

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 mental health clinics?

What are their 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>

The main story thread of the Bible that centers around the theme of forgiveness

We learn kindness from others who treat us with kindness. We learn forgiveness from others who forgive us. But the supreme example of undeserved love and forgiveness comes from God. Here is how the Bible describes how God offers us forgiveness.

1. Because God is our Creator, we owe Him our very lives. He is the one who gave everything we enjoy. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights..."(James 1:17).

What do you think about this idea, that all the good things we enjoy come from God?

2. Even though God gives us all things to enjoy, we often do not recognize and honor Him. Instead, we depend on our own resources to satisfy the longings of our hearts. We often substitute God with things like pleasure, recognition, and wealth.

What are other things that people substitute for God?

3. Think of God like someone who does not give up on a relationship. He wants to forgive us and makes two important steps to provide forgiveness and reconciliation. The first step has to do with justice. When a true offense has been committed, a punishment must be delivered. That is how our legal systems work for example. Jesus Christ bore the guilt and shame we deserve when he died on the cross. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

What do you think of this idea, that Jesus took responsibility for our sins by dying on the cross in our place?

4. The second step involves us. God does not force himself on us. You cannot make one person love another. So He offers us an invitation, to receive His forgiveness. We enter a loving relationship with Him when we trust in Jesus Christ. And because Jesus rose from the dead, He can say to us, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:29). Will you turn away from your own way of living and trust in Jesus?

How could trusting in Jesus Christ help you forgive those who have hurt and harmed you?

Chai and Chat: What is forgiveness?

There are many health benefits when we forgive others. According to the Mayo Clinic, “Letting go of grudges and bitterness can make way for improved health and peace of mind. Forgiveness can lead to: healthier relationships, improved mental health, less anxiety, stress and hostility, lower blood pressure, fewer symptoms of depression, a stronger immune system, improved heart health, and improved self-esteem” (<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/forgiveness/art-20047692>).

Forgiveness requires mental, emotional, and spiritual strength. Think of the most difficult physical feat that you might be capable of. How would you reach that goal? Forgiveness is like that. It requires a great deal of attention and energy.

What is forgiveness? According to Dictionary.com, there are three aspects of forgiveness.

1. To let go of a legitimate claim of what they owe you whether it is money, time, or attention. (This does not mean that you do not pursue legal action when needed).
2. To refrain from hurting them or paying them back for the harm and hurt they did toward you, especially if they took something from you like your reputation, friends, or innocence.
3. To stop feeling anger toward them.

What are some steps you take to forgive?

There are many questions that swirl around the topic of forgiveness.

If you forgive, does it mean that what they did was ok?

If you forgive, are you excusing their behavior and encouraging them to do it again?

If you forgive, do you have to reconcile with the person? Should you reconcile?

If you forgive today, will all your feelings of anger and rage disappear? Will you need to forgive them tomorrow?

What other questions do you have about forgiveness?

Choose a few of these questions to discuss.

Thumbprint art. Arrange a setting on your paper that describes something we talked about today.