

# Mental Health Awareness

## RESOURCE GUIDE

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# FOREWORD

This resource was developed to help demystify and remove the stigma of mental illness. It is not a comprehensive overview of mental health, but rather a user-friendly, quick reference for individuals and families seeking insight and information. It is not intended to be used as a diagnostic tool but simply to provide basic information about mental health – including potential signs and frequently asked questions.

As followers of Jesus, we believe every person is created in God’s image and deeply valued. While mental health challenges are real and complex, we hold to the hope that no one walks through them alone. God is near, and His people are called to walk alongside one another in truth and grace.

If you or a family member is showing signs and symptoms that concern you, please don’t hesitate to consult with your family physician or a pastor, who can help connect you with appropriate professional resources. And if you are struggling with suicidal thoughts or suspect a loved one is, please get help immediately. There are resources provided at the back of this booklet to guide you in getting the help you need.

If you have further questions about the spiritual aspect of mental illness (not discussed in detail in this guide), please speak to one of your pastors or contact our Care Team ([care@firstdecatour.org](mailto:care@firstdecatour.org)).

Statistics and research findings referenced in this guide are drawn from reputable sources including the National Institute of Mental Health, the World Health Organization, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

*This guide is for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional medical or mental health advice.*

# INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a universal human experience. The World Health Organization defines mental health as a state of well-being in which individuals recognize their abilities, cope with normal stress, work productively, and contribute to their communities.

At some point in life, every individual and family is touched by emotional or psychological struggle. In any given year, nearly 1 in 5 adults in the United States experiences a mental health condition, and by midlife, nearly 1 in 2 Americans will have experienced one. Yet despite effective treatments being available, fewer than half of adults receive professional care. For children and adolescents, the gap is even greater, with only about 1 in 5 receiving needed support (NIMH).

Stigma remains a significant barrier to diagnosis, treatment, and community acceptance. In church settings, mental illness may be misunderstood as weakness or a lack of faith, and seeking professional care has sometimes been discouraged. Research from NIMH clearly shows measurable differences in brain function and stress-response systems among individuals experiencing depression, anxiety, and trauma-related disorders. Without appropriate support, many may remain caught in cycles of emotional distress, even while deeply committed to their faith.

Much of the harm surrounding mental illness comes not only from symptoms themselves, but from misunderstanding and silence. As the body of Christ, we are called to respond with compassion and truth, creating spaces where individuals feel safe to seek help. This resource is one step toward fostering a community marked by care, dignity, and hope.

# MYTHS ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS

## **Mental Illnesses Aren't Real Illnesses.**

Mental illness results from a complex interaction of genetic, biological, psychological, and environmental factors. Research shows measurable differences in brain structure and function among those experiencing mental health conditions. Like physical illnesses, mental illnesses vary in type and severity.

## **People With Mental Illnesses Are Violent and Dangerous.**

Although often portrayed as dangerous, individuals with mental illness rarely commit serious crimes and are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators (NIMH).

## **Bad Parenting Causes Mental Illness.**

While abuse and neglect increase risk, many individuals from stable homes develop mental illness, and many who experience trauma do not. Fear of stigma can prevent parents from seeking help for their children.

## **Mental Illness Is Caused by Spiritual Warfare.**

While Scripture affirms spiritual struggle (1 Peter 5:8; Ephesians 6:11–13), mental illness is not typically caused by demonic influence or spiritual failure. Mental health conditions are best understood as health issues shaped by biological, psychological, and environmental factors. Prayer and spiritual support are meaningful but are not substitutes for appropriate mental health care.

## **People Don't Recover from Mental Illness.**

Mental illnesses are treatable, and many people live full, productive lives with appropriate care. Psychotherapy is highly effective for many conditions, and for some, a combination of therapy and medication offers the greatest protection against relapse.

## **People With Mental Illnesses Are Weak.**

Mental health struggles require courage and resilience. Like chronic physical illness, emotional suffering often involves significant unseen effort. Living with mental illness can feel like carrying a heavy weight while navigating daily responsibilities.

## **Kids Can't Have Mental Illnesses; Their Problems Are Just "Bad Behavior."**

Approximately 70% of mental health conditions begin in childhood or adolescence. Because children often lack the words to describe distress, symptoms may appear as behavioral problems.

### **Mental Illness Is Just an Excuse for Sin.**

While Scripture acknowledges human brokenness (Romans 7:14–23), it does not define mental illness as sin. Jesus consistently responded to suffering with compassion rather than condemnation (Luke 13:1–5). Labeling mental illness as sin oversimplifies complex biological and psychological realities. Faith supports healing, but it does not replace appropriate care.

## **SUPPORTING A LOVED ONE**

Mental health incorporates our emotional, psychological, and social well-being and it affects how we think, feel, and act. Mental health is the ability to function to the best of our ability in daily activities, whether at school, home, or work and in our relationships with others.

A mental illness is any disorder or disability of the mind that causes mild to significant disturbances in our thinking, behavior and/or emotions. It refers to a wide array of disorders that affect mood, thinking and behavior, and impacts our ability to cope with ordinary life challenges well. Common mental health conditions include depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, dementia, and psychotic disorders.

### **Some Warning Signs of Mental Health Problems**

#### **Physical Signs**

- Dramatic changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- Numerous unexplained physical complaints with no clear medical cause
- Extreme physical dishevelment or neglect of personal hygiene

- Wild or unusually high levels of energy that are not typical for the person

### **Mental Signs**

- Confused, disorganized, or irrational thinking
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering appointments, names, or familiar places
- Tangential speech that rapidly shifts from topic to topic
- Perseveration, or abnormal repetition of speech or behaviors
- Changes in speech patterns, either unusually rapid or noticeably slowed
- Delusional or fixed false beliefs despite clear evidence to the contrary
- Paranoid thinking, including beliefs of being harmed, watched, or plotted against
- Abnormal sensory experiences, such as hearing voices or seeing things others do not

### **Emotional Signs**

- Prolonged sadness, emptiness, or irritability
- Extreme emotional reactions, including intense anger or emotional flatness
- Rapid or exaggerated mood changes inconsistent with circumstances
- Excessive or constant worry and anxious feelings
- Suicidal thoughts or expressions of hopelessness
- Declining ability to cope with daily stressors and responsibilities

### **Behavioral & Relational Signs**

- Inflexibility or rigidity in behavior
- Social withdrawal or isolation
- Impulsivity or impaired judgment
- Excessive use of alcohol or other substances

### **In Children and Adolescents, Warning Signs May Include:**

#### **Physical Signs**

- Sudden changes in sleeping and/or eating habits
- Frequent complaints of physical symptoms such as stomachaches or headaches with no clear medical cause
- Persistent nightmares
- Noticeable hyperactivity or restlessness

## **Mental Signs**

- New, excessive, or developmentally inappropriate worry or fear
- Difficulty concentrating or managing age-appropriate responsibilities
- Preoccupation with death or dying

## **Emotional Signs**

- Prolonged negative mood, sadness, or irritability
- Frequent emotional outbursts or temper tantrums beyond what is typical for age

## **Behavioral And School-Related Signs**

- Changes in school performance
- Poor grades despite strong effort
- Avoidance of school or bedtime
- Persistent disobedience, defiance, or aggression
- Defiance of authority, truancy, theft, or vandalism
- Substance use or experimentation beyond expected developmental norms

**Note:** *The presence of one or more of these signs does not automatically indicate mental illness. However, persistent, worsening, or combined symptoms may signal the need for additional support or professional evaluation.*

# SUICIDE AWARENESS

Suicide is a serious public health concern that affects individuals, families, and communities, including communities of faith. Experiencing suicidal thoughts does not mean a person wants to die; it often reflects deep emotional pain, hopelessness, or a desire for the pain to stop. Talking openly and directly about suicide does **not** increase the risk. In fact, asking about suicidal thoughts can reduce isolation and help individuals feel seen and supported (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention).

## Common Warning Signs May Include:

- Talking about wanting to die or feeling like a burden
- Expressing hopelessness or feeling trapped
- Withdrawal from relationships or activities
- Significant mood changes
- Giving away possessions or saying goodbye
- Increased substance use
- Reckless or impulsive behavior

## If you are concerned about someone, it is appropriate to ask directly:

*“Are you thinking about hurting yourself or ending your life?”*

Asking does not put the idea in someone’s head and may save a life.

If someone is in immediate danger, **call 911**. Do not leave the person alone if immediate risk is present.

You can call or text **988**, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, for 24/7 confidential support.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **What should I expect if I see a licensed mental health professional?**

The first few sessions with a licensed counselor, therapist, or mental health professional typically focus on understanding your concerns, history, and goals. A therapist may ask questions about mood, stress, relationships, physical health, and life experiences. Over time, you and your therapist may develop a treatment plan together. If a diagnosis is discussed, it is based on patterns over time, not a single conversation, and is used to guide care, not define a person.

## **Can Christians take psychiatric medication?**

Yes. Medication can be a helpful and sometimes life-saving part of treatment for many people, much like medication for diabetes or heart disease.

## **How do I talk to my counselor about incorporating my faith into my mental health treatment?**

You are encouraged to share your values, beliefs, and spiritual practices with your counselor. Ethical mental health professionals respect clients' faith and will integrate it into treatment when requested. If faith is important to you, you can ask directly whether your counselor is comfortable incorporating spiritual perspectives into your care.

## **Does treatment mean symptoms will disappear forever?**

Recovery often means improved functioning, coping skills, and quality of life. Some conditions are episodic or chronic and may require ongoing care.

## **When should I seek help?**

If distress interferes with daily life, relationships, school, or work, or if symptoms persist or worsen over time, it is appropriate to seek professional support.

## **What should I do if I'm worried about my loved one's safety?**

If you are concerned that a loved one may harm themselves or others, take those concerns seriously. Encourage them to seek help, stay connected, and reach out to

professional support. If you believe there is immediate danger, call **911** or contact the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** for guidance and support.

## 4 DAILY PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT WELL-BEING

Mental health is not only about treating illness; it is also about cultivating habits that support emotional resilience, clarity, and connection. While these practices are not substitutes for professional care when needed, research shows they can play a meaningful role in supporting mental well-being for individuals and families.

### **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness involves intentionally paying attention to the present moment with curiosity rather than judgment. This may include noticing thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, or surroundings without trying to immediately change them. Research shows that mindfulness practices can reduce stress, improve emotional regulation, and increase awareness of internal experiences.

Examples include:

- Slow, intentional breathing
- Prayerful awareness or stillness before God
- Noticing thoughts and emotions without reacting to them

### **Movement**

Regular physical movement supports mental health by improving mood, reducing anxiety, and regulating the body's stress response. Movement does not need to be intense or structured to be beneficial.

Examples include:

- Walking, stretching, or gentle exercise
- Playing outside or engaging in physical activity as a family
- Choosing movement that feels sustainable rather than punishing

## **Mastery**

Mastery refers to engaging in activities that build a sense of competence, accomplishment, or growth. Even small experiences of success can strengthen confidence and motivation, especially during seasons of emotional difficulty.

Examples include:

- Learning or practicing a skill
- Completing manageable tasks
- Engaging in hobbies or creative work

## **Meaning-Making**

Meaning making involves connecting experiences, including hardship, to purpose, values, and hope. For many people of faith, this includes spiritual practices and community.

Examples include:

- Reflecting on values and purpose
- Engaging in prayer, worship, or reading Scripture
- Serving others or participating in meaningful relationships

## **A Gentle Reminder**

Mental health practices are supports, not cures. For individuals living with mental illness, these habits can complement professional care, but they are not replacements for therapy, medication, or crisis support when those are needed.

*Caring for mental health is not about perfection. It is about small, consistent practices that support wholeness over time.*

# LOCAL & ONLINE MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

*These resources are provided as a helpful starting point. Because providers, services, and availability can change, First Christian Church cannot guarantee specific outcomes or experiences. If you are unsure where to begin, start with your primary care physician, a trusted pastor, or our Care Team for guidance and referral support.*

## Emergency & Crisis Support (U.S.)

### 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text 988 for 24/7 confidential support

### 911

Call for immediate danger or life-threatening emergencies

## Local Counseling & Behavioral Health

### Counseling Services

- Andrea Burns, LCPC (Decatur, IL) – (217) 520-1047
- Open Skye Counseling (Decatur, IL) – (657) 580-4135
- Wellspring Center for Counseling (Mt. Zion, IL) – (847) 707-2689
- Truth in Love Counseling & Care (Bloomington, IL) – (309) 585-0241
- Elevate Counseling Services (Decatur, IL) – (217) 233- 8401

## Hospital-Based Behavioral Health

### Carle BroMenn Medical Center (Bloomington, IL)

Inpatient and outpatient behavioral health services

## Local Support Groups

### Decatur Area Survivors of Suicide Support Group

For individuals grieving the loss of a loved one to suicide

Meets 1st Wednesday of each month, 6:30–8:00 p.m.

Our Lady of Lourdes Library (Non-denominational)

Contact: (217) 519-9612 (Woody) | (217) 201- 2640 (Jacki)

# SUBSTANCE USE RECOVERY SUPPORT

## **Celebrate Recovery at First Church of the Nazarene**

A Christ-centered, 12-step recovery program for individuals facing hurts, habits, and hang-ups of all kinds. Meetings are held weekly with dinner and group time.

**Location:** 1177 W Hickory Point Rd, Decatur, IL 62526

**When:** Thursdays, 5:15-8:00 p.m. (dinner served before group)

**Contact:** Text (217) 775-9320 or email [NichoThornell96@gmail.com](mailto:NichoThornell96@gmail.com) for info.

## **Celebrate Recovery at Passion Community Church**

A weekly Christ-centered recovery program offering support, healing, and community.

**Location:** 4225 Camp Warren Ln, Decatur, IL 62521

**When:** Dinner at ~5:15 p.m.; groups begin around 6:00 p.m. (typically weekly)

*(Please check the church's calendar/website for the most current schedule.)*

## **Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)**

Peer-led recovery meetings for individuals seeking freedom from alcohol dependence.

Find local and national meeting information at:

<https://www.aa.org>

## **National Mental Health Organizations**

### **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)**

Evidence-based information on mental health conditions

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov>

### **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

Treatment locator and crisis resources

<https://www.samhsa.gov>

### **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)**

Education, advocacy, and support groups

<https://www.nami.org>

## **I'll Start Podcast**

A faith-integrated mental health podcast featuring real stories, clinical insight, and conversations at the intersection of mental health and faith.

Available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and YouTube.

# CAREGIVER RESOURCES

## Support for Aging Parents & Cognitive Decline

### Local Community Support

#### **CHELP (Comprehensive Home Enhanced Living Program)**

2545 Millikin Parkway, Decatur, IL 62526

Phone: (217) 422-9888

<https://www.chelpil.org>

#### **HSHS St. Mary's Hospital – Alzheimer's Support Group**

Meets 3rd Thursday of each month, 1–2 p.m.

Phone: (217) 464-2045

### In-Home Care Services (Local Options)

**SYNERGY HomeCare** – Decatur – (217) 615-1826

**Comfort Keepers** – Decatur – (217) 429-6666

### State & National Caregiver Support

#### **Illinois Department on Aging – Family Caregiver Support Program**

1(800) 252-8966

<https://ilaging.illinois.gov/programs/caregiver/program.html>

#### **Alzheimer's Association – Illinois Chapter**

24/7 Helpline: (800) 272-3900

<https://www.alz.org/help-support>

# FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH CARE TEAM

To seek care at First Christian Church, reach out to Heather Kaloupek, LCSW, Care Director or Chris Vieth, Care Pastor at [care@firstdecatour.org](mailto:care@firstdecatour.org). You are not alone.

## REFERENCES & FURTHER READING

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

<https://www.samhsa.gov>

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

<https://www.nami.org>

World Health Organization (WHO)

<https://www.who.int>

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

<https://afsp.org>