

DROP-IN ARTICLE

Do You Know What Mental Illness Feels Like?

We often hear the clinical terms used by doctors and other professionals to identify the symptoms of mental illnesses...but if someone hasn't gone through it, would they know how to recognize it?

So often, clinical terms don't do justice to what *life with a mental illness* feels like. We know that two people with the same diagnosis can experience the same symptom and describe it in very different ways. Understanding the signs of a mental illness and identifying how it can feel can be confusing—and sometimes can contribute to ongoing silence or hesitation to get help.

It's important for people to talk about how it feels to live with a mental illness. We know that mental illnesses are common and treatable, and help is available. But not everyone knows what to look for when they are going through those early stages, and many simply experience symptoms differently. We all need to speak up early—*Before Stage 4*—and in real, relatable terms so that people do not feel isolated and alone.

This May is Mental Health Month; [AFFILIATE NAME] is raising awareness of the importance of speaking up about mental health, and asking individuals to share what *life with a mental illness* feels like by tagging social media posts with *#mentalillnessfeelslike*. Posting with our hashtag is a way to speak up, to share your point of view with people who may be struggling to explain what they are going through—and to help others figure out if they too are showing signs of a mental illness.

Life with a Mental Illness is meant to help remove the shame and stigma of speaking out, so that more people can be comfortable coming out of the shadows and seeking the help they need. Whether you are in Stage 1 and just learning about those early symptoms, or are dealing with what it means to be in Stage 4, sharing how it feels can be part of your recovery.

[AFFILIATE] wants everyone to know that mental illnesses are real, that recovery is always the goal, and that the best prospects for recovery come when we act *Before Stage 4 (B4Stage4)*.

Addressing mental illnesses *B4Stage4* means more than burying feelings and refusing to talk about them, and waiting for symptoms to clear up on their own. *B4Stage4* means more than wishing that mental health problems aren't real, and hoping that they will never get worse. *B4Stage4* means more than thinking that someone on the edge of a crisis will always pull himself or herself back without our help, and praying that someone else will intervene before a crisis occurs.

B4Stage4 means, in part, talking about what mental illnesses feel like, and then acting on that information. It means giving voice to feelings and fears, and to hopes and dreams. It means empowering people as agents of their own recovery. And it means changing the trajectories of our own lives for the better, and helping those we love change theirs. So let's talk about what *life with a mental illness* feels like, to voice what we are feeling, and so others can know they are not alone.

