

# Mental Health Matters

The newsletter of the Illinois State Bar Association's Section on Mental Health Law

## Editor's Note

BY: SANDRA M. BLAKE

**HAPPY MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH** to all mental health law practitioners.

Observed in May in the United States since 1949, Mental Health Awareness Month was begun by Mental Health America (MHA), previously known as the National Association for Mental Health. During Mental Health Awareness Month, organizations raise awareness and educate the public about mental illnesses—including the realities of living with serious conditions—and strategies for attaining mental health and wellness. Activities are also focused on suicide prevention and reducing the stigma associated with mental illnesses.

The theme for 2025 Mental Health Awareness Month is “Turn Awareness into Action.” The Mental Health America toolkit provided materials for outreach activities to “celebrate the progress we’ve made in recognizing the importance of mental health—and challenging us to

turn understanding into meaningful steps toward change.”

The Mental Health Month ribbon is green, symbolizing hope, strength, and emotional support for those affected by mental illness.

In recognition of Mental Health Awareness Month, I am taking the liberty of sharing some inspirational quotes:

**“What mental health needs is more sunlight, more candor, and more unashamed conversation.”**

— Glenn Close, American actress

**“We would never tell someone with a broken leg that they should stop wallowing and get it together. We don’t consider taking medication for an ear infection something to be ashamed of. We shouldn’t treat mental health conditions any differently.”**

— Michelle Obama, former First Lady of the United States

*Continued on next page*

### Editor's Note

1

### Mental/Emotional Health and Community Wellness

1

### In the News

4

## Mental/Emotional Health and Community Wellness

BY ROBERT E. WELLS, JR.

### THE TOPIC OF COMMUNITY

**WELLNESS** is often examined using multiple dimensions. One model I have seen involves eight dimensions: emotional, financial, social, spiritual, occupational, physical, intellectual, and environmental. When I researched this topic in 2018, I elected to use the following 12 dimensions:

- Physical Health

- Emotional Health
- Mental Health
- Social Well-Being
- Safe and Sustainable Environment
- Intellectual Cultural Exposure
- Family Integrity and Support
- Collaboration of Organizations/Groups

*Continued on page 3*



## Editor's Note

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

**"Mental health problems don't define who you are. They are something you experience. You walk in the rain and you feel the rain, but, importantly, you are not the rain."**

— Matt Haig, author

**"You are not your illness. You have an individual story to tell. You have a name, a history, a personality. Staying yourself is part of the battle."**

— Julian Seifter, author

**"The advice I'd give to somebody that's silently struggling is, you don't have to live that way. You don't have to struggle in silence. You can be un-silent. You can live well with a mental health condition, as long as you open up to somebody about it, because it's really important you share your experience with people so that you can get the help that you need."**

— Demi Lovato, American singer and songwriter

**"I found that with depression, one of the most important things you can realize is that you're not alone. You're not the first to go through it, you're not gonna be the last to go through it,"**

— Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson, American actor and professional wrestler

**"People feel so much shame about [mental health], so if, by talking about it, I can even have an impact on one person, that would be awesome."**

— Sophie Turner, English actress

**"I think it's really important to take the stigma away from mental health... My brain and my heart are really important to me. I don't know why I wouldn't seek help to have those things be as healthy as my teeth."**

— Kerry Washington, American actress

**"Your mental health is everything — prioritize it. Make the time like your life depends on it, because it does."**

— Mel Robbins, American author

**"It is okay to have depression, it is okay to have anxiety and it is okay to have an adjustment disorder. We need to improve the conversation. We all have mental health in the same way we all have physical health."**

— Prince Harry

**"Being vulnerable is actually a strength and not a weakness — that's why more and more mental health is such an important thing to talk about. It's the same as being physically sick. And when you keep all those things inside, when you bottle them up, it makes you ill."**

— Cara Delevingne, English model and actress

**"My depression isn't something that I suffer from, but it's not something that I'm cured of. It's just a thing I have to manage. And so the more I learn about it, the more I learn about myself, the more I learn about my traumas and triggers, the better I am at being proactive and heading it off before it can, you know, cause a lot of damage."**

— John Moe, American writer and radio personality

**"We are not our trauma. We are not our brain chemistry. That's part of who we are, but we're so much more than that."**

— Sam J. Miller, American author

**"If you know someone who's depressed please resolve to never ask them why. Depression isn't a straightforward response to a bad situation; depression just is, like the weather. Try to understand the blackness, lethargy, hopelessness and loneliness they're going through. Be there for them when they come through the other side. It's hard to be a friend to someone who's depressed, but it is one of the kindest, noblest and best things you will ever do."**

— Stephen Fry, English actor, comedian, writer, director, narrator, and broadcaster

**"The strongest people are not those who show strength in front of the world but those who fight and win battles that others do not know anything about."**

— Jonathan Harnisch, American author

**"To anyone out there who's hurting — it's not a sign of weakness to ask for help. It's a sign of strength."**

— Barack Obama, 44th U.S. President

**"If you can't fly, run. If you can't run, walk. If you can't walk, crawl, but by all means, keep moving."**

— Martin Luther King, Jr., American human rights activist

**"Sometimes even to live is an act of courage."**

— Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Ancient Roman philosopher

## Mental Health Matters

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## Mental/Emotional Health

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

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- Financial Integrity
- Vocational Opportunity
- Humility
- Spirituality

I started my examination by borrowing the following Native American quote: “We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children.” This compelled me to examine the subject through the lens of a greeting from Africa. The greeting does not inquire about the well-being of the person being greeted, but instead is, “How are the children?”

Why this approach? It is my belief that if children thrive, it is because the community thrives through a collaboration of the schools, the home, and the community. Professor Laurence Steinberg, PhD, wrote a number of books about adolescents. I was first exposed when I picked up a copy at “The Lord’s Warehouse,” a sophisticated name for a thrift shop. The book was entitled *Age of Opportunity: Lessons from the New Science of Adolescence*. I was so impressed with the consequences of missing this “opportunity” that I ordered 25 copies from the publisher, sent them to the author to be signed, and gave them to teachers, judges, parents, youth leaders, and public officials.

Professor Steinberg examined the function of schools, but did not omit to acknowledge the obvious: “I noted (20 years ago) no school reform effort would have any impact if the students didn’t come to school ready and able to learn.” With adolescence, the key aspect is self-regulation, *i.e.*, emotional control and the development of executive decision-making capacity and mastery. Professor Steinberg noted that while it may be unpopular to acknowledge genetics, the environmental influences may be more important in explaining the relative intellectual deficiencies of children from poorer families. These environmental factors include trauma (both inside the home and in the community), chronic distress related

to poverty (food insecurity and inadequate access to healthcare), and meeting the child’s emotional needs. The safety nets of the community are particularly important to those with less support and inadequate or strained resources.

Emotional needs of teenagers have been described using a number of characteristics. Jacqueline Amor-Zitzelberger, MA, Penn State Extension, lists the following: belonging, enjoyment, power, and independence. Dr. Bruce Narramore states six in his book *Parenting Teens: developing distinct identity* (sense of uniqueness); gradual separation from childhood dependence on one’s parents; development of meaningful relationships with peers; development of the ability to relate well to the opposite sex; gaining skills to prepare for a career and adult responsibilities; and fashioning their faith and value commitments while developing a basic attitude toward life. YDisciple lists five fundamental needs for teenagers: to be understood, to belong, the ability to be transparent, the need to engage in critical thinking about faith and life, and the need for guidance. Pat Tanner Nelson, Ed.D., with the University of Delaware, opined the following social and emotional issues: establishing identity, establishing autonomy, establishing intimacy, becoming comfortable with one’s sexuality, and achievement (mastery of some aspect of life).

I will summarize these with a personal experience. In acting as moderator for the Center for Racial Harmony, I had the opportunity to interview a panel of four students of different races and genders. When asked to identify the elements most important to their success, they came up with the following: Guidance, Opportunity, Respect (Given and received), and (reasonable) expectations. It yields an awkward acronym GORE, but it makes the concepts easy to remember.

It is suggested by Linda Tropp, Professor at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, that the majority of people would like to discuss, engage, and

collaborate in person in a non-partisan way, particularly on local issues. Many others believe the divide is too great on national/international issues (*e.g.*, abortion, immigration, climate control/global warming, war in Gaza, war in Ukraine, DOGE, DEI, etc.). How can we satisfy both groups?

There is no perfect solution, but we have to start somewhere. What can we do? On April 3, 2025, I had the opportunity to moderate a public dinner table meeting for the Center for Racial Harmony. It received a grant from Healing Illinois to provide a series of events. The general public was invited and welcomed. Approximately 80 citizens attended. “Community Wellness Begins with You.” The first question posed was “What can we do individually and collectively to make government a more effective and healing agent?”

Those in attendance were assigned to tables of eight for dinner and discussion. Each table was encouraged to meet neighbors and community members, many previously unknown to them, and learn about those with whom they would share the evening. After being given the opportunity to greet and meet their tablemates, the tables were given a few simple instructions. First, none of the divisive national and international issues were on the table this night. Next, all were encouraged to follow another acronym, **ROPE**, *i.e.*, be Respectful (to each other), be Open with thoughts and feelings, be Positive (avoid negativity and seek common solutions and suggestions), and be Empathic to others.

The same three questions were provided to each table, and a “reporter” was selected at each table to take notes of the commentary, discussions, and suggestions. After an hour, the group reconvened and listened to the commentary from the other tables. The star of the night was Emma, the only teenager present. She was 13, and she went to the front of the gathering and explained the discussions and findings of her table.

This was the first of three dinner tables planned. The next dinner will focus on healthcare (physical and mental) and effective ways the family can provide the necessary emotional and mental support. The third will focus on education. Most attendees enjoyed the opportunity to be heard and explore important issues to gain a greater understanding of themselves, their neighbors, and the community.

Is the program a success? We don't know, but its start has received a positive reception despite the storm that preceded the event. Community wellness starts with communication. As Cheryl Richardson noted, "People start to heal the moment they feel heard." When individuals heal, the community does as well. Your thoughts, suggestions, experiences, and examples of efforts in your community

are welcome and appreciated. Community wellness starts with our own and our neighbors' mental and emotional health. By collaboration and coordination, perhaps WE can build a model for others to follow. ■

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## In the News

**EARLIER THIS YEAR, WGN-TV NEWS** reported that marijuana use could trigger a mental health disorder.

According to the report, "doctors long ago established a connection between cannabis use and schizophrenia. Now, Canadian researchers at the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences measured the increase in cases since marijuana legalization."

"Researchers say new cases of schizophrenia associated with cannabis use disorder nearly tripled."

"The study looked at data from every Ontario citizen, ages 14-65, visiting healthcare providers from 2006 to 2015, when medical cannabis was legalized, and from 2018, when non-medical cannabis was cleared for purchase, through 2022."

"Experts say there have been concerning increases over time in the number of people diagnosed with schizophrenia who were heavy cannabis users. The number of people receiving hospital care for cannabis use disorder increased 270 percent." ■



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*"We hope to see you there!"*

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# May is Mental Health Month.

Explore Mental Health America's  
2025 Mental Health Month Action  
Guide at [mhanational.org/may](https://mhanational.org/may)

TURN  
AWARENESS »  
INTO ACTION