



SEA MANUAL VERSION 1
01

Cougar Support Den - Self Education Awareness

Mental Health

/'men(t)l/ • /helTH/

a person's condition with regard to their psychological and emotional well-being.

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Letter from SEA

■ Hello reader!

Thank you for deciding to look through our guide! It is long and may be intimidating, but it is a resource that we hope will be valuable and significant to you. Before starting we felt it was important to introduce ourselves first, so hi! We are SEA, or Self Educational Awareness, one of the services offered by the Cougar Support Den Program of EVHS. Our team is made up of students who collaborate to research, write, and create informational guides about different topics for our community. Mental Health is the very first guide we are publishing, and we are very excited that it is now finally out! :)

The purpose of our guide isn't to give you a textbook understanding of mental health, but rather is to open discussion of the ways in which we see ourselves in relation to these topics. We believe there needs to be a shift in the way that we look at mental health, both as a social issue as well as in the way we perceive mental health in others and in ourselves. Many resources about mental health try to provide a lens of how a person should look at or dissect their mental health, but oftentimes this can feel almost impersonal, or something that readers struggle to identify with. The reasoning for this may be because there is no one true answer as to how to view your own mental health, and in that there is no one true way to approach it either. Ultimately, unpacking mental health is a personal process that requires you to form a relationship with yourself and your experiences, so our hope is that our guide will offer insight for you to evaluate and engage in your own understanding of mental health.

This guide will be divided into two areas:

- 1) Understanding mental health as a concept/social issue and the significance of mental health advocacy
- 2) Unpacking mental health on a personal level & what it means to approach mental health

Disclaimer: This guide is not intended to be used for providing medical advice; if you are searching for medical advice, it is best to seek out professional input. However, if you would like to be connected with local resources and options, you are more than welcome to reach out to us and ask any questions!

We sincerely hope that this guide will be an initiating step for you, and we really appreciate you taking the time to read through it! With that all said, here is our Mental Health Guide ~

Signed,
SEA 2021-2023 <3



How do we look at mental health?

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health itself refers to our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Everything that involves the way we think, behave, and feel is a part of mental health, which allows for it to become a very complex and nuanced subject. As human beings, mental health affects how we process the world around us as well as how we pursue our own wellbeing and happiness. Our mindsets, emotional regulation, coping mechanisms, and actions have a direct impact on how secure and stable we feel in our lives.

Mental health is also directly connected to our physical body, as having poor mental health can be associated with increased risks of physical health problems. Chronic illnesses such as strokes, heart disease, diabetes, and gastrointestinal issues are associated with individuals who struggle with mental health problems.

It is also important to recognize that mental health is not just maintained individually, but also needs to be supported and preserved at a community and society level. The way different environments and systems around us are structured have an immediate effect on our sense of security and happiness, thus we have a responsibility to evaluate the resources we offer (or do not) in order to empower our communities.

Taking care of our mental health is important at every stage of our lives, from childhood to adulthood. On the other hand, a **mental disorder or illness** is a serious condition that can affect one's thinking, mood, and behavior. This can include disorders such as: depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia.

Mental disorder or illness:
a serious condition that can affect one's thinking, mood, and behavior

Mental health is a spectrum, and it is dangerous for us to view mental health as a binary between having “normal” mental health versus being mentally ill. On top of stigmatizing mental illnesses, it also negates the way that you can severely struggle with your mental health without having an illness. As stated by Christopher M. Palmer MD, director of McLean's Department of Postgraduate and Continuing Education, “it's not all or nothing... there are a lot of ways people can be mentally healthy or ill, just like there are many ways to be physically healthy or unwell. Some people can have mild cases and function fairly normally. Others can be disabled and struggling in their daily lives. Some people may do well day to day, and others might not.”

Experiencing poor mental health is not the same as having a mental illness; A person with a mental illness can experience periods of great wellbeing in the same way that a person without a mental illness can still be suffering. The way your experiences, engagement, and interactions affect you are always valid, and it is a process of self-reflection and understanding that ultimately allows you to grow and feel more secure in your sense of self.

History of Mental Health

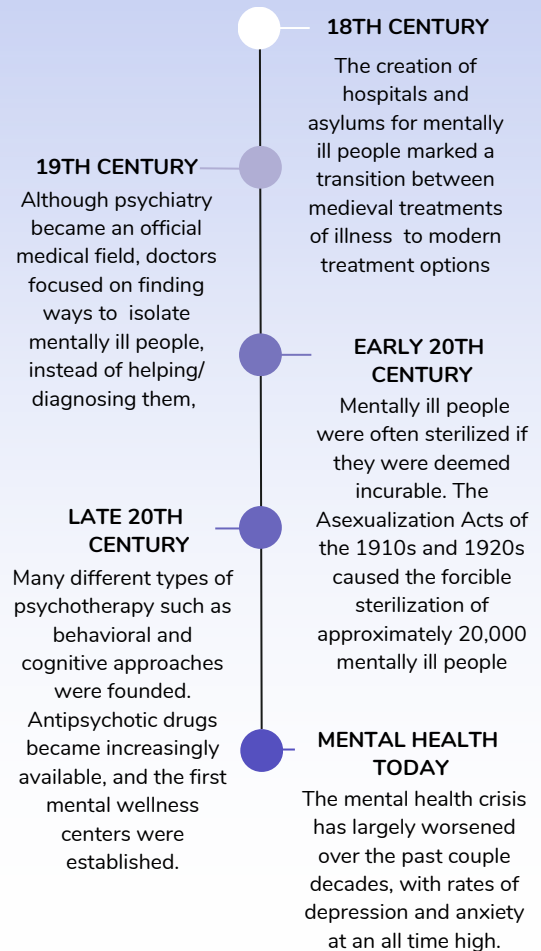


How did the idea of mental health as we know it come about?

Struggling with mental health has become increasingly common in our society. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, one in five American adults experienced a mental health issue in 2020, and one in six young people experienced a major depressive episode. Many factors can impact our mental health, from biological factors, life experiences, family history of mental health problems, or our lifestyle (including diet, physical activity, and substance use).

Perspectives of mental health directly impact the way society functions on various levels; Societal values and beliefs directly affect how we perceive ourselves and others, and the different environments and systems we've built around them. Looking at how the concept of mental health has grown and been used in the past helps us to more deeply understand how mental health is connected to everything that surrounds us.

BRIEF TIMELINE



For a more in depth explanation of the history of mental health, continue to pages 6-7.

The history of modern mental health begins in the 18th century; The establishments of hospitals and asylums for mentally ill people marked a transition between medieval treatments of illness (such as **trephination**, rituals, and exorcisms) to modern treatment options. Despite this shift, societies still saw mental illness as something to get rid of, rather than as people to help. Even during the 19th and 20th centuries when psychiatry became an official medical field, doctors focused their efforts on finding ways to further isolate mentally ill people through the form of **incarceration**. Moreover, mentally ill people were thought to be **deviants** from society, and if deemed incurable, were often **sterilized**. For example, in California, the Asexualization Acts of the 1910s and 1920s caused the forcible sterilization of approximately 20,000 mentally ill people, most of whom were Black and Mexican, demonstrating how sterilization often disproportionately impacted already marginalized communities (2).

As the field of psychiatry evolved through the 19th century and entering the early 20th century, doctors began shifting towards an increasingly **psychogenic** approach in addressing mental illness, studying the brain and using a system to diagnose patients. The reform movement led by Dorothea Dix to move mentally ill people from prison institutions into mental health asylums proved to be successful (3). However, stigma around mental illness persisted as asylums continued to isolate patients, and the emergence of psychosurgeries that claimed to “cure” people of mental issues gained popularity. An example of this is the **lobotomy**, a surgery that involved severing the prefrontal lobe part of the brain with the goal to reduce tension and violent outbreaks, which often had drastic consequences for patients.

The National Mental Health Act was passed in 1946, and established the necessary funds for a National Institute of Mental Health. By the mid-1950s, the push for **deinstitutionalization** grew as antipsychotic drugs became increasingly available and word of poor conditions within mental health asylums drew public outrage (4). Community-based efforts to treat mental health became championed, and prompted the closing of many asylum institutions as well as the opening of various mental wellness centers across the country through the Community Mental Health Centers Act of 1963.

Psychogenic treatments for mental illness led to the founding of many different types of psychotherapy such as behavioral and cognitive approaches. Advancement in treatment of mental illness ushered in a standardized system of diagnosis. In 1952, the **American Psychiatric Association (APA)** published the **DSM-1**, or the first edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. At the time, that manual only contained 60 disorders; however, the APA has since revised the DSM multiple times, expanding it to have more than 300 various disorders.

Trephination: a surgical intervention in which a hole is drilled or scraped into the human skull

Incarceration: inaccessible

Deviant: people who departed from society's accepted standards/norms

Sterilized: removed of their ability to reproduce

Psychogenic: studying the brain and using a system to diagnose patients

Lobotomy: a surgery that involved severing the prefrontal lobe part of the brain with the goal to reduce tension and violent outbreaks, often had drastic consequences for patients

Deinstitutionalization: the release of a long-term inmate from an institution such as a mental hospital or prison

It is important to note that while creating a way to systematically diagnose mental illnesses was revolutionary in the mental health community, tools such as the DSM will always have political contexts and nuances that work to further influence peoples' perceptions. An example of this would be how the DSM considered homosexuality to be a severe mental disorder until 1973, and as a result, it was weaponized against the LGBTQ+ communities during the **Lavender Scare**, a period of time where suspected homosexual individuals were interrogated and often dismissed from government jobs for their identities.

The 1980's version of the DSM (the third edition) introduced a five-part multiaxial classification system that took into account the entire individual—analyzing clinical diagnoses, medical conditions, and environmental factors. This system, which allowed for a more streamlined and standardized diagnosis, was adopted by following editions.

Currently, there have been five editions of the DSM released, demonstrating how our knowledge on mental health is continuously growing and expanding. The impact and accessibility of tools such as DSM relies on political and social contexts. There is much more that can be delved into regarding the evolution of mental health as a concept and field; Ultimately, what we hope to be taken away from this section is that mental health as a phenomenon will always be inherently political and has always intertwined with our society's understanding and treatment of people, and that's why we work to create resources like these!

Jumping to Mental Health Today

The mental health crisis has largely worsened over the past couple decades as a result of a multitude of different factors, with rates of depression and anxiety at an all time high. Modern studies show that the average child today reports more anxiety than child psychiatric patients in the 1950s (5).

As covered, our knowledge and perceptions of mental health will always be wielded by social and political contexts, as well as our understanding of people. Looking at mental health as a whole, it is important that we view it as a broader phenomena rather than an individual problem. The World Health Organization estimates that 350 million people worldwide suffer from depression, and that depression is set to beat heart disease as the primary cause of disease burden worldwide by 2030 ([source](#)). Collective decline in mental health is not at the failure or hardship of single individuals, but rather a working combination of inequitable systems and institutions that fail to address the needs of communities.

Stigmas Around Mental Health

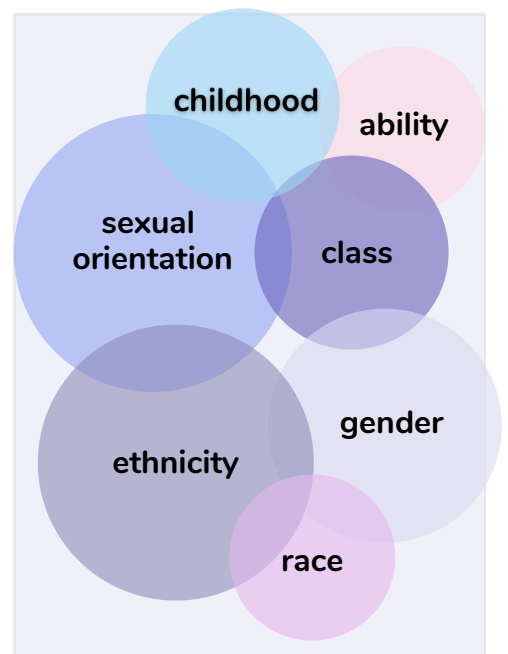
Ableism

As we stated in our History of Mental Health section, much of the stigma surrounding mental health is grounded in a lack of knowledge and awareness of what mental health is. However, mental health stigma is not just rooted in ignorance, but also ableism. Ableism refers to discrimination held against people with disabilities or people who are perceived to be less “functioning” (which will be more covered more in our next guide about neurodiversity).

A lot of the stigma surrounding personal mental health involves how we as individuals do not want to be seen as or consider ourselves as less functioning. There is a large emphasis in society to be constantly productive, resulting in a prejudice against those who we perceive as less productive/functioning when they don't meet this expectation. But the fact is that when hundreds of millions of people worldwide are dealing with the same things, there is no shame in feeling as though you are struggling with your mental health – it is something that needs to be accounted for by society instead of something boxed into individual issues.

Intersectionality

In looking at mental health as a broader phenomenon and social issue, it is also important to evaluate the way societal aspects, interactions, and systems play an intimate role in our lives and our own processing. Coined by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, the term **intersectionality** acknowledges how different aspects of a person's social and political identities “intersect” to create unique modes and experiences of oppression. Such social and political identities can include **a person's race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability, class, immigration status, childhood experiences, trauma, and more**. This concept is crucially relevant to understanding mental health on a wider-scale, with issues that are more prevalent in certain communities or groups with shared experiences. The way society perceives certain aspects of our identity (often negatively) influences how we see our identity and thus impacts our mental health. Detrimental relationships and experiences are the result of our social, political, and economic roles in the society, and they can lead to negative emotions towards ourselves. Understanding that the struggles you face are not solely individual can help you to discover a sense of solidarity or belonging with people around you.



Dissecting Mental Health

DISSECTING MENTAL HEALTH

Dissecting mental health is the process of breaking down one's thoughts and feelings in order to better understand one's emotions, reactions, and responses to events. This can seem overwhelming, but learning how to manage so many intersecting factors and aspects of your life, and understanding your mental health as a whole can be provoking and valuable. There is a lot that can go into the ways you process and deal with mental health, but remember to give yourself time and go at the rate that you feel comfortable with, because dissecting your mental health is a personal journey, not a process - it's about finding who you are and accepting vulnerability.

Dissecting Your Own Mental Health

It involves a lot of self-evaluation to decide what kind of choices you want to be making for yourself. You may find yourself asking several questions, such as: "How is this going to affect me? Am I putting myself or others at risk? What if others look down on me? Is it even really that bad? Can I even afford (financially or personally) to be worrying about my own mental health?" These are common worries that often hold people back and leave them reluctant towards approaching mental health, but ultimately, processing these worries can be the first steps towards coming to terms with the way you feel. Looking at your own mental health and deciding what to do with it is scary, but it also involves an approach of learning to trust yourself, to trust your judgements, to accept and validate your feelings rather than suppress them, and recognize how different experiences and environments have impacted your life.

Everyone's life is also individually diverse and complex, meaning that your approach to mental health should be unique to you and what shapes your life. There is no one way to approach mental health, but if you are feeling unsure of how to navigate through your thoughts, following these steps can help provide some guidance in taking your mental health one step at a time.

STEPS TO DISSECTING YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

- ## 1.

Identify what feelings or thoughts you are having in the first place

Consider what experiences, environments, or influences that may contribute to these feelings + your overall perception of yourself
- ## 2.

Think about someone you trust talking these things out with - it could be a friend, peer, adult, or professional, but reach out!
- ## 3.

Come to terms with your experiences/self-evaluation and ways of thinking
- ## 4.

Thinking of different ways of working with your mental health - reaching out for help? changing approaches? talking honestly w others, etc.
- ## 5.

Think about someone you trust talking these things out with - it could be a friend, peer, adult, or professional, but reach out!

Dissecting Someone Else's Mental Health

Taking the time to process your own mental health can be difficult, and trying to understand the perspectives of others that we haven't experienced can be even more challenging. **It is important to remember that it is not your responsibility to take on the needs of others, and sometimes it can even violate someone else's boundaries in doing so.** However, it is also important to recognize the significance of being there for someone in need of support. To have someone you can count on can be so powerful in overcoming difficulties in your life. When it comes to dissecting someone else's mental health, your role is not to prescribe what others are going through or process their feelings for them. Rather, it is to empathize with them, listen to their feelings, and support them in their own journey of processing their mental health. It can also become really easy to blur the lines between supporting versus overstepping, or listening versus assuming, in dealing with another person's concerns.

Like the previous section, each approach towards mental health is unique to each person and their circumstances, which is especially why you should proceed with caution in dealing with someone else's life experiences – in this, some of the steps we are listing can help you better comprehend your position and what kind of difference you can make in helping someone else.

STEPS TO DISSECTING SOMEONE ELSE'S MENTAL HEALTH

- 1.** What am I recognizing in this person that makes me concerned for their mental health? Identify their actions, words, choices - what is bringing concern to you
- Try to think of circumstances they may be in without getting involved with their personal life or asking around **2.**
- 3.** Ask them personally if they are struggling/if they want to talk about anything they are dealing with
- If they say no, respect their wishes, don't enforce yourself onto them or assert blame onto them **4.**
- 5.** Consider your own mental health, how much you're extending of yourself and how you treat yourself



Diagnosis & Resources

In our discussion of mental health, it is important that we recognize that there are multiple factors, either from the environment or personal perception, that influence the development of individuals' mental health, especially for teenagers. Mental health struggles have continually become more widespread throughout society, displaying that there are certain needs that are not being addressed or met.

This has led to controversies surrounding the validity of self-diagnosis: the process of identifying medical conditions in oneself without a professional. Self-diagnosis is often critiqued as something that delegitimizes actual mental conditions and disorders, and it should be emphasized that receiving a professional diagnosis is extremely important for those who are struggling with an illness.

On the other hand, some prefer self-diagnosis because getting a professional diagnosis can be extremely expensive, especially if your insurance doesn't cover mental health conditions. Having a label can also help some people feel less isolated. This isn't to take away from the fact that a professional diagnosis is extremely important for those who are struggling with an illness, and there is no shame in being evaluated for one even if you may not end up being diagnosed. Many people believe that mental health is not a big deal if it is not a diagnosed illness, but it absolutely is.

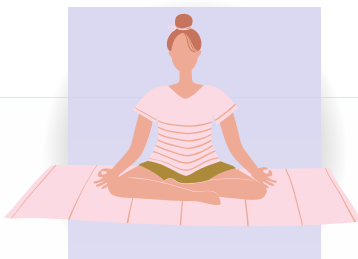
In a lot of cases, society only takes mental health seriously if it comes with a professional diagnosis. When someone has a diagnosis and shows symptoms or behaviors associated with a condition they have, we refrain from judging them. However, when they have no known diagnosis, they are often judged for being "strange" or "not normal." For example, if someone has autism and doesn't get certain jokes or they get overstimulated, most people are understanding, compassionate, and patient. However, if an undiagnosed person had these same behaviors, they would be seen as "stupid" or "weird".

A diagnosis or lack of diagnosis should not be the reason as to why we judge people or treat them differently. It's important to advocate for the acceptance of behaviors that may seem different, regardless if someone has a mental disorder or illness. Accommodating for a spectrum of needs is crucial to reducing the stigma and stereotypes around mental health. Many people believe that those with mental disorders or illnesses are less capable of doing certain things because of their physical or mental limitations, which may not always be true. This concept is also known as the medical model of disability.

Diagnosis & Resources

In fact, it is a lack of resources and accommodations that prevents people's needs from being met. This is highlighted in the social model of disability which says that if disabled people had access to proper accommodations and resources everywhere, they may not even be considered disabled by society. In this way, mental disabilities are not necessarily caused by individual limitations as the medical model of disability states, but rather the lack of effort from society to adjust to the needs of disabled people.

It is also important to note that mental health does not always refer to mental disorders. As mentioned before, mental health simply refers to your emotional and psychological well-being. It's important to take care of your mental health and there are many ways to do this. It can include things like:



Taking care of yourself after a busy day



Taking a day off to rest



Maintaining healthy habits

In seeking resources for mental health, it is important to know that there are many professionals you can talk to, both locally and online. But, resources can also involve organizations and resources that are meant to help uplift communities, provide funding and allocation for people who are disadvantaged, spread awareness and advocacy, and so much more. They can even help with treating specific symptoms, such as lack of motivation, and teach you how to cope with them.

Ultimately with mental health, empowerment and advocacy is vital for yourself and society as a whole. Dealing with your mental health comes through evaluating yourself, your experiences, what needs you have that aren't met, what changes need to be made in society, and how we can uplift and build our communities together.

For the rest of this guide, we compiled different resources you can reach out to, such as mental health resources in the community and more resources to learn about mental health history and advocacy.

Thank you
for reading our guide!

Love, SEA



RESOURCES

Click on the titles to get redirected to each respective website!

TREVOR PROJECT

A project that provides resources and counseling for **LGBTQ+ youths**. Although it's for a specific group of users, it's still helpful since they do provide help for those who are struggling with mental health due to their identities. It's online, confidential, and free!

NATIONAL ALLIANCE ON MENTAL ILLNESS (NAMI) - SANTA CLARA COUNTY:

The organization offers **practical experience, support, education, comfort and understanding** to anyone concerned about mental illnesses and their treatment in Santa Clara County.

TEEN LINE

A resource that can be used via **phone call, text, or email**. Anonymously connects struggling teens to other teens who have been trained by mental health professionals. Allows teens to discuss problems with someone of a similar age while maintaining confidentiality.



SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION (SAMHSA)

"SAMHSA's mission is to lead **public health and service delivery** efforts that promote mental health, prevent substance misuse, and provide treatments and support to foster recovery while ensuring equitable access and better outcomes."

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH - NIMH

CalHHS offers hotlines from different organizations for youths to talk to people regarding specific topics. They also provide guides for parenting as well teachers to address mental health within student bodies.

CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCE HUB - CALHHS

CalHHS offers **hotlines from different organizations** for youths to talk to people regarding specific topics. They also provide guides for **parenting** as well teachers to address mental health within student bodies.

THE YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT

"The Youth Mental Health Project is a **grassroots nonprofit organization** whose mission is to educate, empower, and support families and communities to better understand and care for the mental health of our youth." The Youth Mental Health Project works **towards their mission through support groups, events and guest speakers, creating educational booklets, and more.**

MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF S.F. - WARM LINE

A **non-crisis emotional support source** for CA residents that connects callers to experienced Warm Line Counselors. This resource can be accessed via phone or chat line. Their main goal is to support emotionally distressed callers before a crisis point is reached.

Ableism: discrimination held against people with disabilities or people who are perceived to be less “functioning”

American Psychiatric Association: the largest scientific and professional organization of psychologists in the United States, with over 133,000 members, including scientists, educators, clinicians, consultants, and students

Deviant: people who departed from society's accepted standards/norms

Diagnostic and Statistical Manual: the handbook used by healthcare professionals in the United States and much of the world as the authoritative guide to the diagnosis of mental disorders

Incarceration: the state of being confined in prison; imprisonment

Intersectionality: how different aspects of a person's social and political identities “intersect” to create unique modes and experiences of oppression

Lobotomy: a surgery that involved severing the prefrontal lobe part of the brain with the goal to reduce tension and violent outbreaks, often had drastic consequences for patients

Medical Model of Disability: views disability as resulting from an individual person's physical or mental limitations, and is not connected to the social or geographical environments

Mental health: refers to our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Everything that involves the way we think, behave, and feel is a part of mental health, which allows for it to become a very complex and nuanced subject

Mental disorder or illness: a serious condition that can affect one's thinking, mood, and behavior

Psychogenic: studying the brain and using a system to diagnose patients

Self-diagnosis: the process of identifying medical conditions in oneself without a professional

Social Model of Disability: identifies systemic barriers, derogatory attitudes, and social exclusion, which make it difficult or impossible for disabled people to attain their valued functionings

Sterilized: removed of the ability to reproduce

Trefination: a surgical intervention in which a hole is drilled or scraped into the human skull

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