



THE LEARNING BRAIN

Each week in BCPVPA eNews, we share tips, links and self-assessment tools that will help our members to better understand the mental health continuum, and to use the resources that are available.

bcpvpa.bc.ca/thelearningbrain

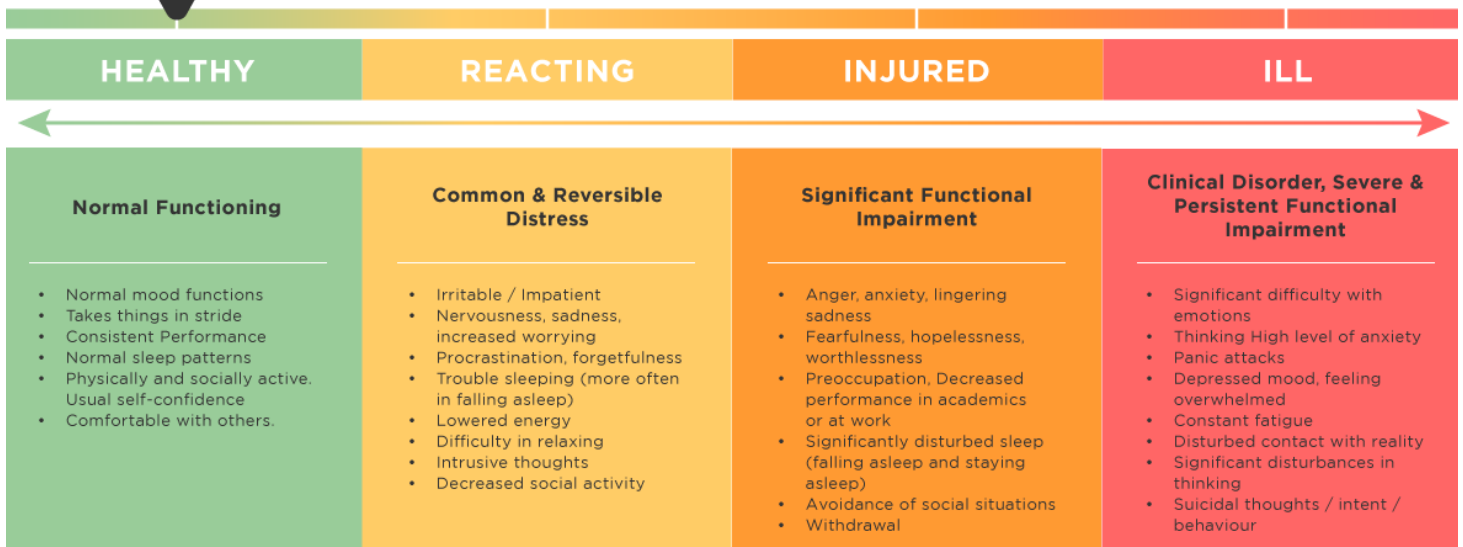
Friday June 19, 2020

A SUMMER OF OPPORTUNITY

By Rochelle Morandini



The Mental Health Continuum



Source: sapience.com.au

The last few months have certainly felt strained and have been full of concerning news. Our lives are certainly different now than they were when I started this series. However, the learnings are more important now than ever!

Take a moment and do a check-in. Where are you right now on the mental health continuum?

Soon, the summer break will be here. Ask yourself: what can you do for yourself this summer? What commitment can you make to yourself and to those you support, that will help you move 'leftwards' on the continuum?

RESILIENCE - STRENGTHENING IN THE SUN

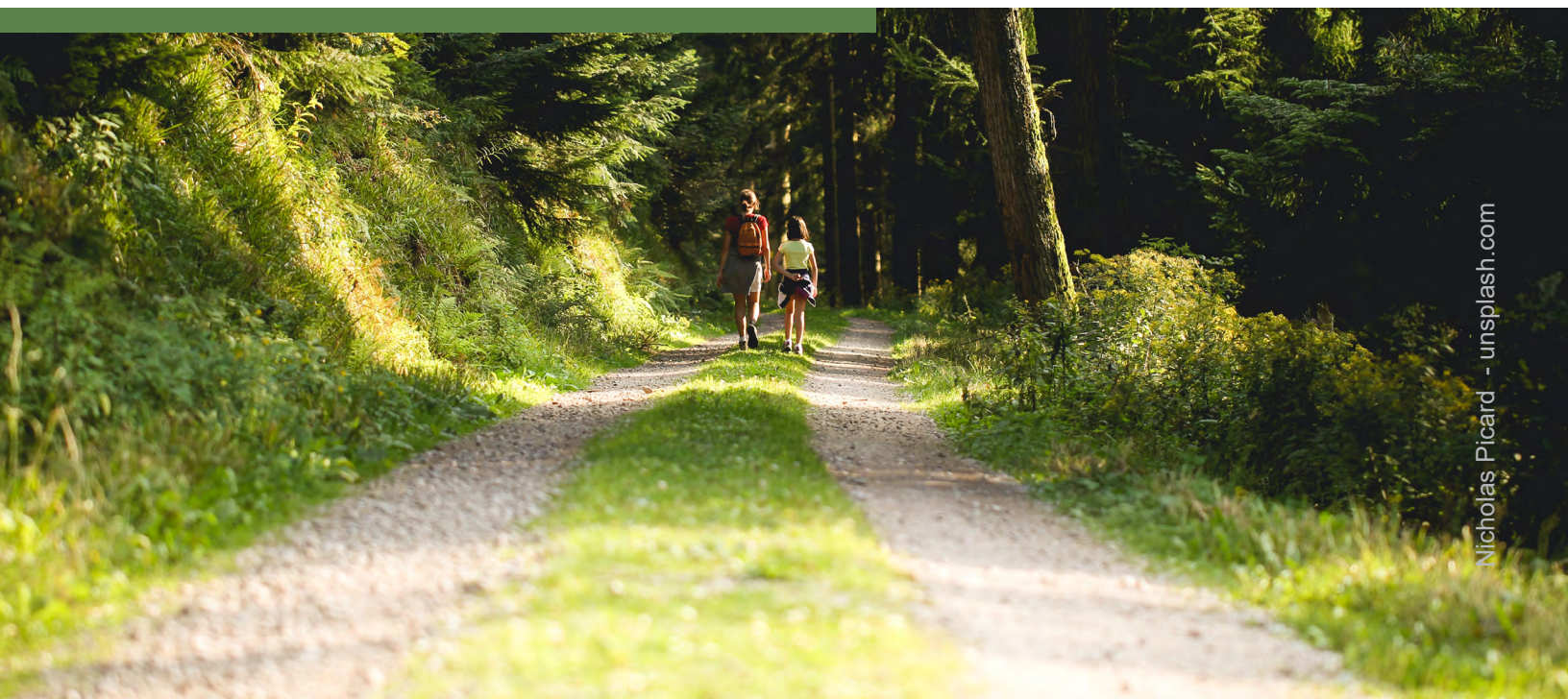
What better time is there to invest in yourself than the next two summer months? You can take small steps to build your resilience. By building resilience, you can start work in September with more energy and enhanced well-being!

Build your resilience by:

- Getting connected, and investing in and nurturing relationships
- Setting a goal each day that is meaningful for you
- Remaining hopeful
- Considering how to change your perspective when you are trapped in negative thinking — be creative!
- Being proactive: don't ignore problems – make a plan and move forward one step at a time

Boost resilience and practice self-care for 10 weeks by:

- **Exercising:** elevated cardio, in particular, has shown to have a tremendous impact on our mood and mental health.
 - Schedule in 30 minutes a day! It does not have to be all at once. Even if it is 10 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise 3 times a day. [Watch this video](#) to find out what intensity level is right for you!



- **Eating the right foods:** Fuel your body with food that supports your overall well-being.
 - June to September are great months for us British Columbians, due to all the wonderful local foods in season, such as salmon, Fraser Valley berries, and Okanagan fruit.

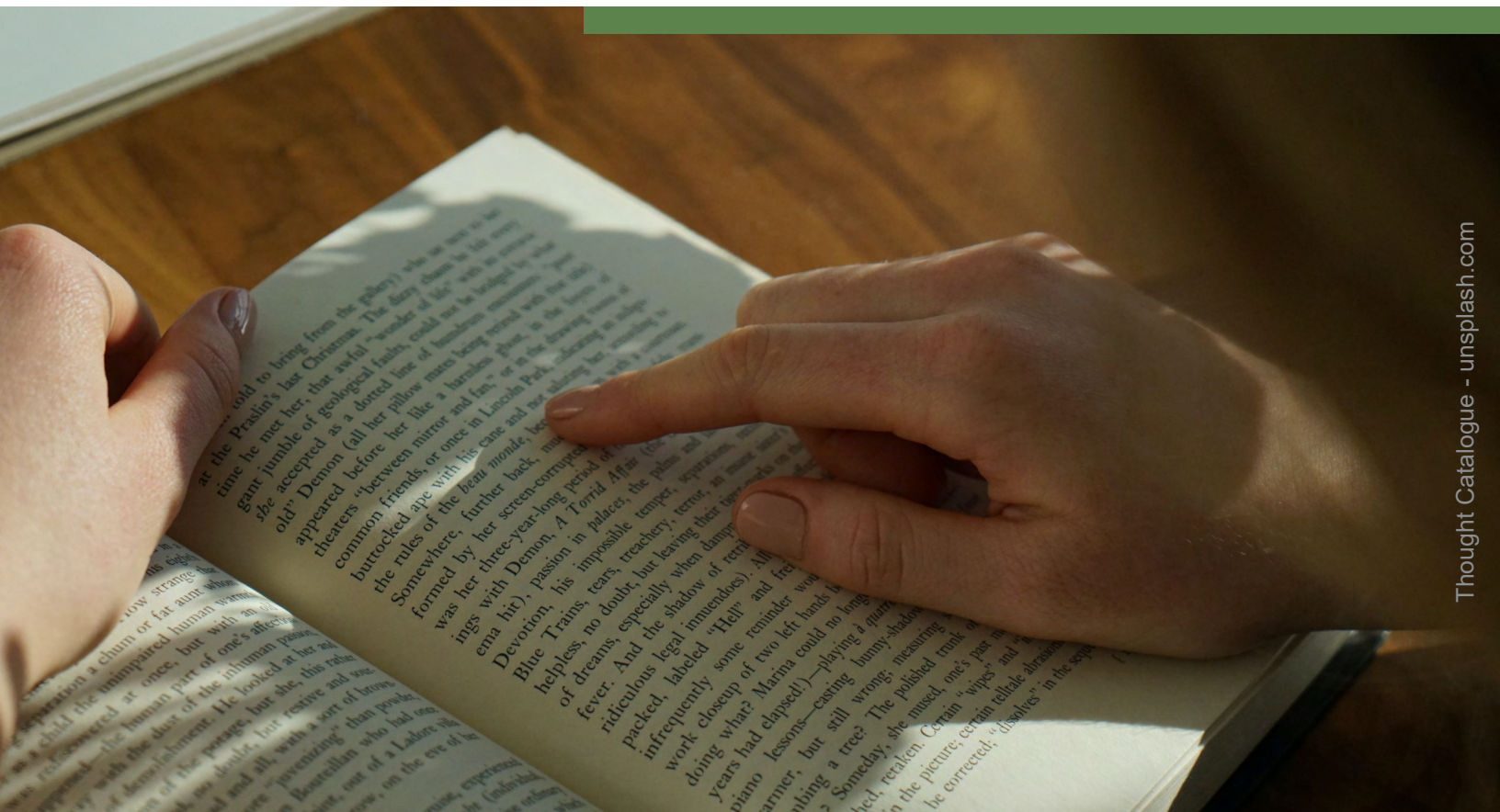
Stick with these great foods for the brain:

- Green, leafy vegetables – don't forget broccoli as well!
- Fatty fish
- Berries – particularly blueberries
- Oranges
- Nuts and seeds – particularly almonds, walnuts and pumpkin seeds
- Coffee and green tea (in moderation)
- Turmeric
- Eggs

For more information, check out [this link!](#)



I don't know about you, but for me, summer time means patios, champagne by the campfire, and Baileys in my coffee (not all at once!). It is nice to have these treats as we relax and enjoy some festivities; however, it is important to be cautious with these self-soothing activities and other substances. When not managed carefully, they can often add to your stress and worsen your mental health.



REST

This is a critical one! Our body and our brains rely heavily on rest and sleep to *develop, learn, recover and restore*. We often sacrifice our rest to squeeze more things into our day – but what are we sacrificing in the end?

More than 40% of people with chronic health conditions also suffer from insomnia. And this statistic gets even more alarming when you look at the relationship between poor sleep and mental health.

So: do your body, brain and nerves a favour. Develop habits this summer that help you rest and refresh your body. And then, hopefully, you can carry these habits with you into the fall.

Here are some habits that encourage rest:

- Breathing techniques to help you regulate and calm your system. This is easy to do, several times a day for only a few minutes each time. These short spurts will minimize the tiring impact of stress on your well-being.
- Get the right amount of sleep! Take time this summer to set a better sleep pattern and rhythm for the fall.
 - Remember, the Public Health Agency of Canada recommends that adults get 7-9 hours of sleep a night.¹



Annie Spratt - unsplash.com

Here are 10 tips to help you sleep better: ²

1. **Avoid drinking caffeine close to bedtime.**
2. **Avoid drinking alcohol close to bedtime.**
3. **Unwind:** Stress has a big impact on sleep, so it's important to take time to relax before bed.
4. **Exercise before bedtime — but not within 2 to 4 hours of sleeping.**

¹ <https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/wellness-module/wellness-module-6-getting-a-good-nights-sleep>

² <https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/wellness-module/wellness-module-6-getting-a-good-nights-sleep>

5. **Follow the same routine.** Try to keep the same sleep and wake schedule every day—including weekends.
6. **Avoid naps if you experience sleep problems.**
7. **Avoid going to bed too hungry or too full.**
8. **Get up if you do not fall asleep within half an hour.** Go back to bed once you feel drowsy.
9. **Make your bedroom comfortable and only use it for sleeping.**
10. **Challenge the belief that you can't function without a perfect night's sleep.**



See the [full version here!](#)

If you are struggling to get a good night's sleep or want to sleep better (quantity and quality!), there are helpful apps and even sleep treatment (check out [Haleo](#)) available.

Cognitive behaviour therapy via [Haleo](#) and assessment tools via the app can really help get you on the right path. And even better, this type of therapy can be covered by your extended health benefits.

POSITIVE THINKING TO START YOUR HOLIDAYS

It may take some effort, but our brains and physiology could benefit from some positive vibes these days. Perhaps try practising some positive psychology:

1. ***Start the day with positive affirmation.***
2. ***Focus on the good things, however small.***
3. ***Find humour in bad situations.***
4. ***Turn failures into lessons.***

5. Transform negative self-talk into positive self-talk.

6. Focus on the present — not today, not this hour, only this exact moment.

7. Surround yourself with positive friends, mentors and co-workers.



For those of you finding yourselves struggling in the middle to the right side of the continuum, summer is an excellent time to seek help.

Please don't hesitate to...

- Visit your physician – virtually or in person.
- Book a counsellor.
- Contact your [Employee Assistance Program](#) or the [EIP](#).
- Research other treatment modalities, such as neurofeedback, and see if it is right for you.
- Please **DO NOT** let stigma get in the way of your path to feeling better. The next 8

weeks can make all the difference in turning around how you feel and enhancing your well-being. Reach out and get support.

- Get in touch with me at **604-689-3399**! I can direct you to resources.



Last word, for now...

- **Take care of yourself.**
- **Remember to take time to play.**
- **Laugh loud and often!**
- **And, if you haven't yet, try mindfulness meditation** – or just find ways to calm your mind a few times a day. There are lots of guided meditation options on YouTube if you just want to try. Try one with your kids! It will be safe.
 - Check out mindfulness apps, such as Calm, Headspace, or Buddhify

Mindfulness can benefit our mental health in many ways. To name a few ways, mindfulness can:

- *Calm our mind;*
- *Reduce our stress;*
- *Improve our memory and concentration;*
- *Enhance our creativity;*
- *Decrease our emotional reactivity;*
- *Increase our empathy; and,*
- *Improve our mood and resilience.*

We wish you a wonderful summer, full of song, dance, and relaxation — like this guy in this [quick video clip](#)!

Stay tuned for The Learning Brain series to start up again in the Fall!

We will explore different coping skills and how to identify and develop those skills to strengthen our mental fortitude.



**WHAT OTHER HEALTH
TOPICS DO YOU WANT TO
LEARN MORE ABOUT?**



Let us know on our Twitter
and Instagram this week!
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engage, share and comment!