



DigitalRightsFoundation
"KNOW YOUR RIGHTS"



SELF-HELP TOOLKIT ON MENTAL HEALTH



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Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) is a feminist, not-for-profit organisation based in Pakistan working on digital freedoms since 2013. DRF envisions a place where all people, especially women and gender minorities, can exercise their right of expression without being threatened.

DRF believes that a free internet with access to information and impeccable privacy policies can create safe online spaces for not only women but the world at large.

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This toolkit on Mental Health has been developed with the support of UN Women Pakistan. It focuses on dealing with stress and emotional turmoil that impacts functioning and wellbeing. This resource book is intended as a practical knowledge tool based on existing guidance combined with field experiences of the psychologists working at the cyber harassment helpline.

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UNDERSTANDING IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

What is mental health?

Mental health is an integral and essential component of health. The WHO constitution states: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." An important implication of this definition is that mental health is more than just the absence of mental disorders or disabilities. It's a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (WHO, 2004).¹ Good mental health leads to positive self-image and in turn, satisfaction in work and relationships.

What is mental illness?

Mental illnesses on the other hand, are health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking or behavior (or a combination of these). They are associated with distress and/or problems in social and occupational functioning. Many people have mental health concerns from time to time. But a mental health concern becomes a mental illness when ongoing signs and symptoms cause frequent stress and affect your ability to function. Mental illnesses or disorders comprise a broad range of problems, with different symptoms.

However, they are generally characterized by some combination of abnormal thoughts, emotions, behavior and relationships with others. Examples are schizophrenia, depression, intellectual disabilities and disorders due to drug abuse. In most cases, symptoms can be managed with a combination of medications and psychotherapy (WHO, 2004).¹

What is stigma around mental health?

Negative attitudes and beliefs toward people who have a mental health condition are common. People with serious mental illness are challenged doubly. On one hand, they struggle with the symptoms and disabilities that result from the disease. On the other, they are challenged by the stereotypes and stigma that result from misconceptions about mental illness (Corrigan & Watson, 2002).²

Some of the harmful effects of stigma can include:

- Reluctance to seek help or treatment
- Lack of understanding by family, friends, co-workers or others
- Fewer opportunities for work, school or social activities
- Bullying, physical violence or harassment
- Health insurance that doesn't adequately cover your mental illness treatment
- The belief that you'll never succeed at certain challenges or that you can't improve your situation

Here are some ways you can deal with stigma:

- Get treatment even when you might be reluctant to seek help
- Don't let stigma create self doubt and shame
- Don't isolate yourself, reach out to friends and family
- Don't equate yourself with your illness, you are not your illness!
- Speak out against stigma

Mental illness does not discriminate; it can affect anyone regardless of your age, gender, geography, income, social status, race/ethnicity, religion/spirituality, sexual orientation, background or other aspect of cultural identity. Its important then to support each other and stand with people going through any mental health challenges.

01 STRESS & BURNOUT

Stress is often defined as a physical and emotional response to situations that feel threatening or demanding or that upset our inner emotional balance (Schneiderman, Ironson & Seigel, 2005).³ Each person responds to stress in different ways. Two people in the same situation may not react in the same way, depending on their personal characteristics, resources, and the perceived ability to cope with the situation.

There are many different stressors in each of our lives. A stressor can be something as simple as extreme temperatures, or extreme noise, but can also be more complex concepts such as divorce, moving to a new place, or loss in business. Sources of these stressors can be categorized to help us define and identify areas that are more problematic for us than others.

Some important sources of stress

Physical environments around us

The world we live in impacts our sensory system. Think about your five senses; are your clothes uncomfortable? Is the music at your neighbor's too loud?

Was the food at lunch spoiled? Is the weather too hot or humid? These uncomfortable (and sometimes unsafe) living or working conditions can cause irritability and stress.

Family and relationships

These are common daily stressors for many of us. It is difficult not to bring our issues from home into the school, college, or workplace. Parental conflicts, marital disagreements, rebellious teens, unhealthy relationships, lack of recognition for efforts, or caring for an ill family member can all send stress levels to heights that we never imagined before.

Work

We recognize that work can sometimes be a major source of stress, and it's likely that it might be causing you stress as well. However, each of you may have a different stressor – general job dissatisfaction, an exhausting workload, insufficient pay for the work you do, rampant office politics, or workplace conflicts.

Life situations

There are general life situations or conditions that can act as stressors and have considerable impacts on our lives and functioning which may include poverty, financial pressures, discrimination or harassment, unemployment, isolation, and/or a lack of social support.

Major life changes

These include getting married, having a baby, a divorce, a career change, or moving places. Some of these life changes even though are a welcome and positive change in our life, but can come with potential pressures, higher expectations, increased workloads, and increased financial pressures which can become a major source of stress.

Burnout

Burnout is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long-term exposure to demanding work and home situations. It is the cumulative result of stress. Job burnout can result from various factors, including:

Lack of control

An inability to influence decisions that affect your job, such as your schedule, assignments or workload, could lead to job burnout. So could a lack of the resources you need to do your work.

Unclear job expectations

If you're unclear about the degree of authority you have or what your supervisor or others expect from you, you're not likely to feel comfortable at work.

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Dysfunctional workplace dynamics

Perhaps you work with an office bully, or you feel undermined by colleagues or your boss micromanages your work. This can contribute to job stress.

Extremes of activity

When a job is monotonous or chaotic, you need constant energy to remain focused, which can lead to fatigue and job burnout.

Lack of social support

If you feel isolated at work and in your personal life and feel like you are alone, you might feel more stressed.

Work-life imbalance

a healthy work-life balance is important, but if your work takes up so much of your time and effort that you don't have the energy to spend time with your family and friends, you might burn out faster than you think.

How to be aware of being stressed and burned out?

We often do not realize that we're stressed until it begins to consume us and we aren't always good at identifying signs of stress and burnout in ourselves. In fact, sometimes it is easier for another person to point them out.

It could be because stress and mental health issues can cloud our thinking and recollection of situations. In other cases, we might not have the words to put our feelings together.

It becomes important then to be aware of the signs and symptoms of stress and any changes we might experience in our minds, bodies, and routines. Mentioned below are some signs and symptoms which are indicative of high levels of stress and burnout:

Cognitive	Emotional
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Memory problems• Inability to concentrate• Indecisiveness• Poor judgement• Continuous worry• Racing thoughts• Overthinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feeling Down• Feeling overwhelmed• Irritability• Short temper• Inability to relax• Sense of loneliness and isolation• Loss of interest, enjoyment in things you enjoyed before
Physical	Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Headaches or backaches• Muscle tension and stiffness• Excessive Perspiration• Chest pains/ elevated heart• Frequent colds• Nausea or dizziness• Weight gain or loss• Change in sleep patterns• Loss of sex drive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eating more or less• Insomnia• Isolating yourself from others• Procrastination• Neglecting responsibilities• Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax• Nervous habits (e.g., nail biting, pacing)• Overreacting to problems• Picking up fights

How to manage stress and avoid burnout?

There are many strategies to cope and manage stress and avoid burnout, some work in the short term, while others work in the long run. Different things work for different people; the goal is to avoid, tolerate, or minimize stress. Here are some steps which might help you in managing your stress (APA, 2018)

1. Track your stressors

Keep a journal for a week or two to identify which situations create the most stress and how you respond to them. Record your thoughts, feelings and information about the environment, including the people and circumstances involved, the physical setting and how you reacted. Taking notes can help you find patterns among your stressors and your reactions to them.

2. Develop healthy responses

Instead of attempting to fight stress by binge eating unhealthy food, or sleeping through the whole day, do your best to make healthy choices when you feel the tension rise. Exercise is a great stress-buster. Yoga can be an excellent choice, but any form of physical activity is beneficial. Also make time for hobbies and favorite activities. Whether it's reading a novel, going to concerts or playing games with your family, make sure to set aside time for the things that bring you pleasure. Getting enough good-quality sleep is also important for effective stress management.

3. Establish boundaries

In today's digital world, it's easy to feel pressure to be available 24 hours a day. Establish some work-life boundaries for yourself, which might mean making a rule not to check email from home in the evening, or not answering the phone during dinner. But also establishing some personal boundaries in relationships as well. Verbalize boundaries is important not letting others overstep them. Say no to tasks you don't want to do or don't have time to do. Let go of your need to be there all the time for the other needy individuals. Forgive yourself for feeling bad about not being able to help, and be assertive in all your communications.

4. Learn how to relax

Techniques such as meditation, deep breathing exercises and mindfulness (a state in which you actively observe present experiences and thoughts without judging them) can help melt away stress. Start by taking a few minutes each day to focus on a simple activity like breathing, walking or enjoying a meal. The skill of being able to focus purposefully on a single activity without distraction will get stronger with practice and you'll find that you can apply it to many different aspects of your life.

5. Take care of yourself

Self-care is extremely important when dealing with stress and burnout. We are only able to face every day struggles and stressors if we have a healthy body and mind, and have the strength and energy to keep fighting and keep going. Self care can look like many different things.

Types of self care with examples

Physical Self Care

- Eat healthy and regularly
- Walk, run, swim, play sports, or do some other physical activity that is fun
- Get enough sleep

Psychological Self Care

- Make time for self-reflection
- Decrease sources of stress in your life
- Notice your inner experience – listen to your thoughts, judgments, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings

Emotional Self Care

- Spend time with others whose company you enjoy
- Give yourself affirmations, praise yourself
- Allow yourself to cry

Emotional Self Care

- Spend time with nature
- Find a spiritual connection or community
- Meditate

Workplace/Professional Self Care

- Take a break during the workday (e.g. lunch)
- Take time to chat with co-workers
- Identify projects or tasks that are exciting and rewarding

6. Give yourself positive affirmations

Many of us have negative thoughts, especially when we're stressed, often frequently. They can make our confidence, mood and outlook negative too. The problem with such negative thoughts is that they can become self-fulfilling prophecies. We talk ourselves into believing that we're not good enough. And, as a result, these thoughts drag down our personal lives, our relationships, and our careers, leading to stress and anxiety. But, if we give ourselves positive affirmations and thoughts, they can help us to challenge and overcome self-sabotaging and negative thoughts. When we repeat them often, and believe in them, we can start to make positive changes.

(Appendix: Handout 2)

Therefore, it is important to not ignore any signs and symptoms of prolonged stress, and get professional help from a certified therapist or counselor.

7. Get some support

Accepting help from trusted friends and family members can improve our ability to manage stress. It also acts as a reminder that we have people around us who care and are willing to help us and support us in challenging times.

8. Therapy

If you're going through extreme levels of stress and burnout, getting professional help is important. Long term and chronic stress can have many serious physical and emotional effects, from muscle pain, ulcers, a compromised immune system, to a number of mental and emotional disorders, including depression, anxiety, and panic attacks.

02 SETTING BOUNDARIES

What are personal boundaries?

A personal boundary is an imaginary line that separates us from others. It separates our physical space, our feelings, needs, and responsibilities from others. Our boundaries also tell other people how they can treat us – what’s acceptable and what isn’t. Without boundaries, people may take advantage of us because we haven’t set limits about how we expect to be treated.

If you have difficulty saying no, override your needs to please others, or are bothered by someone who is demanding, controlling, abusive, pleading, or even smothering you with kindness, it’s a sign that your personal and emotional boundaries are being violated.

What are emotional boundaries?

Emotional boundaries involve separating your feelings from another’s feelings. They are like an imaginary line or force field that separates you and others. Violations include:

- taking responsibility for another’s feelings;
- feeling guilty for someone else’s problems;
- letting another’s feelings dictate your own;

- taking other’s comments and actions personally;
- sacrificing your own needs to please another;
- blaming others for your problems; and
- accepting responsibility for others’ mistakes.

These are common daily stressors for many of us. It is difficult not to bring our issues from home into the school, college, or workplace. Parental conflicts, marital disagreements, rebellious teens, unhealthy relationships, lack of recognition for efforts, or caring for an ill family member can all send stress levels to heights that we never imagined before.

Work

We recognize that work can sometimes be a major source of stress, and it’s likely that it might be causing you stress as well. However, each of you may have a different stressor – general job dissatisfaction, an exhausting workload, insufficient pay for the work you do, rampant office politics, or workplace conflicts.

Codependency at the workplace

Personal and emotional boundaries also need to be taken care of at the workplace, otherwise their exploitation might lead to Codependency between supervisors and employees. Codependency can be defined as an excessive emotional or psychological reliance on others, and being dependent on them for approval and feelings of self-worth.

At a workplace, this could be spotted as:

- An over involvement with peers to help get “their” work done
- Feeling responsible for solving others’ problems without even receiving approval or recognition
- Inability or fear of communicating valid needs
- Fear of conflict
- Fear of being judged or abandoned
- Quick to doubt yourself and feeling that you need permission
- Feelings of guilt or shame for normal human experience
- Feelings of inadequacy or of not being good enough
- Need for control of others since there is lack of control of oneself
- Expecting oneself to be perfect

Codependency at the workplace resulting from exploitation of personal and emotional boundaries, affects our professional relationships as well as our ability to perform. It creates an unhealthy work environment with an excessive and unnecessary reliance on others (supervisor/colleagues) to get your part of the work done, leading to inefficiency and resentment.

Some ways to avoid codependency at the workplace:

- Set boundaries, verbalize them and do not let others overstep them
- Say no to tasks you don’t want to do or don’t have time to do
- Let go of your need to be there all the time for the other needy individuals
- Forgive yourself for feeling bad about not being able to help
- Delegate tasks
- Do not enable other’s behavior
- Be assertive
- Validate other’s needs, but remove yourself from dealing with their problems, personal or otherwise.

03

ELIMINATING TOXIC INFLUENCES

No relationship is perfect, in the personal or the professional sphere. But for the most part, a good relationship makes you feel secure, happy, cared for, respected, and free to be yourself.

On the other side of the coin are toxic relationships, the ones that make you feel drained, exhausted, anxious and even scared. A toxic relationship contaminates your self-esteem, your happiness and the way you see yourself and the world. Pinpointing the toxic influences in our life and creating boundaries can improve mental and physical health over time.

Identifying common traits in toxic people is the first step:

1. Controlling

One of the most dangerous traits of a toxic person is their controlling behavior. They may try to restrict you from contacting your friends or family, or limit resources like transportation or access to money to restrict your ability to interact with the world around you, eventually isolating you.

2. Manipulation

Toxic people are often very good at manipulation. They may seem to be genuinely interested in your company and getting to know you first, but will eventually use the knowledge they gain about you to try and get you to do what they want.

3. Develop healthy responses

Insults are the most direct way that toxic people can make you feel bad, but most of the time the ways they affect your self-esteem are more subtle. When you are feeling happy or proud of yourself, they will find ways to ruin your happiness or downplay your achievements. They might also act like they are smarter than you to make you feel dumb or insignificant.

4. Passive aggression

These behaviors are a way that people express their dislike without having a conversation about their problems. This type of hostility is less obvious than anger and can be shown by passing snide comments, sabotaging the efforts of other people, and purposefully doing something or not doing something to make others upset.

5. Self-centered

Toxic people care mostly about themselves. They don't think about how their actions affect others and believe they are better than everyone else.

6. Anger issues

The smallest thing can trigger them into a fit of rage, and often nasty, hurtful things are said while they are in this mental state. There may be apologies the day after, but often they are insincere and the toxic person will repeat their angry, hurtful behaviors soon after.

How to eliminate toxic people and relationships?

7. Don't expect them to change

Firstly, and most importantly, moving past toxic relationships requires true acceptance of the fact that you can't force toxic people to change. They may say that they can change, or you may want to be the one who can help them become better, but this almost always never happens. Toxic people are motivated by their own complex problems and needs. So when you give up the desire to change them, it's much easier to let them go.

2. Set and maintain boundaries

Manipulative and toxic people drain your resources by constantly pushing you to work harder to please them, making you compromise more and more which can be exhausting. Give some serious thought to what you will tolerate and what you won't from partners, family members, colleagues, and friends. Communicate these boundaries and then don't be flexible with them and keep reinforcing them whenever necessary.

3 Building confidence and self worth

When you're in a toxic relationship of any kind, you'll notice that the other person tends to exploit your flaws and find ways to use them against you. However, you can reduce the likelihood of this happening by simply getting to know yourself and learning to accept your weaknesses. If you're able to own your strengths and weaknesses, what they think won't matter anymore because you'll know that your strengths are more than enough to make you worthy of love and respect.

4. Surround yourself with healthy relationships

Removing toxic people from your life can be deeply painful, as you may deeply care for some of these people in spite of how difficult it is to have them in your life. To maintain your resilience and cope with any sadness, stay in close contact with those who make you feel safe, cherished and happy, so you can have better support systems.

5. Forgive but don't forget.

Forgiveness is about letting go. You'll never be able to control the past but you can control how much power it has to impact your future. Forgiveness doesn't mean accepting bad behavior or approving of it – it means that you're not going to be controlled by it any more. It's something done in strength and with an abundance of self-love.

6. Understand the cycle

There is a pattern many toxic people follow. First they're charming. This is when they'll get you. They'll be attentive, loving and impressive, but all of it will be to get you into position. Next, when they have your trust you'll start to see things fall apart. There will be huge demands and accusations where you will be the one wronging them. Then there will be the incident when you are most likely emotionally, physically, or sexually harmed. You'll feel stuck and compromised. But then they'll start showing remorse and asking for forgiveness, they'll be back to charming you and giving you just enough of what you need to make you stay. The problem is this cycle continues to go on, and no matter how much you want it to end it keeps repeating, getting worse every time.

04

EMOTION REGULATION

According to Kraiss et al. (2020), “emotion regulation is defined as a set of specific strategies people may use to alter their emotional experiences.” These strategies include:

- Cognitive reappraisal – involves reframing cognitions or altering thoughts
- Problem solving – involves intentionally modifying a given situation
- Acceptance – accepting the emotions, thoughts and behaviors that are experienced without attempting to justify, adjust or tone them down
- Suppression – inhibiting and mitigating the expression of thoughts and feelings without processing them
- Avoidance – being elusive about processing uncomfortable thoughts, feelings and sensations.
- Rumination – excessively focusing on cognitions, emotions and behavior

The strategies we choose to deploy determine our emotional and behavioral response, especially in an emotionally provocative situation.

Out of the above-mentioned strategies, cognitive reappraisal, problem solving, and acceptance are widely considered adaptive strategies while the others are considered to be maladaptive (Kraiss et al., 2020). This means that adaptive strategies equip an individual with the skills to respond and behave in a healthy and productive manner while maladaptive strategies can lead to negative psychological health.

The process of emotion regulation is inextricably linked to emotional awareness. Emotional awareness is the ability to recognize and identify different emotions. In fact, emotional awareness is the first step in the process of improving emotion regulation. People with high emotional awareness are better able to accept emotional responses, control impulsive behaviors and engage in positive social and psychological behavior. Emotional awareness, therefore, is key in being able to assess a situation with clarity and allowing individuals to access adaptive emotion regulation strategies.

For DRF’s blog on emotional regulation, click [here](#).

05

SUPPORTING OTHERS

(BUILDING SUPPORT SYSTEMS)

Active listening

People who are seeking help often just want to be heard. However, active or reflective listening is more than simply hearing what is being said. It is a process that requires complete focus on the part of the listener who has cultivated the skill to lend a compassionate and non-judgmental ear, and respond thoughtfully.

Active listening techniques include:

- Being present in the moment without any judgment
- Putting our own thoughts and feelings on hold
- Giving our full attention to the speaker
- Not interrupting the speaker
- Withholding our desire to speak and making space for the speaker to share
- Fully engaging ourselves not in what we are thinking or feeling but rather in what it is like for the other person.
- Ask thoughtful questions. These questions should be directed at understanding the situation better, not satisfying your own curiosity.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand and feel what someone is experiencing, from the perspective of the sharer. Empathy is a critical skill in developing healthy relationships and exhibiting compassionate behavior.

How to practice or increase your empathy?

● Start with some self compassion and emotional awareness:

This implies the development of emotional literacy, which is the ability to recognize and understand emotions using a wider context, including one's own needs. Self-compassion leads to self-acceptance, which is different from self-pity as it allows an individual to understand why their emotions arise and how to attend to their emotional needs in a positive way without any self-judgment, whereas self pity creates feelings of helplessness and often paves the way for self-indulgent and negative behaviors.

● Invest your time in others:

Take some time out of your day to ask what others are experiencing, and practice active listening. Tip: Simply observe how people interact in social gatherings, notice their body language and other emotional reactions that arise.

● Practice mindfulness:

Mindfulness is the ability to stay in the present moment without judgment. When interacting with others, be mindful of both verbal as well as non-verbal communication in order to stay fully engaged with the speaker and allow you to give your full attention to the needs of others.

Offering help

Offering help does not simply mean giving advice. It is an entire continuum from exercising empathic listening to offering emotional validation to responding thoughtfully.

When speaking with someone who is distressed and in need of help, first evaluate the kind of support they are looking for by:

- Finding out more about the situation
- Repeating the information back so you can confirm the accuracy of what you heard
- Validating feelings by repeating them back
- Encourage the speaker, in case of any hesitation, by relaying your support.
- Always follow up by summarizing what the speaker has said before offering any kind of help

It is also important to set realistic expectations about the kind of support you're able to provide. If you feel an individual's needs are beyond the scope of your helping capacity, then be honest and provide the best possible support that you can.

06

DEALING WITH GRIEF

Grief is a, natural psychological and physiological reaction concomitant with the loss of a loved one or thing (Lundorff et al., 2017). Grief is often a prolonged and long-lasting experience that is accompanied by various stages and intensities of emotional responses. Some of the most common emotions experienced during this process include sadness, anger, guilt, fear, anxiety, shock and confusion. Grief can also manifest itself physically in the form of exhaustion and body aches and can result in changes in sleeping and eating patterns. An individual experiencing grief may even socially withdraw from friends and family as motivation levels to engage in enjoyable activities decrease. Constant worry becomes a key feature of an individual's cognitive functioning which not only involves intrusive thoughts and memories of the loved one and what life would be like without them, but it also forces people to confront their own mortality, which can be an extremely anxiety-provoking ordeal.

Elizabeth Kubler Ross' five stages of grief involving denial, anger, bargaining, sadness and acceptance is widely used as a model to explain the grieving process, however, there are a few things to consider when experiencing a significant loss:

- There is no one 'right' way of experiencing grief. While it's possible for people to experience all the stages of grief, it is also possible for many to skip some. It is usually not helpful to compare your grief to others' experience of it. Depending on where people are in their psychological, physiological and spiritual developmental process, the way they experience grief can look very different. Each person's experience is valid and acknowledging these different processes can often serve to help them and you during this difficult time.
- Grief is a complex, developmental process. For some people, it may take a few days or weeks to return back to their usual routines; for others, it may take longer. Whatever the case may be for you, don't rush yourself. Just remember that it takes time to readjust after experiencing such a significant loss.
- Going through and overcoming the grief process does not mean that you will no longer experience feelings of sadness or regret. There may be constant reminders around you of your loved ones that can trigger memories and emotions. The experience of grieving is about learning to accept and manage these emotions and thoughts as opposed to avoiding them, which only makes negative emotions stronger and more difficult to deal with.

- Seek out social support. This is one of the most common pieces of advice given to people experiencing grief. The right kind of social support while coping with grief can really aid the process. However, this doesn't always mean constantly talking about your loss. While talking about your experience is necessary and therapeutic, you don't want this to reinforce your rumination and helplessness. It can be exhausting for you and the people around you. Know that it is perfectly okay for you to not want to talk about your grief either, especially if you're unsure of how to deal with it. Not wanting to talk about your feelings doesn't always mean you're avoiding them. The point of seeking social support is to feel connected. Sometimes, giving yourself a break and engaging in enjoyable activities will give you some time and space to start processing your emotions without feeling pressured and when you're ready, let people know what they can do to help.

To check out DRF's blog on cyber harassment and its impact on mental health, click [here](#).

07

SELF-CARE: CREATING HEALTHY ROUTINES

Self-care is a process of self-improvement that is aimed at achieving physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being. Self care is linked to reduced levels of anxiety, increased productivity, better stress management and overall wellness. One of the first steps towards self-care is to assess the most urgent needs that can catalyze this process of positive transformation. In order to evaluate these needs:

- Sit with yourself in a comfortable and quiet place and think about what your daily routine is like. Pay special attention to things that bring you joy.
- Set a realistic goal. For example, the amount of time you're going to spend on the activity or the number of days per week you're going to practice.
- Make a list of activities and practices that you think aid your well-being. Then label them according to the area of wellness they fall into: physical, emotional, mental and/or spiritual. Mark the amount of time you spend on each activity.
- Next, evaluate the areas of strength and weakness. Perhaps you pay more attention to your emotional well-being but not enough to your physical one etc.
- Think of an activity that you can easily manage in the area you're weakest in. It should be an activity that you will enjoy.
- Once your goal for a week is met, reward yourself.
- Don't be too hard on yourself if you miss a day, but also keep pushing yourself by using positive affirmations and motivating yourself.

Remember

It takes 21 days to develop a habit. So try to follow through on this activity for at least 21 days.

08

DEBUNKING MYTHS AROUND MENTAL HEALTH



Myth 1: Mental health conditions are uncommon and will never affect me.

Globally, mental health issues affect 1 in every 4 individuals. About 15 million Pakistanis suffer from mental health issues. While some people may be more prone to mental illnesses, they can happen to anyone.



Myth 2: People "fake" their mental illnesses or are simply trying to get attention.

People suffering from mental health conditions don't choose to have the illness. Just like physical illnesses, mental illnesses can be complex and extremely challenging. You may not understand what someone is going through but that does not mean their experiences are not real.



Myth 3: People don't recover from mental illnesses.

Today, there are many forms of treatments, services and support mechanisms that can help individuals recover completely from their mental health conditions. People with long lasting mental illnesses can learn how to manage symptoms that can help them lead productive and meaningful lives.



Myth 4: Mental illnesses are the result of bad parenting.

Just like adults, children also experience mental health impairments. While poor parenting may impact a child's mental and emotional development, there are many other contributing factors such as genetics, environmental influences, childhood traumas or a combination of factors that can result in a mental illness.



Myth 5: People with mental illnesses are violent and dangerous.

According to research, individuals with mental health conditions are no more violent than individuals without mental illnesses. In fact, having a mental health condition makes individuals more susceptible to becoming victims of violence.



Myth 6: You can't help someone with a mental illness.

Supporting loved ones with mental health impairments may play a significant part in their recovery process. By making an effort to remove the stigma around mental health, you are playing your part to help everyone affected by mental health conditions.

09

CYBER BULLYING & MENTAL HEALTH

According to Saeed et al., (2019) “cyberbullying is the use of technology to harass, threaten, humiliate, or target another person” and can affect people from all walks of life, regardless of age, gender, socioeconomic status, religious or sexual identity and race. Cyberbullying can have serious implications on the mental health of victims resulting in symptoms of anxiety, depression, substance abuse, PTSD and can even lead to suicide. It has also been shown that children and young adults experiencing mental health issues are three times more likely to be cyberbullied, resulting in the exacerbation and increased severity of their mental health conditions.

Even though there is dire need for more research on the impact of cyberbullying and cyber harassment on the mental health of individuals in Pakistan, global trends indicate a strong relationship between cyberbullying and negative mental health, highlighting the importance of creating awareness and ethical guidelines pertaining to the digital world. There are, of course, steps and measures that can be taken to protect ourselves from online predators and to ensure that our over-

-all mental health does not get adversely affected by incidents of cyberbullying and harassment. These include:

- Protecting personal information online: Be extremely careful when sharing identifying information, especially on a public forum.
- Report the incident: This is important because you may not be the only victim of this online bully, and by reporting the incident and helping to identify the perpetrator, you may even prevent others from becoming a victim.
- Never delete the evidence: Evidence of cyberbullying including screenshots and voice or video recordings can really help if you decide to take a legal course of action.
- Avoid any contact with the abuser: Because online bullies derive power from and thrive on their victims' perceived helplessness, it is recommended that you do not engage with them. Any response or retaliation on your part may be used by the abuser to exert even more power over you, and to inflict greater mental harm.
- Seek help: Cyberbullying can be a terrifying and alienating experience. Cyberbullies may often blackmail you into maintaining secrecy about your situation or convince you that no one will understand. However, by reaching out to family and friends, who can offer emotional support, you'll be able to handle your situation with more clarity. It is also important for your mental wellbeing to share the pressures and abuse that you may face as a victim of cyberbullying.

10

MENTAL HEALTH AND COVID-19

The coronavirus pandemic has presented an unprecedented and difficult challenge for the entire world. The necessary steps and measures taken so far to prevent and curtail the spread of the virus and ensure safety including lockdowns, social distancing and self-isolation are unparalleled and these sudden changes, while important to safeguard physical health, are bound to impact psychological dimension of our wellbeing. The uncertainty of what the future will look is concomitant with feelings of fear and anxiety. In addition, the fear of contracting the virus and the preventative measures accompanying it have really changed the dynamics of our personal, social and professional interactions. Those who have experienced loss, be it a job, a house or a loved one are burdened by learning to cope and adapt, not only with their loss, but with all the other changes happening around them. The negative impact on the psychological functioning of individuals is exacerbated by factors such as domestic violence, abuse, financial distress, poverty and poor health. Even though it is probably too early to assess and pinpoint the psychological ramifications of the pandemic, it is important to continually care for your psychosocial wellbeing.

Here are some healthy ways to cope with the stress:

- Know what to do if you are sick and are concerned about COVID-19.
- Know where and how to get treatment and other support services and resources, including counseling or therapy (in person or through telehealth services).
- Take care of your emotional health so you can think clearly and react to the urgent needs to protect yourself and your family.
- Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including those on social media. Hearing about the pandemic repeatedly can be upsetting.
- Make time to unwind. Try to do some other activities you enjoy.
- Connect with others. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
- Take care of your body:
 - Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate
 - Get plenty of sleep.
 - Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals.
 - Exercise regularly.

HANDOUT 2

POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

Positive Affirmations for Work

These positive affirmations can help you clarify and obtain your career goals. If you're looking to improve your overall job performance, find a new job, change careers or even improve relationships with clients and coworkers, you can use the affirmations below:

- I further my career with every action I take.
- I love every day that I work.
- My job brings me financial abundance.
- My coworkers love being around me.
- My boss values the work I do.
- My clients appreciate and value my work.
- I attract new clients every day.
- My positive attitude, confidence and hard work naturally draws in new opportunities.
- I am enthusiastic and excited about my work.
- I make decisions easily.
- I speak positively about my coworkers and they respond by speaking positively about me.
- I am rewarded for doing my best.

HANDOUT 2

POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

Positive affirmations for stress and anxiety

Stress can be particularly bad when approaching some important event or something that has high stakes, e.g. giving an important presentation to a client, or going to a networking event at work. Instead of trying to avoid such situations altogether, remind yourself of these affirmations:

- I've done presentations before and I can do this one too.
- When this is over, I'll be so proud of myself.
- If I keep doing it, it will get easier.
- The last time I did this, everyone said I did really well.
- If I take deep breaths, that will help soothe me before I go in.
- I've survived this before, I'll survive now.
- I'm strong and can persevere.
- I can take things one step at a time.
- I'm in charge of my breathing, and I can slow it down.
- I'm courageous and can make it through.
- I use my unique strengths to move beyond stress.

HANDOUT 2

POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS

Positive affirmations for everyday life

Who doesn't want every day to be filled with happiness and excitement for life. Practice these affirmations for a healthier, happier, more productive day.

- I wake up happy and excited every single day.
- Each day of my life is filled with joy and love.
- Everything I do is fun, healthy and exciting.
- I crave new, healthy experiences.
- All my relationships are positive and filled with love and compassion.
- I see others as good people who are trying their best.
- I find opportunities to be kind and caring everywhere I look.
- I easily accomplish all my goals.
- I only desire things that are healthy for me.
- I am present in every moment.
- People treat me with kindness and respect.
- My environment is calm and supportive.

HANDOUT 1

ARE YOU BURNING OUT?

Have you noticed changes in yourself over the past 6 months? Assign a number from 0 (for no or little change) to 5 (for a great deal of change) for each of the following questions. (This test is not meant to replace a clinical assessment.)

1. Do you tire more easily? Feel fatigued rather than energetic?
2. Are people annoying you by telling you, "You don't look so good lately"?
3. Are you working harder and harder and accomplishing less and less?
4. Are you increasingly cynical and disenchanted?
5. Are you often invaded by sadness and you can't explain?
6. Are you forgetting things (appointments, deadlines, personal possessions)?
7. Are you increasingly irritable? More short-tempered? More disappointed in the people around you?
8. Are you seeing close friends and family members less frequently?

9. Are you too busy to do even routine things like making phone calls or reading reports or sending out birthday or other cards?

10. Are you suffering from physical complaints? (e.g., aches, pains, headaches, a lingering cold)

11. Do you feel disoriented when the activity of the day comes to a halt?

12. Is joy elusive?

13. Are you unable to laugh at a joke about yourself?

14. Does sex seem like more trouble than it's worth?

15. Do you have very little to say to people?

0-25: You're fine.

26-35: There are things you should be watching.

36-50: You're a candidate for burnout.

51-65: You are burning out.

Over 65: You sound burned out; a situation that may be threatening to your physical and mental well-being.

Don't let a high total score alarm you, but pay attention to it. Burnout is reversible, no matter how far along it is.

(Developed from materials downloaded on 10/9/2007 from: <http://sarbc.org/ciss8.html> adapted from The Freudenberger Burnout Scale.)

END NOTES

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