Let's Talk About Mental Health

Illustrated By:
Njung'e Wanjiru
Vania Dhianisya

How are you really?

a poem by Taz (@clickbytaz)

I'm falling behind at school
I've become distant with my friends
I can feel myself slowly slipping away
And everytime I try to make things better,
I hit a dead end

I don't know man,
I'm struggling to keep it together
I've worked too hard to lose it all now, but
I'm crumbling under the pressure

It feels like no matter how hard I try
It just never feels enough
I'm tired and exhausted all the time,
It's all becoming too much
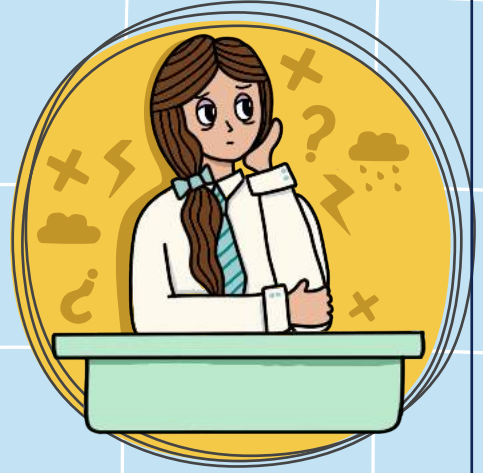
I just wish there was someone I can talk to,
Someone who wouldn't judge me and accept me as I am.
Someone who I don't have to pretend to be fine
around all the time.
Someone who understands

I feel like something's wrong
She's not acting like her usual self.
I don't know if I'm just reading too much into it, or if maybe,
these are signs of a cry for help.

She seems happy,
but also distant and distracted.
I don't know,
my gut instinct tells me
something isn't right.

But then again I don't want to
cross the line
and overstep boundaries.
Maybe I am overthinking
and actually everything is fine.

I wish I knew how to spot the signs.
That way I can better detect
if there's actually an issue
or if it's all in my mind.
Maybe it'll all just figure itself out.
It's like the saying goes:
Nothing heals better, than time.
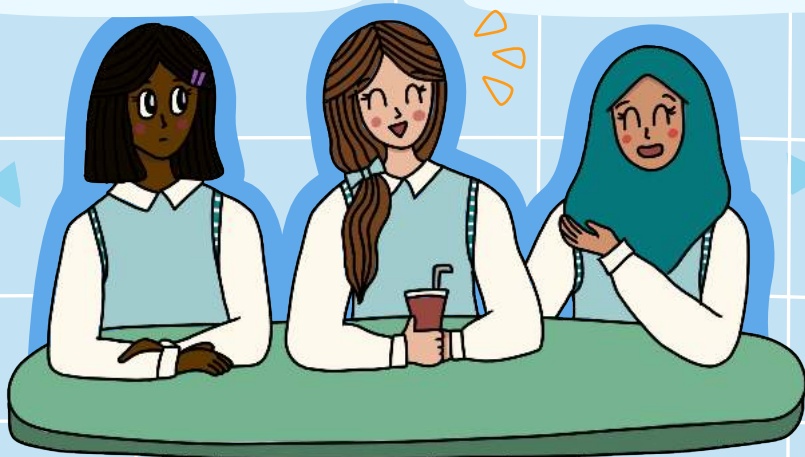
She seemed fine.
She's the smartest in our class,
great work ethic,
happy all the time.
No one would have suspected
it was a lie,
that there was so much
she was hiding.

Makes me think,
had I just asked her how she was,
maybe she would have known,
she had someone she could
confine in.

I guess this is a wake up call.
A moment to realize,
that we're all human at the end of
the day.
We all struggle from time to time.
Sure, we can come across fine,
but how many of us hide the
battles we fight inside?

And it makes me question,
Why?
Why do we feel like it makes us weak?
Why do we feel this
overwhelming sense of shame
and become too afraid to speak?

I was that person once,
felt so empty and alone.
I was fortunate enough to have
people
who made me feel safe
So I didn't have to battle these issues
on my own.

They provided me with a safe space,
to get the right help.
And now that I'm feeling healthier,
I'd like to be that person for someone
else.

Truth is, it's not an easy battle.
It's a path of constant challenges.
But we as a society need to do better.
We can't turn a blind eye
or ignore the signs.
The only way to actually bring effective
change,
is together.

Sometimes it's up to us to initiate,
go out of our way to ask if they're OK.
Educate ourselves to pick up on the
signs
and become that safe space.
The sooner we accept
that mental health is part of our reality,
the sooner we can seek help
and strive for a healthier society.

KNOW the facts

Did you know that mental health is an important part of everyone's life?

Taking care of our mental health is a journey, there are ups and downs, but we can always take small steps to protect our mental health. Our mental health changes every day but we can prepare for life's challenges by practicing certain skills for our mental health.

Mental health can also be very misunderstood.

There are many ideas and opinions across different communities and cultures that influence the way we think and talk about mental health. Let's take some time to discuss what mental health really is so that we can inform ourselves and the people around us of the facts.

1 So what exactly is mental health?

Mental health is a part of our health and well-being that enables us to understand our abilities, cope with our day to day life, contribute to our community, build relationships, and shape the world we live in. It can range from feeling well to feeling distressed, and each of us falls somewhere on this spectrum.

No matter where you are, remember: it is important not to judge ourselves when we are going through highs and lows. Accepting ourselves is the first step in building a community where we all feel safe, welcome, and valued.

2 What does it mean to have positive mental health?

Someone who is experiencing positive mental health can:

- Understand their abilities
- Deal with the normal stresses of life in a good way
- Overcome challenges
- Interact and build relationships with other people
- Work and study productively
- Enjoy life and contribute to their community

3 When is it important to ask for support?

It can feel scary to admit that you need support, but it is a sign of courage and strength. Here are some signs that you might need help with your mental health:

- ✗ Finding it hard to get out of bed or feeling tired all the time
- ✗ Avoiding friends or tasks you need to do
- ✗ Losing interest in activities you usually like
- ✗ Having trouble concentrating
- ✗ Feeling irritable, lonely, down, or sad most of the day, nearly every day
- ✗ Experiencing any of the above for more than a couple of weeks

4 Where can I start if I need help and how can I ask for it?

It's never too early to ask for help.

Asking for help can feel hard, but getting help from other people can positively change your life. You can talk to someone in your community like a counselor, health care worker, or community leader. If this is challenging, try talking first to someone you trust, like maybe a teacher or family member, who can help you reach out for help.

You may even find an available helpline that you can call or reach online. It's especially important to ask for help from a trusted adult if our difficult feelings feel like too much, last a long time, or make it hard to do our daily routine. If you are struggling and don't know what to say or how to ask for help, try these:

When you don't know what you need:

"I'm feeling _____ . I'm not sure what to ask for, but I think I need some support. Are you free to talk (day/time)?"

When you feel stuck:

"I'm struggling. Can we (meet up/talk)? I'd love your help in thinking about some ideas and making a plan."

When you don't want to talk about it:

"I'm in a bad place but I'm also not ready to talk about it. I'd love to do an activity together to distract me."

When you need to feel connected:

"Can you call or message me (on date/every day) to make sure I'm doing OK?"

There are professionals who are specifically trained to support you with your mental health. If you feel like you might need professional help, try reaching out to a trusted adult who can guide you. If you aren't sure where to go, try this resource first https://findahelpline.com/

5 Understanding myths about mental health can help our communities break the stigma and create ways for starting conversations and getting help.
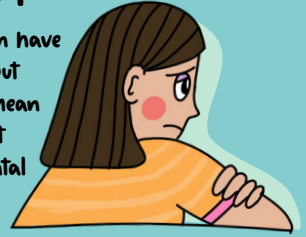
✖ MYTH

Teenagers don't deal with poor mental health. They just have mood swings and rebel to get attention.

✔ FACT

Teenagers often have mood swings, but that does not mean that they don't experience mental health

➡ 14% of the world's teens experience diagnosed mental health conditions.
➡ Among 10-15-year-olds, self-harm is the 5th leading cause of death.
➡ Half of all mental health conditions start by the age of 14.
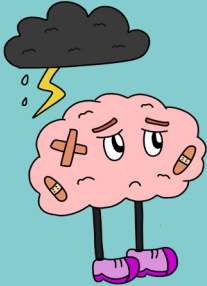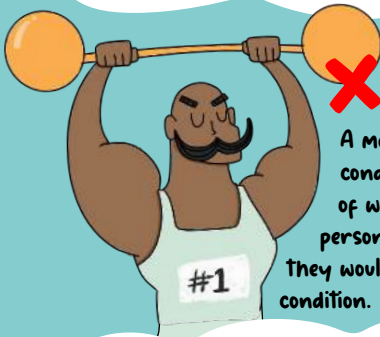
✖ MYTH

You only need to take care of your mental health if you have a mental health condition.

✔ FACT

Everyone has mental health and can take active steps to work on their well-being and improve their mental health.

Everyone should also take active steps to create habits that help them lead healthy and safe lifestyles. It's not always easy or possible to change our circumstances, but sometimes even small things like making sure we have enough sleep and exercise can make a difference to our mental health

✖ MYTH

A mental health condition is a sign of weakness; if the person were stronger, they would not have this condition.

✔ FACT

A mental health condition has nothing to do with being weak. It is not something people can choose to have or not have.

In fact, realizing that you need help and asking for it requires great strength and courage. Anyone can develop a mental health condition.

Sometimes you may find yourself somewhere in between experiencing positive mental health and experiencing a mental health condition. Life is tough! **Have you ever felt stressed, sad, lonely, afraid, or anxious while balancing school, work, relationships, and regular life challenges?**

When you're experiencing difficult emotions, who can you talk to?

Some methods of coping can be helpful while others can be harmful. When choosing how to cope, try to think of what's best for you. It can be difficult, but choosing how we cope in times of stress is as important as actively choosing behaviours and habits that can promote our wellbeing. **When you're experiencing difficult emotions, what are 2 ways that you cope?**

What is one thing you would change about the way people talk about mental health in your community? Why?

If you see a friend going through a challenging time, what are 2 ways you could support them?

Acknowledging our strengths can be useful for our wellbeing, and for recognizing that, regardless of how we are feeling, we add value to the world. Think about yourself. **What are three things that you would consider to be your own strengths?**

think about it!

Make a Difference

A note to yourself

Share a message to your younger self that may have been dealing with difficult feelings. You can do this by writing in your personal journal, telling a loved one about your reflection or sharing it on social media, or take some time to read someone else's reflection. Turn this into a trend and challenge your friends to think about a message they would share to their younger selves.

Be there for a friend

Take some time to write a letter that you won't send. It can be to anyone past or present. This exercise might help you achieve clarity, calmness, or confidence. The idea is to get everything out on paper so that you can either address some of the topics in the letter or move on.

The Unsent Letter

Take some time to write a letter that you won't send. It can be to anyone past or present. This exercise might help you achieve clarity, calmness, or confidence. The idea is to get everything out on paper so that you can either address some of the topics in the letter or move on.

Share your opinion

Write and submit an opinion piece on how your community thinks, talks, and acts when it comes to mental health. What would you want to change about this? Why? How? Tell us how you would take action to create a more mental health promoting community!