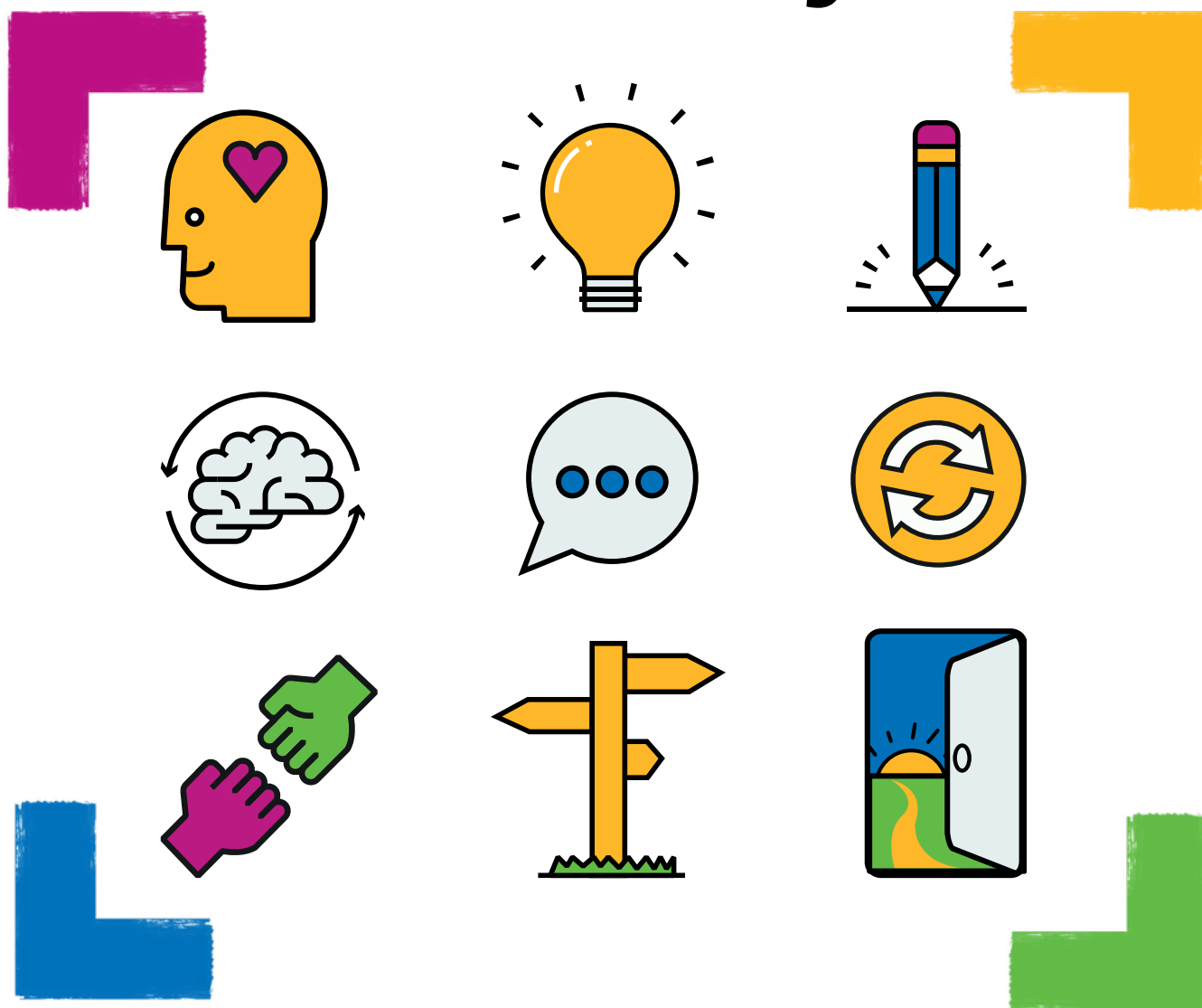


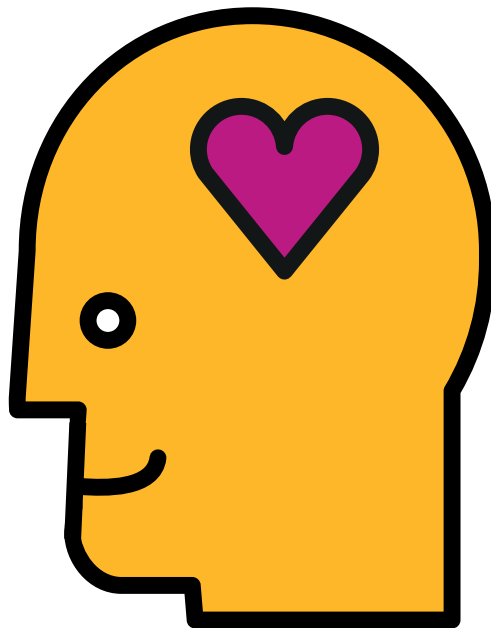
# Introduction to recovery



## *Workbook*

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# Welcome

Welcome to the **introduction to recovery** workbook. This resource is for anyone who is interested in re-defining how they think about their lives and recovery.

This workbook is one of a series that has been written during the Covid-19 lockdown period, a time which has brought about new challenges and opportunities for every person on the planet. We all face challenges at different times in our lives and whilst we can't always change those circumstances, we can develop the self-awareness and skills to decide how we respond.

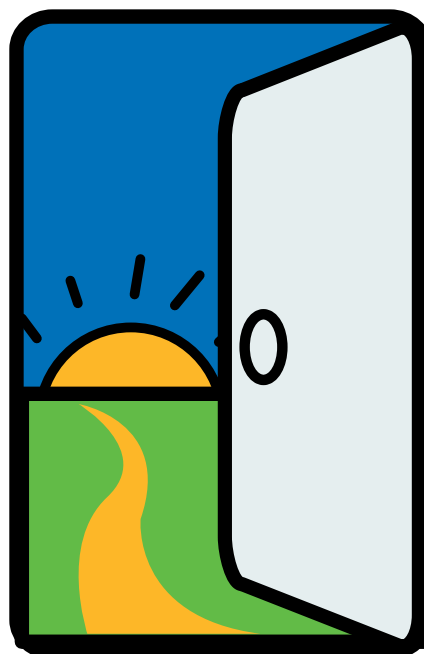
This is the first workbook that we invite you to take your time with and complete. This is because we can allow mental health problems to take centre stage in the story that we tell ourselves and tell others, about who we are. In our opinion, deciding how helpful or unhelpful this is; can be the first step towards re-discovering who you are and where you want to be. Throughout this workbook, we have included comments from those that have been there and got the t-shirt. To identify those contributions, look out for this symbol. 

There are also activities within this workbook for you to have a go at. We think that these may help, but that is for you to test and decide. The only expert on you, is you! Look out for this symbol for those exercises. 

We hope that this workbook helps you to think differently about your life and who is in control of it.

**Best wishes,  
The Exchange Recovery College and Mental Health Core Team, Barnsley**

**With thanks to the experts by experience and experts by qualification who built this guide.**



## Learning outcomes

By completing this workbook you will be able to:

- Describe what recovery means to you
- Name a person, place, song, book or film that's meaningful to you and describe why
- Describe occasions when you have felt that change was possible
- Record things that give you hope and develop your own journal of hope
- Decide where you have choice, where others have control, and if this is something that you want to or can change
- Develop short, medium and long term goals.

# Section one

## What is recovery?

Recovery has been described as a personal journey of discovery. It involves making sense of and finding meaning in what has happened, becoming the expert in your own self-care, building a new sense of self and discovering your own resourcefulness (Shepherd et al., 2014).

In the textbox below, we're inviting you to have a go at describing what recovery means to you. If this is the first time that you've thought about this, it might seem difficult at first and that's ok! Take your time to explore and develop your ideas.




It might be useful to revisit and repeat this activity throughout your journey, because as you grow in self-knowledge, so will your definition.









### **Activity:** Describe what recovery means to you




*Type here, write or draw!*




Naturally, recovery means different things to different people and that's exactly how it should be. Whilst we might sometimes feel united in the labels that give meaning to distress, our experience of it and what helps, is unique to each of us. Here are examples of how others define recovery:




 *Recovery is about having the ability to observe my situation and to use my abilities and experience to accept it or attempt to change it. It is not about the absence of pain, symptoms or stress. It is also not dependent on the ability of others to "fix this". Neither is it about handing over to "experts" the power to interpret my actions and statements as evidence of being "sick" or "well". Recovery is about me deciding whether or not I address a difficulty, and how I choose to do that.*  




 *Recovery to me means the start of the journey to uncover the problems that caused the break down, so that I can identify and work on these problems. E.g. if your car breaks down, you call the RAC to recover you to a garage, find the underlying problem and fix it. This doesn't mean that you are fixed for the rest of your life, the journey never ends.*  

 *Living my life, the best way possible.*  

 *I dislike the word recovery. It almost implies that human suffering only happens to some people. Yet we are human and none of us are exempt from that! I prefer to say that recovery is learning how to live life well, even when it sucks, and of course I've needed guidance to get there, but what I've realised is that 'there' has no end point. It's ongoing. A process of learning, evolving and becoming.*  

 *Recovery means getting my life back in order mentally and taking back control of my thoughts and actions.*  

 *Recovery is not a quick fix. It's something that you have to work hard at, to achieve some kind of normality. It's taking steps in your life to reach your goals.*  

 *Recovery to me means support. Due to having other health issues too, I need support and I have to take it. Accepting it and trying to recognise when it's essential and when I need to be independent too!*  

# Section two

## What gives life meaning?

In order to start living a life that's not defined by illness, we must consider what really matters to us. That means exploring the places, people and things that make life meaningful. Below are a series of questions that we invite you to think and write about.



**Activity:** A person that you admire and why?



**Activity:** A song that you'd use to sum up the best of your life and why?



**Activity:** A place that you go to feel ok and why?



**Activity:** A book or a film that inspires you and why?



*Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.*



*- Aristotle*

The answers that you have recorded hint at the qualities that you admire and possibly aspire to, in your own life. They reflect the things that matter to you most at this point in your journey. As we learn, change and grow as individuals, the answers that you give will reflect that. Opposite, are **examples** of the contributions from others. We hope that they inspire!

## A person

### **My son**

He's the one that gets me through the bad days.

### **Myself**

Ten years of stress and anxiety, loss of trust and loyalty. I am still here!

### **Nelson Mandela**

Who's fight for political freedom led to 27 years in jail. After being released he showed no bitterness, but instead, let go of the past.



## A song

### **The Shapeshifters, Lola's theme**

I don't see it as someone else changing my life. I change it. With some help, but mostly me making the choice.

### **Simple Minds, don't you forget about me**

Free, happy times before depression affected my life. I love to dance to this song and let go. When I hear this song, I can picture myself dancing to it on holiday abroad.

### **Coldplay, fix you**

Because it's about when things go wrong, don't give up! Lights will guide you home, you can learn by your mistakes. If you don't try you'll never know your worth.



## A place

### **Bedroom**

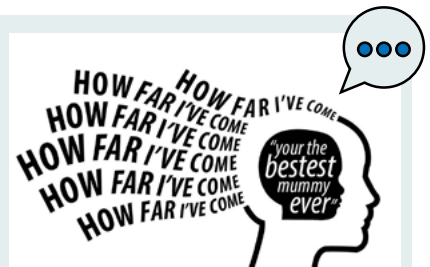
It takes the sun, its bright and dry - I read there

### **A place in my head**

I go to a place in my head where I think of my son telling me I am the 'bestest mummy ever'. I also think about how far I've come.

### **Whitby**

Whitby has to be my go-to place. I love everything about it...our first view when we arrive would always be from the whalebones and a sense of happiness and contentment would settle over me.



## A book or film

### **Eat Pray Love by Elizabeth Gilbert**

Liz has everything. Yet she is lost, in an unhappy marriage and unfulfilled. Taking the brave decision to change her life, she embarks on a journey of self-discovery through travel, finding solace in meditation, good food and discovering what's important to her. In many ways Eat Pray Love, embodies my own inward journey, and for this reason it reminds me to be brave enough to a live a courageous life, one that is a good fit for me.

### **A man's search for meaning by Viktor Frankl**

Life changing.

### **Simple abundance: A daybook of comfort and joy by Sarah Breathnach**

This is a book I have turned to periodically over the last 20 years. I have found it very comforting when I have been feeling low or stressed. It is set out in the form of a daily journal with positive and inspiring quotes, advice and observations on life. This book never fails to help me to feel better about my life and to appreciate what's important. Its message is around gratitude and creating a life which is balanced and fulfilling.



# Section three

## The values of recovery

### Hope

The emotional essence of recovery is hope and a promise that things can and do change (Jacobson & Curtis, 2000).



**Activity:** Think of and describe occasions when you have felt that change was possible



*Paying attention to nature and the seasons has made me appreciate change. When I feel stuck and frustrated with life, reminding myself that things are always changing gives me hope for my future.*



*When I watched the film Erin Brokovich It gave me strength to grow wings and courage to fight another day. It gave me the belief that I could survive, learn to grow and help others.*



*When I look back and see how far I've come. What a journey!*



*Listening to Coldplay, a song called Daylight. The lyrics quote - you can always trust night becoming day, always try again, hope with a new day.*





We have provided examples of people, places and things that inspire hope for others. Now we would like to invite you to start paying attention to everything that inspires hope for you and to keep a log of it. This could be developed into your own personal journal of hope, and could be used when hope is waning!




If you don't have a journal lying around, feel free to use the textbox below. We hope that you enjoy learning about you, through the records that you develop and keep.









**Activity: My hope journal**

## Choice and control

What if we told you, that you have a choice in how you see your life and who is in control of it? For some, that message might seem farfetched, exciting or even scary! Either way, that's understandable, other people have felt much the same. That's why the content of this workbook has been heavily influenced by people who have been there and got the t-shirt. Here are the thoughts and conclusions of others, who had started to recognise their ability to choose differently, if they want to!

 *My mental health problems were triggered by a traumatic bereavement six years ago and since then I have been trying to get back to my 'old self'. I realise that it is fruitless to spend my energies trying to recover a version of me that does not exist, but that I can live my life being true to myself, without the negative labels I have previously taken on.*  

 *I have started to realise that I get to choose how I allow people to treat me. I get to choose if I accept the labels and live up to them. I get to choose how I treat and feel about myself. I am not a label, I am a human being. I'm the director of my own life. Because of this I am starting to find a real sense of inner peace, something I've never had before.*  

 *I still carry a lot of embarrassment about the fact that I have a mental health problem, but I know that this is due to my own self-perception. I realise now that I can work on building a new foundation, to move towards a brand new self-image if I want to, which gives me hope that things can be better.*  

We think that the last quote was really important to include. Because, even if you recognise your ability to make different choices in your life, it doesn't mean that you want or have to. What matters is knowing that you have the option! For a lot of people, change feels scary and it's a process in its own right. That's why we've added section four into this workbook called 'Tensions in recovery', because those feelings and experiences are shared by many!

For your next activity, we would like you to think about the following categories; home, work, volunteering, friendships, relationships, family, health, appearance, time, transport and hobbies. Next, consider and answer the questions opposite.



**Activity:** Where do you have choices?

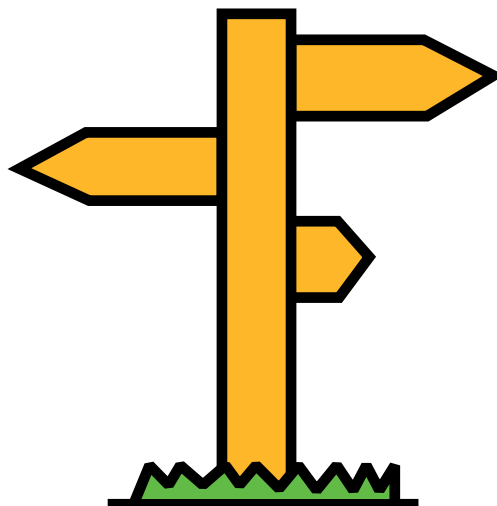


**Activity:** Where do others have control?



**Activity:** Would I / can I change this?

When you answer this question, pay attention to how you feel. If you notice any discomfort that's ok! Make a note of any dilemmas or fears that arise. Section four of this workbook might help with this.





# Opportunity

Opportunities are the chance to do things that matter, in pursuit of the change that you hope to see in your own life. Opportunities can't be prescribed by someone else; they can only be determined by you. That's because what we regard as an opportunity, is unique to each individual and their longer term goals and aspirations.



When we are able to identify the change that we hope to see in our lives, and we are willing to work towards that change, the opportunities that we create and embrace become the road to getting there.



What one person sees as an opportunity, another might not! But they are everywhere, even if at first, we are unable to see them.



Don't forget to tune in and look around for the opportunities that are available to you. You might need to do your research or get creative, but rest assured opportunities are out there. Below are some examples of opportunities taken by others.


 *Learning through reading books and taking courses.* 







 *I get anxious talking to people. Deciding to say hello to the person serving me in my local shop is only a small thing, but it's made a difference to my life and my confidence.* 

 *Taking driving lessons. Independence is important to me.* 

 *Researching different agencies and their volunteer opportunities.* 

 *Developing my confidence on public transport.* 

 *Saying yes the next time my friend invites me to do something with her.* 

 *I wanted to practice saying no, so I've taken advantage of all those unwanted PPI phone calls. It's been a great opportunity to be brave and learn.* 

# Section four

## Tensions in recovery

When there are aspects of our life that we feel unhappy with, the discomfort caused by this encourages us to do something about it; like picking up this workbook for example! Often, we want to 'recover' but we want it to be easy! Recovery isn't always easy or straight forward. We can assume that 'experts' have all the answers, which can cause us to overlook our own resourcefulness to do things differently.

When we start to become aware of the choices that we are making in our lives, we have an opportunity to question how helpful or unhelpful these are, in pursuit of the life that we want to live. It's then that we are faced with the dilemma of doing things differently or not. This is where tensions can arise and feelings of being 'stuck' might occur. What's important to remember is that we have a choice. Feel free to revisit section three of this workbook if needed.

Here are some examples of the tensions experienced by others on their recovery journey.



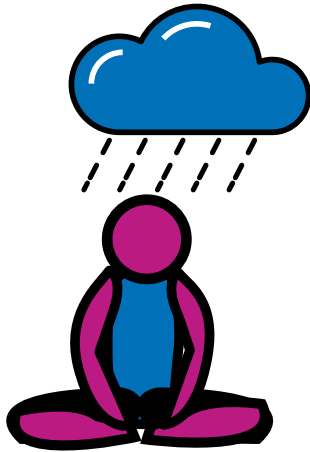
*I'm a carer for my uncle. It wasn't something that I chose to do, it just happened because no one else was around to do it. Over the years, I've lost what makes me, me. Being a carer is all I know! I'd like to live a life that feels my own, but I'm stuck in a rut and its making me depressed. Even though I resent being a carer, I'm scared to let go of it too, because if I'm not a carer then who am I?! At first, I thought I had to stop being a carer if I wanted to be happy, but then I realised, it doesn't have to be as black and white, or as drastic as that. Instead, I decided that I'd choose how much time I spent caring. This meant that I needed to explore what help I could get. The first step was contacting social care to explore the support available. Now I have some dedicated time for me and I've started a new hobby. Funnily enough, I've become a better carer because of it which makes me feel better about me. I wish I'd have been braver years ago.*



*I used to work in the public sector, but I left my role due to a nervous breakdown. Even though I hate the impact that depression has on my life, it's been hard for me to admit that I sometimes hide behind it. As much as I don't want it to define me, it's a big part of me and how I see myself. Getting better is a priority, but it's equally a source of anxiety, because if people think I'm ok, I get worried that I'd lose support from services. It's been helpful for me to recognise this and talk it through with the person that supports me.*



In any situation where obstacles arise, just like the examples above, there are four response options available to us:



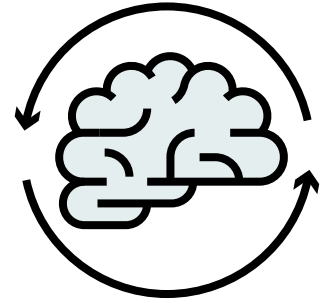
1. Tolerate it



2. Change it  
(if we can)






3. Escape /  
avoid it



4. Change the way  
you feel about it

We understand that at first, some of these options might seem impossible! This is why exploring the advantages and disadvantages of each of these are worth doing.

1. **Tolerating it** usually sounds like “I can’t stand it!” If you’re describing it, you have stood it! Therefore, tolerating allows time to study it and yourself, and consider what it’s teaching you. This can be a chosen temporary measure.
2. **Change it.** Sometimes there are things that we simply cannot change. If you feel stuck, consider what knowledge, skills or advice you need to move forwards.
3. **Escaping or avoiding it**, provides temporary relief but ultimately leads to putting it off! Weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of avoidance, might be a helpful action.
4. **Reframing it**, means thinking about your situation differently. If there is a situation that you can’t change, this can help you to live well despite it. The example of the carer that realised “*I am only a carer, when I am caring and in between I can be lots of other things if I choose to,*” is an excellent example of reframing. You might feel that you need external help to reframe your thinking. Therapy can help, but there are plenty of other resources that can help you to examine this before leaping into seeking therapy. This includes learning from other people’s experiences. You could find examples of this in lots of places, including courses, books, films and friends!

 *Struggling is human. It is not of itself, something wrong with me.*  

# Section five

## Next steps

### Goal setting

It feels important to devote this final section to exploring what comes next for you in your journey. We hope that these questions help you to define the change that you hope to see in your own life. If you don't have the answers, it's a great incentive to find out!



**Activity: What change do you hope to make in your own life?**

i.e. To work towards work/volunteering, to explore what brings me joy in life, to improve my wellbeing etc.

Today...

This month...

This year...

This decade...



**Activity: How can you achieve this?**

i.e. Research opportunities, attend a course or online group, trial different self-soothe strategies, explore my interests etc.



**Activity:** What values do these goals connect with?

i.e. Control, progression, growth, individuality, spirituality, love, courage, simplicity, peace, strength, joy, freedom, contentment, connection, purpose, perseverance etc.



**Activity:** What tensions might arise for you?

Refer back to section four for examples, if this helps.



More often than not, we already have access to the things that we need to support the journey onwards. We just don't recognise it. Don't overlook your own resourcefulness, or the people, places and things that help you best. Consider what you might need and how these things can help to support your next steps.



**Activity: What resources and help might you need?**

i.e. Support from a trusted friend, internet access for research, time, social care input, assertiveness skills

## Additional resources

If you feel that your health and wellbeing would benefit from the contribution of outside help, the following resources have been provided for you to explore at your own leisure.

- To learn more about The Exchange Recovery College get in touch by telephone on 01226 730433 or email [Barnsley.Recoverycollege@swyt.nhs.uk](mailto:Barnsley.Recoverycollege@swyt.nhs.uk)
- If you would like to tell us about your experience of this workbook or have any enquiries please contact [georgina.williams@swyt.nhs.uk](mailto:georgina.williams@swyt.nhs.uk)
- If you would like to build on the learning taken from this workbook, The Exchange Recovery College provides a course entitled 'Renew you'. For further information please contact the college.
- Access the link below to listen to a playlist created by one of our recovery college volunteers. The playlist compiles a list of songs that previous students had said to "sum up the best of their lives". We hope that this dissolves the barriers between shared struggles and promotes a sense of connection (it did for us!)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvrP82-hnZo&list=PL5DVuMwbKhSiuKaDBXMxuXMy1mAufhU1q>
- Book recommendations include; *A man's search for meaning* by Viktor Frankl and *Mindfulness for beginners; reclaiming the present moment and your life* by Jon Kabat-Zinn.
- Where you feel that you require further help for your physical and or emotional health, please contact your GP in the first instance, who can refer you to the appropriate services where required.

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