



10 Things Parish Leaders Need to Know About Mental Illness

(provided courtesy of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability)

1. Mental illness is a disease of the brain and is not a character/moral weakness.
2. One in five families are directly affected by mental illness. If we don't encounter persons of families dealing with mental illness in our parishes, then they are either hiding (often in plain sight) or feel unwelcome. What you do see is often the tip of the iceberg.
3. Stigma (a mark of disgrace) isolates people, and sometimes kills both body and soul.
4. The symptoms of mental illness vary in intensity over time and so should our support of them. Each situation is unique.
5. The public mental health system is at or above capacity, which is why it's important to assist people to find the help they need.
6. Many persons with serious and persistent mental illness do not know they are sick, and they may think their behavior and their beliefs are normal.
7. It is a myth that persons with mental illness are dangerous. In reality, they are for more likely to be victims themselves because of their illness.
8. Persons with a mental illness are more likely to abuse alcohol and other substances than the general population.
9. Poverty and underemployment are pervasive among persons with mental illness. Many of the problems of persons with serious mental illness have more to do with their poverty than their disease.
10. Understand the importance of making and keeping good boundaries.

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10 Things Parish Leaders Should Consider Doing About Mental Illness

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1. Listen with compassion, and form relationships.
2. Occasionally include mental illness, addictions, and marriage problems in the Prayers of the Faithful.
3. Visit those with mental illness at home, in the hospital, and in jail.
4. Know how and where to make a treatment referral for both adults and youth.
5. Specifically include mention of mental illness and addictions when inviting parishioners to a healing Mass or service.
6. Invite parish groups to have speakers on mental illness or addictions at their meetings. Especially consider those in recovery to speak, if available and willing.
7. Invite persons with mental illness who live in group homes or apartments near your parish to worship and to social events. Make sure they feel welcome.
8. Learn about local mental health systems. Invite someone to speak to the parish staff or group of churches on this topic.
9. Believe in recovery and support it.
10. Include parents, siblings, spouses, and children of those with mental illnesses and addictions in your pastoral care, for they are hurting too.

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