



Your Personal  
Recovery Journey

PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK

# Identity



# Welcome back.

## Review of today's topic:



### Identity

- Rebuilding a positive sense of who we are
- Overcoming stigma

**Review:** What should I do if something triggers me during this module?

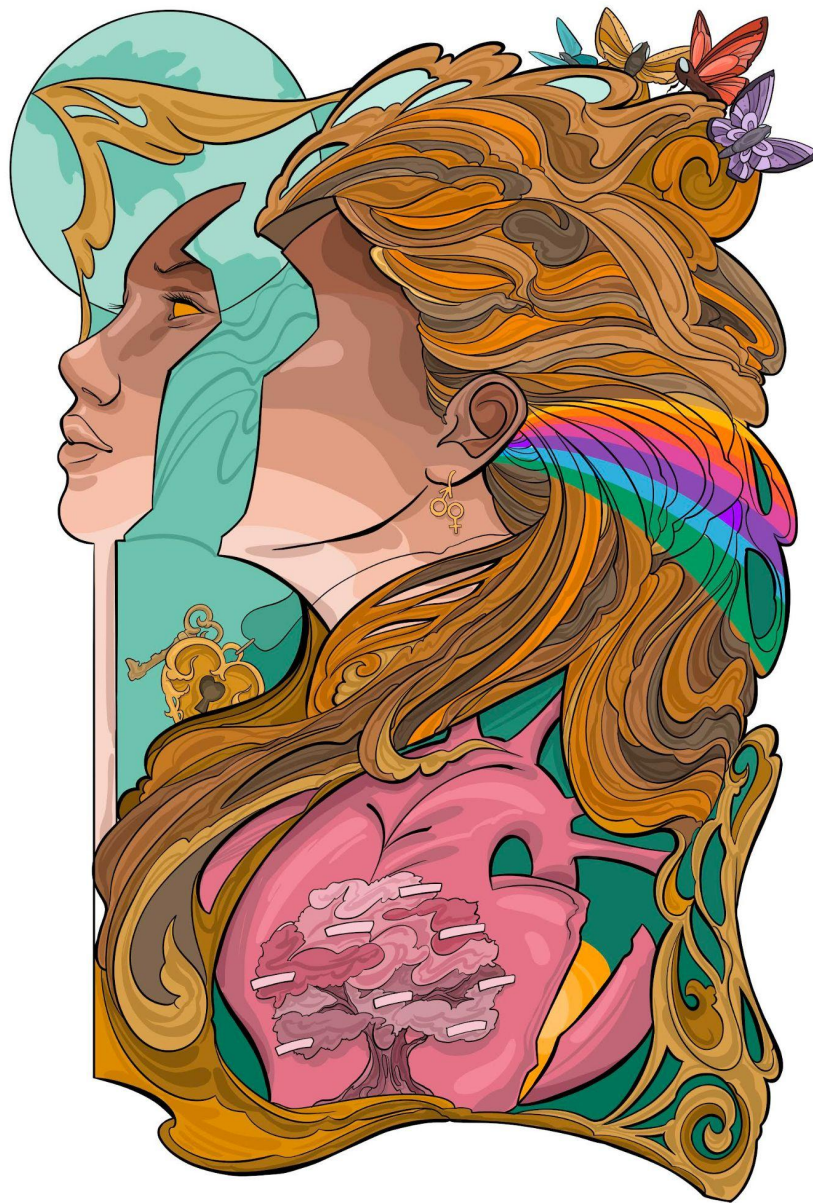
We encourage everyone to honor their own needs as they participate in this program. If at any point you feel triggered, overwhelmed, or just in need of a moment to care for yourself, please feel free to step out, take a breath, or use any self-care methods that work for you. Returning to the group is always welcome and there is no pressure to explain. Our priority is creating a safe and supportive space for each of us. Please also let the facilitator know if you need any additional support.

So, let's get started!

EXERCISE

# Who am I?

Let's reflect on this art work and write down some of our thoughts on the next page.



Artwork Title: **Identity**  
Artist: **Greg Hodge**

## EXERCISE

# Who am I?

"Who Am I?" We've all asked ourselves this question at different points in our lives. Let's talk about this piece of art... What do you see in this artwork that relates to this question (or reflects how you see yourself)?





# What is identity?

Personal identity is the unique ways that we define ourselves. Social identity refers to “your sense of who you are based on your membership in certain groups”, for example our social groups may include age, economic class, gender, nationality, etc.<sup>1</sup> Both personal identity and social identity influence how we see and describe ourselves.

Things like our memories, experiences, relationships, and values all create our sense of who we are and how we see ourselves. Negative and positive experiences can shape our identity. Our identity can change as we reflect and wonder and create/recreate that sense of who we are throughout our lives. Who we are has an impact on how we feel and how we perceive the world around us.

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Identity is about our  
sense of who we are.

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1. Facing History & Ourselves, “Exploring the Concept of Identity”, last updated July 14, 2021

Being a part of a group can also “provide a framework to understand oneself in the context of a larger community.”<sup>2</sup> For example, if you are a student or an artist, you may have shared values or goals with others in those same roles that can help describe who you are.

Everybody has questions about who they are at some points in life.

When we don’t really have a good understanding of who we are or if we don’t feel good about ourselves, it is difficult to feel hopeful and grounded; we may wonder whether our lives have meaning, and we may not feel like we belong anywhere. Especially if we are ignored or misunderstood or labeled, it is difficult to have a positive sense of who we are.

Sometimes when we experience signs and symptoms of mental illness, or if we are diagnosed with a mental illness, we feel like the illness IS who we are. We lose our understanding of who we are as a person, as the illness and its symptoms and needs take over.

When we understand who we are and feel good about ourselves and who we are, we feel more grounded and hopeful; we feel that we have purpose and meaning and that we belong. Focusing on our strengths can give us energy, confidence, and makes us happier!<sup>3</sup> Feeling good about ourselves can also help us to cope better, handle difficult situations, and keep negative things in perspective. Having a positive sense of ourselves will help us to move forward in our recovery and toward the life we want to live.

It is important to understand that a mental illness is only one part of who we are. As Pat Deegan, a mental health advocate and person with lived experience of mental illness says, “I am a person, not an illness.”

How do we get to a point of feeling good about ourselves and seeing ourselves as a person again? Re-defining who we are is a central task of moving forward in our recovery. You are resourceful and resilient, and you get to make choices about who you are regardless of where you are at in your recovery!

2. Saul McLeod PhD, Social Identity Theory in Psychology, SimplyPsychology.org, October 5, 2023.

3. How Understanding Your Strengths Can Liberate You From Perfectionism by Sarah Cramoysan | November, 2022, The Positive Psychology People.



Michael Joslin, *Invisible Illness*, August 2020

*"My mental illness became who I am. It has molded my personality, my beliefs, my personal qualities, my expressions, and my behaviors. I have grown tired of my mental illness defining who I am as a person. It is just an aspect of me, it doesn't need to consume me anymore. Yes, the mental illness will still be there, but it doesn't need to play such a big role in the play that is my life. My illness can play a smaller role, fade into the background, and be an aspect of my identity, not swallow up the entire thing."*



While you move forward with re-defining who you are beyond your mental illness, remember...

- It takes time to build/rebuild a sense of identity,
- It may not always be easy to let go of old ways of being that are easy to fall back into, and
- We are all works in progress!





# Let's watch a video by Pat Deegan about being more than your illness.



Video to be played by your facilitator during the module.



## You are Diagnosed with Mental Illness

Pat Deegan

VIDEO

Created by: Pat Deegan (PhD) and Associates LLC

Video link: [player.vimeo.com/video/1093145611](https://player.vimeo.com/video/1093145611)



Our diagnosis does not define us. Our mental health challenge is just one aspect of who we are.

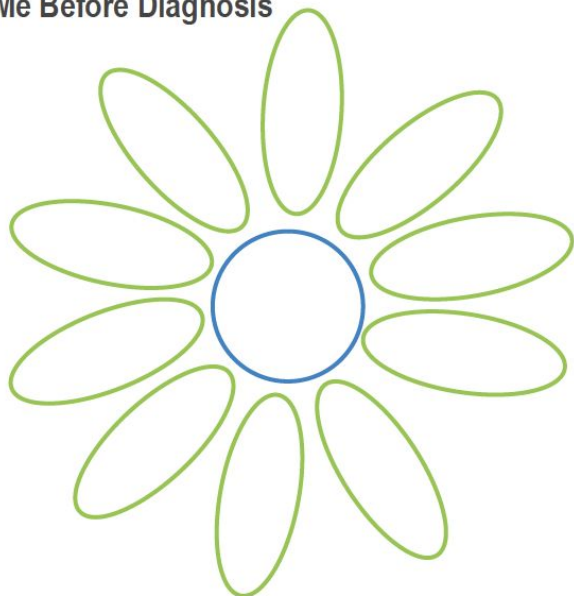
In this worksheet, you will have a chance to explore YOU before, and after, being diagnosed with a mental health challenge. Let the flower be a symbol of you.

**Step 1:** Put your name in the center of each flower.

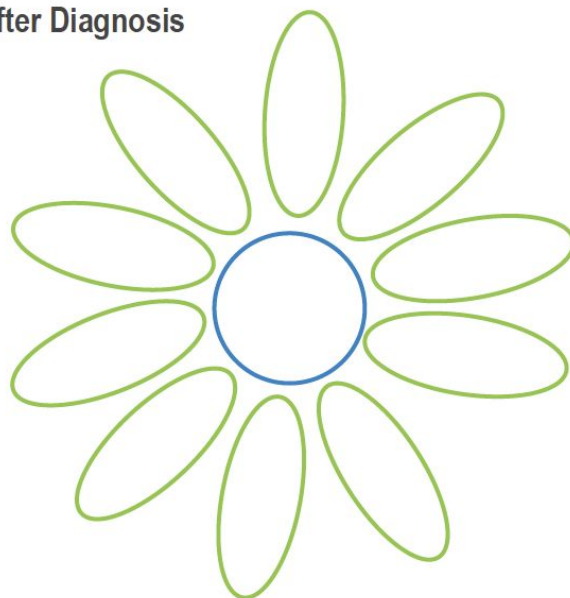
**Step 2:** Fill in the important things about who you were as a person BEFORE diagnosis. You might include examples of your talents, interests, spirituality, family, culture, your hopes and dreams, etc.

**Step 3:** What, if anything, has changed about you since diagnosis? Are there new things you want to add to your petals? Are there petals that no longer belong after diagnosis?

**Me Before Diagnosis**



**Me After Diagnosis**



## My Flower Story

### Summarize what's the same and what's different now that you have a mental health diagnosis

*Example: I used to think I was invincible and that only weak people had problems. Now I am more compassionate. I'm even thinking about getting a job helping other people who experience challenges like I do.*

## My Plan for Using My Flower Story

**I will** (check all that apply)

- ☐ Share my flower story with
- ☐ Take a photo of my flowers and store them on my phone to remind me of how far I have come.
- ☐ Cut out my flower story and post it in a prominent place to remind me of what I have accomplished.
- ☐ Create my own art, music or video to express and celebrate who I am today.
- ☐ Look at my card and remember my worth if I encounter stigma.
- ☐ Other:

EXERCISE

# I am a person, not an illness.

Now let's think about our future flower and how we will use it in our lives.

Going forward, how would you like the flower look? Who would you like to be into the future?

How will I use my flower story in my life?

What can I do to nurture a positive sense of myself and continue to grow the flower I want to be?

# How does stigma affect my identity?



People with a diagnosed mental illness or people that have signs and symptoms of a mental illness may encounter stigma. Stigma in a mental health context is a set of negative and often unfair attitudes or beliefs that society or a group of people have about mental illness.<sup>4</sup> Despite lots of work done to destigmatize mental illness, stigma, as well as prejudice and discrimination towards people with mental illness, still exists in our society.

Stigma can make people with mental illness feel embarrassed, ashamed and/or excluded. It can also make them feel discouraged. Sometimes, these feelings can cause people to stop asking for help, as they try to hide their signs and symptoms instead.

Experiencing stigma can cause people to lose hope and to feel badly about themselves. This can make it difficult to have confidence in who we are and can make it difficult to imagine who we are beyond our mental illness.

Stigma can exist anywhere – in our communities, in the mental health system, even in our own families and within ourselves. Stigma is huge; and self-stigma is even bigger. It's more intimate...it's the deep stuff. It takes someone else's opinion and makes it your own despite it being wrong. People may start to believe all those things and make it part of their life and who they believe they are – and act so.

4. Mental Illness Stigma, Health Direct, Government of Australia.  
[www.healthdirect.gov.au/mental-illness-stigma#:~:text=Stigma%20can%20make%20people%20with,educating%20themselves%20about%20mental%20illnesses.](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au/mental-illness-stigma#:~:text=Stigma%20can%20make%20people%20with,educating%20themselves%20about%20mental%20illnesses.)



# So, what can I do about stigma?



Here are some things that you can do if you feel like you have the capacity to.<sup>5</sup> If you can't do some of these things at the moment, be compassionate and patient with yourself as you move forward in your recovery.

## Get the mental health treatment you need

Try not to let your fear of being labelled or discriminated against stop you from seeking help and treatment. This may be difficult if a service you sought out previously has discriminated against you or stigmatized you. It may be hard to push through and still search for help but there are agencies and mental health workers out there who will help.

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## Do not believe it

If you hear or experience something often enough, you can sometimes start to believe it. Try not to let ignorance of other people influence how you feel about yourself.

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## Remember that you are not your illness

Someone with a broken arm is not a broken arm — they are more than that. So are you! This can be difficult if you experience signs and symptoms 24/7 but keep in mind what you have learned in this course here today.

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5. Points in this section are quoted or adapted from and/or adapted from Mental Illness Stigma, Health Direct, Government of Australia.  
[www.healthdirect.gov.au/mental-illness-stigma#:~:text=Stigma%20can%20make%20people%20with,educating%20themselves%20about%20mental%20illnesses.](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au/mental-illness-stigma#:~:text=Stigma%20can%20make%20people%20with,educating%20themselves%20about%20mental%20illnesses.)

## **It's not personal**

Most discrimination comes from people who don't understand mental illness. Advocate for yourself when you can and educate others on your personal and valuable mental health experiences.

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## **Use facts**

Mental illness is common and is not a sign of weakness. Learn some useful facts and figures and tell people about it.

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## **Stand up to negative stereotypes**

If you have the capacity to, "set the record straight when you hear false or negative information." Be conscious of your own language.

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## **Consider telling your story**

"Speaking out can have a positive impact, especially if it means you stop feeling ashamed when it comes to your mental illness."

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## **Connect with others**

Don't isolate yourself! Get outside that box! Pursue a hobby that you are interested in; go to events that you are interested in where you can meet and connect with others. It may be useful to join a mental health support group and meet others in the same situation. Support or peer groups can be difficult to find, especially in remote areas. Local services may be able to connect you with these resources, either online or in person.

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## **Believe that you can and will recover**

Nurture the belief that you can and will recover!

## EXERCISE

# Reflecting on stigma.

Let's reflect on and talk about the stigma we may have experienced as part of having signs and symptoms of mental illness and how it affected your thinking, feeling, and doing. Considering what we have learned in today's module, how would you respond to a similar situation when you experienced stigma or self-stigma?

# Let's watch a personal recovery story video about identity.



Video to be played by your facilitator during the module.



**VIDEO**

**Created by:** Schizophrenia Society of Canada, ColCon Productions

**Video link:** [player.vimeo.com/video/1063643295](https://player.vimeo.com/video/1063643295)

Reflect and share thoughts about the video if you wish. For example, how did hearing Allison's story about identity make you feel? What inspired you about her story? How does this video fit with your experiences?



# Wrap up and “what did I get from this module?”



Closing discussion and outstanding questions.

Continue to reflect regularly on the person that you are beyond your signs and symptoms of mental illness as well as on that life you want to live.

What will you do with the flower for your day-to-day inspiration? How will you use it when you encounter stigma?

Recognize stigma and self-stigma when it happens and practice ways to deal with it based on what you reflected on and learned here today.

If you have access to photos on your phone or elsewhere (e.g. in a magazine, etc.), find a photo that reflects who you are. It may be a photo of yourself that you like! Hang it somewhere, (along with your flower) to remind you that You are a person, not an illness.



# See below for additional resources and support:



## Coming to Terms with Mental Illness and My Identity

A critical step in accepting my intersecting identities is not letting my mental illness take away from everything I want to be.

VISIT WEBSITE



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## Addressing Stigma

Challenging the stigma associated with mental illness takes understanding, education and a closer look at our own attitudes toward health.

VISIT WEBSITE



These resources can be accessed electronically through the online participant workbooks available at your [yourpersonalrecoveryjourney.ca](https://yourpersonalrecoveryjourney.ca)



# Thank you for participating in this module.

Please **fill in an evaluation** at the end of each module!

Your facilitator will provide you with an evaluation form at the end of each module, or send one to you electronically following each module.

The Schizophrenia Society of Canada would like to acknowledge and thank the Your Personal Recovery Journey Advisory Committee for their meaningful and thoughtful co-creation of the ideas and information contained in these workbooks. An abundance of gratitude to committee members Greg Hodge, Katrina Tinman-Dubois, Allison Dunning, Cam Webster, Maria Alvarez, Joe Veres, Leif Harris, and Ernie Bart for the time, effort, and heart that they put into this important project. Special thanks to Greg and Katrina for their additional direction as a sub-committee as well. And many, many thanks to Fran Schellenberg, who has been a leader of leaders in the mental health movement in Manitoba for over 25 years, for her visionary leadership on this project, under the always capable and caring guidance of Dr. Chris Summerville, CEO of the Schizophrenia Society of Canada and who has been involved in the schizophrenia recovery movement for over 30 years.

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