

Safety Circular

December 2025

Mental Health Awareness

Mental illness is a general term for a group of illnesses that may include symptoms that can affect a person's thinking, perception, mood, or behavior. Mental illness can make it difficult for people to work, maintain relationships, and stay in control of other aspects of life.

Examples of mental illness that can affect people on a daily basis include:

- Anxiety disorders
- Behavioral and emotional disorders in children
- Bipolar affective disorder
- Depression
- Dissociation and dissociative disorders
- Eating disorders
- Obsessive compulsive disorder
- Paranoia
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Psychosis
- Schizophrenia

Anxiety Disorder

An estimated 31.1% of adults in the United States experience any anxiety disorder at some time in their lives. Anxiety has a variety of disorders that many do not know exist. General anxiety, phobias, panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are examples of anxiety disorders that can interfere with a person's day-to-day life if not treated.

Bipolar Affective Disorder

Bipolar affective disorder is often referred to as manic depression and can be a product of a clearly established genetic predisposition. Individuals with bipolar affective disorder may experience psychotic symptoms. Environmental stressors can trigger individuals with manic depression.

Behavioral & Emotional Disorders in Children

Mental illness can affect children as well. Some common disorders in children include oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), conduct disorder (CD), and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Some helpful treatments for these disorders are therapy, education, and medication.

Depression

Depression is a mood disorder characterized by lowering of mood, loss of interest and enjoyment, and reduced energy. There are different levels of depression and symptoms of depression vary for everyone. Depression can lead to suicidal thoughts or behaviors.

Dissociation and Dissociative Disorders

In dissociation and dissociative disorders, a person disconnects from their thoughts, feelings, memories, or sense of identity. Examples of dissociative disorders include amnesia, depersonalization disorder, and dissociative identity disorder.

Eating Disorders

Eating disorders affect people both mentally and physically. Eating disorders can affect all races and genders and can cause serious psychological and physical consequences. Examples of eating disorders include anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating.



Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is an anxiety disorder that results in obsession (recurrent thoughts, images, or impulses that are intrusive and unwanted) and compulsions (time-consuming and distressing repetitive rituals). Treatments for OCD include cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) and medication.

Paranoia

Paranoia occurs when a person is irrational and has a persistent feeling that someone is out to get them. Some examples of disorders that result in paranoia include paranoid personality disorder, delusional (paranoid) disorder, and schizophrenia.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that can develop as a response to a traumatic event that has occurred in an individual's life. Some known traumatic experiences that can cause PTSD include minor and major car accidents, physical or sexual assault, war-related events or torture, and natural disasters.

Psychosis

Psychosis can cause people to experience delusions, hallucinations, and confused thinking. Several different things can induce psychosis, like drugs, schizophrenia, and mood disorders. Medication and psychological support can relieve, or even eliminate, psychotic symptoms.

Schizophrenia

Schizophrenia is a complex psychotic disorder characterized by disruptions to thinking and emotions, along with distorted perception of reality. Symptoms of schizophrenia can include hallucinations, delusions, thought disorder, social withdrawal, lack of motivation, and impaired thinking or memory. Schizophrenia does not result in "split personality". Individuals with schizophrenia tend to be at a high risk for suicide.



Mental Wellness

Mental wellness includes all aspects of mental health, emotional state, and well-being, as well as how these aspects interact. In turn, your mental wellness influences your thoughts, feelings, and daily behaviors. Mental wellness affects each dimension and includes coping with the normal difficulties of life.

Strategies to enhance mental wellness:

- Practice mindfulness by focusing on the present moment rather than focusing on the past or imagining the future
- Use relaxation and self-care strategies that work for you
- Seek support from family, friends, community, and/or a professional
- Exercise, eat well, and maintain a healthy sleep schedule
- Express feelings and emotions effectively and practice positive self-talk
- Know where to turn in times of crisis

Warning Signs of Suicide

Knowing the warning signs for suicide and how to get help can help save lives. The behaviors listed below may be some of the signs that someone is thinking about suicide. If these warning signs apply to you or someone you know, get help as soon as possible, particularly if the behavior is new or has increased recently.

Talking about:

- Wanting to die
- Great guilt or shame
- Being a burden to others

Feeling:

- Empty, hopeless, trapped, or having no reason to live
- Extremely sad, more anxious, agitated, or full of rage
- Unbearable emotional or physical pain

Changing behavior, such as:

- Making a plan or researching ways to die
- Withdrawing from friends, saying goodbye, giving away important items, or making a will
- Taking dangerous risks such as driving extremely fast
- Displaying extreme mood swings
- Eating or sleeping less
- Using drugs or alcohol more often

Other signs to look out for include previous suicide attempts, recent serious losses, and lost interest in school, work, hobbies, and/or personal appearance.

TDCJ Resources

The Employee Support Services (ESS) section of the Victim Services Division (VSD) is available to any TDCJ employee. Services include peer support, information and referrals, critical incident support and debriefing, training, and follow up.

- The CRISP Coordinators are ESS staff located in each CID Region. They are available to meet by phone, video conference, or in person. They can help with connections to additional resources and are not a replacement for mental health counseling or therapy.
- The Staff Wellness Resource Library provides links to helpful tools and information that can help you equip yourself with skills and knowledge for managing the stress of the job so you can maintain your quality of life off-duty. (<https://ivss.tdcj.texas.gov/staff-wellness-resources/>)
- You may contact ESS directly by leaving a message with the Regional CRISP Coordinator in your area or through the general email or hotline number below. Leave a brief message with your preferred contact number and your call will be returned within 24 hours Monday-Friday.

ESS Email:

vsd.employee_support_services@tdcj.texas.gov

TDCJ Victim Services Hotline:

800-848-4284

M-F 8:00 am-5:00 pm

Additional Resources

- National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: 988
- National Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-800-656-4673
- National Domestic Violence Hotline: 800-799-7233
- Texas Abuse Hotline: 800-252-5400
- Employee Assistance Program (EAP): 866-832-5927
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741
- Veterans Crisis Line: 988 (then press 1) or text 838255
- Alcoholics Anonymous: <https://aa.org/>
- Narcotics Anonymous: <https://na.org/>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration National Helpline: 800-662-4357



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The Safety Circular, a publication of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Risk Management Department, is published monthly in an effort to promote and enhance risk management awareness on issues relating to TDCJ employees. Comments, suggestions and safety related items are welcome.

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References: ♦ tdcj.texas.gov ♦ nimh.nih.gov ♦ betterhealth.vic.gov.au ♦ apa.org ♦ students.wlu.ca