SHARE THE JOURNEY

What is it all about?

Each year in NSW, Mental Health Month is celebrated throughout the month of October. The aim of this month is to encourage all of us to reflect on our mental health and wellbeing, but also; include the month’s message in our everyday lives. It helps us, whether we have a lived experience of mental illness or not, to think about the importance of looking after our mental health and wellbeing.

Connecting with others is important for our health and survival. Research tells us that feeling connected, valued and loved by others gives us a sense of security, support, purpose and happiness. Close connections and good relationships with others allows us to enjoy the good times in our lives and helps us deal with the hard experiences we face. This is important for all of us!

Unfortunately in today’s society, we have many demands on our attention and time, and more people experience loneliness in Australia than ever before. For those experiencing or living with mental illness, loneliness can be far worse as individuals can face social exclusion, stigma and discrimination. As social beings, this can affect all aspects of our wellbeing.

To help encourage people to connect with others, the theme for Mental Health Month is:

Share the Journey

This theme focuses on the importance of social connections in:

1. Our journey to better mental health and
2. Our ability to cope with life’s challenges.

Good social connections not only improve our overall mental health and wellbeing; they also build our resilience.

MENTAL HEALTH MONTH - Share the Journey
Supportive relationships improve our ability to cope with life’s challenges and stressful events. In fact, social connection is a key factor that helps us to develop our resilience (APA, 2017). Resilience is very important for everyone because it is the ability to prepare for, deal with and move on from events that can affect all parts of our health – the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

You may ask, how does connecting with others improve resilience?

Loving and trusting relationships can encourage and motivate us, help remove our doubts and fears, and give us hope in difficult situations. Positive connections with family, friends and the wider community also helps individuals to better deal with life’s challenges and have people to look up to as role models (APA, 2017). Accepting help and support from people we’re close to can also strengthen our resilience.

Positive social relationships are important when we experience mental health difficulties. Connecting with others and being included in the community helps with recovery and staying well longer. Sharing stories with others who face/faced similar challenges is also very valuable as individuals are able to connect through experience, and build relationships of understanding and support.

Share the Journey by Offering a Helping Hand

There are many ways that we can share the journey with others, not only to improve our mental health and wellbeing but also those we connect with. One way is by offering a helping hand and giving more of our time to people and the community. This can be small everyday actions like holding the door open for someone or larger commitments like volunteering for a cause you’re passionate about.

We can also help others out by checking-in with them and offering support. This lets us start conversations around mental health, break down stigma around mental illness and build closer connections with others.

Giving a helping hand not only improves our wellbeing, it also strengthens our connections with ourselves, others and the broader community. We can also develop a greater sense of meaning in life and feel connected to something bigger than ourselves (APS, 2016). No matter the action, giving can be life-changing.

The ‘Balcony People’ are people and relationships in our life that cheer us on. They support us, inspire us, acknowledge us and encourage us— as if cheering us from the balcony of life’s stage.

Joyce Landorf Heatherly 1989
Mental Health - a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community (WHO, 2001).

Mental Distress - a term used to describe the resulting experience a person may be having rather than a diagnostic term. Can occur at any point of the wellness to illness spectrum.

Mental ill-health - When our ability to think, feel and respond to others is interfered with. This often occurs in response to life events and stressors and may resolve over time or when stress is reduced. If ongoing or getting worse, a mental health problem can become a mental illness.

Mental Illness - is a clinically diagnosable illness that significantly interferes with an individual’s cognitive, emotional or social abilities. The diagnosis of mental illness is generally made according to the classification system of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). Mental Illness are diverse and each of these can occur with a varying degree of severity.

Some examples of mental illness include Anxiety Disorders, Depression, Bipolar Disorder, psychotic disorders (such as Schizophrenia), eating disorders and personality disorders.

Having patience is essential for our everyday lives particularly for building social connections and resilience. It is being able to accept and handle difficult situations without overwhelming yourself with anger, frustration or other negative emotions. Patience allow us to show kindness, concern, understanding and forgiveness to others. This can help us have better relationships with people and help us support individuals who are facing challenges – a perfect way to share the journey!

When it comes to our mental health, practicing patience doesn’t only apply to ourselves but also when we are supporting others in their mental health journey. When we face situations that can test our mental health resilience, it is often easy for us to develop assumptions that lead to negative thought patterns on both ourselves and on others. In such circumstances, approaching conversations and situations with a non-judgemental approach and being mindful of the present is also an example of practicing patience.

Patience and resilience are also connected. Practicing patience can help us to cope better with stressful and upsetting times, by allowing us to feel less impacted by initial negative emotions and stress which are key factors that affect our mental health. This is a reason why patience can be so important for a person recovering from mental illness as it can help individuals stay hopeful in tough times.

We can practice patience everywhere and anywhere we choose. It can be in situations like sitting in traffic, waiting in a queue, supporting a loved one or finding the right help for your mental health. So remember the importance of patience the next time you are annoyed with yourself, others or a frustrating situation – it can change your journey.

Remember to give yourself and others the time.
Do you need some more help?

Sometimes our biggest priority will be getting some help for things that are causing us problems or for changes in the way we are feeling and thinking.

Often, a good first step is having a chat to a local doctor who can refer you to someone who can help. You may be able to obtain a Medicare rebate for some sessions with a psychologist when your GP develops a management plan.

For more information on how to find help, call the Mental Health Information Service on 1300 794 991 (9am – 5pm, Monday - Friday) or the NSW Mental Health Line on 1800 011 511 (24hrs). Another option is to go online for more information on mental health services via - wayaheaddirectory.org.au

If you would like more information regarding mental health, support or about maintaining wellbeing visit our website wayahead.org.au to download and view our numerous factsheets and support programs.

If you need to talk to someone now call Lifeline on 13 11 14

If you are from a culturally or linguistically diverse background, contact the Transcultural Mental Health Centre (TMHC) Information and Clinical Consultation Line on (02) 9912 3851.

Finally, remember that if you don’t find the right help the first time you try, it’s important to keep trying. It’s okay to ask again or to talk to another mental health professional until you find the support and help that is right for you.

For 24/7 counselling and support

- Lifeline - 13 11 14
- MensLine Australia - 1300 789 978
- Suicide Call Back Service – 1300 659 467
- Kids Help Line - 1800 55 1800
- National Sexual Assault, Domestic & Family Violence counselling service 1800Respect – 1800 737 732
- Domestic Violence line – 1800 656 463
- Alcohol & Drug Info Services (ADIS) – 1800 422 599

These numbers are either free or the cost of a local call.