



Newsletter – December 2022

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OUR ATTITUDE AND RESPONSE AS PARENTS AND FAMILY TOWARDS MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

SEE

On 1 May 2022, CNA Insider (1) reported how youths struggled to find help with mental health issues. From a published study in 2021, the numbers of youths diagnosed with Depression aged 10-24 grew four-fold between 2013 and 2018. That same year, Singapore recorded its highest suicide rate in 8 years with 452 reported suicides amid the Covid-19 pandemic (2).

What stood out as appalling was how the parents reacted to the situations when their children turned to them for help. One youth who tried speaking to his parents about getting professional help, was put through an exorcism ritual, believing he was possessed. The experience left him traumatised. In another case, a mother attributed her daughter's self-harming behaviour and feelings of numbness and hopelessness down to her perfectionist tendencies "as a Virgo" rather than clinical depression. She also reacted with anger when asked to attend a session by the psychologist. Another youth's truancy behaviour was ascribed by his parents, school counsellor and teachers to laziness and lack of motivation, downplaying his needs for deeper social connections and confusion over his sexuality.

With the rise of mental health concerns, and how it affects our children and the youth population pervasively, the knowledge, attitudes and responses we adopt form the pillar of support and help to those around us (in our own family as well as others and the society at large) who need them.

Sources:

1. More youths seeking help with mental health - but finding it isn't always easy
<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/cna-insider/youth-mental-health-illness-singapore-help-treatment-2649296>
2. Suicide cases in Singapore highest in 8 years amid COVID-19 pandemic
<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/suicide-highest-record-elderly-mental-health-isolation-covid-19-1984716>

Causes

1. What is/ are the root cause/s of the mental issues that our children and youth face today? Why is it so prevalent? Is this reality occurring only in Singapore?
2. Is the society at large causing these challenges too?

Consequences

1. What happens if we ignore the above challenges?
2. How would our ignorance, if any, reflect about our Christian faith?

JUDGE

Personal Reflection

- What is my own understanding of mental health issues? Do I see it as insanity, as defects or simply issues that I can ascribe blame (on self, others or the society)?
- Are we falling behind and allowing the stigma of mental health to inhibit our choosing to act with haste, compassion and love to be the help and support our children need from us?
- Are we someone who flees or freezes in unknown or uncomfortable situations and avoids contact after we learnt of someone's mental issues or are we able to seek to understand and offer whatever support we can?
- Does our ignorance and lack of knowledge of what mental health mean constraint our willingness to lend a hand or be a listening ear?
- What effect does the prognosis have on us as parents or close relations to the one struggling with mental health issues? What feelings do I have towards it (e.g. shame, guilt, anger, etc.)? Are we able to take responsibility for our own feelings? How can we learn to manage our own feelings before we offer help?
- How are we as parents or family (sometimes), a contributing source of the root cause of the problems that had manifested in the symptoms? Acknowledgement is the first step to healing.

Christian Reflection

- What false beliefs are holding us back and what Gospel values are we lacking in exercising courage to support our fraternity of children/family members who live with mental health struggles?
- How did our Lord Jesus Christ care for the mentally challenged persons in the Gospel and what is his message to us?
- How can we apply the Catholic Social Teachings in the above reality?

ACT

- Let us ask ourselves today what is one or more things different I can do as an individual, as a parent, as family members to support those struggling with mental

health in our neighbourhood, our parish and in our society? Can we begin with learning and reading more about mental health, re-examining our own reactions (verbal and non-verbal expressions and responses if we are standing next to a fellowman with mental health struggles or diagnosis), and deciding how you can respond by words, behaviour or actions showing more understanding, tolerance and compassion?

- How can our Movement assist children and youth who have mental issues?

Reading of the above reports and the other relevant reports on similar subject matters are a start for us to join in the shaping of being more informed and aware about mental health issues and struggles involved. This can be our first commitment towards developing more knowledge and understanding about such mental and social issues thereby becoming a pillar of comfort, support and healing rather than a source of denial, rejection and abandonment of our loved ones.

(Synopsis from Miss Ong San San, Our Lady of Perpetual Succour Base Group)



Father Dominique and the CFM Exco wish all CFM members and their families a Blessed and Holy Christmas 2022.