

Mental Health and Faith Communities

Symptoms of Mental Illness

It is often difficult to tell the difference between what are expected behaviors and what might be the signs of a mental illness. There is no simple test to determine if a person's actions and thoughts might be due to mental illness, typical behaviors of that person, or the result of a trauma or physical illness.

Although each illness has its particular symptoms, common signs of mental illness in adults and adolescents can include the following:

- Excessive worrying or fear
- Feeling excessively sad or low
- Confused thinking or problems concentrating and learning
- Extreme mood changes, including uncontrollable "highs" or feelings of euphoria
- Prolonged or strong feelings of irritability or anger
- Avoiding friends and social activities
- Difficulties understanding or relating to other people
- Changes in sleep habits or feeling tired and low energy
- Changes in eating habits such as increased hunger or lack of appetite
- Changes in sex drive
- Difficulty perceiving reality (delusions or hallucinations, in which a person experiences and senses things that don't exist in objective reality)
- Inability to perceive changes in one's own feelings, behavior or personality ("lack of insight")
- Abuse of substances like alcohol or drugs
- Multiple physical ailments without obvious causes (such as headaches, stomach aches, vague and ongoing "aches and pains")
- Thinking about suicide
- Inability to carry out daily activities or handle daily problems and stress
- An intense fear of weight gain or concern with appearance (mostly in adolescents)

Young Children can also begin to develop mental health conditions. The most obvious symptoms of mental illness in children are behavioral. Atypical behaviors for a child may be important clues. Symptoms in children may include the following:

- Changes in school performance
- Excessive worry or anxiety, for instance fighting to avoid bed or school
- Hyperactive behavior
- Frequent nightmares
- Frequent disobedience or aggression
- Frequent temper tantrums

When to Refer

What indicates the need for a faith community to refer a member or attendee for mental health services? It's about intensity of symptoms.

- Behavioral cues
 - Threat to safety: violence to self or others
 - Person has become non-functional
- Emotional cues
 - Intense expressions of anger, anxiety, sadness
 - Rapid changes of emotion
- Cognitive cues
 - Strange, irrational thoughts
 - Delusions
 - Hallucinations
- Social cues
 - Person is asking for more than the church leaders or members are able to provide
 - Person is constantly berating others for not being/doing what they need

What to do for the Individual

- If threat of harm to individual or others: get to closest ER; call the Crisis Line, 855-274-7471; or call 911 but indicate a mental health crisis
- Connect with family member, physician and/or other community support
- Refer to counseling
- Discover and enlist a care leader and care team to administer the care offerings of the faith community

What to do for the Faith Community

- Educate members about mental wellness, illness, and recovery
- Organize member care processes
- Support congregational care leaders with training and debriefing experiences
- Speak about mental health concerns from the pulpit
- Consider offering your organization's meeting spaces for community conversations and support groups focused on addressing mental health issues

Resources in the Community

Insight Counseling Centers: 615-383-2115 ext. 100

Centerstone Community Mental Health Center: 615-463-6600

Mental Health Cooperative: 615-726-3340 or 615-726-0125

Tennessee Mobile Crisis Services: 855-CRISIS-1 (855-274-7471)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or call 911.

NAMI Helpline: 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)

www.nami.org National Alliance on Mental Illness

www.mentalhealth.gov US Department of Health & Human Services