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We are Muslim Girls Fence, a project that creates safe spaces for Muslim girls to explore our identity through fencing and creativity.

From the workshops that we've been running across the country since 2015, we've heard stories about the joys and complexities of being a Muslim girl. We've also seen the struggles Muslim girls face, such as Islamophobia, racism, sexism and other inequalities – experiences that can make us feel low, anxious and isolated.

We use fencing to connect with our inner strength and battle expectations that say we are quiet, weak and oppressed. We reclaim our identity and tell our stories in our own terms through art, physical activity, and activism. There aren't many mental health resources made for Muslim girls by Muslim girls. We decided to share these five key elements of our project, that can help you feel strong and more confident to look after yourself:

Mental health and wellbeing

Identity

Creativity

Safe and brave spaces

Movement

We're girls from East London, aged 12-17, and we've written this zine with Maslaha to share what we think will help you with your wellbeing.



How to use this zine

This zine is a space for you to explore your emotions, struggles and strengths with different activities, practices and techniques.

It's a space to explore how being kind to yourself and others can improve not only your wellbeing as an individual, but also as a collective. Reaching out and encouraging others to ask for help is very brave and it's the first step in your healing journey. We hope that you find the exercises useful. Remember there is no one-size fits all when it comes to wellbeing. It's about finding what helps you in different situations. Take your time with the zine, be curious, be kind and figure out what works best for you.

Take your time

Be kind to yourself

Be curious

Whatever is best for you





Sometimes it can be scary to admit when you're not feeling ok.

As a Muslim girl, you might fear that people will perceive you as someone who is lacking in faith, weak, or like there's something wrong with you. None of these things are true.

Remember to lead with kindness and care for yourself and others.

yourself and others.

for

lead with kindness

"Islam says that you treat people how you want to be treated and you treat yourself just as well as you treat other people."

Hafsa from Muslim Girls Fence

For example, your creativity, your body, your friendships and your identity.

Your faith can be a source of strength, but you also need to feel empowered in all parts of your life!

mental health to us is...

about how you think, feel and act.

Your mental health is just as important as your physical health - just like our bodies we need to look after our minds.

Everyone struggles with their emotions from time to time, and there are many reasons that can impact your mood – like not getting enough rest, pressures from school, or facing discrimination.

wellbeing to us is...

related to your emotional, physical and mental health.

It means you know how to look after yourself and you have thoughts and actions that affect your life in a positive way. Your wellbeing can be affected by racism, Islamophobia, sexism and unequal access to opportunities. Treating your body and your mind with care, connecting with your emotions and celebrating your identity are key elements to maintaining your wellbeing.





Who or what

We gather strength and positivity from activities and the people around us. Everyone is part of our healing journey. Name all the people and activities who can help you grow:

Makes me laugha (e.g. cor. cor. Lideos)

to talk top (e.g. a Journ worker or a mening)

when I'm selfs (e.g. when I'm).

to (e.g. my football coach)

Makes me feel calmo (e.g. breathing exencios)

ord support? (e.g. my best friend)

on Instagnan)

A sipling (e.g. my sibling)

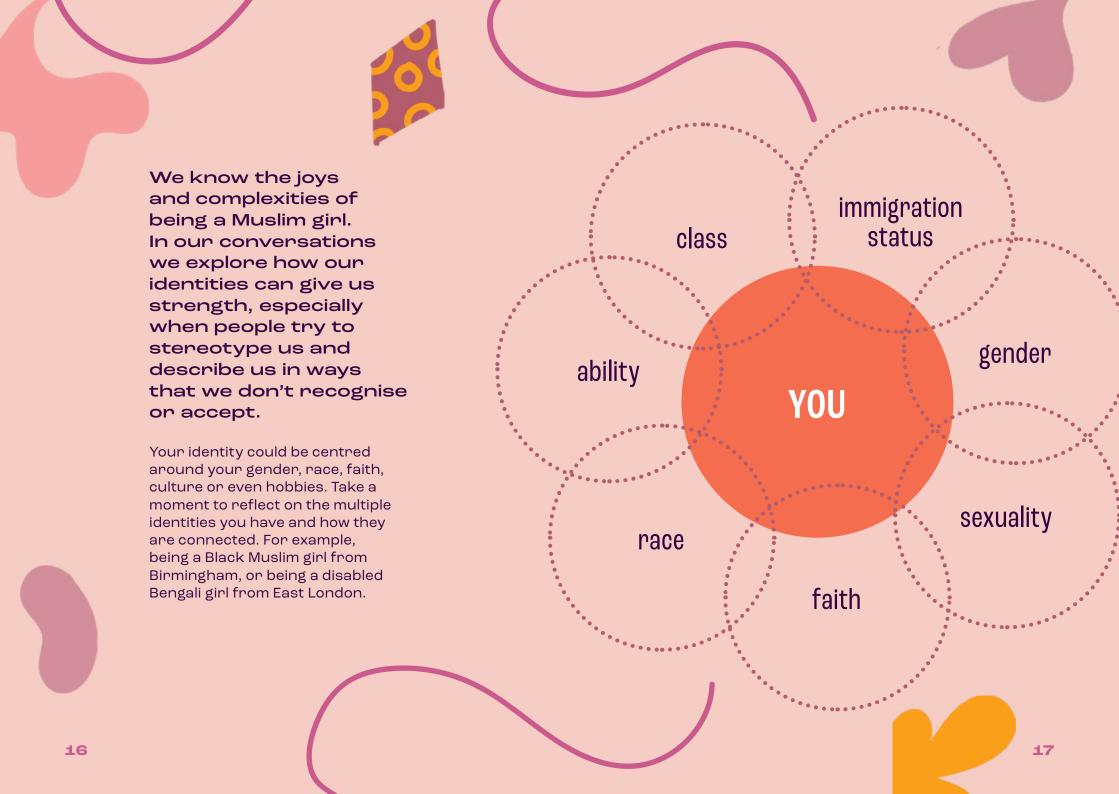


Identity









"I am a Black Muslim girl. It's something I am proud of and defines who I am. I have complicated feelings about my identity because of the stereotypes and expectations that are attached to being a woman. But to me, being a Black Muslim girl is about sisterhood and power."

- Halima from Muslim Girls Fence

"What gives me comfort. joy and hope is my hijab. It is a relationship that sometimes changes, there are moments where I feel so proud of wearing it, sometimes Iquestion wearing it, sometimes liust don't even think about wearing it but it is a decision that I make."

"What gives me joy and hope about being a Muslim girl is Ramadan. Hove praying in groups, spending time with my family and friends and going to Tarawih prayer with my best friends. It gives me comfort knowing that I'm sharing the experiences with others. We know our future destination and who we want to be, despite all the Islamophobia that is rooted in ignorance."

> - Amaayah from Muslim Girls Fence

- Huda from Muslim Girls Fence

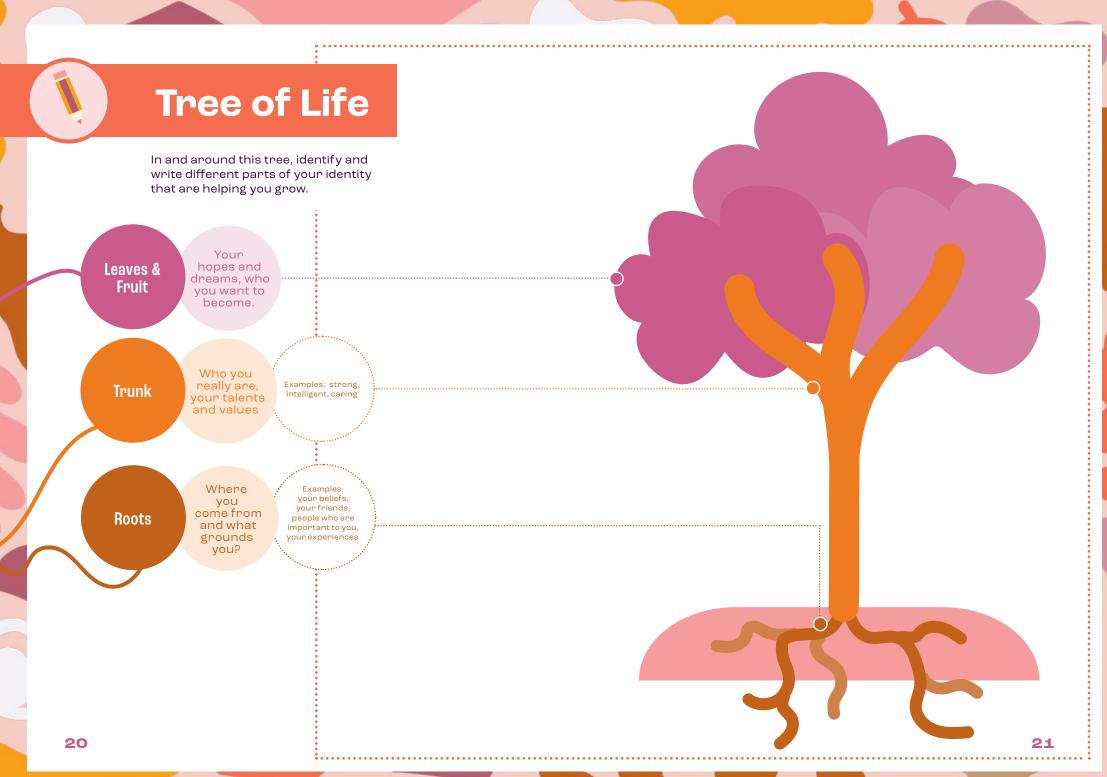


Now take a moment to think about what your identity means to you and how you celebrate



it.

18 19





Remember that you have the power to write your own narrative.

Celebrate all the things that make you who you are! Your identity can be a source of power, strength and joy.

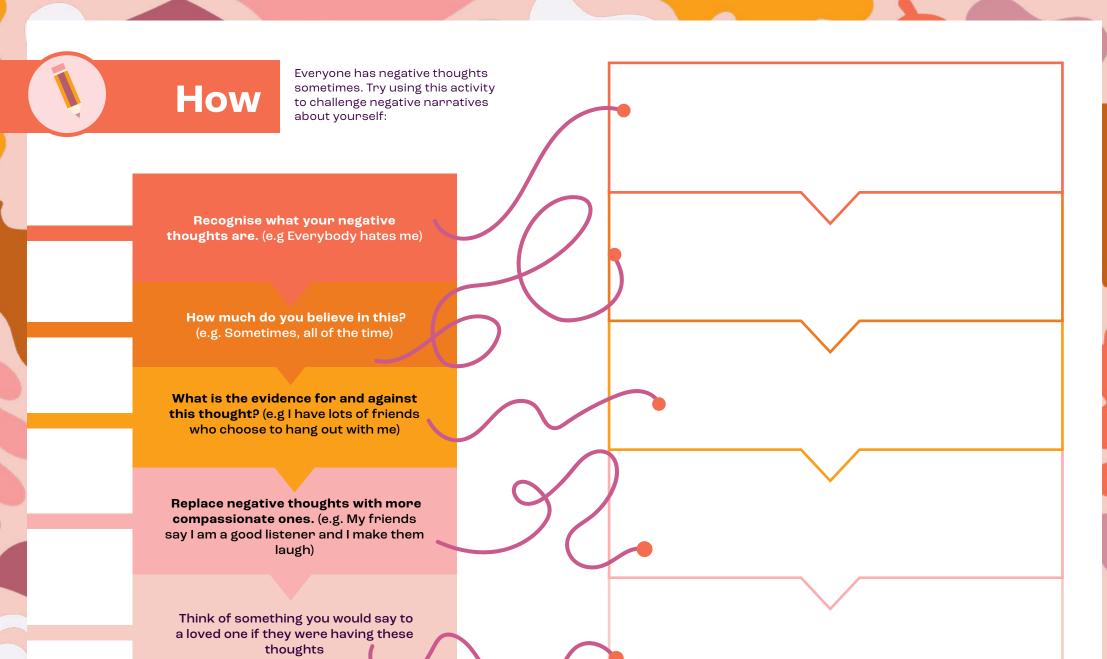
"My advice is: tell someone how you're feeling, find community and above all make sure that you don't let them define who you are! You know who you are and you are in charge of how you see yourself and love yourself."

- Aisha from Muslim Girls Fence

"I feel like as a Muslim girl, people assume things about me. I normally face these stereotypes in public by strangers, I can feel people looking at me. It doesn't make me feel good about myself, I feel excluded and othered by society."

- Farah from Muslim Girls Fence







Promise Page

Write a promise to yourself of what you can do to feel powerful:

Example: I promise to be kind to myself because I am a strong Muslim girl

Date:
Promise:
Signed:

Date:
Promise:
Signed:

Date:
Promise:
Signed:

Date:
Promise:
Signed:



a safe space to us is...

This might look like a comfy quiet room, a prayer room, a library, being outdoors, online, or just a place where you are surrounded by people that make you feel safe and brave.

Some spaces make you feel like you can't

express yourself, so you hide your different identities and you are not expressing your full self. This can negatively impact your wellbeing.

A place where you can celebrate and explore being who you are!

What we find helpful is practising creating a safe space in your head. Visualise a place that makes you feel safe and brave – this can be somewhere you've visited or a completely new space. Focus on a really happy scenario, notice what's happening in this scenario, what you're thinking and what you're feeling. You can do this anytime you're going through a stressful situation and it can help ground you and enable you to be your full self again.

Online Spaces

The internet is a great place to connect, to learn and to feel less alone.

But sometimes being constantly online can be really overwhelming and impact how you feel about yourself. This could be because Islamophobic and racist content online can make you feel angry, isolated and confused. Or it might be because of pressures to look a certain way, constant comparisons or creating a 'perfect' version of yourself.

Remember what you see is not always reality – people choose to show only the very best parts of their lives.

Take time to figure out what makes you feel good and what makes you feel more like your true self



What does your brave and safe space look like?

Draw your safe & brave space:

Prompts:

Somewhere to go?

Someone to speak to?

Something to do?



How to create a more

empowering online experience

Don't be afraid to unfollow accounts that make you feel bad about yourself

The mute button is there to give you a breather

Don't feel the need to constantly post on your feed to stay engaged

Seek out some new accounts to follow that inspire you

Find and share positive content that makes you feel good and keeps you interested

Check in with yourself How are you feeling before you start scrolling? Is going online going to make you feel better or worse?

Your perception of me is not my responsibility.
••••••
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Creativity can be a powerful tool to explore your emotions and tell your story in your own terms. It is also about being curious and exploring things you never thought of exploring.

There
are
many
different
activities
that you
can try

You can:

start a pottery class, join a sewing group, learn how to play an instrument, visit art galleries and museums or redecorate your room.

One thing you can do that will help you be more connected with yourself is journalling.

You
can take
5 minutes to
write down your
thoughts or feelings.
Don't worry about
writing coherently,
concentrate on
exploring what
you feel.

Another way you can use journalling is by writing down a list of all your strengths.

Now use this list every week to journal how you used your strengths in different situations in the past few days.

This is a great way to remind yourself of how strong you are when trying to overcome difficult situations.

If you don't like
writing, there are other
creative activities you
can use to explore your
emotions. For example, you
can draw a comic, write a
poem, do a painting or
make a collage.

Creativity



Here is a powerful poem created by Hafsa from Muslim Girls Fence You don't see me as the young lioness ready to pounce
You don't see me as someone filled with life and passion
You just think I am as sweet as candy.

You don't see me as having my own knowledge
You don't see me as capable of holding my own future
You just see my hijab.

You don't see it as a pair of butterfly wings ready to open up the grand windows of my soul.

But I am a young lioness

I am filled with life and passion

I may be as sweet as candy but I'm not afraid to bite.

I am knowledge

I am my own future

I can choose what beauty means

I am qurux and I am an ubax

I am Hafsa Hayaat Hilwa Elmi.







Movement











We know that as a Muslim girl it can be hard to feel in control of your body, especially when politicians and the media portray us as being quiet, weak, oppressed and not in control. But we know that we are not.

We are in

control of our

bodies, emotions

and image.

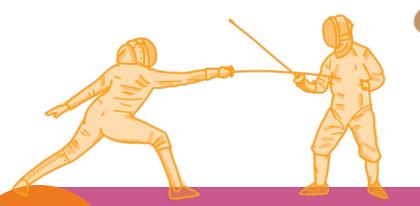
Connecting with our bodies makes us feel powerful. This can be through physical activity like fencing, going for a walk, dancing, prayer, doing some stretches at home or even just wiggling your toes.

Find a space where you feel free, comfortable and safe to move your body, like your friend's house or your room.

It's not about how good you are at something; it's about connecting with your body



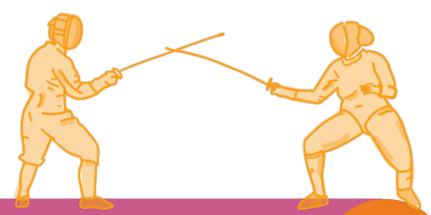
Why not try doing these fun fencing moves at home using a spoon!? Don't worry about getting it perfect, it's about having fun, being silly and free in your body.



Believe that you can achieve anything if you trust yourself.

Thrust

Ground and root yourself in your strength and space. At a 45-degree angle from your waist, aim your sword high and hit a target.



En garde

Bend your knees and feel your feet sink into the ground. Try to keep your balance and feel centred. Trust your body and be focused. You are prepared for anything. You are prepared for anything.



Lunge

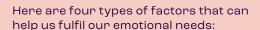
Step forward with courage, take up space and opportunity. Make eye contact, find strength in your sword.

Feel your power and lunge!













Connection

Things that make you feel like you belong and give you a sense of purpose

Example:

Spirituality

it is a feeling, belief or practice that gives you an understanding of the world

> Example: praying, listening to nasheeds, meditation



An activity that brings you happiness and pleasure

> Example: reading books, watching TV, visiting new places and trying new things

Movement

An activity that helps you feel connected to your body

> Example: going for a walk, stretching, wiggling your toes





Create your own wellbeing plan here

Connection

Joy

Spirituality

Movement



How to ask for help

Having conversations about mental health can be really difficult for many reasons.

There are misconceptions and stigma around mental health in all communities, and sometimes when you reach out for help, the person you talk to may not be able to support you in the way you hope.

Don't let this stop you from reaching out to other people or finding mental health support that is appropriate for you. If someone doesn't react how you expected, don't take it personally, remember that this is not a reflection of your worthiness.

Remember all the different people you trust and who can support you in your healing journey (like a mentor, coach or friend).

Here
are some
tips on how
to start these
conversations
with some of
those people:



Your family

Practise what you are going to say — This could be in your head, with your friend, or you could write it down. Here is an example of how you can lead the conversation:

I wanted to share with you how I've been feeling _____ because of _____, and it has been affecting me in this way

This is what I need from you

"This is something difficult to talk about, but I wanted to share with you how I'm feeling anxious because of my upcoming exams and I'm having panic attacks. I need you to talk to the school about getting me counselling sessions."

Suggest what your family can do to help you – For example, do you need them to talk to you more? Do you want them to talk to your GP? Do you need them to arrange fun activities? Or talk to your school counsellor? – but remember you don't need to have all the answers yet, you can find the answers together.

One conversation doesn't solve everything - Remember your family members are human too! Sometimes you need to give them time to process what you shared. If you can't talk to your parents or carers, think of someone who understands you like a sibling, a cousin or an auntie. If your family doesn't provide you with the support you need, there are other people who might be able to help.







honest — It can take a lot of courage to share what you're feeling, but this is the first step in your healing journey.

Talking to your friends can make you feel less alone, and it also opens up space for your friends to be more honest about how they are feeling too.

Find joy and fun with your friends – Talking about your struggles can be draining, which is why having moments of joy, care and laughter can help make these conversations easier and make you feel hopeful. Create sisterhood and care
- Always check in on your
friends and lead with care
because you never know
what someone may be going
through.

You can do monthly check in conversations with your friends, it can start as simple as asking each other "how are you feeling?"

Your school



Find the right person to talk to

> Share what you feel comfortable with

Find
a teacher
who you trust
and feel comfortable
sharing with, or it could
be someone from the
pastoral team, school
nurse, your head
of year or your
tutor.

You don't have to share everything that is going on, only share what you think is necessary.

Bring a friend

Think about what you want to get out of it

You could bring another trusted person with you to help you feel more confident and to support you.

You can practise or write down what you want to share beforehand, but also think about what kind of support might be helpful.

It might be support around speaking to your family, or getting counselling support.

Your GP

If your negative emotions last a long time and feel severe, it's important to seek help from a GP. Especially when your emotions are affecting your everyday life, such as continuously avoiding people, struggling to get out of bed, finding it difficult to relax or fall asleep.

Make notes

- Write down
beforehand what
you want to share with
your GP but also write
notes during the
appointment.

Decide what you want from the appointment – Do you want to discuss getting therapy?

Do you want to learn about techniques to manage your panic attacks? Do you want to be referred to a link worker or a youth worker?

Follow up – If you don't agree with the treatments suggested by your doctor then you can always ask for a second opinion and to be referred to another service. Remember that you know how you feel better than anyone else and deserve the best treatment for you.

Keep having these conversations with people who you trust and feel comfortable with, because healing takes time.

They can help you with finding different sport activities, support groups and wellbeing programmes.

You are valuable and deserve to be heard and cared for.



Where to look for help





Where to look for help

Childline

www.childline.org.uk Or call 0800 1111

Free helpline service and mental health resources for young people.

Muslim Youth Helpline

www.myh.org.uk
Faith and culturally sensitive support by phone, live chat,
WhatsApp or email.

The Mix

www.themix.org.uk
Offers online information as
well as helpline support to
under-25s about anything that's
troubling them.

Papyrus

www.papyrus-uk.org Or call 0800 068 4141 Free suicide prevention helpline for young people.

Kooth

www.kooth.com
Online mental wellbeing
community. Free, safe,
anonymous support for young
people.

YoungMinds

www.youngminds.org.uk Free mental health resources for young people.

Black Minds Matter

www.blackmindsmatteruk.com Free mental health resources and therapy for Black people.

Anna Freud

www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/youth-wellbeing/find-a-service-near-you
You can use Anna Freud's
directory to search mental

health services near you.

The Black African and Asian Therapy Network

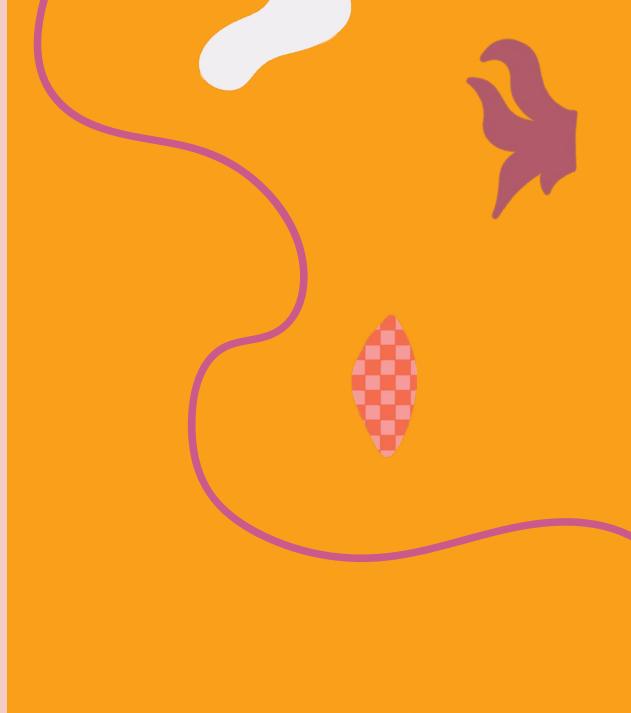
www.baatn.org.uk
Network of Counsellors and
Psychotherapists in the UK that
are of Black, African, Asian, or
Caribbean backgrounds. This is
a paid service.

Muslim Counsellor and Psychotherapy Network

www.mcapn.co.uk
Directory of Muslim counsellors,
therapists and psychologists.
This is a paid service.

Fireweed collective

fireweedcollective.org
Fireweed collective offers
mental health education
that centres people from
marginalised backgrounds
such as queer, disabled and
People of Colour. Check out
their 'Madness and Oppression
Guide': fireweedcollective.
org/publication/madnessoppression-paths-to-personaltransformation-and-collectiveliberation





Thank You

Valentines High School

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