



Tapping Your Mental Resources



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Have you ever felt fearful and unsure of openly sharing something difficult about your mental health? It's not easy and often fills us with strong negative reactions, which can hold us back. However, it is now more than ever, during these unprecedented times of crisis, that we care for our mental well being

Taking Down Barriers for Better Mental Health

One of the reasons for this and one of the biggest barriers to seeking support and improving our mental health is the stigma. Many people feel unable to talk about their issues through fear of being judged, unfairly treated or not understood. They remain silent, attempting to cope with problems by themselves and unable to receive appropriate support. Getting rid of the stigma is then a major challenge in moving us forward

Accepting our Human Vulnerability

As a young psychology student accepting my mental health difficulties of anxiety and depression, came as a major shock and turning point. One in four of us, in the UK, experience a mental health problem every year. No-one is immune to poor mental health or mental illness. I had to confront my human vulnerability, deal with my shattered self -image, as well as challenge my strong defences and assumptions. I feel fortunate enough to have gained the knowledge, skills and insight, which have enabled me to build my mental resilience

Spotting the Flags

How do we recognise when our own or someone else's mental health is suffering? Just like with our physical health it can be useful to look out for times, when something seems off or isn't working, as well as it should. This is not only with ourselves, but also for those around us, such as our family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and employees

Signs and symptoms for mental health difficulties vary depending on the nature and seriousness of what we are experiencing. Some of the signs and symptoms, which may indicate a mental health problem relate to:

- Mood swings, personality changes, low mood, on-going sadness or tearfulness
- Negative, harmful or suicidal thoughts
- Confused thinking, difficulties in memory, concentration or problem solving
- Extreme irritability, anger, aggression, withdrawal or excessive tiredness
- Detachment from reality (delusions), paranoia, hallucinations

Managing Our Mental Health

There are situations, in which difficulties appear obvious and others times when this is less so. Becoming more aware of the signs and symptoms makes it possible for us to respond more effectively.

It is understandable, that some people may feel reluctant to react. Perhaps not feeling skilled or secure enough or not wanting to offend or make things worse. Finding out more and checking in with someone, that we trust can be a first step

We also know that not everyone feels able to ask for support when they are in distress or struggling. With any difficulty or problem, we first need to recognise and accept that there is one. Only then can we focus on the things, which we need to work on, in order to improve. Acknowledging that we are all human and vulnerable supports us to react more to how things actually are and enables us to strengthen our resilience

Supporting Others

You do not need to be a mental health professional, in order to assist someone who is in distress or dealing with a mental health problem. There are many ways to offer support. Two very effective responses are:

- Listening without judgement and avoiding making assumptions. This is one of the most positive ways to support someone to feel safer and more at ease
- For a person to feel heard, accepted and cared for expressing empathy is fundamental. Empathy enables us to acknowledge how someone is feeling, shows understanding about their difficulty and lets them know that this is okay
- Being there for others, with openness and respect, can make a world of difference to someone going through a tough time

Life Lessons for Improved Mental Health

Becoming a mental health professional, along with taking a hard and honest look at my own experience and reactions to my mental health taught me some very valuable lessons in how to take care of myself, as well as better deal with life challenges

Five Ways to Help Get You Through the Tough Times

Asking for a Hand: Talking about and seeking support can provide huge relief. This enables us to gain understanding and guidance, in order to deal with our circumstances and feelings more effectively

Confronting Challenges: Ignoring problems can often do more harm than good. Acknowledging and facing our difficulties, as they emerge, helps to prevent these from building up and generally makes them easier to manage

Taking Control: Prevention and reacting early to difficulties can lead to more positive outcomes. We can take time to learn and invest in factors, which promote good mental health.

Whenever we start to feel anxious or a problem comes up, it can be beneficial for us to react sooner rather than later. We are then in a better place to find out and access what we need, in order for us to remain balanced or to get back on track

Being You: Allowing myself to no longer be distracted or discouraged, through comparing myself to others, was both tough and a major shift in how I now perceive and react to things. This can relieve mental stress, anxiety and pressure. When we recognise and accept ourselves for who we are, we not only gain more focus and strength, which empowers us to positively grow on our own terms

Self-Care & Resilience: Most of us understand that self-care is crucial if we want to protect our mental health and well-being. Relaxation, exercise, healthy eating, good sleep, having fun, connecting with others are all essential parts of our life-style. Keeping these in check are our personal resources and strategies in building resilience and dealing with what life throws at us

Getting Support

There are times when seeking input from a professional or support service can provide resources and advice to move us forward. It can be confusing to know exactly where to turn when dealing with poor mental health and mental illness issues. You can consider getting in touch with local professional support services

Your General Practitioner (G.P) will usually be your first port of call. She / He can make an assessment of your situation, provide guidance, prescribe medication (if required) and refer on to other support professionals or services

National Health Service (NHS) - Mental Health Support

<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services/how-to-access-mental-health-services/>

The NHS offer free mental health services and support, which can be accessed through your G.P. Some services such as drug and alcohol services can be accessed directly

Children Mental Health Services

<https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/mental-health-services/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-services-camhs/>

NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) together with other psychological health providers offer support for children & young people suffering with emotional and behavioural difficulties

NHS Moodzone

www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression

Offers practical advice, interactive tools, videos and audio guides to help you feel mentally and emotionally better

Mind

www.mind.org.uk

Provides advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem. They campaign to improve services, raise awareness and promote understanding

Private Counselling from qualified and registered counsellors and psychotherapists can be found through professional associations such as; the

UK Counselling for Psychotherapy (UKCP)

<https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-therapy/we-can-help/>

British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP)

<https://www.bacp.co.uk/about-therapy/we-can-help/>

Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs)

An EAP is a confidential free service for employees, usually provided by the employer, which offers emotional counselling, practical support and information on personal and work-related problems

You can ask your manager or HR Department if you have access to an EAP



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