

Behavioral Health Awareness

Welcome

Welcome to Introduction to Behavioral Health. This series is designed to help you navigate pathways to hope, and to provide you with resources and support for yourself or someone you care about. Additional resources for each module are available by selecting the Resources link in the top right corner of the window. If you have visual or auditory assistance needs, please select the Accessibility On/Off button for help with this training. You are free to start, stop, or pause the module at any time.

Did You Know?

Did you know that 46% of Americans will have a diagnosable mental health condition during their lifetime? Perhaps you know someone who lives with a behavioral health condition like depression, anxiety, or a substance use disorder, or maybe you yourself are experiencing symptoms and are looking for help.

Objectives

This table of contents provides an outline for what you will walk through in this training. We will help you define Behavioral Health, learn about conditions and misconceptions, think through treatment and recovery options, and give you a preview of the journey you will take through the modules which follow in this series.

We invite you to explore the following chapters that address questions you may have about the topic. You also have the option to move freely about the module using the menu on the left hand side of the window.

Its All of Us

Mental illness isn't an us/them issue; we are all on the scale somewhere. So we must be very careful to resist ignorance and combat the stigma that leads to dangerous silence.

–Author unknown

What Is Behavioral Health?

This module is an introduction to the Behavioral Health Awareness series, providing foundational information and an overview of terminology you might hear in remaining modules. Let's start by simply defining behavioral health. Behavioral health describes the relationship between a person's behaviors and their overall health.

There are several pieces to the puzzle on the road to replacing stigma with understanding. Unveil this path of contributing factors by sliding the circle to the right.

- Mental: Behavioral health includes mental health.
- Physical: Physical health can be a factor in a person's behavioral health.
- Social: A person's interactions with others can affect the other aspects of their behavioral health.
- Spiritual: Spiritual health may be connected to the other aspects of someone's behavioral health.
- Diet: Behavioral health also includes eating habits. Your diet can have a significant influence on your physical and mental health.
- Exercise: A person's level of physical activity, like their diet, can have an impact on mental and spiritual health.
- Substance Use: Lastly, substance use behaviors can also have a significant impact.

Conditions and Disorders

In this module and throughout the series, we will focus on two types of behavioral health conditions: mental health conditions and substance use disorders. While people can have one type of condition or the other, it's also common for these conditions to happen at the same time, or "co-occur." Now, let's talk briefly about each of these types of conditions.

Mental health conditions:

We all have bad times and hard days. We all feel sad, anxious, and scared sometimes. For many people, these feelings resolve on their own and are only temporary. But for some, these feelings and moods can last for long periods of time and feel unbearable. Some have experienced major stressors, tragedies, or traumatic events that trigger these feelings. Others may have a biological predisposition, or tendency, to develop a certain condition or several conditions. Mental health conditions affect a person's mood, thinking, and behavior to the point where their activities and quality of life are severely affected. These conditions can cause many problems for those who have them, including increased relationship strain, increased stress, impaired functioning, and physical pain. They can interfere with someone's personal relationships and work performance. Some examples of mental health conditions include depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). For more information about any of these conditions, we encourage you to explore the module devoted to the topic.

Substance use disorders:

Substance use disorders involve problematic use of substances like alcohol, illicit drugs, or prescription medication. A person might be diagnosed with a substance use disorder when their use of substances begins to interfere with their ability to function in different areas of their life, such as their performance at work, their relationships with their family and friends, or their personal responsibilities. Substance use disorders are also diagnosed when people cannot control their use of a substance despite the negative consequences it has on their life.

Factors of Influence

There are many reasons why people of all ages, genders, races, socioeconomic backgrounds, and ethnicities experience behavioral health conditions. Our genetic and biological makeup, our environmental and life experiences, and our daily habits all play a role in our behavioral health.

The factors that play into whether someone develops a condition are generally understood in two ways: risk factors and protective factors. Risk factors are more likely to produce negative outcomes or increase the likelihood of a condition developing. Protective factors do just the opposite. These are factors that counter the effects of risk factors and lower the likelihood of developing a condition.

Categories of factors include:



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- Biological and genetic predispositions
- Family, peer, and community influences
- Cultural factors
- Psychological factors, including self-image
- Socioeconomic status, which is often determined by income level, employment and education
- History of childhood or past experiences or trauma

Any of these factors can increase someone's risk for, or protection against developing a behavioral health condition. It depends on how it appears in the individual's life. For example, a community risk factor might be neighborhood poverty or violence, while a community protective factor might be ample availability of after-school activities. A family risk factor could be having parents who are heavy drinkers, while a family protective factor might be having siblings that warn you about the dangers of substance use and teach you how to cope with peer pressure in a positive way.

Misconceptions

Notes:

Unfortunately, many people discriminate against those who have mental health conditions and substance use disorders. This discrimination is often based on negative, untrue, and harmful societal perceptions. People with behavioral health conditions are often labeled, stereotyped, and treated in a negative way. Remember, all aspects of health are equally important.

A person's behavioral health, including their mental health, is just as important as their physical health; and mental health conditions are just as real as physical illness. It is important to keep this in mind during your conversations and interactions with others.

Harmful Perceptions

Some people think those with behavioral health conditions are dangerous, irresponsible, or weak. They might discriminate against, avoid, or withhold help from individuals with these conditions, or exclude these people from social or professional opportunities. Even health providers can focus on the condition more than the person, resulting in lower quality care.

Unfortunately, people with these conditions sometimes adopt these negative



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perceptions of themselves. They begin to see themselves as weak, incompetent, at fault, or undeserving. These feelings can lead to low self-esteem, shame, and social withdrawal. They can contribute to a lack of desire or confidence to pursue opportunities for improvement. They can even interfere with someone's desire to pursue treatment. The fear of negative perceptions can cause people to deny symptoms they might be developing.

Clicking on the signs at left will show you some examples of negative and harmful perceptions about these conditions.

Dangerous

"People with schizophrenia are dangerous."

Control

"People who misuse drugs and alcohol have no self-control."

Unreliable

"People with mental health conditions are unreliable."

Not real

"Mental illnesses are not real medical issues."

Snap

"People with depression should be able to snap out of it."

Truth and Growth

Emotional pain is not something that should be hidden away and never spoken about. There is truth in your pain, there is growth in your pain, but only if it's first brought out into the open.—Author unknown

Actions You Can Take

Every one of us can play an active role in ending the negative perceptions associated with behavioral health conditions. Here are some practical ways you can join the effort:

Talk Openly: Don't be afraid to talk with those in your life about these conditions. If you have a behavioral health condition, be open about your story. This may invite others to own and share their experiences, which helps reduce the shame associated with having these conditions. Sharing your story can have an incredible impact. You can provide someone else the courage and strength to come forward and open the door for them to pursue a path toward recovery.

Educate Yourself: By viewing this training, you are already doing a great job educating yourself on this topic. Take advantage of any learning opportunities you can to gain more information about these conditions.

Treatment and Provider Options

A number of treatment options are available to help those who need it. Each serves a different purpose. While medications can help decrease the intensity of symptoms, therapy helps influence behaviors and thoughts. Often, treatments work well together to help people feel better. There are also different types of behavioral health providers. When in doubt, your primary care provider is always a great place to start. You can ask them for help when deciding between types of providers, and they can help you determine the best fit for your situation.

Psychiatrists can diagnose mental health and substance use disorders, prescribe medication, and monitor medications. Some may also provide therapy or counseling. Psychologists, social workers, and counselors can help diagnose and treat behavioral health conditions, as well as participate in advocacy and linking to community resources. Specific treatment options for various behavioral health conditions are discussed in more detail in the individual modules in this series.

Recovery Is a Process of Change

At one point, behavioral health conditions were thought to be very difficult, if not impossible, to overcome or manage. But now, we know that individuals can learn to manage their health conditions and often recover fully.

Recovery is a process of change that helps people move toward their fullest potential. Recovery encourages people to be involved in their own goal-setting and achievement.



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Recovery does not happen overnight and it looks different for each person. Recovery focuses on how individuals can restore a sense of purpose and value to their lives by not letting their illness define them, their goals, or their dreams.

Recovery Is Cyclical

Recovery means that individuals can live a life in which mental and substance use disorders are not the defining factor. Most importantly, recovery means that people are not expected to simply cope with the symptoms of their health conditions, but are encouraged to find purpose and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

Even for those on the path of recovery, symptom recurrence and returning to substance use happens, just as symptoms can return with other chronic diseases. Symptom recurrence can happen at any point during recovery. Recovery is a cyclical, not linear process.

Recovery Is Continuous

People often view symptom recurrence as failure, which can cause individuals to give up on their efforts or avoid contact with their health providers. But, these experiences can be viewed as an opportunity for learning and growth. Support in the recovery process is available from recovery coaches, peers, and support networks like friends and family.

A recovery perspective means recognizing that the recovery process goes beyond treatment and continues after treatment has ended.

Still to Come

A person's behavioral health is a crucial component to overall wellness and should be considered equally important to physical health. In this introduction, you learned about behavioral health, options for treatment and recovery, and your role in ending the negative stereotypes that exist about these conditions.

This training series offers individual modules that discuss the following behavioral health topics in depth. We encourage you to explore any of the other modules in this series to find additional resources, support, and hope for the future.

Here's a list of individual topics you can explore in this series:

- Aging & Behavioral Health
- Anxiety Disorders

- Bipolar Disorders
- Depression
- Psychosis & Schizophrenia
- Serious Emotional Disturbances in Children
- Substance Use Disorders
- Suicide
- Trauma and PTSD