



Community Champions Initiative

Understanding Mental Illness

The purpose of the following information is to provide a general understanding of what mental illnesses are, and to address some facts associated with these disorders.

What is mental illness?

Mental illnesses are medical conditions that disrupt a person's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others, and daily functioning. Just as diabetes is a disorder of the pancreas, mental illnesses are medical conditions that often result in a diminished capacity for coping with the ordinary demands of life.

Serious mental illnesses include major depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), panic disorder, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and borderline personality disorder.

Mental illnesses can affect persons of any age, race, religion, or income. Mental illnesses are not the result of personal weakness, lack of character, or poor upbringing.

Mental illnesses are treatable. Most people diagnosed with a serious mental illness can experience relief from their symptoms by actively participating in an individual treatment plan.

In addition to medication treatment, psychosocial treatment such as cognitive behavioral therapy, interpersonal therapy, peer support groups, and other community services can also be components of a treatment plan and that assist with recovery.

The good news about mental illness is that recovery is possible.

Some facts about mental illness:

- Mental illnesses are biologically based brain disorders. They cannot be overcome through "will power" and are not related to a person's "character" or intelligence.
- Without treatment the consequences of mental illness for the individual and society are staggering: unnecessary disability, unemployment, substance abuse, homelessness, inappropriate incarceration, suicide and wasted lives; The economic cost of untreated mental illness is more than 100 billion dollars each year in the United States.
- With appropriate effective medication and a wide range of services tailored to their needs, most people who live with serious mental illnesses can significantly reduce the impact of their illness and find a satisfying measure of achievement and independence. A key concept is to develop expertise in developing strategies to manage the illness process.
- Stigma erodes confidence that mental disorders are real, treatable health conditions. We have allowed stigma and a now unwarranted sense of hopelessness to erect attitudinal, structural and financial barriers to effective treatment and recovery. It is time to take these barriers down.



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Discussion Questions:

After reviewing the above information, you should be prepared to accurately answer the following questions.

What is mental illness?

1. Define mental illness.
2. What are some examples of mental illnesses?
3. Who does mental illness affect?
4. Are mental illnesses treatable?
5. How are mental illnesses treated?
6. Is recovery possible?

Some facts about mental illness:

7. Can mental illnesses be overcome by “will power”?
8. What are the consequences of untreated mental illness?
9. Can people suffering from a mental illness live independently?
10. What effect does stigma have on treatment and recovery?