



**Run your own
Recovery Conversation Café**



Welcome to the Scottish Recovery Network conversation café guide

At Scottish Recovery Network collaboration and lived experience are central to our work. We have extensive experience of working with partners to support wellbeing and recovery using co-design and co-production approaches.

We are committed to ensuring that people and communities are central to any developments that are important to them. Recovery conversation cafés are one way of achieving this.

A recovery conversation café can be for 6-60 or more people and this guide has been developed with this in mind. The guidelines and resources can be adapted to your needs and scale. It is the quality of the experience and discussion that is most important not the number of people involved.

We are aware that people who experience a recovery conversation café are keen to facilitate for themselves. In the spirit of empowerment we have created this guide and resources. Together they provide you with the tools to plan and facilitate your own recovery conversation café.

We hope you find this toolkit useful and look forward to hearing about your experiences.

Resources



Throughout the guide there will be references to the relevant resource in the toolkit. They will be highlighted with



Introduction

To enable a move from traditional consultation approaches Scottish Recovery Network developed the recovery conversation café. This approach creates an environment that facilitates discussion and works towards identifying key priorities. This can make it a valuable part of a wider co-production process:

- Creating a welcoming and empowering environment
- Enabling equal participation
- Facilitating curiosity and dialogue
- Ensuring equality of voice and experience as part of any planning process

This leads to a more engaged process where people feel heard and their views valued. A move from passive responder to active participant where people identify what is important to them, their community and their services.

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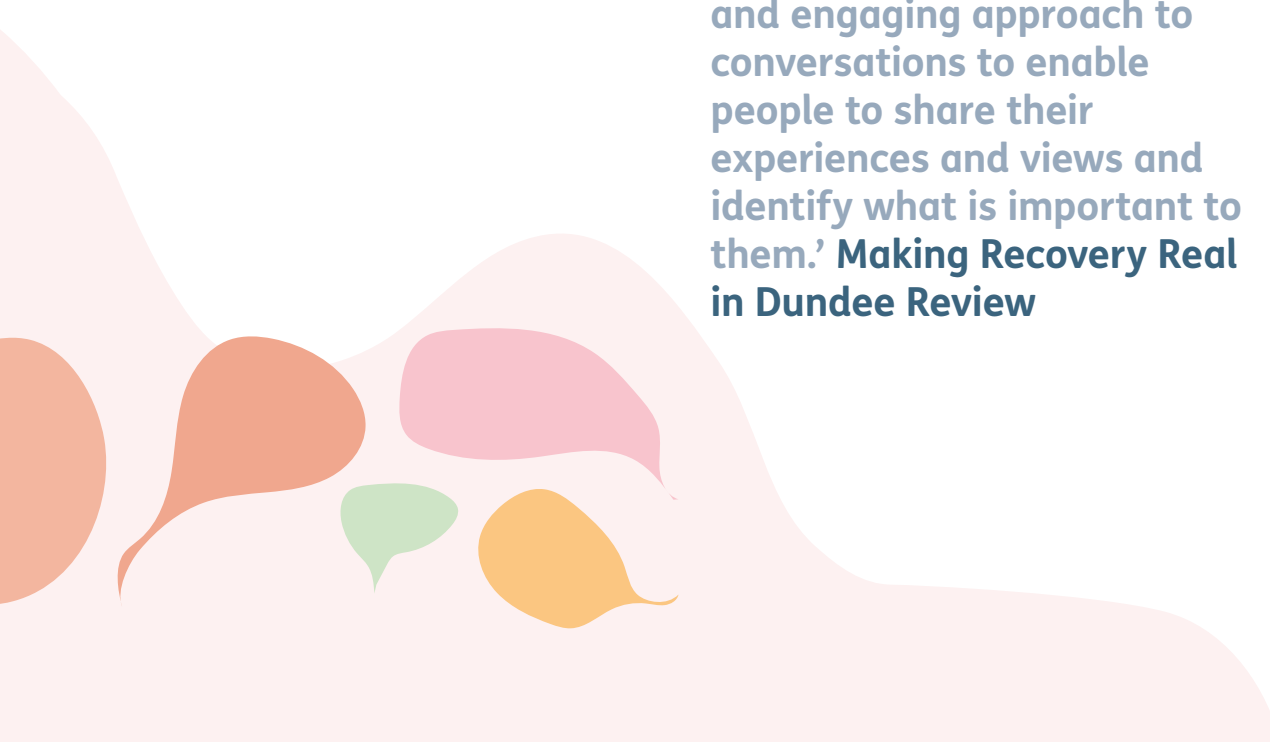
What is a recovery conversation café?

A recovery conversation café is a facilitated process that enables knowledge and experiences from multiple perspectives to develop a way forward.

Some of the best solutions often come about through informal conversations. Historically the opening of coffee houses in the 17th and 18th centuries attracted great thinkers who came together to discuss matters of the day. They were seen to be a threat to established governments!

The format of the recovery conversation café seeks to recreate the informality of a café with the structure of creating an enabling environment. This encourages an informal and nurturing approach to dialogue.

‘... designed informality helps to create a welcoming and engaging approach to conversations to enable people to share their experiences and views and identify what is important to them.’ Making Recovery Real in Dundee Review



Why use this approach?

Great question! It disrupts power and welcomes every participant as someone with valued knowledge and experience.

Engagement and participation is a requirement across the health and social care sector. This approach encourages a co-design and co-production process where people are involved at all stages.

What makes this approach distinct is that power and hierarchy are deliberately disrupted to rebalance power. People with lived experience often talk about the tokenistic nature of involvement and participation activities. This process facilitates a more active and equal involvement that encourages people to listen to each other and build on their ideas.

Recovery conversation cafés:

- Bring people together as people not roles
- Explore what is important to people
- Identify what we have already
- Decide what we want to make happen

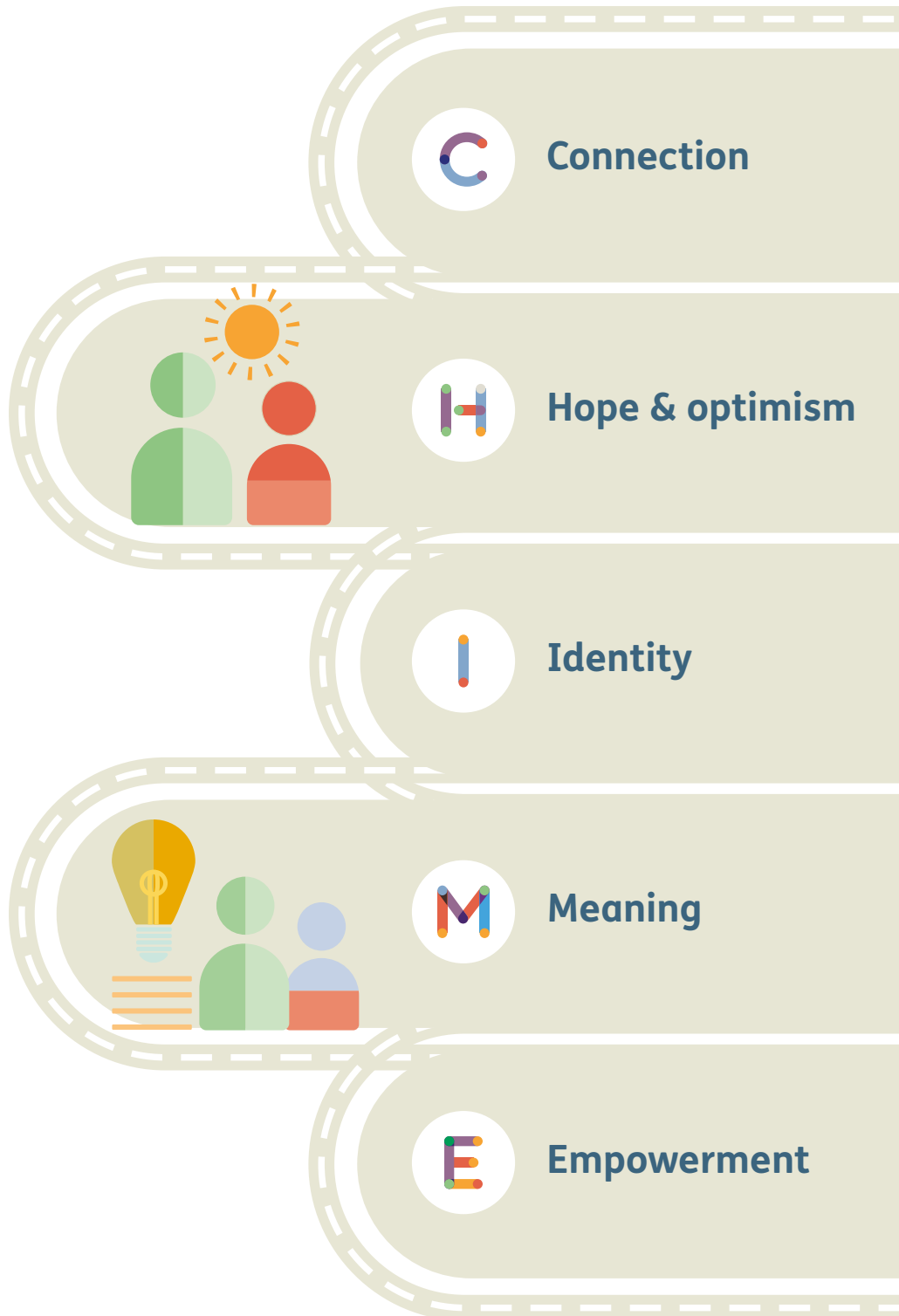
Recovery conversation cafés have contributed towards:

- Increasing participation and involvement opportunities
- Developing deeper understanding of a topic
- Local strategy development
- Local service design



How recovery makes a conversation café different?

A recovery approach offers us a framework for engagement centred on people and their experiences. This focuses our attention and energy on what people say is important to their wellbeing and recovery, and how communities and services can best meet what people need.



At Scottish Recovery Network we use the CHIME framework which describes five key concepts that support recovery. CHIME provides an excellent framework to ensure that what we do and the way we deliver conversation cafés is recovery focused.

Personal recovery

- Relationships
- Support from others
- Being part of the community
- Peer support

Conversation café

- Who needs to be in the room?
- How can we enable?
- Learning from each other
- Working together



- Belief in recovery
- Motivation to change
- Having dreams and aspirations

- Belief that the knowledge is in the room
- Belief that we can build a better future through collaboration

- Rebuilding positive sense of self
- Overcoming stigma

- Bringing our whole selves to café
- Participate as a person not in particular role



- Having sense of purpose
- Making sense of our experiences

- Listening to each other with curiosity and to understand

- Control over own life
- Strengths focused
- Ability to respond to life situations

- People feel listened to and valued
- Power is shared
- Collaboration is the approach



Getting Started

A key part of a recovery approach is being strengths based. This means focussing on strengths, potential and aspirations rather than focusing on gaps, deficits and needs. Our experience is that this is a critical ingredient to the learning, knowledge and experience generated from recovery conversation cafés.

Why a strengths based approach is important

When we focus on deficits such as asking what's wrong and what's not gone well the narrative and tone of events can become stuck. Focusing on what is important to people and their vision of what 'good' looks and feels like opens up the conversation.

What's working well?

What could make this even better?

Versus

What are the problems?

What gaps need to be addressed?

Interestingly, it is still possible to identify 'need' and 'areas for development' by framing what we are asking people in a strengths based way.

Start with a question to identify:

- **What the need is that requires answering**
- **The burning issue that needs to be explored**
- **The change that needs to happen**

Doing this helps you define the purpose of your conversation café and sets the foundation for the conversation.

Explore power from the start! This approach is designed to create an environment where power is shared. Bringing people together as equals creates opportunities to share our humanity as we create common ground, build connection and connectivity.

Recognise and be open about where power lies. Trust needs to be built and the approach you take is key, especially in relation to decision making and taking work forward.



Planning is key!

Get some people around you to help plan and deliver the recovery conversation café. Ideally think about who you need to involve that will bring a mix of experience, skills and networks. You may want or need to take some time to build trust to ensure that issues of power and sharing of roles and responsibilities are considered. This planning group, whether formal or informal, will not only help you plan and deliver the recovery conversation café but will also help to encourage participation.

TOOLKIT

Event planning checklist

Who to invite?

It is important to get the right mix of people and experiences involved. No one person or group holds all the answers. Think about:

- Who to involve?
- How to promote participation?
- What barriers to participation need addressed?

TOOLKIT

Key participant checklist



It is a good idea to have someone take photographs over the course of your event. Photographs are a good way of capturing moments. They can be used to create social media posts, used in reports and highlight stories of the event. Consent for both taking photographs and using images is important. You can include in your General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) planning.

Create the environment

How we create a great recovery conversation café environment makes a difference. Providing a warm welcoming space sets the tone. To do this we need to think about the physical space and also the social or participative environment.

For a welcoming physical space:

- Think about the venue you choose – is it accessible, natural daylight, meets your IT needs?
- Create a café environment with small tables of up to 8 people each
- Cover the tables with paper for doodling – paper tablecloths, flipchart paper and rolls of children's drawing paper all work
- Provide refreshments –tea and cake!
- Have coloured pens, fidget toys and fruit/ sweets on tables
- Stretch the budget (if you can) and have flowers on the table

For a participative environment:

- Greet people as they arrive for registration
- Have a welcome team who make themselves available for chat and pointing out facilities as people arrive – it can be daunting walking into a room and sitting on your own
- Encourage people to come as themselves rather than the roles they inhabit – it is surprising just how much this helps people relate to each other as equals. Ask people to remove lanyards and workplace I.D.
- Think about how you use name badges – first name only, whether pre-printed or people design their own
- Use the Recovery conversation café etiquette as a way to set the tone/ground rules for the discussion
- Create ambience with background music



Conversation café etiquette should cover:

- Everyone gets the chance to speak (if they want)
- Everyone's ideas and experiences are valid and welcome
- We listen with curiosity and respect
- It is more important to understand each other than agree

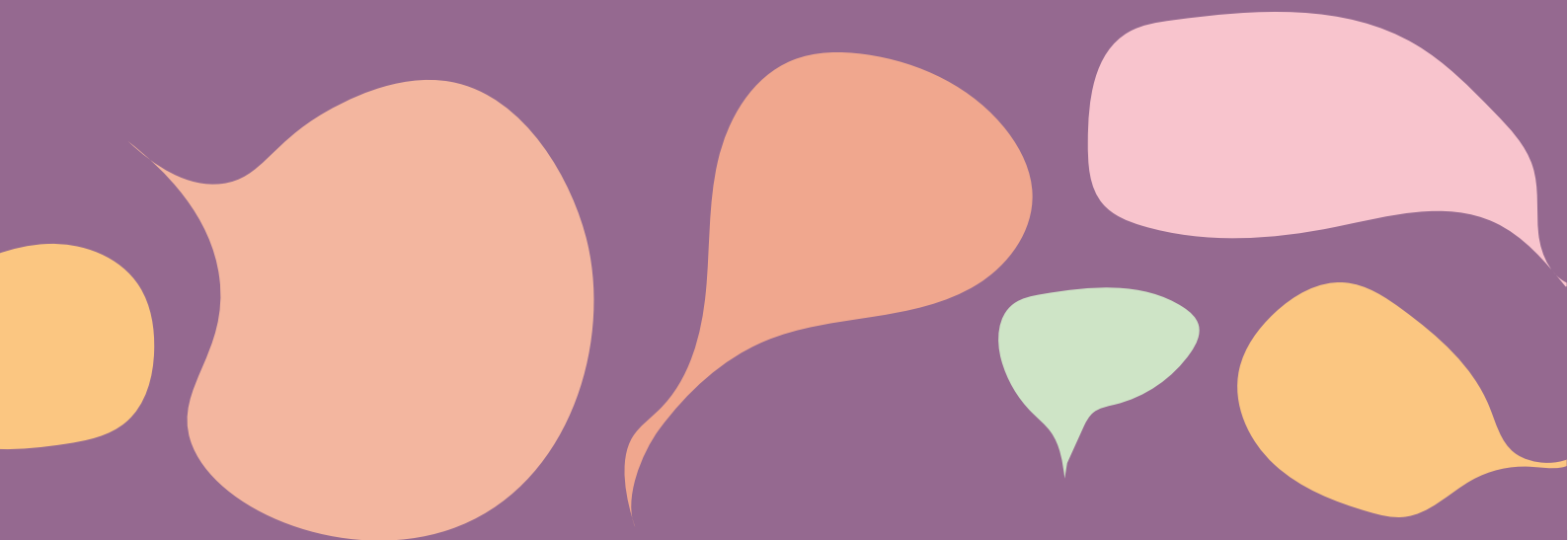
TOOLKIT

Recovery conversation café etiquette

Your budget will determine the extent to which you can provide some of the things listed but many are just about a way of being with others. You can create a welcoming and participative space with little or no budget.



**‘You were there as yourself,
not as your role and
function...That felt different,
it felt that I was able to
contribute more freely, I
felt better able to connect
with people that were
there, breaking some of
those barriers or myths and
misconceptions.’**



Recovery conversation café structure

Recovery conversation cafés can be as creative and unique as the people involved. The basic structure includes:

- Welcome and scene setting
- Connecting exercise
- 3 rounds of questions to stimulate discussion
- Summary
- Close

Welcome and scene setting

Key to any successful event is the introduction. Welcome participants into the room. Talk through the structure and process. Refer to the Recovery conversation café etiquette. It is helpful to have a copy of this on each table.

TOOLKIT

Recovery conversation
café etiquette

When setting the scene we would suggest focusing on the purpose and process. Try not to provide too much background or presentations on current activity etc as this can impose an agenda and limit the discussion.

Connecting

Starting the event with a connecting exercise encourages people to share a little of themselves, acts as an energiser and sets the tone for the event.

A great equaliser is to focus on wellbeing as it's something we all have. This means asking people to share something they do regularly to stay well or something they are looking forward to this week. It is through sharing our experiences that we connect with each other.

An example of a connecting exercise is included in the toolkit.

TOOLKIT

Wellbeing tea exercise

Wellbeing teacup



The power of conversation!

The conversation section is the opportunity for the people participating to engage in dialogue that matters to them.

The belief that ‘we are wiser together’ informs the process. When we talk together about things that matter to us, we can create collective power. Experience suggests that 3 rounds of conversation make a good recovery conversation café!

Start off each round of conversation with a question.

Why a question?

You don't know what the answer will be!

Knowledge emerges in response to powerful questions. The aim is to understand a way forward that works for everyone. Develop questions that are relevant to the real-life concerns of the participants. This involves exploring ideas, experiences and different ways of doing and thinking about things. Powerful questions help attract collective energy, insight and action.

Creating powerful questions

Well crafted questions attract energy and focus our attention on what really matters.

Use open ended questions that invite curiosity, exploration and dialogue. Design each question to take the conversation deeper into the subject.



A powerful question:

- Is open ended
- Is simple and clear
- Is thought provoking
- Generates energy
- Focuses inquiry
- Surfaces unconscious assumptions
- Opens new possibilities

Some examples are:



What would we experience in a recovery focused service?

How would we know we have got there?

What would peer support workers add to the service?

What is working well?

Support your questions by providing context and spark ideas. Think creatively about how to do this in ways that engage and build connection to the purpose of the event. In other words rely less on PowerPoint and presentations. Use personal stories, videos and share only enough information to act as a catalyst for the next round of discussion.

Pose the question or themes for rounds of conversation and make sure that the question is visible to everyone on a PowerPoint, flip chart and/or on cards at each table.

Provide table hosts with the questions and prompts to help support the discussions.

Remember to think about how you take a strengths based approach.

Role of table host

Each recovery conversation café table should have someone who will gently encourage and stimulate discussion and participation.

We use the term ‘table host’ as it is more friendly and feels less intimidating than table facilitator.

You can identify potential table hosts beforehand or on the day. Share with them the Table host guide which you can personalise with your own information.

TOOLKIT

Table host guide

Summary

- Decide on how you want to gather the information generated and key points from the event
- Invite each table to feedback in some way
- Explain what will happen next and how information will be shared from the event
- Where the recovery conversation café is part of a larger co-design, co-produced process ask people to keep engaged and involved



Suggestions

Encourage participants to use the CHIME framework to support their thoughts and conversation.

Think about what is a good length of time for each discussion – 25 mins each works well. Give a reminder at 20 mins to encourage summing up of key ideas and bring discussion to a close.

Participants could stay within the same group for the whole session or encourage people to move tables between conversations. This creates opportunities for thinking and ideas to spread around the room.

There are different ways to capture ideas:

- Encourage people to doodle on the ‘tablecloths’
- Table hosts ask group to agree key points of the discussion and note down. Could use pre-prepared paper, cards, Post-It notes
- Build on each new round of discussions with a brief overview of the previous discussion
- Vote on key priorities – either in discussion groups or as a whole group



Evaluation

Create a meaningful end to the event by inviting people to take a few moments to think about their experience.

Ideas to use:

- Write on Post-Its and add to a large shared wall (flipchart)
- Focus on thinking, feeling and action– ask people what they learned (head), what they felt (heart) and what they will do (hand)
- Share at their tables or ask for some feedback as a large group
- Complete an evaluation form

TOOLKIT

Individual evaluation form

Table/group evaluation form

Close

Bring the event to a close in the way we started – with a focus on wellbeing.

Ask people to think of one thing they will do that day that focuses on nurturing their mental wellbeing. Encourage them to write it down on the back of their teacup as a reminder.

Explain next steps and thank everyone for their hard work and contribution.



**‘Really amazing how 6 people
who don’t know each other
can have such a wonderful
exchange.’**

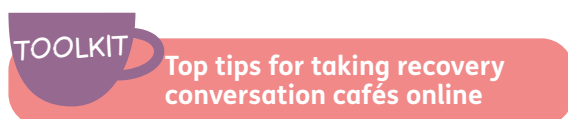


Taking recovery conversation cafés online

Why not run an online conversation café as well as or instead of your face-to-face event?

Online video conferencing tools (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meetups) provide an opportunity to be more accessible. It allows you to engage with people who find it difficult to join face-to-face groups, have limited time or find travel a barrier to getting involved.

Many of the processes talked about in this guide can be transferred to an online environment. We have created a handy Top tips for taking recovery conversation cafés online infograph as part of this toolkit.



‘This has been about more than just getting people together to talk... I have learnt a lot from the experience and it’s been great to hear about your experience, talk about my experience and properly connect with people.’



Next steps

The information you get from a recovery conversation café is like gold dust.

Following on from the event there will likely be a lot of information to pull together from people's contributions on the day. This information might be on Post-It notes, worksheets or flipcharts depending on what you decided for the event itself.

If you have a planning group the responsibility of compiling this information can be shared with one person pulling together the learning. Think creatively and use different formats e.g. written reports, animations, graphic storytelling, podcasts. People value being kept informed about the process and what change has happened as a result.

Keeping in contact

Think about what you send out to people and make sure it's engaging and stimulating. Consider how you illustrate the information as you want people to:

- Be interested in engaging with what you have sent them
- Explicitly see the contributions of the day
- Be kept up-to-date with what is planned/developing from the knowledge created
- Feel empowered to get involved in future opportunities

Simple ways to keep informed could be via:

- E-mail
- Social media platforms
- Newsletters
- Short films and animations

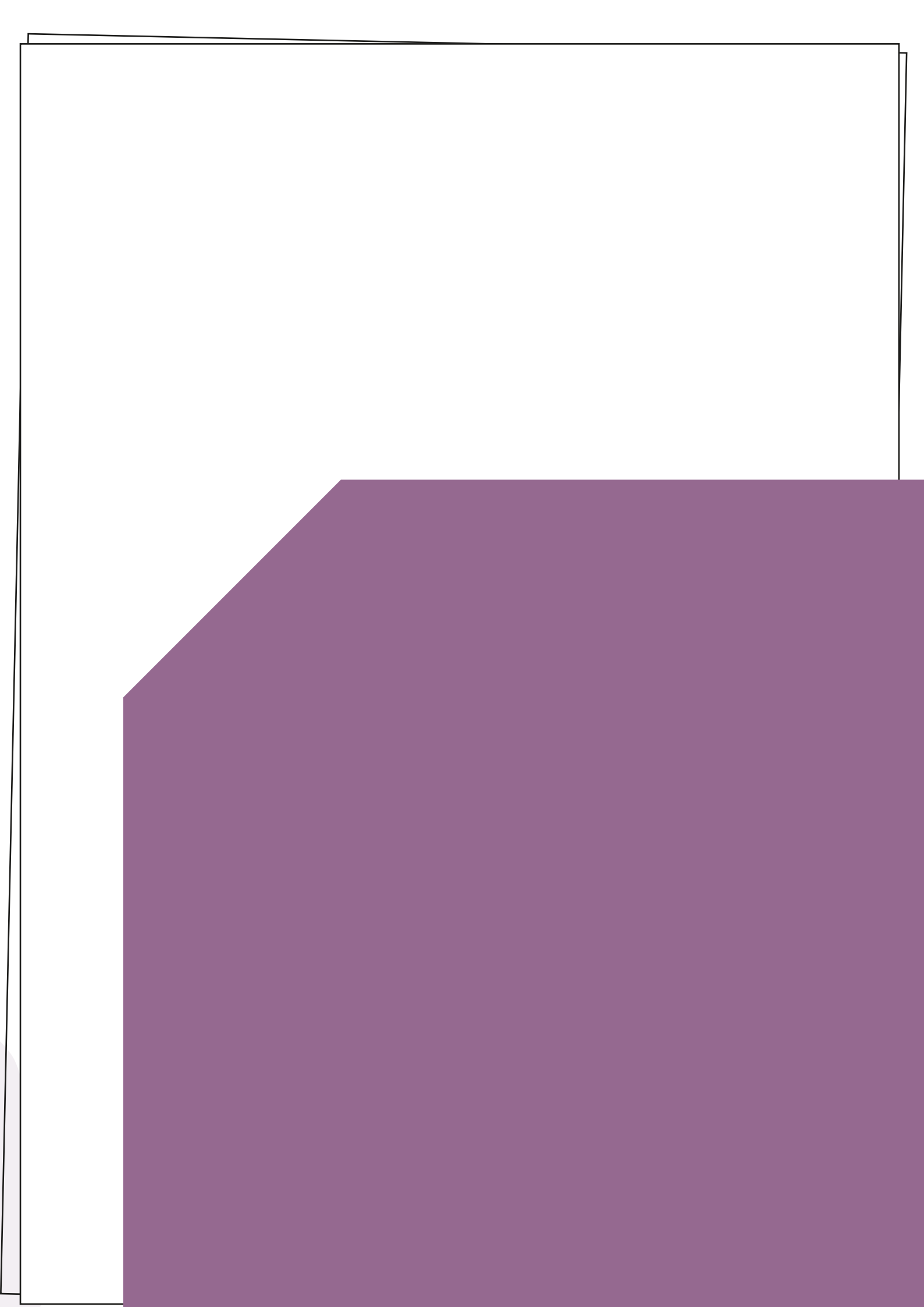
Over to you!!



The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

Plan how you are going to share this information and ensure that people have given their permission for their contact details to be kept. Ensure that any images used only include people who have given permission. Keep a record of permissions.





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**Together we can make
mental health recovery real**

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