

The healing power of turning

Dennis Wake discusses woodturning as therapy

What do you think of when you think of therapy for someone who is struggling mentally? Do you see an image of someone lying on a couch with a box of tissues while their therapist makes endless notes? Do you picture someone answering a ton of questions about their innermost thoughts and feelings?

Of course, this kind of therapy works really well for some people, but not everyone is the same and for some people, talking about their feelings doesn't come easy and this kind of therapy can actually increase their anxiety as they contemplate revealing too much of themselves.

Are you nodding along to that? Can you already feel that prickling feeling on the back of your neck at the thought of being forced to open up? There has to be an alternative, right?

Well, what would you say if I told you there was another way to help ease PTSD, anxiety and mild depression and build your confidence? A practical, hands-on approach that will get you out of your head and also allow you to learn a new skill along the way?

In our current situation, as we slowly begin to come out of lockdown, the mental health of our nation is more prevalent than ever, with a surge in cases of depression and anxiety, and we need ways to help those who are suffering from these issues more than ever. That is where taking a woodturning course comes in.



PHOTOGRAPH BY DENNIS WAKE

I know, I know, it sounds like a stretch of the imagination, right? How can woodturning help anyone with their mental health issues? Well, hear me out and I'll tell you about just some of the ways it can help.

For starters, it gets people out of the house. With everything available to order online and be brought to your door these days, it is easy to cocoon up in your own little world and never cross the doors. This can lead to feelings of fear and anxiety when you do have to leave the house and with everything available at the touch of a button, it is easy to just give in to those feelings and stay home.

Overcoming fears

Taking a woodturning class gives people a reason to get up, get dressed and go outside. Often having a reason to do something is enough to give someone that little push and get them back out into the world again. That first step is the hardest and once it's been taken, many people find that they immediately feel better as they have overcome the first stage of their fears.

The actual act of woodturning is a good way to simultaneously engage your mind

and yet be able to stop over thinking things, a common occurrence in people with depression and anxiety. The process of using the lathe and learning how to use different techniques allows a person to get lost in something new and use their minds to focus on the task at hand rather than focusing on being anxious or nervous.

'Interesting learning what to use and how to use the tools. Relaxing but you have to concentrate on what you are doing'

– Ralph, course attendee

Perhaps the biggest way in which woodturning can help people to cope with their mental health issues is by helping them to gain confidence. This is achieved in several ways.

The first and most impactful way is the confidence that comes from learning a new skill and having something to show for it, something the person made with their own hands. Learning a new skill isn't

'My biggest barrier in life was confidence – I came here and gained that confidence. This confidence has awakened something inside of me to think of the future and learn more new skills'

– Gary, course attendee

easy and showing someone that when they put their mind to it, they can do it, can be pivotal in how someone's self-worth can grow. And once they realise that actually they do have something to give, that can go a long way towards rehabilitation and in some cases, the person will go on to seek employment in an industry they never would have had the confidence to even consider before the course.

As you can see from the photographs, course attendees Gary and Ralph are brimming with confidence after taking the woodturning course, something they feared wouldn't be possible for them due to them being deaf. My course is one of the first to cater to people who are deaf and it has been a pleasure to watch the students' confidence grow as they worked through the course.

All-round confidence

While gaining confidence in a new found skill is important, it's not the only area that people who attend the woodturning course find that their confidence improves in. It also enables them to gain confidence in meeting new people. It can be hard for anyone to make new friends, particularly if the person is shy and/or anxious and the woodturning gives them a common ground so they have an easy way to get chatting to other people.

Often depression is a lonely journey and talking to other people who understand the journey you're on without having to have that be the sole focus of the conversation can be a big help for people with mental health issues. Being in an environment where people are feeling comfortable and their confidence is

beginning to grow is a great time for their social skills to also grow.

When all of these things come together and a person develops confidence, learns a new skill and begins to see their value in the world, it is only natural that their mood will begin to lift and they will start to feel better about themselves.

Isn't it amazing to think that a six-day course in woodturning can change someone's mindset so positively? And at the end of the six days, not only do the course attendees have this new-found confidence and a new skill, they also have the items they have made which they can always look upon and feel proud of, and of course there's also the fact that they have made new friends with at least one similar interest.

'Fantastic tutor that made us all feel relaxed and confident'

– Kath, sign language interpreter



'Made me feel happy. When I'm not here (at the course), at home I talk about it all the time to my partner'

– Ralph, course attendee



Dennis Wake

With 18 years of woodturning experience and a teaching qualification from the Association of Woodturners Great Britain, Dennis Wake is a patient and knowledgeable teacher who enjoys seeing his students grow. As an ex-serviceman who has seen first-hand the effects of mental illness, including PTSD, depression and anxiety, he is passionate about helping people to overcome their mental health issues and begin to heal.

To keep up to date with Dennis and his work, visit www.woodturninghartlepool.co.uk and follow him on www.facebook.com/Woodturning-Hartlepool