

**UNDERSTANDING AND LIVING WITH
PEOPLE WHO ARE MENTALLY ILL**

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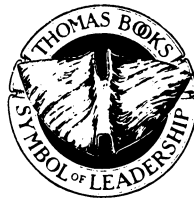
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**UNDERSTANDING AND LIVING
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MENTALLY ILL**

Techniques to Deal With
Mental Illness in the Family

By

JAMES E. SOUKUP, NCACII, MBA, Psy.D.



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PREFACE

Each year from 16 to 20 million Americans suffer from major depression. Even more individuals are impaired by anxiety disorders. It is estimated that 13 percent of the population abuse or are dependent on alcohol and other mood altering drugs. As our population ages, more and more people suffer from Alzheimer's disease. Over two million Americans are diagnosed as schizophrenic.

At one time or another, it is probable that every family will experience mental illness. Living with mental illness in the family is difficult and often has a negative emotional impact on family members. Common responses are feelings of anxiety, guilt, hopelessness, helplessness, depression, shame, codependence, anger, and confusion.

The purpose of this book is to help family members understand mental illness and develop healthy, functional, and appropriate attitudes and responses. This book will also be of interest to students, counselors, and therapists by assisting them to understand the concerns, emotional responses, and problems facing family members. With this knowledge, the therapist can help the family develop coping plans and techniques.

Symptoms, treatment approaches, and advice on obtaining help are discussed. Disorders described include alcoholism, Alzheimer's disease, mood disorders, sexual and spouse abuse, rage episodes, obsessive compulsive disorders, anxiety disorders, sexual dysfunction, bulimia and anorexia nervosa, adolescent suicide and depression, and attention deficit disorders.

Other subjects included are stress management techniques, codependency, self-help groups, adult children of alcoholics (ACOA) issues, effective parenting techniques, the use of psychotropic drugs in treatment, and various types of psychotherapy.

J.E.S.

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Section I

Chapter I

THE NATURE, PREVALENCE AND DIAGNOSIS OF MENTAL DISORDERS

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Fourth Edition)* defines a mental disorder as “. . . a clinically significant behavioral or psychological syndrome or pattern that occurs in an individual and is associated with present distress (e.g., a painful symptom) or disability (i.e., an impairment in one or more important areas of functioning) or with a significant increase of risk of suffering, death, pain, disability or loss of freedom” (p. xxi, introduction). The syndrome must be more than an expected response to an event such as grief with the death of a loved one.

In the case of a mental illness, the disorder creates distress, disability and/or other risks. The distress is more than a passing distress. It must be persistent. (Symptoms less than 6 months are considered acute, over 6 months chronic.) If functional impairment occurs it must be in major life areas such as career, family, social, financial. The “risks” referred to are such things as injuring self or others, inability to care for self, and inability to function independently.

The definition is “wordy” however it is important for a family member to understand the nature as well as characteristics of the particular mental disorder affecting the family. Mental disorders vary in intensity and severity, however in order to fit the diagnostic criteria there must be a significant level of distress and/or dysfunction or risk thereof.

Mental disorders are common in our society. Emotional illness has been recorded since the beginning of history. However, there has been a tendency to consider mental disorders in a negative light. Individuals accept and seek medical treatment for physical disorders. However, many mental disorders go undiagnosed and untreated.

Mental disorders are more prevalent than one might think. According to the American Psychological Association, at any one time, 18 percent of Americans (including 18 million children) suffer from a diagnosable