



**NAMI**

*Frederick County*

**National Alliance on Mental Illness**

**Newsletter of NAMI Frederick County MD**

**Winter 2018**

## **When Stigma Prevented Me from Getting Help**

I was a young girl when I started to experience confusing and frightening symptoms. I didn't tell anyone. I knew my problem wasn't normal and didn't think anyone would ever understand. I didn't dare speak up, in fear of being ridiculed. I thought I could handle it on my own.

It took me twenty years to divulge my secret. I finally went to my doctor and was diagnosed with panic disorder and agoraphobia.

I'm not alone in waiting so long to get medical help. For many, it takes years to tell someone after the first warning signs appear.

The main reason? Stigma.

I was able to hide my panic symptoms. I suffered silently and tried to move on with my life. I graduated from college, got married and had two baby girls. But by my early 30s, my panic attacks became more frequent and more severe.

I was angry with myself because I couldn't stop the anxiety. My internal monologue wasn't very kind:

This is stupid. I worry too much. No one else feels this way.

What's wrong with me?

Maybe it shouldn't bother me when my heart beats too fast, and I get lightheaded and dizzy. It's just how I am. So what if I feel sweaty and shaky, and start to black out? I need to be tougher when I think I'm going to faint. I have to calm down when I feel like running out of the place where I'm panicking.

Who does that? Get over it.

It's the dumbest thing ever that I don't want to drive because I'm scared of feeling panicky. People get annoyed when they're stuck in traffic, but their hearts don't pound and they don't need to pull over to get hold of themselves.

People would think I'm "crazy" if I told them about feeling disoriented—that sometimes I feel like my body is numb, and I'm awake in a foggy dream. That I get scared from looking at myself in a mirror wondering if the person staring back is really me. Who could possibly know what I'm talking about? I'm so weird. **(Continued on Page 2)**

No matter what I do, I can't let anyone know. They'll think I'm strange. I doubt a doctor would know how to help. Maybe I have a brain tumor. I don't want to scare my family.

Whatever. I'm fine... Usually.

When I look back on how I used to talk to myself, it makes me sad. I was sick and needed help.

Growing up, I'd never heard anyone talk about mental illness. Maybe if I had, I would've received treatment much earlier.

But I thought I was alone.

It shocked me to learn that I wasn't.

It took me twenty years to finally talk to my doctor about my symptoms. When my doctor told me I had panic attacks, panic disorder and agoraphobia, I felt a huge sense of relief. Not that I wanted to have those conditions—but I felt validated. I couldn't believe that those scary sensations I'd had all those years, actually had a name.

I was surprised there was medication that might help me. I was even more amazed when the antidepressant worked.

My daughter Talee was 10 years old when she started to show signs of panic attacks. It broke my heart to know that she had to deal with the same terrifying symptoms that I'd had.

Even though I'd been through it myself and knew that millions of others had anxiety, I still felt the stigma. We both did. Talee did not want her friends to know. She didn't want them to think she was strange or different. I didn't want Talee's teacher or the other parents to know. I didn't want my daughter labeled.

But I was not going to let my sweet girl suffer in silence and secrecy, as I'd had. I pushed the stigma aside with all my might and got her medical help.

Back then, I didn't think it was possible for the stigma to lessen. I didn't think people would ever speak openly about their mental health issues. But they are. I'm grateful that mental illness is finally being acknowledged as a real medical condition that cannot be ignored.

The more that people talk about it, the less taboo it will be for future generations. We're heading in the right direction, as many schools now offer courses in mental health. In-school awareness programs, such as NAMI's Ending the Silence, teach high school students the warning signs of mental illness, and what to do if they notice those symptoms in themselves or a friend.

We must keep the conversation going. People need to know there's help available and there is hope.

There's no shame in having a mental health condition.

The shame is in the stigma.

**Jenny Marie is a mental health advocate and blogger. Jenny is married and has two daughters. Her blog is called Peace from Panic.**

**Educational Lectures for 2018/19**  
**YMCA Community Room 7:00 -8:30 pm**

**Thursday Nov. 8** - Rahul Bahradwaj and Joel Klineman, Lieber Institute of Brain Development,  
Johns Hopkins School of Medicine

Recent Brain Research and Causes of Mental Illness

**Wednesday Dec. 12** – JoyceAnn Sundergill Schmit Mental Health Agency of Frederick County,  
Mental health services in Frederick and How to access them.

**Tuesday March 12**, - Shari Scher, Children of Incarcerated Parents

Supporting Children of Incarcerated Parents: One Group’s Journey

**Tuesday April 9** -Rahul Bahradwaj, Lieber Institute of Brain Development, Johns Hopkins

The Art of Thinking- learning about your brain and coping skills

**Tuesday May 7**- Peter Brehme, The Frederick Center

**NAMI Connections: Connecting for Hope and Healing**

Do you feel that no one understands what you are going through? Do you feel alone in your daily battle with mental illness? Go no further. Now there is a consumer-led support group, Connections, that can offer support, hope, and healing for all. On the third Tuesday of every month, consumers meet in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Rupp House from 7 to 8:30 pm. There consumers can share ideas and stories offering mutual support from people who have “been there” in a safe and confidential environment. With respect, solidarity, and little good humor, members can lighten each other’s burden. Stop on by and you may come away with an insight or words of wisdom to help you through the tough times.

**Family Support Groups**

1st Thursday— 7:00pm to 8:30pm

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 1415 West 7th Street

3rd Wednesday— 6:30pm to 8:00pm

# The Impact Of Music Therapy On Mental Health

By Molly Warren, MM, LPMT, MT-BC | Dec. 19, 2016

When I worked at a psychiatric hospital, I would wheel my cart full of instruments and musical gadgets down the hallway every morning. Patients lingering in the hall would smile and tap on a drum as I passed by. Some would ask me if I had their favorite band on my iPad. Some would peek their heads out of their rooms, and exclaim, “Molly’s here! It’s time for music therapy group!” Oftentimes, I would hear about patients who were asleep in their rooms when I arrived, but their friends would gently wake them with a reassurance: “You don’t want to miss this.”

## Music to My Ears

I’ve been lucky to serve many children and adults in various mental health settings as a music therapist. I’ve heard stories of resilience, strength and adversity. I’ve worked with individuals who have experienced trauma, depression, grief, addiction and more. These individuals have not come to me in their finest hour, but despite feeling lost or broken, music provided them with the opportunity for expression and for experiencing safety, peace and comfort.

Research shows the benefits of music therapy for various mental health conditions, including depression, trauma, and schizophrenia (to name a few). Music acts as a medium for processing emotions, trauma, and grief—but music can also be utilized as a regulating or calming agent for anxiety or for dysregulation.

There are four major interventions involved with music therapy:

## Lyric Analysis

While talk therapy allows a person to speak about topics that may be difficult to discuss, lyric analysis introduces a novel and less-threatening approach to process emotions, thoughts and experiences. A person receiving music therapy is encouraged to offer insight, alternative lyrics and tangible tools or themes from lyrics that can apply to obstacles in their life and their treatment. We all have a song that we deeply connect to and appreciate—lyric analysis provides an opportunity for an individual to identify song lyrics that may correlate with their experience.

## Improvisation Music Playing

Playing instruments can encourage emotional expression, socialization and exploration of various therapeutic themes (i.e. conflict, communication, grief, etc.). For example, a group can create a “storm” by playing drums, rain sticks, thunder tubes and other percussive instruments. The group can note areas of escalation and de-escalation in the improvisation, and the group can correlate the “highs and lows” of the storm to particular

feelings they may have. This creates an opportunity for the group to discuss their feelings further.

## Active Music Listening

Music can be utilized to regulate mood. Because of its rhythmic and repetitive aspects, music engages the neocortex of our brain, which calms us and reduces impulsivity. We often utilize music to match or alter our mood. While there are benefits to matching music to our mood, it can potentially keep us stuck in a depressive, angry or anxious state. To alter mood states, a music therapist can play music to match the current mood of the person and then slowly shift to a more positive or calm state.

## Songwriting

Songwriting provides opportunities for expression in a positive and rewarding way. Anyone can create lyrics that reflect their own thoughts and experiences, and select instruments and sounds that best reflect the emotion behind the lyrics. This process can be very validating, and can aid in building self-worth. This intervention can also instill a sense of pride, as someone listens to their own creation.

## On Another Note

When I worked at a residential treatment center, I was notified that a child refused to continue meeting with his usual therapist. Even though he was initially hesitant to meet with me, he soon became excited for our music therapy sessions.

In our first session, we decided to look at the lyrics of “Carry On” by FUN. I asked him to explain what it means to be a “shining star,” which is mentioned several times in the song. I was expecting this 8-year-old to tell me something simple, like “it means you’re special.” But he surprised me when he stated, matter-of-factly: “It means that you are something others notice. It means you are something to look up to, and you are something that helps others navigate.”

And just like that: This lyric offered the opportunity to discuss self-worth, resilience, and strength. Music provided him with the structure and opportunity to process in an engaging way. Soon, his therapist began attending our sessions to help build a healthier therapeutic relationship. His family and teachers reported improved emotion regulation and social interaction skills. Music therapy had provided countless opportunities for building healthy relationships, just as it has for thousands of others.

Try it for yourself! Check out the American Music Therapy Association to find a board certified or licensed music therapist near you.

<https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/December-2016/The-Impact-of-Music-Therapy-on-Mental-Health>

# Managing Your Mental Health During the Holidays

By Colleen O'Day | Dec. 19, 2017

During the holiday season, many look forward to festivities with friends and family. But for others, this time can bring on or worsen stress, anxiety and depression.

There are a variety of factors that can bring on holiday anxiety and depression. Some people experience increased financial burden due to travel, gift and/or hosting costs. Others may feel overwhelmed as the holiday season often includes a packed calendar of parties, performances and traveling that can be difficult to balance with everyday responsibilities and self-care. Not to mention: High expectations to give perfect gifts and plan perfect events, as well as loneliness for those who aren't with loved ones.

If you are experiencing any of these challenges, here are some coping tips you can use to manage your increased levels of anxiety, stress and sadness.

## Stay In Therapy

Although the holiday season is overwhelmingly busy, do not cancel your therapy sessions to make time for other activities. The holidays can bring up difficult emotions. If you can, keep your scheduled therapy sessions to ensure you have built-in time to explore anything that comes up.

## Mindfulness

In addition to professional mental health care, mindfulness can be a valuable mental wellness tool. Certain practices can be particularly helpful if you are traveling or running on an unusual schedule. If you're new to mindfulness, the online MSW program at the University of Southern California created a Mindfulness Toolkit featuring free mindfulness resources, like guided meditations for beginners.

## Don't Rely On Drugs And Alcohol

The Anxiety and Depression Association of America recommends avoiding drugs and alcohol for comfort. While the prospect of escape can be appealing, substance use can ultimately worsen your issues. There is a 20% overlap between people with anxiety or mood disorders and substance use disorders, and substances can exacerbate symptoms. When you feel you need a

relaxation aid, you can instead turn to a mindfulness tactic or other healthy coping mechanism.

## Soak Up

### The Sun

Some struggle with depression during the winter months because of Major Depressive Disorder with a Seasonal Pattern. Exposure to bright lights, including fluorescent lights, can help ease symptoms. Even for those without this form of depression, walking outside in the sun can be an effective centering and calming tool. Numerous studies have pointed to the mental health benefits of spending time in nature, including stress relief, better concentration, lower levels of inflammation and improved mental energy.

### Set Realistic Expectations

Another major source of anxiety, stress and depression around the holidays can be examining accomplishments from the past year. Some may experience negative feelings over not being at a place they feel they "should be" in life. Get yourself out of this space by adjusting expectations and setting realistic goals. For example, if you're trying to establish an exercise routine, try setting a goal of talking a walk three times a week rather than vowing to do CrossFit every day.

Managing mental illness is always challenging, but it can be particularly difficult during the holiday season. While the struggle can feel isolating, remember that you are far from alone. Seek help from professional mental health services, maintain your self-care routines and include mindfulness practices into your days as you approach 2018.

**Colleen O'Day is a digital marketing manager and community outreach support for 2U Inc.'s social work, mental health and K-12 education programs. Find her on Twitter @ColleenMODay.**

# Monthly Support Group Meetings

## Family Support Groups

1st Thursday — 7:00pm to 8:30pm

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, 1415 West 7th St.

3rd Wednesday — 6:30pm to 8:00pm

All Saints Episcopal Church, 106 West Church St.

## Connection Peer Support Group

3rd Tuesday — 7:00pm to 8:30pm

Evangelical Lutheran Church, Rupp House

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