

Mental Health Awareness Shabbat

20-21 January
2023

Jami
Mental Health
for our Community

Toolkit



Our partners



Kindly supported by Shores Charitable Trust

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WELCOME

Dear Friends,

As the 7th Jami Mental Health Awareness Shabbat approaches, I have reflected on how our community has taken huge strides in recent years to raise the profile of mental health.

Community is the theme this year, and there is no doubt that by coming together to talk and learn about mental health, we gain more power as individuals and as groups to support all those around us.

Feeling comfortable to openly talk about the problems we are having, in the same way we may talk about physical illness, brings us closer to creating a more accepting and inclusive community where no one has to feel alone in their struggles.

We are excited that synagogues throughout our community, schools, youth and university groups, organisations, individuals and families will be joining us to mark this special Shabbat. And we hope that you will make full use of the available resources in our MHAS Toolkit and share your plans and stories with us.

Working to create a mentally healthy future for the community is something we should all feel proud of.

Thank you for your support.

Best wishes,



Laurie Rackind
Chief Executive





**Jami enriches and saves lives impacted by
mental illness in the Jewish community.**

We guide people through the challenging journey of navigating mental health services, providing emotional support and expert advice.

We provide professional, person-centred treatment and support for young people and adults with mental health needs, as well as for their families and carers.

Through education and training we equip people with the skills and knowledge to be resilient, inclusive and better able to support mental illness and distress, reduce stigma, and build mutually supporting relationships across the community.

To find out more, please visit jamiuk.org, email info@jamiuk.org or call 020 8458 2223

**About
Jami**



Why mark the Jami Mental Health Awareness Shabbat (MHAS)?

This special Shabbat is an opportunity for us to encourage conversations on mental health, raise awareness of mental distress and share ideas on how to support ourselves and others within our community.

This year the MHAS falls on Parashat Vaera. In Parashat Vaera, Moses tells the Jewish nation that their woes have ended and that redemption is at hand. This should have been a time of elation, but the Israelites were too overwhelmed by their own stresses to absorb this message. They had lost hope and could not imagine a positive future for themselves.

Stresses in life may be inevitable but it is comforting to have hope that the future can bring our own personal redemption and in turn can bring us from darkness into light.

It really is more important than ever to get involved in this vital initiative. Let's make our own mental health and that of our communities a priority.



What can you do?

There are many ways that you, your synagogue, school, student group or youth group can get involved and each community or individual is free to mark the MHAS in their own way.

This Toolkit can assist you in doing so - for example, by using one of the many sermons or activities provided or using the conversation points as part of a discussion group.

Some communities choose to arrange for members of their congregation to share their own lived experience or invite mental health professionals to lead a talk, discussion or panel event. Jami will also have a great programme of online events that you and your community can participate in. Please go to jamiuk.org/mhas for more details and to register.

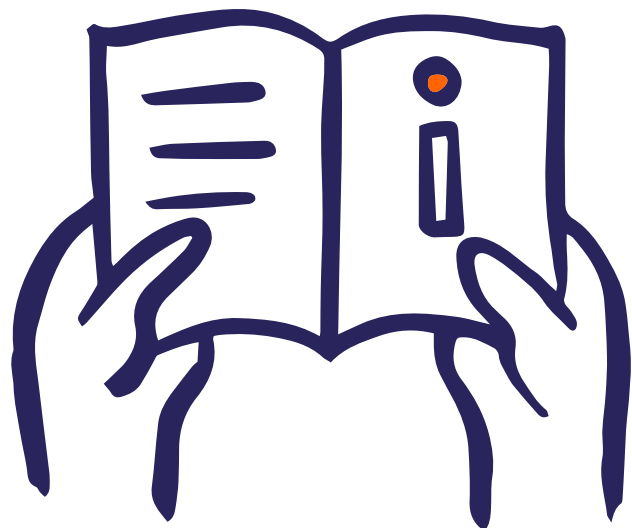
Jami's educational courses & workshops

There are a variety of mental health awareness courses and workshops, facilitated by Jami, that can be booked for your community throughout the year.

You can host a Jami course or a bespoke learning event can be created for your community.

For more information, please go to jamiuk.org/education

For any further guidance or support or to let us know what you have planned, please email Laura Bahar at laura.bahar@jamiuk.org



Key facts on mental health

What is mental health?

Mental health refers to our cognitive, behavioural and emotional wellbeing - it is all about how we think, feel and behave. It helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices.

Mental health also includes a person's ability to enjoy life - to attain a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience.

What is mental illness?

A medically diagnosable illness that can result from a number of factors, including biological or developmental. It can affect the way we feel, act and think and disrupts our ability to work or carry out other daily activities and engage in satisfying personal relationships. It can be managed through prevention, diagnosis, treatment and mental health recovery.

What is mental health recovery?

Mental health recovery means being able to live a good life, as defined by the individual, with or without symptoms. It is a unique and personal experience that can have its ups and downs. Mental health recovery focuses on what a person CAN do rather than on what they can't. It is not necessarily easy or straightforward. Many people describe the need to persevere and to find ways to maintain hope through the most trying times.

Parity of esteem

The principle by which mental health must be given equal priority to physical health. It was enshrined in law in 2012. The government requires NHS England to work for parity

of esteem to mental and physical health through the NHS Mandate. This has still not yet been realised.

Key facts on mental illness

- One in six adults experienced some form of depression in summer 2021, compared with one in five in early 2021. (ONS, 2021)
- Rates of probable mental disorder increased between 2017 and 2021 in six to sixteen-year-olds from one in nine to one in six and in 17 to 19-year-olds from one in ten to one in six. (NHS Digital, 2021)
- In 2021, there were 5,583 suicides registered in England and Wales, equivalent to a rate of 10.7 deaths per 100,000 people. (ONS, 2022)
- In a National Union of Students poll of 4,000 students, 52% reported that their mental health had deteriorated or been affected negatively by Covid-19. However only 29% of those had looked for help. (NUS student survey, 2020)
- In a survey investigating how the Covid-19 pandemic affected Jews across the UK, a clear trend was seen with respect to synagogue membership. Mental distress is notably higher among those who are not synagogue members than among those who are. (JPR Hidden Effects Survey, July 2020)
- People with mental health problems are nearly twice as likely as those without to say they have felt unable to cope due to the rising cost of living. (Money and Mental Health Policy Institute Report, 2022)

NHS 5 steps to mental wellbeing

Evidence suggests there are five steps we can all take to improve our mental wellbeing.

If you give them a try, you may feel happier, more positive and able to get the most from life.



Connect

Connect with the people around you: your family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Spend time developing these relationships.



Be active

You don't have to go to the gym. Take a walk, go cycling or play a game of football. Find an activity that you enjoy and make it a part of your life.



Keep learning

Learning new skills can give you a sense of achievement and a new confidence. So why not sign up for that cooking course, start learning to play a musical instrument, or figure out how to fix your bike?



Give to others

Even the smallest act can count, whether it's a smile, a thank you or a kind word. Larger acts, such as volunteering at your local community centre, can improve your mental wellbeing and help you build new social networks.



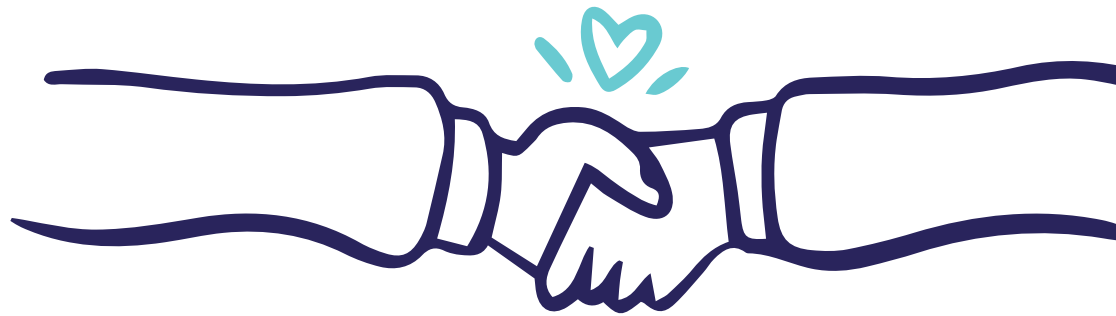
Be mindful

Be more aware of the present moment, including your thoughts and feelings, your body and the world around you. Some people call this awareness "mindfulness". It can positively change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges.

Practising each of the five steps to wellbeing every day can have a very positive impact on your mood and wellbeing. These are also things which are encouraged in the Jewish tradition.

The Five Ways to Good Mental Wellbeing & Judaism has been designed by Good Thinking in collaboration with Jami, in consultation with Rabbi Miriam Berger and Rabbi Daniel Epstein, with the support of The London Jewish Forum, Maccabi GB and the London Borough of Barnet.

You can read the full leaflet [here](#).



Why social connection is the antidote to loneliness

One of the many symptoms of mental health illness that we see is loneliness. Although many of us experience loneliness at one time or another, it's often overlooked or dismissed. Our society prides itself on self-reliance, so loneliness can carry a stigma for people who admit to it. (The Lonely Society Report, Mind)

According to research, being lonely is associated with an increased risk in depression, anxiety and even cardio-vascular disease. When we experience mental illness, this can also exacerbate our loneliness as we get into a vicious spiral of loss, social contact and of feeling 'unworthy' to reach out to people. Either way, it seems loneliness can break our hearts and adversely affect our physical and mental health.

Isolation is not a choice. It's a consequence of loss and distress in our lives and adds to challenges with our mental health. Conversely, authentic and meaningful social contact can increase our confidence and

self-worth, lower our stress hormones and promote wellbeing.

So how can we combat this hidden health burden and bring back joy to ease our pain?

We can feel loved by anyone. We're not talking about romantic love but the love between us – person to person. We all have the power to share that feeling. Warm human connections, conviviality, camaraderie – these qualities make us feel good and may help us live longer.

Our communities, which are often organised around a synagogue but equally can be found in schools, sports clubs, special interest groups or university JSocs, might be a powerful social key to unlock the power of connection and health. According to Rabbi Mirvis, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth: "A community is a place where you know you are welcome and if you are absent, you will receive a call to find out if you are well. In a community, you are not a mere statistic. You are appreciated and respected for being yourself." A report by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research on the mental health of the

UK's Jewish community confirms this view, suggesting that community membership offers a degree of practical support, welcome contact, opportunities to volunteer and, crucially, a general sense of purpose and belonging.

'Social capital' is a phrase that has been bandied about by politicians and lay leaders in recent years and refers to the value of social connection. It encapsulates how we feel about where we live, as well as those we meet. Capital is usually understood as the ability to use wealth to leverage privilege. However, social capital is not measured by finance but by people power. We can leverage social capital through our connections – by being with other people we trust and who respect and value us.

Jami offers social connection through our programme of online events and in person through our Head Room café and hub activities. Our Compeer befriending programme, which matches volunteers with service users, seeks to combine practical support with friendship to promote

independence and recovery while increasing social connections. Indeed, Jami's resources offer many individuals social capital – to those who use our services and those who offer them. We're a community and we need each other.

Rabbi Mirvis reinforces this view: "Across the UK, there's a great need for us all to play a part by investing in our local communities. Doing so can help protect our own mental health and can also contribute to an essential network of belonging, support and reassurance for all those who might be suffering intolerable pain and distress in silence. Such bonds of friendship can quite literally become a lifeline."

Indeed, we are all enriched by social connection and relationships. We're stronger together and can fuel and maintain social capital by kindness and action. So, leverage up your social capital and make those life-enhancing, perhaps even lifesaving, connections for others and for yourself. We have that power between us.

Where to get help with your mental health

If you or someone you know needs mental health help there are a variety of options depending on the issue of concern.

- **Jami Qwell** – free, safe, anonymous mental health counselling and online support from the UK's leading online mental health platform. To find out more go to qwell.io/jami
- **SHOUT** – 24/7 crisis text service – Text **Jami** to 85258
- **Jami** is here to help with mental health support: jamiuk.org/get-support/referral, call 020 8458 2223 or email info@jamiuk.org
- **Ring your GP or out-of-hours service for an emergency appointment**
- **Contact your Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) if you have one**
- **Samaritans** – Call Samaritans on Freephone 116 123 (24 hours a day)
- Call the **Papyrus HOPELINEUK**, on 0800 068 41 41 or text 07860 039 967 if you are under 35 and worried about how you are feeling. Or call if you are worried about a young person.
- Call **999** or **NHS Direct** on 111 (England) or 0845 46 47 (Wales)
- **Jewish Helpline** on 0800 652 9249 (Sunday-Thursday, 12pm-12am; Friday 12-3pm)
- Don't hesitate to call **999** in mental health emergencies



Conversation starters

We all have mental health and it is just as important as our physical health. Starting a conversation about mental health is an excellent way to challenge the stigma and to get people thinking and talking about their perceptions of mental health and mental illness.

We have put together some suggested conversation points that can be discussed over a Friday night meal, Shabbat lunch or even a pre-Shabbat Zoom!

1. Is mental health an important issue in your community? How does the community support our mental health or influence the way we think about it?
2. How does society view mental and physical health differently? Do you think the two should be addressed in the same manner? Why or why not?
3. What steps can be taken within your community to break down any stigma surrounding mental health?
4. In what ways do you engage with hobbies and interests that connect you with your community?



Mental wellbeing and Judaism

The sources below can be used as a starting point to discuss how mental wellbeing fits into religion and culture. How does Judaism recognise the importance of looking after ourselves? What ideas from Judaism can we use to boost our wellbeing?

You may want to think about other textual sources or ideas in Judaism which support wellbeing e.g. trying to use technology less or not at all over Shabbat can boost our mental wellbeing by giving us a break from screen-time. This gives us time to maximise face-to-face communication or focus our time on other hobbies and activities we enjoy.

A valuable lesson

“It is long past time for us all to break the silence and speak openly about mental illness. It is time for this last stigma to fall and fall quickly in the recognition that we are all created b’tzelem Elokim (in the image of G-d)” – Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot, 2001

A key part of education is leading from the front. Just by educating about mental health we are raising awareness that we all have mental health and we need to look after our wellbeing to maintain it. We are role modelling the importance of looking after ourselves and teaching a valuable lesson.

Do we have the concept of mental illness in Judaism?

Prayer for the sick

Refuat Ha’Nefesh, V’refuat Ha’guf / Healing the soul and healing the body

Judaism shows us a connection of healing the soul and healing the body; there is no division between mental and physical illness. There is only illness. Likewise, everyone has both physical and mental health which changes over time and needs looking after.

Does Judaism help?

“The support individuals derive from the members, leaders and clergy of religious congregations is widely considered one of the key mediators between spirituality and mental health. Spiritual or religious support can be a valuable source of self-esteem, information, companionship and practical help that enables people to cope with stress and negative life events” – Mental Health Foundation, The Impact of Spirituality on Mental Health.

Religion and culture can provide us with a sense of community and belonging. Within these communities we know that there are people we can turn to and trust when we need them.

How does Judaism help?

Pirkei Avot 1:6

Aseh Lecha Rav, V’Kneh Lecha Haver

Make for yourself a Rabbi (teacher) and acquire for yourself a friend.

We all need someone to talk to sometimes, whether we turn to a Rabbi or Rebbetzin for guidance or a friend for support. Most of us will have a community, family and friends who we can turn to.

Parshat Va’etchanan 5:12

Shamor et Yom HaShabbat

Keep (Guard) Shabbat

However we choose to mark Shabbat, Judaism recognises the need to “switch off” from our busy lives and reconnect with those around us. Whether we find comfort in or feel connected to familiar routines and rituals or choose not to use technology for a while, these are great ways to boost our mental wellbeing.

Guidelines for sharing lived experience

If you choose to tell your story on the Jami Mental Health Awareness Shabbat, here are a few suggestions to help you stay in control of what you share.

Spend time on this

Think about which parts of your story you wish to share and write a first draft. Put that away for a couple of weeks and then revisit it. Have you opened up about experiences that actually feel too raw to share with others? Can you make some edits and tweaks?

Keep it simple

A human story simply told has the power to grip an audience and capture both hearts and minds.

Expert by experience

You are an 'expert' on your lived experience. Don't forget that.

Set boundaries for questions

Decide what you are prepared to answer questions on and what you will not discuss.

People are naturally curious and their questions may feel too intrusive. So, decide if you are prepared to take questions after your talk. There may be areas that you do not wish to answer questions on. Some speakers, for example, who talk about their experience of eating disorders make it clear they are not prepared to answer questions about their weight or what they eat.

Be proud

Sharing your story is a courageous act. By sharing your account you will inspire those who listen, who also identify with lived experience of mental illness, and educate and inform others.

Reflect

Give your talk to a friend or relative and reflect on how telling your story makes you feel. Then imagine telling the same story to a room full of people. It will feel different, so if anything felt too triggering or made you feel vulnerable in front of one person, think about how you might feel in front of others.

Make final edits and practise

We suggest that you write and rehearse your story several times before it gets a public outing.

Personal stories

There are many online resources where people share their personal stories via video or on a blog which our communities can access. For example, Time to Change Wales and Mind both provide real life personal stories which can be found here:

timetochangewales.org.uk/en/personal-stories/

mind.org.uk/information-support/your-stories

Look after yourself

Whenever we're taking on something big, it's important that we make time to look after ourselves. Think about who you may want to spend time with or chat to after you've given the talk. Perhaps there's an activity or hobby that you really enjoy and would like to do. It's great to plan ahead with this to ensure you have the time to unwind.

Youth materials & ideas

This range of fantastic resources has been developed for use by teachers and youth leaders in the run up to the MHAS as well as throughout the year.

We hope these activities can support you in how you educate and talk about mental health with young people.

These resources can be used to develop your understanding of how a range of factors can contribute to young people's wellbeing.

We have provided you with practical examples of age-appropriate activities to promote wellbeing in young people which will work in both formal and informal education settings.



Guidelines and tips for

Speaking to young people about mental health and wellbeing

Why do we need to talk about mental health with young people?

- Rates of probable mental disorder increased between 2017 and 2021 in six to sixteen-year-olds from one in nine to one in six and in 17 to 19-year-olds from one in ten to one in six. (NHS Digital, 2021).¹
- A variety of stress and pressures on young people, including social media and technology, can affect their ability to cope and impact possible mental health issues.
- We know that most adults living with mental illness experienced their first mental health problems at a young age. In fact, 50% of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by the age of 14 and 75% by the age of 24.²
- If young people know that support is available for their mental health and they know where they can get this support, we help build the foundations for a better future.

How do we talk about it?

- We need to use boundaries when working with groups of young people. Setting out the aims for our conversations about the subject can help us stick to these parameters. Our aims for these sessions may be:
 - To raise awareness about mental health as something that affects us all
 - To encourage people to talk to each other rather than isolating themselves
 - To encourage the young person to seek help when they need it. If you broke your ankle you would not wait to see if it could get better on its own. We should take the same approach with our mental health
 - Use a 'light' voice when talking about the subject. If we convey anxiety or seem uncomfortable with the information, we give the impression that this is a hard or 'heavy' discussion

Key points to educate young people on mental health

- We all have mental health just as we all have physical health.
- Mental health is about the way we feel about ourselves and the world. Our feelings and thoughts are part of our mental health.
- No one can see inside our head, so we need to tell people how we feel.
- When our feelings and thoughts seem to be out of control or worry us we need to speak to a trusted adult. We may decide to speak to someone we know well and feel comfortable with, such as a parent or carer, grandparent or other family member or a school counsellor or teacher. There are also charities, such as ChildLine and Young Minds, where we can speak to someone anonymously.
- We can get help to get better when experiencing mental health problems.

How do we look after our mental health?

- Talk to our friends and socialise with people who make us feel good about ourselves.
- Make sure we get enough sleep and enough food to eat (we need to look after our minds as well as our bodies!).
- Social media can be a great way to socialise and films and TV can help us unwind but we do need to take regular breaks. We also need to be aware that light from phone screens and laptops or computers can interfere with a good night's sleep.
- Hobbies such as team sports, walking the dog, listening to music or expressing ourselves through art or writing can make us feel better and distract us from life's stresses.
- It's okay to speak to an adult we trust about how we feel.

¹NHS Digital, 2021

Primary school activities

Smile activity

Suitable for Year 1+

Ask everyone to think about one thing that makes them smile.

Ask who would like to share what makes them smile. They can also say why it makes them smile if they want to.

Ask why do we like to smile or make other people smile?

Option 1 (Shabbat appropriate)

Put out pictures of lots of different things that might make the children happy. For example, friends, animals, smiles, the sun, toys, yummy foods.

Make sure you have multiples of each picture in case more than one young person wants to use it.

Give each child an envelope/box or bag and ask them to put a few pictures into their new smile box. If you don't have an envelope/box or bag, you can ask them to choose their pictures and think about where they might put them so they can see them often or to keep them safe.

Remind them that they can always think about the things that make them smile or look in their smile box. This can be useful if you are having a day that is making your face frown or looking a bit sad. We all have those sorts of days sometimes and it is important to let our teachers, friends and parents or carers know.

Option 2 (Use art materials)

Provide art materials and paper that are age-appropriate for your group to use.

Encourage everyone to draw a few things that make them happy.

You can print off some of the ideas in option 1 to help prompt or remind them what they thought about at the start of the activity when we asked them what made them smile.

For older kids

If your group are older primary school children, you can ask them to create a smile poster to help make other people smile that can be helpful to them especially if they are having a difficult day.

Primary school activities

Mental health acrostic poems

Suitable for all years

Ask the group: “What is mental health?”

Collect their ideas on board/paper and make sure to explain that mental health is how we think, feel and behave in the world. Remind the group that we all have mental health, and it is just as important as physical health.

Give an example of how our mental health can impact our thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Such as, if we do badly on a test, we may think negative thoughts like “I am a failure” and that is likely to affect our feelings as we may feel sad or upset. This in turn will also impact our behaviour and we may lose motivation to do our work, try something new or socialise.

However, the opposite is also true. If we do well in a test, we will feel happier and have positive thoughts such as “I can do this!”. This will affect our attitude and behaviour as we might be more willing to engage with work or try and achieve something new.

Activity

In pairs or small groups, write down the word ‘MENTAL HEALTH’ vertically. For each word, try to think of a sentence that is mental health related to create a poem. Remember, poems don’t have to rhyme unless you want them to.

For younger children, you can do words rather than poem sentences.

Offer the pairs / groups the option to read out their poems to the wider group.

e.g.

My mental health is important to me
Everyone has it naturally
Needing to look after my mental health
Talking about it with somebody else
Awareness raising is the key
Letting someone know what it’s like to be me
Helping a friend or a listening ear
Everyone needs someone to hear
About how they think and feel
Let’s be honest mental health is real
Try out different things for self-care
Have a chat with your GP, if life is hard to bear

Primary school activities

Write a letter

Suitable for all years

Ask the group why it is important to look after our mental health. Ensure they understand that mental health is how we think, feel and behave in the world.

If no one is answering, suggest they discuss the question in pairs first and then feedback to the group.

Share that looking after our mental health is important, just like we look after our physical health. It allows us to do everything that is required of us, making sure we have the energy and motivation to do school work, socialise with our friends, help others, engage in extracurricular activities or hobbies, exercise, try new things, take time for ourselves etc. Looking after ourselves is also important to help us manage better when times are hard or we are struggling with something.

Explain that the word we use for looking after our mental health is self-care. We should all be practising self-care weekly but it is not a replacement for seeking help from a trusted adult or a GP if we need it. Some of us may need both.

Ask the group for some ideas for self-care. You could either gather these from the group and see if you can collect a self-care idea for every letter of the alphabet or suggest they work in partners, thinking of two things they already do and one thing they would like to try. Invite everyone to share at least one idea for self-care. See how many different ones you can collect.

Acknowledge if someone suggests talking to someone they trust or with a friend. Make sure this is included on your list.

Explain that talking is one of the most important forms of self-care and this may mean talking to an adult we trust, be it a parent or carer, teacher, youth worker or a healthcare professional like a doctor. We may need to talk to an adult when the situation is more than we can manage or requires extra support. At other times, speaking to a trusted friend may be helpful.

Activity

Ask the group to write a short letter to a friend who lives far away and is having a hard time at school. What would you include in the letter? What would you do to reassure your friend or offer advice?

If there is time, you can invite some of the group to read out some or all of their letter if they want to. Make this an option only.

Ask the group if there is a difference to how we speak to our friend in the letter when they need support and how we may speak to ourselves.

If no one suggests it, ask the group if we tend to be kinder and more understanding to our friends, then we would be to ourselves.

A great way to practise self-care is to remind ourselves to speak to ourselves like we would a friend.

For example, when we make a mistake or don't do as well as we hoped in an exam or piece of work, would we tell our friend they were stupid or should have tried harder? Or would we be kind to them and reassure them that no one noticed the mistake, that it wasn't a big deal and that there are things we can do so it doesn't happen again?

Primary school activities

Self-care bingo

Suitable for all years

Self-care bingo is a great activity for primary school / year 7 pupils to get them thinking and talking about what they've done recently to look after themselves. It could be spending time outdoors, listening to music or trying something new.

Aims and objectives

To encourage young people to compare and discuss with one another what they do for their own wellbeing.

Time required

Approximately 30 minutes

Resources required

Bingo cards and pens

Instructions

Explain to your pupils that you are going to play bingo with a twist!

Give everyone a self-care bingo card and a pen.

Each pupil should walk around the room and ask one another "What do you do for self-care?"

If someone's answer is on the sheet, write their name in the appropriate box and if not, write their idea at the bottom of the bingo card.

You can only ask each person once.

Keep playing until either a line or the whole page is completed.



Resources

Self-care bingo

Ate something delicious	Did something I've been putting off	Made a healthy food choice	Spoke to someone I trust	Took a nap
Said 'no' to something when I was busy	Practised mindfulness or yoga	Played a game	Watched a movie or TV show	Made a to-do list or organised something
Listened to music	Made a gratitude list	Pampered myself	Volunteered my time	Got creative with art materials
Took quiet time	Spent quality time with someone I love	Tried something new	Exercised	Had a hot drink
Read a book or magazine	Spent time outside	Went to bed early(ish)	Took a relaxing bath	Cut myself some slack

Primary school activities

What is mental health?

Suitable for Years 5 and 6

Part 1

1. Tell the group you would like them to complete the sentence 'mental health is...'
2. Use the range of adjectives listed below. You can stick these around the room or put them on pieces of paper on the floor. If you are using an online platform, put the words on a PowerPoint slide and share your screen.
3. Ask everyone to either pick an adjective up or pick one that completes the sentence.
4. Invite them to say why they chose it if they would like to.
5. When everyone who wants to speak has had their chance, explain that mental health is how we think, feel and behave in the world.

Adjective suggestions for completing the sentence:

Important

Necessary

Good

Scary

Bad

Misunderstood

Confusing

Interesting

Healthy

Boring

Part 2

1. Use one or both examples below to illustrate how our thoughts and feelings can change how we behave.
 - Ask them 'If you were all really noisy today and I wanted you to be quiet, how might I feel?'
 - When they say something like cross/angry/sad, ask them: 'Am I more likely to be nice to you and choose something fun to do, or might I be a bit more strict with you?'

OR

- If you are watching TV and someone comes in and changes the channel, how might you feel about that?
 - When they say something like annoyed/angry/upset, ask them: 'Are you more likely to politely ask for them to change it back, or might we raise our voices and shout or try and change it back ourselves?'
2. Explain that this shows how our mental health is important because it can change how we think and feel and that will change how we behave towards those around us.
 3. Use this as an opportunity to let them know that if they are not feeling good about something, instead of acting in a certain way we need to tell an adult we trust how we are feeling. No one can read our minds, so we need to tell people how we feel so they can help us.

Resources

What is mental health?

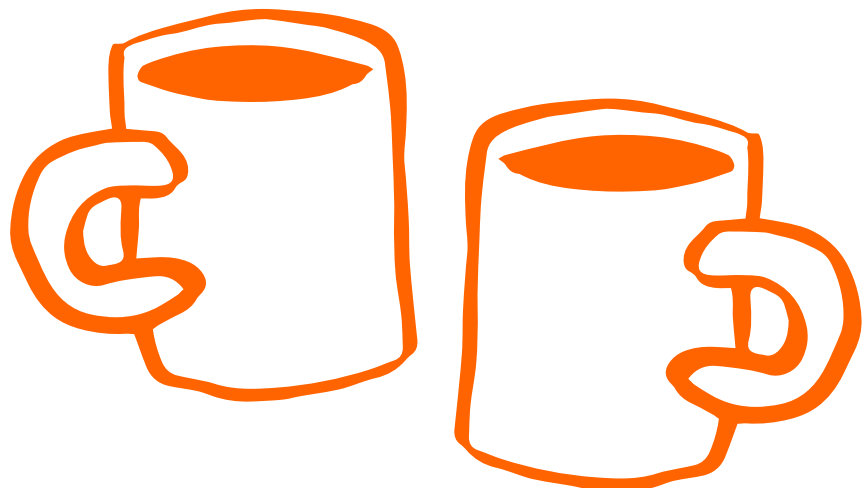
Important	Necessary	Good	Scary	Bad
Misunderstood	Confusing	Interesting	Healthy	Boring

Secondary school activities

Self-care conversation

Suitable for all years

1. Share the quote: **“You can’t pour from an empty cup.”**
2. Ask the group what their initial thoughts or reactions are.
3. Then ask if they think it is relevant to what we know about self-care or their age group in terms of self-care.
4. Acknowledge that at times it can be hard to prioritise looking after ourselves. This may be because we are very busy managing lots of pressures on our time.
5. Or it may be because we find ourselves trying to help other people so it’s hard to find time to look after ourselves.
5. Remind them that we all need to look after ourselves otherwise our batteries will run out. We all feel better when we are recharged.
6. In pairs, ask them to think about one thing they do for self-care and one thing they’d like to try out.
7. Ask the pairs to share back.



Secondary school activities

What is mental health?

Suitable for all years

1. Ask everyone to complete the sentence 'Mental health is...' with an adjective of their choice.
2. Go around the room and ask people to share the adjective that they would use.
3. Share some key messages about mental health as follows:
 - We all have mental health just as we all have physical health.
 - Mental health is about the way we feel about ourselves and the world.
 - Our feelings and thoughts are part of our mental health.
 - We need to look after our mental health, just as we would look after our physical health.
 - We can support our wellbeing by doing things we enjoy or help de-stress us.
 - No one can see inside our head, so we need to tell people how we feel.

OR

1. Ask everyone to complete the sentence 'Mental health is...' using a twitter format.
2. Ask them to consider what is the most important message about mental health as tweets have limited characters.
3. Encourage them to include hashtags.
4. If you have whiteboards or pieces of paper/pens this is a fun way to do it. Or you can ask people for their thoughts or if you're online to share them in the chat function.
5. Share some key messages about mental health as above.



Secondary school activities

Mythbusting mental health quiz

Suitable for all years

Part 1

Put your groups into teams. Depending on how many young people you have, there may need to be more than two teams.

Ask them to pick a team name.

Tell them that you will read a mental health quote to them and they will need to answer true or false.

Agree a way for the teams to answer. This could be hands up, a buzzer if you have one, a noise each team will make or someone from the team standing up.

If they get the answer right they are awarded a point.

If they can explain why or give more accurate information they will get an extra point.

After each myth is 'busted', use some of the key messages in the resources to provide more information.

You may want to think of a fun way to keep score. This can be done by keeping a score board or by assigning sweets/beads/buttons to each team: one per point.



Secondary school activities

Mythbusting mental health quiz

Suitable for all years

Mythbusting mental health quiz

(with key messages about each quote for you to share after each question)

Only some people have mental health – FALSE

We all have mental health in the same way that we all have physical health. They both need looking after as they can impact each other.

Our mental health changes over time – TRUE

Our mental health is always changing and will go up and down. Sometimes big life events or stresses may cause it to change. Other times it could be a build up of lots of little things in a short time period which impact our mental health.

I can look after my mental health – TRUE

This is the concept of self-care. There are things that we can do to help boost our mental health which can make us more productive and motivated and give us more energy. One of the most important forms of self-care is talking about our thoughts and feelings with a trusted adult. Part of looking after our mental health is also getting support from a medical professional if we are worried about our health.

We shouldn't talk about mental health – FALSE

It's really important that we talk about mental health. By speaking about it we teach others to do the same thing too.

When we talk about mental health we help combat stigma where people may not fully understand mental health and therefore treat people differently. It also helps to highlight how important it is that we look after our mental health and get support if we need it.

Mental health is as important as physical health – TRUE

Our mental health and physical health are equally important and make up our overall wellbeing. When our mental health isn't as good as it could be, it might start to affect our immune system so we're more likely to pick up a stomach bug or a cold. If our physical health needs a boost, it may start to impact our mental health and we may find our mood becomes lower or we become more stressed.

Mental health isn't the same as mental illness – TRUE

We all have mental health but we don't all have a diagnosis of a mental illness. It is thought that in this country one in four British adults experience at least one diagnosable mental health problem in any one year and one in eight 5-19-year-olds had at least one mental disorder when assessed in 2017.

Secondary school activities

Mythbusting mental health quiz

Suitable for all years

Stress won't impact my mental health – FALSE

Stress is one of the areas of our lives which is most likely to impact our mental health. If we think about the times when our mental health might have needed a boost, it's likely to be during times when we were stressed - possibly during exam season or when we had a deadline. If our stress levels are increasing and we're finding it difficult to manage, it's important that we talk to a trusted adult about it. They can help us think about ways to manage our stress. Having someone to talk to can also be good stress relief.

I shouldn't go to my GP about my mental health – FALSE

Our doctor is the right person to go to if we have concerns about our mental health. They are there for both our physical and mental health because, as we've seen, they are connected. A GP can help us think about who we can talk to or some self-care options and if needed, refer us to other professionals for further support.

Mental health can affect how I feel – TRUE

Mental health is all about how we think, feel and behave in the world so it is linked to how we feel. Our thoughts and emotions can be an indication of our mood and the state of our mental health.

My mental health can affect my physical health – TRUE

When our mental health needs a boost or our stress levels are high we may experience changes to our physical health. This is most likely to be headaches or aches and pains from being tense and stressed. Or being more likely to pick up a cold or stomach bug.

Part 2

After the quiz, ask the group why it is important to mythbust around mental health.

If needed, you can prompt them by thinking about where we get our mental health information and if it is always accurate.

If needed, suggest the group discusses the answers in pairs or smaller groups before sharing their thoughts.

As a whole group, think about what might happen if information is inaccurate. For example, people may not know where to get help, people might not look after themselves, stigma may increase, etc.

Secondary school activities

Mental health influencers

Suitable for Year 9+

1. Divide the students into small groups.
2. Assign each group one of the mental health influencers, which can be found in the resources below.
3. Tell them they will be taking part in a debate to find the most influential mental health influencer.
4. They will have 10 minutes to discuss in their teams why their influencer has contributed the most to mental health and raising awareness.
5. One by one, each team will have three minutes to pitch their argument to the other groups.
6. Let them know that when they have 30 seconds left of their pitch, you will raise your hand to warn them.
7. At the end, everyone has one vote but they can't vote for the person they pitched for. You can do this by raising hands, writing the name on a piece of paper or ticking a name off on a piece of paper, ballot style.
8. Count the votes and announce who was voted the most influential mental health influencer.
9. Open up the discussion about why it is important that we still educate and raise awareness about mental health.
10. Ask the group if they think this has improved in recent years and if they think we still need influencers for mental health and why.
11. Finish off the discussion by asking if influencers need to be high profile like the people we discussed. Help them think about what we could do to raise awareness.



Resources

Mental health influencers



Olly Alexander

Appearing on The Surgery and Years & Years, Olly Alexander spoke out about feeling like he couldn't tell anyone about his bulimia and self-harming. "All

throughout school I really struggled with mental health problems, loads of different things, and I never told anyone," he said. "Never told my mum. And I think, looking back, it began to eat away at me. I wish I had talked sooner."

Now, Olly knows the importance of speaking up, after seeking help from a therapist. "Today and for the rest of my life I think I'll be using the tools I've learnt from medical professionals, from what I've learnt from therapy, from what I've learnt from friends and talking about things."



Kristen Bell

In an interview with The Off Camera Show, Veronica Mars star Kristen spoke out about her anxiety and depression, and how nobody should feel

shame over taking medication to control their mental health.

"I got on a prescription when I was really young and I still take it today and I have no shame in that because my Mom had said to me, 'If you start to feel this way, talk to your doctor, talk to a psychologist, see how you want to help yourself,'" she said.

"If you do decide to go on a prescription to help yourself, understand that the world wants to shame you for that. But in the medical community, you would never deny a diabetic his insulin."

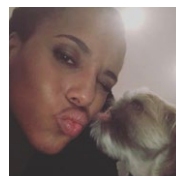


Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson

Appearing on an episode of Oprah's Master Class, Dwayne – who suffered from

depression in his early 20s – emphasised the importance of not hiding or being ashamed of mental health issues.

"I found that with depression, one of the most important things you could realise is that you're not alone," he said. "You're not the first to go through it; you're not going to be the last to go through it... I wish I had someone at that time who could just pull me aside and [say], 'Hey, it's gonna be okay. It'll be okay.' So I wish I knew that."



Kerry Washington

Speaking to Essence magazine, the Scandal star talked about her unhealthy relationship with food and

compulsive exercising.

"I used food as a way to cope - it was my best friend," she said. "I'd eat anything and everything, sometimes until I passed out."

"But then, because I had this personality that was driven toward perfectionism, I would tell people I was at the library, but instead go to the gym and exercise for hours and hours and hours. Keeping my behaviour a secret was painful and isolating. There was a lot of guilt and a lot of shame."

Kerry went to therapy after being approached by her dance teacher about her eating disorder. She continues to see a therapist – as well as a nutritionist – to help her communicate her feelings instead of using food as a crutch.

Secondary school activities

Mental health in the news

Suitable for Year 9+

Part 1

1. Show the group the different newspaper headlines which are reporting about mental health, in the resources below.
2. Ask them to suggest what the story behind the headline might be. They can work in teams to do this or as one big group.
3. You can prompt the discussion by asking:
 - What do we think the story is?
 - What does it tell us about mental health?
 - Do we think it is a positive/negative headline?
4. Once the headlines have been discussed, share with the group what the story actually is. It might not be what we thought.
5. Acknowledge that headlines can be misleading, especially if we only see headlines and don't read the full articles.
6. Ask the group what might be the impact on people reading these headlines? Do they get the full story? Is it easy to misinterpret or misunderstand what's being said?
7. Ask the group to consider if the articles were stigmatising in any way e.g. Do they encourage a negative perception about mental health or those with a mental illness? What might be the impact if the media is promoting or sharing inaccurate or harmful information?

Part 2

1. Ask each person to create their own media headline.
2. The headline could reflect something about young people's mental health which they think the general public should know.
3. If needed, start a discussion on what they, as young people, think adults should know about young people's mental health or the pressures or experiences of young people in the 21st century. They can use these ideas to create their headlines.



Resources

Mental health influencers

NHS staff taking 3.5 million sick days for mental health problems

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/nhs-staff-mental-health-sick-coronavirus-a9617806.html>

Prince William tells Peter Crouch it's not weak to share your feelings

<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/royal-family/prince-william-mental-health-peter-crouch-podcast-interview-duke-cambridge-a9642321.html>

'It all crumbled': pop stars on mental health in the age of Covid

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/aug/24/it-all-crumbled-pop-stars-on-mental-health-in-the-age-of-covid>

Study finds half of 16- to 24-year-olds hit by 'lockdown loneliness'

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jun/08/study-finds-half-of-16--to-24-year-olds-hit-by-lockdown-loneliness>

Teens' anxiety levels dropped in lockdown - study

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53884401>

Conversation starters

Suggested activity for university students

Starting a conversation about mental health is an excellent way to challenge the stigma and get people thinking and talking about their perceptions of mental health and mental illness.

Here are a few suggested conversation points relevant to university students.

1. What are the main concerns students have around their mental health?
2. How does engaging with university group activities support your mental health?
3. How can universities better support the mental health of their students?
4. What tips would you share with new/incoming students about looking after their mental health on campus?
5. How do you look after your mental wellbeing when preparing for the transition after finishing university?



Strength Card activity

Suggested activity for university students

University life is full of new opportunities to learn and have new experiences both in and out of the lecture theatre. This learning can help us develop and uncover strengths and transferable skills which will help us in all areas of our lives, as we move on from university life and into the workplace, further education, volunteering and with our relationships and self-development.

We know that acknowledging our strengths can help boost our confidence and self-esteem, while learning and having new experiences can boost our mental health and wellbeing.

To help you identify the strengths you already have and the ones you'd like to develop, try out our Strength Card activity.

Look at the list of strengths provided or cut them out and spread them across the table or floor.

- Ask everyone to think about three strengths they have. Give people the opportunity to speak about at least one strength they choose.
- Then, ask everyone to think about two strengths they would like to work on. Give people the opportunity to say why they would like this new strength for university life.
- Finally, ask everyone to think about one strength the person on their right has. Invite everyone to say why this person has this strength and why it is so valuable.



Resources

Strength card activity

Coherent	Well-prepared	Flexible	Confident
Charismatic	Knowledgeable	Dynamic	Concise
Understanding	Skilled	Genuine	Open
Enthusiastic	Good leader	Active listener	Friendly
Calm	Thoughtful	Creative	Open-minded
Respectful	Humorous	Personable	Intelligent
Holds boundaries	Patient	Organised	Focused
Inclusive	Authoritative	Encouraging	Accessible

Jewish identity and mental health

Suggested activity for university students

We acknowledge that our transitions to and from university, and the university experience itself, can be a particularly challenging time for our mental health.

So much of these transitions and our university experience force us to think about our identity, who we are and what kind of person we are striving to become.

To help you start thinking about this conversation, we would suggest the following activity:

Activity 1

Spread the words out face down randomly on the table (or floor) in front of you. Invite everyone in your group to pick one up and share it with the others. Discuss how the word on your card influences your identity and impacts your mental health as you transition to or from university or while you are still there.



Resources

Jewish identity and mental health

LGBTQ+	Race and ethnicity	'Jewishness'	Studying
Exams	Employability	Friendship circles	Relationships
Parents' expectations	Workplace expectations	Transition to or from university	Money / finances

**Young.
Jami**

Young adults

In collaboration with Young Jami

Being open to talking about our mental health and listening to others can help us maintain a positive state of wellbeing and help to break down the stigma that surrounds mental health. Continuing these conversations is more important now than ever.





Young adults

In collaboration with Young Jami

Wellbeing balloon debate

There are many different ideas about types of wellbeing or wellness. For this activity we will be looking at the 5 steps to mental wellbeing from the NHS, which you can find on page 7 of the toolkit. This activity can be carried out in the workplace with colleagues or socially in a group setting.

- For the balloon debate, divide your group into five separate groups and assign each group one “way to wellbeing”.
- Let them know that their job is to advocate for why their way to wellbeing is the most important for their mental health. To prove this, they will need to include examples of how their way to wellbeing could be achieved.
- The debate should be structured with short opening remarks, a maximum five-minute pitch and a few minutes for questions from the other side. If possible, have someone to referee the debate and keep time.
- Allow your groups at least 10 minutes to prepare for their debate. When everyone is ready, groups take it in turn to debate with each other. The winner of each debate goes on to the second round until there is one winner.



You can use some of the following ideas about the 5 steps to mental wellbeing and prompts to help your groups get started.

1. Connect with other people

We know connection and community are vital for our mental health. Good relationships can boost our mental health by fostering a sense of belonging and building confidence. It also helps us create bespoke support networks which we can rely on when we need them.

- How can we connect with others in and out of the workplace?
- What support networks are available in the Jewish community?

2. Be physically active

Physical activity is important for both our physical and our mental health. It can help us build confidence and self-esteem. It can also challenge us in a positive way and motivate us to reach our goals. We also know that it can be an important form of self-care and help boost our mood.

- Does physical activity provide us with the opportunity to socialise and interact with others? What are some examples of this?
- Are there other aspects of physical activity that can boost our wellbeing?

3. Learn new skills

Being involved in meaningful activity can provide a sense of purpose, which is vital for our mental health. Likewise, new skills can increase our problem-solving skills and encourage us to be creative. It may also boost our self-confidence when we find success at something we previously found challenging.

- What avenues for learning can be found within our workplace?
- How can we use our hobbies to support our wellbeing?

4. Give to others

Those who volunteer and give to others report higher levels of wellbeing. It can help us feel connected and foster a sense of community. It can create a sense of reward and provide us with a sense of purpose too.

- How can we support one another within our community?
- How does volunteering give us a sense of purpose?

5. Pay attention to the present

Mindfulness is all about being in the present moment. We know that for many, being more mindful can improve their wellbeing. By being more mindful we can boost our mood and enjoy the present moment more fully. It may help us understand ourselves and those around us better too. By being mindful we may be able to slow down and approach challenges in a more thoughtful way too.

- How can we encourage each other to be more mindful?
- What options for mindfulness might exist within our workplace or community?

Sermon

**Rabbi Joseph Dweck, Senior
Rabbi S&P Sephardi**

“It is not what you look at that matters. It’s what you see.”

- Henry David Thoreau

In his book *Musicophilia*, Oliver Sacks writes about the way in which the human mind processes music. He describes the various pathologies of the brain that inhibit a person’s ability to appreciate music’s full impact. The brain employs many different areas of function in order to “hear” music. When just one of these areas falter, the music can be lost to the listener.

While those conditions are biological, Sacks records cases in which people, either through personal choice or as a result of psychological conditions, lose their appreciation for music. He indicated points in his life when he had, while experiencing depression, lost his own ability to enjoy music.

Similarly, at the beginning of *Va’era*, Moshe speaks to the Children of Israel of freedom, love, future and hope. We are told, however, that they could not “hear” him. Because of their workload, stresses and the pressures of slavery, they could not appreciate the great realities which were the music of Moses’ words.

Their inability to hear him was not because they intentionally disregarded him. On the contrary, it was due to “truncated spirits and difficult work”. They had lost their inner capacity to respond to the promises of love and hope.

It is important to recognise that so much of the quality of our life depends on our own inner ability to “appreciate the music”. Often we believe that our perception of a situation is the reality. However, we all have a lens through which we interpret what happens to us. That lens is the mind – the great “ear”

through which we hear the music of life – our most precious possession and the key to our freedom.

At some point in our lives, most of us will experience a level of anxiety, depression or other forms of inner darkness. It is important not to refrain from speaking about the challenges of our inner life, and from seeking help in dealing with them.

We must focus on this critical line in the parashah that tells us why the Israelites did not listen to Moses.

The Israelites’ mental health had been compromised and weakened as a result of relentless and meaningless labour, persecution and trauma. It was not that they did not care. It was that they did not at the time have the ability to take in the music. Their oppression and suffering was not only physical, but also mental and Moses had to liberate them from both.

Often, the story of the Exodus is as much about lifting the spirit as it is about liberation from physical confines. This teaches us that without the mind’s delicate and unfathomably complex ability to receive, the Israelites could not hear the call of hope and redemption that Moses was singing to them. Likewise, without well-nourished and cared-for minds, we will not grasp the music of our own lives that G-d is playing all around us. Paying attention to the maintenance of the mind - our “mental health” – is one of our most critical tasks, for every dimension of our lives.

This Shabbat we focus on our mental wellbeing and what we can do as a community to provide the resources and support necessary for those who struggle, and to heal the “stigma” attached to mental health. This Shabbat we are encouraged to pause and hear the Torah’s outcry to us to foreground mental wellbeing in our communal consciousness and dialogue.

Sermon

Rabbi Dr Margaret Jacobi, Birmingham Progressive Synagogue

This week's sidra begins in an enigmatic way, as G-d explains to Moses that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had known G-d by a different name, El Shaddai, and not by the name that was revealed to Moses, YHVH. The relationship between G-d and the Jewish people was entering a new phase and G-d would come to be understood in a different way, as an Eternal and mysterious G-d, who could not be fully known.

The rabbis understood the names El Shaddai and YHVH to represent different aspects of G-d. El Shaddai is sometimes translated as "G-d Almighty", powerful and sometimes destructive. On the other hand, YHVH, (which came to be pronounced Adonai) best translated as "The Eternal One" came to represent G-d's compassion and lovingkindness, as expressed in words which we recite during the High Holydays: "YHVH, the Eternal One, is compassionate and merciful..." (Ex. 34:6).

Later in the sidra, we read about the first of the plagues with which G-d afflicted the Egyptians. Throughout Egypt, the plagues struck everyone alike, rich and poor, innocent and guilty. We are just emerging from the plague of Covid, although it is not yet completely over. Like the Egyptians, we have all suffered. Whether the illness affected us badly or not, the stresses of the past few years have taken their toll, especially for those who were bereaved or suffer from 'long Covid.' Another group who have been particularly hard hit are teenagers, whose schooling and social life have been badly affected. We know that mental illness amongst young people has soared during and after the pandemic, when isolation

and uncertainty added to the stresses they already faced.

Now, we are facing a crisis of poverty which makes life incredibly difficult for those who are already the poorest. That, too, is taking its toll on our mental health and in the depth of winter gloom, many will suffer both physically and mentally.

Just as the plagues that afflicted the Egyptians took many forms, so mental illness can take many forms. It is not always a result of stress. Sometimes it can arise out of the blue in people who are seemingly well and happy. But it is made worse by the stresses we face. When life already looks bleak, mental illness can make it seem even darker.

At such times, if we have a conventional religious faith, it may give us strength. But G-d can also seem judgmental and we may even think that we are being punished – even if we do not know what we have done wrong. It can help to remember that G-d is YHVH, a compassionate and caring G-d. As Israel Mattuck wrote: "There are sorrows whose roots the sympathy of best friends cannot reach. There are burdens so heavy that no human being can help to lift or bear them... What must it mean to such people to know and to feel that One greater than any human being is there with as sympathy silent, but how tender.... One to whom a heart can pour out its torrents of bitterness without words. A Friend with the tenderness of a mother, and with an understanding that is infinite."

At the same time, whether or not we find the comfort Mattuck writes of, we also need human help. Despite greater awareness, mental health still carries a stigma. Jami, the charity which aims to increase awareness of mental illness and offer mental health support to the Jewish community, has designated this Shabbat as Mental Health Awareness Shabbat. The charity offers

support to people living with mental ill health, whatever form it takes. It also offers education to teenagers and adults. It helps us recognise and acknowledge when we are in need. It also helps us to learn about the best way to support those who are in need are suffering. In the book of Job, we learn that his friends came and sat silently with him for seven days and nights until he spoke. To support someone means to be with them, responding to their needs and being ready to listen. Words can be difficult and inadequate, but being there matters.

The Israelites did finally experience redemption. Although at first they could see no hope 'mikotzer ruach – from shortness of spirit' – which we may understand as despair, they did in the end find light and hope. So we pray that all who are suffering from despair and hopelessness may find their spirit renewed. The Jewish prayer for healing asks for 'refu'at hanefesh u'refuat haguf – healing of the body and healing of the spirit'. This Shabbat may we reach out to those in need of healing of the spirit, so that the prayer may be fulfilled for all in need of healing that they may be healed.

Sermon

Rabbi Robyn Ashworth- Steen, Manchester Reform Synagogue

"I can't do it." "I'm not good enough." "Please, not me." "They can do it better". How often do these types of thoughts cross our minds? Thoughts of self-deprecation or judgemental, negative voices determining that we are less than. They act as an invitation into a darkness where our goodness and beauty are not to be seen. They also act as a red flag that our mental health may need attention – a sign that something is off balance and we are reacting in the only way we know how – to chastise ourselves. But what if there was another way of responding when these thoughts arrive? What if, instead of accepting the thoughts and adding to them, we chose another path – that of self-compassion and turning towards community? Of course, life is messy, often unfair and painful. We don't have the privilege of simply choosing to be happy or turning negativity into positivity. But we can accept the messiness and the pain as being part of the human condition and bring compassion and community to the party of the many emotions we hold each moment. We can choose to prioritise our mental health without shame and judgment.

To help us explore this alternative path let's turn to Moses. For rather than our spiritual teacher, father and ancestor being a perfect, saint-like role model for us, we see his humanity and our own. In Parashat Vaera, firstly, we hear the groaning of the Israelites – their pain given the circumstances of their slavery and the oppression they were under. Many times throughout the Torah we hear, alongside G-d, the crying of the Israelites and our ancestors. We hear Abraham weep following the death of Sarah. We listen to the deep darkness of Jeremiah's struggle with his place and role. We sit alongside Job

as he screams out: "Why me?" Why do bad things happen to good people? We sit with Rizpah as she mourns for her sons. And we stand here alongside Moses as he also asks G-d, twice in this parashah - "Why me?" I can't barely talk – let someone else lead the Israelites."

In each of these modelling of humanity, we see a part of us. A real, messy, insecure emotional part. There is no pretence that life is anything other than complicated and through seeing our ancestors' struggle, we are liberated to step into our own without judgment. Indeed, our very name, Israel, means, literally, one who struggles with G-d. We are strugglers – finding our way through our lives with all its pain and beauty. As the writer Glennon Doyle succinctly wrote:

I don't think that I'm broken at all. I no longer think that I'm a mess. I just think I'm a deeply feeling person in a messy world.

We are not broken for feeling feelings. We are, as Doyle also writes, responding appropriately to a broken world. What Moses and all of our ancestors teach us is that we are never to blame for any emotion we hold. Emotions arise naturally in us. In it is our reaction to our emotions where we can cause further harm – these secondary emotions. We feel sad so we judge ourselves for not being able to be the happy person we feel we should be. We feel scared so we feel ashamed at not being strong enough. We feel angry so we separate ourselves from those around us to prove that we are unloveable. We turn our initial, human, natural emotions into something to beat ourselves with. We use them as weapons against ourselves to critique our worth and value.

What if, instead, we chose another way? In the parashah, straight after Moses' first questioning of his own value, we read a

long list of tribes and their children, and the families of Moses and Aaron. Whilst this roll call feels like an interruption of the story, it is vital to it for it is a response to Moses' fear – "you are not alone – here is your community," the text says.

Judaism recognises the struggle and beauty of living our lives and through prayer, law, custom and ritual it keeps insisting, in the words of Hillel, the 1st century sage, that we do not separate ourselves from our community. Yes, this is hard. Being with people when we are in pain is complex. But we also know that connection is the balm to moments of shaky mental health. Recognising that we are part of something bigger than ourselves and that everyone is putting one foot in front of the other – this is

vital to helping us to take that next step and find liberation. It moves us from me to we – from an individual suffering to a community of people who struggle, care and act for each other. We can then find our power and can recognise where, instead of individual blame, the broken parts of society mean our pain is inevitable and action is needed.

May we be able to find and step into community, wherever and whatever that means to us. May we turn to compassion rather than judgment. May we each find the courage to feel our feelings and turn from self-blame to action towards a better, more whole world for all.

Sermon

Rabbi Oliver Joseph, Masorti Judaism

וְגַם אֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת־נֹאקֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֲשֶׁר מִצְרִים מַעֲבִדִּים אֹתָם וְאֶזְכֹּר אֶת־
בְּרִיתִי: וְלֵכֵן אֶמַּר לְבְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי ה'
וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלַת מִצְרַיִם
וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִמַּעַבְדֵּיהֶם וְגָאֹלְתִּי
אֶתְכֶם בְּזְרוֹעַ נְטוּיָה וּבְשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים:

EXODUS 6:5-6

I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am ה'. I will free you from the labours of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements.

SHEMOT RABBAH 6:4

וְעַל זֶה נֶאֱמַר: וְגַם הִקְמַתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי, שֶׁנִּתְּנָה לָהֶם כְּמוֹ שֶׁאִמְרַתִּי לָהֶם שֶׁאֶתְּנוּ לָהֶם אֶת הָאָרֶץ וְלֹא הִרְהַרוּ אַחֲרָי. וְגַם אֲנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת נֹאקֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, לְפִי שֶׁהָיוּ לֹא הִרְהַרוּ אַחֲרָי, וְגַם אִף עַל פִּי שֶׁיִּשְׂרָאֵל שִׁבְּאוֹתָיו הִזְוֹר לֹא הָיוּ נוֹהֲגִין כְּשׁוֹרָה, שֶׁמַּעֲתִי נֹאקֶתָם בְּעִבּוּר הַבְּרִית שֶׁכָּרַתִּי עִם אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם, הִדָּא הוּא דְכָתִיב (שְׁמוֹת ו, א ג, יד): וְלֵכֵן ה': וְאֶזְכֹּר אֶת בְּרִיתִי. לָכֵן אֶמַּר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֲנִי לָכֵן אֶלֶּא לְשׁוֹן שְׁבוּעָה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שְׁמוּאֵל נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְבֵית עֲלִי, נִשְׁבַּע הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁיִּגְאֹלֵם, שֶׁלֹּא יִירָא מִשָּׁה שְׁמָא מִדַּת הַדִּין יַעֲכֹב גְּאֻלְתָּו. וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלַת מִצְרַיִם, אֲרִבַּע גְּאֻלוֹת יֵשׁ כָּאֵן, וְהוֹצֵאתִי, וְהִצַּלְתִּי, וְגָאֹלְתִי, וְלִקְחֹתִי. כְּנֶגֶד אֲרִבַּע גְּזֵרוֹת שֶׁגִּזְרָה עֲלֵיהֶן פְּרָעָה. וְכִנְגְּדוֹן תִּקְנֻ חֻכְמַיִם אֲרִבַּע כּוֹסוֹת בְּלִיל הַפֶּסַח, לְקַיֵּם מָה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (תְּהִלִּים קטז, יג): כּוֹס יִשׁוּעוֹת אֲשָׁא וּבִשְׁם ה' אֶקְרָא, וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת יְדִי, אֲעֲשֶׂה לָהֶם מָה שֶׁאִמְרַתִּי לְאֲבוֹתֵיהֶן שֶׁאֶתְּנוּ לָהֶם אֶת הָאָרֶץ וְהָיוּ יוֹרְשִׁין אוֹתָהּ בְּזִכְיוֹתָו.

“We are going to fix this.” “We are going to make this better.” That is the language of a good supportive friend, partner, parent or another person. The reality we know is that “getting better” or “fixing” any part of ourselves is in fact a long and often tough journey.

Our Parashat this week, Parashat Vaera, begins with the laying down of some of the plans for the Exodus from Egypt, the big and dramatic exit of the Israelite tribes from their slavery. G-d’s language is of reassurance to Moses that the Israelites will be freed from Egypt and released from slavery but the reality is that the journey is more complex than perhaps either Moses or G-d anticipate.

Ten plagues later and after lot of kvetching (trouble and strife) the Israelites finally get

released and then chased out of town.

There is a good model here in this Parashat for our own personal journeys to healing and recovery: first, call out; second, make a plan; third, carry out plan.

Start at the top. Crying out is the only way we can begin. When we are suffering, often-times, saying out loud that we are in tough times is the hardest and most frightening of steps. Sometimes, even when we say we are in trouble, it takes time for those around us to actually, clearly hear our words. Finding a way to tell those closest to us or support organisations like Jami about our trouble and our distress is a crucial step on a path to finding the support we need and better mental health.

The second part is making a plan. The exchange between Moshe and G-d is a dynamic exchange. Moshe is 'כַּבִּד־פָּה', cannot speak up with any ease and he is anxious about the mission he is assigned. G-d, too, has likely underestimated the scale of the project he has taken on, how tough Pharaoh is going to be and how unruly our Israelite people are going to be. Despite the challenges, a plan is laid out and like all best laid plans, they will be changed and adapted as you go. This too is the story of finding support and gaining strength; that often our immediate plan of action might actually not be the final plan that crosses us back into a world of good mental health and managing the pressures that our life presents. Our Parashat teaches us flexibility and adaptability as a core part of the journeys in our life.

The third part is Exodus, when we actually get there. We've done the work, our life is back on track, we are feeling healthier and more balanced out. It is here that celebration and storytelling come into play. It was Miriam and the Israelite women who went out of Egypt with musical instruments for celebration. They went out of Egypt with great faith that there would be celebration around the corner and they were not disappointed. The point here is how important celebration is. When we reach milestones, we must find even the smallest way to celebrate ourselves and mark progress. The Israelites knew this

and in the ark of Jewish history, this is what our festivals are there for. We are here, in strength, let's celebrate!

Our Passover Seder, which we will celebrate in the spring, embodies each of these parts. We retell this story of crying out, of journey and adaptability and of celebration. We double down on celebration by putting four cups on the Seder table which, too, mark the stages of this journey from slavery and suffering to freedom.

This Shabbat we are marking Mental Health Awareness Shabbat. In part this Shabbat is a celebration of all the work Jami is doing in our community. It is also an opportunity to share stories of tough times that each of us have faced individually, sharing some of our own journeys from darker to brighter days in the hope that more people who are struggling right now can cry out and say: "I am in a tough place". Talking about mental health has always been hard and for this reason it is on all of us to raise our awareness of how many people are in tough times at the moment and make clear that there is support for us in our Jewish community.

The journey is not simple but it is a path worth treading: cry out, speak up, make a plan, celebrate moments of strength and achievement on your path to better days. This Shabbat and going forward we are celebrating you and here in your support.

Sermon

Rabbi Dr Samuel Landau, Barnet United Synagogue and Clinical Psychologist

One of the most powerful things that I can do as a Rabbi is to hold another human being in mind. Some people think that the role of a Rabbi is to lead services, officiate at life events or be an inspirational teacher. While all those things are true, possibly an even greater impact someone can have on another's life is to send a short message, "I am thinking of you." Whether it is following an operation and checking on recovery, after a holiday and seeing whether the required level of relaxation was reached or simply knowing that someone has been facing a challenging time (as we all do) and seeing how today is going – this is the mark of a pastoral leader.

We do not have to look far within the Torah to see an example of this. Indeed, it is an account that fills the section of our Rosh Hashana prayers concerned with G-d's Zichronos – literally translated as, "Memory", referring to G-d holding someone else in mind. The person involved is Noah.

Put yourself in Mr and Mrs Noah's shoes for a moment. They had put themselves at odds with the society around them; holding onto ethics and values that the rest of the world had cast aside. With Divine guidance they had built an ark, gathered the animals two by two (or seven by seven) and been cast upon the open floodwaters. For 40 days and nights the sky was darkened with clouds and the little ark was hurled across the deep. Time passed, the rains stopped but still the waters remained and G-d did not offer an olive branch of hope. Mr and Mrs Noah may have felt lost, low and lonely. They may have felt helpless and hopeless. Then something happens:

וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ וְאֶת־כָּל־הַחַיָּה וְאֶת־כָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בַּתֵּיבָה וַיַּעֲבֵר אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ עַל־הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁכּוּ הַמַּיִם:

Genesis 8:1

G-d remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark, and G-d caused a wind to blow across the earth, and the waters subsided.

The first thing that happens is that G-d remembers Noah. He is no longer alone.

What causes loneliness? (adapted from Mind)

Loneliness has many different causes, which vary from person to person. We don't always understand what it is about an experience that makes us feel lonely.

For some people, certain life events may mean they feel lonely, such as:

- experiencing a bereavement
- going through a relationship break-up
- retiring and losing the social contact you had at work
- changing jobs and feeling isolated from your co-workers
- starting at university
- moving to a new area or country without family, friends or community networks

Other people find they feel lonely at certain times of the year, such as around Rosh Hashana or Pesach.

The relationship between loneliness and mental health (adapted from executive summary)

In 2022, a government department commissioned an in-depth report into better understanding loneliness. It looked at the experiences of loneliness among those who had experienced a mental health condition.

Participants did not always describe themselves as feeling “lonely”. Instead they talked about feeling isolated, alone, or being a loner. Other ways in which participants talked about the lack of connection they felt in their lives was to describe not having anyone they could turn to for emotional support, or feeling like a burden on those they had existing connections with.

Across the sample there was a spectrum of experiences of loneliness. Those who were most lonely described feeling isolated, with no close friends or supportive others. Participants in this group tended to have depression and be in the middle-aged or retired life stages. At the other end of the spectrum, the least lonely people were those with a wider social network, including close connections who provided emotional support. Participants in this group tended to have experienced anxiety and depression and were found across all life stages. For this group, periods of loneliness correlated with poor mental health. In between these groups were people with a few close connections, and a small number of supportive others. However, these social connections were not always able to provide the level of support participants needed.

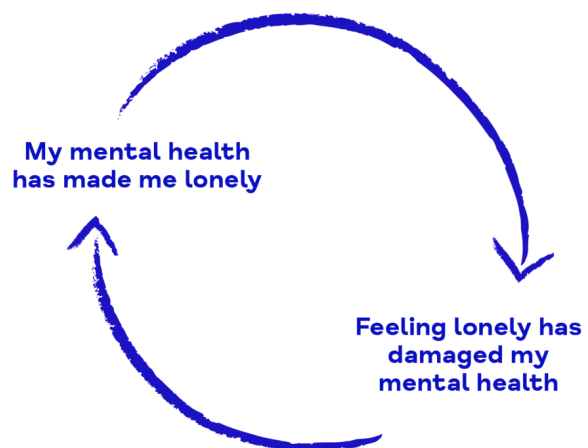
The relationship between loneliness and mental health was bidirectional and cyclical. Participants described the following ways in which mental health issues could lead to greater feelings of loneliness:

Mental health conditions reduced capacity for social interaction. Low mood could lead to feeling disconnected from others or simply feeling too exhausted to engage with others. Public spaces for socialising could also feel overwhelming.

Negative perceptions about themselves or others could lead to withdrawal. Mental health conditions were associated with feelings of low self-esteem and participants worried about the stigma they might experience if they revealed their mental health issues.

Not being able to share that they were struggling with others, and feeling the need to hide mental health symptoms for fear of being seen as a “downer” could also lead to feelings of loneliness. Maintaining a pretence of being fine when around others was exhausting and unsustainable for participants, leading to them withdrawing from social contact instead.

On the other side, loneliness could also lead to a decline in mental health. This happened where participants had more time alone to ruminate on negative thoughts; where they lost confidence in their ability to socialise, leading to low self-esteem; and where not talking about their feelings led to them feeling even more overwhelmed.



Loneliness can be hard, whether we are experiencing a mental health condition or not.

Rashi on the verse we mentioned earlier gives us a powerful insight into the feelings that Noah was experiencing. The typical way to read the verse is that G-d remembers Noah, holds him in mind, and so causes a wind (ruach) to blow that somehow dries the waters. However, this word can also mean 'spirit', not just wind. And that is the explanation that Rashi chooses:

וַיַּעֲבֵר אֱלֹהִים רוּחַ. רוּחַ מְנַחֵם וְהַנְחָה עָבְרָה לִפְנָיו

**AND G-D MADE A WIND (or SPIRIT) TO PASS —
A spirit of comfort and relief passed before Him.**

G-d did not simply remember Noah. G-d cheered Noah up. He sent a spirit comfort. The Gur Aryeh explains that Rashi had to interpret the verse like this. If the translation was 'wind' and referred to an attempt to dry the waters, it would not work very well. Blowing at water simply causes it to spread from one place to the other. It does not make it dry. Therefore, Rashi had to understand a deeper message in this verse, that G-d came to cheer Noah from his low-mood and loneliness. It is a gentle and inspiring message.

Over the past few years, so many of us have felt lonely. The social isolation of Covid has hurt. Let's take a leaf out of G-d's book and resolve to do *one* thing this week differently. Let's resolve to pick up the phone to somebody that might need it and say, "I'm thinking of you".

Mental Health Awareness Shabbat

**20-21 January
2023**

**Save
the date**

**For the next
MHAS
19-20 January
2024**



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