



What happens after a mental illness diagnosis?

Getting a diagnosis of a mental illness brings its own unique range of feelings. It is normal to feel afraid, angry, sad, and embarrassed. A mental illness diagnosis can actually be a very positive thing: a first step towards feeling a whole lot better.

Directly following a diagnosis, you may experience both negative and positive thoughts and emotions. Some common feelings following a mental illness diagnosis are:

Grief – *“This is the end of life as I knew it, I have lost who I thought I was”.*

Guilt – *“This is all my fault, I should have sought help sooner”.*

Shame – *“This is so embarrassing; I hope no one ever finds out”.*

Anger – *“Why did this happen to me?”.*

Denial – *“This isn’t real, there must be some mistake”.*

Hope – *“Maybe now that I know what’s wrong I can begin to get better”.*

Relief – *“Finally I know what is happening to me, I feel good knowing it is no longer a mystery”.*

You may go from feeling one of these difficult, negative emotions to feeling positive ones and you may feel many things at the same time. It can be very confusing to receive a mental illness diagnosis and that’s okay. Here are some facts to keep in mind, as well as steps to take after receiving your diagnosis:

You are not alone

This is an important thing to keep in mind. Mental illness is incredibly common: 1 in 5 North Americans live with a mental illness.

Learn about your diagnosis

Read as much as you can about your diagnosis. Seek out reputable sources like books and mental health organization websites, as well as personal testimonies that can be found on online message boards.

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It is up to you who you tell

Disclosure is completely personal – you can choose to tell many people about your diagnosis or you can tell no one. You do not have to tell people right away, you can wait until it feels right and appropriate.

Understand your treatment options

Just because your diagnosis is medical, does not mean your treatment needs to be medical too. For some people, medication is an important part of their treatment, for others, talk-therapy is enough.

Engage the help of professionals

Whichever road you take, it is important to get help. Your EFAP can provide you with counselling and educational services for you and your family.

Build a social support network

Whether you feel totally hopeful and relieved about your diagnosis or are troubled by it and feel scared, you will need support outside of just your therapist, counsellor or doctor. Whether it is family or friends or an entire community online, you will need people who are aware or even know first-hand what you are going through to help you navigate the ups and downs of your condition.

Although it can be scary and overwhelming, a mental illness diagnosis does not define you: you are not your diagnosis, you are one of millions of people living with a mental illness. Focus on the positive: you probably sought professional help because something didn't feel right. Now that you know what's wrong, you can begin to change it.

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Effects of negative self-talk

"I'm not working hard enough".

"I'll never get anywhere".

"I'm not as smart as they are".

"I look so ugly today".

Do any of these phrases sound familiar? Unfortunately, for most of us negative self-talk is something we are used to hearing, and it can be very detrimental to our mental health and general well-being. Let's examine negative self-talk: how it is defined and ways to defeat it.

What is negative self-talk?

Sometimes referred to as the "inner critic", negative self-talk is the little voice in your head that tells you that you are not good enough and it has a million different ways to say it. Since it is a part of your own consciousness, it knows your weak spots better than anybody else and will attack you where it hurts the most. Everyone's negative self-talk is unique to them. When negative self-talk gets out of hand and takes over, it can lead to depression and anxiety.

How to overcome negative self-talk

Since negative self-talk is a part of our inner-monologue, it is easy for it to fly under the radar of your conscious mind and go unnoticed. This means that the first step towards eradicating this kind of thinking is identifying it. Like weeds in a garden of flowers, when you can begin to recognize your thoughts as negative self-talk, you can begin to weed it out. One way to begin to notice it is to give your mean inner critic a name or personify it as a nasty villain. Whether it's "the nag" or "the meanie" or "the monster", any silly name will do in helping you reduce your inner critic's power over you.

Negative self-talk often falls into categories; here are some types of negative self-talk:

- **Catastrophizing:** Playing over worst-case scenarios and "what-ifs" in your mind, and anticipating them instead of positive or neutral outcomes.
- **Blaming:** Making yourself responsible for problems or putting all the responsibility on others.
- **Polarizing:** Seeing things in black or white, if something is not perfect it's terrible.
- **Filtering:** Focusing only on the negative parts of any situation and ignoring the positives.
- **Never and always:** If you make a mistake, you are *always* messing up or you *never* do things right.

When you are feeling upset about a situation, examine your thoughts about it and see if you are engaging in any of the above patterns.

Fostering positive self-talk

Positive self-talk can improve your confidence and make you feel happier overall. To begin to plant seeds of healthier, happier self-talk, start by replacing negative self-talk with positive self-talk. This does not mean lying to yourself if you are not feeling good about something – putting a false positive spin on something won't make you feel better about it. Instead, focus on what you did well and action plans to improve.

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Here are some examples of negative self-talk and how to replace them with more positive self-talk.

Negative: *I totally bombed that presentation, I'm such a failure*

Positive: *I did an okay job but I didn't live up to my potential. Next time I'll prepare a bit more and rehearse before presenting.*

Negative: *If I don't do a good job on that report I'm going to get fired.*

Positive: *It is important to me that I do a good job. I will work hard and ask for help if I need it.*

Negative: *I always make mistakes.*

Positive: *I am human and sometimes I make mistakes. I am doing my best.*

It may be helpful to write down your negative thoughts and then write out more positive, action-oriented versions. When you're putting yourself down, ask yourself, "what would my best friend/sister/partner say?" They would definitely not talk about you as harshly as you are talking about yourself, so start by stepping out of your own head for a minute and speaking more kindly about yourself.

Identifying and replacing negative self-talk can only benefit you. If you need more help in noticing these patterns of thinking or if you feel stuck in endless negativity, talk to a counsellor to get help in ending negative self-talk.

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