

Fighting Spirit

The path to better mental health can be long, nuanced and often best approached with professional help. In lieu of World Mental Health Day, three experts share how to normalise stigmas and fearlessly drive the conversation on mental health support



FEEL THE DISCOMFORT

Learn to break free when you find yourself staying in agreement with things you don't feel comfortable with. According to Briar Jacques, Holistic Director and Co-Founder at The Free Spirit Collective, "the reactive over-pleasing syndrome is one that is too familiar. Women can be overly sensitive to how they are perceived by others, and this can result in habitual reluctance to set healthy boundaries. Saying no is just as important as saying yes. It frees us. We only have so much energy and time. Developing conscious discernment about how we use both can feel like a radical act – because it is. The pressure on women to be 'nice' can be intense. Women are labelled 'difficult' far more quickly than men. But when the price we pay for the nice label is our own mental and physical wellbeing, we need to deeply reflect. Managing how we show up in other people's minds is an exhausting, pointless activity. It's also an illusion. People will think what they want, mostly based on things to do with themselves. I'm not talking about not caring how we impact the feelings of others, just how buying into the illusion of control of others' feelings and opinions can

turn into habitual, unconscious-pleasing behaviours. This often will look like saying yes reflexively and not saying how we really feel when it is uncomfortable or may cause conflict. We block ourselves from the freedom to want what we want. Consciousness is changing about this topic though. More and more I see women coming together to support each other to challenge the pleasing habit. It's inspiring. And necessary. And is easier than we have been taught. It's just the willingness to feel the discomfort of perceived judgment. The prize? Freedom to claim what we really, truly want."

TALK YOURSELF UP

Licensed Psychologist at The Hundred Wellness Centre, Dr Devika Mankani, advises "Always, always honour yourself. While recognition and praise can come from the world around you, be your own source of power. Don't be shy to acknowledge your strengths, they are real, and they belong to you. No one can take away your power unless you allow them."

FIND THE SPACE TO FORGIVE

Mankani adds, "This sounds clichéd but when you can release the pain, stress, and resentment it can be liberating and move you forward, psychologically unencumbered. Forgiveness doesn't condone the act or behaviour; it allows us to reclaim ourselves before the event."

BREAK THE CYCLE

Learn to listen and help others to help yourself. "Denounce sexism, harassment and discrimination wherever it occurs, call injustice out, speak up, and share your story, and help destigmatise. In the workplace, make sure women's ideas are given space and airtime, celebrate each other's accomplishments, give feedback when needed, share ideas and communicate openly. Mentor other women, support one another, find and create a platform with like-minded women around a shared interest," shares Dr Vassiliki Simoglu, PhD Psychodynamically-oriented Psychotherapist at Thrive Wellbeing Clinic.

EMBRACE SOLITUDE

Find comfort in your own company. The more you sit it out with your feelings, the more you recognise your triggers and understand your fears. Identifying your patterns of behaviour will allow you to manage your fight-and-flight response before it hits boiling point.