



MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Updates and Information from the Atlantic County Office

National Wellness Month

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

SAY CHEESE!
Pictures from IFSS
Summer Luncheon

PAGE 3

FINDING WELLNESS AT 70

PAGE 4

NEWS BRIEFS
(little...but BIG bites of info)

PAGE 6

**WELLNESS BULLETIN
BOARD**

PAGE 9

BACK-TO-SCHOOL
Helpful call lines,
social media tips, and more

PAGE 10

Holding On To Hope

A mother shares inspiring new milestones seen in her daughter who was diagnosed with a serious mental illness more than 15 years ago

BY BETH WADE

Public Relations Specialist

Her warm, maternal smile brightens the room when Sharon describes her daughter as the “star of the neighborhood” in their 55+ community. She’s a beloved, well-liked thirty-something with a fondness for people and their pets.

To Sharon, her daughter is the “sweetest, kindest, most giving woman” she knows. And, coming from a person who has passed her 70th birthday, that’s saying a lot. Recently her third-born shined as a caregiver to her when she recovered from surgery.

“She tied my shoes, cooked, cleaned -- she was terrific,” said Sharon. “I am really blessed.”

Her daughter is also a person who, for a period, heard friendly voices that turned dark, slipped into a comatose state, and was hospitalized four times. She’s a survivor of a suicide attempt.

All of that – and countless other bumps in the road since Jennifer’s college-age breakdown – is not lost on her mother. Those were difficult years, fraught with worry and fear of the unknown.

“Life can change in a moment,” she says, pausing. “I wasn’t sure if I’d ever have my daughter back.”

Life today is not how Sharon envisioned nearly 20 years ago while running a successful business and sending her daughter off to study at college. All signs pointed to a bright future for Jennifer who was a Type A person, hard-working, motivated, and self-disciplined. She was living in a sorority house and working on graduating with a degree in fashion design when Sharon got the call from the house

continued on page 2

“
Life can change in a moment. I wasn't sure if I'd ever have my daughter back.
”



*Sunflowers
symbolize
loyalty and
admiration.*

mother that Jennifer seemed to be on drugs – not talking sense and acting out of character.

Nope. Not her daughter. She knew that something else was wrong.

Stressors at school including drama among the sorority sisters as well as family genetics collided – and Jennifer was smack in the middle of that intersection.

On Jennifer’s father’s side of the family, there is a history of mental illness. His mother and brother had lived with bipolar disorder, and one attempted suicide. Sharon said prior to the breakdown at college Jennifer had been treated for depression in her early teen years following the divorce of Sharon and her then husband. At 18, Jennifer was diagnosed with ADHD.

All that was true, but no one had an inkling of the serious illness that was to come. During the worst of those years, Jennifer stopped talking for a period and remained in a catatonic state. Other times, she’d scream periodically through the night. Another heartbreak -- Jennifer suffered a psychiatric episode during the year her sister got married. At one point, a member of Jennifer’s treatment team suggested that her brain trauma was significant and permanent.

Her initial diagnosis was bipolar 1, which later changed to schizo-affective disorder. (Her mother explained that .4 percent of the population who have ADHD and take an antidepressant develop bipolar).

“You can never cure mental illness,” said Sharon. “But knowledge is power.”

And learned she did.

She took a course provided by NAMI called Family to Family and participated in NAMI’s Connections Group. She credits and celebrates what that organization did for her – they helped her understand and support Jennifer

as well as care for herself and provide an essential community of support through peers. She also learned the importance of a Psychiatric Advanced Directive, which enabled doctors to speak with Sharon when Jennifer was hospitalized and unwell.

Currently Sharon also works with Gail Christian, our IFSS Director, who is helping Sharon work through some feelings and relationship strain associated with one of her other children who disagrees with the current living arrangement between Sharon and Jennifer. A few years ago, Jennifer’s mental health declined following a tapering of one medicine combined with grief/loss and then a lump which turned out to be cancer. The stress led to one occasion of uncharacteristic aggression (a push as she fled in panic), though Sharon says she wasn’t seriously hurt in the incident. That family rift is painful, but Sharon remains hopeful for it to heal. She hopes, as she always does.

In addition to NAMI and IFSS, Sharon credits two great psychiatrists who were able to come up with the right combination of meds and who allowed Sharon to be a part of Jennifer’s appointments. (Jennifer also became involved in NAMI’s peer-to-peer support meetings.)

Jennifer’s life is full these days. She’s immersed and active in her community where she enjoys tennis, gardening, cooking, and art lessons, according to her mother. She’s attempted work a few times – and as her ability to focus and read continues to improve, Sharon said employment may become a possibility.

The pair sometimes travel together. In one treasured mother-daughter photo, the two are on a balcony with water behind them. The sun was shining that day but is eclipsed by the affection you feel between these two women, these survivors.

“She’s a joy to me,” said Sharon. “We enjoy one another’s company, and the simple things.”

Sharon is the type of person who sees and appreciates the joys in day-to-day life. That’s her nature – and Jennifer’s, too. Jennifer’s incredible inner strength continues to buoy her, said Sharon.

Recently more milestones in Jennifer’s recovery have been met. Her mother says that after many years Jennifer can once again read and comprehend words. Her ability to connect with people on an emotional level has also returned. Concentration, too, is markedly improved.

Again, that warm, maternal, hopeful smile appears.

“I don’t dwell on the past,” she said. “Never, ever give up, there is always hope.” ●

Note: the names in this story have been changed to protect their privacy

SUMMER

Family Luncheon 2023

About 30 families members in our Intensive Family Support Services program gathered with staff to enjoy this year's summer luncheon. MHA Atlantic plans events like this to provide families an opportunity for camaraderie.

This year's event was held at Fred and Ethel's Lantern Light Tavern in Galloway. Special thanks to the host and service staff who made the day feel special.

The next luncheon will be held in winter.

For more information about the program, please contact Gail Christian at gchristian@mhanj.org or 609.517.8614.



“ It's important that people come together in a relaxing atmosphere outside the home to socialize and interact. ”

Gail Christian
IFSS Program Coordinator

FOR THIS SENIOR, NO EXPIRATION DATE ON DISCOVERING WELLNESS

BY BETH WADE

Public Relations Specialist

To recognize National Wellness Month, we are spotlighting a senior standout from Atlantic County who found his way to MHANJ online groups through a therapist. He asked not to be identified in this story in order to protect the privacy of his family.

When a cardiologist said his symptoms of AFIB were aggravated by his anxiety and trauma, “Bud” took the first step toward recovery for his mental health – at age 70.

For Bud, the availability of virtual medical appointments proved to be a gift from the pandemic -- he was not driving much anymore and living with agoraphobia. First, he tackled the challenge of learning enough about technology to attend online therapy through AtlantiCare and succeeded. When the therapist suggested he try virtual groups through United By Wellness, UBW, he did that, too, and found supplemental help through peers.

For about 3 years, he attended a variety of groups, among them meditation, anxiety, Humanist Recovery, and gratitude.

“The experience was beneficial, very positive,” he said. “I kept on growing during that time. My only regret is it didn’t happen at age 40.”

Looking back, he says that being in groups with people of all ages helped him improve his empathy and compassion. In his family, multiple generations are affected by mental health disorders. Being able to pose questions to facilitators in the chats helped him understand their experiences and support loved ones.

He also appreciated each facilitator for their ability to run a meeting, maintain composure, keep boundaries and focus. As a person who appreciates a good analogy, he used one to explain how he saw facilitators during group, “They control the vehicle while riding on bumpy ground.”

A side benefit of the group experience was that one facilitator, Bern Trendler, who ran the meditation group, encouraged him to go back to school and finish his degree in Liberal Arts. Bud has taken 5 classes like Philosophy, Food and Culture, and Hindu Ayurveda during the past two years. (He earned three As, one B+ and one B.) Bud has 11 more credits to take in order to graduate.

Recently Bud called MHA Atlantic to say he appreciated Bern’s encouragement and what UBW did for him. He also wanted to tell another facilitator, Emily McCall, that a book she’d recommended to him made a difference in the way he could relate to and support a family member.

Another reason he picked up the phone – he was seeking a resource for someone who reached out to him for help.



Bud is 74 now. He is still learning, still helping, still telling stories peppered with endearing analogies.

He acknowledged how hard it was to control PTSD, agoraphobia, anxiety and substance use disorder for a long time – too long. Reflecting on it, he picked an analogy (very fitting), and said that the experience was “like catching four baseballs with two hands.”

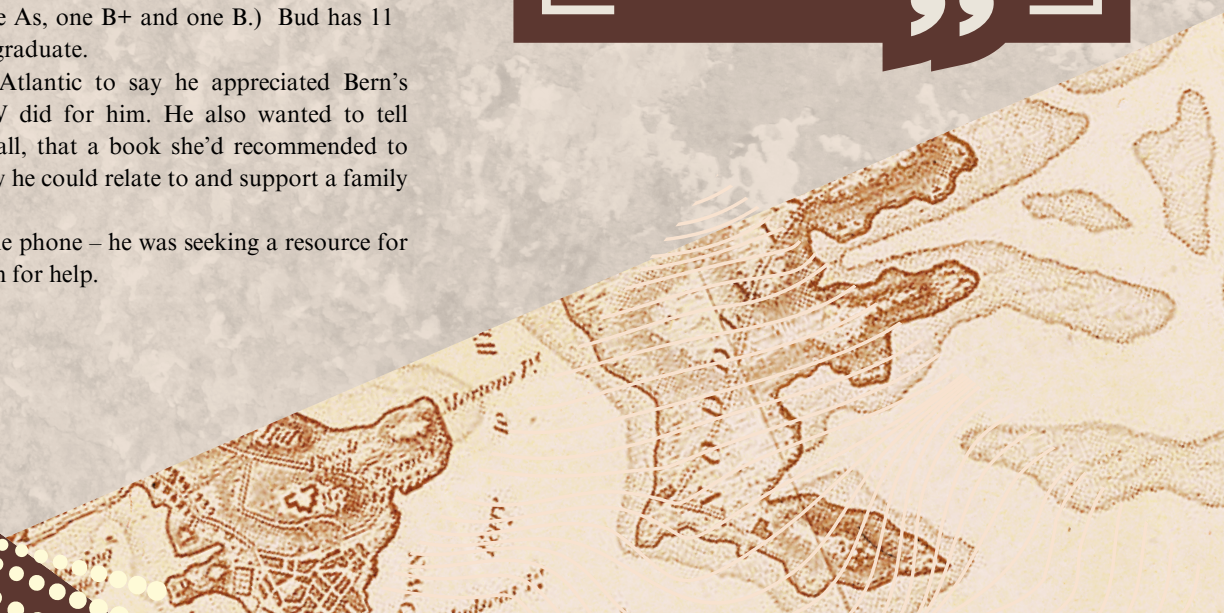
To this remarkable senior wellness “athlete” of sorts, we wave our caps in the air today. Happy National Wellness Month, sir.

“

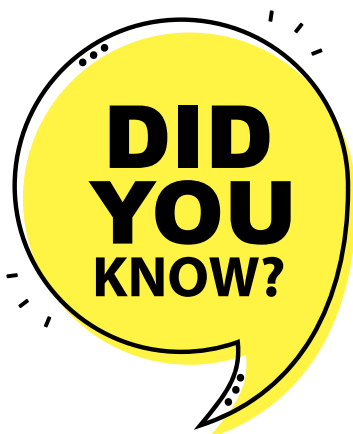
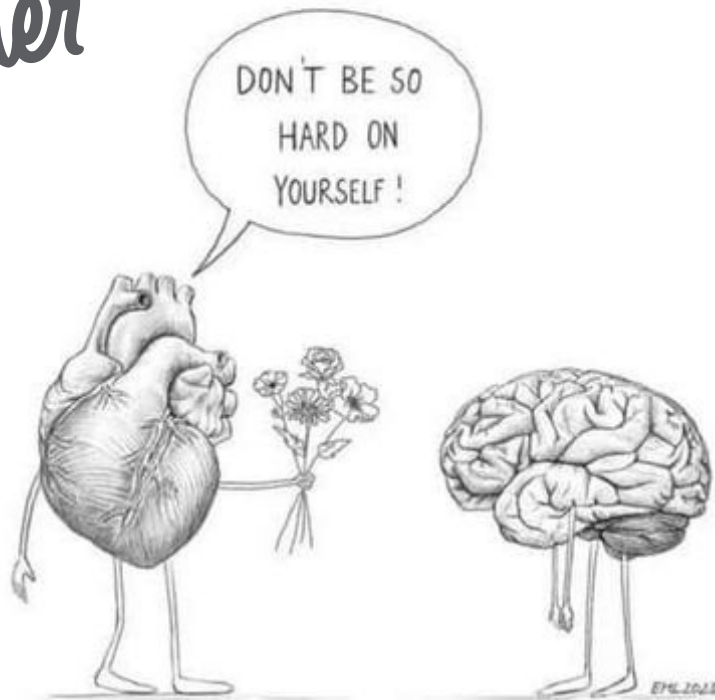
His inquisitive and open mind was consistently inspiring to witness! He is an inspiration to us all, showing that it’s never too late to heal and learning is lifelong. He made our groups shine with his great sense of humor, stories of his rich life experiences, and his example of applying what he learned in groups.

Bern Trendler

”



Reminder



Our website includes a large section of resources!



www.mhaac.info

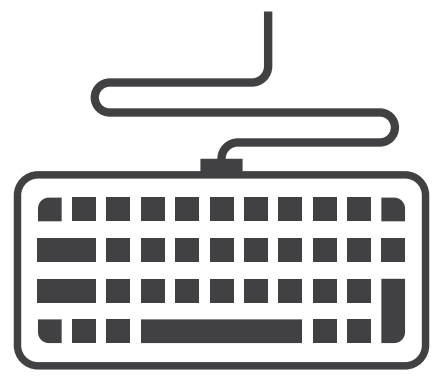
On the toolbar, go to "GET HELP" then click on "Atlantic County"

HOME WHAT WE DO COMMUNITY COLLABORATION UNITED BY WELLNESS **GET HELP** ABOUT DONATE

- Advocacy Services
- Boarding Home
- Cable Internet
- Consumer Run Services
- Clutter/ Finding&Keeping/ Hoarding Disorder
- Dental
- Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
- Emergency Mental Health Services
- Energy Assistance
- Family Support Services
- Free/Low Cost Events
- Funeral & Grief Resources
- General Education
- Homelessness
- Help and Hotline Numbers
- Housing and Rental Assistance
- Intergenerational Services
- Integrated Case Management
- Job Readiness
- Legal Services
- Life Line
- LGBTQIA+
- Medicaid/ Medicare
- Neurodivergent Resources
- Outpatient Counseling & Medication
- PACT
- PAAD
- Partial Care
- Public Benefits
- Substance Use and Addictions
- Transportation
- Therapist (see Outpatient Counseling & Medication)
- Types of Therapy
- Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) & Psychiatric Advanced Directive (PAD)

NEWS

briefs



Fall Programming from Cape Atlantic Caregiver Coalition

The Cape Atlantic Caregiver Coalition will be offering programming through the Atlantic County Library System on the topic of "Self-Care for the Caregiver."

In September, the presentation is scheduled at various library branches: Sept. 14 at 2 pm in Galloway; Sept. 19 at 2 pm in Ventnor; Sept 21 at 2:30 pm in Hammonton; and Sept. 26 at 2 pm in Somers Point.

"Often times as caregivers, we put our own wellbeing aside and in doing so we are at risk of negatively impacting our mental and physical health which can diminish our quality of life," said Gail Christian, one of the presenters. "We are no longer the best caregiver we can be in this scenario."

As a founding member of the coalition, MHA Atlantic and staff here will be among the presenters. Later in fall, members of the coalition will present on the subject, "Managing Grief During the Holidays." Information will be in the October and November newsletters.

If you are a caregiver to a person of any age, the coalition can help with support, referrals, and resources. For more information, email CapeAtlanticCaregivers@gmail.com or call 609-652-3800 ext. 301.

The Return of In-person Groups

The MHA Atlantic ICE Wellness Center is hosting four groups in various locations in the county. These groups are provided in addition to the dozens that are offered virtually by United By Wellness, the MHANJ online wellness center.

The in-person groups in Atlantic County are: **Living in the Moment** 10:30 am on Wednesdays at our office (4 E. Jimmie Leeds Rd., Galloway); **Women Survivors of Workplace Abuse** at C.R.O.P.S. 2101 Atlantic Ave., Atlantic City Fridays at 3 pm; **Eating Disorders and Disordered Eating** at ARC Community Garden, 1311 N. Main Street, Pleasantville, Mondays at 5 pm; and **Better Together**, a group for individuals who live with both a mental and physical health challenges, Oceanside II Family Success Center, 3201 Atlantic Ave., Atlantic City, 4 pm on Thursdays.

Coordinator named for MHANJ's virtual wellness center

An MHA Atlantic staff member, Seth Edwards, has accepted the position as Coordinator of United By Wellness, UBW. Seth has been involved with the agency since December 2021 through several positions including volunteer group facilitator and Peer



Support Specialist. Recently he earned a WRAP Level II Facilitator certification through MHANJ Consumer Connections.

In this new role, Seth will work closely with the center's 35 facilitators by providing support, arranging training, and debriefing staff about challenging situations that arise in group. In addition, he will monitor the needs of UBW membership and seek ways to improve their experience through one-to-one conversation and feedback from surveys. His experience with technology and Zoom made him a good fit for this new position, according to UBW leadership. Seth will be responsible for creating and sending the daily UBW newsletter to participants.

"My goals are to make the group experience accessible, reliable, authentic, empowering, and most importantly, valuable," he said.

United By Wellness is the online, statewide wellness center provided by MHANJ. More than 1,400 individuals have registered to use the center, which was established during the pandemic. Daily groups are provided (including weekends) related to mental health, substance use disorder, and wellness.

Seth studied psychology at Stockton University where he was in several leadership roles in the Active Minds chapter.

Prior to Seth, Ashleigh Zappala had been responsible for most day-to-day UBW operations. Ashleigh has started graduate school and shifted gears to work as a Peer Specialist.

Seth can be reached at 609-652-3800 ext. 302 or sedwards@mhanj.org.



Join

Atlantic Center for Independent Living &
Mental Health Association Atlantic County

For Our

CIVIC ACTION & ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE ADVISORY GROUP

Tues., September 12, 2023
AT 4:30-5:30PM



[https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82937548941?
pwd=VnUvRlFtenhpeFVXZ1FwZ3dtVTF6Zz09#success](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82937548941?pwd=VnUvRlFtenhpeFVXZ1FwZ3dtVTF6Zz09#success)

Meeting ID 829 3754 894

Passcode: 252125

OR

Mental Health Association
4E Jimmie Leeds Rd. Ste. 8
Galloway, NJ 08205



- Share your personal experience with advocating & civic engagement
- Brainstorm how to better engage disability communities

Please give two weeks notice for any requested accommodations to attend the meeting.
Contact Patti Kuhn pkuhn@atlanticcil.org 609-748-ABLE Press 1

MHA - Acute Care Family Program

Support and assistance for families with a loved one in crisis and in need of linkage to treatment and other services.

**7 days per week
Available 8 am to 8 pm
609-517-8614**

Our team engages families who are often navigating the mental health system for the first time. Staff educate families about mental illness and offer resources and referrals that can help their loved one

**When your family needs help...
we are a phone call away
609-517-8614**



NAMI Hosts Monthly Support Group in Somers Point

NAMI Family Support is a support group for adults (18+) with a loved one with a mental health condition. Participants gain insight from the challenges and successes of others facing similar experiences in an empathetic and supportive environment.

**Register online at namiacm.org
or call (609) 741-5125.**

Meeting held the 2nd Monday of the month in St. Joseph's Catholic Church, 606 Shore Road, Somers Point, 7 to 8:30 p.m.

Peer Run Support Groups



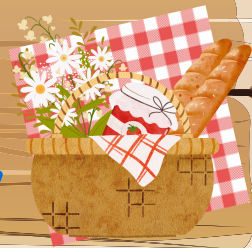
United By Wellness (UBW) is a virtual wellness center where peers offer hope and skills for recovery to people living with mental illness and/or substance use disorder. This is accomplished by providing support, education and advocacy in a safe, and diverse community which embraces the uniqueness of its members and their chosen path toward recovery.

United By Wellness Center is a virtual center designed to engage all members to promote a sense of commonality... purpose...unity. Within the umbrella of the UBW community, members will be able to explore sub-communities for engagement depending on their interests or needs.

Join United By Wellness at
<https://mhaac.info/ubw-how-to-join.html>
More than 30 weekly groups offered

**Your NAMI Connection is a recovery support group for adults (18+) who have experienced symptoms of a mental health condition or a dual diagnosis. Participants gain the support of peers who understand their experience and gain insight into others' challenges and successes.
(See NAMI above for date/time/location)**

August Wellness Bulletin Board



Qigong classes - gentle, mindful movements

Adult virtual class Fridays 11 am
register at acfpl.org

Summer class at O'Donnell Park, AC
Wednesdays 5 pm

Senior Class age 60+
Absecon Senior Center Tuesdays 10 am

Ventnor Cultural Arts Center

Classes in pottery, watercolors/mixed media, oils and acrylics, pastels, jewelry making. Ballroom dancing for beginners.
\$20 per class
609.823.7952

Local Events

Open Mic
Ventnor Coffee
Thursdays 6:30-9pm
108 N. Dorset, Ventnor



Fireworks
Tropicana - beachfront
Saturdays at 10 pm



Weekly Tues and Sun 8 am to 4 pm
Admission and parking are always free.
Donations accepted

SERENDIPITY DAY

Friday, August 18

Look for and appreciate the unexpected delights in life. 'Serendipity' is a happy accident or a pleasant surprise.

National Immunizations Month

This quick worksheet/quiz can help you find out if you're up-to-date

Vaccines are recommended for adults based on age, health conditions, job, and other factors.



Back to School

And Mental Health

Helping Cultivate Healthy Social Media Use With Youth

Content from Mental Health America



Parents and schools have a tough job—the goal isn't to keep students off social media altogether, but to support them in developing healthy social media behaviors. Here are a few tips.

Celebrate the positives. When youth feel judged or misunderstood about their social media use, they're likely to get defensive or shut down. Make sure to point out how great it is that they were able to connect with their friends and family who live far away, or comment on how helpful it must be to reach most of their classmates for an emergency study buddy.

Ask questions. Most youths know way more about social media than the adults in their life. And they definitely know more about what exactly they're doing online. Instead of starting conversations by talking about the harms or effects of social media, be open and curious about their unique experiences with it.

Promote limiting screen time. Excessive time on the internet and social media has been linked to poorer mental health outcomes like depression, anxiety, and loneliness. Younger children will need more help with this—consider setting time limits or media-free zones. As children get older, support them in managing their own usage—encourage them to dedicate time to offline activities or help them update their phone settings to limit time on certain apps (instructions for iPhone and Android).

Model healthy use. Young people notice what adults are doing more than we may think, including being told to get off their devices while the adults in their life seem just as obsessed. It can be tempting to try to manage their use, but you're better off modeling healthy habits (age dependent, of course). Studies have shown that parental use of digital technology, rather than their attitudes toward it, determines how their children will engage with it.

Friend/follow your kids' accounts. Your kids—especially teenagers—might resist you monitoring their social media, but it's important that you're (somewhat) informed of what's happening in their online world. Explain your reasoning, listen to their hesitations, and let them set boundaries. Your virtual relationship with your child is an entirely new one, so be patient. Your best bet to build trust is to stay in the background: Don't comment or like their posts unless they want you to, let the little things slide, and be ready to have offline conversations about the important things.

Parent Call lines
National Parent Helpline 1-855-427-2736
1-800-THE-KIDS (843-5437)

Youth Call Lines
Age 10-24 Call or text 888-222-2228
Trevor Project - LGBTQ youth
Text: START to 678-678
Call 1-866-488-7386



Online Screening for Parents and Youth

mhaac.info/screening

Here's a sample of the survey.

The questionnaire can be used to see if a child is having emotional, attentional, or behavioral difficulties.

Blames others for his/her troubles

NEVER SOMETIMES OFTEN

Feels hopeless

NEVER SOMETIMES OFTEN

Does not understand other people's feelings

NEVER SOMETIMES OFTEN



Tips & conversation starters for youth about mental health

Watch for reactions - slow down or back up if the youth looks confused or upset

Speak at a level that's age appropriate

Discuss the topic when the child feels safe and comfortable

Communicate in a straightforward manner

Listen openly. Let the youth tell you about his/her feelings and worries

Can you tell me more about what is happening? How are you feeling?

Have you had feelings like this in the past?

I'm worried about your safety. Can you tell me if you have thoughts about harming yourself or anyone else?

Do you feel like you want to talk to someone else about your problem?

Sometimes you need to talk to an adult about how you're feeling. I'm here to listen. How can I help?

Tips from www.MentalHealth.gov

Screening includes:

Mental Health Info & Resources for Parents

HOW CAN I HELP A LOVED ONE WITH BIPOLAR?

HOW CAN I HELP A LOVED ONE WITH ANXIETY?

HOW CAN I HELP A LOVED ONE WITH PTSD?

IS BIPOLAR GENETIC?

Plus many helpful articles!

