

# Mental Health: Conversations & Education

Created by Mary Elder, United Methodist Church, Fredericktown, OH in collaboration with the Circle of  
Congregations and

ALL BELONG CENTER FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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## Forward to Leader(s)

Blessings as you lead this series! Collaborators on this project with a variety of backgrounds and experiences with persons who have mental health challenges have prayed for this to bring understanding, growth, and healing in your community. From the array of experiences represented by the collaborators, here are a few suggestions for you:

- Rehearse each session before you lead it.
- There will be “curve balls” when people are working through these topics. You don’t want to get into problem solving with individuals. Be willing to offer another time with someone who has much to share. And/or suggest they talk with someone (therapist, counselor, etc.).
- Take note and decide how you will use language in a way that honors those in your community and brings insight where there may be misunderstanding. Answer for yourself these two questions before you launch the series:
  - Will you usually use the phrase “mental illness”, or would you say, “mental health challenge”?
  - Why?
- Working with local professionals, consider their expertise, share the video(s) you will use the day they are coming and discuss with them the video content. Honor their expertise and be willing to let go of parts of this plan if it conflicts with something they wish to share.
- Invite people with lived experiences to briefly share their story on any of the Scripture passages or topics you are discussing. You will need to be careful to keep this sharing to about 5 minutes and be ready to enforce that time.

## Forward to Everyone

This series is aiming to inform and bless the community by addressing some topics that may be uncomfortable for some to hear and talk about.

The discussion times are optional (no one *has* to speak if they do not wish to).

This will be a safe place to ask questions. Respectfully keep it safe by honoring everyone as they speak, listening carefully to what they say and how they say it. Commit to keeping these discussions confidential unless you gain permission to share what others have said.

Each session is a brief introduction; you may want to follow up with professionals to find out more.

## Session 1: Mental Health (Opening Session)

### Introduction

**Video:** [The Stigma of Mental Health](#) (3:50) by the Mental Health Collaborative

**(Optional) Video:** [The Basics of Mental Health](#) (3:45) by Crossroads Church

### Handouts / Q & A

- ❖ Language Patterns to Avoid (from online article “[Speaking Well in Worship about Mental Illnesses](#)” by Charlotte vanOyen Witvliet, Ph. D.)
- ❖ NAMI handouts:
  - [“You Are NOT Alone”](#)
  - [“The Ripple Effect of Mental Illness”](#)
  - [“Common Warning Signs of Mental Illness”](#)
  - [“It’s Okay to Talk About Suicide”](#)
- ❖ [Recovery Oriented Language Guide](#) (Second Edition Revised © Mental Health Coordinating Council pgs.6-10)
- ❖ [The Puzzle Piece Perspective](#) (article)

Talk about the opening video and contents of the handout(s). Have a mental health professional take a few general questions.

### Discussion Time

**Video:** [Dr. John Swinton on mental health support from churches](#) (5:06)

#### Discussion Questions:

1. What do we have “thin” descriptions of that we need to learn more about? (Go around the group and allow people to say a topic or two they want to learn more about in the coming weeks, based on the list of what you have planned).
2. What is our motivation to go through this series? (Allow everyone, if they wish, to share in a word or two a relationship or key reason they are coming to learn and discuss these areas)
3. What is one thing we each want to gain from this series? (Or 2 things, maybe 3, but keep to no more than 3 for the purpose of this discussion)

**Puzzle Piece Perspective:** [Puzzle Piece animation video \(3:15\)](#)

Using this brief video, discuss how this perspective might shape the conversations about mental health challenges in this series.

**Scripture:** [John 9:1-5, The Message](#)

**Thought to take with you:** Jesus says the question is not “Why?” or “Who’s to blame?” but rather, “What does God want me to do in order that his power and purpose can be seen in this situation?” (from [Study Guide](#), p.4)

**(Optional) Discussion Question:** What did you learn about people with mental illness as you grew up? (From family, school, church, media...) From all those messages and experiences, what beliefs did you form about people who have mental health challenges? (Adapted from [Study Guide](#), p.5)

**Prayer:** Lord, thank you for the opportunity to start talking about a topic that is hard to talk about. Some of us might secretly be dealing with it, and it’s lonely, Lord. Help us learn what it is that you want to teach us in order that we might learn to care for those among us and their families who experience mental health challenges. Grant us your grace to respond with compassion. Amen. (from [Study Guide](#), p.6)

## Session 2: Depression/Mood Disorders

### Introduction

**Video:** [“I had a black dog; his name was depression.”](#) (4:18)

### Handouts /Q & A

NAMI handouts

- ❖ [“Depression”](#)
- ❖ [“Bipolar Disorder”](#)

Talk about the opening video and contents of the handout(s). Have a mental health professional take a few general questions.

**Video:** [“Living with a black dog”](#) (5:57)

### Discussion Time/Key Ministry website

**Video** – [Dr. Steve Grcevich \(Key Ministry\) on welcoming persons to church who struggle with social isolation](#) (9:49)

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Who do we have in our church that is routinely in contact with individuals affected with mental health conditions?
2. How can we take church to persons who are dealing with social isolation?
3. How can we better follow-up with those persons who once were participating in church activities and gradually quit all activities?
4. Do our small groups or Sunday School classes practice “relational respite”?

**Scripture:** [Psalm 88](#) The Psalmist understands depression (Heman the Ezrahite)

#### (Optional) Personal Story

If you have invited someone to share for 5 minutes, now is the time for that.

**Thought to take with you:** (from [Study Guide](#), p.12) “Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which you invite strangers to become friends, to get to know their inner selves more fully, and even to dare to be silent with you.” (Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*)

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, thank you that you are our friend and are present with us in the darkness. Help us to understand better the truths that our brothers and sisters who have mental illness experience. As your friends, teach us to be present with others and to carry them to you. Amen. (from [Study Guide](#), p.10)

## Session 3: Anxiety/Social Phobia

### Introduction

**Videos:** Dr. Tracey Marks

- ❖ ["Anxiety is more than worry "](#) (5:08)
- ❖ [What are Panic Attacks and Why You Get Them?"](#) (7:37)

### Handouts / Q & A

- ❖ NAMI handout ["Anxiety Disorders"](#)

Talk about the opening video and contents of the handout(s). Have a mental health professional take a few general questions.

### Discussion Time

**Video:** [Dr. Steve Grcevich \(Key Ministry\) on overcoming anxiety as a barrier to church attendance](#) (13:14)

#### Discussion Questions:

1. What tasks would you have a Mental Health Liaison in our church perform?
1. Think of an area of ministry in our church. How can we “show” it better with pictures on our website?
2. How can we improve our church welcoming experience for first time visitors who might have anxiety?

**Scripture:** [Psalm 42](#)

#### (Optional) Personal Story

If you have invited someone to share for 5 minutes, now is the time for that.



**Thought to take with you:** “Anything that’s human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary.” (Fred Rogers)

**Prayer:** Lord, we thank you for the opportunity for getting to know more about the struggles people experience when dealing with mental health challenges. We pray that you will give us the courage and wisdom and compassion to support our brothers and sisters, and receive their support, in a way that is honoring to them and you. Forgive us when we make mistakes and provide us the grace to carry on again. Bless us as we try to be partners in the work of your kingdom. Amen. (from [Study Guide](#), p.13)

## Session 4: Autism/Sensory Processing

### Introduction

**Video:** [What it's really like to have autism: TED Talk with Ethan Lisi](#) (9:52)

### Handouts / Q & A

From All Belong Center for Inclusive Education:

- ❖ [“Autism Spectrum Disorder”](#)
- ❖ [“Sensory Differences”](#)

Talk about the opening video and contents of the handout(s). Have a mental health professional take a few general questions.

### Discussion Time

**Video:** [Dr. Steve Grcevich on welcoming persons to church who struggle with sensory processing differences](#) (11:05)

#### Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways can we make our entrances more sensory friendly? Our worship spaces? Our children's and youth areas?
2. How can we improve our marketing and promoting of our online church?
3. What kinds of sensory free community outreach could we offer if we partnered with other churches?

**Scripture:** [Psalm 137:1-6](#)

#### (Optional) Personal Story

If you have invited someone to share for 5 minutes, now is the time for that.

**Thought to take with you:** “Mental Health problems don’t define who you are. They are something you experience. You walk in the rain, and you feel the rain, but importantly, YOU ARE NOT THE RAIN.” (Matt Haig)

**Prayer:** Lord, thank-you that we can learn about persons who live with autism and sensory issues. Help us to be quick to love and slow to judge. Teach us ways that we can be in relationship with all people as well as keep all people in mind when we plan worship services and church activities. Continue to remind us that the greatest of all things is love.

## Session 5: ADHD/OCD/Eating Disorders

### Introduction

#### Videos:

- ❖ [Jessica McCabe “This is what it’s really like to live with ADHD”](#) (17:13)
- ❖ [Holderness Family “ADHD” song](#) (3:42)

### Handouts/ Q & A

From All Belong Center for Inclusive Education:

- ❖ [“Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder”](#)

NAMI handouts:

- ❖ [“ADHD”](#)
- ❖ [“OCD”](#)
- ❖ [“PTSD”](#)
- ❖ [“Eating Disorders”](#)

Talk about the opening video and contents of the handout(s). Have a mental health professional take a few general questions.

### Discussion Time

**Video:** [Dr. Steve Grcevich on welcoming children and adults who struggle with self-discipline](#) (8:38)

#### Discussion Questions

1. Is our church signage clear?
  1. Where could we implement one-point messages and one thing to do?
  2. Are there spaces in our church that have too much stimulation and information to process?

**Scripture:** [Romans 12:3-13](#)

#### (Optional) Personal Story

If you have invited someone to share for 5 minutes, now is the time for that.

**Thought to take with you:** “The experience I have had is that once you start talking about (experiencing a mental health struggle) you realize that you’re actually part of quite a big club.” (Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex)

**Prayer:** Dear merciful and gracious God, thank-you for teaching us about challenging diagnosis like ADHD, OCD, eating disorders and more. Help us to be compassionate with and supportive of persons who cope with life differently than we do. Help us see beyond behaviors and view God’s handiwork and gifts in all people.

## Session 6: Other – Psychosis, Schizophrenia

### Introduction

**Video:** [Dr. John Swinton shares Allen's story of hearing voices and a mother's love](#) (3:27)

### Handouts/ Q & A

NAMI handouts:

- ♦ [“Psychosis”](#)
- ♦ [“Schizophrenia”](#)

Talk about the opening video and contents of the handout(s). Have a mental health professional take a few general questions.

### Discussion Time

Listen to the reading and then discuss the following questions.

**Reading:** Open Letter to My Church Family (from [Study Guide](#), p.13-15).

### Discussion Questions:

1. After this mental health series is over, how can the church continue to educate members about mental health challenges and support those members who have mental health diagnoses?
2. How do we keep our prayer ministries for those with mental health diagnoses ever in the forefront of our pastor's and leader's eyes?
3. How can we make sure that our areas of service are inclusive to those with mental health challenges?

**Scripture:** [Joshua 6:13,20](#)

### (Optional) Personal Story

If you have invited someone to share for 5 minutes, now is the time for that.

**Thought to take with you:** “It is time for us to convince the Faith Community that it should join in leading all of society in a march. It is time for us to shout and blow our horns. The wall of stigma of mental illness must come down. For most of us the wall is invisible. But those with one of these disorders can see it clearly.” (Gunner Christiansen of NAMI FaithNet, from [Study Guide](#), p.7)

**Prayer:** Lord, teach us how to break the silence around mental illness. Forgive us for building a wall between ourselves and brothers or sisters in Christ who experience mental health challenges. Grant us more wisdom and understanding and give us the grace to include all people in your kingdom. Amen. (from [Study Guide](#), p.8)

## Session 7: Dementia (Closing Session)

### Introduction

**Video:** [Living with Dementia with the Social Care Institute for Excellence](#) (10:22)

### Handouts / Q & A

From All Belong:

- ❖ [“Dementia”](#)
- ❖ [“Practical Tips for Interacting with Persons with Dementia”](#)

Talk about the opening video and contents of the handout(s). Have a mental health professional take a few general questions.

### Discussion Time

**Videos:**

- ❖ [“Church Values Gifts on Those with Dementia](#) (3:06)
- ❖ [Ministry with the Forgotten – Session 4 – Responding with Love](#) (23:22  
Stop 1 minute before the end)

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How do we show God’s love to those with dementia?
2. How do we receive love from those with dementia?
3. How do we show love to persons who are caregivers for those living with dementia?

**Scripture:** [1 Corinthians 13:4-8,13; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7](#)

**(Optional) Personal Story**

If you have invited someone to share for 5 minutes, now is the time for that.



**Thought to take with you:** “It is not how much you do, but how much love you put in the doing.” (Mother Teresa)

**Prayer:** O God of Light and Knowledge, -- we pray that darkness, fear, and ignorance about serious mental illnesses might be dispelled by the light of knowledge. We pray for Peace and Wholeness – for those with troubled minds and hearts, that broken lives and relationships might be mended.

We ask for Understanding -- that the walls of stigma, labels, exclusion, and marginalization might be broken down through education and advocacy.

We pray for Healing -- for men, women and children living with mental illness, for better treatment, for steadier recovery, for greater opportunity to work and serve.

We ask for Faith and Hope – for those who feel no one cares. Dispel their despair through a cup of cold water, an outstretched arm, a listening ear, a committed advocate.

We offer our Thanks – for new discoveries in medical research, for faithful caregivers, for dedicated mental health professionals and persistent researchers.

Most of all, O God of Steadfast Love, we thank you for your Love -- that sustains the weary, that defends the weak, that sets the lonely in families, that brings beauty out of ashes, that brings a song in the night; that inspires courage to hope, to watch, to work for a new and brighter Day.

AMEN. ([An Advocate's Prayer from the NAMI FaithNet website](#))

## Resources for Sessions

### Session 1: Mental Health

- ❖ [“Speaking Well in Worship About Mental Illness”](#) –an article in Reformed Worship Journal by Charlotte VanOyen Witvliet about the language we use to talk about mental health and illnesses.
- ❖ [A study guide to Swinton’s book](#) full of great questions, Scripture, and ways to think through and discuss mental health issues as a group.
- ❖ [NAMI Infographics and fact sheets](#)
- ❖ [Recovery Oriented Language Guide](#) – Second Edition Revised © Mental Health Coordinating Council 2018 PO Box 668 Rozelle NSW 2039
- ❖ Video: [Why Church is hard for Families affected by Mental Illness](#) by Key Ministry

### Session 2: Depression, Mood Disorders

- ❖ <https://www.dbsalliance.org/about/language-guide/>
- ❖ NAMI fact sheets: [Depression](#) and [Bipolar Disorder](#)

### Session 3: Anxiety, Social Phobia

From All Belong:

- ❖ Mental Health liaison tips and tools (from [All Belong’s Best Practices for Building Belonging in Congregations Guide](#))
- ❖ [Church Welcome Story](#) (for use on website, for individuals, etc.)

From NAMI:

- ❖ Handout [Anxiety Disorders](#)

### Session 4: Autism, Sensory Processing

From the All Belong:

- ❖ 1-pager [on ASD](#)
- ❖ 1-pager on [sensory differences](#)
- ❖ [Handout](#) (accompanies [35-minute training](#), but is also useful on its own)

### Session 5: ADHD, OCD, Eating Disorders

From All Belong:

- ❖ [1-pager on ADHD](#)

- ❖ Difference between OCD and ASD regarding repetitive behaviors (1-minute clip [of ASD video](#) from 5:12–6:09)
- ❖ [23-minute video](#) on paying attention as an area of struggle.

NAMI handouts:

- ❖ [ADHD](#)
- ❖ [OCD](#)
- ❖ [PTSD](#)
- ❖ [Eating Disorders](#)

Others:

- ❖ How to ADHD [YouTube channel](#): [youtube.com/channel/UC-nPM1\\_kSZf91ZGkcgY\\_95Q](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-nPM1_kSZf91ZGkcgY_95Q)
- ❖ The Holderness Family “ADHD” song: [youtube.com/watch?v=Zvqx9DfG9lU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zvqx9DfG9lU)
- ❖ Eating Disorders -article by Ministry Matters: <https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/6496/eating-disorders>

## Session 6: Psychosis, Schizophrenia

- ❖ Interview (blog post) with John Swinton by Faith and Leadership: <https://faithandleadership.com/john-swinton-helping-christians-mental-health-issues-starts-better-language>

NAMI handouts:

- ❖ [Psychosis](#)
- ❖ [Schizophrenia](#)

## Session 7: Dementia

From All Belong:

- ❖ [1-pager on Dementia](#)
- ❖ [12 tips for ministry with persons with dementia](#)
- ❖ Practical [Tips for interacting with persons with dementia](#)
- ❖ [A story and ideas to try](#) (blog post)

Other:

- ❖ Kenneth Carder’s Video Study – Alzheimer’s/Dementia: Ministry with the Forgotten. There is a comprehensive downloadable study guide with NUMEROUS resources listed: [tnumc.org/dementiaresources/](http://tnumc.org/dementiaresources/). (Be sure to scroll down to find the leader’s guide.)

## Additional Resources

### Books

- Carder, Kenneth L., *Ministry with the Forgotten: Dementia through a Spiritual Lens*, Abingdon Press, 2019.
- Grcevich, Stephen, M.D., *Mental Health and the Church*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing, 2018.
- Swinton, John., *Finding Jesus in the Storm: The Spiritual Lives of Christians with mental Health Challenges*. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing, 2020.

### Websites

- All Belong Center for Inclusive Education: [allbelong.org](http://allbelong.org)
- Fresh Hope: Find real hope whether you have a mental health challenge or love someone who does: [freshhope.us](http://freshhope.us)
- Key Ministry (Resources for Mental Health Ministry): [keyministry.org/resources-for-mental-health-ministry](http://keyministry.org/resources-for-mental-health-ministry)
- MHA (Mental Health America): [mhanational.org](http://mhanational.org)
- Mental Health Grace Alliance: An innovative experience integrating science and your faith in Christ to renew your mental and emotional health: [mentalhealthgracealliance.org](http://mentalhealthgracealliance.org)
- NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness): [nami.org/Home](http://nami.org/Home)
- NAMI FaithNet (Interfaith Resource Network): [nami.org/Get-Involved/NAMI-FaithNet](http://nami.org/Get-Involved/NAMI-FaithNet)
- NIMH (National Institute of Mental Health): [nimh.nih.gov](http://nimh.nih.gov)
- Pathways to Promise: [pathways2promise.org/](http://pathways2promise.org/)
- The Healing Center: [healingcare.org/](http://healingcare.org/)
- Touchpointe Family Resources: [touchpointe.org/](http://touchpointe.org/)