



## May is Mental Health Awareness Month

### Celebrating Mental Health!

A note from Nicole Kurdyla, LCSW

#### **What is Mental Health?**

According to general consensus, *mental health includes emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act, and helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.* Conditions that affect one's thinking, feelings or mood are considered 'illnesses' or 'mental health issues'.

So, are you 'sick' if you have a mental health condition? Do you need to have an illness to have mental health needs? Does your diagnosis matter? Does any of this even matter if you are predisposed to mental illness?

The answer to everything is yes, and no. *I would challenge that every person on this earth has mental health needs and issues.* That is, we feel anxious, we feel depressed, we feel highs and lows. We feel suspicious, we feel guarded, we talk to ourselves internally, and we have rituals that make us feel safe or confident. Women have chemical mood swings post-partum, pre-menstrual and menopausal - that is nature speaking. **Life events can throw us into despair or elation, grief or anger.** So, on the continuum of mental health, moods shift, our mental health shifts, people shift in life, during life, all throughout life.

In some people, conditions develop that more seriously impact one's life. The continuum of mental health shifts considerably in one direction. Sometimes it is genetically caused, sometimes it is trauma-induced and sometimes it is none of the above. On the spectrum of moods from depression to elation, some people's highs and lows become more extreme and mentally painful. Some people develop thoughts and sensations that only they can detect, causing challenges to function in everyday life. Some have certain preoccupation of thoughts and ideas that make it difficult or impossible to focus. Still others become emotionally dis-regulated and struggle with past trauma, making it a challenge to have fulfilling relationships and livelihoods. Do people with these issues struggle all of the time, day and night.....usually not. Some people do, but the most do not. **Symptoms come and go. Do they even consider it a struggle? Many do not and it should not be assumed that they are suffering.**

**These are Symptoms. These are Descriptions. These are not People.**

So are people with mental health conditions 'sick'?

Fortunately, the mind is incredibly complex and has the ability to withstand an amazing amount of 'un-wellness'. And also fortunately, there are treatments for those who have mental health conditions - therapies of many different kinds, medications, wellness activities such as meditation and physical activity, vast support networks and activities. Diagnoses are the containers that hold all of your symptoms so that treatment providers know how to treat you - so while they are useful for that reason, they do not define you. Just because someone has tried one or two different kind of treatment does not mean you should give up. **DO NOT GIVE UP.** Mental health help is not a perfect science. You are not a perfect science. *Sometimes it takes some trial and error to figure out the best combination of therapies and support to help you on your journey, but recovery is more than a possibility.*

Alternatives, Inc. offers Community Support Services to people with mental health needs....whatever those needs may be. Send a message for more information.

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