Mental Health Toolkit for Caregivers
Dear Mental Health Champion,

Thank you for joining UNICEF’s Every Day is Mind Day campaign to normalise conversations about mental health for young people and caregivers in Thailand.

We need your help in making mental health and well-being part of our daily conversations.

Take the first step and use this toolkit to learn more about your own mental health and things that you can do every day to look after yourself.

When you feel ready, start having conversations with your loved ones about mental health. The more we all talk about it, the less stigma there will be about sharing our feelings and challenges.

You may not be able to solve their problems, but you can be a good listener and direct them to professional help if needed.

Helping others is also good for your own mental well-being. It can make you more aware of how you feel and boost your mood and self-esteem.

Being a Mental Health Champion can be a part of your everyday life with these simple steps.

Thank you for joining us on this journey to make a positive difference in the lives of young people and their families.

UNICEF and Department of Mental Health
TALKING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH
TOOLS TO HELP YOU TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF AND YOUR FAMILY
The COVID-19 pandemic and the new normal has had a huge impact on our lives. Many of us are left feeling stressed, overwhelmed and worried about the future. But you are not alone.

Now is the time to learn more about mental health, which can often feel like a tricky or taboo topic to talk about.

Mental health is just as important as physical health. We need to look after ourselves and help those around us stay healthy, especially children.

Young people need healthy food and exercise to grow into healthy adults. Good mental well-being is equally as important to help them grow up happy and resilient.

In this toolkit, you will find practical tips to help your families and loved ones with their mental well-being. It can also help us take better care of ourselves so we can help those around us, especially during COVID-19. Remember – we are all in this together.
Mental health is our psychological and emotional well-being. It’s how we feel inside our hearts and minds. Good mental health helps us cope with the stresses of ordinary life, school and work. It can also contribute to inner equilibrium and balance.

Mental health challenges are not something to be ashamed of. Sometimes we feel okay. Sometimes we don’t. This is normal. Understanding mental health is the first step to becoming stronger and more resilient.

Self-care means looking after our own mental health. For example, getting enough rest, eating healthy foods and exercising.

Mental health challenges are common. There are different types and some are more severe than others. They can affect emotions, thinking, problem-solving and behaviour. If you notice changes in your child or your friends, it’s important to help them access support. Call Hotline 1323 to get professional help.

Resilience is our ability to overcome challenges and positively adapt to change. Just like we need a daily fitness regime to keep our bodies strong against illnesses, we need to practise emotional fitness to help us manage stressful situations.

Social support is what we offer others to help them improve and maintain their mental health.

Want someone to talk to? Call the Department of Mental Health Hotline 1323 for confidential and anonymous counselling, 24 hours a day.
DID YOU KNOW?

Around 20% of the world’s children and adolescents have a mental health condition.

Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide.

Half of all mental illnesses show early signs before a person turns 14 years old.

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Drink up! Staying hydrated is important for focus and emotional stability.

Bananas contain tryptophan, which helps your brain create feel-good chemicals.

For optimum well-being, children should get at least one hour of exercise per day.

Expressing gratitude increases your feelings of well-being.
EMPATHISING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

The world feels unpredictable for young people. They are undergoing a lot of physical and emotional changes and may be struggling to feel in control. Understanding what young people are experiencing can help you guide them through this period of change and positively impact the rest of their lives.

Young people can experience

- Rapid physical changes which can lead to concerns about body size, shape or weight.
- Heightened moodiness and social anxiety.
- Sadness or depression, which can lead to low self-esteem or other problems.

More than just feeling sad

- Poor mental health in adolescence can go hand-in-hand with other health and behavioural risks, including alcohol or drug use, violent behaviour and unsafe sex.
- Many health behaviours and habits from adolescence continue into adult years. It is very important to support young people in choosing healthy practices that assist their well-being.
UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS

**Intense emotions**
- **Loved**
  Feeling appreciated and cared for
- **Hatred**
  Intense dislike

**Related to outside influences**
- **Happy**
  Joy or when our experiences meet our expectations
- **Sad**
  Feeling down or heartbroken
- **Disappointed**
  Let down and defeated
- **Relieved**
  Comforted or reassured
- **Grateful**
  Thankful and appreciative
- **Angry**
  Frustrated or cross

**How you view yourself**
- **Proud**
  Pleased with an achievement
- **Embarrassed**
  Ashamed or shy

**Connected to thoughts of the future**
- **Scared**
  Anxious or afraid
- **Hopeful**
  Feeling good about the future
Every day is Mind Day

Daily reminders for mental well-being

Good mental well-being needs to be worked on daily, just like physical fitness.

You’re not a bad parent if you or children you care for have mental health challenges.

Self-care is the first step for maintaining and improving mental well-being.

Everyday mental health practices are easy to do and can help you and your loved ones.
GAINING SELF AWARENESS

What does it mean to be self-aware?
Self-awareness is about understanding yourself. It means listening to your thoughts and emotions and identifying how you feel. It’s also important to know that other people may see you differently from how you see yourself.

Why is self-awareness important?
Understanding your own feelings is essential to good mental health. It helps you identify your strengths and weaknesses. Self-awareness is especially important for children to develop. It builds their self-esteem and helps them understand how they can overcome challenges.

How can I help my child develop self-awareness?
The first step is talking to them. Encourage them to listen to their emotions and reflect on how they feel. Help them identify and work through their feelings. Focus on their strengths, and discourage negative self-talk. Journaling, meditation, yoga and nature walks can all help young people listen to their feelings.

Practising self-awareness
Pay attention to how you feel throughout the day. Do you feel happy? Anxious? Overwhelmed? Practise how you would tell someone what’s on your mind and what you need to feel better.
BOOSTING WELL-BEING

Doing small things can have positive effects on your mental health. Here are some easy ways to practise self-care every day.

- **Stick to a routine**
  with regular sleep and wake-up times to get enough rest and plan your days. Routines also help us create healthy habits.

- **Walk**
  to lift your mood, clear your head and boost the blood flow to your brain and body.

- **Keep a journal**
  and write down your feelings to help understand them better. A journal can be a safe place to vent frustrations or fears. No one else needs to see it but putting thoughts and emotions on paper can also help you better understand them.

- **Eat nutritious food**
  for mental well-being. Fruits, vegetables and “brain foods” like nuts, oily fish and beans are all healthy options. Energy drinks, sugary foods and drinks and alcohol should all be avoided. Excess sugar consumption can cause anxiety and irritability.

- **Stretch**
  or try gentle yoga movements to relax. Exhaling releases feel-good chemicals or endorphins in the brain.
Meditate
to help control your breathing and heart rate. This will lower your stress. It’s also good for improving concentration and boosting self-esteem. Start by playing calming music, sitting in a comfortable position, closing your eyes and calmly inhaling and exhaling. There are also many techniques to try online.

Switch off from devices
to feel better. Less than two hours of screen time per day has been linked to lower stress and greater life satisfaction in young people.

Spend time in nature
to help relieve stress levels. Caring for animals, visiting a park and gardening can all help.

Spend time with friends
They provide social support and make us feel loved and appreciated. Even a quick phone call can help.

Get enough sleep
It is closely related to mental and physical well-being. Avoid electronics and caffeine before bed and maintain a consistent sleep pattern to get enough quality rest.

How to put your feelings into words
Start with something simple like:
“I feel _____ right now”
or “I feel _____ when I ______.”
CREATING SAFE SPACES

Safe spaces
are places where you can feel comfortable to freely express yourself without worrying about what others think. These spaces can be physical or online, private or public.

Make your home a safe space
by using positive language with your child, showing affection, paying attention and being a role model by taking care of your own mental well-being.

Social media-free zones
can help us chase away feelings of anxiety, isolation and hopelessness. Make mealtimes and bedtimes quality time by telling everyone to put away their phones.

Quality time
with family and friends can reduce stress and promote resilience. Play sports with friends. Cook a meal together, go for a walk, do volunteer work or simply meet to talk. Even a chat group can help.

Music
has the power to relax and lift moods. Use sound to create a safe space.

How to create safe spaces
Feeling safe means feeling loved, supported, comfortable, secure and protected. Identify people who make you feel safe and find ways to connect. Certain places can offer comfort too, for example your own home, a friend’s home, a favourite cafe or a library. Try to spend time there.
Your child might not be able to tell you how they are feeling or if they need help. But there are signs you can look out for. If you notice any of the below, encourage your child to talk to you about it. See page 16 of this toolkit for guidance on how to open up a constructive conversation with your child.

**SPOTTING EARLY WARNING SIGNS**

Recognising early warning signs

Physical
- Insomnia
- Sleeping too much
- Self-harm
- Eating disorders

Behavioural
- Extreme changes in personality
- Unusually low grades
- Drug use
- Loss of interest in hobbies
- Isolation from friends
- Stealing
- Lying

Cognitive
- Loss of self-esteem
- Obsessive thinking

Emotional
- Severe mood swings
- Prolonged anger or sadness
ASKING FOR HELP

We ask each other for help all the time in our daily lives. This could be assistance in our homes, help at work or advice about raising children. We also ask for help when our bodies are sick. We want to know why we are sick and how we can get better.

Why don’t we ask for help with our mental health?

It’s understandable that you might feel nervous because this isn’t a topic that many people talk about in our society. However, we need to start talking about it. Talking can help us understand our problems better. It can also give us new perspectives to see things differently. Talking also helps people know we need help.

The most important thing to remember is that you are not alone. What you are experiencing is more common than you think, and talking about your problems with people you trust is the first step to getting help.

Three ways talking can help

It makes you feel less alone. Sharing mental health concerns can make you feel a bit better. You may experience some relief knowing that somebody is listening to you.

Talking about your problems also gives other people the chance to help you. They may have had a similar experience or can simply listen. If they know how you feel they might be able to recommend where you can get help.

Talking helps everyone to know that mental health challenges are real and something we should all help each other with.

Who to talk to

When you feel the time’s right, think about who you want to talk to. Think about people you can trust and people who are close to you. Sometimes, it’s easier to talk to people who don’t know you like a professional counsellor.
Write your feelings in a journal if talking to someone feels too hard.

Talk to the mirror and practise what you want to tell people.

Record voice notes for yourself.

Try sending a text to a friend or someone you trust first to open the conversation.

Write a letter to someone you trust and read it to them.

A letter can spark a conversation. Here are some prompts to use:

- I have been feeling...
- I am afraid of...
- I am nervous to talk about this because...
- I want to tell you this because...
- Can you please help me?
Helping young people with their mental well-being starts with having empathy and talking. How you start the conversation is important to make them feel comfortable sharing their feelings.

Here are some pointers for talking about mental health with anyone of any age who may need help.

**Start the conversation**

Turn off any digital distractions like your phone and the TV. Share your own story if it’s relevant and may give the other person the confidence to open up to you. Be neutral and non-judgemental. Understand if they don’t feel comfortable sharing with you. Suggest other people they may like to talk to.

**Ask how they are feeling**

Start simply, and make sure to listen attentively. Be honest with them. It’s okay to admit it if you feel uncomfortable talking. It’s okay for there to be periods of silence.

**Ask twice**

People might say they’re fine the first time you ask. A second “How are you feeling?” tells them you are really ready for them to open up.
Ask open-ended questions

that begin with who, what, where, when, why or how and invite more detailed answers than yes or no questions.
“How are you feeling?”
“What was your favourite or least favourite part of the day?”
“Really? Tell me more…”
“What’s your take on that?”

Keep the conversation going

Encourage people to share more by using prompts like “Tell me more…” or “I’m listening…” Asking questions such as “And what do you think about that?” can keep the lines of communication open, especially for young people.

Keep conversations casual

and talk while doing other things to reduce the pressure on everyone. Try starting a conversation when you are walking or cooking together.

Don’t try to fix things, and just listen

Listening is an important part of helping. Let them talk and express their feelings without judging or interrupting them.

Help them see they’re not alone

Reassure people that you are there to help them, especially your own children. Tell them they have your support and you will try to help them get whatever help they need to feel better.

Be informed about professional support services

It’s important to know that you can also get support by accessing the services below.

- Hotline | 1323
- Mental Health Clinics at general hospitals
- Empathetic listening service | www.satiapp.co
- LoveCare Station
  Online counselling (16:00-24:00) www.lovecarestation.com
  LINE Chat (12:00-20:00) @lovecarestation
- Self-assessment tool | www.วัดใจ.com
What to say
Tell them that you care about them and that they matter to you.
Ask how you can help.
Ask if they want to talk about how they are feeling.
Tell them you understand, but only if you really do.
Remind them that they matter.
Remind them it’s okay to feel this way.

What NOT to say
“I know how you feel.”
Don’t say this if you don’t know how they feel; it invalidates or minimises their experience.

“Others have it worse than you.”
This can make your child feel guilty for how they feel.

“This is your own fault.”
Don’t blame your loved ones for how they feel. Be understanding and empathetic.

What NOT to do
- Avoid the person.
- Make fun of their mental health challenges.
- Pressure people to talk to you, especially your children. Give them time and space.
- Use words that stigmatise mental health, like ‘psycho’ or ‘crazy’.
- Interrogate, moralise or threaten.
- Expect an easy cure. People need time and space to overcome mental challenges.

Remember, Every Day is Mind Day

Let’s all be kind to ourselves and support each other. A simple action, like asking how someone is feeling or being a good listener can make a big difference for those with mental health challenges. We are all in this together.

This toolkit was developed by UNICEF in partnership with Thailand’s Department of Mental Health. Mental health content provided by Sompop Jamchan, a counselling psychologist.

Find more UNICEF resources on mental health at Every Day is Mind Day l www.unicef.or.th/mindday and On My Mind l www.unicef.org/mental-health-on-my-mind