



## **Mental Health Minute**

*To increase public awareness about mental health issues, the Mental Health Association will run 8 columns with the first giving an overview on mental illness.*

What is mental illness? Mental illness is a disease that causes mild to severe disturbances in thinking, perception and behavior. These disturbances may impair a person's ability to cope with life's ordinary demands and routines, but with the proper care and treatment, the majority of people can recover and resume normal activities.

Many mental illnesses are believed to have biological causes, just like cancer, diabetes and heart disease, but some mental disorders are caused by a person's environment and experiences.

There are five major categories of mental illness:

**Anxiety Disorders:** These are the most common mental illnesses. The three main types are: phobias, panic disorders, and obsessive-compulsive disorders.

**Mood Disorders:** Mood disorders include depression and bipolar disorder. Symptoms may include mood swings such as extreme sadness or elation, sleep & eating disturbances, & changes in activity & energy levels. Suicide may be a risk with these disorders.

**Schizophrenia:** This is a serious disorder that affects how a person thinks, feels, & acts. It is believed to be caused by chemical imbalances in the brain that produce a variety of symptoms including hallucinations, delusions, withdrawal, incoherent speech and impaired reasoning.

**Dementias:** This group includes diseases like Alzheimer's which leads to loss of mental functions, including memory loss and a decline in intellectual and physical skills.

**Eating Disorders:** Anorexia nervosa and bulimia involves serious, potentially life-threatening illnesses. People with these disorders have a preoccupation with food and an irrational fear of being fat. Anorexia is self-starvation while bulimia involves cycles of bingeing (consuming large quantities of food) and purging (self-inducing vomiting or abusing laxatives).

*Mental Health Minute* is provided by the Mental Health Association of Franklin & Fulton Counties (MHA). through funding from the Franklin/Fulton Mental Health/ Mental Retardation/ Drug and Alcohol Program. For more info: call 1-866-593-8351 or email: [info@mhaff.org](mailto:info@mhaff.org).