



ROYAL COLLEGE
RED CROSS SOCIETY



IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL HEALTH



HealthFirst

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THE HEALTHFIRST MAGAZINE SERIES

The HealthFirst Magazine series is a set of publications which are published by the Royal College Red Cross Society as a free of charge publication. This Magazine series includes 5 magazines under the topics of First Aid in Emergencies, Importance of Mental Health, Laws related to children in Sri Lanka, Importance of Physical Health and Non Communicable Diseases.

This project is being concluded to provide good knowledge about non-identical health related topics as mentioned above for students, teachers and parents in Sri Lanka as the country is going through a global pandemic. The main intention of this magazine series is to generate a new link for the community to have a healthy life. Healthy living means maintaining a healthy lifestyle and introducing habits that improve your health. It might be difficult for you to change the usual habits at once but you can always take new steps to become more healthier. An important first step is identifying less healthy habits and learning new, positive ones to replace them. The HealthFirst Magazine which consists of 5 different magazines will create a new path to be healthy for not only the students alone but also for each and every individual in the country.

HealthFirst Magazine series consists of Health tips, Health-related articles from doctors, articles from the members of the Royal College Red Cross Society and many more important health-related information and facts which will be useful for all the readers. We cordially invite you to refer to these magazines.

**Nethul Tennakoon,
Editor,
HealthFirst Magazine.**

NO HEALTH WITHOUT MENTAL HEALTH:

Importance of Mental Health

Health is defined by WHO (World Health Organization) as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of diseases. This definition clearly indicates that mental health is an essential component of health. It also implies that mental health is more than just the absence of mental disorders.

What do we mean by mental health? Mental health is a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stressors of day today life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.

As students, mental health is fundamental to study, interact with others, do sports and enjoy life. Not only adults, but also children and adolescents are vulnerable psychological stress especially during COVID-19 pandemic. All are affected by new life style changes caused by the COVID-19pandemic, such as closure of schools, lack of daily routines (eg. Meeting up with friends, sport practices etc.), lack of outdoor activities, Exposure to gruesome pictures of disease and death in media and parents' anxiety about the pandemic. It can be normal at times to feel a little bit of distress, boredom or frustration during this period of pandemic. However if a child or an adult experiences severe or prolonged episode of tearfulness, fear, aggressive behavior, irritability, sleep disturbances, poor motivation for school work or hobbies and overuse of smartphone, computer or internet, it can be a sign of poor mental wellbeing. Poor mental health can directly and indirectly make us vulnerable to acquire infectious diseases including COVID-19 by reducing immune protection.

What can we do to enhance our mental wellbeing?

- Identify and ventilate emotions: everyone feels sadness, happiness, anger, fear, frustration, boredom in day to day life. Talking about your feelings is good for your mental health. It isn't a sign of weakness. Just being listened to can help you feel supported and less alone. You can talk to a friend, a family member, a teacher or if needed a mental health professional such a psychologist or a psychiatrist.

- **Regular physical exercise:** Exercise releases chemicals called endorphins in our brain that make us feel happy. Regular physical exercise can boost your self esteem, help us concentrate and feel better.
- **Healthy balanced diet:** There are strong links between what we eat and how we feel. Eat at least three meals each day and drink plenty of water. Do not skip meals. Need to limit high-caffeine or sugary drinks.
- **Engage in a hobby:** Do something that makes you happy. Add such activities to your daily routine. Concentrate on a hobby which helps reducing stress, boosts self esteem and makes you feel relaxed and happy.
- **Limit screen time:** using digital screens or internet for entertainment purposes should be limited. Total screen time for entertainment purposes (including watching TV, playing video games, browsing internet etc.) should be less than two hours per day. Excessive use of digital screens can lead to poor cognitive functions (attention, concentration, memory etc.) and difficulties in emotional regulation.

National Mental Health helpline (toll free) 1926 can be contacted for further information and help related to mental health.

Dr. Wajantha Kotalawala
Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

How to cope up with anger

Do you lose your temper and wonder why? Are there days when you feel like you just woke up angry?

Some of it may be the changes of your body's going through: All those hormones you hear so much about can cause mood swings and confused emotions. Some of it may be stress: People who are under a lot of pressure tend to get angry more easily. Part of it may be your personality: You may be someone who feels your emotions intensely or tends to act impulsively or lose control. And part of it may be your role models: Maybe you've seen other people in your family blow a fuse when they're mad. No matter what pushes your buttons, one thing is certain — you're sure to get angry sometimes. Everyone does. Anger is a normal emotion, and there's nothing wrong with feeling mad. What counts is how we handle it (and ourselves) when we're angry.



Self-Awareness & Self-Control

Because anger can be powerful, managing it is sometimes challenging. It takes plenty of self-awareness and self-control to manage angry feelings. And these skills take time to develop.

Self-awareness is the ability to notice what you're feeling and thinking, and why. Little kids aren't very aware of what they feel, they just act it out in their behavior. That's why you see them having tantrums when they're mad. But teens have the mental ability to be self-aware. When you get angry, take a moment to notice what you're feeling and thinking.

Self-control is all about thinking before you act. It puts some precious seconds or minutes between feeling a strong emotion and taking an action you regret.

Together, self-awareness and self-control allows you to have more choice about how to act when you're feeling an intense emotion like anger.

Getting Ready to Make a Change

Deciding to get control of your anger — rather than letting it control you — means taking a good hard look at the ways you've been reacting when you get mad. Do you tend to yell and scream or say hurtful, mean, disrespectful things? Do you throw things, kick or punch walls, break stuff? Hit someone, hurt yourself, or push and shove others around?

For most people who have trouble harnessing a hot temper, reacting like this is

not what they want. They feel ashamed by their behavior and don't think it reflects the real them, their best selves.

Everyone can change — but only when they want to. If you want to make a big change in how you're handling your anger, think about what you'll gain from that change.

More self-respect? More respect from other people? Less time feeling annoyed and frustrated? A more relaxed approach to life? Remembering why you want to make the change can help.

It can also help to remind yourself that making a change takes time, practice, and patience. It won't happen all at once. Managing anger is about developing new skills and new responses. As with any skill, like playing basketball or learning the piano, it helps to practice over and over again.



The Five-Step Approach to Managing Anger

If something happens that makes you feel angry, this approach can help you manage your reaction. It's called a problem-solving approach because you start with the problem, you're mad about. Then you weigh your choices and decide what you'll do. Each step involves asking yourself a couple of questions, then answering them based on your particular situation.

Let's take this example: There's a party you're planning to go to, but your mom just told you to clean your room or stay home. The red-hot anger starts building.

Here's what to do:

1) Identify the problem (selfawareness). Start by noticing what you're angry about and why. Put into words what's making you upset so you can act rather than react.

Ask yourself:

What's got me angry? What am I feeling and why? You can do this either in your mind or out loud, but it needs to be clear and specific. For example: "I'm really angry at Mom because she won't let me go to the party until I clean my room. It's not fair!" Your feeling is anger, and you're feeling angry because you might not get to go to the party. Notice that this is not the same as saying, "Mom's so unfair to me." That statement doesn't identify the specific problem (that you can't go to the party until you clean your room) and it doesn't say how you're feeling (angry).

2) Think of potential solutions before responding (self-control). This is where you stop for a minute to give yourself time to manage your anger. It's also where you start thinking of how you might react — but without reacting yet

Ask yourself:

What can I do? Think of at least three things. For example, in this situation you might think:

- (a) I could yell at Mom and throw a fit.
- (b) I could clean my room and then ask if I could go to the party.
- (c) I could sneak out to the party anyway.

3) Consider the consequences of each solution (think it through). This is where you think about what is likely to result from each of the different reactions you came up with.

Ask yourself:

What will happen for each one of these options? For example:

- (a) Yelling at your mom may get you in worse trouble or even grounded.
- (b) Cleaning your room takes work and you may get to the party late (but maybe that adds to your mystique). With this option, you get to go to the party and your room's clean so you don't have to worry about it for a while.
- (c) Sneaking out may seem like a real option in the heat of anger. But when you really think it through, it's pretty unlikely you'd get away with being gone for hours with no one noticing. And when you do get caught — look out!

4) Make a decision (pick one of your options). This is where you take action by choosing one of the three things you could do. Look at the list and pick the one that is likely to be most effective.

Ask yourself:

What's my best choice? By the time you've thought it through, you're

probably past yelling at your mom, which is a knee-jerk response. You may have also decided that sneaking out is too risky. Neither of these options is likely to get you to the party. So, option (b) probably seems like the best choice.

Once you choose your solution, then it's time to act.

5) Check your progress. After you've acted and the situation is over, spend some time thinking about how it went.

Ask yourself:

How did I do? Did things work out as I expected? If not, why not? Am I satisfied with the choice I made? Taking some time to reflect on how things worked out after it's all over is a very important step. It helps you learn about yourself and it allows you to test which problem-solving approaches work best in different situations.

Give yourself a pat on the back if the solution you chose worked out well. If it didn't, go back through the five steps and see if you can figure out why.

These five steps are pretty simple when you're calm, but are much tougher to work through when you're angry or sad (kind of like in basketball practice when making baskets is much easier than in a real game when the pressure is on!). So, it helps to practice over and over again.



Other Ways to Manage Anger

The five-step approach is good when you're in a particular situation that's got you mad and you need to decide what action to take. But other things can help you manage anger too.

Try these things even if you're not mad right now to help prevent angry feelings from building up inside.

- **Exercise.** Go for a walk/run, work out, or go play a sport. Lots of research has shown that exercise is a great way to improve your mood and decrease negative feelings.
- **Listen to music** (with your headphones on). Music has also been shown to change a person's mood pretty quickly. And if you dance, then you're exercising and it's a two-for-one.
- **Write down your thoughts and emotions.** You can write things in lots of ways; for example, in a journal or as your own poetry or song lyrics. After you've written it down, you can keep it or throw it away — it doesn't matter. The important thing is, writing down your thoughts and feelings can improve how you feel. When you notice, label, and release feelings as they show up in smaller portions, they don't have a chance to build up inside.
- **Draw.** Scribbling, doodling, or sketching your thoughts or feelings might help too.



• **Meditate or practice deep breathing.** This one works best if you do it regularly, as it's more of an overall stress management technique that can help you use selfcontrol when you're mad. If you do this regularly, you'll find that anger is less likely to build up.

• **Talk about your feelings** with someone you trust. Lots of times there are other emotions, such as fear or sadness, beneath anger. Talking about them can help.

• **Distract yourself.** If you find yourself stewing about something and just can't seem to let go, it can help to do something that will get your mind past what's bugging you — watch TV, read, or go to the movies.



By: Chenuka Elwitigala – After O/L

Bullying and Cyberbullying

Being bullied can leave you feeling helpless, humiliated, depressed, or even suicidal. But there are ways to protect yourself or your child—at school and online—and deal with a bully



What is bullying?

Bullying is repeated aggressive behavior that can be physical, verbal, or relational, in-person or online. Bullies are often relentless, bullying over and over again for long periods of time. You may live in constant fear of where and when the bully will strike next, what they'll do, and how far they'll go.

Physical bullying includes hitting, kicking, or pushing you (or even just threatening to do so), as well as stealing, hiding, or ruining your things, and hazing, harassment, or humiliation.

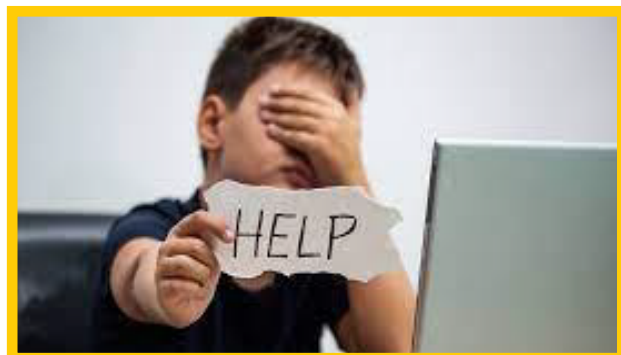
Verbal bullying includes name-calling, teasing, taunting, insulting, or otherwise verbally abusing you.

Relationship bullying includes refusing to talk to you, excluding you from groups or activities, spreading lies or rumors about you, or making you do things you don't want to do.

Boys frequently bully using physical threats and actions, while girls are more likely to engage in verbal or relationship bullying. But no type of bullying should ever be tolerated.

What is cyberbullying?

Technology means that bullying is no longer limited to schoolyards or street corners. Cyberbullying can occur anywhere, even at home, via smartphones, emails, texts, and social media, 24 hours a day. Cyberbullies use digital technology to harass, threaten, or humiliate you. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying doesn't require face-to-face contact and isn't limited to just a handful of witnesses at a time. It also doesn't require physical power or strength in numbers.



Cyberbullies come in all shapes and sizes. Almost anyone with an Internet connection or mobile phone can cyberbully

someone else, often without having to reveal their true identity.

Cyberbullies can torment you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and the bullying can follow you anywhere so that no place, not even home, ever feels safe. And with a few clicks the humiliation can be witnessed by hundreds or even thousands of people online.

The methods kids and teens use to cyberbully can be as varied and imaginative as the technology they have access to. This could range from sending threatening or taunting messages via email, text, social media, or IM to breaking into your email account or stealing your online identity to hurt and humiliate you. Some cyberbullies may even create a website or social media page to target you.

As with face-to-face bullying, both boys and girls cyberbully, but tend to do so in different ways. Boys tend to bully by “sexting” (sending messages of a sexual nature) or with messages that threaten physical harm. Girls, on the other hand, more commonly cyberbully by spreading lies and rumors, exposing your secrets, or by excluding you from social media groups, emails, buddy lists and the like. Because cyberbullying is so easy to perpetrate, a child or teen can easily change roles, going from cyberbullying victim at one point to cyberbully the next, and then back again.

The effects of bullying and cyberbullying

Whether you’re being targeted by bullies or cyberbullies, the results are similar:

You’re made to feel hurt, angry, afraid, helpless, hopeless, isolated, ashamed, and even guilty that the bullying is somehow your fault. You may even feel suicidal. Your physical health is likely to suffer, and you are at a greater risk of developing mental health problems such as depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, or adult onset PTSD.

You’re more likely to miss, skip, or drop out of school to avoid being bullied. In many cases, cyberbullying can be even more painful than face-to-face bullying because:

Cyberbullying can happen anywhere, at any time. You may experience it even in places where you’d normally feel safe, such as your home, and at times when you’d least expect it, like during the weekend in the company of your family. It can seem like there’s no escape from the taunting and humiliation.

A lot of cyberbullying can be done anonymously, so you may not be sure who is targeting you. This can make you feel even more threatened and can embolden bullies, as they believe online anonymity means they’re less likely to get caught. Since cyberbullies can’t see your reaction, they will often go much further in their harassment or ridicule than they would if they were face-to-face with you. Cyberbullying can be witnessed by potentially thousands of people. Emails can be forwarded to many, many people while social media posts or website comments can often be seen by anyone. The more far reaching the bullying, the more humiliating it can become



Why am I being bullied?

While there are many reasons why bullies may be targeting you, bullies tend to pick on people who are “different” or don’t fit in with the mainstream. While your individualism is something that you will celebrate later in life, it can seem like a curse when you’re young and trying to fit in. Perhaps you dress or act differently, or maybe your race, religion, or sexual orientation sets you apart. It may simply be that you’re new to the school or neighborhood and haven’t made friends yet.

Other reasons why kids bully:

- To make themselves popular or to gain attention.
- Because they’re jealous of you.
- To look tough or feel powerful.
- Because they’re being bullied themselves.
- To escape their own problems.

Whatever the reasons for you being targeted, it’s important to remember that you’re not alone. Many of us have been bullied at some point in our lives. In fact, about 25 percent of kids experience bullying, and as many as one third of teenagers suffer from cyberbullying at some point.

But you don’t have to put up with it. There are plenty of people who can help you overcome the problem, retain your dignity, and preserve your sense of self.

How to deal with a bully

There is no simple solution to bullying or cyberbullying, and no foolproof way to handle a bully. But since bullying is rarely limited to one or two incidents—it’s far more likely to be a sustained attack over a period of time—like the bully, you may have to be relentless in reporting each and every bullying incident until it stops. Remember: there is no reason for you to ever put up with any kind of bullying. Don’t blame yourself. It is not your fault. No matter what a bully says or does, you should not be ashamed of who you are or what you feel. The bully is the person with the problem, not you.

Try to view bullying from a different perspective. The bully is an unhappy, frustrated person who wants to have control over your feelings so that you feel as badly as they do. Don’t give them the satisfaction.

Don’t beat yourself up. Don’t make a bullying incident worse by dwelling on it or reading cyberbullying messages over and over. Instead, delete any messages and focus on the positive experiences in your life. There are many wonderful things about you so be proud of who you are.

Learn to manage stress. Finding healthy ways to relieve the stress generated by bullying can make you more resilient so you won’t feel overwhelmed by negative experiences. Exercise, meditation, positive self-talk, muscle relaxation, and breathing exercises are all good ways to cope with the stress of bullying.

Spend time doing things you enjoy. The more time you spend with activities that bring you pleasure—sports, hobbies, hanging out with friends who don't participate in bullying, for example—the less significance bullying or cyberbullying will have on your life.

Find support from those who don't bully

When you're being bullied, having trusted people you can turn to for encouragement and support will ease your stress and boost your self-esteem and resilience. Talk to a parent, teacher, counselor, or other trusted adult—it doesn't mean that you're weak or there's something wrong with you. And reach out to connect with real friends (those who don't participate in any kind of bullying).

If you're new to a school or neighborhood, or don't feel that you have anyone to turn to, there are lots of ways to make new friends. It may not always seem like it, but there are plenty of people who will love and appreciate you for who you are.

Unplug from technology. Taking a break from your smartphone, computer, tablet, and video games can open you up to meeting new people.

Find others who share your same values and interests. You may be able to make friends at a youth group, book club, or religious organization. Learn a new sport, join a team, or take up a new hobby such as chess, art, or music. Or volunteer your time—helping others is a great way to feel better about yourself and expand your social network.

Share your feelings about bullying. Talk to a parent, counselor, coach, religious leader, or trusted friend. Expressing what you're going through can make a huge difference in the way you feel, even if it doesn't change the situation.

Boost your confidence. Exercise is a great way to boost your self-esteem and reduce stress. Go for a run or take a kickboxing class to work off your anger in a healthy way.

Tips for dealing with cyberbullying

Dealing with cyberbullying is rarely easy, but there are steps you can take to cope with the problem. To start, it may be a good time to reassess your technology use. Spending less time on social media or checking texts and emails, for example, and more time interacting with real people, can help you distance yourself from online bullies.

It can also help to reduce anxiety, depression, and feelings of loneliness. As well as seeking support, managing stress, and spending time with people and activities that bring you pleasure, the following tips can help:

Don't respond to any messages or posts written about you, no matter how hurtful or untrue. Responding will only make the situation worse and provoking a reaction from you is exactly what the cyberbullies want, so don't give them the satisfaction.

Don't seek revenge on a cyberbully by becoming a cyberbully yourself. Again, it will only make the problem worse and could result in serious legal consequences for you. If you wouldn't say it in person, don't say it online.

Save the evidence of the cyberbullying, keep abusive text messages or a screenshot of a webpage, for example, and then report them to a trusted adult. If you don't report incidents, the cyberbully will often become more aggressive. Report threats of harm and inappropriate sexual messages to the police. In many cases, the cyberbully's actions can be prosecuted by law. Prevent communication from the cyberbully, by blocking their email address, cell phone number, and deleting them from social media contacts. Report their activities to their Internet service provider (ISP) or to any social media or other websites they use to target you. The cyberbully's actions may constitute a violation of the website's terms of service or, depending on the laws in your area, may even warrant criminal charges.



By: Vidura Kaushalya – 12M1

Proper Stress Management in life

Stress is part of being human, and it can help motivate you to get things done. Even high stress from serious illness, job loss, a death in the family, or a painful life event can be a natural part of life. You may feel down or anxious, and that's normal too for a while.

Talk to your doctor if you feel down or anxious for more than several weeks or if it starts to interfere with your home or work life. Therapy, medication, and other strategies can help.

In the meantime, there are things you can learn to manage stress before it gets to be too much. Consider these suggestions:

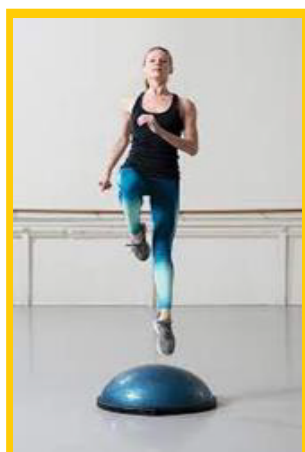
Exercise

To start with, physical activity can help improve your sleep. And better sleep means better stress management. Doctors don't yet know exactly why, but people who exercise more tend to get better deep "slow wave" sleep that helps renew the brain and body. Just take care not to exercise too close to bedtime, which disrupts sleep for some people.

Exercise also seems to help mood. Part of the reason may be that it stimulates your body to release a number of hormones like endorphins and endocannabinoids that help block pain, improve sleep, and sedate you. Some of them (endocannabinoids) may be responsible for the euphoric feeling, or "runner's high," that some people report after long runs.

People who exercise also tend to feel less anxious and more positive about themselves. When your body feels good, your mind often follows. Get a dose of stress relief with these exercises:

- Running
- Swimming
- Dancing
- Cycling
- Aerobics



If you don't have the time for a formal exercise program, you can still find ways to move throughout your day.

Try these tips:

- Bike instead of driving to the store.
- Use the stairs instead of the elevator.
- Park as far as you can from the door.
- Hand-wash your car.
- Clean your house.
- Walk on your lunch break.

Sleep

A common side effect of stress is that you may struggle to fall asleep. If this happens three times a week for at least 3 months, you may have insomnia, an inability to fall and stay asleep. Lack of sleep can also add to your stress level and cause a cycle of stress and sleeplessness.



Better sleep habits can help. This includes both your daily routine and the way you set up your bedroom. Habits that may help include:

- Exercise regularly.
- Get out in the sunlight.
- Drink less alcohol and caffeine close to bedtime.
- Set a sleep schedule

- Don't look at your electronics 30–60 minutes before bed.
- Try meditation or other forms of relaxation at bedtime.

The role of your bedroom in good sleep hygiene also is important. In general, your room should be dark, quiet, and cool. 60–65 degrees is thought to be an ideal temperature to stay asleep. Your bed also plays an important role. Your mattress should provide support, space and most of all, comfort.

Connect with people

Spend time with a friend or family member who will listen to you. It is a natural way to calm you and lower your stress. When you connect with people in person, your body releases a hormone that stops your fight or flight response. You relax.



Behavior

How you respond to people directly impacts your stress levels. Manage your response with these tips:

- Try not to overcommit yourself
- Share the responsibility
- Count to 10 before you respond
- Walk away from a heated situation
- Distract yourself with music or podcasts

By: Akmitha Jayakody – After O/L

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