

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Student's Booklet

"LiveLoveLaugh aims to give hope to every person experiencing stress, anxiety and depression."

Deepika Padukone, Founder

At its core, LiveLoveLaugh is an idea, a movement, and a metaphor for hope. Arising from her personal journey with anxiety and depression, LiveLoveLaugh (LLL) was founded in 2015 by actor Deepika Padukone. The Foundation combines knowledge and domain expertise to create awareness about mental health, reduce stigma associated with mental illness, and provide credible mental health resources.

LLL's programs and outreach are conducted and implemented through partnerships and collaborations.

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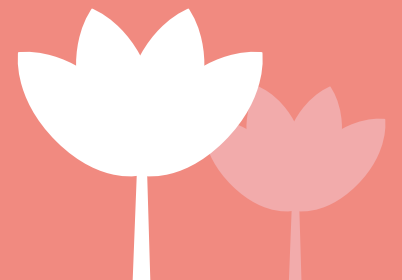
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INTRODUCTION





**TAKE A MINUTE TO LOOK AT THESE TWO IMAGES.
WHAT DO YOU SEE? WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS?**

The picture on the left is a broken pot. In the picture on the right, you can see that the pieces have been joined with glue, polish and precious metal, and this increases the value of the pot.

This is Kintsugi, a 400 year old Japanese art form of joining broken pottery pieces with gold. As you can see the result is a beautiful and a stronger work of art that has a higher value.

**Kintsugi teaches us an important life lesson:
Each broken piece is an important part
of the pot, and rather than be discarded
or disguised, Kintsugi prefers to highlight
the scars.**

THE MESSAGE

Every broken part reflects the flaws and imperfections in our lives. The polish and precious metal that join the scars, indicates your resilience with which you can create an even more unique, stronger, and beautiful piece of art in you.

The journey from childhood to adulthood is filled with many challenges. Your thoughts, feelings and the physical sensations you experience will change depending on the situations you encounter.

Your physical and mental wellness is tested especially during times of uncertainty, disruption of education and social interaction, and stressors from parents because of job loss/ financial difficulties. Adapting to change is tough, as we move ahead in a world that is talking about embracing the new normal.

The marks in gold in the pot that you saw on the previous page indicate your resilience to the changes that take place as you grow up in a rapidly changing world. You can build this resilience with support from your parents, teachers, close friends, and mental health professionals. Being resilient will enable you to live a healthy life – both physically and mentally.

Challenges in life are more difficult to face especially in uncertain situations like the COVID-19 pandemic. During such times, you may have felt isolated from friends, school and teachers, extended family or from sports and other activities like holiday travel or even other social interactions. Some of you may have had to return from cities to your hometowns, some may have to return to your families from boarding schools.

All of these situations and more may have caused you to worry and have given rise to feelings of stress and anxiety.



UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF AND ASPECTS OF MENTAL HEALTH

Health comprises our physical as well as mental state of well-being.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Being physically healthy is not merely an absence of sickness. It means we feel well, often by following healthy practices to stay fit like eating right, exercising, getting adequate sleep and being active.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health is "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community." (defined by WHO)

When you are able to focus and concentrate, able to interact with friends, enjoy and relax, and you are able to look after yourself and others – that means you are mentally healthy.

So what is mental health and why is it important for you and all of us?

Mental health is a state of emotional and psychological well-being.

When we are mentally healthy, it does not mean we do not have worries and stress. Feeling anxious, sad or fearful is normal. For example, it is okay to feel butterflies in your stomach as your exams approach or anxious about a loved ones who may be ill.

What can you do to manage your mental health better? Just as we exercise regularly to keep physically fit, we can follow certain steps or routines to stay mentally healthy.

However, there may still be instances when we face challenges in our life, that may cause us to experience stress, anxiety, depression or other forms of mental illness. It is important to remember that it is okay to feel overwhelmed sometimes, that you are not alone and that help is available.

ADAPTING TO CHANGES DURING ADOLESCENCE

During adolescence, there are many different things that are going on in the body, both physically and mentally. There may be social, physiological and emotional changes that demonstrate that you are on the way to becoming an adult.

During this phase, you may feel that you are on a roller coaster ride – sometimes there could be feelings like joy and happiness, and at other times, sadness and dejection.

You may also be trying to understand yourself better – your likes, desires, preferences or even your sexuality.

From growth spurts to questions about the future – including your own aspirations and ambitions, to when the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic will end – there is so much to cope with!



WHAT IS STRESS?

You may have used or heard the word stress very often. When you are stressed, you may go through many emotions like mood changes, the feeling of vulnerability, increased irritability and frustration, and a tendency to be angry easily and crib more. There may be many instances when you have expressed to your friends and family that you are stressed.

Most often we hear the word stress used in a negative sense. However, stress isn't always bad. Stress is a normal part of life.

'Stress' is the body's reaction to any change that it experiences, which requires an adjustment or response. These changes trigger physical, mental and emotional responses.

When you were at school, did you observe how your classmates studied for an exam? Some like to read aloud, while others may choose to read silently. This is because each one of you has a different learning style.

In the same way, stressful situations can affect each one of you differently. While some of you are able to cope more easily, others may find it more difficult.



POSITIVE STRESS (EUSTRESS)

You can experience stress from your environment, your body, your thoughts. Eustress helps you stay focused, energetic, and alert. It may help you meet deadlines, sharpen your concentration when you are competing in a race or a game, or compel you to study for an exam when you would prefer to watch TV. In fact, positive stress can boost motivation as you work hard to get a good grade or win a competition.

Both good and difficult situations that we face in our everyday lives, cause us some amount of fear and worry – fear could serve as a motivating factor to help us perform tasks better.

Stress helps the body adapt to these situation as per the need, by energizing you and giving you additional strength and energy to cope.

NEGATIVE STRESS (DISTRESS)

However, when the stress becomes exhausting and gets in the way of your normal routine, it can affect your overall health. It may affect your moods, your ability to work, your performance, and your relationships. You may feel you cannot cope. This experience, again, is common and usually lasts for shorter periods of time.



LEARNING ABOUT ANXIETY

Anxiety is that feeling of fear, worry, or nervousness you experience when you are about to do something challenging.

Everybody experiences anxiety differently. You may feel nervous and restless about simple situations like going to school or working on an assignment, there could be physical symptoms like headaches or body pain not caused by other bodily ailments or difficulty in sleeping.

However, there can also be more challenging situations that may give rise to severe anxiety or even a panic attack – **shortness of breath, trembling hands and feet, chills/cold/heat sensations despite no change in weather, sweating, nausea, dizziness, possible crying spells.**

So it is important to remember that when the anxiety you experience becomes a constant part of your daily life, and the fear overshadows most other emotions you experience, it is a sign of distress and you may need to seek help from somebody.

IDENTIFYING DEPRESSION

Feeling low, sad or upset is a very natural part of our range of emotions that we may experience at different points in our lives.

As an adolescent, ups and downs are both natural and pronounced as you go through the transition from childhood to becoming a young adult.

Your academic performance, relationship with friends and family, and experience of your identity could be different in this phase and that could cause you to feel alone, not heard or not understood.

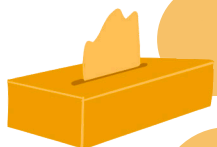
That does not necessarily mean you have a serious illness. However it can still be helpful to talk to your parents, teacher, trusted younger or older friends, or a professional.

Depression is not just a feeling of sadness or low mood. It is a genuine mental health concern that can be triggered by several causes.

The word depression or “being depressed” is often used in everyday conversations, when one experiences sadness or is upset with an outcome that is not in one’s favour.

While sadness can be brief, depression will persist for at least two weeks or more. When depression persists, it may become a serious health condition and hamper an individual’s ability to function in many areas of life, including work and relationships. It is important to reach out and seek professional treatment at the earliest.

Some common symptoms are :



A low mood.

Changes in appetite and/or sleep patterns.



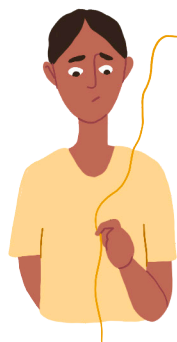
Loss of interest or pleasure in things around you.



Tiredness or persistent loss of energy.



Thoughts of self-harm or suicide.



Loss of confidence.

Feelings of frustration especially in an environment of uncertainty like the pandemic.



THESE COULD TRANSLATE TO EXPERIENCES LIKE:

- Not wanting to get out of bed.
- Sleeping for extremely long hours or not getting enough sleep as one regularly would.
- Constant headaches/stomach aches.
- A pit-ish or hollow feeling in the stomach.
- Avoiding eating or overeating.
- Dodging social situations/attending school.
- Lack of energy, and not wanting to do things that he/she liked doing before.
- Irritability – snapping at people often, trying to start fights without reason.
- Feeling that life is not worth living.

Many of us are uncomfortable using the term 'depression' because we fear it will associate us with a serious mental illness or a sense of personal failure. This comes from a strong stigma attached to the illness itself and is a wrong notion to hold on to.



Experiencing depression isn't anyone's fault. It is like catching a common cold – a result of the environment and your body chemistry, not something that you willingly experience.

HANDLING BULLYING AND CYBERBULLYING

Bullying is a form of aggressive behaviour in which someone intentionally and repeatedly causes another person injury or discomfort. Bullying happens in many different forms and can take place anywhere. It can take the form of physical contact, abusive words or more subtle actions. It may take place at school, at home, or your apartment complex etc.

Cyberbullying happens on the Internet/online via text messages, emails, videos or on social media platforms.

COMMON EXAMPLES OF BULLYING:

- Teasing someone, calling them names, giving nasty looks or making rude gestures.
- Spreading rumours or lies about someone (online or in person).
- Hurting someone physically by pushing, hitting, slapping, ganging up on or restraining them.
- Excluding someone from a group (online or in person).
- Harassing someone because of their race, sex, religion, gender, or a disability.
- Sharing embarrassing photos of someone online.
- Posting negative things about someone on social media.
- Stalking someone online with texts or instant messages, or in person by intimidating them or following them.

For the person being bullied, it is an incredibly stressful experience that can have a serious and long-term impact on their life. They can experience low confidence, sadness, loneliness, changes in sleep and eating patterns, loss of interest in activities, anxiety, and other health issues.

Bullying can also take a toll on the bullies themselves.

*!#?



What can you do if you or someone you know is being bullied?



Reach out to a parent or teacher to share the incident and seek their support.

Report the incident to school authorities who can take appropriate action.



Reinforce the idea to the victim that they are safe and secure.

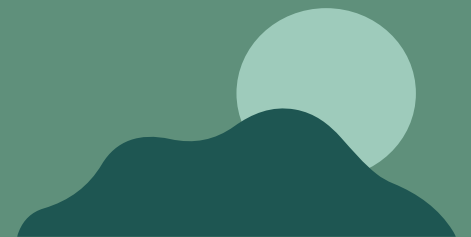


Share information on available resources to deal with the trauma caused by bullying with the victim.



You can learn more about approaching professional help under the section "Seeking Help" covered later in this booklet.

MANAGING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH



BUILDING RESILIENCE

What can you do to help yourself?

Your physical and mental health are interconnected.

Ensuring that you take care of your physical well-being, can also directly impact your mental health.

PHYSICAL EXERCISE

Exercising doesn't necessarily mean you have to go to a gym and lift weights – although if that is what you enjoy doing, there is no harm. The main point is to opt for a movement based activity that you enjoy, which will also ensure your overall health is maintained. This could mean different forms of dance or team sports for some people, while for others it could be running or rock climbing.

While exercise can improve your physical health and your physique, the focus of exercise is not just to alter how you look. Anything that gets you moving, can help.

Exercise is a natural and effective way to deal with anxiety and gives people an enormous sense of well-being. You will feel more energetic throughout the day, sleep better at night, and will be able to concentrate better and feel more relaxed and positive. It relieves tension and stress, boosts physical and mental energy, and enhances well-being through the release of endorphins.

Exercise also helps one become more mindful and establishes a strong connection between your mind and body.





BREATHING EXERCISES

Pranayama

1. Sit comfortably on a chair, with your knees bent and your shoulders, head and neck relaxed.
2. Place one hand on your upper chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.
3. Breathe in slowly through your nose so that your stomach moves out against your hand. The hand on your chest should remain as still as possible.
4. Tighten your stomach muscles, letting them fall inward as you exhale deeply, through pursed lips. The hand on your upper chest must remain as still as possible.

Note: You may notice an increased effort will be needed to use the diaphragm correctly. At first, you may probably get tired while doing this exercise. But be consistent with it, because with continued practice, diaphragmatic breathing will become easy and automatic.

How often should you practice this exercise?

At first, practice this exercise for 5-10 minutes about 3-4 times per day. Gradually increase the amount of time you spend doing this exercise, and perhaps even increase the effort of the exercise by placing a book on your abdomen.

Anulom Vilom Pranayam

1. Close your eyes. Focus your attention on your breathing.
2. Close the right nostril with the right thumb. Simply press the thumb against your nostril to block it.
3. Inhale slowly through the left nostril. Fill your lungs with air. First, feel the diaphragm move down, allowing the lungs to expand and forcing the abdomen out; then feel your chest expand with your collarbones rising last.
4. Remove your thumb from your right nostril. Keep your right hand by your nose and your lungs full of air.
5. Use your ring and middle finger to close your left nostril. Most people find it easier to continue using the same hand to block either nostril, but you're welcome to switch hands depending on which nostril you're blocking. You can also switch if your arm gets tired.
6. Exhale slowly and completely with the right nostril. Feel the collarbones dropping, chest deflating, and abdomen shrinking as the lungs collapse. When you've finished exhaling, keep your left nostril closed.
7. Inhale through the right nostril. Fill your lungs.
8. Close the right nostril and open the left.
9. Breathe out slowly through the left nostril.

This process is one round of Anulom Vilom Pranayam.



Continue for 15 minutes.
You may take a minute's rest after every five minutes of exercise.

USING TECHNOLOGY EFFECTIVELY

The COVID-19 pandemic brought schools and workplaces into our homes. We spent hours attending online classes, doing assignments, and learning. To relax, we access social media to stay up to date and connected with friends.

This overuse of technology can have a negative impact on our mental and physical health. Excessive use of technology or social media on a daily basis can cause feelings of unease, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. Therefore, it is recommended that the use of technology should be restricted to maintain a healthy balance.



How can you help yourself?



Keep a track of the time you spend online to limit excessive use.



Try to substitute your social media time with face-to-face activities.

Make a conscious effort to put down your phone and other devices when you are with others.

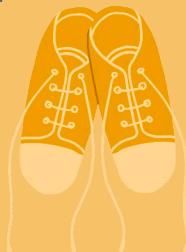
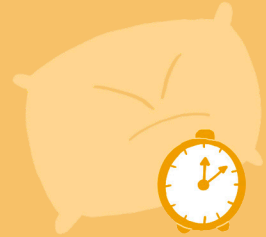


While using social media, set firm boundaries based on avoiding platforms that leave you feeling upset.



TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

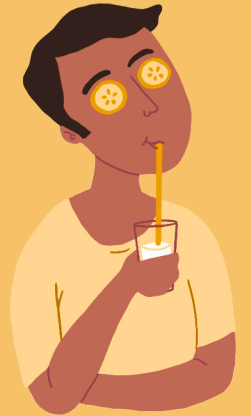
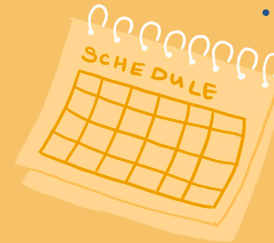
- **Get adequate sleep** : It is necessary to get 7-9 hours of sleep for optimal mental health. Poor sleep (in both quality and quantity) is associated with physical problems such as a weakened immune system and mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. When you improve your 'sleep hygiene', you will not only see an improvement in your moods, but you will also notice that you have higher levels of energy and motivation.
- **Stay hydrated** : Studies have indicated that dehydration is linked to heightened anxiety, panic, and other issues such as forgetfulness.
- **Eat regularly** : Eat regular meals and avoid stress-eating. Most people tend to overeat less healthy foods during exam time. This could lead to sudden weight gain, exhaustion, and a lowered attention span.
- **Limit intake of caffeine** : It is important to limit our intake of caffeine. Perhaps it would help to look into other means of staying awake such as drinking water and exercising.
- **Decluttering** : Removing all unnecessary items from your personal space such as a study area may help make your environment more peaceful. This in turn can help declutter your mind allowing for greater concentration.
- **Take breaks** : It is important to take breaks every 1-1.5 hours, even if it is for



just 10-15 minutes. Step away from the screen and take a walk around your home or in your room. Play with your pet, if you have one, or chat with your family.

Too much screen time could hurt your eyes. So, close your eyes for a few minutes. Turn off your screens a couple of hours before bedtime.

- **Stay in touch** : Even though you may not see your friends regularly, keep in touch with them on the phone at reasonable hours.
- **Stick to a routine** : In uncertain times like the pandemic, even though you may not have to be in school at a particular time, keep a routine like waking up at a fixed time, taking care of personal hygiene – this will help you to maintain physical and mental wellness.
- **Avoid tobacco, alcohol and other substance** : While you may think that these give you comfort and strength to deal with your emotions, especially during adversity, they do not.



SUPPORTING OTHERS

By helping others, you may actually be helping yourself. There are plenty of opportunities to support others to feel good when they are feeling low. And in the bargain, you will find that it improves your emotional well-being. Imagine the satisfaction of standing up to somebody who is bullying or teasing a classmate or friend, when the bully feels he or she has an upper hand, or even giving a loved one a listening ear.

HERE ARE SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO :

- Look out for those in your school or home, whom you can support.
- If you believe that your friend/family member seems to be behaving differently, make the effort to have a genuine conversation.
- When you reach out to a friend or family member who is going through anxiety, help them understand that you accept them without judgment.
- Listen carefully and show the person you understand what they are feeling.
- Lend them emotional support and encourage them to talk to their family doctor or a general physician or avail of professional help if you find that you are not equipped to handle this entirely on your own.
- Support them while they reach out to mental health professionals, by helping them converse with their families regarding what they are going through or even helping them reach out to the counsellor in school or in the city.
- Help your friend or family member see that they are on the right track, encourage them to become involved in activities previously enjoyed, and support them.

When your loved one, family or friend, is not interested in getting professional help:



You need to be in touch with them. Listen, and allow them to talk about their feelings.

Reassure them because they may find seeking help scary.



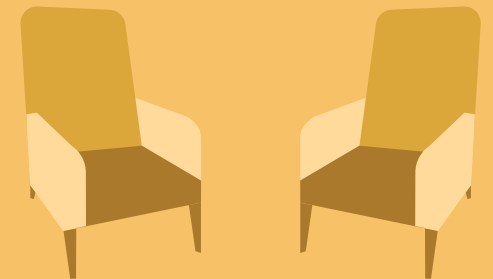
Stay calm and patient, and don't make assumptions.



You could talk to your parent and seek advice on how to handle the situation.



SEEKING HELP



WHEN TO ASK FOR HELP?

When you get hurt while playing a sport or get sick, you usually know that you need to go and see a doctor. When it comes to mental health, however, it can get confusing because most of us may not have the information we need to make a decision for ourselves, our friend or family member etc.

HERE ARE STEPS TO HELP YOU SEEK HELP :

- Recognize the symptoms that indicate you are not feeling okay – anxious, fear, sad, irritable, stressed, depressed.
- Talk to your friend, sibling, parent, teacher or a relative.
- If the symptoms persist, talk to your school counsellor/ your family doctor /general physician.
- You may be then directed to a psychologist /or psychiatrist.

It is important to recognize that it is much better to look for help early. In fact, it is a sign of strength rather than weakness to ask for help from a family member, friend doctor, mental health professional.

HELP IS AVAILABLE!

WHOM SHOULD YOU TALK TO?

When we talk of mental health professionals, Psychologists, Psychiatrists and Counsellors are the first ones that come to mind. The professions overlap, the use of exercise, diet and other lifestyle changes including the importance of social connections, and work study and family and friends.

So, you may wonder how to find the right mental health professional? Let's help you to see the difference.

Psychiatrists, psychologists, and counsellors are trained to think of mental health as part of health and so take an all-round view of mind and body.

A PSYCHIATRIST

is a medical doctor, with a post-graduate medical degree in Psychiatry who specializes in preventing, diagnosing, and treating mental illness in various ways including talk therapy and medicines. Psychiatrists often work in a team with other health and mental health professionals. They usually aim to provide person-centred care and to work in partnership with the person seeking help and his or her family where that is appropriate. They can prescribe medication if needed, and are attached to a hospital, or have a private practice.

A PSYCHOLOGIST

has a masters degree or higher in psychology, which is the study of the mind and behaviours. They are attached to a hospital, or may have a private practice. They evaluate and treat mental and emotional disorders but cannot prescribe medication.

A COUNSELLOR

has a master's degree or higher in mental health counselling or marriage and family therapy. They help clients to discover better ways to manage their problems, mainly by providing psychotherapy or talk therapy. Counsellors usually work in a private practice, in schools or mental health clinics.

HELPLINE INFORMATION

If you or anybody close to you feels like they need to speak to a trained expert, please call the helplines listed below. They are good resources for emergencies or if for some reason or the other, you are unable to visit a counsellor in person.

Mental health professionals on these helplines are able to help individuals who are worried about their academic grades, careers, have trouble in their relationships with friends and loved ones, or are just feeling very lost about the way ahead and the tough decisions to be made.

COOJ MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION (COOJ)

Helpline: 0832-2252525 | 01:00 PM – 07:00 PM | Monday to Friday

Email: YouMatterByCooj@gmail.com

Proficient with: English

PARIVARTHAN

Helpline: +91-7676 602 602 | 10:00 AM to 10:00 PM | Monday to Friday

Website: www.parivarthan.org

Proficient with: All Indian languages except Telegu, Malayalam

CONNECTING TRUST

Helpline: +91-992 200 1122 | +91-992 200 4305 | 12:00 PM to 08:00 PM | All days of the week

Website: <https://connectingngo.org>

Proficient with: English, Hindi, Marathi

ROSHNI TRUST

Helpline: 040-66202000, 040-66202001 | 11:00 AM – 09:00 PM | Monday to Sunday

Email: roshnihelp@gmail.com

Proficient with: Telegu, Urdu, Hindi, English

iCALL

Helpline: 022-25521111 | +91-9152987821 | 08:00 AM to 10:00 PM | Monday to Saturday

Email: icall@tiss.edu

Proficient with: Marathi, Bengali, Telegu, Hindi, English

MITRAM FOUNDATION

Website: www.mitramfoundation.org

Helpline : 080-2572-2573 | 10:00 AM – 02:00 PM | Monday to Saturday

Email: share@mitramfoundation.org

Proficient with: English, Hindi

ARPITA SUICIDE PREVENTION HELPLINE

Helpline: 080 23655557 | 10:00 AM – 01:00 PM | 02:00 PM – 05:00 PM | Monday to Friday

Email: arpita.helpline@gmail.com

Proficient with: Hindi, Urdu, Kannada, Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam, Konkani, Assamese, Gujarati, Bengali



LIFELINE

Helpline 1: 033-40447437 | 10:00 AM – 06:00 PM | Monday to Sunday

Helpline 2: +91-90 88030 303 | 10:00 AM – 10:00 PM | Monday to Sunday

Email: lifelinekolkata@gmail.com

Proficient with: Bengali, Hindi, English

SUMAITRI

Helpline: 011-23389090 | +91-9315767849 | 02:00 PM to 10:00 PM | Monday to Friday | 10:00 AM to 10:00 PM on Saturday & Sunday

Email: feelingsuicidal@sumaitri.net

Proficient with: Hindi, English

SAMARITANS MUMBAI

Helpline: +91-84229 84528, +91-84229 84529, +91-84229 84530 | 05:00 PM – 08:00 PM | Monday to Sunday

Email: talk2samaritans@gmail.com

Proficient with: Hindi, Marathi, English

MANN TALKS

Helpline: +91-8686 139 139 | 09:00 AM – 06:00 PM | Monday to Sunday

Website: www.manntalks.org

Proficient with: English, Hindi, Marathi

VANDREVALA FOUNDATION

Helpline: +91-9999 666 555 | 18602662345 | 24x7

Website: www.vandrevalafoundation.com

Proficient with: English, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam & Bengali

KIRAN

Helpline: 1800-599-0019 | 24x7 | Government Helpline

Proficient with: Hindi, English & other regional languages

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You are not alone. There are others who have the same questions, concerns, & doubts.

LiveLoveLaugh website details:

Visit us at <https://thelivelovelaughfoundation.org/> to know more.

STORIES OF HOPE

Disclaimer: The stories of hope ("Stories") set out by The Live Love Laugh Foundation ("TLLLF") are intended purely for reference purposes and are by no means intended to malign or defame any person, organization, caste, or community. The Stories are views of the concerned author only and TLLLF does not endorse, recommend, or represent on the veracity of the advice contained in the Stories. Additionally, the Stories should not in any manner be considered a substitute for professional help. All experiences are personal, hence advice and suggestions contained in the Stories may not apply to the user's specific facts or situations, and it is recommended that professional help is sought for such matters. TLLLF disclaims all liability of all nature arising out of reliance placed on the advice set out in the Stories.



THARUN'S* STORY OF HOPE

"I realized that you do not need to seek help only if you have serious mental health problems or feel stressed.

I have not faced very huge problems or issues that might force me to seek professional help. But I tend to ponder over big questions. Who are we? Why are we born in this world? What is the purpose of human existence? What are we doing with our lives?

I recall that these thoughts would run through my mind when I was 16 years. Then I put it down to teenage thoughts, and it unconsciously remained probably at the back of my mind.

When I turned 17 and moved to class 12, my quest to get these answers became serious. I think it was a boy who died, and I wondered why nobody stopped him from dying. Every one of us born, are bound to pass away one day. So, what is the purpose of this human existence? Am I the only one with these questions? Why isn't anyone else posing these questions? I began thinking about my identity. I realized I was facing an existential crisis.

I could not find the right person who could answer these questions. And I knew I had to find the best person to get these answers.

I tried discussing these thoughts with a couple of close friends, especially one who shared similar questions, and my mother. I used the internet but was not satisfied.

I had registered to do a course on an online education tech platform, where it was announced that the founder of The Live Love Laugh Foundation Deepika Padukone was going to talk to students. After the session, I looked up the website and called many counsellors before deciding on the one I thought I would be most comfortable sharing my thoughts. The only drawback was the fee of Rs. 1000/- for an hour, which my parents were not happy about. Since I was a student, the counsellor said that the first few sessions would be at no cost. I was grateful.

This initiative that I took to find out who I am, what sort of person I am, how can I cope with the changes around



*Name changed to maintain anonymity.

me, started helping me to find the answers. I do continue every now to question my own emotions and feelings. My counsellor advised me you will need support from time to time and taking support from a professional is nothing to be ashamed of.

And so, for now, I am not taking any sessions from her, but I think in the future if need be, I will not hesitate to go to her again. I am comfortable with the thought of reaching out for help.

I realized that you do not need to seek help only if you have serious mental health problems or feel stressed. Even when you are feeling low, or you are probably undermining yourself, I think it is necessary to seek help from a professional.

Another influence on my initiative to seek help was the TV series where you see the characters consulting a professional when they have marital problems or issues with their children.

While I may not want to share my thoughts and feelings with anybody, I do encourage others to find professional help. The taboo or stigma around mental illness prevents people from asking for help. But it is gradually going away. For me there is nothing wrong with going to a professional. I feel it is better to take care of your mental health more than your physical health."

RAHUL'S* STORY OF HOPE

"I had a happy childhood until I reached my pre-teens. At the age of 12 however, I was diagnosed with depression and my world seemed to come crashing down. I withdrew from everything including giving up on my studies. Though I did receive the medical help I needed, it took almost four years for me to stabilize and see the light at the end of the tunnel. However, the four-year gap had already made an irreversible dent in my life. My classmates had moved on and I had to pick up the pieces of my life.

I have been blessed to have had wonderful parents who have been a pillar of strength at every stage of my life. They supported me and with their help I enrolled to open university and was able to complete my graduation and post-graduation.

There were times when my struggles were overwhelming and I even thought of giving up on life. However, I always held back because I didn't want my loved ones to go through the pain of losing me.

At 24, however, I was once again put to the test as I had to explain to interviewers the gap-years and the unconventional route I had to take in obtaining my educational qualifications. After a couple of interview rejections, I started to devalue myself. I started suffering from anxiety disorder which was first triggered during an interview. The panic attack was nightmarish.

It took me some years to realize what panic attacks were and along with medications and therapy that I take, I am still in search of coping mechanisms that can help me deal with my illness. I am 28 today and have had to learn to live with multiple panic attacks and bouts of depressive episodes.

Through this journey I have discovered so many positive qualities that I possess. I am fortunate and blessed to have been born with a great fighting spirit that has kept me alive. I have been given the courage to face life despite all the adversities.

Although I struggle with my illness on a daily basis, I am equally optimistic. I am on the path of acceptance and healing. I hope to make some positive impact on society by helping people see beyond the stigma and shame surrounding mental illness."



*Name changed to maintain anonymity.

SONAL'S* STORY OF HOPE

"Neglect, bullying, loneliness – these are just some of the experiences that triggered my depressive episodes. Depression and borderline personality disorder might be my official diagnosis, but trauma is the underlying factor. It all began at boarding school where, as a natural extrovert, I expected to build great new friendships and really express myself. The actual experience couldn't have been further from my expectation.

When things get difficult, it's easy to pretend that you're okay, but you always know what is happening in your mind and how it's consuming you. Since I'm from a small town, I was nervous about moving to a boarding school and engaging with people I have never met before. The fact that my English language skills were limited and that I came from a middle class family added on to my pressure and it wasn't long before I felt left out in the presence of classmates who bullied me and made me feel inferior. The bullying took a turn for the worse as school progressed. I started to feel neglected and would frequently run away from school, hiding in different parts of the campus. The principal would find me and coax me back to school but I hated being there.



Even though I had some loyal friends, I never appreciated them. I couldn't speak with my parents either because they would just blame me for everything. When things reached a breaking point, I attempted suicide but my batchmates managed to save me. After I finished school, I was told to consult a psychologist who diagnosed me with depression.

Now, I'm in my third year of law school and I still have flashbacks, suicidal thoughts, and unpleasant experiences, but I don't lose hope easily. My passion lies in pursuing a career in humans rights so I can help those who can't help themselves, and spread the message of compassion and kindness, because those are the qualities that we truly need today. I'm still in therapy with a college counselor and I haven't fully healed, but I know it's okay not to be okay. Whatever you're going through, don't give up and don't lose hope. You will shine soon. Life is with you and it will find you."



FAQS



1. Are stress and anxiety the same?

Stress and anxiety are not interchangeable terms, though the physical sensations may be very similar. Stress is the body's reaction to a situation that requires a physical, mental, or emotional adjustment or response. It can have both a positive and a negative impact.

Anxiety, on the other hand, often comes from a place of fear, uneasiness, or worry. While it is common to experience anxiety in our daily life, it can also manifest itself in the form of panic attacks, phobia, social anxiety and many other related symptoms. Further, stress can be a temporary condition, while anxiety can be more lasting, persistent and pervasive.

2. I feel like I am depressed, what can I do?

Just like other illnesses, depression is a serious, but treatable, medical condition. You can reach out to a mental health professional or a helpline number. Statistics suggest that 1 in 5 Indians will suffer from some form of depression at some point in their lifetime, so always remember that you are not alone.

3. Can someone who has had depression previously experience it again?

Depression is a serious, but treatable, medical condition. Having experienced an episode of depression can place a

person at higher risk of a relapse. But not everyone who has recovered from depression will experience it again. Getting the right treatment is crucial to recovery and in helping prevent future episodes.

4. What do I do if I feel suicidal or know someone who is?

If you feel suicidal or know someone who is, do not ignore it. Any thoughts about suicidal ideation must be taken seriously. Immediately speak to someone you trust such as your parent, teacher, family member or a mental health professional. Always remember that you are not alone.

5. What if people judge me for visiting a mental health professional?

There should be no hesitation or shame in seeking mental health support. Visiting a mental health professional is the same as visiting a physician when you catch a fever or break a bone.

6. Is counselling only meant for people with mental health conditions?

No, this is a misconception about counselling. Counselling is not only for people with mental health conditions but also for anyone who is seeking support or finding it difficult to deal with a situation. Here are a few common myths about counselling that are not true:





- It is exclusively for suicidal or aggressive people.
- Visiting a counsellor implies you are incapable or incompetent
- It always involves medication, hypnosis, or other scary things.

7. What do I need to tell my mental health professional on the first visit?

- Be open, expressive and tell your mental health specialist exactly what you feel.
- Observe and write down any behaviour change or symptoms you think you are experiencing.
- Make sure to ask your mental health specialist all the questions you have in mind.
- Take a friend or family member along with you.

8. What typically happens in a counselling/ talk therapy session?

Regular counselling sessions are held in a private and confidential space. In the current scenario of the pandemic, counselling can even be done via a phone call, video call or online chat. Counselling relationships are professional working relationships with a purpose.



During a session, your counsellor will listen to you, ask you questions and try to gain a better understanding of who you are. In subsequent sessions, you may mutually set goals with your counsellor and work towards them. Counselling can help you understand yourself better and enable you to cope with any challenges you may be facing.



ADDITIONAL READING

1. <https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/how-teenagers-can-protect-their-mental-health-during-coronavirus-covid-19>
2. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/three-ways-to-protect-your-mental-health-from-covid-19>

