Friendly Places

**I believe that there is a significant and positive role for faith communities to play in the support of mental health.**

**I pledge to support faith groups in my community to become Friendly Places which welcome and support those struggling with their mental health.**

'There's no health without mental health'. Mental health is just as important as our physical health. Like our bodies, our minds change and develop throughout our lives. And, like our bodies, our minds can become unwell.

Mental health problems are very common. They affect how people think and feel about themselves and others, how they interpret events, how they cope with life events and how they develop and sustain relationships. One in four of us is likely to visit our GP in connection with a mental health problem. Every faith community contains people who have experienced mental health problems, or their family and friends.

There is a significant and positive role for faith communities to play in the support of those with mental health problems – both within their own congregations and in the wider community. This stems from the position of faith groups as places of community, of meaning, and of connection.

By signing up to the Friendly Places Pledge a faith group makes a commitment to be a place which welcomes and supports those struggling with their mental health.

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# Ways to become a friendlier place...

## Increasing accessibility

- Providing opportunities for connection, such as activities or refreshments after services.
- Making sure those people who can be approached to talk about pastoral care or prayer are visibly available to speak to after services or meetings.
- Providing help and support for people caring for those with mental health difficulties.
- Keeping seats or spaces free so people can slip in and out during services or ceremonies.

## Being friendly and welcoming

- Having people in place to greet those attending meetings or services
- Ensuring that there is a structure where each person in the community is 'seen', so that even if a person does not regularly participate in social or community activities, there is someone to look out for them, or if they are absent it is noticed and acted upon.
- Listening; giving people time and space to speak.
- Accepting and welcoming others as they are: seeing past unhelpful behaviour and focusing on the person rather than 'reacting' to people who may be 'different'.
- Being prepared to come alongside and accept people with complex problems, so that they are not made to feel that they have to be 'fixed'.

## Raising awareness and challenge stigma

- Talking openly about the mental health needs of the whole community.
- Offering opportunities for improved awareness, such as discussion groups or a film event to help to raise awareness and dispel myths.
- Addressing mental health issues in public messages or sermons.
- If your place of worship has space for telling stories – encouraging and supporting those with personal experience of mental health problems to share their story with others in the faith group.

## Understand Mental Health

- Committing to understand more about mental health as a congregation; supporting those who want a deeper understanding of mental health through accessing training opportunities available.
- Having an awareness of local mental health services.

**www.faithaction.net/friendlyplaces**

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