Mental Health Awareness Week May 18th-22nd

Why kindness?

The Mental Health Foundation have chosen kindness to focus on because of its ability to unlock our shared humanity. Kindness strengthens relationships, develops community and deepens solidarity. It is a cornerstone of our individual and collective mental health. Wisdom from every culture across history recognises that kindness is something that all human beings need to experience and practise to be fully alive.

Celebrate kindness

But they also want to shine a light on the ways that kindness is already flowering at this time. We have seen it in the dancing eyes of 100-year-old Captain Tom Moore as he walked his garden to raise money for the NHS and in the mutual aid groups responding to local needs. We want that kindness to spread further in every community in the UK.

Finally, they want to use the week to explore the sort of society we would like to emerge from the coronavirus pandemic.

Kindness and Mental Health

Kindness is defined by doing something towards yourself and others, motivated by genuine desire to make a positive difference. We know from the research that kindness and our mental health are deeply connected. The research shows that kindness is an antidote to isolation and creates a sense of belonging. It helps reduce stress, brings a fresh perspective and deepens friendships. Kindness to ourselves can prevent shame from corroding our

sense of identity and help boost our self-esteem. Kindness can even improve feelings of confidence and optimism.

Kindness is an act of courage

But kindness is an intrinsically risky endeavour. It can risk us looking foolish or being taken advantage of, which is why we sometimes retreat. To receive or to give kindness is an act of courage. We want to use Mental Health Awareness Week to support each other to take that brave step and harness the benefits for both giver and receiver.

A kinder society?

We have a once in a generation opportunity not only during but also following this pandemic for a reset and re-think about what kind of society we want to emerge from this crisis.

Take Action, Get Active 2020

During Mental Health Awareness Week, we are asking you to do three things:

- Reflect on an act of kindness. Share your stories and pictures (with permission) of kindness during the week using **#KindnessMatters** and **#MentalHealthAwarenessWeek**

- Share your ideas on how you think we could build a kinder society that would support our mental health using **#KindnessMatters** and **#MentalHealthAwarenessWeek**

- We are asking you to be active for 30 minutes a day, which may include running, walking and cycling, but this does not have to be strenuous – you can do the gardening or get those arm muscles moving by baking a cake. Whatever your physical ability, this challenge is for everyone.

What sort of activities can I do?

- HIIT, Pilates, Yoga – whatever exercise floats your boat that day.
- Walking – it's great to try and get some fresh air everyday so why not incorporate this into your challenge?
- Baking – get your sweat on in the kitchen by cooking up a storm.
- Ultimately, you can get creative in this challenge by taking on whichever form of movement makes you happy (personally we think dancing in your kitchen is a good one!)
- Not everyone is online, so think about who else you can reach out to more personally to tell them about your challenge.

You can tag them across social media – we would love to see what you get up to:

- **Facebook: @mentalhealthfoundation**
- **Twitter: @mentalhealth**
- **Instagram: @mentalhealthfoundation**

Tips on well-being.

1. Plan your day

We are all adjusting to a new, rather strange, way of life. This can be a risk to our mental wellbeing. As tempting as it might be to stay in pyjamas all day, regular routines are essential for our identity, self-confidence and purpose. Try to start your day at roughly the same time you usually would and aim to set aside time each day for movement, relaxation, connection and reflection.

2. Move more every day

Being active reduces stress, increases energy levels, can make us more alert and help us sleep better. Explore different ways of adding physical movement and activity to your day and find some that work best for you. Even at home, there will be lots of ways to exercise and keep your body moving.

Read the Mental Health Foundation guide on [keeping active](#) and visit [Every Mind Matters](#) for some ideas to get you started.

3. Try a relaxation technique

Relaxing and focusing on the present can help improve your mental health and lighten negative feelings. Try some different meditation or breathing exercises to see what helps. For example, sometimes we can be so tense that we do not even remember what being relaxed feels like. Progressive muscle relaxation teaches you to recognise when you are starting to get tense and how to relax.

A range of [relaxation techniques, including progressive muscle relaxation](#) are available from the NHS

4. Connect with others

Staying at home, especially if you live on your own, can feel lonely. Find creative ways to keep in touch with friends, family, and others to help you (and them) feel more connected and supported. Explore ways of connecting that work for you, whether that's by post, over the phone, social media, or video-chat. This could be anything, from sharing a cup of tea over video, playing an online game together, or simply sending a supportive text-message.

5. Take time to reflect and practice self-compassion

Make time every day to reflect on what went well. It's important to recognise your successes and the things you are grateful for, no matter how small. Consider keeping a gratitude journal each day where you could write two or three of these things every night before you go to bed.

Mindfulness techniques may also help you focus on the present rather than dwelling on unhelpful thoughts (though they may not be helpful for those experiencing more severe depression).

They have a number of [relaxation and other digital exercises](#) on our website.

6. Improve your sleep

Feelings of uncertainty and changes to daily life may mean you have more difficulty sleeping. There is a lot you can do to improve your sleep. Aim to go to bed and get up at the same time each day, even at the weekend if you can, and try to get some natural sunlight (by opening your curtains and windows) where possible. This helps to regulate your body clock which can help you sleep better.

Wind down before bed by avoiding using your phone, tablet, computer or TV for an hour before bedtime.

A range of [tips for improving sleep](#) can be found on the mental health foundation website and from [Every Mind Matters](#)

Kooth.com - online support for young people

We would like to remind students and parents/carers of the availability of Kooth's online service to support wellbeing and resilience.

Kooth is a web based confidential support service available to young people. Kooth provides a safe and secure means of accessing mental health and wellbeing support designed specifically for young people.

Kooth offers young people the opportunity to have a text-based conversation with a qualified counsellor. Counsellors are available from 12noon to 10pm on weekdays and 6pm to 10 pm at weekends, every day of the year on a drop-in basis. Young people can access regular booked online counselling sessions as needed. Outside counselling hours' young people can message our team and get support by the next day.

When students register with Kooth they will have support available to them now and in the future. Support can be gained not only through counselling but articles, forums and discussion boards. All content is age appropriate, clinically approved and fully moderated.

To find out more visit http://www.Kooth.com where young people can register and others can find out more about the service.