Mental Health Matters

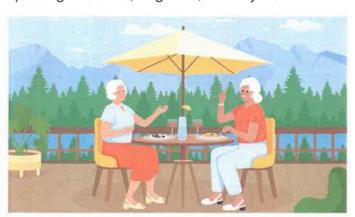## What do we mean by mental health?

Everybody has a state of mental health: it is the way we think, feel, and cope with life's ups and downs. We all experience times of positive mental health, as well as times where our wellbeing is lower, and we may need some help. For some people this may mean feeling down or worried from time to time, but others may have a diagnosable mental health condition and can benefit from professional support. Looking after our mental health is just as important as staying physically fit.

As people age, they may experience certain life changes that impact their mental health, such as coping with a serious illness or losing a loved one. Although many people will adjust to these life changes, some may experience feelings of grief, social isolation, or loneliness.

There is also less awareness among older people about mental health, meaning that they do not always recognise they are experiencing a mental health condition. For example, while they may recognise that they are feeling consistently sad, they may not realise this could be a symptom of depression. We must support older people to recognise the symptoms of mental health conditions and to feel able to reach out for help when needed. You may find further support from a variety of sources including local health services, charities, voluntary organisations, and local groups.

Loneliness in older people

According to Age UK, more than 2 million people in England over the age of 75 live alone, and more than a million older people say they go over a month without speaking to a friend, neighbour, or family member.

Older people are especially vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation. But there are ways to overcome loneliness, even if you live alone and find it hard to get out:

Keep in touch

Social interaction is important for maintaining your wellbeing. It's good to develop new friendships with people of all ages. Friendships with both older and younger people help to keep you in touch with the world as it changes.

A simple chat or phone call with a friend or relative can make all the difference. Or you can call **Independent Age** on **0800 319 6789** or **Age UK** on **0800 678 1602**.

You can also call **The Silver Line**, a helpline for older people on **0800 470 8090**.

Learn to love computers

If your friends and family live far away, a good way to stay in touch, especially with grandchildren, is by using a personal computer, smartphone or tablet.

You can share emails and photos with family and friends, have free video chats using services such as Skype, Zoom, FaceTime or Viber.

Tips for improving your mental wellbeing:

- Try to relax and reduce stress.
- Find ways to learn and be creative.
- Spend time in nature.
- Connect with others.
- Look after your physical health.
- Try to improve your sleep.

Spending time in areas with abundant green space and low air pollution levels has been shown to have a positive impact on both physical and mental wellbeing. Being in green spaces with clean air can also improve cardiovascular health, boost the immune system, and even aid in recovery from illnesses or injuries. Exposure to nature can also improve cognitive function, boost creativity, and may even help with depression and anxiety.

By taking care of their mental health, elderly individuals can improve their quality of life and enjoy their golden years to the fullest. It's important to remember that seeking help is not a sign of weakness, but rather a sign of strength and self-care.

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