

Healthy Is a State of Mind By Nina Danielson

When our nose runs, or our throat is sore, or we are stuck in bed with a fever, we take care of ourselves. Whether the remedy is medication from a doctor, chicken soup from mom, or just rest mixed with hours of daytime television, we pull out all the stops to get well again and get on with our lives. We all know that if we pretended there was nothing wrong, and went about life as usual working late, stressing out about getting all the chores done, or meeting friends to celebrate the weekend, we would wake up one day feeling far worse than before. Yet, when it comes to mental health, we do just the opposite.

Everyone has experienced sadness, fear, grief, anxiety, and stress. These are common emotions. But sometimes these emotions stick around longer than we would like them to and begin to make us feel uneasy and unwell. And yet, when it comes to our mental health, we tend to bottle everything up inside and continue to live as though we will wake up one day and our problems will have dissipated. After all, you say, I'm not crazy! I don't need help. Why should I go to a therapist? Crazy you might not be, but just like an ear infection or cold, if the problem is not dealt with directly (even if it's a minor problem), it can exacerbate the issue causing unneeded stress for your mind and body.

May is National Mental Health Awareness Month. So this month, why not take a step forward in the right direction?

- * If you have a therapist already, talk to your therapist.
- * If you are looking for a first or new therapist, ask your doctor or a trusted friend if they can recommend someone.
- * Remember that seeking help is a sign of strength and not weakness.
- * You are the consumer. Make sure your needs are met.
- * Get support from a friend – but remember that friends are not professionals and cannot be your therapists even if they have some training.

Therapy is a sign of respect for yourself and your wellbeing. A sign that you are ready to stop dealing with the same old mental blocks over and over and over and over and . . . you get the idea. A trusting relationship with a skilled and caring therapist can help us revisit some of the material that we are defending against that may be frightening or painful or anger-provoking. Seeking help from a therapist can help you work through feelings and behaviors that trouble you and help you get on with your life. Your mental health is waiting.

Finding a good therapist might take time and energy. Take recommendations from people you respect, but remember, you have a right to find someone that you feel comfortable with, someone who is “your type.” If you are suffering from severe depression or have thoughts of suicide, contact your physician or the Mental Health America crisis hotline immediately: 1-800-273-TALK.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Nina Danielson, M.S.W., a seasoned therapist and lecturer with 40 years of experience in the mental health field and author of **WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR THERAPIST ISN'T THERE**. She earned her master's degree in Social Work from Columbia University and is an advisor for The Compassionate Friends, a support network for bereaved parents and siblings. She maintains a private practice on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, where she lives with her husband and three-and-a-half dogs (they share custody of a granddog with one of their sons).