

Seeking Mental Health Care: Taking the First, Scary Step

By ROXANNE PORTER

Despite increasing acceptance and public awareness, there is still a [stigma](#) associated with seeking help from mental health professionals. While mental health screening and treatment can dramatically improve someone's quality of life, there is often still a very strong resistance to the idea.

People may be afraid that they are "crazy" or that others will look down on them for it. They may have an irrational fear that they will be locked up. The truth of the matter is that seeking professional help is a suitable course of action in many situations.

If you are resisting seeking mental health help, there are a few things that can help you move forward.

Figure Out Why You Are Reluctant

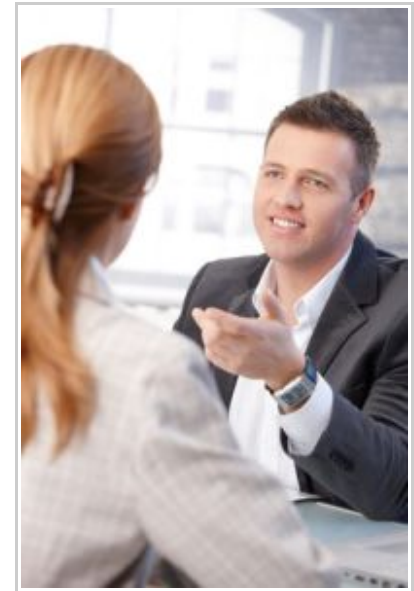
Some people can point to very specific things that teach them that they should not engage in seeking mental health help, but other people have only a strong and unconsidered resistance to the idea. If your mind automatically shies away from thinking about the possibility, ask yourself why. Are you afraid of how you will be seen? Are you concerned about the idea of being put on drugs that will affect you adversely? Once you figure out why you are averse to the idea, you can move forward.

Use Anonymous Help Lines

There are a number of anonymous help lines where trained counselors can help distressed people or suggest ways to handle mental health concerns. Though suicide hotlines are the best known, there are others which will help you understand mental health services and put you in touch with the organizations that you need. There is no pressure in calling an anonymous hotline, and you'll find that it can make you much more inclined to talk about getting the help that you need.

Stop Using Pejorative Language

Many people afraid of seeking help for mental illness speak derogatorily about those who do. They use words such as "crazy," "psycho," or "loony bin." Not only does this shame people who might be listening, it also creates a distance between themselves and something that could potentially help them. When you catch yourself calling yourself or someone else crazy, stop yourself. At the very least, it might clue you in to how you are behaving.



Ask Around

It can be hard to find a mental health professional who is suited to you. For example, if you are dealing with issues related to alternative lifestyles, sexuality or abuse, you want to make sure that you are dealing with a professional who is skilled in these matters. If your friends or family members regularly see a therapist, ask them for advice. If you feel as though you cannot talk to anyone who knows you, go online. Many people review their counselors on the Internet, and it can help you find someone who can help you.

Talk it out

Talk out your fears with a sympathetic friend. Find someone you know who is aware of issues like this, or at least someone you know will be understanding. Sometimes, it can be a good way for you to overcome your fears; others may be able to point out things that you miss. It also can be very freeing to talk to someone about something you may perceive as shameful or problematic. This is something that can give you the courage you need to move forward.

Ask for Company

If you are making your first steps toward seeking professional psychological help, you'll find that it can be tough to even make it out the door. You might find yourself delaying the trip or repeatedly putting it off. Making that first step is hard, and sometimes, it is a good idea to make sure that you have a friend who can help you with it. Ask a friend to go with you on your first trip to a mental health center. They may simply drive you there, or they may wait there with you. This can be quite comforting if you are worried or if you have [anxiety](#) problems. Your friends want to be there for you, so remember to let them.

Keep a Journal

Sometimes, people have very short memories when it comes to their mental health. They may have a good idea, and in some ways, they simply forget that they ever have bad ones. It is a perilous see-saw. They do not get help when they are upset because they lack the willpower or motivation, but when they are feeling happy, they don't get help because they're convinced that they will always be happy. Keeping a journal that tracks your moods can help you establish patterns that will help you understand what is going on. Also, a journal is a great thing to give to a mental health professional, as it shows where you have been and what you have been going through.

Consider Support Groups

If you know the area with which you are struggling, it can benefit you to go to a support group. Support groups often are mediated by people with some kind of mental health training. In some cases, a support group is less intimidating because you can hang back before you participate, and the focus is not necessarily on you. If you live in a major city, support groups often are quite numerous, but if you live in a smaller city or a rural area, they may take some effort to attend. Remember that participation in a support group is purely voluntary, and that you can leave at any point during the meeting that you want to.

Consider What to Expect

People often are nervous about seeking psychological help because they are afraid of the unknown. They may think that someone will make a snap judgment about their case, and they may be afraid that they will not be able to negotiate their needs. When you go in for

a mental health appointment, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire about yourself and your reasons for seeking treatment. Then a therapist will talk to you, and if it is appropriate, outline their ideas for treatment. None of this is binding, and you are allowed to state your preferences.

Set Limits

Some people feel that they will be completely helpless when they are dealing with a counselor. The truth of the matter is that unless you are speaking of doing something illegal or you are going to harm yourself, a mental health professional cannot detain you in any way, nor can they force treatment on you. If you do not want to be on medication, you can set that as a limit, and if there are some things which disturb you or upset you, you can set limits there too. Mental health professionals should always encourage good boundaries.

Mental health can be a frightening issue to deal with, but learning more about it can make you much healthier and happier.

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APA Reference

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