



The Myths of Mental Illness:
Understanding Depression, Anxiety, and Other Common Mental Illness

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MYTHS:

- ALL MENTAL ILLNESS IS CAUSED BY SIN

- The truth is that many faithful Latter-day Saints who live the commandments and honor their covenants experience struggles with mental illness or are required to deal with the intense pain and suffering of morally righteous but mentally ill family members. Their burdens—and they are many—can be lifted only by love, understanding, and acceptance.

- SOMEONE IS TO BLAME FOR MENTAL ILLNESS

- Ascribing blame for mental illness causes unnecessary suffering for all concerned and takes time and energy which would better be used to increase understanding of what actually is happening—to get a complete assessment and proper diagnosis of the illness involved, to understand the causes, to get proper medication and learn behavioral and cognitive techniques that are part of the healing process.

- **ALL PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS NEED IS A PRIESTHOOD BLESSING.**

- We must understand, however, without in any way denigrating the unique role of priesthood blessings, that ecclesiastical leaders are spiritual leaders and not mental health professionals. Most of them lack the professional skills and training to deal effectively with deep-seated mental illnesses and are well advised to seek competent professional assistance for those in their charge who are in need of it.

- **MENTALLY ILL PEOPLE JUST LACK WILLPOWER**

- The fact is that seriously mentally ill persons simply cannot, through an exercise of will, get out of the predicament they are in. They need help, encouragement, understanding, and love. We don't say to persons with heart disease or cancer, "Just grow up and get over it." Neither should we treat the mentally ill in such an uncompassionate and unhelpful way.

- **MENTAL ILLNESS DOESN'T STRIKE CHILDREN**

- An estimated 20 percent of children in the United States suffer from a mental health disorder that disrupts their functioning at home, in school, or in the community

- **MENTAL ILLNESS IS UNTREATABLE**

- “Broken minds can be healed just the way broken bones and broken hearts are healed. While God is at work making those repairs, the rest of us can help by being merciful, nonjudgmental, and kind.”

--Elder Jeffrey R. Holland

WARNING SIGNS

- Excessive worrying or fear
- Feeling excessively sad or low
- Confused thinking or problems concentrating and learning
- Extreme mood changes, including uncontrollable “highs” or feelings of euphoria
- Prolonged or strong feelings of irritability or anger
- Avoiding friends and social activities
- Difficulties understanding or relating to other people
- Changes in sleeping habits or feeling tired and low energy
- Changes in eating habits such as increased hunger or lack of appetite
- Difficulty perceiving reality (delusions or hallucinations, in which a person experiences and senses things that don't exist in objective reality)
- Inability to perceive changes in one’s own feelings, behavior or personality
- Abuse of substances like alcohol or drugs
- Multiple physical ailments without obvious causes (such as headaches, stomach aches, vague and ongoing “aches and pains”)
- Thinking about suicide
- Inability to carry out daily activities or handle daily problems and stress
- An intense fear of weight gain or concern with appearance

SEVERITY OF MENTAL ILLNESS

	MILD	MODERATE	SEVERE
DURATION	Lifts after stress is reduced	Weeks, Months, or Years	Chronic or brief and intense (as in crises)
ABILITY TO FUNCTION	Handles responsibilities	Reduced, but person gets by	Often unable to work or care for self
ABILITY TO FACE REALITY	May overreact, but able to cope	Faces reality; sees self negatively; feels helpless and hopeless	Sees self and world in an unrealistic way
SUICIDE RISK	No risk, or low	Low to high	Moderate to high

HOW TO HELP

	MILD	MODERATE	SEVERE
INDIVIDUAL	Solve Problems, Pray, Work, Read, Exercise, Have Fun, Talk, Endure	Learn Relaxation, Reach out for support or possible professional help	Recognize need for medical and /or professional counseling
BISHOP, FAMILY, OTHERS	Explore cause; help, encourage, counsel, support, friendship, empathy	Support, help as needed, counsel, consider referral to a professional resource	Encourage professional help; provide support
PROFESSIONAL	Unnecessary	LDS Family Services or another resource is often needed	Major responsibility lies with clinic or hospital

BUILDING YOUR TOOLBOX

ANXIETY:

- Meditation
- Deep Breathing
- Progressive Relaxation
- Sensory Visualization

DEPRESSION:

- Challenge Negative Thinking
- Gratitude Journal
- I Am Statements
- Using and Developing Talents

BUILDING YOUR TOOLBOX

PORNOGRAPHY ADDICTION:

- Change Activity & Environment
- Sensory Overload
- Battlefield Exercise

ANGER:

- Recognize Tension
- Turn Away Agreement
- Tension Reducers

FINAL WORD

WHEN IN DOUBT, ALWAYS SEEK HELP!

- TRUSTED FAMILY
- TRUSTED FRIENDS
- BISHOP
- MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL
- SCHOOL COUNSELOR
- DOCTOR