



MENTAL HEALTH

**What to do
to live a
better life**



By Shelly Pratt, registered nurse

**Dedicated to individuals & loved ones
dealing with mental health**

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Who is affected by mental health?

Mental health affects millions of people every day. **About 1 out of every 4 people has a mental illness.** There are many people who live without knowing they have a mental illness. **Mental health conditions have many faces.** They can present themselves as physical, emotional or psychological problems.

Today, there are many ways to manage mental health but it's not always as easy as it looks. Medications aren't the cure and it's not the only way to deal with it. **This e-book gives information in smaller steps for better control.**

There are 2 major ways to fight mental health:

1. Learn about mental health
2. Learn about yourself

Part 1: Learn about mental health

Not Knowing What's Wrong

How can you fix something when you don't know what's wrong? A lot of times, you or a loved one might not feel like yourself or see someone not acting like themselves. **You know something is wrong but you don't know what.** When someone has a mental illness, there is a higher chance another family member can have it even if it's not diagnosed.

Mental health symptoms can vary a lot. When depression and/or anxiety symptoms occur, you or loved one probably won't have the same symptoms every time. **These symptoms can be different in other people.** For example, depression could mean just lying in bed, being quiet or eating more or less than usual. The next time, symptoms might be different. Or it could be combination of anxiety and depression. So, you or a loved one might feel irritable or uncomfortable and sad which could be anxiety and depression combined. **Get necessary and useful information.**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), about 85% of people with severe mental illness in low or middle-income families don't get the care they need. Everyone deserves good treatment for health issues to live a healthier and more productive life. *This is why useful, practical information is extremely important so mental health can be controlled better.*

Facts on mental health

“One in **four people** in the world will be affected by mental or neurological disorders at some point in their lives. Around **450 million people** currently suffer from such conditions, placing mental disorders among the leading causes of ill-health and disability worldwide” in 2018 (According to World Health Organization)

“**Mental illnesses are common in the United States. Nearly one in five U.S. adults live with a mental illness** (46.6 million in 2017). Mental illnesses include many different conditions that vary in degree of severity, ranging from mild to moderate to severe. Two broad categories can be used to describe these conditions: Any Mental Illness (AMI) and Serious Mental Illness (SMI). AMI encompasses all recognized mental illnesses. SMI is a smaller and more severe subset of AMI” according to National Institute of Mental Health

“Treatment for mental health problems varies depending on the individual and could include medication, therapy, or both. **Many individuals work with a support group during the healing and recovery process**” According to Mental Health government site

Causes of mental illness

The exact cause(s) of all mental health illnesses are unknown, but several factors seem to be involved in causing and triggering these types of conditions:

Genetics: Mental health disorders are more common in people who have a family member(s) with the condition. There is still research going on to find genes that may be involved in causing these condition(s).

Environmental: Being abused, stress, loss or other traumatic experiences may be a factor when it comes to mental health

Biological changes: People with mental health problems appear to have physical changes within their brains. The significance of these changes is still uncertain but this may explain a cause in the future.

Neurotransmitters: An imbalance in naturally occurring brain chemicals called neurotransmitters can be present in mental health disorders

Hormones: Imbalanced hormones may be involved in causing or triggering these types of conditions

Other causes: there could be other causes of mental illness that we don't know about yet

Sometimes It's not the condition

Sometimes, it's easy to confuse mental health symptoms with the "normal" feelings of hard times in life. These life events can include loss of family/friends, job loss, moving, marriage, having a baby or any other major change or loss. **These situations can cause mental health conditions to flare up.** Remember *you/loved one might have the same feelings of despair, sadness or anger among other feelings if life changes occur.* It's good to pay close attention to symptoms early to get the help needed to lower the impact of mental illness.

As a result, **mental health conditions can sometimes be blamed** when dealing with everyday life issues such as daily traffic, work stress or a fight with someone to name a few examples. **There are some ways of knowing what's causing the symptoms: mental illness, life situations or both.** Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Is the way I feel related to the mental health condition? (compared to past)
2. Is this how I would feel if this situation happened without having a mental health problem? (i.e. divorce, loss of a job, loss of family/friend etc.)

It could be a different condition

In medicine, sometimes many symptoms can overlap meaning different conditions can have the same symptoms. **There are other conditions that can have the same symptoms as depression, anxiety, bipolar depression and other conditions.** This can include the following: thyroid disorder, electrolyte imbalance, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, hormonal imbalance, neurological problems or another conditions. There may be several factors which can cause symptoms.

Obviously, there aren't laboratory tests for everything but it's important to find out the correct health condition(s) that are causing the symptoms. **Once there are answers, the right condition can be treated in the right way to make life better.**

Get a good health care provider. Get a second opinion from another one if you/loved one feels, needs or wants more information

Part 2: Know yourself (Self-awareness)

One of the BEST WAYS to handle mental health conditions is to be **self-aware**. "**Self-awareness** is a psychological state in which people are aware of their traits, feelings and behavior. Alternately, it can be defined as the realization of oneself as an individual entity," according to Crisp, RJ & Turner, 2010.

This will help you/loved one have **better control of the condition**. This will open up all sorts of doors to make life better. There are many ways to become more self-aware. **Being self-aware helps to recognize symptoms early so you know what to do and start doing it as soon as possible**. Sometimes it's hard to see results right away but doing it over and over again, it can make a big difference. **Self-awareness can change the future and how good life can be**.

Self-awareness can be put in 2 different categories:

Public Self-Awareness: This is when people are aware of how they appear to others. Public self-awareness comes up in events/situations when there is focus on the person having mental illness. People observe how someone follows social norms. When someone with mental illness is being observed by other people so that person can try to behave in ways that are socially acceptable and desirable. *Mental health sufferers can feel very self-conscious because they don't want to do anything that makes other people look at them differently*. Public self-awareness may cause someone with mental illness to have symptoms such as irritability, fear, anxiety or concern about how other people see them.

Private Self-Awareness: This is when people become aware of whom they are on a personal level. This is what someone sees in the mirror; feels or acts on this level. This is when someone is aware of how someone is. Knowing how you feel when you are faced with handling major issues or managing symptoms are part of self-awareness. If someone isn't aware of their current situation, they can't make changes to make life better.

There are many ways to become more self-aware then make necessary changes to control mental illness. Changes will occur at a different pace for everyone. The following are some tips from Lori Dechene from Tiny Buddha:

- **Understanding emotions** is when someone is aware of how they're feeling and what causes these feelings and whether the feelings are good or bad. That way, it's easier to work through these emotions to make good choices to handle situations better when symptoms occur or get worse

- **Realizing behavioral patterns/ habits** so that you/loved one can change negative habits into positive ones. Doing this can change how life can look like with mental illness
- **Find out what's going on inside the body** so it can be used as a tool to control the illness
- **Understanding our belief systems and expectations**, and how they influence what we choose to do in life choices. For example, during the bad times if someone feels worthless then beliefs need to be changed. This way thoughts and actions show these feelings are just a part of the illness
- **Taking responsibility for your choices.** When you/loved one can recognize certain patterns in response to people or life events then changes can be made to turn any bad behaviors into good ones

Your reasons: what is your “why”?

Learning “why” you need and want to control mental health will drive you to MAKE IT HAPPEN. **Think about 3 or more reasons why controlling mental health is important. It will give you reasons to fight mental illness** especially on the bad days, the days when nothing seems to go right, the days where nothing seems to matter.

Review your “whys” often. Do it every day, every other day or at least a few times a week. *This will motivate you during good and bad times and keep you on track.* **Fill out, save or print next page and review it for better results.**

Here are some WHYS. Create your own!

For you (so you can be there for others)

For my family and children

For my friends

For my pets

To be happy

To reach my goals

To enjoy life

To have a good job or career

Travel

Have hobbies

Try new things

Meet new people

Enjoy nature

And more....

Have a good support system

Dealing with mental health problems can make you feel *alone, misunderstood and sad*. Having a **strong social support system** is very important so it's easier to deal with life, bad days and hard times.

Social support means having family, friends or other people and resources to turn to when you need it or during a crisis. Social support can be *people, books, health care providers or anything else that can help*. Build a strong support system so you know what to do to have support, have a plan when things are bad and when you feel more stressed. **Good social support** can make life better and less stressful.

Write down your social support system and review it at least once a week (see next page). **Fill out, save or print next page and review it for better results.**

Controllable vs. uncontrollable factors

There are many situations that can happen in life to almost anyone. **Causes can include people, things and/or events.** These problems can basically be put in two categories: **controllable and uncontrollable factors.**

Both **controllable and uncontrollable factors** can trigger depression, anxiety or other symptoms. The following are some good examples of scenarios that fall into these categories.

Uncontrollable Factors

- Having a mental health condition or disease
- The way someone else reacts to someone having a condition
- Loss of family/friend
- Being laid-off
- Natural disasters/environment

Controllable Factors

- The way you act
- The way you/ loved one responds to a situation or problem
- The way you/loved one can live life
- The way you/loved one can avoid negative problems (i.e. substance abuse)

Self-Awareness: Learn the triggers

When you or a loved one is having difficulty dealing with mental health, you have to know how you are. Self-awareness is knowing who you are and how you are. This could be thoughts, actions, feelings. **One of most important information you can learn about yourself and mental health are triggers.**

A trigger is a person, thing and/or event that can cause symptoms to start or get worse. It's hard to know all triggers unless triggers have been experienced before. It's a good idea to **write down major triggers and what controlled them in the past. If they couldn't be controlled, there has to be a plan to deal with them.** It's best to know what to do before triggers happen so you/loved already have a plan.

Life has its ups and downs. Everything can be going great but then **something will happen that can cause symptoms or make them worse. Sometimes, it's life and it's not the condition at all.** It can be a combination of both of these factors.

Some triggers could include one or more of the following:

Loss of someone (family, friends and/or pet)

Divorce/ relationship break-up

Dealing with family, friends and/or co-workers

Daily life stress

Trauma such as an accident

Lack of sleep

Increased work hours/working different shifts at work

Loss of job

Medication changes

Change in routine

Lack of exercise

Finances, bills

Please understand these triggers can cause mild, moderate or severe symptoms. The better the plan to control them, the better the outcome. **Some ways to tell if a trigger is causing mental health symptoms/issues is by asking the following questions:**

1. Does it make the condition worse?
2. Does it cause more stress?
3. Does it cause major problems with relationship?
4. Does it affect moods?

Knowing triggers gives you/loved one power to handle them. Write down triggers and review it. Put it in your phone, laptop, calendar, journal or where you can see it. You will probably need it in the future.

It's very important to let other people know about them as well. *This way, if there is a problem the person having the mental health disorder can't recognize, someone else can know the signs of when help might be needed.* The consequences of not recognizing them which could cause major problems like depression and/or anxiety getting worse, more stress and relationships issues. Sometimes, it's not easy to know some triggers and sometimes, new triggers occur. **Discover your triggers and learn how to deal with them early can make all the difference.**

Trigger Action Plan

Write down 3 things that will help when triggers occur. Review this several times per week so you know exactly what to do when triggers occur. *It's very hard to think of what you should be doing when you're dealing with problems so it's important to know this ahead of time.* **Just take 5-10 minutes to do 1 trigger and add the rest later.** **Fill out, save or print "trigger list" and review it for better results.**

Example: Trigger List

Trigger: Feeling down because of relationships with family or friends

Solutions:

1. **Ask yourself, "What is causing me to feel this way?"** (Then, write down 3 things that will make you feel better)
2. Tell 1-3 people you trust how you're really feeling and ask for support
3. Write down how you feel in a journal or phone

Trigger: Feeling anxious because of something negative that's happening

Solutions:

1. Try to relax. *You shouldn't be driving when this happens*
2. Start deep breathing for 1-2 minutes throughout the day
3. Take time off work or school, if possible
4. **If you have one, reach out to your health care provider if doing the above isn't working.** Depending on the health care provider, a prescription may be called into the local pharmacy. Or, a same day appointment could be made.

If you don't have a health provider, call a local mental health clinic, urgent care center, mental hotline or go to emergency room. Ask someone you trust for help

Trigger: Feeling overwhelmed with getting things done

Solutions:

1. Prioritize what is most to least important. Focus on the most important tasks first
2. Break down goals into days, weeks or months. Make a checklist and follow it
3. **Ask for help.** We all need help sometime!

My Trigger List

Trigger: _____

Solutions:

Trigger: _____

Solutions:

Trigger: _____

Solutions:

You have learned some ways of knowing yourself and becoming self-aware. Learning about mental health is just as important. You **need information and learn how to apply it so you can get better outcomes**. When you know what to expect, you'll know how to handle situations that occur when dealing with mental health.

You need a written treatment plan so you know what to do to manage the **condition**. This should be done **with a health care provider who understands mental health**. *You can print out the next page and take it with you to an appt or write it down yourself.*

Write down the plan. Review your plan. Follow the plan so you can feel better. See what works and what doesn't then you can make changes.

What to ask a health provider

1. **Talk about all symptoms. Say which ones are the same, getting better or worse.** *Be honest* about how you/ loved one are doing to get the RIGHT type of help. Mention any symptoms you had even if they stopped before the appointment. **Save or print this and next page and talk about it at the appointment. Review it for better results.**
2. **Tell the health provider which medication(s) need to be refilled. Mention if a medication is not working so the dose or medication can be changed**
3. **Ask the provider to review and write down current treatment plan.** *Get any changes to treatment plan in writing*
4. **Ask about any recent medical updates/treatments** related to the condition(s)

**Anyone can be diagnosed
with a mental health problem
at any time**

Final thoughts: What's your mental health worth?

If nothing else, do following:

1. **Ask for help early on.** This could for symptoms, stress, relationship problems. Ask for help early or it get worse over time. Control and treat the problem as soon as possible
2. **Talk with mental health provider and get a written treatment plan and review it often.** If you don't have a health provider, get one

We all need help some time

Asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness

Control mental health & reach your goals

Get more powerful tips, tools & ideas for better mental health

Written by Shelly Pratt, registered nurse



[Get Tools to Live a Better Life](#)