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Mental Health Issues are Common

I am concerned about my 32-year-old sister. She seems depressed. She has always been a very active person. About a month ago, I noticed something wasn't right. She looks and acts extremely fatigued and I have noticed she has trouble thinking clearly when we're together. She doesn't go to lunch with her friends at work and she seems to be sleeping more and eating less. Last week, she commented that she didn't feel she "could go on like this much longer" and that she "can barely put one foot in front of the other." I think it's time I get involved and help her get help.

You have done a good job paying attention to your sister's behavior. The first step is recognizing that something is just not right. Many people with mental health issues feel like they don't have anyone to talk to. Be sure to open those lines of communication, and try to make them feel comfortable talking to you. The second step is getting help. These two steps may in fact be the hardest part of the entire healing process.

Mental illnesses are thought to be caused by several factors: Biological factors - Mental illnesses are often hereditary, meaning that they tend to run in families like other illnesses. Psychological factors - Various psychological factors, such as trauma suffered as a child or the loss of a close loved one, may contribute to mental illness in some cases. Social factors - Certain social or environmental stressors may also contribute to mental illness. These may include life events such as moving to a new place, a divorce or job loss, or chronic feelings like low self-esteem, loneliness or anger.

When people decide they are ready for help, they should contact their medical doctor or a mental health professional. If they are not sure what mental health professional to call, contact the community mental health center and they can assist you. Once you seek help from a qualified health care provider, and the correct diagnosis has been made, proper treatment can be given to help get you back on track.

Many safe and effective treatments exist. Depending on symptoms and diagnosis, health care professionals will explain a course of treatment that best fits the person's needs. Some commonly used treatments include: Medication - Medications work to reduce the symptoms of the mental illnesses. Therapy - During therapy, a person with a mental illness talks to a licensed and trained mental health care professional who helps him or her identify and work through the factors that may be triggering the illness.

If you are concerned your loved one is exhibiting harmful behavior or speaking about taking his or her own life, you need to call 9-1-1 or the local suicide prevention hotline. Professionals at these organizations will be able to quickly get help for the person in need.

Remember, you are not alone - Mental illness is common; one in four Americans are affected each year. You are not the first to face a mental illness or receive treatment. Also, treatment works. This is possible because many safe and effective treatments exist today, and many people with mental illness can and do recover.

Article by Tom Pletcher, LCP, LCAC, clinical director of COMCARE of Sedgwick County who has been involved in community mental health service delivery for 25 years. If you would like to talk to a professional confidentially, help is available by calling 316-660-7540. COMCARE is the licensed Community Mental Health and Certified Substance Use Center in Wichita and Sedgwick County serving children, adolescents and adults.