

INFORMATION ON MENTAL HEALTH

- **What is mental health?**
- **What is mental illness?**
- **What are the common causes of mental illnesses?**
- **What are the symptoms of mental illness?**
- **What are some of the treatments available for mental illnesses?**
- **How can you help people with mental illness?**
- **What can you do to maintain good mental health?**

Mental health is a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.

Mental illness is a disease or condition that affects the way a person thinks, feels, behaves, and relates to others and to his or her surroundings and impairs their ability to function on a daily basis.

Examples of mental illnesses

- Depression
- Anxiety disorders
- Schizophrenia
- Trauma and stress related disorders
- Alcohol, drug and substance abuse disorders
- Behavioural disorders
- Epilepsy and convulsive disorders

Common Causes of mental illness

Emotional, physical or sexual abuse, bullying	Loss of a loved one
Poor parenting, abuse and neglect	Divorce and separation
Low self-esteem	Infections in the brain
Domestic violence	Stressful life events
Growths in the brain	Alcohol and drug abuse
Head injuries	Lack of social cohesion and migration
Children of women who use drugs or alcohol or are exposed to illnesses or infections in pregnancy	Children of born through complicated births or children who get infections in early life
Poverty, unemployment or underemployment	Genetic inheritance

Common symptoms of mental illness

- Excessive concern about bodily symptoms (headache, backache)
- Loss of enjoyment
- Low mood
- Crying
- Anxiety and panic
- Fatigue
- Poor concentration
- Impaired sleep
- Impaired appetite and weight loss
- Irritability
- Obsessional thoughts and actions
- Loss of social skills and social withdrawal
- Strange behaviours e.g. talking to him/herself

Mental illnesses can be treated using any of the following methods:

1. Counseling
2. Psychotherapy
3. Medication
4. Brain-stimulation treatments
5. In-patient care in hospitals
6. Alcohol and substance use treatments

Common Myths and Facts about Mental illness

MYTHS	FACTS
People with mental illness cannot work.	People with mental illness can work if they take treatment and have follow-up care.
People with mental illness are violent.	Treatment usually reduces the risk of violence. Violence is not necessarily due to illness but to many factors.
All people with mental illness are retarded.	Mental illness is not synonymous to mental retardation. Mental illness affects people of all levels of intelligence
People with mental illness should be kept in jail.	Prison is likely to worsen the condition of the person with mental illness. They deserve treatment in a therapeutic environment.
People can never recover from mental illness.	People with mental illness can live a normal life and symptoms can be controlled just like Diabetes and Hypertension. All they need is support from their families and communities and continued follow-up care.
Mental illness is contagious.	Mental illness is not contagious and should not be feared
Mental illness is caused by evil spirit or witch craft.	Mental illness is not a punishment from God. It is also not caused by witchcraft. Causes of mental illness are varied including genes and environmental factors.
People with mental illness are never able to make any decisions.	People with mental illness may only have difficulties making decisions during acute phases as at onset and relapse. Involving individuals in decisions about their own care improves treatment outcomes.
Depression and other illnesses, such as anxiety disorders, do not affect children or adolescents. Any problems they have are just a part of growing up.	Both adults and children can develop mental illnesses. One in ten children has a disorder severe enough to cause impairment
Mental illness is fairly rare and doesn't affect average children.	Mental illness is quite common. According to the WHO, one in four children suffers from a mental disorder in their lifetime. Mental illness can strike both adults and children of any age, race, religion or income status.

Do you know anyone with a mental illness? What you can do to help.

People with mental illness need treatment and support from their families and communities and continued follow-up care and have the right to:

1. An adequate standard of living and social protection
2. The right to enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health
3. The right to exercise legal capacity and to personal liberty and security
4. Freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment and from exploitation, violence and abuse
5. The right to live independently and be included in the community

Tips to maintaining good mental health

- Maintain a healthy lifestyle – Eat a balanced diet, exercise regularly and avoid alcohol and drugs
- Identify what triggers stress to you and look for ways to manage stress
- Keep in touch with family and friends and show care for others
- Accept who you are
- Rest, refresh and have a good sleep
- Share your feelings with others
- If things are getting too much for you and you feel you can't cope, ask for help
- Regularly engage in doing things that you are good at or talented in



In Deus Nos Fides

For more information contact:

AFRICA MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION (AMHF)

Mawensi Gardens, Matumbato Road, Upperhill (Opposite the Geomaps
Centre), Nairobi, Kenya

P.O. Box 48423-00100, Nairobi, Kenya

Tel: +254202651360

Email: info@amhf.or.ke

www.africamentalhealthfoundation.org