

# How to Understand Mental Health Challenges & Recovery

Grace + hope for you or your loved one's mental health journey.



**GRACE ALLIANCE**

HEALTHY SOLUTIONS FOR YOUR MIND

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**GRACE  
ALLIANCE**

Mental Health Grace Alliance is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that cultivates healthy solutions for hearts and minds through a simple and innovative approach with biblical truths, scientific research, and practical tools.

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## What is a mental health challenge?

### Understanding grace within the challenge.

Your or your loved one's experience with mental health challenges is **NOT** a failure of faith or a punishment from God. Instead, a mental health challenge is an opportunity to see God's grace guide you into greater wholeness of life.

- + **God is for you to help.** God never defines or sees you or your loved one as a mental health challenge, illness, or other complex health condition. God sees the person with grace to respond to their condition. During Jesus' ministry, His heart and desire (with the Father, Jn. 14:19) were to be with the person in a healing way (Matt. 4:23, 9:35; Acts 10:38).
- + **God has lavished you with unmeasured grace – even within your mental health condition.** His grace pours out love and redefines you as worthy as you have always been to Him. Grace is part of your new constant identity (Rom. 5:1-5, 8:37-39 Col. 2:9-10).

### Understanding mental health challenges.

Mental health challenges can also be described as the experience of mental health difficulties or be classified as a diagnosable mental health disorder.

- + **Genetic & situational:** These mental health challenges can arise from genetic factors (e.g., hereditary, other family members' similar challenges) and/or situational conditions (e.g., trauma, overworked or under-worked, toxic environments, etc.).
- + **Symptoms uniquely vary:** Someone experiencing mental health challenges will have prolonged periods and varying levels of anxiety, depression, mood instability, negative thoughts (intrusive, racing), discouraged and irritable emotions, and physical discomfort (unusually low or high energy) that can adversely disrupt life, relationships, occupation, school, etc.
- + **Professional & community strength:** Mental health professionals can significantly assist with mental health challenges, including medication and therapy. In addition, being involved in an understanding community with similar lived experiences is often vital to their overall well-being. Every aspect of supportive care is strength- and faith-building for general well-being.

## Understanding the spectrum of experiences.

Our mental health challenges are not a one-size-fits-all experience; each person can have varying degrees of mental, emotional, and physical discomfort or distress. Many diagnosable mental health conditions are classified within a spectrum of generalized symptoms (e.g., Bipolar 1 vs. Bipolar 2). No matter where you may be on the mental health spectrum, you can still learn and grow from it and live with whole well-being and purpose, not letting it become your identity.

- + **Learn & grow from mental health challenges:** The point is to understand where you might be on the spectrum and learn about it, but not get fixated on the mental health difficulty or diagnosis as a weakening identity label, an excuse for pulling away from life and opportunities, or as a subtle means to not personally grow from it.
- + **Mental health challenges don't define your identity (worth and value):** As you learn about your mental health condition and how it affects your life, it is good to remember the balance between accepting that you have and are experiencing mental health difficulties or a disorder (on the spectrum) and not letting the condition or the diagnosis becoming a personal identity.
- + **Friend, you are not the "difficulty," "disorder," or "illness."** Mental health challenges are part of the journey, and God is not intimidated by them! You are a child of God, thoroughly cherished, loved, and accepted by God. God longs to reveal His compassion and hope at every step of this journey (2 Cor. 12:9).



## What is mental health recovery?

***“We are on a wholeness journey,  
not a brokenness journey.”***

- Joe Padilla (CEO + Co-Founder,  
Mental Health Grace Alliance)

- + **Mental health recovery is a whole-health growth process, a transformation in resilience for improving overall well-being (physical, mental, spiritual, and relational).** This whole-health approach utilizes a two-fold system from what psychology calls “*primary control*” (environmental management) and “*secondary control*” (internal management). Over time, the person becomes more resilient with personal growth, improved well-being, and life satisfaction.
- + **Mental health recovery can decrease symptoms and intervention.** It is common for those experiencing mental health recovery/resilience to see varying degrees of reduction and management of complex symptoms, decreased frequency and severity of episodes, and improved personal well-being, faith (spirituality), relationships, life satisfaction, and meaning. For some, this improved well-being aids professional intervention and can decrease periodic monitoring and mental health check-ups.
- + **Mental health recovery is new protective strength, not about being “healed” or “cured.”** Future stressors (adversity) may cause individuals to experience residual mental health symptoms. However, various studies reveal that mental health recovery/resilience helps to buffer and protect against future stressors (i.e., triggers). In other words, when they experience future stressors with new insights and tools (resilience), their symptoms may occur with less severity and for a shorter time. Some may experience a remission of symptoms and no further complications; however, most will experience mental health resilience with a lesser degree of their mental health difficulty or disorder.

- + **Mental health recovery is discovering wholeness, not achieving a “better you.”** Mental health recovery/resilience is not the willpower to overcome (“beat”) the condition or diagnosis. It is not a “self-help” focus on trying to achieve a “better version” of yourself (or other self-help programs that focus on “maximizing” or “biohacking” to achieve more significant results). While many of these programs have sound principles, techniques, or resources to help improve our health, the motivation to “achieve” can leave you exhausted trying to attain and maintain that ultimate result. Some of these programs are built on an underlying premise that “you’re not enough” (failure) and can be more extrinsic worth motivators that are proven not to sustain long-term motivation.

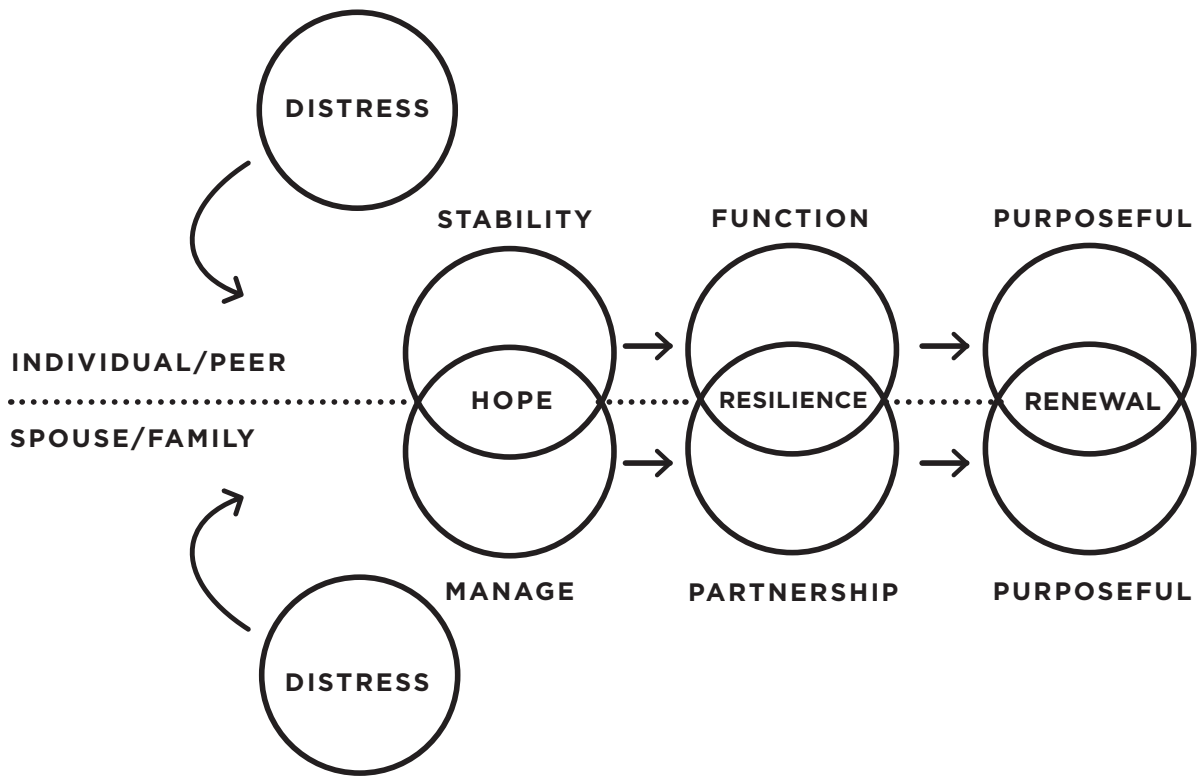
Instead, mental health recovery/resilience is accepting the condition or diagnosis (but not as your identity). While you are learning about the condition, you are still discovering who you truly are (“you’re enough,” wholeness) from a renewed perception of yourself and being empowered to create a meaningful life (as you journey with/through the condition or diagnosis). These are better empowered by fueling intrinsic worth and values that provide for long-term motivation and ongoing personal growth. Within the condition, we change by discovering wholeness, which can naturally help decrease symptoms and improve life over time.

## **How does mental health recovery work?**

**Mental health recovery is a continuum of growth.** Mental health recovery and resilience are not about achieving specific steps; instead, it’s a process that takes time, faith, and patience – a continuum of growth.

The **following diagram** represents this continuum of mental health recovery and resilience for the personal and family/spouse journey.

## MENTAL HEALTH CONTINUUM OF GROWTH



### DISTRESS (immobilized)

Symptoms are overwhelming and there may be feelings of hopelessness, confusion and hurt.

\*The individual and Family/Spouse are searching for answers for many of their disappointments from “unanswered prayers” or trying to figure out what are possible causes and how to “fix” them (e.g., searching the internet for spiritual and natural answers).

### STABILITY & MANAGE (Hope)

Symptoms are still challenging, but now learning new ways to manage and having renewed hope.

\*Some mental health symptoms may hinder full function and the family, spouse, or friend is involved to help manage life (e.g., severe depression may hinder memory or focus and may need helpful reminders from family or spouse).

### FUNCTION & PARTNER (Resilience)

Symptoms are manageable and able to function with life as you are building strength and resiliency.

\*The individual can now function with more health and independence. The family, spouse, or friend can pull back from helping manage.

\*The family/spouse/ friend may feel reluctant to let go and have tendency to stay in the “stability & management.”

### PURPOSE (Renewal)

Symptoms decrease and no longer filter or drive life. With new mental resilience, you are experiencing healthy relationships and see life with a God-given purpose.

\*The individual and family experience has given them new insights and outlook on life. The condition is not seen as a hinderance, but a unique part of their life and can enhance their sense of “calling” or purpose (both for individual and family/spouse/friend).



## How can the Grace Alliance help?

**The journey toward mental health is a strength-based and whole-health (holistic) process of change that focuses on rebuilding:**

- + Self-management and whole-health lifestyle for symptom relief (work down and work through symptoms)
- + Self-worth and purpose
- + Life-giving community support
- + Pure and simple rest in God's love and grace

The Grace Alliance's mission is to provide simple and innovative Christian mental health resources and programs for families and individuals experiencing mental health challenges and to equip the Body of Christ with active community support and leadership tools.

Our [Living Grace](#), [Redefine Grace](#), [Living Hope](#), and [Family Grace](#) workbooks cover many of these topics in an introductory manner. Our [Thrive workbook](#) explores these topics in an in-depth, whole health (i.e., holistic) step-by-step course or process for mental health recovery, resilience, and wholeness. [You can also find a group near you.](#)

For access to more free e-books, devotionals, blog articles, and resources with responses to many challenging mental health and faith questions, mental health recovery and wellness tips, biblical mental health encouragement, and more. visit our website:

[www.mentalhealthgracealliance.org](http://www.mentalhealthgracealliance.org)