



Mental health
advocacy, education
and support.

Mental Health Fact Sheet

What is Mental Health?

Mental Health is a state of wellbeing in which a person realizes their own abilities, can cope with typical life stresses, and can work productively and make a contribution to their community. Everyone has mental health; it influences the ways we think, feel, and act as we move through life. It also affects how we handle stress, relate to one another, and make decisions. Mental health has an impact on every aspect of our lives. Mental health includes partaking in productive activity, having fulfilling relationships, the ability to adapt and change, and the ability to deal with adversity.

What is Mental Illness?

Mental illnesses, or mental health conditions, encompass all diagnosable mental disorders characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, behavior, and impaired functioning. Symptoms of mental illness are marked by their pervasiveness and persistence. It is important to always remember that mental illnesses are **common and treatable** and that people living with mental illness can **recover and lead meaningful and successful lives**.

Causes

Mental Illness can be caused by a combination of:

- Biological causes such as genetic predispositions, chemical imbalances in the brain, damage to the central nervous system from a severe head injury.
- Environmental events and stressors like exposure to violence and trauma, stress related to chronic poverty, discrimination, or other serious hardships, and the loss of important people through death, divorce, or broken relationships.

Signs and Symptoms

A variety of signs and symptoms may point out mental health conditions, and it is important to pay attention to any potential warning signs. Each condition has its own set of symptoms but some common signs of mental health conditions in adults and adolescents can include:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or empty mood
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in ordinary activities, including sex
- Decreased energy, a feeling of fatigue or of being “slowed down”
- Difficulty concentrating, easily distracted, trouble with memory and attention
- Difficulty planning or carrying out activities of daily life
- Disorganized speech and thinking, inability to express emotions
- Restlessness, irritability, or anger
- Social withdrawal, isolation
- Trouble understanding or relating to others
- Pounding or racing heart, shortness of breath



Mental health
advocacy, education
and support.

- Intrusive thoughts and memories, obsessive behaviors
- Change in sleeping or eating patterns
- Chronic pain or other persistent bodily symptoms not caused by physical disease
- Thoughts of death or suicide; self-injury or suicide attempts
- Racing thoughts, pressured speech
- Frequent and extreme mood changes
- Increased risk-taking behavior, impulsivity
- Excessively cheerful, high, euphoric mood
- Suspiciousness, paranoia, hypervigilance
- Emotional flatness or lack of expression, apathy, feeling numb
- Difficulty perceiving reality, delusions (false beliefs), hallucinations (false sensations)
- Substance use

Treatment

Evidence-based treatments for mental health conditions include medications, talk therapy, and psychosocial treatments. Recovery for mental illness is not only possible, it is highly probable; mental health treatment is more effective than some common treatments of other physical illnesses.

Recovery in Mental Health

Recovery is defined as the process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential. There are four major dimensions that support a life in recovery.

- Health- making informed healthy choices that support physical and emotional wellbeing.
- Home- having a stable and safe place to live.
- Purpose- having meaningful activities that helps to create a sense of purpose in a person's life.
- Community- relationships and social networks that foster support, friendship, and love.

It is important to remember that while recovery is a person-driven journey drawing from many pathways, receiving support from family and the community, and addressing previously experienced trauma are all principles of recovery. Lastly, one of the fundamental factors in the process of recovery is to remember that **recovery is possible** and **there is hope**.