

Mental Health in Families and Communities of Color

Mental health is part of overall health, but talking about it is not easy in every family or community. In some communities of color, strong stigma, cultural beliefs, or past harm from health systems can make mental health feel like a private or unsafe topic. If this feels familiar to you, but you would like to talk about your or your loved ones' mental health, here is how you can start respectful conversations.

Starting Safe and Supportive Conversations

When stigma is strong, how you start a conversation matters. Choose a calm time and a private place where your loved ones do not feel rushed. Try to speak from your own experience instead of using clinical terms or labels. Saying something like “I’ve been feeling stressed and worn down” can feel safer than naming a diagnosis right away.

Keep your language simple and respectful. Avoid blame or judgment, even if you feel hurt or misunderstood. Listening closely can be just as important as speaking. Open and clear communication can help build understanding and trust around mental health concerns (National Institute of Mental Health).

Not every conversation will go well. That does not mean you failed. Even small moments of honesty can open the door to future talks.

Finding Culturally Grounded Support

Support does not always start in a clinic. Many people feel safer first talking with someone who understands their culture or values. This might be a close friend, sibling, elder, faith leader or community mentor. These trusted connections often offer comfort, a common language and lived understanding.

Strong social support can reduce stress and protect mental health (CDC). If professional care feels like too big of a step, starting with familiar support is still meaningful.

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Minority communities may face trauma from racial discrimination, immigration stress, language barriers and displacement. Some may also feel the affects of the “model minority” myth and the challenges of multiple racial identities.

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Encouraging a Loved One to Seek Help

Talking with a loved one of color about mental health can feel delicate. Focus on care, not correction. Use language that shows concern, such as “I care about you and want you to feel better.” Try to connect help to shared values like faith, strength, family or balance.

Avoid pressuring or arguing. Instead, offer support with next steps, like helping find a provider or sitting with them during a call. Culturally informed and respectful approaches can improve trust and willingness to seek care (SAMHSA).

Remember that readiness varies. You can offer support without forcing change.

Setting Gentle Boundaries

Sometimes family members may dismiss mental health concerns or say they are not real. It is okay to protect yourself. Decide what you are willing to talk about and what feels off limits. Calm statements like “This is important to me, even if we see it differently” can help set boundaries without conflict.

You may also choose to pause or step away from conversations that feel harmful. Boundaries are not disrespectful. They are a form of self-care.

Moving Forward

Mental health, culture and healing can exist together. Talking about mental health in families of color often takes time, patience and courage. Asking for help is a sign of strength. You may have access to support that can respect your values and lived experiences. You deserve care and conversations that honor who you are.

#MinorityMentalHealthMatters #NotaCharacterFlaw

If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health issue, help is out there. Contact the Mental Health America 24/7 Crisis Text Line (Text MHA to 741-741).

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