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Mental Health

Looking after your mental health is just as important as looking after your physical health. In the same way that you eat the right diet and take exercise to keep your body feeling good, you need to look after your mind to keep your mind feeling good.

Mental health is a fundamental aspect of life and is closely linked to your physical state. A balanced diet, regular exercise and relaxation all contribute to a healthy mental state.

Nobody is 'up' all the time; it's normal to have 'down' days. However, it is much easier to maintain a good mental state than to correct a problem that occurs later.

If you're feeling low or stressed, it's nothing to be ashamed of, and should be openly discussed. It is not automatically more serious than something like anxiety or depression.

Lots of people suffer from mental health problems at some point in their life. So even if you're feeling better, it's important to know that other people are not coping so well.

You interact with lots of people during the day, so you may notice that someone you are familiar with is acting differently. It might only be temporary, but it could also continue over a period of time.

Things you might notice:

- They say negative things a lot
- It seems like they don't care about anyone else (or seem unreasonable)
- They are drinking alcohol a lot more often, or are drinking more heavily
- They start fights, say nasty things or are bad tempered
- They won't talk to you or other people as much
- They are ill more often, or have days off school or work sick
- They eat a very small amount or eat a lot (not a 'normal' amount)
- They seem tired all the time, or never seem to sleep.

Helpful tips

Ways you can help them are:

- Be understanding. Let them know that you care and show understanding.
- Listen. The more you know about the symptoms and issues, the more you can help them and what is not helpful to one another.
- Share feelings. It is important for everyone to share feelings. By talking about issues and experiences, you can help each other and what is not helpful to one another.
- Create a support system. Try not to take on caring for the person all by yourself. It's difficult if you try to do it alone. Talk to other people about sharing responsibilities.
- Seek immediate help. If at any time the person talks about death or suicide or may be harmful to themselves or others, seek help immediately. Don't forget that adults in Scouting have a responsibility to follow the 'Child Protection First' policy.

What not to do

- Do not dismiss their feelings by saying things like 'snap out of it' or 'pull yourself together.'
- Do not force them to do things they do not feel they can, eg going out if they have anxiety further.
- Try not to agree with negative views. Be realistic, but remind them that the situation will ge

Getting help

There are many places you can look for information, for example in your local library, internet or If you're worried about anything, or just feeling like you're not yourself, there's always someone

Advice

- [ChildLine](#) has a very good website with information and advice.
- [Get Connected](#) has advice for under 25s and areas where you can write in for advice or help
- [Mind](#) exists to make sure anyone with a mental health problem has somewhere to turn for a
- [Young Minds](#) is the UK's leading charity committed to improving the emotional wellbeing and people.

Types of mental illness

OCD – Obsessive Compulsive Behaviour

According to the National OCD Foundation:

'Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a disorder of the brain and behaviour. OCD causes sev involves both obsessions and compulsions that take a lot of time and get in the way of important

Activity one: Understanding OCD

For all ages

For many people with OCD, if they don't do a certain task right, they feel they have to do it all o tolerate imperfection in their lives and many tasks regarded as 'simple'involve repetition until th repetition but often cannot prevent it.

Make up a simple obstacle course such as:

- narrow walkways
- jumps
- passing through hoops
- target throwing (bean bags)
- balancing.

Use your imagination to make it challenging but fun.

The object is to complete the course and record the finish time but there are strict conditions. Ar very beginning. Each section has to be completed exactly right:

- Passing through a hoop – the hoop is not allowed to touch the body
- Bean bags – all three bean bags must be successfully thrown into a bucket.

This can be made even more challenging by adding special moves in between obstacles (hopping

The outcome of this exercise highlights the frustration felt from people with OCD.

Depression

If anyone has been experiencing several of the depression symptoms below for more than two weeks and they have been thinking about death or suicide, they need help straight away.

People suffering depression might:

- feel miserable and sad almost everyday
- lose interest in most activities
- feel anxious or irritable
- have trouble concentrating or remembering
- feel tired
- feel guilty
- sleep too much or too little
- eat too much or too little
- have medically unexplained aches and pains
- be thinking of death or suicide.

Schizophrenia

Views on schizophrenia have changed over the years. In general it is a condition where a person has distorted ideas, perceptions and imaginings from reality.

In general though there are signs which are used to diagnose and treat schizophrenia in the same way.

In making a diagnosis, doctors have to be sure it is not something else, either a physical or a mental health problem. They look for various 'positive' symptoms and 'negative' symptoms, and make a decision from there.

Positive symptoms

'Positive' symptoms are symptoms that most people do not normally experience. They include:

- strange thinking ('thought disorder')
- Thoughts and ideas may be jumbled and not make sense to other people. Conversation is disjointed.
- Hallucinations, which can affect any of the senses, ie they may hear, smell, taste or feel things that are not there.
- Any voices may be a familiar person, or a stranger. The voices are often critical but can be friendly. Note: people can hear voices without being schizophrenic.
- Delusions. Usually strongly held beliefs or experiences that are not in line with a generally accepted view of reality or extreme. This may seem like paranoia.

Negative symptoms

'Negative' symptoms are a lack of some emotional responses or thoughts. 'Negative' symptoms include: lack of motivation, emotional flatness, inability to concentrate, wanting to avoid people or to be protected.

These are significant changes in behaviour which may happen quite suddenly or may occur more gradually. People may be more withdrawn, upset, anxious, confused and suspicious of other people, particularly anyone who doesn't agree with them. They may be unaware, or reluctant to believe, that they need help.

Social Anxiety

The fear of behaving in an embarrassing or humiliating way can make a person become withdrawn. They may avoid particular things, like public toilets, eating out etc. They might find themselves blushing, shaking or sweating.

Alzheimer's/Dementia

Look at the booklet 'The milk's in the oven'. Activity suggestions are in this publication.

Bipolar disorder

When someone has bipolar disorder, also known as manic depression, their mood can swing from

In the high phase (also referred to as hypomania), someone with bipolar disorder may have a huge need for sleep. They can think and talk faster than usual, and thoughts may jump rapidly from one conversation to the next.

They may have what are called 'grandiose' ideas or delusions about their abilities and powers, and in the high phase can get themselves into all sorts of difficulties that they would normally avoid – they may not have, or give away all their possessions.

When they're feeling low, someone with bipolar disorder can feel hopeless, despairing and lethargic – they may have difficulty concentrating. This can make it difficult to cope with everyday life. They may have difficulty with work and social contacts, and may feel suicidal.

Cyclothymia, also called cyclothymic disorder, is a less intense version of bipolar disorder, with less extreme mood swings, but it still causes difficulties.

ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or ADHD, is the term used to describe three main kinds of behaviour:

- overactive behaviour (hyperactivity)
- impulsive behaviour
- difficulty in paying attention.

Children with ADHD are not just very active; they also have a wide range of other problem behaviours that make them difficult to care for, manage and teach.

Anxiety disorders

Anxiety disorders are those that are characterised by excessive and abnormal fear, worry and are often accompanied by physical symptoms.

Types of anxiety disorders include:

- Generalized anxiety disorder
- Agoraphobia
- Social anxiety disorder
- Phobias
- Panic disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Separation anxiety

Factitious disorders

These psychological disorders are those in which an individual acts as if he or she has an illness, exaggerating symptoms or even self-inflicting damage to the body. Types of factitious disorders include:

- Munchausen syndrome
- Munchausen syndrome by proxy
- Ganser syndrome

Impulse-Control Disorders

Impulse control disorders are those that involve an inability to control impulses, resulting in harm

Types of impulse-control disorders include:

- Kleptomania (stealing)
- Pyromania (fire-starting)
- Trichotillomania (hair-pulling)
- Pathological gambling
- Intermittent explosive disorder
- Dermatillomania (skin-picking)

Mental disorders due to a general medical condition

This type of psychological disorder is caused by an underlying medical condition. Medical conditions such as catatonia and personality changes. Examples of mental disorders due to a general medical condition include:

- Psychotic disorder due to epilepsy
- Depression caused by diabetes
- AIDS related psychosis
- Personality changes due to brain damage

Substance-related disorders

Substance-related disorders are those that involve the use and abuse of different substances, such as opiates and alcohol. These disorders can include dependence, abuse, psychosis, anxiety, intoxication. Results from the use of various substances.

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