GROW YOUR DREAM FOUNDATION

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

Let’s talk about our minds, our feelings and how we can support one another.

A friendly, practical guide for individuals, families, schools and communities

YOUR MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS.
YOU DESERVE CARE, RESPECT AND SUPPORT.

1. Let’s Understand Mental Health

What do we mean by mental health? Mental health is about how we think, feel and cope with everyday life. It affects how we handle problems, relate to other people, make decisions, learn, work and enjoy the things that matter to us.

Think about mental health as part of your overall health, just like your physical health. We all have mental health, and it can change. Some days we feel strong and hopeful; on other days we may feel worried, sad, tired or overwhelmed. That is part of being human. When difficult feelings last a long time or make everyday life hard, it may be time to seek support.

Mental health is not simply about whether someone has a mental illness. It is also about feeling supported, having hope, managing challenges and being able to take part in everyday life.

Why does mental health matter?

- It helps us think clearly, learn, solve problems and make decisions.
- It helps us build and maintain healthy relationships with family, friends and colleagues.
- It affects our sleep, energy, physical health and how we care for ourselves.
- It helps children and young people learn, grow in confidence and reach their potential.
- It helps families, schools, workplaces and communities become stronger and more supportive.

What can affect our mental health?

Many things can affect how we feel. These may include money worries, unemployment, illness, family problems, grief, violence, bullying, discrimination, loneliness, trauma, lack of sleep or pressure at school or work. Supportive relationships, safe homes and schools, meaningful activities, good health care and a sense of belonging can help protect our well-being.

There is no shame in struggling. A person who experiences a mental health challenge is not weak, lazy or a failure. They deserve understanding and support, just like someone with a physical illness.

2. Stress: What It Is and How We Can Manage It

What is stress? Stress is the way our mind and body respond when life feels demanding, uncertain or difficult. It can happen when we have too much to do, face a problem, feel unsafe or worry about what may happen next.

A little stress can sometimes motivate us to prepare for an exam, meet a deadline or respond to a challenge. But when stress becomes too strong or continues for a long time, it can affect our health and our relationships.

What can cause stress?

- Money problems, debt, unemployment or uncertainty about the future.
- Family disagreements, relationship difficulties, grief or caring for someone who is ill.
- School pressure, examinations, demanding work or fear of losing a job.
- Illness, pain, violence, bullying, discrimination or an unsafe environment.
- Major changes in life, loneliness or feeling that we have no one to talk to.

How might stress show itself?

- **In our feelings:** we may become worried, impatient, angry, sad or easily overwhelmed.
- **In our bodies:** we may experience headaches, muscle tension, stomach problems, tiredness or changes in sleep.
- **In our thoughts:** we may find it hard to concentrate, remember things or make decisions.
- **In our behaviour:** we may withdraw from others, argue more, eat differently or turn to alcohol or drugs.

Simple ways to manage stress

- **Pause and breathe.** Take a slow, gentle breath in and breathe out a little longer. Repeat for a minute or two.
- **Talk to someone.** Share what is troubling you with a trusted friend, family member, counsellor or health professional.
- **Take one step at a time.** Break a big problem into smaller tasks. Start with one thing you can do today.
- **Make time to rest.** Try to keep a regular sleeping routine and take short breaks when you need them.
- **Move your body.** Walking, stretching, dancing, gardening or playing a sport can help you feel better.
- **Do something you enjoy.** Listen to music, pray, write, spend time outdoors or enjoy a hobby.
- **Look after your body.** Eat regularly, drink water and avoid using alcohol or drugs to escape difficult feelings.

Try this when you feel overwhelmed

Stop for a moment. Notice what you are feeling without judging yourself. Take a few slow breaths. Then ask: “What is one small, helpful thing I can do right now?” It may be calling someone, taking a short walk, drinking water or asking for help.

If stress continues for weeks, affects your sleep or daily activities, or feels too difficult to manage alone, speak with a qualified health professional.

3. Mental Health Conditions: Understanding Them Without Judgement

Sometimes a person's thoughts, feelings or behaviour change so much that they experience serious distress or find it difficult to manage everyday life. This may be a sign of a mental health condition. These conditions are real health concerns, and many can be treated or managed with the right support.

A few examples include:

- **Depression:** a person may feel very low or lose interest in things they used to enjoy. They may feel tired, hopeless or worthless, and their sleep or appetite may change.
- **Anxiety disorders:** a person may experience strong, ongoing fear or worry that is difficult to control. Some people also experience sudden episodes of intense fear called panic attacks.
- **Bipolar disorder:** a person may experience periods of depression and periods of unusually high or irritable mood and energy. During a high period, they may sleep very little or make risky decisions.
- **Psychotic disorders:** a person may have difficulty telling what is real from what is not. They may hear voices, see things others do not or hold beliefs that are not based on reality.
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):** after a frightening or traumatic experience, a person may have nightmares, unwanted memories, avoid reminders or feel constantly on guard.
- **Eating disorders:** a person may develop serious difficulties with eating, food, weight or body image. These conditions can affect both physical and mental health.
- **Neurodevelopmental conditions:** conditions such as autism and ADHD can affect how a person communicates, learns, focuses or experiences the world.
- **Substance-use disorders:** a person may find it difficult to control their use of alcohol or other drugs, even when it is causing harm.

When should we be concerned?

Pay attention when someone has a major or lasting change in their mood, sleep, appetite, behaviour or ability to manage daily activities. They may stop spending time with others, lose interest in life, struggle at school or work, seem very confused, or talk about hurting themselves. These signs do not automatically tell us what condition a person has, but they do tell us that the person may need support.

Please remember: we should not diagnose people ourselves or use hurtful labels. A qualified health professional can listen, assess what is happening and recommend the right care.

4. Psychosis: Recognising It and Helping Someone

What is psychosis? Psychosis is a health condition or group of symptoms that can make it difficult for someone to tell what is real and what is not. It can be frightening and confusing for the person experiencing it and for their family. It is important to remember that the person needs care, not blame or ridicule.

What might we notice?

- **Hearing or seeing things:** the person may hear voices or see things that other people do not.
- **Unusual or strongly held beliefs:** they may feel that someone is watching them, following them or trying to harm them, even when there is no clear evidence.
- **Confused speech or thoughts:** they may find it hard to explain what they mean, follow a conversation or keep their thoughts organised.
- **Changes in behaviour:** they may become withdrawn, frightened, confused, very restless or have difficulty with everyday activities.

How can we help?

- Stay calm. Speak gently and use simple, respectful words.
- Listen to the person. Do not laugh at them, argue aggressively or call them names.
- You can recognise their feelings without agreeing with something you cannot confirm. For example, say: “I can see that this is frightening for you. I’m here to help.”
- Try to reduce noise, crowds and other things that may make the person feel more overwhelmed.
- Give them space and avoid sudden movements, threats or confrontation.
- Help them get assessed at a health facility as soon as possible, especially if this is the first time it has happened.

How is psychosis managed?

A qualified health professional needs to assess the person and look for possible causes. Treatment may include prescribed medication, talking therapies, family support, help with sleep and follow-up care. The person may also need support to return to school, work and everyday activities. Medication should only be used as prescribed, and it should not be stopped or changed without speaking to the prescriber.

Psychosis can sometimes be linked to substance use, medicines or a physical health problem. That is another reason professional assessment matters. Do not give someone another person’s medicine or delay medical care while trying unverified treatments. Spiritual support may be meaningful to a person, but it should never replace or delay needed healthcare.

If the person is in immediate danger, seriously injured, unable to care for basic needs, or at risk of harming themselves or someone else, seek emergency help immediately.

5. Treatment, Recovery and the Role of Family and Friends

A mental health condition does not mean that a person's life is over. With appropriate care, many people improve, return to their usual activities, build relationships and work towards their goals. Recovery can look different for each person, and it may take time. Patience and encouragement matter.

What can help?

- **Professional care:** a doctor, mental health nurse, psychologist, psychiatrist or other qualified provider can assess the person and discuss treatment.
- **Talking therapies:** these can help people understand their experiences, work through difficulties and learn healthier ways of coping.
- **Medication:** some conditions benefit from prescribed medicine. The person should take it as directed and speak to the prescriber about side effects or concerns.
- **Support from others:** family, friends, peer groups, schools and community organisations can help people feel less alone.
- **Healthy daily habits:** regular sleep, nutritious meals, physical activity and meaningful activities can support recovery.
- **Follow-up:** keeping appointments and asking for help when symptoms return can prevent problems from becoming worse.

How can we support someone we care about?

- Make time to listen. Sometimes a person needs someone who will hear them without rushing to give advice.
- Ask kindly: "How are you really doing?" or "What would make today a little easier?"
- Offer practical help, such as accompanying them to an appointment or helping with a daily task.
- Encourage professional support, but avoid threats, shame or forcing the person where it is not necessary for immediate safety.
- Respect their privacy. Do not share their personal story with others without permission, unless sharing is necessary to prevent serious harm.
- Remember to care for yourself too. Supporting someone can be difficult, and you may also need advice, rest and support.

Things we should avoid

- Do not call people "mad", weak, cursed or hopeless.
- Do not assume that mental illness is caused by laziness or a lack of faith.
- Do not share medicines or tell someone to stop prescribed treatment suddenly.
- Do not use alcohol or drugs as a way to treat emotional pain.
- Do not ignore serious warning signs or leave someone to face a crisis alone.

People living with mental health conditions deserve the same respect, kindness and opportunities as everyone else. A diagnosis does not define a person.

6. Crisis Support and Building a Caring Community

What if someone talks about suicide or self-harm?

Take the person seriously. Listen calmly and ask directly whether they are thinking about suicide or hurting themselves. Asking does not put the idea into someone's mind; it can give them a chance to speak honestly and receive help.

- If there is immediate danger, stay with the person if it is safe for you to do so.
- Contact emergency services or take the person to the nearest hospital or emergency department.
- Involve a trusted family member or support person. Do not promise to keep an immediate safety risk secret.
- If it can be done safely, reduce access to things the person could use to seriously hurt themselves. Do not put yourself in danger.

In Ghana: Call 112 for a general emergency or 193 for ambulance assistance. In an urgent situation, contact emergency services or go to the nearest hospital.

What can our communities do?

- Make it normal to talk about mental health at home, in schools, at work and in community meetings.
- Teach children and young people how to recognise feelings and where to find help.
- Speak up against bullying, violence, discrimination and stigma.
- Help community leaders, teachers and volunteers recognise warning signs and connect people to trained professionals. They should not try to diagnose or prescribe treatment.
- Make information about nearby health facilities and referral services easy to find.
- Include people who have experienced mental health challenges in community conversations. Their voices and experiences matter.

A promise we can make to ourselves

I will try to take care of my mind as well as my body. I will give myself permission to rest, speak up when I am struggling and ask for help when I need it. I will try to listen to others without judging them, because I may never know the full story they are carrying.

Conclusion: Let's Look Out for One Another

Mental health is part of everyday life. Every one of us has it, and every one of us deserves care and support. We will all face difficult moments, but no one should feel ashamed of asking for help. Stress can be managed. Mental health conditions can be treated. People experiencing psychosis or a crisis can receive care and support.

Let us build homes, schools and communities where people feel safe to speak, where no one is laughed at for struggling, and where people are guided towards the help they need. A kind word, a patient listener or helping someone reach a health professional can make a real difference.

GROW YOUR DREAM FOUNDATION
Promoting awareness. Encouraging support. Building healthier communities.

A note for readers

This handout is for general education and awareness. It cannot diagnose a condition or replace advice from a qualified health professional. If you are worried about your mental health, or someone else's, please speak with a qualified health professional. In an emergency, seek immediate help.

Further reading

World Health Organization (WHO), "Mental health: strengthening our response" — WHO website.

World Health Organization (WHO), "Mental disorders" — WHO website.

NHS, "Treatment – Psychosis" — NHS website.

Ghana National Ambulance Service — official website.