

The Vantage Point

Anxiety & grounding ourselves

Feeling anxious?
Here are a few tips
and tricks on how
to soothe your
anxiety

Head in the clouds

Exclusive interview with a
student from Beirut - how does
the news impact mental
health?

Mental health through a scientific lens!

How does brain
chemistry affect your
mental state? Find out
here!



Hidden toxicity

If you're used to
feeling
uncomfortable or
anxious, reconsider.

A psychological virus?

How the covid19 virus
has not only affected our
physique, but moreover
our state of mind

Perfectionism

Why do we feel the
need to be *perfect*?
What is perfection?

FEATURING ARTS, POETRY,
AND MORE!

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MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH A SCIENTIFIC LENS



HEAD IN THE CLOUDS



PERFECTION- NOT SO PERFECT



HOW TO MANAGE STRESS 101 WITH MR. DUNK



POETRY

Sm:~e

Welcome to our second issue – the stressful time due to the global pandemic, the new year filled with uncertainty ahead, student life manifesting itself through examinations, our brains, our beings becoming unbalanced. All of these led us to the topic of this issue – mental health. We wanted to reflect the minds of many at this time and share with you a bit of what mental health itself is, as well as the various branches stemming off of it.

We are not psychologists in any way, and we are not telling you how to think. We have simply shared personal experiences coupled with research within the pages of the magazine. You can find articles behind the science of mental health, a personal account (with tips!) of someone dealing with anxiety, a look at the stress from hearing the news, including an interview with a student from Beirut, and questions answered by Mr. Dunk, our school's counselor.



We hope you find out something new and connect to the experiences and pieces, all the while hearing the voice of your fellow school citizens. Of course, please do know that we are not claiming to be medical professionals, and remember that you are able to reach out to the school counselors or support mentors at any time!

Stay healthy, stay safe!

*Elizbitta
Chernyak*

Editor's Note



**Perfection -
Not so Perfect**

Professionals tend to define perfectionism as “a combination of excessively high personal standards and overly critical self-evaluations,” but there are extra nuances to this definition.

Gordon Flett and Paul Hewitt are two main authorities in the area of perfectionism, each of whom have studied this subject matter for many years. Flett is a professor within the school of fitness at York University in Ontario, Canada, and Hewitt is currently a professor of psychology at the University of British Columbia (UBC), also in Canada.

Collectively, the 2 psychologists defined the 3 major sides of perfectionism in a study they published nearly three decades in the past. They say that there is “self-oriented perfectionism, other-oriented perfectionism, and socially prescribed perfectionism.”

Perfectionism can severely impact our intellectual and bodily health. In a recent examination conducted through Thomas Curran, a lecturer inside the department for fitness on the University of Tub within the United Kingdom, and Andrew P. Hill, of York St. John College, also inside the U.K., the authors explain that socially prescribed perfectionism is the “most debilitating” of the three forms.

In socially prescribed perfectionism, “individuals believe their social context is excessively demanding, that others judge them harshly, and that they must display perfection to secure approval.”

Anxiety, melancholy, and suicidal ideation are only a few of the intellectual fitness problems that professionals have repeatedly related with this shape of perfectionism. Curran and Hill studied over 40,000 American, Canadian, and British college students and located that in 1989–2016, the share of people that exhibited traits of perfectionism rose by 33 percent.

As Curran and Hill factor out, “self-oriented perfectionism” — which occurs while “individuals connect irrational importance to being perfect, hold unrealistic expectations of themselves, and are punitive in their self-reviews” — is linked with clinical depression, eating issues, and untimely demise among university students and young people.

Despite this, countless studies and psychologists have debated whether perfectionism is more beneficial or harmful. Perfectionism looms over people all around the world, and it is important to be educated about it.

Citations

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HOW TO HANDLE STRESS

101 WITH MR. DUNK

By Maryam Adrianto
and Federica Pivetti

As students and developing members of the society, we encounter problems that we feel might be overwhelming, and we do not know how to handle them. We turned to Mr Kevin Dunk, one of the school counsellors here at GEMS, and conducted an interview regarding how to manage pressure and stress that one might experience at school, or at home.

Since we're students of a rigorous curriculum, some of us tend to be stressed and panic, especially when it starts to feel overwhelming. What would you suggest as a tip or advice for us on how to handle that stress?

KD: Yes indeed, the IB is a rigorous curriculum, and it is very common to feel stress and panic. I think the first thing that is important, is to understand what stress actually is. Have you heard of 'fight or flight', the idea that our bodies are primed in emergency situations to run away or fight the situation? Well, this is based on years of evolution.

Our brain is wired to send messages to our body when it thinks we are in danger, a response that was needed when being attacked by wild animals in the past, and it is still important to this day, like when we step out into the road and have to jump back to avoid a cyclist, or in a high pressure, dangerous situation. Unfortunately, our brains react the same way when faced with non-life threatening situations, like doing well in a test or getting into a 'good' university. While these situations are important, our bodies react in a physical way (sweaty palms, increased heart rate, feeling disorientated, etc.) and this is what causes panic and stress. The most important tip I would give is to remind yourself that you are not in a life or death situation, and it usually turns out better than you might think. I will go through some specific techniques in a moment.

Sometimes we lose motivation for doing schoolwork, and forcing ourselves to do work can add more stress. What would you suggest doing when we lose motivation to do something?

KD: Stop and do something else. Losing motivation is very common, even if it is a subject that we really enjoy. It is perfectly natural to lose motivation especially when it seems like the end is so far away, and you have other work you know you need to do, so my advice is to stop and go and do something that you enjoy for a while, go for a walk, take in some fresh air, do some mindfulness, grab a bite to eat, call a friend, spend time with family...

When we see someone struggling, because they might have problems at home or with school, how do we comfort or help them? What if they do not want to be helped, even though it is clear they are having a hard time? Should we still try to help them?

KD: Recognizing that someone you know is having a hard time shows that you care about them and are empathetic to their situation. As a school counsellor, I am a big believer in 'talking' as a therapeutic methodology, but really anyone can be a good listener, and you can help your friends by being there, listening to them (and I mean really listening to them and giving them your undivided attention) which will be a great source of comfort to them. If they really do not want to talk, you can suggest they come and talk to a trusted adult, which can include coming to talk with myself or Ms McClure here at school.

Stress does not only come with exams/written tasks, sometimes students struggle with presentations or speaking up in class. Are there any techniques to help relax and feel less nervous?

KD: There are a lot of techniques you can try to feel relaxed and less nervous. The key is breathing regulation, as when we feel stressed, panicked, anxious and nervous it is because our brain is sending messages to our body, and we are having those physical reactions I talked about earlier. Controlling our breathing physically decreases our heart rate and calms down our bodies. There are loads of breathing exercises on YouTube you can try for yourself, but one I like is called 'Square Breathing' and it's really simple: 'Inhale for 4 seconds, hold in for 4 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds, hold out for 4 seconds', then repeat. It really does work!

When someone has problems and is not able to talk to someone about them (they cannot talk to friends or their parents, or are uncomfortable talking to people they do not know), what do you suggest for them to do?

KD: The thought of talking to someone you don't know, especially about private things, can seem like a really uncomfortable thing to do. We do understand that. However, we (the school counsellors) would really encourage you to come and have a chat with us, we really are non-judgemental, and we don't take sides, nor 'tell you what to do', and you can talk to us in confidence about most things. If you are still uncomfortable talking to us or if we are not available, you could call the Samaritans of Singapore: 1800 221 4444 (24 hours)

What kind of support is there in school for students who are struggling?

KD: We are very fortunate at GWA to have two student counsellors in SY and two in PY who are available to offer support to students who are struggling. You can also talk to Mr. Petterson who is the Designated Safeguard Lead at the school, and also a trained counsellor. If you would rather speak to a student, we are very fortunate to have a dedicated team of Support Mentors who you can also talk to (their faces are on posters around the school, or you can contact us to speak to one of them).

Thank you so much, Mr. Dunk, for taking the time to contribute to this issue of the Vantage Point! We hope that each reader can take away something helpful from this interview.

Head in the Clouds

By Cynthia Aung

Edited by Darius Fleischmann

In 2021, we possess devices at our fingertips that provide us access to information about the world and much more. We are privileged to be educated on what is going on around us, but there is a point in time where this benefit can ultimately cause a negative impact on our mental health. 2020 tested our abilities to cope with the news. Personally, I found myself obsessively checking my phone as much as I could, only to be faced with the same news that would stress me out for days. I would stare at a screen which showed a drastic increase in numbers of Covid-19 patients or the reports of the destruction caused by the Australian wildfires. This was probably one of the only ways most of us could get through with all the free time on our hands in quarantine when distanced from our loved ones. At first, I profited off of this. I could turn my knowledge into a debate session with my parents at the dinner table or just share it with my peers. But as time went by in isolation, days didn't take long to blur into a continuous loop and I was stuck in a cycle of being force fed by the media.

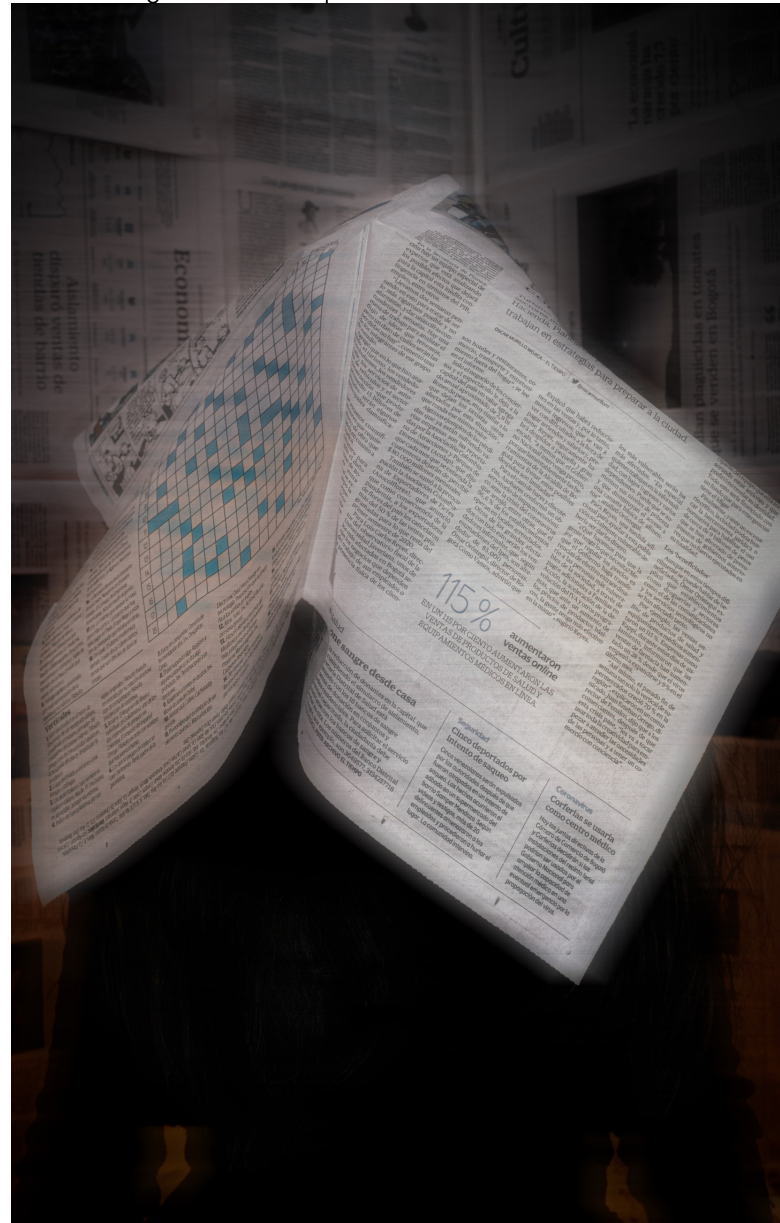
So what is the difference between being educated and becoming obsessed and stressed with news? Being educated is when you are aware of the situations that affect others and not only yourself in the world. You are educated regarding topics that impact other people and are keen on learning more.

Becoming obsessed is when you cannot take your mind or time off the news no matter how stressful it is. This obsession can decrease your productivity and negatively impact your views, as being reminded of the same bad news may lead to a pessimistic mindset.

WW3 scares. Covid-19. Natural disasters. 2020 Presidential election.

These were some of the few major topics that came up in 2020. They were spoken of so much that at times it felt inescapable. Social media, radios, newspapers, and magazines all repeated the same things. Chaos seemed to repeat itself like a broken record. Taking a break or even logging out of social media can be beneficial for you to focus on your life and those around you instead of the negativity and hoaxes that the media produces.

I have interviewed a fellow friend, Adrian El Chaar, who has spoken up about news stress in 2020 during the Beirut explosion.



I am Cynthia Aung interviewing a fellow friend, ADRIAN EL CHAAR on news stress. Specifically the Beirut explosions and the tragic news that followed the country's explosion.

Adrian is Lebanese. So you could only imagine how he must have felt last year after the Beirut explosion.

"Tell me about when you first heard the news. How did you find out?"

Adrian: "I first heard the news on social media where it was shared by multiple individuals. It was later immediately announced on TV at home. I was heavily worried as based on the reactions I observed I understood the alarming extent of its severity and the negative impacts it had caused within my country."

"How did it feel? Did you have a shock of fear thinking of your loved ones?"

Adrian: "As I witnessed the dreadful and disturbing scenes. I was flabbergasted by the explosion which had occurred that day and frightened for my loved ones, as there were multiple casualties and major injuries which required hurried attention. I was just hoping my loved ones wouldn't be the victims of this incident. Numerous hospitals were overfilled with patients, three major hospitals had to close while three others had to downsize. As a result, people who were in critical conditions did not receive the necessary care in a timely manner."

"I'm sorry to hear that. Can you tell me ways you coped with the stress of the news?"

Adrian: "I avoided triggering topics in the news which created a personal connection with me as it constantly heightened my stress. I decided to take a break from those certain channels and outlets who were covering disturbing news such as the Beirut explosion. It was important for me to follow up with the current events, however, I had to limit the amount of news consumption, as developing that obsessive habit from irresponsible use of technological devices would have resulted in negative effects on my mental health."

"2020 was rough, is there any advice you have for those struggling to handle their negative thoughts and feelings on the chaos of news and social media?"

Adrian: "Practicing sound stress management on a regular basis would be an effective solution towards decreasing news anxiety. Engaging in exercises and physical activities is essential as it improves your mood, significantly reduces feelings of depression and stress. Physical activities enhance your awareness of your mental state and are considered to be a form of distraction from your fears. Sleep is another important factor as it enables the body to repair and be fit. In addition it relaxes and clears your mind from nerve-racking topics."

"Anything else you would like to share about your experiences relating to last year?"

Adrian: "2020 and COVID-19 was a challenging year for everyone but had allowed me to reflect on myself, focus on my passions and discover multiple different approaches to increase my productivity on a day to day basis. I would recommend everyone to keep their heads up during tough times and hope for the best outcome possible."

"Well, thank you for your time Adrian."

Like what Adrian said, focusing on your own well being is a good tip to ignore the stress. It is important for us to not abandon our priorities in our day-to-day lives. Something as simple as having a technology free time or exercising more can help us feel better about ourselves and be healthier. Remember that it is ok to not have an account of all that is happening in the world. Once you start to feel as though your energy is being drained, take a break. At the end of the day, breathe and take time away from your devices to spend time focusing on yourself and your family.

Mental Health Through a Scientific Lens

By Muskaan Duneja
Edited by Tanha Azam
Chowdhury

Mental health is one of the most controversial global topics in this societal day and age, where people are constantly surrounded by numerous misconceptions, one of them being that mental illnesses are rare. In reality, 1 in 4 adults every year suffers from a diagnosable mental disorder. This being established, another misconception that precedes in the society today is that any individual suffering from such disorders can overcome it in

a healthy way by choice and personal effort. While this may be the case in some patients, this notion fails to address mental illness as an actual medical condition and the fact that several cases of such disorders may require medical attention or treatment. Mental health issues are not only developed due to physiological factors, but biological elements also play a role in provoking such conditions.

As stated by the National Centre for Biotechnology Information (NCBI)¹, several researchers and scientists believe that mental disorders are partly developed due to the imbalance of neurochemicals in the brain. These chemical messengers are responsible for carrying signals between nerve cells and other cells in our body. If such chemicals are processed in incorrect amounts, they may hinder the brain from properly responding to a stimulus by hindering the communication between the brain and our body, affecting many physical and psychological functions.



For example, too much stimulation of the hormone known as adrenaline, responsible for regulating muscle contraction, heart rate, and blood pressure, may lead to chronic stress, difficulty concentrating, dizziness, as well as anxiety.

That being said, there is more to mental health challenges than simply the brain's chemistry. How people suffering from such disorders are treated and looked at is also an aspect in considering the factors that cause such conditions. We all possess the ability to change, grow and improve over time and therefore, a little understanding, empathy, and respect from individuals that do not suffer from such issues would be really beneficial in creating a supportive and accepting environment for all in need. So, check up on your loved ones and remind them that they are appreciated, because you never know who is in need of some dopamine.

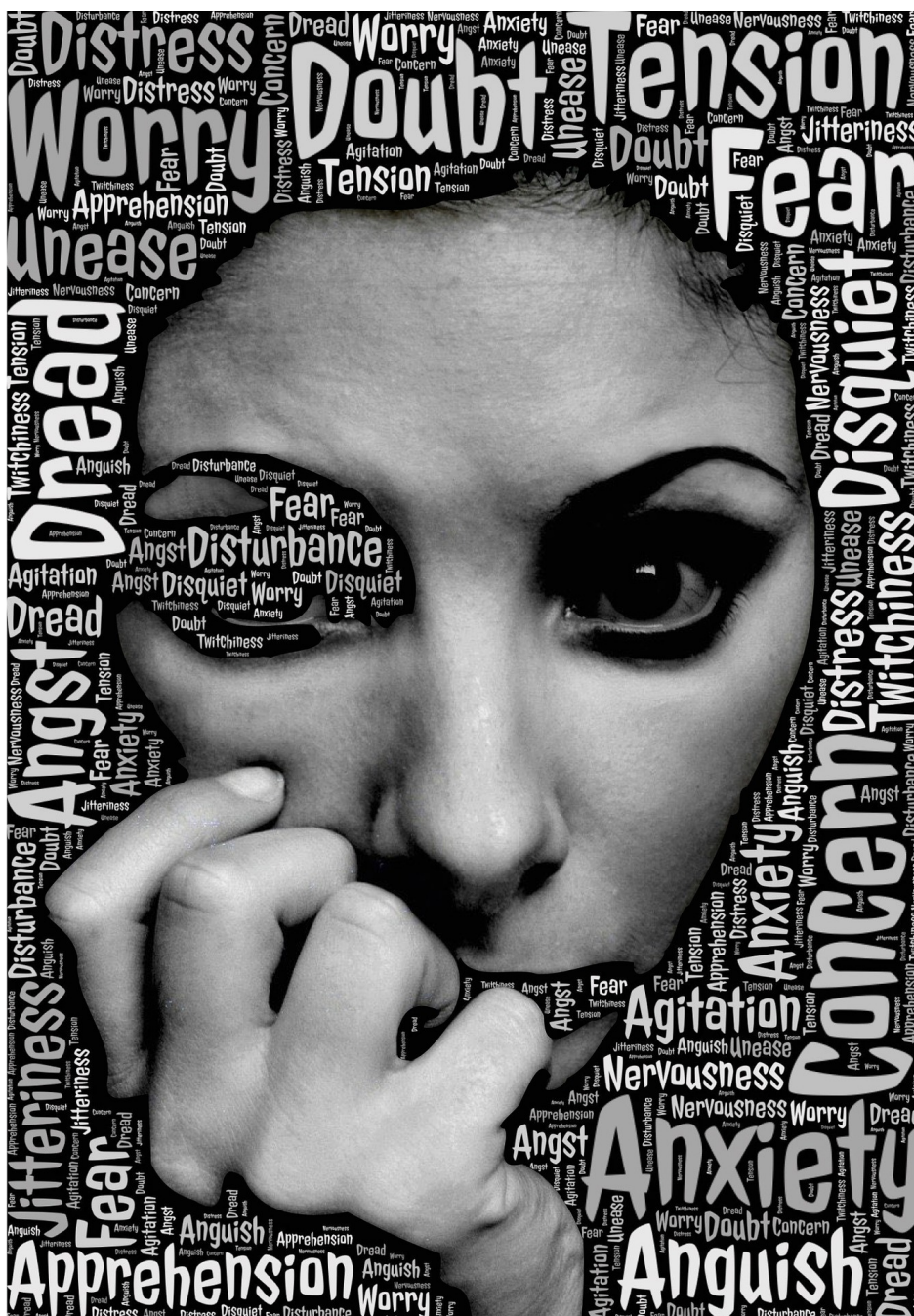
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¹Health, and Curriculum Study. "Information about Mental Illness and the Brain." Nih.Gov, National Institutes of Health (US), 2012, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK20369/.

Anxiety and Grounding Ourselves

By Aamina Akmal

In the bustling rhythm of our everyday lives and the seemingly never ending chaos and to do lists, we sometimes tend to lose our sense of calm and composure. This of course is absolutely acceptable and nothing short of a basic psychological function. Often referred to as anxiety, it is one of the most commonly felt and perfectly normal emotions. The certain sensation of restlessness can be as extreme as manifesting itself as a feeling of impending doom, be it as a result of a big upcoming exam or simply starting off your day. Besides solutions such as seeking therapy, there are a few things that we can do in everyday lives that might help in their own small way in bringing a sense of peace and order into our lives and help alleviate our anxiety to whatever extent that might be. Of course I am in no way claiming to be a professional whatsoever, but I will simply be sharing a few things that I do in my everyday life that have helped me deal with and reduce my own symptoms of anxiety.



One thing that I think everyone should have and create for themselves, if conditions allow it, is a safe space. This safespace, be it your room, somewhere in the fresh air or simply a little nook in your home will serve as a place of solitude, something along the lines of your own personal bat cave, if you will. Fill this space with things that make you happy and bring you tranquility such as plants, soft pillows and sheets, a diffuser or maybe even a record player. I have personally found that lighting within your safe space is an important aspect to consider, as it can be manipulated to improve your mood. For example, some people might open up windows to let the sunlight stream in in order to feel warm and bright, while others might prefer a cooler, more dimly lit room to calm their nerves.

Another rather interesting tip that I learned that helped me in perhaps some of the most anxious times, was simply to pop something in your mouth, such as mint or even some hard candy. Picture this: you're about to enter the exam room. There is a general sense of nervousness floating through the air paired with the erratic pacing of your classmates and you begin to feel the familiar sensation of anxiousness creeping up on you. In this situation, eating something fresh and cooling will almost always help bring about some sense of relief. This is because it is impossible for our body to consume something and stay anxious at the same time. Anxiety is a primitive instinct used by humans to prepare us for dangerous situations. When we eat something, our body immediately realises that there is no need for this extreme anxiousness, as we would not tend to eat when faced with imminent danger and it begins to relax and cool down.

Last but not least, one of the most frequent things that we're told to do when anxious is to breathe. Slowing down and taking deep breaths helps in bringing you back to reality and grounding yourself. Sometimes your mind needs a little extra push to remind you that you're alright and bring you down to reality. Breathing deeply and slowly all the while, list:

- Five things you see around you
- Four things you can reach out and touch
- Three things you can hear
- Two things you can smell
- And finally going back to our previous tip, one thing you can taste

Using this simple technique during times of anxiousness helps engage all five of your senses and aids in bringing our anxious minds to rest and back to reality.

Grounding ourselves and taking good care of ourselves is especially important in the 21st century world that we live in today, our lives seemingly flying past in a blink. These tips are just a small fraction of the enormous amount of helpful information that can be found in regards to coping with the extremely common emotion of anxiety.

Although, I do hope this article helped in its own little way :) Remember to breathe deeply and have fun!

A PSYCHOLOGICAL VIRUS

By Darius
Fleischmann



Mental health. We've all heard of it, we've all thought about, but what really is it? Mental health is quite a broad concept to take in, since there's a whole lot going inside our brains, and thus might be understood and experienced differently by each individual. However, it is important to note its correct definition, which, according to the World Health Organisation, is "a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community." Unlike what most people may think, mental health does not solely refer to the absence of mental disorders. In fact, everyone has mental health. It is a wide spectrum of emotions, feelings and thoughts that make up our psychological well-being. Still, it is possible to distinguish between good and bad mental health, as a person with a positive mental health would generally display more feelings of contentment, being able to form good relationships with others and having the ability to cope with a workload, while someone with a poorer mental health may struggle with these tasks and would more likely display symptoms of anxiety or depression.

Mental health is an important aspect of our overall health and is arguably just as important as our physical health, because it deeply affects how we are feeling, thinking and how we behave with each other. These in turn impact the choices and decisions we make throughout our lives, and guide us to where we are now. Both our mental and physical health go hand in hand as a reduction in one can affect the other. It is similar to how we feel emotionally tired when our body is sick.

Our mental health can also change completely over time, as it is affected by many social, environmental, and biological factors that occur in our lives such as family complications, natural disasters and our brain chemistry just to name a few. It is normal for us to experience emotions of stress, anger and sadness at times. However, if these negative feelings become more severe and persist for long periods of time, problems can arise in our mental health, which can affect how we function daily.

Because of Covid-19, many of these factors have changed abruptly, and so has our mental health.

Some of us may have felt more laid-back about not having to travel to school or work for the first few weeks, but over time, as we learned about the permanence of the situation, many of us have since faced difficulties adjusting to these changes. The most apparent effects would have been caused by the restrictions placed upon our freedom to connect with others. Humans are social animals, we need each other's company and amity to thrive. Being trapped in our homes and unable to meet up with our closest friends and family for this long can make us feel lonely and isolated, as we begin to loathe the present, look back on the past and yearn for the future. We might feel angry and disappointed because long-awaited events had to be cancelled, or even feel worry or paranoia for ourselves and others, as we watch the death toll rise. These restrictions have only extended to businesses being shut down, causing many to lose their jobs during the crisis, and leaving millions of people out of work and in despair. These are just some of the issues that have arisen from this pandemic as many around the world are struggling with their own.

To make matters worse, mental health services in around 93% of countries have been interrupted according to a WHO survey, all while the demand for these services have increased. To cope with the increased levels of stress placed on them, more people have resulted in consuming large amounts of harmful substances as coping mechanisms, such as drugs and alcohol, destroying their mental health in the process.

Having to face these changes without being able to relate them to past events can cause distress among us as we fear for the worst. It is therefore essential that we are always mindful of our own mental health, especially during times like these, and look out for those around us too. It may be vital for us to seek professional help when we need it and to know that no one is alone in the way we may feel. All over 7 billion of us are in this together. Thankfully, humanity is an adaptive species, and with the distribution of the vaccine, this ordeal might be over sooner than we think. As always, if you or someone you know might be struggling with any problems, don't be afraid to reach out to the school counselors - they are here to help you.

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HIDDEN TOXICITY

By Arshia Sharma

Edited by Ishnaa Goenka

Relationships are an essential part of human life. The relationships we form can have a tremendous impact on us and shape who we become in the future. While many relationships are positive, there can be times when a relationship may become harmful or “toxic”. Unlike the common misconception, toxic relationships aren’t limited to only romantic ones. Co-workers and friends can suffer from unhealthy relationships too. These can cause huge strains on the damaged relationship whilst also mentally affecting the people involved. The essential question here is, how? When does it become unhealthy? To what extent can a toxic relationship damage us mentally?

Toxic relationships can be defined as “unhealthy dynamics”. Toxicity can sometimes be difficult to detect due to its subtleness and its variance with each relationship. It can be said that these relationships can emerge from a combination of toxic emotions and toxic thinking from either party involved. In terms of mental health, feelings such as low self-worth, paranoia, anxiety and even depression can arise due to toxic relationships.

In toxic relationships, the most common effects are feelings of self-worth doubt and heightened insecurities. A common trait of toxic relationships is the abuse of power and lack of support. According to a study, 1 in 3 young people have increased insecurities due to an unhealthy relationship. Being in a toxic environment slowly strips away your self-esteem, leading to self-doubt in certain things you do. You may begin questioning your own judgement and wondering whether you should go forward with things. Living this way is almost like being puppeteered by someone else. Every decision you make goes through them first. It is mentally draining and can cause unhappiness.

As said by Elizabeth Scott, a wellness coach, "It can be easy to forget to practice self-care in relationships like these, where taking time out for themselves is vital in their well being" This gives them the freedom to do what they like, making the relationship free and not constraining.

Toxic relations also have a pattern of causing unhealthy amounts of stress. Large amounts of stress, in general, aren’t good, but in a toxic relationship, there is a constant dose of stress. Being under constant stress or tension can cause your body to perpetually stay in a state of fight or flight. This can lead to ongoing production of adrenaline and quick discarding of the excess. As a result, the body tends to be in constant fatigue which may lead to a weakened immune system and eventual possible organ damage. Along with several mental impacts, toxic relationships can also affect us physically.

Our mental health is essential for us to perform tasks and live life to the fullest. Any relationship that compromises our health isn’t something that should be tolerated. A relationship can only work if both participants put in an equal amount of effort and have the same influence on each other. Toxic relationships can be mended by putting in time and effort, but can be difficult to fix.

Relationships are an essential part of human lives, so remember, if they are weighing you down – perhaps it’s time to make a decision on whether you truly want them to be a part of your life!

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Mackenzie, Alexis Jones and Macaela, and Alexis Jones Assistant Editor Alexis Jones is an assistant editor at Women's Health where she writes across several verticals on WomensHealthmag.com. "Not Having 'Me Time' Is A Pretty Sure Sign You're In A Toxic Relationship." Women's Health, 22 Oct. 2019, www.womenshealthmag.com/relationships/a19739065/signs-of-toxic-relationship/.

A CORNER OF CREATIVITY

By Muskaan Duneja

POETRY

Sm:)e

Contagious it is, this unspoken kindness,
The radiating rainbow after misty darkness.
Stringing voiceless affection for the lovers,
Sewing the broken hearts green undercover.
Bridging the unknown, fusing lost bonds,
It's a trail of light through the soulless clouds.
This obscure magic is concealed in everyone,
One simple gesture and it's all said and done.



ART



THE TEAM



None of this of course would be possible without the amazing team:

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We are infinitely thankful for each reader and are looking forward to sharing YOUR voice with every publication.

If you have any questions, would like to join our team, or would like to submit your own writing piece, artwork, or ideas, you can contact us by email at contact@vantage-point.online
We look forward to hearing from you!

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