

shadow VOICES

FINDING HOPE IN MENTAL ILLNESS

HOW INDIVIDUALS AND THEIR FAMILIES SEEK HELP AND COPE

Shadow Voices: Finding Hope in Mental Illness is an intimate, inside look at what it is like to live with a mental illness and how individuals and their families find their way through a tangle of medical, governmental, societal and spiritual issues. Ten persons from all across the U.S. with mental illness tell their stories, plus many experts and advocates in the field add helpful perspectives. The program focuses on people's experiences with stigma, recovery and rehabilitation, parity in insurance programs, and how faith communities can do a better job responding to those with mental illness. This program aired on ABC TV, NBC and the Hallmark Channel in cooperation with Faith & Values Media.

Preparation: *Shadow Voices* is one hour long. The DVD includes an additional 1½ hours of material. You will be better prepared if you preview the portions you plan to use. Use the guide for discussion with small groups, religious education classes, workshops, conferences or support groups. Choose the questions that work best for your group.

How to use this study guide: This Six-Session guide offers ample material, including scripture passages, for six sessions. There is also Bonus Content for additional study in groups or families.

I. Six-Session Study

Overview. Each session is designed for 1 to 1¼ hour. The first session, where we recommend you watch the entire 58-minute program, may be the most challenging to manage time-wise. Tell participants that in the remaining sessions, you will study each topic in more depth, look at relevant scripture passages, view additional personal stories, and discuss many questions.

Session 1: Introduction

Read the paragraph introducing the documentary from the beginning of this guide.

Read: 1 Samuel 16:14-23

The young David is introduced to the troubled King Saul who is tormented by “an evil spirit from the Lord.” David provides soothing music for the troubled king. But, more importantly, he is caring and compassionate even in the face of Saul’s terrible rages. Too often we try to explain behaviors we do not understand by labeling them as an “evil spirit” or as a punishment from God. Medical science has taught us much about illnesses of the brain. Modern researchers have theorized that Saul suffered from a mental illness. As people of faith, we are called to share God’s love and compassion with those who are

hurting. We can and should be instruments of healing and comfort to those we know are suffering from a mental illness just as David was an instrument of healing and comfort to Saul.

Show the documentary. Then, if you have time, or as a closing or something to think about until the next session, ask, “Has this program helped you see persons with mental illness in a different way?”

Session 2: How churches can help

Read: Luke 15:11-32

When a young adult has a mental illness they often feel lost and abandoned by family, friends, and church. Parents need to realize that young people make mistakes, because they are young and sometimes because their judgment is impaired by a mental illness. Most, like the prodigal son, come home. If they don't seem to be headed in this direction, parents need to know the signs and not be afraid to intervene. Seeking professional help is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength. The congregation can play a vital role in educating the congregation so that it can be a safe and supportive community for the youth and the families struggling with these issues.

Show: Judy Herbold from Personal Stories

1. At one place Judy wanted to reject a label of schizo-affective disorder for her son because of her mother's life with schizophrenia, yet when he was finally diagnosed she felt relieved to find out that something “really big” was wrong. How can labels be limiting? But how can it be good to name an illness and deal with it? Has anything similar ever happened to you?
2. Some people seek out help and comfort from others when faced with a problem such as the one Judy and her family face. Others withdraw and want to be alone to sort things out. Which style are you? Why? Are you different from your spouse?
3. How can telling your story to others be helpful?

Show: “How churches can help” from Bonus Content

1. How can your congregation do a better job of meeting the needs of those with mental illness?
2. Most pastors have only had a few classes to deal with mental illness. Is there anyone in your congregation who is fully trained? How can persons tap professionals in the congregation as resources without taking advantage of getting “therapy” without an appointment?
3. David says in this segment, “Sometimes religious leaders believe that people who are suffering from a mental disorder just don't have strong enough faith.” Have you ever heard this expressed? Do you agree? Disagree? How is it unhelpful?
4. Susan shared that her family was unable to get the support and care they needed through her illness, mainly because she felt she had to keep it quiet. How can we create a congregational environment where there is no need to keep silent about mental illness?
5. Susan says: “It is in relationships and persons that we experience the presence of God, and the ministry of presence to another person is the biggest gift that can be given.” Share experiences of this truth.
6. Are there any ways your congregation can develop a program or plan for responding to persons with mental illness? Consider planning an ongoing support group, reach out ministry (visiting or phoning those who are ill), or educational activity regarding mental illness for others in your congregation.

Close discussion with prayer for any in your congregation or friends with mental illness.

Session 3: Husband-wife relationships

Read: Have different persons read the following scriptures: Isaiah 58:8, 9; John 1:1-5; John 8:12.

The creation story from the first chapter of Genesis tells of God creating light out of the darkness. Light is a symbol of hope and new life throughout our sacred scriptures. The Gospel of John proclaims, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." (John 1: 5) The foundation of our faith is God's victory over darkness and the ultimate triumph of light. Darkness can be terrifying for those experiencing mental illness. But love comes out of the darkness and this love gradually draws us back into the light of this world. For persons experiencing a mental illness, we can be instruments of God's love by extending care, compassion and hope to those in the grip of darkness and despair.

Show: "Husband-wife relationships" from Bonus Content

1. Have the group name some of the steps mentioned in the DVD of relating to a spouse with deep depression. Which items would be difficult for you? Which would come more naturally?
2. How can spouses plan for understanding in a time of mental illness, such as agreeing up front to seek counseling together? How could this potential issue be addressed in marriage counseling, at the time of making a living will, or other time?
3. How do spouses walk the fine line of the well one helping to care for the ill one, without doing too much and engendering an unhealthy dependency?
4. How would you feel having a disagreement with your spouse on an important issue, fearing that it could cause them to become depressed again?
5. Stan says at some point the recovery or a next step was up to Susan. Discuss: At what point is it helpful to allow the person with depression to initiate the next step? When is it not caring, and when is it the best possible response?
6. How can you just be present with someone in their pain without necessarily trying to fix them or it? Is that hard for you? How can you learn the ministry of presence?
7. How can a spouse work and still care for a person with a mental illness?
8. Stan stresses how difficult the long journey is, that one must be persistent, and to keep trying over and over. What keeps you going through difficult places in your marriage, no matter what the problems are?

Show: Amber Joplin from Personal Stories

1. Have you ever known someone with paranoia? How does one decide when someone simply has mild paranoid tendencies, or when it becomes something that needs treatment? How does one know when "hard to live with" has become something that has to be addressed?
2. Why do people tend to think that someone with a mental illness is not as intelligent as other people?
3. At what point is it helpful to realize that a spouse can't fix the other person, and that it is advisable to "learn to live with this new situation in a successful way"?
4. Amber had to deal with the difficult reactions of her adolescent daughter to her husband's illness. Share stories of how you or others have dealt with the responses of children/teens to tragedy, illness, disabilities, or death.
5. Amber's church and others came through for her in very supportive ways. How can you make sure the same kind of response happens at your church?

Close by praying for Amber, Susan, and other persons that are on the hearts of participants—for their ongoing struggles. Pray for new openness in your congregation or among acquaintances.

Session 4: Stress and self-care

Read: Luke 8:26-29

The story of the man called Legion, though it appears three times in the Gospels, only appears once in the preaching lectionary. This text from Luke reveals that people with mental illness in biblical times were often banished from their communities because of the community's fear of behaviors they did not understand. In Luke's version of this story, Jesus intentionally sought out this man just as the church must do today. Because of Jesus' love and compassion, this man was healed. The church today is called to embrace those who struggle with a mental illness and be instruments of healing and wholeness. Even though this man wanted to follow Jesus, he was sent back to the full membership of his own community. And so it was that a person with a mental illness became the first "missionary" to the Gentiles.

Show: Debbie Miller from Personal Stories

1. For those of us who grew up as families that attended religious services two or more times a week, some of Debbie Miller's compulsions and guilt about religion sound familiar. Discuss how much perceptions of God are shaped by family and early church experiences, and how much they are shaped by our own personality, illness or idiosyncrasies.
2. Did you ever feel like you were supposed to respond to an altar call, or give a testimony, or some other religious act? How did you respond? How did you feel? What is the difference between those experiences and genuine faith-changing movements of God in your life?
3. How does the experience of growing up overseas or in a missionary family impact kids? How can it be a good experience? How can it be a bad or difficult experience? How can you be tuned into the experiences of families in your own congregation with this background?
4. Have you ever felt, as a child or adult that you just did not want to live?

Show: "Stress and self-care" from Bonus Content

1. How do you manage stress? What are tips that work for you?
2. Do you have people who tell you when you seem stressed, or who you can go to and ask for feedback on how you are coming across?
3. Have you noticed any links between stress and any particular kinds of pain? (Headache, back ache, shoulders, etc.?) How do you deal with physical pain (besides taking a pill)?
4. How is a comprehensive approach to health beneficial? How can you help your doctors look at your emotional, spiritual and mental health as well as your physical? Whose responsibility is that?
5. How do world events or community events contribute to your own stress? Does it bother you? Should it? How about church conflict?
6. Does your job, lifestyle or chosen career contribute to your stress?
7. How can you help your pastor watch that he or she has downtime?

Close with 4-5 minutes of quiet rest and meditation as a way of practicing self-care.

Session 5: Support of family and friends

Read: John 4:7-30

In the story of the Samaritan woman, Jesus asks for water from an outcast woman – a woman who has had five husbands and is living with still another. Jesus boldly initiates the conversation with the woman at the well knowing the cultural taboos of a man speaking to a woman and a Jew addressing a Samaritan. Their lengthy conversation centers on the theme of “living water,” which Jesus promises to the woman. Persons struggling with addictions that are often brought on by mental illnesses, such as depression, also thirst for “living water.” Jesus did not dwell on the Samaritan woman’s past. Rather he gave us an example of how the faith community can initiate a relationship with those struggling with these illnesses. Jesus clearly understood that all persons of faith, and especially those who are separated from their faith community for whatever reason, need to be offered a drink from the deep well of “living water” so they may find the gift of new life.

Show: Lyn Legere from Personal Stories

1. Do you know or have you known anyone who “self-medicates” for depression or other mental illness? What are the dangers? What are the advantages?
2. Lyn talks about the importance of a therapist who believed in her. When has someone demonstrated belief in you and what did it mean to you?
3. Lyn talks about getting to the place of forgiving her mother and accepting her in spite of the poor choices she made in life. How can forgiveness contribute to good emotional health? Other examples?
4. How can you avoid judging people on appearances?
5. What does Lyn’s story say to you? How is it like the story of the Samaritan woman? How is it different?
6. Lyn’s experience of family in the beginning of her life was not ideal, but she has good relationships today. How have they been a support?

Show: “Support of family and friends” from Bonus Content

1. Have you ever sent a card or casserole for a person dealing with mental illness?
2. How does struggling in silence make an illness worse?
3. What do we fear about a person with mental illness?
4. Ray says that “One of the catalysts of my recovery was when my family was educated and it was explained to them and they realized it wasn’t their fault.” How can you help this to happen for families who are suffering?
5. Susan says many wanted to “get me better right away.” However, a pastoral counselor “... was vulnerable enough himself to enter into my dark place and to be there with me. And it was his faith that I was a child of God, even in the midst of all that I was going through that was one of the sustaining factors that helped me come back around to a point of healing and wholeness.” How can trusting God even amid doubts and anger be life transforming?

Close with each person naming one friend or family member that they are especially thankful for.

Session 6: History of treatment**Read: Micah 6: 8**

The major reason many persons do not get the treatment they need for a mental illness is the stigma that surrounds these illnesses of the brain. Most fear comes from our lack of understanding of these illnesses. Faith leaders and congregations can and should learn ways to be supportive and helpful to

persons struggling with mental illness. The words of Micah remind us that the Lord requires us “to act justly and to love mercy.” This may require us to advocate for social issues affecting the mentally ill. By offering loving mercy and including those struggling with mental illness in our prayers and in the life of our congregations, we will give hope to those who often feel hopeless.

Show: Bob Carolla from Personal Stories

1. How is Bob Carolla’s work in advocacy with the Nation’s Voice on Mental Illness (NAMI) one way to fulfill Micah 6:8?
2. Why does it take so long for doctors and therapists to get an accurate diagnosis when it comes to mental illness? Persons often complain about inept diagnoses, but how can friends and families be helpful and supportive as those with symptoms seek help?
3. Did you know that police are often called rather than an ambulance if a psychiatric disturbance is suspected? Why is this? Is that the way it should be? Do you know how it is in your community? Discuss.
4. Some persons enjoy and thank God for the creative side of bipolar disorder, even going so far as to say if they had a choice, they would accept being bipolar even with its negative and life-threatening implications, rather than miss out on its creative inspiration. What does it mean to be created in the image of God when it comes to mental illness?

Show: Johnny Limbaugh from Personal Stories

1. How do you weigh the rights of a patient to privacy and the need of a family to be given information about their loved one? Which is more important?
2. Should policies be different for persons with mental illness?
3. How can Johnny’s experience be instructional for you—how he felt being surrounded by police cars, versus the more individual approach where he was told everything that was being done to him and why?
4. Have you ever seen someone talking to him or herself in public (and not on a cell phone or other device)? What did you think—did you judge them or were you fearful? Have your views towards those with mental illness changed as a result of education on these issues?

Show: “History of treatment” from Bonus Content

1. What was new to you in the documentary or this segment about the history of treatment with mental illness? What have you learned?
2. It has been said it is a miracle that anyone got better in the “grim” atmosphere of mental hospitals in the first half of the 1900s. How does our current fractured mental health care system contribute to more illness? Are there any signs of hope you would point to in the system(s)?
3. Several of the experts pointed to the tradition of care for the mentally ill being a need shouldered by the community, from the days of state sponsored mental hospitals, to today’s state and government sponsored aid programs. The current rehabilitation movement puts some responsibility into the hands of those with illness. Is this good? Bad? How can those with mental illness be best cared for?
4. Dr. Joyce Burland talks about some of the early psychotropic medicines that would “drop an elephant.... They were very hard to tolerate. They were Civil War medications. And so people who took those found ways to go off of them.” How are people and society still bearing scars from those early medications?
5. Should a person have a right to not take medication even if everyone else says they should? Who decides?

Close with a circle prayer. Each person can pray if they wish, or decline to pray and pass on the opportunity by squeezing the hand of the person next to them.

*Scripture descriptions written by Rev. Susan Gregg-Schroeder
Taken from the Resource Guide for the DVD, Mental Health Mission Moments.
Available from www.MentalHealthMinistries.net.
Used by permission.*

G. Summary

How has this program helped you see persons with mental illness in a different way? What did you learn that surprised you? What changes would you like to see in your congregation, in your community, and in your own life as you relate to those with mental illnesses?

Websites of the organizations mentioned in the documentary:

<https://cpr.bu.edu/> - Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation
www.cartercenter.org – The Carter Center
www.hopehaven.org – Hope Haven
www.mentalhealthministries.net – Mental Health Ministries
www.nami.org – National Alliance On Mental Illness
www.pennfoundation.org – Penn Foundation

This study guide originally produced by **Mennonite Media**
A department of Mennonite Mission Network
1251 Virginia Avenue
Harrisonburg VA 22802-2497

©2005 Mennonite Mission Network.

More Web Resources

National Mental Health Association (NMHA)
(800) 969-6642
www.nmha.org

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)
(800) 950-NAMI
www.nami.org

Alcoholics Anonymous
www.alcoholics-anonymous.org (for meetings in your area)

American Association of Pastoral Counselors
www.aapc.org

Anabaptist Disabilities Network

www.adnetonline.org

Episcopal Mental Illness Network (EMIN)

www.eminnews.org

Mental Health Ministries

www.MentalHealthMinistries.net