

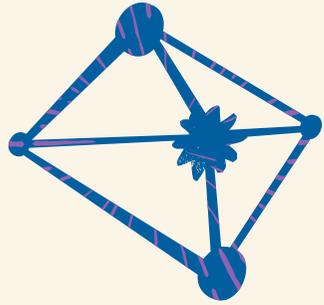
BUILDING YOUR
network
of SUPPORT

POCKET GUIDE

4

ELIZABETH CASSON TRUST





BUILDING YOUR network of SUPPORT

Welcome to Building your Network of Support. One of a series of pocket guides created to support the wellbeing of occupational therapists in their first year of practice.

Year One: Thriving not Surviving is a grass roots initiative. Over the course of several months, we engaged with many occupational therapists in their first year of practice and asked a core question, “How has the first year of practice impacted on your wellbeing?” The answers have informed the pocket guide that you are now reading.

As an occupational therapist you will already have a range of excellent tools that you can use to support you. Think of this as an addition to your toolbox. A kind voice that reminds you to, ‘Stop for a moment and take some time to focus on yourself because your wellbeing is important’. It is designed to not only make you stop and think but, as importantly take action. All of the guides are designed so that you can dip in and out and pick the tools which resonate most with you.

The tools are designed to support your wellbeing but are not a replacement for specialist support if you are experiencing significant challenges to your mental health. If this is the case, you are advised strongly to seek support via your GP or through your occupational health department.

By reading the insights of other newly qualified occupational therapists we hope that you get a sense that others are having similar

Introduction

Alongside our core question about the impact of the first year of practice on well-being we asked a subsidiary question, ‘What helped?’. An answer that stood out like a shining beacon from the rest was, ‘support from other people.’

In your final year of university, you probably had your support networks well established: friends and family; colleagues you’d been on the same journey with, maybe even lived with; social networks outside of university; relationships with tutors. You had trust in those relationships and knew who to go to for what kind of support. Then it changed, especially if you have moved to an area where you don’t know anyone.

The thing that was very clear from the people we spoke with was the importance of friends from university and, for some people, family during the first few months of practice. The people you trust, who are on the end of the phone when you’ve had a challenging day and understand what you are going through.

‘My University friends were all in the same boat. A little lost, a little frustrated. It was good to go through this together.’

‘My peers provide the greatest support despite working in many different roles within OT. Having someone who understands the journey you have been on is a great help.’

Now that your situation has changed you have moved into a space where new relationships need to be built and developed. You are a new

member of your occupational therapy team but also a new member of a multi-disciplinary team. For those of you in rotational roles these teams will change with each rotation. The teams are usually well established with set ways of working and a nuanced understanding of the team dynamics.

Part of your work, and it is work, is to make connections, build relationships and develop a sense of who you can turn to for different kinds of support. This takes time and energy and whilst some people thrive on this, others find it energy sapping.

However, developing effective support networks is central to building your resilience and maintaining your well-being. The central message of this pocket guide is to encourage you to take responsibility for putting support systems in place. Below is an excerpt from one of the year one project blogs which sums this up perfectly:

When I was a student, I felt like I always had an invisible protective coat of my university tutors and peers to support, protect and build me up. It was warm, comforting and protected me if the weather ever got too bad. Having a network behind me made me feel supported and challenged me professionally, it was a large part of the reason why I felt capable. When I qualified I felt it slowly fall away. Suddenly, my coat was gone I was in a t-shirt and it was cold. When I realised this was happening, I decided that I needed a new coat.

I decided to start with what I had left of my old coat, by keeping in touch with friends from my course and reaching out if I needed support, but also offering support when they needed it. I then began to make sure I got the best out of supervision by engaging with my manager and lead and really working on building good working relationships within both the OT team and MDT. I then began to work on building my knowledge tool kit. Whenever there was an opportunity to take part in relevant training or CPD opportunities, I took it.

I also took a long hard look at what my job lacked. I love my role and I'm part of a great team. However, our Occupational Therapy team is small, I knew I needed to widen my network of Occupational Therapists who work in my field (learning disabilities). I spoke to my lead about this and she pointed me in the direction of the Royal College of Occupational Therapist specialist section for people with learning disabilities, of which she was a member.

Through that group I have a role on the committee and I have started co-hosting a podcast with my old manager. It's been a great way to make professional connections and to learn about how other services work. Slowly as I have kept working on it. I felt like I have a pretty good protective coat again.

Rebecca Power

The metaphor of shedding a coat is a great way of describing this process of transition. You will see from what Rebecca has written that she has flagged up several different kinds of support, friends from her course, formal supervision, the teams she was working in and professional networks she joined to support her clinical development. Hopefully you also picked up how intentional she was about developing her networks.

Before we go any further it's helpful to pause for a moment and think about what support looks like for you at this point in your life. So, sit quietly for a moment and use the space below to reflect on the words 'feeling supported'. What comes up for you?

When I think of feeling supported it feels like...

When I think of what it means to be supported it means...

My ideal support network would look like...

Taking Stock

Now that you have hopefully gained some clarity about what you would like support to look like for you how does that compare with your current support network? Take your time over this as we are going to use what you write in a number of different ways. Maybe come back to it later as it's easy for people or groups can get forgotten first time round.

1 Using the next blank page draw yourself in the middle of the box

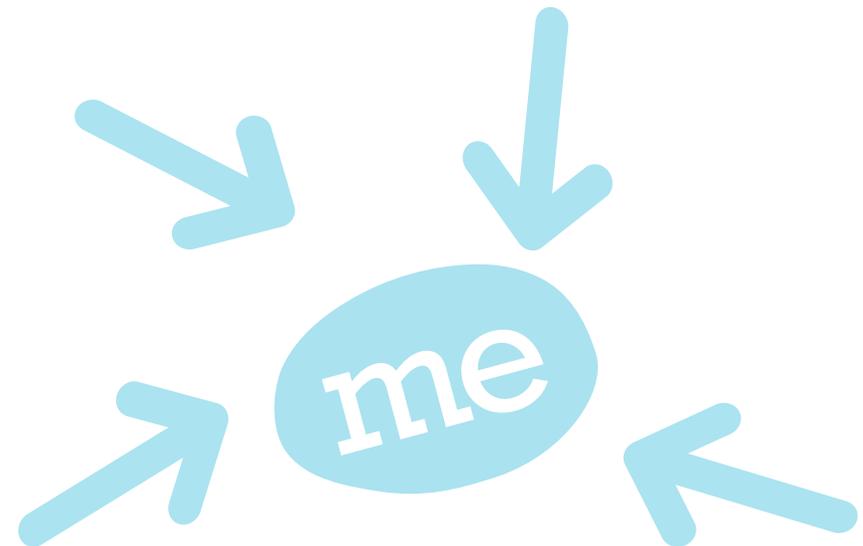
2. Around you jot down all the people/groups you draw on for support at the moment. Think about the different aspects of your life: personal support, formal support from your employers, professional support from outside of your immediate place of work.

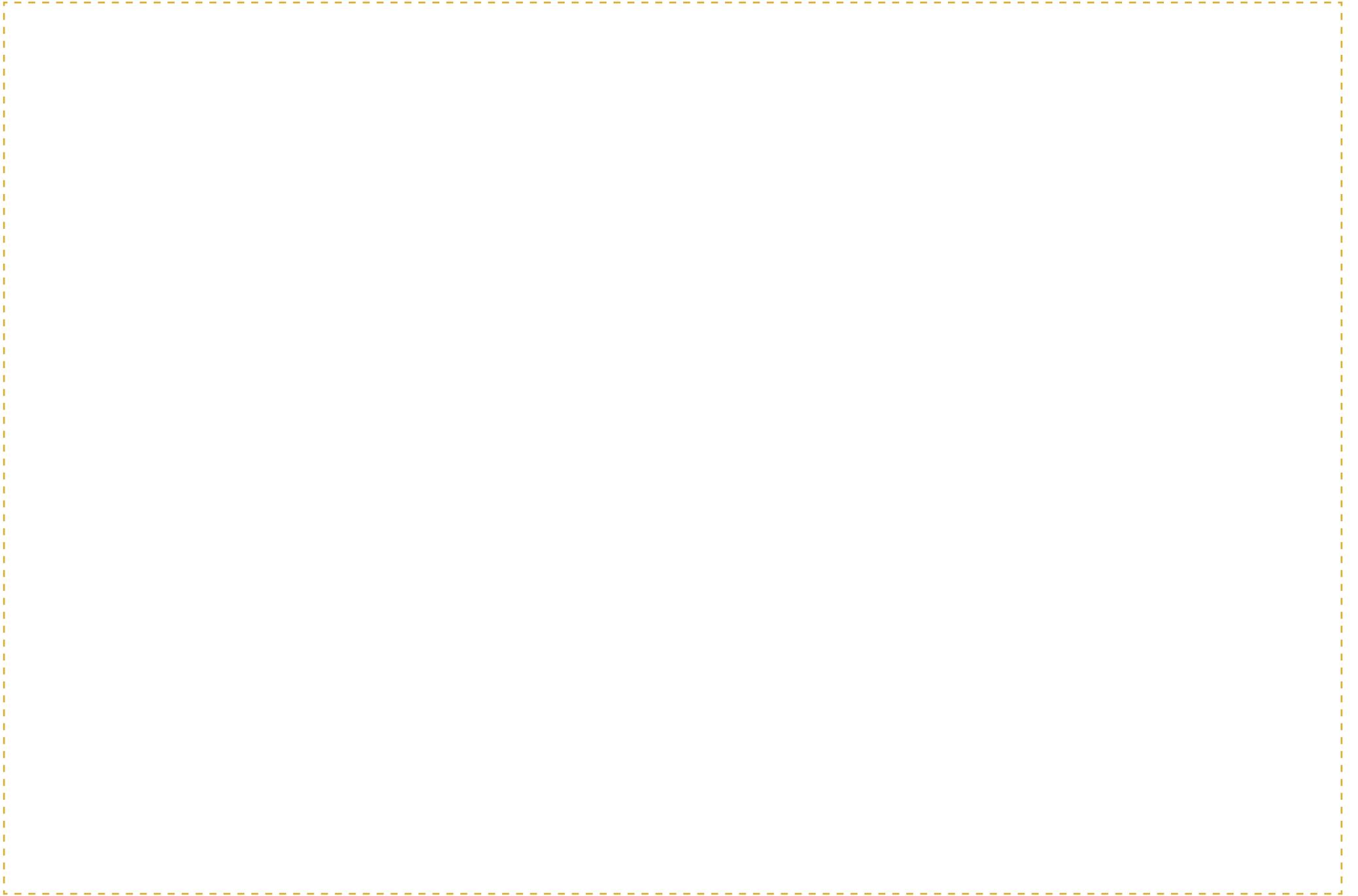
1. Referring back to what you wrote about how you would like support to look, do the two match up?
2. If not who or what is missing?
3. If you have identified gaps pick one or two, think about what action you need to take to fill them and put an intention around it. This means not only saying I need to make more connections to support my clinical practice but saying exactly what this entails and the timescale in which you are going to do it.

Maybe you need to start by exploring what is available, maybe you already know but haven't got around to doing anything about it?

As described by Rebecca earlier a support network can have a number of different facets. May be that you want to increase your knowledge in a specific clinical area and need to explore what could help with this. You may want to widen your connections with the world of occupational therapy. Developing more peer support may be a priority. Remember support doesn't have to be face-to-face, it can also be through social media groups.

It is well worth revisiting this exercise a couple of times during your first year as your network and your needs will change over time. Initially your focus will almost certainly be on your immediate team but as you progress through the year your focus will and should widen.





Where is your energy going?

All relationships, whether personal or professional, require attention to maintain them. You need to make sure you keep in touch on a regular basis with close friends, if your new team is having a social gathering or lunch together it's great to make the effort to join them.

One challenge however is making sure that you aren't putting a lot of time and energy into sustaining well established relationships because they feel safe and comfortable at the expense of reaching out and building ones.

1. Go back to your network map and draw a line between yourself and each person or group you've written down.

2. On each line you score 2 things:

How important in this relationship from 0-5 (0 being unimportant and 5 very important)

How strong is this relationship 0-5 (0 being very weak and 5 being very strong).

When you've done that here are some questions to think about:

1. Are there any important relationships that need to be strengthened?

How are you going to go about doing this?

2. Have you marked any relationships as unimportant that you investing a lot of time and energy in? For example you might be spending a lot of time on social media trying to keep in touch with colleagues from university. If these are established relationships do you need to connect every day?

Why is this?

Is there a different way of maintaining them?

Expanding Your Horizons

Alongside your established support network over the course of your first year in practice there are all kinds of opportunities to build your professional support networks. This probably isn't something that will be a top priority in your first few months but as the year progresses and your confidence builds there are whole communities of practice waiting for you to explore.

Places where you can link up with like-minded colleagues, pose those clinical questions you'd like to ask, learn how other people approach similar issues. The charities that have a wealth or resources for health professionals and clients. Even within your organisation there is so much to gain by reaching out and making connections beyond your immediate team. What learning and development opportunities are offered within your Trust? What research is being undertaken within the Trust?

The idea of doing this might, at first, feel a bit daunting. However, the first and most important thing to remember is that you are already a skilled communicator who can build rapport. It's what you've been doing throughout your training and what you are doing every working day. Whilst this seems obvious, in the moment when you walk into a new context and everyone else seems to know each other it can feel very different. If, at this point, your inner critic is piping up and giving you all kinds of reasons not to do this please read the pocket guide to Quietening Your Inner Critic.

The Support Tree

This final exercise is designed to help you think about how much support you are giving and how much you are receiving. Sometimes the balance can get out of kilter.

If you're the kind of person who is always there for other people you can easily find yourself giving a lot of your time and energy to supporting others which eats into the time you could be spending supporting your own well-being. It's worth, from time to time, checking in on the balance of giving and receiving.

In this box draw a tree with branches and roots.

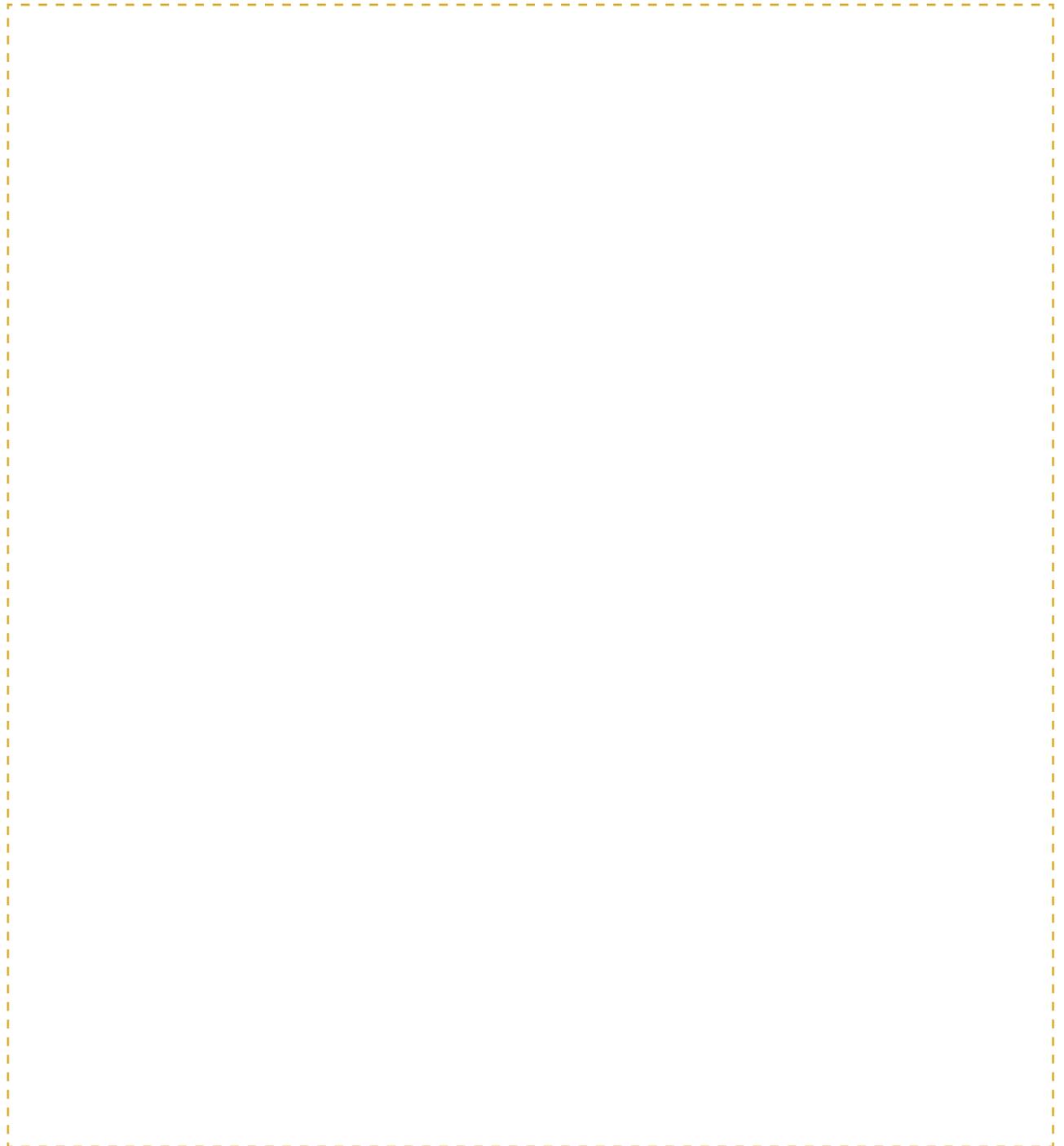
On the trunk write the names of your absolute 'go to' people when you're feeling at your most vulnerable.

On the branches write the names of the people you are supporting

On the roots write the names of the people who are supporting you

When you've done that here are a couple of questions to reflect on.

1. Is there a balance between giving and receiving support? If not, what actions do you need to take?
2. If you look at the people you are supporting, are there some who drain your energy? Are you trying to sort out their problems at the expense of your own wellbeing? Taking care of them rather than caring about them? If so, how can you reduce the amount of time you are giving them?



Where can I share my vulnerability?

This was probably one of the most challenging questions that cropped up for the first-year practitioners we spoke with, *'when I'm really struggling who can I talk with who won't judge me or see it as a poor reflection on my skills as a therapist.'*

The concern for some people was about sharing these feelings with supervisors and the assumed negative consequences of being open and honest.

All my mates shout loudly in threads where they know they won't be judged, but they wouldn't dream of sharing with a wider audience. Within our own private space, we engage, reply and offer gems, but when we do communicate with the outside world, our voices become smoother, more considered. The risky parts ironed out now, edited... fit for practice!

For a few people there was a strong sense of not being in the right place, wanting to look for a new job and wanting to talk this through with someone. Questions like, *'what will it look like on my CV if I change jobs so soon?' or 'should I stick it out for a little while because it might get better.'* *'If I share with another member of the team will it get back to my manager?'*

It's a challenge to answer this question in this kind of resource because we know that people's experiences vary widely and that different people are facing different challenges. One thing for sure though which relates back to taking responsibility

to ensure that somewhere in your support network you have people you feel comfortable with who can support you in such situations. The temptation is to turn inward and feel you have to work it out alone. To get stuck in an energy sapping cycle of stress and anxiety.

The other thing we would flag up, if you find yourself in this situation, is the importance of checking in with what your inner critic is saying to you. It is so easy to jump to the place of, *'don't say anything because it will reflect badly on you'* but the reality may be very different.

Supervisors generally have a wealth of experience in supporting newly qualified occupational therapists and are well aware of how you might be feeling. They have expertise in supporting you or pointing you to where support can be found.

It takes courage to share if you are struggling but the response may not be the one your inner critic is warning you about.

The biggest help, and the most terrifying do, was admit in my supervision that I didn't quite feel like an OT. It opened up a dialogue with my amazing supervisor and things were better from there.

I suddenly felt so overwhelmed at the sheer mass of jobs to be completed. It was like a fire of worry had ignited inside me, well that fire soon turned into a wildfire, igniting all these different feeling

such as worry, anxiety and self-doubt. I turned to my mentor and sheepishly uttered the words "I don't think I can do this" ... I could feel tears run down my face, like raindrops running down the windowpane. My mentor provided reassurance, and we broke everything down together. We found the solution to minimising that spark from igniting in the future, was to engage in regular supervision on a one to one basis, peer discussions with other OT's in the office and most importantly to work on prioritisation skills. All these solutions were like having a shield in battle, which would protect me from the anxiety and stress.

When you are new to a team becoming a member requires work and here's an important thing to remember - developing personal and professional networks is a two-way process of give and take and it is something you are already experienced at doing.

It's easy to forget that you are already a skilled communicator able to establish rapport with a wide range of people. This isn't the first time you've done it.

Reflection

This page had been included so that you can use it in your CPD File to evidence your learning

Date:	Impact on my practice
Description of what you have done	
	Follow-up actions or further development.
Summary of my main learning points	
Relevance to my practice	

Resources to Explore

There is a wealth of resources available on the internet to support well-being. Here are just a few that you might wish to explore further. They have been chosen because they are varied in their approach to well-being.

Becoming Who You Are

Hannah Braime is a creative coach who blogs about self-care and personal growth and has developed a range of resources which can be downloaded or purchased through her website.
<https://www.becomingwhoyouare.net>

Brené Brown

Brené Brown is a research professor at the University of Houston. She has spent two decades studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy and is an internationally renowned author and speaker. Her website contains a wide range of resources including podcasts, blogs, downloads and guides.
<https://brenebrown.com>

Jen Gash

Jen Gash is an occupational therapist and personal coach and her website contains information about coaching, a series of blog posts related to personal development and links to other occupational therapists working as personal coaches
<https://otcoach.com/about-us/>

Lynne Goodacre

Lynne Goodacre is an occupational therapist and personal coach who blogs on a regular basis on topics related to personal development and well-being. She has created a mini-series of free eBooks which can be downloaded from her site.
www.lgpersonaldevelopment.co.uk

Greater Good Science Centre at University of California, Berkley

An extensive online resource comprising blogs, podcasts, videos, tools and educational programmes informed by research. The tools are focused on creating a happier life and more compassionate society. Well worth checking out.
<https://greatergood.berkeley.edu>

Gretchen Rubin

Author of The Happiness Project, and internationally renowned author this website contains a wide selection of blogs and podcasts about creating a happier, more productive and creative life.
<https://gretchenrubin.com>

Kristin Neff

Is one of the world's leading experts on self-compassion. Her website contains a range of exercises and tools focused on developing self-compassion and a comprehensive list of recommended reading. <https://self-compassion.org>

Life Coach on The Go

Life Coach on The Go is an online resource providing a wide range of self-coaching tips, tools, articles and resources. <https://lifecoachonthego.com/about/>. It is merging with the Fierce Kindness Blog <https://fiercekindness.com/page/2/>.

Mind Tools

Provides access to several thousand resources including articles, videos and podcasts to support you in learning management, leadership and personal effectiveness skills. www.mindtools.com

On Being

The On Being Project is a non-profit media and public life initiative making radio shows, podcasts and tools for 'the art of living'. It explores the intersection of spiritual inquiry, science, social healing, community, poetry, and the arts.
<https://onbeing.org>

Positive Psychology

A community of practitioners who have built an online science-based resource of courses, techniques, tools and tips to help you put positive psychology into practice every day.
<https://positivepsychology.com>

Tara Mohr

An expert on women's leadership and wellbeing, author of Playing Big: Practical Wisdom for Women Who Want to Speak up, Create and Lead. Tara Mohr also developed the global Playing Big Leadership Programme and is a Certified Coach. Her website includes a range of resources and blogs.
www.taramohr.com

TED

Several of the people mentioned in the pocket guides have given TED talks. A place where you can explore short powerful talks of 18 minutes or less from some of the worlds most inspiring thinkers on a wide range of topics from science to business to global issues. <https://www.ted.com>

Tiny Buddha

The sites feature blogs, articles and insights on a wide range of personal development topics. Whilst it has its root in Buddhism it is not a site about religion. <https://tinybuddha.com>

End Note

The Year One: Thriving Not Surviving pocket guides have been funded by the Elizabeth Casson Trust. We would like to extend our thanks to the Trust and to everyone who has contributed to the project. Without the insights that have been shared by the occupational therapy community, with honesty and compassion, this resource would not have been possible.

The Project was led by Dr Lynne Goodacre (an occupational therapist and personal coach) and Rob Young (a writer and artist who helps NHS leaders to communicate).

The project team comprised: Andrew Bates, Stephanie Exley, Joanna Hunt, Bethany Morgan-Davis, Deborah May, Ryan McClure, Rebecca Power, Siobhan Scanlon, Paul Wilkinson, Katy Williams. All of whom were in their first year of practice as occupational therapists.

We would like to also thank Jessica Salmon for her support in editing the resources and Paul Baker for his design work.

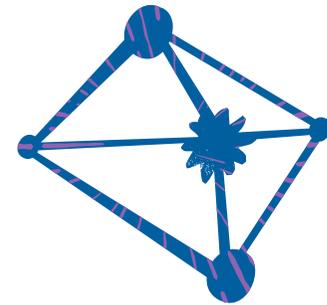
The Elizabeth Casson Trust is excited to have commissioned this work by Dr Lynne Goodacre and Rob Young and is proud of, and grateful to, the first-year occupational therapists who committed their time and energy for the success of the project. The Trust aims to further the profession of occupational therapy and offers a range of support and development opportunities.

Please visit our website (elizabethcasson.org.uk) and follow us on Twitter (@elizabethcasso1) for more information.

This is one of a series of pocket guides which includes:

- **Becoming Your Own Cheerleader**
- **Building Your Network of Support**
- **The Book of Blogs**
- **Finding Perspective in Tough Situations**
- **Finding Balance**
- **Questioning Your Inner Critic**
- **Treating Yourself with Compassion**

All are available freely from the Elizabeth Casson website.



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