

Guided into Family Grace

Practical, Christ-centered guidance
for your family's mental health journey



GRACE ALLIANCE

HEALTHY SOLUTIONS FOR YOUR MIND



GRACE ALLIANCE

The Grace Alliance is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization providing simple and innovative Christian mental health resources and programs for families and individuals experiencing mental health challenges and to equip the Body of Christ with active community support and leadership tools.

The Grace Alliance

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Understanding the Experience

Understanding mental health challenges or mental illness can be a defining moment for many. However, it is good to remember the balance between having a mental health disorder vs. the diagnosis becoming a full, personal identity.

What is a mental illness?

Mental illness is ...

“Genetic or circumstantial factors causing a disruption in the brain affecting a person’s thoughts, moods, behaviors, and relationships. The severity of symptoms requires professional treatment, whole health (holistic) care, and life-giving community support.”

Mental illness is NOT...

... an identity.

God never defines or sees your loved one as an illness. God lavishes them with unmeasured grace. God’s grace pours out love and redefines us as worthy. Grace is now our new constant identity and worth, forever positioning you with love, mercy, and unending grace. Their illness does not change the way God views or loves your family member.

... your fault or failure.

As parents, spouses and families, it can be easy to blame yourself for what your loved one is experiencing. We all make mistakes, but that does not mean these mistakes are the sole cause or root problem of the disorder. You are not being cruelly punished or judged by God. God is love and that is His constant nature toward you and your loved one.

Can your loved one recover from mental illness?

We can approach mental illness in a similar way that we would approach any other physical injury or illness: by looking at the whole body to develop a plan for care (whole-health approach).

The journey towards mental health is a strength-based and whole-health (holistic) process of change that focuses on rebuilding:

- + **Self-worth and purpose**
- + **Self-management and whole-health lifestyle for symptom relief**
- + **Life-giving community support**
- + **Pure and simple rest in God's love and grace**

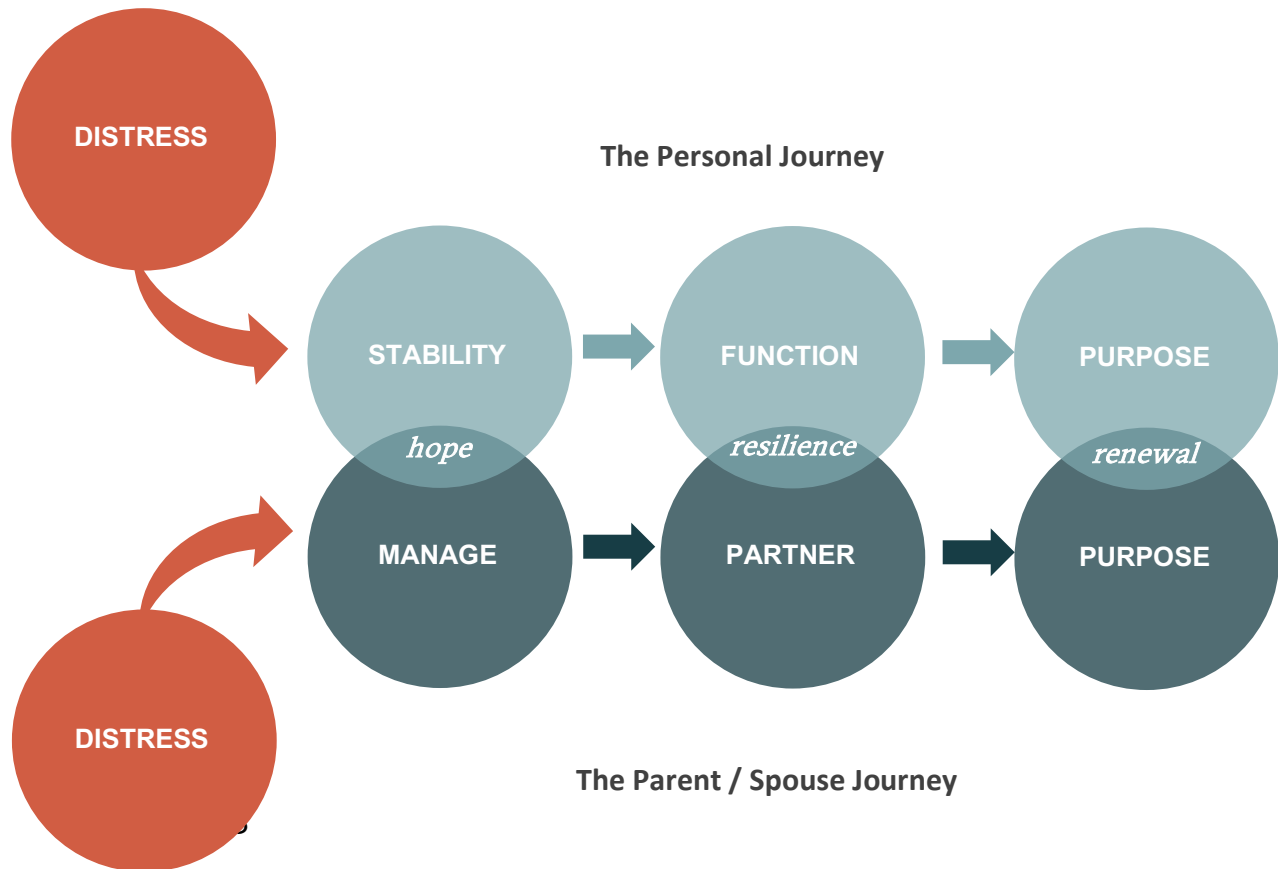
There are no easy answers and no list of action points that will be effective in every situation. Sometimes, it may feel frustrating and confusing, but this guide will reaffirm that you and your loved one are moving in the right direction.

In this book, we are giving guidance for the journey, not specific tasks to achieve complete mental health.

In every part of the journey, remember to walk in God's grace that He has lavished upon us.

Mental Health Recovery is a continuum of growth.

Mental health is not just about achieving specific steps. It is a process that takes time, faith and patience – a continuum of growth. The diagram below represents this continuum of mental health and what the growth looks like as you walk alongside your loved one.



DISTRESS (Immobilized)

The marriage and family are in **distress** due to the ongoing difficulties with loved one.

STABILITY & MANAGE (Hope)

Life is still difficult and you are helping manage life together. You may be carrying more responsibility as your loved one regains **stability**.

FUNCTION & PARTNER (Resilience)

Life is more manageable and your loved one can now **function** more on their own. You partner alongside for support, not management.

PURPOSE FOR BOTH (Renewal)

Life has new meaning with your loved one – a renewed life. Your relationship has new resilience to maintain healthy lives and God's **purpose**.



Understanding the Needs

God created each of us as complex, unique beings with physical, mental, spiritual and relational needs. As you develop a plan to help with your loved one's needs, it is just as important to be aware of your own needs. Setting up healthy plans for yourself will be one of the best things you can do to help your loved one.

What is “whole-health”?

The Whole-Health Approach and Needs

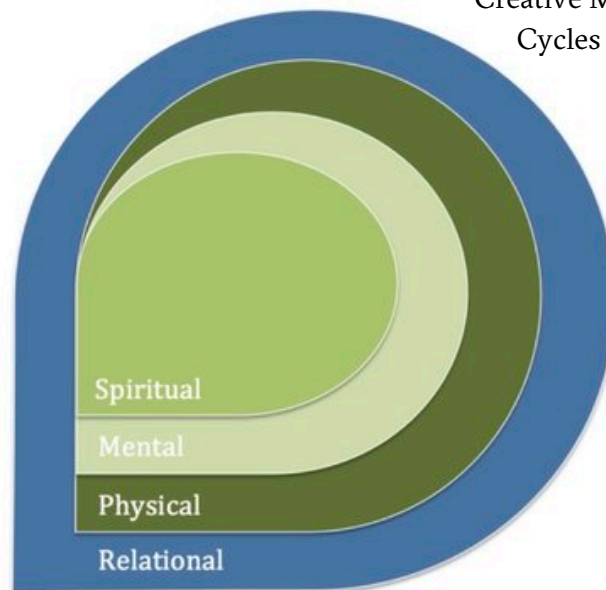
As you help your loved one address their individual needs, here are some areas to consider. These topics are addressed in the free e-book for individuals experiencing a mental health difficulty and they are discussed in-depth with accompanying education, self-evaluation and tools in our [Thrive Workbook](#).

Spiritual Needs:

- Identity
- Spiritual Growth
- Prayer

Mental Needs:

- Psychotherapy/Counseling
- Healthy Thinking
- Positive Coping/Stress Management
- Creative Mental Activities
- Cycles and Triggers



Physical Needs:

- Sleep
- Medication
- Relaxation
- Nutrition
- Exercise

Relational Needs:

- Encouragement
- Supportive Listening
- Opportunities to Serve Community

What are your needs?

Self-Care Compassion

It can be easy for the spouse or family member to over-extend themselves caring for their loved one without taking care of themselves, which can lead to exhaustion and burn out, also called “compassion fatigue.”

1. Take care of yourself.

Be intentional with your own whole-health care. Be creative and simple to find rest and ask for help from others. With rest, you can love well.

- **Physical:** Make sure you are eating well, getting enough sleep, exercising regularly.
- **Friends:** Stay connected to supportive relationships.
- **Hobbies:** Don't give up your hobbies; let them rejuvenate you.
- **Routine:** As much as possible, keep your daily structure and routine; don't let the situation take all your attention or make you feel consumed.

2. Stay positive with Grace, there is hope.

When properly treated and supported, your loved one can live a happy and productive life! Even if your loved one is unwilling to receive care, being part of a supportive community can help you keep a hope-filled perspective (Grace Groups – see [pg. 13](#)).

3. Rest in God's character.

Focus on God's loving nature and character to be faithful to us, even in troubling times. Keep in mind that God gives these to you, He never demands this of you or your loved-one.

- **He is our Comforter, validating pain and giving new hope**
Psalm 119:76; Romans 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18
- **Peace is our new state of being and we always have it with God**
Psalm 29:11; John 16:33; Romans 5:1; Romans 15:13; 2 Thessalonians 3:16
- **Love is His constant toward you and your loved one**
John 3:16-17; John 16:27; Ephesians 3:17b-19; 1 John 4:8, 16; Revelation 1:5

4. Keep prayer a partnership.

You may feel like the burden of your loved one's condition depends on your faithful prayers and petitions. You may even feel like your prayers have to move mountains, get a breakthrough, and see miracles. Understand that God doesn't put the success or failure of your loved one's condition on the success of your faithfulness and prayers. If that were the case, then that would make God a task-master blaming us for our loved one's failures or praising us for their success! We are partnering with God's faithfulness! Our prayers are co-laboring His faithfulness to work in our loved one's life. Your prayers for your loved one's wellness is the same deep, passionate desire of God, yet His ways will be unique to every unique person. This journey will feel like "unanswered prayers," but see this as one person with a difficult mental health disorder once said about God working in his life: "It's more about slow miracles."

First, know that Jesus is the intercessor for you. He is always for you, never against you or your loved one. Second, keep prayer simple and real as it pertains to your life and your loved one. In other words, if you care about it, He cares about it, so talk to Him about it!

- **Jesus interceding for you**
Luke 22:31-32; Romans 8:27; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 4:15; Hebrews 7:24-25
- **Asking for strength & perspective when feeling weak**
Mark 9:24; Romans 8:15; Romans 8:26; Ephesians 2:18; Colossians 1:9-12
- **Asking for you & your loved one's well-being (relationships & needs)**
John 15:12-16; Ephesians 3:14-16; Ephesians 6:18; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Hebrews 13:18-19

*The same spiritual perspectives are reviewed in the "**Guided into Living Grace Guide**" to help have the same like-minded and grace-filled approach.

4. Let yourself off the hook.

As a family member, it is not your responsibility to fix your loved one. God never intended for you to have the ability to fix your loved one on your own. You can be part of their mental health recovery continuum ([pg. 7](#)) to help manage, partner, and renew purpose.

5. Develop reasonable expectations.

Mental health recovery is a slow process. A quick fix or one-time treatment that takes care of all their symptom and problems does not exist. There will be good days and bad days. Try to remember, a bad day doesn't mean they are failing or going down-hill to disaster.

Here's a helpful tip about asking, "Did you take your medication?"

If you can tell they are having a hard time, instead of first asking if they took their medication or if they are applying their therapy tools, ask if they are having a bad day or rough time and just listen. Sometimes just sharing what's going on can help them get back on track.

However, like most family members or spouses, you are probably still worrying if they took their medication and can't handle not asking, right?! It's better to ask after they feel heard. BUT, if you do want to ask, ask about the medication efficacy:

"Do you feel like the medication is working ... does it still feel awkward or hard taking the medication ... or is it just a bad day?"

Asking in this manner is inviting rather than pushing expectations. They might share with you they didn't take their medication or they did. If they didn't, then you can reassure them that their situation or condition might change a little by taking a helpful medication. Be sensitive with the medication question because most people are frustrated having to take psychotropic medications, endure the side-effects, and then feel their approval is based only on taking their medication. Be patient with grace for yourself and your loved one's journey with rough days.

5. Acknowledge your grief.

Your loved one's disorder will require time to grieve the loss of how life used to be and the effect on the future. **These emotions are normal and they are important to process.**

- **Shock & Denial:** Feeling it's just a phase or that you can fix it.
- **Sadness & Anger:** The emotions of your loved one's condition goes through painful disappointment and discouraging feelings.
- **Judging & Bartering:** Trying to find the reasons or the roots of why this happened and making deals with God to alleviate it all.
- **Resolve:** Understanding, accepting and finding ways to manage life with your loved one's condition and even being willing to help others with similar situations.

Community Support

1. Join a support group.

You are not alone. Regularly attending a support group, like our Family Grace Group, will allow you to educate yourself about mental health, learn practical skills and tools for navigating daily life and give you an opportunity to serve and support others dealing with similar circumstances.

2. Seek out a faith community.

While some churches may not fully understand what you are experiencing, that doesn't stop them from taking the time to show you supportive love. Find supportive people who can encourage you, and don't be afraid to let them know how they can specifically help you. Isolation can bring frustration and fatigue, but an active and supportive faith community cultivates life.

Healthy Boundaries

1. Create a refuge with positive boundaries.

Healthy boundaries must be put into place so that you don't give allowance to destructive behaviors. Boundaries exist to help your loved one develop security and a safe and healthy lifestyle, not to take away freedom or build fear and guilt. Instead of focusing on tough love, focus on the grace needs, such as:

- + Grace to find ... better professional care and support.
- + Grace to find ... a better schedule and routine.
- + Grace to find ... manageable responsibilities.
- + Grace to find ... healthy and respectful communication.
- + Grace to find ... healthy relationships/community support.

2. Create boundaries for attitude and language.

While struggling with a mental illness, your loved one may become irritable, explosive and/or use explicit language. This can create a tense and unsafe home environment and cannot be tolerated. **Utilize the communication tool in the Family Grace Group workbook to help diffuse difficult interactions.*

3. Create boundaries for aggression.

People with mental health or serious mental illness are no more violent than the rest of the population. However, if aggression or violence starts, discuss the boundaries of this behavior and healthy coping options (talking to a therapist or mental health coach). If there is ever an immediate danger of being harmed, calling 9-1-1 must be an option.

4. Create boundaries for substance abuse.

Individuals with serious mental health concerns are at a higher risk of drug and alcohol abuse due to self-medicating and negative coping patterns. It is advisable to remove alcohol from your home to minimize the temptation to drink. The use of illegal drugs is not to be

tolerated. The abuse of both alcohol and drugs will also make it difficult for any psychiatric medications and therapeutic processes to work effectively.

5. Create boundaries for negative relationships or influences.

Emphasize the value of healthy relationships that reinforce and encourage a healthy lifestyle rather than those that disregard your loved one's struggles, promote an unhealthy lifestyle and cause division in your relationships. If these friendships are abusive or involve illegal activity, talk with a professional therapist or attorney to understand what options you have to protect your loved one and marriage/family.

6. Create boundaries for finances.

If excessive spending becomes a problem, work together to find a better system of financial management. This may include a weekly allotment of cash or gift cards, limiting (or barring) access to credit/debit cards and being creative to figure out responsibility for paying bills.

7. Create boundaries for professional treatment.

Taking prescribed medications and going to scheduled psychiatrist and therapist appointments must be looked at as a boundary. Organize medications to make it easy for them to be taken regularly.

8. Determine freedoms and responsibilities.

Depending on the severity of your loved one's disorder, you may need to restrict use of a vehicle, phone and other freedoms around the home and community. This should be seen as a safety issue, not a punishment. This will take some time and energy, but it will lend towards building a healthier environment – a refuge.

*For more topics, tools and tips on communication and problem-solving, check out our [Family Grace Group workbook](#), which can be utilized in a small group setting or for personal use.



Understanding the Care

You have discovered there's a mental health problem, now what? Navigating the mental health care system and figuring out where to find the best help can be confusing and takes time. However, this

section will help guide you to the right care and show you that there is hope!

Where can we find help?

The Professionals

1. General Practitioner

Family Doctor or Physician who can do initial evaluation and refer you to a specialist.

2. Psychiatrist

Evaluates symptoms and prescribes and monitors medications for symptom reduction/relief.

3. Psychotherapist (PsyD/Ph.D.)

Works and specializes in mental health diagnoses (e.g., Cognitive Behavioral Therapy – CBT and other specialized therapy models).

4. Counselor (MFT/LPC/LCSW or LMSW/other)

Works with various therapy models for interpersonal and internal challenges. Some are qualified and specialize in mental health diagnoses by incorporating CBT and other specialized therapy models (ask).

5. Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP)

Professional therapeutic programs facilitated during the week (half/full days) with education and tools.

6. Certified Specialist Coach/Mental Health Coach (peers)

Certified to coach and work with mental health needs and often work in conjunction with professionals. Often used in state service programs. Peer services and coaches are effective with evidence-based research / results.

Community Support

Mental illness can often lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation. However, research shows that community is imperative to mental health recovery! Thankfully, there are some great options available and more are being introduced every day.

1. [Grace Alliance Grace Groups and Resources \(pg. 22\)](#)

We offer helpful, grace-filled resources and mental health curriculum for community small groups that work in any denomination and church.

2. [Fresh Hope Groups](#)

Family and loved ones in combined group with discussion centered on biblical tenets (scriptures) and mental health recovery principles.

3. [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#)

Free educational courses and support groups for those in the mental health journey and their families.

Christian Mental Health Support and Resources

The Grace Alliance: www.mentalhealthgracealliance.org

Hope and Healing Center and Institute: www.hopeandhealingcenter.org

Key Ministry: www.keyministry.org

Bright Tomorrows: www.brighttomorrows.org

Fresh Hope: www.freshhope.us

Focus on the Family: Thriving Pastor: www.thrivingpastor.com

General Support and Resources

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): www.nami.org

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH): www.nimh.nih.gov

WebMD: www.webmd.com

Psychology Today: www.psychologytoday.com

Psych Central: www.psychcentral.com

Child Mind Institute: www.childmind.org

How do I navigate the mental health care system and find community support?

1. Consult with a family physician / general practitioner.

Your loved one should have a complete physical and blood work evaluated for possible primary or secondary causes. They can consult with their doctor about recommendations and referrals to trusted psychiatrists. Many psychiatrists not accepting new patients will accept someone if referred by another physician. If they don't have a family physician or clinic, consult with any urgent medical care facility to conduct initial lab work evaluations and utilize their referrals to other professionals.

2. Find a psychotherapist / counselor and psychiatrist.

These mental health professionals are equipped to conduct psychological evaluations and start a process for care (medication, therapy, etc.). Quality mental health care should be purposeful, consistent and ongoing.

3. Find local community mental health support.

Seek out mental health agencies, organizations or ministries in your loved one's area and also your area that provide support, education and resources for both you and your loved one (The Grace Alliance, NAMI, Fresh Hope, etc.).

4. Develop a whole-health plan.

As you gather support and resources, help your loved one evaluate each area of life (mental, physical, spiritual and relational) to establish a care plan. For more information, refer to our [Thrive Workbook](#) or our [Family Grace](#) or [Living Grace](#) Group workbooks.

5. Know the acute crisis support and hospitalizations.

Many cities have a crisis response team to help provide an assessment during difficult times. Find these numbers at any local mental health agencies (NAMI affiliates or hospitals). If hospitalization is necessary, it usually only lasts 2-5 days (longer if needed).

Finances / Insurance

1. Insurance

Consult your loved one's insurance for doctors/therapists in their network. If they can't get an appointment, their family doctor can refer them to a psychiatrist and/or therapist.

2. No Insurance

Consult with the various family clinics or state-run services in your loved one's area that provide professional mental health services. Be patient because these state-run services are generally full and have a longer waiting period to see a professional.

3. Can't Afford Services

Look into government entitlement programs (SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, Medicare, food stamps, housing). This assistance will increase the number of mental health care options available.

Other Items to Be Aware Of

1. Release of Information Consent

If your loved one is over 18, the doctor/therapist can only talk to you if you have guardianship or your loved one has signed a release form. Don't force this. If you don't have a release form, you can still give any relevant information to their doctors.

2. Accompanying Your Loved One to Appointments

You will most likely only be brought into therapy appointments at key points decided upon by the professional and your loved one. When you do participate in appointments, prepare ahead of time and keep your comments and questions simple, focused and factual.

3. Keep Your Information Organized

There will be a lot of paperwork, so keep a record of your professional care, including:

- Dates of diagnoses
- Hospitalizations
- Copies of psych. assessments
- Medical records
- Contact info for doctors/therapists
- History of medication/treatments
- Insurance/Medicare/Medicaid info

How can the Grace Alliance help?

The Grace Alliance's mission is to provide simple and innovative Christian mental health resources and programs for families and individuals experiencing mental health challenges and to equip the Body of Christ with active community support and leadership tools.

The topics discussed in this book – in addition to other helpful topics, tools and tips – can all be found in greater detail in our various mental health workbooks.

Thrive Workbook

Simple, practical and hope-filled education and tools to guide you through your mental health journey.

Family Grace Group Workbook

A small group experience providing simple, innovative and grace-filled mental health solutions and community support for families, spouses and parents.

Living Grace Group Workbook

A small group experience providing simple, innovative and grace-filled mental health solutions and community support for those in the mental health journey.

Redefine Grace Group Workbook

A small group experience providing simple, innovative and grace-filled mental health solutions and community support for students.

Grace Alliance Blogs & Videos

Various blogs and videos discussing hot topics regarding faith and mental health from The Grace Alliance team and influential guest bloggers.

To purchase your copy of one of these resources, read our blog or find other resources, visit us at:

www.mentalhealthgracealliance.org