

General Information about Mental Illness

What does it mean to have a mental illness?

Mental illnesses are health conditions that disrupt a person's thoughts, emotions, relationships, and daily functioning. They are associated with distress and diminished capacity to engage in the ordinary activities of daily life.

Mental illnesses fall along a continuum of severity: some are fairly mild and only interfere with some aspects of life, such as certain phobias. On the other end of the spectrum lie serious mental illnesses, which result in major functional impairment and interference with daily life. These include such disorders as major depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder, and may require that the person receives care in a hospital.

It is important to know that mental illnesses are medical conditions that have nothing to do with a person's character, intelligence, or willpower. Just as diabetes is a disorder of the pancreas, mental illness is a medical condition due to the brain's biology. Similarly to how one would treat diabetes with medication and insulin, mental illness is treatable with a combination of medication and social support. These treatments are highly effective, with 70-90 percent of individuals receiving treatment experiencing a reduction in symptoms and an improved quality of life. With the proper treatment, it is very possible for a person with mental illness to be independent and successful.

Source: The Kim Foundation

How can I find a mental health professional for myself or my child?

Feeling comfortable with the professional you or your child is working with is critical to the success of the treatment. Finding the professional who best fits your needs may require research. Start by searching for providers in the grand forks area at gfcare.com.

Don't be afraid to try out a few places/providers to find one you really connect with, or switch after some time with one. Professionals want you to be comfortable too and may even have a recommendation based on your time with them!

Do I need a referral to see a mental health specialist (i.e. counselor, therapist, psychologist)?

No. You do not need to visit with your primary care provider before seeking mental health help. If a particular provider does require any pre-authorization, they will walk you through that process.

How much does an appointment cost? How do I pay?

Cost of services and treatment vary. Most insurances have benefits that include mental health treatment, including many types of therapy and prescriptions. If you do not have insurance, or your insurance does not provide this type of coverage, ask the agency you want to work with if they have payment plans or sliding fee scales. Payment should never be a barrier to seeking help!

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Do I need to have a mental illness to see a mental health specialist?

No.

Tough days come and go, and circumstances always change. You can visit with a specialist for just about anything! Vent about a tenuous relationship, talk through a conflict at work, or simply have someone you can talk to without fear of judgement. You can go once or have recurring appointments. It is up to you!

What treatment options are available?

Just as there are different types of medications for physical illness, different treatment options are available for individuals with mental illness; these include talk therapies, play therapies, medications, and more. Treatment works differently for different people, so it is important to find what works best for you or your child.

Source: The Kim Foundation

If I feel better after taking medication, does this mean I am "cured" and can stop it?

It is not uncommon for people to stop taking their medication when they feel their symptoms are under control. Others may choose to stop taking their medication because of its side effects, without realizing that most side effects can be effectively managed. While it may seem reasonable to stop taking the medication, the problem is that most often, the symptoms will return. If you or your child is taking medication, it is very important that you work together *with your doctor* before making decisions about any changes in your treatment.

Another problem with stopping medication, particularly for stopping it abruptly, is that you may develop withdrawal symptoms that can be very unpleasant. If you and your doctor feel a trial off your medicine is a good idea, it is necessary to slowly decrease the dosage of medications so that these symptoms don't occur.

It is important that your doctor and pharmacist work together to make sure your medications are working safely and effectively. You should talk with them about how you are doing and if there are side effects that make you unwilling to continue treatment. They will work with you to develop strategies for minimizing these side effects or will create a plan for switching to a different treatment that will be a better fit.

Source: The Kim Foundation

Why don't people talk about mental illnesses like depression, bipolar disorder and suicide?

Stigma and lack of understanding are the main reasons mental illness and suicide remain topics we avoid. People suffering from a mental illness fear others will think they're crazy or weak, or somehow a lesser person. Cultural norms are slowly changing, and people are becoming more aware of the nature of mental illnesses and their impact on a person's wellbeing. Education will help reduce stigma and save lives. Request educational presentations at gfcare.com.

Alcoholism, drug addiction, HIV and AIDS are examples of medical conditions previously attributed to a weakness or character problems. Today, they are widely recognized as medical diseases

and people feel comfortable openly discussing the impact of the disease and seeking help through a variety of treatments. The dangers of alcohol and substance abuse have been the subject of major national public health campaigns in the United States, leading to a general public more aware of the value of prevention. Breast cancer is another medical illness that for many years went unspoken, but today receives millions of dollars in research funding, supportive programming and awareness.

Source: Western Michigan University

What should you do if someone tells you they are thinking about suicide?

If someone tells you they are thinking about suicide, you should take their distress seriously, listen nonjudgmentally, and help them get to a professional for evaluation and treatment. If someone is in imminent danger of harming himself or herself, do not leave the person alone. You may need to take emergency steps to get help, such as calling 911. When someone is in a suicidal crisis, it is important to limit access to firearms or other lethal means of committing suicide.

Source: The National Institute of Mental Health

Have an honest conversation

1. Talk to them in private
2. Listen to their story
3. Tell them you care about them
4. Ask directly if they are thinking about suicide
5. Encourage them to [seek treatment](#) or [contact their doctor or therapist](#)
6. Avoid debating the value of life, minimizing their problems or giving advice

If a person says they are considering suicide

- Take the person seriously
- Stay with them
- Help them remove lethal means
- Call the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255](#)
- Text TALK to [741741](#) to text with a trained crisis counselor from the [Crisis Text Line](#) for free, 24/7
- Escort them to mental health services or an emergency room

Source: American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

****Validation of somebody's concerns and feelings is not *condoning* suicide.**

What will happen if I tell a doctor, police officer, etc. that I am having thoughts of hurting myself or dying?

If you tell an officer that you are having thoughts of harming yourself or suicide, they will call for paramedics to come check on you. The officer will wait with you until medical assistance arrives.

If you tell a doctor or other medical professional, they will ask you questions to assess your immediate safety. If you are in imminent danger, they may ask you to stay under medical supervision to monitor your safety and help you navigate your feelings or the circumstances that are causing you to feel this way. If you are not in imminent danger, they will speak with you about a safety plan and other resources that you can utilize to help you through your crisis. They will also ask if you have somebody you trust to stay with you and keep you safe.

Disclosing thoughts of self-harm or suicide does not automatically mean that you will be put on a "hold" or sent to a psychiatric hospital. Every situation is unique and treated as such.