

Maintaining Good Mental Health

Whether you realize it or not, mental health plays a big role in your overall well-being. When you're mentally healthy, you are able to enjoy your life and the people in it, feel good about yourself, keep up good relationships, and deal with stress. It's normal for your mental health to shift over time – we all face difficult situations in our lives. Creating positive habits is a great way to support your mental health when you're doing well and helps you build skills to use if you do face symptoms of a mental health condition.

Recognizing When You Need Help

Think about your physical health. We all have days where we feel a bit sore, have a headache, or are extra tired. That doesn't necessarily mean you're sick. You're sick when something suddenly and significantly changes for the worse or prevents you from functioning properly.

Mental health is similar – the occasional bad day is to be expected, but when things that used to be easy become a lot more difficult, something's going on. Instead of focusing on physical symptoms, you'll want to look at your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

IF YOU ARE IN CRISIS: Text “MHA” to 741741 or call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) to reach a trained crisis counselor 24/7, 365 days a year. Spanish speakers: 1-888-628-9454. Deaf & hard of hearing: TTY users, use your preferred relay service or dial 711 then 1-800-273-8255

Recognizing Warning Signs and How to Cope

Most people believe that mental health conditions are rare and “happen to someone else.” In fact, mental health conditions are common and widespread. An estimated 44 million Americans suffer from some form of mental disorder in a given year.

Most families are not prepared to cope with learning their loved one has a mental illness. It can be physically and emotionally trying, and can make us feel vulnerable to the opinions and judgments of others.

If you think you or someone you know may have a mental or emotional problem, it is important to remember there is hope and help.

What Is Mental Illness?

Mental illnesses are brain-based conditions that affect thinking, emotions, and behaviors. Since we all have brains – having some kind of mental health problem during your life is really common.

For people who have mental illnesses, their brains have changed in a way in which they are unable to think, feel, or act in ways they want to. For some, this means experiencing extreme and unexpected changes in mood – like feeling more sad or worried than normal. For others, it means not being able to think clearly, not being able to communicate with someone who is talking to them, or having bizarre thoughts to help explain weird feelings they are having.

There are more than 200 classified forms of mental illness. Some of the more common disorders are depression, bipolar disorder, dementia, schizophrenia and anxiety disorders. Symptoms may include changes in mood, personality, personal habits and/or social withdrawal.

Mental health problems may be related to excessive stress due to a particular situation or series of events. As with cancer, diabetes and heart disease, mental illnesses are often physical as well as emotional and psychological. Mental illnesses may be caused by a reaction to environmental stresses, genetic factors, biochemical imbalances, or a combination of these. With proper care and treatment many individuals learn to cope or recover from a mental illness or emotional disorder.

Warning Signs and Symptoms

To learn more about symptoms that are specific to a particular mental illness, search under Mental Health Information. The following are signs that your loved one may want to speak to a medical or mental health professional.

It is especially important to pay attention to sudden changes in thoughts and behaviors. Also keep in mind that the onset of several of the symptoms below, and not just any one change, indicates a problem that should be assessed. The symptoms below should not be due to recent substance use or another medical condition.

If you or someone you know is in crisis now, seek help immediately. Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255) to reach a 24 hour crisis center or dial 911 for immediate assistance.

In Adults, Young Adults and Adolescents:

- Confused thinking
- Prolonged depression (sadness or irritability)
- Feelings of extreme highs and lows
- Excessive fears, worries and anxieties
- Social withdrawal
- Dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Strong feelings of anger
- Strange thoughts (delusions)
- Seeing or hearing things that aren't there (hallucinations)
- Growing inability to cope with daily problems and activities
- Suicidal thoughts
- Numerous unexplained physical ailments
- Substance use

In Older Children and Pre-Adolescents:

- Substance use
- Inability to cope with problems and daily activities
- Changes in sleeping and/or eating habits
- Excessive complaints of physical ailments
- Changes in ability to manage responsibilities - at home and/or at school
- Defiance of authority, truancy, theft, and/or vandalism
- Intense fear
- Prolonged negative mood, often accompanied by poor appetite or thoughts of death
- Frequent outbursts of anger
- Defiance of authority, truancy, theft, and/or vandalism

In Younger Children:

- Changes in school performance
- Poor grades despite strong efforts
- Changes in sleeping and/or eating habits
- Excessive worry or anxiety (i.e. refusing to go to bed or school)
- Hyperactivity
- Persistent nightmares
- Persistent disobedience or aggression
- Frequent temper tantrums

How To Cope Day-To-Day

Accept Your Feelings

Despite the different symptoms and types of mental illnesses, many families who have a loved one with mental illness, share similar experiences. You may

find yourself denying the warning signs, worrying what other people will think because of the stigma, or wondering what caused your loved one to become ill. Accept that these feelings are normal and common among families going through similar situations. Find out all you can about your loved one's condition by reading and talking with mental health professionals. Share what you have learned with others.

Handling Unusual Behavior

The outward signs of a mental illness are often behavioral. A person may be extremely quiet or withdrawn. Conversely, they may burst into tears, have great anxiety or have outbursts of anger.

Even after treatment has started, some individuals with a mental illness can exhibit anti-social behaviors. When in public, these behaviors can be disruptive and difficult to accept. The next time you and your family member visit your doctor or mental health professional, discuss these behaviors and develop a strategy for coping.

The individual's behavior may be as dismaying to them as it is to you. Ask questions, listen with an open mind and be there to support the

Establishing A Support Network

Whenever possible, seek support from friends and family members. If you feel you cannot discuss your situation with friends or other family members, find a self-help or support group. These groups provide an opportunity for you to talk to other people who are experiencing the same type of problems. They can listen and offer valuable advice.

Seeking Counseling

Therapy can be beneficial for both the individual with mental illness and other family members. A mental health professional can suggest ways to cope and better understand your loved one's illness.

When looking for a therapist, be patient and talk to a few professionals so you can choose the person that is right for you and your family. It may take time until you are comfortable, but in the long run you will be glad you sought help.

Taking Time Out

It is common for the person with the mental illness to become the focus of family life. When this happens, other members of the family may feel ignored or resentful. Some may find it difficult to pursue their own interests.

If you are the caregiver, *you* need some time for yourself. Schedule time away *to prevent* becoming frustrated or angry. If you schedule time for yourself it

will help you to keep things in perspective and you may have more patience and compassion for coping or helping your loved one. Being physically and emotionally healthy helps you to help others.

"Many families who have a loved one with mental illness share similar experiences"

It is important to remember that there is hope for recovery and that with treatment many people with mental illness return to a productive and fulfilling life.

Help is Available

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's 24 hour toll-free crisis hotline, 1.800.273.TALK (1.800.273.8255) can put you into contact with your local crisis center that can tell you where to seek immediate help in your area.

Those who are uncomfortable with speaking on the phone can **text "MHA" to 741-741 to speak with a trained crisis counselor at Crisis Text Line.**

The Child-Help USA 1.800.4.A.CHILD (1.800.422.4453) crisis line assists both child and adult survivors of abuse, including sexual abuse. The hotline, staffed by mental health professionals, also provides treatment referrals.

In areas where [211](#) is available, dialing this number can connect you with mental health crisis services in your area or help you find where to seek immediate help in your area.

The **SAMHSA Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator** and the **SAMHSA 24/7 Treatment and Referral line at 1.800.662.4357** provide referrals to alcohol, substance abuse and dual diagnosis treatment facilities, including facilities that offer sliding scale fees and other special payment arrangements. Dual diagnosis services provide integrated treatment for individuals who have both an alcohol or substance abuse problem and a mental illness.

For more information go to: www.mhanational.org
<https://www.mhanational.org/staying-mentally-healthy>

For mental health screening testing go to: <https://screening.mhanational.org/>