Mental Health Awareness Week 2020

Mental Health Awareness Week will take place this year between 18–24 May with the theme of kindness.

Why is the theme kindness?

Evidence shows that helping others can have a positive effect on your own mental health and wellbeing.

During these challenging and unprecedented times, where restrictions to help reduce the spread of Covid-19 mean we all have had to adapt the way we live and work and socially distance from others, an act of kindness has perhaps never been more important.

Kindness from friends, family, colleagues and even complete strangers can have a very positive impact and support us in so many ways. Being kind is something we can all do to boost our feelings of being connected which is an important feature of good mental wellbeing.

Why is looking after our mental health important?

Like our physical health, our mental health has its ups and downs throughout life; it is not static and we need to be aware of what influences it. The more we understand about mental health, the more likely we are to recognise symptoms in ourselves and others then seek support.

Stigma often arises from lack of knowledge, perception and awareness, so it is crucial we speak about mental health openly and honestly to help support and educate one another.

Advice for looking after your own mental health

- The Mental Health Foundation has useful advice on how you can look after your mental health during pandemic including tips for at work, staying at home and finance worries.
- Consider developing your wellbeing through online courses so that you feel resilient and confident about maintaining positive mental health. Oscar Kilo provides a free online mindfulness course and to support this Awareness Week,
- **Get involved in Mental Health Awareness Week**

  The restrictions in place in order to reduce the transmission of Covid-19 have
reduced opportunities for the force to mark the week with local events however; we can still celebrate acts of kindness and learn more about how being kind can benefit our psychological wellbeing.

Here are some ideas that you can consider for yourself, your team or at home. If you would like to be involved in developing awareness in your area of work, please speak with your Wellbeing SPOC or Wellbeing Liaison Officer.

- Pay it forward with kindness – when a person shows you kindness, you in turn show kindness to someone else. For example, if a stranger thanks you for staying 2 metres away on a footpath, you can forward that kindness by calling an old friend, that friend may then go on to give their neighbour some books that they may enjoy during lockdown. Find some inspiration about acts of kindness from the Mental Health Foundation.
- Kindness postcards – send a postcard or e-card to colleagues who are working from home or to loved ones who you are unable to see whilst restrictions are in place. The simple act of sending a postcard to let someone know you are thinking of them can go a long way in times like this.

**Get started:**

- **Things to consider**
- **Volunteering, mentoring and peer support**
- **Do something for a good cause**
- **Random acts of kindness**

1. **Helping others feels good**

There is some evidence to suggest that when you help others, it can promote physiological changes in the brain linked with happiness. Helping others can also improve our support networks and encourage us to be more active. This in turn can improve our self-esteem.

2. **It creates a sense of belonging and reduces isolation**

Volunteering and helping others can also help us feel a sense of belonging, make new friends and connect with our community. Face-to-face activities such as volunteering at a food bank can help reduce loneliness and isolation.

3. **It helps keep things in perspective**

Many people don’t realise the impact that a different perspective can have on their outlook on life. Helping others, especially those who are less fortunate than yourself, can help to put things into perspective and make you feel more positive. There is some evidence that being aware of your own acts of kindness, as well as the things you are
grateful for, can increase feelings of happiness, optimism, and satisfaction.\textsuperscript{5,6} Doing good may help you to have a more positive outlook about your own circumstances.

4. It helps make the world a happier place – it’s contagious!

Acts of kindness have the potential to make the world a happier place. An act of kindness can improve feelings of confidence, being in control, happiness and optimism.\textsuperscript{6} It may also encourage others to repeat the good deed that they’ve experienced themselves – contributing to a more positive community.\textsuperscript{7}

5. The more you do for others, the more you do for yourself

The benefits of helping others can last long after the act itself, both for you and them.

- Throughout the Coronavirus pandemic, we have seen so many fantastic examples of kindness from right across the world. People are helping their neighbours, delivering food and essentials to vulnerable people and communities are coming together to support the NHS and other key workers.
- Kindness and mental health are deeply connected – helping others makes us feel good. Being aware of our own acts of kindness can increase feelings of happiness, optimism and satisfaction, they make the world happier, contributing to a more positive community.
- We need to emerge from this epidemic with the understanding of what affects our mental health and what we can do to improve it. Looking after our mental health should be as natural as looking after our physical health.

- We all need to recognise the signs

- Emergency services workers face unique and complex challenges on a daily basis that you don’t often find in other sectors. It is crucial that we all learn to recognise when we are struggling and that we know what interventions and support packages are available.
- Police officers and staff can often be reluctant to put their hand up and say “I can’t cope” – but talking about what you are experiencing when you are struggling, can often be helpful. Taking those things home at night, whether it be stress or trauma related, often isn’t the best answer for the person concerned.
- It’s really important that line managers are able to recognise the issues affecting their teams – fifty per cent of a person’s wellbeing at work is determined by how well they get on with their line manager. Talk to your staff, be kind, be understanding, small things make a big difference.

- Once we understand why we are feeling a certain way and identify the causes, there are lots of things we can do to improve our own mental health. We need to take time out to relax, try a breathing exercise or a mindfulness session, take up a new hobby, read a book, ring a friend, take some exercise or, just rest.