

You Don't Have to Be in Crisis to Need Support

For many people, the idea of getting support for their mental health is still connected to the idea of crisis.

Something has to be terribly wrong. Life has to become unmanageable. A relationship has to be falling apart. Anxiety has to become overwhelming. Depression has to make it difficult to function. We wait until we reach a point where we can no longer ignore what is happening before we decide that maybe we deserve some help.

But support does not have to begin at the breaking point.

Throughout my years working with people in counseling, behavioral health, community services, and forensic settings, I have met people during incredibly different seasons of their lives. Some were living with significant and persistent mental health conditions. Others were experiencing grief, relationship difficulties, anxiety, trauma, overwhelming stress, major life transitions, or simply the realization that the ways they had always coped were no longer working.

These experiences are not all the same, and they should not be treated as though they are.

But they remind me of something important: **any of us can experience struggles with our mental health at different points in our lives and to different degrees.**

Struggling Doesn't Always Look Like a Crisis

Sometimes struggling is obvious.

Other times, it looks like getting up, going to work, taking care of everyone else, answering the emails, making dinner, keeping the appointments, and doing everything you're supposed to do while knowing somewhere inside that you aren't doing particularly well.

It can look like becoming irritated more easily.

Sleeping too much or not enough.

Feeling disconnected from people you care about.

Avoiding something because thinking about it feels overwhelming.

Feeling anxious without understanding why.

Going through the motions of a life that suddenly doesn't feel quite like your own.

Or realizing that something you've carried for a very long time is heavier than you thought.

None of those things automatically mean someone has a mental health disorder. They do mean that something may deserve attention.

We don't have to wait for suffering to become severe before we're allowed to notice it.

What Does Good Support Look Like?

There isn't one answer because people don't all need the same things.

Sometimes good support is professional counseling. Sometimes medication or other medical care is an important part of treatment. Sometimes it means learning new coping or communication skills.

But support can also be a trusted person who listens without immediately trying to fix the problem.

It can be a community where you feel like you belong.

It can be learning to set a boundary you've needed for a long time.

It can mean sleeping, moving your body, spending time outside, reconnecting with something meaningful, practicing your faith or spirituality, writing, creating, or simply giving yourself enough quiet to figure out what you're actually feeling.

Sometimes support is learning a five-minute grounding skill.

Sometimes it is finally saying, **"I'm not doing as well as I would like to be."**

Often, good mental health support isn't one thing at all. It's several small things working together.

Support Isn't the Same as Fixing

One of the things I have learned from working with people is that we are often very quick to try to fix one another.

Someone tells us they're struggling and we offer solutions. We tell them what we would do. We remind them to look at the positive side. We reassure them that everything will work out.

Usually, we mean well.

But good support often begins somewhere much simpler: **listening.**

It means making room for another person's experience without immediately deciding what it should mean or what they should do about it.

Professional support can work the same way. Therapy isn't about having someone else run your life or hand you all the answers. At its best, it can provide a place to understand what is happening, recognize patterns, develop skills, explore choices, and decide what you want to do next.

The goal isn't to create a life without difficult emotions.

That's not realistic.

The goal is to have more ways to move through difficult moments when they come.

Checking In Before Things Fall Apart

We routinely maintain things that matter to us.

We change the oil in our cars before the engine fails. We go to the dentist before every tooth hurts. We try to address small problems in our homes before they become expensive repairs.

Yet when it comes to ourselves, many of us wait.

We push through.

We tell ourselves other people have it worse.

We decide we should be able to handle it.

And sometimes we can handle it.

But being capable of carrying something doesn't necessarily mean carrying it alone is the best choice.

A simple check-in with yourself can be a good place to start.

How have I actually been feeling lately?

What has been taking more energy than usual?

What am I doing that is helping?

What am I avoiding?

Who do I feel supported by?

What do I need more of right now?

You don't have to turn every difficult day into a diagnosis. You don't have to analyze every emotion. And you certainly don't need to believe that every uncomfortable feeling requires professional treatment.

Sometimes life is simply difficult.

But you are allowed to pay attention when it is.

You Can Ask for Support Earlier

Maybe support means counseling.

Maybe it means talking honestly with someone you trust.

Maybe it means learning a new skill, using a worksheet, changing a routine, reconnecting with your community, or finally making an appointment you've been putting off.

The right kind of support depends on the person, the circumstances, and what is happening in their life.

What matters is recognizing that help doesn't have to be reserved for our worst moments.

You don't have to wait until you're falling apart to decide that something deserves your attention.

Sometimes noticing is the first step.

And sometimes asking for a little support earlier makes the road ahead much easier to travel.

The Dragonfly's Den provides educational resources intended to support reflection, learning, and emotional wellbeing. Educational content is not a substitute for individualized mental health or medical care.