

# LIFE WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS



**LEARN**

about it.

**ACT**

B4Stage4.

**SHARE**

with #mentalillnessfeelslike.

**MAY IS 2  
MENTAL 0  
HEALTH 1  
MONTH 6**

**Outreach  
Toolkit**

**MHIA**  
Mental Health America  
**B4Stage4**

 /mentalhealthamerica

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[www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)

[mentalhealthamerica.net/may](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/may)

This activity is supported by contributions from  
The Allergan Foundation, Lilly and Neurocrine Biosciences.

# FOREWORD

In 2015, we tied Mental Health America's longest-standing signature national initiative – Mental Health Month – to our newest one, B4Stage4. This year, we build on that theme.

When we started Mental Health Month back in 1949, we did so to raise awareness about mental health and the crises that occur when we fail to address mental health concerns early and effectively. Millions of veterans had recently returned from war, our baby boom had just begun, and we were seeing the enormous toll mental illnesses took on individuals and the people who loved them.

Mental Health Month made an impact. Today, thousands of organizations throughout the nation and the world embrace it.

When we added B4Stage4 thinking to Mental Health Month in 2015, our reach grew dramatically. More than 5,500 entities downloaded our tool kits, and our materials were seen and used by 19 million people. B4Stage4 thinking resonates with people, because it takes back the message frame from those who created the myth that “mental illness” means the same as “dangerous to self or others.”

How does it feel to live with a mental illness? That (#mentalillnessfeelslike) is what we're focusing on during Mental Health Month in 2016. The reason is far from trivial. B4Stage4 means more than burying feelings and refusing to talk about them, and waiting for symptoms to clear up on their own. B4Stage4 means more than wishing that mental health problems aren't real, and hoping that they will never get worse. B4Stage4 means more than thinking that someone on the edge of a crisis will always pull himself or herself back without our help, and praying that someone else will intervene before a crisis occurs.

B4Stage4 means, in part, talking about what mental illnesses feel like, and then acting on that information. It means giving voice to feelings and fears, and to hopes and dreams. It means empowering people as agents of their own recovery. And it means changing the trajectories of our own lives for the better, and helping those we love change theirs.

It is our hope that our Mental Health Month toolkit for 2016 will help us all do just that, because the concept of mental health has meaning in two ways. The first is when we protect and preserve it. The second is when we recognize that it can be compromised, that mental illnesses are real, that recovery is always our goal, and that the best prospects for recovery come when we act B4Stage4.



Paul Gionfriddo  
President & CEO



# INTRODUCTION

Clinical terms are the words used by doctors and other professionals to describe the symptoms of a disorder, but often times those words don't do justice to what life with a mental illness feels like.

We know that two people with the same diagnosis can experience the same symptom and describe it in very different ways. Let's take fear for example: Jamie describes fear as being scared to the point of feeling paralyzed, while Andre describes fear as an overwhelming urge to run away. It can be confusing and sometimes contribute to ongoing silence or hesitation to get help. It's important for people to talk about how it feels to live with a mental illness.

This May, MHA is calling on you to share what *life with a mental illness* feels like by tagging your social media posts with #mentalillnessfeelslike. Posting with our hashtag is a way to speak up, to share your point of view with people who may be struggling to explain what they are going through—and help others figure out if they too are showing signs of a mental illness. Sharing is the key to breaking down the stigma surrounding mental illnesses and to showing others that they are not alone in their feelings and their symptoms.

By using the toolkit materials, you will help members of your community:

- Understand how common mental illnesses are and what it is like to live with them, reducing stigma;
- Start talking about mental health B4Stage4;
- Assess their own mental health through use of MHA's screening tools; and
- Share their personal experience with mental illness by tagging social media posts with #mentalillnessfeelslike, or uploading content directly to MHA's website at [www.mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike).

This year's toolkit includes:

## Media Materials

- Key Messages
- Sample Press Release
- Drop-In Article
- May is Mental Health Month Proclamation

## Social Media and Web Components

- Sample Facebook and Twitter Posts
- Facebook Cover and Profile Images
- Twitter Header and Profile Images
- Instagram Profile Image
- Shareable Image optimized for Facebook and Twitter
- #mentalillnessfeelslike Call to Action Image
- Horizontal Banner Image
- Vertical Banner Image
- Hand held #mentalillnessfeelslike card

## Fact Sheets and Handouts

- Fact Sheet: Life with Anxiety
- Fact Sheet: Life with Depression
- Fact Sheet: Life with Bipolar
- Fact Sheet: Life with Psychosis
- Fact Sheet: Life in Recovery
- May is Mental Health Month Calendar/Poster
- Worksheet: Think Ahead
- Worksheet: What's Underneath
- Worksheet: Smash Stupid Thoughts

## QUESTIONS?

If you have further questions about Mental Health Month, please contact Danielle Fritze, Director of Public Education and Visual Communications at [dfritze@mentalhealthamerica.net](mailto:dfritze@mentalhealthamerica.net).

# OUTREACH IDEAS

## How #mentalillnessfeelslike Works:

Mental Health America will have a page on our website at [mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike](https://mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike) where special software will collect Tweets, Pins (Pinterest), Vines and posts from Instagram and Tumblr tagged with #mentalillnessfeelslike that describe what it feels like when a person is living with a mental illness.

There will also be a place at [mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike](https://mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike) where people can post videos, images or words describing their personal experience with mental illness directly to the site (anonymously and outside of social media).

Unfortunately, Facebook and Youtube posts that use #mentalillnessfeelslike will not automatically be collected on the page due to the privacy restrictions of these social media platforms.

- Use the “hand held #mentalillnessfeelslike card” at public events. Have people write or draw what life with a mental illness feels like to them, then take a photo of them holding the card. Post the photos at [mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike](https://mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike) or on your own social media pages (you can also send them to [dfritze@mentalhealthamerica.net](mailto:dfritze@mentalhealthamerica.net) if there are a bunch that you want to share with us).
- Post to your organization’s social media networks: Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Facebook, etc. to raise awareness of May as Mental Health Month. Make sure to use the May is Mental Health Month hashtag: #mentalillnessfeelslike and tag Mental Health America’s profile using the account information below so we can see it!

 /mentalhealthamerica

 /mentalhealtham

 @mentalhealtham

 /mentalhealthamerica

 @mentalhealthamerica

### Here are some other ideas to help you plan for outreach activities during the month of May:

- Ask your governor or mayor to declare May as Mental Health Month, using the sample proclamation that is part of the toolkit.
- Organize a community run or walk for mental health. Reach out to your local media for assistance in promoting the event. Email all of your partners, family members and friends, donors, and local officials inviting them to participate.
- Host a mental health screening or other educational event at a local venue (e.g., town hall, firehouse, church, mall or library). Have computers or tablets available for people to go to [mhascreening.org](https://mhascreening.org). Make sure to have a printer so people can print their results.
- Plan a day at your state Capitol. Invite advocates, consumers, concerned citizens and community and business leaders to visit each policymaker to discuss your community’s mental health needs.
- Host a meet-and-greet with local leaders in mental health and the community they serve at the local town square. Ask a consumer and local community leader to share why mental health is so important to them personally.
- If your community has a number of buildings with bell towers or a bell-ringing ensemble, ask them to ring their bells for mental health on May 1 or another day. Alert the public and the media in advance. Share toolkit materials with attendees.

We'll be reaching out in mid-June to ask about your outreach and impact. Make sure to keep track of your efforts by doing things like:

- Counting how many handouts you distribute;
- Tracking media hits and impressions;
- Keeping tally of likes, shares and retweets of your Mental Health Month posts on social media networks
- If you do a screening event or health fair, keep count of how many people visit your booth and/or take a screen; and
- Conducting a pre/post survey to see how you've increased knowledge about mental health issues among those you reach. Set up a quick survey of up to 10 questions for free online using [SurveyMonkey.com](http://SurveyMonkey.com).

## Let us know what you've got planned!

Tell us about your events so we can post them on MHA's Web Calendar, and help you get the word out. Contact Antionette Means at [ameans@mentalhealthamerica.net](mailto:ameans@mentalhealthamerica.net) with the following information:

Name of Event

Date

Location

Brief Description

Registration/Sign-Up Instructions

Contact Person

## Like our materials? Want more?

Brochures on assorted topics and B4Stage4 merchandise are available through the Mental Health America store to supplement the information provided in the 2016 May is Mental Health Month toolkit.

Visit the Mental Health America store by clicking the "Store" link on the dark blue menu bar at the top of the Mental Health America's website, [www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net).

**\*MHA Affiliates** – One of the benefits of being an affiliate is getting a discount on printed materials at the MHA store. To place an order, contact Antionette Means at 703-797-2592. There will also be extra May is Mental Health Month tools for you ("Affiliate Exclusives") on the Education and Outreach section of the Affiliate Only Site.



# KEY MESSAGES

- If we want to break down discrimination and stigma surrounding mental illnesses we need to start talking about mental health before Stage 4 and sharing how it feels to live with a mental illness.
- Having healthy relationships and getting on a path to good mental health begins with being able to talk about how you feel.
- Telling people how life with a mental illness feels helps build support from friends and family, reduces stigma and discrimination, and is crucial to recovery. Whether you are in Stage 1 and just learning about those early symptoms, or are dealing with what it means to be in Stage 4, sharing how it feels can be part of your recovery.
- People experience the symptoms of mental illnesses differently, and sharing how it really feels—throughout all the Stages of an illness—can help others to understand if what they are going through may be a symptom of a mental health problem.
- Mental illnesses are common and treatable, and help is available. We need to speak up early—before Stage 4—and in real, relatable terms so that people do not feel isolated and alone. Life with a Mental Illness is meant to help remove the shame and stigma of speaking out, so that more people can be comfortable coming out of the shadows and seeking the help they need.

Feel free to supplement these key messages with the assortment of statistics, quotes and tips included in the fact sheets.

# PRESS RELEASE

## This May is Mental Health Month

*Life With a Mental Illness* Theme Highlights Importance of Speaking Up, Sharing What #mentalillnessfeelslike

Contact: [NAME, PHONE, EMAIL]

[CITY, STATE] (DATE)—When mental illnesses or disorders are talked about, the language typically used to describe them tends to be clinical and impersonal. These words, while useful for doctors or clinicians, often don't do justice to what life with a mental illness feels like. That is why this year's theme for May is Mental Health Month—*Life With a Mental Illness*—is a call to action to share what life with a mental illness feels like to someone going through it.

May is Mental Health Month was started 67 years ago by (AFFILIATE's) national organization, Mental Health America, to raise awareness about mental health conditions and the importance of good mental health for everyone.

Last year, Mental Health Month materials were seen and used by 19 million people, with more than 5,500 entities downloading MHA's tool kits. The 2015 theme -- based off of our *B4Stage4* initiative -- helped individuals understand that when you address mental health symptoms before Stage 4, people can often recover quickly, and live full and productive lives.

This year, we are building off of the *B4Stage4* message and encouraging individuals to give voice to what it really means to live at stages 1, 2, 3, and 4 of mental illness. *Life with a Mental Illness* is meant to help remove the shame and stigma of speaking out, so that more people can be comfortable coming out of the shadows and seeking the help they need.

"Mental illnesses are common and treatable, and help is available. We need to speak up early—before Stage 4—and in real, relatable terms so that people do not feel isolated and alone," said [NAME] [TITLE] of [AFFILIATE]. "Sharing is the key to breaking down the stigma surrounding mental illnesses and to showing others that they are not alone in their feelings and their symptoms."

This Mental Health Month, we are encouraging people to speak up about how it feels to live with a mental illness by tagging social media posts with #*mentalillnessfeelslike*. Posting with our hashtag is a way to speak up, to share your point of view with people who may be struggling to explain what they are going through—and help others figure out if they too are showing signs of a mental illness.

MHA has also developed a series of fact sheets available on its website ([www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may)) on realizing the critical importance of addressing mental health early, recognizing the risk factors and signs of mental illness, understanding what mental illness is and isn't, and how and where to get help when needed.

Research shows that by ignoring symptoms, we lose ten years in which we could intervene in order to change people's lives for the better. Speaking out about what mental illness feels like can encourage others to recognize symptoms early on in the disease process, and empower individuals to be agents in their own recovery.

"Prevention, early identification and intervention, and integrated services work," concluded [NAME]. "Telling people how life with a mental illness feels helps build support from friends and family, reduces stigma and discrimination, and is crucial to recovery."

For more information on May is Mental Health Month, visit Mental Health America's website at [www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/may).

[BOILERPLATE]



# DROP-IN ARTICLE

## Do You Know What Mental Illness Feels Like?

We often hear the clinical terms used by doctors and other professionals to identify the symptoms of mental illnesses...but if someone hasn't gone through it, would they know how to recognize it?

So often, clinical terms don't do justice to what *life with a mental illness* feels like. We know that two people with the same diagnosis can experience the same symptom and describe it in very different ways. Understanding the signs of a mental illness and identifying how it can feel can be confusing—and sometimes can contribute to ongoing silence or hesitation to get help.

It's important for people to talk about how it feels to live with a mental illness. We know that mental illnesses are common and treatable, and help is available. But not everyone knows what to look for when they are going through those early stages, and many simply experience symptoms differently. We all need to speak up early—*Before Stage 4*—and in real, relatable terms so that people do not feel isolated and alone.

This May is Mental Health Month; [AFFILIATE NAME] is raising awareness of the importance of speaking up about mental health, and asking individuals to share what *life with a mental illness* feels like by tagging social media posts with *#mentalillnessfeelslike*. Posting with our hashtag is a way to speak up, to share your point of view with people who may be struggling to explain what they are going through—and to help others figure out if they too are showing signs of a mental illness.

*Life with a Mental Illness* is meant to help remove the shame and stigma of speaking out, so that more people can be comfortable coming out of the shadows and seeking the help they need. Whether you are in Stage 1 and just learning about those early symptoms, or are dealing with what it means to be in Stage 4, sharing how it feels can be part of your recovery.

[AFFILIATE] wants everyone to know that mental illnesses are real, that recovery is always the goal, and that the best prospects for recovery come when we act *Before Stage 4 (B4Stage4)*.

Addressing mental illnesses *B4Stage4* means more than burying feelings and refusing to talk about them, and waiting for symptoms to clear up on their own. *B4Stage4* means more than wishing that mental health problems aren't real, and hoping that they will never get worse. *B4Stage4* means more than thinking that someone on the edge of a crisis will always pull himself or herself back without our help, and praying that someone else will intervene before a crisis occurs.

*B4Stage4* means, in part, talking about what mental illnesses feel like, and then acting on that information. It means giving voice to feelings and fears, and to hopes and dreams. It means empowering people as agents of their own recovery. And it means changing the trajectories of our own lives for the better, and helping those we love change theirs. So let's talk about what *life with a mental illness* feels like, to voice what we are feeling, and so others can know they are not alone.



# PROCLAMATION

Encourage your local public officials to go on the record in support of mental health. Below, please find a sample proclamation that designates May as Mental Health Month. An official signing of a proclamation is a perfect occasion for a news event, photo opportunity or other activity.

## Mental Health Month 2016

WHEREAS, mental health is essential to everyone's overall health and well-being; and

WHEREAS, all Americans experience times of difficulty and stress in their lives; and

WHEREAS, prevention is an effective way to reduce the burden of mental illnesses; and

WHEREAS, there is a strong body of research that supports specific tools that all Americans can use to better handle challenges, and protect their health and well-being; and

WHEREAS, mental illnesses are real and prevalent in our nation; and

WHEREAS, with early and effective treatment, those individuals with mental illnesses can recover and lead full, productive lives; and

WHEREAS, each business, school, government agency, healthcare provider, organization and citizen shares the burden of mental illnesses and has a responsibility to promote mental wellness and support prevention efforts.

THEREFORE, I [NAME OF PUBLIC OFFICIAL], do hereby proclaim May 2016 as Mental Health Month in [STATE OR COMMUNITY]. As the [TITLE OF LOCAL OFFICIAL], I also call upon the citizens, government agencies, public and private institutions, businesses and schools in [STATE OR COMMUNITY] to recommit our community to increasing awareness and understanding of mental health, the steps our citizens can take to protect their mental health, and the need for appropriate and accessible services for all people with mental illnesses at all stages, and especially before stage 4.



# SAMPLE TWEETS

Celebrate Mental Health Month! Download the toolkit & spread awareness in your community about what #mentalillnessfeelslike [bit.ly/MayMH](http://bit.ly/MayMH)

What does it really feel like to live with a #mentalhealth condition? Share your thoughts using #mentalillnessfeelslike [bit.ly/MayMH](http://bit.ly/MayMH)

There are many misconceptions about what #mentalillnessfeelslike. Learn about anxiety, depression, bipolar, psychosis & more: [bit.ly/MayMH](http://bit.ly/MayMH)

Share what life with #anxiety feels like for you. Tag your posts with #mentalillnessfeelslike [call to action img]

Share what life with #depression feels like for you. Tag your posts with #mentalillnessfeelslike [call to action img]

Share what life with #bipolarisorder feels like for you. Tag your posts with #mentalillnessfeelslike [call to action img]

Share what life with #psychosis feels like for you. Tag your posts with #mentalillnessfeelslike [call to action img]

What does #recovery look like? Share your journey - use #mentalillnessfeelslike [call to action img]

Clinical words often don't do justice to what mental health conditions feel like. Share what #mentalillnessfeelslike to you. [bit.ly/MayMH](http://bit.ly/MayMH)

#B4Stage4 means talking about what #mentalillnessfeelslike and acting on that information. [bit.ly/MayMH](http://bit.ly/MayMH)

## Other ideas:

Tweet the tips from the Calendar each day!

Share graphics from the toolkit

Retweet @MentalHealthAm always

 /mentalhealthamerica

 @mentalhealtham

 @mentalhealthamerica

 /mentalhealtham

 /mentalhealthamerica

[www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)



# SAMPLE POSTS

Celebrate Mental Health Month! Download the MHA toolkit, filled with information and resources, to help spread awareness in your community about what #mentalillnessfeelslike. [bit.ly/MayMH](http://bit.ly/MayMH)

What does it really feel like to live with a #mentalhealth condition? Share your thoughts using #mentalillnessfeelslike [bit.ly/MayMH](http://bit.ly/MayMH)

There are a lot of misconceptions about what mental illness feels like. Learn about anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, psychosis, and more with this year's Mental Health Month fact sheets: [bit.ly/MayMH](http://bit.ly/MayMH)

Share what life with #anxiety feels like for you. Tag your posts with #mentalillnessfeelslike [call to action img]

Share what life with #depression feels like for you. Tag your posts with #mentalillnessfeelslike [call to action img]

Share what life with #bipolarisorder feels like for you. Tag your posts with #mentalillnessfeelslike [call to action img]

Share what life with #psychosis feels like for you. Tag your posts with #mentalillnessfeelslike [call to action img]

What does #recovery look like? Share your journey - use #mentalillnessfeelslike [call to action img]

When mental illnesses or disorders are talked about, the language used to describe them is typically clinical and impersonal. These clinical words often don't do justice to what life with a mental illness feels like. This Mental Health Month, share what #mentalillnessfeelslike in your own way. [bit.ly/MayMH](http://bit.ly/MayMH)

#B4Stage4 means talking about what #mentalillnessfeelslike and then acting on that information by taking a screen or talking to a friend. [bit.ly/MayMH](http://bit.ly/MayMH)

## Other ideas:

Post tips from the Calendar or fact sheets!

Share graphics from the toolkit

Tag @MentalHealthAmerica

 /mentalhealthamerica

 @mentalhealtham

 @mentalhealthamerica

 /mentalhealtham

 /mentalhealthamerica

[www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)



# IMAGES FOR SOCIAL

Download and save the images provided for use on your social media platforms or websites. All images can be downloaded by visiting [www.mentalhealthamerica.net/mental-health-month-2016-toolkit-download](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/mental-health-month-2016-toolkit-download), then right-clicking on the image and selecting "save picture as."

#mentalillnessfeelslike  
Call to Action (300 x 250 px)



Facebook Profile (180 x 180 px)  
Twitter Profile (240 x 240 px)  
Instagram Profile (110 x 110 px)



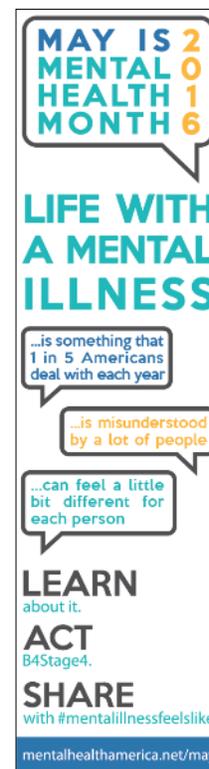
Horizontal Banner (468 x 120 px)



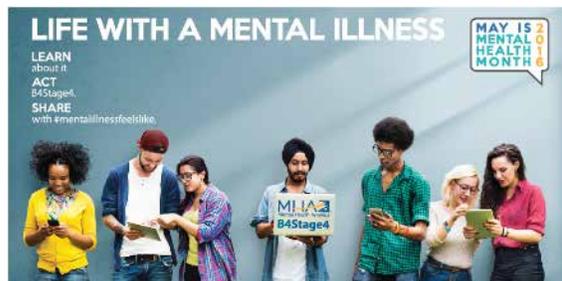
Facebook Covers (851 x 315 px)  
Twitter Headers (1500 x 500 px)



Vertical Banner (160 x 600 px)



Facebook Sharable (1200 x 630 px)  
Twitter Sharable (440 x 220 px)



SEE NEXT PAGE FOR  
Hand Held  
#mentalillnessfeelslike  
Card



**#mentalillnessfeelslike**

# LIFE WITH ANXIETY

## PEOPLE WITH ANXIETY SAY IT FEELS LIKE:



OVER OF AMERICAN  
**21** ADULTS  
PERCENT BETWEEN THE  
AGES OF 18-64  
WILL HAVE DIAGNOSABLE  
ANXIETY DISORDERS  
IN A GIVEN YEAR  
(THAT'S OVER 42.5 MILLION)'



## #mentalillnessfeelslike



Share what life with an anxiety disorder feels like for you in words, images or video by tagging your social media posts with [#mentalillnessfeelslike](#).

Posts will be displayed at [mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike) where you can also submit anonymously if you choose.

- Speak up about your own experiences
- Help others who may be struggling to explain what they are going through to figure out if they are showing signs of a mental illness
- Break down the discrimination and stigma surrounding mental illnesses
- Show others that they are not alone in their feelings and their symptoms

## ANXIETY DISORDERS ARE REAL ILLNESSES THAT ARE BASED ON EXTREME FEAR. THEY AFFECT:



### THE BODY

**Causing:** chest pain, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness, stomach discomfort, nausea, fatigue, trembling, muscle tension, headaches, tingling in the hands and feet, or trouble sleeping.



### THOUGHTS

**Causing:** exaggerated worry about everyday life, fear of dying, repeated unwanted thoughts, nightmares or flashbacks, irritability, anger, trouble focusing, numbing of emotions, or anticipating the worst outcome to a situation even though it is unlikely.



### BEHAVIORS

**Causing:** rituals that seem impossible to control, being easily startled, avoidance of people, places and/or things, limiting life experiences, inability to sit still, easily losing one's temper, or being snappy with others.

## HAVING AN ANXIETY DISORDER IS NOT:

- Just stressing out
- Being a "neat freak"
- Being excitable
- Having feelings of anticipation before a big event
- An excuse to get attention
- Being nervous with good reason
- Fear in a dangerous situation
- Being shy
- A choice
- A sign of weakness
- A character flaw

# TIPS FOR TACKLING ANXIETY



Call someone you trust. Let them know that your anxiety has gotten the best of you and that you need their support. That may mean asking them to stay on the line with you until you've worked through your symptoms, or coming over to keep you company and help put your mind at ease. If you can't get in touch with a friend or family member, go to [www.warmline.org](http://www.warmline.org) to find someone to talk to in your state.



Do something physical. Take a brisk walk, go up and down the stairs, or do some jumping jacks. Give your body a way to physically use up some of its excess energy.



Distract yourself—try an adult coloring book, knit or crochet, draw. Repetitive activities can have a calming effect similar to meditation. For free, printable coloring pages, visit [www.coloring-pages-adults.com](http://www.coloring-pages-adults.com).



Go somewhere safe and quiet, and challenge yourself to have a full-blown anxiety attack. Many people find that directly challenging themselves to have an anxiety attack actually has the opposite effect.



Deep breathing can help. One popular technique is belly breathing: Lay on your back and breathe in through your nose, watching your belly rise as you inhale. Hold your breath for a few seconds then exhale deeply through your mouth, watching your belly fall as you exhale. Repeat until you notice yourself feeling more relaxed. Alternatively, singing can also regulate your breathing if you find yourself starting to hyperventilate.



Write it down. Getting thoughts out of your head and onto paper can be helpful. This could be making a to-do list to organize your thoughts if your mind is racing and it's hard to focus, or writing in a journal to express what is bothering you.



Focus on things you can control and take action. Pick out your clothes for the week, plan your meals for the next couple days, organize your desk—taking care of small things empowers you to take charge when it comes to larger tasks.

## FIND HELP NEAR YOU

Locate an MHA Affiliate in your area by visiting [mentalhealthamerica.net/find-affiliate](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/find-affiliate)

Find treatment providers using SAMHSA's Treatment Locator at [findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov)

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 /mentalhealthamerica

[www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)

## SOME OF THE MOST COMMON TYPES OF ANXIETY DISORDERS INCLUDE:

Panic Disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Phobias, General Anxiety Disorder, and Social Anxiety Disorder.

To learn more visit:  
[mentalhealthamerica.net/anxiety](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/anxiety)

## SCREENING CAN HELP CATCH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS EARLY—B4STAGE4.

If you think you may be showing signs of an anxiety disorder, take a screen at [mhascreening.org](http://mhascreening.org).

A screening is not a diagnosis, but it can be a helpful tool for starting a conversation with your doctor or a loved one about your mental health.



[www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org)

Anonymous • Free • Confidential

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255), go to your local Emergency Room or call 911.



### SOURCES

1 KESSLER, R. C., PETUKHOVA, M., SAMPSON, N. A., ZASLAVSKY, A. M., & WITTCHEN, H.-U. (2012). Twelve-month and lifetime prevalence and lifetime morbid risk of anxiety and mood disorders in the United States. *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research*, 21(3), 169–184. <http://doi.org/10.1002/mpr.1359>

2 [http://files.shareholder.com/downloads/NFLX/47469597x0x821407/DB785B50-90FE-44DA-9F5B-37DBF0DCD0E1/Q1\\_15\\_Earnings\\_Letter\\_final\\_tables.pdf](http://files.shareholder.com/downloads/NFLX/47469597x0x821407/DB785B50-90FE-44DA-9F5B-37DBF0DCD0E1/Q1_15_Earnings_Letter_final_tables.pdf)

# LIFE WITH DEPRESSION

## PEOPLE WITH DEPRESSION SAY IT FEELS LIKE:

You are a burden to everyone

Fighting an exhausting battle against yourself

A needle of pain pricking at your body at every chance it gets

You want your life to get better, but everything is so hard to do and you have no motivation

A dark, empty room with no escape

Your head is surrounded by a thick, black, unrelenting fog

You need to hug someone. But at the same time, you don't want any human to hug you

All you want is to go home and just curl up and fall asleep forever

It's hard to be happy, to love or accept love

Exhausting, like you're living in a cage

You have a lump in your throat, as if you're about to cry at any moment, all day

Being misunderstood and ashamed

Drowning and no one sees it and you feel helpless against the water around you

You'll never be happy again, even when you know that's not true

Hopeless. Like there is no person or thing that can help you forget about everything that makes you sad all of the time

An overwhelming sense of sadness about life and about all that you are and all you do

Difficult to tell if you can trust your own perception of reality

Soul sucking torture

You are numb to the world

Really terribly lonely all of the time

Heavy and tired, like you're moving through quicksand



OF AMERICAN ADULTS HAD A MAJOR DEPRESSIVE EPISODE IN 2014.<sup>1</sup> THAT IS 15.7 MILLION PEOPLE.



ENOUGH TO FILL EVERY MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL AND FOOTBALL STADIUM IN THE UNITED STATES



## #mentalillnessfeelslike



Share what life with a depressive disorder feels like for you in words, images or video by tagging your social media posts with [#mentalillnessfeelslike](https://www.instagram.com/mentalillnessfeelslike).

Posts will be displayed at [mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike](https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike) where you can also submit anonymously if you choose.

- Speak up about your own experiences
- Help others who may be struggling to explain what they are going through to figure out if they are showing signs of a mental illness
- Break down the discrimination and stigma surrounding mental illnesses
- Show others that they are not alone in their feelings and their symptoms

**DEPRESSIVE DISORDERS ARE REAL ILLNESSES THAT INVOLVE EXTENDED PERIODS OF FEELING EXTREMELY LOW AND DISRUPT A PERSON'S ABILITY TO ENJOY LIFE. THEY AFFECT:**



### THE BODY

**Causing:** headaches, changes in appetite which cause either weight gain or loss, constantly feeling tired, body aches and pains, a weakened immune system, and sleeping too much or not enough.



### THOUGHTS

**Causing people to feel:** inadequate (like they aren't good enough), extremely sad, guilty, irritable, lonely, empty, pessimistic (having a negative outlook), preoccupied with death or suicide, unable to focus, or unmotivated.



### BEHAVIORS

**Causing:** withdrawal from social activities, decreased interest in sex, slowed speech, difficulty finishing (or even starting) tasks, or not keeping up with daily responsibilities.

## HAVING A DEPRESSIVE DISORDER IS NOT:

- Being sad about a bad situation
- Grieving the loss of a loved one
- All in a person's head
- Overreacting or being overly emotional
- Something that everybody experiences
- Something that a person just "gets over"
- A pity party
- Being stuck in a rut
- Laziness
- A choice
- A sign of weakness
- A character flaw

# TIPS FOR TACKLING DEPRESSION



Figure out what lifts your spirits and make a list you can refer to when you start to feel down. Some things you might include: funny websites, movies that make you laugh, looking at pictures of good times, playing with a pet, taking a bath, hiking, puzzles, phone numbers of people you like talking to or places you like to go.



Get moving to get your body's feel-good chemicals flowing. Take a brisk walk, go up and down the stairs, or do some jumping jacks. Aim for 30 minutes daily - you can break it up into three, 10-minute sessions to make it easier.



Remind yourself that everything does not suck by keeping a journal. Take some time each night to write down three things that you're grateful for, three things you achieved during the day, and/or three good things that happened.



Make an appointment with a therapist. It might take a while to get an appointment, but once you have that relationship it will be easier to set up appointments in the future. Taking that first step can make you feel like you've made progress, give you a sense of control over your condition, and hope for the future.



If your to-do list seems daunting, take a few moments to determine how much time it actually takes to complete each task. For instance, folding laundry may seem like a real pain, but only takes about 10 minutes. Rather than allowing it to sit and become a big, intimidating laundry pile, you'll feel a sense of accomplishment in getting it done. Start with quick tasks and build up momentum to taking care of the more time-consuming ones.



Call someone you trust and ask them to talk to you or even just sit with you. Having a non-judging person present can help you open up, or at least feel less alone. If you can't get in touch with a friend or family member, go to [www.warmlines.org](http://www.warmlines.org) to find someone to talk to in your state.



Challenge your negative thoughts about yourself. Being depressed may make you feel like something you've done was horrible, or that you're ugly, or that you don't deserve good things to happen. But if a loved one told you they were feeling that way—what would you say to them?

## FIND HELP NEAR YOU

Locate an MHA Affiliate in your area by visiting [mentalhealthamerica.net/find-affiliate](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/find-affiliate)

Find treatment providers using SAMHSA's Treatment Locator at [findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov)

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[www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)

## SOME OF THE MOST COMMON TYPES OF DEPRESSIVE DISORDERS INCLUDE:

Major Depressive Disorder, Persistent Depressive Disorder (Dysthymia), Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder, Seasonal Affective Disorder, and Post-Partum Depression.

Depression is also a feature of Bipolar Disorder.

To learn more visit:  
[mentalhealthamerica.net/depression](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/depression)

## SCREENING CAN HELP CATCH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS EARLY—B4STAGE4.

If you think you may be showing signs of a depressive disorder, take a screen at [mhascreening.org](http://mhascreening.org).

A screening is not a diagnosis, but it can be a helpful tool for starting a conversation with your doctor or a loved one about your mental health.



[www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org)  
Anonymous • Free • Confidential

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255), go to your local Emergency Room or call 911.



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2 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_current\\_National\\_Football\\_League\\_stadiums](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_current_National_Football_League_stadiums)  
3 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Major\\_League\\_Baseball\\_stadiums](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Major_League_Baseball_stadiums)

# LIFE WITH BIPOLAR

## PEOPLE WITH BIPOLAR DISORDER SAY IT FEELS LIKE:

Being misunderstood

An amazing feeling that leads to feeling horrible

You feel everything at once and then you are numb to the world

Mania is speed. You must start and finish everything now—you can't stop moving

Busy brain, busy senses, busy libido

Unending back and forth with yourself

When the mania burns out, you've got nothing left in you

Frightening to be so out of control and off-balance

Having so much energy that you stress out your mind and your body

Things are going great and it's scary because you know it will not stay that way

"Normal" people are annoying because you'll never have that stability

Being constantly in activities that take up time with hardly any results or satisfaction

Being on a see-saw of human emotion

Flipping a switch in your mind

The future quickly goes from bright to bleak

Trying to catch up to your own mind

You do not want the high of the mania to end; then after the high of the mania is over, the lows set in and reality becomes a problem

Exhilarating. You finally feel like you're normal, until the anger sets in

Difficult to tell if you can trust your own perception of reality

Productive, carefree, and then exhausting



OR 1.7% OF AMERICAN ADULTS BETWEEN THE AGES OF 18-64 WILL HAVE BIPOLAR DISORDER IN A GIVEN YEAR.<sup>1</sup>



THAT'S MORE THAN THE POPULATIONS OF:



SAN FRANCISCO



SEATTLE



NASHVILLE



INDIANAPOLIS



NEW ORLEANS

COMBINED<sup>2</sup>

## #mentalillnessfeelslike



Share what life with bipolar disorder feels like for you in words, images or video by tagging your social media posts with [#mentalillnessfeelslike](https://www.instagram.com/mentalillnessfeelslike).

Posts will be displayed at [mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike](https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike) where you can also submit anonymously if you choose.

- Speak up about your own experiences
- Help others who may be struggling to explain what they are going through to figure out if they are showing signs of a mental illness
- Break down the discrimination and stigma surrounding mental illnesses
- Show others that they are not alone in their feelings and their symptoms

**BIPOLAR DISORDERS ARE REAL ILLNESSES THAT INVOLVE EXTREME SHIFTS IN MOOD CALLED MANIA AND DEPRESSION.**

### MANIA CHANGES:

#### THOUGHTS

**Causing:** racing thoughts, unrealistic beliefs about one's abilities, feeling invincible or "on top of the world", excessive optimism, or in severe cases, delusions and hallucinations.

#### BEHAVIORS

**Causing:** rapid speech, restlessness, extreme irritability, less sleep, impulsivity, engagement in risky activities, or taking on more projects or activities than usual.



### DEPRESSION CHANGES:

#### THOUGHTS

**Causing people to feel:** inadequate (like they aren't good enough), extremely sad, guilty, irritable, lonely, empty, pessimistic (having a negative outlook), preoccupied with death or suicide, unable to focus, or unmotivated.

#### BEHAVIORS

**Causing:** withdrawal from social activities, decreased interest in sex, slowed speech, difficulty finishing (or even starting) tasks, or not keeping up with daily responsibilities.

## BIPOLAR DISORDER IS NOT:

- Moodiness
- Being overly emotional
- Having multiple personalities
- Being a "drama queen"
- Artistic, or for geniuses
- Violent
- Switching between happy and sad
- A choice
- A sign of weakness
- A character flaw

# TIPS FOR TACKLING BIPOLAR DISORDER



Learn from others who have bipolar disorder. Find a peer support group where people meet to share resources and provide support based on their histories and personal knowledge. You can find peer support groups through mental health organizations in your area, like your local MHA affiliate ([mentalhealthamerica.net/find-affiliate](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/find-affiliate)).



Be aware of your personal patterns. Is there something that you start or stop doing a few days before symptoms of mania or depression go into full effect? Once you identify your patterns, ask a friend or family member to help alert you when you start to show early signs.



Keep a mood journal. Write a little about what happened and what kind of mood you were in each day. By doing so you'll be better able to monitor changes, identify potential triggers, and keep track of what helps you to feel good.



Make a routine and stick to it as much as possible. Try to wake up, eat, and go to sleep at the same times every day to get your body operating at a steady rhythm. Don't forget to block off time for things you enjoy doing!



Be careful when it comes to substances. Stimulants like caffeine and nicotine can interfere with sleep and intensify mania. Drinking alcohol can trigger mood changes, worsen depression, and interact with medications commonly used to treat bipolar disorder.



Embrace exercise. Physical activity is great for your mind and body. During times of mania, exercise is a positive way to use your extra energy and may help you to sleep better. During times of depression, exercise helps lift mood by releasing endorphins into your blood stream. No need to spend hours at the gym; a simple 15-minute walk can help.



Know when to seek professional help. There are things you can do to manage symptoms, but if you find that you're having symptoms more often or that they are getting worse, doctors and therapists can help.



Add Omega-3 fatty acids to your routine. Omega-3s (found in fatty fish) have been shown to be effective in reducing mood changes in people with bipolar disorder. Omega-3s are also really good for your body in general!

## FIND HELP NEAR YOU

Locate an MHA Affiliate in your area by visiting [mentalhealthamerica.net/find-affiliate](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/find-affiliate)

Find treatment providers using SAMHSA's Treatment Locator at [findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov)

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[www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)

## SOME OF THE MOST COMMON TYPES OF BIPOLAR DISORDERS INCLUDE:

Bipolar I, Bipolar II, Rapid-Cycling Bipolar, Mixed Bipolar, and Cyclothymic Disorder.

To learn more visit:  
[mentalhealthamerica.net/bipolar](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/bipolar)

## SCREENING CAN HELP CATCH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS EARLY—B4STAGE4.

If you think you may be showing signs of bipolar disorder, take a screen at [mhascreening.org](http://mhascreening.org).

A screening is not a diagnosis, but it can be a helpful tool for starting a conversation with your doctor or a loved one about your mental health.



[www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org)  
Anonymous • Free • Confidential

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255), go to your local Emergency Room or call 911.

  
Mental Health America  
**B4Stage4**

### SOURCES

1 KESSLER, R. C., PETUKHOVA, M., SAMPSON, N. A., ZASLAVSKY, A. M., & WITTCHEN, H.-U. (2012). Twelve-month and lifetime prevalence and lifetime morbid risk of anxiety and mood disorders in the United States. *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research*, 21(3), 169–184. <http://doi.org/10.1002/mpr.1359>

2 <http://factfinder2.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/PEP/2014/PEPANRRSIPUS12A>

# LIFE WITH PSYCHOSIS

## PEOPLE WITH PSYCHOSIS SAY IT FEELS LIKE:

You're special, but it's not right

People and things randomly become scary

You have some sort of special power or 6th sense that you cannot control

Being stuck at a carnival fun house - you don't know what is real and things are distorted

It is hard to trust your version of the world around you

Seeing faces; hearing voices and sometimes what sounds like a leaky pipe

You are paranoid about the world around you, but don't want to be

You are not safe in your own house sometimes

Hearing everything around you all at once

Terrifying, noisy, lonely and frustrating

Constantly arguing with yourself

You're looking around for the source of the voice you heard or the object that just flashed by—even if you're by yourself

Betrayal

Being confused and excited at the same time

You're frightened and confused and don't want to tell people what is going on

You can't think, or learn anything new because your brain stopped working

Your feelings went away

Oh God - Is that real, or is that me?

## #mentalillnessfeelslike



Share what life with psychosis feels like for you in words, images or video by tagging your social media posts with [#mentalillnessfeelslike](https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike).

Posts will be displayed at [mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike](https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike) where you can also submit anonymously if you choose.

➤ Speak up about your own experiences

➤ Help others who may be struggling to explain what they are going through to figure out if they are showing signs of a mental illness

➤ Break down the discrimination and stigma surrounding mental illnesses

➤ Show others that they are not alone in their feelings and their symptoms

**PSYCHOTIC DISORDERS ARE REAL ILLNESSES THAT INVOLVE CHANGES IN PERCEPTION OF REALITY, AND TYPICALLY START IN ADOLESCENCE OR EARLY ADULTHOOD. THEY AFFECT:**



### THE BODY

**Causing a person to:** hear sounds or voices that others don't; see trails, ghost-like shadows or wavy lines; have heightened sensitivity to light, sound or touch; or have decreased sense of smell.



### BEHAVIORS

**Causing:** withdrawal from family and friends; changes in sleep, including reversal, where a person sleeps during the day and is awake at night; changes in appetite; decreased attention to personal hygiene; behaviors that are strange or seemingly uncharacteristic; incoherent or bizarre speech or writing; or dramatic drop in ability to function at work or school.



### THOUGHTS

**Causing people to feel:** disconnected; out of control; that things aren't real or quite right; that something is happening to their thoughts; extreme fear for no apparent reason; or like they can't focus or remember.

**NEARLY**  
**3.5%**  
**OF ALL PEOPLE WILL EXPERIENCE PSYCHOSIS IN THEIR LIFETIME.<sup>1</sup>**



**AMERICAN PEOPLE.<sup>2</sup>**



**MORE THAN THE ENTIRE POPULATION OF GREECE.<sup>3</sup>**

**PSYCHOSIS IS NOT:**

- Made up
- One specific mental illness
- Caused by bad parenting
- Permanent – symptoms change over time
- Just being “eccentric”
- Untreatable
- Violent by nature
- Having multiple personalities
- A choice
- A sign of weakness
- A character flaw

# TIPS FOR TACKLING PSYCHOSIS



If you feel like your brain is playing tricks on you, reach out for professional help right away - before Stage 4. The earlier you get treatment the better. Medications are very effective at reducing symptoms of psychosis, but are most the most helpful when combined with other services such as case management, supported employment, supported education, family supports, and psychoeducation.



Find tricks that help you feel “grounded in reality.” Some tricks could be a change in scenery, realizing that hallucinations only come at certain times, or that hallucinations go away when you say or do a specific thing.



Give your senses a break. If you are feeling especially sensitive to light, sound or touch, find a place where you can close the blinds or curtains, where it is quiet, and you feel safe and comfortable. If you are having trouble finding a place that suits you, try noise canceling headphones to help with sounds, or sunglasses to help with light.



Stay away from recreational drugs. Drugs make it more difficult for treatment to work. Even though smoking marijuana might make you feel relaxed in the short term, marijuana and other hallucinogenic substances have been connected to increased symptoms of psychosis.



Minimize the stress in your relationships. Struggling with mental illness can be difficult, and fighting increases stress which can aggravate symptoms and make it harder to recover. Focus on finding solutions and not placing blame. Know when it is best to walk away from conflict and come back when everyone is able to collect their thoughts and talk calmly.



Try to get about 7 hours of sleep each night. It can be really hard to sleep when you're experiencing psychosis, but not sleeping definitely makes things worse. Melatonin is a supplement that can help with sleep, but you should talk with a doctor before taking it, especially if you take prescription sleeping pills or tranquilizers.



Eat Omega-3 rich foods (like wild-caught fish) or take high quality fish oil supplements. Regular, long-term inclusion of Omega-3s can reduce symptoms of psychosis. They are also really good for your body in general!

## FIND HELP NEAR YOU

Locate an MHA Affiliate in your area by visiting [mentalhealthamerica.net/find-affiliate](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/find-affiliate)

Find treatment providers using SAMHSA's Treatment Locator at [findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov)

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[www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)

## SOME OF THE COMMON TYPES OF PSYCHOTIC DISORDERS INCLUDE:

Schizophrenia, Schizoaffective Disorder, Schizophreniform Disorder, Delusional Disorder, and Schizotypal Disorder

## PSYCHOSIS CAN ALSO BE A FEATURE OF OTHER ILLNESSES LIKE:

Bipolar Disorder, and Depression

To learn more visit:

[mentalhealthamerica.net/psychosis](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/psychosis)

## SCREENING CAN HELP CATCH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS EARLY—B4STAGE4.

If you think you may be showing warning signs of psychosis, take a screen at [mhascreening.org](http://mhascreening.org).

A screening is not a diagnosis, but it can be a helpful tool for starting a conversation with your doctor or a loved one about your mental health.



[www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org)  
Anonymous • Free • Confidential

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255), go to your local Emergency Room or call 911.

Mental Health America  
**B4Stage4**

### SOURCES

1 Perälä J, Suvisaari J, Saarni SI, et al. Lifetime Prevalence of Psychotic and Bipolar I Disorders in a General Population. Arch Gen Psychiatry. 2007;64(1):19-28. doi:10.1001/archpsyc.64.1.19.  
2 <http://www.census.gov/population/www/popclockus.html>  
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# LIFE IN RECOVERY

## PEOPLE RECOVERING FROM MENTAL ILLNESSES SAY IT FEELS LIKE:



## #mentalillnessfeelslike



Share what life in recovery from mental illness feels like for you in words, images or video by tagging your social media posts with [#mentalillnessfeelslike](https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike).

Posts will be displayed at [mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike](https://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike) where you can also submit anonymously if you choose.

- Speak up about your own experiences
- Help others who may be struggling to explain what they are going through to figure out if they are showing signs of a mental illness
- Break down the discrimination and stigma surrounding mental illnesses
- Show others that they are not alone in their feelings and their symptoms

## THE OTHER "R" WORDS ASSOCIATED WITH RECOVERY

### RESPONSE

is a term that service providers use to refer to improvement in your illness as a result of treatment

### RESILIENCE

is about adapting to stress and change in a way that helps you to become a stronger person over time

### RELAPSE

means that symptoms of a mental illness have returned and is part of the recovery process - there will be ups and downs

### ROLES

are about having a meaningful sense of your purpose and who you are outside of your mental illness

## RECOVERY IS:

- A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential!
- Regaining losses and rebuilding relationships
- Trusting yourself
- Finding your place in the world
- Lifestyle changes
- Understanding what does and does not help you feel better
- Respect—feeling that you deserve it and are treated with it
- Something that takes time
- Incremental—with plenty of ups and downs
- Doing what you can to help others and helping yourself in the process
- Reclaiming your power
- Getting more of what is important to you

## RECOVERY IS NOT:

- Instant
- A 12-step program, but they can help
- A one-size-fits-all solution
- Found in a pill, although medication does play a role in recovery for many people
- A destination that you arrive and stay at; it's a continuous journey
- Easy—it requires hard work and dedication
- A cure

## TIPS FOR TACKLING RECOVERY



Embrace the idea of change. Making lifestyle changes is difficult for everybody, but you will need to mentally prepare yourself for the fact that change is necessary (and worth it) in order to achieve recovery.



There is tremendous power in peer support. Peer support services put someone in your corner who has “been there, done that” and can help you find your own way through the recovery process. Some places you can find peer support are at your local MHA affiliate, community mental health centers, drop-in centers, and peer-run support groups.



Forgive yourself for failure. Recovery doesn't happen overnight, and there are going to be days that are going to go really well, and other days that are going to be crappy. Having a crappy day, or showing signs of relapse or recurrence, doesn't mean that you haven't made any progress or that you should give up trying to get better. Be kind to yourself and keep fighting for the life you want.



Learn about all the resources available to you to support your recovery. Therapy and medication are the two most widely known treatment options, but recovery is about more than treatment. Other resources and services include: case management, supported employment, supported education, family supports, warmlines, peer support specialists and psychoeducation.



Think about who among your friends and family members you can turn to for support. The person or people you choose should care about you, believe in you and believe in your worth. Having someone you can call or meet up with if you are feeling lonely or starting to struggle can help you to feel better and stay accountable to yourself and your recovery goals.



Set yourself up for success by creating recovery plans that you are confident you can stick to. Try this exercise: Think about a change you want to make to help you reach a recovery goal. Now rate your confidence in your ability to make that change on a scale of 1 (not confident) to 10 (positive you can do it). If you aren't confident at a level of 7 or higher, revise your plan. Start with smaller changes that you are sure you can make, and build up to tougher changes to reach your goals over time.

## FIND HELP NEAR YOU

Locate an **MHA Affiliate** in your area by visiting [mentalhealthamerica.net/find-affiliate](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/find-affiliate)

Find **treatment providers** using SAMHSA's Treatment Locator at [findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov)

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[www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)

## RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE AT ALL STAGES OF MENTAL ILLNESS, BUT THE EARLIER YOU TAKE ACTION THE EASIER IT IS TO GET BETTER

To learn more visit:  
[mentalhealthamerica.net/recovery](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/recovery)

## SCREENING CAN HELP CATCH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS EARLY—B4STAGE4.

Understanding what is going on with your mental health is the first step towards recovery.

A screening is not a diagnosis, but it can be a helpful tool for starting a conversation with your doctor or a loved one about your mental health.



[www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org)  
Anonymous • Free • Confidential

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255), go to your local Emergency Room or call 911.

  
Mental Health America  
**B4Stage4**

# Believe you can and you're halfway there.

-Theodore Roosevelt

SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT

1

Track gratitude and achievement with a journal - include 3 things you were grateful for and 3 things you were able to accomplish each day.

2

Start your day with a cup of coffee. Coffee consumption is linked to lower rates of depression. If you can't drink coffee because of the caffeine, try another good-for-you drink like green tea.

3

Set up a summer get away. It could be camping with friends or a trip to the tropics. The act of planning a vacation and having something to look forward to can boost your overall happiness for up to 8 weeks!

4

Work your strengths. Do something you're good at to build self-confidence, then tackle a tougher task. You've got this!

5

Keep it cool for a good night's sleep. The optimal temperature for sleep is between 60° and 67° Fahrenheit.

6

*"You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step."*  
-Martin Luther King Jr.

Think of something in your life you want to improve, and figure out what you can do to take a step in the right direction.

7

Experiment with a new recipe, write a poem, paint or try a Pinterest project. Creative expression and overall well-being are linked.

8

It's Mother's Day! Show some love to someone in your life who is a mom. Close, quality relationships are key for a happy, healthy life.

9

Boost brainpower by treating yourself to a couple pieces of dark chocolate every few days. The flavanoids, caffeine, and theobromine in chocolate are thought to work together to improve alertness and mental skills.

10

*"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you."*  
-Maya Angelou

If you have personal experience with mental illness or recovery, share with #mentalillnessfeelslike.

11

Sometimes, we don't need to add new activities to get more pleasure. We just need to soak up the joy in the ones we've already got. Trying to be optimistic doesn't mean ignoring the uglier sides of life. It just means focusing on the positive as much as possible.

12

Feeling anxious? Take a trip down memory lane and do some coloring for about 20 minutes to help you clear your mind. Pick a design that's geometric and a little complicated for the best effect.

13

Take time to laugh. Hang out with a funny friend, watch a comedy or check out animal videos online. Laughter helps reduce anxiety.

14

Go off the grid. Leave your smart phone at home for a day and disconnect from constant emails, alerts, and other interruptions. Spend time doing something fun with someone face-to-face.

15

Dance around while you do your housework. Not only will you get chores done, but dancing reduces levels of cortisol (the stress hormone), and increases endorphins (the body's "feel-good" chemicals).

16

Mondays can be a little rough. Go ahead and yawn. Studies suggest that yawning helps cool the brain and improves alertness and mental efficiency.

17

Relax in a warm bath once a week. Try adding Epsom salts to soothe aches and pains and help boost magnesium levels, which can be depleted by stress.

18

Has something been bothering you? Let it all out...on paper. Writing about upsetting experiences can reduce symptoms of depression.

19

Spend some time with a furry friend. Time with animals lowers the stress hormone - cortisol, and boosts oxytocin - which stimulates feelings of happiness. If you don't have a pet, hang out with a friend who does or volunteer at a shelter.

20

*"What lies before us and what lies behind us are small matters compared to what lies within us. And when you bring what is within out into the world, miracles happen."*  
- Henry David Thoreau

21

Be a tourist in your own town. Often times people only explore attractions on trips, but you may be surprised what cool things are in your own backyard.

22

Try prepping your lunches or picking out your clothes for the work week. You'll save some time in the mornings and have a sense of control about the week ahead.

23

Work some omega-3 fatty acids into your diet—they are linked to decreased rates of depression and schizophrenia among their many benefits. Fish oil supplements work, but eating your omega-3s in foods like wild salmon, flaxseeds or walnuts also helps build healthy gut bacteria.

24

Practice forgiveness - even if it's just forgiving that person who cut you off during your commute. People who forgive have better mental health and report being more satisfied with their lives.

25

*"What appear to be calamities are often the sources of fortune."*  
- Disraeli

Try to find the silver lining in something kind of cruddy that happened recently.

26

Feeling stressed? Smile. It may not be the easiest thing to do, but smiling can help to lower your heart rate and calm you down.

27

Send a thank you note - not for a material item, but to let someone know why you appreciate them. Written expressions of gratitude are linked to increased happiness.

28

It's Memorial Day Weekend! Do something with friends and family - have a cookout, go to a park, or play a game. People are 12 times more likely to feel happy on days that they spend 6-7 hours with friends and family.

29

Take 30 minutes to go for a walk in nature - it could be a stroll through a park, or a hike in the woods. Research shows that being in nature can increase energy levels, reduce depression and boost well-being.

30

Enjoy Memorial Day! Make sure to enjoy 15 minutes of sunshine, and apply sunscreen. Sunlight synthesizes Vitamin D, which experts believe is a mood elevator.

31

*"Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new."*  
-Albert Einstein

Try something outside of your comfort zone to make room for adventure and excitement in your life.



#mentalillnessfeelslike

Share what it's like for you by tagging your social media posts with #mentalillnessfeelslike.

See what others are saying at [mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike) where you can also submit anonymously.



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[/mentalhealtham](https://www.youtube.com/mentalhealthamerica)  
[/mentalhealthamerica](https://www.youtube.com/mentalhealthamerica)  
[www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)

# THINK AHEAD

Organizing your thoughts and taking steps to feel better can be tough when you're weighed down by mental illness. That's why it's important to think ahead. At a time when you're feeling well and able, use this worksheet to prepare or plan ahead.

## SUPPORTS

Think about the people in your life who can offer the positive supports you need. Thinking about specific things they can do to help you feel better will provide guidance during tough times. Some examples might include: someone you can call who will just listen, someone to hang out with even though you have low energy, or someone to take a slow walk with.

PERSON I CAN TURN TO	HOW THEY CAN HELP
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_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

When symptoms become serious, it's helpful to identify an emergency contact and list specific actions they can do to help you get back on track. Use the back of this worksheet to help identify when things get serious.

### MY EMERGENCY SUPPORT PERSON

\_\_\_\_\_

**WHAT THEY CAN DO TO HELP** (For example: call your treatment provider, is there a hospital you prefer to go to, do they need to know about your medications or medical background.)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**CONTACT INFO FOR TREATMENT PROVIDER** (Have you signed a release for this person?)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## TOOLS

### MONITOR YOUR SYMPTOMS

Screening tools can help you to monitor the severity of your symptoms. Visit [mhascreening.org](http://mhascreening.org) every so often to take a screen and "check-in" on your mental health.



[www.mhascreening.org](http://www.mhascreening.org)  
Anonymous • Free • Confidential

### FIND YOUR LOCAL MHA AFFILIATE

Mental Health America has over 200 affiliates in 40 states that can help you with programs and services to support your recovery. Find the affiliate closest to you by entering your ZIP code at: [mentalhealthamerica.net/find-affiliate](http://mentalhealthamerica.net/find-affiliate).

### FIND TREATMENT PROVIDERS

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has an online treatment locator that can help you find a variety of mental health professionals at [findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov).

### FIND PEOPLE TO TALK TO

Warmlines are numbers that you can call (usually during business hours) to find someone to talk to if you are struggling with your mental health. Find a warmline in your area by visiting [warmline.org](http://warmline.org).

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call 1-800-273-TALK (8255), go to your local Emergency Room or call 911.

# THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR

Triggers are people, places, words, or situations that increase negative feelings. They can make it difficult to cope with mental health symptoms. When you're well, it can be helpful to work on exposing yourself to triggers so that negative experiences are lessened when you're stressed. For example, if going to the grocery store or crossing bridges is scary – take small steps to expose yourself to these situations. There are some triggers, like yelling, or abusive relationships that you might consider avoiding all together. Identify some triggers that you can work through. And identify if there are triggers that you should avoid.

## MY TRIGGERS

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Early warning signs are personal changes in thoughts or behaviors that signal that things are getting worse. The sooner you intervene when these signs occur, the better. Use the lines below to think about your early warning signs. Some examples might include: withdrawing for more than two days, feeling so agitated you haven't slept for three or more days, or finding it difficult to get out of bed. When these signs occur, it's helpful to list out your next steps for seeking help. This might include calling your treatment provider, or calling your emergency contact.

## MY EARLY WARNING SIGNS

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## STEPS TO INTERVENE

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# ACTIONS TO TAKE

Stress can creep up on you when it seems like you have so much to get done and not enough time to do it. Or sometimes when symptoms of mental illness come back, normal every day activities become stressful. When stress comes, it often affects sleep. Use the lines below to identify steps you can take to reduce stress. You can use the list below to get started.

## THINGS THAT MAKE ME FEEL BETTER

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1. Make a routine.
2. Stand up and stretch.
3. Take 4 slow, deep breaths.
4. Do a puzzle or color.
5. Talk to someone who is a good listener.
6. Give yourself a pep talk ("I can do this.")
7. Close your eyes and listen to sounds around you.
8. Look at animal pictures. Who doesn't like a puppy?
9. Watch a funny video.
10. Take a brisk walk.
11. Read a magazine.
12. Watch the sunrise or sunset.
13. Massage your temples.
14. Do a good deed or random act of kindness.
15. Listen to music.

# STOPPING STUPID THOUGHTS

“Of course, I messed this up. I always find a way to ruin things.”

“He only complimented me to be polite. No one actually thinks that about me.”

“She still hasn’t replied to my message; she must be mad at me.”

Thoughts like these are painful and can happen so quickly that you may never stop to question them. That’s why we call them stupid thoughts. Known in psychology as “cognitive distortions,” these inaccurate or exaggerated thoughts can damage self-esteem, mood, and relationships with others. They can be extreme and frequent, often contributing to anxiety and depression. It’s hard to feel good when someone is saying mean things to you all the time, especially when that person is you!

Fortunately, with practice, you can address and change these thoughts. By noticing the negative things you say to yourself, you can choose nicer thoughts to replace them. Try this five step exercise using post-it notes or use the shapes below to create your own cut-outs.

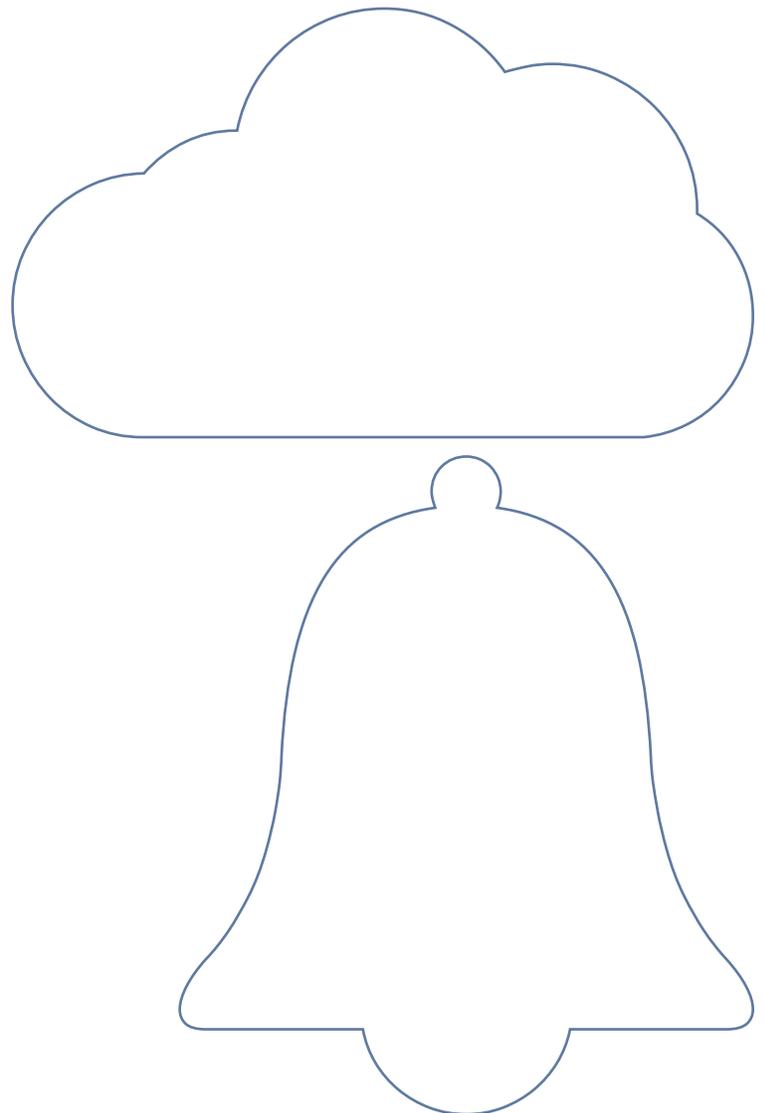
*Writing out your thoughts will help you to process and reinforce the thought change in a different way. Putting the words up where you need to see them helps provide visual reinforcement where and when you need it – especially when it’s hard for your brain to do it. Overtime, hopefully the thoughts will become more automatic.*

## Materials:

Post-it notes  
OR  
Construction paper, scissors, markers and tape.

## Instructions:

1. Identify the stupid thought. Use the list on the back of this page to identify your most common stupid thoughts (cognitive distortions).
2. Use a post-it note, or cut out the shapes below on colorful construction paper. Write the thought on one side of the cut-out (or the sticky side of the post-it note).
3. Identify a corresponding compassionate thought. Maybe think of what you would say to a friend who was having the stupid thought.
4. Write the compassionate thought on the other side of the cut-out (or the non-sticky side of the post-it note).
5. Tape or stick the compassionate (reframed) thoughts where you need to see them most – by your bed, in the bathroom, on your desk, or in your car!



# Stupid Thoughts\*

**1. All-or-nothing thinking:** You see things black or white, good or bad, all or none. There is no gray area—just the extremes. It has to be perfect or else you're a failure. Example: *"I'm always a horrible mother." "I'm never going to get it together."*

**2. Overgeneralization:** Taking a single event and making sweeping conclusions. Example: *"My best friend is mad at me. I'm sure she doesn't want to be friends ever again."*

**3. Negative mental filter:** You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it, ignoring all the positive or neutral things that might have happened. Example: *"It was such an important meeting. Why did I make that stupid statement? I'm such an idiot."*

**4. Discounting the positive:** You ignore when good things happen by insisting they "don't count" because there were other circumstances. This allows your brain to stay in a pattern of negative thinking. Example: *"No one will ever love me." "We love you." "No, you don't understand. No one will ever love me."*

**5. Jumping to conclusions:** You assume that something bad will happen or that someone will have negative feelings toward you, even though you don't have any evidence to support that thought. Example: *"My boss must be mad at me for being late. I'm not going to bother talking to him because he won't believe my excuse."*

Two subtypes of jumping to conclusions:

**a. Mind reading:** You assign negative thoughts and feelings to other people, even when there are other logical explanations for what happened. Example: *"My neighbor rushed by me and didn't even acknowledge me. I must have done something wrong."*

**b. Fortune Telling:** You assume that things are going to turn out badly and treat negative outcomes as eventualities, not possibilities. Example: *"I submitted my application, but I already know they won't call me back for an interview."*

**6. Catastrophizing or Minimizing:** Catastrophizing is when you exaggerate the importance of things that you do (like making a mistake at work) or that someone else does (that someone got a better office than you.), Minimizing is the opposite; it's when you discount the importance of something that's actually really important. Catastrophizing Example: *"Why did I use that word in that email? I'm sure I'm going to get fired."* Minimizing Example: *"Yeah I got a raise, but it's not big deal. I'm not even sure why they gave it to me."*

**7. Emotional reasoning:** You assume that just because you felt something, it's true; it's like relying too strongly on your gut instinct. Example: *"I feel like crap, so I'm probably a crappy person."*

**8. Should statements:** You focus on how things should have gone or should have been rather than how they actually are. When you direct should statements toward others, you can feel anger, frustration, and resentment. Examples: *"I should really exercise more. I'm so gross." or "My brother should have talked to me before he made any decisions about where our family is going. He's so inconsiderate."*

**9. Labeling:** This is an extreme form of overgeneralization. You take a situation (a one-time event, misunderstanding or accident) and you determine it must be about your character or their character. Examples: *"They didn't like me: I'm a huge nobody." or "That guy cut me off. He's obviously a jerk."*

**10. Personalization:** You take on responsibility for negative events, ignoring how other people or factors may have contributed. Example: *"Our relationship ended because I was a bad partner."*

**11. Blaming:** The opposite of personalization. You lay blame entirely on other people, without thinking about where you may have gone wrong or how you could have changed a situation. Example: *"Our project is slowed down because they never made a point to contact me. This is all their fault."*

# WHAT'S UNDERNEATH?

People are pretty bad at identifying their true feelings.

When asked about our feelings, most people will usually say they feel: bad, sad, mad, good, or fine. But underneath "good, bad, sad, mad, or fine" are many words that better describe how we feel.

*Taking the time to slow down and identify what we are really experiencing can help us feel better and can improve our communication and relationships with others.*

Using the prompts below, think of a specific action (this could be something you did, or something someone else did) or event and fill in the blank to identify what's underneath. The feelings list on the back of this page can help you build your mental collection of feelings. This type of activity takes practice, but once you start doing it you'll find it easier over time.

I felt bad when \_\_\_\_\_ (action or event).  
But what I was really feeling was \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

I felt sad when \_\_\_\_\_ (action or event).  
But what I was really feeling was \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

I felt mad when \_\_\_\_\_ (action or event).  
But what I was really feeling was \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

I felt good when \_\_\_\_\_ (action or event).  
But what I was really feeling was \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

I felt happy when \_\_\_\_\_ (action or event).  
But what I was really feeling was \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

# NEGATIVE FEELINGS

## Afraid

Nervous  
Dread  
Frightened  
Cowardly  
Terrified  
Alarmed  
Panicked  
Suspicious  
Worried  
Apprehensive

## Agitated

Bothered  
Disoriented  
Uncomfortable  
Uneasy  
Frenzied  
Irritable  
Rash  
Offended  
Disturbed  
Troubled  
Grumpy  
Unsettled  
Unnerved  
Restless  
Upset

## Angry

Furious  
Livid  
Irate  
Resentful  
Hate  
Hostile  
Aggressive  
Worked up  
Provoked  
Miffed  
Outrage  
Defensive

## Annoyed

Irritated  
Frustrated  
Bothered  
Impatient  
Aggravated  
Displeased  
Exasperated  
Disgruntled  
Disturbed  
Irk

## Anxious

Shaky  
Distressed  
Distraught  
Edgy  
Fidgety  
Frazzled  
Irritable  
Jittery  
Overwhelmed  
Restless  
Stressed  
Preoccupied  
Flustered

## Confused

Lost  
Disoriented  
Puzzled  
Chaotic  
Uncertain  
Stuck  
Indecisive  
Foggy  
Mistrust  
Dazed  
Baffled  
Flustered  
Perturbed  
Perplexed  
Hesitant  
Immobilized  
Ambivalent  
Torn

## Disconnected

Lonely  
Isolated  
Bored  
Distant  
Removed  
Detached  
Separate  
Broken  
Cold  
Aloof  
Numb  
Withdrawn  
Rejected  
Out-of-place  
Apathetic  
Indifferent  
Misunderstood  
Abandoned  
Alienated

## Disgust

Appalled  
Horried  
Dislike  
Loathing  
Disturbed  
Repugnant  
Contempt  
Spiteful  
Animosity  
Hostile  
Bitter

## Disorganized

Distracted  
Disheveled  
Bedraggled  
Run-down  
Confused  
Discombobulated  
Disjointed  
Displaced  
Jumbled  
Out of sorts

## Embarrassment

Awkward  
Self-conscious  
Silly  
Mortified  
Humiliated  
Flustered  
Chagrined  
Ashamed  
Put down  
Guilty  
Disgraced

## Envy

Jealous  
Rivalry  
Competitive  
Covetous  
Resentful  
L longing  
Self-conscious  
Insecure  
Inadequate  
Yearning  
Nostalgic  
Wistful

## Helpless

Paralyzed  
Weak  
Defenseless  
Powerless  
Invalid  
Abandoned  
Alone  
Incapable  
Useless  
Inferior  
Vulnerable  
Empty  
Distressed

## Pain

Hurt  
Remorseful  
Regretful  
Disappointed  
Guilty  
Grief  
Bereaved  
Miserable  
Agony  
Anguish  
Bruised  
Crushed  
Wounded

## Sadness

Heartbroken  
Disappointed  
Hopeless  
Regretful  
Depressed  
Pessimistic  
Melancholy  
Sorrowful  
Morbid  
Heavy-hearted  
Low  
Blue  
Gloomy  
Miserable  
Despair

## Stress

Tension  
Pressure  
Overwhelmed  
Frazzled  
Strain  
Imbalanced  
Worried  
Uneasy  
Cranky  
Distraught  
Dissatisfied  
Weighed down  
Overworked  
Pounded  
Anxious  
Shocked  
Frustrated

## Tired

Bored  
Fatigued  
Exhausted  
Uninterested  
Overworked  
Worn out  
Fed up  
Drained  
Weary  
Burned out  
Lethargic  
Beat  
Sleepy  
Depleted

## Vulnerable

Insecure  
Shaky  
Open  
Unsure  
Exposed  
Unguarded  
Sensitive  
Unsafe  
Inferior  
Raw  
Weak  
Judged  
Inadequate

# POSITIVE FEELINGS

## Admiration

Adoration  
Affection  
Appreciation  
Delight  
Fondness  
Pleasure  
Wonder  
Regard  
Amazed  
Amused

## Affectionate

Caring  
Friendly  
Loving  
Sympathetic  
Warm  
Doting  
Soft  
Tender  
Attached  
Compassionate

## Confident

Bold  
Courageous  
Positive  
Sure  
Fearless  
Optimistic  
Encouraged  
Safe  
Powerful  
Proud  
Satisfied  
Trusting  
Secure  
Brave  
Empowered

## Excited

Enthusiastic  
Delighted  
Amazed  
Passionate  
Amused  
Aroused  
Alert  
Piqued  
Astonished  
Dazzled  
Energetic  
Awakened  
Eager  
Charged

## Exhilarated

Blissful  
Ecstatic  
Elated  
Enthralled  
Exuberant  
Radiant  
Rapturous  
Thrilled

## Gratitude

Thankful  
Grateful  
Moved  
Touched  
Appreciative  
Graceful  
Responsive  
Recognized  
Indebtedness

## Included

Engaged  
Understood  
Appreciated  
Accepted  
Acknowledged  
Affirmed  
Recognized  
Welcomed  
Connected  
Supported  
Belonging  
Heard  
Respected  
Involved

## Intrigued

Absorbed  
Fascinated  
Interested  
Charmed  
Entertained  
Captivated  
Engaged  
Engrossed  
Curious  
Surprised

## Joyful

Cheerful  
Festive  
Heartening  
Lighthearted  
Upbeat  
Glad  
Merry  
Elated  
Enjoyable  
Euphoria  
Delighted  
Jubilant  
Hopeful  
Tickled  
Pleased

## Peaceful

Clam  
Quiet  
Trusting  
Fulfilled  
Harmonious  
Steady  
Collected  
Composed  
Comfortable  
Centered  
Content  
Relieved  
Constant  
Mellow  
Level  
Restful  
Still  
At ease  
Satisfied  
Relaxed  
Clear  
Reassured

## Refreshed

Stimulated  
Replenished  
Exhilarated  
Reinvigorated  
Revived  
Enlivened  
Restored  
Liberated  
Lively  
Passionate  
Vibrant  
Rested