

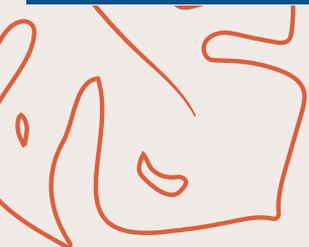


# Faith Places as Safe Spaces

A Mental Health Handbook for Leaders in Faith communities

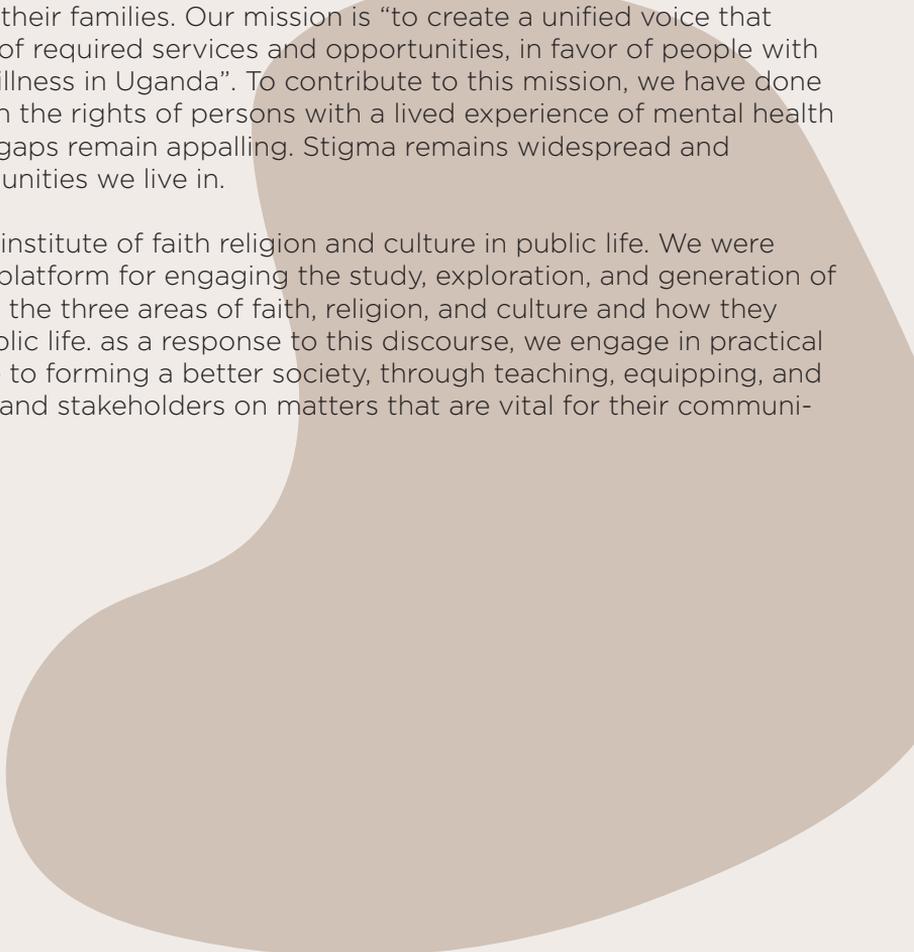
# About Us

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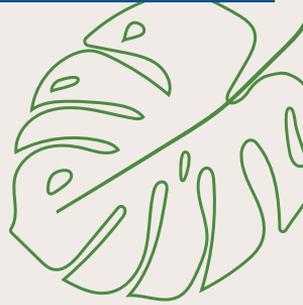
Mental Health Uganda (MHU) is an indigenous, non-government, membership-based Disabled People's Organization, established in 1997 and formally registered as a National NGO in 2001. Our establishment was in response to the overwhelming marginalization, isolation, and abuse of rights of persons with psycho-social disabilities/users of psychiatry services, and their families. Our mission is "to create a unified voice that influences the provision of required services and opportunities, in favor of people with and survivors of mental illness in Uganda". To contribute to this mission, we have done lots of advocacy work on the rights of persons with a lived experience of mental health problems. However, the gaps remain appalling. Stigma remains widespread and entrenched in the communities we live in.

Interface Uganda is the institute of faith religion and culture in public life. We were established in 2016 as a platform for engaging the study, exploration, and generation of knowledge pertaining to the three areas of faith, religion, and culture and how they interplay and impact public life. as a response to this discourse, we engage in practical activities that contribute to forming a better society, through teaching, equipping, and skilling different leaders and stakeholders on matters that are vital for their communities.



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[www.mentalhealthuganda.org](http://www.mentalhealthuganda.org)

Illustration & Design by Samuel .M. Kabali



# Introduction

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Everyone's general well-being greatly depends on their mental health. Mental health is just as important as physical health. However, the majority of people ignore their mental health and do not take it as a priority and as a result, so many silently suffer from mental health problems. There are also several myths and negative perceptions on mental health problems in most societies. These negative perceptions have led to discrimination, stigmatization and the violation of the rights of those with mental health problems. Such negative perceptions need to be broken as these problems are very widespread and everyone is vulnerable and can get a mental health problem. As such, it is the duty of everyone to know about mental health problems, how they manifest themselves and what should be done.

As a response to the mental health crisis in faith communities, INTERFACE Uganda and Mental Health Uganda have partnered to produce this handbook that simplifies the whole subject of mental health for religious leaders. When people in faith communities are made aware that mental health problems are diverse and can affect anyone, that proper diagnosis is necessary and invaluable, that some people can fully recover, and that they are part of the support system available in the community, then our society will be one step closer to overcoming the dire shortfalls and limitations we have experienced in improving the mental health of our communities.

Understand that we do not intend to replace your knowledge and vast resources of your faith. We, however, would like to offer you another tool to help you navigate this unique challenge of mental health. Our hope is that this handbook will provide much-needed support as you labor for the good of your communities.





# Chapter 1: **Understanding Mental Health**

# Chapter 1: Understanding Mental Health

## What is Mental Health?

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines Mental Health as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to contribute to his or her community.

## What is Mental Illness?

Mental Illness is a condition that impacts a person's thinking, feeling, or mood and may affect his or her ability to relate to others and function normally.

According to the United Nations, millions of people worldwide have mental health problems and an estimated one in four people globally will experience a mental health problem in their lifetime. Almost one million people die due to suicide every year, and it is the third leading cause of death among young people. Persons with mental and psychosocial problems often face stigma and discrimination, as well as experience high levels of physical and sexual abuse, which can occur in a range of settings, including police cells, prisons, hospitals, homes and others. While mental health data is scarce in Uganda, current estimates reveal mental disorders make up 14% of the global burden of disease. About 75% of this is borne by populations in low and middle-income countries. Also considering that 78% of Uganda's population is under 30 years, mental health problems should concern us because 75% of all these problems start before the age of 24.

## Who is likely to suffer from a mental health problem?

Anyone is likely to suffer from a mental health problem regardless of gender, race, religion, age, tribe, and profession. However, some people are more vulnerable than others. These may include people with chronic health conditions, minority groups, and persons exposed to and/or displaced by war or conflict.

## What are the possible causes of mental health problems?

The cause of mental health problems is not known, however there are a number of associated factors which can be classified into 2; hereditary and environmental factors.

### 1. Hereditary factors

Mental illness is common in people whose blood relatives also have a mental illness. Certain genes may increase one's risk of developing a mental illness, and life situations may trigger it.



# Chapter 1: Understanding Mental Health

## 2. Environmental factors

These may include but not limited to;

Unhealthy relationships and effects like divorce/separation

Living in extreme poverty including homelessness

Violence (domestic, gender-based violence (GBV), and violence against children)

Excessive consumption of alcohol and other harmful substances.

Major negative life events such as loss/ change of jobs or retrenchment.

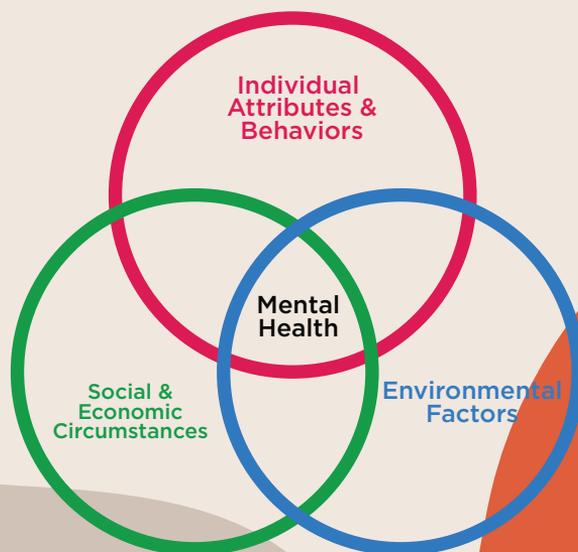
Direct injury to the brain e.g. through accidents

Disasters such as landslides, pandemics, wars, etc.

Chronic illness e.g. HIV, cancer etc.

Having one or 2 factors listed above, is not sufficient that you will have a mental health challenge in life, there will always be a predisposing, precipitating and perpetuating factor that will cause a mental illness in an individual.

Mental well-being is achieved through a combination of factors (see below)



# Chapter 1: Understanding Mental Health

## What are the signs and symptoms of mental illness?

People with mental health problems show different characteristics. However, the common indicators that someone is developing or having a mental health problem include;

- Hearing voices or seeing people/things that other people do not hear or see
- Excessive fears, worries and anxieties
- Social withdrawal e.g. from friends and activities
- Being overly loud or shouting
- Sudden changes in eating or sleeping habits.
- Suicidal thoughts or attempts (wanting to take away one's life)
- Feeling guilty and worthless
- Signs of violence like throwing stones to people, etc.

Note: Again, these are just a few signs and symptoms of mental illness. Having one or even more, of the symptoms above is not sufficient to conclude that an individual is suffering from mental illness. The signs or symptoms should only indicate the need for support or referral to professionals that will do further investigations.





Chapter 2:

# Dealing with Fellow Humans: The Rights of Persons with Mental Health Problems

## Chapter 2: Dealing with Fellow Humans: The Rights of Persons with Mental Health Problems



The best interests of the person with a mental health problem should always be considered in upholding their rights, as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda. The rights include but are not limited to the following;

The person, human dignity and privacy of a person with a mental health problem, should always be respected.

A person with a mental health problem has the right to protection from physical, economic, social, sexual and other forms of exploitation and abuse.

A person with a mental health problem shall be provided with care and treatment that improve his or her mental capacity to develop to full potential and which facilitate his or her integration into ordinary life.

A person shall not be discriminated against, by any person, on grounds of his or her mental illness.

An employer shall not discriminate against an employee who is a person with a mental health problem, on the basis of the mental health problem of that employee.

A mental health practitioner who attends to a person with a mental health problem shall provide the person with all the necessary information such as information about his or her admission, the treatment to be administered, and the right to consent to the treatment, support groups and any other resources.

All rights enshrined under chapter 4 of the Constitution apply. The Mental Health Act also re-emphasizes the rights of persons with mental disabilities. These include but are not limited to:

Equality under the law

Right to life

Right to liberty

Right to freedom from torture

Right to freedom from slavery

Right to privacy

Right to protection from physical, economic, sexual and other forms of exploitation and abuse

Right to own property

Right to freedom of speech and association

Right to education

Rights of persons with disabilities

Affirmative action

Right to found a family etc

Note: These are just a few and not an exhaustive list of all the rights. Persons with mental health problems should enjoy equal rights to any other persons as stipulated in the constitution of the Republic of Uganda.





# Chapter 3: **Mental Health in Community Settings**

# Chapter 3:

## Mental Health in Community Settings

It is important to understand that communities have a monumental role to play in the mental health of individuals. Community reactions, beliefs, and practices concerning mental health can directly impact whether a person receives the help that they need. Some community practices are healthy positive and supportive and promote healing while some are harmful and cause simple cases to become significantly worse and even irreversible.

### What are some of the common harmful practices in communities?

#### **Public Shaming**

Mental health challenges should not be shared publicly with the entire community. It is important to handle such cases with confidentiality and respect for their privacy.

#### **Restraining /Locking people up**

Even in the most extreme cases, it is not advisable to restrain people for any period of time. This violates their human dignity and could even make their symptoms worse. In instances where harm to oneself or to the public is likely, it is better to contact mental health professionals with the appropriate facilities.

#### **Banning them from the faith community**

Sending people away from the community instead of supporting them through their challenges will not help them on their journey to better mental health. It will also prevent other people from coming forward to request for help.

Waiting until the mental illness is advanced before consulting a professional. Many mental health cases in this country are left unattended to until they are severe and difficult to reverse. The sooner you contact a medical professional, the better.

#### **Acting on ignorance and myths**

Many a times people with mental health problems are considered cursed or bewitched and not given a chance to seek professional care or medical support which in most cases intensifies the stigma and isolation of the persons but also aggravates the problems they may be experiencing if the adequate support is not given.

### What are the unique opportunities available for faith leaders.

#### **First point of Contact:**

People with challenges normally consult their faith leaders first before anyone else. This puts you in a unique position to help through the way you respond. If leaders in the faith community can respond well to mental health issues, the entire community will benefit.

#### **Community trust.**

People trust their spiritual leaders; you have the unique opportunity to honor this trust by ensuring you get people the best help possible when they come to you.

#### **Skills within the congregation.**

As a leader, you interact with numerous medical professionals, psychiatrists, and counselors who attend your place of worship. You are in a unique position to reach out to these people and work with them to improve mental health issues in your faith community.

# Chapter 3: Mental Health in Community Settings

What else can a religious leader and community member do to support someone with a mental health problem?

## On a Personal Level:



# Chapter 3: Mental Health in Community Settings

What else can a religious leader and community member do to support someone with a mental health problem?

## On a Community Level:



# Chapter 3: Mental Health in Community Settings

What else can a religious leader and community member do to support someone with a mental health problem?

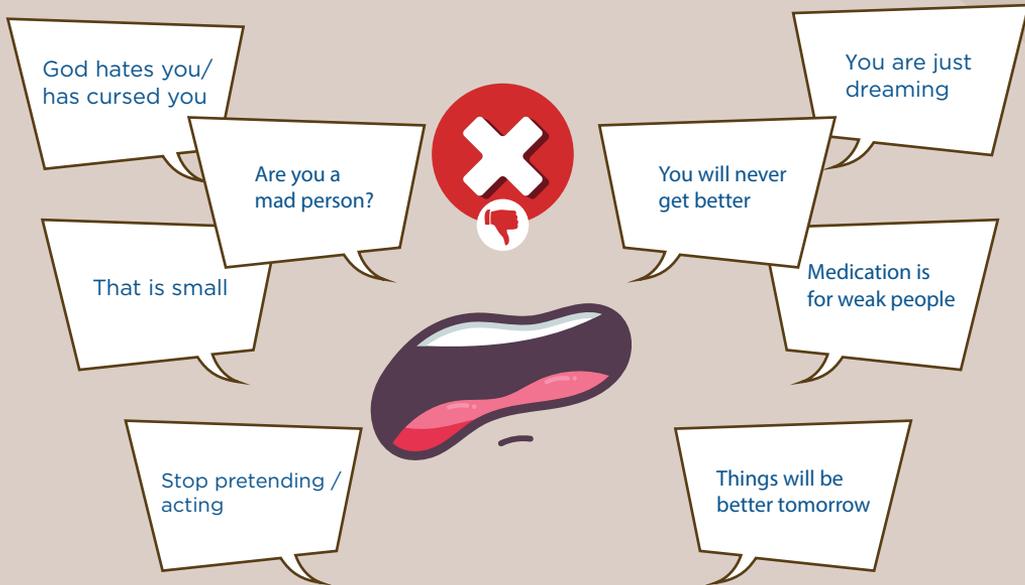
## On a Medical Level:



**Learn about their mental health problem**  
**Help them get treatment and support, as necessary.**  
**Escort them to appointments**  
**Ensure their personal hygiene and proper feeding.**  
**Make sure they are talking to their provider or therapist**  
**Make sure they have and take their medication.**

# Chapter 3: Mental Health in Community Settings

Some of the things you should never say to someone with a psychosocial problem.



You could alternatively say...



# Conclusion

There is more to good health than just a physically healthy body; most of us agree that a healthy person should have a healthy mind. This can mean a number of things; the person should be able to think clearly, solve various challenges they may face in life, they should feel satisfied with the quality of their life and enjoy good relationships with friends, family and colleagues at work.

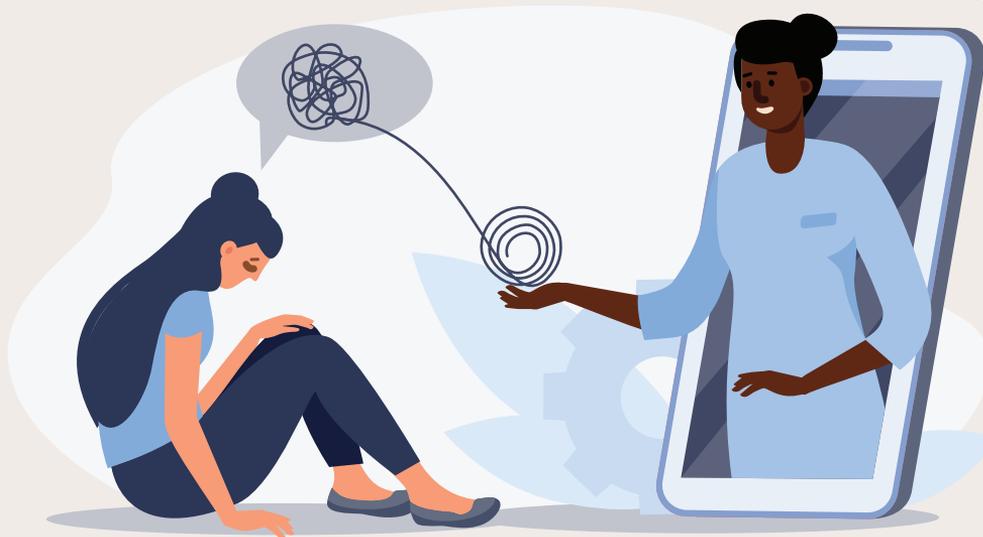
As earlier mentioned, mental illness knows no age, race, tribe or religion; it can be me or you, let's be kind and support people living with mental health problems.



# Appendix

## Important contact information

For mental health counselling, consultation, psychosocial support you can call Mental Health Uganda on our toll free number 0800 21 21 21 available during working days Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 5pm. You can also call 0392 178953, 0778 035 128 or 0701 748 185 during regular office hours. You can also reach us on our social media platforms on Facebook at @MentalHealthUg, Twitter at @MentalHealth\_Ug and Instagram at mental\_health\_uganda.



# Appendix

## Offices or institutions that can be contacted, for different needs related to mental health:

Sector/Function	Office/Institution	Level	Remark
Health & Rehabilitation	All Regional Referral Hospitals	District	
	All Health Centre IVs	District	
	Selected Health Centre IIIs	Sub-county/Division	
Human Rights	Uganda Mental Health Advisory Board		First point of reference in case of violation of rights of a person with a mental health problem
	Uganda Human Rights Commission		Has a mandate to investigate complaints of violation of Human Rights
	Equal Opportunities Commission		has a mandate to investigate complaints on marginalization and discrimination of marginalized groups
	Courts of Law		The Constitution empowers any person who claims violation of or threat to his or her rights to apply to a competent court for redress
Protection	Police		For issues involving children you can also call the toll-free Uganda child helpline "Sauti" on 116

# Appendix

**For Kampala region, in order to access diagnosis and treatment, please contact one of these 24-hour public health facilities**

	<b>Name of Facility</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Contact</b>
1.	Butabika National Referral Mental Hospital	Plot 2 Kirombe-Butabika Road, Kampala.	0717 782 920 0704 620 153
2.	Mulago National Referral Hospital,	Mulago, Kampala.	0772 629 862
3.	Kawempe National Referral Hospital	Kawempe Division, Kampala	0753 851 410 or 0779 108 512
4.	China Uganda Friendship Hospital	Naguru, Nakawa Division, Kampala	0704 288 080
5.	Kisugu Health Centre III	Muyenga, Makindye Division, close to International Hospital Kampala	0774 706 396
6.	Bukoto Health Centre III	Bukoto	0776 700 542 or 0751 757 568
7.	Komamboga Health Centre III	Gayaza Road, Kawempe Division, Kampala	0755 833 383
8.	Kawaala Health Centre III	Kasubi - Kawaala, close to Kasubi market Kampala.	0752 111 211
9.	Kitebi Health Centre III Rubaga Division	Kampala, close to Wankulukuku football stadium	0757 981 252

# Appendix

If your rights or those of someone with a mental health challenge are violated, please contact any of the following numbers from a police

Name of Police Station		Contacts	
		Criminal Intelligence	Community Liaison Office
1.	Old Kampala Police station	0777 733 553 or 0755 270 899	0714 667 798 or 0707 101 546
2.	Wandegeya Police Station	0772 928 778	0714 667 791
3.	Katwe Police Station	0752 525 085	0714 667 793
4.	Kawempe Police Station	0782 928 510 or 0701 537 214	0714 667 795
5.	Jinja Road Police Station	0752 088 642	0714 667 799
6.	Kajjansi Police	0775 618 677	
7.	Kabalagala Police Station	0774 350 828	
8.	Central Police Station (CPS)	0704 311 833	
9.	Kampala Road Police Station	0774 463 746	
10.	Nateete Police Station	0704 421 487	
11.	Kampala Divison	0701 662 031 or 0772 634 145	
12.	Nansana Police Station	0752 411 212 or 0779 838 174	

If you or someone you know is at risk of suicide and needs urgent help, please call Doreen Kanyesigye on 0772 518 055.



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