



STOP THE STIGMA:

Understanding Mental Health



If you or someone you love have a mental illness, you are not alone. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, it is estimated that more than one in five U.S. adults live with a mental illness (57.8 million in 2021). Despite such prevalence, mental illness is still stigmatized.

Anxiety disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and bipolar disorder are among the most common and well-known mental illnesses. Schizophrenia affects less than 1% of the population.

Let's be mindful not to perpetuate mental health stigmas. People who have mental illness are so much more than their diagnosis. They work with you, live in your community, and could be among your loved ones. So, it's important to get up to speed on common mental health issues so you can do your part to support your loved ones and community!

ANXIETY

Anxiety disorders range from: social anxiety, to phobias, to panic disorders, to generalized anxiety. While the specific characteristics of these conditions are different, the symptoms may include the following:

- Nervousness or restlessness
- Trouble sleeping
- Increased heart rate
- Sweating
- Feelings of panic
- Worrying



If you're experiencing any of these symptoms, seek support from a mental health professional. Taking this first step is essential for an official diagnosis of an anxiety disorder. With their guidance, you can access treatment options aimed at easing these symptoms and providing necessary support along your journey to wellness. Options may include medication, group therapy, or personalized therapy, each tailored to meet your specific needs and support you on your path to managing anxiety effectively.



FOLLOW THE MOUSE:

We've hyperlinked resources you may want to access. Just hover and click!

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DEPRESSION

There's a common misconception that depression is just sadness, however, it's much more complicated than that. Depressive episodes disrupt people's lives, making it hard or impossible to enjoy the things you may have looked forward to in the past.

Symptoms of depression extend beyond feelings of hopelessness, worry, or sadness. They may also include irritability, trouble sleeping or sleeping too much, eating too much or too little, fatigue, and other symptoms. In the most severe cases, a person with depression may contemplate self-harm or attempt suicide.

Depression is a complex disease that could be the result of trauma, genetics, environmental conditions, and a myriad of other root causes. While there's no singular explanation that one can pinpoint for causing depression, it's important to take note that, brain chemistry, stress, and even some medications can be the catalyst for depression. Support is often just a phone call away. In moments of crisis, individuals contemplating should immediately call or text 988 for confidential support and guidance. For routine treatment for depression, you can meet with a therapist or psychiatrist to determine what's most appropriate for you.



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POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

According to the National Institutes of Health, 6% of people will experience PTSD at some point in their lives. And that's not exclusive to veterans—you can develop PTSD from a wide range of traumatic experiences, including witnessing violence, experiencing an assault, or surviving a natural disaster.

The symptoms of PTSD are often debilitating. People often re-experience the event that triggered their PTSD through flashbacks, recurring nightmares, or thoughts about the event, or reliving the physical signs of stress the event caused. There are also other symptoms like trouble concentrating, irritability, outbursts, feeling isolated, and unreliable memories about the event.

A therapist or psychiatrist can help people with PTSD reach a diagnosis and find the most appropriate treatment for them. Medication may help treat symptoms, but psychotherapy and cognitive restructuring—both of which are types of talk therapy—show the most promise for managing symptoms.



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BIPOLAR DISORDER

People experiencing bipolar disorder often swing between manic and depressive states. Someone in a manic episode might appear extremely upbeat, energized, and or irritable; whereas, someone in a depressive episode may appear down, hopeless, or numb.

There are three different types of BD: bipolar I, bipolar II, and cyclothymic disorder. A manic episode for someone with bipolar I, typically lasts for seven days or longer, followed by a depressive episode that can persist for at least two weeks. Bipolar II is similar, but instead of manic episodes there are hypomanic episodes (which are less severe). Cyclothymic disorder describes a person who's alternating between mild depressive and hypomanic episodes that are shorter in duration.

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4 WAYS TO DESTIGMATIZE

Stigma around mental illness prevents people from seeking needed help. As a result, many people with mental illness self-medicate and turn to alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs to mitigate their pain and symptoms, which makes them susceptible to substance use disorder.

A lack of treatment and resources often isolates people with mental illness, making it difficult for them to actively engage in their community. Stopping the stigma should be a priority so we can uplift and support everyone in our community, including those who are most vulnerable.

Here are 4 ways you can help end the stigma!

1. Learn about mental illnesses
2. Support your friends and family who have mental illness
3. Advocate for policies and programs to support people who have mental illness in your community
4. Volunteer with nonprofit organizations impacting mental health



Partner with your Primary Care Physician (PCP) for mental health questions or concerns. If you do not have a PCP, you may call the Customer Service number on your BCBSIL member ID card or [log on to Blue Access for MembersSM \(BAMSM\) bcbsil.com](#) and use the Provider Finder. This fast, easy-to-use tool improves members' experience when searching for in-network health care providers.

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Treatment varies depending on the type of BD someone has, but usually includes a combination of medication and therapy. Other treatment options include light therapy and other, more invasive treatments that stimulate the brain to reduce or relieve symptoms.

SCHIZOPHRENIA

Schizophrenia is an extremely complex mental illness. Schizophrenics experience hallucinations and may hear voices, see things that aren't there, or have disorganized thinking or speech. Due to the magnitude of the disease, some schizophrenics neglect their personal hygiene, withdraw from social interactions, and often appear as emotionally distant.

Since the symptoms of schizophrenia cause a dramatic shift in behavior, there's an extreme stigma associated with it – especially because untreated schizophrenia can make it difficult for someone to provide for themselves. However, appropriate treatment can help someone with schizophrenia manage their symptoms and lead a productive life.

Due to the need for medication to manage schizophrenia, people who have this mental illness must be treated by a healthcare professional specializing in psychiatry. Therapists without these credentials can't prescribe medication, but they can work in tandem with a professional who does.



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If you suspect that you or someone you love may have a mental illness, don't wait to get help. Connect with a therapist through [ComPsych EAP](#). Enter Web ID: **BCBSILEAP** to get access to mental healthcare and more.



SOURCES: [NIH.gov](#), [MayoClinic.org](#), [ClevelandClinic.org](#), [MayoClinic.org](#)