

When A Loved One Has Mental Illness

Do you or a loved one have a mental illness? Do you have a neighbor, co-worker, or relative struggling with mental illness? Are you facing it daily in your own home? Is it your spouse or grown son or young daughter? Too often those with mental illness and those close to them suffer in silence. Sometimes families are unaware that the unpredictable behaviors, bad moods ... can be a sign of mental illness.

It is heart breaking to see lives in shambles at times and dreams lost. It is not easy to be screamed at by a loved one in a bad state of mind. It is hard when you are hated for trying to keep your loved one from harming themselves and they are committed for a hospital stay. Life is not easy when you find yourself walking on eggshells and fearing another episode of acting out. It is tough when others avoid you. It is even more frustrating when you cannot get answers. Your whole life can be turned upside down when mental illness knocks on your door.

Fortunately for many this illness knocks and visits for a short while. Medications and therapy do not allow it to totally take over a life. Today many with mental illness live almost completely normal lives. Others are not as fortunate. Once this illness knocks it doesn't leave and it tries to control the lives of our loved ones and complicates life for entire families.

Our loved ones with mental illness did not ask for it. It is not their fault that they are ill. As caregivers we must remember to not blame them for being sick. We must also remember to take good care of ourselves so that we do not become worn down, hopeless, fearful, depressed, and physically exhausted ourselves. Remember they count on us as advocates!

Some mental illnesses are quite complicated and require major life adjustments. Frequently consultations with many mental health professionals and even legal expertise may be required. There is so much to consider and some decisions dictate other decisions as we help those with mental illness.

Fortunately in Wheeling there is support for the mentally ill and their families through groups such as NAMI of Wheeling, -National Alliance on Mental Illness. The local chapter meets monthly at 7:00 p.m. on the fourth Tuesday of every month at the Overbrook Cafeteria at Ohio Valley Medical Center. Topics of interest to consumers, family members, and mental health professionals are included. These meetings are so educational that I regularly try to attend myself and include my college interns.

NAMI also helps to sponsor a drop in center for those with mental illness, Marian House Drop in Center. It is located at 118 15th Street, Wheeling, WV. They offer noon meals, field trips, arts and crafts, life skills and support daily from 10-3 p.m. in a friendly and professionally staffed environment.

The local chapter will be hosting several events during the month of October. The first event will be held October 2nd at the White Palace. Melissa Hopely of Active Minds will be the featured speaker. She will speak during two sessions 3-5 p.m. and again from 7-9p.m. Melissa understands mental illness. “After being bullied in high school and hiding her struggles with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Melissa hit rock bottom at fifteen with self-hatred and suicidal intentions. Today she is a college graduate, a prized motivational speaker, a volunteer for the American Association for Suicide Prevention in Philadelphia and has a book in progress.” A panel discussion will also be held addressing mental health needs in our community after her presentation. This event is free to the public and CEU’s are available. Guests will be treated to a piano recital by John Nozum during the registration. St. Michaels Parish and NAMI of Wheeling will hold a candlelight vigil on Sunday, October 7th. St. Michaels is located at 1225 National Road, Wheeling, WV. This will be a special time of prayer for our loved ones with mental illness.

I look forward to seeing you in October as we celebrate Mental Health Awareness.