

Tips for Mental Well-being

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According to the World Health Organization (WHO) the Covid-19 pandemic has had a major impact on people's mental well-being, particularly affecting health and other frontline workers, students, people living alone, and those with pre-existing mental health conditions. Services for mental, neurological and substance use disorders have also been significant, yet, there is cause for optimism as some countries have found new ways of providing mental health care to their populations. It was during the World Health Assembly in May 2021, that governments from around the world collectively recognized the need to scale up quality mental health services at all levels. This is a significant development as we commemorate World Mental Health Day on Sunday October 10, 2021.

The day is about more than advocacy though, as it also provides an opportunity to empower people to look after their own mental health and provide support to others. Being in good mental health means you can make the most of your potential, cope with life and play a full part in your family, workplace, community and among friends. Some people call mental health 'emotional health' or 'well-being' and it is just as important as good physical health. Mental health is everyone's business because we all have times when we feel down or stressed or frightened. Most of the time those feelings pass, but sometimes they develop into a more serious problem and that could happen to any one of us.

Everyone is different, so while you may bounce back from a setback, someone else may feel weighed down by it for a long time. Mental health problems range from the worries we all experience as part of everyday life to serious long-term conditions. Majority of people who experience these problems can get over them or learn to live with them, especially if they get help early on. Here are some common signs and symptoms of mental illness to look out for in others:

- Feeling sad or down
- Confused thinking or reduced ability to concentrate
- Excessive fears or worries, or extreme feelings of guilt
- Extreme mood changes of highs and lows
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Significant tiredness, low energy or problems sleeping
- Inability to cope with daily problems or stress
- Trouble understanding and relating to situations and to people
- Problems with alcohol or drug use
- Major changes in eating habits
- Sex drive changes
- Excessive anger, hostility or violence
- Suicidal thinking

Many people do not feel comfortable talking about their feelings and, unfortunately, there is a stigma attached to mental health problems that makes people feel even less talkative about their issues. If you notice these changes in a friend or loved one, then here are some tips on how to approach and offer to help them overcome their struggles:

1. Set time aside with no distractions - it is important to provide an open and nonjudgmental space with no distractions.
2. Let them share as much or as little as they want to - let them lead the discussion at their own pace. Don't put pressure on them to tell you anything they aren't ready to talk about. Talking can take a lot of trust and courage and you might be the first person they have been able to talk to about this.
3. Don't try to diagnose or second guess their feelings - you probably are not a medical expert and, while you may be happy to talk and offer support, you aren't a trained counsellor. Try not to make assumptions about what is wrong or jump in too quickly with your own diagnosis or solutions.
4. Keep questions open ended - say "Why don't you tell me how you are feeling?" rather than "I can see you are feeling very low". Try to keep your language neutral and give the person time to answer without grilling them with too many questions.
5. Talk about wellbeing - talk about ways of de-stressing or practicing self-care and ask if they find anything helpful. Exercising, having a healthy diet and getting a good night's sleep can help protect mental health and sustain wellbeing.
6. Listen carefully to what they tell you - repeat what they have said back to them to ensure you have understood it. You don't have to agree with what they are saying, but by showing you understand how they feel, you are letting them know you respect their feelings.
7. Offer them help in seeking professional support and provide information on ways to do this - you might want to offer to go to a medical professional or mental health professional with them, or help them talk to a friend or family member. Try not to take control and allow them to make decisions.
8. Know your limits - ask for help if the problem is serious. If you believe they are in immediate danger or they have injuries that need medical attention, you need to take action to make sure they are safe.

If you are worried about someone it can be difficult to know what to do. When you are aware there is an issue, it is important not to wait. Waiting and hoping they will come to you for help might lose valuable time in getting them support. Talking to someone is often the first step to take when you know they are going through a hard time. This way you can find out what is troubling them and what you can do to help.

