



Mental health and stigma

If you have a mental health problem, you may worry about what other people will think of you. In many cases, no one can even tell if you are struggling with symptoms. But sometimes the fear that someone can tell is enough to cause concern. Mental health problems can include bipolar disorder, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

You have a say in how others see you. The way you act and treat others can help influence people's attitudes toward you and toward mental health problems.

Stigma

People sometimes have negative views about things they don't understand, such as mental health problems. Some people may believe things about mental health problems that aren't true. Other people may have good intentions but still feel uncomfortable when they find out you have a mental health problem. This can make people treat you and your family differently. This is called stigma.

Stigma occurs when others:

- Don't understand the mental health problem or think it's a laughing matter
- Don't realize that a mental health problem is an illness that can be treated
- Think that a mental health problem is "your own fault" or that you should "get over it"
- Are afraid they might someday have a mental health problem themselves
- Are nervous around you

Breaking the stigma

Respecting yourself is an important part of your recovery. Try to remember that there's nothing to feel ashamed of. The problem is with your brain, not with you. You can reach goals that are important to you even if you have a mental health problem.

Your attitude and actions can influence what others think. Be honest with people, and show them who you really are. When you help people understand your mental health problem, they are more likely to get past their negative views.

Here are some ways you can help others better understand mental health problems.

- Let them know that your mental health problem is a medical problem that can be treated.
- Talk about your recovery. This will help them understand the challenges you face.
- Show them your strengths and talents. Don't let your mental health problem keep you from going after things you want to do.
- Show them how you want to be treated by the way you act. Treating yourself with respect can set an example for everyone.
- Accept that you may need breaks during activities. Your symptoms may make it harder to focus on things for a long time.
- Work with your family and doctor to set goals you can reach. Let them know what changes you want to make in your life.

Getting help

Find a mental health therapist who can help you address your concerns.

Your mental health care team may be able to connect you with other support services that can help. Your therapist may refer you to a social worker or case manager who can help you find a place to live. You may be able to find the training and support you need to get and keep a job.

Many cities have a local job service, employment office or state health and welfare office. These organizations also can help you get work or find a place to live.

Substance use disorder, which is common with some mental health problems, may make your life harder. If you have this problem, talk to your doctor about getting drug or alcohol treatment.

About behavioral health care

Behavioral health care focuses on an individual's psychological wellness. However, the term behavioral health is more common now because it encompasses the biology of mental health, as well as a person's behaviors and habits.

Measuring mental health

How do you assess or understand your mental health? Looking at your emotional well-being and your overall life enjoyment on a day-to-day basis is an excellent guide. Consider the following:

- Are you able to cope with the normal stresses of life?
- Can you bounce back and adapt to unexpected news?
- Are activities like working, going to school or forming relationships inhibited?

Depending on your answers, you may want to focus on improving your behavioral health.

Behavioral health issues and signs

There are many contributors to mental health problems. Biological factors such as your genetics, life experiences and a family history of mental health issues can lead to behavioral health problems. Some of the mental health issues people face include depression, anxiety, trauma, relational issues and addiction.

Signs of a potential behavioral health issue range in their severity. Some minor clues include:

- Changes in eating and sleeping patterns
- Withdrawing from activities and relationships
- Low energy
- Feeling hopeless
- Numbness to life are all clues to a mental health problem

Also, keep these severe warning signs in mind:

- Mood swings
- Hearing voices or hallucinating
- Increased substance abuse
- Thoughts of harming yourself or others

When a person is unable to complete daily life tasks, such as showering, getting out of bed, getting dressed, etc., they also might be struggling with a mental illness.

Professionals and treatment options

When it comes to behavioral health issues, you're not alone. There are numerous professionals who can help you overcome and adjust to life's challenges. These might be your primary care physician or nurse practitioner, or a counselor, therapist, psychologist or psychiatrist.

These professionals are skilled in a variety of behavioral health interventions that cover a broad spectrum. These range from psychotherapy and group therapy to support groups to expressive therapy in art, music or drama. Recreational therapy, meditation and mindfulness practices are also options, as is medication.

Good mental health signs

When your mental health is functioning well, there are several indicators, including:

- Setting and meeting goals
- Coping with stress
- Problem-solving
- Finding meaning in relationships and the community

Whatever your current mental health, you can benefit from practicing good behavioral health strategies. Some of the ways to maintain and/or improve your mental health might include:

- Connecting with others
- Being physically active
- Eating healthy
- Getting proper rest
- Developing strategies for dealing with life's stressors
- Staying positive
- Asking for help when needed

The importance of behavioral health

Why is behavioral health such a critical issue? Half of the world's population is believed to experience mental health symptoms that impact their day-to-day functioning. Our mental state impacts our physical health, so being able to reduce our body's stress responses can help us live longer and healthier lives. Another benefit of working on your mental health is the control you gain over your life. People who are mentally healthy are more goal-directed, and they function better in relationships.

Not addressing our behavioral health issues impacts all areas of life. Depression and other mental illnesses can lead to disability, physical impairments and even suicide. Financial, social and vocational issues may arise from failing to work on mental health problems.

Getting started

Improving your mental health does not need to be overwhelming, as there are many people available to guide you. The following tips suggest how to get started and where to go for help:

- **Gather information:** Talk to your doctor, friends or other trusted individuals about resources in your area. Treatment options may be available through your physician's office, mental health specialists, community mental health centers, hospital psychiatric departments, outpatient clinics, university programs, social services agencies and employee assistance programs.
- **Find affordable help:** Don't allow cost to deter your mental health desires. There may be free support groups near you, and many counselors and therapists offer services on a sliding scale. If cost is a problem don't ever

be afraid to ask professionals what free or low-cost options are available in the community.

A lifestyle complete with good mental health is possible for you and your loved ones.

Source:

Mental Health. What is mental health?

[mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health/](https://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/what-is-mental-health/)

Supporting a friend during a mental health struggle

It's normal for people to get upset or sad sometimes. But there are some warning signs to look out for when a friend is going through something more serious, like a mental health condition. These include:

- Withdrawing from conversations and activities
- Showing symptoms such as crying, fatigue or disinterest
- Self-harming actions such as cutting or burning
- Talking about suicide
- Taking dangerous risks such as ignoring traffic laws
- Feeling afraid or paranoid for no reason
- Avoiding food, or regularly using the bathroom right after meals to purge
- Shifting mood swings
- Using drugs or alcohol regularly
- Changing behaviors, personality or sleeping habits
- Struggling to concentrate or stay still

How you can help

Express your concerns

When talking to your friend, make sure to act with compassion and understanding, and to not judge. Focus on using "I" statements such as:

- I've noticed you're [sleeping more, eating less, etc.]. Is something going on?
- I've noticed that you've been acting different lately. Is everything OK?
- I get concerned when you talk like this. Let's talk to someone about it.

Talk to someone you can trust

You don't have to put the weight of a friend's mental health concern on your shoulders. While your support is important, it's equally important to know when to involve others. Seek out someone who may be able to relate to your friend's concerns, but make sure to talk to your friend first so they don't feel cornered. People you can reach out to may include:

- Other friends
- Family
- Counselors
- Faith-based leaders
- Coaches

Support your friend

It's important not to force a friend into talking about what they're going through. It's equally important that they know you support them and are ready to help when they're ready to get help. Try these suggested statements to

show that you care:

- How can I support you now?
- Can we involve someone else who may be able to help you?
- Can I help you make an appointment with a professional?
- Do you want help with any tasks to lighten your load until you're feeling better?
- Do you want me to attend a support group or meeting with you?

You can also help a friend build a positive support network. Here are some tips to get started:

- Keep in touch regularly and let them know you are there for them.
- Invite your friend to events and other outings. Even if they don't come, they will appreciate being included.
- Research mental health conditions so you can better understand what your friend is going through and are better able to help.
- Reassure your friend that you are a safe place. Avoid judgmental or dismissive language, such as "you'll get over it" or "toughen up."