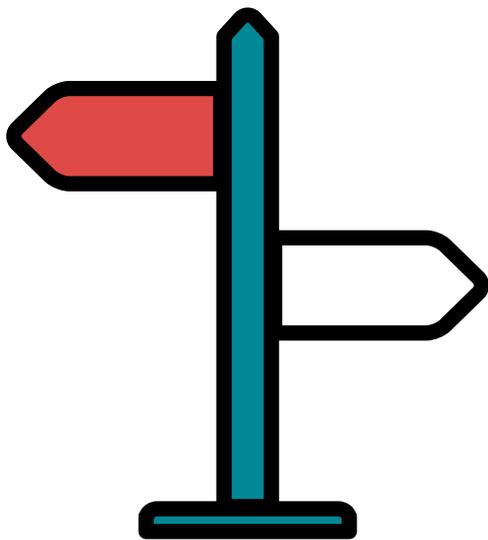


# Mental Health Factsheet



## What is mental health?

Mental health is a crucial aspect of our life just as physical health is. It can be described as the positive sense of wellbeing, and the emotional and spiritual resilience which enables us to enjoy life and to survive pain, disappointment and sadness.

As Almoner, you will naturally take an interest in the welfare of members of your Lodge and their families. Research shows one in four of us will experience some kind of mental health, so it is helpful to have a basic understanding of the issues, symptoms, impacts and sources of support available.

## Mental health issues

As Almoner you should be aware that there are a number of diagnosable mental health conditions with people experiencing different symptoms that can vary in severity, intensity and form. The most commonly diagnosed are:

- Depression
- Anxiety disorders (including panic attacks, obsessive compulsive disorders, phobias and post-traumatic stress disorders)
- Eating disorders
- Bipolar disorders
- Schizophrenia
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Self-harm

Recovery is possible with the right help and support, with many people able to lead independent and fulfilling lives. However, some individuals may relapse and will need support.

## Influences of wellbeing

The following things can all affect somebody's wellbeing:

- Work pressures (or unemployment)
- Stress
- Relationship pressures (including bereavement and loss)
- Abuse (physical or psychological)
- Financial worries (including debt)
- Homelessness / housing pressures
- Addiction (drugs and alcohol dependency)
- Physical illness or injury

## Identifying early signs

When you are speaking to or meeting Brethren or their dependants, the key thing to look for is a change in the person's typical behaviour. This can take many forms, so for example, they may have gone from being quite extrovert to becoming much more introvert. Other signs to look out for include tearfulness, headaches, loss of humour or appetite, or sudden changes in emotions or mood. Also, if a Brother who is normally good at ritual appears distracted and performing below his usual standard, he might be struggling in his personal life.

## Supporting someone

If problems are identified at an early stage then more effective help and appropriate support can be possible. Sometimes just having someone who will listen is a comfort but always ensure that you actively listen in order to manage a person's expectations around the support they might need. If you notice any signs then you should gently encourage the person to speak to their GP or seek further support from an appropriate organisation.

## Things you should and should not say

Whatever you say to somebody you should always try to be positive and encourage the person to help themselves. Don't be judgmental or make assumptions about anybody. If they have requested a family member or friend to be present it could be beneficial to involve them in conversations. Questions you could ask to begin with include:

- How are you feeling at the moment?
- How long have you felt like this – is it an ongoing issue?
- Who do you feel you can go to for support?
- Is there anything we can do to help?



Above all, it is important to provide reassurance to anyone you are supporting and to encourage them to do the things which make them happiest. For example, if supporting a Brother this could mean encouraging him to revisit his love of Freemasonry, arranging transport to Lodge meetings, if necessary and seating him among friends at the Festive Board. Alternatively, you could encourage them to take up pastimes they once enjoyed by joining a local group or by going with a friend or loved one.

## What to do if someone becomes emotional or upset

Here are some points to help you should somebody you are visiting become emotional or upset:

- Try to be calm
- Reassure them that it is okay to be upset
- Ask if there is anyone they would like you to contact for them
- Be sensitive and sympathetic
- Be respectful
- Confirm that the discussion can continue at a pace that suits them

In these circumstances remember you must not take on responsibility for solving a person's mental health and always remember to look after yourself.

## Getting help

### MIND

Provides advice and support to empower anyone experiencing a mental health problem.

[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk) or call 020 8519 2122

### Rethink Mental Illness

Helps millions of people affected by mental illness by challenging attitudes, changing lives.

[www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org) or call 0300 5000 927

### Mental Health Foundation

Helps people to thrive through understanding, protecting and sustaining their mental health.

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk) or call 020 7803 1100

### Combat Stress

Provides UK wide support to veterans from every service and every conflict.

[www.combatstress.org.uk](http://www.combatstress.org.uk) or call 0800 1381619



## **ASSIST trauma care**

Information and specialist help for people with PTSD and anyone supporting them – [www.assisttraumacare.org.uk](http://www.assisttraumacare.org.uk) or call 0178 856 0800.

## **Masonic Charitable Foundation**

The MCF runs the Counselling Careline which has specialist counsellors for anyone struggling to cope. Additional counselling sessions can be provided, if necessary face to face rather than on the telephone. This is a free service and requires no form filling or application. A call should be made to the MCF to make an enquiry on 0800 035 60 90.

## **The MCF's Advice and Support Team**

Offer advice, guidance and support on a range of issues. Contact them by calling 0800 035 60 90. Your Provincial Grand Almoner may be able to signpost you to local support and assistance.

## **Provincial Grand Almoner**

Your Provincial Grand Almoner may be able to signpost you to local support and assistance.

The information contained in this factsheet is intended for general guidance only and does not constitute advice. The MCF does not endorse any of the organisations listed.

