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# NEWSLETTER

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# WORD OF MISS MINDS

**Dear Readers,**

Each month, I write to you about mindfulness, mental well-being, and the little joys that help us navigate life's challenges. But this month, I want to talk about something different—something heavier, yet deeply important.

**April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month**, a time to acknowledge a painful reality that affects millions of men and women worldwide. Sexual violence is not just a statistic—it is a wound carried silently by far too many. It shatters trust, damages self-worth, and leaves scars that often remain unseen. And yet, for all its devastating impact, it remains one of the least discussed issues in our society.

**Survivors** of sexual violence—whether **women, men, or non-binary individuals**—often suffer in silence due to shame, fear, or societal stigma. Many are **afraid to share** their stories, fearing they won't be believed or that they will be blamed. But healing begins when we listen, when we create a world where survivors are met with compassion instead of judgment, support instead of silence. **To those who have endured this pain: you are not alone.**





**Your experience does not define you,** and your voice holds power. Speaking out—whether to a trusted friend, a therapist, or the world—can be a step toward reclaiming your strength. And if you are not ready to share, that is okay too.

**Your healing is yours to define.** To the rest of us: we must do better. Believe survivors. Stand by them. Challenge the culture of silence. Offer a listening ear, a safe space, and a reminder that they are worthy of support, not shame. Even the smallest act of kindness can be a lifeline for someone struggling in the shadows.

This month, **let's not look away.** Let's educate ourselves, check in on those who may be hurting, and be the voices that break the cycle of silence. With strength and solidarity,

**Miss Minds**





# NATIONAL CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION MONTH



A parent or caregiver may **hit a child** with a belt or a fist, leaving bruises or injuries. In some cases, a parent consistently **belittles a child**, calling them names like "stupid" or "worthless."

An **adult relative may engage** in inappropriate gestures; a child may be left alone for extended periods without supervision, leading to accidents.

All these are forms of child abuse, **child abuse** refers to any intentional harm or mistreatment of a child, which can take various forms. It encompasses physical, emotional, sexual, and neglectful behaviours that can adversely affect a child's physical and psychological well-being.

Aside from the immediate physical injuries children experience through abuse, it also leaves a **lifelong and intergenerational impact**. Research studies suggest child abuse and neglect can lead to mental health problems that can persist into adulthood, affecting their normal everyday functioning, like, forming relationships, self-esteem, and overall wellbeing.





Experiencing childhood maltreatment is a risk factor for **multiple psychiatric disorders** throughout adulthood. Studies show 46% of individuals with depression reported a history of child abuse, and 57% of individuals with bipolar disorder have also reported the same.

**Childhood maltreatment** is also associated with a more harmful and destructive disorder course, with the majority of studies showing increased recurrence and persistence of depressive episodes. Child abuse also **increases the risk of** suicide attempts, anxiety disorders, PTSD, and substance abuse.

Further, adults with major depression who experienced abuse as children had poorer response outcomes to antidepressant treatment.

**Consistent chronic stress** in children can become toxic and leads to disrupted structural changes in the developing brain, which in turn affects the executive functioning of the brain, causing hindrance to basic functions like *memory, self-control, cognitive flexibility, learning, and attention*.

*"As I grew older, I realized that my mental abilities had been deeply affected. My memory was unreliable, and I found it hard to process things under pressure. Taking decisions became overwhelming, and anxiety clouded my ability to think. I later learned that this was because my brain had been wired to react to danger rather than to learn and grow."*

-Emily





Children who experience maltreatment or neglect tend to develop attachment disorders, which negatively impact their ability to form positive peer, social, and romantic relationships later in life. They also tend to develop antisocial traits as they grow up, which can lead to criminal behaviour in adulthood.



***"At school, I struggled to trust anyone, I had difficulty making friends. I pushed people away before they could leave me, I was convinced that no relationship was permanent."***

-- anonymous.



Childhood abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglect, can adversely impact a child's self-worth and self-esteem; it creates a state of negative self-image, which can distort a child's self-perception. They may internalize their abuser's criticism and judgments and view themselves as damaged or defective



Additionally, they blame themselves for the trauma they endure, they end up in a vicious cycle of self-blame where they believe they deserve the mistreatment further eroding their self-worth. The low self esteem also adds on to their struggle with social interactions.

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***"I was abused by my parents growing up, and they constantly put me down, telling me I wasn't good enough. Over time, I started believing I was worthless and couldn't see any value in myself. As an adult, I still struggle with low self-esteem and pushing people away because I feel unworthy of love or respect. Therapy has helped me understand that my negative self-image was shaped by the abuse, but it's been a long journey to start rebuilding my confidence and self-worth."***

– anonymous

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**Child maltreatment has serious, long-lasting repercussions on mental health** that frequently last far into adulthood. A variety of problems, including *anxiety, sadness, PTSD, and trouble establishing positive relationships*, can affect survivors.

These **long-lasting effects have an effect** on the person as well as on communities and society at large. For survivors to recover and end the trauma cycle, early intervention, continuous support, and therapeutic treatment are crucial. We may endeavor to lessen these long-term effects and **promote healthier futures for abuse survivors** by raising awareness and **providing resources for those impacted**.



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**CONTENT: GURUNANDAN**





# INTERNATIONAL DAY OF CONSCIENCE



The **International Day of Conscience**, observed on April 5th, was established by the United Nations to promote peace, tolerance, and ethical behavior, encouraging self-reflection and mental well-being. This day highlights the importance of **conscience for a harmonious world**. It urges individuals to align their actions with moral values. Self-reflection, the process of examining one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, is central to this mission. It supports **personal growth** by helping people learn from experiences, increases the emotional intelligence of a person, deepens self-understanding, and reduces stress and increases self-awareness. On the International Day of Conscience, reflecting on how our actions impact others is emphasized.



**Self-reflection** is vital for several reasons. It allows individuals to grow by analyzing successes and failures, such as improving skills after a weak performance. It **increases emotional intelligence**, leading to better relationship management and decision-making. It also ensures that people's actions align with their personal values. This is one of the key focuses of the International Day of Conscience. According to research, it is observed that **regular reflection can lower stress** and **increase well-being**, though it's worth noting that only 10-15% of Americans are truly self-aware. This highlights the need for consistent practice of self reflection. Without this, people risk stagnation, which leads to missing opportunities to adjust unfulfilling routines.







People practice self reflection in many ways. **Journaling** helps process emotions by documenting daily experiences, while meditation, even for five minutes, enhances mindfulness and self-awareness. Setting aside dedicated time either daily or weekly in a quiet space, like nature, lets people engage in deep introspection. Asking **reflective questions**, such as “***What did I learn today?***” or seeking feedback from others, provides fresh perspectives. **Goal-setting and reviewing progress**, alongside gratitude practices like listing three daily joys, build a habit of positive reflection. These **strategies** are supported by psychological research and make reflection accessible and effective. The following steps can be followed to help individuals start self reflecting.



- **Finding a calm environment** that is free from distractions in order to focus inward or introspect within oneself
- **Self reflection** starts with a simple question, like “What went well today, and why?” to ease into the process
- **Writing down thoughts** in a journal or notebook to clarify insights is also usually followed.
- People **review their past actions** or decisions, and identify one strength and one area for improvement
- They commit to small, actionable changes. This is generally done based on reflection, such as adjusting a habit.





Self-reflection is best suited for individuals seeking personal growth. This involves people like students that aim to improve academically, professionals that want to refine their skills, or anyone navigating life transitions like a career change or loss.

It also **benefits** those with high emotional demands, like caregivers or leaders, who need to manage stress and maintain empathy, as well as curious minds that are eager to understand their motivations and values.

The International Day of Conscience helps us in **incorporating practices** like these to broader goals, encouraging dialogue, empathy, and ethical acts reflection on one's moral compass. This day helps in **reminding** us to self reflect and introspect, helping us **understand oneself better**.



DESIGN: ASHIQA PERVEEN  
CONTENT: TANVI YADLAPATI



### ***EVERY MIND MATTERS : CELEBRATING AUTISM***

Every year on **April 2nd**, the world comes together to observe and celebrate **World Autism Awareness Day**, a meaningful occasion to foster understanding, acceptance, and inclusion for individuals on the autism spectrum. **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neuro-developmental condition** that affects how individuals perceive the world, interact with others, and process information. Despite increasing awareness, many misconceptions about autism persist, often contributing to the challenges faced by those living with the condition.





## Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder

### The National Autism

**Association** estimates that autism affects **1 in every 59 children**. The bio-neurological developmental impairment generally manifests itself by the age of three and is more common in boys (four times more likely) than in girls. One thing I've learned is that 'Autism' is **not a one-size-fits-all diagnosis**.

The term "spectrum" reflects the wide variation in how autism presents in different individuals. Some people with autism may require significant support in their daily lives, while others may live independently and thrive in their personal and professional endeavours. This diversity in experiences means that **no two autistic individuals are the same**.

Some common characteristics of autism can include:

- Differences in social communication and interaction
- Repetitive behaviors or restricted interests
- Sensory sensitivities (e.g., being over- or under-responsive to stimuli)
- Unique strengths, such as attention to detail, strong memory, or creative problem-solving abilities





## ***Challenges Faced by Individuals with Autism***

Through my research, I've come to understand that living with autism comes with unique challenges that can impact various aspects of life, including education, employment, and social relationships.



### **1. Social Misunderstandings:**

People with autism may find it difficult to interpret social cues, maintain eye contact, or engage in small talk, which can lead to feelings of isolation and misunderstanding.

### **2. Sensory Overload:**

Everyday environments can be overwhelming. Bright lights, loud noises, or unfamiliar textures can trigger distress or discomfort for many individuals on the spectrum.

### **3. Access to Appropriate Support:**

Despite advancements in research and advocacy, access to tailored education, healthcare, and workplace accommodations remains a significant challenge for many autistic individuals and their families.

### **4. Mental Health Concerns:**

Autistic individuals are at a higher risk for co-occurring mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, often due to social exclusion and the pressure to mask or hide their autistic traits.





## ***Debunking Common Myths About Autism***

I've also encountered many myths and misconceptions that continue to shape public perceptions of autism. This misinformation can perpetuate harmful stereotypes about autism. Here are some **common myths and the truths** behind them:

Myth 1: **"All autistic people are the same."**

**Truth:** Autism is a spectrum, meaning it manifests differently in everyone. Some people may have advanced verbal skills, while others may be non-speaking but communicate effectively through other means.

Myth 3: **"People with autism lack empathy."**

**Truth:** Many autistic individuals experience deep emotions and empathy, though they may express or process these feelings in ways that differ from neurotypical individuals.

Myth 2: **"Autism is caused by vaccines."**

**Truth:** Extensive scientific research has debunked this myth. Autism is believed to result from a combination of genetic and environmental factors, and there is no credible evidence linking vaccines to autism.

Myth 4: **"Autism is a childhood condition."**

**Truth:** Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental difference. With appropriate support, autistic individuals can lead fulfilling lives at any age.





## ***Fostering Inclusion and Acceptance***

I believe that creating a world that values and supports autistic individuals **requires both systemic and cultural changes.** Here are a few ways to promote inclusion:

- **Listen to Autistic Voices:** Center the experiences and perspectives of autistic individuals in conversations about autism advocacy and policy.
- **Educate Yourself and Others:** Challenge misinformation by sharing evidence-based knowledge about autism.
- **Support Accessibility:** Advocate for sensory-friendly environments, workplace accommodations, and inclusive education policies.
- **Celebrate Neurodiversity:** Recognize the value of diverse ways of thinking and being. Everyone deserves the opportunity to thrive.

This World Autism Awareness Day, let us move beyond awareness and towards genuine acceptance and empowerment. By embracing the full spectrum of human diversity, we can create a more inclusive and compassionate world for everyone, including those on the autism spectrum.







# WORLD HEALTH DAY

**World Health Day** falls on **April 7th**, an occasion meant to start conversations about healthcare systems and the realities of living with illness. While global health campaigns often focus on widespread diseases, perhaps overwhelmingly so after the pandemic, there is immense value in understanding individual experiences, especially those of people navigating chronic conditions. This year, I had the opportunity to speak with someone living with a chronic illness – specifically Crohn’s diseases in order to gain a deeper understanding of how individuals who struggle with their physical health manage their illness when it doesn’t go away.

**Crohn’s disease** is a form of **inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)** that causes persistent inflammation in the digestive tract. Symptoms can range from severe abdominal pain and diarrhea to fatigue and malnutrition. But beyond the medical definitions, Crohn’s reshapes the way a person lives, dictating what they eat, how they work, and even how they plan their days. I interviewed L, who described it as “a full time job with no breaks and no guarantees”





One of the hardest aspects of Crohn's and a lot of other chronic illnesses, they explained, is the way others perceive it. "If you don't look sick, people assume you're fine. But inside, you're constantly managing overwhelming exhaustion and pain." Unlike disabilities that are visible, invisible chronic illnesses often lead to a sense of skepticism, making it harder for those affected to receive the support they need. "I've had to justify my illness more times than I can count. Oftentimes, I'm told I'm making it up for attention."

The unpredictability of their illness also means that plans are always tentative. They described how flare-ups can completely derail a workday, going out with friends, or even something as simple as a trip to the grocery store. **"Some days, you feel okay. Other days, you wake up knowing you won't be able to leave your house. And there's no warning."** Chronic illness doesn't just affect the body, it reshapes everything about you, your identity, your relationships. "You lose a lot," my interviewee admitted. **"You lose energy. You lose spontaneity. Sometimes, you even lose friendships because not everyone understands why you have to cancel plans so often."**



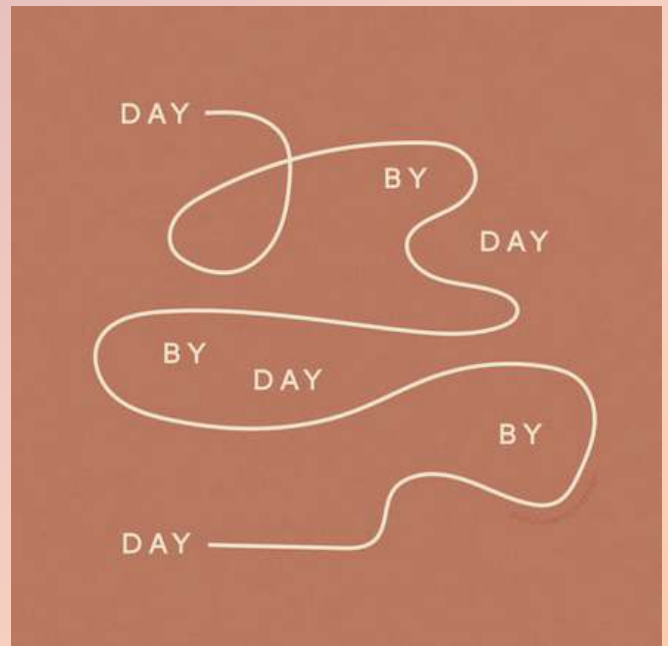


Anxiety and depression are common among those with long-term illnesses, not just because of the symptoms, but because of the isolation that often comes with them. **“When your world shrinks to accommodate your illness, it’s hard not to feel left behind.”** For my interviewee, one of the most unexpected yet powerful moments of feeling seen came from an indie video game, *But You Seem Fine*. Created by a developer with chronic illness, the game takes players through a first-person experience of navigating daily life with an invisible condition. **“It was the first time I saw something that really captured what it feels like, not just the physical pain, but the exhaustion of trying to explain yourself to people who don’t get it.”**

They described how the game mirrored their own struggles: the dismissive comments from others, the frustration of medical appointments that don’t lead to solutions, and the relentless balancing act of trying to appear ‘normal’ while dealing with symptoms. **“It’s one thing to read about chronic illness, but this game made you feel it.”** They explained how rare it is to see media reflect the experience of living with an ongoing, invisible struggle. “Most portrayals of illness focus on either recovery or tragedy, but *But You Seem Fine* just tells the truth—it’s a cycle of managing, explaining, and surviving.”



For people with chronic conditions, medical advancements alone aren't enough. What's also needed is **systemic change** in how society and healthcare systems treat chronic illness. My interviewee emphasized that affordability is one of the biggest barriers. "It's exhausting to fight your own body, but it's even more exhausting to fight for insurance approvals, medication refills, and basic accommodations at work or school." They described the sheer irony of celebrations of health, days like this, they said, sometimes made her feel bitter. Most activism felt vacuous if it's not combined with actively reducing costs and improving the living experiences for those with illnesses like them.



Raising awareness about these struggles boils down to empathy. World health day is about advocating for real, structural improvement in healthcare policies, workplace accommodations and public understandings of chronic illness. World Health Day is often framed as a **celebration of progress**, but my conversation reminded me that progress isn't just about breakthroughs in medicine or statistics on life expectancy. It's also about recognizing the daily battles that millions fight, not for survival, but for a life that feels normal and fulfilling. So this year, rather than just talking about health in abstract terms, maybe we should listen more to the stories of those living with chronic conditions, to the frustrations they carry, and to the changes they need. Health isn't just about treatment; it's about dignity, equity, and the right to live without constantly having to prove your pain is real. Let world health day serve as a reminder of that.



# SEXUAL ASSULT AWARENESS MONTH

**Sexual violence** is a pervasive issue that affects millions of individuals worldwide, leaving lasting physical, emotional, and psychological scars. Every April, **Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM)** serves as a crucial time to raise awareness about sexual violence, its impact on mental health, and the importance of support and prevention.







## Understanding Sexual Violence

Sexual violence encompasses a range of **non-consensual acts**, including sexual harassment, assault, rape, and coercion. **It can happen to anyone**, regardless of age, gender, or background. However, statistics show that women, children, and marginalized communities are disproportionately affected.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately **1 in 3 women** experience sexual violence in their lifetime.

In the U.S., **the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN)** reports that every 68 seconds, an individual is sexually assaulted. Despite these staggering numbers, many cases go unreported due to fear, stigma, and societal attitudes.





Survivors of sexual violence often face profound psychological consequences, which can persist for years if not adequately addressed. The trauma associated with sexual violence manifests in various mental health conditions, including:



### 1. **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):**

Sexual violence is one of the leading causes of PTSD. Survivors may experience flashbacks, nightmares, hypervigilance, and avoidance behaviors that significantly impact daily life. Triggers, such as certain places, sounds, or even conversations, can cause severe emotional distress.



### 2. **Depression and Anxiety:**

Many survivors struggle with depression and anxiety following an assault. Feelings of helplessness, guilt, and self-blame can lead to persistent sadness, social withdrawal, and even suicidal ideation. Anxiety disorders, including panic attacks and generalized anxiety, are also common.



### 3. Dissociation and Emotional

**Numbness** Some survivors experience dissociation, where they feel disconnected from reality as a defense mechanism against overwhelming pain. Emotional numbness, where individuals suppress their feelings to avoid confronting trauma, is another coping strategy that can hinder emotional healing.



### 4. Substance Abuse and Self-Destructive Behaviors

To cope with their pain, some survivors turn to alcohol, drugs, or self-harm. This behavior often stems from a desire to numb emotions or regain a sense of control over their bodies and experiences. Unfortunately, these coping mechanisms can further deteriorate mental and physical well-being.



## Sexual Violence in Media and Current Trends

The media plays a powerful role in shaping societal perceptions of sexual violence.

In recent years, the **#MeToo** movement has amplified survivors' voices, encouraging more people to speak out against sexual violence and demand accountability.

However, **media portrayal can also be problematic**—some content sensationalizes trauma, blames victims, or normalizes toxic behaviors, reinforcing harmful stereotypes.

The **rise of digital platforms** has also led to an increase in online sexual violence, such as cyberstalking, revenge porn, and digital harassment.

Social media has been both a **tool** for **advocacy** and a space where **survivors face retraumatization** through victim-blaming comments and online abuse.







## Healing and Support: The Path to Recovery

Recovery from sexual violence is a deeply personal journey that requires time, patience, and professional support. Here are some ways survivors can seek healing:



### 1. Therapy and Counseling

Trauma-focused therapies, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), help survivors process their experiences and develop coping strategies. Support groups can also provide a sense of community and validation.

### 2. Self-Care and Grounding

Techniques Mindfulness, meditation, and breathing exercises help survivors manage anxiety and flashbacks. Engaging in hobbies, journaling, and physical activities can also aid in emotional healing.



### 3. Strong Support Systems

Having a trusted support system—friends, family, or advocacy organizations—can make a significant difference. Knowing they are believed and supported encourages survivors to seek help without fear of judgment.



## The Importance of Awareness and Prevention

Preventing sexual violence requires collective effort. **Education** on consent, healthy relationships, and bystander intervention should be integrated into schools, workplaces, and communities.

**Encouraging open conversations** about sexual violence and breaking the stigma around seeking help is crucial.

This **Sexual Assault Awareness Month**, we must stand in solidarity with survivors, amplify their voices, and work towards a world where safety, respect, and dignity are fundamental rights for all. Healing is possible, and support is available. No one should suffer in silence. If you or someone you know is struggling with the effects of sexual violence, reach out to a trusted mental health professional or crisis support organization. **You are not alone.**



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