

IAO

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ACCREDITOR

EXCLUSIVE:

TOXIC POSITIVITY:

Why It's Okay to Not Be Okay"

MEET DR. TAGHREED MOHAMED

The Heart and Mind Behind Education and Volunteerism

SHAPING THE FUTURE:

IAO's Global Accreditation Impact

THE POWER OF THERAPY:

Why Talking About Mental Health is Key to Healing

10/10: BECAUSE YOUR MIND DESERVES IT!

It's mind over matter, any day

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This World Mental Health Day, we shine a light on the significance of mental well-being in our lives. Mental health literacy empowers us to recognize our emotional needs and seek support when necessary. In a fast-paced world filled with challenges and uncertainties, how can we prioritize our mental wellness? This is where open conversations and community support come into play.

Engaging in dialogues about mental health helps break down the stigma that often surrounds it. It reminds us that seeking help is a strength, not a weakness. By fostering a culture of understanding and acceptance, we can create safe spaces for individuals to share their struggles and triumphs.

In this edition, we explore various aspects of mental health, from the importance of therapy to practical tips for self-care. Let's embrace the theme of connection this World Mental Health Day, celebrating the power of reaching out and supporting one another. Here's to a journey of healing, understanding, and resilience in our quest for better mental health.





TOXIC POSITIVITY: WHY IT'S OKAY TO NOT BE OKAY

In today's fast-paced, social media-driven world, positivity is often promoted as the ultimate solution to all of life's challenges. We're constantly bombarded with phrases like, "Look on the bright side," "Stay positive," or "Good vibes only." While a positive attitude can indeed be helpful, this relentless pressure to remain upbeat at all times can actually become harmful. This phenomenon, known as toxic positivity, dismisses negative emotions, creating a culture where it feels unacceptable to express pain, sadness, or frustration.

In this article, we'll explore why it's okay not to be okay and how embracing the full range of human emotions is essential for genuine mental well-being.



THE RISE OF TOXIC POSITIVITY

With the rise of self-help books, motivational speakers, and the social media era, positivity has taken center stage. It seems like everyone is sharing inspirational quotes, posting photos with beaming smiles, and promoting the message that happiness is a choice we can make every day.

At face value, these messages might seem harmless or even helpful. After all, who doesn't want to feel good and be surrounded by uplifting content? But the problem arises when these messages deny the complexity of human emotions. This constant demand to "be happy" often leads people to suppress their true feelings, pretending that everything is fine even when it's not.

This is where toxic positivity comes into play. It's the belief that positive thinking should dominate every situation, even in the face of hardship. This outlook suggests that negative emotions like sadness, anger, or fear are something to be avoided or even shamed. Instead of allowing ourselves or others to feel and express pain, we are encouraged to "just be positive." This attitude, while well-intentioned, can leave people feeling invalidated, isolated, and even more distressed.



WHY IT'S OKAY TO NOT BE OKAY

We are human, and as humans, we are meant to experience a broad spectrum of emotions. Happiness, sadness, joy, anger, fear, and excitement all play crucial roles in shaping our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. To deny ourselves the opportunity to fully experience any of these emotions is to deny our humanity.

Feelings Are Valid

It's important to acknowledge that all feelings, positive and negative, are valid. Life isn't always easy, and we can't expect ourselves to be happy all the time. Difficult emotions like grief, frustration, and sadness are natural responses to challenges or losses. By pretending these emotions don't exist or by pushing them away in favor of forced positivity, we only increase our emotional burden.

Recognizing and sitting with these feelings allows us to understand ourselves better and move toward healing. It's not about wallowing in negativity; it's about being honest with ourselves and allowing space for every emotion.

Embracing Vulnerability

One of the biggest dangers of toxic positivity is that it discourages vulnerability. Vulnerability is often seen as a weakness, but in reality, it's one of the most powerful aspects of human connection. When we open up about our struggles, it invites others to do the same, creating a supportive and empathetic community.

Feeling “not okay” doesn't mean you're broken or that something is wrong with you. It means you're a living, breathing person who is navigating the ups and downs of life. By allowing ourselves to be vulnerable, we can find comfort in shared experiences and build deeper, more meaningful relationships with others.

Negative Emotions Serve a Purpose

Many people view negative emotions as something to avoid, but they serve important purposes in our lives. Sadness, for instance, can be a signal that something meaningful has been lost or that change is needed. Anger can drive us to confront injustice or set boundaries. Even fear can be protective, warning us of potential dangers.

By accepting these emotions instead of rejecting them, we can better understand what they are trying to tell us. This doesn't mean we should dwell on negativity, but rather that we should listen to our emotions as guides, helping us to navigate life's challenges in a healthy and informed way.





THE HARM OF SUPPRESSING EMOTIONS

When we suppress our emotions or feel pressured to always be positive, the consequences can be significant. Ignoring or downplaying negative feelings can lead to emotional suppression, which, over time, can result in:

Increased Stress and Anxiety: Trying to maintain a facade of positivity can create an internal conflict, leading to increased stress and anxiety. When we feel one way but pretend to feel another, we create a disconnection within ourselves that can have long-term psychological effects.

Emotional Burnout: Suppressing emotions can be exhausting. The constant effort to appear happy or optimistic, especially during difficult times, can lead to emotional burnout. This is when we feel mentally and emotionally drained, making it even harder to cope with life's challenges.

Strained Relationships: Toxic positivity can also strain relationships. When we respond to someone else's pain with superficial platitudes like "Stay positive" or "Look on the bright side," we minimize their experience. This can make them feel unheard or misunderstood, ultimately weakening the bond of trust and support.



HOW TO EMBRACE EMOTIONAL AUTHENTICITY

If you're someone who's been stuck in the toxic positivity mindset or if you know someone who has there are ways to move toward a more emotionally authentic way of living.

Acknowledge Your Feelings

The first step to breaking free from toxic positivity is to acknowledge your feelings, no matter what they are. Whether you're feeling sad, angry, anxious, or overwhelmed, recognize that it's okay to feel that way. Instead of brushing those emotions aside, take the time to sit with them and explore why you're feeling the way you do.

Journaling, mindfulness, or simply talking to someone you trust can be great ways to start this process.

Allow Space for Others to Be Vulnerable

When a friend or loved one comes to you with their struggles, resist the urge to offer quick fixes or positive reassurances. Instead, offer a listening ear and validate their experience. Statements like "That sounds really tough" or "I'm here for you" go a lot further than "Just stay positive."

Creating space for vulnerability in others not only helps them feel supported but also strengthens your relationship with them.

Challenge the Need for Perfection

Many of us fall into the trap of thinking we need to be perfect, perfectly happy, perfectly successful, or perfectly in control. But life is messy, and perfection is an illusion. Instead of striving for constant happiness or smooth sailing, accept that it's okay to have rough patches. It's okay to not have everything figured out all the time.

When you let go of perfectionism, you open yourself up to the beauty of growth, learning, and self-compassion.

Practice Self-Compassion

Being kind to yourself is essential when navigating difficult emotions. Instead of criticizing yourself for not feeling happy or for struggling with certain feelings, offer yourself the same understanding and kindness you would offer to a friend.

Self-compassion allows you to recognize that you're doing the best you can, and that's enough. It's okay to have bad days, to cry, to feel frustrated. These feelings don't make you weak; they make you human.





FINDING BALANCE: POSITIVITY IN MODERATION

While it's important to reject toxic positivity, that doesn't mean we should abandon positivity altogether. A healthy balance involves embracing the full spectrum of emotions both positive and negative while still maintaining hope and resilience.

Positivity in moderation can be a powerful tool for coping with challenges. It's not about denying the difficulty of a situation, but about finding meaning and growth in it. When we accept our emotions and allow ourselves to be fully present in the moment, we can navigate life's ups and downs with grace and authenticity.



CONCLUSION: IT'S OKAY TO NOT BE OKAY



The message that “it’s okay to not be okay” is more important than ever in a world that often glorifies constant happiness. Embracing our negative emotions doesn’t mean we’re giving up; it means we’re choosing to honor our full humanity. By acknowledging the complexity of our emotional experiences, we can build resilience, foster deeper connections with others, and ultimately find a more genuine and sustainable sense of well-being.

So, the next time you’re feeling down, anxious, or overwhelmed, remember: It’s okay to not be okay. Feel your emotions, give yourself permission to be vulnerable, and know that in doing so, you’re not alone. The path to healing begins with accepting where you are right now, even if it’s not a positive place and that’s perfectly fine.



Exclusive

DR. TAGHREED MOHAMED

The Heart and Mind Behind Education and
Volunteerism



Interview:

Q: Could you please walk us through your academic background and achievements? Your extensive and varied experience can be a source of inspiration for many; please share the highlights and milestones of your professional journey.

A: I started my academic journey with a solid foundation in English Literature at University of the Punjab/Lahore Pakistan 1981, where I obtained a Bachelor's degree. I continued my advanced studies and obtained a Master's degree in English Literature from [University of the Punjab/Lahore Pakistan 2004. As a result of my passion for science, I received an honorary doctorate from the University of Houston in Collections and Volunteer Management, certified by the International Accreditation Organization (IAO) 2018.

Over the years, I have been fortunate to contribute to the field of education by enjoying the passion for volunteering. I received:

1-Honorary Doctorate: From the Norwegian International Society for Justice and Peace. On the decision of the Board of Trustees No. 185 of 2021. Humanities in humanitarian work.

2-Honorary Doctorate from the University of Houston in Collections and Volunteer Management certified by the International Accreditation Organization (IAO). 2018

3- Honorary Doctorate from the International Institute for Knowledge Exchange at the Fourth Conference of Islamic Psychology for the research presented the psychological effects of voluntary work on women model: The role of Emirati women in voluntary work in the Federal Republic of Germany - Amden - Aurich 2017 These milestones not only shaped my career path, but also deepened my commitment to promoting educational excellence by obtaining the International Coaching License as a certified trainer at the Arab Trainers Federation.

4- Honorary Doctorate from the University of Houston in Association and Volunteer Management certified by the International Accreditation Organization. 2018 IAO

5- Honorary Doctorate from the International Institute for Knowledge Exchange at the Fourth Conference of Islamic Psychology for the research presented the psychological effects of voluntary work on women model: The role of Emirati women in voluntary work in the Federal Republic of Germany - Amden - Aurich 2017





Experience:

Q: Currently heading the institute, what are some of your long-term and short-term goals for the education system?

A: In accordance with the encouraging academic policies in the UAE, our primary short-term goal is to enhance the quality of teaching and learning at our institution by introducing several initiatives such as professional diplomas in volunteering and specialized programs in humanitarian media. I also aim to strengthen our student support services to ensure that every student has access to the resources they need to succeed. In the long term, I envision our organization becoming a leader in educational work, mental and psychological health, and deepening the concept of volunteering, humanitarianism and community engagement. This includes expanding our reach through online education and forming strategic partnerships with other organizations.



Q: What do you think your biggest challenge is working in the education industry at such a key position?

A: We in the UAE are aware of the challenges facing those in academic field and our wise government is working to overcome these challenges, but overall, the biggest challenge is balancing the need to innovate and maintain the core values and traditions of our institution. The rapid pace of technological advances and changing student needs require us to constantly adapt, but it is essential to do so in a way that is in line with our educational philosophy. In addition, securing the funding and resources to support new initiatives while maintaining high standards across all programs is an ongoing challenge.



Q: During your entire career, which milestone felt most accomplished and why?

A: One of the most important achievements in my career was the successful implementation of professional diplomas in volunteering and specialized programs in humanitarian media, which we are seeking to be accredited by the United Nations as an active member of the Economic and Social Commission. This was a challenging project that required collaboration between multiple departments and external partners. Seeing the positive impact this project had on our students and faculty, and knowing that it contributed to our institution's reputation for excellence, was very satisfying. It reinforced my belief in the power of teamwork and innovative thinking in education.



Q: Educationists are advised usually to share their experience and learning. What method of information-dissemination would you say is most effective for this purpose?

A: The current education system in our region has many strengths, including a commitment to high academic standards and a strong network of institutions, especially after the Covid-19 crisis. This experience has been instrumental in supporting a policy of distance working and the subsequent adoption of a hybrid education system that blends face-to-face and distance education. However, there are areas that require improvement, such as better preparing students for the fast-changing labor market. To revolutionize the system, we need to focus on developing critical thinking, creativity and adaptability in our students.



INTEREST & OPINIONS:

Q: Recently, there have been many reports and trends of students opting for alternate methods of education such as distance learning, diplomas, short-courses, etc. instead of traditional degrees. What's your view on this?

A: Traditional certificates are certainly still of great value, especially for certain professions, but there is a growing recognition that skills and knowledge can be gained through various other means. Distance learning, diplomas, short courses, and as can be seen on a global scale and in the UAE, there is a huge demand for specialized professional certificates in many fields, which is why we were keen to renew our membership, to ensure that international professional certificates offer flexibility and can be tailored to suit specific career goals, making them a valuable complement to traditional education. I believe that the future of education lies in creating pathways that integrate these diverse approaches, allowing learners to build a set of skills that are aligned with their personal and professional aspirations.



Q: As an educator, what's your perspective on the current education system in your region and how do you think it can be improved or revolutionized, if required.

A: The current education system in our region has many strengths, including a commitment to high academic standards and a strong network of institutions, especially after the Covid-19 crisis. This experience has been instrumental in supporting a policy of distance working and the subsequent adoption of a hybrid education system that blends face-to-face and distance education. However, there are areas that require improvement, such as better preparing students for the fast-changing labor market. To revolutionize the system, we need to focus on developing critical thinking, creativity and adaptability in our students.

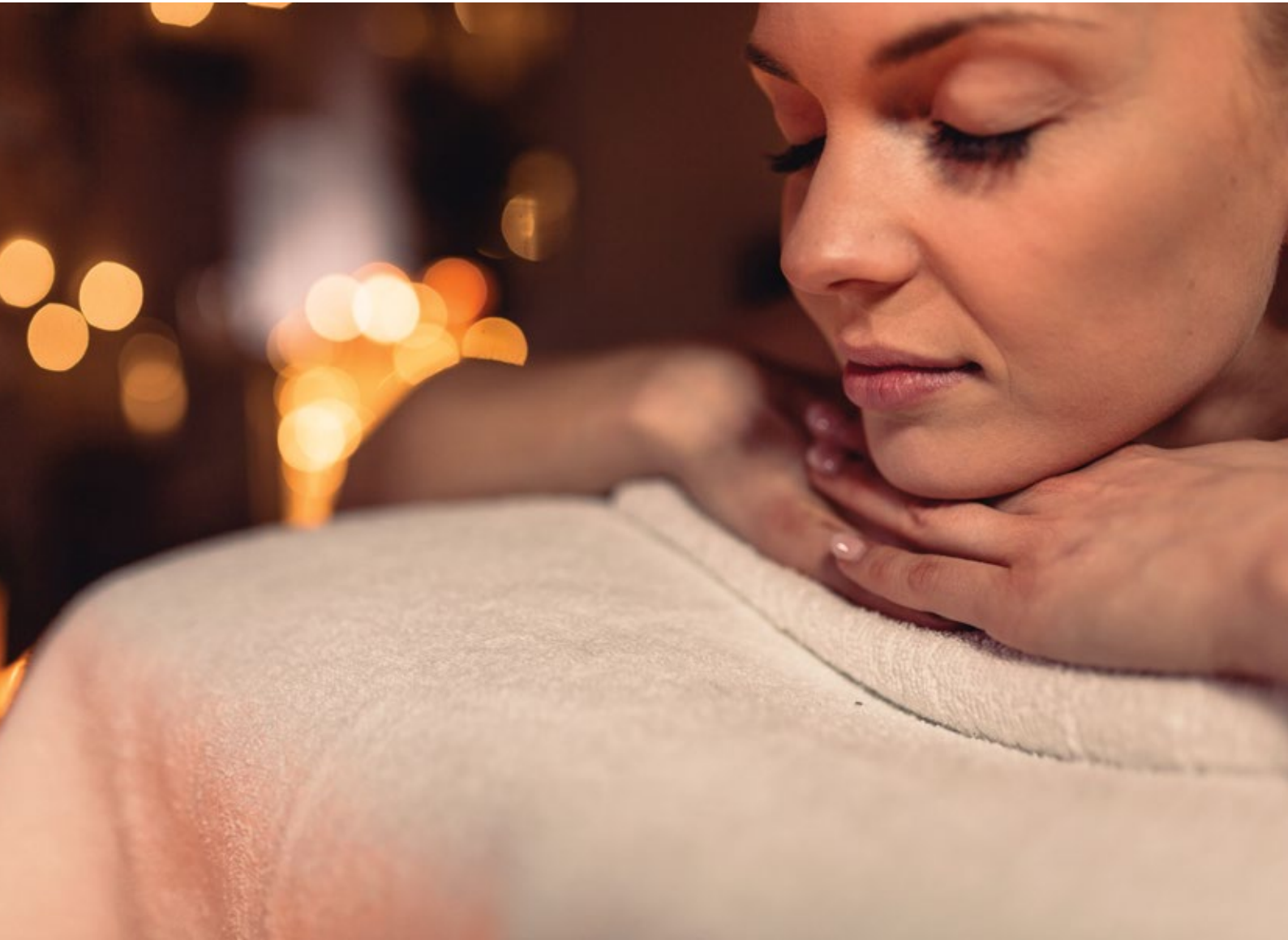
A woman with her eyes closed and hands raised near her temples is meditating. She is wearing a light pink long-sleeved shirt and matching pants. In the foreground, there is a lit candle in a glass holder and a green plant. The background is a dark blue wall with some framed pictures.

ENDING NOTES:

Q: Please share your philosophy of the ideal education a person can achieve regardless of its methods and processes. E.g. it could simply be a moment of enlightenment or a life-long struggle to gain perspective, how would you like to describe 'the best education or lesson' one can get.

A: In today's modern age, while we are undoubtedly witnessing rapid technological advances, the ideal education is one that empowers individuals to think critically, act ethically and continue learning throughout their lives. It's not just about acquiring knowledge; it's about developing the wisdom to apply that knowledge in ways that make a positive impact on the world. The best lessons often come from experiences that challenge our assumptions and push us out of our comfort zones. Whether it is a moment of profound insight or a lifelong journey of discovery, education should ultimately lead to a deeper understanding of self and the world around us.

Taking advantage of advanced artificial intelligence technologies, we are guided by ethical standards and a high degree of responsibility to our UAE and Arab society first, not forgetting that our country has become a multinational, multipath and multilingual meeting place.

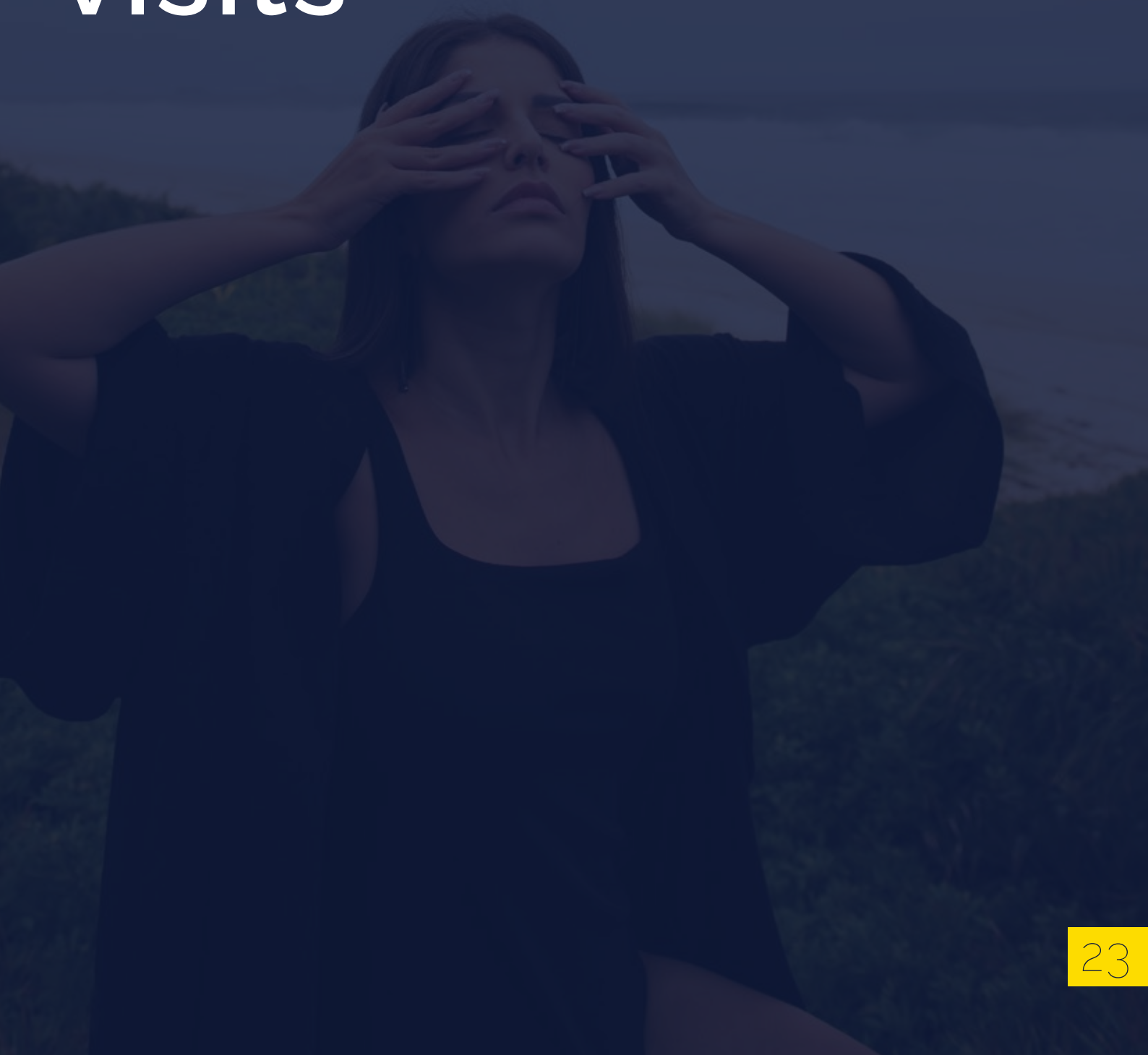


Q: Thank you for taking the time to answer a few questions for IAO Accreditor. Do you have any parting words of wisdom for educationists and students?

A: We in the UAE are always proud to have a conscious leadership of our Emirati people and their advanced work in providing all means of development in all aspects of life, especially in all areas of the educational process, and my advice to educators is to remain curious and open to new ideas. Take ownership of your learning, look for opportunities to grow, and don't be afraid to follow your passion. Remember that education is not just about preparing for a career, but about becoming a well-rounded individual who can contribute meaningfully to society.

Third Quarterly

Accreditation visits





Aries International Maritime Research Institute (INDIA)

During their visit to Aries International Maritime Research Institute, the IAO team was greeted by a lively atmosphere focused on improving maritime education and research. The institute showcased its modern facilities and a curriculum that combines theory with hands-on learning. As they spoke with teachers and students, the team noticed the emphasis on developing critical thinking and real-world skills. This visit was an important step in the accreditation process, highlighting Aries International's commitment to providing top-quality maritime education.



Taj International School (SOMALIA)

During their visit to Taj International School, the IAO team felt a warm welcome in a lively environment dedicated to nurturing young minds. The school highlighted its balanced approach to education, focusing not only on strong academics but also on character development. Engaging with teachers and students, the team appreciated how the school creates personalized learning experiences that cater to each child's strengths and interests. This visit was a meaningful moment in the accreditation journey, showcasing Taj International's dedication to helping students grow into confident and well-rounded individuals.

THE POWER OF THERAPY: WHY TALKING ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH IS KEY TO HEALING

In today's fast-paced world, mental health conversations have become more critical than ever. As people navigate the complexities of life, work, relationships, and personal growth, the need for a safe space to discuss mental well-being is undeniable. Therapy, once stigmatized, is now embraced as a lifeline for those seeking clarity, understanding, and healing. In this article, we'll explore the profound benefits of therapy, why talking about mental health is essential, and how seeking professional help can be a pivotal step toward emotional well-being.

Understanding the Importance of Mental Health Conversations

For many years, mental health was shrouded in silence, often ignored or dismissed as a taboo topic. People were expected to cope with their struggles in private, without acknowledging the very real and valid emotional challenges they faced. This culture of silence bred shame, isolation, and a growing crisis of unaddressed mental health issues.

The tides are turning, however, and mental health is gaining the attention it deserves. Celebrities, influencers, and everyday people are openly sharing their journeys, reminding us that it's okay to talk about mental health. It's not a sign of weakness but a mark of strength to acknowledge that you might need help.

Therapy plays a central role in this transformation. By providing a safe, non-judgmental environment for individuals to explore their emotions, therapy helps break down the walls of isolation and fosters healing.



WHAT IS THERAPY?

At its core, therapy is a professional relationship designed to help individuals better understand themselves, their emotions, and their behaviors. It's a collaborative process where a trained therapist guides someone through their challenges, offering tools and techniques to navigate life's ups and downs.

Therapy can take many forms. Some people engage in individual therapy, where they work one-on-one with a therapist. Others might find benefit in group therapy, where shared experiences provide comfort and insight. There's also family therapy, couples counseling, and various specialized forms like cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), which focuses on changing negative thought patterns, and psychodynamic therapy, which explores deeper emotional experiences rooted in the past.

The beauty of therapy lies in its adaptability. No two sessions are the same, and therapy is tailored to meet the unique needs of the individual.



THE BENEFITS OF THERAPY: MORE THAN JUST TALKING

Many people assume therapy is just "talking about your feelings," but it goes far beyond that. Therapy offers several tangible benefits that can profoundly impact a person's life:

1. Clarity and Self-Understanding

Life can often feel like a confusing tangle of emotions, thoughts, and external pressures. Therapy helps untangle that mess, allowing individuals to gain a deeper understanding of their emotions, behaviors, and motivations. Through guided exploration, people can identify patterns in their thinking and behavior that may be contributing to their struggles.

For example, a person who consistently feels anxious in social settings may uncover through therapy that these feelings stem from a deep-seated fear of rejection or past trauma. By bringing these underlying issues to light, therapy paves the way for meaningful change.

2. Developing Healthy Coping Mechanisms

We all have ways of coping with stress, but not all coping mechanisms are healthy. Some people turn to avoidance, substance abuse, or self-destructive behaviors to numb their pain. Therapy teaches healthier ways of managing difficult emotions and situations.

Through therapy, individuals learn skills such as mindfulness, grounding techniques, and stress management tools that help them cope more effectively with life's challenges. Instead of reacting impulsively, they learn how to respond to situations with greater control and awareness.

3. Building Stronger Relationships

Human beings are social creatures, and relationships, whether romantic, familial, or platonic are central to our well-being. However, unresolved emotional issues can strain these relationships, leading to misunderstandings, conflicts, or even breakdowns.

Therapy offers a space to explore relational patterns, address communication issues, and work through conflicts in a constructive manner. Couples therapy, for instance, can help partners better understand each other's emotional needs, while family therapy can resolve deep-rooted tensions and promote healthier family dynamics.

4. Improving Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation is the ability to manage and respond to emotions in a healthy and balanced way. Many people struggle with overwhelming emotions such as anger, sadness, or anxiety, which can negatively impact their personal and professional lives.

Therapy helps individuals become more aware of their emotional triggers and offers strategies to regulate their emotions effectively. Over time, this can lead to increased emotional stability, reduced impulsivity, and a greater sense of control over one's life.

5. Boosting Self-Esteem and Confidence

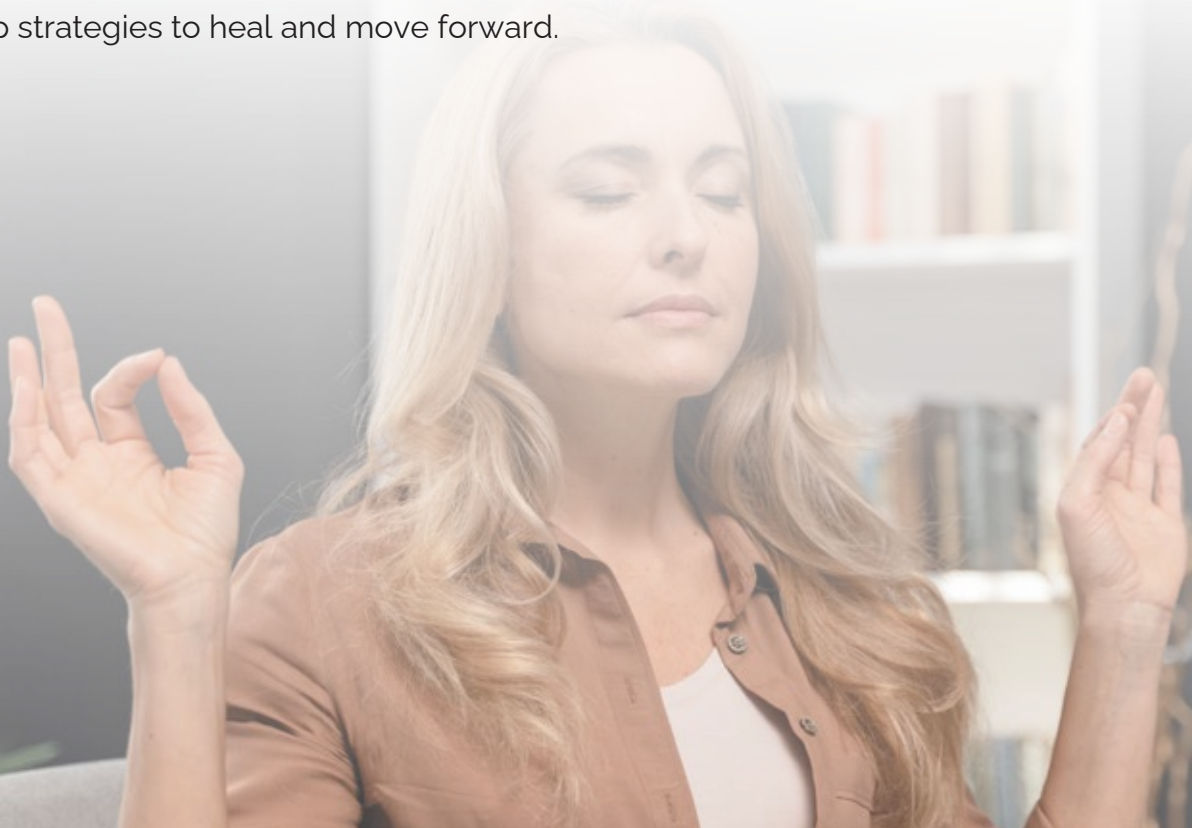
Low self-esteem is a common issue that can manifest in various ways, from avoiding challenges to engaging in self-sabotaging behavior. Therapy provides a supportive space for individuals to work on their self-worth, challenge negative self-beliefs, and build a healthier self-image.

Through therapy, people learn to acknowledge their strengths, set realistic goals, and develop a sense of self-empowerment. As a result, they become more confident in their abilities and are better equipped to face life's challenges with resilience and optimism.

6. Addressing Trauma and Past Experiences

For many, unresolved trauma or painful past experiences can be a heavy burden that impacts their daily lives. Whether it's childhood trauma, a difficult breakup, or the loss of a loved one, these experiences can leave emotional scars that linger long after the event.

Therapy provides a safe and structured environment to process these experiences. Trained therapists can help individuals explore their trauma, understand how it's affecting them, and develop strategies to heal and move forward.





BREAKING THE STIGMA AROUND THERAPY

Despite its benefits, there's still a lingering stigma surrounding therapy. Many people are hesitant to seek help because they fear being judged, labeled as "crazy," or seen as weak. This stigma is particularly strong in certain cultural or societal contexts, where mental health issues are often minimized or dismissed.

However, the tide is shifting. More and more people are recognizing that therapy is not just for those in crisis it's for anyone seeking personal growth, emotional balance, and a better quality of life. It's time to break the misconception that therapy is a last resort. Instead, it should be viewed as a proactive and empowering tool for self-care.

When Should You Seek Therapy?

One of the most common questions people ask is, "When should I see a therapist?" The answer is different for everyone, but some signs suggest it might be time to seek professional help:

- **Persistent feelings of sadness or anxiety** that don't seem to go away, even with time.
- **Difficulty managing daily life** or feeling overwhelmed by stress or responsibilities.
- **Struggles in relationships**, whether it's with a partner, family member, or friend.
- **Unresolved trauma** or past experiences that continue to affect your present life.
- **Feeling stuck**, unmotivated, or unsure about your direction in life.
- **Using unhealthy coping mechanisms**, such as substance abuse, avoidance, or self-destructive behavior.

Remember, you don't have to wait for a crisis to seek therapy. Therapy is for anyone who wants to better understand themselves, improve their relationships, and enhance their overall well-being.

Choosing the Right Therapist

Finding the right therapist is a deeply personal decision. It's important to choose someone you feel comfortable with and who has experience in the areas you want to explore. Some people may prefer a therapist who specializes in certain techniques, like cognitive-behavioral therapy, while others may want a therapist who takes a more holistic approach.

Don't be afraid to try different therapists until you find the right fit. Therapy is a partnership, and the relationship you build with your therapist plays a crucial role in the success of your journey.

Therapy is Not a Quick Fix, But It's Worth It

One important thing to remember is that therapy is not a quick fix. It's a process that requires time, patience, and commitment. Healing doesn't happen overnight, but with consistent effort, therapy can lead to profound changes in your life.

It's okay to have moments of doubt or frustration along the way. What matters is showing up for yourself, being open to the process, and trusting that healing is possible.





CONCLUSION: TALKING IS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD HEALING

Mental health is just as important as physical health, and therapy is a powerful tool for maintaining emotional well-being. By talking about your feelings, exploring your thoughts, and working through challenges with a professional, you can embark on a journey of self-discovery and healing.

If you're struggling, feeling lost, or simply want to understand yourself better, don't hesitate to reach out for help. The power of therapy lies not just in the conversations you have with your therapist, but in the personal growth, emotional resilience, and clarity you gain along the way.

Talking about mental health is key to healing and it all begins with that first, courageous step.