

Chai and Chat: What is mental health? What is mental illness?

What is Mental Health?

The World Health Organization defines mental health as "a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>).

How do you know when you have good mental health?

Here is a short check list.

- Self-esteem: Feeling good about who you are
- Managing emotions: Recognizing and expressing a wide range of emotions constructively
- Responding to stress: Managing and coping well with stress
- Mindfulness: Being aware of the details of this moment
- Relaxation: Being able to unwind and calm the body and mind
- Getting help: Seeking or accepting help from others when needed

(<https://wellness.asu.edu/explore-wellness/mind/emotional-well-being>)

Early Warning Signs

Not sure if you or someone you know is living with mental health problems? Experiencing one or more of the following feelings or behaviors can be an early warning sign of a problem:

- Eating or sleeping too much or too little
- Pulling away from people and usual activities
- Having low or no energy
- Feeling numb or like nothing matters
- Having unexplained aches and pains
- Feeling helpless or hopeless
- Smoking, drinking, or using drugs more than usual
- Feeling unusually confused, forgetful, on edge, angry, upset, worried, or scared
- Yelling or fighting with family and friends

(<https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health>)

What are the locations and phone numbers for your local mental health clinics?

What is Mental Illness?

The Mayo Clinic defines it as, "a wide range of mental health conditions — disorders that affect your mood, thinking and behavior. Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, eating disorders and addictive behaviors."

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.

When should you seek help?

- Experiencing severe mood swings that cause problems in relationships
- Having persistent thoughts and memories you can't get out of your head
- Hearing voices or believing things that are not true
- Thinking of harming yourself or others
- Inability to perform daily tasks like taking care of your kids or getting to work or school

What can I do to keep my mental health strong?

Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories, including those on social media.

Take care of your body

- Eat healthy, well-balanced meals
- Exercise regularly
- Get plenty of sleep
- Avoid excessive use of alcohol and tobacco

Make time to unwind — Try to do some other activities you enjoy

Connect with others—talk with people you trust about your concerns

Connect with your community or faith based organizations

<https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/stress-coping/cope-with-stress/index.html>

Two stories of anxiety producing situations in the Bible

Anxiety disorders may have their roots in physical or emotional sources. And yet, the presence of God in our lives can help us manage what we need to do to get help, like seeing a doctor, counselor, or conversing with a trusted friend.

There are plenty of times when people of faith experience normal anxiety. For example, the New Testament tells about Paul, the man who traveled all over the Mediterranean region telling people about Jesus Christ. For about three years, Paul was beaten, stoned, and expelled from cities for explaining and inviting people to turn to faith in Jesus Christ. When he settled in Corinth, he again was opposed by the Jews though he continued to share the good news with non Jewish people. In a vision one night, the Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. For I am with you and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9, 10).

Why do you think Paul needed this vision?

What kind of encouragement have you received in the face of anxiety and fear?

Do any of the encouragements you have received have a spiritual origin, like from prayer or a word of wisdom, or a vision?

In the Bible we also read about people who should have been anxious but do not seem to be anxious at all. During Israel's exile in Babylon, there were three Israeli men who were commanded to bow down to an image and worship that image as God. These men believed there was one creator God and they would not bow down. Consequently, they were brought before King Nebuchadnezzar and threatened with death in a fiery furnace. Amazingly, the three answered the King, "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up" (Daniel 3: 17,18).

The three were thrown into the furnace but were not burned up. In fact, when the king looked in the furnace he saw a fourth man who "...looked like the son of the gods" (Daniel 3:25). King Nebuchadnezzar brought the men out of the furnace and declared about the three, "...they trusted in him (their God) and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God" (Daniel 3:28).

Without a doubt, these three men know things about God that gave them confidence. Israel's poets repeated this phrase, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever" (Psalm 107:1)

How do you think these three men faced their own death with courage?

What did they believe about God that gave them courage?

Chai and Chat: What Are Examples of Anxiety?

Everybody feels fearful, worried, or anxious from time to time. Anxiety becomes a problem when there is nothing to be worried about or the worry outweighs the risk.

For example, people usually feel anxious before they take a test or give a speech, which is completely normal. But if anxiety is so overwhelming that a person cannot sleep or eat, then that is a problem.

What do you think are common experiences that cause people anxiety?

How do you distinguish normal expected anxiety from abnormal, high level anxiety?

There are several kinds of anxiety disorders.

1. Generalized Anxiety Disorder, GAD produces chronic, exaggerated worrying about everyday life. This worrying can consume hours each day, making it hard to concentrate or finish daily tasks.
2. More than shyness, social anxiety disorder causes intense fear about social interaction, often driven by irrational worries about humiliation (e.g. saying something stupid or not knowing what to say).
3. Panic disorder is characterized by panic attacks and sudden feelings of terror sometimes striking repeatedly and without warning. It is often mistaken for a heart attack but could also look like shortness of breath, dizziness, or upset stomach.
4. A phobia can create powerful reactions of irrational fear triggered by certain places, events or objects. Phobias include fear of high places or crowded areas.

[\(https://nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Mental-Health-Conditions/Anxiety-Disorders\)](https://nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Mental-Health-Conditions/Anxiety-Disorders)

Activity based on **Picture This, by Molly Bang**

Choose three colors of the geometric shapes and make a picture that is related to the discussion or Bible