm it up before you can do your most difficult tricks. The same goes for depression, anxiety, addiction or whatever. Once an alcoholic, you're an alcoholic for life. It only takes 45 minutes warming up to relapse. And it's not about the drinking, it's about the thinking and craving. So building a healthy mental state is about filling our lives with good mental skills and making sure we keep them warmed up.

The other way we can fix our mental problems is by changing our skills. A 5 year old kid may be a footballer. But he's not yet fully trained. We can change our skills from something destructive into knowledge that we can use to help others and hopefully even feed our family.

We're used to think of mental problems as mental illnesses. Why else would be go to the doctor if we're depressed? Who takes a bad habit or destructive skills to the doctor? It's obvious that this is a very important question. If you have a problem with a skill, for example, you're not good enough at playing football to be in the team, then you don't go to the doctor. You go to your coach who will figure out a training program for you. We're hoping that our mental sanctuary will be a place where you'll find good support for improving your good skills and getting the bad ones rusty.

Our brain has strong mechanisms to help us maintain focus. But when our focus turns dark or distracted over long time, then those mechanisms become our mental problem.

Questions:

- Do you have experience with skills "warming up" and "getting rusty"?
- Can you relate this to mental problems as well?
- Can mental problems be both destructive skills and illness (we'll get back to this later)? What about severe ones like schizophrenia?
- Many know this from addiction to alcohol, chocolate or whatever… Can you relate to this?

How?

How to best recover from mental health problems like depression, anxiety, addiction or other unwanted thought activity?

The traditional approach to this is to visit a psychologists who asks you some questions about your past trauma and suggests better ways of thinking.. then repeat next month. But if we're right, and mental problems are more like skills, then this just sounds like a weird approach. Skills are changed by repetition and by determination to change. We call this practicing. Some skills and habits are very hard to change. This is well known to athletes. How come it seems totally unknown when it comes to mental health? Normally, if the psychologist is unable to change the patient, he or she will be forwarded to psychiatrist for assessment for diagnosis and drugs. That's normally not how you would treat skills that needs to be improved. Athletes who use drugs or alcohol will not be able to work on their skills and habits and will under perform. The same goes for people who want to improve their life skills.

So how do we suggest to approach this:

1. Establish a good focus (short term – focus changes "very easily")

2. Get rid of destructive thoughts (medium term - get them rusty)
3. Establish better automatic thoughts (long term – skills, habits and similar are permanent but can still be changed)

You can do this alone. However, it's much easier in a small group dominated by care, commitment, openness and whatever else it takes to create a good team. The group can implement this in any way they like. The purpose of this document is to give hints and guidelines regarding topics you can discuss.

Such groups are subject to Taransvar ©, and the theories made known through the Facebook group page "Mental Health Awareness and Solutions". However, to spread this concept, we are open for such local groups evolving into local therapy businesses. Rehabs charge high price, the demand is increasing and once you've been through this training, you should be able to also teach others the same. You can test it with your friends and neighbors and if the results is good, then there should be no reason why others can't also benefit from this. If you're struggling yourself, then helping others will also contribute to your own healing. Please contact us if you're interested in testing this.

1. Establish a good focus

What are the requirements for a good focus?

- When we want to bring about change like this, then it all starts with trust. This is often where the mental health care system fails.
- Eagerness to change focus. There may be many reason why people are not willing and able to change focus
- Distance from disturbing destructive thoughts and triggers.
- Hope for a better future
- Enough rest/sleep
- Drugs may distort things and will normally affect the ability to focus. Drugs are also given to increase the ability to focus, but it too often gets random. Focus becomes irrational.

2. Get rid of destructive thoughts

This is what the mental sanctuary is all about. And it's about finding peace of mind by warming up (and learning) better skills. This is explained in more details elsewhere.

3. Establish better automatic thoughts

Various forms of therapy are suggested and explained in details elsewhere. Exposure therapy is especially important to change reaction to trigger. We have said that mental problems are like skills. And that training is the right method for changing such. Now consider what psychologists call "exposure therapy". It's just the same. They're just giving it a more sophisticated name.

Questions:

- Do you have experience with people who should change their focus but they're not willing or able (keep it anonymous if it's not about you)
- Any experience with how drugs or alcohol affect focus or change habits?

- How do you best establish a good focus?
- How important is trust? Can you give example where there's no trust regarding mental health?

What is a "Mental sanctuary"?

The word sanctuary means a holy place – normally a religious one. Then there's fish sanctuary and other places where nature is preserved that are called sanctuaries. This means that a mental sanctuary is a place where you should not bring anything destructive. Litemind.com says:

"The Mental Sanctuary is a metaphor for a specially designed place that exists only in your imagination. Think of that place as your personal fortress — a safe haven that you can "enter" at any time to recreate any feeling or mental state."

This makes very much sense. Can you enter this sanctuary any time you like? Maybe not if you can't bring your destructive thoughts into the sanctuary. Then you may have to undergo some mental cleansing before you enter. Otherwise you risk polluting it (or warm up some destructive triggers).

So entering a sanctuary should be a multiple step process and you should design your own process:

- Get rid of tasks you need to do
- Get rid of destructive focus and triggers
- Enter into a better focus accompanied by special music or other rituals
- Enter the sanctuary.

If your sanctuary is in a designated location, then going there is an important part of the process.

This means that our mental sanctuary is just a tool to help you establish your own mental sanctuary.

For some, the word "mental" will bring about lots of stigma. So we may use "wellness sanctuary" instead. This may sound more like a spa, though.

Questions:

- Do you or someone you know have a mental sanctuary?
- How to create such a mental sanctuary and how to keep it holy?
- Should your mental sanctuary be a physical place or is a virtual one better?
- Can you have multiple mental sanctuaries?
- How to expand or improve a mental sanctuary?
- What steps or "cleaning routine" do you have for entering your sanctuary?

Why should you join a mental sanctuary?

1. Get rid of mental problems

There are what we call “real problems” and “mental problems”… Real problems are how to deal with family issues, diseases, work, financial issues, kids with any kind of problem at school or with friends, love problems, any kind of trauma and more. These need to be handled and it will affect any aspect of our daily life. Mental problem is when sadness dominates your life long after the problem is gone. Or when fear of something specific turns into anxiety. Or when kids get so occupied with solving advanced math problems, that they miss the opportunity to learn important social skills.

You don’t have to live with those mental problems. They don’t contribute in any way to enrich your life. Some think drugs or other substitute is a good way to handle it. But we want to provide something better.

2. Get prepared to help others

If you know how your brain works when it comes to mental problems, then it’s easier to understand why other behave “odd”… This gives you an advantage in handling them in a better way and hopefully you can help them solve their problems.

3. Job opportunity or your own business

Mental health is a huge problem for society. It’s also a growing problem because the society is handling it in a very bad way. We also have our challenge in how to roll out this concept all over the world. So we’re inviting anyone who’s interested in spending time with us (no matter what reason) to tap into this market. A local self help group can look for investor or can transform their own group into a booming business by evolving into a local mental training center. For now, this concept is very new, but it should evolve into a global brand for mental health. Those who join early are in a good position to influence how this plays out. They also get the best deals. So this could be a good topic that you can dream together about. After all, it’s a good focus. As mentioned, hope is very important for good change.

Therapy

Traditionally, when someone is suffering from depression, anxiety or other mental problem, therapy would be the first remedy to seek. But if we’re right, and mental problems are rather bad habits, then therapy is no longer that obvious. As said, nobody would bring their bad habits to a doctor and expect to get any help. So does that leave us with no available option for professional help – unless we have a mental sanctuary around? Well, we hope reading this pamphlet will help by giving ideas on how to implement our own mental sanctuary in our head that we can visit whenever we need it. However, sometimes, that is just not good enough.

So offering traditional therapy that is adjusted to modern science showing that mental problems are destructive skill will still be a very important part of what's provided in the mental sanctuary. Traditionally, understanding what went wrong is an essential part of therapy. They dig in the past to figure out everything that happened. Many who have been through this will say that understanding why they're thinking and feeling the way they do is what helped. Others will drop out of therapy because it's too painful (re-traumatizing).

What function in the brain makes it important to go back to the trauma? Maybe the reason why they tell this is because the therapists have told them that this is essential so many times that they started believing it? We think what helped was figuring out what's the triggers so that they can be avoided or changed and to change focus. "Closure" is of course very important.

When we go back and talk about a trauma, it gets warmed up. This is of course not a problem if it's already warmed up. And we have no measuring instrument to figure out if this is the case or not. This means that a good therapy should let the patient decide if they should go digging in the past or find better methods. That's of course a problem for a psychologist who lack other tools (there's 45 minutes assigned and no room for a walk in the forest).

So let's say we go back to the past. Why does it help? One very important reason is that talking about it makes it obvious that it's something in the past. We change the trauma from being still ongoing to something that is no longer. And that should make a huge difference. But for some, this is impossible. Feeling of guilt, hatred, need for revenge, retribution, forgiveness making up or similar all ties us to the past and prevents us from moving on. There are many methods of fixing this and if you struggle with this, then you should seek a therapist. Some therapists encourage you to write down what's preventing you from moving on, proclaim that it's all forgiven and then put what you've written on fire. If you can make this a ceremony with others, then it's more powerful. If it's burned to ashes, then you can't get it back, so no need to go back there.

"Closure", by the way is permanent shift of focus. So it's obvious that it's better if we can get the closure without the re-traumatizing. And maybe it's important to understand why but maybe the need for understanding is a bigger problem than the fact that they didn't understand. One reason why the psychologists claim that it's important to dig in the past is to get a full understanding of the triggers because the triggers will probably make problems in the future. That is a valid argument for sure, but many are enough aware of their triggers to handle them. And we should teach people how to handle triggers, even when they pop up unexpectedly.

Let's talk about re-traumatizing. Digging in the past should be done with care. It should also be done in very small portions at the time to avoid "warming up" the trauma. Consider the time it takes to warm up. Of course this is much better in a sanctuary where you can visit the sanctuary to have a good time with good focus and then do therapy in small portions because the therapist is always around. Now compared this with the traditional approach where patients may get an appointment with the therapist in 4 weeks and then end up spending a full month preparing for re-traumatizing. That's just a very bad idea. When someone admits to have a problem and is willing to change, it's very important that there's some support system ready to receive them immediately. And it's better to talk with a good friend who can help shift focus now than a psychologist in 4 weeks.

We will get back to this later, but therapy can be divided into 3 main categories:

- Cognitive therapy: Finding better ways to see the situation. E.g: change from “nobody loves me” to “Frank and Liza like me”.
- Exposure therapy: Practicing better ways to respond to triggers. E.g learn not to fear spiders
- Meta cognitive therapy: Learn just to ignore what can’t be changed

Reinhold Niebuhr said it like this: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

Pushing people with mental problem to talk about any kind of trauma should only be done by professionals. However, because we don’t see that much point in messing with the past, our therapists don’t need years of training to be a good therapist. We can all motivate each others to find a better focus in life and the best therapists are normally those why have overcome their own problems. So we encourage those with problems to view the problems as an opportunity for a future job. Once you’ve found a way to overcome your own problem, you’ll be an expert who can help others. We can’t promise such job, but the need is nearly unlimited. Millions of people suffer from mental problems and nobody seem to know why. And this kind of therapy can’t be done in Western countries because regulations will say that there will always have to be a psychologist or psychiatrists in charge of any therapy. Then there will be a demand to use drugs, which will reduce the outcome of the treatment. Meaning we will have better result – which we must be prepared to prove of course.

Timespan of the healing process…

We admit patients in our mental sanctuary who are truly eager to change. Many have built their own “mental sanctuary” based on delusions as their coping strategy. We see this especially with schizophrenia and psychosis. They’re bothered by hallucinations, suicidal thoughts, delusions and or other ideas and set up “their own world” that seem “crazy” or odd to others. However, it somehow makes sense or feels safe for them. One key reason may be that they feel less bothered by automatic thoughts or memories that may haunt them when they’re not in their own world. They’re often not willing to leave this “safe space” even if the “mental sanctuary” we’re offering is obviously better. This means that we need to bridge this gap before the cure can start. In this process, building trust will be the main job. Key components here will be good activities combined with access to multiple “therapists” where the “patient” will hopefully find at least one person he or she can trust enough to be willing to try our mental sanctuary.

Once 100% ready for change, our goal is to fix any kind of mental problem in one month. One reason for this is to make it accessible also for those who can’t afford to stay away from their family or other obligations for longer. This also opens for a concept where people can be “patient” for one month for free and then remain as (junior) therapist for a number of consecutive months to reduce the risk of relapse or as a preparation for a job as therapist at one of our sanctuaries.

We’ve also seen that this is possible even with schizophrenia – which is considered impossible to cure.

What if I relapse?

We want a 100% success rate. So it's very important for us that you don't relapse. And when you relapse it's very important that you let us help you get back on track. For this we have a support system (see next chapter). With "traditional" approach assuming mental problems are illness, a relapse becomes very problematic for several reasons: The "patients" is back to "illness" which normally takes years to cure – if ever. The process of getting cured failed and it's all hopeless. This also comes with the stigma attached to those diagnoses.

With our approach, a relapse is "just" one or more triggers warming up a destructive skill. We may need help to get those triggers rusty again, but we're more than willing to help doing so and it shouldn't take long because you already have the knowledge about what happened and how to fix it. This means that when you fall, you just get back on our feet very quickly. It's more like a failed penalty kick in the world cup final. It's a hard blow, but it's not worth wasting energy on. It's better to make it a lesson and practice more to it's more likely that you'll score next time. A missed penalty kick doesn't have to define your future life.

Support system

Knowing that mental problems are normally related to destructive skills, it becomes obvious that the risk of relapse is something we normally have to live with. Therefor, a support system becomes obvious and important. When we have multiple people who have been trough our therapy, it's obvious that they will become the backbone of such support system. One important way to cope with mental problems is to turn what's bad into something good. One way to do that is to use our bad experiences to help others cope with their problems. Our support system should therefor also be utilized to create "self help groups" with people who struggle but who for various reason are not (yet) going to our mental sanctuary.

How to deal with "crazy people"

This refer to the chapter about "psychosis". The main cause of "craziness" is that people have lost the abilities to relate to (or don't care about) the normal perceptions of how to live. This can be due to drug abuse, trauma (leading to an all consuming destructive focus) or as a coping strategy – or a combination of those. Many have created their alternative world where "dress code" and normal behavior is now irrelevant. For them, this is their "mental sanctuary", a safe space in their mind where they decide the norms themselves. The normal perception is that people with such condition need drugs so they can easily be shaped to fit at least some of the standard norms for human behavior. We are determined to prove that we can do better by providing trust, showing love and compassion and welcome them to our own sanctuary where we can teach them a way of living that is compatible with the standards of society while still safe and with access to good therapy for past trauma and mentorship when it comes to life skills. Unlike their own "sanctuary", this also comes with true friendship and other benefits of being member of a group. "Peer pressure" is used as a terms that explains how people ended in drug addiction. "Peer pressure" also saves a lot of people.

Mental health is like a team sport. Many have been on a destructive team where people spend their energy on destroying each other or some "easy targets". Why not join a team of mental health champions instead?

One important criteria for getting any outcome from our mental sanctuary is determination and commitment to change. This means that it will probably take long time to prepare these people for becoming members of such sanctuary (unless we set up a special one).

When approaching such people, there will often be so many triggers involved, that we can not expect a one on one therapy – patient relationship to work. We may need to present 10-20 different therapists and let them choose which one is trust worthy. In this setting, our use of group therapy and equipping all members of the sanctuary as junior therapists may prove to be very effective.

One way to approach such group of people could be to set up a special feeding program with a group of team members. Offering a safe place to sleep would of course also be great.

Illness or destructive skill?

Everybody is used to the perception that severe mental problems are illnesses. And it's a fact that physical and mental states are intertwined. Many are even classified as "psycho-somatic", meaning they're both somatic and psychological or somewhere in between. When we've heard many times that it's illness, then it becomes part of our "knowledge". But that does not mean it's correct. It may be a delusion. The sad part is that this affects how "professionals" are handling their patients. Then it may even be fatal or ruin the lives of people making them "zombies" for life. Many of them could "easily" be helped if they were willing and able to shift focus and change the way of thinking.

Such denotations may also be a way to preserve the position of "professionals" preventing close friends or other groups who may be in better position to help the opportunity to provide such help. Our experiences in Akili Bomba and from our mental sanctuary indicate that this is true. Mental problems seems to be based on destructive thinking or bad focus that prevents us from learning important skills at an early age where our intelligence is at it's peak. This is especially true when it comes to social skills and may lead to diagnoses like ADHD or autism.

Another important issue for us is that if mental problems are illness, then few of those we deem the best qualified for the task are formally qualified to do the job. It is even illegal to present them as therapists. And this is a big risk to our operations. If we're right and mental problems are in fact rather bad habits and destructive thinking, then we're in a position to change how mental health is handled world wide and save millions from all kinds of mental problems. So for us, this is a very important question – though it may seem irrelevant to you. Maybe the key question for you is how you feel about "being ill" or "having a bad habit"? Is it irrelevant for how you handle it in your own life?

So what indicates that severe mental problems are illnesses?

- Mental problems affects physical conditions

- Mental problems have "always" been considered illness

- Drugs normally help (but normally doesn't cure it)

None of these are really arguments because the same arguments can be used in favor of mental problems being bad habits. So what are the arguments that mental problems are in fact bad habits?

- Akili Bomba in Nairobi has many examples of people with severe diagnosis who are healed through therapy and a good support system. This also includes schizophrenia and bipolarity.

- Most of these diagnosis are triggered by trauma or similar. It's pretty obvious that it's got to do with the way of thinking.

- The first attempt by "professionals" will always be therapy – which is a clear indication that they know it's about way of thinking. The question of illness and drugs come when the therapists prove unable to "fix" the patient. This looks more like a cover-up for the therapists lack of skills than that there's something wrong with the patient.

- This concept has been available for critics through the Facebook group page "Mental health awareness and solutions" for more than a year and no professional every made any attempt to question the conclusion. In the files section, there is even a 70 page document with all the findings that form the foundation for this document. It's just a draft and there should be plenty of errors to find there.

- If mental problems are illnesses to be cured with medicine, then how come what's prescribed is always drugs or manipulation of the transmitter fluids? The only part of it that can be classified as medicine is to cure the side effects from the same drugs. Meaning the "medicine" is "pain relief for thinking", it affects only the thinking. No doctor would call pain reliever medicine. How come they implicit call drugs medicine by claiming mental problems are illnesses and then prescribe drugs – just because they're unable to help their patients? They should be put in jail. They can claim that the patient came to them and drugs is the best treatment they can give. But that's no longer true when we're around. They're free to send their patient to one of our mental sanctuary. We'll provide much better help.

When discharged

When leaving the sanctuary (or even a group meeting), you'll probably go back to your old destructive triggers. You'll probably feel the craving, the anxiety, depression or whatever made you join the sanctuary. For some, the solution is to get rid of friends or whatever. But that may not be necessary. The craving++ is just the body's function to help us maintain focus. It will tell us what's normal in the giving situation. Doing what's not normal will feel uncomfortable (urge++). But the normal reaction to triggers may be changed by repetition. To change this you need to put yourself in a situation that triggers the urge++ and then react in a different way. This is what we call exposure therapy. This of course introduces a risk of relapse, so you should also take measures to reduce this risk. This can be:

- Implement good daily routines

- Substituting the craving with something else. This can be energy drink, coffee or other.

- Have a good plan for the exposure. You can bring friends. Talk about what you're going through++

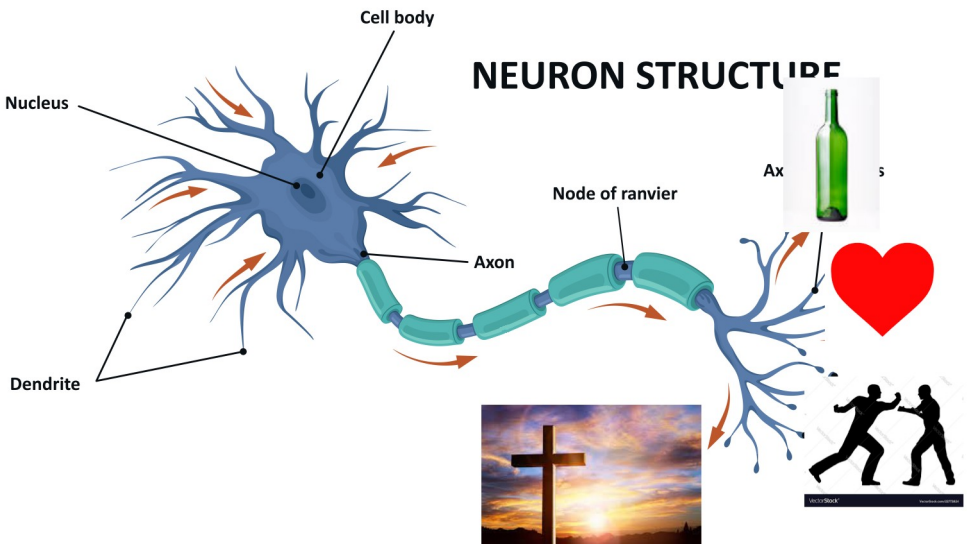
- Talk with those around you to prepare them. Walk through the dos and don’ts.

- What else?

Question:

- Is it important to understand why things went wrong?
- How can you motivate your friends and neighbors to work on their bad habits?
- Would you bring your friends and neighbors to our mental sanctuary?
- How can we improve to offer better therapy?
- How can we do self therapy?
- How can we improve the awareness about this among our friends and family members?
- Are there issues among friends and family that should be brought to therapy?

The nerve cell



Obviously, the nerve cell is the cause of both good and bad – luckily mostly good. The nerve cell is like an electric cord transferring electric signals within the brain and to and from muscles, and all the other organs. So to understand how the brain works, it’s important to know about the basic components.

We can say that the nerve cell is all about everything that is permanent. When we learn a skill, craft, sport, depression, anxiety, ADHD, memories, feelings and anything else, then it’s all about the nerve cells and what other nerve cells they’re connected to. The branches of the nerve cell are called dendrites. Each nerve cell may have thousands of connections with other nerve cells. In terms of mental functions, we can say that they represent various possible reactions to event or triggers as illustrated above. When something happens, we may get reminded of a childhood trauma, we may feel good, urge to drink or whatever else. These are more or less permanent – but we also know that this depends on our mood and the situation we’re in. We’ll cover this in the next chapter.

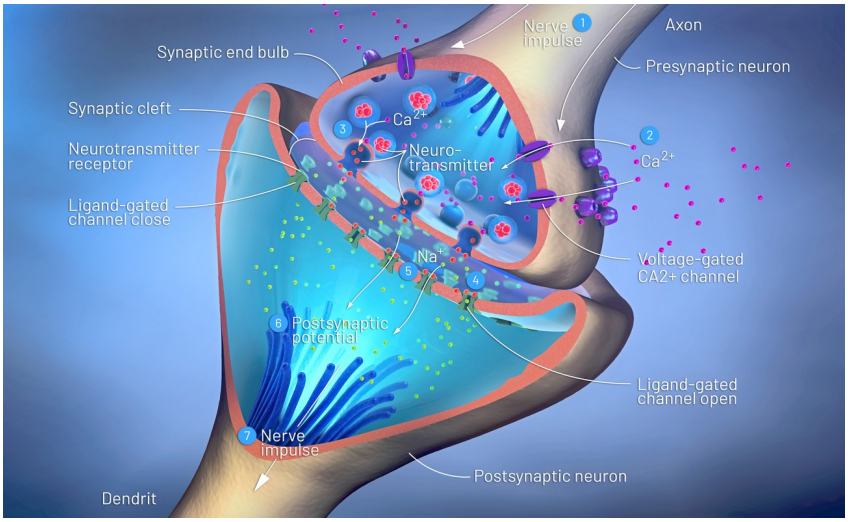
Myelin is a white fatty substance that makes nerve signals passing through the nerve cells up to 100 times faster. This is what makes a gray baby brain turn white as we grow older. Myelin should get the honor for our ability to fine-tune all kind of skills. And as we've seen, this also includes mental problems, habits and in fact everything else. Dendrites and myelin combined becomes what we know as knowledge, skills, habits or personality.

Questions:

- Is depression a "destructive skill" or merely a "bad habit"?
- Have I been "practicing" depression? Is this a provoking claim?
- What are my prime destructive skills (physical or emotional or in between)?

The synapses

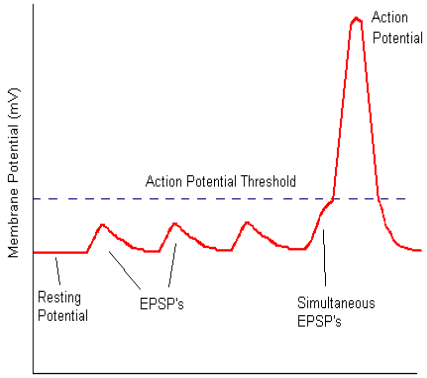
The synapses are the connections between two nerve cells. In the illustration, the nerve signal comes from the top and reaches the "synaptic cleft" where one of the 100 identified "neurotransmitters" is responsible for bringing it over the "synaptic cleft". Everything that is temporary but not instant (focus related) happens in the synapses. So the skills warming up and getting rusty all happens in the synapses.



The function of the synapse is to filter out what's important and what's not. It helps us maintain our focus. Our focus may be good, but sometimes we need to focus on bad things to solve problems. Our mental problems are often related to inability to switch focus back to something good when we're no longer solving our big problems. Focusing on problems for too long is draining. We need rest and be happy. We need to unwind, recharge and sleep with a brain that is controlled by transmitter fluids and hormons. This easily gets too complex.

All our body functions are somehow controlled by the nerve system and the synapses play a key role. When we're about to sleep, our body will produce a "transmitter fluid" that slows down the traffic (GABA). All the drugs work mainly on the synapses to either slow down (e.g. opium or alcohol) or speed things up (e.g amphetamine, kokain ++)

When athletes train for years, they build new connection and fine tune them with myelin. When they warm up before a match, changes to the synapses are the main effect. And it's the same thing that happens when we start a fight, get tempted to eat, drink or whatever addiction we have or get excited about anything.



One way to understand the functions in the synapses better is to look at it from the "electric perspective". Nerve cells are like electric cords – though much slower than copper. Nerve pulses are seen at fluctations in the chart to the right. When the nerve signal comes, the potential will rise and then fall again. As mentioned, synapses have this very important task of filtering out what nerve traffic is supposed to passed on and which is not. This is seen as a threshold that the potential has to reach for the nerve signal to pass to the next nerve cell. In the chart to the right, at some point, two signals comes at the same time (labeled "Simultaneous ESPS's"). Then there's a spike and that's when the nerve signal passes the synaptic cleft. There are four main ways to change this system:

1. One is by rising or lowering the threshold. This is what drugs do. Warming up and getting rusty is what is supposed to change the threshold.
2. The second way is to increase the number of nerve signals so that the action potential does not have time to go down to "resting potential". This can be done by activating multiple channels leading to the same center in the brain. Let's say you there's a word you've forgotten. Now try to remember what it looks like, how it smells, whom you last saw it with. Try to remember how it's spelled by starting with "A", "B", "C". All these approaches may trigger various centers in your brain and increase the traffic to the word you're trying to remember. You can also repeat things several times to increase the nerve traffic – both the permanent parts and the synapses.
3. The third way to influence the process of the synapse, is to increase the speed by building myelin. When we increase the speed (that's what myelin does), it's more likely that several signals will reach the target before the action potential can go back to resting potential (see the chart) and thus reach the threshold.
4. The fourth and maybe most important is by focusing on whatever process the synapse is involved in. We will look more into this in the next chapter.

So we see that both practicing, warming up and focus are essential. This is probably no secret to an athlete. It's just as important if you want to build a good mental health.

Questions:

- Give examples of what happens in the synapses
- What are the differences between manipulating the synapses with drugs compared to shifting focus?

- Give more examples of “simultaneous EPSP” (e.g. warming up several ways to remember a word or name).
- What’s your strategies for remembering words? How does this match with what’s written above?

Why is focus so important?

Our focus sets the direction. We can’t control everything that happens. But over time, our focus is what shapes our personality. Everything we see, hear or feel influences us somehow. But we can somehow direct our focus. .. but not always.. Many find themselves in situations where they’re stuck. No matter how much they try, they can’t shift focus. Maybe they can for a short while, but then any kind of trigger may bring them back in the black hole. Needless to say, this is not a good situation. But it is not as permanent as it feels. And sometimes, it’s our own thinking that locks us up. If you have this feeling of being locked up, then you should probably talk with someone. If it’s just your own thinking that keeps you captive, then you should visit our mental sanctuary.

The neurological reason why focus is so important is that is sends a stream of nerve signals to the part of the brain in focus. Now go back to the figure about action potential threshold and see what this stream of nerve signals do. It will overwhelm the synapses and determine what part of the brain becomes your consciousness.

The basic of all learning is the “Hebbian synapse concept”. It says that “what fires together wires together”. Meaning if someone tells you that 8 * 8 = 64 some times, your brain will make a connection (nerve connection) between “8 * 8” and “64”. Learning includes anything that hits our eyes, ears and whatever. It’s also obvious that our focus is essential for this process of “firing together”. Obviously, learning also applies to any kind of mental process. If something painfull happens to us and we keep being reminded about it, then going back to the same place or meeting those involved later may be painful or at least cause discomfort. We can call it re traumatizing or whatever, but it’s the same as learning. We have learned that being at this place is painful and it may or may not last for the rest of our life – depending on if the given nerve connection is kept rusty or warmed up.

Questions:

- Give examples of when we can’t control our focus.
- Are there ways to change this to make it easier to focus?
- Is it easier to maintain a good focus if you’re member of a group of like minded? Why (not)?
- Discuss about “no matter what, they can’t shift focus”.
- Does it make sense to link complex mental problems to simple learning like 8 * 8 = 64?

- Can you give examples of how drugs affects focus?

Rationalization

Wikipedia defines “rationalization” as:

Rationalization is a defense mechanism (ego defense) in which apparent logical reasons are given to justify behavior that is motivated by unconscious instinctual impulses.[1] It is an attempt to find reasons for behaviors, especially one's own.[2] Rationalizations are used to defend against feelings of guilt, maintain self-respect, and protect oneself from criticism.

To give an example: A very close friend hurt you by forgetting to greet you on your birthday. You got hurt and the “easiest” explanation is that you got hurt by your close friend. But what really happened was that you heard something, which you interpreted and your automatic response to what you heard was getting hurt. But the real problem here is your interpretation and your reaction to that interpretation and not what your friend said. Some people would have responded differently. So you risk ruining your good friendship because of rationalization. I’m not saying this to offend you, but if you have problems with people or some specific person hurting, provoking, making you depressed or whatever, then know that this is normal but it can be changed. And our support system is the best place to do so.

Questions:

- Can you give examples of rationalization?
- This may be a sensitive topic, but is this something you can work on in the group?

Depression

Depression can be defined as sadness when there’s nothing to be sad about. Our brain shapes according to our focus in life. So our focus should be on the good values of life. Then we can dive into the problems in life, work on them and then go back to the good life.

Depression is normally connected to some bad event or situation in our life. But if we think too much, this affects our synapses and eventually create new nerve connections that link our personality closer to the bad event. We slowly become the depressed one, the victim, the sad one or whatever. The solution is to make sure we’re still able to have fun and joy when we’re with friends. When the event or situation happened in early childhood when the foundation for our personality was shaped, then it’s especially severe. The good news is that our brain shapes all through our life. So we can always start a new and better chapter in life. This is what our mental sanctuary is for.

To people who are not depressed themselves, it may seem obvious that the solution is to go out and have fun with good friends. But for the depressed, it's normally just provoking. Because they have tried or they know it's impossible. How can they forget what happened?

Our answer to this is: Yes it may seem impossible, but shifting focus is still the only solution for getting out of depression. And this is the main purpose of the mental sanctuary. So if you can't do this alone, then you should visit us. It's definitely worth it.

It may take some time, though. After a day or two away from destructive triggers, depression will normally be gone. But it may come back immediately when you're back in your own environment. The reason is that your depression is still warmed up. You need to get it rusty. Then you will still remember what happened, but if you're able to divert your focus, it will not affect your mood too much. You'll be in control. To get your depression rusty, you may want to go back to the sanctuary, build your own sanctuary in your mind or maybe ask your friends for help.

For some it may take much longer, and it probably depends on many factors. Everything may trigger us and we may not know why. So we should try different locations, people, activities and much more to find a "situation" where we're not triggered. Then we can more easily find "peace of mind". We will covered this more extensively in a designated chapter about "triggers".

Question:

- Have you witnessed depression in your own or other's life?
- Have you seen the reaction when someone suggest a depressed person change focus?
- Is it correct that depression is sadness when there's nothing to be sad about?

Anxiety

Everything we see, hear, smell of feel with other senses is processed by our brain. And some of these impressions generate an automatic reaction. That's the result of learning. When we learn to walk, talk, cook dinner or whatever we do, our motions, feelings, and everything else will over time become automated. And everything builds on things we've learned before. To cook, we may need to turn on something, pour something, lift something and thousands of other details that together shape our cooking skills. If we fall forward, we put out a foot. If we continues to fall forward, we put out the other foot.. It's called "walking" and it's automated.. When we get good at walking, we can even "run". Once learned, it's even hard to fall on your face because you will put out your hand or whatever to prevent falling flat on your nose. We take all this for granted though we spent time learning the basics when we were maybe 1 year old. It's exactly the same process that leads to anxiety. And the way to get rid of it is to learn other ways to handle undesirable ways to react automatically to impressions. And the method is the same as for any other kind of learning: By repetition until the new and better reaction becomes automatic. See designated chapter about "Exposure Therapy".

So the job is to teach your brain that this particular situation is not dangerous. There are two errors we do: One is to stay away from “dangers”. The other one is to get into the dangerous situation but then withdraw. The problem with both these “approaches” is that they confirm to your brain that this really was dangerous and contribute to worsen the anxiety. Instead, you should approach the danger very carefully and stay in the situation until the discomfort vanish. And repeat as many times as needed. This way you confirm to your brain that there’s no danger. You can do this alone, but it’s much easier if you’re part of a loving and caring group of close and good friends and see them approach the “dangerous situation” without problems. We will look more into this in a chapter about exposure therapy.

Questions:

- For those who are comfortable to share about triggers (sensory impressions that trigger the anxiety), share about it.
- Any suggestion from the other group members on how to learn better ways to react?
- If possible, talk about how you can turn the group into a good and safe environment for approaching the triggers leading to anxiety.
- Then make some plans (which may be very uncomfortable if you struggle with anxiety)
- Then do it… (NOTE! Only if comfortable… nobody should be pushed to do this)
- Do you know someone who struggle with anxiety? Maybe one of you can invite someone?

Homeostasis system and pain

Sciencedirect.com defines homeostasis as:

“Homeostasis is defined as a self-regulating process by which a living organism can maintain internal stability while adjusting to changing external conditions. Homeostasis is not static and unvarying; it is a dynamic process that can change internal conditions as required to survive external challenges.”

Our body is a very complex machinery. There’s all kinds of body fluids, nutrition, waste management and a lot more that needs to be in balance. It should have some system of internal warnings and error codes that the doctor can read by plugging a cable to our brain.. But there is no such connector (yet). There are, however many ways for the body to signal that something is wrong – though these are not always that accurate. For example may pains in your right arm mean that you have a heart problem. If we get dizzy, we know that we may be dehydrated. Hunger may give us pain. And there are many similar cases. As the definition above states, this is not static. It’s very much related to our mental state. So also with pain. This is yet another reason why we should eat healthy, make sure we get enough sleep, exercise regularly and make sure we fix our mental problems.

If you're suffering from some kind of pain and neither you or doctors can figure out why, then it may very well be the homeostatic system that fires an alarm for no good reason. As we've seen in the chapter about focus, we may have learned that being at some place or with some people is painful. This may very wall evolve to "being awake" is painful. This probably plays a central role in conditions like fibromyalgia and "Chronic Exhaustion Syndrome".

National Institute of Health (US) says this about fibromyalgia:

"Fibromyalgia is a chronic (long-lasting) disorder that causes pain and tenderness throughout the body, as well as fatigue and trouble sleeping. Scientists do not fully understand what causes it, but people with the disorder have a heightened sensitivity to pain.

There is no cure for fibromyalgia, but doctors and other health care providers can help manage and treat the symptoms. Treatment typically involves a combination of exercise or other movement therapies, psychological and behavioral therapy, and medications."

So the treatment suggested is the same as we suggest for mental problems: Shift of focus. That's interesting. So the scientists admit that fibromyalgia is not a disease or illness – but yet there's a diagnosis. How can they be sure about all the other mental diagnoses?

Question:

- Can you give other examples of "alarms" from the homeostasis system?
- Have you heard of examples of working out has removed pains?

Addiction

We may get addicted to anything we do often. Addiction is about doing what feels natural in a given situation. Bad habits and addictions are the same. It feel uncomfortable to do what's not natural. However some habits are worse than others. And of course we just call it addiction when it becomes a problem.

Some habits involve intake of food, drinks or others that influence chemical balances in our body. Those addictions are worse because they mess with our "homeostasis", the system for maintaining chemical balance, and may very well trigger various tool for making us unwell. This include feeling tired, dizzy, hungry, thirsty, pains and more.

Whatever our addiction is, the way to handle it is to teach our brain that this addiction is not part of our new life by ignoring the craving. Then our brain will adjust to that. The easiest way to do this is to remove the triggers (go somewhere else) and do something fun. This is the main purpose of our mental sanctuary.

It's important to know that addiction is a natural part of our life. There are many ways that we may get addicted to things that are unfortunate. Many of those are beyond our control. So this is nothing to be

ashamed about. And because the best way to cure it is to focus on something else, the group doesn't have to know what the addiction is as long as they're able to get rid of the triggers (like don't bring alcohol, don't yell +++), so that's probably what you should talk about.

Getting rid of addiction consists of the following steps:

1. Make the addiction rusty by getting away – preferably visit our mental sanctuary (let us know if there's bad triggers present). When it's rusty enough, there's no longing, cravings or similar.
2. Exposure therapy to be able to change the automatic response. Repeat it until the exposure does not generate any cravings or other discomfort. See also designated chapter about "Exposure Therapy" below.
3. There will be cravings later when situation changes. This can be when you're also depressed, home alone, heart broken or whatever. Get a good understanding of what the triggers are, strategies for minimizing them and how to handle it if it gets out of control.
4. Establish routines for follow ups and whom to call when there's danger of relapse or when it's already happened. The damage will be bigger the longer or deeper the fall is.
5. Consider changing your lifestyle. Eat healthy, exercise, fill your life with happiness and good habits
6. Build a support system and help others in the process. There are many who struggle.

Substance addiction

We have seen that addiction is about doing what's natural in a given situation because that's what we've done so many times before. If there's a bottle on the table, then we need to drink it. When we're having our morning coffee, we need to read the newspaper or whatever. Doing what we're used to feels natural. The opposite feels wrong and may even give some kind of discomfort or craving. Substances adds another level to this because they mess with the transmitter fluids and thus also with the homeostatic system. The homeostatic system is there to warn us when something is not normal. When we make using drugs the new normality, the homeostatic system will adapt and fire the warnings (pain, discomfort, wommit++) when the drug is not there. This of course makes it harder to change such habits. Add to this that many use drugs as a cure to some kind of mental problem. And random may feel better than the problem we normally struggle with.

But it's only temporary – contrary to finding and keeping a good focus. For an addict to "stay cured", they need to keep using the drug. And random focus over time causes all the problems that addicts struggle with. Someone who is affected by drugs can not change his life in a good direction.

So how to get rid of such addiction?

First of all, there are often strict laws and regulations for this, so we can't give specific advice in a document like this. Special care should be taken when tapering substances that increase brain activity

because the brain will counter by reducing the brain activity. So when you go off such substance, brain activity may be too low causing heart of respiration to stop. When tapering substances that decrease the brain activity, the brain may have countered by increasing brain activity. Meaning when you taper these drug, you may experience unrest, sweating, pains, itching, increased respiration or heart rhythm and all kinds of destructive thinking that may cause violence, suicide thoughts and anything else.

Ideally, this tapering should be done in a controlled environment while monitoring basic body functions. Alternatively, the tapering can be done very slowly to let the brain stabilize at each level of substances. But the addict has often gone on and off the substance many times already so they know how they respond physically. Then being in a controlled environment to help coping with emotional challenges is also great. This is also something we'll assist with in our mental sanctuary.

When the substance is out of the body and the brain has adjusted, then addiction to substances is back to the "normal" craving of any other addiction – except this is probably much stronger craving because the addiction has had a very big influence on life. This craving is a destructive skill that we can get rusty by warming up better skill or we can change it. One way is to change the addiction is by focusing on all the negative aspects of the addiction. All the people who are hurt, all the money wasted, ignored responsibilities and so on. Then when there's no longer any positive association with the addiction, start being happy that it's over and find joy in getting back to where you should have been.

In our sanctuary, we'll mostly employ people who overcame their own challenges. Turning your destructive skills into a job opportunity is a great way of overcoming.

Dealing with the cause of addiction

Many (most?) addicts have tried multiple times to get off the drug. Why is it failing? If you ask them, they may not tell you the truth. However, knowing the truth may be crucial for helping them prevent relapse. Therapy is one obvious choice. Because drugs have such a strong manipulative effect on the brain, maybe you should also take a look at the chapter about hallucinations.

Questions:

- This is a sensitive topic.. So maybe you should start by talking about confidentiality.
- Can you tell about your addictions and their consequences, especially for your family and other victims.
- Talk about how you can get rid of them.
- Talk about triggers
- Talk about relapse.
- How does the teaching here match with what you've learned before?

Triggers

We react automatically to everything that happens to us. Under the chapter about anxiety, we saw that walking may be seen as a response to falling forward. Once we've learned this, we don't even think of it. We just do it. And when we stand up, our legs are working constantly to avoid us from falling. It all happens without even touching our conscious mind. If you want to test how strong this mechanism is, then try to fall forward without using your arms to absorb the impact. It's hard, but it's possible with practicing. I suggest experimenting in a swimming pool.

One such trigger could be a ball coming in your direction. The preferred habit of a football playing could be to score a goal or pass it on to someone else. How that is done depends on what kind of sport we're playing and it requires thousands of hours of practicing to do this the optimal way. If you're into depression, then you have much of the same. Something happens and you automatically feel down. This is a result of repetition, just as scoring a goal. Many spend thousands of hours thinking destructively. That affects our brain and a big portion of it happens as response to triggers.

We call it learning, and the process is to train ourselves to react automatically. When we don't respond to stimuli, then that's a serious problem. Our whole life is ruled by triggers. So we can say that the process of building a good life is to take control over all the triggers. Do we react in a way that contribute to a good life or do we respond irrationally? So working on our mental health is about getting rid of irrational or destructive response to triggers and replacing them with good response.

Something happens and you react one way automatically. If you have a mental problem related to this, then you should have reacted some other way or just ignored it. You may not agree that there is a better way to react, but ask your good friends and they'll probably come up with a better idea – which is of course just provoking. One example on this could be if you're an alcoholic and enter a room with a bottle of beer standing on the table. Your automatic reaction would probably be to crave the bear. But that's not the optimal reaction. And our reactions to triggers can be changed. For some reason you have learned how to respond to some specific event (trigger) and you'll continue to respond that way until you've learned a better way to respond.

Sometimes we should avoid the problematic triggers and sometimes we can't. Our spouse may be the worst trigger. That's a challenge, especially when there are kids involved. How do we react when we see various persons? It's normal to react negatively to some persons. It just means we have a brain and that it is working as it should. But if that person is close, then that may be big a problem. The good news is that we can change the way we react to triggers. It may be very hard, though. If you have problem with this, then you may want to visit our mental sanctuary and talk with one of our therapists.

The best way to get rid of destructive triggers is through exposure therapy, which we'll look into in the next chapter.

So why may it still seem impossible? The reason is to be found in the way our nerve cells work. You may want to go back to the chapters about "The nerve cell", "The synapses" and "Why is focus so important?". Nerve cells are permanent. This means that experiences even from before we were born will affect us for the rest of our life. And some things affect us much more than others. So you may not

know why things you experience. You have forgotten what happened, but your response in specific situation is still automatic. The good news is it can be changed.

Albert Einstein said: “The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results”. So if you get the same bad result every time, then you can try doing it in a completely different way. We’re here to help you.

Questions:

- Mention some triggers in your life
- Do you have special triggers in your life that you don’t understand?
- Do you know someone with destructive triggers? (keep it anonymous if it’s not about you)
- Can you give example of situation where you don’t understand the trigger?

Exposure therapy

Everything that happens to us will be processed by our brain and the brain will react automatically. The normal reaction is not to react. For example a bird passing by, the wind blowing in our hair or a dog barking far away. However, if we were severely bitten by a dog, then even a distant dog barking may produce a panic attack. The reason is that our brain has learned that dogs are dangerous and reacts as if this is a very dangerous situation. And this reaction may get out of control. And this it the patters with everything that happens to us – not only with negative reaction as fear, sadness or similar. Joy and happiness are also potential reactions from triggers. And the good news is that our brain changes all through life and we can teach our brain a better reaction to anything that happens. And when the therapists talk about this, they call it “exposure therapy”.

Exposure therapy is not as advanced as is sounds. Like I said, it’s just about learning new and better way to handle situations. Some think exposure therapy has to be unpleasant, but it’s more effective if it’s not. This is obviously very essential when it comes to anxiety, PTSD and OCD, but it’s also very relevant to most other mental problems.

There are two errors when for example confronting anxiety through the trigger:

- Avoiding the trigger confirms to your brain that it’s dangerous and thus makes it worse.
- Triggering the anxiety and then withdrawing from the situation. This confirms to your brain that it’s dangerous and thus makes it worse.

So the clue is to make a safe environment that makes it possible to approach the trigger without triggering the full anxiety. If it’s triggered, then it’s important that the group ensures that it’s safe and you stay in it until it’s ok. That’s how you teach your brain that there’s nothing to worry about.

If someone has problem being in a store, then stay “near” the store until that’s ok.. Then approach it slowly until it’s all ok. Just go inside, then turn around and walk out again. Then repeat that until your able to stay there for minutes or walk deeper inside the store before walking out again. Our brain wants the best for us, but we need to teach it what’s safe and what’s not.

After only a few “exposures”, the reaction will change. But be aware that you change the reaction to “this specific situation”. If you’re depressed, alone, heart broken, hungry, it’s raining, you’re at a specific location or anything else, then that may be a enough change in “the situation” to go back to the old bad reaction. We learned before that one way to remember things is to warm up many different nerve cells that lead to the thing we’re struggling to remember. This is normally the same thing as happens when we relapse. One trigger that is normally insignificant may tip the the balance and cause a bad reaction – or relapse.

So what if you “relapse” - you go back to the bad habits? Then you get back to the good habits as soon as possible. The reason shy this is hard is that destructive automatic reactions are destructive skills that get warmed up when we relapse. The good news is that our good habits are the same. So we can get the bad stuff rusty by shifting focus and warming up better skills. If this tend to happen too often, then we should acquire more good skills and keep them warmed up. And when we’re really down and unable to do this alone, then remember that good friends and our support system are also to be considered skills in this setting. So if we have a good support system, then our good stills can come to our rescue if we make sure to maintain them.

Questions

- Does it make sense to link sports this closely to mental problems?
- How important is your support system? Should you invest more in it?
- How can this group help people with exposure therapy? Do you know someone who needs it?

Meditation

To get the bad habits rusty, the best method is to fill your brain with as much other stuff as you can and the more intense the better (for most people). But we also need rest. So the best method is to find the perfect balance. And this balance is individual though it’s affected by your expectations, upbringing and a lot more… And that is okay. Many find meditation to be the best way to find the perfect balance in life.

Wikipedia defines meditation as:

“Meditation is a practice in which an individual uses a technique – such as mindfulness, or focusing the mind on a particular object, thought, or activity – to train attention and awareness, and achieve a mentally clear and emotionally calm and stable state.”

We can also say that meditation is to enter your inner mental sanctuary.

We will probably experiment with different kind of meditation. One very good reason to take this seriously is that we all need to sleep. And being good at finding such emotionally and stable state may be a very good way to establish a good sleeping pattern.

Based on the definition, lots of “activities” could match. Nature walk, concert, sex+++. I’m sure many would protest, though.

Questions:

- What is your experience with meditation?
- Do you think it will work for you? How can you make it work (better)?
- What do you think about such extended definition of meditation activities?

Compulsion (OCD)

Compulsion is very similar to addiction and has the same reason. We do things because we have done that before. We do what’s natural to do in this given situation. The main difference may be that OCD is normally linked to some strong fear that something bad will happen if not acting according to the urge. There is only one way to break this curse. That is to take mental control and do something else than what we’re always doing. This may seem very unfair to the one suffering from OCD. After all, they’re suffering from this to prevent something bad from happening – very often to someone else. If this is the case then it means that those “involved” should also be included in the process of curing it. OCD may also be seen as a matter of “rationalization”: I feel the urge to check the door 5 times before leaving. Why do I feel like this? It must be because it’s important. Something bad may happen if I don’t do it. It’s logical, but it’s wrong. We feel like we do because it’s the normal reaction in some kind of situation. It’s just like an addiction.

Compulsion is partly about lacking or willingly having put aside that ability to override what comes naturally. When should we act automatically and when should we override it? This is intricate and we probably all have areas where we should override. OCD may be when it gets too obvious to others to others that we should override but we still somehow don’t manage. The ability to take control and override the automatic reaction is something we can practice. In team sports, changing automatic response to triggers is what they do all the time. And those who are unable to do this will end as substitutes. If we’re able to take control in one part of life, then it’s easier to do the same in other parts. And social settings are like teams. We adapt to those around us. So if you struggle with any part of this, then you should be on a good team that encourages to change. Many have good friends, but they’re not talking about mental problems.

The process of building a good life is mainly about learning good ways to handle things that happen in our life. Everything is learned by repetition. And if there’s destructive triggers we can’t handle, then we

should probably seek help. There's nothing about this that should be embarrassing as long as we're willing to change. This is mainly what the mental sanctuary is for. There's help available.

Questions:

- This is often very shameful, so identity should be hidden. But can you give example of OCD?
- How can this group help people who suffer from OCD?

Hallucinations

Everything we experience is stored in the brain. And everything that's stored in the brain may be reactivated as a memory, vision, sound, feeling, craving or anything else. According to experts, 98% of us get stuck on songs, known as an earworm. *"Certain people are more prone to earworms. Those with obsessive compulsive disorder or who have obsessive thinking styles experience this phenomenon more often. Musicians also frequently get earworms."*. I'm not saying this because earworms is a problem, but rather because it is a reminder of how our brain works – also when it comes to real problems like hallucinations. The best we can do when this happens is to distract ourselves. There may also be a trigger that we can remove. The worst thing we can do is to give it any kind of attention. That will warm up that hallucination and increase the probability that it will come back. When someone experience trauma of any kind, it may be tempting to start communicating with hallucination and even look for more. Fear may lead to the same – though undesired. If you look for dangers, then your brain will be more likely to interpret any kind of signal as a danger. So shadows on the carpet may turn into giant spiders or other dangers.

The best way to handle this is by getting the bad things rusty by warming up other better memories, habits, skills or whatever you prefer to call it. This is what we're procticing in the mental sanctuary.

I've heard (which should be confirmed) that 15% of us are bothered by hallucinations at some time in life. So this is quite normal and if you're one of them, then it only means you have a brain. You can, however, reduce the probability that it will bother you.

Hallucinations may be triggered by any kind of drug. Some people also use alcohol or other drugs to avoid nightmares or hallucinations. As said elsewhere, the main effect of drugs is to manipulate the synapses. But it's random. That's why drugs "work" for some and not for others. However, this indicate that at least one part of the good solution to the problem is also in the synapses and to make the bad stuff rusty. The other important way is to change the automatic reaction to hallucinations to something else. This means that whenever there's an indication that a hallucination is coming, we shift our focus to something else. When repeated many times, this will be the standard reaction. This may be combined with exposure therapy if possible – depending on triggers and situation.

This should be taken into consideration when dealing with drug addicts. They may claim that the reason for drinking is to have fun or just a bad habit. But there is often something else behind. The "drinking to forge" reason may very well be about some kind of hallucination, nightmare, guilt or any

kind of memory, and they all work the same way. And it can all be dealt with. That is much easier in a group of sober, caring and understanding people than left alone with drugs.

Questions:

- Any experience with earworms?
- Why are musicians more prone to earworms than others?
- This is sensitive, but do you have any experience with this?
- Should it be so sensitive? Isn't it a core function of the brain?

Psychosis

Mimh.mih.gov defines psychosis as:

"Psychosis refers to a collection of symptoms that affect the mind, where there has been some loss of contact with reality. During an episode of psychosis, a person's thoughts and perceptions are disrupted and they may have difficulty recognizing what is real and what is not."

There's no doubt that that's how it appears from the outside. We're all to some extend affected by delusions. One example is that the world still thinks that mental health is illness. Millions of Jews were killed by nazi Germany based on delusions. People still fear global climate change though global temperature has been in a declining trend since 2016 – which proves that though the temperature is still high and cause sea to warm up and glaciers to continue melting, it's definitely not because of CO2. Or am I the delusional one for not believing in this "green house effect"? Time will show.

The good news is that we can change our thinking. And if my thinking creates serious problems for my ability to relate to other people, then better change myself that having to create my own reality that only fits myself.

We can change our thinking or we can reduce the impact our thinking makes on our life and the life of our friends and family. But unless we're willing, there will probably be no good change.

Psychosis is normally when we're not able to establish contact with a person. One interesting question is to what extent the patient has voluntarily escaped into that alternative world due to trauma or as a result of drugs or just a bad habit. How does that person view our world? Why has the person escaped into other reality? Probably because he or she considers it easier to handle: Is it less painful? One big challenge we will have is probably lack of trust. People who struggle should be offered many different "therapists" and they're the one to choose whom they trust. Once trust is established, our question should be if this is something we can fix? Can we present a better world that makes the person stay with us instead of escaping? Can we make some kind of agreement that the person notifies us when reality is about to get too hard? This is what our mental sanctuary is for. We all need to get away from

what’s destructive sometimes. Otherwise we end up in a bad place. But there is hope and there are better ways to handle this than psychosis.

Questions:

- Do you have experience with people who are in a state of psychosis?
- How important is trust when it comes to talking with people with psychosis?
- Mention problematic delusions
- How can we make delusions less destructive?

ADHD/ADD

Attitudemag.com defines ADD and ADHD as

“*ADD is the term commonly used to describe symptoms of inattention, distractibility, and poor working memory. ADHD is the term used to describe additional symptoms of hyperactivity and impulsivity. Both are included in the medical diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.*”

Attention, focus and memory are essential skills that can and must be trained. Our ability to learn new skills are best in early childhood. If we fail to learn such skills and instead learn the opposite, then it should be no surprise that that will affect our whole life. However, the good news is that though it’s harder, it’s never too late to improve or even learn new skills.

Still, most “professionals” seem to fail to understand this. In most countries, even kids with ADHD are treated with medication which are essentially drugs. This will of course make them calmer, but it also affects their ability to learn and it turns into substance addiction.

Like all learning, willingness to learn is essential. That makes it especially hard to help kids.

Bipolarity

Bbrfoundation.org defines bipolarity as:

“Bipolar disorder, formerly known as manic-depressive illness, is a brain and behavior disorder characterized by severe shifts in a person's mood and energy, making it difficult for the person to function. More than 5.7 million American adults or 2.6 percent of the population age 18 or older in any given year have bipolar disorder. The condition typically starts in late adolescence or early adulthood,

although it can show up in children and in older adults. People often live with the disorder without having it properly diagnosed and treated."

We think this definition is wrong. We think bipolarity is depression and bad coping strategies for getting out of depression. Depression will be the constant force pulling you down. Sometimes you have enough energy (or positive focus) to fight yourself to the surface by doing something that takes your focus away from whatever pulls you down. It becomes manic. You get high on adrenaline and the joy of success. Many get reckless in a desperate move to keep the depression away. Party, drugs and sex are effective ways to divert focus. It lasts for a while, maybe even for weeks. But eventually you get too tired and fall back into depression.

We have never heard anybody else telling this, so it's surely a bold stand. However, it's tested on a few with the diagnose and they normally agree. If we're right, then the right treatment for bipolarity will be to find peace of mind – which is a complete different strategy from the former manic attempts. Then the bad habits may go away. Otherwise they should be treated as any bad habit.

Questions:

- Is bipolarity really a helpful diagnosis? Many are "happy" to get diagnosed? How would it affect them if they're told that it's a destructive skill or bad habit that can get rusty by warming up better skills?

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

Social skills spans lots of disciplines from articulation, humor, memory, association to facial expression. These are very advanced skills that should be learned when our intelligence is on top in early childhood. Some kids use this crucial period in life to learn other skills to perfection. The list of kids with ASD like aspergers or other and extraordinary other skills is long. Still "professionals" don't link this to priority of focus and learning of important skills. Of course some people also have reduced intelligence which will affect their ability to acquire such skills. However, we're all responsible for how we spend our intellectual capacity. Are we using it to build a good or bad personality?

Yet again is the good news that we can learn for as long as we live.

So how to cure ASD? As for any other mental problem, the best place to change will be as part of a small group dominated by trust, understanding and love.

Questions:

- Is ASD an illness?
- What's the dominant treatment for ASD?
- What's the consequences of medicating kids with ASD from early childhood?

Self harming

When there's a trauma, there's not always an obvious way to escape. This is maybe especially a problem for kids and women in controlling relationships. In lack of better option, many figure out that if they harm themselves, it may be painful, but it's less painful than the trauma they go through. So when the bad thinking starts, they escape into self harming. It becomes like a "mental sanctuary" – though a destructive one.

Others find other way to lead focus away from the trauma. Boys may start a fight, drink or test criminality for the same reason. There's no limit to what this can lead to, and once acquired, habits and skills are "permanent". The obvious solution is still the same: To get the bad skills rusty by warming up better skills.

Then there's a need to talk about how to find better ways to solve the problems. We all need to be able to talk about our problems and have influence on our own situation. An external therapist or inter-mediator should probably be involved because the self harming individual has probably already given up finding good ways to solve it.

It's important to emphasize that such traumas may be delusions or based on misunderstanding. There's lots of shame and stigma connected to this. But there's help available. And it's normally important to bring in other therapists and let the person doing self harm choose between therapists to ensure that there's trust.

Questions:

- How to treat people who harm themselves?
- How can we ensure that there's trust?

Eating disorders

Eating disorders are like addiction, OCD or anxiety. It's like an inner voice telling what to do. "What is natural in this situation?". And that may have been established by a comment, some ad, celebrity, trauma or anything else. One challenge is that eating disorders often occur at young age. The best approach may be when the "voice" tells not to eat, then do the opposite. That is the same as exposure therapy. But how to teach that to someone very young?

Questions:

- How can the group help someone with eating disorders?

Religion

As you have probably found out, this document rests solely on science. If we know how our brain works, we can live good lives – until we or someone dear to us experience trauma or any kind or face illness or death. To be able to handle such situations, we may need God. Many want to come to peace with God the perception that religious faith contradicts science prevents them. This may have been true before. However, newer science has made it more likely that there is a God. Three such discoveries are:

“The big bang theory”

It confirms that there was a beginning – just like the bible says. The bible says that before creation, there was light – which is also confirmed by this theory.

DNA and Darwin’s “evolution” theory

Darwin’s theory becomes less and less likely because they’ve never found fossils confirming it. As the complexity of DNA is being exposed, it’s also getting obvious is that DNA is a “programming language” and the idea of such even existing without intelligence behind it is unthinkable. If we are a result of natural selection, then scientists should be able to copy it and at least create something living from a pile of dirt. Nobody has a clue how to do that.

The fine tuning of natural laws

There are thousands of requirements for life like the electron charge, the freezing and boiling point of water, gravity, photosynthesis and similar. And if even one of them was different, then life could not exist. And nobody can tell why there’s gravity. We can measure it and utilize it but we can’t tell why.

Conclusion

This does not prove that there’s a God. There are of course other reasons for not being religious. We may have bad experience with religious people. How can a loving God allow all the evil we see or even experience ourselves? However, if we want to stay mentally healthy, then we should not close that door. If there’s a God out there who created the universe because He wanted us to live with Him eternally then we should pay attention – at least when we’re giving up fixing our own mental problems ourselves and running out of good options. As stated again and again in this document, when we’re locked in destructive thinking, shifting focus and getting away from destructive triggers is a key. Religion offers a golden opportunity to do exactly that. If you want to find God, then talk with people who claim they know him and not someone who claim He doesn’t exist. Finding hope is crucial for finding a good focus. It’s hard to find peace with the details solved if the big questions remain unanswered. And it may be too hard alone. So better talk with us or others. If your religion feels more like a burden than relief, then try another one. There’s lots of resources available online.

Case studies

Case studies can be a very good way to learn how to handle mental problems. The leaders of the mental sanctuary should keep a stack of cases for group studies that also allow the participants to add their own cases anonymously as a way to get 2nd hand opinion on what they struggle with without revealing themselves. (some may not trust the present therapists enough or there may be shortage of such)

Case studies – to discuss in the group:

1. Her boyfriend left her when she's 5 months pregnant and now she's depressed.
2. She's afraid of her neighbor's new dog so she needs her friend escort her out.
3. Fred lost his fiancee in a motorbike accident. After this he started drinking and will lose his job.
4. Someone is hearing voices after trying drugs.
5. Someone hears voices after tamering drugs. What's the difference?
6. Someone is getting seizure whenever she's told something sad or funny. Why? And how to cure?
7. Someone reports to have lost contact with own feelings. What can this be and how to cure?
8. A man showed up on our group meeting and shared about some past trauma. The night after was sleepless thinking of what happened. He may not show up next time… Did the group do something wrong? How can we handle this?
9. Each group member can find a case from our Facebook group page: "Mental health awareness and solutions"

Local representatives

How to become a local representative? Many who suffer from mental problems are hard to reach – unless their doctors or psychologists bring them to us. So we may have a program for local representatives that mean you get some kind of commission or get involved as therapist. You can ask our instructors if you're interested. This may vary from place to place and over time.

One good way to help your friends, neighbors and others is by starting self help group. There is a flier available on the "Mental Health Awareness and Solutions" Facebook group page that you can print and distribute. For most people, being members of such groups (if they're able to make it well functioning) will be enough. For those who need more, the group should refer them to our "mental sanctuaries" where people can get away from triggers for a while, learn more from our experts, get the bad stuff rusty and be better prepared for what ever triggers awaits them back home.

After cure, what’s next?

After working on these topics together, there will probably be a good foundation for also working on other topics:

- Improving life skills
- Social skills
- What is my talents?
- What other habits should we work on?
- How to become a good therapist to help others?
- Can we turn this into a better sanctuary where people get cured?
- How can we represent Akili Bomba locally?

The group should be including new members and split in two when it’s getting big enough. It’s unlikely that all members of the group agrees to this. One solution could be that those who are interested in becoming local representatives leave the group and start a new one while the rest of the group becomes more permanent in nature.