IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY

MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

Let us pray…

Dear God,
Grant us the wisdom to understand the complexities of mental health struggles that many individuals face. Help us to see beyond the surface and recognize the deep pain and challenges that lie within. Guide us in offering compassion, empathy, and unwavering support to those who are battling silently. May we be a source of comfort, understanding, and hope in their time of need. Thank you for the opportunity to show love and kindness to those who are struggling.
Amen.

The importance of community & support networks to mental health

Scaffolded Starter:

Dana is usually a happy girl and has spent all afternoon chatting to friends on social media in her bedroom - so she doesn't understand why she feels so miserable and lonely.

Her mum keeps asking her to come outside and help with a neighbourhood bring and buy sale. *No chance!* Thinks Dana.

Discuss: Why would Dana feel miserable and lonely if she's chatted online to friends all afternoon?
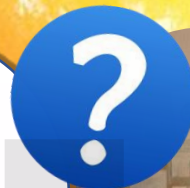
Why do you think Dana's mum wants her to come outside and help with a community activity?

*I think Dana's mom wants her to help because....*

The importance of community & support networks to mental health

New key terms:

Community - a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common. A community can be online or off-line.

Support Network - a group of individuals who provide emotional, practical, and/or informational support to an individual.
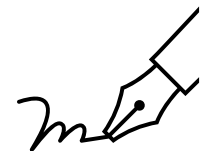
The importance of community & support networks to mental health

Health and Wellbeing

Task One:

REPORT

Why are we focusing on mental health, community and support networks today anyway? Well, there are many good reasons for this. Read the statements below and vote to see if you think they are true or false as a class. **We'll reveal the answers on the next slide.**

1 in 5 children and young people aged 8 to 25 had a probable mental health disorder in 2023.

Only 38% of young people with mental health issues felt they could talk to a trusted adult about how they felt

28% of 13–19-year-olds said they felt lonely "often" or "always"

Nearly 1 in 3 teenagers said they had not received any mental health support even though they had asked for it.

Teenagers who feel a sense of belonging at school are 50% less likely to report symptoms of depression.

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ANSWERS:

REPORT

Unfortunately, all of these statistics today are true.
This highlights the importance of us learning about and recognising the link between having support networks, talking about our feelings and fostering community relationships.

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28% of 13–19-year-olds said they felt lonely "often" or "always" ✓

Nearly 1 in 3 teenagers said they had not received any mental health support even though they had asked for it. ✓

Teenagers who feel a sense of belonging at school are 50% less likely to report symptoms of depression. ✓

When we talk about **community**, we just mean a group with something in common which we can be a part of. In today's starter, Dana's mum thought it might be helpful to her mental health to come outside and be part of a neighbourhood community event.

We are all part of at least one community. Some of our communities may overlap, as we see from the example below. Some of our communities may also act as **support networks.** (as seen in this clip - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGXWr6dQHgs)
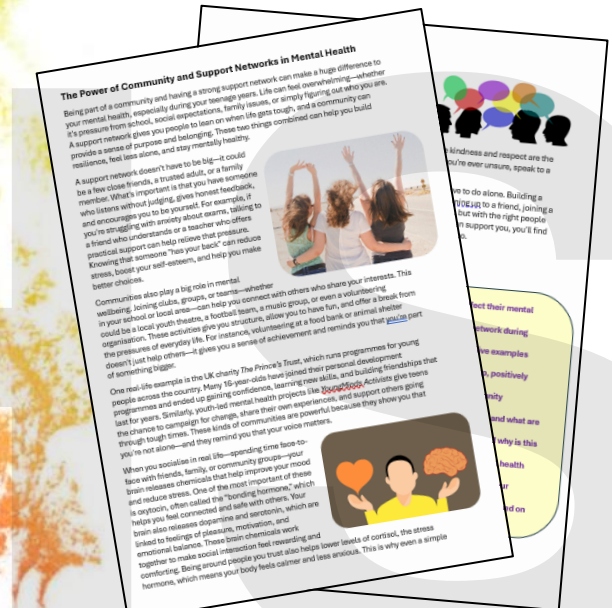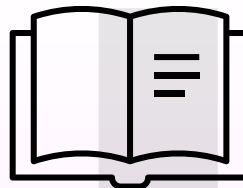
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Health and Wellbeing

Task Two:

POPCORN READING!

Take it in turns to read the following slides.

The Power of Community and Support Networks in Mental Health

Being part of a community and having a strong support network can make a huge difference to your mental health, especially during your teenage years. Life can feel overwhelming—whether it's pressure from school, social expectations, family issues, or simply figuring out who you are. A support network gives you people to lean on when life gets tough, and a community can provide a sense of purpose and belonging. These two things combined can help you build resilience, feel less alone, and stay mentally healthy.

A support network doesn't have to be big—it could be a few close friends, a trusted adult, or a family member. What's important is that you have someone who listens without judging, gives honest feedback, and encourages you to be yourself. For example, if you're struggling with anxiety about exams, talking to a friend who understands or a teacher who offers practical support can help relieve that pressure. Knowing that someone "has your back" can reduce stress, boost your self-esteem, and help you make better choices.

Communities also play a big role in mental wellbeing. Joining clubs, groups, or teams—whether in your school or local area—can help you connect with others who share your interests. This could be a local youth theatre, a football team, a music group, or even a volunteering organisation.

These activities give you structure, allow you to have fun, and offer a break from the pressures of everyday life. For instance, volunteering at a food bank or animal shelter doesn't just help others—it gives you a sense of achievement and reminds you that you're part of something bigger.

One real-life example is the UK charity *The Prince's Trust*, which runs programmes for young people across the country. Many 16-year-olds have joined their personal development programmes and ended up gaining confidence, learning new skills, and building friendships that last for years.

Similarly, youth-led mental health projects like *YoungMinds Activists* give teens the chance to campaign for change, share their own experiences, and support others going through tough times. These kinds of communities are powerful because they show you that you're not alone—and they remind you that your voice matters.

When you socialise in real life—spending time face-to-face with friends, family, or community groups—your brain releases chemicals that help improve your mood and reduce stress. One of the most important of these is oxytocin, often called the "bonding hormone," which helps you feel connected and safe with others.

Your brain also releases dopamine and serotonin, which are linked to feelings of pleasure, motivation, and emotional balance. These brain chemicals work together to make social interaction feel rewarding and comforting. Being around people you trust also helps lower levels of cortisol, the stress hormone, which means your body feels calmer and less anxious.

This is why even a simple laugh with friends or a conversation with someone who listens can have a big impact on your mental wellbeing—it's not just emotional, it's chemical too.
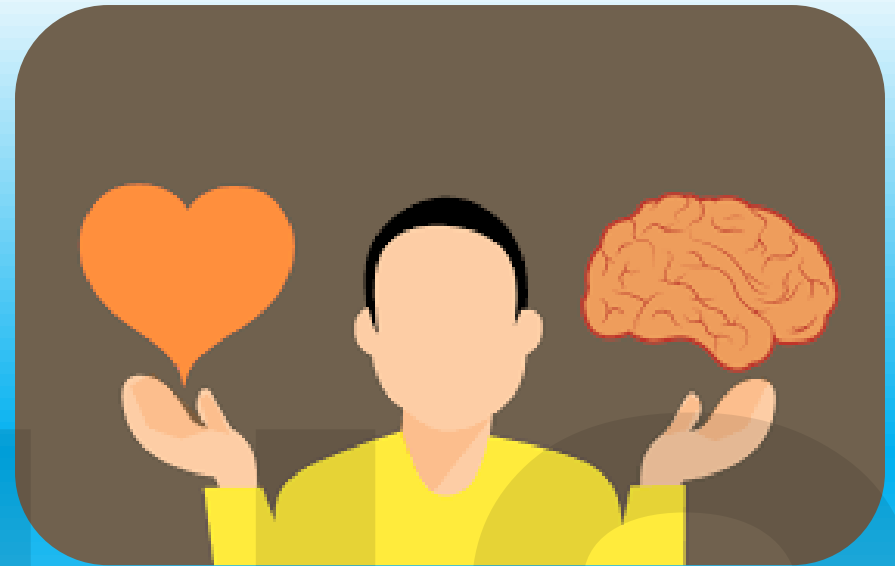
Online communities can also be a source of support, as long as they're used safely and responsibly. There are positive spaces where teens talk about mental health, share coping tips, and support each other, like *Kooth* or *The Mix*. But it's important to choose spaces where kindness and respect are the norm, and where professional support is available if needed. If you're ever unsure, speak to a trusted adult before getting involved.

In the end, looking after your mental health isn't something you have to do alone. Building a support network takes time, but it starts with small steps—like opening up to a friend, joining a club, or reaching out to a trusted adult. Everyone struggles at times, but with the right people around you, it's easier to find your way through. And just as others can support you, you'll find that you can be a powerful part of someone else's support network too.

Cerebellum-
cognitive
processing,
emotional
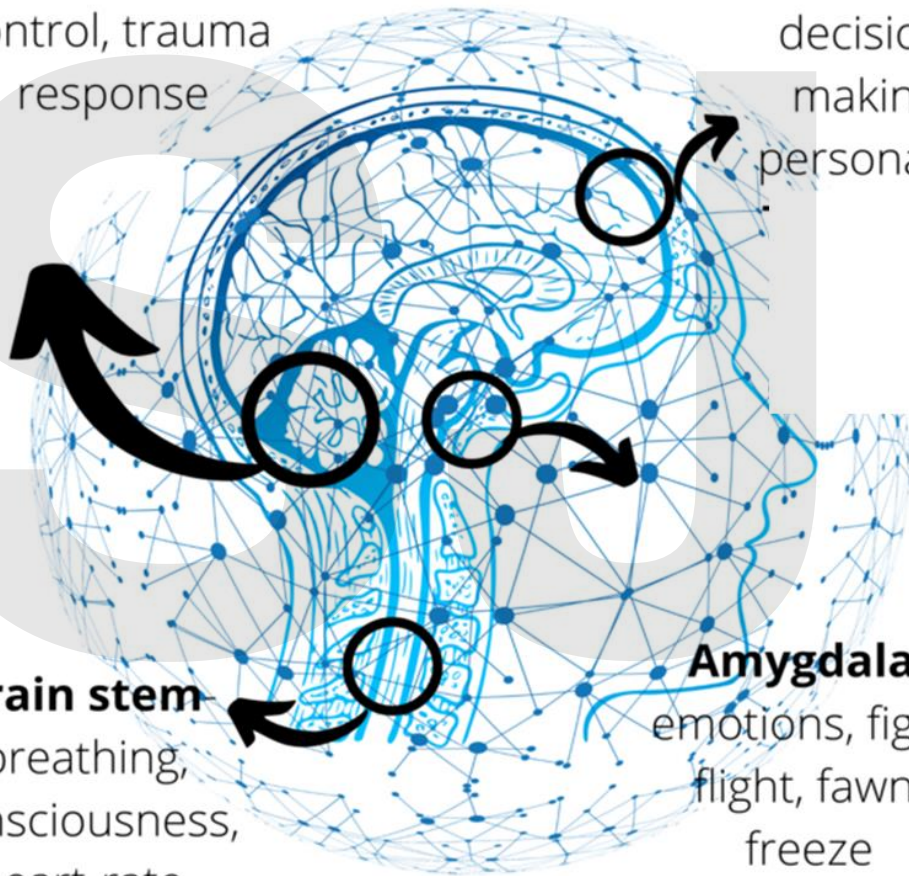control, trauma
response

**Prefrontal
Cortex**-
executive
function,
decision-
making,
personality

Brain stem-
breathing,
consciousness,
heart-rate,
sleep

Amygdala-
emotions, fight,
flight, fawn,
freeze

When we take a closer look at our marvellous brains, we can see how different areas influence emotions and behaviour. The mind can even influence our physical symptoms.

For example - if we are constantly stressed, it can affect our resting heart rate, our sleep , and even heightening our fight or flight response. So, if something startles you, your reaction may be more pronounced.

When it comes to health, the mind and body are connected. This is also why eating poorly can contribute to mental health symptoms too.

As we know, our brains are very complicated organs – and sometimes we don't recognise when our behaviours or our environment influences our feelings until it's too late. For example, if you eat junk food for lunch, you might feel great at first but then later feel tired and grumpy – but because you ate a couple of hours ago, you might not make the connection between what you ate and how you feel.

The same with exercise or socialising – the positive effects may be felt a little while after the event.

But what if you could feel the effects immediately?

DISCUSS: Would it change how you behave?

FEELING GREAT

FEELING MISERABLE

The importance of community & support networks to mental health

Health and Wellbeing

Join a sports club and take part in a game outside.

Walk and chat with friends outside – no looking at your phone!

Limit scrolling through social media.

Get a full eight hours sleep.

Help out at your local food bank for an hour.

Read a story to a younger sibling or cousin – or help out an elderly relative.

Volunteer for an hour at your local animal shelter.

Do not drink caffeinated or sugary drinks and drink water instead.

Try not to think stressful thoughts without taking any action to solve things.

Put on some music you love, turn up the volume and dance for 5 minutes.

Do not spend all day indoors.

It's funny looking at that old photo of me you saw in the starter. That basically summed up my life though – if I wasn't at school, I was just sitting around indoors on my phone most of the time. I had no clue why I always felt so down – but it's pretty obvious to me now, I barely ever spent any time outside or socialising with people in real life!

The thing is, you don't realise what a huge difference getting outside, meeting new people and doing something purposeful actually makes until you try it. Did I join in with the neighbourhood bring and buy sale? I did in the end – in fact I help run them now, with the friends I made.

Discuss: **Why do you think so many of us find it harder to go out, socialise and make real connections with people, rather than spending time on our phone, even though studies show it's making us miserable?**

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Signposting support:

Useful helplines and charities:

Young Minds. Child and adolescent mental health charity for teens struggling with any subject. Call: 0808 802 5544

Teen Line | Teens Support hotline - Connect, talk, get help! Teen Line's highly trained teen listeners provide support, resources and hope to any teen who is struggling.

SANE. National out-of hours mental health charity offering emotional support, guidance and information. Call: 0300 304 7000 (4.30pm to 10.30pm)

Mental Health Foundation. Information and support for anyone with mental health problems or learning disabilities.