

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL ILLNESS: A GUIDE FOR FAMILIES



Mental illness refers to a wide range of conditions that affect a person's thinking, emotions, and behavior. These disturbances can significantly impact an individual's daily life, relationships, and overall well-being.

COMMON MENTAL ILLNESSES INCLUDE:

- **Neurodevelopmental Disorders:** These typically emerge in childhood and include conditions like autism spectrum disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and learning disorders.
- **Schizophrenia Spectrum and Other Psychotic Disorders:** These cause detachment from reality, characterized by delusions, hallucinations, and disorganized thinking.
- **Bipolar and Related Disorders:** Alternating episodes of mania (excessive activity and excitement) and depression.
- **Depressive Disorders:** Affect emotional well-being, leading to sadness, disrupted functioning and conditions like major depressive disorder.
- **Anxiety Disorders:** Characterized by excessive worrying and avoidance behaviors. Examples include generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder and phobias.
- **Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders:** Involve preoccupations, repetitive thoughts and actions (e.g. obsessive-compulsive disorder).

SUPPORTING LOVED ONES

Be Educated: Understand the illness to provide effective help. Recognize that their thoughts and actions are symptoms, not personal choices.

Open Communication: Keep lines of communication open. Discuss boundaries and respect their need for space.

Participate in Treatment: Be involved in their treatment plan. Ask questions, attend appointments and learn about their condition.

Self-Care: Maintain your own well-being. Seek support networks and consider therapy if needed.

HOW TO TREAT MENTAL ILLNESS

Treatment varies based on the specific diagnosis, severity, and individual needs. Here are some essential points:

1. **Education:** Learn about your loved one's illness. Understand that their thoughts and actions are not under their control. Seek reputable resources and books to gain insights into the condition.

Recommended Books:

- The Complete Family Guide to Schizophrenia: Helping Your Loved One Get the Most Out of Life by Kim T. Mueser and Susan Gingerich
 - Surviving Schizophrenia: A Manual for Families, Patients, and Providers by E. Fuller Torrey
 - Schizophrenia for Dummies by Jerome Levine and Irene S. Levine
2. **Seek Professional Help:** Encourage your loved one to consult mental health professionals. Treatment may involve psychotherapy (talk therapy), medication, or a combination of both.
 3. **Supportive Environment:** Create a compassionate and understanding atmosphere. Avoid blame or criticism. Remember that their behaviors are manifestations of the illness, not intentional actions.

Remember, supporting someone with mental illness requires patience, empathy, and a commitment to their well-being. Together, we can create a more compassionate and informed environment for those affected by mental health conditions.

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