



Your Mental Health: An introduction

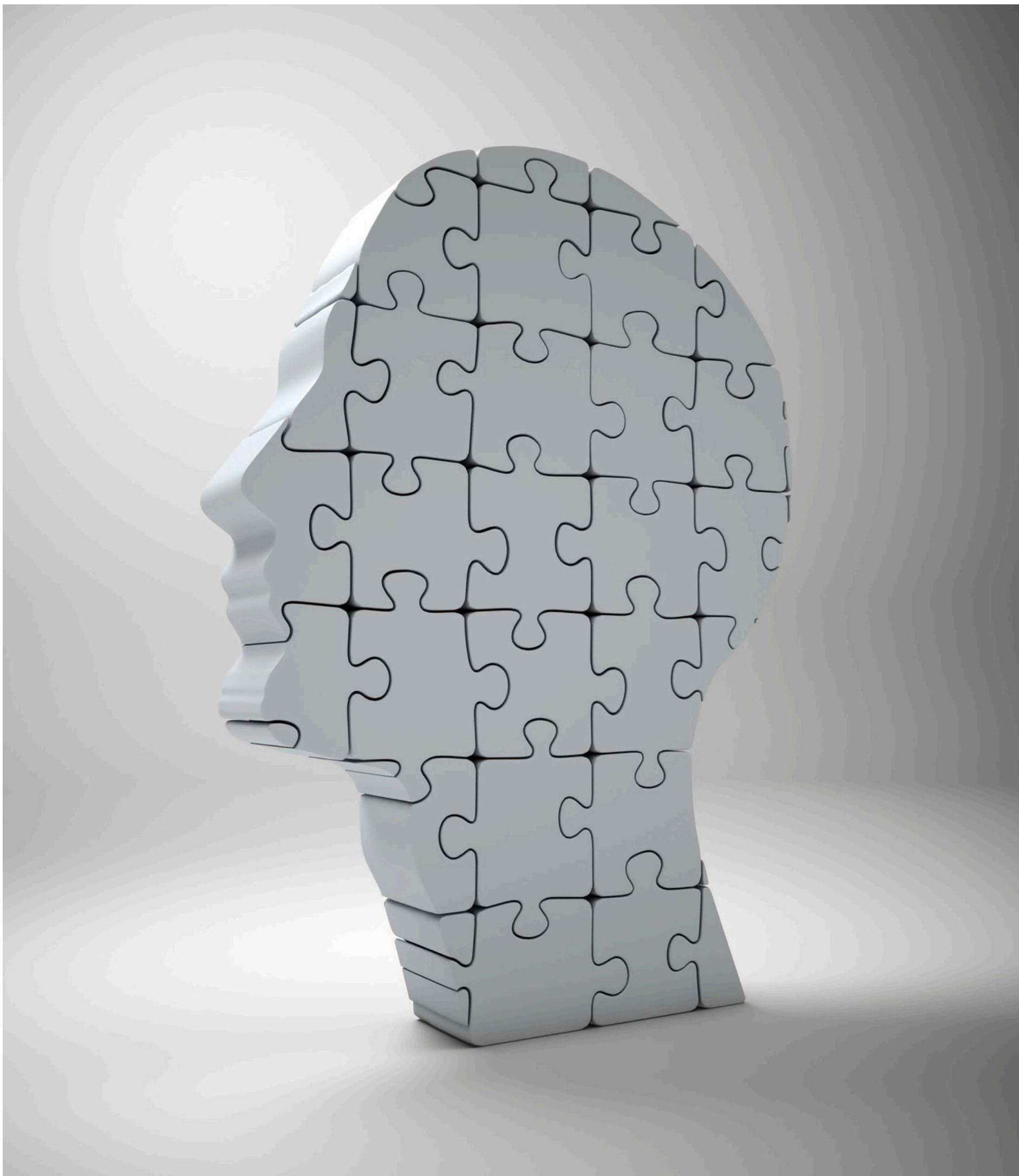


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Mental health: An Introduction

Reclaiming Our Peace: Mental Health for the Journey After Incarceration

Welcome. This workbook was made for you. If you're holding this, you're already doing something powerful: choosing to look at your mental health, to understand yourself better, and to find new ways to deal with life's challenges. That takes guts. That takes strength. Reentry is no small thing. It can come with pressure, expectations, and emotions that feel all over the place. But here's the truth: you are not alone, and you are not broken. You are human. This space is yours to explore, reflect, and grow. Use this workbook however you need. Take your time. Be real with yourself. You deserve peace. You deserve healing. Let's reclaim it together.

Reflection:

What brought you to this workbook today?

- **Example:** *I've been feeling stuck lately and needed something to help me sort through my thoughts. I saw this workbook and thought it might help me figure things out.*

What are you hoping to get out of it?

- **Example:** *I'm hoping to find healthier ways to deal with stress and start feeling more in control of my life.*

Write your answers for the following:

- What made you try out our workbook today?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

2-3 Why Mental Health Hits Different During Reentry

Mental health isn't just about diagnoses or therapy. It's about how we handle stress, relationships, pressure, and decisions.

During reentry, you may feel overwhelmed by responsibility, unsure about trust, or even numb. That's normal. When you take care of your mental health, everything else becomes more manageable. You think clearer. You react slower. You stay grounded.

Reflection:

What kind of pressure or stress are you dealing with right now?

Example: I'm feeling pressure to find a job fast while also trying to reconnect with my kids. It's hard to balance both.

How do you usually handle it?

Example: I usually shut down or isolate when it gets to be too much, but I want to find better ways to deal with it.

Write your answers for the following:

- What kind of pressure or stress are you dealing with right now?
- How do you usually handle it?

4-5 Breaking the Silence: The Truth About Mental Health Stigma

In most of communities, and families talking about mental health can feel like breaking a rule. Or worse that any reference to mental health means that you are weak. We are constantly told to “be tough.” But real strength isn’t ignoring our painful past or experiences. Ignoring our pain actually is actually what makes us weak. Ignoring our pain and not facing it so that we can be free from it makes us weak, self-medicate, self-destructive, angry and bitter.

“Be strong.” “Don’t cry.” “Keep it moving.”

But silence doesn’t equal strength. Real strength is facing what’s we are dealing with inside of us.

Myth vs. Fact Chart

- **Myth:** Therapy is for weak people.
- **Fact:** Therapy is for people who want to grow and heal.
- **Myth:** Only crazy people have mental health issues.
- **Fact:** Everyone has mental health. It’s part of being human.
-

Reflection:

What were you told growing up about mental health?

- **Example:** *I was told to keep my feelings to myself and never show weakness. That made me feel like I had to deal with everything alone.*

How do those beliefs serve or limit you today?

- **Example:** *That belief has made it hard for me to trust others or ask for help, but now I'm learning that it's okay to open up and take care of myself.*

Write your answers for the following:

What were you told growing up about mental health?

6-7 What Trauma Really Is (And Why It's Not Your Fault)

Trauma is not just one bad event. It's what happens inside you when you go through too much, too fast, with not enough support. Incarceration is trauma. So is violence, betrayal, poverty, and loss. You might feel numb, angry, jumpy, shut down, or always on edge. That's your body doing its best to protect you. You are not crazy. You are not weak. You are reacting to pain.

Reflection:

- **What's something you've survived that changed how you see the world?**
- ***Example:** I survived years in a toxic relationship where I always had to walk on eggshells. Now I value peace and respect in every connection I make.*

Write your answer:

What's something you've survived that changed how you see the world?

-8- Mental Health vs. Mental Illness

Mental health is like physical health. We all have it. Some days it's strong. Some days it needs care.

Mental illness refers to diagnosed conditions like PTSD, anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, etc. You can have good mental health and still have a diagnosis—and you can struggle without a diagnosis.

Mental Health Spectrum Chart:

Thriving	Struggling	Overwhelmed
Calm, focused	Anxious, tired	Panicked, depressed
Good sleep, energy	Moods are constantly Up and down	Explosive, numb, shut down

9-10-The Trap of Self-Medicating

When life hurts, we look for ways to stop the pain. Alcohol, drugs, risky behavior, even isolation can feel like quick fixes. But they don't heal. They just hide the wound. This isn't about shame. It's about understanding that pain needs care, not cover-ups.

Covering Up the Problem Leads to:	UnCovering the Problem Leads to:
Hate: self, others, anything and everything	Love: self, others, life

Reflection:

What do you turn to when life gets overwhelming?

- **Example:** *When things get too stressful, I usually smoke or scroll on my phone for hours just to block everything out.*

How do those habits help or hurt you?

- **Example:** *It helps in the moment because I feel numb, but it keeps me from dealing with the real problem and makes me feel worse later.*

Write your answers for the following:

What do you turn to when life gets overwhelming?

How do those habits help or hurt you?

11-12 Building Awareness: The First Step to Freedom

You can't change what you don't notice. Self-awareness helps you slow down and choose your next move.

Daily Mental Check-In:

- **What am I feeling right now?**
- **Example:** *I feel tense and a little angry, like I'm holding something in.*
- **What thoughts are running through my mind?**
- **Example:** *I'm thinking about an argument I had earlier and wondering if I messed up.*
- **What does my body feel like?**
- **Example:** *My shoulders are tight, and my jaw is clenched. I haven't taken a deep breath in a while.*

Reflection:
Write your answers for the following:

How are you feeling right now, really?
What do you need in this moment?

13-14 Everyday Mental Health Practices

Mental health tools don't have to be complicated:

- Deep breathing
- Taking a walk
- Listening to music
- Writing your thoughts down
- Talking to someone you trust

Practice	How to Use It Daily
Deep breathing	Set a timer and take 5 deep breaths before starting your day or when feeling tense.
Taking a walk	Take a 10-minute walk after meals or when you feel overwhelmed.
Listening to music	Create a playlist that lifts your mood and listen during stressful moments.
Writing your thoughts	Keep a small notebook and write down 3 thoughts or feelings each evening.
Talking to someone	Call or text a trusted friend or peer once a day, even just to check in.

5-Minute Mental Reset:

- 1. Breathe in for 4 seconds. Hold for 4. Breathe out for 6.
- 2. Name 3 things you see, hear, or feel.
- 3. Say something kind to yourself.

Try This:

Commit to 1 mental health practice today. How did it feel?

Who’s In Your Corner? Rebuilding Trust + Support

Healing doesn’t happen alone. We all need people who see us, support us, and keep it real.

Green Flags:

- Listens without judging
- Encourages you to grow
- Shows up when it matters

Red Flags:

- Makes you feel small
- Uses you
- Dismisses your feelings

Reflection:

Who makes you feel safe?

***Example:** My aunt always makes me feel safe because she listens without judging and reminds me I can start over.*

Who drains your energy?

***Example:** One of my old friends always brings drama and pressures me to go back to old habits. It makes me feel tense and off balance.*

Write Your Answers:

- Who makes you feel safe?
- Who drains your energy?

15-16 Coping—The Good, the Bad, and the Real
Swap This for That

Instead of...	Try...
Getting high	Going for a walk, music
Shutting down	Journaling, talking to someone
Exploding	Deep breaths, taking a pause

Try This:

Name 2 ways you want to start coping better this month.

Mental Health + Choices: Think Before You React

Big emotions lead to fast reactions. But fast isn’t always right.

Trigger + Response Mapping:

- Trigger: Someone disrespects you
- Emotion: Anger
- Old Reaction: Fight or yell
- New Choice: Step back, breathe, speak when calm

Reflection:

Think of a moment when you lost control.

Example: *I snapped at my partner during an argument and said things I didn’t mean. I felt bad after because I didn’t want to hurt them.*

What could help you next time?

Example: *Taking a short walk to cool off or using breathing exercises before I say anything. Maybe stepping away to collect my thoughts instead of reacting right away.*

Write your answers:

Think of a moment when you lost control.
What could help you next time?

Getting Help Is a Power Move

Therapy. Peer support. Talking to a mentor. These aren't signs of weakness. They're tools for freedom.

Types of Support:

- Peer support groups
- Mental health hotlines
- Faith-based or cultural support networks

Reflection:

What kind of support do you wish you had more of?

***Example:** I wish I had more people who could relate to what I've been through and remind me that I'm not alone in this.*

What's one step you could take to get it?

***Example:** I could ask my case manager or peer mentor if they know about any local support groups or reentry circles I can join.*

Write your answers:

What kind of support do you wish you had more of?
What's one step you could take to get it?

17- Real Stories, Real Strength

"I used to think being tough meant not talking. Now I know it means doing the work to heal."

Getting myself a psych-evaluation saved my life. I didn't know how heavy I was carrying it all."

Healing looks different for everyone. But it's always possible.

Reflection:

What kind of story do you want to tell one day about your healing?

Example: *I want to be able to say I faced everything I used to run from. That I chose to grow, forgive myself, and build a better life—not just for me, but for my kids too.*

Write your answer:

What kind of story do you want to tell one day about your healing?

What kind of story do you want to tell one day about your healing?

Build Your Mental Health Plan

Your Plan:

- My triggers are: _____
- I calm down by: _____
- My support system includes: _____
- My go-to self-care routine: _____

Mental Health Plan Category	Example Entry
My triggers are:	Loud arguments, feeling disrespected, being ignored.
I calm down by:	Taking deep breaths, listening to calming music, or stepping outside.
My support system includes:	My brother, my reentry coach, and my friend from the support group.
My go-to self-care routine:	Journaling at night, stretching in the morning, and no phone after 9 p.m.

Mental Health Plan Category	Example Entry
My triggers are:	
I calm down by:	
My support system includes:	
My go-to self-care routine:	

Reflection:
What will you do this week to take care of your mental health?
Example: This week, I plan to wake up 10 minutes earlier to do some deep breathing before the day starts and call my cousin to check in instead of holding everything inside.
Write Your Answer:

What will you do this week to take care of your mental health?

18-Final Words — You Got This!

You're not just surviving. You're rebuilding.

This isn't about being perfect. It's about being real. Taking one small step at a time. Giving yourself the same care and respect you'd give someone you love.

Keep going. Keep growing. You deserve peace. You deserve healing. And it starts right here, with you.

“The only journey is the journey within.” – Rainer Maria Rilke

