

Getting Help

As you have seen, there are many different types of mental disorders. Within each type, the severity of the problem varies greatly. Unlike the symptoms of a cold or rash, specific symptoms of mental disorders are much more difficult to identify. There are places to go, however, to get help for these problems.

HEALTH TERMS

psychiatrist
neurologist
clinical psychologist
psychiatric social worker

HEALTH CONCEPTS

- Treatments are now available for many types of mental disorders.
- Mental disorders require the attention of a trained health professional.
- Mental health professionals can help their patients or clients to improve their perceptions of themselves, their relationships, and the outside world.



Signs of Mental Health Problems

Recognizing early warning signs of mental disorders is one key to getting help for them. Any of the following feelings or behaviors that persist over a period of days or weeks and begin to interfere with other aspects of daily living could be a sign of a mental or emotional disorder:

- prolonged sadness for no specific reason
- hopelessness—the sense that one's life is out of control
- violent or erratic mood shifts
- inability to concentrate or to make decisions about daily life
- overwhelming fear, anxiety, or anger at the world
- severe sleep disturbances—nightmares, insomnia, fitful sleep
- compulsive behaviors such as repeated handwashing

- self-destructive behaviors such as overeating, starving oneself, drinking, or other drug use
- frequent physical ailments for which no medical cause can be found

Of course, no one symptom means a person has a mental disorder. However, any one of these symptoms may be an indication that stress in your life is building. Such stresses need to be closely examined before more serious problems arise.

Myths About Seeking Help

MYTH	REALITY
Seeking help from a mental health professional means a person is weak or crazy.	Asking for needed help is a sign of strength. It shows responsibility for one's well-being.
People who set their mind to it can get better on their own.	Serious disorders, compulsions, and addictions are complex and require professional intervention.
Finding help is difficult.	Help is as close as a trusted adult, friend, family physician, clergy member, or the phone book.
Getting professional help for a mental problem is too expensive.	Some mental health care professionals have sliding pay scales. Other state and community facilities offer low-cost or no-cost help.
Sharing your deepest thoughts with a "stranger" is painful and embarrassing.	People are almost always surprised to find out that unloading their problems makes them feel better.

Kinds of Professional Help

Often it is difficult to look in the mirror and do your own mental health checkup. Sometimes others are needed to help. The principal health care providers for mental health are psychiatrists, neurologists, clinical psychologists, psychiatric social workers, and counselors of various types. These individuals may work in hospitals, clinics, or private offices.

Psychiatrist

A **psychiatrist** is a medical doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating mental disorders and can prescribe medications. He or she deals with mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders of the mind.

The psychiatrist uses many therapies, or treatment techniques. Among these are:

- **psychotherapy**—an ongoing dialogue between the patient and psychiatrist designed to get to the root of the problem and find a solution.
- **psychoanalysis**—an analysis of a patient's past, particularly his or her early life, to determine the early roots of a mental problem. This is rarely used today.
- **medical psychotherapy**—the use of certain medications to treat or reduce a mental disorder or to use in conjunction with or as preparation for the above two treatments.



▲ **With time, caring, support, and proper treatment, most people with mental disorders can return to life and enjoy its simple pleasures "to the max."**

ACTIVITY List five short-term and five long-term benefits of seeking help for a mental problem.

Neurologist

If a psychiatrist thinks a patient may have some organic problem of the brain, the patient may be referred to a neurologist. A neurologist is a physician who specializes in organic disorders of the brain and nervous system. Those who specialize in surgery are called neurosurgeons or neural surgeons. Consultation with and testing by a neurologist may be required for patients whose mental symptoms are suspected as being caused by an organic disease.

Clinical Psychologist

The clinical psychologist is a psychologist who diagnoses and treats emotional and behavioral disorders but cannot prescribe medications. State law usually determines what kinds of training is required to earn the

update

▶ *Looking at the Issues*

Talk Therapy vs. Medication

When a person has a mental disorder, which should he or she choose: talk therapy, chemical medication therapy, or a combination of both? This is the question asked by people needing treatment as well as by researchers, doctors, therapists, and other mental health professionals.

ANALYZING DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS

▶ Viewpoint One

Many psychologists and counselors feel that patients with mild depression are too often overmedicated and that they might achieve the same or better results through talk alone. They point out that with *pharmacotherapy*, or chemical therapy, there are sometimes side effects, including dry mouth, nervousness, nausea, insomnia, diarrhea, or changes in appetite. In addition, they state that ethical questions are raised by giving "mood brightening" medications to people who are only suffering life's normal ups and downs.

▶ Viewpoint Two

Advocates of chemical therapies point out that recent discoveries about the structure and workings of the brain have resulted in the development of new classes of medications for treating mental disorders. They view chemical intervention, therefore, as more effective and immediate than talk therapy. Such individuals note that side effects, if any, are a small price to pay when compared with living in despair.

EXPLORING YOUR VIEWS

1. If you decided to go for therapy, which type of treatment would you consider first? Why?
2. Why is proper diagnosis of mental disorders as important as finding the proper course of treatment? Explain why each patient's treatment should be individualized.

title *psychologist*. The clinical psychologist can practice psychotherapy, group therapy, and individual counseling, in addition to testing for many kinds of specific mental disorders.

Counselors

There are many kinds of counselors, including school counselors. These professionals usually have a master's degree and work with young people, helping them in personal or educational matters. Pastoral counselors, who include ministers, priests, and rabbis, often help people with mental, social, and marital problems. Addictions counselors have special certification and training requirements.

Psychiatric Social Worker

A **psychiatric social worker** is *one who has concentrated on psychiatric casework, doing fieldwork in a mental hospital, mental health clinic, or family service agency that provides guidance and treatment for clients with emotional problems*. They usually have a master's degree.

Seeking Help

More and more Americans, including many teens, are seeking professional help from mental health professionals. Though mental problems are often undiagnosed and untreated, many people are working hard to change the situation. If you or someone you know has a mental problem, you no longer have to suffer in silence. Talk to a trusted adult. Get the support and the help that you need.

Did You Know?

- There is a new movement afoot to get more mental health services in the schools. In Baltimore, Maryland, more than 60 public schools now have full-time mental health professionals to work with students.