

HOW TO BE YOUR OWN GOOD FRIEND

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Life coach and complementary therapist Eve Menezes Cunningham looks at some common mental health issues

Mental health is such a loaded phrase – but we all have mental health, just as we all have physical health.

With both, we often take this health for granted until something goes wrong.

With physical health we can generally be fairly objective, but mental health issues are harder for us to separate out. It's not as simple as thinking, "Oh no! My leg! I'll go see a doctor and get it treated."

Instead of being able to clearly

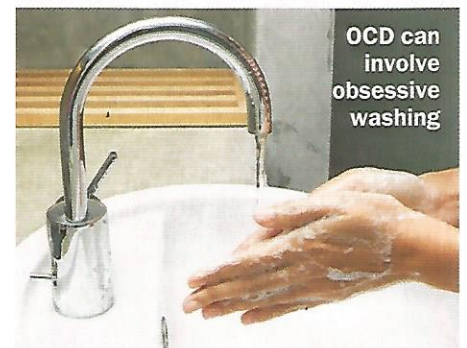
recognise something has triggered our anxiety, stress, OCD, post traumatic stress, depression and so on, we tend to get sucked into it.

We forget that there's much more to us than whatever condition we are dealing with. We can easily find ourselves thinking and even believing there's something inherently wrong with us.

Diagnoses (and treatment) can help and our attitude towards seeking help can play a big part in our recoveries.

We might search online and see we have symptoms of depression, but not want to waste our GP's time because we feel unworthy in some way. We forget that the self-loathing is a symptom. It's actually a clue.

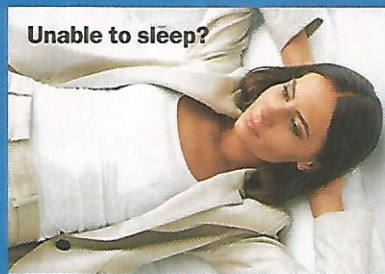
The NHS estimate that 10% of us struggle with clinical depression at some point in our lives. Symptoms that point to depression and burn-out include losing interest in even the things that used to bring joy, feeling low becoming the norm, being tearful, sad,



unwanted, intrusive and disturbing thoughts) and compulsion (to check things or behave in a certain way). Anxiety is heightened and relief, albeit temporary, comes when the compulsive behaviour is indulged. This can often trigger shame, as well.

For some, it's about checking the door is locked and iron unplugged; for others, washing hands until, sometimes, they bleed from rawness, and compulsive cleaning. The lack of felt choice is important. OCD in some cases is about awful thoughts such as

POST TRAUMA



MIND estimate trauma affects up to 3.5% of the general population, not just the military.

We might feel numb, shrink our worlds to avoid reminders, feel hypervigilant, constantly on edge and be unable to relax, let alone sleep. Flashbacks can trigger panic attacks and make life feel debilitating.

For many, post traumatic growth can ultimately bring a greater sense of purpose. But it's not about rushing recovery or minimising life events

being unable to concentrate and difficulty making decisions. It also impacts on our energy levels and motivation.

People struggling with bipolar disorder have symptoms of depression as well as "highs" where they can get swept up in grandiose plans, get by on very little sleep, feel very energised, be excessively happy and enthusiastic and overdo things.

OCD has its obsessive elements

being responsible for others' deaths.

Whether we have a diagnosis or not, remembering that we are more than even the most overwhelming symptoms can help us take better care of ourselves.

This might mean seeing our GP and seeing a counsellor – and committing to however long it takes rather than expecting a quick fix. Maybe it's remembering to take medication as