

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>)

Where are 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>

St. Paul’s advice about worry

In part 1, we considered legitimate anxiety, anxiety that has a reasonable root. For example, St. Paul was worried because he had experienced persecution and knew that it was likely he could experience it again given the hostility people felt toward Jesus Christ. Perhaps we experience anxiety because we face the consequence of a poor choice, like failing an important class because we did not prepare for it adequately.

Part 2 examines anxiety we experience that does not come from a clear rational source. Usually, the terrible thing we think may happen is not very likely to happen at all. In the Bible, we read about a king named Saul that felt so threatened by a young man, David, he spent time hunting him down to kill him. David was not a threat at all. He was loyal to Saul, much younger, and without resources. Yet Saul was threatened by his growing reputation and popularity.

Give some examples of reasonable and unreasonable anxiety.

In the New Testament, Paul addressed the topic of anxiety to the readers in the city of Philippi. This church faced the outward pressure of persecution from the community and inward pressure of conflict within. Both can be the source for reasonable and unreasonable anxiety. So Paul advised them, “Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon. Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4: 4-7 NLT).

Explain Paul’s advice in your own words.

Have you ever used his advice? What happened?

Next, Paul gives further advice about how to calm our minds down.

“And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:8,9 NLT).

Give an example of things that are true, honorable, pure, lovely, and admirable.

How could thinking about such things help calm our bodies and mind, whether or not the anxiety seems rational or not?

Chai and Chat: How Does Anxiety Manifest Itself ?

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 are some things that cause people anxiety?

Have you ever seen someone whose anxiety kept them from fulfilling their responsibilities, such as going to work or class?

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>)

What do you do when you feel overwhelmed with anxiety?

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