

mental health series

leader resource

Based on the advice of mental health professionals, here are some resources for leaders on how to approach sensitive topics and lead groups through this mental health series:

LEADERSHIP NOTES:

- You're not expected to be a mental health professional... you're a leader and a pastor.
- You're not expected to have answers to mental health issues or be an expert in any area of mental health.
- You are expected to **be a safe, listening ear**.
- There is no resource that has the "answer" to someone's mental illness.
- Don't try to counsel.
- When diving into questions specifically about mental health:
 - Give trigger warnings, and recognize that certain boxes... once they are opened, can't be put back.
 - Sharing your story may encourage someone else to share theirs.
 - No one should be forced to open up.
 - Let your group know: "If you don't want to go there, that's ok."
 - Let your group know: "If you need to take a break or walk away, that's ok."
- Don't try to "make it better."
- **Don't minimize mental illness, normalize it.**
 - Don't minimize heartbreak or trauma in young people.
 - (The [cognitive distortions](#) resource can help, because we all have experience with probably all of them.)
- **Listen to understand** their experience.
- Meet people with empathy and active listening.
- If someone is struggling, ask if they are willing to see a professional.
- Give permission to "not be ok."
 - "Mental illness doesn't mean you've done something wrong."
 - "We accept you right where you are."
 - There are no such things as "bad" feelings... they are just feelings.
 - How we feel isn't always based on facts.
 - It's ok to be angry.
- Be there for someone, but don't take the entire burden on yourself ... help them carry it.
- Be kindly directive in support.
 - Don't ask "how can I help?" or "can I help?" Instead, show up or do something - "I'm coming over with lunch," or "I'm coming over, so put on a hat, we're going for a walk." "I bought you coffee, and I'm coming to hang out."
 - "Can I give you a hug?"
- Care requires: patience, perseverance, and kindness.
- See people as whole people, not just what they do or have done.
- Don't say "commit suicide." Instead, say "died by suicide."
- Don't use "crazy" or any other judgment-related words.
- "Read the Bible more" is not a helpful solution for mental illness.
- It can be helpful to ask people to share what someone else has done to provide support in the past.
 - Example: What have you done relieve stress? When? How? What are the impacts?
 - What do you do to calm down when you're anxious?

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE:

- There are diagnosed and undiagnosed mental illnesses.
- In therapy, often the mental health situation gets worse before it gets better.
- Depression doesn't have to have a "reason."
 - The science behind it... there is a "serotonin crisis."
 - There is a difference between a "sad moment" and chemical anxiety or worry, or clinical depression and anxiety.
 - Depression can cause a cycle of unhealth where we do the things we don't want to do... and know we shouldn't... which leads to deeper mental illness.
- The pandemic undid much more than two years for many young people, and that has led to increased cases of mental health, especially anxiety and depression.
- Awareness of what is healthy and unhealthy is often the first step toward healing. Part of our goal in this series is to help people become aware of common mental health issues.
- Some habits that can help:
 - **Sabbath**
 - **Balance:** mind, body, Spirit
 - **Boundaries:** learning to say "no" to good so you can say "yes" to the best
 - **Prayer/meditation**
 - **Mindfulness**
 - **Self-awareness:** recognizing connections between what we think, feel, and do
 - **Silence/Solitude** (not isolation)
 - **Unplug** - not just put phone away
 - **Get rid of social media**
 - **Move** - do physical activity
 - **Breathing exercises**
- If kids are self-harming, depressed, missing class, etc. they need more intensive care than a school counselor.
 - School counselors keep students safe, inform parents, and refer/resource on how to get further help; they also educate and resource parents.
 - Home has to be a safe place!
 - "Nothing good happens after midnight."
 - It's helpful to have kids/teens turn phones in, put phones away (parents too) - get an alarm clock if that's the excuse for keeping devices bedside.

ABOUT COUNSELING:

- Regular therapy is the best way for a sick person to get well.
- Almost every counselor is full and has a three-month wait. Having a pastoral conversation can be helpful, but don't try to counsel.
- If money is an issue: Ask about insurance... many of them cover a large portion or will have a copay.

RESOURCES:

- <https://psychologytoday.com> has really great resources, including online counseling options
- Psychological First Aid (PFA) training: free through NCTSN: <https://learn.nctsn.org/enrol/index.php?id=596>
- [Video](#) a psychologist made for 2|42 leaders in November 2020:
- [Mark Williams/Danny Peman chocolate mindfulness exercise](#) or [here's the audio version](#)
- [Cognitive Distortions](#)
- [Circle of Control](#) and [this too](#)
- 242community.com/mental-health