



National Alliance on Mental Illness Help Line
1-800-950-6264 <https://www.nami.org/help>
Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800.273.TALK
Translifeline 877.565.8860
Veteran's Crisis Line 800.273.8255 *press 1*
Pastoral Care—Pastor Jim Alexander 623.792.5295
<https://thepalms.org/Tools2Thrive>

Mental-health experiences, treatments, and outcomes vary from person to person. Gender, race, and socio-economic variables also factor into the equation. As we observe Black History Month, we will offer several sacred stories from our Black brothers and sisters who are active and highly skilled in the mental-health profession.

I remember precisely the day that I first heard the word “depression” float into the air, and for some reason the word landed heavily on me in a foreshadowing manner. I was thirteen years old and overheard a conversation between my parents as my father half pleaded and half demanded my mother to “shake off her depression.” Knowing what I know now, I’m baffled that I didn’t learn about mental-health and family history of mental illness until years later. But that’s common in the African American community. For too long, mental health and illness have been stigmatized in our society, but even more so in the African American community as a “weakness,” “curse,” “craziness,” or “character flaw.”

Alarmingly, 1 in 4 Americans suffers from a diagnosable and treatable mental-health issue each year. African Americans are 20% more likely to experience mental-health issues compared to their white counterparts, yet are 50% less likely to seek mental-health assistance. Hearing these statistics, no wonder that my family kept depression under wrap like avoiding Voldemort’s name in Harry Potter.

But this tendency toward avoidance of the issue, even lack of education around mental health in general, led me to hide my own clinical depression for years from those closest to me and finally...my mask wore off. I suffered two suicide attempts, resulting in hospitalizations in my early 20s. I whole-heartedly attribute my desire to end my life to not being able to handle my demons; my lack of education, support and resources that would have helped me, a young Black female, lead the mentally well life to which was destined.

I feel personally blessed, yet also saddened, that so little focus is paid to mental-health issues, that at times we as a society lose sight of the importance of prevention and early intervention. Mental-health issues are not just your uncle who everyone just says is a little “off,” or the homeless person you walk past who is arguing with a person not actually there. Mental health is how we feel, think and react to life. When I started to realize this and treat my depression as any other diagnosis, such as diabetes, I re-directed and focused my life on living and being mentally well. This isn’t taught; it wasn’t taught to me.



We must change this. I am so excited that MHA is focused on continuing to embrace the legacy of Bebe Campbell Moore and her dedication towards addressing the needs of all people, particularly minority communities during Minority Mental Health Awareness Month. It took me awhile to move beyond the stigma, taboo, and shame of suffering from a mental-health issue, but when I learned to accept all of me, including my depression, I was free, and in all honesty, happy and healthy for the first time in a long time.

Lauren Carson graduated with a BA in Psychology from the University of Virginia. In 2012, Lauren founded [Black Girls Smile Inc.](#) based on her personal mental-health journey’s struggle to find racial sensitive treatment and support. As the visionary and leader of BGS, since inception in 2012 BGS has made amazing headway and continue to toward establishing the organization as a premiere mental wellness nonprofit.