



FAMOUS PEOPLE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS



Stephen Colbert

The comedian and talk show hasn't shied away from discussing his lifelong struggle with anxiety.

Is it Time to Seek Help from a Therapist?

A local psychotherapist weighs in on when it's the right time to speak to a therapist — and how you can find the right fit. *By Stacey Wincone*

It has been a life-changing few months for people around the globe. The COVID-19 pandemic has touched all of our lives and resulted in illness, financial hardship, an early end to in-person learning and so much more.

For those with pre-existing and underlying emotional issues — including anxiety, depression and mood disorders — symptoms have intensified during this time, says Lori Edelson, a psychotherapist and owner of Birmingham Maple Clinic in Troy. And, as things open back up in Michigan, those feelings have ramped up even more.

People got used to staying safe in their own homes and doing things in their own way after the initial panic brought on by the lockdown.

"Once everyone sort of found their way to hunker down and feel safe and organize their own personal world and their own lives, I think they felt, 'If I can only sustain this and if I can afford to sustain this, then I'll be safe, and that will help manage my anxiety,'" she says. "And the idea and discussions that started about re-entering society, going back to work, going into a grocery store, going back to school, going to camp — whatever the topic is related to reentry — I think the anxiety really started to intensify even more so than with the original lockdown."

If you or your child is struggling to cope with your new normal, it could be time to speak to a trained therapist or psychiatrist.

Signs to watch for

Is your child constantly angry, overreacting to situations, worrying more, fearful, preoccupied with his or her physical illness or weight, showing a sudden lack of interest in things they were interested in, or is much more reclusive? It's time to seek help. If they tell you they've heard voices in their head, can't concentrate, or are having feelings of self-harm, it's time to ask for help.

"It's a judgment call and, for children, it's a judgment call on the part of a parent. Sometimes children ask for help and say they want to talk to somebody. That is not that common," she says. So whenever a teen or child asks to see a therapist, start looking.

And for moms and dads? "I think that the symptoms are very similar for children and adults, so I think we need to think about the same things. We need to look at an intensification of anger and aggressive behavior and anxiety and fearfulness and worry," Edelson says. "Is the adult preoccupied with medical issues, their appearance, their health? Are they showing a loss of interest in things that normally and previously were important and interesting to them? Are they sleeping too much or not sleeping enough?"

Finding the right fit

Therapy is more mainstream now, Edelson notes, but the stigma attached to it lives on, and some people believe they should be able to handle their issues solo.

Some believe they cannot afford ther-

apy, while others don't want to have their family secrets uncovered. Whatever the reason, Edelson says, "I don't think you should ever force someone to see a therapist. If someone is really resistant, therapy is not something that will go anywhere if a person feels forced into it."

However, if you feel it's the right time, you have to find the ideal match — and that is different for everyone.

To get started, ask someone you trust for a referral, whether it's a doctor, clergy member or close friend. It's a good idea to get at least three names. Call each person and spend some time talking to them. Essentially, conduct an interview. Ask them about their approach to therapy, if they have expertise in handling the issue you're hoping to work on. Ask them about their schedule. Does it work with your availability? "You want to get a consistent appointment and build it in as part of your routine," Edelson says.

Also, find out if they participate with your insurance. Do they do private pay? What is their fee? Is there flexibility in this fee?

Ask yourself, "Do you have a sense from talking to this person that you kind of like them or if you find their voice or their style is off-putting?"

Ultimately, listen to your gut when it comes to finding the right fit, she notes.

"The importance of a good fit is critical," Edelson says. "Because the therapy is most successful when the relationship with the therapist is a good one."

SEEKING SUPPORT

It has been an unprecedented few months filled with illness, job loss, isolation and more. For many, the changes in day-to-day life have amplified their mental illness. For others, time in quarantine brought on new feelings of anxiety or depression.

While you and your family are adjusting to the new normal after the flattening of coronavirus curve, you might find yourself still struggling to combat your feelings of depression and anxiety — and that's OK.

There is help for you and your loved one, and we hope this installment of *Opening Minds, Ending Stigma* helps you on your journey to finding the right support.



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