Is someone you care about suffering in silence?

Help destigmatize mental health and connect people to the care they may need.

Close to one billion people globally live with mental health disorders.[1] And few people receive help. The stigma associated with mental health conditions causes many people to stay quiet about what they're really experiencing — and not seek treatment. They might perceive themselves to be "weak," feel ashamed, or tell themselves it's "just a phase" that'll pass if they push through. They might worry about being treated differently or losing their jobs. Or, they just might not know where to begin finding help.

This is all to say that someone you know may be suffering in silence. You can help destigmatize mental illness, and encourage the people you care about to feel comfortable getting care.

Learn the signs

While different mental health conditions have different symptoms, with variances depending on the person, early warning signs include behavior changes over time that last for two or more weeks. For example, a previously energetic, reliable colleague now consistently seems fatigued, shows up late and looks disheveled. They also seem angry, irritable and prone to outbursts.

Some common signs of mental illness include:

1. Excessive worrying or fear
2. Persistent sadness, hopelessness or "empty" feeling

3. Lack of concentration
4. Extreme mood changes, including irritability or anger
5. Changes in eating habits, energy level or sleeping patterns
6. Delusions and/or hallucinations
7. Increased use of alcohol or other substances
8. Persistent physical aches and pains
9. Suicidal thoughts
10. Lack of interest in activities
11. Inability to carry out daily activities or handle daily problems and stress
12. Intense fear of weight gain or concern with appearance

Reach out

If someone you know is showing warning signs and needs help coping with a situational or chronic mental health condition, reaching out can make a difference. Consider using the method like "NOTICE. TALK. ACT.™" from American the Psychiatric Association.[3]

If you notice a person is exhibiting the warning signs, and these signs last for two or more weeks, find a quiet place to ask, "Are you OK?" Compassionately and nonjudgmentally provide a few examples of what's worrying you. Do not assume you know what is going on. Listen with the aim to learn more from their perspective. Remind them that we all have challenging times in life, and getting extra support and guidance can help us get through those times. Recommend they consider consulting with a behavioral health care professional, and offer to help them connect with support and care. Then, check back in with the person in a day or two to see how things are going.

Please note: If you are worried about the person's immediate safety, do not leave the person alone. Seek emergency assistance.

Be an ally

You also can help create a supportive environment, increase awareness and reduce stigma for those who may be living with a mental illness. For example, commit to using respectful and compassionate language to describe or talk about mental illnesses. Using derogatory terms perpetuates discrimination and stigma. It also dehumanizes the people living with mental health conditions, dismisses their experiences, and can discourage them from asking for support.

In addition, intervene if you overhear others using verbally abusive language, and challenge misconceptions when you see or hear them.

You can make a difference.

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Answers to 4 common questions about mental health

1. Why is mental health important?

Mental and physical well-being are equally important to our overall health and wellness. It is important to take care of our mental health because experiencing problems in this area can affect all areas of our lives, including our physical health, relationships, career and finances. For instance, research shows that mental illness can contribute to stroke, heart disease, and Type 2 diabetes.

Achieving and maintaining positive mental health and wellness helps us to reach our potential in our personal and professional lives, cope with the stresses of life, build lasting relationships and contribute to the overall wellness of our communities.

2. Are mental illnesses medical conditions?

Yes, mental illnesses are medical conditions. They are a product of the interaction of biological, psychological and social factors. They do not represent a lack of willpower, a character flaw or a phase. Just as with other illnesses, the right care plan and treatment can help people recover from and/or manage mental health conditions.

Our mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being, and impacts how we think, feel and act. If experiencing mental health conditions, our thoughts, moods and behaviors can all be affected.

Depending on the severity, mental health conditions can significantly interfere or limit our ability to function in our daily lives and in our ability to be productive, maintain healthy relationships, cope with stress and make decisions.

3. How long does a mental illness last?

Mental health conditions can be situational or chronic.

Situational conditions can occur during a time of uncertainty, crisis or in response to a specific stressful, traumatic or life-altering event, such as the loss of a job, death of a loved one, divorce, etc. Situational mental health conditions usually develop within three months of the event.

A chronic, also sometimes called "clinical," disorder persists for three months or more. Some people live with chronic mental illness throughout their lives. Also, an untreated situational mental health condition can become chronic mental illness.

A complete evaluation conducted by a qualified mental health care provider is important, as many different conditions can display similar signs or symptoms. Similarly, it is important to receive a full medical evaluation by a health care provider to ensure that the symptoms are not related to a medical condition.

4. Who lives with mental illnesses?

Some risk factors for developing a mental illness may include:

- A previous mental illness or a history of one in a blood relative
- Stressful or life-altering events
- A chronic medical condition, such as diabetes
- Traumatic experiences, like racism, assault or military combat
- Childhood abuse or neglect

Sources:

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Learn how virtual visits are connecting more people to the care they need

It's well documented — including in this newsletter — how common mental health conditions are (close to 1 billion people globally live with mental health disorders)[1] and yet how few people receive treatment (less than half in the U.S.[2], for example, and more than 75% in middle- and low-income nations[3]).

The rapidly expanding availability of virtual visits is making it easier and more convenient for more people access mental health care. That's especially good news for people who:

- Live in an area with a shortage of mental health providers
- Live in an area with limited culturally competent care resources
- Lack the time or flexibility to travel to and from an appointment
- Feel uncomfortable going in person

In real terms, teletherapy offers many benefits.

From a personal perspective, scheduling may be more flexible, so you can choose times that work best for you. You don't have to travel to an office or spend time in a waiting room. You can use your own device from wherever you feel most comfortable. You may find it easier to talk with a therapist over a screen than face to face. Plus, it often costs less than in-person care.[4]

From a clinical point of view, virtual mental health sessions have been shown to be as effective as face to face visits for many conditions, and carry high patient satisfaction rates.[4]

So, if you or someone you care about has been putting off getting treatment for a mental health concern, consider trying an online visit with a licensed clinician.

Ready to give it a try? Here are some tips to get started:

- To find a therapist, check your insurance website for a list of network providers. If you plan to pay directly, consider asking a trusted friend or health care provider for a referral, or look online for referral sites for licensed professionals.
- You may need to use a certain internet browser or download an app for your appointment. Prepare the device and any accessories (like headphones or a mic) you plan to use.
- Choose a location that offers privacy and has a good internet connection for your virtual visit. Also, think about what you want to discuss. It may help to make notes that you can use during your session.
- Sign in to your appointment a few minutes early. At its best, video conferencing is easy to use and works great, but glitches can happen. Also, if the video doesn't work, you may be able to continue the appointment with a phone call.
- Be patient with yourself and the process. If you have one or two sessions with a therapist and don't find them helpful, don't give up on counseling. Try again with another therapist who may be a better fit for you.

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This program should not be used for emergency or urgent care needs. In an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. This program is not a substitute for a doctor's or professional's care. Due to the potential for a conflict of interest, legal consultation will not be provided on issues that may involve legal action against Optum or its affiliates, or any entity through which the caller is receiving these services directly or indirectly (e.g., employer or health plan). This program and its components may not be available in all states or for all group sizes and is subject to change. Coverage exclusions and limitations may apply.