

Millennials And Mental Health

As a mother of two Millennials, I've noticed differences between their generation and mine. Like how they prefer to spend money on travel, amazing food and experiences rather than physical things like homes and cars. These aren't negative qualities—just different.

There is one difference I've noticed that is extremely positive: how they view mental health. I recently had a conversation with my oldest daughter, Mackenzie, who struggles with anxiety. "Mom, you wouldn't believe how many people my age talk about mental health," she said. "It's not a taboo subject anymore. I know a lot of people at work and friends outside of work who see therapists or take medication for anxiety and depression."

I couldn't hide my smile. Obviously, I'm not happy they're dealing with mental illness, but I'm glad they're not afraid to bring up the subject. My experience growing up was completely the opposite. I felt totally alone. My panic attacks began when I was 10 and I kept it a secret. I didn't want to be seen as strange or different. By the time I was in my 20s, I panicked every time I drove or went to the grocery store. I knew my symptoms weren't normal, but I still said nothing. Stigma and fear kept me quiet.

Meanwhile, Mackenzie was 23 when symptoms of anxiety first started to show. At first, I don't think she wanted to admit she was having problems. She spent hours at the office, working her way up; she rarely took time to relax, never thinking much about her mental health. She blamed her lack of sleep on her motivation to get ahead, and her lack of appetite on acid reflux. But there was a deeper problem.

Mental health conditions run in our family. My mom had depression. My youngest daughter and I have recovered from panic disorder. Mackenzie was aware of our family history, and maybe that made it easier for her to talk about her symptoms. But I think the main reason she was encouraged to get professional help was that she heard her friends and coworkers openly discuss *their* mental health issues. Mackenzie didn't feel ashamed or alone.

Millennials are often referred to as the "anxious generation." They were the first to grow up with the constant overflow of the Internet and social media. The Internet can make life better, but it can also make life complicated, as Millennials often compare their personal and professional achievements to everyone else's. This can result in low self-esteem and insecurity.

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Talk Saves Lives for Local Baristas

Thank You!



Alexis McKinnon has been with Starbucks for five years. Throughout her time with Starbucks, Alexis noticed more conversations surrounding mental health and wellness among her staff, and felt there was a local need to provide education surrounding the highly stigmatized topic.

As a first step, Alexis and her staff developed a Mental Health and Wellness Box for people to leave inspirational messages and resources for customers to see and take. In November, Alexis was approached by *SPEAK UP Cortland*, Cortland County's Suicide Prevention Coalition, to see if she would like the baristas from the Cortland Starbucks to receive the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's (AFSP) *Talk Saves Lives* training. Alexis welcomed this opportunity and scheduled two separate trainings for her staff to attend. On January 2, 2020 and January 16, 2020, the Cortland Starbucks baristas participated in *Talk Saves Lives*.

On behalf of *SPEAK UP Cortland*, thank you to Alexis and all the baristas for taking an interest in reducing stigma surrounding mental health and starting to talk openly about suicide prevention. If you are interested in bringing this training to your local agency please contact Patty Schaap at (607) 428-5473.



Kurt's Korner

The Language of the Mentally III

In his essay Self-Reliance, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "Every heart vibrates to that same iron string." However, it is true the spectrum of diversity slices across the human experience so much so that, at times, it may seem that we are utterly disconnected. Despite the seemingly limitless spectrum of human behaviors and conditions, there is something – some aspect of experience – that connects us all.

Mental illnesses are one such realm of the human experience through which there runs a connection between sufferers. This connection is what enables us to categorize mental illnesses... each share certain characteristics that are manifested in the sufferer.

Sufferers express these characteristics through words and actions. Most often, the similarities of action are noted (such as inactivity). Less often do we take note of the similarities in words used to describe the experience of mental illness.

Dr. Wes Burgess, a psychiatrist of almost twenty years and author of The Bipolar Handbook, notes this phenomenon in regard to bipolar disorder. He writes, "...if you had a party of one hundred completely different people who all had bipolar disorder, you could walk through the group and hear everyone saying similar things about their bipolar illness, sometimes using the same words."

These similar verbal descriptions of mental illness are particularly evidenced by writers who suffer from mood disorders. Those who use words as the tools of their trade are especially proficient at expressing the altered states that mental illnesses can imprison the sufferer. Furthermore, individuals with mental illness often have a propensity toward writing and art. As Ernest Hemingway noted, "The terrible mood of depression is known as the artist's reward." It is remarkable how often the same concepts and even the same words are used when describing mental illnesses of every stripe... especially depression.

Perhaps the most commonly used descriptions of depression are those of being submerged. Writer William Styron said, "the pain [of depression] is most closely connected with drowning and suffocation..." Poet John Keats described depression by also using drowning imagery. He stated, "I am in the temper that if I were under water I would scarcely kick to come to the top." Writer and poet Sylvia Plath also used theme of suffocation and drowning. She wrote, "I am now flooded with despair, almost hysteria, as if I were smothering..." These authors are but three of the multitude of famous artists who described their depression with images of drowning and suffocation. The more one reads the words of mood disorders, the more evident this particular metaphor becomes.

The descriptions and themes vary from disorder to disorder. For instance, sufferers of anxiety disorders such as General Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Panic Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and Social Phobia tend to have their own language to describe their mental illness. Words such as "confine," "jail," and "being chained" are often used to form metaphors about the imprisonment of the sufferer tend to be commonly used. In the words of sufferers of almost any disorder, specific metaphors almost always emerge.

Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that every person's experience is unique. No two individuals have exactly the same experience of a mental disorder just as no two individuals have the exact same experience of anything. However, the similarities found in the descriptions of the sufferers are abundantly evident. Emerson's words ring true: every heart does vibrate to that same iron string. One need only look at language as evidence.

*Kurt Warner, Vice President, MHA Board of Directors and
Community Housing Manager at Catholic Charities of Cortland County*



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Millennials and Mental Health

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The world is at Millennials' fingertips, but they also feel its immense weight. "Everything is so fast-paced and competitive. Part of that is social media," Mackenzie told me. "The sense of immediacy—everything has to happen right away, at the click of a button. There's pressure to constantly be 'on.' To look and sound perfect, and act like you have it all together. But you don't." She continued, "I'm relieved my friends and I talk about being anxious and depressed. I don't have to pretend anymore."

A 2015 study by American University said that Millennials grew up hearing about anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and suicide, and they are more accepting of others with mental illness. Millennials are more likely to talk about mental health than their parents or grandparents. As more people speak out, the stigma surrounding mental illness is beginning to lessen.

Word is spreading through social media that mental health is an important part of overall well-being. Celebrities are openly sharing their struggles. The younger generation is learning about mental illness at an earlier age (thanks to programs like NAMI Ending the Silence).

It's still difficult for many people to be open about their mental health issues—I'm not saying stigma is completely gone. But at least it's not a totally taboo subject, like it was when I was growing up. I'm thankful Millennials are helping to break that stigma barrier a little further. I'm so glad my daughter doesn't feel alone.

Jenny Marie is a mental health advocate. Read her entire blog from nami.org [here](#).

How Do Seasons Affect Mental Health? Colder Weather Can Affect All Kinds Of Mental Illness



When the days become shorter and the weather becomes chillier, many people can find themselves with a slight case of the winter blues, as the change in seasons can indeed affect mental health. However, if you notice this depression is recurring every year, you may have Seasonal Affective Disorder (aka, SAD). According to the National Institute of Mental Health, Seasonal Affective Disorder is "a type of depression that comes and goes with the seasons, typically starting in the late fall and early winter and going away during the spring and summer." Basically, people with SAD experience depression, but it ebbs and flows along with seasons.

SAD is an extremely important mental health issue, but many people don't realize the folks with other mental illnesses can also experience an influx of symptoms with the change of seasons. A 2013 study that examined Google searches on mental health suggests all (yes, all) mental illnesses tend to get worse during the colder months — likely because people are feeling the

effects much more. While mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, or Bipolar disorder are a year-round challenge, winter weather can make coping with mental illness with more difficult. Colder weather can affect all kinds of mental illness.

Cold weather can limit access to coping skills

While some may enjoy snowy weather, it can inhibit mentally ill people from seeking out or accessing their most helpful coping skills. "In the colder seasons, the things that function as my self care — being in the sunshine, being able to exercise freely, and being able to see my friends — are restrained by the weather here in Illinois," Talia, an 18-year-old artist and activist tells Bustle. "While I think some solitude is very healthy to thrive, [winter] often leads to more time spent confined to my room." Investing in a light therapy box, or simply stocking up on small, in-home comforts could ease the transition of coping during the winter. Also, though the role of Vitamin D deficiencies and how they affect mental health is still a contentious topic, studies suggest taking Vitamin D during darker months could help lift your mood.

Winter weather can influence manic and depressive episodes in people with Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar Disorder (both Type I and II) are characterized by two major, alternating mood patterns: manic episodes occur when a person diagnosed with Bipolar disorder has an elevated mood, insomnia, impulsivity, and other high-energy symptoms according to the DSM-5. Depressive episodes mimic the symptoms commonly found with clinical depression, but Bipolar depression can be more volatile. The change of seasons can impact people with Bipolar in multiple ways and influence the occurrence of an episode. "The biological effects of a lack of sunlight can produce disruption in sleep

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FREE Workshop Series



THE ADOLESCENT BRAIN: A HOW-TO GUIDE FOR PARENTS & TEACHERS

FREE DINNER & CHILDCARE INCLUDED

This workshop series taught by counselor, Karen Dudgeon, LCSW, is for any adult with an adolescent in their lives. Participants will receive a free copy of the book, Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain, by attending any individual session, but we hope you attend all five. Pre-registration strongly encouraged.

5:00-5:30pm: Light dinner for participants and their children

5:30-7:30pm: Workshop

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February 27

**HOMER INTERMEDIATE
SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM**
*Understanding
Your Pre-Teen / Teenager*

2

March 5

**HOMER INTERMEDIATE
SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM**
*The Many Pressures Facing
Today's Kids Part I*

3

March 12

**HOMER INTERMEDIATE
SCHOOL - AUDITORIUM**
*The Many Pressures Facing
Today's Kids Part II*

4

March 19

**CORTLAND JUNIOR SENIOR
HIGH SCHOOL - LGI ROOM**
*The Many Pressures Facing
Today's Kids Part III*

5

March 26

**CORTLAND JUNIOR SENIOR
HIGH SCHOOL - LGI ROOM**
*Care and Feeding of Healthy
Pre-Teens / Teens*

CARE COMPASS
NETWORK

Sponsored by Care Compass Network and Seven Valleys Health Coalition.



For more info or to register:

(607) 756-4198

www.sevenvalleyshealth.org

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How Do Seasons Affect Mental Health? ...Continued from page 3

cycles, decreased and depressed mood [...] the changes in the season and temperature are mirroring the changes in their bodies that help adapt to the climate change which can exacerbate and manifest as manic and depressive symptoms," Clarissa Silva, a Behavior Scientist, explains to Bustle via email. While symptoms can vary in degree and significance depending on the individual, there's little doubt that seasons affect how their illnesses present.

Anxiety, like Bipolar Disorder, can also fluctuate with the weather

Similarly to Bipolar Disorder, people who live with anxiety disorders can experience a volatile influx or range of symptoms with the oncoming winter months. "For those diagnosed with bipolar disorder or anxiety, the winter can be especially challenging. Research has shown seasonal patterns in increased hospital admission rates, mood relapses and symptom fluctuations during the winter months," says Silva. People diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder or anxiety "will experience more irritability, changes in sleep cycles, changes in mood that are drastic, and/or feelings of not wanting to do similar activities done in the previous months." Easing the transition from summer to cold weather and dark days can be difficult, but by utilizing small coping skills, you could possibly deter some anxiety, or stop a panic attack in its tracks.

Elevating your awareness around your mental health, and learning how the seasons can personally affect you could make or break your winter months. Even if you love the snowy months and winter activities, keep in mind that less sun and limited time outside can impact your mental health — whether or not you live with a mental illness. For folks who do have mental health issues, taking any possible, proactive steps to alleviate your winter-borne symptoms before they become unmanageable can help keep you healthy.

Kylie Rodriguez-Cayro. To read the entire article on [bustle.com](https://www.bustle.com), click [here](#).



COMMUNITY EVENTS AND SUPPORT

Food for Thought—Our Stigmas & Biases

Wednesday, February 12, Noon–1:00 PM

New location: TC3 Cortland Ext Ctr, 157 Main St, Cortland

How Our Stigmas & Biases Can Impact our Clients

Presented by Mandy Stout, LCSW & Derek Titus, CASAC 2 Learn how professionals can positively influence change in those who struggle with substance abuse.

RSVP required to lbarbin@fscscortland.org

Cortland LGBTQ Resource Center Support Groups

Men's Group—Wednesday, February 19, 6:00-8:00 PM

Youth (K-8th grade)—Monday, February 24, 5:30-7:30 PM

GEAR Teens—Thursday, February 6, 6:00-8:00 PM

165 Main St Suite B

For more information: (607) 756-8970

Caregivers Support Group

Thursday, February 20, 3:00-4:00 PM

Conf Rm B, Basement of GCMC, 134 Homer Ave, Cortland

For those who provide support for someone aged 60 or older.

For more info: Caregivers Resource Center (607) 753-5060.

Family Support Group

Tuesday, February 4, 7:00-8:30 pm

Monday, February 17, 1:30-3:00 pm

108 N Cayuga St, Suite 2, Ithaca

For adult family and friends of individuals living with a mental illness.

For more info: namifingerlakes.org

607 Healing Hearts

Monday, February 17, 6:00-8:00 PM

165 Main St, Cortland

Grief support group for parents/guardians who have experienced the death of an adult child.

For more info: 607healinghearts@gmail.com

Understanding Alzheimer's and Dementia

Thursday, February 13, 12:00 -1:00 PM, Rm 302, COB

Covers the basics of Alzheimer's and dementia.

For more info or to register: (607) 753-5060

If you have an upcoming community event or article you would like considered for inclusion in the MHA Newsletter, send your submission to kristin@sevenvalleyshealth.org by the 14th of the month prior, or subscribe to the newsletter via email.

Disclaimer: The information presented here does not constitute professional medical advice. Individuals respond to treatment for mental health conditions in different ways, and treatment plans often need adjustment over time. Patients should work closely with their doctor and other health professionals in order to achieve optimal control of symptoms.