

Mental Health Diagnoses Overview

Anxiety

Anxiety is feeling worried or tense about something about to happen or something we think might happen. It is a natural response to feeling threatened or in danger. Most people feel anxious at some time in their lives, but living with an Anxiety Disorder means a person's anxiety gets out of control and affects how they live their life. The fight or flight response gets stuck in the 'On' position.

People with anxiety disorders often go out of their way to avoid situations or things which trigger their anxiety. Their feelings of anxiety are greater than a person without anxiety disorder in the same situation.

Healthy anxiety	Problem anxiety
Lasts only a short time	Lasts for months or years
Happens in a stressful situation	Not always linked to a stressful situation
Feel anxious occasionally	Feel anxious often
Doesn't affect daily life	Disrupts normal daily activity
Worried about things that could cause problems	Worried about things that aren't likely to cause problems

What this looks like:

- Racing heart or chest pain
- Trouble breathing
- Feeling dizzy or shaky
- Difficulty thinking clearly or concentrating
- A churning or upset feeling in the stomach
- Feeling restless or unable to sit still
- Headaches, backaches, other aches and pains
- Sleep problems
- Clenching or grinding their teeth, especially at night
- Having a sense of dread, fearing the worst in a situation
- Believing that others are looking at you, talking about you, or judging you

- Difficulty caring for yourself
- Difficulty getting and keeping a job
- Difficulty maintaining healthy relationships
- Difficulty enjoying life and leisure activities

Things you can do to support an individual struggling with anxiety:

- Don't pressure them to do more than they are comfortable doing or willing to try.
- Stay calm and help them co-regulate.
- Don't try to rationalize away their anxiety.
- Learn about anxiety.
- Ask about their experience and how you can support them.
- Be kind and non-judgmental.
- Be supportive as they seek help.
- Be aware of your own boundaries and don't take on more than you can handle.

PTSD

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that can occur following the experience or witnessing of a traumatic event. A traumatic event is a life-threatening event such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, or physical or sexual assault in adult or childhood. PTSD in childhood can occur from bullying, emotional abuse or neglect, witnessing something traumatic-even something seen on TV or a movie.

PTSD is a biological response to a fragmented trauma trigger. The Amygdala responds to the trauma trigger in a way that would have been appropriate for the original trauma event.

Symptoms:

- Feeling on edge or on high alert
- Sleep disturbances
- Experiencing Flashbacks
- Becoming easily upset or angry
- Difficulty concentrating
- Avoiding feelings or memories
- Difficult beliefs or feelings
 - No one understands
 - Blaming self for what happened
 - Feeling like there's nowhere safe or can't trust anyone

What this looks like:

Difficulty with:

- Getting and keeping a job
- Taking care of one's self and one's family
- Maintaining relationships
- Remembering things and making decisions

Things you can do to support an individual struggling with PTSD:

- Listen; without pressure or judgment.
- Allow them to tell their story at their own pace.
- Don't "Silverline" what they are sharing. "It could have been worse."
- Learn their triggers.
- Help them make a plan with you for the difficult times and what to do.
- Respect their personal space.

Depression

Depression is a mental health problem which involves experiencing a low mood and/or losing interest/enjoyment in life. It can also change behaviors and feelings in an individual's daily life. Symptoms of depression may be short term, last for weeks or months at a time, or come and go throughout a person's lifespan.

An individual struggling with depression can also have other symptoms, such as having no energy, being irritable, or having problems with sleep. Depression may interfere with their ability to work, study, or look after themselves and their family. In severe cases, it may lead to thinking about or attempting suicide.

Depression tends to run in families and is often seen connected to emotional abuse and neglect. Depression and anxiety are often associated together. The depression response can be considered as dose dependent; the higher the ACE score, the higher the chance for chronic depression and the worse the symptoms may be. With the right treatment, many individuals with depression can recover and live a full, satisfying life.

Symptoms:

- Down, upset, tearful
- Restless, irritable
- Guilty, worthless
- Empty, numb
- Isolating
- Hopeless
- No self-confidence
- Tired all the time

What this looks like:

- Avoiding social events, or canceling at the last minute
- Forgetting things
- Increased use of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- No appetite and losing weight or increased appetite and gaining weight
- Physical aches and pains without physical cause
- Physical movement that is either sped up or slowed down
- Self-harm or suicidal ideation talk

Things you can do to support an individual struggling with depression:

- Support them in getting help.
- Be open about depression.
- Be willing to listen, without finding solutions, offering fixes, or with judgment.
- Keep in touch, routinely check in.
- Talk to them; about things, life, etc.
- Keep doing the things that you've always done together.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition. As a spectrum disorder, there is a wide range of deficits and abilities as well as capabilities for independent living. ASD affects the way a person interacts and communicates.

It is diagnosed about 4 times more often in males than females. It is speculated that there are many females who are not diagnosed with ASD because their symptoms and behaviors look different than the typical symptoms displayed by males. Asperger's is now classified under the ASD umbrella and the term asperger's is no longer used.

Symptoms:

- Interacting differently with others
- Avoidant eye contact
- Either sensory seeking or avoiding behaviors
- Stimming - repetitive movements used for self-regulation
- Discomfort with changes in routines
- Difficulty in conversations; joining and not monopolizing
- Socially awkward
- Trouble forming, making, and maintaining relationships
- Food issues; aversions and preoccupation

What this looks like:

- Having difficulty understanding what others are feeling or thinking
- Extreme anxiety in social situations
- Trouble making friends or preferring to spend time alone
- Coming off as rude, blunt or not interested in others but not meaning to
- Difficulty expressing feelings
- Need for a consistent routine and feeling anxious if it changes
- Avoiding eye contact
- Problems with appropriate space, such as getting too close to other people

Things you can do to support a person on the Autism Spectrum:

- Understand that the person with ASD is intelligent, but learns in a different way.
- Individuals with ASD tend to be concrete thinkers, so avoid using figures of speech that may confuse them.
- Allow them to do for themselves, even when it looks different.
- Remind yourself that there is always more than one way to complete a task.
- Really listen to them.

ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a mental health condition where there are differences in parts of the brain that control an individual's ability to plan, organize, and focus. Symptoms start in childhood and continue throughout adulthood, however, symptoms are sometimes missed in childhood only to be discovered in adulthood. ADHD causes executive dysfunctions in the brain. Having ADHD can make family life, studying, work and friendships/relationships challenging. Many individuals with ADHD may attempt to regulate their symptoms by self medicating with alcohol or drugs. This could lead to a substance abuse disorder.

There is evidence to indicate that some individuals who have been diagnosed with ADHD are actually struggling with the effects of trauma rather than ADHD.

There are 4 types of ADHD:

- Inattentive
- Hyperactive-Impulsive
- Combined; showing both inattentive and hyperactive
- Unspecified

Symptoms:

- Inability to focus on tasks
- Disorganization
- Unreliable work habits
- Forgetting things/easily distracted
- Poor time management
- Unable to sit still and concentrate
- Sleep problems
- Appearing agitated or nervous
- Starting things and not finishing them
- Not considering the consequences of their actions
- Have problems with money
- Changing jobs frequently
- Drug or alcohol use
- Having a hot temper

What this looks like:

- Poor self-esteem
- Eating disorders
- Risky behaviors
- Substance/alcohol abuse
- Trouble maintaining relationships
- Job instability
- Frequent driving accidents and injuries

Things you can do to support an individual with ADHD:

- Focus on strengths instead of challenges.
- Be patient and supportive.
- Be encouraging.
- Encourage them with their treatment.
- Listen empathetically; without judgment.
- Support them as they create routines.

Psychosis

The term **psychosis** is part of the description for the next several diagnoses. Psychosis is defined as a severe mental disorder in which a person loses the ability to recognize reality or relate to others.

Symptoms of Psychosis

- Hear, see, or taste things others don't
- Hang on to unusual beliefs or thoughts, no matter what others say
- Pull away from family and friends
- Stop taking care of themselves
- Unable to think clearly or pay attention

Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar Disorder is a mental illness that causes unusual shifts in the person's mood, energy, activity levels, and concentration. Someone with Bipolar Disorder can experience different mood episodes, such as:

- **Manic or hypomanic episodes** which means feeling high or euphoric
- **Depressive episodes** which means feeling low
- **Potentially some psychotic episodes** during either manic or depressive episodes

Much of what we think we know about Bipolar Disorder, previously known as Manic-Depressive disorder, is not fully correct.

Bi means two while polar means opposite. This refers to how the mood of a person can shift between two very different states. These shifts can potentially occur as quickly as every few hours but often individuals with Bipolar Disorder can live in a state of stability for months at a time.

The causes of Bipolar Disorder are still uncertain, but research suggests that childhood trauma, brain chemistry, stressful life events, and a family history of mental illnesses may all be contributing factors. Bipolar is often seen in those who have experienced the loss of a parent or sexual or physical abuse in childhood. Substance abuse has also been determined to be a risk factor for developing Bipolar Disorder.

Symptoms:

There are several different types of Bipolar Disorders, but we will talk about general symptoms that most individuals with the diagnosis may experience.

- Extreme mood swings that include extreme highs (mania) and lows (depressive)
- Mania episodes
 - Feelings of euphoria
 - Exaggerated feelings of well being
 - Increased energy
- Depressive episodes
 - Fatigue, loss of energy
 - Deep depression
 - Possible suicidal ideations

What this looks like:

- Mania phase:
 - Risk taking behavior; unsafe practices
 - Very excitable and unable to reign it in
 - Rapid speech
 - Hyper focused on things, completing big projects quickly or,
 - Easily distracted and difficulty staying on task
 - Needing less sleep than normal, or staying awake for many hours
 - Irritable/edgy
 - Increased sexual energy
- Depressive phase:
 - Tired/sluggish
 - Eating too little or too much
 - Sleeping too little or too much
 - Avoiding people and social situations
 - Self-harm
 - Feelings of worthlessness, guilt, inability to cope

Things you can do to support someone struggling with Bipolar Disorder:

- Be open about Bipolar Disorder.
- Adjust your expectations. Walking with someone through the highs and lows of Bipolar Disorder can feel like riding a roller coaster.
- Help the individual make a plan for navigating their manic episodes safely.
- Check in with them frequently during their depressive episodes and create a safety plan if necessary.
- Try not to be overly critical or judgmental of their behaviors; many will experience guilt and regret for behaviors in the manic phase.
- Don't try to explain away what feels real to them in the midst of a psychotic episode, even if it is not your reality.
- Learn their warning signs and triggers.
- Remain calm.
- Take care of yourself.

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a complex mental health disorder related to psychosis that is not fully understood, even in the mental health professional community.

Most diagnoses occur between the ages of 18 to 35. About 1 in every 100 people will be diagnosed with schizophrenia at some point in their life. A diagnosis of schizophrenia is more likely in the Black population than among Caucasians.

There are many misconceptions about Schizophrenia that often lead to fear and stigma. Schizophrenia is often associated with violence and dangerous behavior, but in truth, an individual with this diagnosis is more likely to be victimized than they are to harm others.

Schizophrenia usually involves delusions (false beliefs), hallucinations (seeing or hearing things that don't exist), unusual physical behavior, and disorganized thinking and speech. It is common for people with schizophrenia to have paranoid thoughts or hear voices.

Although Schizophrenia likely has a genetic link the onset of the disorder is often triggered after a traumatic event, a series of stressful or traumatic events, or with substance abuse. A history of childhood emotional neglect often correlates with more severe symptoms.

When someone with schizophrenia gets the right treatment, they can think and act like themselves again.

Symptoms:

- Feeling disconnected from you emotions
- Difficulty concentrating
- Hallucinations; such as hearing voices or seeing things others don't
- Delusions which are strong beliefs others don't share; including paranoid delusions
- Not wanting to take care of themselves
- Overly suspicious of other people, including people they are close to
- Feeling like others can read your thoughts

What this looks like:

It's not possible to predict how schizophrenia will affect a person's life because severity of symptoms and the pattern of the illness can vary greatly depending on treatment and support by professionals and their personal support system

- Inability to carry on with day to day activities; work, self-care, caring for others
- Easily upset, confused or suspicious of other people, including family members
- Afraid to seek help
- Common Co-occurring struggles
 - Anxiety and depression
 - Problems with drug and alcohol abuse
 - Health issues due to smoking
 - Physical health problems

Things you can do to support someone with Schizophrenia:

- Ask how you can help; offer with daily life tasks
- Focus on feelings and not experiences. Don't tell them what they are experiencing is not real; it's very real to them.
- Notice what's going well; no matter how small it may seem
- Plan for the difficult times; talk about a crisis plan

- Learn their triggers and plan on how to help cope with them
- Take care of yourself. Know when you need help.

When is it an emergency:

- If they have deliberately injured themselves
- If they are talking about suicide or harming another
- Is disoriented
- Is confused or not making sense

Schizoaffective Disorder

Schizoaffective disorder is a mental health problem where a person experiences psychosis along with mood symptoms. Schizo- is characterized by hallucinations and delusions while Affective- is characterized by mood disorders such as depression or mania. Many mental health professionals believe that schizoaffective disorder is in the middle of a spectrum, with schizophrenia on one end and bi-polar on the other end. These diagnoses share many similarities of symptoms but each is a separate diagnosis.

Schizoaffective disorder is often seen as a psychotic disorder with significant mood features, rather than a mood disorder with psychosis.

Symptoms:

- Delusions — having false, fixed beliefs, despite evidence to the contrary
- Hallucinations, such as hearing voices or seeing things that aren't there
- Impaired communication and speech, such as being incoherent
- Bizarre or unusual behavior
- Symptoms of depression, such as feeling empty, sad or worthless
- Periods of manic mood, with an increase in energy and a decreased need for sleep over several days, and behaviors that are out of character
- Impaired occupational, academic and social functioning
- Problems with managing personal care, including cleanliness and physical appearance

What this looks like:

- Hallucinations; visual and auditory hallucinations
- Delusions
- Confused and/or disoriented thoughts
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling disconnected from their emotions
- Lack of motivation or interest in things
- Mood symptoms including depression and mania
- Suicidal thoughts can be possible

Things you can do to support an individual with Schizoaffective Disorder:

- Learn about the diagnosis; learn about the triggers and symptoms.
- React calmly in difficult situations.
- Accept that their beliefs, the voices they hear, and the hallucinations they experience are real to them; it's their reality even if it's not your reality.
- Focus on how they are feeling instead of what they are experiencing.
- Support them to get treatment, or access another form of treatment.
- Keep them company if they are anxious, or while waiting to get access to treatment/appointment.
- Check in with them regularly, in person or by phone so they don't feel like they are in this alone.
- Support them in making decisions. When they ask you to make a decision for them, encourage them to make the decision. Be there for support.
- Respect their decisions. Even when those decisions are not the ones you would make.
- Be very clear about your limits; where you can help, how long, and what you can do.

Dissociative Identity Disorder

Dissociative Identity Disorder used to be referred to as Multiple Personalities. If a person has DID, then they often feel like different aspects (states) of their identity have control over their behavior and thoughts at different times. They feel like they have 2 or more distinct personalities who can control their thoughts and behaviors when that personality is in control; this leads to lapses in memory. Each personality will have its own history, traits, likes and dislikes which can be very different from the other personalities.

DID is more common in women than men and often develops due to childhood sexual or physical abuse and trauma. It is thought that DID develops as a way to dissociate or distance themselves from the event(s) happening.

What this looks like:

The "core" identity is the person's usual personality; while the other personalities are considered "alters". Alters can be very different from the core identity; including ethnicity, gender, age, and how they interact with others.

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Memory lapses
- Delusions
- Disorientation
- Suicidal thoughts
- Drug/alcohol abuse

Things you can do to support someone struggling with DID:

Supporting someone with DID can be overwhelming and confusing. You may struggle to know how to respond to the differing personalities. Here's some suggestions on how to better support them:

- Be a support for them.
- Learn about DID and the symptoms.
- Be calm and supportive during sudden behavioral changes.
- Be patient and understanding.
- Ask them how they want you to support them, or what would be useful. Understand that they may not know how to respond.
- Try to listen with acceptance if they want to tell you about their experiences.
- They may not like to be touched; ask before touching or hugging. Don't initiate.
- Different personalities may need to be interacted with in different ways.
- Be calm and try to keep a soothing presence.

Borderline Personality Disorder

Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is a mental health condition marked by extreme mood fluctuations, instability in interpersonal relationships, and impulsivity. People with BPD have an intense fear of abandonment and have trouble regulating their emotions, especially anger. They also tend to show impulsive and dangerous behaviors, such as reckless driving and threatening self-harm. All of these behaviors make it difficult for them to maintain relationships.

People with BPD have difficulties with how they think and feel about themselves and others. It makes it difficult for them to cope day to day.

Symptoms:

- Quick mood swings, changes in values or interests
- A distorted self image, making it difficult to find a clear sense of purpose and direction
- Excessive self-criticism, making it difficult to find a clear sense of purpose and direction
- Impulsive, often reckless behaviors
- Self-harm behaviors; such as cutting, burning, skin-picking, scratching, punching or hitting, biting, pinching, or bone-breaking

What this looks like:

- Instability in relationships; people with BPD use coping strategies/defense mechanisms which allows them to deny responsibility for their actions and feelings
- Impulsive and reckless behaviors; spending large sums of money, unsafe sex practices, substance abuse, reckless driving, risk taking, binge eating
- Fear of abandonment; real or perceived
- Self-injury; suicidal ideations or behaviors

Things you can do to effectively support an individual with Borderline Personality Disorder:

- Be patient.
- Don't judge.
- Be calm and consistent.
- Remind them of their positive traits.
- Set clear boundaries.
- Plan ahead.
- Learn their triggers.
- Provide distractions.
- Learn more about BPD.
- Help them seek treatment and support.
- Take care of yourself

