

5 Simple Things You Can Do

to make the world a better place for people w/ mental health challenges and their families

1. **Be a friend.** Provide companionship and compassion on the road toward recovery. Offer a ride to church or to a local support group. Listen without judgement. Pray for those you know with mental health challenges, substance use disorders, and for their family members.
2. **Share your story.** Has mental illness impacted you or your family in some way? Your story may empower others to seek treatment or have hope.
3. **Watch your language.** Pay attention to the words you use and avoid stigmatizing labels. Do not refer to people as "crazy," "psycho," "lunatic" or "mental."
4. **Be a "Stigma Buster."** Challenge negative attitudes toward mental illness among your friends and acquaintances and in the media.
5. **Learn the facts.** Educate yourself about the various mental health challenges, substance use disorders, neurodevelopmental differences, and other brain disorders. Check out the resources at the UCC Mental Health Network (www.mhn-ucc.org), take a Mental Health First Aid class and host one at your congregation for the larger community. Offer a class or going a support group with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (www.nami.org) and check out the facts at the National Institute of Mental Health (www.nimh.nih.gov), the US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (www.samhsa.gov), the Alzheimer's Association (www.alz.org). Visit the Mental Health Commission of Canada for education, supports and programs related to mental wellness <http://mentalhealthcommission.ca/>

Pointers for Successful Conversations about Mental Health

- ♦ Be careful to respect what is said in confidence. Many people with mental illness have endured stigma for many years. They may not want others to know they have mental health challenges, substance use disorder, neurodevelopmental difference, or other brain disorder, so always check with the person before talking about their condition publicly.
- ♦ Listen without being judgmental or offering advice.
- ♦ Talk to others of God's unconditional love for them and your care and concern for them.
- ♦ Pray for balance in their lives and tolerance in yours.
- ♦ Gently educate those who spread misinformation about mental health challenges, substance use disorders, and brain differences, or perpetuate negative stereotypes
- ♦ Treat persons affected by mental health challenges and their families with compassion, not condescension. Most don't want pity, just understanding and the ability to bring their whole selves and their stories to the congregation.
- ♦ Educate yourself about mental health challenges, understanding that some individuals may need more than spiritual counseling. Refer them to appropriate mental health professionals while continuing to support them as a spiritual friend.



United Church of Christ
MENTAL HEALTH™
NETWORK