

# 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 is your local mental health clinic?

What are its phone numbers?

## 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>

## Real People, Real Trouble, Real Faith

The Psalms is a book of Hebrew poetry found in the Bible. Though their poetic forms may be unfamiliar to us, what is familiar is their emotions. You can find everything from ecstatic joy to deep depression; from confidence to anger. Poetry has always been a vehicle for expressing our deepest thoughts in language that is powerful. Consider this excerpt from the Sons of Korah. They were the ones that are responsible for leading Israel in worship.

The author of this poem begins by lamenting the sad turn of events. He no longer has the freedom to go with others to worship at the temple, which was a festive, life-giving experience for him. Instead, people are making fun of him and accusing God of leaving him.

My soul is downcast within me;  
therefore I will remember you  
from the land of the Jordan,  
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.

Deep calls to deep  
in the roar of your waterfalls;  
all your waves and breakers  
have swept over me.

By day the Lord directs his love,  
at night his song is with me—  
a prayer to the God of my life.

I say to God my Rock,  
"Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I go about mourning,  
oppressed by the enemy?

My bones suffer mortal agony  
as my foes taunt me,  
saying to me all day long,  
"Where is your God?"

Why my soul, are you downcast?  
Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God,  
for I will yet praise him,  
my Savior and my God (Psalm 42:6-11).

Describe what the author is experiencing and what he feels as a result.

Describe his conflicting thoughts about God and how he resolves that.

In light of that, what do you think about his advice to his readers? How might these thoughts help you?

## Chai and Chat: What is Clinical Depression?

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Some depression is caused by a loss, such as the death of a loved one, or a medical condition, such as a thyroid disorder. Clinical depression is the most severe form of depression. To diagnose clinical depression, doctors use the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), published by the American Psychiatric Association. They look for 5 or more of the following symptoms.

- \*Feelings of sadness, emptiness or hopelessness (most of the day nearly every day for at least two weeks)
- \*Diminished interest or pleasure in most or all normal activities nearly every day.
- \*Weight loss or gain (5% or more in a month).
- \*Trouble sleeping, including too much sleep or not able to sleep
- \*Restlessness such as pacing around a room, wringing the hands, pulling off clothing and putting it back on.
- \*Slowed thinking, speaking or body movements.
- \*Tiredness and lack of energy, nearly every day.
- \*Feeling of worthlessness or excessive guilt nearly every day.
- \*Trouble thinking, concentrating, and difficulty in making decisions.
- \*Reoccurring thoughts of death, suicide, or attempts at suicide.

According to the Mayo Clinic, symptoms of one who is clinically depressed, are usually severe enough to cause noticeable problems in relationships with others or in day-to-day activities, such as work, school or social activities.

Clinical depression can affect people of any age, including children. However, clinical depression symptoms, even if severe, usually improve with psychological counseling, antidepressant medications or a combination of the two.

*What would you suggest to a friend that had a number of these symptoms?*

*What would you want someone to do for you?*

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