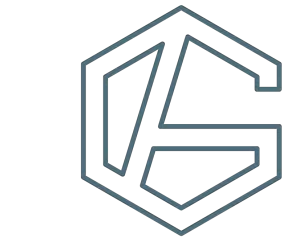
Guided into Living Grace

Practical, Christ-centered guidance
for your personal mental health journey

GRACE ALLIANCE

HEALTHY SOLUTIONS FOR YOUR MIND



GRACE
ALLIANCE

The Grace Alliance is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that cultivates healthy solutions for hearts and minds through simple, innovative biblical truths, scientific research, and practical tools.

www.mentalhealthgracealliance.org

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Understanding Your Experience

Mental health difficulties and disorders are not the end of your story but an opportunity to see God's grace guide you into a greater wholeness of life. God never defines or sees you as an illness. God has lavished you with unmeasured grace. His grace pours out love and redefines you as worthy. Grace is now your new constant identity and worth.

What is a mental health difficulty or disorder?

Mental health difficulties and disorders are…

"Genetic or circumstantial factors causing a disruption in the brain affecting a person's thoughts, moods, behaviors, and relationships. The severity of symptoms requires professional treatment, whole-health (holistic) care, and life-giving community support."

Mental disorders affect the brain, which in turn affects your whole life … physically, mentally, spiritually, and relationally. As you learn about your mental health condition and how it affects your life, it is good to remember the balance between having a mental health disorder vs. the diagnosis becoming an entire personal identity.

Friend, you are not the illness or disorder. Mental health difficulties are part of the journey, and God is not intimidated by them! You are a child of God, fully cherished, loved, and accepted by God. God longs to reveal His compassion and hope at every step of this journey.

Mental health difficulties and disorders are NOT…

… your identity.

God never defines or sees you as an illness. God has lavished you with unmeasured grace. God's grace pours out love and redefines you as worthy. Grace is now your new constant identity and worth. You are forever positioned with love, mercy, and grace.

… your fault or failure.

You are not being cruelly punished or judged for not being enough for God. God is love, and that is His constant nature toward you because you are worth everything to Him.

Can your loved one recover from mental health difficulties or disorders?

We can approach mental health difficulties and disorders in a similar way to any other physical injury or illness: by looking at the whole body to develop a plan for care (whole-health approach).

The journey towards mental health is a strength-based and whole-health (holistic) process of change that focuses on rebuilding:

+ **Self-worth and purpose**
+ **Self-management and whole-health lifestyle for symptom relief**
+ **Life-giving community support**
+ **Pure and simple rest in God's love and grace**

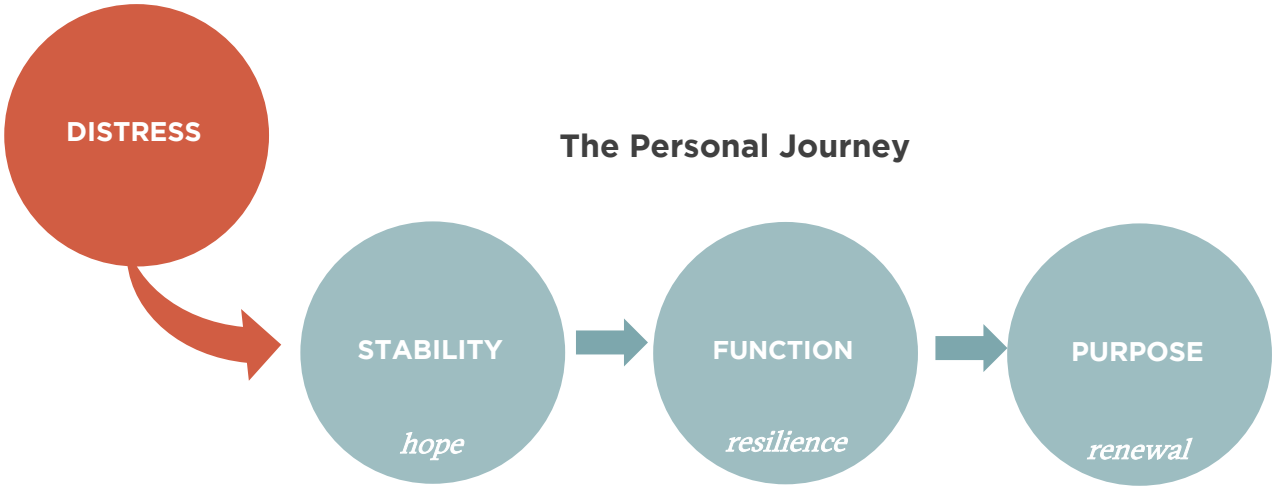
There are no easy answers and no list of action points that will be effective in every situation. Sometimes, it may feel frustrating and confusing, but this guide will reaffirm that you are moving in the right direction.

In this book, we are giving guidance for the journey, not specific tasks to achieve complete mental health.

In every part of the journey, remember to walk in God's grace that He has lavished upon us.

Mental Health Recovery is a continuum of growth.

Mental health is not just about achieving specific steps. It is a process that takes time, faith, and patience – a continuum of growth. The diagram below represents this continuum of what mental health recovery looks like for someone on the journey.



DISTRESS (Immobilized)

Symptoms are **overwhelming** and there may be feelings of hopelessness, confusion, and hurt.

STABILITY (Hope)

Symptoms are still challenging, but now learning new ways to **manage** and have renewed hope.

FUNCTION (Resilience)

Symptoms are manageable and able to **function** with life as you are building strength and resiliency.

PURPOSE (Renewal)

You are no longer driven by symptoms. You are experiencing healthy relationships and life has a God-given **purpose**.

Understanding Your Needs

God created each of us as a complex, unique being, and He knows our every need. Yet, God's best and most beautiful miracles are done over the long haul. Typically, mental health recovery is not about finding a complete cure, but it is a process of building resiliency and resting in God's grace – a life renewed.

What is “whole-health”?

The Whole-Health Approach and Needs

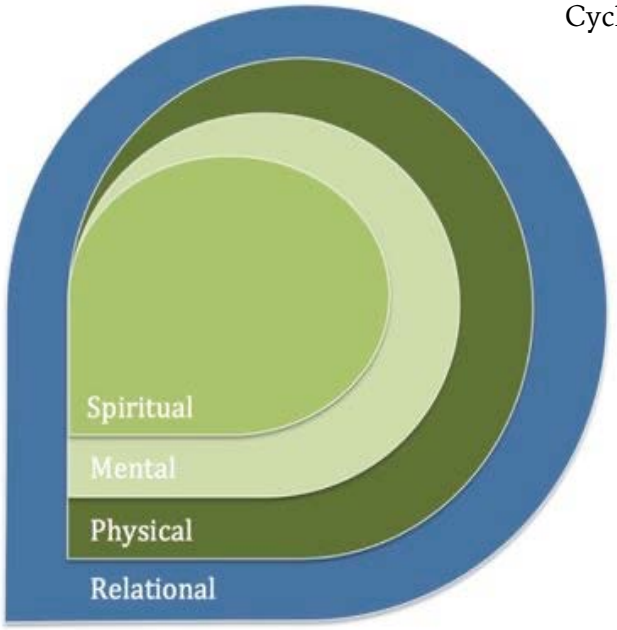
As you address your needs, here are some areas to consider. These topics are discussed in-depth with accompanying education, self-evaluation, and tools in our Thrive Workbook.

Spiritual Needs:

Identity
Spiritual Growth
Prayer

Mental Needs:

Psychotherapy/Counseling
Healthy Thinking
Positive Coping/Stress Management
Creative Mental Activities
Cycles and Triggers



Physical Needs:

Sleep
Medication
Relaxation
Nutrition
Exercise

Relational Needs:

Encouragement
Supportive Listening
Opportunities to Serve
Community

What are my physical needs?

1. Sleep

Trouble with sleep is common with mental health challenges and can make symptoms worse. The keys to getting good sleep are:

- **Sleep Routine** – Determine a healthy schedule and routine; 7.5 – 9 hours of sleep.
- **Sleep Hygiene** – Find creative ideas to help wind down before sleep.
- **Sleep Diary** – Keep a log to monitor your sleep habits and progress.

2. Medication

Not everyone needs medication. However, medication can be one helpful tool for individuals experiencing mental health difficulties. Always educate yourself about any medications that you are prescribed. Here are a few medication tips:

- **Psychiatrist or Therapist** – Either can help determine if you need medication.
- **Medication** – Keep a record of the medication, type, and dosage.
- **Side Effects** – Communicate with your doctor about challenging side effects.
- **Progress** – Monitor your overall progress, don't feel stuck with medications.

3. Relaxation

Relaxation techniques, like muscle relaxation and paced breathing, can be done daily to decrease stress and can be helpful during episodes of panic and anxiety.

4. Nutrition

Evaluate your overall eating habits. A healthy diet helps your brain function and also enhances the effects of medication.

5. Exercise

Simple, daily physical activity is recommended. The benefits can help relieve anxiety and depressive symptoms.

What are my mental needs?

1. Psychotherapy / Counseling

Therapy in conjunction with medication has been shown to be the most effective approach to treating mental health difficulties and disorders. **See page 17 for more information.**

2. Healthy Thinking

Simple tools to address ongoing negative thinking, identify stressors, and discover healthy thinking solutions are essential for the recovery process. There are various resources, professional therapists, mental health coaches, and supportive community environments that can help reinforce this. Simple exercises include:

- Gratitude – List three things and people you are thankful to have in your life.
- Affirming Security – Remind yourself they are just thoughts, not really you.
- Reframing Security -

    a) Understand what the specific negative thoughts are (normal to everyone).
    b) Understand they are irrational thoughts and can be challenged.
    c) Understand you can reframe positive and secure thoughts.

3. Positive Coping / Stress Management

Identifying stressors and simple solutions to create healthy coping skills will greatly aid in defusing difficult symptoms.

- Breathing exercise
- Muscle relaxation
- Mindfulness
- Healthy distractions

4. Creative Mental Activities

Mentally refreshing and stimulating activities are highly therapeutic and will help create opportunities to experience positive rest. Ideas could include:

- Painting
- Puzzles
- Games (e.g., word games, Tetris, Solitaire, etc.)
- Playing music

5. Cycles and Triggers

Understanding the patterns and cycles of your specific symptoms (e.g., depression every winter) and triggers (e.g., holidays) is key in being prepared to manage ongoing stability.

- Cycles – Be aware of the patterns of how often throughout the year you experience different episodes of depression, anxiety, or other challenges. Are they the same time every year (seasons, end of school year, work calendar)? Do you see them more often due to stressful events?

- Triggers – Be aware of certain things that seem to trigger depression, anxiety, or other challenges (e.g., school, work, relationships, finances, spiritual, crowds, holidays, etc.).

What are my spiritual needs?

Keep It Simple

It's important to keep it simple when going through depression, anxiety, or other similar challenges. The Lord knows how exhausted you feel, so only do what you desire and can do. This is about growing in love, NOT more pressured devotion. Love naturally grows into more, so start with what seems most loving.

The list below includes only simple concepts to encourage and explore a starting point (or add to your current devotion) for your personal devotion / spiritual journey.

1. Identity

Circumstances, struggles, and disorders do not define who we are; God does. His love for us redefines our identity.

- **Grace Made You Complete in Christ (loved, forgiven, & free)**
  John 16:27; Colossians 2:10; Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 8:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 5:1

- **Grace Made You Strong in Christ**
  Ephesians 1:3, 18-19; Romans 8:31-39; 1 John 4:4-5; Philippians 4:13

- **Grace Made You to Belong (always) – Christ in you**
  John 6:35-37; John 14:20; Romans 8:10; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:4-7; Ephesians 3:17; Colossians 1:27; 1 John 3:24

2. Spiritual Growth

Focus on God's loving nature and character to be faithful to us, even in troubling times. Keep in mind that God gives these to you; He never demands them from you.

- ### Love is His Constant toward You and in You
  John 3:16-17; John 16:27; Ephesians 3:17b-19; 1 John 4:8, 16; Revelation 1:5

- ### Peace is Your New State of Being and What You Have with God
  Psalm 29:11; John 16:33; Romans 5:1; Romans 15:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:16

- ### He is Our Comforter, Validating Your Pain and Giving New Hope
  Psalm 119:76; John 14:16; Romans 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

3. Prayer

Even when we feel far from God or unable to connect with Him, He is still there. First, know that Jesus is the intercessor for you. He is always for you, never against you. Second, keep prayer simple and honest as it pertains to your life and for others. In other words, if you care about it, He cares about it, so talk to Him about it!

- ### Jesus Interceding for You
  Luke 22:31-32; Romans 8:27; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 7:24-25

- ### Asking for Strength and Perspective When Feeling Weak
  Mark 9:24; Romans 8:15; Romans 8:26; Ephesians 2:18; Colossians 1:9-12

- ### Asking for the Wellbeing of Others (Relationships and Needs)
  John 15:12-16; Ephesians 3:14-16; Ephesians 6:18; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Hebrews 13:18-19

What are my relational needs?

1. Life-Giving Community

Isolation can be common when you're experiencing difficult symptoms. Yet, comfort, encouragement, and support from a caring community and church are vitally important in the healing and mental health recovery process.

2. Stigma and Shame

While secular and spiritual stigma may still be present, learning about other men and women who have walked through severe mental health challenges, like Martin Luther and Mother Theresa, can offer great encouragement.

3. Opportunities to Serve

As stability is regained, look for simple ways to serve and bless others. Helping others leads to restoration as it reinforces personal value and worth.

— Additional Needs —

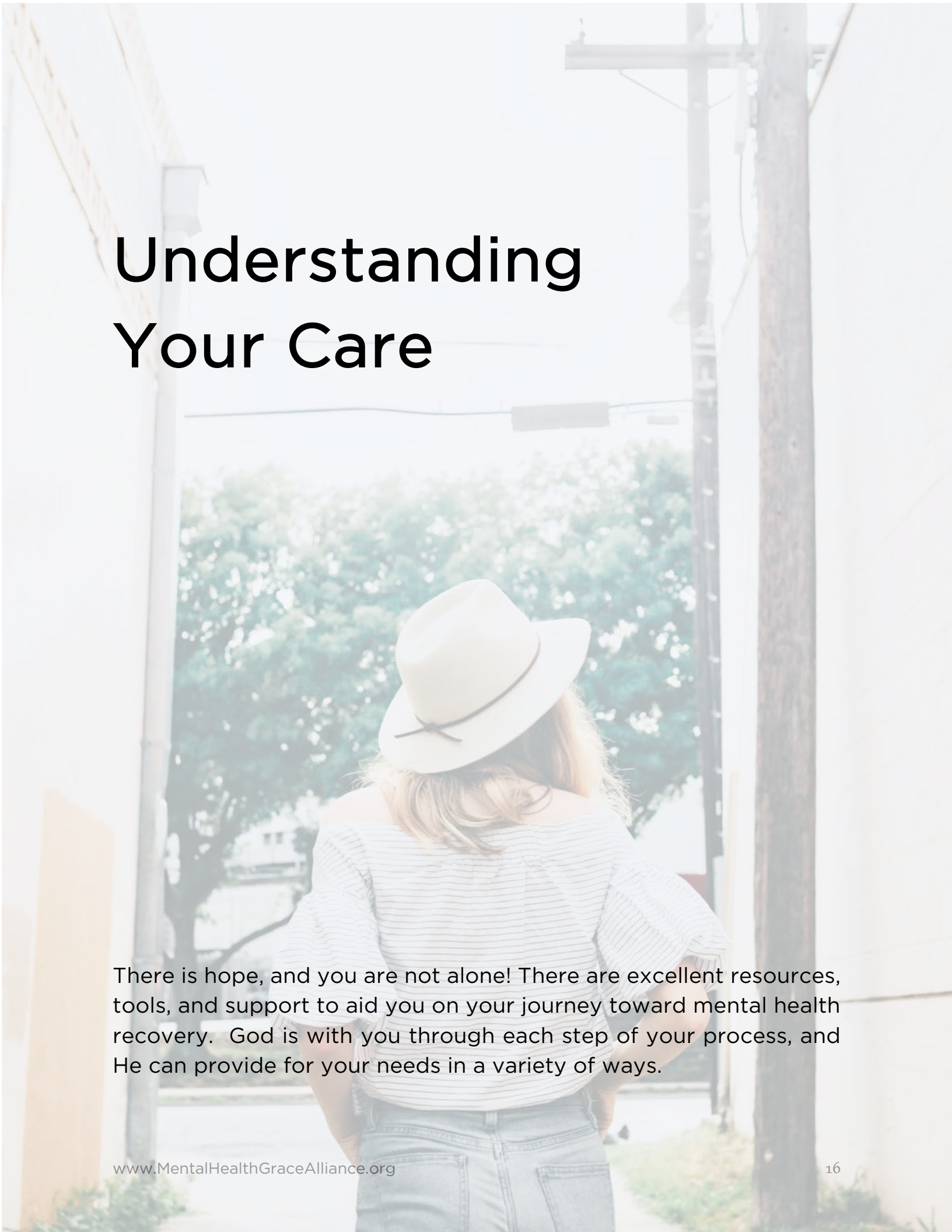
Celebrate Progress

At times, it may be challenging to recognize or see the positive progress. To stay encouraged, celebrate even your small steps to build confidence and strengthen yourself for difficult times that may come.

Employment or Education

As your condition improves and you have extended periods of stability, you may want to find a job or return to school. It is important that you find a job or a school in which you can thrive and be successful without escalating symptoms. If you are returning to school or a career, take it step by step. Jumping back in quickly can make you feel overwhelmed. Ease yourself back in, and don't push too hard.

Understanding Your Care



There is hope, and you are not alone! There are excellent resources, tools, and support to aid you on your journey toward mental health recovery. God is with you through each step of your process, and He can provide for your needs in a variety of ways.

Where can I find help?

The Professionals

1. General Practitioner

Family Doctor or Physician who can do an initial evaluation and refer you to a specialist.

2. Psychiatrist

Evaluates symptoms and prescribes and monitors medications for symptom reduction/relief.

3. Psychotherapist (PsyD/Ph.D.)

Works and specializes in mental health diagnoses (e.g., Cognitive Behavioral Therapy – CBT and other specialized therapy models).

4. Counselor (MFT/LPC/LCSW or LMSW/other)

Works with various therapy models for interpersonal and internal challenges. Some are qualified and specialize in mental health diagnoses by incorporating CBT and other specialized therapy models (ask).

5. Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP)

Professional therapeutic programs facilitated during the week (half/full days) with education and tools.

6. Certified Specialist Coach/Mental Health Coach (peers)

Certified to coach and work with mental health needs and often work in conjunction with professionals. Often used in state service programs. Peer services and coaches are effective with evidence-based research/results.

Community Support

Mental health difficulties and disorders can often lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation. However, research shows that community is imperative to mental health recovery! Thankfully, there are some great options available, and more are being introduced every day.

1. Grace Alliance Grace Groups and Resources (pg. 22)

We offer helpful, grace-filled resources and mental health curriculum for community small groups that work in any denomination and church.

2. Fresh Hope Groups

Family and loved ones in a combined group with discussion centered on biblical tenets (scriptures) and mental health recovery principles.

3. National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

Free educational courses and support groups for those in the mental health journey and their families.

Christian Mental Health Support and Resources

The Grace Alliance: www.mentalhealthgracealliance.org

Key Ministry: www.keyministry.org

Bright Tomorrows: www.brighttomorrows.org

Fresh Hope: www.freshhope.us

Sanctuary Ministries: www.sanctuarymentalhealth.org

Church and Mental Health: churchandmentalhealth.com

Reboot Recovery: rebootrecovery.com

General Support and Resources

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): www.nami.org

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH): www.nimh.nih.gov

WebMD: www.webmd.com

Psychology Today: www.psychologytoday.com

Psych Central: www.psychcentral.com

Child Mind Institute: www.childmind.org

How do I navigate the mental health care system and find community support?

1. Consult with a family physician / general practitioner.

Have a complete physical and blood work evaluated for possible primary or secondary causes. Consult with your doctor concerning recommendations and referrals to trusted psychiatrists. Many psychiatrists not presently taking new patients will accept someone if referred by another physician. If you do not have a family physician or clinic, consult with any urgent medical care facility to conduct initial lab work evaluations and utilize their referrals to other professionals.

2. Find a psychotherapist / counselor and psychiatrist.

These mental health professionals are equipped to conduct psychological evaluations and start a process for care (medication, therapy, etc.). Quality mental health care should be purposeful, consistent, and ongoing.

3. Find local community mental health support.

Seek out mental health agencies, organizations, or ministries in your area that provide support, education, and resources (The Grace Alliance, NAMI, Fresh Hope, etc.).

4. Develop a whole-health plan.

As you gather support and resources, evaluate each area of life (mental, physical, spiritual, relational) to establish a care plan. For more information, refer to our Thrive Workbook or our Living Grace Group or Redefine Grace Group (students) workbook.

5. Know the acute crisis support and hospitalizations.

Many cities have a crisis response team to help provide an assessment during difficult times. Find these numbers at any local mental health agencies (NAMI affiliates or hospitals). If hospitalization is necessary, it usually only lasts 2-4 days (longer if needed).

Finances / Insurance

1. Insurance

Consult your insurance plan for available doctors/therapists in your network. If you can't get an appointment, your family doctor can refer you to a psychiatrist and/or therapist.

2. No Insurance

Consult with the various family clinics or state-run services in your area that provide professional mental health services. Be patient because these state-run services are generally full and have a longer waiting period to see a professional.

3. Can't Afford Services

Look into government entitlement programs (SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, Medicare, food stamps, assisted housing). This type of assistance will greatly increase the number of mental health care options available to you. This is not a sign of failure! These services were intended to help when mental health disorders interfere with life.

Other Items to Be Aware Of

1. Release of Information Consent

If you are 18 or older, consider signing a release form for your doctors, therapists, and insurance to be able to discuss your care and treatment with other medical professionals and trusted family members. This will help your professionals and support system work as a team. Include trusted individuals who can help you navigate your overall care.

2. Keep Your Information Organized

There will be a lot of paperwork, so keep a record of your professional care, including:

- Dates of diagnoses
- Hospitalizations
- Copies of psych. assessments
- Medical records
- Contact info for doctors/therapists
- History of medication/treatments
- Insurance/Medicare/Medicaid info

How can the Grace Alliance help?

The Grace Alliance's mission is to cultivate healthy solutions for hearts and minds through simple, innovative biblical truths, scientific research, and practical tools.

The topics discussed in this book can all be found in greater detail in our various mental health workbooks that provide simple, practical, and hope-filled education and tools to guide you or your loved one through the mental health journey.

Thrive Workbook

For anyone – An in-depth, self-directed whole-health guide proven to reduce depression, anxiety, etc., improve daily life, and renew your life in Christ.

Family Grace Group Workbook

For families/marriages – A 16-week small group curriculum to reduce your stress and empower your loved one with hope.

Living Grace Group Workbook

For adult individuals – A 16-week small group curriculum to reduce stress, depression, anxiety, and other challenges and encourage faith.

Redefine Grace Group Workbook

For high school/college-aged students - 10-week curriculum for high school and college-aged students to address relevant topics and help reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and other challenges and renew your faith.

Articles about Faith & Mental Health

Various articles discussing hot topics regarding faith and mental health from The Grace Alliance team and influential guest authors.

To purchase your copy of one of these resources, read our articles, or find other resources, visit us at:
www.mentalhealthgracealliance.org