

# T-MAPS

transformative mutual aid practices



## Table of Contents

**Introduction**

**Map-Making Instructions**

**The T-Maps Questions**

Section 1: Connection and Vision

Section 2: Wellness Practices

Section 3: Navigating Crisis

Section 4: Support

## Introduction to T-MAPs

Transformative Mutual Aid Practices (T-MAPs) are a set of tools that provide space for building a personal “map” of wellness strategies, resilience practices, unique stories, and community resources.

T-MAPs offer the opportunity to connect with yourself and others in tangible ways that contribute to personal and community healing. You can complete a personalized booklet (or “T-MAP”) by yourself or with a group. Your T-MAP becomes a guide for navigating challenging times, returning to what you care about, and communicating with the important people in your life. Some of these questions relate to general wellness strategies and life challenges, and some are aimed specifically at navigating the experiences of emotional distress that get labeled as “mental illness” or crisis. Feel free to answer questions that are relevant to you and skip those that are outside your experience.

T-MAPs are drawn from our collective wisdom. These tools take into account our social, economic, and political context, and create space for thinking through how our histories and backgrounds shape who we are now. As our political climate becomes more heartless and unstable, we feel the need to weave our own safety nets. T-MAPs can be nourishing to everyone from grassroots social justice activists to woke health care practitioners and Peer Specialists working to support people in the mental health system.

### Why make a T-MAP?

Writing down stories about our lives helps us understand who we are, how we got here, and how we relate to the world around us. **Wellness strategies** are things like eating enough food every day and talking to our support people, which help us stay on our path. **Resilience practices** are things that bring us a feeling of being whole and alive—spending time in nature, singing, hanging out with people we care about—which help us stay grounded. **Resources** can be things in our local community—like friendly gathering spaces and places where we can watch the stars at night—or our favorite media, like helpful books and podcasts, or international resources like

*Madness Radio* and *The Hearing Voices Network*. Articulating these things gives us a resource we can share with the people in our lives to guide our conversations and help us support each other through rough times.

## The History of this Tool

T-MAPs were originally born in the early years of The Icarus Project (TIP), a community of people working at the intersection of mental health and social justice. Over the years, TIP has created peer-based mental health support groups, alternative publications and educational resources, and new language outside the conventional “mental illness” paradigm. One tool developed by TIP, which partly inspired T-MAPs, is called Mad Maps. Mad Maps began as creative and supportive conversations on the Icarus website about strategies for friends and strangers to communicate about ways to take better care of one another. Mad Maps has evolved into a set of guides on different topics like intergenerational trauma, and madness and oppression.

We have had many other influences in developing T-MAPs, including organizations like Intentional Peer Support and the Western Mass Recovery Learning Community, as well as specific tools like Mary Ellen Copeland’s Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP). Some of the ideas around practice and transformation are inspired by the organization generative somatics. While T-MAPs were initially inspired by advanced directives and related recovery tools for planning mental health treatment options in times of crisis, we have turned it into a group practice of mutual aid, imagination, and prefigurative cultural change.

## The T-MAPs Name

The acronym T-MAPs stands for Transformative Mutual Aid Practices.

### **Transformation**

We understand that we’re always in a process of **transformation** and growth; we’re not just in a process of “recovery” or going back to some state of health (that we may have never known). As our lives change, it’s helpful to leave tracks for ourselves about where we’ve been and where we want to be going; T-MAPs help facilitate this process.

## Mutual Aid

We also understand that just working on our own “self-care” isn’t enough; we also need **mutual aid**. Most simply, mutual aid is when people help each other. Historically, mutual aid has been a way that people have organized themselves to create interdependent networks of support. People might help each other with things as basic as growing food and building barns, or as abstract as education and mental health support.

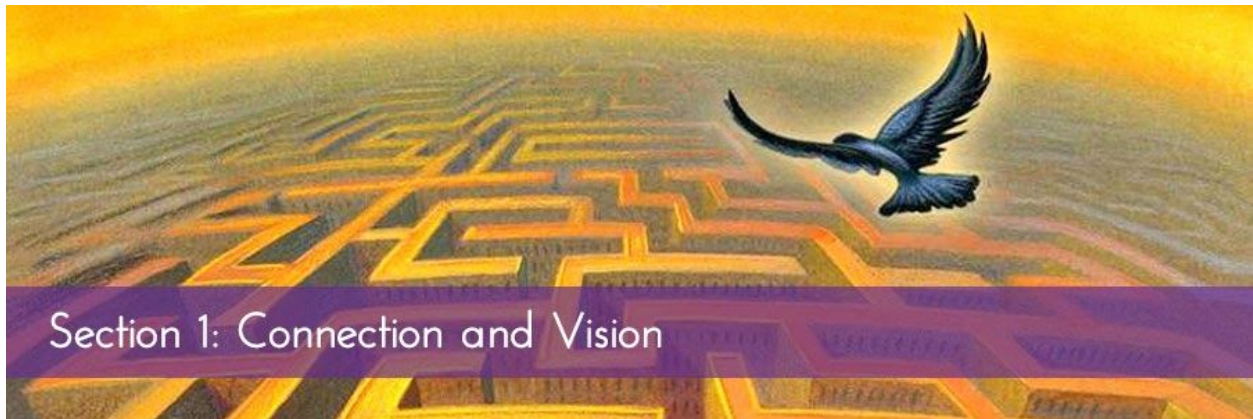
## Practice

When we think about how personal and community change happens, it’s pretty clear to us that the only way to grow and evolve is to intentionally practice what we want to see happen in our lives. **Practice** might be as simple as not getting on our phone as soon as we wake up in the morning or as intentional and deliberate as a daily sitting meditation practice.

## Grounding

Before you start working on creating your T-MAP, take a few minutes to ground yourself if you find it helpful to you—being more centered can be helpful in this process. If you don’t already have a grounding practice and you’d like to try one, try feeling your feet on the ground and taking five deep breaths.

The T-MAPs workbook is designed to begin with questions that explore who you are and what you care about, and become more challenging as they go on, digging into what it’s like when you’re struggling. Eventually, you’ll want to answer the following questions thoroughly, but you may start out with notes and evolve your answers over time. **This is a living document. You don’t need to do it all at once**, and it can be really helpful to talk over these questions with other people. If they get too challenging, take a break and come back to it. Remember that you are creating a map for you and other people to be able to follow—it’s worth taking the time to find the right language that will make sense to you, and that you will be able to share with others.



## Section 1: Connection and Vision

### **How do I feel when I'm most alive?**

*Check any that apply to you, and write in your answers at the bottom:*

- I want to look people in the eyes.*
- I feel capable - I can manage my day to day activities.*
- I feel hopeful and excited about the future.*
- I feel like there is a place for me in the world, that I actually belong here.*
- I feel connected to something much larger than myself: history, land, community, spirit.*
- I feel strong in my body*

Add your own:

### **What am I like when I am doing well?**

*Check any that apply to you, and write in your answers at the bottom:*

- My head is clear - no nagging negative thoughts, not foggy, not agitated*
- Present - Taking pleasure in the simple act of breathing/ feeling my feet on the ground.*
- Well Rested - Comfortable in my body*
- Social - I want to be around friends and family*
- Organized - I keep it together and get things done*
- Creative - I have new ideas, work on projects*
- I do things I love, and don't just stay home all the time*

Add your own:

## **What are the most important things in my life?**

*Check any that apply to you, and write in your answers at the bottom:*

- Getting along with my family*
- Being able to pay my rent/keep up my home*
- Feeling safe and that the people I care about are safe*
- Maintaining my connection to my imagination*
- Working on projects with other people that can change the world*
- Romantic relationships, dating, or friendships*
- Learning and growing*
- Doing well in areas I care about, like school, activist groups, creative projects, or my workplace*
- Having mentors and being a mentor to others*
- Being a good parent*
- Caring for/ being considerate of my partner/ spouse*
- Ability to be generous*
- Solidarity with oppressed people everywhere*

Add your own:

## **What are some of my strengths?**

- I'm a survivor*
- I'm real*
- I'm honest*
- I am good at telling stories*
- I have a big heart*

- I care about the other people in my life*
- I feel things really strong*
- I'm in touch with my emotions*
- I'm creative*
- I take good care of myself*
- I fight for what I believe is right*
- I don't give up*
- I'm kind*
- I take good care of children and animals*
- I know how to ask for help when I need it*
- I'm a strong leader*
- I believe in G-d/a higher power*

Add your own



This section is designed to guide us in building our wellness map to identify what practices and supports help us stay grounded and healthy. Once we've developed these lists, you may want to look at them on a daily basis and potentially share them with others in our lives. Or they may be something you return to after a few weeks. If we notice we're veering off our planned course, we can return to this map to help us reorient and shift course.

### **What do I do to take care of myself?**

*Check any that apply to you, and write in your answers at the bottom:*

- Daily Journaling – Writing down dreams. Recording awake and asleep times*
- Routine – Clear and delineated hours For work/study/play; making sure that there are activities and things I'm doing out in the community every day*
- Staying engaged – Keeping up with hobbies like basketball or music, staying involved in work, school, or volunteering*
- Food – designating a time for meals or eating meals with my friends or family rather than by myself*
- Hours For Work/ Study/ Play*
- Exercise – at least 3 x week*
- Listening to Music*
- Community – Check in at regular intervals with friends*
- Meds - if they are helpful to me, take them regularly.*
- Sleep – make a point of going to bed at a time that works for me, and prioritize getting enough sleep every night*
- Taking on fewer responsibilities if I feel overwhelmed*
- Taking breaks from things (school, work, family) and going for walks*
- Asking for help*



- Doing things that are meaningful to me*
- Challenging myself, not giving excuses when things get harder*
- Spending time with my friends or other people I feel safe with*
- Focusing on good things happening in my life and resisting the temptation to dwell on difficult things that have happened*
- Prayer*
- Spending time with my kids*

Add your own:

**Daily Practices: Make a list of things to do every day**



## Section 3: Navigating Crisis

This section is to help you create a written agreement with yourself and your community to use when you are in crisis. Crisis comes to everyone and we all respond in unique ways. This agreement helps you to identify what crisis looks like for you and to communicate about it to the important people in your life, empowering them to help you in the ways that you want. Having a plan in place is not about giving over control, it's about staying in control.

We get to decide what “not well” means for each of us. There’s nothing wrong with having a hard time, but sometimes things feel like more than we can handle. Try to identify what is a “warning sign” for you that danger is ahead, and what is just part of the natural ebb and flow of how you experience life. The next three questions try to distinguish between hard times that come and go and serious warning signs that you might be headed towards crisis.

### **What it looks like when I’m not doing well:**

*Check any that apply to you, and write in your answers at the bottom:*

- Overwhelmed*
- Disoriented*
- Suspicious*
- Scared most of the time*
- Anxious*
- Mind seems to be spinning out of control*
- I have a lot of nightmares*
- Feeling like people can read my mind*

- I have intrusive negative thoughts*
- I can't stop thinking about certain things (like climate change and the end of the world)*
- I feel exhausted and unmotivated*
- I want to sleep all the time*
- Everything seems like too much effort*
- I want to hurt myself*
- Overwhelmed*
- I want to hide*
- I'm worried about money all the time*
- Sometimes I stutter when I talk*
- Like I have really thin skin and I'm sensitive to everything around me*
- I feel spacey and out of it. Can't concentrate.*
- I have all kinds of body symptoms - headaches, pains, upset stomach*
- I don't care about anyone or anything; I feel numb*

Add your own:

## **Here are some warning signs that I might be approaching crisis.**

*Check any that apply to you, and write in your answers at the bottom:*

- I'm not sleeping enough, or I can't get out of bed and sleep all the time*
- I have no appetite, or I'm eating way too much*
- My thoughts are really negative most of the time*
- I'm having paranoid thoughts about people who are close to me and that I normally trust*
- I burst into tears all the time*
- I keep seeing signs in things—like the colors of people's shoes on the subway, or hidden messages in billboards*
- I can't get excited about things I usually love*
- Everyone and everything irritates me*

- I have trouble finding my way around and get lost easily*
- Something seems wrong or off about my food*
- I have a lot of flashbacks*
- Sense of the world "crawling under my skin"*
- I see things other people don't see*
- I get in a lot of fights or arguments*
- I have real trouble at work, and might get fired*
- Saying sexual things that aren't usual for me*
- Drinking or using drugs more and in ways that are harmful*

Add your own:

### **I know things are getting really bad when...**

*Check any that apply to you, and write in your answers at the bottom:*

- I'm not sleeping at all*
- I feel intense hatred towards myself most of the time*
- I feel so paranoid that it's difficult to function*
- I can't get out of bed at all – I have a hard time forcing myself to do really basic things like go to the bathroom or eat*
- I have the sense that I'm a character in a story rather than a real person*
- I spend most of my time feeling numb or terrified*
- I have lost any sense of what is real and what isn't*
- I cannot stop crying, shaking, or banging my head against things.*
- I find myself completely consumed with particular ideas—for instance that I'm here to save the world, that the Dalai Lama is trying to communicate with me about issues that are vital to world peace, that the world is going to end, that aliens have taken over*
- It's hard to follow what people are saying, and people/family members are telling me that what I'm saying doesn't make sense*
- I find myself frequently wishing I didn't exist.*
- I'm doing research about suicide.*
- I want to die and I know how I would do it*

Add your own:

Now that we've gotten some clarity on what crisis looks like, let's create a clear plan of action. Crisis can sometimes be averted by trying to change direction early on.

### **What helps if I am showing some of the warning signs I have described above?**

*Check any that apply to you, and write in your answers at the bottom:*

- Taking my emergency meds or herbs*
- Reaching out to healing practitioners I trust*
- Prioritizing sleep and stress-reduction above all else*
- Not using the computer after 9 at night*
- Having a pre-bed slowing-down ritual: make sleepy tea, put on candles instead of bright lights, read something of a calming nature instead of using the computer, maybe do my centering exercises*
- Getting more exercise during the day to wear me out*
- Drinking more liquids and eating more healthy meals, with people if necessary*

Add your own

## **Crisis Plan**

Crises mean many things to many people. Sometimes it means we want to die. Sometimes it means we are putting ourselves in uncharacteristically risky situations. Sometimes we are having a totally different experience from those around us. Many times, historically, crises have been used as an excuse to control us. This is an act of taking the crisis into our own hands and retaining our agency throughout. This can make a crisis less traumatic, as we refuse to give up our choices.

The word "crisis" comes from a root meaning "judgment." A crisis is a moment of great tension and meeting the unknown. It's a turning point when things can't go on the way they have, and the situation isn't going to hold. Could crisis be an opportunity for breakthrough, not just breakdown? Can we learn about each other and ourselves as a community through crisis? Can we see crisis as an opportunity to judge a situation and ourselves carefully, not just react with panic and confusion or turn things over to the authorities?

The feelings and actions in the "*I know things have gotten really bad when...*" section signal that a crisis may be occurring or on the horizon. I might make decisions I wouldn't otherwise make. Those who know me well and care about me might remember who I am and how I handle various situations. I would ask these friends to help me remember my own roadmaps.

Sometimes, when things get really bad, the authorities might become involved. I could be deemed "a danger to myself or others" and be temporarily prohibited from making my own medical choices.

Should this happen, I want the following people to make medical decisions advocating for me:

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I would also like the following people to make sure that my responsibilities are taken care of (i.e. kids, plants, pets, work, bills) if I am in a situation where I cannot do so:

---

I want the following people to provide care and support:

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Who are the people who have helped me through similar difficult times in the past in a way that worked? Invite them to share their experiences about what was effective (call or email)

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I do not want the following people involved in any way in supporting me/in my care or treatment. List names and (optionally) why you do not want them involved:

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Where do I want to be and why? (Home/ Community Care/ Respite Options/ Hospital)

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Where do I NOT want to be and why? (Hospital/ Home Alone)

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Am I okay with medications?

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What medicines do I want to take and for what?

---

What medicines are okay if my preferred ones aren't available?

---

What medicines do I refuse to take and why?

---

If I must to go to the hospital here are the places I'm okay with:

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What I want from my supporters when I am in crisis:

---

What I don't want from my supporters when I am in crisis:

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How do I want my supporters to respond if I would very likely to put myself in danger?

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How do I want my supporters to respond if I would very likely put someone else in danger?

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Insurance information/SSN/ Passwords to important accounts:

---

Important documents and where they are stored:

---

Who do I want to be notified that I am unavailable (i.e., boss or supervisor, children's school or daycare)

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Things I need others to do for me and who I want to do it:

Task

Person

Contact info

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Things I can do for myself:

---

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I (give, do not give) permission for my supporters to talk with each other about my situation and how to best support me.

Indicators that supporters no longer need to use this plan:

---

I developed this document myself with the help and support of:

---



One of the main benefits of making a T-MAPs document is being able to get clarity on the things that are important to us and being able to share it with other people. In this section, we identify the people, services, and resources that are the most important sources of support for us. This helps us remember where we can turn when things get hard, and who to stay in touch with along the way.

## **Who are people in my life who support me?**

**Family:**

**Friends and partners:**

**Groups or networks:**

*Examples: support groups, activist group, collectives I'm part of, study groups, etc.*

**Mental health and healing practitioners:**

*Examples: Therapist, Acupuncturist, Somatic Coach, Psychiatrist, Herbalist*

***Mentors:***

*Example: elder in my community, work supervisor, friend of the family, teacher or professor, spiritual teacher*

***Support animals:***

*Do you have any pets or support animals that help keep you calm and soothed?  
If yes, what ways of interacting with them are most helpful?*

**Of these people, who am I going to share this map with? And how?**

- Email
- Print a copy

**Questions For My Friends/Family to Ask Me if They're Concerned About My Mental Health:**

*Check any that apply to you, and write in your answers at the bottom:*

- How am I feeling overall?*
- How is my sleep?*
- How regularly am I eating?*
- Am I exercising?*
- (If I choose to use meds), am I taking my meds regularly?*
- How am I getting along with significant people in my life (partner, roommates, co-workers, etc)*
- How many hours am I spending on screens/plugged into technology in a day?*
- Am I in contact with my support people regularly?*
- When's the last time I did something I really love?*

Add your own:

## Things people can do that are supportive:

Check any that apply to you, and write in your answers at the bottom:

- Invite me to do things with them (making food, going for a walk, watch a movie)*
- Remind me of times in my life when I've been happy*
- Remind me that people love me*
- Help keep me grounded by talking to me about normal mundane things*
- Stay near me so that I feel safer and less alone*
- Take me to \_\_\_\_\_ [one of my favorite places or a favorite activity]*
- Really accepting rather than judging me*
- Leaving me alone if that's what I ask for*
- Believing in me that I will get through this*

Add your own:

## In the past, what kinds of treatment, help, or healing is most supportive when I'm not well?

- Alternative medicine. Type:*
- Support groups*
- Medical care. Type:*
- Mental health treatment. Type:*
- Work-based counseling*
- Folk healing*
- Religious or spiritual counseling*

Add your own:

**What are the names and contact info of your preferred providers?**

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**What kind of local community resources are available to support me?**

- Sobriety/recovery groups*
- Wellness collectives*
- Spiritual or religious groups*
- Book clubs*
- Sports teams*
- Open mics*
- Dancing*
- Youth organizations*

Add your own:

**What kind of online community resources are available to support me?**

- Meet-up groups*
- Social media*
- Specific Facebook groups such as:*
- Discussion forums, such as:*
- Blogs:*

Add your own:

## **What are national or international resources that are helpful to me?**

*Examples: Organizations like Common Ground, The Icarus Project, the Hearing Voices Network, the Mental Health Empowerment Project, Peer Crisis lines, Alcoholics Anonymous*

Describe what helps you:

## **Conclusion - T-MAPs as a Tool for Mutual Aid**

We hope the process of completing your T-MAP has given you new insights into your own story and inspiration to engage in this process with others. This is a living document - you can keep revising it and adding to it as you gain more ideas and visions. While T-MAPs can help you map your individual transformation and growth, we think they're more powerful as a collective practice. T-MAPs are a tool that is designed to be developed in groups, shared with groups, and practiced in groups. Our vision is that T-MAPs and tools like them will play an important role in evolving the ability of creative activist movements and mental health support networks to communicate with each other and build the kinds of stronger, more effective communities and forms of resistance that our current historical moment requires.

By reflecting deeply on our own experiences and developing a stronger connection with ourselves and what's important to us, we can become more comfortable sharing that knowledge; we can learn from each other and more effectively collaborate with one another. By having a better awareness of each other's personal struggles, it's easier to understand our similarities and differences and navigate them with respect, love, and understanding. T-MAPs is really our attempt to help create a concrete framework for mutual aid.

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