

# I'm Not My Diagnosis: Embracing Identity Beyond Labels

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MHTTC/UND

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Mountain Plains (HHS Region 8)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network  
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

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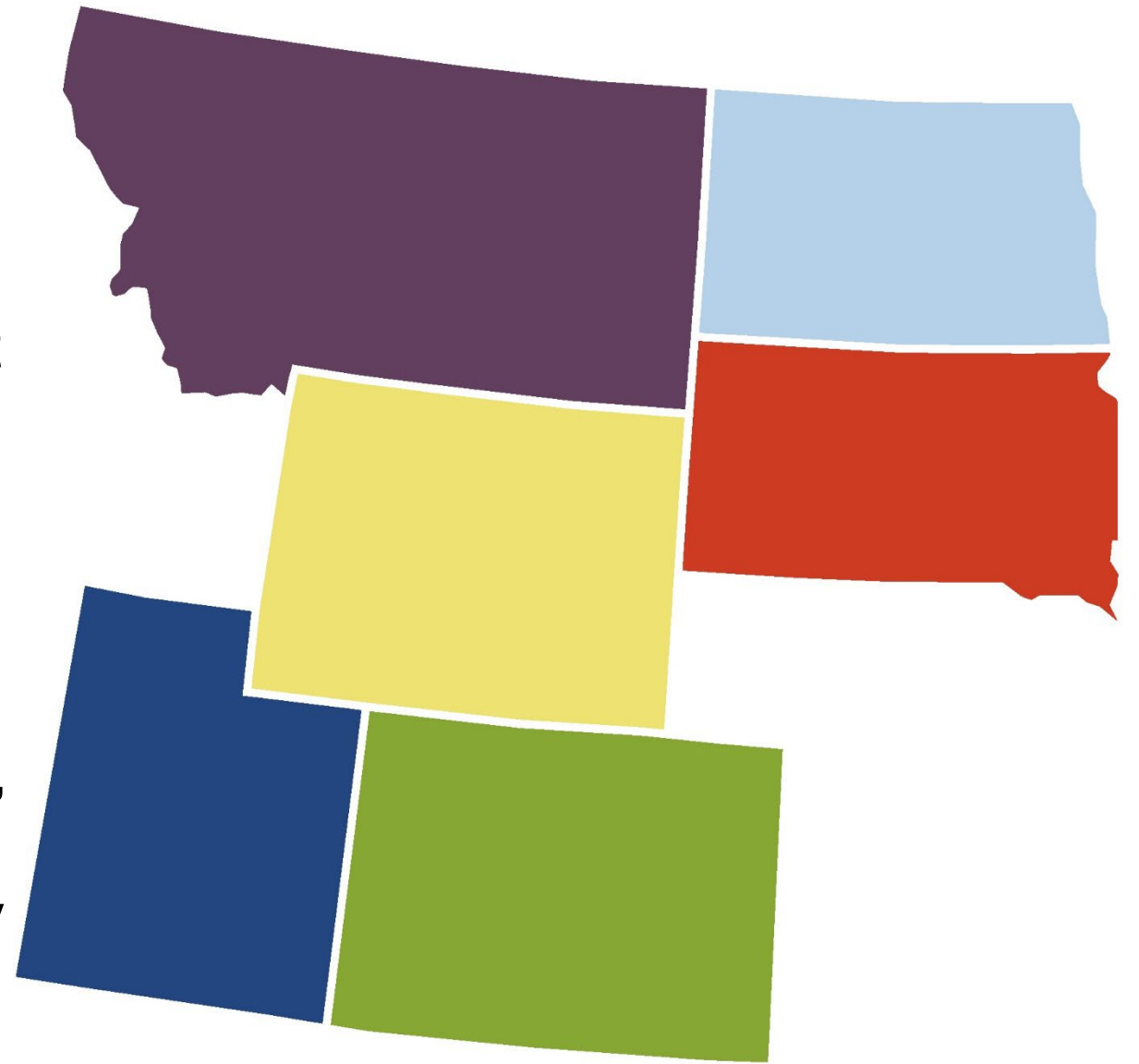
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# The Mountain Plains Mental Health Technology Transfer Center

The Mountain Plains Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (Mountain Plains MHTTC) provides training and technical assistance to individuals who serve persons with mental health concerns throughout Region 8 (Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming).

We belong to the Technology Transfer Center (TTC) Network, a national network of training and technical assistance centers serving the needs of mental health, substance use and prevention providers. The work of the TTC Network is under a cooperative agreement by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA).



# Land Acknowledgement Statement

Today, the University of North Dakota rests on the ancestral lands of the Pembina and Red Lake Bands of Ojibwe and the Dakota Oyate - presently existing as composite parts of the Red Lake, Turtle Mountain, White Earth Bands, and the Dakota Tribes of Minnesota and North Dakota. We acknowledge the people who resided here for generations and recognize that the spirit of the Ojibwe and Oyate people permeates this land. As a university community, we will continue to build upon our relations with the First Nations of the State of North Dakota - the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Nation, Spirit Lake Nation, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians.



The MHTTC Network uses affirming, respectful and recovery-oriented language in all activities. That language is:

STRENGTHS-BASED  
AND HOPEFUL

INCLUSIVE AND  
ACCEPTING OF  
DIVERSE CULTURES,  
GENDERS,  
PERSPECTIVES,  
AND EXPERIENCES

HEALING-CENTERED AND  
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

INVITING TO INDIVIDUALS  
PARTICIPATING IN THEIR  
OWN JOURNEYS

PERSON-FIRST AND  
FREE OF LABELS

NON-JUDGMENTAL AND  
AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS

RESPECTFUL, CLEAR  
AND UNDERSTANDABLE

CONSISTENT WITH  
OUR ACTIONS,  
POLICIES, AND PRODUCTS

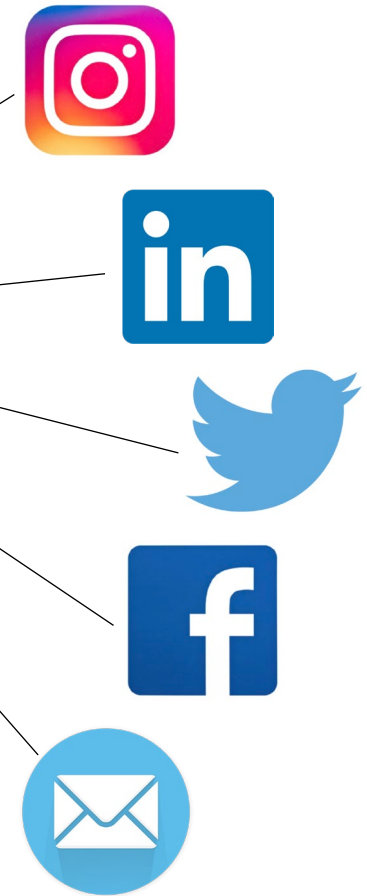
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# Learning Objectives

- Understand the dual nature of diagnoses as both helpful tools in healthcare and limiting labels that can impact self-perception and societal perception.
- Recognize the limitations of defining oneself or someone solely by a diagnosis and the importance of embracing a multifaceted identity.
- Empower individuals to advocate for themselves and others in matters related to mental health and well-being.
- Promote a broader understanding of identity that goes beyond labels and diagnoses, recognizing and valuing the complexity and diversity of individuals' experiences, strengths, and aspirations.



# INTRODUCTION



# Getting Started

fun  
brother  
funny  
father  
son  
loving caring  
loyal uncle  
protective

# My Baby Brother



# Dual Nature of Diagnoses

## Benefits of a Diagnosis

- Most appropriate interventions
- Validation of experiences
- Eligible for support services & resources targeted to that condition.
- Insurance coverage for services and medications.
- Legal Protections
- Understanding and coping
- Research and advocacy

## Limitations of a Diagnosis

- Stigma & discrimination
- Labeling & identity
- Self-fulfilling prophecy
- Overmedicalization
- Inaccuracies & misdiagnosis
- Dependency on labels
- Treatment and service disparities
- Subjectivity and cultural bias

**Everyone's experience with a diagnosis is unique, and it's essential to support, respect and strengthen their autonomy and capacity in navigating their own mental health journey.**



# Purpose

- The purpose of a diagnosis in healthcare is to identify and classify a person's symptoms and experiences into a recognized medical or psychological condition. Diagnoses serve several important functions:
  - Treatment Planning
  - Communication
  - Research & Statistics
  - Insurance & Reimbursement
  - Validation & Understanding

# What's the Potential Societal Impact of a Diagnosis?

## Stigma & Discrimination

- Society's perception of certain diagnoses can lead to stigma and discrimination, impacting how people are treated, their job prospects, social inclusion, and overall well-being.

## Support & Resources

- Influences the availability of support and resources depending on the diagnosis.

## Legal & Social Implications

- Diagnoses can sometimes have legal and social impacts, like qualifying for disability benefits, getting accommodations at school or work, or being involved in legal proceedings.

## Perception of Abilities

- How society sees certain diagnoses can affect how people's abilities and contributions are seen, which in turn can affect their chances for education, work, and social involvement.

# What's the Potential Societal Impact of a Diagnosis?

## Workplace & Education

- Diagnoses can affect their experiences at work and in the educational setting.
- Issues related to accommodations, discrimination, adequate resources.

## Relationships

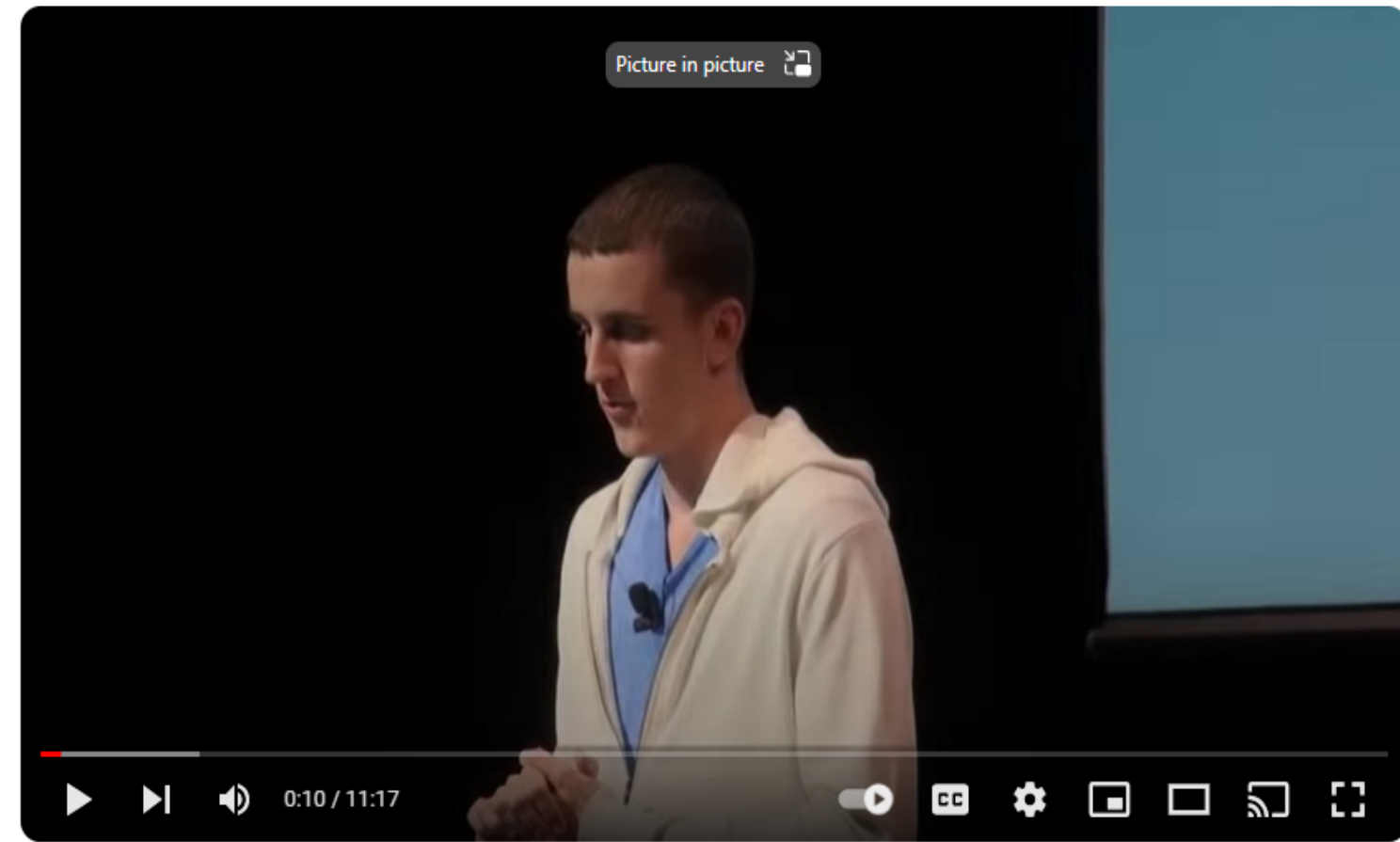
- Diagnoses can impact family dynamics and social relationships. If the support & understanding is not there, it can strain relationships.

## Media

- The media plays a huge role in public perception of many areas in our lives.
- Positive portrayals & accurate information can help reduce stigma & increase understanding. Negative does the opposite.



“And what you really fear the most isn’t the suffering inside of you. It’s the stigma inside of others, it’s the shame, it’s the embarrassment, it’s the disapproving look on a friend’s face, it’s the whispers in the hallway that you’re weak, it’s the comments that you’re crazy.” — Kevin Breel,



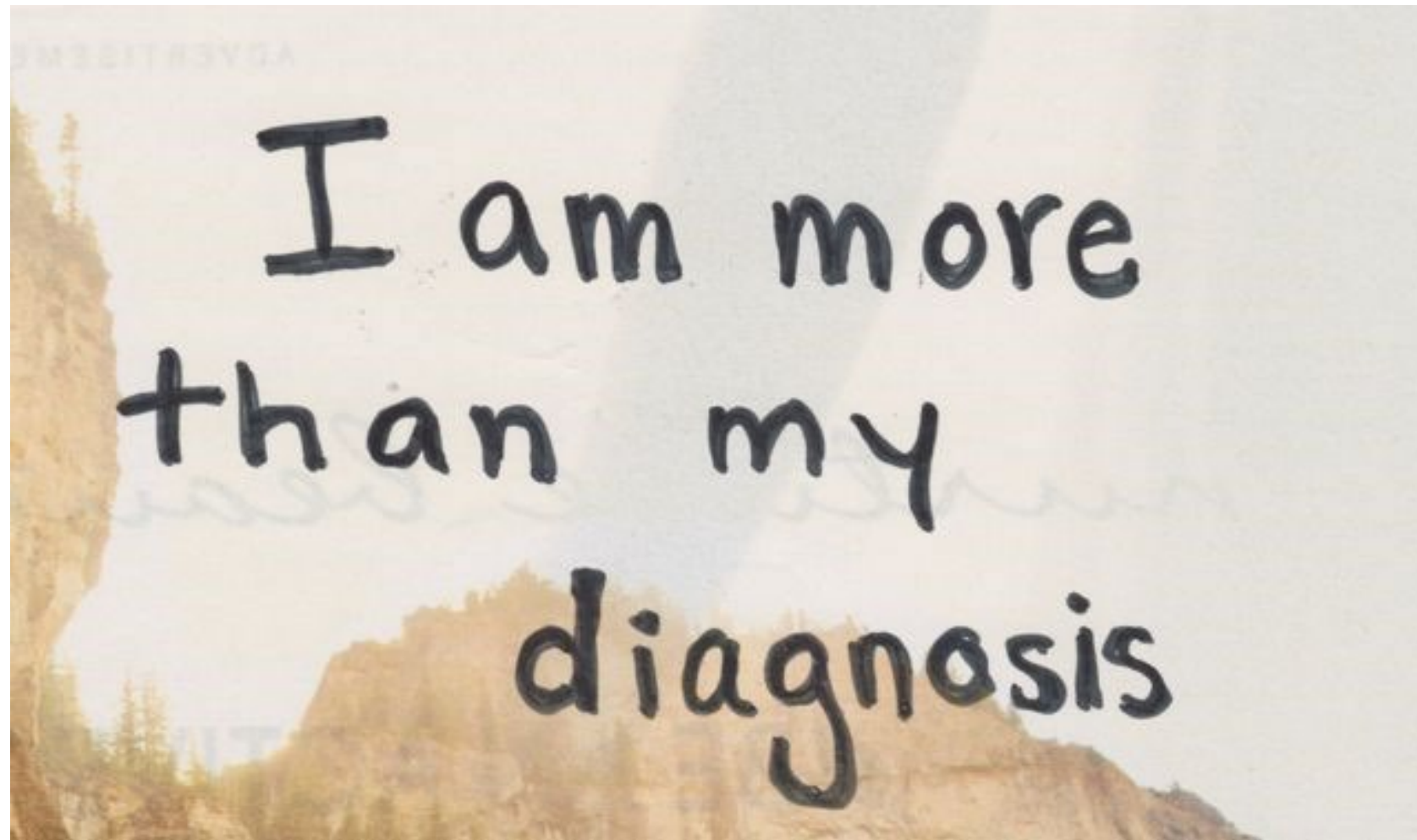
(FIXED AUDIO) Kevin Breel: Confessions of a Depressed Comic at TEDxKids@Ambleside

# What's the Potential Personal Impact of a Diagnosis?



- A diagnosis can have significant effects on a person's self-perception.
- These effects can vary widely depending on the individual, the specific diagnosis, and the context in which it is given.

# DEFINING ONESELF



It's important to approach mental health diagnoses with a critical and balanced perspective, considering both their potential benefits and limitations.

# Defining Oneself by Diagnosis

- A diagnosis can be an important part of understanding oneself but defining oneself solely by a diagnosis can limit personal growth, self-expression, and the richness of one's identity.
- It's important to recognize that a diagnosis is just one aspect of a person and not the sum of who they are.
- We must teach those we work with about this. We need to support and advocate.

# Defining Oneself by Diagnosis (cont.)

Loss of  
Individuality

can overshadow other aspects of a person's identity, such as their talents, interests, and personal qualities, leading to a narrow view of themselves.

Limiting Potential

They may feel defined by the limitations associated with the diagnosis rather than their strengths and possibilities

Negative Self  
Perception

could see themselves primarily in terms of their diagnosis, potentially leading to feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, or low self-worth.

Social Stigma

could reinforce stigma & discrimination and see themselves as different.

# Defining Oneself by Diagnosis (cont.)



- **Reduced Autonomy**
  - May feel that their actions and choices are predetermined by their diagnosis
- **Impact on Relationships**
  - Others may also start to see the person primarily through the lens of their diagnosis,
- **Barriers to Growth**
  - May focus more on managing their diagnosis than on pursuing their goals and aspirations.

# SELF ACCEPTANCE



# **Beyond Diagnosis: Empowering Positive Self-Identity**

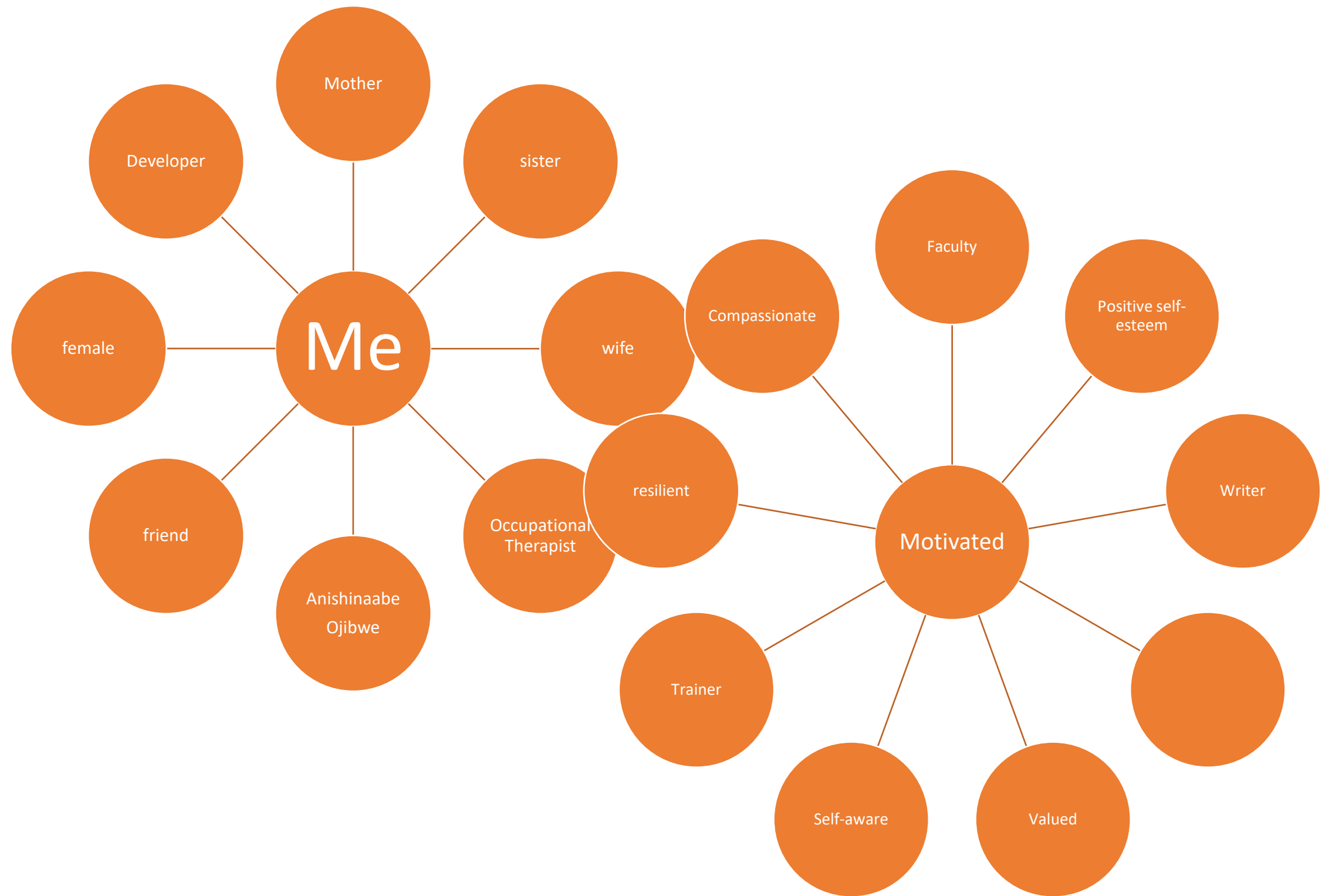
**Cultivating Self-  
Acceptance and  
Resilience**



# Beyond Diagnosis: Empowering Positive Self-Identity.....what does that mean?

- To move beyond a label or diagnosis that one might have and focusing on empowering a positive sense of self!
- To encourage individuals to see themselves as more than their medical or psychological condition.
- To cultivate a strong positive identity that goes beyond one's diagnosis.

1. Personal Identity
2. Social Identity
3. Cultural Identity
4. Professional Identity
5. Psychological Identity
6. Interpersonal Identity
7. Aspirational Identity



# What is the Multifaceted Nature of Identity?

Personal  
Identity

Social  
Identity

Cultural  
Identity

Professional  
Identity

Psychological  
Identity

Interpersonal  
Identity

Aspirational  
Identify

# *Possible Questions to Consider?*

- **Personal History**
  - How do I perceive my cultural or ethnic identity?
  - What are some significant life events that have shaped who am today?
- **Roles & Responsibilities**
  - What roles do I play in my family, work, or community?
  - How do these roles influence my sense of identity?
- **Interests & Hobbies**
  - How do my interests & hobbies contribute to my sense of self?
- **Values & Beliefs**
  - What are some core values that guide my decisions and actions?
- **Strengths & Challenges**
  - What do I consider to be my strengths and talents?
  - How do I cope with challenges or setbacks in my life?
- **Goals & Aspirations**
  - What are my short-term and long-term goals?
  - How do I envision my future self?
- **Self-Reflection**
  - How would I describe myself to someone who doesn't know me?
  - What aspects of my identity are most important to me?
  - How has my sense of identity evolved over time?

# Possible Questions to Consider?

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do I feel my identity is defined by my diagnosis or label?
- How often do I think about my identity beyond my diagnosis?
- To what extent do I believe my diagnosis influences how others perceive me?
- How confident am I in expressing my identity separate from my diagnosis?
- How much do I agree with the statement: "My diagnosis is just one aspect of who I am"?
- How important is it for me to be recognized for my abilities and talents unrelated to my diagnosis?
- How often I engage in activities or hobbies that have nothing to do with my diagnosis?

# Thriving Beyond Diagnoses

- 1. Temple Grandin:** Temple Grandin is an American professor of animal science who has autism. She is known for her work in animal behavior and is an advocate for autistic people. Grandin has written several books and articles about autism and has been influential in raising awareness and understanding of the condition.
- 2. Vincent van Gogh:** Vincent van Gogh was a Dutch post-impressionist painter who struggled with mental health issues throughout his life. Despite his challenges, he created some of the most famous and influential works of art in history, and his paintings are celebrated for their emotional depth and beauty.
- 3. John Nash:** John Nash was an American mathematician who made significant contributions to game theory and differential geometry. He struggled with schizophrenia for much of his life but continued his work in mathematics and eventually won the Nobel Prize in Economics for his contributions to game theory.
- 4. Lady Gaga:** The singer and actress has been open about her struggles with mental health, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and fibromyalgia. She has used her platform to advocate for mental health awareness and has been active in promoting mental wellness initiatives.
- 5. Michael Phelps:** The most decorated Olympian of all time, who has openly discussed his struggles with depression and anxiety. Phelps has become an advocate for mental health awareness and has used his platform to encourage others to seek help and support.

# Building Self-Acceptance

- Practice Mindfulness
- Challenge Negative Thoughts
- Focus on Strengths
- Setting Realistic Expectations
- **Practice Self-Compassion**
- **Seek Support**
- **Engage in Self-Care**
- Focus on the Present
- Seek Meaning & Purpose
- Practice Gratitude



# What are Cognitive Distortions?

- All-or-Nothing Thinking (Black & White)
- Overgeneralization
- Mental Filtering
- Jumping to Conclusions
- Magnification & Minimization
- Emotional Reasoning
- Should Statements
- Labeling & Mislabeled
- Personalization
- Discounting the Positive

# Steps to Challenge Negative Thoughts

- Identify the thought
- Evaluate the Evidence
- Consider Alternatives
- Challenge Cognitive Distortions
- Reality Testing
- Use Coping Strategies
- Practice Mindfulness
- **Seek Support**
- Engage in Positive Activities
- Challenge Perfectionism

# **Taking Care of Myself is just as Essential as Putting My Oxygen Mask on First**





# Self Compassion

- Have I heard or told someone any of the following sayings?
  - Cut yourself some slack
  - Extend yourself grace
  - Give yourself a break.
  - Be kind to yourself.
  - Grant yourself some leniency.
  - Offer yourself some understanding.
  - Ease up on yourself.
  - Extend a little grace your way.
  - Cut yourself some slack.“
  - Give yourself the gift of patience.
  - Be gentle with yourself.
  - Grant yourself the freedom to make mistakes.

# Self Compassion

## Self-Kindness

- I can't do everything. I am only human, and it's alright to ask for help when needed
- I deserve breaks. Recharging is essential, and I won't feel guilty about taking time for myself to relax and rejuvenate.
- I don't need to be perfect. Establishing realistic expectations enables me to face challenges without undue pressure.
- I'm doing my best in challenging circumstances. It's okay to be kind to myself and recognize my effort in my work.
- It's a sign of strength to seek support.
- Taking care of myself is not selfish. It's a necessity.
- It's okay to say no when I need to. Setting boundaries is an act of self-compassion
- I have accomplished meaningful things in my work.

## Self-Judgement

- I should be able to handle this better?
- I should be able to handle everything without feeling overwhelmed. Others seem to manage just fine; why can't I
- I'm not doing enough. No matter how hard I try, I always feel like I'm falling short in providing the support that is truly needed.
- I can't let others see that I'm struggling.
- I don't have time for breaks or self-care.
- Look at how well my colleagues manage stress.

# What is Resilience?

- The ability to adapt and bounce back from adversity, trauma, or significant stress.
- It involves the capacity to withstand and recover from difficult experiences while maintaining a sense of well-being.
- Its not about avoiding stress or difficult situations but rather about developing the skills and resources to navigate them effectively.
- Work to maintain a positive outlook, cope with stress in healthy ways, and thrive despite challenging circumstances.
- Adynamic process that can be developed and strengthened over time through various strategies and practices.

# 10 Examples to Build Resilience

1. Practice Mindfulness
  2. Physical Exercise
  - 3. Develop a Support Network**
  4. Set Realistic Goals
  5. Cultivate Optimism
- **Practice Self-Care**
  - Develop Problem-Solving Skills
  - **Seek Support**
  - Practice Gratitude
  - Maintain a Sense of Humor

# Strategies to Build a Support Network

- Identify Potential Supporters
- Be Open & Communicative
- Join Support Communities
- Offer Support in Return
- Attend Social Events
- Seek Professional Support or Support Groups
- Stay Connected
- Be Proactive
- Set Boundaries
- Be Patient



EMPOWERMENT

# Empowerment & Self-Advocacy

1. Enabling individuals to advocate for themselves and others while challenging the narrow definitions imposed by labels or diagnoses.
2. It involves acknowledging that people are complex and multifaceted, with unique strengths, experiences, and aspirations that go beyond any single aspect of their identity.
3. Emphasizing the importance of recognizing individuals for who they are as whole people, rather than defining them solely by their diagnoses or other labels.
4. Promoting a broader understanding of identity, can foster inclusivity, reduce stigma, and create more supportive environments for everyone.

# Barriers to Advocacy

- Stigma & Discrimination
- Lack of Awareness & Understanding
- Limited Access to Resources
- Power Imbalance
- Cultural & Linguistic Barriers
- Legal & Policy Barriers
- **Personal Barriers**
- Systemic Barriers
- **Lack of Support Networks**
- Resource Constraints

# Strengthening my Advocacy Skills

- **Practice Self-Care**
- Educate Myself
- Identify My Needs
- **Build a Support Network**
- Strengthening Assertiveness
- Stay Informed
- Set Goals
- Celebrate Progress
- Increase Comfort with Seeking Help
- Strengthen Communication Skills

# Strategies for Self-Care

- Prioritize Sleep
- Regular Physical Activity
- Healthy Eating
- Mindfulness & Meditation
- Limit Screen Time
- Create a Relaxing Environment
- **Practice Self-Compassion**
- Establish Boundaries
- Seek Social Support
- Engage in Hobbies
- Practice Gratitude
- Seek Professional Help when Needed
- Limit Alcohol & Caffeine
- Unplug & Relax

# To My Future Providers: I Am More Than My Diagnosis

by Madison Fidler

When I think about future providers — the doctors, nurses, therapists who will be diagnosing, treating and supporting people with mental illness — I often reflect on what I want them to know. As someone who has mental health conditions, I have a wealth of experience with caretakers and would like to offer some advice.

So, to all future providers: When you enter an exam room, please think about who you will be walking in to meet. As symptoms and diagnoses churn in your brain, I urge you to think about why you have chosen this path. To treat symptoms, yes, but also to help people. People who exist beyond a list of diagnoses and medications.

I am Madison. I am not post-traumatic stress disorder; I am not depression; I am not cancer; I am not borderline personality disorder; I am not epilepsy — or any of the other labels that are listed in my chart. I am me; a complex, multi-faceted person with a unique experience to share.

Are diagnoses, symptoms and treatment history important? Yes, of course. They tell us so much about the patient and person. But, in the end, the person — Madison — should come first. She is different than the other patient you saw with the same diagnoses. She deserves time and to be seen beyond her history and scars.

All of us have scars, and we choose each day how we are going to grow from them. I have not only grown but am beginning to blossom. This is due to hard work and amazing people (doctors, nurses, techs and friends) who chose to fight this battle with me.

So I urge you, as you keep growing in whatever field grabs your attention, to ask yourself, who not what will I be helping today? The medical labels are not a core part of who I am — they are sticky notes on my chest that I work to remove. This work takes time and many people but in no way is it Madison, the person.

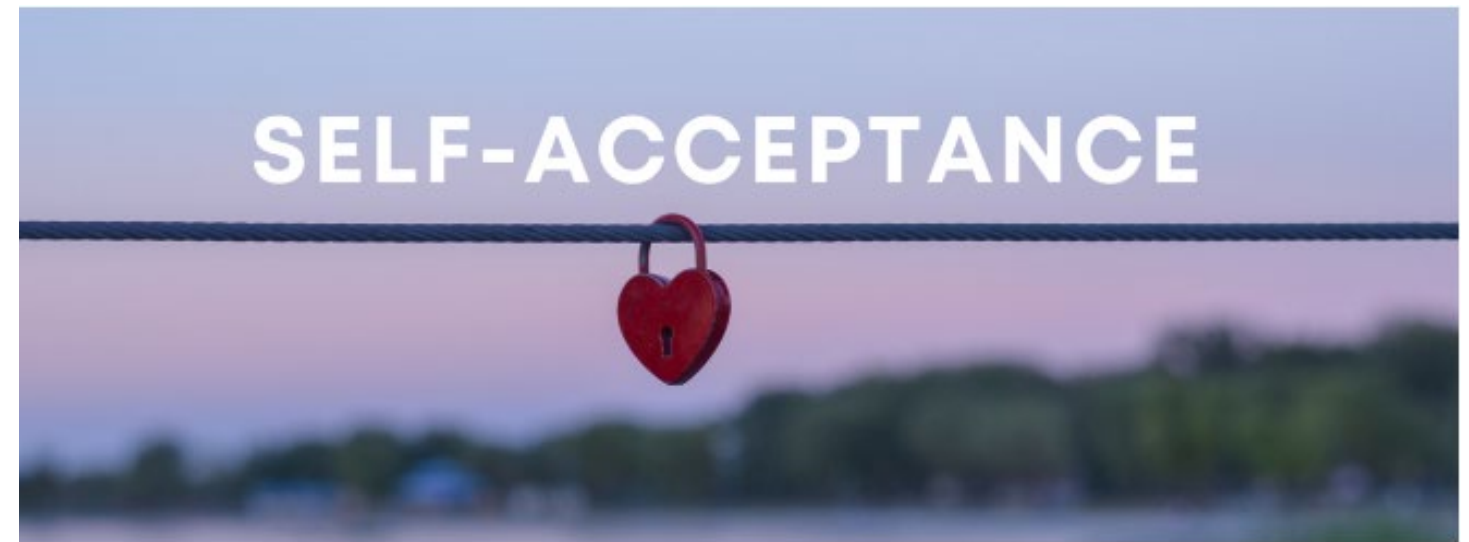
For far too long, I existed as my medical labels and Madison was lost, even to myself. I write this short letter in hopes that maybe, just maybe, the next person is not lost.

Ultimately, I hope that you will remember that people with mental illness have unique stories, and they are deserving of your time.

Thank you for your future work.

# SUMMARY

- Overemphasizing a diagnosis can limit our view of ourselves or a person, overshadowing other qualities.
- Self-acceptance beyond diagnoses means embracing one's whole self, including the challenges of a diagnosis and the traits that make them unique.
- This broader perspective fosters resilience, allowing individuals to draw on their strengths to navigate life's challenges. By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of identity, individuals can develop a more holistic view of themselves, moving beyond the constraints of a diagnosis to lead fulfilling lives.



Source: [mentaltoughnesspartners](https://mentaltoughnesspartners.com)



TAK MAHALO Shukran Salamat  
Teşekkür ederim Thank you Arigato  
Dankie Obrigado  
Gracias MERCI  
TAK DANKI DANKUJEM  
KIITOS DANKE  
KÖSZI HVALA DANKON MAHALO  
Merci AITÄH БЛАГОДАРА  
DANKJEWEL THOINKS MORTE Na gode PRASOM  
Efharisto СПАСИБО GRAZIE  
БЛАГОДАРАМ Paladies KÖSZÖNÖM TACK



# References & Resources

## 1. Books:

1. "The Gifts of Imperfection" by Brené Brown: This book explores the idea of embracing imperfections and letting go of who we think we're supposed to be.
2. "The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma" by Bessel van der Kolk: This book delves into the effects of trauma on the body and mind, emphasizing the importance of holistic healing beyond diagnoses.

## 2. Websites and Organizations:

1. National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): NAMI provides resources and support for individuals and families affected by mental illness, focusing on education, advocacy, and support.
2. Mindful.org: Mindful.org offers articles, guided meditations, and resources on mindfulness, which can be beneficial for mental well-being and resilience.
3. The Mighty: The Mighty is a platform where people share their experiences with various health conditions, including mental health, to foster understanding and support.
4. PsychCentral: PsychCentral is a popular mental health website that provides a wide range of resources related to mental health and psychology.

# Podcasts & Articles

## 1. Podcasts:

- "The Mental Illness Happy Hour" hosted by Paul Gilmartin: This podcast explores mental health topics with a focus on personal experiences and candid conversations.
- "The Hilarious World of Depression" hosted by John Moe: This podcast combines humor and honesty to discuss depression and mental health.

## 1. Articles

- "The Role of Identity in Mental Health Outcomes and Recovery" by Patrick W. Corrigan: This article discusses the impact of identity on mental health and recovery processes.
- "Beyond the Diagnosis: Exploring the Role of Identity in Mental Health Recovery" by Leanne S. Son Hing et al.: This research paper explores the role of identity in mental health recovery and well-being.
- I am/Might Be/Am Not My Diagnosis: A Look at the Use and Misuse of Diagnosis in Adolescence by Marsha H. Levy-Warren & Anna Levy-Warren