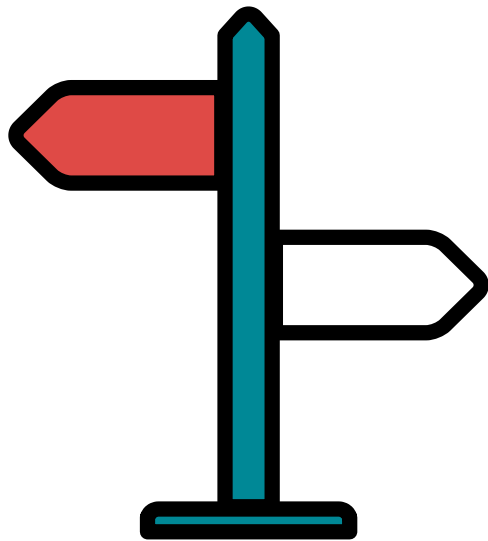


Mental Health Factsheet



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 issue, 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
- Loneliness and social isolation

Identifying early signs

When you are speaking to Brethren or their dependants, the key thing to look and listen out 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 has normally been good at ritual appears distracted or disengaged when you are speaking to him, 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 someone you are speaking to becomes emotional, upset or you pick up on 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. It could be beneficial for them to involve a family member or friend in conversations should they wish to do so. 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 or explore taking up other hobbies.

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.

Mental Health First Aid

Mental Health First Aid teaches people how to identify, understand and help someone who may be experiencing a mental health issue through listening, reassuring and responding, even in a crisis – and even potentially prevent a crisis from happening. For more information visit MHFA England - www.mhfaengland.org/individuals/adult

Getting help

MIND

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

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 or call 0300 5000 927

Mental Health Foundation

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

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 or call 0800 1381619

ASSIST trauma care

Information and specialist help for people with PTSD and anyone supporting them – www.assisttraumacare.org.uk

Voluntary Action Service

For anyone who is vulnerable and needing somebody to talk to, NHS Volunteer Responders delivered through the Royal Voluntary Service, has been set up to support the NHS and the care sector during the Covid-19 outbreak. Visit www.nhsvolunteerresponders.org.uk or call 0808 196 3646.

Young Minds

Leading the fight for a future where all young minds are supported and empowered, whatever the challenges, making sure they get the best possible mental health support and have the resilience to overcome life's difficulties. Visit www.youngminds.org.uk or call 0808 802 5544 if you are a parent needing help.

Masonic Charitable Foundation

The MCF runs the Counselling Careline which has specialist counsellors for anyone struggling to cope. Freemasons, their wives, partners or widows, as well as children between the ages of 17 - 25 who are in full-time education can access the Counselling Careline. Counselling sessions can be provided if preferred via a secure video link rather than on the telephone. This is a free service and requires no form filling or application. Contact should be made with the MCF on 0800 035 60 90 (calls are free) or email help@mcf.org.uk

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.

Metropolitan/Provincial Grand Almoner

Your MetGA/PGA may be able to signpost you to local support and assistance.

Why not watch the MCF's 'Almoner's Tale' video on mental health - www.mcf.org.uk/almoner

You may also be interested in reading our Loneliness factsheet.



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.