

MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

EXAMPLES OF SPECIFIC MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

There are many types of mental health challenges. Here is a list of some: anxiety, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder. Some mental health challenges can lead people to do things that hurt their bodies, such as **cutting** or eating disorders like anorexia or bulimia.

Only a **mental health professional** can say if someone has a mental illness. Everyone has good days and bad days. Just because someone has a bad day does not mean he or she have a mental illness.

If you think someone you know is going through a mental health challenge, it's important to speak up. Talk to a **trusted adult**. This is the first step to helping someone get better. If you think you're going through a mental health challenge, it's important to ask for help so you don't have to be scared. Remember - you can get better.

ADHD (ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER)

ADHD is pretty common and can make it hard to focus and sit still. ADHD makes it hard to finish things, and makes thoughts jump around. Kids who have ADHD can learn to control their thoughts and bodies by figuring out what helps them focus, or by talking to a doctor or mental health professional. Some kids with ADHD do better in school if they can do their work in a quiet room. Sometimes medicine can help too. Even though having ADHD can make some things harder, people who have ADHD are just as smart as other people. They can still do well in school and in life.

ANXIETY (PANIC DISORDER)

Have you ever been really nervous? Maybe from a test, a speech, or a big game? When you're nervous, your heart starts pounding, you breathe fast, or your stomach might feel funny. Feeling anxious and nervous is common. But a person diagnosed with an anxiety disorder will have these feelings suddenly and often. These strong, sudden feelings of stress or fear are called "panic attacks." A panic attack can make your chest or stomach hurt, your heart speed up, make you feel afraid, dizzy, or feel like you can't breathe. Even kids can have panic attacks. People who have panic attacks sometimes feel scared to go places because they're afraid of having an attack. Their daily life can be scary, but they can get help, get better and be okay.

Adapted from the Walk in Our Shoes initiative



Funded by counties through the voter-approved Mental Health Services Act (Prop. 63).

DEPRESSION

Depression is a mental health challenge that makes people feel very sad all the time. It can change how you think, feel, and act. It can even make your body feel sick too. A person diagnosed with depression can feel so sad that it makes it hard to think clearly. Someone diagnosed with depression might feel very sad every day, or feel that nobody loves them. They might not want to do things they used to think were fun. People diagnosed with depression may not know why they feel so sad. Even if you have a good life, you can struggle with depression. It is good to have family and close friends to talk to and help when things are bad, and talking to a mental health professional about these strong feelings can help. Depression can be very hard, but people with depression can get better too, and learn how to enjoy life.

BIPOLAR DISORDER

Everybody has feelings that change. When something good happens, you feel happy. If something bad happens, you feel sad. Bi-polar disorder changes the way people feel emotions. If people have bipolar disorder, their emotions can go from happy to sad very quickly. They can be very cheerful one moment, and very angry, sad and tired the next moment. When people with bi-polar disorder experience intense feelings of happiness it is called “mania.” They can’t think clearly or sleep well, and they might do things without thinking about them first. When people with bipolar disorder feel intense sadness and tiredness, it’s called “depression.” Having bi-polar disorder can be very tiring and stressful. Medication can help. Talking to a mental health professional, friends and family can also help someone with bi-polar disorder learn how to manage feelings and live a healthy life.

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER (PTSD)

Sometimes if you see or live through something very scary, you can keep feeling afraid even after the scary part is over. It is normal to feel afraid sometimes, but people with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) feel scared even if they are safe and there is nothing to be afraid of. Kids with PTSD might have very bad dreams that seem real, or think something bad is going to happen again. Even when they are safe, the feelings of fear are very real. Talking to a mental health professional or friends and family can help. It takes time and hard work, but kids who are diagnosed with PTSD can learn ways to handle their fears and can live healthy, happy lives.

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EATING DISORDER

An eating disorder exists when a person's thoughts and behaviors are focused too much on food and body weight. The person may worry about being "too fat." The person may have a big fear of becoming obese. Yet, the person's weight may be quite healthy. Three of the most common types of eating disorders are anorexia, bulimia, and extreme overeating.

- Anorexia refers to weight loss that occurs from not eating.
- Bulimia refers to eating large amounts of food over a short period of time followed by an attempt to get rid of the food. This getting rid of food is called "purging."
- Extreme overeating is marked by eating, and eating, and eating and then having feelings of guilt and shame.

The important thing to remember is that having an eating disorder is about more than body weight and food. Behind the problem we see is something bigger – a person's sense of self-esteem, relationships, feelings, and how the person handles the stresses of life. A medical doctor, a mental health professional and a nutritionist are important helpers for this type of problem.

SCHIZOPHRENIA

Schizophrenia makes it hard for people to know what is real and what is not real. Schizophrenia can make the brain think it sees or hears things that aren't really there. A person diagnosed with schizophrenia can also start to think that people are trying to control them or read their minds. Even though the things they see, hear, believe or feel might not be true, their brains think they are real and true, and that can be very scary. Having schizophrenia does not mean a person is violent or bad. Usually people do not get this illness until their late teens or early adulthood, and there are ways to make their lives better, like **therapy** and medication.

GLOSSARY

Cutting: Cutting is an example of self-harm, or hurting your body on purpose. Someone who cuts in generally in a lot of emotional pain and uses cutting to feel better. Cutting does not solve the cause of emotional pain and any relief it might bring is only temporary.

Mental health professional: A mental health professional is trained to help people improve how they think, feel, and act. Mental health professionals help people solve problems that cause anxious, sad, and angry feelings.

Trusted adult: A trusted adult is someone who will listen to your troubles and help you figure out what to do next. Trusted adults could be parents, guardians, grandparents, older siblings, aunts, uncles, teachers, coaches, school counselors, school nurses, parents of friends, religious leaders, mental health professionals, and medical doctors.

Therapy: Therapy is the problem-solving process that happens when someone meets with a mental health professional. Counseling is another word for therapy.