

Five Warning Signs of Mental Illness

Nearly one in every five people, or 42.5 million American adults, has a diagnosable mental-health condition. Often our friends, neighbors, co-workers, and even family members are suffering emotionally and don't recognize the symptoms or won't ask for help. Here are five signs that may mean you or someone you know is in emotional pain and might need help:

Personality Change – You may notice sudden or gradual changes in the way that someone typically behaves. He or she may behave in ways that don't seem to fit the person's values, or the person may just seem different.

Agitation – They seem uncharacteristically angry, anxious, agitated, or moody. You may notice the person has more frequent problems controlling his or her temper and seems irritable or unable to calm down. People in more extreme situations of this kind may be unable to sleep or may explode in anger at a minor problem.

Withdrawal – They withdraw or isolate themselves from other people. Someone who used to be socially engaged may pull away from family and friends and stop taking part in activities he or she used to enjoy. In more severe cases, the person may start failing to make it to work or school. Not be confused with behavior of someone who is more introverted, this sign is marked by a change in someone's typical sociability, as when someone pulls away from the social support he or she typically has.

Poor Self-Care – They stop taking care of themselves and may engage in risky behavior. You may notice a change in the person's level of personal care or an act of poor judgment on his or her part. For instance, someone may let his or her personal hygiene deteriorate, or the person may start abusing alcohol or illicit substances or engaging in other self-destructive behavior that may alienate loved ones.

Hopelessness – They seem overcome with hopelessness and overwhelmed by their circumstances. Have you noticed someone who used to be optimistic and now can't find anything to be hopeful about? That person may be suffering from extreme or prolonged grief, or feelings of worthlessness or guilt. People in this situation may say that the world would be better off without them, suggesting suicidal thinking.

If you recognize that you or someone in your life is suffering, now what? You connect, reach out, you inspire hope, and you offer help. Show compassion and caring and a willingness to find a solution when the person may not have the will or drive to help him- or herself. It may take more than one offer, and you may need to reach out to others who share your concern about the person who is suffering. If everyone is more open and honest about mental health, we can prevent pain and suffering, and those in need will get the help they deserve.