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<b>Talk About Mental Health</b> ▼
For People With Mental Health Problems
For Young People Looking for Help
For Parents and Caregivers
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<b>For Community and Faith Leaders</b>
Conversations in Your Community ▶

## For Community and Faith Leaders

### Creating Community Connections for Mental Health

Faith and community leaders are often the first point of contact when individuals and families face mental health problems or traumatic events. In fact, in times of crisis, many will turn to trusted leaders in their communities before they turn to mental health professionals. When leaders know how to respond, they become significant assets to the overall health system.

Faith and community leaders can help educate individuals and families about mental health, increasing awareness of mental health issues and making it easier for people to seek help. Community connectedness and support, like that found in faith-based and other neighborhood organizations, are also important to the long-term recovery of people living with mental illnesses.

Faith communities are also in a unique position to reach many of the millions of Americans who struggle with serious thoughts of suicide each year. Many people having thoughts of suicide feel hopeless, trapped, or are in such emotional pain or despair, that they struggle to face another day. Suicidal thoughts are often accompanied by a spiritual crisis or deep questioning about the purpose of life. If faith leaders are better able to recognize the signs of suicide and learn how to respond, they can serve as an expanded safety net for those most in need.

### What Community and Faith Leaders Can Do

**Educate your communities and congregations.** Promote awareness by educating the members of your communities and congregations about mental health issues through educational forums and other opportunities.

- Invite local mental health experts—including those who have experienced mental illness—to speak with your congregation or at community gatherings.
- Share [facts and common myths](#) about mental health.
- Support the development of a [trauma-informed community](#). Trauma often lies beneath seemingly unrelated problems.
- Organize additional meetings, dinners, or other gatherings for members of your congregation or community to have conversations about mental health.

**Identify opportunities to support people with mental illnesses.**



Religious and other community organizations can play an important role in supporting individuals living with mental illnesses and encouraging them to seek help.

- Consider offering your organization's meeting spaces for community conversations and support groups focused on addressing mental health issues.
- Provide space for peer-led groups that give people the chance to tell their stories in their own time and way.
- Include safe shared spaces for people to interact (for example, parks and community centers) that can foster healthy relationships and positive mental health among community members.
- Support community programs (for example: peer mentoring programs or opportunities for volunteering) that encourage social participation and inclusion for all people
- Plan and facilitate a community conversation using [SAMHSA's Toolkit for Community Conversations About Mental Health](#). The toolkit provides information about how to plan a community conversation, how to guide these discussions, and includes information about mental health issues to use during the discussion.
- Share the Toolkit for Community Conversations About Mental Health with your colleagues and leaders in other organizations.

**Connect individuals and families to help.** Strengthen the connections within your community to mental health services and support and enhance linkages between mental health, substance abuse, disability, and other social services.

- Learn the basic signs of mental illnesses and other facts about mental health to encourage those in need to seek help.
- Remind others that [people can and do recover](#) from mental health challenges and that [help is available](#) and effective.
- Train key community members (such as adults who work with the children, youth, older adults, veterans, and LGBT) to identify the signs of depression and suicide and refer people to resources.
- Develop relationships with local mental health service providers and other family and youth organizations to help to direct individuals and families in need to available services and support in the community.
- Share the [SAMHSA treatment locator](#) in your community newsletter or other publications.

**Promote acceptance of those with mental health issues.** The voices of leaders and members of faith-based and other community organizations can greatly influence attitudes about mental health conditions and those who experience them.

- Talk about your own mental health openly.
- Be an example of taking good care of your mental health by making [mental wellness](#) a priority in your personal life.
- Be inclusive. Mental health affects all of us.
- Foster opportunities to build connections with individuals and families dealing with mental health challenges through trust and acceptance.
- Foster safe and supportive environments for people to openly talk

about mental health, stress, trauma, and related issues.

- Ask, “What happened?” instead of, “What’s wrong?” when [talking with a friend](#) in need.
- Encourage and express empathy in your family, congregation, and community. Convey a message of nonviolence, acceptance, and compassion.

Resources:

- [SAMHSA Faith-Based and Community Initiatives \(FBCI\)](#)
- [Community Conversations About Mental Health](#)
- [Information for Faith-Based and Community Leaders](#)
- [Faith-Based Organizations Fact Sheet](#)

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