



May 2024 News and Notes

The Many Faces of Mental Health Awareness

By Robin Joy Berenson, PhD, LMFT

Mental Health America (MHA) first designated May as “Mental Health Awareness Month” in 1949. The organization’s origins date back to 1909 when, then the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, the founders set forth the following goals:

- to improve attitudes toward mental illness and people living with mental health conditions;
- to improve services for people with mental health conditions; and
- to work for the prevention of mental illnesses and the promotion of mental health.

Under this year’s theme, “Mental Health in a Changing World,” MHA addresses each of these goals with a range of materials and resources. Only a few are noted here.

Listed on their website are many ideas as to how to raise awareness of mental health issues. These include strategies for individuals, businesses, organizations, and so on, as well as practical information for individuals who want to “Learn more about Mental Health.”

One item is “4 things likely affecting your mental health,” such as Current Events; Loneliness; Technology; and Social Drivers, that is, “the conditions in which we live, work, learn, and play.” Also listed are “4 things you can do about it.” Here they suggest:

- Find your support system
- Set tech limits / boundaries
- Change what you can
- Find healthy coping skills for dealing with difficult emotions

Practical support resources provided go even further, to include Worksheets and Tools:

Worksheets

- Dealing with tough situations
- Looking for good
- Managing frustration and anger
- Processing trauma and stress
- Social confidence and connections

Interactive tools

- Dealing with tough situations
- Prepare for difficult conversations
- Where to get help

<https://mhanational.org/mental-health-month>

SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, an *agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*) reminds visitors to its website, “we all play active roles in caring for our mental health!”

In honor of Mental Health Awareness month, they offer a “toolkit” of materials “designed to be shared with your audiences and across your media channels; they are downloadable and shareable, and some of the material is customizable.”

Described as a “one stop shop,” their toolkit features:

- Social media content to help spread awareness about the vital role mental health plays in our well-being, promote acceptance and support of anyone living with a mental illness, and share key resources.
- Best practices for engaging in healthy discussions about mental health.
- Promotional materials for mental health awareness in May and beyond.

Their Social Media Shareables offer “Key Messages and Weekly Themes,” highlighting the diverse needs of a different population each week: Older Adults; Children and Teens; Maternal Mental Health; Race and Ethnic Minority Groups, and LGBTQIA+ communities.

<https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health-awareness-month>

NAMI (National Alliance for Mental Illness) website describes National Mental Health Awareness Month as “a cornerstone of addressing the challenges faced by millions of Americans living with mental health conditions. . . . [And] dedicated to eradicating stigma, extending support, fostering public education and advocating for policies that prioritize the well-being of individuals and families affected by mental illness.

“This year, NAMI is celebrating Mental Health Awareness Month with the Take the Moment campaign. We encourage you to join us in fostering open dialogues, cultivating empathy and understanding. We also urge you to share our resources to support individuals and families on their journey towards mental wellness. Through "Take the Moment," we shine a spotlight on NAMI's array of signature programs including: [NAMI Basics](#), [NAMI Family-to-Family](#), [NAMI Family & Friends](#), [NAMI Homefront](#), [NAMI In Our Own Voice](#), [NAMI Peer-to-Peer](#), [NAMI Support Groups](#) and our invaluable [NAMI HelpLine](#), which is a free, nationwide peer-support service providing information, resource referrals and support to people living with a mental health condition, their family members and caregivers, mental health providers and the public.”

<https://www.nami.org/Get-Involved/Awareness-Events/Mental-Health-Awareness-Month/>