

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

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## 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 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>

## An Example of Loneliness in the Bible

The Old Testament Bible tells the story of Elijah, the prophet of Israel. In this story, Elijah was fleeing from evil Queen Jezebel, who was angry at him for opposing Baal, the regional god. Elijah ran to a cave to hide, when God came to talk to him.

“The Lord said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

Elijah replied, “I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”

“Go out and stand before me on the mountain,” the Lord told him. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And a voice said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

He replied again, “I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, torn down your altars, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me, too.”

Then the Lord told him, “Go back the same way you came, and travel to the wilderness of Damascus.... Yet I will preserve 7,000 others in Israel who have never bowed down to Baal or kissed him!” (1 Kings 19:9-18).

*In your own words, retell the story.*

*What can we learn about God from this story?*

*The New Testament tells us, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:8).*

*In what way could we draw near to God?*

# Chai and Chat: What is loneliness?

Loneliness is something that people from all walks of life can experience. Prolonged loneliness can lead to negative physical and mental effects, such as depression, alcoholism, and suicidal thoughts. There are many medical conditions that have been associated with loneliness. Is loneliness lack of being around people? Is it a lack of connection to people? The dictionary defines loneliness as “sadness because one has no friends or company.”

*In what way do you see people experiencing loneliness nowadays?*

*Why do you think people feel lonely?*

From research on loneliness, the authors gave definitions of three types of loneliness: Intimate/emotional loneliness, relational/social loneliness, and collective loneliness.

- Intimate/emotional loneliness: The loneliness you feel when you don't have a friend to rely on for comfort and help during a crisis. This is loneliness that desires a spouse or for a best friend who understands your problems and values you, no matter what happens.
- Relational/social loneliness: The loneliness you feel when you aren't closely connected with your family or a friend group. Not seeing your family or friend group regularly can lead to relational/social loneliness.
- Collective loneliness- The loneliness you feel when you are separated from others from your “group”. For example, if you get to class on the first day and there are only people of the opposite gender in the class.

*Tell about a time when you were lonely.*

*Which kind of loneliness do you fear the most?*



Illustration by Mark Smith for TIME

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