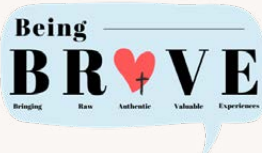


I AM BRAVE

Mental Health Resource for the Catholic Community



MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends-in-Christ,

Mental health is increasingly seen as an important component of our everyday lives, as with the physical and spiritual aspects. As Catholic Christians, the integration of mental health and faith can not only help us in our lives journey but also better equip us to reach out to those who may be struggling in our community.

The conceptualisation of this booklet started with a group of volunteers, passionate for Christ and advocates of mental health. They aim to incorporate mental health and our Catholic faith through sharing of knowledge and personal experiences.

The booklet follows the story of a fictional character Zac, who struggles with depression and anxiety. Along the way, he receives help and encouragement from friends, family, and fellow Church members. As you read the story, you will also learn more about the signs and symptoms of common mental health conditions, where to seek help, tips for your mental health and how you can support someone in need.

We hope that this booklet will serve as a resource for you and your community to better understand mental health through the lens of faith, and how we can reach out to those around us with charity and hope.

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

- Philippians 4:6

With blessings,



Joachim Tph
Executive Director, Clarity Singapore

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I plead with you, never, ever, give
up on hope, never doubt, never
tire and never become discouraged.

Be not afraid!

- Pope John Paul II

INTRODUCTION

Dear reader,

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'

- Mark 12:30-31

What does it mean to love God with our entire being? This includes the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of ourselves. As we journey towards integrated beings, it is important to include both spiritual and psychological elements when we speak about mental health. Thus, the *I AM BRAVE: Mental Health Resource for the Catholic Community* was created. Inspired from our BRAVE CHAT discussions held with volunteers and young Catholics in 2021 and 2022, we realised that there is a need for an increased awareness and conversations about mental health amongst Catholics in Singapore. Hence, bringing together the creative energies of our dedicated team of volunteers, this booklet was created to encourage and bring hope to those who are struggling with their mental health.

I AM BRAVE is targeted at youths, young adults and those who are working closely with them. The booklet serves as a resource to share mental health knowledge and strategies, while incorporating elements of our Catholic faith such as prayer and stories of the Saints. It follows the story of a fictional character Zac, which is inspired by the real-life experiences of people of faith struggling with their mental health. Zac's story will be told on the left side of the booklet, while the corresponding information related to the story will be on the right side.

Join us on this adventure as we get to know more about our mental health, how we can show love and care to others, and the presence of God's healing hand.

Icons

You may also find some icons below scattered throughout the booklet - feel free to either click or scan the QR codes to read up more about certain topics or watch our videos as we bring the booklet to life! Take some time to reflect too, through the bubble icon.

Trigger Warning: This booklet contains information about self-harm and suicide. You will see this icon at some parts of the booklet. Reader discretion is advised.



Reflection



YouTube



Trigger Warning



Scan to
Read more

Disclaimer: While this booklet consists of some common signs and symptoms of mental health conditions, it is not meant to be a diagnosis tool. If you suspect that you/someone has a mental health condition, you are encouraged to seek professional mental health support.

Hello there, my name is Zac.
I like watching movies.
Superhero movies are my favourite.
Superheroes are BRAVE.

I am not like them.
I am not good at sports.
During PE, no one wants me to be on their team.
I failed Mrs Chia's A Math pop quiz again.
I am a stupid sandwich.



"I AM A STUPID SANDWICH"

From our life experiences and interactions with others, we may have developed certain ways of thinking which can be unhelpful to our mental health.

The thought of "I am a stupid sandwich" and other self-criticism or labels that we put on ourselves are a type of unhelpful thinking style. This is not helpful to our perception of ourselves in the long run as over time, we begin to believe these thoughts to be true.

Here are some unhelpful thinking styles which you may find familiar:

Mental Filter

Of all the things going well, you pick one negative detail out and focus all your attention on it.



For example:

You received 20 feedback forms after facilitating a workshop. 19 of the forms were filled with positive statements about you and your work. One form noted that you could have managed the time better. All you thought about was that one "negative" statement while ignoring all the other positive feedback.

All-or-Nothing/Black and White Thinking

Seeing things in black or white. No shades of grey. This thinking pattern involves thinking in extremes. If things are not perfect, you see them as failures.



For example:

I am either successful or a complete failure

Emotional Reasoning

Believing that whatever you feel, it must be so.



For example:

You are anxious about the test that is upcoming thereby concluding that you would not do well on the test paper even before taking it.



Check out this resource for more unhelpful thinking styles and ways to think alternatively!



Can you identify your unhelpful thinking style?



Some of my classmates tease me for my pimples and say that my glasses are dorky. I wish I had a girlfriend like the other cool boys in my class, but no one will like a loser like me. I am going to be forever alone.



“NO ONE WILL LIKE A LOSER LIKE ME”

Self-worth: a sense of one's own value as a human being.

What do we mean when we say that something is 'worthy' or 'worth it'? We usually refer to it being deserving of our attention or even sacrifice. And yet, getting caught up in our busy lives, we may sometimes forget that we ourselves are worthy as well - worthy of God's love and worthy of our own love.

Why is self-worth important?

1. Self-worth helps in achieving our goals

With self-worth comes a feeling of confidence in oneself, as we are able to recognise our own innate value. This gives us the mental strength and capacity to take on challenges that will inevitably fall on our paths as we work towards our goals. While it might not make the journey a lot easier, it smoothenes out the path ahead of us, as we know that we will be able to make it through tough times.



2. Self-worth brings us closer to our loved ones

A lack of self-worth can have detrimental effects on our loved ones, as we may project our insecurities onto them, or require an excessive amount of reassurance, which could take a toll on the other party. On the contrary, a sense of self-worth not only creates greater security in the relationship, but also allows for us to give more instead of constantly taking from the other person.

3. Self-worth brings us closer to God

God views us as His precious children with infinite worth, and therefore there is no reason why we should not view ourselves in the same way He views us.

As Henri Nouwen said in [“The Return of the Prodigal Son”](#) that we should claim the “first love” and the “original goodness” that God gave us. By being in touch with our true self as being made in the image and likeness of God, we can grow closer to God (Gen 1: 26-27).

4. Self-worth empowers one to make better decisions

With self-worth, we may find that we are more ready to try new things with less fear of failing because we know that our failures do not define us. In essence, self-worth allows us to more easily discern when to push on and when to let go.

So I got into a "good" junior college,
but I don't think I deserve to be here.
I probably lucked out in the "O" Level exams.
I feel so anxious; I haven't slept well in
months. Sometimes my heart beats so fast
and I feel like I can't breathe.
I have to drink at least 4 cups of coffee a day
just to be able to stay awake in class and
keep up with my schoolwork.
I have no appetite to eat.



UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY



Anxiety is...
an **emotion, mood or state** of worry or fear that **does not go away**,
affecting relationships and daily activities

Common signs of anxiety may include

Physical symptoms

- Restlessness & irritability
- Pounding or racing heart
- Shortness of breath
- Upset stomach
- Frequent urination or diarrhea
- Sweating, tremors and twitches
- Headaches
- Insomnia

Emotions

- Excessive worry
- Panic
- Helplessness
- Feeling on edge

Thinking

Anticipating the worst and being watchful for signs of danger

Feeling anxious is something we all have experienced before and it is a normal emotion that we all have, just like feeling happy, sad or angry.


However, when feelings of fear and distress persist for a **prolonged period of time** and **affects our daily activities**, it may be an indication that **professional attention is needed**.

Note: This list of signs is not exhaustive and is not meant for self-diagnosis. Experiencing some of these signs does not mean that you have anxiety.

Adapted from: <https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Mental-Health-Conditions/Anxiety-Disorders>

Anxiety can also manifest in different ways for different persons. One may feel physiological symptoms such as heart palpitations, difficulties breathing, and/or excessive perspiration while another may or may not have physiological symptoms but tend to worry excessively or ruminate about past events.

There are several types of anxiety, with the more common ones being generalised anxiety disorder (GAD), social anxiety, panic disorder and phobias.

 If you experience these signs for more than 2 weeks, please consult a medical doctor/mental health professional.

Check out this resource to read up more on Generalised Anxiety Disorder



There is nothing right in my life anymore.
Nothing interests me anymore, not even
watching my favourite Marvel character.
I feel lousy about myself and am crying all the
time, sometimes for no reason.
I struggle to focus in class.
And I have these monsters in my head...
they make me wish I were dead.



UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION



Everyone feels down and sad sometimes – feeling sad is a normal human emotion and these feelings usually pass by with a little time. However, **when these feelings persist and affect a person's functioning in life, seeking professional help may be helpful.**

Common signs of depression may include:

- S**leep disturbances
- A**ppetite changes
- D**epressed mood or feelings of sadness over a sustained period of time

- C**oncentration of problems
- A**nhedonia: Loss of interest in enjoyable activities
- G**uilt or shame
- E**nergy and enthusiasm low
- S**uicidal thoughts due to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness

Note: This list of signs is not meant for self-diagnosis. Experiencing some of these signs does not mean that you have depression.

Adapted from: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/depression>

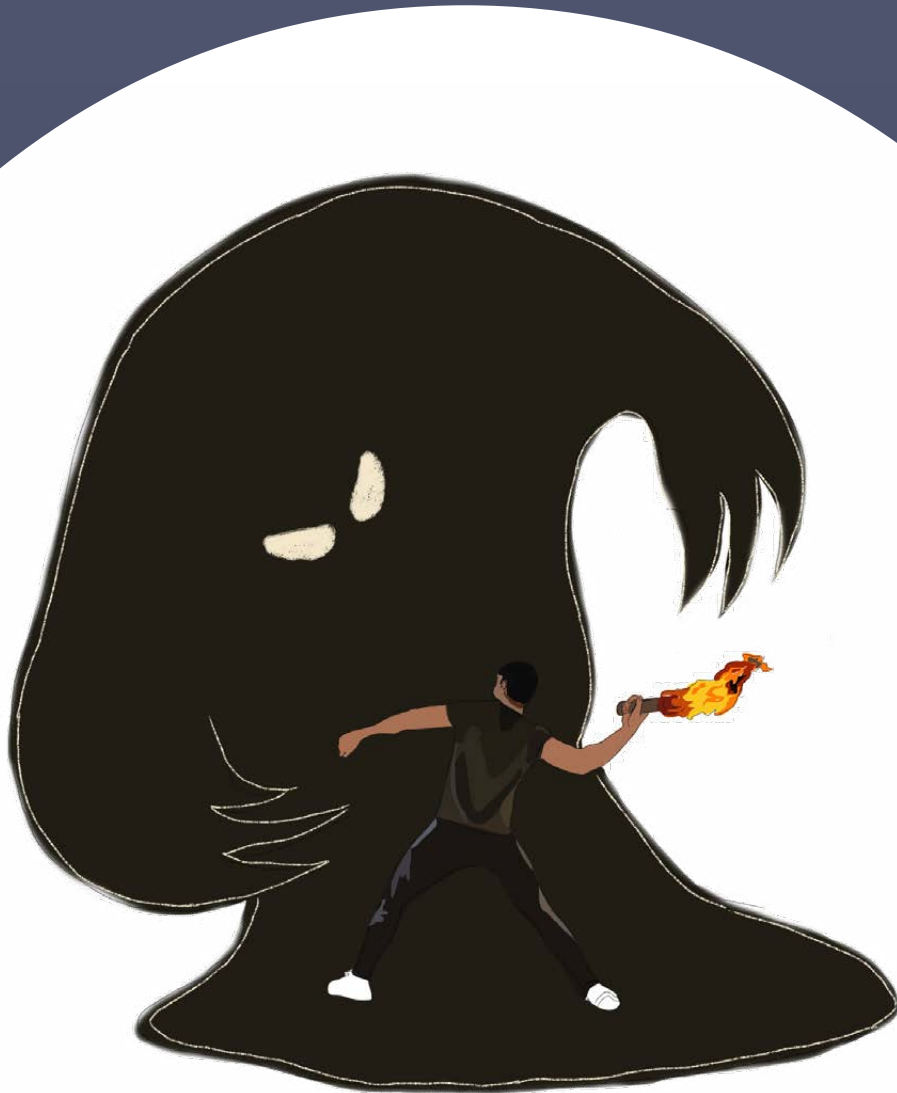
! If you experience these signs for more than 2 weeks, please consult a medical doctor/mental health professional.



Check out this
resource to read up
more on depression



So,
I hit my face into a wall,
to kill the monsters inside.



WHAT IS HAPPENING?



Zac smashing his head is an attempt to take away the psychological pain he is experiencing. This could be a sign of self-harm.

What is self-harm?

Self-harm means that a person harms him/herself on purpose. Self-harm is not a mental health problem, but it is often linked to mental distress.

Signs you may want to look out for include:

- Bruises, scars from cuts or burns usually on the wrists, arms, thighs, or chest which cannot be explained.
- Blood stains on clothing, towels, bedding or blood-soaked tissues
- Sharp objects or cutting instruments, such as razors, knives, needles, glass shards in the person's belongings.
- Covering up. A person who self-injures may insist on wearing long sleeves or long pants, even in hot weather.
- Frequent 'accidents'. Someone who self-harms may claim to be clumsy or have many mishaps, in order to explain away injuries.
- Isolation and Irritability. The need to be alone for longer periods of time, especially in the bedroom or bathroom.

Check out this resource to read up more about self-harm



Elizabeth is a survivor of complex trauma. Watch [this video](#) to hear her story about the ups and downs of her mental health journey, and the role God played in her healing.



Scan to watch



This video contains mentions of self-harm and suicide, and images of self-harm scars. Viewer discretion is advised.

Celine saw me that day -
Swollen eyes, tired face.

She smiled a warm summer sun and told me
she had monsters in her head too.

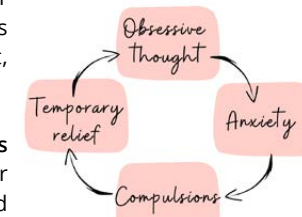
She told me her monster was named OCD, and
she taught me that monsters can be fought.



OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER

We often hear people exclaim that "I have a bit of OCD!" when they just like things to be neat. There is a big difference between having OCD and being neat. OCD, like other mental disorders, impairs one's daily functioning or causes significant distress. Being neat, however, probably does not, and may even improve one's functioning.

OCD is characterised by (1) obsessions and (2) compulsions that usually occur together. Obsessions are anxiety- or distress-provoking recurring thoughts that are unwanted and intrusive. Individuals then attempt to reduce the anxiety caused by these thoughts by performing compulsions. These compulsions can be repetitive acts (e.g. washing hands) or mental acts (e.g. counting) that are intended to prevent or reduce anxiety caused by obsessions, but may not be realistically linked to the obsessions or are overly repetitive.



The OCD Cycle

Note: These signs is not meant for self-diagnosis. Experiencing some of these signs does not mean that you have OCD

Myth 1: OCD is a form of perfectionism

Perfectionism can manifest as a strongly held belief about being perfect, as well as a tendency to ceaselessly demand perfection of the self. Research has shown that perfectionism may have positive or negative outcomes, depending on whether one's perfectionism originates from the self (positive) or from others (negative) (e.g. [Stoerber & Otto, 2006](#)).

OCD however, impairs a person's functioning and generally would not be linked with any positive outcomes. That said, perfectionism is also often found in people with OCD ([Frost & Steketee, 1997](#); [Wu & Cortesi, 2009](#)), but that does not mean that they are the same thing.

Myth 2: Double checking is a sign of OCD

People tend to have the occasional thought that someone with OCD engages with. For example, one may worry that one did not lock the door after they left their house. Most would return to check the door once before leaving - however those with OCD might check multiple times before being assured that the door was locked. This might even prevent them from getting to work on time due to the excessive time spent checking, thus affecting one's daily life.

Myth 3: People with OCD are obsessively tidy or clean

This is untrue. While some people with OCD may have obsessions and/or compulsions that make it such that they appear obsessively tidy or clean, there are other obsessions and/or compulsions that do not result in being tidy or clean. For example, someone might have obsessions about unwanted sexual images. These are unlikely to result in compulsions regarding cleaning, counting or being tidy, though they may still occur.

She showed me her anti-monster pills and told me about her monster-reduction therapy. She told me that it would take time, but things can get better with appropriate help. And she assured me that she would be there for me.



TYPES OF TREATMENT AVAILABLE



Hello! I am a **psychiatrist**. As a medical doctor specialising in psychology, I am able to diagnose mental health conditions and prescribe medication as treatment.

I am a **counsellor**, and I can provide help for those with mild mental health related issues like stress, grief and relationship issues.

I am a **psychologist**, and provide psychotherapy for those suffering with mental illness.



We are unable to prescribe medication but can treat you through therapy.



I am your friendly **GP or family doctor**. I can treat mild mental health issues and prescribe medication for more common conditions like depression and anxiety. I can also provide referrals to mental health professionals in hospitals or community agencies.



Hi! I am a **peer supporter**. I can support you in your struggles and we can relate with each other in our situations. Often, I have been in a similar space before and will share with you my experience.

Can therapy really help? Read this article to learn more about the myths and truths of therapy



Say hi to Laura, clinical psychologist at Clarity Singapore, as she shares about her journey as a mental health professional and where she sees God in her work.



Hello Laura!



I finally found the courage and told my Dad about the monsters. But he did not understand. I tried to tell my Mum. I knew she tried to understand, but somehow the monsters scared her.

Even though they did not understand, they loved me and accompanied me to get professional help. They also learnt about the monsters through books and workshops to better support me.



Tips for Parents: Ways to help Youth with their Mental Health

By Theresa Bung

To help develop good mental health, parents and family members can support their youth in the following ways:

1. Helping youths to recognise their true emotions

Sometimes in my counselling session, I have youth confiding in me:

"No one notices my fear
No one notices my tears
No one notices my wounds
But they noticed my mistakes and shame"

As such, youths turn to automatic responses of "I AM OK" to conceal their feelings when others check in on them. It is painful for youths to live a life of "fake it till you make it" as pretending to be fine often causes them to feel anxious and depressed.

One of the ways we can help youths is to encourage them to use responses like "I'm coping", "I'm surviving", "I'm still learning" or "I am work-in-progress". These methods of responding can help youths to feel more genuine and liberated, allowing them to build more authentic relationships with people.

2. Letting go of the need to be perfect

Some youths feel that they need to be perfect to be worthy. They feel less valued by their parents or friends in school if they make mistakes. The inability to accept their mistakes can lead to feelings of shame, sadness and even anger.

We can ask them thought-provoking questions to encourage them to think more positively over mistakes. A question I often use in my practice is: "Why do you think we have an eraser or delete key in our devices?" And I would share that it is because everyone makes mistakes, and we can learn from our mistakes and rewrite them using the right words.

I have also shared with youths who would beat themselves up over their failure to achieve good grades or excel in sports to see mistakes as opportunities for growth. Bravery is in rising every time we fall. Appreciate your courage of rising to walk again.

3. Reducing usage of digital devices

The use of smartphones through its endless variety of apps and social communication platforms can be a rewarding and enriching activity. However, maladaptive use of such devices can also lead to addiction, fears of missing out (FOMO) or nomophobia (fear of being without a phone).

To increase their repertoire of rewarding activities, we can advise youths to substitute the use of smartphones periodically or randomly with other activities like reading books or taking photos with a camera. When they switch between different activities, they may discover more about themselves and their preferences and hobbies. Advise and encourage youths to grab a book instead of the smartphone when they feel bored. We can also arrange to speak in person instead of using virtual platforms if they need to talk.

4. Provide safe spaces for youths to develop their self-worth

Youths have difficulties saying no to friends or people they like. They desire approval, and acceptance in what they do or say, sometimes even at the expense of their own self-interest, resulting in feelings of anxiety and stress.

It can be helpful if parents provide their youths a safe space to talk. To achieve this effectively, it is important that parents listen silently without judgement and withhold the need to problem-solve during the conversation. Asking open-ended questions will also convey parents' interest, helping youths to recognise their significance to them. Parents can also highlight their strengths and empathise with them on their limitations to build their self-worth. Asking youths about their motivations and allowing them to choose to do what they love can also boost self-esteem and overall happiness.

Teaching youths to have a voice on issues that are troubling them allows them to honour themselves and their needs. Acknowledge that it takes courage to speak up on such issues and encourage youths to have a growth mindset that prioritises their learning over their desires for approval and recognition. Life is like a tree where youths can learn to focus on the process instead of the outcomes. Just as the parable of the mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32), a beautiful bush can grow from something small, and youths can take heart in that!

In conclusion, I want to end with these thoughts:

In my line of work, I have seen youths celebrating their academic and sports success through different awards. It is a proud moment for themselves and for their families. I see them growing in confidence, competence, and congruence. However, there are no awards for those youths who:

1. Get up to go to school even when they are being bullied or failing in school.
2. Struggle with schoolwork as they need to look after their numerous siblings while their parents are at work.

3. Go to school with little or no pocket money and go hungry on certain days.
4. Experience sleepless nights hearing parents screaming and fighting, suffer bruises, fear more every day and yet bravely go to school with a smile.
5. Have ill health or are physically challenged yet pluck up the courage to go to school with all the stares and go through the flow of the school system.

For all their courage and perseverance, these youths should be given an award!

ABOUT THE WRITER

Theresa Bung is the Principal Therapist at Catholic Family Life. She has more than two decades of experience as a Marital and Family Therapist, dedicating her time to support individuals and strengthening families. Theresa has also had numerous interviews with various newspapers, magazines on topics related to children, couple and family issues.



Caregiving is difficult. Read this article to learn about the struggles and how you can support caregivers.



MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH AND FAITH

There is often a misconception that mental health and the Catholic faith are mutually exclusive concepts that do not go together. Often, mental health is viewed as part of the scientific, psychological realm, while our faith is seen as occurring only within the confines of the spiritual realm. This leads to vastly different explanations for mental struggles. Some people may leave out spiritual health as a possible contributing factor to mental struggles, while others may over-spiritualise these problems, attributing them solely to poor spiritual health. Hence, as integrated human persons, we must take into consideration both mental and spiritual health (amongst other aspects of health) to truly understand the plight of those with mental health struggles.

Biopsychosocial-spiritual model (BPSS)

The biopsychosocial-spiritual model is a holistic approach that recognises the interconnectedness between the biological, psychological, social and spiritual aspects of a person's well-being.

In order to attain well-being, all four aspects must be present. If any aspect is lacking, the person's overall well-being will be affected.

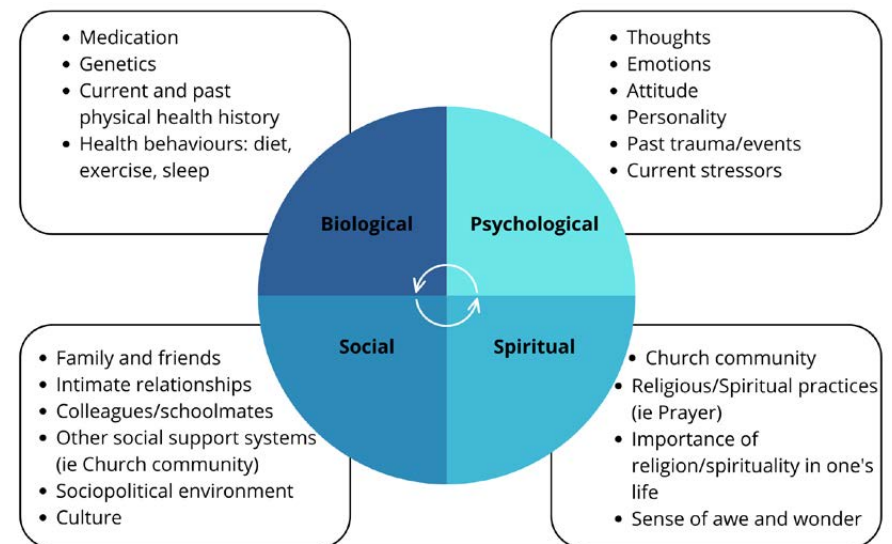


Image adapted from: Robinson, W., & Taylor, N. (2017). Assessment, biopsychosocial. In J. Carlson, & S. Dermer (Eds.), *The sage encyclopedia of marriage, family, and couples counseling* (Vol. 1, pp. 84-90). SAGE Publications, Inc, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483369532.n25>

Why am I so weak?

Why can't I snap out of this?

Maybe I did not pray hard enough?

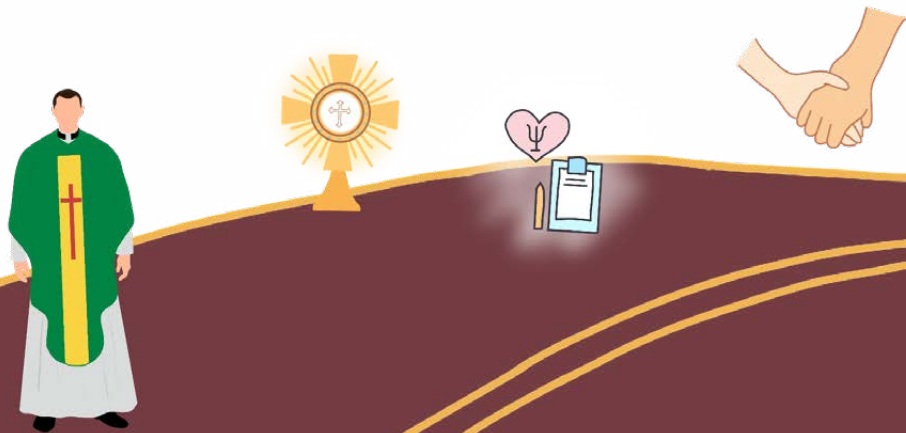
Maybe God has abandoned me?

These questions kept circling in my mind.

Celine took me to meet Father James who assured me that the monsters were not because of spiritual weakness. He assured me that God loves me and would be with me and give me the strength to fight the monsters, especially through the sacraments. He shared that spiritual healing can work together with medication and therapy. He also encouraged me to join a faith community who can be a source of support through my struggles.

There began a journey of
self-discovery, understanding, healing,
learning to cope.

And God was with me.



Mental Health Issues in Spiritual Direction

By Diana HC Tan

I had my formation and training as a spiritual director (SD) 18 years ago and was happy to answer God's call to journey with seekers who were trying to grow in relationship with God. Some sought to know God's will; some tried to find meaning and purpose in life; and some wanted to learn how to listen to God's voice. We talk about prayer, and how God shows up, or if He is seemingly absent in a directee's¹ life.

Over time and during the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, I found more people coming to spiritual direction with issues that are usually attended to by mental health professionals. Spiritual direction is a helping ministry somewhat akin to counselling, but its slant is towards one's relationship with God, and the movement of God within and outside a directee's life.

There are differences between spiritual direction and counselling. According to [Barbara Brown Taylor](#), "We go to counsellors when we want help getting out of caves. We go to [spiritual] directors when we are ready to be led further in."

Sometimes a directee may present issues that are beyond my expertise or training. This is when a referral to a trained healthcare professional is needed. Sometimes it could also be a referral to a priest, pastor or members of religious orders.

In my practice and ongoing formation as a spiritual director, I have developed a keen interest in human psychology and development. God is in the whole person - mind, body and spirit. The mind, body and spirit are not separate compartments but dis-ease in one area affects another. For example, dis-ease in the mind (mental health) affects the physical body and the spiritual being.

The benefit of a two-pronged approach to receive both counselling and spiritual accompaniment for a person with mental health needs depends on several things. For example, a person with, say, obsessive compulsive disorder or is suffering from deep trauma or severe panic attacks will certainly need help from trained therapists first. Some other considerations for a two-pronged approach are:

- Does the person seeking help have the time and resources?
- Does the person have the capacity to spend time in prayer?
- How complex is the mental health issue? In complex situations, it would be better to focus first on improving the mental health first before coming to spiritual direction. If in doubt, it is suggested to discuss the situation with both their Counsellor and SD.

¹ Directee – a seeker in spiritual direction, as opposed to "client" in counselling.

Spiritual direction would be the space for that person to, among other things, find solace and resilience in prayer; experience God's loving presence and embrace; and to encounter Jesus who heals.

While certain mental health patients require medications and careful modulation to their lifestyle to stay free of mood or thought symptoms, the use of prayer, beliefs, community, and spiritual practices such as chanting or quoting scripture are methods that can sustain states of resilience in unique ways (Griffith and Griffith, 2003). Spiritual direction, with its contemplative stance on non-judgemental and compassionate listening could be an additional support to therapy and/or medication and may help people cope with mild mental health challenges. For example, a SD could offer scripture passages that encourage someone who is feeling anxious in a new job.

There is also space within spiritual direction for a person with mental health to ask, "Where is God in this?", and to get help to grow in faith and trust in a caring and loving God. When I find that the person before me is willing to talk about God, I raise some of the following questions:

- Did they speak to God about what they are experiencing?
- What do they sense God is telling them?
- Did they experience God's comforting touch or presence when they were praying?
- What is the most important thing about their issues that they hope God would understand?

I look forward to the day when, with permission from the client, counsellors and spiritual directors could share case notes² so that they could work collaboratively with the client to bring about positive changes.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Diana HC Tan is a trained spiritual director in the Christian tradition and is schooled in Ignatian spirituality. She has also received training in Counselling and Integrated Psychotherapy (Spiritual). She has keen interest to explore the integration of counselling and spiritual direction as a helping ministry because she believes that God is interested in the whole person - mind, body and spirit. The views expressed in this article are her own.



Discover yourself and God, through your mental health. Read this article to find out how!



²About case notes - unlike counsellors, spiritual directors are not required to record notes of their conversations with their directees at this time.

THE DAILY EXAMEN

The Examen is a prayer created by St Ignatius of Loyola as a guide to reflect on the events of the day and to discern God's presence in our everyday lives. Through this reflective prayer, many have found it useful to assess their mental and emotional states and discovering the graces and gifts that God has given to us.

Here are the five stages of the prayer:

- 1. Ask God for light**
Invite the Holy Spirit to look at the day with God's eyes, not merely my own.
- 2. Give thanks**
The day that just ended is a gift from God, and I am grateful for it.
- 3. Review the day**
Reflect on the day that has just ended, paying attention to God's presence.
- 4. Face your shortcomings**
I am sorry for not having responded to God's promptings during the day and I rejoice when I see that I have responded.
- 5. Look toward the day to come**
I ask where I need God in the day to come.

Adapted from: <https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/examen-prayer-card/>



"Whatever you are going through, God loves you." Even when she struggled with depression and did not feel like praying, Elizabeth shares how God never left her side through the simple acts of the people around her.



Watch here



This video contains mentions of self-harm and suicide, and images of self-harm scars. Viewer discretion is advised.

I thought I did it.

I thought I was the monster-slayer.

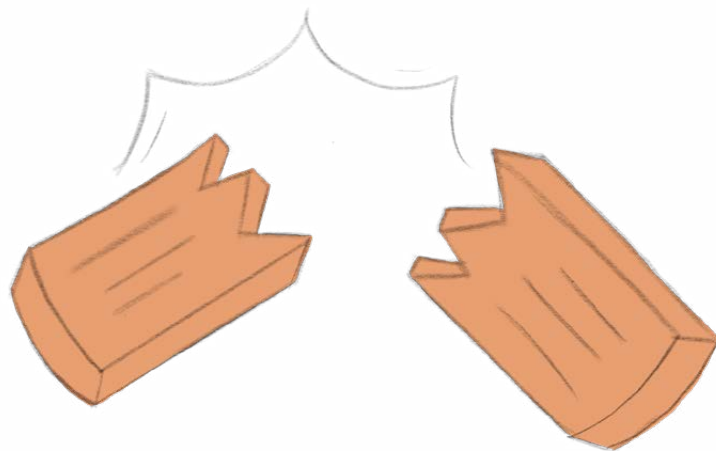
I thought the monsters were gone for good.
But a stint in a high-stress workplace made
me so burnt-out. I found myself captive again
to the monsters.

Why is this happening to me again?

How can this be possible? Why am I like this,
when others seem to cope so well?

I am so angry with myself, so angry at a God
who is supposed to care for me.

How could He let this happen,
time and time again?



STRESS AND BURN OUT

Stress is our body's way of responding to demands. When we sense that we are in danger, our bodies go into an automatic process known as the 'fight or flight' response, also known as the stress response. This is the protective mechanism that our body uses to provide us with energy, strength and alertness to deal with stressful situations.

For example, when we are in physical danger (e.g., being lost in a deep forest, walking in a dark secluded alley), we are on high alert and our bodies are ready to fight or run away when the need arises.

Signs of Stress

- Cognitive Signs**
 - Memory problems
 - Inability to concentrate
 - Poor judgment
 - Seeing only the negative
 - Anxious or racing thoughts
 - Constant worrying
- Physical Signs**
 - Aches and pains
 - Diarrhoea/constipation
 - Nausea, dizziness
 - Chest pain, rapid heart rate
 - Loss of sex drive
 - Frequent colds or flu
- Emotional Signs**
 - Depression or general unhappiness
 - Anxiety and agitation
 - Moodiness, irritability, or anger
 - Feeling overwhelmed
 - Loneliness and isolation
 - Other mental or emotional health problems
- Behavioural Signs**
 - Affected appetite, sleep
 - Social withdrawal
 - Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities
 - Using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax
 - Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)

Burn-out

What is burn out?

How does it differ from stress?

Stress and burn out are on a continuum: when chronic stress becomes more intense and severe, it leads to burn out. Burn out can impair functioning.

Three main features of burnout include:

- Overwhelming exhaustion
- Cynicism and detachment from the job or task
- Sense of not being productive, accomplished, or effective

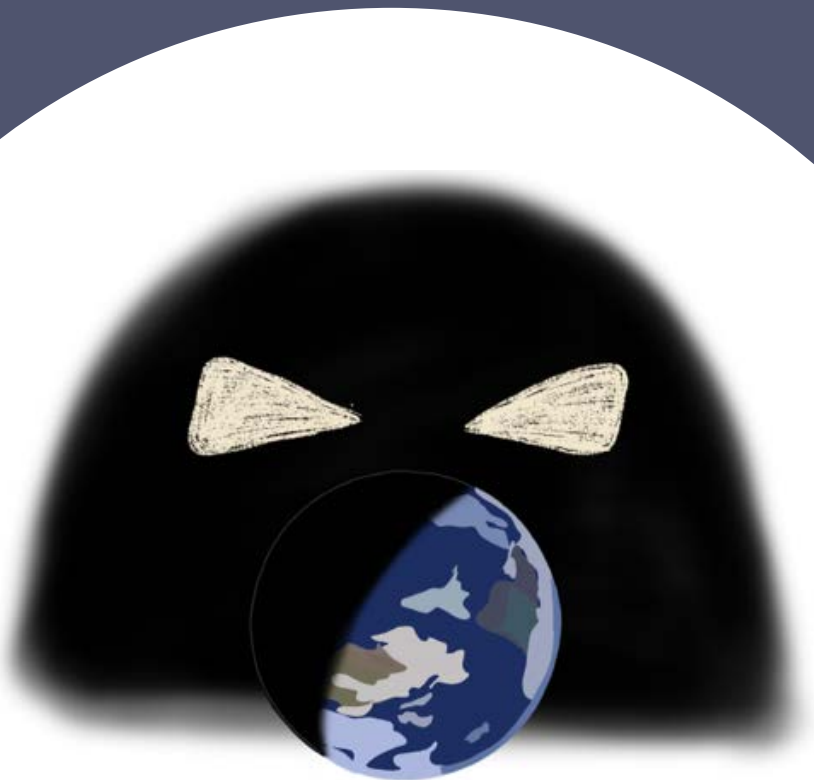


Check out this resource for some ways to cope with stress!



I decided to call it quits.
The monsters have won. I had enough.

I didn't want to burden my family and friends
anymore.



SIGNS OF SUICIDE



Just as looking out for signs of illness can allow us to seek the necessary treatment in time, keeping an eye for suicide warning signs can help to prevent suicide. The signs may not be obvious, but it is helpful to be aware of them so as to we look out for our friends who may be in need.

Talk	Actions	Mood
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Saying that: "I wish I was dead", "I want to end the pain", "They will miss me when I'm dead" Expressions of being a burden to others: "My family will be better off without me" Expressions of feeling trapped/unbearable pain: "There's no point to my life anymore" Suicide threats: "If you don't love me anymore, I will kill myself" Saying negative things about themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Giving away treasured possessions and saying goodbye Writing suicide notes (including emails/diaries/blogs) Taking alcohol or drugs Planning to attempt suicide by buying knives, ropes or accumulating pills in large amounts Researching ways to end their life Isolating themselves from family and friends and preparing a will 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in mood: quieter than usual, marked mood swings, increased sense of hopelessness and emptiness, more easily agitated, increased anxiety and extreme sadness Loss of interest, restless Changes in sleep patterns (sleeping less or more than usual)

Adapted from: <https://www.sos.org.sg>



Know someone in a mental health crisis? Here are some ways you can help.



If you/someone you know are in need of immediate mental health support, please do not hesitate to call Samaritans Of Singapore at 1-797

On that fateful night,
I saw my phone light up.
The last bit of strength in me prompted
me to call Celine.

Celine's voice was
like a soft autumn breeze.
She didn't seem fazed by
what I was saying.
She convinced me to call 995,
and I think she saved my life.



Role of Communities in Youth Mental Health Care

By Jorain Ng and Christine Wong

In recent years, the mental health needs of children and youths have been in the spotlight on the news.

In 2021, the number of suicides among children and youth aged 10 to 29 reached a record high ([Menon & Abdullah, 2022](#)). Furthermore, Singaporean youths in the 20s reported a decline in mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic ([Mathews, Hou, & Phoa, 2022](#)).

In response, the Singapore Government and social service agencies have done a lot of work in this area. There are both upstream and remedial interventions available in the community, from counselling services for the youth to mental health literacy talks for the public. One of the latest initiatives is an intermediate residential facility for youth who are hospitalised for risk of suicide or severe self-harm ([Goh, 2022](#)).

So why are youth suicides on the rise despite the vast array of services available to them?

Experts in suicide prevention currently do not have the exact reasons for the increasing suicide rates. However, they understand the impact of modern technology and social media on suicide. For instance, it is important to educate youths on the use of online information. Schools need to roll out programs to equip youths to gain resilience skills and suicide awareness, [Gatekeepers' skills](#), peer leadership/screening and assessment skills and to collaborate closely with community services.

Religious and faith-based organisations can play a bigger role within the community too as they are sought out when someone is facing depression or suicidal ideation. The Catholic Church's teaching on the Principle of Solidarity means we are all interconnected and interdependent as one human family. Caring for and about the general welfare of the family or our youths in this context, is not just the Government's and social service agencies' obligation. It is everyone's.

Communities facilitate help-seeking behaviour

Instead of delegating care to others, we should closely examine the communities to which we belong to because they are often the first places people turn to for support. The school, workplace, parish, parish ministry, and friends – these are some examples of communities where you may encounter someone with mental health needs. Do get the relevant training if you are a peer leader in your school or parish and willing to offer your support. You may also contact Caritas Singapore or Clarity Singapore to check if trainings are available.

Are our communities a safe space where people can share their emotional distress, feel accepted and respected, and find empathy and social support?

If the results of local studies on stigma are any indication, there is still a lot more work to be done in this area. A population-wide study of Singapore residents aged 18 to 65 found considerable stigma towards persons with mental health conditions ([Subramaniam et al., 2016](#)). Younger people, too, had misconceptions. Another local study revealed that a large proportion of youths aged 14 to 18 made pejorative associations with mental health conditions ([Pang et al., 2017](#)).

With self and social stigma being a significant barrier to help-seeking, having access to a community of people who are empathetic and understanding towards mental health conditions could positively influence help-seeking attitudes. In fact, positive help-seeking attitudes predict actual service use ([ten Have et al., 2010](#)), hence communities are vital in bridging the treatment gap in mental healthcare.

Creating a safe space within communities

In your community, you may encounter a friend who is emotionally distressed or expresses suicidal thoughts. It is okay to feel alarmed and concerned about what to say or do. Regardless of how you feel, be empathetic and non-judgemental. Start the conversation by letting your friend know that you are concerned and would like to help.

Here are three ways you can do so:

1. **Practice active listening.** Listen to understand your friend's situation, not to give advice or opinions. Unsolicited advice and opinion, no matter how well-intentioned can come off as criticism. Your friend may also require time to express their thoughts and feelings, so be patient. Allow pauses and periods of silence. If you need to clarify certain points, do ask questions. *Asking about suicide does not increase its likelihood.*
2. **Explore options.** Check with your friend about the coping strategies and community resources they have tried. This allows you to identify what worked or did not work for them. If they found an existing resource unhelpful, you could suggest alternative ones. The National Council of Social Service has an online [Mental Health Resource Directory](#) which you could refer to (or you can also flip to the back of this booklet for more resources!). If your friend has not received any professional help, encourage them to do so.



3. **Offer support.** Making the first contact to a professional can be hard. Your friend may share that they want to seek help but do not know where to start or feel hesitant. Offer to help them contact the professional in whatever way you feel comfortable.

The above tips are meant to serve as a guide. They may not be useful in every scenario, such as if your friend does not want to talk or rejects your suggestion of professional help. If they are not in immediate danger, be patient. Let them know that you will be there for them when they are ready.

ABOUT THE WRITERS

Jorain Ng is a Senior Executive, Program & Social Work at Caritas Singapore. She is an accredited Social Worker and has been working in the social service sector for more than 7 years.

Christine Wong is the Executive Director of Caritas Singapore, is an accredited Social Worker, member of the Singapore Association of Social Workers (SASW), member of the American Association of Suicide Prevention (AAS) and a certified Crisis Worker (AAS), member of International Association of Suicide Prevention (IASP), Regional Representative for Singapore. Christine has completed 3 research papers published in international articles together with IASP and NUS, Invited Speakers in many conferences locally and overseas. She has been in the mental health and social service field for the last 30 years.

The anti-monster pills are back again,
so is the therapy and a much-needed
break from work.

I'm slowly getting better.

I take the time to sip my coffee,
eat my cake, go for a run, and remind
myself that I matter.

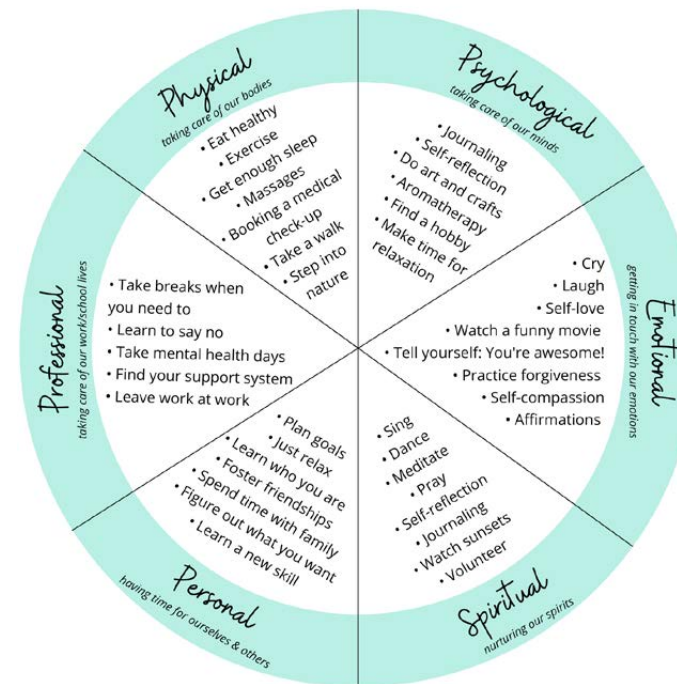


SELF-CARE

Self-care is the act of taking care of ourselves. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines self-care as “the ability of individuals, families, and communities to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and to cope with illness and disability with or without the support of a healthcare provider.”

Self-care involves caring about different aspects of ourselves, including our physical bodies, emotions and spiritual health. In the commandments, Jesus calls us to love our neighbours as ourselves (Mark 12:31). Self-care is an act of loving ourselves, so that we can love others better.

There are 6 areas in our lives in which we can care for ourselves. Are you caring for yourself enough in these areas?



Remember, the self-care activities you do should promote your health and happiness, it is not about doing any particular self-care activity, rather it is about doing what helps you.

What are some things you can do to care for yourself today?

I wish I could tell you a happily ever after, but the reality is that my monsters never go away. I can never kill them off, but I get better and better at managing them.

I have learnt to trust my support network - of friends, therapists, doctors and loved ones. I have come to accept that like any other illness, my condition can be managed.

I have accepted that recovery is non-linear, and there is no shame in living with monsters. We all have monsters - big or small, most of us just try to hide them away.



Peer Support: To Befriend and Empower

By Gillian Teng

"In the past years, I've come to realise that friends and peers are people that I can really depend on to help me get through day to day, even though, sometimes, it may get hard."

- Theresa, speaker at Clarity Singapore's Peer Support for Youths workshop

How often have you been touched by a kind, unexpected gesture from someone around you? Unbeknown to us, a simple, "How are you?" or smile can bring great comfort to someone who is going through a rough patch. Perhaps, these might even be the catalyst for change.

It is these actions, together with the effort to spend time with and show concern for our friends, that define what peer support really is - just being a friend to them.

What is Peer Support?

At the Peer Support for Youth workshop organised by Clarity Singapore in 2021, Maxx, one of the panellists and a youth peer supporter at his school, described peer support in this way: "(I wish) to be a lens for them, to look through me, to see themselves one day".

Peer support is about building the emotional resilience in another, enabling their mental and emotional states to better withstand challenges. This can be through formal peer support in a professional setting or informal ways such as befriending or offering a listening ear.

As the word 'peer' implies, we are all fellow travellers on a journey, helping one another in this journey. As Faith, a fellow panellist and a Peer Support Specialist puts it, "Hope is like a button" - and may we be that 'button' for our friends and the people we meet in this journey of life.

A Supporter, not a 'Float'

While listening to our friends share their troubles, we may often feel the urge to give advice and solutions that we think are fitting for their situation. But sometimes, all they need is a listening ear and for us to realise that they too have their own autonomy and individuality.

Faith nailed this point: “We are not there to change people (but) to fulfil their potential.”

Theresa, another panellist, shared the need to provide autonomy with her simple analogy of a lifebuoy. “When you are in trouble, you feel like you are in a deep sea. The water might be shallow, but you might not be aware that you can stand on your own. You can’t expect someone to be there for you 24/7. Because you will never learn to swim; you’ll be holding onto a float always.”

This striking message from Theresa, who has received peer support during her own bouts of depression, sparked the realisation that our role as a peer supporter to our friends should not be one where we do everything on our friends’ behalf and allow them to hold on to us as floats, but one which we recognise our friends’ individual abilities and help them to thrive on their own.

Faith also emphasised the need to empower our friends while helping them.

“An important part of setting boundaries is not just for our own self-care, but an equally important reason is to give some independence to the friend whom we’re helping to be able to feel empowered and stand on their own feet by themselves.”

This was something I had neglected previously when supporting friends through difficulties. Many of us often grapple with balancing the need for self-care and the need to be there for our friends. However, it was refreshing to learn that we should allow our friends to stand on their own two feet too and not be a ‘float’ for them all the time.

How you can support your friends

Through my own experience, I have seen how help may come in the form of the little things we can do. Having struggled through a long period of spiritual dryness and conflict in my life, I am thankful to some of my close friends who have seen me through darker days. Their willingness to listen and quiet support have helped me in tough moments. It was comforting to know that there is someone who loves and cares for me, even when I felt alone in my troubles.

Building our listening skills is important when supporting our friends. This includes deferring from judgements and advice when speaking to them, and to listen wholeheartedly. While listening, we should also normalise and validate their feelings, and that it is okay if they are feeling a certain way. You can also share your own experience which invites vulnerability, said Faith, encouraging them that they are not alone in their struggles!

Secondly, we should be aware of our own limitations and capabilities. When journeying with someone struggling with their mental health, it can sometimes get too much for us to handle. The support needed can far exceed our abilities. When this happens, our role is to guide them to relevant professional support such as doctors and psychologists.

Lastly, we can also help through prayer and companionship like accompanying our friends to therapy appointments, offering to pray with them and introducing community support available in church. As we journey with our friends, we must also realise that ultimately, God is the divine healer who can heal their hearts and minds. We can also share about St Dymphna, the patron saint of those suffering in their mental health!

The little actions of a sincere friend go a long way for the one in need. If you are supporting your peer in need, do not give up if they are not responding to you. Know that every little deed you do, though small, can make a significant impact on the other.

ABOUT THE WRITER

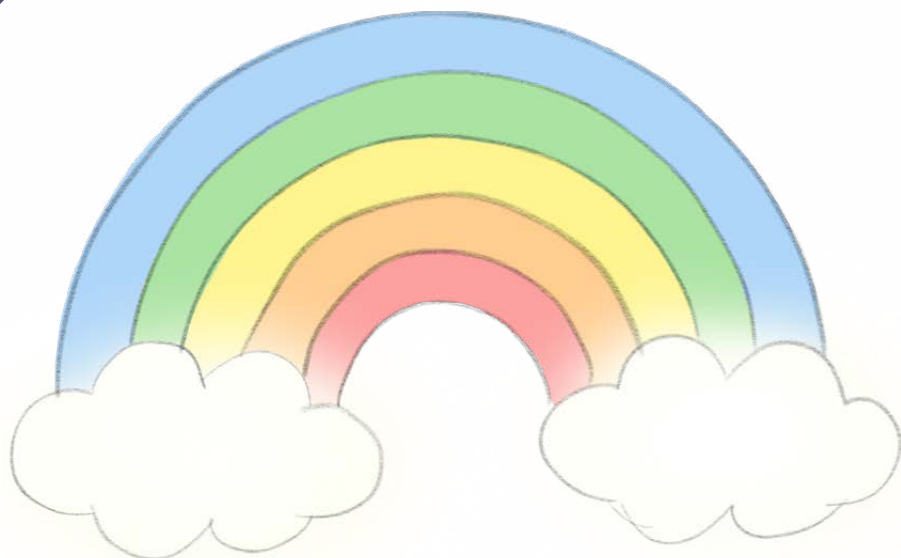
Gillian didn’t like coconut nor bitter gourd when she was young, but it seems like age has tempered the senses and she voluntarily eats both now. Just waiting for age to temper the Temper too!

Gain some insights on how you can maintain a good mental health, and some tips on how to help others in their journey.



My fight with the monsters has drawn me closer to God. I know that He didn't make the monsters, but He has given me strength and courage to overcome them. Some days I look at the rainbow, and I remember that there can be no rainbow without the rain.

Celine also shared stories from some saints with me, it gives me some level of comfort knowing that these saintly people had such struggles too and how they persevered with the help from God.



FAITH-BASED CONTEMPLATIVE STRATEGIES

Contemplative practices that invoke the relaxation response can bring about mental health benefits. Some find comfort and peace in spiritual practices of surrender and contemplation on meaning and purpose. You can incorporate these practices into your daily routine.

Rosary

The rosary provides a structured way of getting into prayer. Meditating on the holy mysteries remind us of Jesus's humanness and how he experienced the full range of emotions just like we do. When recited regularly, the rosary has also been shown to lead to feelings of tranquillity, inner peace, relaxation and connectedness to God ([Stöckigt et al., 2021](#)). Other research studies also showed that reciting the rosary can help slow down our breathing and reduces anxiety ([Bernardi et al., 2001](#); [Anastasi & Newberg, 2008](#)).

Jesus prayer

"Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have mercy on me." Simply reciting this phrase can calm our nerves and reduce stress as we increase our surrender to God ([Knabb & Vazquez, 2018](#); [Rubinart et al., 2016](#)).

Contemplative prayer

According to St. Teresa of Ávila, [contemplation](#) is "nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us." [Research](#) has also found that regular practice of mindfulness and meditation can also physically change our brain, creating new neurological networks that lead to improved health and well-being.



St Dymphna



St Jane Frances
de Chantal



St John
of God



St Therese
of Lisieux



These Saints struggled with their mental health too. Read this article to learn more about them!



Captain America is BRAVE.
But I am BRAVER as I fight these
monsters every day.



STORIES OF HOPE

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.
- John 1:5

Clariss (25)

For the past two years, I have been struggling with anxiety, overwhelming stress and burnout. Apart from experiencing anxiousness and fatigue, I would also find myself with deep feelings of helplessness, especially at the end of a long grueling day. While I recognised that I needed help, I was initially reluctant to seek help due to the fear of being seen as a failure. It was only through prayer and encouragement from my family that I eventually decided to seek professional help.

It's been a few months and therapy has now become an important aspect of my personal healing journey. It has not only equipped me with the tools to cope with my anxiety and burnout but also helped me to understand my own brokenness and to be kinder to myself. Through this experience, I also realised that our loving God has given therapy to us as a beautiful gift and that accepting it is not a sign of weakness. Instead, it is a gesture of trust in which we give Him the opportunity to let His grace and healing be received. Therapy has given me the clarity to identify the areas of my life in which I can bring up to God in prayer, and subsequently, I have found my faith growing too.

As my journey continues and while some days are tougher than others, I am now calmer when handling stress, am practicing more self-care and I am in a healthier head space than I was before. But above all, I am heartened to know that there is great strength to be found in vulnerability and that no struggle is too small to seek help.

Esther (22)

In 2019, I was in a very dark place in my life. I often experienced rejection in different situations and would constantly have panic attacks in public until I could not go outside. I felt like my world had ended, and I had lost everything

I was and still am on medication. It helps me with my panic attacks and sleep. I also believed that this excruciating emotional pain was what I had to go through so young in life, I could be so that nothing could faze me. During therapy, I realized a lot of deep inner work needed to be done. Going for therapy has helped me in many ways, and I cannot thank my therapist enough. From the deep breathing exercises to acknowledging the small steps and practising self-compassion. If I were allowed to go back in time to change my life experiences, I would not change a thing.

It has been a crazy ride. I am coping much better with my emotions, being kind and not quick to discriminate myself. I am closer to accepting myself and being at peace with who I am.

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Crisis and Suicide Prevention (24hrs)

Emergency Services: 999 or 995 (or approach the A&E department of your nearest hospital)

Non-Emergency Ambulance: 1777

IMH Mental Health Helpline: 6389 2222

SOS Hotline: 1-767

National Anti-Violence Helpline: 1800 777 0000

Silver Ribbon Singapore: 6386 1928

Care Corner: 1800 252 5800 (Mandarin, 10am-10pm daily, closed on PH)

SOS CareText (WhatsApp): 9151 1767

Here4U Whatsapp: 6978 2728 (Mon-Fri only)

Public Healthcare Services

General Practitioners (GP) Clinics

GPs can refer you to a mental health specialist (psychiatrist, psychologist or counsellor) in a public hospital or private practice.

Polyclinics with psychology services

- Ang Mo Kio
- Geylang
- Hougang
- Kallang
- Toa Payoh
- Woodlands
- Yishun

Hospitals

- Institute of Mental Health
- Khoo Teck Puat Hospital
- Singapore General Hospital
- Changi General Hospital
- Tan Tock Seng Hospital
- KK Women's and Children's Hospital
- Sengkang General Hospital
- Jurong Community Hospital
- Ng Teng Fong General Hospital
- National University Hospital

Counselling and Psychotherapy - Catholic Organisations

Clarity Singapore

Individual therapy and group programmes for 18-65 years old

- clarity-singapore.org
- ask@clarity-singapore.org
- 6757 7990

Catholic Family Life

Marital and Family Therapy, Children & Adolescence Therapy; Para-counselling Services

- familylife.sg
- cfl@familylife.sg
- 6488 0278

Pregnancy Crisis and Support

- pregnancycrisis.sg
- help@pregnancycrisis.sg
- 6339 9770 (crisis hotline)

Kingsmead Centre

spiritual direction also available

- kingsmeadcentre.sg
- cisc2664@gmail.com
- 6467 6072

Church of St Mary of the Angels Counselling Ministry

- stmary.sg
- intake.stmary@catholic.org.sg
- 6567 3866

Youthline

15-35 years old only

- youthline.sg
- hello@youthline.sg
- 6436 6612 (helpline)

Spiritual Direction

Cenacle Sisters

- cenaclemission.com
- cenaclemissionsingapore@gmail.com
- 6565 2895 / 9722 3148

FMM House of Prayer

- fmm-mysg.org
- fmmhp@yahoo.com
- 6474 2526

Good Shepherd Oasis

- gssmission.org
- gosingapore.ldt@gmail.com
- 6353 4809

Kingsmead Centre

- kingsmeadcentre.sg
- cisc2664@gmail.com
- 6467 6072

Counselling and Psychotherapy - Other Social Service Organisations

Care Corner Counselling Centre

- carecorner.org.sg
- cccc@carecorner.org.sg
- 6353 1180

Family Service Centres

- Find the nearest here: www.msf.gov.sg/dfcs/familyservice/default.aspx
- 1800 222 0000

REACH Counselling Centre

- reach.org.sg
- contact@reach.org.sg
- 6252 2566

Shan You Counselling Centre

- shanyou.org.sg
- info@shanyou.org.sg
- 6741 9293

Life Direction Singapore

- lifedirectionsingapore.sg
- sp.direction.sg@gmail.com
- 9101 0747

LifeSprings Canossian Spirituality Centre

- lifespringscanossian.com
- lifesprings@singnet.com.sg
- 6466 2178

Monfort Centre

- montfortcentre.org
- enquiries@montfortcentre.org
- 6769 5711

San Damiano Franciscan Centre

- franciscans.sg/franciscan-centre/
- sandamiano@franciscans.sg
- 8188 3725

Singapore Anglican Community Services

- sacs.org.sg
- admin@sacs.org.sg
- 6586 1064

Singapore Association for Mental Health

- samhealth.org.sg
- counselling@samhealth.org.sg
- 1800 283 7019 (helpline)

TOUCH Community Services

- touch.org.sg
- tcs@touch.org.sg
- 6377 0122

WINGS Counselling Centre

- wingscounselling.org.sg
- admin@wingscounselling.org.sg
- 6383 5745

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ABOUT CLARITY SINGAPORE

Clarity Singapore is a Catholic mental health charity that empowers persons with mental health issues to lead meaningful lives through support, acceptance, and recovery, regardless of race, religion, or culture. We work with individuals between the ages 18-65 that are at risk of or struggling with mental health conditions arising from anxiety and depression, including trauma, pre- and post-natal depression, stress, bereavement and loss, relationship, and other emotional issues.

Our mission is to rebuild lives and renew hopes for mental wellness by supporting, caring, and facilitating reintegration into the community.

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*Come to me, all you that are
weary and are carrying heavy
burdens, and I will give you rest.*

- Matthew 11:28