

Mental Illness



The Mississippi Department of Mental Health is working to change the way you think about mental health. One of the most difficult challenges the field of mental health faces in Mississippi is stigma. Our goal is to eliminate misconceptions and promote a better understanding of mental health and illnesses. The following information is a way to help you “Think Again” about mental illness and understand the related issues.

What is Mental Illness?

A mental illness is a brain disease that causes mild to severe disturbances in thinking, perception and behavior resulting in an inability to cope with life’s ordinary demands and routines. It is sometimes easy to forget that our brain, like all of our other organs, is vulnerable to disease. Mental illness is a health condition just like diabetes or asthma is a health condition. People with mental illness often exhibit many types of behaviors such as extreme sadness and irritability, and, in more severe cases, they may also suffer from hallucinations and total withdrawal. Most families are not prepared to cope with learning that a loved one has a mental illness. It can be physically and emotionally trying and make them feel vulnerable to the opinions and judgments of others. Some of the main barriers to seeking help are the misconceptions and stereotypes we have of mental illness and mental healthcare.

Having good mental health is an essential component of good physical health. In Mississippi, mental health problems are more common than you may think. One in five people will experience a mental illness during their lifetime, and one family in four has a member who has a mental illness and who will require some type of treatment.

What are the signs and symptoms?

In Adults:

- Confused thinking
- Prolonged depression (sadness or irritability)
- Feelings of extreme highs and lows
- Excessive fears, worries or anxieties
- Social withdrawal
- Dramatic changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Strong feelings of anger
- Delusions or hallucinations
- Growing inability to cope with daily problems and activities
- Suicidal thoughts
- Denial of obvious problems
- Numerous unexplained physical ailments
- Substance abuse

In Older Children and Pre-adolescents:

- Substance Abuse
- Inability to cope with problems or daily activities
- Changes in sleeping or eating habits
- Excessive complaints of physical ailments
- Defiance, truancy, theft and/or vandalism
- Intense fear of weight gain
- Prolonged negative mood; thoughts of death
- Frequent outbursts of anger



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Mental Illness Facts:

- Mental illness exists throughout the world, in every culture and country, regardless of custom, race, religion, economic condition, child-rearing practice or political orientation.
- Mental illness is very common. In one year, over 54 million Americans are affected. Of these approximately 2.8 percent of the adult population, approximately five million people suffer from severe mental disorders.
- People who have a mental illness are no more violent than someone suffering from any other serious illness. More often, they are quiet, fearful, withdrawn and often the victims of violence.
- Severe mental illnesses are biological brain diseases and are caused by disrupted brain chemistry. Genetic factors may create a predisposition in some people, and life stressors may trigger the onset of symptoms. These are illnesses, just as diabetes, cancer and epilepsy are illnesses. People with mental illness cannot “snap out” of their condition any more than someone can “snap out” of diabetes.
- Mental illness can happen to anyone; no one is immune. They are equal opportunity diseases, striking families of all walks of life, regardless of age, race, income, religion or education. Even famous people can be affected. Just look at all of the famous people who have had a mental illness: Jim Carey, Brooke Shields, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, Isaac Newton and Ernest Hemingway.
- People with a mental illness do not look different. You can’t tell by looking on the outside, just like you can’t tell a person has diabetes by looking on the outside.
- There is hope for people with a mental illness. There are more treatments, services and community support systems than ever before and more are in the works.
- People with a mental illness can lead active, productive lives.

How to Get Help?

For more information, please contact the Mississippi Department of Mental Health at (601) 359-1288 or your local community mental health center. If you or someone you know is talking, writing or thinking about suicide, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK.

