



ADAIYALAM 2026

CHENNAI'S MENTAL HEALTH FEST

PARTICIPANT GUIDELINES: ADAIYALAM 2026

Participant Guidelines | 5 July 2026, IITM Research Park, E block, Ground Floor, Chennai

Adaiyalam · An old flower, a new voice · House of Hibiscus

BEFORE YOU ARRIVE

Adaiyalam is built on a simple idea: the conversations we are usually told to keep quiet deserve room, language, and dignity. Over one day and three venues, we will sit with questions about identity, neurodivergence, gender, caste, disability, class, and the systems that decide what counts as "normal." Some of it will be joyful. Some of it will be heavy. All of it is held with care.

These guidelines are not rules handed down from above. They are the shared agreements that make Adaiyalam a space where people can show up honestly and leave feeling safer than when they came. By joining us, you are agreeing to hold this space with us.

We call it a brave space, not only a safe one. Safe means you will not be harmed. Brave means you are willing to be honest, to be uncomfortable sometimes, and to extend that same grace to everyone around you.

— WHY ADAIYALAM

Why we do this

Mental health touches almost everyone, yet so much of it still goes unspoken.

In India, around one in seven people lives with a mental health condition, close to 197 million people, according to the Lancet Psychiatry. Depression and anxiety are the most common. Yet most go without support: the National Mental Health Survey found that fewer than one in six people with a mental disorder receives treatment, a treatment gap of more than 80 per cent. India has fewer than one psychiatrist for every 100,000 people, far below what the World Health Organization recommends.

The gap is not only about hospitals and budgets. It is also about silence. Stigma, shame, and the fear of being seen as different keep people from speaking, and keep some communities further from care than others.

Adaiyalam exists to make that conversation easier. For one free and open day, we bring mental health into a public space, in our own languages, alongside art, music, and people who understand. Not to fix anyone, but to remind each other that struggling is human, that support exists, and that no one has to carry it alone.

Illusion of Normality

Each year, Adaiyalam takes up one question and stays with it. This year, the question is normality itself.

We are all handed a script. Sit still. Speak a certain way. Have the right kind of body, the right kind of mind, the right kind of grief, the right kind of ambition. Be normal. But normal is not neutral, and it is not natural. It is built, and it quietly decides who belongs and who is asked to shrink, to mask, to make themselves smaller and apologise for the space they take.

The Illusion of Normality looks at how that idea is used to control, silence, and push people to the margins: across gender, caste, neurodivergence, mental illness and stigma, class, and culture, and all of these at once, because no one lives them as separate things.

This year's theme grows out of Aksheyaa Akilan's TEDx talk of the same name.

Adaiyalam 2026 does not ask you to become someone else. It asks something gentler and harder: who gets to be normal, who decided, and what becomes possible when we stop trying?

— THE DAY

Agenda

All sessions run on 5 July 2026 at IITM Research Park.

Time	Session	Led by	Hall
10:00 to 12:00	Opening Ceremony and Networking	House of Hibiscus	Lilavati Hall
10:30 to 11:30	Theatre Workshop	Agai	Exhibition Hall 1
12:30 to 14:00	Youth Mental Health Summit	with SCARF	Lilavati Hall
12:45 to 13:45	Trauma Healing Workshop	Rooted Connections and CHI	Exhibition Hall 1
14:15 to 15:15	Geriatric Mental Health	DEMCARES, SCARF	Exhibition Hall 1
14:30 to 15:30	Therapist Finance	Karthik Manikonda, The Mind and Company	Lilavati Hall
15:00 to 17:00	Coffee and Puzzles	Sanah, Sanation	Large Lunch Hall
15:30 to 17:00	Therapist Safety Session	Theraspace and Imaara	Exhibition Hall 1
16:00 to 17:00	Music Therapy	Simran, Airaanah	Lilavati Hall
17:30 to 18:00	Closing Ceremony and Awards	House of Hibiscus	Lilavati Hall

Stalls are open all day, 10:00 to 18:00, in Exhibition Hall 2, the first hall you walk into. Some sessions run at the same time in different halls, so do plan the ones you would most like to attend.



— WHAT'S ON

The sessions

TheatreWorkshop · Agai

A participatory session on understanding society and normality using theatre to spark dialogue and reflection.

Youth Mental Health Summit · with SCARF

Young people, mental health professionals, researchers, and advocates come together on the future of youth mental healthcare. A short talk, small group discussion, and shared ideas.

Trauma Healing Workshop · Rooted Connections and CHI

Trauma does not sit in isolation. This session looks at how relationships, communities, and systems shape healing, through reflection and shared learning.

Geriatric Mental Health · DEMCARES, SCARF

Understanding dementia and building practical caregiving skills: communication, everyday support, and person-centred care.

Therapist Finance · Karthik Manikonda, The Mind and Company

The financial side of building a therapy practice, including pricing, budgeting, boundaries, and long-term sustainability.

Coffee and Puzzles · Sanah, Sanation

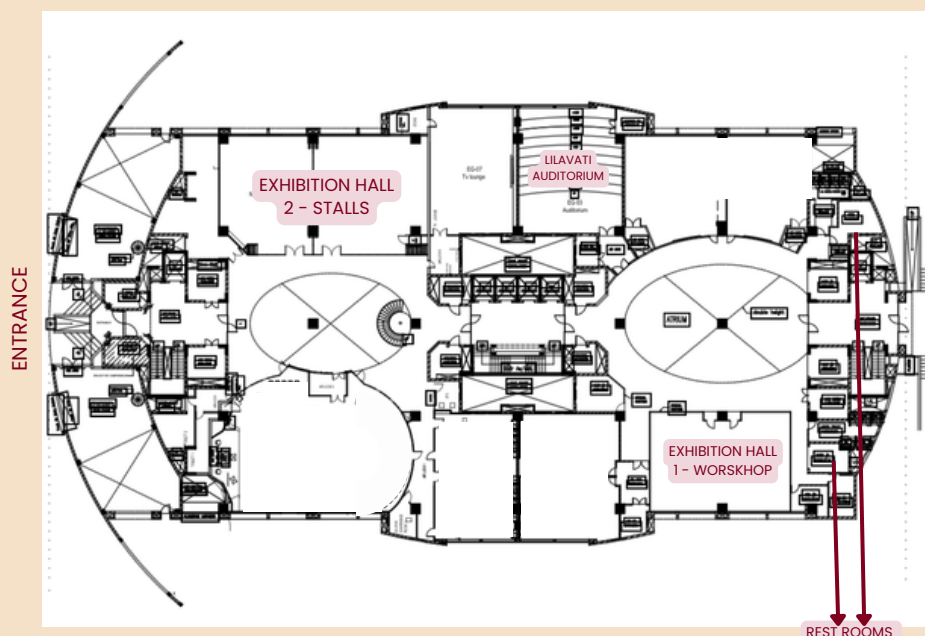
A slower corner of the festival. Coffee, puzzles, and room to pause and connect.

Therapist Safety Session · Theraspace and Imaara

Therapist safety, professional boundaries, and gender-based violence in practice, explored through discussion and real scenarios.

Music Therapy · Simran, Airaanah

Voices Beyond Normal. A music therapy experience built on voice, breath, rhythm, and collective sound. No musical experience needed, only a willingness to listen and connect.





— AT THE FEST

Stall partners

All stalls are open all day in Exhibition Hall 2. Session and workshop partners are credited in the agenda and sessions above.

SCARF-YMH. A youth mental health non-profit that works directly with young people and families through research, awareness, and care, and runs rYms, a safe space for ages 15 to 25.

DEMCARES. A dementia care project of the Schizophrenia Research Foundation (SCARF), a leading mental health care and research organisation in Chennai.

The Mind and Company. A mental health platform making psychological support accessible through therapy, workshops, community work, and advocacy that challenges stigma.

Rooted Connections. A connection-focused initiative built around belonging, presence, and authentic relationships.

NalandaWay Foundation. A non-profit that uses the arts to support wellbeing, confidence, and self-expression for children and communities.

Imaara. A survivor support foundation offering space for reflection, resilience, and meaningful connection.

Theraspace. A space for grounding, reflection, conversation, and connection.

Mohitha, Therapeutic Chatters. A mental health initiative led by a professional from a marginalised community, with resources and activities centred on decolonial mental health, nature, and Chennai's local context.

Sugi Sketches. An art platform by Sugithaa Paraman, a counselling psychologist, sharing mental health awareness and emotion through her work.

Shravya Wellness and the Fun Class. A holistic wellbeing practice focused on slowing down, reconnecting, mindfulness, and self-care.

Firefly. A wellbeing initiative creating safe, playful spaces, with interactive activities, self-reflection products, and simple tools that bring mental health into everyday conversation.

Agai, Theatre of Voices. A youth-led initiative using theatre and the arts for equity, justice, climate action, and critical consciousness.

Stage and Stance Co. A performance initiative centred on voice, self-expression, and the confidence to be seen and heard.

The Banyan. An employment initiative creating work for people with psychosocial disabilities and those who have experienced homelessness, across sectors from healthcare to arts and crafts.

Squiggles by Ram. A visual art platform with playful, imaginative work that sparks curiosity and conversation.



— AT THE FEST

Stall partners

All stalls are open all day in Exhibition Hall 2. Session and workshop partners are credited in the agenda and sessions above.

Words by G2. A storytelling platform connecting people through language, stories, and reflection.

Intending Glimmers. A wellness platform for capturing and sharing small moments of joy, gratitude, and positivity.

Nest Social. A community-building initiative focused on connection, collaboration, and belonging.

Yarnoodle. A handcraft and art practice by Shivani Boopathy, celebrating slow making and creative expression.

The Love Hope Company. A mental health and wellbeing organisation making emotional support more approachable, human, and culturally relevant through therapy, workshops, support spaces, and community experiences.

Youth for Mental Health. A youth mental health non-profit offering psychoeducation, peer community, and creative, stigma-free spaces where young people can engage with mental health beyond clinical language.

Penn Collective. A non-partisan public charitable trust building inclusive, democratic leadership, with gender justice, mental wellbeing, and care at its centre, especially for women and gender minorities.

Studio Uda. A slow-living practice rooted in South Indian aesthetics, celebrating small mindful rituals like drawing kolams and chai breaks as accessible, grounding forms of self-care.

Leah, Thulara Mind. An organisational psychologist and counsellor using arts-based interventions, dance, and storytelling for collective healing, community building, and psychological first aid in native languages.

Aparna R, SeekHelp. A queer-affirmative, trauma-informed counselling practice blending psychology with expressive arts to offer accessible, multilingual, and culturally rooted mental health support.

Heal with Airaanah. A music therapy practice led by Simran, using sound and music as a medium for emotional expression, healing, and wellbeing.

CHI for Trauma and Wellbeing. A trauma-focused initiative facilitating workshops centred on trauma healing, recovery, and emotional wellbeing.

Citta. A gifting partner crafting handmade cloth-covered journals for reflection, expression, and everyday wellbeing.

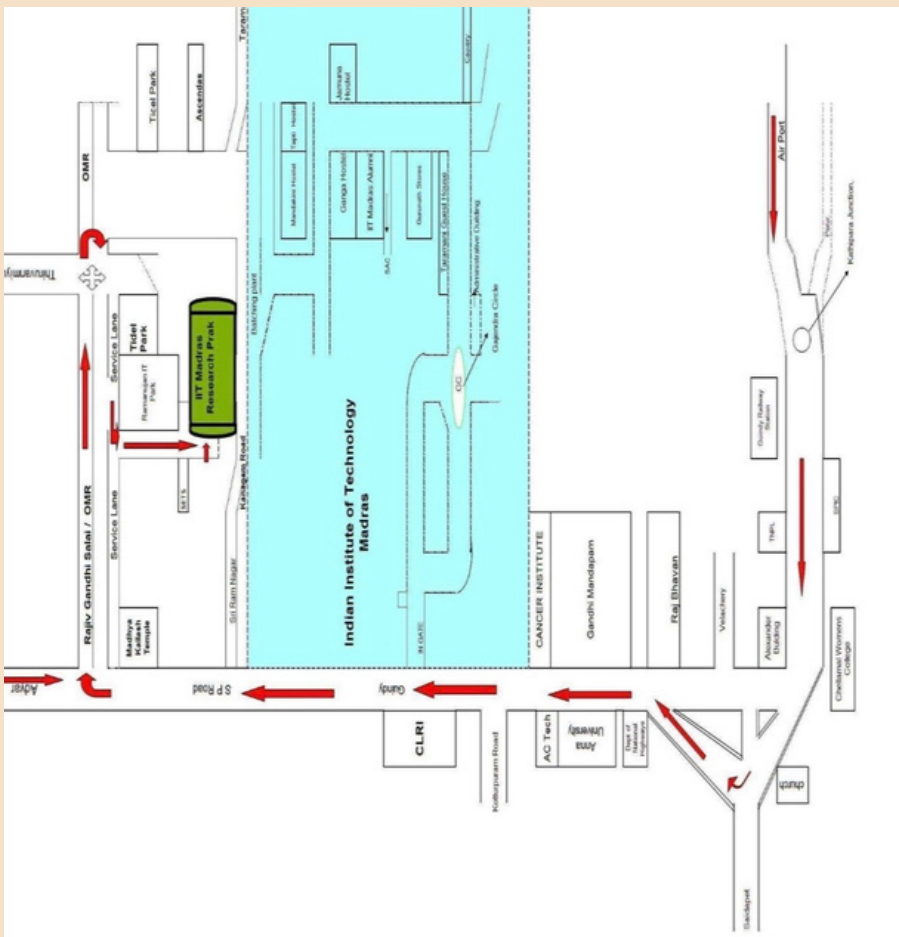


OUR SHARED AGREEMENTS

These apply in every session, hallway, and conversation across the day.

- **Registration for each workshop/session:** Will begin 15 minute before for all registered participants
- **Speak from your own experience.** Use "I" rather than "everyone" or "people like us." Your story is yours to tell. No one else's is yours to speak for.
- **Make space, take space.** If you tend to speak a lot, leave room for quieter voices. If you tend to stay quiet, know that your voice is welcome whenever you are ready.
- **Listen to understand,** not to reply. You do not have to agree with everyone. You do have to let them finish.
- What is shared in vulnerability stays here. Carry the insight out into the world, not the identity. Do not repeat, screenshot, or attribute anyone's personal story outside this space.
- Assume good intent, and stay accountable for impact. We will all get something wrong today.
- When someone names that an impact landed badly, the response is to listen and adjust, not to defend.
- **It is okay to disagree. It is not okay to demean.** Challenge ideas, never a person's dignity.
- **You can pass, and you can step out.** You never owe anyone your story, your reasons, or your presence in a session that is too much. Caring for yourself is always allowed.

Location - Route chart to reach IITM Research Park



Please note the location is IITM Research Park (not IITM) They've different gates. You'd have to take the Rajiv Gandhi Salai and take a u-turn and turn left into the MGR Road. The Research Park gate is at the end. Please scan the QR below for exact location.

Note: the event is in the E block - ground floor.



RESPECT, DIGNITY, AND INCLUSION



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Adaiyalam exists to interrogate who gets called "normal" and at whose cost. That work cannot happen in a space that recreates the same exclusions.

We hold a zero tolerance position on discrimination, harassment, or demeaning behaviour on any ground, including gender, gender identity, sexuality, caste, religion, language, disability, neurodivergence, body, class, age, or appearance.

In practice, this means:

- Use the name and pronouns each person shares with you. If you are unsure, ask gently or use their name.
- Watch your language around mental health. Words like "crazy," "psycho," "OCD" used casually, or "she's so bipolar" carry weight in a room where many people live these realities. Choose with care.
- Difference is not a deficit here. Stimming, fidgeting, needing to move, needing quiet, processing out loud, or processing slowly are all welcome. Please do not stare, mimic, or comment.

EMOTIONAL SAFETY AND SELF CARE

- Some sessions will touch difficult material, including trauma, grief, discrimination, body image, suicide, and lived experiences of mental illness. We will flag sensitive content before such sessions where we can, but please look after yourself throughout.
- You are free to step out of any session at any time, no explanation needed.
- A quiet, low stimulation space will be available for grounding and rest.
- Adaiyalam is a space for reflection, connection, and community. It is not therapy, and it is not a substitute for crisis care or your own treatment. If you are in active distress, please tell a volunteer so we can support you with the right help.

CONSENT AND BOUNDARIES

- Ask before any physical contact, including hugs. A warm festival is still a consent first one.
- Respect personal space, seating, and the comfort of those around you.
- Closed or sensitive sessions may ask that nothing leaves the room. Please honour that fully.

PHOTOGRAPHY, MEDIA, AND SOCIAL SHARING

We want you to share the spirit of Adaiyalam. We also want everyone to feel safe being in the room.

- A small number of official photographers and our media team will be capturing the day. They will be identifiable by official badges/lanyards.
- If you prefer not to be photographed, please inform those in our team in the respective room. Our team and fellow participants are asked to respect this.

- Do not photograph or record other participants without their clear consent, and never share someone's face, name, or words from a vulnerable moment online.
- Tag us and join the conversation: @adaiyalam.hoh and #adaiyalam2026.



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ACCESSIBILITY AND ACCOMMODATIONS

We want Adaiyalam to be usable and welcoming for every body and mind.

- Available on the day: The IIT Madras Research Park (IITMRP) in Chennai is highly accessible. It features universal physical infrastructure, including wheelchair ramps, accessible elevators, and designated restrooms.
- If you have an access need we can help with, please reach out in advance to adaiyalam@hibiscusfoundation.org or speak to any volunteer at the registration desk on the day. We will do our best, and we would rather you ask than struggle quietly.

SAFETY, SUPPORT, AND REPORTING

You deserve to feel safe here, and we take that seriously.

- Organisers and volunteers are identifiable by an adaiyalam badge (and some of them have hibiscus t-shirts) and are there to help.
- If you experience or witness harassment, discrimination, or anything that makes you feel unsafe, please tell us. You can speak directly to +9188660 76600, approach any team member, or message +9188660 76600. Reports are taken seriously and handled with discretion.
- We reserve the right to ask anyone who breaches these guidelines, or who harms another participant, to leave the venue. The wellbeing of the community comes first.
- You will never be dismissed for raising a concern. If something feels wrong, that is reason enough to tell us.

PRACTICAL CONDUCT

A few simple things that keep the day running well for everyone:

- Arrive on time for sessions, and enter and exit quietly if a session is underway.
- Keep phones on silent during sessions.
- Please attend free of intoxication. Alcohol and recreational substances are not permitted at the venue.
- Help us keep IITM Research Park clean and follow all venue rules and the directions of venue staff and security.
- Once you enter a workshop hall, you may not exit for the duration of the workshop.
- Once you exit the stall hall, you can re-enter as many times as you like.
- Keep the hand wrist as carefully as possible, as those with 5 or more coloured tags would get a token of appreciation at the closing ceremony!

FAQs

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is Adaiyalam?

Adaiyalam (அடையாளம்) is Chennai's Mental Health Fest, a free, community-rooted gathering that brings together mental health practitioners, artists, and young people to explore identity, healing, and the question of who gets to decide what's normal. Adaiyalam 2.0 is the second edition, organised by House of Hibiscus.

2. When and where is it?

5th July 2026, 10am to 6pm, IITM Research Park, Chennai.

3. Is there a dress code?

Yes. We invite all attendees to come dressed in Indian attire.

4. Is entry free?

Yes. Entry is free for all registered attendees.

5. Do I need to bring anything to confirm my registration?

Your registration confirmation is sufficient. Please carry it on your phone or a printout.

6. How do the sessions work?

Each workshop runs for approximately one hour. If you step into a session, we ask that you stay for its full duration out of respect for the facilitators and everyone in the room. Outside of sessions, you are free to explore stalls, move between spaces, and come and go as you like.

7. What is the wrist tag system?

Each session has a coloured wrist tag for entry, collected at registration. If you collect five or more tags through the day, you receive a small prize from House of Hibiscus.

8. Can I attend multiple sessions?

Yes. Sessions run across Lilavati Hall and Exhibition Hall 1 through the day. Check the agenda on the hall posters for timings.

9. Are there any qualifications required to attend the therapist safety or finance workshops?

None at all. Both are open to anyone who is interested.

10. What does the Mental Health Youth Summit involve?

The summit opens with a keynote, followed by a panel discussion on mental health in Chennai and Tamil Nadu, an informal conversation, and a team-based presentation. It is open and participatory.

11. What is Coffee and Puzzles?

A drop-in session by Sanah from Sanation, running from 3pm to 5pm in the Large Lunch Hall. No wrist tag required. Come as you are, stay as long as you like.

12. What language will sessions be in?

Most sessions will be conducted in English.

13. I am coming alone. Will it be easy to meet people?

Adaiyalam is built for exactly this. The opening ceremony includes a dedicated networking session, the stalls are a natural place to stop and talk, and Coffee and Puzzles is designed for easy mingling.

14. Can I leave early if I need to?

Yes, you can leave at any time.

15. Will I receive a participation certificate?

Yes. Fill in the feedback form at the end of the day and your participation certificate will be sent to you.

16. Will materials or resources be shared?

Yes. Resources and links will be shared after the event.

17. Who do I contact if I have a question on the day?

Find a volunteer in an Adaiyalam t-shirt at any hall entrance, or reach us at adaiyalam@hibiscusfoundation.org.



Don't forget to take photos at our photo booth on the day of the event. You'd find it in the Exhibition Hall 2 along with the other stall.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

Adaiyalam is built for everyone who has ever been made to feel they do not quite fit. You are likely to find yourself among people from the LGBTQIA+ community and from many other communities that are too often pushed to the edges, across gender and sexuality, caste, disability and neurodivergence, mental health, faith, language, and class. Some of them may be sitting right beside you, and some of them are us. Whoever you are, and however you arrived here, you belong in this space, exactly as you are.

That welcome rests on something simple: we treat one another with kindness and respect. We ask you to meet the people around you with that same warmth, to use the names and pronouns people give you rather than the ones you assume, and to leave your assumptions at the door. On this there is no room for compromise. Bigotry of any kind, whether a slur, mockery, harassment, deliberate misgendering, or any behaviour that makes another person feel unwelcome for who they are, has no place at Adaiyalam, and will not be tolerated from anyone here.

If you witness or experience anything like this, you do not have to deal with it on your own. Find any member of our team, who you can spot by their volunteer badge, and we will step in. If you need a quiet moment, you are welcome to use the quiet space at any time. And if someone slips, a fumbled pronoun or a clumsy word while clearly meaning well, that is not the same as cruelty. A gentle word is enough, and none of us need to be afraid of getting it wrong. What matters is that we are kind to each other.

IN CASE OF DISTRESS OR AN EMERGENCY

- Medical or safety emergency: dial 112 (national emergency number).
- National mental health support: Tele MANAS, 14416 (toll free, available in multiple languages).
- If you are worried about yourself or someone near you, you do not have to handle it alone. Find a volunteer. That is exactly what we are here for.

ONE LAST THING

You belong here. However you arrive, whatever pace you move at, whatever you are carrying, there is room for you at Adaiyalam. Thank you for helping us build a space where honesty is safe and difference is celebrated.

See you on the 5th.

With warmth,
Team Adaiyalam | House of Hibiscus