Mental Health Awareness Shabbat

At NEMS – 28th January 2023

Key facts on mental health

What is mental health?

Mental health refers to our cognitive, behavioural and emotional wellbeing - it is all about how we think, feel and behave. It helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices.

Mental health also includes a person's ability to enjoy life - to attain a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience.

What is mental illness?

A medically diagnosable illness that can result from a number of factors, including biological or developmental. It can affect the way we feel, act and think and disrupts our ability to work or carry out other daily activities and engage in satisfying personal relationships. It can be managed through prevention, diagnosis, treatment and mental health recovery.

What is mental health recovery?

Mental health recovery means being able to live a good life, as defined by the individual, with or without symptoms. It is a unique and personal experience that can have its ups and downs. Mental health recovery focuses on what a person CAN do rather than on what they can't. It is not necessarily easy or straightforward. Many people describe the need to persevere and to find ways to maintain hope through the most trying times.

Parity of esteem

The principle by which mental health must be given equal priority to physical health. It was enshrined in law in 2012. The government requires NHS England to work for parity

of esteem to mental and physical health through the NHS Mandate. This has still not yet been realised.

Key facts on mental illness

- One in six adults experienced some form of depression in summer 2021, compared with one in five in early 2021. (ONS, 2021)

- Rates of probable mental disorder increased between 2017 and 2021 in six to sixteen-year-olds from one in nine to one in six and in 17 to 19-year-olds from one in ten to one in six. (NHS Digital, 2021)

- In 2021, there were 5,583 suicides registered in England and Wales, equivalent to a rate of 10.7 deaths per 100,000 people. (ONS, 2022)

- In a National Union of Students poll of 4,000 students, 52% reported that their mental health had deteriorated or been affected negatively by Covid-19. However only 29% of those had looked for help. (NUS student survey, 2020)

- People with mental health problems are nearly twice as likely as those without to say they have felt unable to cope due to the rising cost of living. (Money and Mental Health Policy Institute Report, 2022)

Why social connection is the antidote to loneliness

One of the many symptoms of mental health illness that we see is loneliness. Although many of us experience loneliness at one time or another, it's often overlooked or dismissed. Our society prides itself on self-reliance, so loneliness can carry a stigma for people who admit to it. (The Lonely Society Report, Mind)

According to research, being lonely is associated with an increased risk in depression, anxiety and even cardio-vascular disease. When we experience mental illness, this can also exacerbate our loneliness as we get into a vicious spiral of loss, social contact and of feeling 'unworthy' to reach out to people. Either way, it seems loneliness can break our hearts and adversely affect our physical and mental health.

Isolation is not a choice. It's a consequence of loss and distress in our lives and adds to challenges with our mental health. Conversely, authentic and meaningful social contact can increase our confidence and self-worth, lower our stress hormones and promote wellbeing.

We can feel loved by anyone. We're not talking about romantic love but the love between us – person to person. We all have the power to share that feeling. Warm human connections, conviviality, camaraderie – these qualities make us feel good and may help us live longer.

Our communities, which are often organised around a synagogue but equally can be found in schools, sports clubs, special interest groups or university JSocs, might be a powerful social key to unlock the power of connection and health.

Conversation starters

We all have mental health and it is just as important as our physical health. Starting a conversation about mental health is an excellent way to challenge the stigma and to get people thinking and talking about their perceptions of mental health and mental illness.

We have put together some suggested conversation points that can be discussed over a Friday night meal, Shabbat lunch or even a pre-Shabbat Zoom!

1. Is mental health an important issue in your community? How does the community support our mental health or influence the way we think about it?

2. How does society view mental and physical health differently? Do you think the two should be addressed in the same manner? Why or why not?

3. What steps can be taken within your community to break down any stigma surrounding mental health?

4. In what ways do you engage with hobbies and interests that connect you with your community?
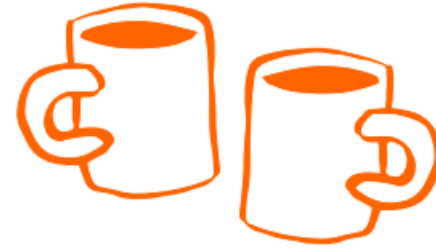
Self-care conversation

Suitable for all years

1. Share the quote: "You can't pour from an empty cup."

2. Ask the group what their initial thoughts or reactions are.

3. Then ask if they think it is relevant to what we know about self-care or their age group in terms of self-care.

4. Acknowledge that at times it can be hard to prioritise looking after ourselves. This may be because we are very busy managing lots of pressures on our time.

Or it may be because we find ourselves trying to help other people so it's hard to find time to look after ourselves.

5. Remind them that we all need to look after ourselves otherwise our batteries will run out. We all feel better when we are recharged.

6. In pairs, ask them to think about one thing they do for self-care and one thing they'd like to try out.

7. Ask the pairs to share back.

Mythbusting mental health quiz

(with key messages about each quote for you to share after each question)

Only some people have mental health – FALSE

We all have mental health in the same way that we all have physical health. They both need looking after as they can impact each other.

Our mental health changes over time – TRUE

Our mental health is always changing and will go up and down. Sometimes big life events or stresses may cause it to change. Other times it could be a build up of lots of little things in a short time period which impact our mental health.

I can look after my mental health – TRUE

This is the concept of self-care. There are things that we can do to help boost our mental health which can make us more productive and motivated and give us more energy. One of the most important forms of self-care is talking about our thoughts and feelings with a trusted adult. Part of looking after our mental health is also getting support from a medical professional if we are worried about our health.

We shouldn't talk about mental health – FALSE

It's really important that we talk about mental health. By speaking about it we teach others to do the same thing too.

When we talk about mental health we help combat stigma where people may not fully understand mental health and therefore treat people differently. It also helps to highlight how important it is that we look after our mental health and get support if we need it.

Mental health is as important as physical health – TRUE

Our mental health and physical health are equally important and make up our overall wellbeing. When our mental health isn't as good as it could be, it might start to affect our immune system so we're more likely to pick up a stomach bug or a cold. If our physical health needs a boost, it may start to impact our mental health and we may find our mood becomes lower or we become more stressed.

Mental health isn't the same as mental illness – TRUE

We all have mental health but we don't all have a diagnosis of a mental illness. It is thought that in this country one in four British adults experience at least one diagnosable mental health problem in any one year and one in eight 5-19-year-olds had at least one mental disorder when assessed in 2017.

Stress won't impact my mental health – FALSE

Stress is one of the areas of our lives which is most likely to impact our mental health. If we think about the times when our mental health might have needed a boost, it's likely to be during times when we were stressed - possibly during exam season or when we had a deadline. If our stress levels are increasing and we're finding it difficult to manage, it's important that we talk to a trusted adult about it. They can help us think about ways to manage our stress. Having someone to talk to can also be good stress relief.

I shouldn't go to my GP about my mental health – FALSE

Our doctor is the right person to go to if we have concerns about our mental health. They are there for both our physical and mental health because, as we've seen, they are connected. A GP can help us think about who we can talk to or some self-care options and if needed, refer us to other professionals for further support.

Mental health can affect how I feel – TRUE

Mental health is all about how we think, feel and behave in the world so it is linked to how we feel. Our thoughts and emotions can be an indication of our mood and the state of our mental health.

My mental health can affect my physical health – TRUE

When our mental health needs a boost or our stress levels are high we may experience changes to our physical health. This is most likely to be headaches or aches and pains from being tense and stressed. Or being more likely to pick up a cold or stomach bug.

Part 2

After the quiz, ask the group why it is important to mythbust around mental health.

If needed, you can prompt them by thinking about where we get our mental health information and if it is always accurate.

If needed, suggest the group discusses the answers in pairs or smaller groups before sharing their thoughts.

As a whole group, think about what might happen if information is inaccurate. For example, people may not know where to get help, people might not look after themselves, stigma may increase, etc.

Strength card activity

Life is full of new opportunities to learn and have new experiences. This learning can help us develop and uncover strengths and transferable skills which will help us in all areas of our lives, in the workplace, further education, volunteering and with our relationships and self-development. We know that acknowledging our strengths can help boost our confidence and self-esteem, while learning and having new experiences can boost our mental health and wellbeing.

To help you identify the strengths you already have and the ones you'd like to develop, look at the list of strengths provided and think about three strengths you have.

Think about at least one strength you have and about two strengths you would like to work on. Why would you like a particular strength?

Finally, think about one strength the person on your right has. Why do you (and others in your group) feel that this person has this strength and why it is so valuable?

Coherent	Well-prepared	Flexible	Confident
Charismatic	Knowledgeable	Dynamic	Concise
Understanding	Skilled	Genuine	Open
Enthusiastic	Good leader	Active listener	Friendly
Calm	Thoughtful	Creative	Open-minded
Respectful	Humorous	Personable	Intelligent
Holds boundaries	Patient	Organised	Focused
Inclusive	Authoritative	Encouraging	Accessible

Wellbeing balloon debate

1. Connect with other people

We know connection and community are vital for our mental health. Good relationships can boost our mental health by fostering a sense of belonging and building confidence. It also helps us create bespoke support networks which we can rely on when we need them.

- How can we connect with others in and out of the workplace?

- What support networks are available in the Jewish community?

2. Be physically active

Physical activity is important for both our physical and our mental health. It can help us build confidence and self-esteem. It can also challenge us in a positive way and motivate us to reach our goals. We also know that it can be an important form of self-care and help boost our mood.

- Does physical activity provide us with the opportunity to socialise and interact with others? What are some examples of this?
- Are there other aspects of physical activity that can boost our wellbeing?

Wellbeing balloon debate

3. Learn new skills

Being involved in meaningful activity can provide a sense of purpose, which is vital for our mental health. Likewise, new skills can increase our problem-solving skills and encourage us to be creative. It may also boost our self-confidence when we find success at something we previously found challenging.

- What avenues for learning can be found within our workplace?

- How can we use our hobbies to support our wellbeing?

4. Give to others

Those who volunteer and give to others report higher levels of wellbeing. It can help us feel connected and foster a sense of community. It can create a sense of reward and provide us with a sense of purpose too.

- How can we support one another within our community?

- How does volunteering give us a sense of purpose?

5. Pay attention to the present

Mindfulness is all about being in the present moment. We know that for many, being more mindful can improve their wellbeing. By being more mindful we can boost our mood and enjoy the present moment more fully. It may help us understand ourselves and those around us better too. By being mindful we may be able to slow down and approach challenges in a more thoughtful way too.

- How can we encourage each other to be more mindful?

- What options for mindfulness might exist within our workplace or community?

Evidence suggests there are five steps we can all take to improve our mental wellbeing.

If you give them a try, you may feel happier, more positive and able to get the most from life.

Where to get help with your mental health

If you or someone you know needs mental health help there are a variety of options depending on the issue of concern.

- **Jami Qwell** – free, safe, anonymous mental health counselling and online support from the UK's leading online mental health platform. To find out more go to **qwell.io/jami**

- **SHOUT** – 24/7 crisis text service – Text **Jami** to **85258**

- **Jami** is here to help with mental health support: **jamiuk.org/get-support/referral**, call **020 8458 2223** or email **info@jamiuk.org**

- **Ring your GP or out-of-hours service for an emergency appointment**

- **Contact your Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) if you have one**

- **Samaritans** – Call Samaritans on Freephone **116 123** (24 hours a day)

- Call the **Papyrus HOPELINEUK**, on **0800 068 41 41** or text **07860 039 967** if you are under 35 and worried about how you are feeling. Or call if you are worried about a young person.

- Call **999** or **NHS Direct** on **111** (England) or **0845 46 47** (Wales)

- **Jewish Helpline** on **0800 652 9249** (Sunday–Thursday, 12pm–12am; Friday 12–3pm)

- Don't hesitate to call **999** in mental health emergencies

Speaking to young people about mental health and wellbeing

Why do we need to talk about mental health with young people?

- Rates of probable mental disorder increased between 2017 and 2021 in six to sixteen-year-olds from one in nine to one in six and in 17 to 19-year-olds from one in ten to one in six. (NHS Digital, 2021).[1]

- A variety of stress and pressures on young people, including social media and technology, can affect their ability to cope and impact possible mental health issues.

- We know that most adults living with mental illness experienced their first mental health problems at a young age. In fact, 50% of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by the age of 14 and 75% by the age of 24.[2]

- If young people know that support is available for their mental health and they know where they can get this support, we help build the foundations for a better future.

How do we talk about it?

- We need to use boundaries when working with groups of young people. Setting out the aims for our conversations about the subject can help us stick to these parameters. Our aims for these sessions may be:

  - To raise awareness about mental health as something that affects us all

  - To encourage people to talk to each other rather than isolating themselves

  - To encourage the young person to seek help when they need it. If you broke your ankle you would not wait to see if it could get better on its own. We should take the same approach with our mental health

  - Use a 'light' voice when talking about the subject. If we convey anxiety or seem uncomfortable with the information, we give the impression that this is a hard or 'heavy' discussion

Key points to educate young people on mental health

- We all have mental health just as we all have physical health.

- Mental health is about the way we feel about ourselves and the world. Our feelings and thoughts are part of our mental health.

- No one can see inside our head, so we need to tell people how we feel.

- When our feelings and thoughts seem to be out of control or worry us we need to speak to a trusted adult. We may decide to speak to someone we know well and feel comfortable with, such as a parent or carer, grandparent or other family member or a school counsellor or teacher. There are also charities, such as ChildLine and Young Minds, where we can speak to someone anonymously.

- We can get help to get better when experiencing mental health problems.

How do we look after our mental health?

- Talk to our friends and socialise with people who make us feel good about ourselves.

- Make sure we get enough sleep and enough food to eat (we need to look after our minds as well as our bodies!).

- Social media can be a great way to socialise and films and TV can help us unwind but we do need to take regular breaks. We also need to be aware that light from phone screens and laptops or computers can interfere with a good night's sleep.

- Hobbies such as team sports, walking the dog, listening to music or expressing ourselves through art or writing can make us feel better and distract us from life's stresses.

- It's okay to speak to an adult we trust about how we feel.