



JOHN MELNICK

A Plan for Mental Health



What is your plan for good mental health?

I spent six weeks in a mental health ward in the fall of 2002. I was diagnosed with severe depression.

Each evening, a psychiatric nurse would meet with me to find out how I was feeling. She would listen to my answers with great attention, and often gave me suggestions to consider to aid in my recovery. The best suggestion I received was, "You have to have a plan, the purpose of which will be to improve your mental health." I took that advice to heart and started that night to develop my plan.

Perhaps in sharing my plan, others who wish to improve their mental health, will find some helpful ideas. The following plan has been working for me for eight years:

Journaling - Moving Forward Aided by Looking Backward

I record things that are going on in my life and how I am feeling about them. I make entries mostly on a daily basis, and especially when I start to experience a change in my mood. Looking back over weeks, months, and now years, I can see patterns. For example, I often go into a "down mood" after Christmas and it often lasts until early March. So, I do not take on many projects at that time. Deadlines and some work associated with projects add stress, which can lead to loss of sleep. That can in turn lead to anxiety and push me into

depression. I realized that from January to March is a high-risk time for me when I saw the pattern in my journal.

Enjoyable Activities - Give Your Mind a Health Break

I love baseball and when I go to the ballpark to watch a game, time ceases to exist. The sights, sounds, and smells (hot dogs, etc.) of the ballpark take over my senses, which I welcome. I forget about everything else for about three hours. When I keep score, I am completely involved in the game. It is a labor of love and is very healthy.

I recently spoke to a woman who loves to dance the tango. Going to a dance class and dancing has the same effect on her.

Make sure to get some physical activity in your routines. Choose something you like so it does not become a drudge. Exercise is related to positive mental health and it may provide relief in symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Medical Team - I am the Co-ordinator

I have gathered a medical team. My general practitioner monitors my overall health. He keeps an eye on blood pressure, sugar levels, weight and things necessary for good physical health. My psychologist, whom I have been seeing since 2002, monitors my moods and helps me find ways to live healthier from a mental health perspective. My psychiatrist monitors my medications, which may be adjusted from time to time.

My role as the coordinator is to meet with each one regularly and advise each one what the other two are doing or what has been recommended. Keeping all three informed is key. It is easier to treat a patient when you have the whole picture.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy - Amazingly Helpful

I have taken two courses in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). The premise of CBT is that we base our actions on emotions and base our emotions on thoughts. It all starts with our thoughts. If we are not thinking clearly, we can get into a negative tangle of destructive thoughts, not based on reality, but based on "twisted thinking". CBT can teach us to check our thoughts, thus preventing us from getting into negative mindsets based on conclusions

arrived at through erroneous assumptions of twisted thinking. I apply the techniques I have learned through CBT on a daily basis.

Personal Relationships - Keep them Healthy

It is important to foster healthy relationships.

Many relationships start out on a healthy basis, but over time can become toxic. I assess my personal relationships. I have had to re-set some by establishing new boundaries. With some cases, terminating the relationship is the only healthy choice.

This can be a tricky process, but one that is important.

Remember to always "**RISE ABOVE**".



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