

# Mental Health Awareness





# Talking About Mental Health

Mental health is a varied and complex topic, with different effects on different people. Talking about it can be deeply personal.

As a result, engaging in conversations about mental health is both crucial and can be quite difficult. Begin by focusing on support, speaking constructively and providing whatever help you can — even if that simply means connecting them with someone more experienced.

## STARTING A CONVERSATION

Beginning this conversation can often be the most difficult step. Choose a quiet, comfortable environment where distractions are minimized. Approach the discussion with an open mind, allowing the individual to express their experiences and how this mental health condition affects their life. Above all, be patient. Discussing mental health may be challenging for them.

## HELPFUL PHRASES

Sometimes what we say doesn't reflect the care and concerns we have. Rely on helpful phrases that show you're attempting to reach out, rather than judge. They include: "How can I help?" "You are not alone in this."



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"You are valued." "I'm here to listen." "I appreciate your openness." "That sounds really challenging. How are you managing?"

## BEING CONSTRUCTIVE

Encourage them to seek assistance, help them find resources that could aid in overcoming those challenges and ask about obstacles they may face in accessing this help. Improve your own understanding of mental

health issues and discuss self-care strategies that may be beneficial. Offer support in their pursuit of care and commit to being a reliable source of support over time.

## WHAT TO AVOID

Individuals with mental illness often face insensitive remarks about their experiences. It's important to avoid trivializing their struggle. Joking about mental health can be misconstrued as mockery.

Someone may even laugh in response, but that's often a coping mechanism rather than a reflection of how they feel. Avoid using sarcasm and refrain from displaying hostility. Avoid diagnostic judgments or questioning their medical choices.

## THE ROAD AHEAD

It's important to remember that the decision to pursue therapy or medication is theirs to make. Encouraging

someone to get help is important, but so is discussing things in a supportive and non-judgmental manner. Whatever happens, their actions are not a reflection of you. Many mental health disorders can lead to irrational thinking.

There are many stages to a mental health journey and they may not be prepared to take certain steps or be able to nurture external relationships in the moment.

# Suicide's Warning Signs

Here's how to spot one of the leading causes of death today in the United States.

Some 50,000 Americans die by suicide annually, regularly making this one of the Top 15 leading causes of death in the United States according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. More than a million people attempt suicide each year, with hundreds happening each day. That's why recognizing the warning signs is so important. Together, we can help prevent a tragedy.

## RISK FACTORS

Research has shown that certain factors increase the likelihood that someone will contemplate, attempt or die by suicide. Among them are mental health disorders, particularly mood disorders such as schizophrenia, personality disorders and anxiety disorders. Chances may increase with substance abuse disorders, and for those who feel hopeless or deal with impulsiveness or aggressive behaviors.

Having a history of trauma or abuse can play a role, along with job stress, financial losses and relationship changes. Doctors focus on those with a familial history of suicide, noting that there can be localized clusters of suicide. Be on the lookout for those who lack social support and have feelings of isolation. Risk factors also include inadequate access



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to health care, notably for mental health and substance abuse treatment.

## WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Pay close attention to anyone expressing thoughts about wanting to die or discussing self-harm, those who are seeking means to end their life, such as researching methods

online or purchasing firearms. Other key indicators are voicing feelings of hopelessness or a lack of purpose, mentioning feelings of being trapped in unbearable situations and describing feelings of being a burden to others.

Watch for increased alcohol consumption, anxious or agitated behavior, or engaging in

reckless activities. They may experience disrupted sleep patterns, whether too little or too much, withdraw from social interactions or isolate themselves, display signs of anger or discuss revenge, and show extreme fluctuations in mood.

If you or someone you know displays any of these warning

signs, seek help immediately. The Suicide Prevention Lifeline can be reached at (800) 273-8255 or through the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Call, text or chat with trained counselors who will provide support and connect people with needed resources. Help is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



# What to Look for in a Therapist

Finding the right person to begin your mental wellness journey with can be difficult.

Therapy can be an immensely rewarding journey, and you'll need to establish an open, trusting connection with a new person. Research indicates that the quality of the relationship with a therapist plays a central role in this search for personal growth. Here's how to select a therapist who aligns well with your needs:

## BEGINNING THE SEARCH

If you intend to use your insurance for therapy payments, begin the search by reviewing your insurance plan's network to identify providers who are covered. Familiarize yourself with the number of sessions covered by the plan and understand its mental health coverage policies, including copays and deductibles.

## DISCUSS YOUR OPTIONS

Dig into reputable online databases to learn more about mental health providers in your vicinity. Resources such as the American Psychological Association, the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, and the Association of LGBTQ+ Psychiatrists are excellent starting points. Some organizations focus on specific concerns



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related to your mental health. The National Center for PTSD, the National Eating Disorders Association, and the Anxiety and Depression Association of America can provide valuable guidance in finding suitable providers.

With all that information in hand, seek out recommendations from trusted family members, friends and colleagues. Ask about their

experiences, including how long they've been working with their current therapist and how they compare with others. Just remember that your particular therapeutic needs or objectives may differ from others. What works for them may not necessarily be suitable for you.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

The selection process can

be narrowed by asking potential therapists key questions suggested by the American Psychological Association. They include asking about state licensing, areas of specialization, experience with your issue and successful approaches to its treatment, the therapist's insurance and network affiliations, and individual payment or reimbursement options.

## SETTING GOALS

Before you start therapy, outline your specific goals and the outcomes you wish to achieve. For instance, if you want to explore your options with medications, select a provider who can write prescriptions. Note that your goals may shift as you make progress in therapy. Just be sure to communicate those changes with your therapist.



# Finding Your Resilience

Taking care of your mental health often starts with building inner strength.

Life will inevitably present challenges. Prepare for them by fostering personal resilience through connections with others, staying positive, being physically active and eating well. Here are some achievable strategies to help get you there:

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

Building connections is vital for emotional support, practical assistance and shared perspective. Engage in the world around you by joining a club, enrolling in classes, volunteering or simply by reaching out to old friends and acquaintances. Strengthening these existing relationships requires dedication. Schedule time to nurture these bonds by setting specific dates and activities to get together. Experts say participating in a support group may be beneficial.

## POSITIVE VIBES

Laughter can alleviate pain and anxiety, while positive emotions help lower stress hormones. Cultivating a mindset of optimism can have a positive effect on both your mental and physical health. To maintain a positive outlook, focus on gratitude, identify silver linings in difficult situations, avoid procrastination, visualize a hopeful future — and, above all, steer clear of



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negativity.

## STAY ACTIVE

Regular exercise benefits physical health while boosting your mood through the reduction of stress and anxiety. The American Heart Association recommends taking part in moderate aerobic activity for at least 30 minutes five days a week, with strength training

on the two additional days.

## HELPING OTHERS

Research shows that frequent helping behaviors lead to lower levels of depression and enhanced overall well-being. Acts of kindness can range from volunteering for nonprofits to lending a hand to a friend, or simply smiling at a stranger. Look around for

volunteer opportunities that align with your interests and values, and you'll be investing in good mental health, too.

## SLEEP AND EAT WELL

An element of our everyday lives has a huge effect on our mental health: Insufficient sleep can lead to increased anxiety, heightened risk of depression and impaired

memory. Establish a consistent bedtime routine, reduce your caffeine intake (especially close to bedtime) and give yourself plenty of time to unwind before sleeping. Maintaining a nutritious diet also enhances energy levels, supports a good mood and mitigates stress. Plan meals thoughtfully, eat healthy snacks and steer clear of excessive dieting.



# Avoiding Compassion Fatigue

If your first instinct is to help, you might find yourself feeling burned out these days.

It's been a very challenging era, with political turmoil, natural disasters, international conflict, a global pandemic and mass shootings. That's to say nothing of the stress and emotional toll that can sometimes surround our personal lives. Helping others through it all is rewarding work, but these kind efforts can take a toll over time. Here's how to avoid compassion fatigue:

## UNDERSTANDING BURNOUT

Burnout can be a component of compassion fatigue, but the American Psychological Association notes that these are two distinct experiences. Many healthcare and frontline workers may find that their compassion fatigue is misidentified as burnout, but the reality is more nuanced. Those with compassion fatigue are not merely tired but are also grappling with the effect of traumatic events on top of their own challenges. Compassion fatigue is closely associated with secondary traumatic stress. These conditions predominantly affect professionals in caregiving roles, including healthcare providers, first responders, mental health practitioners, legal professionals and service workers.



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## RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS

At its most severe, compassion fatigue can significantly impair both your job performance and your ability to engage in daily activities. Key symptoms include mood fluctuations, including negativity and cynicism, and feelings of anxiety or depression, irritability and quickness to anger. Look for feelings of social

detachment and withdrawal from relationships, increased likelihood of self-medication or addiction and difficulty concentrating or retaining information. You may suffer from sleep disturbances or persistent fatigue, changes in appetite and digestive issues and frequent headaches.

## START A CONVERSATION

Compassion fatigue can be

profound and may disrupt your daily and professional lives. If you find that your symptoms are becoming serious, consult a physician. They might refer you to a psychologist or psychiatrist who specializes in trauma. Treatment options will vary based on individual circumstances, but effective strategies often include improved self-care practices such as prioritizing nutrition,

sleep, hydration, relaxation and exercise. Next, start a wider conversation by sharing your experiences with supervisors and colleagues. You may not be alone in these feelings. Your organization might be able to implement changes to help with your workload. Fostering a sense of community is vital for healing and helps lower the risk of another bout of compassion fatigue.

# Here's to Your Telehealth

Changes forged during the pandemic era have transformed our approach to healthcare.

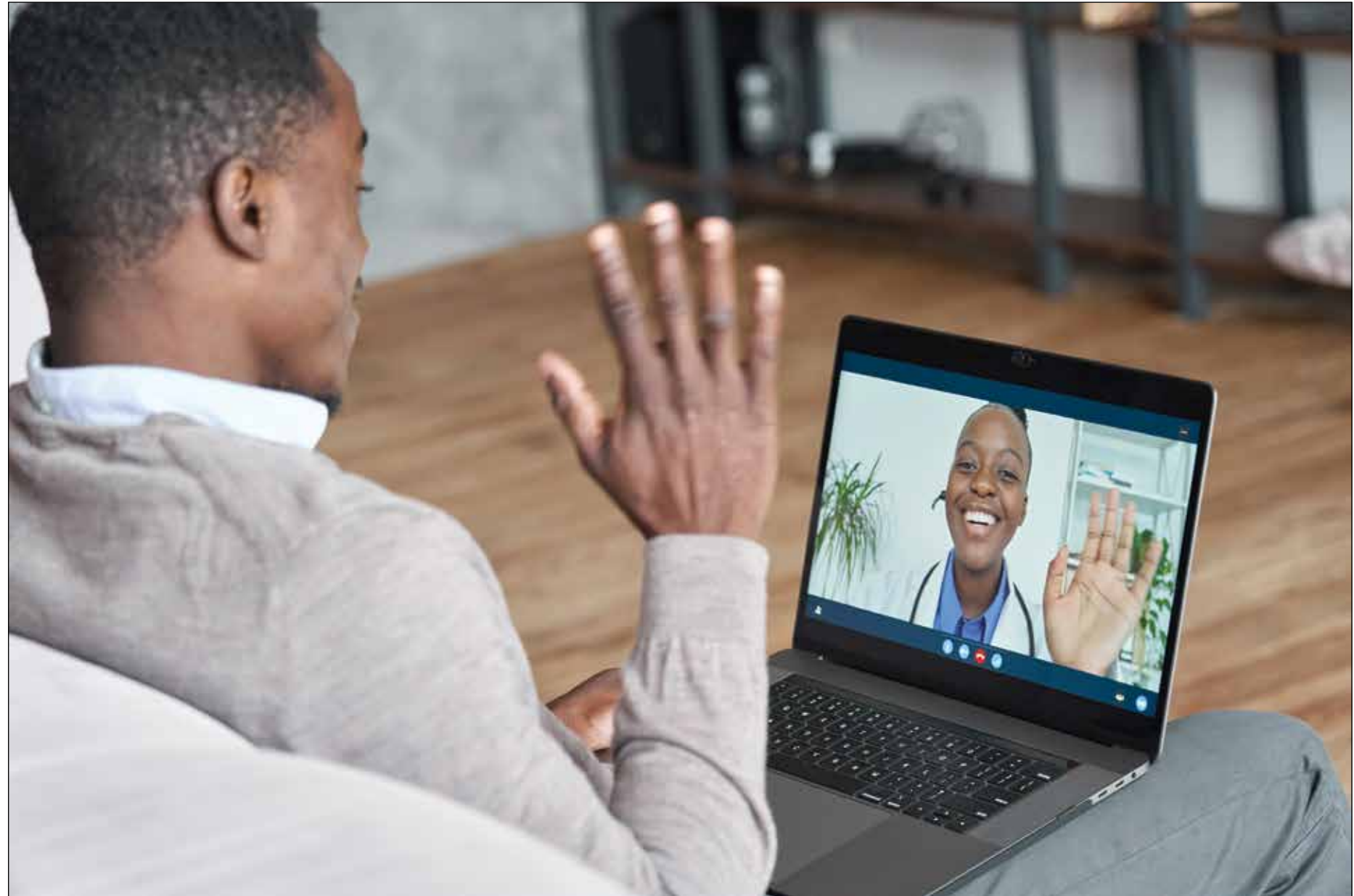
There was a rapid expansion of telehealth and telemedicine services during the worst of the COVID-19 crisis. Patients who were quarantined away from their doctors began conducting medical visits via chat, video calls or audio. Soon, the federal government and insurance providers began rapidly expanding telehealth programs.

## HOW TELEMEDICINE STARTED

Online conversations conducted through secure software on computers, tablets and smartphones were initially scheduled simply to decrease the risk of exposure to illness for both parties. But telehealth had other, longer-lasting benefits that transcended the pandemic: Online visits minimized time away from work, eased the scheduling process and lowered transportation expenses. Most crucially, telehealth allowed people in underserved areas to get the treatment they needed from a doctor — even if they were very far away.

## MEDICAL HEALTH NEEDS

More recently, telemedicine has helped to save lives in a



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new way by providing access to mental health professionals for millions of Americans. This growth has been as impressive as it has been needed: One recent study found that more than half of all U.S. counties didn't have a practicing psychiatrist. As with visits with general practitioners, these therapy sessions can be held as needed, even during a lunch break from a worker's vehicle. There's unmatched convenience in

scheduling appointments without the need for travel and or long periods spent in the waiting room.

## INSIDE THE NUMBERS

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports huge increases in telemedicine — with simultaneous upticks in services provided and patient satisfaction. Medical specialists like therapists have more recently outpaced primary care physicians and

surgical specialists in moving to telemedicine. But the responses were uniform about the quality of care: Some 77 percent of primary care physicians and 73 percent of medical specialists said telemedicine addressed patient needs as well as their in-person visits.

## IN-PERSON VISITS

Telehealth represents a big advancement in medical treatment, but it may not be

suitable for every scenario. Situations involving family crises, suicidal ideation or suspected abuse typically require in-person consultations. Some therapeutic techniques may not adapt as well to virtual environments. Some patients simply prefer in-person sessions. But even then, this new and improving technology can be used to conduct quick follow-up sessions or for initial discussions when a pressing matter arises.



# Recognizing Mental Illness

Mental illness often manifests in our youth, so it's important to be aware of the signs.

Issues with mental health most often emerge when we're young. In fact, the American Psychiatric Association reports that half of all mental disorders begin by age 14. Experts say 75% of all disorders have begun by age 24.

Severe disorders are typically preceded by less severe issues that often aren't brought to the attention of doctors, according to the National Institutes of Health. Some anxiety issues, including phobias and separation anxiety disorder, also arrive early with a median age range of 7-14.

So, recognizing the earliest warning signs is critical so that there can be timely intervention for young people. Unfortunately, specific symptoms may emerge in developmental stages when they are still acquiring language and communication skills. This limitation can make expressing feelings and thoughts challenging so pay close attention to behavioral changes as potential warning signs.

Look for significant mood fluctuations, including irritability, euphoria and anger. There may also be changes in sleep patterns or appetite, withdrawal from social interactions and decreased

performance in academic, professional, or social contexts. Be on the lookout for difficulties with concentration, memory and thinking, as well. Having one or two symptoms may be typical or even simply temporary but dealing with several should be cause for concern.

If you see the signs, see a doctor right away

— particularly if there are thoughts of self-harm or harming others. Prompt treatment can reduce the severity of an illness or potentially delay its onset. Research shows that early intervention leads to better outcomes, preventing hospitalization and easing symptoms.

Begin with an evaluation from a qualified mental health

or healthcare professional, rather than relying on online resources for diagnosis. They'll begin by assessing the severity of these symptoms. If they have begun to interfere with daily functioning, doctors will immediately craft a personalized treatment plan.

Supportive counselors and behavioral therapists can discuss coping strategies and

assist in managing the stressors in our daily life. Depending on the specific condition, further monitoring may be required to determine whether other care is necessary. Disorders manifest themselves differently from patient to patient, and that underscores the need for professional assessment and treatment.



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