

SELF-CARE GUIDE



***Sustaining Through the Depths of
Depression, Panic Attacks, OCD, Bipolar Disorder,
Anxiety, Grief, and Borderline Personality Disorder***

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Orchard Human Services, Inc. *in collaboration with*

Psychoneuroeducational Institute, LLC

This thin book is dedicated to the brave and courageous people who face each day with an overwhelming burden of hopelessness, anxiety, fear, despair, depression, compulsion, and other tragic symptoms of trauma, loss, mental health and substance use problems.

May you find the peace and fulfillment to sustain you for a lifetime ... and while you search for that peace, my hope is that this little guide will give you a sense of hope, knowing there is help out there ... and that you are truly cared for.

Yours truly,

Dr. Darleen Claire Wodzinski



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crushing fear or grief, or desire to self-harm or end life**

Get Help NOW!!!

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- 2. Go directly to the Emergency Room at the nearest hospital**
- 3. Call a crisis hotline. SAMHSA's National Helpline –
1-800-662-HELP (4357)**
- 4. Call or visit your mental health or medical care provider, if
immediate or crisis access is available. If not, call 911 or go
directly to the Emergency Room at the nearest hospital or call a
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agency for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services
Administration. The SAMHSA hotline provides referrals for
various mental health and substance use problems.**

Introduction

The human mind is a powerful instrument that has the capacity to create positive feelings of joy, love, satisfaction, and bliss. The mind is also able, however, to generate intense feelings of pain, shame, depression, guilt, fear, anxiety, anger, and rage. Some intense life experiences can lead to abject human suffering, which is sometimes situational and transient. In other situations, however, the individual experiences such dramatic and enduring suffering that mental health is compromised.

People who experience intense enduring symptoms of emotional distress may be diagnosed with a mental health problem such as depression, panic attacks, obsessive compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, anxiety, borderline personality disorder, or complicated grief. This guide is about those times that the personal experience is so overwhelming that the individual is at risk of losing the things that are most wonderful about being human ... purpose, inspiration, and hope.

People suffering with extreme emotions, who have a diagnosable mental health condition or who feel like they have lost their reason or will to live, must seek professional help from a mental health professional, such as a counselor, therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist. When the crisis of emotion and devastation is too overwhelming for the individual to sustain activities of daily living, when the desire to live no longer exists, when the feeling of total loss and devastation take over, then immediate professional help is required.

Immediate courses of action to get help NOW include some of the following:

1. **Call 911 or Emergency Services**
2. **Go directly to the Emergency Room at the nearest hospital**
3. **Call a crisis hotline. SAMHSA's National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357)**
4. **Call or visit your mental health or medical care provider, if immediate or crisis access is available. If not, call 911 or go directly to the Emergency Room at the nearest hospital**

Who, How, and When to Disclose

Please only continue reading this AFTER you have sought help for yourself or another who is suffering with overwhelming emotions, desire to harm or end life of self or others, or who is unable to perform activities of daily living – including care of self or children – due to emotional, mental health, or substance use problems. After taking that first critical step – and getting professional support and care – the next step is to seek help from friends, family, community. Whenever possible, seek the advice and support of mental health professionals to strategize healthy and effective ways and times to disclose.

The decision to discuss mental health and serious emotional problems with others is a big one. If you are contemplating discussing such issues with an employer or someone connected to your place of employment, I suggest that you speak with your mental health therapist, counselor, psychologist, or psychiatrist before taking action. Once a mental health condition is disclosed, there is no going back. In some

cases, people may lose jobs as a result of disclosing personal medical or mental health information.

So take the decision to inform an employer very seriously – and do so only after thoroughly discussing with your mental health provider. If your job or career may be seriously negatively impacted by disclosure of a diagnosis, also consider seeking the advice of an attorney of law to afford yourself the maximum protections under the law. Taking care of yourself includes caring for and protecting your right to work, and your right to be treated fairly if you have a disability, such as a mental health diagnosis. Protections do exist under the ADA, or Americans with Disabilities Act.

Telling family and close friends about your condition may provide some additional support. Loved ones may be confused about displays of emotion and behaviors that are sometimes associated with mental health and substance use problems. The people who care about you will benefit from understanding what is going on, so they can

understand what they are seeing and hearing ... and begin to learn how to support you.

In other situations, individuals suffer quietly, not showing others their intense inner struggles. As a result, their family and friends may continue as if everything is fine – when you are in intense and hopeless agony or despair. If you are hiding your problems from those who are closest to you, this is a good time to tell others about your experience.

As mentioned previously, your best course of action is to discuss how and when to disclose your mental health, substance use, or emotional problems with a mental health professional. Young children may not be ready to hear the harsh reality of mental health issues; your care provider can help you find the right words and decide the right time to tell young children and teens about your problems. In some cases, you will need to use simplified language to describe your situation – like ‘Daddy is having problems feeling happy’ rather than ‘Daddy has been diagnosed with depression’. Clearly, children may not

be ready to hear certain details and lack the capacity to understand complex medical terminology.

Others who may not be ready to hear about your situation might be friends or family members who are, themselves, in a crisis of physical, emotional, or mental health. Again, your mental health professional is in the best position to help guide you through the decisions about whom to tell, how to tell them, and when to tell.

When You Are Ready to Tell

Once you have explored the many issues involved in disclosing your mental health, emotional, or substance use problem, the next step is to make a plan for disclosure. You never know how the information about your problems will be received; do not assume that everyone you tell will be supportive right away. Some people may be taken by surprise, frightened, or saddened; others may have an immediate anger response. So your best course of action is to come up with a self-care plan that involves boundaries and strategies for keeping yourself safe.

You might want to imagine which person is the best to tell first; or you may want to sit with your entire family at one time. However you decide to move forward with disclosure, remember that you are responsible for your own health and wellbeing. Have a plan to access additional support, say from your mental health professional or a crisis hotline, so you have somewhere to turn if disclosing is challenging.

Plan a quiet or enjoyable activity following your disclosure discussion to show yourself support. For example, you may choose to go see a movie, visit the local park or library, or go for a jog while listening to your favorite music. Whatever you choose to do, be sure to have a supportive and soothing activity to do immediately following your disclosure of your emotional, mental health, or substance use problems with others. Disclosure can be an important step toward healing – and at the same time, you are responsible for maintaining your own wellbeing. Guard it well.

Setting Boundaries

Setting personal boundaries is a critical issue for many people with emotional challenges. Often, a failure to establish and maintain healthy rules and boundaries for effective living can contribute to the underlying emotional or mental health problem. This is where the guidance of your mental health professional may provide excellent insight. Depending upon your individual situation and diagnosis, you may require boundaries like ...

- Keeping your condition confidential
- Only discussing your condition in private
- You may want comfort and kindness from loved ones
- You may need personal time each day to care for yourself, focus on your healing, and maintain your wellbeing
- You may need extra time off work or away from the house to pursue exercise or other health-supportive activities
- You may need additional finances or health benefits to pay for professional care

- You may benefit from the other person not using angry words or an upsetting tone of voice when discussing problems ... to help you both stable and focus on wellbeing
- You may need to take a nap or make sure you sleep enough at night, which might change your routine or in some way affect your schedule or responsibilities [for example, you might need to ask a family member to walk the dog at night so you can go to bed early to get enough rest]
- You may need to have some occasional quiet time, away from others to focus on yourself and your care
- You may need to have a vacation or prolonged time away from stressful situations or people, to focus on wellbeing
- You may need to go away for a period of time, to receive services at a facility – this could create a need for a house-sitter; approved time off from work; or care providers for pets, children, elderly, or medically fragile individuals whom you may care for in your home

As you explore your path to wellbeing, you will identify boundaries that can help support your recovery. Your mental health provider is an excellent support for setting healthy boundaries.

Rules for Disclosing and Setting Boundaries

Prepare yourself for disclosing your situation and helping others recognize and honor your personal boundaries. In most cases, the people you are telling are not mental health professionals. Understand that they will have their own reaction to your news ... including emotions, concerns, and questions. Be patient with them; this is not a time to challenge or argue. Your time of disclosing and of setting healthy boundaries is meant to move you closer to stability, peace, and mental wellbeing.

Even if you have close family or friends who are in the mental health field, give them some space to think things through. Their experience with you is a personal one – so their skills for dealing with

mental health issues in a professional setting may not apply to your disclosure or sharing of boundaries. Remember that every person will have their own unique response to your disclosure and will need time to reflect and decide how they respond.

In general, you must use positive and present-moment language that simply states your situation, explains the boundaries you wish to set and maintain, and provides information about any support you may need. Following are some ways to discuss your situation and begin to set healthy boundaries that will support your stabilization and recovery. Choose the ones that fit your situation ... fill in the blanks or make changes to it is the right statement for your personal situation:

- ❖ I am having problems with [fill in the blank]
- ❖ I still care about you and our relationship; I may need some space and patience from you while I work on getting support
- ❖ I am telling you because you are important to me; thank you for letting me share

- ❖ I understand that you may have big feelings about what I am sharing with you; I will give you the time and space to process – and I am still processing it, too
- ❖ I am feeling afraid, and wonder if you are having feelings, too
- ❖ It will help me if we can talk about this in a [few hours/day/week/month] when we both have had time to figure things out
- ❖ You don't have to say anything – I am grateful that you are listening while I share because it is part of my healing
- ❖ I [love/value] being your [partner/family/friend/colleague] and we can discuss ways to keep our connection strong while I am healing
- ❖ May we please talk more after we both have had some time to think about these things?
- ❖ Would you like to go to a session with my therapist to ask any questions about my diagnosis, problems, or the boundaries I am setting so I can recover?

- ❖ Please give me some extra space for taking care of myself ... I need more [quiet time/rest/personal space/freedom/time away from here/support from you/patience from you/sleep/exercise and fitness/healthy eating/help with the house/help with the children/help with the pets/help with figuring things out] – We can talk more about what that looks and feels like for me, and what your needs are in our relationship
- ❖ Do you need help finding someone to support you, based on my telling you about my situation?
- ❖ I understand that you may have big feelings – that makes sense
- ❖ My problem is just that – my problem – it is not anyone else's fault and I am getting the help I need and caring for my own wellbeing
- ❖ It makes sense that you are [angry/mad/hurt/scared/afraid/confused] and we can talk about it more in a while when we are both ready
- ❖ I know it will be [hard/difficult/different] for you now that I have some new boundaries to help me recover

- ❖ I am willing to discuss how to make things work with my new boundaries and healing process; I am committed to our relationship
- ❖ Thank you for giving me the space to talk about what I need; do you have any needs we should discuss the next time we talk?

Healing Letter to a Friend or Loved One

Sometimes it is just too hard to speak the words in your heart or on your mind when you are with someone whom you really care for. You may have strong patterns of communication and behavior that make it difficult for you to share your message clearly. Perhaps you had a long standing habit of nurturing others or putting their needs first; perhaps you bicker or argue; or maybe you depend heavily on others' support and nurturance. Whatever the case, sometimes a *Healing Letter* is a great way to let someone know exactly what is on your mind and how you need help.

Here is a sample *Healing Letter* ... fill in the blanks, and make adjustments to match your individual situation. If you want to share

your diagnosis, that is fine; but, if you want to keep the diagnosis private and just talk about your feelings and challenges, that is fine, as well. Your discovery and healing process is all about you.

Be sure to approaching writing this letter with a pure heart and clear intent. This letter is to disclose your situation and let others know about the healthy boundaries you are setting for yourself and your relationship with the other person. This letter is not a cry for help – you should already have sought professional mental health support for your situation. This letter is not a judgment or indictment of the other person; you are simply stating your truth and establishing the healthy boundaries that will support your recovery.

The letter is a tool for communication. Some people do not always hear the words we speak; and if they do, their interpretation may be different than what we intended to communicate. As you write your letter, choose your words carefully; check the things on the list that affect you most. Or perhaps they all apply to you. You must make your letter factual, authentic, and focused.

Most importantly, this letter is not an impassioned plea for someone else to change. You are in the processing healing and getting help. The intent of this letter is to share that information and explain why you need to set healthy boundaries. So, in the end, YOU are the one changing. And this letter explains that.



Healing Letter

Dear _____,

I am writing to you to talk about the problems I am going through. I am getting professional help. I have been diagnosed with _____. My experience is difficult, and I am feeling intense:

- sadness, despair, or depression
- overwhelm or feelings of hopelessness
- fatigue, exhaustion, or need for more sleep or rest
- pressure to perform, and feel that I need a break
- fear, anxiety, panic, or compulsion
- loss or feelings of being alone
- _____

I am going to change, grow, and heal. I am taking personal responsibility for myself. I will be setting some healthy boundaries in my life so I can focus on my recovery. Thank you for being there.

Signed,

After the Disclosure or Healing Letter

The moment after you disclose, share your boundaries, or give someone a copy of your letter of healing, your focus must be back on your healing and wellbeing. The next order of work is establishing a new sense of normal ... that includes you caring for yourself, honoring boundaries of self and others, and focusing on ways to be healthy, having healthy relationships, and enjoy life.

As you define your list of boundaries over time, expect your friends and loved ones – those closest to you – to need time to discuss, process, and understand. Be patient with yourself, with others, and continue to do the work in the therapeutic space with your counselor, therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist. Focus on ways that you can learn, grow, and become more of yourself.

What you need, in the end, is a way to have more resilience, a more effective perspective on your life circumstances, and a sense of hope for good things in the future.

Moment by Moment

If you face a crisis in the moment, slow yourself down. Take things moment by moment. Ask yourself, first, “*am I safe? Am I okay? Do I need to call 911? Should I go to the nearest hospital emergency department? Or do I think I can take some positive actions to self-calm and get myself back on track?*”

If you need help NOW ... take action to get immediate help. You are strong for recognizing and reaching out for help, when needed. There is no shame in asking for help when you need it.

If you feel you can self-calm and get back on track, slow yourself down. Find something to do RIGHT NOW that is safe, soothing, and supportive. Twelve step recovery programs recommend taking a shower when you are upset as a kind of ceremony to change your state of mind and start fresh with a new perspective.

Pre-planning is the best strategy for insuring your own stability when you face a crisis. Your best course of action is to create a *Moment*

by *Moment Action Plan* of things to do when you are feeling out of control or filled with unbearable emotions.

Create a *Moment by Moment Action Plan* that includes favorite activities and places to visit as well as some new things to try. Explore calming and uplifting activities like meditation, mindfulness classes, yoga, support group, book club, spiritual group, positive psychology workshop, or volunteering at the animal shelter or community garden. On the following page is a sample *Moment by Moment Action Plan* that you can use by checking off boxes ... or you can use it as an inspiration to create your own action list.



Moment by Moment - Action Plan

- Call a crisis hotline for support
- Call a friend, counselor, relative who is supportive
- Listen to soothing or uplifting music
- Take a walk or jog, take a nature walk, do some gardening
- Do yoga, chi gong, tai chi, stretch, bike, workout go to gym
- Lift weights
- Breathe to heal, such as Prana work or patterned breath
- Meditate, practice mindfulness, rest or nap
- Take a shower or bath to self-calm my mind and body
- Watch a movie that always cheers or calms me
- Read a book that is engaging, uplifting, informing
- Visit the nearest Twelve-Step Group such as ACOA, AA, Al-Anon
- Go to temple, church, synagogue, mosque
- Eat a healthy meal, have a cup of herbal tea, or drink a glass of water
- Go to the bookstore, tea or coffee shop to read books or magazines
- Get a massage or give yourself a soothing massage with sesame oil

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- Marmalade Jam Series –
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- Methylene Tetrahydrofolate Reductase Deficiency: Practical Implications for Pediatric Medical and Dental Practice
- Autism Insights – A New Hope *series*
- Dead Children Can’t Read – *Classrooms of Compassion*
- Raising Social Children – *A Guide for Parents Who Suspect Their Child May Have a Delay in Social Development*
- Self-Harm Guide – *A Guide for Youth, Families, Educators, Human Services Workers*





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Our special works include direct services, professional training and development, and parent support for the following challenges:

- **Adoption, foster care, separation from parents**
- **Attachment disorder, Reactive Attachment Disorder RAD & Disinhibited Social Engagement Disorder DSED**
- **Autism Spectrum Disorders**
- **Brain-Based Strategies for Healing & Learning**
- **Complex and Co-occurring Disorders of Learning, Behavior, Development, Mental Health**
- **Complex Trauma & Developmental Trauma**
- **Epigenetic Foundations of Neurodevelopmental, Learning, Behavioral, and Mental Health Problems**
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