

Congregational Get Started Kit to Respond to Mental Health Issues

Getting Started to Talk About Mental Health and Illness in Your Congregation

How do you get started to talk about mental illness in your congregation? This is often a topic that is ignored and hidden. There are many resources to help you start a conversation in your congregation. This is a list of just a few!

1. Add books about mental health and coping with mental illness to your book club or study group list.

Some suggested books are:

- a. Rev. Daranne Harris suggested a book written by her friend and colleague Rev. Sarah Griffith Lund. [Blessed are the Crazy: Breaking the Silence about Mental Illness](http://www.amazon.ca/Blessed-Are-Crazy-Breaking-Silence/), 2014. (www.amazon.ca/Blessed-Are-Crazy-Breaking-Silence/) This book has gained some incredible acclaim south of the border. It is a wonderful resource to share with families living with mental illness and may be a tool for a congregation's study or book group.
- b. Rev. Susan Gregg-Schroeder, [In the Shadow of God's Wings: Grace in the Midst of Depression](#). Upper Room Books, Nashville, TN, 1997
- c. Rev. Dr. Kathryn Greene-McCreight, [Darkness is my Only Companion](#), Brazos Press, 2006.

2. Download a copy of the resource/study guide for clergy and communities of faith, Mental Illness and families of Faith: How congregations can Respond (www.MentalHealthMinistries.net) and plan a workshop using the guide. This study introduces a 5-step program to create a caring congregation.

3. Use videos or clips from YouTube to introduce the topic. Mental Health Ministries (www.MentalHealthMinistries.net) over the past 15 years has produced many shows, which address faith/spirituality and mental illness. Three of their shows, Creating Caring Congregations, Mental Illness and families of Faith and Breaking the Silence: Postpartum Depression and Families of Faith received Telly awards for excellence. Each show is provided in a preview clip or a complete show on DVD and can be accessed on their YouTube channel www.youtube.com/user/mMentalHealthMin. A complete list of the DVD's and preview clips is available on their webpage.

4. Include special prayers related to mental health in our regular services.

5. Develop special services e.g. a candle lighting service of truth and healing related to mental illness. Both NAMI and Mental Health Ministries offer sample services/sermons.

6. Sign up to receive regular updates via links to resources addressing spirituality and mental illness.

- a. Mental Health Ministries E spotlights. Sign up at their website www.MentalHealthMinistries.net.
- b. Healthy Place Newsletter. www.healthyplace.com. You can read the newsletter on line or subscribe to the newsletter.
- c. National Alliance on Mental Illness Faith Net <https://www.nami.org/NAMIFaithNet>

7. Use bulletin inserts to focus on various mental health issues and congregational responses to them. See examples on Mental Health Ministries website. (www.MentalHealthMinistries.net)

8. Make sure your congregation has selected a team of 1-3 persons to receive the scholarships offered from the ELCIC Alberta and the Territories Synod to attend a Mental Health First Aid Workshop! www.mentalhealthfirstaid.ca

9. Present short Adult Forums on mental health topics e.g. impact of dementia on the person experiencing it, the loved ones caring for them and the system of care.

10. Organize a hymn singing event for people with dementia and their caregivers. Music is often an important element of connection for those experiencing dementia

11. Encourage people to be careful in their use of language – someone should be described as a person experiencing or living with mental illness not “out of it”, or “crazy”.
 12. Start a support group for caregivers.
 13. Make sure your hospital and home visitors have education about mental illness and how to support those experiencing it or supporting those with it.
 14. Identify a mental health contact person or team in your congregation e.g. those who have taken Mental Health First Aid, Stephen’s Ministry training or professional training.
 15. Add persons experiencing a mental illness and their caregivers to your prayer list.
 16. Share your good ideas with other congregations.
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Post Emergency Response Numbers in a Prominent Place – Find out the Local Numbers for your Zone

Alberta Health Services

Directory of Addiction Services (services are listed by zone North, Edmonton, Central, Calgary, South, Provincial)
www.albertahealthservices.ca

Access Mental Health (non-emergency service) www.albertahealthservices.ca

Mental Health Helpline 1-877-303-2642

Available 24/7 toll free. Anonymous, confidential, crisis intervention, information about programs, referrals to other agencies if needed.

Addictions Helpline 1-866-332-2322

Crisis Lines

- a Edmonton [780-482-4357](tel:780-482-4357) / [780-342-7777](tel:780-342-7777) (Mobile Response Team)
- b Calgary [403-266-1605](tel:403-266-1605) / [403-266-HELP](tel:403-266-HELP) (4357)
- c Text 587-333-2724: [Calgary Connect Teen](http://CalgaryConnectTeen.ca)

Use 911 for all emergency situations

Educational Resources

- [Canadian Mental Health Assn.](http://CanadianMentalHealthAssn.ca) (offices located in various places in the Province)
a wide variety of educational booklets are available – 35 cents a copy in bulk – single copies can be downloaded cmha.ca/mental_health/factsheet
- [United Church of Christ Mental Health Network](http://mhn-ucc.blohsport.com) – mhn-ucc.blohsport.com
- [Canadian Coalition for Seniors’ Mental Health](http://www.ccsmh.ca) – www.ccsmh.ca
- [Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention](http://www.suicideprevention.ca) – www.suicideprevention.ca
- [Alzheimer Society Canada](http://www.alzheimer.ca)- www.alzheimer.ca
- [Suicide Prevention Centres Across Canada](http://suicideprevention.ca)- suicideprevention.ca