



World Class Schools Quality Mark (WCSQM) – Symposium 2018.

We asked our World Class Students - What is good mental health? They said...

It is

- different for everybody
- functioning at full capacity
- embracing the positive
- overcoming difficulties and becoming stronger
- resilience

It is

- knowing
- understanding
- accepting
- looking after yourself

It is

- helping yourself
- knowing how to get help
- being prepared to get help
- accepting that sometimes the help won't work
- helping others

- being
 - open minded
 - able to deal with different situations
 - rational when faced with a difficult situation
 - physically healthy

- understanding the
 - bigger picture
 - future
- knowing what is going on
- feeling
 - positive
 - balanced

- having the confidence to talk about yourself and how you are feeling, even though it can feel selfish
- thriving on a small amount of stress
- not overthinking
- being aware of possible symptoms of poor mental health, such as stress and anxiety

We feel better when we

- talk about our feelings
- talk to pastoral staff, counsellors and therapists at school
- access phone call assessment system because it is less stressful, less formal; anonymity allows you to let everything out
- access support networks like 'Childline'
- have moved to England from another country, and can use social media to connect with a culture we know



Kate Nolan, CEO of CiC talking to World Class students about mental health at the WCSQM

We get stressed because

- ... there is bad news, for example, news about terrorists, because you can't do anything about it so it can make you feel paranoid

- we can let poor mental health define us
- there seem to be more mental health issues the older you get; you get exposed to more things, exam stress, new social situations and new relationships

- we get judged by our peers; this makes us self-conscious
- the perfect image is seen as more important than what's inside
- of name calling; nobody wants to be called an 'emo'
- social groups at school can make you feel lonely

The issues for us with mental health are

- you can't see it, like you can if you have a broken leg
- it is too easy to self-diagnose
- poor mental health
 - has to be dealt with over a long period of time, and there is no quick fix
 - still has a stigma, particularly for males
 - takes away your confidence
- there are too many unhelpful mental health stereotypes
- professionally, it is difficult to know when you should declare that you have poor mental health
- sometimes it feels now that so many people are talking about it, that it makes it worse



World Class students discussing mental health issues at the WCSQM Symposium 2018

- there are long waiting lists for things like CAMHS
- support services are closing down

With teachers we sometimes feel

- scared to talk to them about serious topics, because they have more authority than us, and are not our friends; we are also concerned about confidentiality
- they should be more welcoming, approachable and understanding
- there should be an 'open door' policy
- they do not reassure us enough that they are interested in our mental well being



World Class students discussing mental health issues at the WCSQM Symposium 2018

We would feel better if

- there was somewhere at school we could go to seek anonymous advice
- we could access to a regular forum which would tell us what signs to look out for to check whether we, or our friends, were mentally well.

With parents we sometimes feel they

- haven't been through the same stresses as us
- don't understand the damaging impacts of social media; school has changed, exams have got more difficult and they have forgotten what it was like

Support from CiC

[CiC](#) is a leading EAP (Employee Assistance Programmes) provider in the UK, recommended by our partner World Class schools for the high quality of their assistance provision for staff. Their helpsheet below and on the following pages aims to give advice on how best to take care of your mental health.

Mental health: Looking after yourself

Good mental health isn't just the absence of mental health problems. Individuals with good mental health have the capacity to live a full and creative life and the flexibility to deal with life's inevitable challenges.

One way to define mental health is by looking at how effectively and successfully a person functions. This includes:

- Feeling capable, and competent, and having a sense of achievement.
- Feeling resilient, flexible, and able to manage normal levels of stress most of the time.
- Maintaining satisfying personal relationships; feeling loved and lovable.
- Being independent and feeling in control of your life.
- Being able to recover from difficult situations such as bereavement and other losses.
- The ability to enjoy life and keep it balanced: balancing social time with time alone, balancing work and play, sleep and activity, and relaxation and exercise.

None of us ever are perfectly balanced. We are all human. Mental health becomes an issue when problems begin to affect daily functioning or leave you feeling overwhelmed.

When to seek help

From time to time, everyone experiences emotional pain. But sometimes the distress is particularly severe or long-lasting and interferes with your ability to function in your daily life. If you are experiencing sadness, grief or anxiety that is persistent, professional help can be useful.

If you are concerned about yourself or someone you care about...

The following may be warning signs of mental illness, and you should go to your GP to seek medical advice as soon as possible if any become apparent.

- Noticeable change in personality.
- Inability to cope with problems and daily activities.
- Strange ideas or delusions (beliefs that are not rational).
- Excessive anxiety that interferes with daily life.
- Prolonged feelings of sadness, lack of motivation, feeling lethargic.
- Changes in eating pattern and difficulty sleeping.
- Thinking or talking about suicide, lacking hope, feeling despair.
- Changeability of moods from extreme highs to lows.
- Increased use of alcohol, drug usage.
- Irritability and anger that is out of proportion.
- Irrational fears.

What can friends and relatives do to help?

When someone you care about becomes mentally distressed, it is likely to create strong reactions amongst friends and relatives. It can be frightening to be with them, and frightening to not know when they will get better. You may feel helpless. It is important to seek out resources – including information and support. Finding someone to talk to about the situation is also very helpful.

It is possible to take action to improve mental health before problems arise.

Improving your mental health

- **Develop flexibility** – Having high expectations of yourself or others leads to disappointment. Having very rigid opinions sets yourself up for stress. Asking yourself how much something really matters can change your outlook and reduce your stress. Accepting all your feelings including sadness and anger and being able to express them can improve your mental health.
- **Having fun** - and making time to do the things we enjoy. This includes a balance of activity and relaxation. There are many books and audio tapes on relaxation techniques available. Yoga, meditation, and massage can all help with relaxation.
- **Assertive communication** - Being assertive is not about being stroppy and demanding but is more about respecting your own and others' rights to be listened to. It encompasses a range of skills to express yourself including saying how you feel and what you want honestly and appropriately without becoming aggressive or it's opposite - burying your feelings. Hiding how you feel can lead to a build-up of feeling inside which can then lead to health problems or lead to an inappropriate outburst. Assertiveness training classes and books can improve your ability to handle such situations.
- **Review** - Take time to review the direction your life. We can want to change but change is not easy because it involves facing the unknown. Start with small achievable changes that add up.
- **Dealing with problems** - Being unsure or overwhelmed can lead to procrastination. Although temporarily you get away from what is making you anxious, it can create a feeling of dread and irritability because of what is not dealt with. It can help to break a problem down and deal with it bit by bit or ask for some help.
- **Develop relationships** that nurture you and increase your sense of connection to others.
- **Self Care** - If there is a problem taking as much care of yourself as you do for others in may be useful to train yourself to think differently about this. Instead of thinking of it as selfish, self-indulgent, or unnecessary, reframe self-care as essential for looking after yourself and building the capacity to cope with stress.
- **Exercise** has now been shown to have as much effect on mental health as taking antidepressant medication for some people. An advantage is that is free from side effects, - except for sore muscles when you begin.
- **Cut down addictive substances** – have less coffee, alcohol, nicotine and other addictive substances. Again this is about balance. If these substances are having a negative effect on your life and health, assess whether reducing them changes the way you cope.
- **Eat foods that are thought to affect mental health** - A fifth of our brain is made up of essential fats, and often these are lacking in our diets. The potential consequences can affect our mood, concentration, memory and intelligence.

Eating your way to mental health

Dr Basant Puri, a consultant psychiatrist at Imperial College School of Medicine, has written the book 'The Natural Way to Beat Depression' which focuses on how and why the Omega 3 and Omega 6 fatty acids contained in fish oil and evening primrose oil are helpful. Rates of depression have been shown to be higher in countries with low intakes of fish. The Mental Health Foundation says scientific studies have clearly linked attention deficit disorder, depression, Alzheimer's disease and schizophrenia to junk food and the absence of essential fats, vitamins and minerals in industrialised diets. Saturated fats act to slow down the brain's working process.

General guidelines

Good for the brain:

- Vegetables, especially leafy
- Seeds and nuts
- Fruit
- Whole grains
- Wheatgerm
- Organic eggs
- Organic farmed or wild fish, especially fatty fish

Bad for the brain:

- Deep fried junk foods
- Refined processed foods
- Alcohol
- Sugar
- Tea and coffee
- Some additives

Specific food advice

For further information see the foundation for mental health's site:

www.mentalhealth.org.uk/feedingminds

This is a wonderfully informative comprehensive site that tells you which foods are good for combating a range of mental health problems including insomnia, depression, stress and anxiety.

Further help

CiC: There may be times when these tips may feel insufficient and you may need to talk through the issues that are distressing you with one of our Adviceline consultants who are all well qualified and experienced counsellors - www.cic-eap.co.uk

National MIND site: wide range of on-line resources including leaflets and articles on mental health and mental illness (A-Z of Mental Health) - <http://www.mind.org.uk/>

Mental Health Foundation: A Complete Guide to mental health problems, topical issues and treatment options – <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mental-health-a-z/>

Mental Health First Aid, England: Mental Health First Aid – <http://www.mhfaengland.org/find-an-instructor>