

Some things you should know

about mental and emotional illness . . .



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Mental illness . . .

. . . is a name covering several sicknesses of the mind which affect the way a person thinks, feels and behaves. The medical term for serious mental illness is "psychosis." The legal term is "insanity."

People suffering from psychosis live in imaginary worlds of their own, which have little relation to the real world. But they are not entirely unaware of what is going on around them or what is happening to them.

Here are some of the ways that mental illness affects people: they may think they hear voices, or that their food is poisoned, or that everybody is out to "get" them. They may be very depressed or in a state of great excitement. They may feel that a terrible thing is going to happen to them or that they have committed a horrible crime for which they are being punished. They may imagine they are some famous person or that they have magical powers.

During the time that they are sick these mentally ill people have little control over what they do and they need to be cared for and treated. They are not insensitive, as many people believe. Many mentally ill people suffer intensely. Most of them respond to kindness and attention. There are often times during their illness when they have relief from their symptoms.

Most of the mentally ill are quiet and unexcited people. Few of them are overactive or violent. Only a very small percentage are dangerous.

Mental illness seldom comes on suddenly. There are usually early signs which trained people can recognize long before an actual breakdown.

Almost all severe mental illness can be benefitted by hospital treatment. Early treatment generally increases the chances of recovery. New and improved treatment methods are being put into use all the time. Advances in treatment have brought about marked increases in the numbers of people who recover from mental illnesses.

Some mental illnesses come from injury to the nervous system, like the mental illnesses resulting from brain injury, severe alcoholism, some poisonous chemicals, and advanced syphilis. Others are connected with bodily changes like cerebral arteriosclerosis and senile psychosis (the "psychoses of old age").

There are some mental illnesses for which there is no known physical cause. These are called the "functional psychoses." Among these are paranoia, manic depressive psychosis and schizophrenia.

Schizophrenia is the most common of all the mental illnesses. It is called "the psychosis of youth." This illness seems to be linked to certain gland conditions and researchers are trying to find out more about this. They are also trying to find out whether people can be saved from developing schizophrenia by protecting them from harmful experiences in childhood.

A neurosis . . .

. . . (or psychoneurosis) is a type of emotional illness that interferes with a person's happiness and efficiency. Neurotic people feel that they are not loved; they feel guilty, inferior and inadequate without reason; they have an almost constant sense of dread and fear. All of us, at one time or another, have a little of some of these feelings. But the neurotic person has them to a greater degree most of the time.

The symptoms of some of the neuroses are: certain phobias like fear of high places or closed-in places; chronic tiredness or nervous tension (the very "high strung" person); excessive shyness, sleeplessness, over-conscientiousness; constant fear of physical illness, even to the point of imagining that one "has all the symptoms"; inability to get along with people; having to "prove" all the time how good, or smart, or important one is.

Neuroses can be very severe and prevent a person from carrying on with his job or in his family life. They can be less severe and permit a person to go about his daily routine.

Very severe neuroses may require psychiatric treatment in a hospital. The less severe conditions also require psychiatric treatment, though not in a hospital.

Some neuroses show themselves in symptoms of physical sickness. A "nervous headache" is an everyday example of the effect that the emotions can have on the body. Many of the more serious physical disorders, such as stomach ulcers, diabetes, arthritis and high blood pressure, are often emotional in origin.

There are other types of mental and emotional disorders which show up mainly in the person's behavior. Some examples of these are: the alcoholic, the drug addict, the juvenile delinquent.

People with either mental or emotional illnesses need help from a medical specialist, just the same as people with pneumonia, or ptomaine. Telling a mentally or emotionally ill person to "pull yourself together and snap out of it" is like telling a person who has a fever to "snap out of it," without giving him medical help.

These facts are being presented as a service by the *National Association for Mental Health* to help spread understanding about mental and emotional illness.

People equipped with the truth are in a better position to do something about the problems arising from these illnesses.

Your *community mental health association* is working for prevention of mental and emotional illness and for adequate care and treatment for those who are suffering from these illnesses. You can help by publicizing these facts. You can also help by participating in mental health work. Please get in touch with your local or state mental health association and they will tell you how.

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