



# MENTAL HEALTH

A Simple Guide  
for Everyone

# Understanding Mental Health



Maintaining good health is essential for leading a fulfilling life. The term “healthy” isn't confined to just physical health; as defined in the founding document of the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1948, health refers to “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”<sup>1</sup>.

Mental health pertains to the state of our minds, enabling us to navigate life's challenges, utilize our skills, learn, work, and contribute to our community. It encompasses our emotions, thoughts, and relationships with others. Good mental health assists us in managing stress and making appropriate choices.

A mental health problem, or mental illness, occurs when something impacts how a person thinks, feels, or behaves. Some mental health problems are short-lived, while others persist for a longer duration. People from different backgrounds might experience more mental health problems due to difficulties in accessing quality help, feelings of shame, experiences of discrimination, or lack of knowledge about mental health.



<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. (2022). Constitution. <https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution>

# Factors Affecting Mental Health

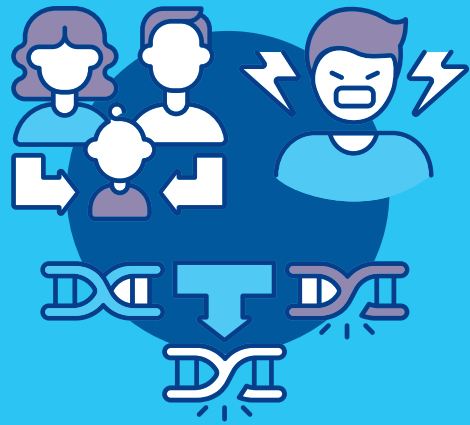
Our mental health is affected by<sup>2</sup>:

# 1

## Biology

### Biological Factors

Age, gender, presence of any illness or disabilities, family history of mental illness



# 2

## Mind

### Psychological Factors

Negative life events, unemployment, financial crisis, prolonged stress

# 3

## People Around Us

### Social Factors

Socioeconomic status, lack of support, family conflict, peer pressure



<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization, (2022), Mental Health: Strengthening Our Response. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>



# Understanding Mental Health Disorders

Mental health disorders can affect anyone, regardless of age or background. Here, we provide an overview of five common mental health disorders, their symptoms, and potential treatment options.

## 1 Stress

Stress is a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Prolonged stress can lead to mental illness. Common signs of stress include mood changes, difficulty concentrating, palpitations, indigestion, sleep disturbances, and aches and pains. Managing stress can involve exercise, meditation, relaxation techniques, and counseling<sup>3</sup>.



## 2 Anxiety

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe. Symptoms include feelings of nervousness, panic, and fear, as well as sweating and a rapid heartbeat. Treatments include relaxation techniques, lifestyle modifications, medications, and psychotherapy<sup>4</sup>.



<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization, (2023). Stress. <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/stress>

<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization, (2022). Mental Disorders. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-disorders>

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization, (2022). Mental Disorders. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-disorders>



### 3 Depression

Depression is a common and serious medical illness that negatively affects how you feel, think, and act. It causes feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities once enjoyed. Other symptoms include hopelessness, helplessness, suicidal thoughts, low self-esteem, and changes in sleep and appetite<sup>5</sup>. Managing depression can involve lifestyle changes, improving social interaction, and seeking professional help<sup>6</sup>.



### 4 Psychotic Disorders

Psychotic disorders are serious illnesses that affect the mind, making it difficult for someone to think clearly, make good judgments, respond emotionally, communicate effectively, understand reality, and behave appropriately. Two main symptoms are delusions and hallucinations. Treatment methods for psychosis include psychosocial support, medication, psychotherapy, cognitive remediation, and vocational training<sup>7</sup>.



### 5 Childhood Disorders

Childhood disorders, also known as childhood mental disorders or developmental disorders, are brain-based or behavioural disorders that affect a child's quality of life. Some of them are autism, ADHD, childhood anxiety, depression, conduct disorders, OCD, and learning disabilities. Common treatment methods include behavioural therapy, play therapy, and medications<sup>8</sup>.



<sup>6</sup> NHS Choices, (2022), How to Cope with Depression, <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/tips-and-support/cope-with-depression/>

<sup>7</sup> NHS Choices, (2019), Overview – Psychosis, <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/psychosis/overview/>

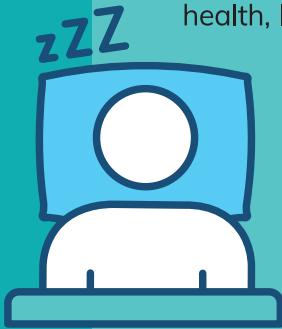
<sup>8</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, (2016), DSM-5 Child Mental Disorder Classification – DSM-5 Changes – NCBI Bookshelf, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK519712/>

# Tips on Better Mental Health Self-Care Strategies

## 1

### Lifestyle Modifications

Numerous studies have shown that these lifestyle choices can significantly improve mental health, leading to better overall well-being and reduced risk of mental disorders. Make simple, healthy choices daily to boost your overall mental well-being. These include: eating a balanced diet rich in whole foods, fruits, and vegetables to nourish your body and mind; prioritizing sleep and maintaining a consistent sleep schedule to ensure your body receives adequate rest and recovery time; and managing stress through relaxation techniques.



## 2

### Better Communication

Research has shown that strong social connections can reduce stress, improve mood, and increase resilience in the face of adversity. Talk openly with family and friends about your feelings and concerns. Good communication can strengthen your relationships and help you cope with challenges. Fostering social connections and maintaining strong relationships with friends and family create a support network for emotional well-being.



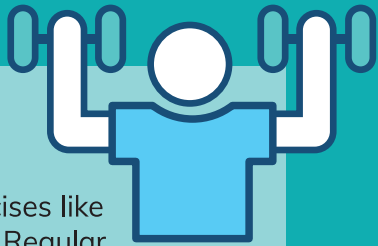




# 3

## Regular Exercise

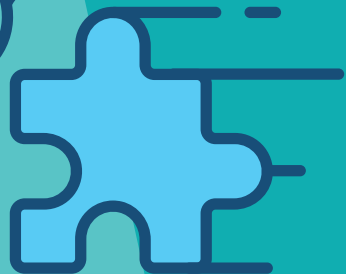
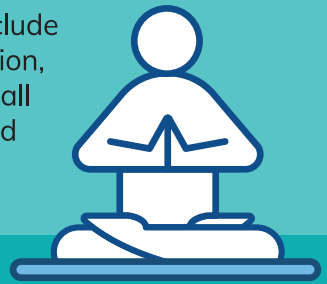
Stay active by engaging in exercises like walking, swimming, or yoga. Regular exercise can boost your mood and improve your overall well-being by releasing “feel-good” hormones – endorphins, reducing stress, and promoting better sleep.



# 4

## Mindfulness Activities

Practice mindfulness through activities like meditation or deep breathing. These techniques can help you stay focused on the present moment and manage stress. Benefits of mindfulness practices include reduced anxiety, improved concentration, and enhanced emotional regulation, all contributing to better mental health and well-being.





# ALGEE:

## A Mental Health First Aid Approach

ALGEE, an acronym used in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training, is a five-step action plan designed to guide your actions in a supportive way when assisting someone who may be experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis<sup>13</sup>. The steps, in order, are:

# A

**Assess for risk of suicide or harm:** Determine if the person is in immediate danger of hurting themselves or others. If necessary, seek professional help or call emergency services.

# L

**Listen nonjudgmentally:** Offer a sympathetic ear and be open to hearing the person's thoughts and feelings without judgment. Encourage them to share their experience at their own pace.

# G

**Give reassurance and information:** Provide comfort and understanding to the person in distress. Offer appropriate information about mental health resources and support available to them.

# E

**Encourage appropriate professional help:** Gently suggest that the person seek the advice of a mental health professional, such as a psychologist, psychiatrist, or counselor. Offer to help them find suitable options if needed.

# E

**Encourage self-help and other support strategies:** Recommend self-help techniques that the person can incorporate into their daily routine, such as exercise, meditation, or relaxation. Additionally, suggest they reach out to friends, family, or support groups for emotional and practical assistance.

<sup>13</sup> Kapil, R. (2021). Algee: How MHFA Helps You Respond in Crisis and Non-Crisis Situations. Mental Health First Aid. <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/2021/04/algee-how-mhfa-helps-you-respond-in-crisis-and-non-crisis-situations/>

# Key Stakeholders in Mental Health Services – Who are the People?

This section provides an overview of the key stakeholders that play a crucial role in the provision and mental health care.



## General Practitioners (GPs)

GPs are medical doctors who often serve as the first point of contact for individuals experiencing mental health issues. They can manage mild to moderate mental health concerns, provide initial assessment, prescribe medications, provide preventative care, and offer health education. If necessary, they can also refer patients to psychiatrists or other specialists.

## Psychiatrists

Psychiatrists are medical doctors with specialized training in diagnosing, treating, and managing mental health disorders, often prescribing medication and managing other medical treatments. In Hong Kong, psychiatrists can be found in public hospitals, private clinics, community mental health centers, and universities. To find one, seek referrals from a GP, search professional directories, or ask your trusted one, or insurance providers.



## Clinical Psychologists (CPs)

Clinical Psychologists are professionals with advanced training in psychology who assess, diagnose, and treat mental health issues through evidence-based therapeutic interventions. Psychologists cannot prescribe medication. It is essential to check the qualifications and professional memberships of psychologists in Hong Kong, as there is no official regulation for this profession.

## Counselors

Counselors are professionals who provide psychological support and guidance, helping individuals cope with emotional, behavioral, or mental health challenges. It is essential to check the qualifications and professional memberships of counselors in Hong Kong, as there is no official regulation for this profession.



## Registered Social Workers (RSWs)

Social Workers help people and families by connecting or referring them with helpful community services and resources. You can find them in places like hospitals, schools, charity groups, and community centers.

**In the next section, we will provide information on how and where to access professional mental health services in the city.**

# Seeking Mental Health Support in Hong Kong

If you need help with emotional or mental health issues, you can find support from the following organisations in Hong Kong:

## Public Healthcare

Go to a general out-patient clinic (GOPC), emergency room, or family doctor to get a referral. To get psychiatric help, bring your referral letter (valid for 3 months). Some cases may be sent to the Integrated Mental Health Programme for help from doctors and social workers. To see a clinical psychologist, get a referral from a public sector psychiatrist or call the Mental Health Direct hotline (24-hours) at 2466 7350. You can also get help from the Social Welfare Department (SWD) by getting a referral from their service units or calling their 24-hour hotline at 2343 2255.

## Private Sector

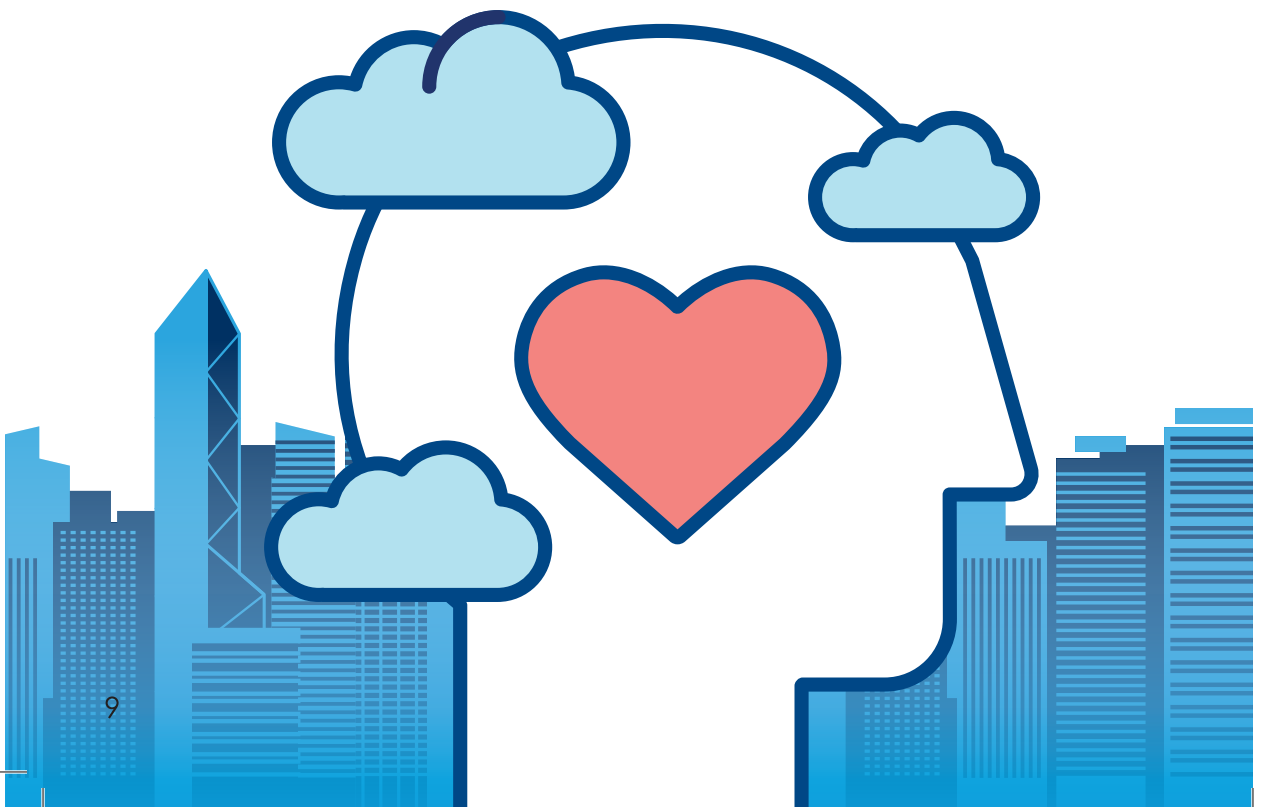
Private mental healthcare services in Hong Kong have shorter waiting times but cost more. If you're interested in private healthcare, reach out to organizations that have well-regarded psychologists and psychiatrists.

## Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Non-government organizations (NGOs) offer different services. For mental health services, some offer counseling, support groups, and crisis help. Some services are low-cost or free.

## Integrated Community Centre for Mental Wellness (ICCMW)

You can visit an Integrated Community Centre for Mental Wellness (ICCMW) for mental health services. You can go by yourself or with a referral from a social worker.





# Community Directory



## 24-hour Suicide Prevention Hotlines

The Samaritans Hong Kong	2896 0000
The Samaritan Befrienders Hong Kong	2389 2222
Caritas 24-hour Crisis Line	18288
Social Welfare Department Hotline	2343 2255
Hospital Authority Mental Health Hotline	2466 7350



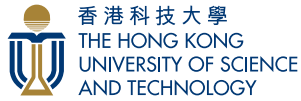
## Other Hotlines

Organization	Hotline
The Zubin Foundation Call Mira Helpline for Women and Girls	9682 3100 (hotline / WhatsApp) (English, Hindi and Urdu) Email: info@zubinfoundation.org
Harmony House Crisis intervention, counselling, and referral resources	For female: 2522 0434 (24-hour) For male: 2295 1386
Hong Kong Red Cross Shall We Talk Psychological Support Service	5164 5040 (hotline / WhatsApp)
Lutheran Parents Hotline Provide different support services for parents	Hotline counselling service time: Mon, Wed & Fri: 10:00 – 12:00 Tue & Thu: 16:00 – 18:00 Hotline: 3622 1111 WhatsApp: 9250 8124
M.O.T.I.ON – Multicultural Outreaching Team for InclusiON	Tel: 2708 2018 Hotline: 2708 2225 Email: otem@hkcs.org
HKCS-CHEER – Hong Kong Christian Service-Centre for Harmony and Enhancement of Ethnic Minority Residents	Urdu: 3755 6833 Nepali: 3755 6822 Hindi: 3755 6877 Tagalog: 3755 6855
H.K.S.K.H. Lady Malehose Centre- P.R.A.I.S.E.	Hotline: 2492 0866

\* This information is collated by the HKUST Mental Health Project Team purely for reference purposes. For the most recent and precise information, we recommend visiting the respective organization's website. The HKUST Mental Health Project Team is not responsible for any content from external sources, and the presence of any external links does not constitute an endorsement.

**Remember, seeking help is a sign of strength.**  
Reach out to a trusted friend, family member, or professional if  
you're struggling with your mental health!

## Acknowledgement



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