



Mental Health Guide



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Introduction



Mental health encompasses our emotional, mental, and social well-being, and it can impact every dimension of our lives from our finances to our physical health. The state of our mental health determines how we show up in the world: how we think, act, and feel on a daily basis. Mental illnesses are conditions that affect these factors, and they may be long-lasting or brief.

Around 1 in 5 Americans will experience a mental illness in any given year. There are many different reasons why someone might develop a mental illness, including a history of trauma, biological factors, experience of physical illness, or substance use. Each reason is equally valid, and every person is deserving of treatment. Misunderstandings about mental illness often lead people to believe that they are alone, should be ashamed for having a mental illness, or are weak for needing support. This is called stigma, and it can prevent people from getting the help they need.

Seeking therapy, medication, or other treatments for your mental health is a sign of strength and bravery, not weakness. Exploring options for treatment and talking about mental health are powerful ways to fight stigma and work towards healing.

This guide will provide you with information and resources surrounding mental health that can help you identify mental illness and understand options for improving mental well-being.

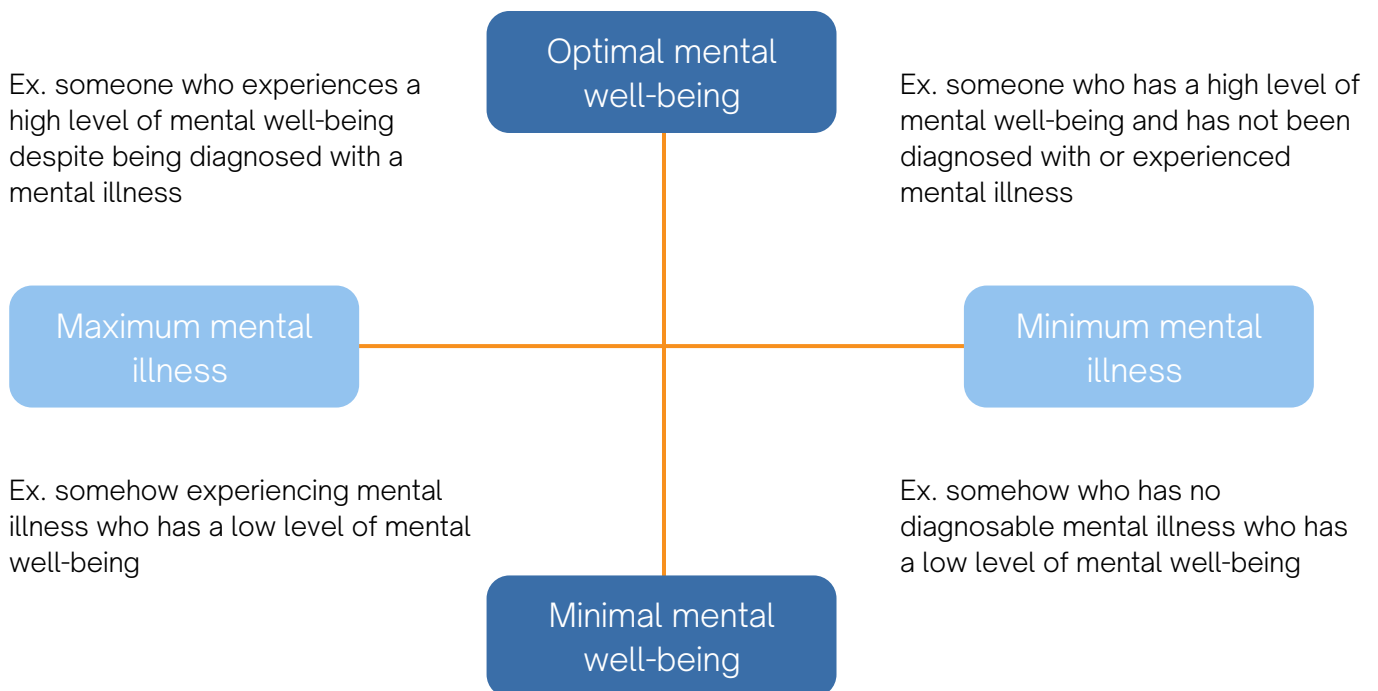
This guide provides mental health information and is only intended to assist individuals in their personal mental health journey. Nothing contained in this guide is medical advice or diagnosis nor should any information in this guide be construed as such.

You are urged and advised to seek the advice of a physician or licensed mental health provider regarding mental health care.

Mental Health & How to Talk About It



Mental health and illness make up a complex spectrum. Individuals who have a diagnosed mental illness may experience periods of happiness and heightened well-being, and people who are in a state of optimal well-being can experience periods of sadness or stress. The below model illustrates this idea about mental health:



Tips for talking about your mental health with a friend or loved one:

- Ask to have a conversation - this may be over text, in person, or on a phone call. If they agree, avoid scheduling the conversation far in advance to reduce worry and anticipation on both ends.
- Use "I" statements - Focus the conversation on how you are feeling and thinking to prevent the listener from feeling a misdirected sense of blame or responsibility for your mental health.
- Find information online about mental health that might help you explain what you're feeling.
- Prepare for the possibility that the listener may not understand or react how you hoped. Don't let this discourage you from seeking future support from others.
- Even though the conversation might feel awkward, you'll likely feel relieved after and more confident in seeking help from a professional.

Tips for talking to a friend or loved one about their mental health:

- Ask to have a conversation with them - if they agree, avoid scheduling the conversation far in advance to reduce worry and anticipation on both ends.
- Create a non-judgmental environment with no distractions.
- Ask open-ended questions - avoid making assumptions or accusations about the state of their mental health. Instead, let them answer by asking "How have you been doing recently?" or other questions that require more than a "yes" or "no" answer.
- Be an active listener - let them finish their thoughts before you respond.
- Validate that you're understanding what they're saying by repeating it back to them.
 - Ex. if they say "I've been feeling really low and I'm not sure what's wrong" you could say, "It sounds like you've not been feeling like yourself lately."
- Avoid diagnosing what they're going through, and instead offer your support in finding them a mental health professional to speak with.
- Know your limits - if you believe they are in immediate danger, take action to make sure they are safe. If they aren't in danger, set healthy boundaries to protect your own mental health. You are there to offer support, but you are not a therapist.

Note: just as a tumor doesn't define someone who has cancer, mental illness doesn't define who you are as a person. Even still, this doesn't make it any less hard. Sometimes all people need to hear is "I'm sorry you're going through this. That sounds really difficult."



Signs & Symptoms

Recognizing the signs of mental illness in yourself and those close to you is the first step in seeking help. Each mental illness has its own unique symptoms, but some common signs are listed below. Mental illness is a prolonged experience of these symptoms that impacts your ability to function:

- Feeling excessively sad or down
- Confused thinking or reduced ability to concentrate
- Excessive fears or worries, or extreme feelings of guilt
- Extreme mood changes of highs and lows
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Significant tiredness, low energy or problems sleeping
- Detachment from reality, paranoia or hallucinations
- Inability to cope with daily problems or stress
- Trouble understanding and relating to situations and to people
- Problems with alcohol or drug use
- Major changes in eating habits
- Multiple physical ailments without obvious causes (such as headaches, stomach aches, vague and ongoing “aches and pains”)
- Sex drive changes
- Excessive anger, hostility or violence
- Suicidal thinking

Recognizing Mental Illness in Children

Children can experience mental health conditions, but they may not have the tools to talk effectively about their thoughts or emotions. For this reason, it's important to recognize the following behavioral signs:

- Disrupted ability to participate in play, school, or typical age-appropriate social situations
- Excessive worry or anxiety, for instance fighting to avoid bed or school
- Hyperactive behavior
- Frequent nightmares
- Frequent disobedience or aggression
- Frequent temper tantrums
- Racing heartbeat, headaches or belly aches

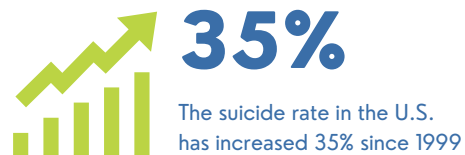
Suicide & Suicide Prevention

Experiencing thoughts about suicide can be scary, but it's important to remember that you're not alone, and there are resources for support. It's crucial to take suicidal thoughts seriously in order to work towards a path of healing.



2nd

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for people 10-34 years old



Risk factors for suicidality may include:

- Mental illness
- Alcohol and other drug use
- History of trauma or abuse
- Major physical illness
- Family history of suicide
- Easy access to lethal means
- Lack of social support
- Exposure to others who have died by suicide

Warning signs of suicide may include:

- Talking/thinking about wanting to die
- Looking for a way to end one's life (e.g. searching online)
- Talking about/feeling hopeless, trapped, or like a burden
- Increase alcohol and/or other drug use
- Withdrawing or isolating oneself
- Extreme mood swings
- Sleeping too little or too much

If you or a friend are having thoughts about suicide, consider doing the following:



Make an appointment with a doctor or therapist to talk about how you're feeling.



Remind yourself that suicidal thoughts are a symptom, they can be treated and improve with time.



Call or text a crisis line or trusted friend. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-8255.

NEW - Call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org for the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.



Seeking Help: Why You Should



Treatment for mental illness may include a variety of types of therapy, medication, support groups, and/or lifestyle changes. Choosing your path to treatment is personal, and it might take time to feel the positive changes of one or more of these methods combined.

Research shows that **75% of individuals who go to therapy show some benefit or improvement to their mental health.** Depending on the person, it's possible to feel these positive impacts after anywhere from a few therapy sessions to a year or two of recurring sessions. For some people, the benefits of combining both therapy and medication may be greater than the impacts of either on their own. Generally, if you can function well on a daily basis, you may benefit just from therapy alone.

Potential benefits of seeking treatment for mental health include:

- Overcoming past trauma
- Improving your relationships with others and yourself
- Finding positive coping mechanisms that work for you
- Reduced depression, anxiety, or compulsive behaviors
- Improved self esteem
- Improved communication skills

On the fence about seeking treatment? Ask yourself the questions below...

What would you like to change about how you're feeling lately? _____

Have you noticed that it's more difficult to do the things you once did? _____

How important is it to you to feel better? What benefits might it bring? _____

How do you think change might occur? _____

Why now? _____

Seeking Help: Finding Care



Finding a mental health care provider can often feel stressful or intimidating, but it doesn't need to be. There are a number of ways to connect with a psychiatrist and/or licensed mental health counselor; read below to find what may work best for you.

EAP: Employee Assistance Program

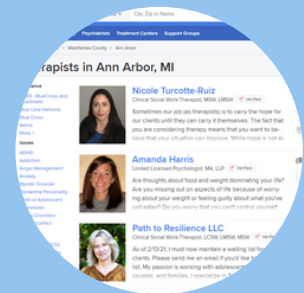
Check with your company's HR department to find out if there is an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) available to you. EAPs often offer free and confidential short-term counseling or referrals to mental health care providers, are available 24/7, and are usually available to your household members as well. If you're looking to connect with a mental health care provider quickly or temporarily, this may be a good place to start.

Pros: receive immediate assistance, no cost

Cons: not meant for long-term care, can't "shop around" for a provider

Psychology Today

Psychology Today offers an online search tool to find verified and licensed therapists, teletherapy providers, psychiatrists, treatment centers, and support groups in your area. Users are able to filter based on insurance, issues, types of therapy or care provided, and more. This is a helpful tool for finding a long-term mental health care provider that works for you.



Pros: vast pool of providers, ability to filter & verify, free to use

Cons: may take several sessions to find the right fit

Insurance Carrier

Depending on your insurance provider, they may offer a search tool for finding in-network mental health care providers including psychiatrists and licensed counselors.

Pros: guaranteed in-network providers, free

Cons: provider pool may be limited, covered sessions may be limited

Independent Providers

If you're having trouble finding a provider in-network or are interested in teletherapy that's more accommodating to your schedule, there are online therapy companies who can connect you with a mental health care provider. For more information, see page 16.

Pros: flexible scheduling, accessible anywhere, 24/7 access to care

Cons: out-of-pocket cost (possible HSA), virtual therapy and telehealth only



Seeking Help: What to Expect

There are varying approaches to mental health treatment depending on different diagnoses, treatment models, behaviors, etc. Outside of psychiatric care, most prevalent and adaptable is mental health counseling, or therapy. Beginning therapy can often feel intimidating or overwhelming, especially when you don't know what to expect. Learning about what to look for when seeking a therapist and how therapy works can help alleviate some of the nerves you may be feeling.

Shopping Around

It is perfectly normal and encouraged to interview or meet with a number of different therapists in order to find your right match. You're not married to the first therapist you see and if you find that you're not benefiting from your meetings it may be time to reevaluate and switch therapists or the method of approach.

Questions to ask when you're looking for or consulting with a therapist:

- What's your experience? How long have you been practicing?
- What type or style of therapy do you practice? Do you think it will be a good fit for what I'm dealing with?
- Is your approach more directive or more guiding?
- What are your strengths and limitations as a counselor?
- How do you create counseling goals and what does success in our sessions look like to you?
- How do I prepare for my first session?

Questions to ask yourself before starting therapy:

- What brings you to therapy?
- What do you hope to achieve?
- How will you know when your goals are met?
- How do you think change might happen?
- What are you prepared to commit to and let go of to move forward?

What Happens During Therapy

Essentially, therapy is a chance for you to problem-solve current situations in your life and your feelings around them with someone who is trained in different interpersonal and psychological methods. You are given a space to talk openly and honestly about what's going on in your life, any problems you're facing, or any goals you'd like to achieve. Your therapist will actively listen and never judge, criticize, or penalize you for thoughts you share, rather they'll help you work through them with a variety of strategies.

Depending on what you want and what works for you, your therapist may want to try strategies outside of talk-therapy such as meditation, visualization, or role-playing exercises. They may also give you "homework," like journaling or breathing exercises to practice at home.



Coping Mechanisms

Coping mechanisms are how we respond to stress, whether it be internal or external, day-to-day or stemming from a traumatic experience. Coping mechanisms can often improve mental health and emotional well-being; however, some maladaptive coping mechanisms can have the opposite effect.

Maladaptive (-)

Projection

Putting our own negative or frightening emotions onto another person ("I'm not upset, you are!") in order to ignore the problem and protect ourselves.

Dissociation

Removing yourself from traumatic or frightening thoughts, emotions, memories, or surroundings to "escape" overwhelming feelings.

Self-Medication

Offering feelings of acceptance or confidence, substances like drugs, alcohol, or food can often offer temporary relief from negative or frightening emotions but ultimately have a negative effect on mental and physical health.

Denial/Repression

Selectively denying or ignoring bad, or seemingly unbearable, news helps create a false sense of security. For example, it could look like denying a cancer diagnosis or being unwilling to admit addiction.

Self-Harm

Injuring yourself physically as a means of dealing with trauma, stress, or upsetting emotions.

Adaptive (+)

Social Support

Asking for help or for emotional support from family members, friends, and intentional support group, or a professional can be an effective way to deal with stress and/or negative emotions.

Positive Reframing & Humor

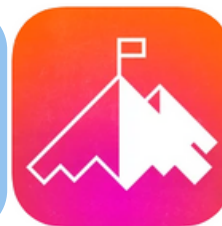
Pointing out the amusing aspects of a problem or identifying the upside to a negative situation is a way to relieve stress. It can also help adjust your mindset to focus on a solution or express gratitude.

Physical Recreation & Relaxation

Regular exercise, such as running, walking, yoga, or team sports, is a healthy way to handle stress and process negative emotions. Additionally, relaxation and calming techniques can help to manage stress and improve overall coping.

Acceptance

By accepting the reality of past trauma or current negative situations and emotions, you can begin to acknowledge your feelings, process them, and work through the discomfort.



MoodMission: Based in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), this app prompts quick and achievable mental health strategies to reduce stress and help positively cope with negative emotions.

Substance Abuse & Mental Health

The most common maladaptive coping mechanism is substance use, with roughly **50% of those with severe mental health disorders being affected by substance abuse.**

Of those with a diagnosis of mental illness, **29%** abuse alcohol or drugs.

37% of alcohol abusers and **53%** of drug abusers also have at least one serious mental illness.

Signs and symptoms of substance use include, but are not limited to:

- Feeling that you have to use the substance regularly
- Having intense urges for the substance that block out any other thoughts
- Spending money on the substance, even though you can't afford it
- Not meeting obligations and work responsibilities, or cutting back on social or recreational activities because of drug use
- Continuing to use the substance, even though you know it's causing problems in your life or causing you physical or psychological harm

Mental health disorders and substance use disorders are often co-morbid:

- Alcohol and/or drugs are often used to self-medicate the symptoms of mental health disorders; however, these substances can cause side effects and ultimately worsen the symptoms they are being used to alleviate.
- Not only can alcohol and drugs worsen symptoms, they can also trigger new symptoms and interact with medications such as anti-depressants and mood stabilizers, which can be dangerous and delay recovery.
- Admitting and addressing substance abuse can be particularly difficult due to both the physical addiction and stigmatization, but is essential when caring for your mental health.
- Treatment for a mental health disorder may include medication, individual or group counseling, self-help measures, lifestyle changes, and peer support and can be accomplished concurrently with treatment for substance abuse.

Sober Grid: This app offers 24/7 peer support for recovery and sobriety, allows users to keep track of their sobriety time, acknowledge achievements, earn badges, and complete check-ins and pledges



For treatment referral and information, call the SAMHSA's National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

Lifestyle & Mental Health

Mental health is a part of overall health. Not only can maintaining a healthy lifestyle help prevent the onset of mental health conditions, it can also help prevent the worsening of symptoms and act as a powerful coping mechanism and protective factor. Read below about the components of a healthy lifestyle and how they can affect mental health.

Physical Activity

Exercise has been shown to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression while improving mood, confidence, and cognitive function. Even 20 minutes of physical activity a day, whether it be walking, dancing, biking, or yoga, can have a positive impact on your mental health.

Healthy Diet

Our diet can and does affect our brain. A healthy diet full of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and healthy fats can help reduce symptoms of some mental health disorders including anxiety and depression. Diets high in saturated fats and sugars have been shown to be linked to higher levels of anxiety and depression. Eating a healthy diet also reduces your risk for chronic health conditions, further reducing your risk for co-morbid mental health conditions.

Social Support

While many parts of health are personal and internal, having social support systems is an important part of an overall healthy lifestyle. Struggling with mental health can often feel overwhelming and isolating, so being able to talk to and rely on support is essential whether it be family, friends, support groups, or a mentor.

Sleep Well

Sleep problems can often exacerbate existing symptoms of mental health conditions. For example, night-time anxiety may lead to reduced rest and increased anxiety during the day, creating a cycle that can be emotionally challenging to break. Having a sleep schedule, making sure to unplug and relax, and creating a restful environment can help you sleep better.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness practices, such as meditation and yoga, can help reduce stress and chronic pain, lower blood pressure, and improve sleep. Not only can mindfulness practices improve overall health, they can also help train your brain over time to have better control over processing pain and emotions—two factors linked closely with mental health.



Medication

Starting a new medication for any health condition can be a source of stress or worry; and medications for mental health conditions can be especially stigmatized. Using medication to manage and treat a mental health condition, however, is a normal and healthy strategy. Medication is especially effective in tandem with a healthy lifestyle and mental health counseling. Read below to learn more.

Getting Prescribed

Medications for mental health conditions can only be prescribed by medical doctors (not your psychologist or therapist), so it's important to see and communicate your needs with either your primary care physician or psychiatrist. Depending on your diagnosis, your lifestyle, and any existing medical conditions, your prescription type and duration will vary -- there is no standard prescription for those experiencing a mental health condition. Additionally, it may take trial and error with a number of different medications to find out what works best for you. This is perfectly normal and a common part of the process.

Antidepressants

Antidepressants, including SSRIs and SNRIs, are most commonly used to treat depression as well as anxiety, OCD, PTSD, chronic pain, insomnia, and others.

Antidepressants are thought to work by balancing levels of neurotransmitters, such as serotonin and noradrenaline, in the brain to have an effect on mood and emotions. Antidepressants can take several weeks to take effect so it's important to take them consistently under your doctor's direction.

There are a number of other types of medications that can be prescribed for a variety of mental health conditions, including antipsychotics, beta-blockers, and mood stabilizers. If you have any questions or concerns about your medication, talk to your prescribing doctor. **Always talk to your doctor before beginning or ending use of any medication.**

Like other prescription drugs, medications for mental health conditions can have side effects as well as serious interactions with other drugs, vitamins, or supplements. For example, combining benzodiazepines with alcohol can be fatal. It's important to talk with your doctor about possible interactions and side effects. This will also help you find the right medication for you.

Anti-anxiety Medications

In addition to Antidepressants, another class of medications called Benzodiazepines can also be prescribed to treat a number of anxiety disorders.

Instead of targeting serotonin, benzodiazepines work by targeting a different neurotransmitter, GABA, to slow down the nervous system and induce a sense of calm. Though effective in the short-term, benzodiazepines can be habit-forming and are not meant for long-term management.

Diagnosis-Specific Mental Health Apps

The following collection of apps are recommended for those who have already received a diagnosis of a mental health condition from a licensed medical provider. These apps do not substitute treatment of mental health conditions such as medication and/or therapy; rather, they may be used as tools to help alleviate symptoms, track progress, create goals, and share information with your mental health provider.



MindShift: MindShift CBT is a free evidence-based anxiety management app that uses scientifically proven strategies based on CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) to help reduce worry, stress, and panic. The app includes a number of mindfulness methods, personal challenges, and allows users to share their progress and data with their mental health care providers.

For: Anxiety



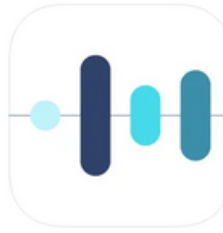
What's Up?: This app uses CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) and ACT (Acceptance Commitment Therapy) to help cope with mental health challenges, track habits, log thoughts and feeling, put problems in perspective, and more! There are forums to talk with others and share challenges as well as positivity.

For: Depression, Anxiety



MoodTools: This app uses a number of research-supported tools to help alleviate symptoms of depression, including a thought diary, energizing activities, and videos of meditations and enlightening talks. The app also allows users to create a suicide safety plan and track symptom severity over time using the PHQ-9 depression questionnaire.

For: Depression

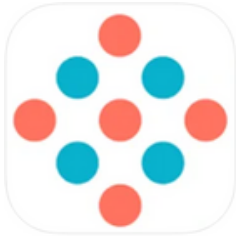


eMoods Bipolar Mood Tracker: Through this app, users can track, journal, and graph their moods, as well as medication changes. Users are able to view both in-app graphs and printable charts to help visualize symptoms and triggers (to review with a mental health care provider).

For: Bipolar Disorder, Anxiety, Depression

Diagnosis-Specific Mental Health Apps

Cont.



NOCD: Effective Care for OCD: Through this app users are able to connect with OCD-specialized therapists, personalize a treatment plan, use research-supported therapeutic tools, and connect with a virtual community of peers to share advice and receive support. The app focuses on exposure and response prevention (ERP) to reduce OCD severity.

For: OCD



PTSD Coach: Created by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, this app provides users with education about PTSD, information about professional care, a self-assessment for PTSD, opportunities to find support, and tools to manage the stresses of daily life with PTSD. The app does have a military-focus but can be used by those outside of the service, as well.

For: PTSD



UCSF PRIME: Created by researchers at the University of California, San Francisco the evidence-backed app includes social networking with relatable peers, goal setting focused on promoting well being, and access to mental health motivational coaches to support users in improving their lives. Potential users will need to email drivelab@ucsf.edu to discuss eligibility.

For: Schizophrenia



Rise Up + Recover: This app uses self-monitoring homework, an integral part of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), to build a healthier body image and relationship with food. Through the app users can log meals, emotions, and behaviors; share pieces of motivation; and share PDFs of their logs with a healthcare provider.

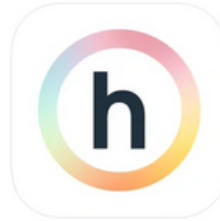
For: Disordered Eating, EDNOS

Wellness Apps

The following collection of apps are recommended as supplements to mental health care and focus on creating and maintaining lifestyle habits that support lower stress and improved mood. The apps include tools for meditation, mindfulness, affirmations, journaling, mood tracking, and more.



Headspace: This app offers a variety of guided meditations for stress, anxiety, depression, sleep, mind-body health, and more. In addition to meditation and mindfulness skills, there are also mindful at-home fitness and cardio workouts led by Olympic trainers. Though most content is only available with a subscription, many resources on the app are available for free with or without a trial.



Happify: Based in positive psychology, mindfulness, and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), Happify's science-based activities and games can help users overcome negative thoughts, stress, and life's challenges. Users are able to choose a number of free improvement tracks, or programs, and visualize their personal progress.



Shine: Made for BIPOC by BIPOC, this app provides representation in mental wellness. The app offers daily meditations, space for reflection via journaling, mood tracking, and the ability to create a daily self-care ritual. With a paid membership, users can access an inclusive peer-community and monthly community care events.



I am - Daily Affirmations: Simple to use, this app sends daily positive affirmations that can help improve users mindsets, confidence, and focus. Users can set daily intentions and choose how many reminders are delivered throughout the day, giving users the power to be their own cheerleader.

Teletherapy Apps

If you prefer a virtual method of attending therapy, check out the apps below. Therapy through these apps may not be covered by your insurance and may require out-of-pocket costs. Check with your insurance, EAP, or wellness program to see if virtual therapy and/or telehealth is available to you.



Talkspace Therapy & Counseling: Through Talkspace, users are able to match with a mental health care provider, communicate via text, video, and audio; book live sessions; track symptoms and goals; and build healthy habits through mindfulness exercises.



Betterhelp - Online Counseling: Users are able to match, connect, and have unlimited communication with licensed counselors and therapists over a wide range of areas, from depression and anxiety to family and couples therapy. Betterhelp also offers access to education group webinars.

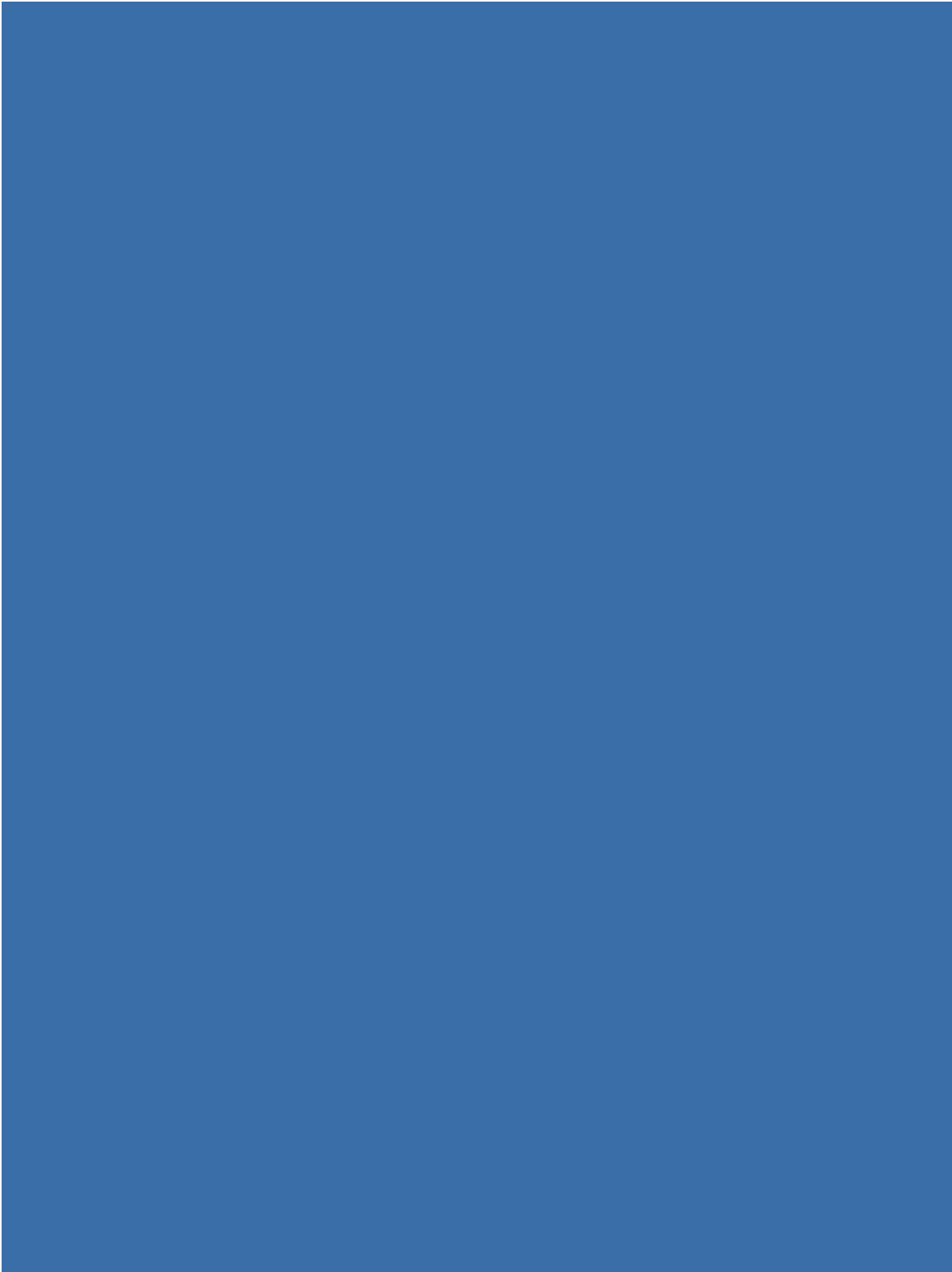
By reading this guide, you've taken the time to understand more about mental health conditions and their treatment. Dealing with mental health conditions is a journey, and we hope that some of the provided resources in this document can help support you along the way.

If you have any questions, you can reach out to the Kapnick Strive team at strive@kapnick.com or 877.233.2296.

Carrier Resources



Your insurance may offer resources to aid you in your mental health care. See below to find out what's available to you.



Carrier Resources



Your insurance may offer resources to aid you in your mental health care. See below to find out what's available to you.

