Helping a Loved One

Disclosure and Mental Health

Most people understand that you shouldn't talk about your mental health status on Facebook if you don't want the world to know about it. But just how do you decide when and whether to tell someone that you are currently struggling—or have struggled in the past—with a psychological disorder? There's no easy answer to this question. But the following are some important things to consider:

Do Tell Someone
It's hard enough to live with a psychological disorder; doing so in secret and in silence magnifies the pain 100-fold. If you don't have a trusted friend or family member, start by talking with your mental health care provider. You can also find and build support online in our anonymous community forums devoted to people living with mental illness.
Need to Know
Is there a good reason for someone to know? If the person plays a primary and intimate role in your life, then the odds are that you'll probably want to tell him orhereventually—especially if your illness is on the severe end of the spectrum. You should also let your primary care provider know, which is even more important if you begin taking medication. Be cautious about telling people at work, but understand that your employers can't choose to accommodate your needs if they don't know there's an issue. Knowing your employment rights is a good place to start before discussing your situation with your work colleagues. Click here to learn about your rights and what you should consider before talking to your employer. And in regards to romance, you aren't obligated to disclose your mental health history on a first date, but you should consider what you might tell that person if things get more serious. This is as much for your own benefit as your potential partner's. Another option is to visit safer dating sites where people might be more open, in a confidential way, with prospective partners.
Don't Assume
If you want someone to keep the news a secret, you should explicitly say so. Even then, people will sometimes break your confidence. This is not a reason to be paranoid, but it does mean that you should approach disclosure with the knowledge that a secret essentially stops being a secret as soon as you tell someone about it.
Trust is Key
Trust is more than just knowing that someone can keep a secret—it also gets at how much you trust a person to react in a supportive fashion. While some people might surprise you with how loving and understanding they can be, others, on occasion, might let you down. It's a good idea to start by telling only the people you feel sure will react to the news in a positive way.

Set Boundaries
Be clear with people about when you want their advice and when you just want them to listen. Also, you should realize that when you tell people you struggle with something like depression or an anxiety disorder, they'll probably tell you their opinions (informed and otherwise) about medication and therapy.

Stand Strong Against Stigma
While you should never put your well-being at risk, know that you're more likely to change societal attitudes when you put a familiar face on a controversial issue—especially when it's your face. Letting people outside your inner circle know you are dealing with or have dealt with psychological problems can change the way people perceive those of us living with mental health issues. In turn, this can make seeking care and support easier for other people facing mental health issues.

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