

Coping with a Diagnosis

When someone is diagnosed with a mental illness, he may experience feelings similar to those when grieving the unexpected loss of a loved one. Depending on the severity of the illness, some people have likened their initial shock to being thrown against a wall or receiving a severe blow to the head. Anger, denial, fear, sadness, nervousness, and helplessness are other common reactions. Grief is normal, and is usually most intense when first diagnosed.

The severity of the illness will affect the way in which people cope with their diagnosis. For some, the chances for full recovery are very positive. For others, the condition may be more severe and/or chronic.

Each person's way of coping with a diagnosis is unique. What is important is how people choose to define their mental illness and the place they give it in their lives.

Growing research on stress, coping, and illness has shown that negative thoughts and expectations add to the progression of illness, stifle people's efforts to cope, and block social support and recovery.

Conversely, hope is increasingly being recognized as a helpful ingredient in benefiting the recovery process.

Some experts suggest that the process of recovery includes learning to accept the illness, developing an appropriate sense of control and responsibility, and creating an adequate identity and new purposes in life.

Helping Yourself

If you have a mental illness, try to accept the illness and learn all you can about it. Take responsibility for developing coping skills. Recognize that there is no correct way to recovery, that everyone has unique ways of self-healing that work for them. It is important to use your assets, and use and reuse what works.

Books, written materials, groups, therapy, and organizations are some of the available resources from which you can learn. In addition, an emphasis on wellness, instead of focusing on the illness, adds to the ability to manage your life.

Helping Someone Else

If you know someone suffering from a mental illness, there are many ways you can help and inspire hope in the person you care about.

Begin by believing in the person's potential and strength. Value the person as a unique human being and accept the person for who he/she is. Express a genuine concern for the person's well-being. Help the person connect to people who are at more advanced stages of recovery who can be positive role models. Be available when the person needs help. Remind the person of previous achievements and positive experiences. Most importantly, believe in the person's capacity to heal.

For more information contact

Northern Lakes Community Mental Health
1-800-492-5742
(231) 922-4850

National Alliance on Mental Illness
www.nami.org
(800) 950-6264

National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov
(800) 421-4211 (depression info)
(888) 826-9438 (anxiety info)
(301) 443-4513 (other info)

Mental Health America
www.nmha.org
(800) 969-6642

The Center for Mental Health Services
www.mentalhealth.org/cmhs/

Serving people in Crawford, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Missaukee, Roscommon and Wexford Counties.

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