



UNIVERSITY OF EMBU

Mental Health Awareness

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Although mental health is a fundamental component of health, recognition of mental disorders and awareness about its importance is limited. Stigma and lack of understanding about mental disorders are major barriers to seeking help and promoting better mental health. Increasing understanding and overcoming stigma through strategic communications and social mobilization are crucial steps towards strengthening mental health programmes.



Mental health promotion involves actions that improve psychological well-being. There are a number of ways to promote mental health, including early childhood interventions; support to children; socio-economic empowerment; social support for elderly populations; programmes targeted at vulnerable people; mental health promotional activities in schools; mental health interventions at work; violence prevention programmes; and anti-discrimination laws and campaigns



Defining mental health

Mental health is a state of well being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to contribute to his or her own community



Defining Mental Illness

Mental illnesses are health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking or behavior (or a combination of these). Mental illnesses are associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities. However, only half of those affected receive treatment, often because of the stigma attached to mental health.



Mental health is too often ignored

Right now :

- 1 in 4 people will experience mental health problems
- 1 in 6 workers are experiencing depression, anxiety or stress



The two most common mental health conditions are:

Anxiety Disorders – More than 18% of adults each year struggle with some type of anxiety disorder, including Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), Panic disorder (panic attacks, Generalized-anxiety disorder and specific phobias.

Mood Disorders – Mood disorders, such as Depression, affects nearly 10% of adults each year and are characterized by difficulties in regulating one's mood.



Signs and Symptoms:

- 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
- Detachment from reality (delusions), paranoia or hallucinations



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- 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



The Importance of Speaking Out About Mental Health

Mental illness is a major global health issue. Raising awareness and increasing the understanding of mental health can change the way society views and responds to this complex issue.

- The stigma combined with the lack of open discussion on mental health undoubtedly heighten the severity of the problem for many people. Isolation and loneliness are known to be contributory factors too.
- Stigma affects not only the number seeking treatment, but also the number of resources available for proper treatment. Stigma and misinformation can feel like overwhelming obstacles for someone who is struggling with a mental health condition.



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- Mental health awareness drives have helped to kick start a more open and frank discussion. Many individuals now bravely stepping up and talking about their mental health struggles.
- Educating the general public is important. It makes people aware of these mental health conditions and, in turn, hopefully reduces stigma. It may also help someone recognize the warning signs of a mental illness they, or a loved one, have been experiencing; thus leading them to seek a professional diagnosis and treatment.



What You Can Do to Help

- Showing individuals respect and acceptance removes a significant barrier to successfully coping with their illness. Having people see you as an individual and not as your illness can make the biggest difference for someone who is struggling with their mental health.
- Advocating within our circles of influence helps ensure these individuals have the same rights and opportunities as other members of your community.
- Learning more about mental health allows us to provide helpful support to those affected in our families and communities



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- Mental health isn't the opposite of mental illness. You don't have to wait for the symptoms and effects of a mental illness or personality disorder to disappear before you can build mental health. Determine what mental health is for you, and begin to take steps toward.
- Mental health is an ongoing process. Approach it as a journey rather than a destination.
- Mental health is loving yourself for all that you are rather than hating yourself for all that you think you aren't.



Self-care tips:

1. Talk about your feelings

Talking about your feelings can help you stay in good mental health and deal with times when you feel troubled.

2. Keep active

Regular exercise can boost your self-esteem and can help you concentrate, sleep, and feel better. Exercise keeps the brain and your other vital organs healthy, and is also a significant benefit towards improving your mental health.



3. Eat well

Your brain needs a mix of nutrients in order to stay healthy and function well, just like the other organs in your body. A diet that's good for your physical health is also good for your mental health

4. Avoid drugs and alcohol

We often drink alcohol to change our mood. Some people drink to deal with fear or loneliness, but the effect is only temporary.

When the drink or drugs wears off, you feel worse because of the way the alcohol has affected your brain and the rest of your body. Drinking is not a good way to manage difficult feelings.



5. Keep in touch

There's nothing better than catching up with someone face to face, but that's not always possible. You can also give them a call, drop them a note, or chat to them online instead. Keep the lines of communication open: it's good for you!

6. Ask for help

None of us are superhuman. We all sometimes get tired or overwhelmed by how we feel or when things don't go to plan.

If things are getting too much for you and you feel you can't cope, ask for help. Your family or friends may be able to offer practical help or a listening ear.



7. Take a break

A change of scene or a change of pace is good for your mental health.

It could be a half-hour lunch break at work, or a weekend exploring somewhere new. A few minutes can be enough to de-stress you. Give yourself some 'me time'.

8. Do something you're good at

Enjoying yourself can help beat stress. Doing an activity, you enjoy probably means you're good at it, and achieving something boosts your self-esteem



9. Accept who you are

We're all different. It's much healthier to accept that you're unique than to wish you were more like someone else. Feeling good about yourself boosts your confidence to learn new skills, visit new places and make new friends. Good self-esteem helps you cope when life takes a difficult turn.

10. Care for others

Caring for others is often an important part of keeping up relationships with people close to you. It can even bring you closer together.



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**Thank You and
Stay Safe**