

NO NONSENSE ADVICE

10

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

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A LUMINARY PUBLICATION



**PUBLISHED BY LUMINARY LEARNING SOLUTIONS
FOR FREE CIRCULATION
FIRST EDITION, 2020**

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PROLOGUE:

A conundrum I genuinely puzzle over is Mental health – Emotional Wellbeing is a positive facet and a good indication of sound Mental health. So, what constitutes good mental health and thereby Emotional Wellbeing, and why is it so important?

It is pretty easy in most cases to identify an illness, for example, a healthy kidney (I hope) has the same function for everyone. However, Emotional Wellbeing cannot be pinned down to a particular function, nor is it a one size fits all application across the board – it differs from person to person!

Our mental health and emotional wellbeing, comprises of psychological, emotional, and social elements; affecting how we think, feel, react, and behave every single day. In turn, affecting our decision making, the way we cope with stress and our relationships with fellow humans.

In short Emotional Wellbeing is a very delicate and extremely complex component and is the essence of being human and functioning as a well-rounded person: affecting every aspect of our existence. The main qualifier here is that you are human. So YES, kids, adolescents, adults, whatever gender, at every stage of our life, Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health plays a silent yet vital role.

So how can we really distinguish between someone just being different, or emotionally unstable? How do we know where freely expressing oneself and being unconventional ends and mental illness begins? Is someone just eccentric or sick?

How can you assess yourself or loved one objectively without being defensive or dismissive? Why is it shrouded in stigma and least spoken of when it affects the very core of human functionality?

One thing is for sure: if you know nothing about it, want to know about it, have suspicions about it, want to know how to overcome it, or be proactive about it or find help for it...

'IT' being Emotional Wellness stemming from sound Mental Health!

This read is for you...

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Chapter 1

But I am not really SICK am I?

Emotional wellbeing or mental health has been an aspect of ourselves that we have struggled to acknowledge and talk about as a society. The fear, silence and therefore, the lack of accurate information around this essential part of us that makes us human has led to people struggling in silence. We see, over and over again that the importance and urgency given to physical health are not afforded to mental health, and there is a tendency to still see the brain as a separate entity, disconnected from the rest of the body. However, scientific evidence has repeatedly shown us that what affects the brain affects the body and vice versa. Our muscles remember trauma, our digestive systems respond to stress, our urinary and bowel systems respond in different ways to anxiety and stress, and there is also evidence now that tells us that the human heart changes in shape due to intense emotional distress. The Japanese call it 'Takotsubo's Cardiomyopathy'. Hence, giving brain health the same importance, we give physical health is vital and will contribute to better functioning, happiness, and contentment in our lives.

Is there anything called 'normal'? How do I know I am not ?

A question that we often struggle with is 'am I NORMAL'? And we continue to twirl it around in our heads, based on things we hear and read about, feedback from other people, interception and exteroception. Simply put, interception is when we are able to identify what goes on in our body, which could be sensations, feelings, etc. and exteroception is our ability to determine what goes on in the outside world. So, coming back to the question of 'am I NORMAL?', being normal puts us on a spectrum with every other human being that exists. Normal and abnormal are never black and white. It is influenced by early experiences, upbringing, our relationships, norms, values and beliefs in our individual and collective cultures, and certain criteria's that people have put together to make diagnosis and treatment of mental health problems more organized.

There is no universal prescribed definition as to what 'normal' means when it comes to mental health and emotional wellbeing. The baseline of normal functioning for someone who has experienced significant developmental trauma like parental neglect, emotional abuse, etc. would be quite different from someone who has had a safe, nurturing relationship with parents. A person's personality that develops over a long period of time would also determine how they respond to different situations and challenges in their lives. Some people avoid distressing situations, whereas others actively approach them.

Listening to our bodies and brains, and the signals they give us, and also paying attention to the feedback given by other people are ways to know whether there is something brewing in the background that needs your attention. Paying attention to these signals and maybe even seeking help, can also be to understand ourselves better, to develop greater self-awareness, to increase resilience and to learn skills to cope in the future. You do not have to be mentally ill to seek support.

What are the warning signs ? How do i know I am not OK ?

Warning signs, their frequency and intensity would differ from person to person. Two people facing the same challenges in their lives, would not respond the same way, and therefore the signs that alert them to potential mental health consequences would be different. However, there are common warning signs that we can look out for, in ourselves and in other people that would indicate the need to shift gears, hit the brakes and check the engine. Common warning signs include difficulty concentrating, slowing down of thinking and processing speed, problems with memory, decrease in motivation and energy, feeling low consistently for an extended period of time, constant anxiety, feeling 'on edge' most of the time, problems with sleep and appetite, interpersonal problems, feelings of guilt and worthlessness, a decline in personal hygiene, isolation, and confusion. There might also be physiological signs like constant aches and pains, headaches that increase in intensity and frequency, gastritis and other digestive problems, frequent urination and bowel movements, tightness in the chest, muscle tension, constipation, irregular menstrual cycles etc.

Does that mean if I am sad, lonely, upset or angry I am having 'mental health problems?'

It is essential: that we understand that feeling sad, angry, upset, frustrated or lonely are all everyday human experiences, and these feelings are normal and valid. Experiencing what might seem negative emotions or thoughts does not always mean that we are struggling with mental health problems or mental illness. It is only when negative thoughts and emotions start to interfere with our daily functioning, cause significant distress and impairment in our work and personal lives that we need to perhaps consider, seeking some support.

But WHY am I feeling this way ?

Changes in brain chemistry, genetic vulnerability, life events like divorce, unemployment, loss of a loved one, etc. Traumatic childhood experiences, chronic stress at work and/or home, financial difficulties, social isolation. Certain physical health problems like Diabetes, Cancer, HIV. Being subject to stigma and discrimination based on one's sexual orientation and gender identity etc. can all be reasons as to why one might develop a mental health problem at some stage of their life. It is often a combination of multiple causes and reasons. It is also important that we note, that not everyone who goes through crisis, trauma or other negative life events will develop a mental health problem/s. It is often a collection of Biological, Psychological and Social factors that work together to either make someone vulnerable to mental illness or not. A resilient mindset, positive family and community support, easy access to mental health services, etc. can act as buffers.

Chapter 2

I can sort myself can't I ?

We are more than capable of handling our emotional wellbeing by ourselves - most of the time. There ARE times when we need help too! Discerning between the two is essential: and only you can really answer it. As much as our physical construct is different: and some are naturally stronger than others: our emotional construct follows suite. There is ABSOLUTELY nothing WRONG with you if you feel you are more 'emotional' than others - and that you feel you need support. Remember also, that, just like with regular exercise and a proper diet, even the skinniest of us can become muscular, and the weakest of us can become stronger. With appropriate 'mental exercises' and a little effort, we can all become emotionally resilient and better at managing our emotions.

- **Is there a limit to which I can weather through storms alone?**

Remember what we said at the outset? We ARE all different! Therefore, we all have DIFFERENT thresholds to pain - both physical and emotional. Some can weather a hell of a lot of emotional distress and be perfectly fine with it, whereas some of us will be upset over what might seem trivial to anyone else. It is tough to put a 'threshold' on someone's capacity to weather the storms: but one inalienable truth is unavoidable: we ALL HAVE THAT BREAKING POINT. WHAT that proverbial 'hair that breaks the camel's back' is going to be vastly different from person to person.

- **How do I know when I have reached that place, where I need an extra hand?**

As with most questions around these emotional wellbeing areas: you are the best authority to answer these questions. Remember the first few chapters where we explored the 'warning signs'? An intensification of any one of these 'signs' is a good indication that you may need to think of sitting down and addressing some of them: and their 'root causes.' Some of these issues you may well be able to address by yourself: and for others, you may need to talk to someone, or seek professional help. (which we will explore in the next few chapters.) The Key is this: ACKNOWLEDGE that there IS a problem - and that you NEED TO ADDRESS it.

A small note of caution here: sometimes we CAN distract ourselves from the immediate and 'get on with it'. Though you may momentarily find solace, the underlying issues of your emotional wellbeing not being addressed means that it is only a matter of time until it comes up again. When we talk of 'self-help' we DON'T mean distractions - and burying yourself in exciting work or a holiday that 'takes your mind off things' for the moment in time. You DO need to consider more long term solutions too.

- **How can religion and spirituality help me?**

Whether you are religious or not is a very personal thing. However, be it traditional religion or spirituality: both have, at its very core, a clear focus on emotional wellbeing. What prayer and meditation are to a religious person can well be mindfulness to a person seeking spirituality (as opposed to being religious). What is essential to understand is this. Both religion and spirituality can offer tools and techniques to ensure your view life, living, situations and relationships are in a manner that enables you to be grounded and rooted in a place and space, that offers the ability to remain emotionally stable. Exploring the teachings, tools and techniques in both religion and spirituality from the viewpoint of finding solutions to emotional challenges is quite different to 'finding God' or 'Nirvana': learn to discern between the two.

If you ARE religious, turn to the scriptures for inspiration: good religious leaders can also help you. If you are more spiritually inclined - then, search for some spiritual guidance. If you are not a believer of either, turn to some professionally researched and authored self-help books/videos.

- **What can I do to help myself when I feel down?**

There are a ton of things that you can do yourself, to ensure you are ok emotionally. But, remember, what works for one person might NOT work YOU. So, experiment with things that have worked for others, and see if they work for you. If it does, continue: if it does not, keep searching...

Here are some things that we have found useful:

- **Start by acknowledging your emotions**

We all tend to 'brush aside' emotions: it is sometimes culturally rooted, sometimes rooted in how gender is perceived, and at times, how we are brought up. Learn to acknowledge your feelings, and sit and understand them.

Spend a few minutes daily, and think about how your day was - not from a 'to do' perspective - but from a 'how did I feel today' perspective. See if it was a 'good day' or a 'bad day' from the emotional viewpoint (and not from a 'productivity' viewpoint that we generally take when working). We all do FEEL emotions: all the time: and we will all have a variety of positive and negative emotions throughout the day. Understand how circumstances, people, situations and how you react to them dictate your emotional state: and recognise patterns. Being AWARE is the first step in being able to control your emotions

- **Practice gratitude:**

Every morning when you wake up, give yourself the task of thinking of what you are grateful for in your life. Then, every night before you sleep, try and identify one thing that made you happy during your day. Gratitude and positive reflection are ways to train your mind to see the good things instead of focusing on the bad. If anything, it would be a welcome little break from whatever is bothering you, even for a moment. Practising gratitude regularly, makes it a habit, that can help shift your attitude towards your challenge.

- **Practice Mindfulness**

Being in the 'here and now' (as opposed to being in the past or planning for the future), enables you to be rooted and grounded. Look at things from the 'present' perspective, which gives clarity and focus. Also, remember to discern between what you CAN influence and what you CAN'T and start making a conscious effort to focus ONLY on what you CAN do something about.

- Rationalise your emotions

Once you are conscious of your emotions and you understand WHY you go through them, you can start quietly rationalising them. It is quite tough to 'rationalise' emotions in the 'heat of things'. So, make a habit of 'dissecting' a situation and how you felt once the initial rush of emotions has subsided. Sifting through the 'emotional onion' and asking not only WHY I felt that way - but also, importantly, whether there were other ways of looking at the same situation which 'makes more sense' enables you to be critical of your own actions and emotions. This introspection will hold you in good stead throughout your life.

What happened?

How did I react to it?

What can I learn about myself from this reaction?

What could I have done differently?

How would that alternative reaction/action have impacted the outcome?

How would that alternative reaction/action help my emotional state?

If this kind of situation happens again: how should I ideally react?

Now, to move from 'thinking about it' to actually being able to 'do it' at that moment in time when the situation actually takes place. It is a long road: but, introspecting on a regular basis, and being able to have that conversation with yourself truly helps the chances of you inculcating alternative responses over time.

- **Take up journaling**

Write about your feelings. Keep a journal not only for 'events' for also to chronicle your feelings daily. Do the introspection on PAPER which will not only help you to think - aimlessly - but focus and rationalise. Writing forces structure: and at times forces you to think about what you are writing. So, imagine rationalising and answering the questions posed in the earlier section in a journal? - Imagine the wealth of data you will have to analyse your feelings over a period of time?

Remember: writing also is a form of 'venting' - and 'getting it out there' - which helps tremendously. Especially if you are too shy or feel awkward to talk to someone (learn to get out of it - which we will talk about later), it certainly helps to keep a journal.

- **Physical exercise**

Time and again, it has been proven, through countless research, that physical exercise can help in emotional wellbeing as much as making you physically fitter and physically healthier. Remember, though: exercise needs to be regular. Don't take on exercise from the perspective of buffing yourself up or losing weight - or with a 'target' in mind. From a wellbeing perspective, resort to physical activity as a form of 'therapy' - and take it on with enjoyment and fun in mind. If you make it drudgery and a 'pain' chances are you are not going to 'ease' the 'pain' but add to it! Doing a sport you love, or just running (if you like running) or swimming (if you enjoy a swim) is just as effective as hitting a gym or crossfire circuit.

- Practising grounding and relaxation techniques

- Grounding techniques

- o Briskly rubbing one's palms together
 - o Pressing fingertips against each other
 - o Pushing feet firmly against the floor while seated and paying attention to the muscle tension in the calves and thighs.
 - o Noticing five things you see in front of you, four things that you feel in your body, three things that you can hear, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste
 - o Massage each arm with the other hand, using varied pressure and speed

- Relaxation techniques

- o Box Breathing: Inhale through the nose for 4 counts, hold your breath for 4 counts, exhale through the mouth slowly for 4 counts, hold your breath for 4 counts.
 - o Alternative nostril breathing: Close one nostril with your thumb, and inhale through the other, then cover the other nostril with your ring finger and exhale through the nostril you closed first.
 - o Paced breathing: Breathe in for about 4-5 counts and breathe out slower than you inhaled for about 6-8 counts. Continue for about five minutes.
 - o Stay lying down in the corpse position for 10-15 minutes.

- Taking on challenges

Challenging yourself and focusing on it until you achieve it - and the satisfaction and joy you feel through it - can help emotional wellbeing tremendously! Also, add to your self-confidence. A small warning here too: please start small. Don't give yourself massive challenges and overburden yourself - which, in itself, can become a cause of enormous stress. So, take on a challenge that will stretch you, but also that you can achieve: and once you have a few achievements 'behind you' take on a more challenging tasks/objectives.

- **Taking frequent breaks**

Feeling down and out? Exhausted? Drained? Why not take a break? Rather than slogging with the hope of 'finishing it off somehow': take a break: and take constant breaks to space yourself out. Unless it is something massively urgent: don't drive yourself up the wall trying to complete it. Remember to enjoy the journey as much as the destination.

- **Speaking to colleagues, supervisors etc**

There is ALWAYS someone to whom you can talk.

Talk... Seek to find solutions through someone else's experience and wisdom.

They may well have faced EXACTLY what you are going through - and their ideas and suggestions may well help you formulate something that works for you. The trick is this though: you need to ensure you listen with an open mind - and understand that not all advice will suit you... There is a delicate balance between listening to advice and acting on it. Weigh things in your own mind before you act on the advice you were given but always, always: as much as possible: speak to others about things. Perspectives are always important: irrespective of their value as practical advice. Remember: talking is therapeutic!

- **Invest in healthy relationships with others**

We cannot but stress the importance of nurturing strong, mutually respectful and healthy relationships. Relationships become the backbone of your support network in times of emotional crisis. (As well as your bulwark against emotional breakdowns in the first instance) Having people who understand you, love you, root for you: but at the same time, have the ability to have that 'tough conversation' becomes extremely important for you to grow as an individual. So, invest time and energy to find a solid network of people who you can be yourself with: and also, rely on to be bone honest with you.

Chapter 3

Do I really need to talk about it?

Imagine a pressure cooker reaching its maximum pressure and beginning to whistle. Can you see the steam starting to escape, can you hear the sound? Can you notice the heat escaping?

Human beings are also like pressure cookers sometimes. We bottle up our thoughts and feelings until they begin to spill out in different ways. Our bodies become storage spaces for stress, our relationships become venting spaces for unprocessed feelings, and our workplaces sometimes become safe havens to where we run, to hide from the pain. Through parental influences, school education etc. we learn different ways of coping with our feelings and ways in which we can express them. Some people go towards withdrawing from other people, suppressing their feelings, numbing them with alcohol and other substances and avoiding them. In contrast, some others actively engage with their feelings, dissect them, speak to other people to gain perspective, and most importantly ventilate to find relief and release. We are not here to judge whether one way is better than the other, but; to suggest that there can be a different lens through which we can look at this.

Speaking to someone you trust, in a private space can bring about immense relief and perspective, especially when the other person invests time and energy into really listening to you with their eyes, ears and heart devoid of judgement and assumptions. Our society repeatedly propagates silence over being vulnerable, or violent/ aggressive behaviour vs constructive conversations. These practices have seeped into how we look at our emotional wellbeing. We also have to acknowledge that our local languages do not allow us sufficient vocabulary to express our feelings and emotions. However, having said all of the above, we can't stress enough the importance of talking about your struggles, difficulties and even triumphs. It helps lessen the burden you carry, offers you a chance to feel heard and understood, and it also helps prevent us from carrying our trauma and stress from one generation to another. You have the freedom to choose to whom you want to speak.

There are friends and family who can support you. However, there is an extent to which this support will work, and there is a point at which professional help should begin.

It is vital that we are aware that there are Psychologists, Counsellors, Befrienders and even Psychiatrists available to help us when we are going through emotional difficulties. We can practice self-help strategies like journaling, exercise, speaking to friends, etc. while simultaneously accessing professional support. Both can co-exist.

“We can make ourselves miserable, or we can make ourselves strong. The amount of effort is the same” - Pema Chodron

- **Making eye contact with someone and saying the words ‘I need help’ can be so powerful - this can be in person or through a video call.**

There is great power in making eye contact with someone and saying the phrase ‘I need help’. It can be in person, or by somehow pressing the video call option on WhatsApp, or other social media that you use.

There are countless stories of lives that have been saved because a person somehow found the courage in the dark recesses of their mind to grab the phone and make that call. There is no shame in doing this; in asking for help. You don’t have to talk all the time, and neither do you have to tell someone everything in one go. Conversations can be paced according to what you are comfortable with and what the other person is comfortable with as well. You can steer the conversation, decide in which direction you want to take it, and also set boundaries around how much you share. Learning to be vulnerable takes time, as we have years of conditioning to remaining hard and stoic. However, with the right amount of support, empathy and some courage thrown in, we can work on expressing vulnerability with people that we trust. We, as human beings, are wired to connect with each other: isolation literally kills. So, sharing our problems and feelings with someone, gradually, gently, while being kind to ourselves, can go a long way, in us feeling better, and also in improving the quality of that relationship.

- Talking to someone can help us understand ourselves better, build perspective, engage the rational parts of our brain rather than only operate from the emotional part.

Expressing your feelings is a sign of strength and resilience. It is not a weakness or a character flaw. You can do this not only by talking to someone but by writing letters, poetry, fiction etc. and also through other creative mediums like music, art and drama. Creating some distance from our thoughts and feelings gives us the space to choose how we want to respond. We have the freedom to choose, as human beings. Viktor Frankl, a holocaust survivor and Psychiatrist, said 'Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom'. So, between pain and its consequences, there is space for us to choose how we want to respond. A powerful way to respond is to, open your heart and mouth, speak out your pain, and then decide how you want to bounce forward.

Chapter 4

I think I want to get help!

Remember that talking to someone - and talking to a 'counsellor' is different: and don't forget there IS a difference between a 'Counsellor' and a 'Psychologist' as well. They ARE professionals who have been specifically trained to help you with your emotional wellbeing, and they will approach things systematically, with structure, customised to you.

However, you MUST be willing to take that initial step and trust the process: and seek them out. We understand there is a HUGE stigma in certain cultures about 'going to a shrink' and anyone who is going to a psychologist or a counsellor is considered 'mad': but know that your confidentiality will be maintained and upheld by any professional of whom you seek help. If you are in that situation where you feel you really can't tackle things by yourself, and that simply talking about it isn't 'making it go away': DO seek that help...

The first step towards recovering from whatever you find challenging is accepting the fact that you need support - if you have reached that stage, congratulations! You're already stronger than some of us are, because we sometimes dislike admitting vulnerability. Learning to accept that we're all human and that everyone goes through hard times is a huge step, but an important one in our journey towards wellbeing.

Help comes in many shapes and forms - be it trusted family, friends, colleagues, your boss or professional support.

However, remember that professionals are specifically trained to guide you in the right way, so their support would be the most advantageous to you in the long term. Please don't be afraid or ashamed to seek it: it's why they're there. Everything you share is kept 100% confidential. In case you fear criticism or judgment, don't. They've heard it all before and much worse too, so you're in really good hands.

We don't question consulting a doctor when our bodies are unwell, so why should it be any different to consult someone qualified to help our minds? Carpenters fix furniture, plumbers fix leaks, doctors fix bodies, and mental health professionals help minds heal. If you think about it that way, the stigma is something we can overcome by taking the first step of talking about your struggles to someone.

- **Who do I contact?**

There are different kinds of mental health practitioners out there- Befrienders, Counsellors, Social Workers, Psychologists and Psychiatrists being the main types, with varying degrees of systematic approaches to addressing your mental wellness, depending on the issue.

If you just need a good, trained, listening ear from someone understanding, a befriender might be the right person for you. However, if the issue requires guidance on the right tools and process you need in order to manage your problem continuously, then a qualified Counsellor or Psychologist can help. If your condition needs medical intervention, then it's better to seek diagnosis and advice from a Psychiatrist. Your Counsellor or Psychologist will help you decide if a Psychiatric Consult is required.

- **How do I know what kind of person suits ME?**

If you're not sure about what level of support you need, your best bet would be, to first consult a recommended Counsellor, who can assess your problem and let you know what level of support you require. Recommendations for good Counsellors can come from friends or peers who may relate to your problem too. Like any professional relationship, you have to 'meet' first in order to know if you are comfortable. It would take that preliminary consultation to put you at ease about any concerns you may have. When choosing a therapist, it's essential to talk to someone who has no preconceived bias towards you or your issue, which means it should not be a family member or a friend. This assures you that your therapist is neutral and effective, whereby the session will focus on helping you with the specific issue and not be diluted by any other influences.

- **Do I need to find out about that person?**

Of course! Your mind is your most precious asset, and you want the right person to helping you take care of it. Counsellor-client relationships boil down to the compatibility between the individuals, and there is no 'one size fits all' solution in this practice... It's important to do your research - ask around, check their credentials and verify before you make your decision.

- **How do I know if the therapist or form of therapy is not for me?**

Any emotional wellness challenge that has lasted for more than a couple of days or happens frequently and regularly is an indication of the need for support. If you feel that you have adequate coping skills to stay balanced and motivated without it becoming a hindrance to your day-to-day life or your family, then you may not have to consult anyone. The choice is yours. However, if you've acknowledged the need for help, then seeking it is the only way to discover its benefits.

Once you have spoken to someone, you will know if it has been helpful or not. Assess your feelings after your session.

Do you feel lighter and less burdened?

More positive perspective towards the problem?

Emotionally stronger?

Better able to resolve your mental conflict?

The process of regaining your wellness is a progressive one. Sometimes it takes more than one session to begin to see the benefits. However, if you find that the process is not helpful to you and doesn't change your situation in any way, you are free to stop any time you like after providing feedback to the respective person. If there is one piece of advice, we can give you, though, it is this - stay the course. Getting help is an essential investment in yourself. Don't give up on it unless you feel it hurts more than heals.

- **What do I say?**

Anything and everything you want! Emotional support providers do not judge, criticize, or force you to do or share anything with which you are uncomfortable. Often, there will be a series of guided questions they ask, to help them assess the problem at hand if you are finding it difficult to articulate it yourself.

- **How do I start?**

You can either call a 24-hour helpline whenever you feel like you need to talk or simply make an appointment for a consultation with a selected professional. Tell your chosen therapist how you feel. Don't worry about your words making sense; that's what they are there for. Express whatever is going on in your mind and describe your struggle to the best of your ability.

- **Does it have to go on forever?**

Not at all. Many challenges that feel overwhelming at first can turn out less intense after you speak to someone and unburden yourself. You may realise that all you needed was someone to listen and help you make sense of it depending on the nature of the issue. You may find perspective and direction either within an hour or in the duration of several consultations. What the therapist will do is guide you to discover your tools for managing the problem on your own if it is a recurring one. In the case of severe psychological issues, however, medical support also may be needed; similar to how you would continue managing any other ongoing health condition.

- **If I have to take medication, will I get addicted? Will it be for a lifetime?**

With any kind of pharmaceutical drug, misuse is always a possibility. This is why any treatment program should also happen with regular follow-ups with your Psychiatrist, who will ensure safe and healthy management of the treatment.

Many myths surround the use and effectiveness of Psychiatric medication, which can magnify anti-treatment attitudes and result in people failing to seek treatment or stopping their medication against advice. Most psychotropic medications – with the exception of a few – are not addictive. Psychotropic medications do not create dependencies, where you need to keep increasing the dosage to receive the same effect. Nor do they result in cravings associated with addiction.

- **What if my family finds out?**

Whatever you share with your therapist is entirely confidential. The only way anyone can find out is if you choose to tell them yourself, or if your Counsellor has your consent to have your family involved as part of your therapy.

However, in instances where you are considered a risk to yourself or your life is in danger, your mental health professional may take the license to inform your family for added support, if and ONLY IF they are not a part of the problem and it is in your best interest.

Chapter 5

I can't do this alone!

You don't have to do this alone. There is help available.

Local crisis hotlines

1. **Sumithrayo:** No. 60B, Horton Place, Colombo - 07 (0112696666/0112692909)
2. **Mel Madura** (for alcohol/substance related issues), No. 60, Horton Place, Colombo 07 (0112694665/0112693460)
3. **1333- Crisis Support Service** (24hrs, toll free)
4. **National Mental Health Line** - 1926
5. **Shanthi Maargam** - 0717639898

Counselling Service Providers

1. **The Family Planning Association 'Alokaya Counselling Centre'**
37/27, Bullers Lane, Colombo 07
0112584157 EXT 162
2. **Women in Need** (for gender-based violence issues):
No.25, Tickell Road, Borella
0114718585
3. **Shanthi Maargam:** 69/17, Gothami Road, Borella,
0717639898

Regional and International Resources:

- <https://www.samaritans.org> (UK)
- <https://www.mind.org.uk> (UK)
- <https://www.verywellmind.com>
- <https://www.whiteswanfoundation.org> (India)
- <https://www.befrienders.org> (worldwide)

Chapter 6

Can't I be proactive and do something to ensure I don't 'get there'?

In your life, going through emotions and breakdowns are going to part of the journey. It is a fact, so acceptance of this phenomenon is a must if you are to survive in this Universe. Having the highs and the lows are part of the day to day package we must accept. We are human beings managing our thoughts with the influence of the world around us. Our journey is to find the balance between the two extremes of positive and negative and to flow in the path of least resistance.

So how can I make sure I am proactive and not get emotionally overwhelmed? The simple answer to this question will be to take things as it comes and go with the flow. Know your balance within the world we live in and be present as often as you can manage.

Being present takes away the pressures of the future while protecting you from the baggage of the past. We are the most content and satisfied if we live in the 'moment', which is the present.

The notion that you are here to survive in this world needs to be rewritten. We have come into this world to enjoy the joys and desires that it provides. Therefore, managing our Mental health is vital to being happy and contents.

In this chapter, we will explore techniques and habits you can incorporate into your daily routine to ensure you endure and flourish at being a more joyful individual while facing challenges of life. This knowledge helps overcome the trials that come your way, which will test both your emotional and physical strength.

- **What are some daily brain hacks to maintain positive mental health?**

The whole aspect of managing mental health is about being aware of how you are thinking and feeling. Your thoughts connect with your emotions. You know when you are feeling happy and joyful: for instance, when you think of our favourite person, song or movie. Your emotions are the guiding force letting you know you are taking the right path.

Being aware of your thoughts is the main factor we need to be conscious of when managing our mental health. Thoughts are a tough thing to control when you have lived most of your life with this thing called 'Mind Chatter'. (Refer to the Video by Dr Srikumar on Mental chatter) Therefore remembering to manage your thoughts on a day to day basis will be the start point of the journey in managing your mental health.

Also, an essential aspect to remember about the thought patterns is that what you create can be managed by you if you deliberately make an effort. The 60-second rule of thinking about something positive or appreciative will bring you more and more of the same. Imagine if you take the time to think about it for more than 60 seconds?

- 1.** Make the extra effort to have a morning ritual that works for you. As the beginning of the day, your focus is at its best.
- 2.** Remember not to bring the worries of yesterday into today. Start a new day fresh without the baggage of your past hovering over it.
- 3.** Take the time to appreciate the small things in life at the beginning of the day and be thankful for what you already have.
- 4.** You are in control of your life, therefore remember that each day is a new chance to be successful.

- 5.** Understand that having a positive overview of each situation makes the outcomes positive as well. From our perspective, each and every element/situation changes the end result.
- 6.** Taking the time to practice mindfulness exercises can give us the strength to become more resilience in stressful situations.
- 7.** Doing physical exercises changes your emotions. Remember that when you are not feeling your best a little exercise and change in your position changes your mindset as well.
- 8.** Make peace with your present. Being happy now will get you the future you desire. For being stratified with what you have now can only give you the peace of mind, you need to work towards the success you want in the future.
- 9.** Enjoy nature when you have the chance. Love the flowers, listen to the birds and embrace the sunshine. You are a part of nature around you, so embrace the beauty it gives to the world.
- 10.** Understand the ways in which you can distract yourself when you feel negative and feel out of balance. Remember to have your favourite songs in your playlist to distract you when you are feeling down or angry. It can even be that favourite YouTube video which makes you feel good. Or that book which is your most trusted. It can also be your friend you would call for support or even your therapist. Know how you function, and then you know the solution you need.
- 11.** Stay away from the bad or negative, if you have a choice. Don't go with the flow, be vigilant and careful how you react to the influences that come your way. Negative influences can be from your family, friends, news and social media.
- 12.** Remember to smile, hug, love, care without conditions. You are in control and responsible for feeling good. So, do the exact things that make you happy. These things don't cost any money. So, do it every day or every moment you can. Be happy.

10 Morning Habits Geniuses Use to Jump Start Their Brain | Jim Kwik
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1c3Kvyy_QE

10 Minute Morning Meditation - To Have A Really Good Day !!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RZ8n86CmJg&t=463s>

Tony Robbins - Motion Creates Emotion
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZUFeMrFW4AA>

Abraham Hicks - The EASIEST Way to Start POSITIVE MOMENTUM!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_ly9IF-hfo

How To Rewire Your Mind For Greater Happiness & Success | Dr. Srikumar Rao
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBIWbV64N4I>

Finding moments to cherish
<https://www.facebook.com/notes/gayanthri-numica-de-silva/finding-moments-to-cherish/10158300332240774/>

7 Ways to Detox Your Emotional Well Being
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PAestsXAWsw>

What are some practices that can be implemented in my organisation?

When organisations are leading with the awareness of Employees Emotional Wellbeing, the approach they will take will be different. They will be more aware of the needs of employees from a perspective that puts them above competitors. They understand that giving space to employees to manage their emotions will provision for motivated employees.

When organisations are led by leaders who practice Emotional Wellbeing in offices, the values that drive the organisation are different. They give flexibility and prominence to happiness. They will also make an effort to educate the leaders as well as the staff to manage their Mental Health and provide the necessary tools they need to become more aware of their emotions.

1. Meetings will start with shared personal emotions. The approach to work will take a more positive note while sharing feelings and emotions will be accepted and acknowledged
2. Employees will have space or opportunity to take time during working hours to work on their Emotional Wellbeing
3. Leaders take on a more human and emotional approach to manage the day to day work tasks
4. Organizations will invest in quiet spaces to do Meditation and Company sponsored yoga sessions
5. Mindfulness-based learnings and mindful exercises will be a part of the daily routine for Employees and will be given needed time and space
6. Health insurance will cover the cost of Psychological Counseling or Psychiatric Consultation while factories with large workforces will have inhouse Counselors to manage employees concerns and situations

10 Ways to Be More Mindful at Work

<https://www.mindful.org/10-ways-mindful-work/>

- **How can I educate myself about emotional wellbeing?**

The emotional journey starts with you. It comes from the 'want' to understand yourself better, how your moods are affected and how to keep yourself happy. So, the start point is always you, and from there, you can start to understand the way how your emotions affects your physical wellbeing. Perceiving our emotions is something we are adept at, as it's natural to want to be happy and content with life. If you notice you will see that babies are emotionally well balanced, and nobody taught them about emotional wellbeing. They are simply enjoying the journey without taking on the problems of the world. They are aware of sadness, and with the comfort of their mother or caregiver, they are calm and happy again.

With age, we become tainted with the way of the world and the stresses of how the world works. It affects our Emotional Wellbeing. The journey of educating, or re-educating ourselves, is going back to our younger days and living in the mindset of a child. Being happy for the 'moment', being happy with the butterfly that I just saw, enjoying each moment with a blissful perspective without conditions of the world.

There is a strong connection with stress levels and the physical illnesses that you encounter. You may get more headaches when you are not aligned and out of balance. When you are in a good mood and full of happiness, you may not have any physical illnesses that you can recollect.

Your brain is the governing body that controls your emotions. Thoughts are components that support daily functionality. How you think will affect the way you feel. Mindfulness will give you the clarity you need to understand your thought patterns. The energy that flows within you is more when you are in a positive mindset; that is why we don't feel any fatigue when we are doing things that we enjoy doing. Like we say the time flies when you are enjoying the situation while you have the strength to do more of the things you love simply because you do it with passion and not with work mindset.

The reason for finding your dream job: we recommend you find your passion and stick to it because the energy you put in will be more as you are doing it with love which will be more fruitful.

Start flexing your brain with mindfulness exercises. Mindfulness is like the strength training for your brain muscles, so doing it more frequently will help you get more focused.

1. Know that your physical health is energized by the mental health, to be a 100% healthy you have to balance both of these aspect
2. Live in the present and enjoy each moment as it happens
3. Become self-aware to how you and the people around you react to the changes that occur daily. Don't try to ride the boat in stormy weather but rest until the storm subsides
4. Know that every day is a fresh start, therefore, start with new and bright thoughts
5. Be hungry to learn about Emotional Wellbeing
6. Know that taking a breather to concentrate on your Emotional wellbeing is a necessity whenever the need arises
7. Understand the ways in which you can distract yourself from your negative emotions

7 Ways Meditation Can Actually Change the Brain

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/alicegwalton/2015/02/09/7-ways-meditation-can-actually-change-the-brain/#2fa8f59e1465>

Your Healthiest Self - Emotional Wellness Toolkit

<https://www.nih.gov/health-information/emotional-wellness-toolkit>

5 Ways to Wellbeing

<https://www.mindkit.org.uk/5-ways-to-wellbeing/>

- How can I start making it a practice to talk about what I feel instead of bottling up?

Being aware of your emotions is the most essential aspect you need to understand. When you have that awareness, being open about it comes naturally. That is the start, and with that initial step toward understanding the emotions, you can unlock the door that opens up to let in your family friends, colleagues and even strangers.

Awareness of your emotions will come to you gradually through mindfulness exercises or self-awareness techniques. Which will give you the confidence to stand on your own feet, in being the person you truly are within. When you know who you are, you don't need to hide behind masks or be shy. You will have the strength to show your true emotions whatever it may be, as you know how you feel, and you are not afraid to show the real you to the world.

What Emotional Wellbeing education provides is the support to stand strong while being the real you. You don't worry about ego or what others might think about you or how they will react to you. It doesn't matter as you are genuinely comfortable with the person you are. The journey towards achieving this level of Emotional Awareness in your life will be proportionate to who you are. When you get to this level, you are going to have a sense of freedom that is beyond anything you have ever experienced. You will not make apologies to anyone as this is the true you.

You may use many methods to tell your story, and you may be freer in talking about your emotions to others. Many people come out and speak about their personal experiences unashamed after reaching this level of freedom.

1. Become self-aware by ensuring you use the method that suits you.
2. Then take the journey to understand yourself. Ask the question “Who am I?”
3. Remember to get more and more comfortable with who you are and bloom into the person you are meant to be.
4. Start small by expressing your feelings to yourself and being open about it. Don't try to judge the situation but start looking at it with an open perspective.
5. Start by forgiving yourself for who you are, don't be ashamed of the past, it's already history. Start from today take a fresh start.
6. Know that you are responsible for yourself and for everything that has happened in your life up to now. All the negative that you think has broken you so far has come into your life because you have thought about it at one point of your life. You have attracted these experiences. Yet don't let them break you, but make you to the better person you are meant to be.
7. Let bygones be bygones. Let go of ego, and mend the relationships you broke, take the first step yourself.
8. Take responsibility and stand up for who you are.

How to Be More Self Aware: 8 Tips to Boost Self-Awareness

<https://www.developgoodhabits.com/what-is-self-awareness/>

22 Mindfulness Exercises, Techniques & Activities for Adults (+ PDF's)

<https://positivepsychology.com/mindfulness-exercises-techniques-activities/>

Oprah Winfrey | 5 Minutes For The NEXT 50 Years of Your LIFE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skj-ALA1HFE&t=220s>

OPRAH WINFREY | Change Your Thoughts, Change Your Circumstances!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aGT42ETeM0&t=173s>

Full Speech: Jim Carrey's Commencement Address at the 2014 MUM Graduation (EN, FR, ES, RU, GR,...)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V80-gPkpH6M>

• How can I develop resilience?

The whole journey we take in understanding our true self, to being self-aware and practising mindfulness is the creation of a new human being. This newly discovered human being is more relaxed, more flexible and in total control of who they truly are. This does not mean that this new reawakening makes you a Superhuman. This discovery creates a human who knows how to manage any situation with resilience and positivity. The emotions are there but being aware of it and managing them are easy. It's like driving with so much precision as you are a frequent driver who knows the roads very well.

Therefore, the steps we discussed at length will be the backbone any individual needs to be more resilient:

1. You are aware of who you are as an individual.
2. You know the best methods of managing your emotions when you are going towards the negatives.
3. You understand that managing your emotions and thoughts will handle the situation, and if you are getting irritated about someone or something, you are not in the right place emotionally.
4. You know when you need to take a breather. This can be something in between meditation, fresh air, music, movie, coffee, exercise, or a hug from a loved one.
5. You understand if someone working with you or someone close to you is not feeling well mentally. You know how to give them space.
6. When the environment is changing around you, and it doesn't seem to bother you as much as it used to for your mind is positive.
7. You know that you are in control of the life you live even if a curve ball hits you know how to stand up and get back to your life with little or no damage done.
8. Problems that come your way is managed because of the perspective you take on it.
9. You will ensure that you consider your happiness at all times, and that is a priority to you.
10. Life is good to you, and you are content with life.

These videos are some music that really keeps you aligned and in your mood.

How To Build Unshakable Resilience | Srikumar Rao

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yh9sqhelDal>

FROZEN - Let It Go - Karaoke

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLIPTGkgRTQ>

Justin Timberlake - CAN'T STOP THE FEELING! (From DreamWorks Animation's "Trolls") (Official Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ru0K8uYEZWw>

Pharrell Williams - Happy (Official Video)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7dPqrmDWxs>

EPILOGUE

"Taking care of yourself and practising wellness is one important way to reduce your stress and anxiety levels, enhance your immune system and increase your energy level," said Julie Joyner, program coordinator for LIVE FOR LIFE, Duke's employee wellness program. Feelings of wellbeing are crucial to your overall health. It enables you to overcome difficulties and achieve success in your life. A positive sense of wellbeing ensures that you, as an individual, can function optimally with society and live a satisfying life.

**"Emotional wellbeing also is ...being at peace with what is not OK." –
Rekha**

Everyone needs a little help sometimes. Changes in life, situations and challenges in life can leave us all emotionally drained.

**"It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change." -
Charles Darwin**

Always remember, we will never be in control of what's happening out there, but we can control what happens with us or within us...thus we should focus on our Emotional Wellbeing at all times.

To be Emotionally literate is when you are able to recognise, able to understand and able to express your emotions: a skill that is nurtured and developed throughout your life. Only when you are able to identify your emotions are you then able to define them. As you progress in life through your experiences, emotional literacy helps you build resilience: which will not only equip you to maintain healthy relationships with others but also enable you to identify and help when someone else needs support, as well.

"Caring for the mind is as important and crucial as caring for the body. In fact, one cannot be healthy without the other." - Sid Garza-Hillman
So always remember that in times of uncertainty, it's more important than ever to reach out for mental and emotional support.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Nivendra Uduman is a Counselling Psychologist and has been practicing in Sri Lanka for the past five years. He was the senior technical officer at Samutthana- The King's College London Resource Centre for Trauma, Displacement and Mental Health in Sri Lanka and thereafter the Psychologist at Shanthi Maargam. He currently runs his own practice. In 2016 he walked from Dondra to Point Pedro for mental health awareness and in 2018, he walked 1460km around the entire coastline of Sri Lanka for suicide prevention.



SHANUKI DE ALWIS

Shanuki de Alwis is by day a brand purpose communication consultant, startup mentor, skills coach and freelance creative director and by night a motivational speaker & theatre practitioner. Additionally, she is a TEDx speaker, podcaster and the Creator and Host of the award winning program 'Shhh...'- Sri Lanka's first online community talk-show that addresses social stigmas. Shanuki is also an advocate for animal welfare, gender empowerment & mental health advocacy, a PFA-trained Community Crisis First Responder and magazine columnist.



NUMICA PERERA

Numica is a seasoned HR professional who has experience in varying industries. With solid, hands on, practical experience and insights into all facets of HR, Numica has the ability to offer context to HR related aspects; and also, has an innate appreciation for people and their behavior. Numica has a passion for 'being centered' and is a student of holistic living and wellbeing. She explores this area with the view of ensuring young executives and managers find that elusive ability to truly balance their different roles, and be at ease with all of them.



TATUM DE SOUZA

Tatum started her career in the banking sector, working both Locally and Internationally, culminating as a Corporate Relationship Manager. Her 18 year career includes exposure in the areas of Sales and Marketing, Content Creation, Creative Writing, HR, Event Management & Social Media Management, covering industries such as Hospitality, Telco, Recruitment and Education.



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Anton is a multi-faceted professional who has had over two decades of hands on experience in process improvement, change management and strategic management. As the former AVP at HSBC DPL Anton won accolades for his superlative work there: and won the prestigious HSBC Group Service – Global Talent Management Member two years in a row. Anton currently works as a consultant focusing on efficiency and productivity improvement and process optimization for local and regional Clients.



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Vidusha is currently the Destiny Architect at High5 Consultancy and Training and also the organization's founder member. His areas of expertise lies with strategy facilitation, HR strategy development and Leadership Training. He has conducted assignments in 15 countries regionally and consulted for the World Bank, the UN as well as some of the top corporates in Sri Lanka and the Region. He is also a member of the board of directors for Chrysalis, a social enterprise working to empower women and youth by fostering inclusive growth in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.