Seven key steps to protect your mental health

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***Top tips**: Experts say there are small steps everyone can take for their mental health.*

Can we learn resilience? Today marks the start of Mental Health Awareness Week. Experts say everyone can make simple changes to improve their mood.

What's happening?

This week is Mental Health Awareness Week. It is a time to talk about mood, wellbeing, and what we can do to feel better and help others feel better.

Mental health is a big concern for health experts. The number of children with **severe** mental health problems has reached record levels in England.

Doctors disagree over the cause of this crisis. However, there is plenty of agreement about the best ways to improve wellbeing. Here are seven top tips:

Find out more

Spend time in nature. Surveys show that time in gardens and parks makes people calmer, less anxious and more hopeful.

Exercise often. Movement — whether dancing, sports, or taking a walk — releases "feel good" **hormones**.

Socialise offline. Spending time with friends in real life reduces loneliness and unhappiness. But lots of time on social media is not good for you.

Prioritise sleep. "Sleep is your superpower," says **Harvard** doctor Matt Walker.

Find time to meditate. Reduced stress, better sleep, less **anxiety**… daily meditation can transform your wellbeing.

Make plans for the future. Plans give purpose to people's lives.

Acts of kindness. Being kind to friends, family and strangers can improve your sense of competence and connection.

Unhappiness is impossible to escape. Rather than people avoiding experiences that might make them unhappy, it is better to learn ways of coping in tough times.

Can we learn resilience?

Some say

Yes! The mind is a muscle. If people perform the right exercises, they will find themselves stronger when things go wrong.

Others think

No! Not everyone has the chance to exercise, or sleep well, or spend time with friends. We also need to create a world without sickness, loneliness and **poverty**.

Some people say

Six steps to discovery

1. **Connect**

"If you take care of your mind, you take care of the world."

Arianna Huffington (1950 –), Greek-American author and editor

What do you think?

How do you feel about this story? - Do you sometimes have low moods? What do you do to make yourself feel better?

2. **Wonder**
What questions do you have? - For example: How long has society been keeping records on mental health?

3. **Investigate**
What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for certain and one thing we cannot say for sure about this story.

4. **Construct**
What is your point of view? - Should you have mental health lessons at school?

5. **Express**
What do others believe? - In groups, come up with three ways that you would change society to improve the overall mental health outcomes.

6. **Reflect**
What might happen next? - Imagine a member of your family was struggling with mental health problems. Design a daily routine that would maximise their mood and wellbeing.

Glossary

Severe - Very bad, serious, or unpleasant.

Hormones - Chemicals created inside living creatures. They are used to send messages from one part of the body to another.

Harvard - A top US university, founded in 1636.

Anxiety - A feeling of unease or worry. It can be mild or very severe.

Poverty - The state of being very poor.