

# Mental Health Matters

## A guide to helping others



Its  OK  
To Talk

An individual's mental health can be difficult to define because their issues, types of problems and the impact these have upon their life, family and friends are individual and specific to them. In other words, no two mental health problems will be experienced or managed in the same way.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) acknowledges that there is no 'official' definition of the term, but they define mental health as:

*"A state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."*

The term mental health therefore refers to the ability to function and deal with daily life. An example of good mental health would be a person who has a positive sense of who they are and the ability to deal with life on a daily basis. So mental health includes being able to:

- cope with the demands of everyday life
- make and maintain relationships and participate in society
- make sense of life and the world around you
- experience, understand and express emotions and feelings
- think clearly, solve problems and make sound decisions

Mental ill health is the absence of some or all of these positive factors on an ongoing basis. Mental ill health refers to a range of mental health conditions that affect an individual's mood, thinking and behaviour. Mental ill health can be any condition that disrupts an individual's everyday life. Examples include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia and addictive behaviour. Everyone may have bad days occasionally where they feel they cannot cope, but for individuals experiencing mental ill health, most days will be like this.

### **Factors that increase the risk of mental health**

There are a number of factors that can increase the risk of an individual experiencing mental ill health. Factors may be temporary, causing short-term mental ill health or distress, or long-term, leading to more serious mental disorders. Often it is a combination of factors from inside and outside the workplace and general life situations that lead to stress, anxiety and ultimately mental ill health. For more information use <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/mental-health-problems-introduction/causes/>

### **The effects of physical health on mental health**

It has long been recognised by medical professionals that there is a link between physical and mental health. Individuals who feel well physically and who are more active are more able to cope with the mental strains and stresses of everyday life.

When they are ill, most people will find that they also feel a bit sad and sorry for themselves. They are less able to cope with everyday tasks and might be irritable towards others. Often, they just want to curl up in bed. Where physical health problems are long-term, individuals may become depressed.

By looking after physical health, we also therefore protect our mental health. Lifestyle factors therefore have an impact on our mental well-being.

The World Health Organisation and other national and international bodies list some 250-300 different mental health disorders that can range from mild to severe. Some of the more common ones are listed here for information.

<b>Stress</b>	<b>Anxiety disorder</b>	<b>Depression</b>	<b>Self-harm</b>	<b>Suicide</b>
<b>Eating disorders</b>	<b>Bipolar disorder</b>	<b>Schizophrenia</b>		

## **Signs and Indicators of Mental Ill Health**

Where individuals display a number of the symptoms associated with the above and/or the symptoms are severe, they may be facing a mental health **crisis**.

Signs that a crisis may be occurring may include breaking down in tears, having a panic attack, talking of suicide, behaving in unusual ways, totally withdrawing from other people, and/or experiencing a different reality (psychosis). For more information please see <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/depression/symptoms/>

## **Dealing with mental health crisis**

If someone is experiencing a mental health crisis, there are a number of things you can do to support them. For more advice on this see <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/depression/for-friends-and-family/>

If there are any indications that the person is suicidal, they should be encouraged to seek immediate help. They or someone else should contact a GP, call NHS111 or contact the Samaritans on 116 123. Help can also be sought from friends, family or local mental health teams.

Where an individual is threatening suicide and someone has called for help, someone should then stay with them until help arrives. That person should talk to the individual, telling them how much they are cared for and wanted. They should however be sure to take care of their own safety and avoid dangerous or confrontational situations.

## **The importance of positive relationships**

Positive relationships are important in preventing and supporting mental ill health in all aspects of life. Being in a negative environment for a large amount of time can cause stress and make individuals feel isolated, which can reduce motivation, lead to low morale and therefore have a negative effect on mental health.

Positive relationships make individuals feel happier and experience better mental health, which can make them more resilient in the face of problems and stressful situations in any environment.

Communication is important in supporting positive relationships. Effective communication gives individuals someone to share concerns with and help them feel supported with problems and worries in general.

Everyone can actively help to support mental well-being by not being afraid of broaching the subject of mental health and of having difficult conversations with individuals about how they are feeling. Active listening is important to make individuals feel properly supported. We all know friends and associates that we will sometimes ask, 'how are you feeling', 'how have you been lately'? Even these short and simple interactions that we often don't think about can help someone feel better about themselves and possibly give them an opportunity to tell you about something that may be troubling them.

Those listening should show the individual they are listening and interested and being non-judgmental about what the individual says.

## **Tips on having difficult conversations**

Conversations with individuals about worries, whether at work, at home or in their leisure pursuits can be difficult. The following link may help.

<https://www.headstogether.org.uk/tipsfortalking/>

## **Tips on active listening**

Active listening is an important skill, especially for handling sensitive conversations. Active listening tips can be found on the link below.

[https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/mentalhealth\\_activelistening.html](https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/mentalhealth_activelistening.html)

## **Supporting an individual with mental ill health**

If you suspect that an individual, is experiencing mental ill health, you can assist them in the first instance by listening to them and giving them the kinds of support described above.

Other ways we can support people in need can be found on the link below.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/supporting-someone-mental-health-problem>

### **Own responsibilities**

Everyone has a responsibility to treat people with respect in any and all environments and to support anyone in need. We must never, of course, discriminate against individuals with mental ill health.

### **Referral to others**

Individuals showing signs of mental ill health will often need to be referred to others. The best scenario is where the individual agrees to seek help. In such cases they can be referred to an appropriate person or service. For further advice please visit <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/seeking-help-for-a-mental-health-problem/where-to-start/%20Support%20for%20own%20mental%20health>

### **Reducing barriers to accessing mental health support**

People who have physical illnesses usually recognise something doesn't feel quite right and seek professional care to treat their symptoms and help them to feel better. But when mental health challenges set in, it's not unusual for people to ignore their symptoms and to avoid seeking treatment.

Often individuals do not access mental health support because of barriers or perceived barriers. See the link below for further information:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/stigma-and-discrimination>

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## **Disclaimer regarding this mental health information**

### **This mental health booklet provides information, not advice.**

The contents of this booklet in our Health & Wellbeing section are provided for general information only. They are not intended to, and do not amount to, set out advice which you should rely on. They are not in any way an alternative to specific or professional advice. You must therefore seek relevant professional or specialist advice before taking, or refraining from, any action based on the information in this booklet or these webpages.

If you have questions about any medical matter, you should consult your doctor or other professional healthcare provider without delay.

If you think you are experiencing any medical condition you should seek immediate medical attention from a doctor or other professional healthcare provider.

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### **References used to create this guide**

Mind	NICE
Heads together	Marie Claire
mentalhealth.org	ACAS
CCHOS	WHO
UK GOV	kingsfund.org
NHS	Mental health first aid level 2