



The bigger picture

Learning to accept yourself and see your self-worth

Flinders University Institute for Mental Health & Wellbeing



Flinders
University

Institute for Mental Health &

wellbeing

Ways to be more accepting and kinder to yourself?

People with an eating disorder tell us they often struggle with feeling not good enough or finding it hard to accept themselves for who they are. But many wonder: ***what can they do to feel more confident and be kinder towards themselves?***



In **Part 1 – Learn** of this chapter, you'll learn what research says about the brain and how focusing on certain thoughts or feelings about us can impact how we see ourselves overall.

In **Part 2 – Do**, you'll practice different writing exercises to improve your acceptance towards yourself.

Then, **we will ask for your advice** on how to share this information with other people who have an eating disorder.

All the stories in this chapter are based on the experiences of real people who have struggled with eating disorders.

Help us help others!

People tell us that the ideas in this module have helped them see themselves in a more positive light. But we need your help to learn how to best support people with eating disorders. By sharing your experiences and advice, the more we can help others feel good about who they are.



We know that **you are the expert** in your life and have more insight into what it's like to be a person with an eating disorder.

Please complete this chapter thoughtfully and share your feedback at the end to help us learn the best way to present this information to others like you.

Tell us what worked well for you and what didn't, so we can improve and make a real difference **together**.

Part 1 – Learn!

Have you ever noticed that your attention can sometimes get stuck on the things about yourself that you don't like? Maybe it's a part of your appearance, a mistake you made, or something you wish you could do better.

What are the areas of your life that you don't like that you feel your attention seems to get stuck on? Describe the area in the relevant box.

	Performance (like how well you do academically/work/ sports):
	Appearance/ 'How I look' /weight/ body shape:
	Eating habits/diet:
	Personality or traits (intelligence, confidence, uniqueness):
	Relationships/friendships:
	Mistakes:
	Other area:

When our attention gets stuck on the parts of us that we don't like, it's almost like those thoughts take over, and it's hard to notice anything else—like things you're good at or the qualities that make you unique.

Take Michael's stories for an example...

Michael's story:



Every time I made a mistake, even a small one, it felt like my brain was zooming in, replaying it over and over like a broken record. It was like my mind had this spotlight that only focused on the moments I got things wrong.

I'd sit in class and hear other people answer questions confidently, and all I could think about was how I'd never be as smart as them. Even when I aced a test, I barely noticed it—I'd just focus on the one question I got wrong. My friends would say I was doing fine, but I couldn't believe them.

All I could see were the times I messed up, and it made me feel like a complete failure.

Here is an example from Mila...

Mila's story:

Whenever I looked in the mirror, all I could see were the things I hated about myself—my nose, my weight, my hair. It was like my brain had this filter that only picked out the negatives.

I'd scroll through social media, comparing myself to everyone else, and I always came up short. I started avoiding pictures, even with my friends, because I couldn't stand how I looked. The hardest part was that no matter how much my friends told me I was beautiful, I couldn't believe them.

Deep down, I felt like I wasn't enough.



How do you think that focusing in on the negatives and discounting the positives or successes has impacted Michael and Mila?

Have you ever felt like Michael or Mila?

Michael shared how his attention was getting stuck on every single mistake, replaying it over and over, while Mila talked about how she could only see the things she disliked about herself in the mirror.



These stories show how our brains can get stuck in patterns of focusing on the negatives. This is what scientists call **“selective attention”**.

Watch this video to learn more about selective attention¹:



¹ <https://www.youtube.com/embed/pTv4yD6BKIA?feature=oembed>

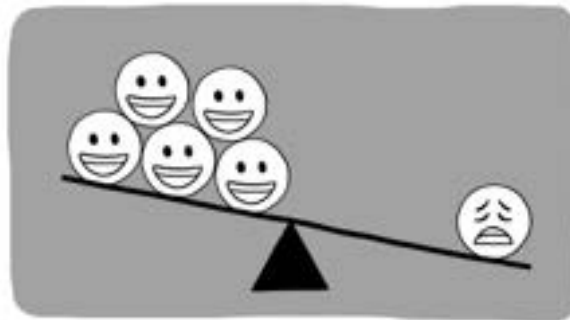
Did you notice the Moonwalking Bear the first time you watched the video?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Most people who watch this video **do not** notice the Moonwalking bear! Watch the video one more time—do you think you can now “unsee” the bear?

No! This is an example of how fast our brains can change what we notice. Our brain filters out a lot, but it also tends to focus more on negative information—that’s called “**negativity bias**”.



Negativity bias helped our ancestors stay safe from things like Saber-toothed tiger. But now, when our environment is much less full of unexpected catastrophes, it can make us dwell on mistakes or things we don’t like about ourselves, even when it’s not helpful.



The Moonwalking Bear video is a great example of how our brains work. When we focus on counting basketball passes, our brain tunes out everything else—even something as strange as a bear moonwalking.

The same thing happens when we focus on something we don’t like about ourselves—like a body part (e.g., our stomach) or a skill we think we’re bad at (e.g., drawing). We miss all the good things about us, not because they’re not there, but because we’re not paying attention to them.

The more we focus on negative things, the more our brain gets used to thinking that way—like walking the same path over and over in a forest.

But here's the good news: just like those paths were created, they can also be changed. We can re-train our brain!



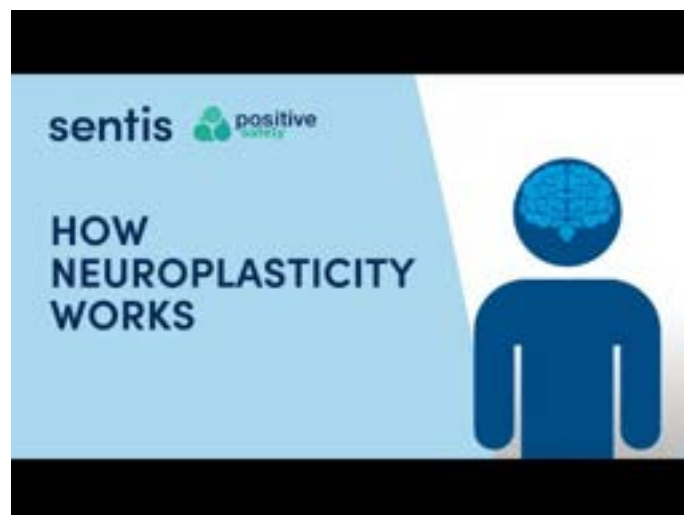
Our brain can change and adapt based on what we focus on the most. If we keep thinking the things we don't like about ourselves—like not liking our stomach or how we look—our brain keeps finding more and more of those things, like **zooming in on the negative** things and **missing everything else** and the amazing qualities we have.

It is like staring at one tree and forgetting
that there's an entire beautiful forest
around you!

With some practice, we can teach our
brain to pay attention to the things that
make us unique, talented and special.



Watch the short video² below to learn more about the science behind **brain neuroplasticity**—the brain's ability to form new pathways over life.



² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELpfYCZa87g>

Want to boost your brain's ability to change?

To help our brain to start noticing our positives—not just the negatives—we've got to take care of it. Ever wonder why some days you feel totally “meh” and other days you're unstoppable? That's your brain reacting to how you treat it.

Here's a secret: your brain runs on fuel from food, especially **carbohydrates**! Carbohydrates give your brain the power it needs to build new connections—super helpful when you're trying to form healthy habits.



So, if you're feeling down, drained, or unmotivated, a simple fix might be making sure you're getting enough carbohydrates in your meals. **Fuel up**, and you might just feel the difference!













Here is what “eating enough carbohydrates” looks like: it is recommended that approximately 50% or more of total energy of your diet should come from carbohydrate. **Select at least 4 servings over the day** – examples of servings are below.³

<input type="checkbox"/> ½ cup muesli	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 ½ Corn Flakes	<input type="checkbox"/> ¾ cup cooked cous cous
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 cup Sustain	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 roll	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 cup cooked barley
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 cup All Bran	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 pita bread	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 cup sweet corn
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 cup Sultana Bran	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 slices bread	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 cup cooked quinoa
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 cup Just Right	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 fruit toast	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 cup mashed potato
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 cup cooked porridge	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 tortillas	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 medium baked potatoes
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 ½ cups Special K	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 cup cooked pasta	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 large sweet potato
<input type="checkbox"/> 1 ½ cups Rice Bubbles	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 cup cooked rice	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 cups cooked noodles

³ This information is available from the Real Food Guide - <https://cbt-t.sites.sheffield.ac.uk/resources>

Now, on a scale from 1 (not at all confident) to 10 (the most confident I can feel) how confident are you in your ability to re-train your brain to notice the positive aspects of your life?

Not at all confident											The most confident I can feel
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Remember, change takes time, and small steps can lead to meaningful progress. We will focus on taking small steps. Every little effort counts, and you don't have to do it all at once.

Try to notice your positive qualities

One way to have a more balanced view of yourself is to **acknowledge and notice the positive aspects of yourself** and behaving like someone who has positive qualities and is deserving of happiness and fun. This can be challenging at first, and that's okay – many people find it difficult to focus on their positives, especially if they've been critical of themselves for a long time.

Remember, **making a start is the most important step**, and it will get easier with practice.



When we want to remember something important, what do we do to help us remember?

We write things down, make a note of it or make a list.

We can use the same approach here. To start acknowledging your positives, you need to write them down.



Remember Michael's story? Here is what Michael wrote down as his positive qualities...

I am a supportive and caring friend.

I am considerate.

I am empathetic towards my friends and family when they're down or having a hard time.

I am intelligent.

Now it is your turn!

Write down a few of your positive qualities in the space below.










Think about the qualities you admire in others—chances are, you might have them too but haven't noticed. You can also include things people have complimented you on before, even if you didn't fully believe them at the time.

Have a look at the examples provided below if you get stuck.

Here are some examples of positive qualities you might admire in others or have yourself:

Kind to others	Stand up for what's right
Good listener	Good at solving problems
Creative or artistic	Brave, even when nervous
Honest	Curious and eager to learn
Open-minded	Good at bouncing back from tough times
Hardworking	(resilient)

Now, on a scale from 1 (extremely hard) to 10 (extremely easy) how difficult was it for you to do that?

Extremely hard										Extremely easy
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Have a look at what your rating shows...

[If you rated < 4]:

It seems like identifying your positive qualities was really challenging for you, and that's okay. Many people feel this way, especially when they've spent a lot of time focusing on areas they wish were different. Remember, noticing the good in yourself is a skill—just like learning to play a sport or instrument. Over time, with practice, it can get easier. Let's start small and look at ways to build this skill step by step during the activities in this module.

[If you rated 4 – 6]:

You've made a great start by identifying some positive qualities, even if it didn't feel super easy. This shows you're willing to give it a go, which is a fantastic first step. Think of this as a process—like building a muscle, each small effort makes it stronger. Let's build on this foundation and help you uncover even more of the qualities that make you unique and valuable.

[If you rated 7 – 8]:

Well done! You've demonstrated a solid ability to notice your positive qualities, even if it might take a little effort sometimes. This is a great foundation to build on, and it shows that you're open to discovering more about yourself. Let's expand this skill and explore how you can use it to enhance your self-acceptance and confidence even further.

[If you rated > 8]:

Amazing! It seems you find it quite easy to identify your positive qualities, which is such a valuable skill. This confidence and self-awareness will serve you well as you take the next steps in this activity. You'll have the chance to refine and build on this ability even more.

Remember Mila's story? What advice would you give Mila on how she could rewiring her brain and create new paths to noticing her positive qualities/successes?



Thanks for giving Mila advice! Here is what she ended up doing...

Once I learned about my brain and how I could create new paths by focusing on the positives, I started to try something different, a 'likeable me' journal. Every night, I'd write down three things I liked about myself that day, even if they were small, like 'I was kind to my friend' or 'I spent time listening to music that makes me feel happy.'

At first, it felt awkward and hard to come up with ideas, but the more I practiced, the easier it got. I also realised that taking care of my brain by fuelling it with nourishing meals, like having some carbohydrates with every meal, helped me stay on top of this process. It meant I was less likely to judge myself based solely on my mood at the time and gave me the energy to focus on things that lifted my mood.

The more I practiced, the easier it got. I started noticing positive things about myself during the day without even trying—like how I made people laugh or how much effort I put into some aspects of my work.

Over time, it felt like I was retraining my brain to see myself differently. I didn't just focus on one thing I didn't like anymore; I started seeing the whole picture of who I am. And that picture was so much more than I had ever realised.



Part 2 – Do!

Creating a more positive view of yourself

Just like we learnt from Mila, we can start creating new paths in our brains by noticing the positive qualities in us and writing them down. One way Mila went about this was to create a ‘**Likeable Me Journal**’.



There are two ways you can start a Likeable Me Journal:

1. Remembering past examples
2. Noticing present examples

Let's look at each one in turn.

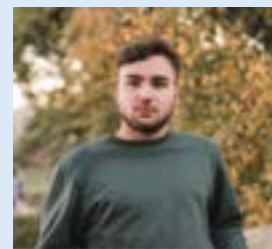
1. Remembering past examples

You can create a Likeable Me Journal by writing down specific past examples where you showed your positive qualities—like times you were kind, brave, or honest.

Let's have a look at how Michael did this. Michael started to think back to every time he showed the quality of being **considerate**...

Examples/situations where I was considerate:

- *When I took my sister some flowers and a book when she was sick*
- *When I offered a listening ear to my colleague who was going through a difficult break up*
- *When I let my friend borrow my car when his was getting repaired*



Let's have a go at remembering some of your past examples of your positive qualities

Using the list below, select one positive quality that you have showed in the past.

<input type="checkbox"/> Kind	<input type="checkbox"/> Resilient	<input type="checkbox"/> Thoughtful
<input type="checkbox"/> Patient	<input type="checkbox"/> Honest	<input type="checkbox"/> Energetic
<input type="checkbox"/> Generous	<input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive	<input type="checkbox"/> Courageous
<input type="checkbox"/> Creative	<input type="checkbox"/> Hardworking	<input type="checkbox"/> Other ideas:
<input type="checkbox"/> Optimistic	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Happy on my own	<input type="checkbox"/> Supportive	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Empathetic	<input type="checkbox"/> Curious	_____

Now think about 3 examples of how you have showed this quality over the last week—even if it felt small. Little things count too.

Example 1: _____

Example 2: _____

Example 3: _____



You just completed your first Likeable Me Journal entry! You are one step closer to rewiring your brain and noticing all of your unique and positive qualities!

Let's look at another way you can create a Likeable Me Journal.

2. Noticing present examples

Once you have spent time recalling past examples of your positive qualities, it is then time to recognise examples of your likeable attributes on a daily basis. This is an ongoing exercise, and something that you should practice every day.

Here are some examples from Mila...

<i>Date</i>	<i>What I did</i>	<i>Likeable Quality</i>
01/12	<i>Finished my school project</i>	<i>Diligent</i>
	<i>Played with my little cousins at family dinner</i>	<i>Fun; caring</i>
	<i>Helped my mum cook for family coming over</i>	<i>Considerate; helpful</i>



Now let's have a look at your own Likeable Me Journal for today.

List 3 things you did today and match them with a likeable attribute/quality:

Date	What I did	Likeable Quality
	1.	1.
	2.	2.
	3.	3.

Good work! You have now practiced two different ways to start rewiring your brain noticing your unique and positive qualities.

1. By noticing **past examples** of likeable qualities
2. By noticing **present examples** of likeable qualities



Let's make a plan!

Now we are going to make a plan for some ways that you can **maintain** your own Likeable Me Journal.

Using the list below, which likeable qualities are you going to focus on when logging in your Likeable Me Journal? You can pick more than one if you like.

<input type="checkbox"/> Kind	<input type="checkbox"/> Resilient	<input type="checkbox"/> Thoughtful
<input type="checkbox"/> Patient	<input type="checkbox"/> Honest	<input type="checkbox"/> Energetic
<input type="checkbox"/> Generous	<input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive	<input type="checkbox"/> Courageous
<input type="checkbox"/> Creative	<input type="checkbox"/> Hardworking	<input type="checkbox"/> Other ideas:
<input type="checkbox"/> Optimistic	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Happy on my own	<input type="checkbox"/> Supportive	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Empathetic	<input type="checkbox"/> Curious	_____

Great! Now it's time to start tracking your Likeable Me moments!

Each day for the next week, write down something you did that you'd admire if someone else did it. Then, match it to one of the positive qualities you picked above. Even small things count—let's write them down!

Date	What I did	Likeable Quality

Now for something a bit different ...

There's a special kind of writing created by Dr. James Pennebaker that's been used a lot by psychologists. It's called '**expressive writing**', and it's been shown to help people feel better both mentally and physically.



Expressive writing is when you write about your deepest thoughts and feelings around personal experiences—especially the tough ones. It's not just like writing a diary; it's about being real and honest with what's going on inside you.

This kind of writing can actually help you feel better emotionally and physically, which can help to improve your overall well-being.







Now we're going to use expressive writing to explore something that can feel pretty tough—seeing yourself negatively. You'll do it in a structured way, using the new and more positive information you've discovered from your Likeable Me Journal over the last week. This will help you start seeing yourself in a more balanced and honest way.

One way to do this is to look at yourself through different eyes.

Using your completed Likeable Me Journal, take a few minutes to reflect on what the last week tells you about yourself as a person.

Now in the space provided below, write a short summary of yourself from the perspective of four different audiences (different points of view).

Spend no more than 5 minutes on each perspective. Complete this exercise three days in a row and see what new information comes up.

<p>Audience 1: Someone who does not know you, like they are reading a novel.</p> 	<p>Summary of yourself:</p>
<p>Audience 2: A close and compassionate friend.</p> 	<p>Summary of yourself:</p>
<p>Audience 3: Your therapist.</p> 	<p>Summary of yourself:</p>
<p>Audience 4: Yourself.</p> 	<p>Summary of yourself:</p>

Now take a few minutes to reflect on what you learnt from completing this activity?
What new information emerged?

How did your perspective (Audience 4) differ from the others?	
What does this suggest you need to work on in re-training your brain?	
What is a one sentence message you can take away from this that represents a fair and balanced summary of the likeable you?	



Now we need your help...

Now that you've heard the science and heard from other people, we'd like you to share your own story and advice. We would like to use your story and advice to help other people like you to deal with some of the challenges they may be experiencing.



Imagine someone your age (Monique) who was struggling with low self-worth and focusing only on their flaws.

Based on what you have learned today about the brain and different writing activities, what advice would you give to Monique to help them start to see the positives in themselves?

Share which strategies worked for you or which ideas you found most helpful.



Thank you for helping us today!

**And well done – you’ve completed the Bigger
Picture chapter!**

*Keep Up the
Good Work!*

Remember...

TODAY
I WANT YOU TO THINK ABOUT
ALL THAT YOU ARE
INSTEAD
OF ALL THAT YOU ARE NOT