



Are nervous breakdowns and mental breakdowns the same thing?

Individuals Newsletter August 2024

Both nervous breakdowns and mental breakdowns are terms used to describe a period of extreme mental or emotional distress. They are essentially the same thing. During this period, you may be unable to function or perform normal day-to-day activities, such as going to work or school or caring for yourself or others.

Although a nervous breakdown is not an official medical diagnosis, the term is still commonly used during a period of intense emotional symptoms like panic, anxiety, and distress.

They can be severely traumatic and overwhelming events that have been linked to wider mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and personality disorders.

What are the causes?

There is no one cause of a nervous breakdown. Anything that leads to excessive stress can trigger it. In general, feeling stress and being unable to cope with it may lead to feeling so overwhelmed that you can't perform your normal daily functions. Some things that might trigger a nervous breakdown include:

- Major life changes
- Lack of sleep
- Financial problems
- Abuse
- Increased stress levels, or burnout
- A sudden tragedy

What are some common signs of a breakdown?

Anxiety or Depression Symptoms:

- Low self-esteem
- Fearfulness
- Irritability
- Worrying
- Feeling helpless
- Getting angry easily
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Losing interest in favourite activities
- Difficulty breathing
- Uncontrollable crying
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide

Trouble Concentrating:

- Long-term stress can affect memory and lead to difficulty concentrating.
- In extreme cases, excessive cortisol (a stress hormone) can even cause memory loss.

Insomnia:

- Stress may cause insomnia, making it difficult to fall asleep and stay asleep.
- Lack of sleep worsens stress and anxiety.

Physical Symptoms:

- Headaches, digestive problems, changes in appetite, or weight fluctuations may accompany a mental break.

How common are breakdowns?

The prevalence of nervous breakdowns or mental breakdowns can vary widely, as they are not precisely defined clinical terms. However, stress-related conditions, anxiety disorders, and depression affect a significant portion of the population. If you're experiencing distress, consider seeking professional help to better understand and manage your symptoms.

What to do during a nervous or mental breakdown?

If you think you might be having a nervous breakdown, contact a doctor or healthcare professional as soon as possible. A nervous breakdown could be a sign of a mental health condition. It's important for you to see a doctor as soon as you notice signs of a breakdown. They can help determine the cause, diagnose any health conditions that may be contributing to your symptoms, and refer you to a specialist for further care.

How counselling can help

Counselling offers a supportive and structured environment where individuals can address the underlying causes of their breakdown, develop coping strategies, and work towards recovery. Here are several ways in which counselling can be beneficial.

Providing emotional support

Counselling offers a safe space for individuals to express their feelings of overwhelm, fear, and sadness. A counsellor provides empathy and understanding, helping individuals feel heard and validated.

Identifying triggers and stressors

Through counselling, individuals can gain insight into the specific stressors or events that contributed to their breakdown. Understanding these triggers is crucial for developing effective coping strategies.

Developing coping mechanisms

Counsellors work with individuals to develop practical tools and techniques to manage stress and anxiety. This can include relaxation exercises, mindfulness practices, and problem-solving skills.





Can genetics influence mental health?

Individuals Newsletter
August 2024

Living with a mental health condition can be debilitating, so it's natural to question where they originate from. Could it be because of experiences in childhood or trauma? Could it be because of social isolation? A loss of job? Substance abuse? Maybe an impact from long-term stress, or could it be passed down from a family member? The impact of genetics on mental health has a long history, with scientists conducting research to understand the link for over a century. However, we are only beginning to understand the relationship.

What are genes and genetics?

Genes are the building blocks that form our cells and body. Genes contribute to personality traits, appearance, and overall health, such as eye colour and the hair texture. This is why children look like their parents and have similar features to family members. Genetics is the study and science of genes and how traits are passed on from one generation to another.

Genetics and mental health

Genetically, many physical conditions are passed down from parent to child, such as cystic fibrosis, diabetes, and cancer, but could this be the case for mental disorders? For years, scientists have investigated the connection between genetics, mental health, and how family history can affect mental wellbeing for better understanding, reduction of stigma, and to drive improved treatment. Extensive research has gone into finding out the links between mental health and genetics, with many studies identifying that certain genetic components can impact mental health.

Scientists have long recognised the connection between family history and mental health conditions. Many case studies have been researched and studied to establish and understand this relationship, such as the non-fiction novel *Hidden Valley Road* with an insight into the Galvin family who had six schizophrenic children.

Genetic Predisposition

Many mental health conditions have a genetic underpinning with the National Library of Medicine recognising that "psychiatric disorders are recognized to be heritable and are influenced by thousands of genetic variants acting together." Having a family member with a mental health condition could mean that there is an increased risk of other family members developing the same mental condition. In fact, according to the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), someone with a family history of depression are twice as likely to develop depression and those with relatives that have schizophrenia are up to eight times more likely.

According to Rethink Mental Illness, mental illness can run in families and depending on the relation of the family member the risk can become more severe. For example, the general population a 1 in 100 chance of having bipolar if they do not have a genetic connection, this risk then increases to 10 in 100 if one of your biological parents have the condition and jumps up even further to 40 in 100 if both biological parents have bipolar.

Vulnerable brain network

A study conducted in 2020, showed a common pattern of connections in the brain, affecting those with certain genetics and influencing the development of mental health issues. The research looks at the way the brain network is impacted by genes and how this can affect our brain's ability to cope with mental health challenges.

The author, Maxime Taquet, explains "those whose genes put them at higher risk of later developing psychiatric illness have a different pattern of brain connections." This disrupted network creates a vulnerability, making the person more susceptible to a range of mental health condition, not just one.

Other factors

Regardless of whether your family has any mental health conditions, it's important to remember that this doesn't mean you will develop the condition. An increased risk does not mean a diagnosis. Much like in the novel *Hidden Valley Road*, only six out of twelve children developed schizophrenia, heavily suggesting that genetics alone are not a defining factor in the development of a mental health condition.

Experience and environment

Our experiences throughout life will affect our mental health, how we cope with symptoms of mental health conditions, and how we respond to stressful situations. This is especially true for early experiences throughout childhood and adolescence. The environment we grow up in during childhood and adolescence is extremely important for emotional regulation and mental health. The way we are treated shapes the way we can develop and cope with mental health issues.

Some common causes to mental health challenges:

- Social isolation or loneliness
- Childhood abuse or neglect
- Traumatic event
- Having long-term stress or burnout
- Experiencing discrimination
- Homelessness
- Substance abuse





Breastfeeding support

Individuals Newsletter August 2024

Mothers go through an incredible and often arduous journey with their mental health during pregnancy and after birth. In fact, between 10% to 20% of women are affected by mental health disorders during and after their pregnancy, including anxiety, PTSD, and depression.

Breastfeeding can be daunting for mothers and may cause stress and anxiety for both mother and baby, especially if there isn't appropriate and accessible support available.

Breastfeeding is a good option for babies and their mothers, it can support the growth of baby teeth, increase cognitive development, improve immunity, and reduce health complications for babies, such as asthma, allergic rhinitis, and diabetes.

Breastfeeding and mental health

After birth can be a particularly turbulent time for mothers and infants, especially if the mother is coping with new or pre-existing mental health challenges.

However, evidence suggests that breastfeeding can have a preventative effect on mental illness developing. In a study, it was found that mothers who breastfed were 50% less likely to become depressed compared to other mothers who did not breastfeed.

Despite this, the relationship between breastfeeding and mental health is widely unknown and it is important to remember that it is entirely individualized to the mother and her baby. What may work for one mother, may not work for another.

Why is breastfeeding support necessary?

Women deserve support, especially after a life-changing and potentially traumatic event, like childbirth.

Breastfeeding can come naturally to some mothers, but for others it may feel like climbing a mountain. New mothers may not have the right information to comfortably breastfeed, and this can become stressful and scary without the right support.

It's important for mothers to have access to breastfeeding support that improves knowledge and understanding, including how to comfortably breastfeed, understand the basics of breastfeeding, and how breastfeeding fits into their individual situation. This is why it is always beneficial to have someone (such as a lactation consultant) who knows the mother and their specific situation and body, so they can advise based on their health and wellbeing. Without support, mothers could face a decline in their mental health and wellbeing.

The Breastfeeding Network reported that around 15% of women who contact the Drugs in Breastmilk information service about the affects of their mental health, such as taking anti-depressants whilst breastfeeding. The Breastfeeding Network have also reported that women have been told to stop taking their anti-depressant medication without realising that evidence suggests this isn't necessary, subsequently risking their mental health. With appropriate support, mothers can feel more confident in their choices and ability to breastfeed.

Babies don't always latch immediately and establishing breastfeeding with a child can be difficult without the appropriate support. It can also be painful for some women and tiring trying to juggle the new world of having a newborn as well as getting to grips with breastfeeding.

Support for women breastfeeding

If you are (or anyone you know is) breastfeeding and need some support, there are a few ways to access help in order to safeguard you and the baby.

01 - NHS breastfeeding support

Contact your midwife or healthcare visitor to access more information on how to access 1-to-1 support. They can provide you with help that is relevant to you, your baby, and your mental health.

02 - Contact breastfeeding specific helplines

National Breastfeeding helpline- This open all year round and you can talk to a trained person, who will understand what you are going through and provide relevant information to support you in your breastfeeding journey. They also accept calls from partners, family members, and friends. The number is 0300 100 0212.

03 - Consider a lactation consultant

Lactation consultants will provide tailored advice on how to best cope with any breastfeeding worries you have. Lactation consultants will know you and your individual situation which can be good for specific challenges you are having, such as latching on issues, breastfeeding positions, and how to prepare for breastfeeding.

04 - Keep a close eye on mental health

Having a new baby can feel overwhelming and exciting all at the same time, you may not feel as though you have enough time to check in with yourself and your mental health. It is imperative that you keep a close eye on your mental health at this time and seek support should you feel that it is necessary. Keeping a daily or weekly journal of how you feel can be helpful for keeping track of your mental health.

Download and register today

Wisdom | health assured





Don't be a bully month

Individuals Newsletter August 2024

When we think of bullying, we often picture children in a playground, but bullying doesn't always stop after adolescence. According to YouGov, two thirds of British people said they have been bullied at some point, with 21% expressing they have experienced bullying as an adult.

Bullying has a great impact on mental health and can affect someone's personal and professional lives greatly, so it's important to understand the signs of bullying if you come across it.

"Don't be a bully" awareness month

Celebrated in August every year, don't be a bully month is a dedicated month to raise awareness for the dangers and impacts of bullying. Bullying can hold a significant strain and stress on someone's mental health, such as damage to self-esteem, sleep disturbances, and isolation.

The month is a reminder to always be kind and compassionate to others, promote acceptance, and boost inclusivity to prevent bullying.

Why do people bully?

There are a variety of reasons why someone may feel compelled to bully. They may feel threatened, envious, or jealous of their target, such as jealous of their clothes or relationship with their partner. They may also want to establish dominance in a group and bully someone to express power, showing others their control.

Much of this jealousy, need for dominance, and need to bully could be the result of a deep-rooted and negative sense of self, stemming from shame and self-dislike.

Often, bullies have fallen victim of bullying, abuse, and domestic violence themselves and repeat the negative cycle.

Impact of bullying

According to Oxford CBT, in 2016 1.5 million people in the UK reported some form of bullying and 19% of these reported happened every single day.

The effects of bullying can be life-long and cause unbelievable amounts of stress on someone. In fact, 79% of bullying cases harmful stress levels and 50% of those bullied in the workplace experience panic attacks. Bullying can have a detrimental effect on mental health and cause long-term problems for mental wellbeing, such as depression, PTSD, and anxiety.

What does this mean for workplaces?

Bullying can be found in the workplace, with 32% of people in a survey confirming they have experienced bullying masked as banter in the workplace. Bully decrease performance and productivity, which can be detrimental to your organisation's growth.

When someone is experiencing bullying, they may become distressed, upset, and worried throughout their day, decreasing morale and productivity. Depending on the circumstances the whole workplace may be affected by the bullying.

How to recognise bullying behaviour?

Anyone can be a bully, and anyone can fall victim of bullying, so it's important that as a leader you are recognising the signs and behaviours that may point to bullying.

Here are a few signs you may have a bully in your workplace.

01 - Claiming credit for work

Bullies may take credit for the work of their target to diminish their efforts and steal praise for good work.

01 - Spreading rumours

Bullies often spread rumours about their victim, using malicious and false claims to discredit the target.

01 - Turning people against the target

How to combat bullying within the workplace?

01 - Create robust policies and procedures

Ensuring all policies and procedures are robust and protect your people from discrimination, prejudice, bias, and bullying. It's important that your policies and procedures are understood by your people, so they know you do not have any tolerance for bullying.

01 - Celebrate awareness days

Awareness days are a great way for employees to gain extra knowledge and understand the importance of certain topics, like anti-bullying. It's easy to create something fun and exciting to engage your people to understand, such as quizzes and away days.

01 - Training days

Training your people to be aware of the impacts and signs of bullying is essential for combatting bullying in the workplace. Providing training for your people gives them more confidence, awareness, and knowledge to be able to spot, stop, and deal with bullying within the workplace.

