

IT IS OK

TO BE NOT OK

- ● ● **A Handbook for Coping with Everyday Life**

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Activities and resources for mental and emotional well-being, disaster-related distress, anxiety, depression, self-care, and coping.

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Mental Health America in Montgomery (MHAM) and its members are advocates working to support people with mental illness and to promote good mental health through a variety of services. Access more resources at mhamontgomery.org.



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An Overview of Mental Health

Let's face it, no one really wants to talk about mental health. Stigma and misunderstanding may cause individuals to not seek help or talk about their mental well-being until they are in a crisis. Mental health is no different than any other aspect of your health. Often people feel the topic is taboo, leading to loneliness, illnesses, relationship problems, and self-harm. If you or someone you love is struggling with mental health issues, you may feel alone and like no one cares or understands.

Quick Facts—Did You Know?

- Annually, 1 in 5 American adults will have a diagnosed mental health condition.
- 46% of Americans will have a diagnosable mental health condition in their lifetime.
- 42.5 million Americans have anxiety disorders and 22.5 million have major depression.
- More than half of American adults with mental illness do not seek treatment.
- Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in the U.S.
- Risk factors for mental illness include genes, biology, environment, and lifestyle.

This handbook was designed to educate you and your loved ones about mental health, mental wellness, and the importance of treating mental health like physical health. Use this handbook to move past self and public stigma, learn about mental health, learn to practice good mental wellbeing and empower yourself to seek help if needed.

Just like any other illness, mental illness can get worse if untreated. There are stages of mental illness that can ultimately lead to loss of work, relationships, costly hospitalizations, incarceration, and even death.

If you are feeling stress, grief, or anxiety during this time, you are not alone.

It is natural to feel stress, anxiety, grief, and worry during challenging times. However, feeling strong emotions or being stressed for extended periods of time can have negative effects on your health. Learning to cope in a healthy way will help you, the people you care about, and those around you become more resilient. You can help yourself, others, and your community by sharing the information in this handbook.

Remember, it is OK to not be OK.

There are resources available to help. You are not alone. If you or someone you know is struggling or in a crisis, help is available. Call or text 988 or chat at [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org).

Quick Self-Check: Do You Need Help?

Do you have mild symptoms that have lasted for LESS THAN two weeks?

- Feeling a little sad or down
- Feeling down but still able to work, take care of yourself, and family
- Trouble sleeping
- Feeling irritable and moody

If so, these are self-care activities that can help:

- Exercising
- Engaging socially with others
- Sleeping on a regular schedule
- Eating healthy
- Sharing with a trusted friend or family member
- Practicing meditation, relaxation, and mindfulness

If these symptoms do not improve or seem to be worse after two weeks of self-care activities, then you may need to talk to your health care provider.

Do you have severe symptoms lasting **MORE THAN two weeks** and that are interfering with daily life?

- Not sleeping
- Appetite changes resulting in unwanted loss of weight or weight gain
- Struggling to get out of bed in the mornings because of mood
- Not able to concentrate or make decisions
- Loss of interest in things you normally enjoy
- Unable to perform daily functions and activities
- Thoughts of death or self-harm

Contact your doctor or a mental health professional if these are problems you are facing. You can also find resources in this handbook.




Scan the code or visit screening.mhanational.org to take a private and confidential screening from Mental Health America.

LET'S TALK ABOUT

- • • Mental and Emotional Well-Being





Mental and emotional health is just as important as physical health. Good mental and emotional health increase happiness and resilience.

Understanding Mental Health

Your mental health is how you feel in your heart and mind. It is always changing. One day you might be happy and another day you might be sad.

Most of us experience mental health challenges. It is normal. Sometimes, they are more severe and can affect emotions and how you think and act.

It is important to know when you need help to maintain good mental and emotional health. It is OK to be not OK. It is also OK to ask for help and to offer help to others who are having mental and emotional health challenges.

Mental Well-Being vs Mental Illness

Mental Well-Being

Mental well-being refers to the ability of an individual to cope with normal stresses of life. This includes being able to work productively and contribute to the community.

Mental well-being is an essential part of overall health. It is as important as a healthy diet, sleep, and exercise. Making your mental health a priority is not a sign of weakness, but an act of strength.

Mental Illness

Mental illness refers to diagnosable mental disorders that include alterations in thinking, mood, or behavior associated with distress and/or impaired functioning.

A mental illness is a condition that can affect your mood, thoughts, emotions, and behavior. It becomes an illness when it is severe or continues for a longer period, and is diagnosed by a trained professional. Common examples of mental illness experienced by individuals are anxiety, depression, bi-polar disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), schizophrenia, and substance disease disorder. Mental illness is real and treatable.

Mental Health America has a #B4Stage4 philosophy that encourages early intervention and treatment to prevent stage 4 mental illness. Our health care system does not wait to treat people in early stages of cancer, heart disease or diabetes. Mental health symptoms are no different.

Stage 1	Mild symptoms and warning signs
Stage 2	Symptoms increase in frequency and severity and interfere with life activities and roles.
Stage 3	Symptoms worsen with relapsing and recurring episodes as accompanied by serious disruption in life activities and roles.
Stage 4	Symptoms are persistent and severe and have jeopardized one's life.

If we treat people with early signs of mental health symptoms, they may not ever become serious or life altering. There are risk factors to developing mental illness, just like there are risk factors to certain diseases. Focusing BEFORE Stage 4 is the answer and the first step is to get screened.

An annual check-up at the doctor or getting a physical exam is normal for most people, but it only covers your physical health. It is important for your overall well-being to self-assess your mental and emotional health and to watch for changes. In today's world, you are not alone if you feel tired, overwhelmed, and stressed. Learning to recognize symptoms and adding coping skills to your daily habits can help you to be OK.

Visit screening.mhanational.org to take a private and confidential screening from Mental Health America.



ACTIVITY: Self-Assessment

Instructions: Below are some signs and symptoms that may have you stressed for various reasons. Place a check mark for each feeling you have felt in the past 30 days and then how you are feeling now. If these feelings are causing trouble in your life or are lasting for longer periods of time, you may want to notify your doctor or another health care professional.

**Felt During
the Last 30
Days**

**Feeling
Now**

Feeling on edge

Exhaustion

Not wanting to make decisions

Difficulty sleeping

Lack of satisfaction or enjoyment with work

Feeling disconnected from co-workers,
customers, or family

Anger and irritability

Not feeling sympathy or empathy

Increased use of alcohol or drugs

Experiencing life-threatening or traumatic events impacts everyone differently. If left untreated symptoms may

not show up until later, not necessarily following the traumatic event. If you have overwhelming thoughts, mood swings or behavior issues that are worrying you or your loved ones, you may want to seek professional help. It is important to understand that some mental health conditions can be due to trauma or started in childhood and may be triggered by genetics. Other stresses like disasters, relationship issues, loss of job or bullying can also lead to trauma-related distress.

You may want to seek professional help you have experienced these signs off and on or for longer than two weeks. There is no harm nor shame in seeking help!

ACTIVITY: Trauma-Related Distress

Instructions: Check the box of any symptoms you have had during or after traumatic events and mark if still feeling.

Felt During a Life Event	Feeling Now	Physical Signs and Symptoms of Trauma-Related Distress
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stomach aches or diarrhea
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Changes in eating habits
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Headaches or other pains with no clear cause
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jumpiness or edginess
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, sleeping too much, or trouble sleeping

Felt During a Life Event	Feeling Now	Cognitive Signs and Symptoms of Disaster-Related Distress
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Difficulty remembering things

Difficulty thinking clearly or concentrating

Confusion

Trouble making decisions

Felt During a Life Event	Feeling Now	Emotional Signs and Symptoms of Disaster-related Distress
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Anxiety and fear

Overwhelming sadness

Anger

Guilt

Numbness and inability to feel joy or sadness

Felt During a Life Event	Feeling Now	Behavioral Signs and Symptoms of Disaster-related Distress
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Increase or decrease in activity levels and reduced stamina

Frequent crying

Use of alcohol or drugs to escape feelings

Angry outbursts


Desire to be alone most of the time and self-isolation

Risk-taking behavior

STRESS & ANXIETY

-
-
- Identifying and Handling Stress and Anxiety





Life is stressful. However, we must learn to cope. Not managing stress or anxiety can result in more serious mental health issues.

The Differences Between Stress and Anxiety

Stress:

- Is a feeling of emotional or physical tension
- Is a response to an external cause, such as having an argument or having your car break down
- Can come from any event or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry, or nervous
- Goes away once the situation is resolved
- Can be positive, like when it helps you meet a deadline or avoid danger
- Can be negative, like when it interferes with sleep

Anxiety:

- Is usually a reaction to stress
- Involves a persistent feeling of uneasiness and dread that does not go away
- Is consistent even when there is no real threat
- Can interfere with how you live your life, like causing you to avoid things and people you enjoy
- May cause negative physical symptoms

Both stress and anxiety can affect mental and physical well-being. You may experience symptoms such as:

- Excessive worry
- Forgetfulness
- Tension
- Headache
- Body pain
- High blood pressure
- Loss of sleep
- Racing heart

Recognize what causes your stress. Common stressors are:

- Money or job issues
- Health or illness
- A sick family member or a sick friend
- Marriage or relationship problems
- Birth of a child
- Moving

Reduce Brain Chatter

Try to block out the voices in your head that cause you distress.



Boosting Well-Being to Cope with Stress and Anxiety

Doing small things every day can help you cope and have a positive impact on your mental and emotional well-being.

Here are some ways to practice self-care:

Stick to a Routine

Have regular sleep and wake-up times to make sure you get enough rest. Routines lead to other healthy habits.

Take a Walk

It lifts your mood, clears your head, and boosts the blood flow to your brain and body.

Keep a Journal

Write down your feelings to understand them better. A journal is a way to express your fears and vent frustrations. Putting emotions on paper can help you identify and work through your problems.

Eat Healthy Foods

Fruits, vegetables, and “brain foods” like nuts, oily fish, and beans are all healthy. They can also help you stay

mentally fit. Energy drinks, sugary foods, sodas, and alcohol can make you feel more anxious or irritable.

Switch off Your Phone

You do not have to make yourself available to everyone every minute of the day. Unplug when you feel like you need to recharge.

Spend Time Outside

Spending time outside can help reduce stress. Caring for pets, walking in the park, and gardening are all good stress relievers.

Listen to Music

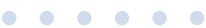
Listening to music can lift your mood or provide a sense of calm, based on the type of music you enjoy.

Spend Time with Friends

Friendships provide support and make us feel loved and appreciated. Even a quick phone call to a friend can make you feel better.

Get Enough Sleep

Sleep is necessary for good mental, physical, and emotional health. Avoid electronics and caffeine before bed. Keep a regular sleep schedule to get good quality sleep.



Social Media and Your Mental Health

For some people social media is a positive way to engage with friends and family and can help with loneliness.

Checking Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, and other social media has become part of our normal daily routines. If you experience anxiety, sadness, frustration, or increased aloneness by being on social media, you might want to take a break or change your relationship with online communication.

Self-assessment:

- How many times per day do you check social media?
- How many hours are you on social media daily?
- How does it make you feel?
- How long are you on the internet each day?
- Does it interfere with your sleep or relationships?

Internet and social media addiction is when you use it excessively and it becomes a compulsive behavior which can lead to problems with your mental health. Look at your answers and determine your relationship with the internet and social media.

Use social media safely by decreasing your screen time. Use that time to visit with family and friends, improve your coping skills and adjust to a healthy lifestyle.

Here are some tips to decrease your screen time:

- Limit social media to 30 minutes per day.
- Set your phone app to set time limits and to not show notifications.
- Don't stay glued to your phone. Leave it in another room for a period.
- Delete apps.
- Unfriend or block people who make you feel bad about yourself, frustrated or angry.
- Practice a mental detox.



ACTIVITY:

Coping With Stress


Instructions: Below are healthy ways to cope with stress. Circle any of the recommendations you currently follow.

- Take breaks from news stories, including on social media. It is good to be informed, but constant discouraging information can be upsetting.
- Stay engaged with family and friends.
- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, lean proteins, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat dairy products. Limit saturated fats, cholesterol, salt, and added sugars.
- Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning, including on weekends. This can improve your sleep.
- Move more and sit less. Every bit of activity helps.
- Take deep breaths, stretch, or meditate.
- Limit alcohol intake.
- Avoid using prescription drugs in ways other than prescribed. Do not take someone else's prescription or use illegal drugs.
- Avoid smoking and the use of tobacco products.
- Continue with regular health appointments.

DEPRESSION

- ● ● Identifying and Coping with Depression





Depression is a mood disorder that affects how you feel, think, and behave. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems. Depression is more than “the blues.” It is not a weakness, and it will not simply go away.

Symptoms of depression that last longer than two weeks need to be discussed with your doctor. Most people who have depression start to feel better with medication, therapy, or both.

Symptoms of Depression

- Thoughts of hurting yourself
- Fatigue
- Trouble concentrating
- Feelings of guilt and worthlessness
- Loss of interest in things that bring joy
- Not being able to sleep
- Irritability
- Overeating or loss of appetite

ACTIVITY:

Depressed Thoughts

Instructions: Below are common thoughts and feelings associated with depression. Place a check mark in the box next to each of the thoughts and feelings you have had.

I am terribly lonely all the time, even when I'm with friends and loved ones.

I am exhausted all the time.

I have an overwhelming sense of sadness about life.

Just getting through the day feels like torture.

I feel like I will never be happy again, even though I know that is not true.


I feel misunderstood and ashamed.

I feel like everything is hopeless.

All I want to do is go home, curl up, and fall asleep forever.

What You Can Do About Depression

- Tell your medical doctor. Depression can last for years if left untreated. There are treatments available to help you cope with depression.
- Set realistic goals. Set priorities. Break things down into small tasks and tackle them one at a time.
- Try to be with other people. Talk to someone.
- Let your family and friends help you.
- Participate in activities that make you feel better, like exercise, church, movies, sports, and social activities.
- Do not make important decisions until your depression is lifted.
- It may take a while to get your first appointment with a mental health professional. Do not despair. Once you are a patient, appointments will be easier to make.



Be Accepting of Yourself

Treat yourself the way you would treat a good friend.

Grief and Loss

All of us will experience grief and loss during our lifetime and of all of life's stresses, it can really test your resilience. Grief is painful and often leaves you questioning if the pain will ever end. The death of a loved one or pet, an ending relationship and losing a job are all losses that can cause you to grieve.

The emotional pain from a loss can cause anxiety, extreme tiredness, depression and thoughts of suicide. It can even cause physical symptoms such as changes in appetite, chest pain and difficulty thinking. The experience of grief is different for everyone. Most people don't know how to talk about grief and often avoid others because they don't know what to say.

Getting help from a grief counselor, spiritual advisor or support group is important to help you move forward after experiencing loss. You don't have to do this alone.

The Grief Cycle

The Kubler-Ross model of grief has five stages of response to loss. They are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and depression.

ACTIVITY: Your Grief Cycle

Instructions: Below is an exercise to help you work out your own stages of grief. Think about if you have had any of these thoughts. Consider doing this even if you have unresolved grief from your past.

- Denial: "This can't be happening."
- Anger: "Why is this happening to me?"
- Bargaining: "I will do anything to change this."
- Depression: "What is the point of going on after loss?"
- Acceptance: "I know what happened. I can't change it. Now, I need to cope."

Now, write down your own thoughts and experiences:

Loneliness and Isolation

Feeling lonely and being socially isolated are two different experiences.

- Social isolation is a lack of social contacts and/or few people to interact with in a meaningful way.
- Loneliness involves having distressed feelings of being alone or separated from others.

The Surgeon General has declared an epidemic of loneliness. This is because of the increased number of people reporting being lonely, and the public health impacts of social isolation and loneliness. Some people believe older adults are at highest risk for being lonely and some are due to social isolation. Yet, young adults report feeling lonely 50% more than adults over age 65.

Groups that are at the highest risk are those who are:

- Living alone or who can't leave home
- Going through a relationship break-up or divorce
- Experiencing the death of a loved one
- Starting at a new school or changing jobs
- Moving to a new area or living in a rural and/or unsafe neighborhood
- Becoming a parent
- Already experiencing mental health problems



Everyone needs social interactions to thrive. Not taking care of feelings of loneliness can cause physical and mental health issues. If you are lonely, there are things you can do to decrease the loneliness you feel.

Tips for Combating Loneliness

- Join social groups or clubs.
- Volunteer.
- Keep a regular schedule.
- Learn a new skill or hobby.
- Join a class or support group.
- Get a pet.
- Prioritize your wellness.

Solo Activities

- Take yourself out on a date.
- Cook for yourself.
- Plant a garden.
- Listen to music and dance.
- Join an on-line class or support group.
- Talk to your higher power like a friend.
- Post positive daily affirmations around your home.

Post-Traumatic Stress (PTSD)

PTSD is considered an anxiety disorder. It can happen to anyone who has experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as war, sexual assault, domestic abuse, other forms of violence, natural disasters, childhood trauma, serious accidents, and bullying.

One in 11 people will be diagnosed with PTSD in their lifetime. Women are two times more likely to experience PTSD. People who have PTSD may relive the events in flashbacks or nightmares. They may also feel sad, angry, and afraid. They may not want to leave their home or engage with others.

Screen for PTSD at screening.mhanational.org.

PTSD can disrupt your everyday life and the lives of your friends and loved ones. It is important to seek treatment if you are experiencing these symptoms. If you think you have PTSD, it is important to seek help so you can start a recovery process.

PTSD in Veterans

Veterans can find themselves struggling with invisible wounds such as PTSD, brain injuries, and/or depression and anxiety. Traumatic events such as accidents, IED blasts, military sexual trauma, or the death of other



service members can cause issues that can cause lasting emotional and mental pain.

Effective treatments and support are available to Veterans who have or think they may have an invisible wound such as PTSD.

Common Symptoms of Invisible Wounds

- Nightmares, trouble sleeping
- Flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, or images
- Anger issues
- Startled reactions
- Constantly feeling overly alert or on edge
- Avoiding crowds, social gatherings, driving or other potential triggers
- Anxiety or Panic Attacks
- Misusing drugs or alcohol



Focus On Breathing

Focus on your breath as it moves in and out of your body.



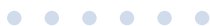
Coping Skills

Coping skills are activities you can use to reduce difficult thoughts. These skills can also help you to move forward when you are having tough times. Everyone is different, so not all skills work for everyone. It is important to give a few different coping skills a try. Find what works for you. Do not forget to use these skills when you are overly stressed.

Quick Coping Skills for a Personal Time Out

Quick things to do when you are STRESSED OUT, HURT, UPSET, or about to BLOW UP:

- Slow in and out breathing
- Count backward from 20
- Give yourself a hug
- Tell yourself that your thoughts are just thoughts
- Tensing and relaxing
- Grounding: Name 5 things you can see, hear, and feel
- Self-talk (“I can handle this”)
- Snap a rubber band on your wrist
- Think about something funny
- Imagine a positive scene
- Spider push-ups (put fingers on one hand against fingers on the other and push in and out)



ACTIVITY:

Coping Skills

Instructions: Below is a list of activities that may help you cope with stress and anxiety. Place a check mark in the box next to each of the activities you have tried. You can write your own ideas in the spaces provided.

Call or visit friends or loved ones

Take a nap, a bath, or a hot shower

Listen to music, dance, and/or sing

Cook, garden, or do yard work

Recite daily devotionals or pray

Write in my journal

Watch a funny video or read something funny

Take a walk, stretch, or play a game or sport

List the things I am grateful for and that bring me joy

Make plans for the future and/or make a to-do list

Take deep breaths, visualize a peaceful place, and/or meditate

Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is a way to relax by purposefully taking slow, deep breaths. When practiced often, deep breathing exercises provide instant and long-term relief from stress and anxiety.

Square Breathing

- Breathe slowly through your nose while counting to four.
- Hold your breath and count to four.
- Exhale slowly while counting to four.
- Hold your breath and count to four.
- Repeat.

Belly Breathing

- Place your hands on your belly.
- Take a deep breath, focusing on your belly expanding.
- Hold your breath for a count of three.
- Slowly exhale and repeat.



Journaling

Using a journal can help you to see your feelings on paper. It can help you to describe how you feel. You can use a notebook or computer to write down your thoughts and feelings.

You can keep these notes to look back on or share with others. You can also write them down and tear them up or delete them. It does not matter what you do with them because the important part is to release your thoughts and feelings and help you better understand yourself.

Journaling can be calming and clearing for your mind. It is a terrific way to release pent-up stress.

Tips for Journaling

- Use a notebook, pen, or computer.
- Keep your journal in your special place.
- Be open and honest.
- Write about upsetting emotional experiences.
- Write about positive things in your life.
- If you are spiritual, write down your prayers.

10 Journaling Prompts to Get You Started

1. How do I feel today?
2. How do I want to feel today?
3. What do I need the most?
4. What is my biggest lesson or achievement today?
This week? This month?
5. The things that bring me joy are _____.
6. I feel happiest when _____.
7. How can I have more joy, happiness, and peace in my life?
8. What changes do I need to make to feel healthier, happier, and more fulfilled?
9. I want to forgive _____.
10. The main cause of stress in my life is _____.

Organize Your Thoughts

Journaling is a great way to organize your thoughts and calm your mind.



Blessings Jar

Find a jar with a top. Decorate it if you like. Whenever you recognize something that is a “blessing” in your life, write it down on a piece of paper, fold it up, and stick it in the jar.

Dump the jar out and read your blessings before you start the new year. Look in your blessing jar throughout the year if you need a prompt for journaling or sharing. Simply pull out a blessing and write about it. This is a fun and enlightening activity to do with family, friends and co-workers.


Did You Know?

- Vitamin D from sunlight helps your body produce serotonin, which affects your mood.
- Helping others can help you feel better.
- Walking for just 30 minutes per day can boost your mood.
- Drinking water and staying hydrated are important for focus and emotional stability.
- Bananas, nuts, and oily fish (like salmon) are foods that can help keep you mentally well.
- Being grateful can boost your feelings of well-being.

SELF-CARE

-
-
- Activities to Improve Your Well-Being





Self-care activities are things you do to maintain good health and improve your well-being. Taking care of yourself helps you with your job, family, and supporting others who may need help.

Types of Self-Care

Physical

- Getting enough good sleep
- Strengthening the body with exercise
- Nourishing the body with healthy foods

Emotional

- Managing stress
- Journaling to organize thoughts
- Practicing coping skills

Social

- Engaging in friendships
- Setting healthy boundaries
- Moderating social media exposure

Spiritual

- Time alone for reflection
- Prayer and reading
- Spending time outside with nature

Work

- Exercising time management
- Taking breaks
- Balancing work and personal life

Financial

- Setting and following a budget
- Managing finances
- Paying bills on time
- Saving money

Personal

- Engaging in hobbies
- Setting personal goals
- Learning new things

Staying Hydrated Improves Mental Wellness

- 73% of your brain is water.
- Dehydration can impact brain function.
- Drinking 6-8 glasses of water per day is recommended.

Signs of Dehydration

- Dry skin
- Sleeplessness
- Dry mouth
- Headaches
- Irritability
- Thirst



ACTIVITY:

My Daily Self-Care

Instructions: Look at the table below. On the left, you will see common feelings of distress. On the right, you will see coping skills to help you deal with difficult feelings.

Fill in the empty spaces on the left with other feelings you have experienced. Write in coping skills that you can use to help you in the future on the right.

I feel...	I need to...
Overwhelmed	Take a step back
Stressed	Focus on relaxing
Anxious	Practice a coping skill
Sad	Be loving to myself
Angry	Breathe deeply and relax
Drained	Rest and recharge
Broken	Find the positive in myself
Upset	Take time for myself
Alone	Reach out for support

Asking for Help

Everyone knows the African proverb: “It takes a village to raise a child.” It takes an entire village of people to support each of us on life’s journey. We do not mind asking for help when our bodies are sick. It is equally important to ask for help when our mind is stressed and we are emotionally exhausted. Know who the people are in your “village” so you can help each other.

It is important to share when you feel that your mental and emotional health are challenged. Talking can help us to understand our emotions and to see things in a different way. Talking helps other people to help us.



ACTIVITY: Define Your Village

Asking for help is not easy. You may feel awkward or ashamed, but your village is there to support you. They love you and will give you a chance to talk, cry, hug, and laugh.

YOU are in control when you learn to ask for help. It is important to know that you are not alone. Your trusted village can help you.

Instructions: Identify five people you can turn to when you are feeling overwhelmed, anxious, lonely, or sad, and list their names below.

1

2

3

4

5

Who To Talk To?

When thinking about asking for help, ask yourself –
“Do I really need to do this alone?”

Think about who you might want to talk to.

Think about the people in your life who you can trust and the people to whom you are closest. A family member, a friend, or spiritual advisor are common sources of support. Sometimes it is easier to talk to people you do not know, like a professional counselor.

Talking to a family member may open opportunities about some mental health issues they or other family members have experienced.

Many mental illnesses occur in families.

That does not mean that you will have one, but it might help you in your journey. You might also learn about some traumatic event in your life that you were not aware of. All of this can help you to discover what you might need to move forward.

Stigma has prevented many families from discussing mental health, don't let this stop you from asking for help from those you trust.



ACTIVITY: Identify Your Needs

Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, but of courage. You are in control when you choose to ask for help. Remember that asking for help is about what you need and deserve. Your friends and family will help you, but it is important to know what kind of help you need.

Instructions: Use the prompts below to help you identify some areas where support would benefit you.

Situations I need help with are:

Ways I can ask for help are:

Things to say when I need help include:

Talking to Spiritual Advisors

Many people feel the need to seek spiritual guidance when they are stressed. If your inclination is to hand over your problems to a higher power, this may be the perfect support outlet for you. No, a priest, minister, or church counselor cannot physically take away your anxiety or solve your problems. Yet, they can guide you to a path of peace and strength through spirituality.

Spiritual wellness is taking time to determine your purpose in life and understanding your personal impact on the rest of the world. You can find your own spiritual wellness through prayer, quiet time, and meditation.

Talking to Your Health Care Provider

- **Do not wait** for your doctor to bring up your mental and emotional health. Take this opportunity to talk to your doctor if you are feeling anxious, depressed, or even overwhelmed. They can help by referring you to a mental health specialist.
- **Prepare ahead of your visit.** Your health care provider has limited time to talk to you. Think of your questions and concerns beforehand and write them down. Take a list of your medications and include anything you take over the counter. Let your doctor know if there are any family mental health issues.

- **Bring a friend or family member.** Sometimes it is helpful to have someone with you, especially if you are not feeling well. They can take notes and remember what your doctor said. They may also be able to offer some insight on how they think you are doing.
- **Be honest.** Your health care provider can only help you with what you tell them. It is a private conversation that is confidential and cannot be shared with anyone without your permission. Describe all your symptoms and when they started. Examples of symptoms include:
 - Sadness, anxiousness, and moodiness
 - Hopelessness, feeling guilty, worthless, or helpless
 - Loss of interest in things you enjoy
 - Decreased energy and tiredness
 - Difficulty sleeping
 - Appetite or weight changes
 - Unexplained aches, pains, headaches, or digestive problems
 - Thoughts of death or suicide
- **Ask questions.** There is no “one size fits all” treatment. You may have to try different things to find what works best for you. Remember to ask questions and be honest.

What to Say to a Friend Who Is Struggling Mentally and Emotionally

We all go through tough times. You can help a friend by letting them talk and express their feelings. It might provide comfort to give an example of a time you or someone you know struggled and needed support.

Listen

Listen carefully to your family member or friend and express your understanding back to him or her. Recognize the feelings he or she is experiencing and don't discount them, even if you believe them to be symptoms of the illness.

Express Hope

It is possible to feel better. Let them know that reaching out and talking is the first step to feeling better. Let them know that there is hope and mental health problems are treatable. Let them know that it is OK to ask for help.

Provide Validation

Validate what they are saying. Respect their trust and do not share what they have told you without permission. Ask how you can best help them.

Show Empathy and Compassion

Remember that our past, cultures, and experiences have an impact on how we seek help. Some people come from families or cultures who view asking for help or seeking mental health counseling as a bad thing. Thinking about why your friend might not want help can be important in helping them find support.

Recommend Professional Support

Encourage your family member or friend to speak immediately to his or her healthcare provider about any problems related to medications. You can also offer to accompany your family member or friend to medical and other appointments and, if they want you to do so.

Keep It To Yourself

Always respect the individual's need for and right to privacy. A person with a mental illness has the same right to be treated with dignity and respect as any other person.

How To Respond To A Friend Needing Help

- "That must be so hard."
- "I am sorry you are going through this."
- "It is normal to have these feelings right now."

FOR MEN

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- Information Specific to Men



Did You Know?

- Six million American men experience depression each year.
- Men are four times more likely than women to die of suicide.
- Men may be more likely to use drugs or alcohol as a means of coping with mental health issues.
- Work stress and a lack of social support have been linked to a higher likelihood of mental health issues in men.
- Men are less likely to seek help for depression, substance abuse, and stressful life events. This is due to social and cultural norms, difficulty talking about problems, and downplaying symptoms.
- 1 in 10 American men suffer from rage.
- Mental health issues have a greater impact on men's physical health.
- "Real men" DO ask for help!

Benefits of Seeking Help

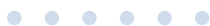
- Helps you to understand your condition.
- Reduces symptoms and improves quality of life.
- Gives you the power to set and achieve goals.
- Improves your ability to deal with stress.
- Helps to improve relationships.
- Reduces or gets rid of negative and destructive behaviors.

When to Get Help for Anger

- Happens often and is intense.
- Causes problems in your relationships.
- Has caused a problem in your job.
- Has resulted in destruction of property.
- Has resulted in injury to you or someone else.

Three Quick Ways to Deal with Anger

1. Take deep stomach breaths. Inhale and count to five. Exhale and count to five. Repeat.
2. Walk away from triggers. Return when calm.
3. Count backward from ten.



How to “Center” Mental Health for Men

- C** Catching and stopping myself when I start putting myself down in my head.
- E** Embracing having more emotionally real conversations with my masculine/friends/bros.
- N** Naming the fact that I cannot control other people’s actions. Focusing on my own instead.
- T** Taking time to express my feelings instead of detaching, distracting, or avoiding them.
- E** Easing the grind by asking for help from others and accepting it freely.
- R** Remembering that I am enough. I do not have to prove my manhood or my worth by overworking or being “tough” or “strong.”

Four Habits of Mentally Healthy Men

1. Healthy Body: Eat well, exercise, reduce alcohol
2. Healthy Lifestyle: Balance work and social time
3. Healthy Mindset: Set goals, reprogram negative thoughts
4. Healthy Connections: Focus on strengthening positive relationships with others

RESOURCES

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- Agencies and Services Ready to Support You



Mental Health America

A national organization dedicated to the promotion of mental health, well-being, and illness prevention. Educational, screening, advocacy and statistical materials can be found on at mhanational.org.

Scan the code below or visit screening.mhanational.org to take a private and confidential screening from Mental Health America.



Veterans Crisis Line

24/7 confidential crisis support for veterans and their loved ones. Ways to connect:

- Dial 988 then press 1
- Text 838255

Disaster Distress Helpline

For anyone experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters. Call or text 1-800-985-5990 to connect with a trained, caring counselor 24/7 or visit disasterdistress.samhsa.gov.

Aging and Disability Resource Centers

For older individuals, people with disabilities, and their caregivers. Access Medicare and Medicaid assistance, crisis support, prescription drug assistance, caregiver assistance, and screening for programs.

- 1-800-AGE-LINE (1-800-243-5463)

Alabama Department of Mental Health

- <https://mh.alabama.gov>
- 1-800-367-0955

Alabama Office of Peer Programs

- 1-800-832-0952

National Alliance on Mental Illness

Provides support, education, and advocacy. You can contact their office for information on MHFA training.

- namialabama.org
- Call or text 334-396-4797
- If a crisis, call 988

211 Connects Alabama

Dialing 211 connects you to a trained operator 24/7 to help individuals find resources in their local communities. You can text for help too! Just text your zip code to 898-211 and message a specialist for help.

Alabama Domestic Violence Hotline

- 1-800-650-6522

The Trevor Project

Trained counselors who understand the challenges LGBTQ+ people face and are available 24/7. They listen without judgement and are confidential.

- thetrevorproject.org
- Text 'START' to 678678
- Call: 1-866-488-7386

Wings Across Alabama

Staffed by Certified Peer Specialists who have personal experience with mental illness, including stigma, feeling overwhelmed, loneliness, thoughts of suicide, challenges of poverty, and more.

- 1-844-999-4647
- wingsacrossal.org

Training

Mental Health First Aid

Mental Health First Aid is an 8-hour self-study program that gives teaches skills to help someone who is developing a mental health problem or experiencing a mental health crisis. Visit mentalhealthfirstaid.org.

The Governor's Office of Volunteer Services

GOVS provides no-cost mental health training to nonprofits, community- and faith-based organizations, first responders, and others. Visit servealabama.gov.

Suicide Prevention QPR

Training to prepare you to intervene and possibly prevent suicide. Find classes for adults at servealabama.gov/mental-health-trainings.

About Mental Health America in Montgomery

MHAM supports recovery for people with mental illness and better mental health for all. Mental well-being is an essential part of overall health and creates a happier and healthier community. We are committed to promoting mental well-being as a critical part of overall wellness.

Our Programs

Friendship Club

Gives people with mental illness a way to socialize, make friends, engage in fun activities, and learn skills to work toward recovery.

Open Door Club

Carefully planned and enjoyable activities for those who need assistance but who are able to live in Carastar Health housing.

Operation Santa Claus

Provides holiday gifts and food to people affected by mental illness and those who otherwise would not receive these good tidings.

Professional Education

Our continuing education series for mental health, healthcare, and social services professionals.

Outreach and Education

We provide mental health information aimed to our community members to help all people cope with normal stresses of life. Depression and anxiety screening are provided by request.

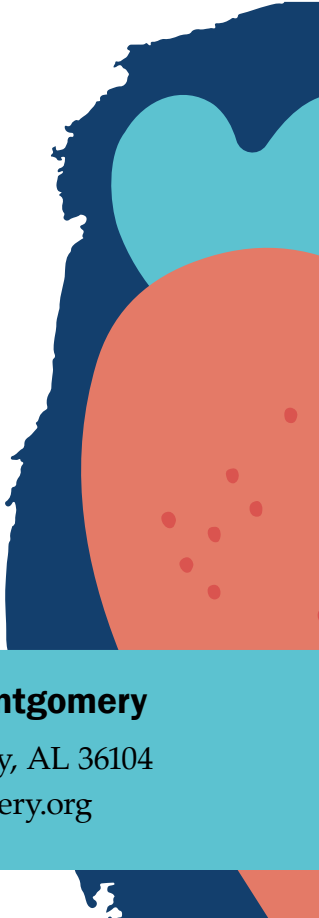
Become a Bellringer!

Not too long ago, people with mental illness in our country were literally locked up in chains. Mental Health America put a stop to this cruel practice when we melted down these bindings and recast them into the Mental Health Bell, which you can see in our logo:



By donating as little as \$5 per month, you are ringing the bell for victory over mental illness. Scan the code to get started.





Mental Health America in Montgomery

1116 South Hull Street, Montgomery, AL 36104
(334) 262-5500 | mhamontgomery.org