

So, you may be wondering why out of all the endless choices available to me why I chose mental health for my speech. I chose the topic mental health as its not spoken about enough due to it being a sensitive topic for many.

Having gone on ncs during the summer, which is national citizen service to those who may not be familiar with it, I made a friend who has struggled with their mental health for several years. They had the ability to share their personal experiences with me in such depth on how it has shaped them into the individual they are today by overcoming various obstacles, which was very inspiring listening to.

I felt it was super important for me to research more into the topic regarding mental health as it affects everyone, whether it be you or someone close to you.

Mental Health. We hear this term a lot nowadays, but what does it actually mean?

- At its core, mental health is an umbrella term for everything that goes on in our head - it is not a fixed state, everyone has good and bad days and there is a spectrum with feeling good, positive and confident at one end and feeling sad, low or even that you are struggling on the other.
- Our mental health can be affected by all the things in our life, for example school pressures, relationships with family or friends and even how much sleep you are getting. Due to this the way you feel may change from day to day or month to month.
- Worries feel different to everyone and if you feel you are struggling or things are getting too much you should talk to someone about how you are feeling as it often helps to lighten the load and gives you a way to move forward. At school you could choose to talk to a teacher, mentor or counsellor.
- Your mental health is as important as your physical health and just like a physical illness, treatment and support is available for mental health illness too.
- Therefore, it is important to recognise if your mental distress is taking over your life or stopping you carrying out your normal day to day activities.

Here are some of the indicators to be aware of :

- Feeling low often or for long periods of time
- Feeling intensely worried or nervous
- Having problems focusing or becoming forgetful
- Experiencing unusual aches and pains
- No longer enjoying your favourite sport or hobbies

- I appreciate It can feel scary or overwhelming to experience mental health problems for the first time or at any time. It can also be difficult to talk about them with your friends and family because you may feel there is a stigma associated with mental illness, however this is not the case and according to the NHS, 1 in 4 people will experience a form of mental health illness during their lives.
- GPs will be aware of the variety different mental health conditions young people can experience which include depression, anxiety, eating problems, phobias and obsessive compulsive disorder and will be able to help with support and treatment
- It's important to know that you're not alone and that there is a way to move forward, no matter what you're going through.

Why do people struggle with their mental health?

- Although a lot of mental illnesses don't have a clear cause, our mental wellbeing is affected by a variety of different things- a combination of biological, psychological and environmental factors.
- Someone may struggle with their mental health as a result of chemicals in their brain, while another person can experience the same symptoms as a result of a one-off incident or ongoing stressful circumstances
- Our brains are also in constant dialogue with the rest of our body and vice versa, so if we are stressed, we may have repetitive thoughts which makes us feel tense which makes us have repetitive thoughts
- No matter the reason, there are things that can help you manage- from medicine to meditation- find what works for you

I'd like to finish by suggesting ways to optimise your mental health

- Physical exercise- from running to yoga, rugby to taekwondo - fitting exercise into your routine can help you to feel more positive
- Regular sleep helps us to repair and recharge our bodies and minds. Aim for 7-9 hours to keep your mental wellbeing in check
- Breathing and meditation- simple breathing techniques can help you clear your mind, reconnect to your body and calm you down
- Healthy eating habits ensure you get a range of nutrients and vitamins. As food is linked to our memories and emotions, you might find certain foods help you feel good.
- Fun stuff- doing things you enjoy are so important. Meeting your friends, going shopping or even listening to music- it's really vital to have things that you can immerse yourself in.

As Dr Noah Shpancer once said, 'mental health is not a destination but a process. It's about how you drive, not where you're going.'

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