



LOOKING AFTER THE MIND AND SOUL

**FIVE GROUP TRAINING SESSIONS EXPLORING ISSUES OF
EMOTIONAL, MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL WELLBEING**

**Hosted by Matt Wilson and Anna Thompson of the Eden Network
and featuring Revd Will van der Hart and Dr Rob Waller of
The Mind and Soul Foundation**

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You will find it helpful to have a notebook and pen handy whilst watching these sessions.

Speaker Biographies

Rev Will van der Hart, is Pastoral Chaplain at Holy Trinity Brompton, London. Dr Rob Waller is a Consultant Psychiatrist working for the NHS in Scotland. Both are Directors of Premier Mind and Soul, a national network exploring Christianity and mental health: www.mindandsoul.info. Matt Wilson and Anna Thompson help to lead the Eden Network and have significant experience in urban mission.

Session 1: Staying sane in ministry

Anna Thompson in conversation with Will van der Hart and Rob Waller

Part 1

Anna opens the conversation by asking the question: **What is ministry?** She talks about running small groups, being hospitable and being interrupted. Will describes what his ministry as a vicar involves and Rob sees his mental health work for the NHS as ministry. **What aspects of your life do you consider to be *ministry*?**

The conversation covers different ways through which mental health problems may begin to appear. Will shares his personal experience of being caught up in the aftermath of the 7/7 bombings. Anna mentions the various stresses and tragedies that come with living in poor urban communities. It is apparent that events around us may trigger an emotional response in us that we may not be equipped to deal with alone. **Have you experienced this? If so did you have a chance to deal with it in a healthy way?** If this has never happened to you, do you know who you would turn to if it did?

Anna raises the issue of the 'daily grind' and Rob responds by summarising a 4-step process of warning signs: 'positive stress' – 'emptying the cookie jar' – 'dropping balls' – 'breakdown'. **Have you ever thought about your own warning signs? What would they be?**

Part 2

Conversation turns to human motivation – why is it that we sometimes drive ourselves too hard – and how can we get a proper sense of what God expects of us?

Rob says we should consider what we are dealing with in terms of what is God's responsibility and what is ours. Think of one or two situations or people you are dealing with and discuss how they can be understood in terms of God's responsibility and your responsibility.

Will says that 3 very dangerous words are 'should', 'must' and 'ought', as they are often laden with a guilt and anxiety. Do you ever find yourself using those words? If so, how can you be 'more generous with yourself'?

The session closes with a discussion of 'healthy habits' such as a 'having a Sabbath or regular rest'. Do you have any healthy habits of self-maintenance to share with your group?

PRAY

Questions to take-away...

- Can you make one change to your lifestyle that will help you stay sane!
- Are you willing / able to support and pray for someone who may be at risk of burning out?

For more on this topic take a look at the podcasts available at www.mindandsoul.info. There is a good one on the 'Mental Health of Pastors' (search for this phrase on the website).

Session 2: Depression, Anxiety, Worry

Anna Thompson in conversation with Will van der Hart and Rob Waller

Part 1:

Rob helps to clarify the difference between temporary episodes of low mood, personality types that are more subdued or nervous, and actual depression. **How do you, or how could you, allow for different personalities and moods within your team?**

Deprived urban communities can have a depressing atmosphere that 'leaks' into us. **Have you experienced this? Have you developed ways of 'immunizing' yourself to this atmosphere?**

Will talks about the expectations we have in ministry, of transformed lives and communities. When this doesn't happen according to our timescale we may experience of disappointment. **Does that sound familiar? Are there any expectations you have had to, or may need to adjust?**

Rob outlines some basic CBT and makes suggestions such as keeping a 'mood diary' or writing down thoughts in order to assess them more objectively. Will points out that depression is an illness not a sin. Anna adds that perhaps we expect depression to be 'healed' too quickly. **Choose one of these points, whichever is most relevant to your group, for further discussion.**

Part 2:

Rob outlines some of the differences between depression, anxiety and other disorders. Anna wonders if we should all do a crash course in CBT or become amateur psychotherapists! Rob suggests some common sense things we can do to help people – such as making a meal. **What would you add to his list?**

Will raises the issue of 'transference' an emotional heaviness due to carrying the feelings that others have pushed onto you. Has anyone in your group experienced this? **Does your team have any system in place to allow people feeling this heaviness to 'offload' through prayer and conversation?**

Rob talks about people's basic human needs, such as food, warmth, safety etc. **What needs are lacking in the lives of people you deal with? How can these needs be met? Have you ever tried to impose a spiritual solution on a basic human problem?**

PRAY

Questions to take-away...

- What has been most helpful to you in this session's material?
- As a result of this discussion is there anything you intend to go away and do, or change?

Will and Rob have co-written 'The Worry Book'. You can buy it (paper and ebook) and read more resources about anxiety at www.mindandsoul.info/worry

Session 3: Mental Health Networking

Matt Wilson in conversation with Will van der Hart and Rob Waller

Part 1:

Matt gives some real-life examples of situations that Eden teams have to deal with and asks Rob to outline times when a referral may be necessary. Will adds some thoughts about the 'need to be needed'.

Would you feel confident to refer someone you know to a doctor? To what extent would you feel the need to handle the situation yourself? Where would you draw the line?

On the subject of 'who ya gonna call' Rob cites the 'big 3': NHS, social work, police.

Were there any aspects of what Rob shared about contacting statutory services that were new to you? Do you have any experience of making enquiries or referrals that you can share with your group?

The conversation shifts to the place of prayer in care. **What would you consider to be the do's and don'ts of prayer with people who may be unstable mentally and/or emotionally?**

Matt closes by asking what the cues might be for getting involved in a situation. **What are some good questions you can be asking to help you make a decision?**

Part 2:

The second half discussion begins with a focus on getting to know providers in your local area, *before* a crisis happens.

How well do you know your local service providers? Are there still certain people you need to intentionally get to know?

Matt asks Rob whether we need to be worried about faith being undermined by secular service providers. In his reply Rob suggests that there can be positive and negative aspects of religious belief.

What aspects of our faith are likely to have a stabilising effect, and what could potentially be unsettling or disturbing for people who are more fragile mentally and emotionally?

PRAY

Question to take-away...

- Are there any practical steps you have been prompted to take as a result of this session?

Go online and seek out the details of the health and social services contacts in your area. Look on the websites for your local council, NHS trust/board and police force. Ask local church leaders – especially those with an interest in community networking and social capital.

Session 4: Help! I want to hurt myself

Matt Wilson in conversation with Will van der Hart and Rob Waller

Part 1:

Matt introduces the session by reflecting on the times when our ministry brings us into contact with people who are in 'self-destruct' mode. Will agrees that self-harm, in all its forms, presents a massive issue. He stresses that we must not condemn self-harmers. **Discuss some of the other things that stood out to you during the opening few minutes of the session.**

The conversation turns to how we might begin to tackle a complex problem like self-harming behaviour. Rob talks about the importance of our initial reaction and Will suggests offering a regular pattern of meeting to chat. **Has anyone in your group dealt with someone who is self-harming, or perhaps been through a time of self-harm personally? What insight are they able to give into the issue?**

Part one ends with talk about the place that feelings of guilt and shame have in self-harming behaviour. **As well as guilt and shame, what other things might compound the problem? How might you be able to help alleviate some of these compounding factors?**

Part 2:

Matt wants to know whether self-harm is a rung on a ladder towards a suicide attempt, and whether certain categories of people are more susceptible. Will and Rob caution against both overly simplistic analysis and overly alarmist responses. **Do you find any of your pre-existing assumptions about self-harm type behaviour being challenged in this session?**

Our hope is that we may be able to assist self-harmers onto a recovery pathway. Rob and Will shared thoughts on how this might start to happen. **What notes did you make during this part of the conversation? Are there any points that warrant further discussion in your group?**

The session closes with some dialogue around the fact that we aren't experts, we're just ordinary, concerned friends, and that actually this might be an advantage. **What is it in the 'normality' of your life that could be helpful to someone trying to recover from self-harming? How might you be able to 'share life' with someone in order to help them establish a more healthy normality?**

PRAY

Question to take-away...

- What patterns of thinking and doing are you leaving behind and the end of this session, and what new insights are you taking away?

Visit www.selfharm.co.uk and have a look at the resources they have to offer

Session 5: Drugs and Alcohol

Matt Wilson in conversation with Will van der Hart and Rob Waller

Part 1:

The discussion begins with the question of why do people use drugs and alcohol. **If you were sat around the table would you have added any other factors to those mentioned by Rob and Will?**

There was talk about the consequences of drug and alcohol misuse. One of the consequences discussed was the wasting of potential through drug use. **How do you think you might use the idea of personal potential as a lever to help someone to acknowledge and begin to overcome a drug / alcohol problem?**

Often, in order to change, someone needs to begin by acknowledging that they have a problem with using a drug excessively or for the wrong reasons. **What part could you play in helping someone come to this awareness?**

In the communities we are based the misuse of drugs and alcohol is simply 'the norm'. **How can you and your team model a better 'norm' for the people you are reaching out to?**

Part 2:

The second half begins with Rob explaining a medical perspective on 'how much is dangerous'. This feeds into a wider discussion about how we resource our response to the problem. We have finite time and energy so where should we be investing our efforts? Will mentions 'impact creep' and cites the example of 'a young mum teetering on the edge of alcoholism'. **What factors would you look at if you had to make a difficult choice about who to help?**

Matt asks for some advice about the stages of change that may be common to people in recovery from an addiction. Rob proposes a model of first visualising change, then preparing for change before then actually attempting the change. **How do you expect this approach might affect the chances of successful change?**

Rob also suggests that the goal is not always abstinence – it may be harm reduction. **What are your thoughts on that?**

Will talks about the church having a big fringe of messed up people who need to feel genuinely included. **What are the dynamics of inclusion in your church context? Do they need to change?**

PRAY

Question to take-away...

- Do you think your attitude or approach toward drug users may change as a result of this training session? If so, how?

Visit website www.talktofrank.com and have a look at the resources they have to offer