

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

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What is mental health? Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Everyone is at some risk of developing a mental health disorder, regardless of age, sex, income, or ethnicity. In the US and much of the developed world, mental disorders are one of the leading causes of disability. Social and financial circumstances, adverse childhood experiences, biological factors, and underlying medical conditions can all shape a person's mental health.

Modifiable factors for mental health disorders include socio-economic conditions, such as whether work is available in the local area, occupation, a person's level of social involvement, education, and housing quality. Non-modifiable factors include gender, age, ethnicity, and nationality. Researchers have found that being female increases the risk of low mental health issues by nearly four times. Biological factors contributing to mental health disorders include chronic stress and physical health problems, such as cancer, diabetes, and chronic pain. The most common mental health disorders are anxiety and depression.

Depression is a pretty normal part of life; we go through ups and downs our entire life. Household bills, things breaking down, kids disappointing us, health conditions, and so on. Symptoms can include the inability to sleep or sleeping too much, gaining or losing weight, isolating from friends and family, the inability to concentrate, lack of interest in things you used to enjoy, feelings of sadness, tearfulness, irritability, angry outbursts, slowed thinking, excessive feelings of guilt over the past, anxiety, and unexplained physical ailments.

People with anxiety disorders frequently have intense, excessive and persistent worry and fear about everyday situations. Symptoms may include being restless or tense, having a sense of impending danger or panic, increased heart rate, breathing rapidly (hyperventilation), sweating, trembling, feeling weak or tired, and trouble concentrating on anything other than the present worry.

The good news is most mental health problems are treatable. Many times, natural treatments can be effective such as exercise, essential oils, yoga, meditation, healthy diets, and elimination of caffeine and alcohol. When natural treatments are not enough, talk therapy with a professional can be effective. And when there is a chemical imbalance in the body, medications can help restore that balance. Most importantly, mental illness is not a weakness, defect, or choice. It is a disease that is treatable. For more information on depression, anxiety and other mental health issues visit: www.nami.org and our own Rochester Area Catholic Family of Parishes Mental Health Ministry webpage: www.stirenaeus.org/mental-health.



Our Rochester Area Catholic Family of Parishes **Mental Health Ministry** responds to mental health needs by providing spiritual support, awareness, education, and resources.

