

DO I NEED HELP?

Recognizing The Early Warning Signs of Mental Health Disorders

Most mental health disorders have a set of symptoms or signs that can help an individual and their family identify whether support is needed. In fact, in many cases, the individual themselves - along with family, friends, teachers, and co-workers - notice that something is not quite right. Therefore, it is critical that everyone be aware of the specific symptoms and understand what steps to take should they notice a change in behavior or actions.

Becoming Aware of the Symptoms is the First Step

Below is a list of general changes or symptoms to be aware of. Please note, if you or anyone you know are suffering from suicidal thoughts/attempts or violent/homicidal thoughts, immediate medical attention is REQUIRED.

- Social withdrawal and loss of interest in others
- Unusual drop in functioning, especially at school or work
- Problems with concentration, memory, logical thought and speech
- Heightened sensitivity to sights, sounds, smells or touch; avoidance of over-stimulating situations
- Loss of initiative or desire to participate in activities, apathetic towards surroundings
- Unusual or exaggerated beliefs about personal powers, influence or hidden 'meanings'
- Fear or suspicion, paranoia, increased feeling of nervousness
- Uncharacteristic, peculiar behavior
- Dramatic sleep and appetite changes or deterioration of personal hygiene
- Rapid or dramatic emotional shifts, "mood swings"

Identifying When Treatment Should Begin

It is always best to begin treatment as soon as possible. Even in cases where an individual does not have a clinical diagnosis, early intervention can lead to improved outcomes and better symptom management.

Specific early intervention steps include:

- Diagnostic evaluation by a trained professional.
- Education about mental health disorders and symptoms to watch for
- Counseling to learn strategies for stress management
- Close monitoring for conditions requiring swift or intensive care

How to Ensure Success

There are many components to successfully identifying a mental health illness and involving family members can be a part of that process. In addition to supporting the individual during the treatment process, ongoing family involvement can help an individual understand the importance, and in some cases, necessity of treatment. Of course, each situation must be assessed carefully as there are cases where family involvement does not help. Treatment should be individualized and may involve therapy, medication or both. Ongoing, open communication with your mental health professional is critical.

Please keep in mind, shame, fear, denial, and other factors often prevent individuals and/or their families from seeking help. Mental illness is a real condition and is not caused by someone's specific actions. Help is available.