

# WINTERING TOGETHER

A TOOLKIT FOR BUILDING YOUR OWN WINTERING WELL COMMUNITY

CREATED BY THE MEMBERS AND PARTICIPANTS OF THE LIVING WITH SAD RESEARCH PROJECT

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This toolkit has been created by the members of the Living with SAD research project in collaboration with the participants of the Wintering Well workshop series and project partners poet-artist Alec Finlay and CBT experts from Living Life to the Full.

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# TOOLS FOR WINTERING WELL



## LIVING WITH SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER

Many people find the darker, colder months of Winter challenging. For some, wintertime brings on a period of particularly intense low energy, low mood and difficulty socialising. This experience is known as Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) or Winter Depression. It is an experience that can feel very frustrating, isolating and misunderstood. Individuals affected by SAD often report a desire to hibernate and to withdraw from social life during the winter months. Although the exact causes of SAD are unclear, a lack of natural light is understood to be a significant factor. The Royal College of Psychiatry estimates that about two million people in the UK live with SAD and cope with emotional challenges, lowered mood, and feelings of anxiety during the winter months, when access to natural light is limited.

Researchers from the University of Glasgow and University of Edinburgh have co-designed a series of 'Wintering Well' workshops for individuals who suffer from SAD in the Glasgow area as part of the 'Living with SAD' research project. The workshops have been designed and delivered in collaboration with artist Alec Finlay and CBT experts from Living Life to the Full (LLTFF). They are creativity-led: each workshop focused on small, creative activities focused on engaging with the season and building new habits of self-care and reflection.

## INTRODUCING THIS TOOLKIT

This document is a toolkit for wintering well with others. The resources gathered here have been developed based on an in-person Wintering Well workshop series in 2022-23. This toolkit is intended to support anyone who struggles with the winter season and who would like to find or build a community of people who can share and understand their experience.

Our goal is to provide you with practical tools and creative inspiration for starting and sustaining your own Wintering Well group.

### **This toolkit contains:**

- Practical guidance on how to connect with others who struggle with winter
- A template for planning your own Wintering Well gatherings
- A programme of 6 creativity-led Wintering Well gatherings for use either in person or online
- A pool of flexible prompts for brainstorming other wintertime activities with your community groups
- Prompts for a wintertime seasonal diary, a tool for self-reflection and creative expression
- Tips and links to additional resources that can support you as an organiser of winter gatherings

These resources are intended to be practical but flexible tools for your own Wintering Well community, and we encourage you to adapt them in a way that is helpful for you.

## RESOURCES FOR INDIVIDUALS

While taking part in this kind of community can have tremendous benefits, we recognise that it can also take a lot of energy and time to organise, especially in Winter. Although it's been helpful for others, you may find that a group activity is not the right approach for you at this time.

The 'Living with SAD' research team has produced a number of other free resources designed for individuals to use on their own, including:

### **Light is a Right: A Guide to Wintering Well**

A creative book containing written and photographic expressions of SAD experience along with creative prompts for responding to your own seasonal experiences.

### **Seasonal Affective Disorder Online Course**

A free CBT-based, online course about living with SAD created by CBT experts from Five Areas and Living Life to the Full.

You can access these resources by clicking the images to the right.

Light is a Right: A Guide  
to Wintering Well



Seasonal Affective Disorder  
Online Course



We hope that across these diverse resources you can find something that helps in your own efforts to live well in winter. We also encourage you to share any feedback, questions or additional ideas with us:

- You are invited to complete our feedback form by [clicking this link](#).
- Or you can email the research team at [hester.parr@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:hester.parr@glasgow.ac.uk).

We will continue to revise and expand our Wintering Well resources based on participant feedback.

SAD can often feel isolating, but there are people who understand what it's like. Together, we can share our experiences and build new ways of living well in winter.





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## FINDING YOUR OWN WINTERING WELL COMMUNITY



SAD affects a diverse range of people, so it's helpful to think about how to create a warm and welcoming environment from the very start.

## SHARING YOUR EXPERIENCES

People with Seasonal Affective Disorder often report difficulty socialising during the winter months, so the suggestion to join, much less start a Wintering Well group can sound counterintuitive - or just plain exhausting. For the participants in our original Wintering Well workshops, the experience could be tiring or challenging at times, but the workshops also became a source of energy, inspiration and hope as the participants shared their experiences, worries and hopes with one another.

Your own workshops can become a place where SAD experiences could be voiced and acknowledged.

Many people with SAD worry about being a burden and they can hesitate when it comes to sharing their feelings with others. A Wintering Well community can be a helpful reminder that sharing difficult experiences is often constructive: it is an important, if challenging step toward facing those experiences and thinking creatively about new ways to respond to them.

## CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

The first step toward building your own Wintering Well group will be searching for and connecting with others, and we encourage you to do this in

a way that is focused on support and self-care. Here are some questions you might want to consider as you get started:

- Do you know anyone who you think would be interested in getting involved - and who could **help** you organise your own gatherings?
- What **pace** feels manageable to you? How often would you like your group to meet?
- Are there any times during the season when you will want to plan a **break**, such as around the holidays?
- How would you like to **communicate** with other participants? You may want to create a new email address for the group or start a group on social media. It's important to also protect your **personal space** as you begin creating your community.

As you begin looking for others to join your new group, perhaps one of the most immediate practical questions you will face is where to advertise. One incredibly helpful resource for this can be local **libraries, cafes or other community spaces**, where you can not only post flyers about your group, but also potentially host your first meetings together.

Besides these spaces, **social media and local news** are another essential resource, especially if you live far from any accessible community spaces. Creating a post about your plans is a great way to get word out, and you might consider creating a group for people to join, where you can discuss how

See **EXTRA RESOURCES** at the end of this toolkit for a sample Wintering Well flyer that you can adapt for your own group.

you would like the group to be organised together. It's also a good idea to look for similar groups that already exist in your area, even if they aren't focused on SAD. You can ask for permission to advertise your activities to their members, or you may even find a group you'd be happy to join instead of starting your own.

## FINDING YOUR SPACE AND PACE

There are a number of different ways you might organise your Wintering Well gatherings: you might want to meet in the same place each time, or you might decide to visit different locations in your area together, or you may find that online meetings are the best approach for your group - or you may do a mix of in-person and online gatherings.

Whichever approach you take, it will be important to consider what you need to ensure everyone will be comfortable. Readily available toilets and warm drinks are essential. If your group decides to go on walks or excursions, plan ahead so that participants know where the nearest toilets will be to be inclusive of everyone.

Regular meetings are very helpful for building your sense of community and checking in on one another, but they can also start to feel exhausting if they are too frequent. As an organiser, it is important to be flexible and inclusive

Starting your own Wintering Well group can take a lot of work, so it's a good idea to start small: maybe the first meeting is just for a walk or a coffee?

to respond to different participants' preferences and needs. It is also important to keep in mind your own needs and energy levels.

And remember, it's okay to take a break. Let group members know it's okay if they have to miss a gathering - and it's okay for you to miss one too. Everyone has a bad day, and you can always plan a new gathering for when you're feeling better!



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## PLANNING YOUR WINTER GATHERINGS



## **PLOTTING YOUR OWN COURSE THROUGH WINTER**

The remainder of this toolkit offers some practical resources that you might use when designing your own gatherings. We have divided these resources into two main sections.

The first is ‘A Sample Wintering Well Programme’, which offers a structured outline of 6 Wintering Well gatherings focused on creating space for reflection, discussion and creative planning about how to improve different aspects of winter life. They include prompts for conversations and creative exercises, which will likely require facilitation. They are designed to build on each other in succession, but they are not prescriptive. You should adapt these plans or use only those that feel useful to you and your group.

The second is a collection of ‘Creative Prompts’ which provide a range of suggestions and ideas about other kinds of wintertime activities that you might try with your group.

## **A WINTER GATHERING TEMPLATE**

In order to help you as you organise your own Wintering Well gatherings, we have broken down our workshop structure into a basic template that you can use to structure or adapt your own gatherings.

The Template breaks down each gathering into 4 essential parts:

**1. Welcoming Words**

**3. Talking Together**

**2. Creative Activity**

**4. Warm Wishes**

We recommend that you plan for approximately 2-hour gatherings and freely tailor them to be shorter or longer according to your group's needs and preferences as you go along.

### **[1] WELCOMING WORDS | 30 MINUTES**

The first part of your winter gatherings will be all about creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere. People can be nervous and uncertain about what to expect. We recommend a slow start, leaving **10 minutes** for people to arrive before starting the day's activities.

When ready to begin, take about **5 minutes** to bring the gathering together with a brief introduction to the group. Introduce yourself again and then introduce the group itself: you can explain what 'wintering well' means for your group, give an overview of the gathering structure, and introduce any themes for the day's activities.

Lastly, take **10 minutes** to invite everyone to share how they have been doing and to reflect on any wintering well activities they've tried over the preceding weeks or since the previous gathering.





## [2] CREATIVE ACTIVITY | 45 MINUTES

The second part of the winter gatherings is designed to be an invitation to creatively reflect on individual experiences of the winter season and to jointly think of new strategies for engaging with the winter and finding ways to feel better during the season. Leave **5-10 minutes** for introducing the chosen activity and inviting any questions about what it will involve.

Many of the activities we recommend involve going outside and/or working in pairs, which can often take some time, maybe **10-15 minutes**. We recommend you allow participants to pick their own partners, but also encourage them to pair with someone they haven't spoken with before.

This will leave a core **20-25 minutes** for the activity itself. Depending on your group and your own preferences, you may want to participate in the activity or instead to circulate between participants to check in on how they're doing and answer any questions. Plan to check in with everyone at the end of the activity and signal that it is time to gather together again.

Conclude each creative activity with a **5+ minute** comfort break.

## [3] TALKING TOGETHER | 30 MINUTES

The third part of the winter gatherings is a structured conversation to reflect on participant experiences during the creative activity and to connect these to their experiences living with SAD.

We recommend beginning with a round of short one-sentence responses and then moving to open discussion.

These conversations have a double purpose: the first is to talk through and acknowledge different aspects of life that can become challenging when experiencing SAD, and the second is to build toward constructive thinking about plans and strategies that might help to avoid or mitigate these challenges. It's worth leaving at least **25 minutes** for these conversations.

To bring the conversations to a close, it can be useful to turn to questions about what participants want to try over the coming weeks toward wintering well. Take **5 minutes** either to introduce the recommended **Independent Activity** from the sample programme, or brainstorm ideas for other independent activities as a group.

#### **[4] WARM WISHES | 15 MINUTES**

The final part of the winter gatherings is devoted to farewells and discussing any future plans for the group. This part of the gathering is open-ended, and you may want to give yourself a bit of extra time to stay on at the end in case anyone wants to talk. In general, though, you can plan for the farewells and feedback to take **10-15 minutes**.

## STARTING YOUR WINTERTIME SEASONAL JOURNAL

The Wintertime Seasonal Journal is a flexible tool that you and your group members can use during and between your gatherings to jot down ideas, quotes or goals - or for any number of other creative uses. Over the course of the season, your group's journals will create a written and creative record of your independent and shared experiences.

We highly encourage you and your group to give the Seasonal Journal a try. You can use it as a space to reflect on how the group is coming along, and you might want to keep notes of things people say while you're talking during the workshops. Your group can use their journals to respond to the day's activities and conversations. This can also help to identify new themes for future gatherings.

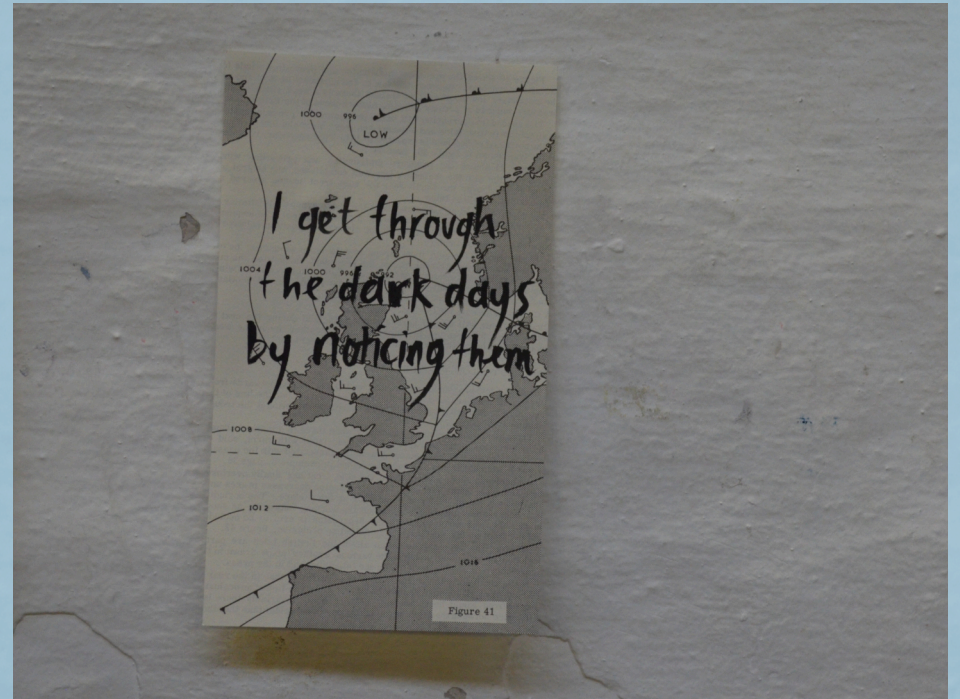
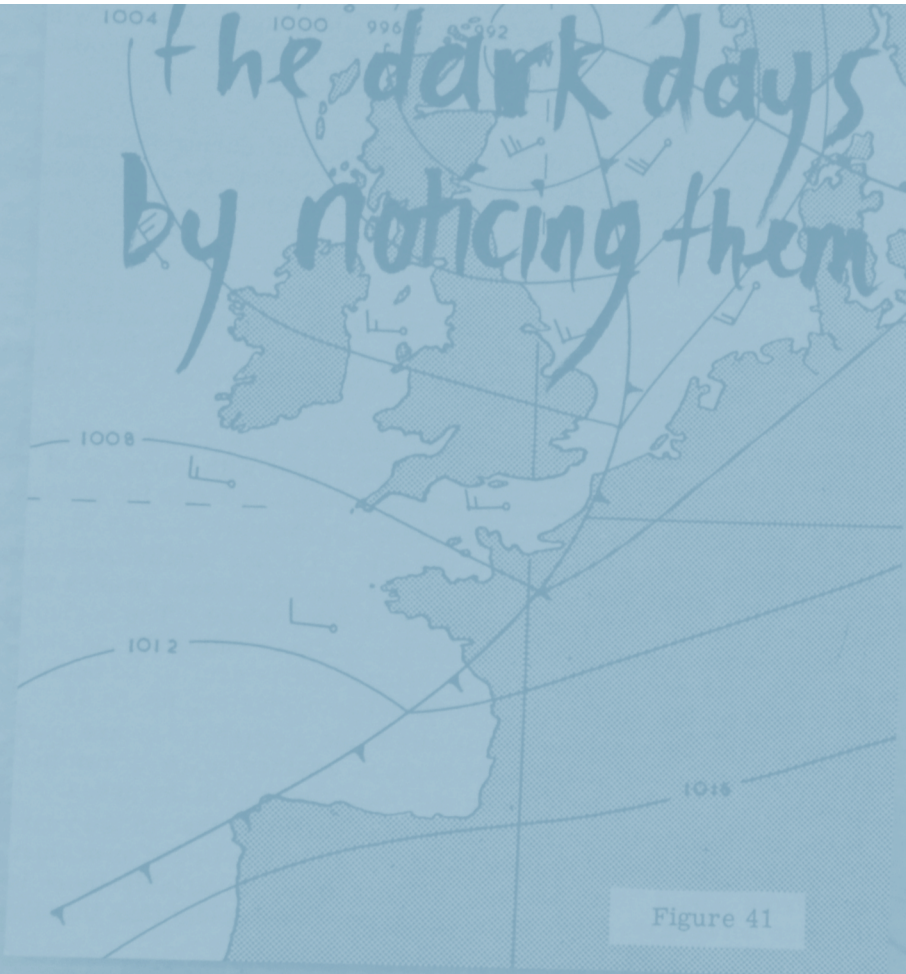
The journals don't need to be complicated things. Use simple jotters with blank pages. During the **Welcoming Words** and **Talking Together** stages of your workshops, you can invite participants to share the thoughts they've written down during the day's activities or about any creative experiments from the past week. The journals can become useful tools for communicating feelings and experiences to others, both at the workshops and, for some participants, at home when talking with friends and family.

Encourage participants to make the journal their own. Some people may prefer to draw, paint or collage photographs instead of - or alongside - writing.

# 4



## A SAMPLE WINTERING WELL PROGRAMME



## GATHERING 1: OUR PATCHES OF SEASONAL SKY

### Aims:

1. Give participants have an opportunity to get to know one another
2. Brainstorm goals and creative plans for the coming winter
3. Reflect on your relationships to sunlight during winter
4. Introduce the seasonal journal

### WELCOMING WORDS

Introduction prompt: each person should share their name and a response to the prompt: “I chose to come here and be part of things because...”

Discussion topic: what do people want to get out of the group

### CREATIVE ACTIVITY: SKY-FRAME

This activity is about observing the winter sky, reflecting on how it makes you feel. Often we picture the sky in wintertime as grey, monotone, flat and unchanging, but when we actually look at it there's a lot more to see: different shades of colour, changing clouds, glimmers of light. Participants

will use small ‘frames’ to identify a patch of sky to observe for the duration of the activity: you can make simple frames by cutting out the centre of a piece of paper, or you can make a rectangle with your fingers, or you can do the activity without frames by focusing instead on finding ‘viewpoints’ to stand and watch the sky from.

Ask participants to spend time familiarising themselves with their new patch of sky and the light that’s held in their frame. During this time you can participate or circulate and chat with everyone about what they see.

In the last 5-10 minutes, encourage participants to write in their journals a list of responses to the following prompts:

- “My patch of sky is...”
- “The light in my Patch of Sky makes me feel...”

Then participants are invited to form pairs or small groups where they can share and talk about their initial observations, while jotting down new ideas and responses from others in their journals.

## **TALKING TOGETHER**

Participants gather together for a group conversation where they voluntarily share some of their responses to the sky-patch prompts, and listen to the

responses from some of their fellow participants. After talking for a while, participants can be given a little time to write down in their notebook a word, or choice of words, reflective of the sky-patch exercise.

Then ask participants to respond to one or both of these questions: “Is there anything SAD-related that today’s workshop is making you re-think?”

“Is there anything you might anticipate doing differently in the approaching winter?”

## **WARM WISHES**

Independent activity: each day try to spend a bit more time with the seasonal sky. Use your journal to keep note of specific things: colours, textures, movements, changes, moods, phases. Note down how this practice of ‘sky-observing’ makes you feel.



## GATHERING 2: OUR SORT OF WINTER PLACE

### Aims:

1. Reflect on experiences sky-observing and journalling
2. Discuss some of the places that have biggest effects on winter life
3. Identify a local outdoor place each participant would like to spend more time in

### WELCOMING WORDS

Introduction prompt: take some time for everyone to re-introduce themselves, as it can be a challenge to remember names. Each person should share their name and respond to the prompt: “I chose to come here and be part of things because...”

Invite participants to reflect on experience using winter diary, how hanging-out with a ‘patch of seasonal sky’ has worked, and made them feel.

Discussion topic: Invite participants to reflect on their experiences using the seasonal journal and to report back about the kinds of skies they observed over the past weeks. Did they observe the sky from the same spot each time? At the same time of day? How did the activity make them feel?



## CREATIVE ACTIVITY: SHELTERING OUTDOORS

This activity is about reflecting on the question: “How can we make ourselves feel more at home out-of-doors?”. It begins with a short conversation about whether participants have any kinds of places they have enjoyed spending time outdoors during the winter. You might also talk about the specific elements of the season that make being outdoors difficult - and if there are any particular elements that people enjoy. Are the answers different on days that are drizzly compared to bright, dry days?

Then participants will experiment with designing their own wintertime shelters. They will think creatively about what kind of place they would like to make to be able to engage the season from. Venture outside as a group, ideally to a park or somewhere with lots of natural materials: you will use whatever you can forage to build small symbolic shelters that express the aspects of your own ideal outdoor winter shelters.

Inform participants that the purpose of the exercise is to generate practical thinking through creative practice: Just how do we go about dwelling when we are outdoors? What can we do to make this a more pleasant prospect? Participants will be encouraged to get resourceful, making use of found/natural/discarded materials on-site for building. Participants will be encouraged to give consideration to different questions of sun-shelter

design: placement, orientation, aspect, cover, elevation, degree of comfort, for sitting, standing, lying down etc.

Participants can work in pairs or small groups to make their shelters, and they should be encouraged to take notes of their decisions and ideas in their notebooks as well. Use the last 5-10 minutes of the activity to give everyone an opportunity to show the rest of the group their shelters.

### **TALKING TOGETHER**

Begin the conversation by reminding participants that the purpose of this playful exercise was to generate some practical thinking. Encourage them to respond to the following prompts:

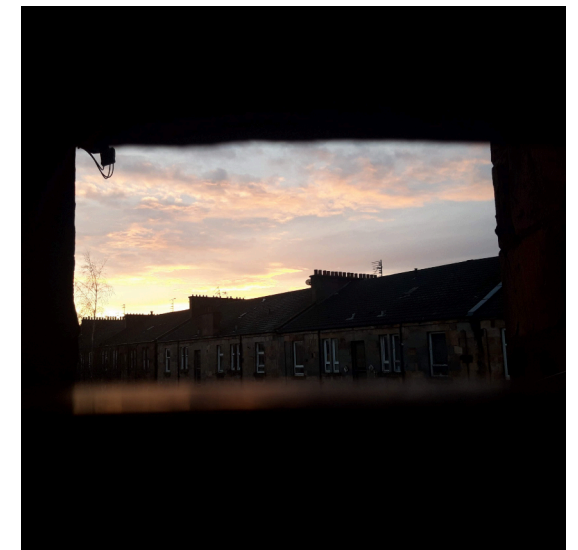
How do we go about dwelling when we are outdoors?

What can we do to make this a more pleasant prospect?

Ask them to jot down some take-home ideas about how to bring some of the ideas and dreams from the activity into their actual homes.

## WARM WISHES

Independent activity: encourage participants to pick a new place where they experiment with some time spend dwelling out-of-doors. There is complete flexibility about the kind of site selected: maybe it's a tree, a local park, a viewpoint, a green space, a garden, etc. Ask participants to note down their experiences in their journal and to take photographs, record a video, draw a sketch or otherwise creatively engage with and respond to their chosen place.



## **GATHERING 3: OUR SENSE OF WINTER SELF**

### **Aims:**

1. Share creative experiments from past weeks
2. Think through Winter challenges and helpful responses
3. Devise concrete plans for small changes to make at home

### **WELCOMING WORDS**

Introduction prompt: ask participants to reflect on their experiences/efforts over the past weeks in creatively responding to their chosen outdoor places (while acknowledging that they weather may have made this challenging!).

Discussion topic: invite participants to reflect on how their engagements with their outdoor place has given them a different vantage point on familiar surroundings or feelings.

### **CREATIVE ACTIVITY: RE-THINKING SAD SELVES**

This activity is about reflecting on what participants find helpful during the Winter and devising creative ways to re-think SAD responses to Winter and

specific elements of the season that participants find challenging. Begin by introducing some questions to prompt conversation and reflection:

- What elements of the Winter season affect your mood most?
- How does your life change when you are feeling SAD?
- How do you recognise when you have started feeling SAD?
- What strategies have you tried to get out of a SAD-spell?

Travel outside together somewhere you can spread out: each participant should find a quiet place where they can spend time with their own thoughts. After about 10 minutes, participants can be invited to join up in pairs or small groups to share their reflections. Encourage participants to take notes about what the other has told them.

What challenges does my partner face in Winter when feeling SAD?

What are the coping and creative strategies that my partner finds most useful when experiencing SAD?

## TALKING TOGETHER

The group conversation will focus on sharing these experiences with the wider group, but you can ask participants to share the things they were told by their partner(s): what things really resonated, what things were different from their own, and what things made them think differently about an aspect of their experience or the winter season?

## WARM WISHES

Independent activity: Encourage participants to keep up with the habit of using their journal and recommend a specific journalling prompt to engage with over the coming weeks: ask participants to draft their own 'Letter to Winter', expressing their feelings about the season, and how they foresee this relationship changing through continued participation in the Wintering Well group. Remind participants that letters take time, so it may be something they work on now-and-then. Encourage them to approach the prompt creatively: for those who would rather express themselves visually, what other kinds of messages or responses to winter might they compose?



## **GATHERING 4: WINTER ROOMS OF OUR MAKING**

### **Aims:**

1. Share and discuss experiences drafting letters to winter
2. Reflect on how our homes shape experiences of the seasons
3. Identify take-home goals to make home more seasonally enjoyable

### **WELCOMING WORDS**

Introduction prompt: Invite participants to reflect on their experience drafting a 'Letter to Winter' and, if they wish, to read theirs to the group.

Discussion topic: Invite the group to respond to one another's letters, to reflect on the tone/style of their different approaches and what kind of feelings they communicated. Did any of the letters make them think of something else they'd like to add to their own?

### **CREATIVE ACTIVITY: REMODELING**

This activity is about reimagining our home and other indoor spaces we inhabit during the winter, and then identifying small, practicable changes

that participants can actually make over the coming weeks to let the outside world in or to create a more comforting space for inhabiting the winter season. Emphasis should be on achievable and available, rather than the ideal.

Begin by asking participants to join up in pairs or small group and to head outside for short walks, during which they can talk about their ideas for redesigning their domestic spaces. You can also invite stories about previous changes they have already made to their homes to make them more enjoyable in winter. Are there any they would like to do again, or any they found didn't work for them - that they subsequently undid?

Once they have had some time to test out their first ideas in conversation, invite participants to regroup inside to draw or describe a modified version of an existing room in their home. Participants can draw or sketch, make a diagram, annotate a photo, describe the desired changes in words, make a list or step-by-step instructions. Encourage participants to think about how to let more light in, improve its quality or intensify its presence. They can note down specific furniture, outfits, books, routines, foods or drinks, hobbies, holidays or company that help make their winter spaces comfortable.

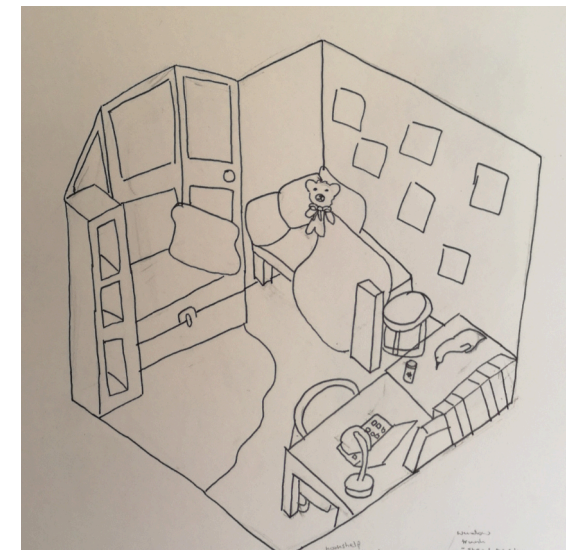


## TALKING TOGETHER

Ask the group to reflect on the kinds of spaces they reimagined and to share the concrete steps they would like to take over the coming weeks. Try to encourage participants to move from general ideas to specific goals they can work on before the next gathering. These ‘take-home ideas’ will become the basis for the independent activity.

## WARM WISHES

Independent activity: encourage participants to do a little bit of experimenting and re-arranging at home. Ask them to try to create their own indoor Sun Room or Weather Window, or similar seasonal space for themselves. Ask them to document the process, either by describing it in their journals or by taking photos and videos that they can bring in to share next time.



## GATHERING 5: OUR WINTER NEIGHBOURHOOD

### Aims:

1. Share stories and documentation of home re-arranging exercise
2. Create a collective plan for an ideal winter neighbourhood
3. Discuss sources of inspiration and hope

### WELCOMING WORDS

Introduction prompt: Invite participants to share their experiences re-making their homes for wintertime seasonal living. Did they find ways of letting more light in, or making a space for appreciating the natural light more, or just somewhere SAD might feel less intensive?

Discussion topic: Invite participant to show-and-tell with any pictures they have of their home changes, and encourage them to explain how they got their ideas, how they approach implementing them, and whether they encountered any challenges. Are there any further changes they're hoping to make?

## CREATIVE ACTIVITY: OUR WINTER NEIGHBOURHOOD

This activity is about scaling-up from the conversations about how to make homes better for wintertime living to begin thinking about the kinds of changes participants would like to see - or even try to make happen - in their local area to make it more suitable for the season. Rather than seeing SAD as something holding you back, this activity aims to encourage participants to see how SAD experiences offer valuable lessons about how we want to design and make welcoming and supportive communities. Participants will be asked to grant themselves special status as local “change-makers”.

Ask participants to join up in pairs or small groups for a creative exercise where they imagine the kind of SAD-friendly street, neighbourhood, village, town or countryside they would want, not the kind that they currently have or are resident in. Encourage them to imagine outwards from the immediate situation of their home, dreaming their way into larger spaces.

As well as paying attention to practical matters (street-lighting, areas of illumination/darkness, green spaces, street-furniture), paired participants can talk about what it is about a place that welcomes people to spend time hanging out, that can generate an individual or shared sense of energy, and that can help us all with a bit of “battery recharge”. While walking and talking participants will compare notes on favourite places previously visited where light seems to be put to work differently/positively, and where the

built environment or green spaces or social habits and customs play an important part in this process. Walking conversations can try to respond to two questions:

Who does Winter better, how and where?

How could our SAD version of the world make it better for all?

### **TALKING TOGETHER**

Invite participants to gather together to pool their ideas and reflections to 'THINK BIG'. Ask them to come up with a utopian vision for their kind of local area (city neighbourhood, village, countryside, coastline, etc.) by compiling suggestions of possible actions and interventions in the local area for making better for SAD dwellers. Participants might make a map together or draft a collective letter outlining their proposal. They could also begin a catalogue of examples from around the world of projects that made local areas more enjoyable to inhabit in the winter: and these could even serve as the starting place for working on something similar, closer to home.

## WARM WISHES

Independent activity: A key part of today's gathering is about finding inspiration and hope from other places and people. This can come from practical projects for re-designing local neighbourhoods, but it can also come from arts and culture. Encourage participants to spend the coming weeks gathering instances of writing, images, or other cultural media that brings them solace during the winter, and which they'd be happy to share with others at the next gathering. They might spend some time journalling about why it is particularly meaningful for them.



## GATHERING 6: SOCIALISING OUR SAD SELVES

### Aims:

1. Share cultural and artistic sources of inspiration and hope
2. Discuss how SAD affects social relationships
3. Experiment with forms of creative expression for communicating SAD experience
4. Discuss plans and hopes for the group in the coming seasons and next Winter

### WELCOMING WORDS

Introduction prompt: Welcome participants to share the cultural and artistic media they have gathered since the last meeting. Ask them to start by choosing the one that they are most interested in sharing with the group: why did they choose this one to share? How does it make them feel? How did they first encounter it?

Discussion topic: Use this to start a broader conversation on the role of arts and creative practices in participants' lives, especially during the winter.

What sorts of creative activities do they enjoy taking part in or viewing? Is there anything they would like to make more time for?

### **CREATIVE ACTIVITY: EXPRESSING SAD EXPERIENCES**

This activity is about how participants can think creatively about how they express their feelings and thoughts about SAD to others, and it is an opportunity to think about the ways in which SAD affects participants' social networks. Begin by acknowledging that SAD not only affects individuals, but also those around them and that everyone faces unique circumstances in their social lives.

Then lead the participants outdoors to walk together in pairs or small groups. Ask them to discuss the following questions while they walk, and to observe how the area has changed compared to the previous weeks (if you have been meeting in the same location):

How do you (or don't you) socialise your SAD feelings (at home, among friends, at work, when socialising)?

What does sharing do to those SAD feelings?

Do you let others know how you feel?

Are you careful about who you choose to share with?



Do you think you do things that might push people away from having a conversation about experiencing SAD?

After participants have had some time to talk, ask them to turn the conversation to creative thinking about how they might express their SAD feelings and who they would like to share these creative expressions with. Participants might try taking photos of the surrounding area that capture how they feel at their worst - or at their best - in winter. Or they could take some time to write a short poem. They could make a playlist of music that expresses how they feel, or a 'Wintertime Film Series'.

### **TALKING TOGETHER**

Gather the participants together and encourage them to share the ideas and forms of creative expression they came up with. Ask them to say a bit about why they chose this form.

Remind one another of the way in which your Wintering Well group can function as a safe social setting, for sharing experience, finding support and solidarity.



## WARM WISHES

Independent activity: gently encourage participants to try ways of sharing more of their SAD self with family, friends, colleagues or others close to them. As always, encourage them to continue to experiment with their journals and use these as spaces to reflect on their goals for changing their SAD social life.

If you have completed all six gatherings from this sample, you may also be approaching the end of the winter season (depending on how much time elapsed between each meeting). In this case, you might also want to take some time to talk about whether the group wants to continue during the sunnier months and whether anyone has suggestions for the next winter. Building on these activities and planning ahead together can be incredibly beneficial for setting in place helpful habits and strategies for living well in winter.



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CREATIVE  
PROMPTS



## 1. TURNING TO THE SEASONS

Local seasonal traditions are a way to attend to the slow changes that continue throughout the seasons. They are not only ways to break up what can feel like a monotony of grey during Winter, but also to revive interest in aspects of the seasons we sometimes take for granted - the changing qualities of light, the warmth of a favourite meal, or a tradition that brings us comfort.

Here are some examples:

### **Harvest Home**

A reunion to mark the conclusion of a season's work. For your group, it could be a prompt to reflect on their favourite memories from this autumn or past autumns. Look for local activities near you, or invite friends to gather for a festival of your own making.

### **Wassailing**

A 'Twelfth Night' tradition (celebrated on 5 January, the traditional 'twelfth day of Christmas' celebrations), a wassail procession involves singing and making a din in orchards to wake up the apples and ward off evil spirits - and to welcome the slow turn to spring.

See what you can learn about local and international holidays and traditions marking the passage of Winter.

You could suggest some of the books you'd be interested in reading to your local library!



## 2. WINTER READING CLUB

Literature can often be a source of inspiration and consolation, and there is a long tradition of writing about seasonal experience. Many myths and folktales from around the world share common stories about struggling with the dark and recovering the 'stolen light' during the Winter.

Work with the members of your group to make a wintertime reading list, and pick one to read together.

Here are some readings that you could start with:

- *Winter: An anthology for the changing seasons* Edited by Melissa Harrison
- *A Poem For Every Winter Day* Edited by Allie Esiri
- *A Winter Book: Selected Stories* by Tove Jansson
- *The Return of the Light: Twelve Tales from Around the World for the Winter Solstice* by Carolyn McVickar Edwards

## 3. SOLSTICE CELEBRATION

The winter solstice, midwinter, marks the shortest day of the year. This is a time that can often be the most difficult for people, when winter has already stretched on for a long time - but another long stretch remains ahead. It is a

day that is worth celebrating, however, because it also marks the turn back to the lighter months: from 22 December onward, the days will be growing longer again.

Your group could mark the occasion in the evening with an online gathering to share favourite lights and seasonal poems with one another. You could also make a list of seasonal milestones you're looking forward to: the first daisies, for instance, or the start of hillwalking season.

## 4. WALKING, TOGETHER

Going outdoors is one of the things that people find most helpful when dealing with SAD, but it's also one of the things they find hardest to do. It can be very difficult just getting over the threshold when you know it's cold and wet out. It can also be very frustrating when someone tells you to 'just get outside a bit' when it's the last thing your body wants. It can be very useful to make a list of local walks that you enjoy to make it that much easier on yourself to get out.

Our workshop participants found it very helpful to come up with creative activities to do on their walks. This helped them enjoy the walks they could access, even if they weren't always in the 'greenest' areas. You might try sky-watching or star-gazing, or you could take notes on local architecture, or

**If you only have energy for 5 or 10 minutes, where will you walk? 30 minutes? Make a set of walks that will suit your different energy levels.**



Your favourite Wintertime places might be different from the places you enjoy visiting during the Summer!

make up stories about people you see through windows. You could encourage each member of your group to make a set of 3-5 'From the Front Door' walks, which begin right at the front door. Jot these down in your seasonal journal!

## 5. PLACES TO BE

Often people with SAD report spending much greater amounts of time at home during the Winter. Sometimes this suits them, but many times people can feel trapped and as though there's nowhere else for them to spend time when it's cold and wet.

It can be fun and useful for your group to start making a list of 'Places to Visit During Winter'. Maybe it's museums, cafes, libraries, parks - or anywhere else you think of. You could make goals to visit them at different times of day, or you could make plans to visit them together as a group.

Each member of the group could also pick a specific place to visit regularly over the course of the season. Ask everyone to take notes about the changes they spot week-to-week. They could make a habit of journalling in their chosen location or perhaps invent their own seasonal ritual to do each time they visit.

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## EXTRA RESOURCES



## A SAMPLE FLYER

We have included a sample flyer that you can use or adapt for advertising your Wintering Well gatherings. We recommend a simple format that gives a clear idea of your group's purpose and the essential details: time, date and location of your first/next meeting along with your contact information. We recommend setting up a separate email or social media group for this purpose to protect your personal contact details.

It can be fun to design your own flyer too, and of course you might decide a different style is better suited for your own group!

However you approach it, we hope that you and your group have a positive and empowering experience as you begin to learn how to winter well together.

# Wintering Well

Wintering Well is a new group interested in finding ways to feel better during winter. We will meet for short chats, walks and creative activities throughout the season. Our group is open to anyone who experiences Seasonal Affective Disorder or lowered wintertime mood.

We would love for you to join us at our first meeting as we begin to learn how to winter well together.

Date & Time:

Location:

For more information, please contact:



## DISCLAIMER

Please be aware that people using these resources may experience low winter mood and all group organisers should be clear that these resources are not intended to replace consultation with medical professionals.

This toolkit is designed by researchers with a non-medical background. Use of the toolkit should not replace any consultation with trained medical professionals. The University of Glasgow and Edinburgh and ESRC and AHRC cannot take responsibility for the outcomes of group work for individuals who use this toolkit and group leader management of related activity. Groups and individuals use these resources at their own risk.

### **WHAT IF I OR A PARTICIPANT IS FEELING OVERWHELMED BY LOW MOOD?**

For UK-based readers, if you are looking for extra support or advice urgently, there are a number of services you can approach: Your own GP or the Accident and Emergency department at your local hospital. If you feel at immediate risk, ring 999 or attend and AE at your local hospital.

Or seek help from public organisations and resources which relate to low mood such as <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/depression/about-depression/> or <https://lthf.com/urgent-help/>

