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## From the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church

*We believe that faithful Christians are called to be in ministry to individuals and their families challenged by disorders causing disturbances of thinking, feeling and acting categorized as "mental illness." We acknowledge that throughout history and today, our ministries in this area have been hampered by lack of knowledge, fear and misunderstanding. Even so, we believe that those so challenged, their families and their communities are to be embraced by the church in its ministry of compassion and love.*

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**“Mental health issues affect *all* of society in some way, shape, or form. It’s estimated that one in four Americans will have a diagnosable mental disorder at some point in their lives.” (from *Mental Health First Aid USA*. Find more at [mentalhealthfirstaid.org](http://mentalhealthfirstaid.org))**

These things include, but are not limited to:

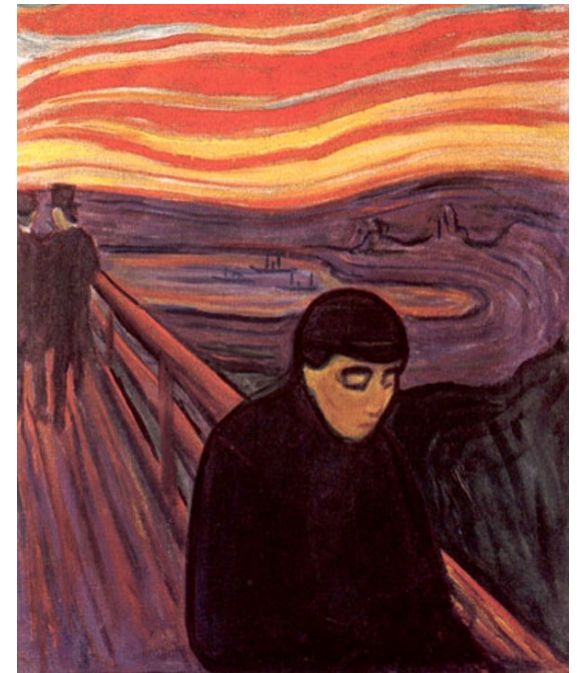
- Schizophrenia
- Bipolar disorder
- Obsessive compulsive disorder
- Chronic depression
- Anxiety disorders
- Self harm
- Eating or body image disorders

**“Most, if not all, mental illnesses are biological in origin, with environmental factors possibly triggering an existing genetic predisposition to the illness.” (Carlene Hill Byron, a teacher through NAMI)**

***Mental illness should be treated with the same non-judgmental care as any other disease or malady.***

# BREAKING THE SILENCE IN CHURCH

## MENTAL ILLNESS



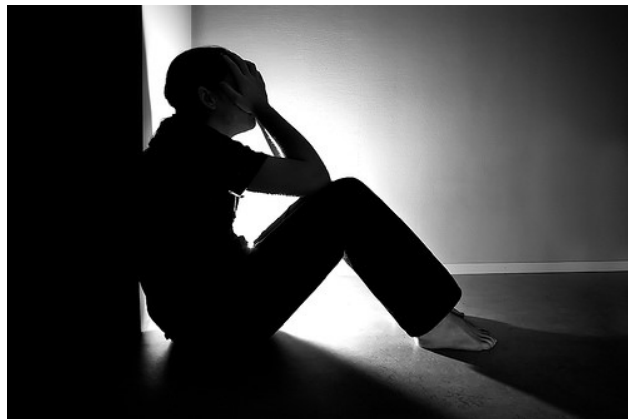
“Despair,” by Edvard Munch, 1892. Used under creative commons from [commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)



# “Stigma is ugly, and it thrives in silence.”

Rev. Robb McCoy,  
Two Rivers United Methodist Church.

“For too long, churches  
have contributed to the  
suffering of others through  
silence, whispers, cold  
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## WHAT CAN THE CHURCH DO?

- Create a culture of caring and compassion that is free of judgement. Encourage church to be a place where people can say, “I’m struggling.”
- Treat all people with respect and dignity.
- Be welcoming to those with acute psychosis. If they become disruptive, speak clearly, calmly, and in direct short sentences. Comply with reasonable requests. Train ushers and others about de-escalation. If situation escalates, be aware of exits and be prepared to seek additional help, even police if necessary.
- ALGEE:
  - A Assess** for risk of suicide or harm.
  - L Listen** without judgement.
  - G Give** reassurance and information
  - E Encourage** appropriate professional help.
  - E Encourage** self-help and other support strategies.
- Do not be dismissive or blame those with mental health disorders. Educate people on the biological nature of many mental health issues.
- Prayer is an important part of healing, and can be very beneficial for mental health. It is not, however, the only answer. It is a part of a broader part of mental health that includes physical and emotional care.
- Advocate to public officials for stronger programs and services for mental health.

## WHAT CAN THOSE WHO ARE SUFFERING DO?

- Know that you are not alone. More than a quarter of adults (26.2%) experience some kind of mental health disorder.
- Affirm that you are no more to blame than someone who has any other physical ailment. Seeking help is a sign of strength, maturity, and wisdom. No one would call a diabetic person ‘weak’ or ‘stupid’ for checking their blood sugar, taking their insulin, and visiting a physician for guidance and care. No one should feel that way for a mental illness, either.
- Seek out professional help. If cost is an issue, there are ways to find more affordable care:
  - ⇒ Search for your Community Health Center. These are clinics designed to help people with many health needs. Most operate under a ‘sliding scale’ system, meaning cost depends on your income.
  - ⇒ Local colleges may have programs where students gain experience with therapy.
  - ⇒ Support groups are often free and meet on a regular basis at hospitals, churches, and community centers.
  - ⇒ Go to [NAMI.org](http://NAMI.org) to find a local branch and counselors that can help you get help.
- If you have already found professional help, stay on program. Find people who can help you remain accountable to the program.



## From the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church

*We affirm with Scripture the common humanity of male and female, both having equal worth in the eyes of God. We reject the erroneous notion that one gender is superior to another, that one gender must strive against another, and that members of one gender may receive love, power, and esteem only at the expense of another.*

*We especially reject the idea that God made individuals as incomplete fragments, made whole only in union with another. We call upon women and men alike to share power and control, to learn to give freely and to receive freely, to be complete and to respect the wholeness of others. We seek for every individual opportunities and freedom to love and be loved, to seek and receive justice, and to practice ethical self-determination.*

**More than 1 in 3 women have experienced rape, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.**

Domestic abuse is a pattern of coercive, controlling behavior that includes physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, or financial abuse. Both men and women are victims and perpetrators of abuse. There is no 'profile' of an abuser.

God wills healthy, loving relationships in our lives. This does not include coercion, jealousy, manipulation, or fear.

***There are places you can go to find shelter. The first step of finding healing is to reach out to those who can help. There is a nationwide hotline that anyone can call who needs help getting away from an abusive relationship.***

***If You Need Shelter, call  
1-800-799-7233***

# BREAKING THE SILENCE IN CHURCH

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

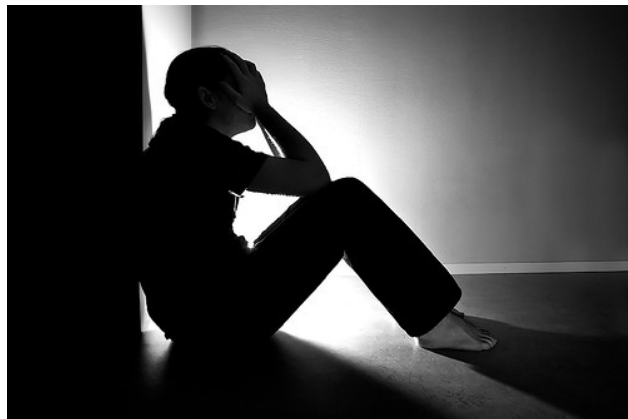


"Weeping Woman," by Vincent Van Gogh, 1893. Used under creative commons from [commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

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## WHAT CAN THE CHURCH DO?

- Create a culture of caring and compassion that is free of judgement. Encourage church to be a place where people can say, “I’m struggling.”
- Teach that all people, man and woman, were created in the image of God, and deserve respect.
- Do not assume only men are abusers. Men and women can fall victim to intimate partner abuse. In many cases, the stigma and lack of understanding is stronger for men who are victims of abuse.
- Teach that marriage is a covenant relationship of mutual submission, and that God wills healthy relationships of love, kindness, and justice for all.
- Support a local women’s shelter with gifts of money or supplies. Make it known to the congregation that this support is in line with the mission and ministry of the church and of Jesus.
- Do not ask, “Why do victims stay with abusers?” Ask “Why do abusers choose to abuse?” The responsibility to change should be on the abuser, not the victim. The victims of abuse need support, not judgment.
- Do not presume to be able to identify an abuser. Abusers are male or female, and are often friendly and charming. This is a part of their controlling personality and makes it easier to maintain their relationships.
- Advocate to public officials for stronger laws to hold abusers accountable, and for life-saving domestic violence services.

## WHAT CAN THOSE WHO ARE SUFFERING DO?

- Recognize the cycle. Does this feel familiar?
  - ⇒ Your abuser threatens violence.
  - ⇒ Your abuser strikes you.
  - ⇒ Your abuser apologizes, sometimes very emotionally, promises to change and may offer gifts.
  - ⇒ Regardless of what you do or say, the cycle repeats.
  - ⇒ Often, the violence gets worse over time.
- Call the police when being physically attacked. Women who report domestic violence to the police are much less likely to be attacked again.
- Do not assume that because you are a man, you cannot suffer abuse. More than 1 in 4 men (28.5%) in the United States have experienced rape, physical violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime.
- Understand that the one who needs to change is the abuser, not the abused. You do not deserve to be attacked, stalked, or mistreated. You did nothing to cause this.
- Remember that a marriage is meant to be a mutually submissive relationship based on love, kindness, and respect. Violence and abuse destroys relationships and marriages, not divorce.
- Seek refuge from a trusted friend or shelter. For men, it can be particularly difficult to admit being a victim of abuse. For all, getting out of an abusive relationship is an incredible act of courage and strength.
- **Nationwide Call: 1-800-799-7233**



**From the Social  
Principles of  
the United  
Methodist  
Church**

*A Christian perspective on suicide begins with an affirmation of faith that nothing, including suicide, separates us from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39). Therefore, we deplore the condemnation of people who complete suicide, and we consider unjust the stigma that so often falls on surviving family and friends.*

*We urge pastors and faith communities to provide pastoral care to those at risk, survivors, and their families, and to those families who have lost loved ones to suicide, seeking always to remove the oppressive stigma*



**American Foundation for Suicide Prevention**  
[www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org)

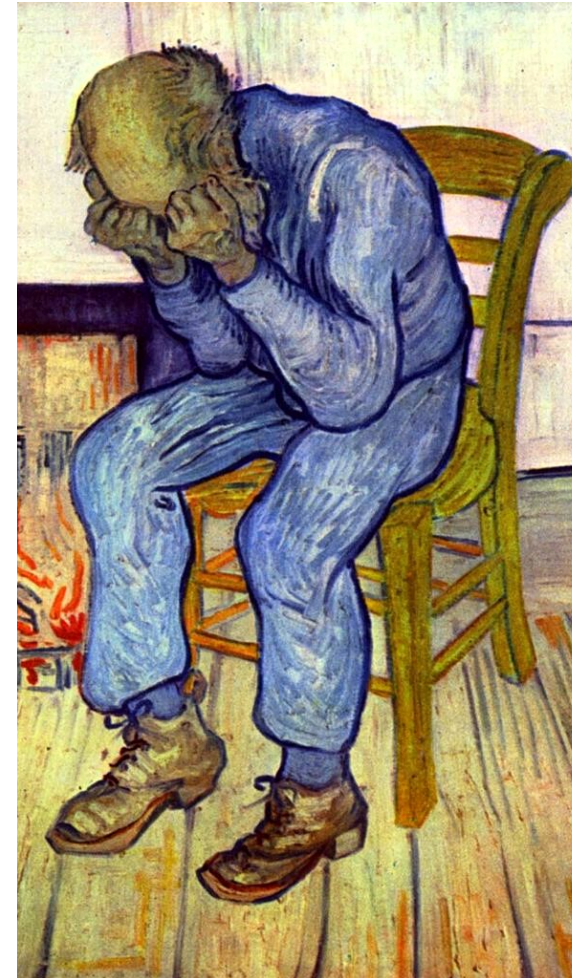
**National Institute of Mental Health**  
[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

**Suicide Prevention Resource Center**  
[www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org)

**Survivors of Suicide Loss**  
[www.soslsd.org](http://www.soslsd.org)

**Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention**  
[www.yellowribbon.org](http://www.yellowribbon.org)

**BREAKING THE  
SILENCE IN  
CHURCH  
SUICIDE**



“Sorrowing Man,” by Vincent Van Gogh, 1890. Used under creative commons from [commons.wikimedia.org](https://commons.wikimedia.org)

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## WHAT CAN THE CHURCH DO?

- Create a culture of caring and compassion that is free of judgement. Encourage church to be a place where people can say, “I’m struggling.”
- Talk openly about suicide and provide education and awareness opportunities about mental illness and suicide.
- Partner with national awareness movements like Mental Health Month in May, Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month in September, Mental Illness Awareness Month in October, and International Survivors of Suicide Loss Day (go to [survivorday.org](http://survivorday.org) to find more).
- Don’t be afraid to ask if someone is thinking about suicide. Do not treat it as a dirty word, or be afraid that you will “give someone an idea.” Speak plainly and compassionately. Tell someone something as simple as “I want you to live.”
- Listen carefully and with respect. Do not dismiss pain.
- Do not attempt to argue someone out of suicide. Communicate your feelings clearly while allowing space for their pain. Do not minimize what they are experiencing.
- Prayer is an important part of healing, and can be very beneficial for mental health. It is not, however, the only answer. It is a part of a broader part of mental health that includes physical and emotional care.

## WHAT CAN THOSE WHO ARE SUFFERING DO?

- Know that you are not alone. Nearly 1,000,000 people make a suicide attempt every year.
- Your life matters. Every day, regardless of how you feel at this moment, your life matters. No matter how much you are hurting, there is a God who loves you and people who care.
- Prayer is an important part of spiritual health, and can have great benefits, but it is not the only answer. Surrounding yourself with a supportive community and seeking professional help is also important.
- “Nothing separates us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.” This truth as found in the book of Romans can be applied to both families who are grieving the loss of a loved one and those who are contemplating suicide. There is no pain, failure, or shame that can keep God from loving you.
- Seek out connections. Go to worship, go to youth group, choir, Bible study, or book club. Find people who share interests, and intentionally build relationships with others.
- Exercise. Even a daily walk for 20 minutes can have enormous emotional and physical benefits.
- Volunteer, tutor, or engage in service.