

Anxiously Engaged

Supplemental Lesson

Marriage and Mental Health

Introduction

Given that almost half of all adults (46.4 percent in the U.S.) will experience a mental illness during their lifetime, there's a good chance that one or the other of us in our marriage will have some season, short or long, of mental health challenges. This lesson is about taking a look at mental health together and being prepared to help each with mental health throughout marriage.

In Sickness and Health

Knowing that the Savior took “upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people” ([Alma 7:11](#)) helps us understand that pains and sicknesses are a part of life. None of us escapes the experience of sickness in some form along our marriage journey.

Some of that sickness may be in the form of mental health challenges. These can come from a mishmash of genetics, body chemistry, environment, diet, climate, experiences, etc. that are sometimes related to choices, and many times circumstances beyond our control. Trauma from natural disasters or other crises, betrayals or abuse, postpartum depression, general stress, physical injuries and illness, aging, and so on can cause changes in our mental health status.

In general, research suggests that marriage is a helpful environment for good mental health. As the bible teaches,

“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.”
([Ecclesiastes 4:9-12](#))

An important part of being one and being intentional in marriage is watching out for each other, checking in on mental health issues, talking openly, monitoring stress levels and helping mitigate and navigate challenges together however we can. As a spouse, we can be wise stewards over our own mental and emotional well being both by doing those things that help us keep up good mental health, and by letting our spouse be aware of and part of addressing our challenges.

Sometimes mental health challenges can strain our marital strength and marital distress can deteriorate our mental health. It's good to keep in mind that perception influences mental health, and mental health influences perception. If our spouse is suffering and behaving strangely, we can remember this was not necessarily a “bait and switch” in their personality, and keep working to see them and the situation with compassion, patience, and hope for the healing that is possible.



Activity #1: Check-in

Each of you take a minute to examine your current mental health by responding individually to this brief assessment, then discuss your responses together.

1. In the past few weeks I would say my mental health has been:

	Severely Challenged		Somewhat Challenged		Good		Very Good		Excellent
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2. In the past few weeks I have experienced feelings of depression (sadness, low-energy, discouragement, low motivation):

	Not at all (0 times)		Somewhat (1-2 times/week)		Moderately (3-4 times/week)		Frequently (5-6 times per week)		Extremely (Daily)
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3. In the past few weeks I have experience feelings of anxiety (worry, fear, distraction, restlessness, upset stomach):

	Not at all (0 times)		Somewhat (1-2 times/week)		Moderately (3-4 times/week)		Frequently (5-6 times per week)		Extremely (Daily)
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4. In the past few weeks I have experienced feelings of stress (tension, frustration, overwhelmed):

	Not at all (0 times)		Somewhat (1-2 times/week)		Moderately (3-4 times/week)		Frequently (5-6 times per week)		Extremely (Daily)
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5. In the past few weeks I have experienced lingering trauma from experiences that still affect me (mood swings, significant irritability, variable appetite, disturbed sleep, other symptoms):

	Not at all (0 times)		Somewhat (1-2 times/week)		Moderately (3-4 times/week)		Frequently (5-6 times per week)		Extremely (Daily)
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6. I feel like I have good knowledge and skills for coping with stress and mental health challenges:

	Never		Sometimes		Most of the Time		Almost Always		Always
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As you review your responses together, consider discussing some of these questions:

1. How comfortable are we discussing mental health?
2. What have been our overall personal and family histories of mental health?
3. How will we check-in with each other about our mental health?
4. Should we get some professional help as part of our preparation for marriage?

The Principle of Preparation

Elder Bednar taught

“Two basic principles can guide and strengthen us as we face proving and trying circumstances in our lives, whatever they may be: (1) the principle of preparation and (2) the principle of pressing forward with a steadfastness in Christ.” [\(General Conference October 2020\)](#)

We can be prepared for mental health challenges in our marriage by understanding and building resilience factors, inoculating ourselves as much as possible, and having resources ready to treat challenges that come.

While it may not be possible to prevent mental health challenges, we can prevent some of the negative effects they may have on our marriage by inoculating our relationship with connection habits. Intentionally guarding daily habits of looking for the good in each other and expressing appreciation, conversations with eye contact, empathic listening (listening to understand instead of to change), hugs and other simple affection, etc. can build resilience for times when connecting is harder. Having these habits well ingrained helps us continue them when we experience challenges to our better thinking and feeling.

We can also be intentional about planning ahead to treat mental health challenges that don't subside easily. Not understanding mental health can make it harder than it needs to be. Learning together what efforts and resources are available and setting up a support system of other people we can lean on for help are important preparations.

Activity #2: Prepare Well

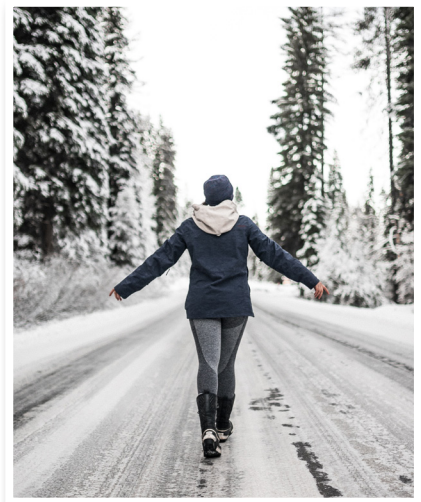
Spend a few minutes right now learning together about mental health, resilience factors, and resources for overcoming mental health challenges.

These links could be a good starting place:

1. [Self-Reliance Emotional Resilience Course](#) (review the manual on your own, or consider joining a group in your ward or stake)



2. [Church Mental Health Library](#) (also available on the app under “Life Help”)
3. [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#) (a free helpline and library of education, including this article on “How To Love Someone With A Mental Illness”)
4. [Therapy in a Nutshell](#) (link to a free youtube channel with many videos on mental health skills and supporting loved ones through mental health challenges)



After you've explored some of these, take a minute to discuss together a few of these questions:

1. What did we learn that seems most helpful?
2. What daily connection habits do we want to guard carefully and how will we do that?
3. Who do we want to be part of our support system (including mental health professionals) and how will we lean on them in times of mental health challenges?

Pressing Forward

The phase “press forward” carries a sense of effort, striving. Mental health challenges usually require some perseverance over time, as well as good knowledge and skills. Spouses who are the caregiver for one who is struggling may also need outside support.

Remember that when our marriage matters most, we may need to take a season of letting go of other priorities to support each other in healing through mental health challenges. As we do, that season can be an opportunity to draw even closer together, to our other loved ones, and the Savior. Pressing forward with faith in Him includes using available resources.

Elder Oaks reminded us:

Latter-day Saints believe in applying the best available scientific knowledge and techniques. We use nutrition, exercise, and other practices to preserve health, and we enlist the help of healing practitioners, such as physicians and surgeons, to restore health.

The use of medical science is not at odds with our prayers of faith and our reliance on priesthood blessings. When a person requested a priesthood blessing, Brigham Young would ask, “Have you used any remedies?” To those who said no because “we wish the Elders to lay hands upon us, and we have faith that we shall be healed,” President Young replied: “That is very inconsistent according to my faith. If we are sick, and ask the Lord to heal us, and to do all for us that is necessary to be done, according to my understanding of the Gospel of salvation, I might as well ask the Lord to cause my wheat and corn to grow, without my plowing the ground and casting in the seed. It appears consistent to me to apply every remedy that comes within the range of my knowledge, and [then] to ask my Father in Heaven ... to sanctify that application to the healing of my body.”

Of course we don't wait until all other methods are exhausted before we pray in faith or give priesthood blessings for healing. In emergencies, prayers and blessings come first. Most often we pursue all efforts simultaneously. ([“Healing the Sick” General Conference April 2010](#))

THE BOTTOM LINE

Becoming one in marriage includes being open about our well-being and helping to take care of each other. When we experience mental health challenges, we can work together to use our faith and resources to find healing.