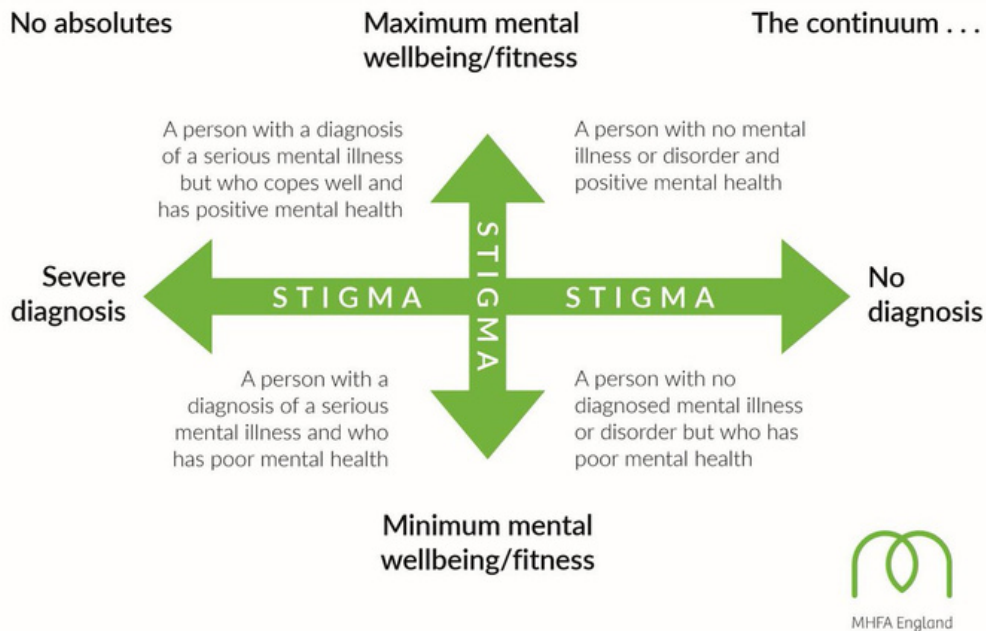# Mental Health Q&A

Produced by Kintsugi Hope

What is Mental Health?

The World Health Organisation define mental health as "state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community". Wellbeing can be a slippery concept but ultimately it's about feeling like life is worthwhile; being able to take care of yourself and enjoy your relationships with those around you.

It can be helpful to think of mental health as a continuum. There is no binary line between mental health and mental illness, but rather a continuum along which we travel, sometimes multiple times a day. Mental Health First Aid England put together this really helpful graphic which demonstrates that not all emotions that may feel negative (sadness, stress) are signs of mental illness - they are a part of being human. In the same way, the graphic shows us that having a diagnosis of mental illness does not mean we can never cope or flourish. We all have mental health, in the same way that we all have physical heath - and our levels of wellbeing will fluctuate throughout our life, month and even day!

No absolutes | Maximum mental wellbeing/fitness | The continuum . . .

A person with a diagnosis of a serious mental illness but who copes well and has positive mental health

A person with no mental illness or disorder and positive mental health

Severe diagnosis ← STIGMA STIGMA → No diagnosis

STIGMA STIGMA

A person with a diagnosis of a serious mental illness and who has poor mental health

A person with no diagnosed mental illness or disorder but who has poor mental health

Minimum mental wellbeing/fitness

MHFA England

What is Mental Illness?

A mental illness is a condition which significantly impacts the way someone thinks, feels and behaves, and usually causes distress and interferes with how someone is able to live in their day to day life. Mental illnesses are diagnosed by doctors, often psychiatrists according to specific symptoms and criteria.

What Are Different Types of Mental Illness?

It's important to note, as we do on the continuum that not all difficulties with mental health are mental illnesses. Mental illnesses tend to fall into categories of mood disorders (which include things like depression and bipolar disorder), eating disorders (which includes anxorexia, bulimia and binge eating disorder), anxiety disorders (including panic disorder, generalised anxiety disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder and post traumatic stress disorder) and psychotic illnesses which include diagnoses like schizophrenia. The degree to which these illnesses affect day to day living will vary both between individuals and over the course of time.

How Do I Respond If Someone Is Experiencing a Mental Health Crisis?

It will not always be possible to know if someone is experiencing a mental illness or struggling more generally with their mental health, but there are a few key principles in responding to someone who is struggling.

1.Keep Calm
Try practicing breathing techniques together, using something like box breathing which involves breathing in for 4 seconds, holding your breath for 4 seconds and breathing out for 4 seconds before repeating the process, or inhaling for 7 seconds and exhaling for 11 seconds. This allows the nervous system a chance to regulate (and keep you calm, too!).

2. Keep Clear
Ensure that there is no crowd around the person who is struggling, if possible have one person stay and engage in the breathing techniques and another seek further help whether from a trained mental health first aider or by calling 999.

3. Call for Help
If the situation is escalating and you are concerned for someone's safety call 111 and ask for option 2, or if there is an immediate risk to life call 999.

Who's Who In Mental Health?

It can be difficult to know the roles of professionals within mental health teams, but most teams will be made up of:

- Psychiatrist: a medical doctor who is trained in mental health and illness who can prescribe medication.

- Clinical Psychologist: someone with a doctorate in psychology and practical experience helping people with mental health issues, they may deliver talking therapies and often work as part of a multi-disciplinary team.

- Occupational Therapist: someone who helps people with mental health conditions gain confidence and skills they need in their lives; this may mean practical support in managing their illness or supporting people to develop the skills and motivation needed to live independently.

- Community Mental Health Nurse: a registered nurse who offers practical advice and support, give and monitor medications and their side effects.

- Care Co-Ordinator: a mental health professional who takes particular responsibility for a number of patients, getting to know them and liaising with other services and professionals on your behalf.

What Are The Best Ways to Improve Mental Wellbeing?

For those without significant mental illness, the things that improve our mental wellbeing are the sae as the things that improve our physical wellbeing. These include getting enough sleep and physical exercise, eating a balanced diet and engaging socially with others. It's also been proven that getting out into nature has a positive impact on wellbeing.

How Can I Best Support Someone Without Being a Professional?

If someone is struggling with their mental health, they may need professional help, but what they need from their communities (and warm welcome hosts) is often a listening ear and a friendly face. In Warm Welcome spaces, you are not expected to be mental health professionals and should not attempt to diagnose or treat mental health problems; instead it is about connecting with one another's common humanity, asking about peoples likes and dislikes, their families or roles they play over the course of their lives. Simply asking "how are you?", listening to their answer and prompting 'how are you really?' Is often the best way to offer your support.