

How to Experience Mental Health Recovery + Navigate Professional & Community Support

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



GRACE ALLIANCE

HEALTHY SOLUTIONS FOR YOUR MIND

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**GRACE
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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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How to Experience Mental Health Recovery

God created each of us as a complex, unique being, and He knows our every need. For most in the mental health journey, it's not about finding the "cure" or complete healing but building resiliency and resting in God's grace for a renewed life. This mental health recovery process happens through a whole-health approach. To God, our whole human life is spiritual. Yet, for our discovery process, we can look at it as different areas of our lives that overlap and affect one another: physical, mental, spiritual (faith), and relational.

What is Whole-Health?

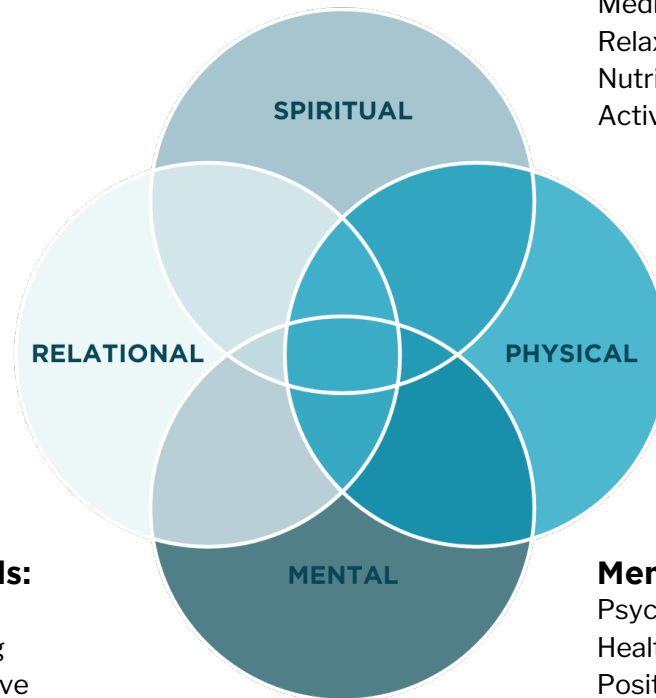
You or your loved one can address various needs and grow within each area of life. Each area will help to serve the whole, resulting in overall well-being and life satisfaction.

Spiritual Needs:

- Identity (self + in Christ)
- Spiritual Growth
- Purpose
- Prayer

Physical Needs:

- Sleep
- Medication (if needed)
- Relaxation Tools
- Nutrition
- Active Lifestyle (exercise)



Relational Needs:

- Encouragement
- Supportive Listening
- Opportunities to Serve Community

Mental Needs:

- Psychotherapy/Counseling
- Healthy Thinking Tools
- Positive Coping/Stress Management
- Creative Mental Activities
- Knowing Cycles and Triggers

What are my physical needs?

+ Sleep

Trouble with sleep is common with mental health challenges and can worsen other symptoms too. The keys to getting good sleep are:

- **Sleep Routine** – Determine a healthy schedule and routine; 7.5 – 9 hours of sleep.
- **Sleep Hygiene** – Creative ideas to help wind down and find calm before sleep.
- **Sleep Diary** – Keep a log to build awareness and monitor your progress.

+ Medication

Not everyone needs medication. However, medication can be one helpful tool for individuals experiencing mental health difficulties. Continually educate yourself about any medications that you or your loved one are prescribed. Here are a few medication tips:

- **Psychiatrist or Therapist** – Either can help determine if you need medication.
- **Medication Records** – Keep a record of the medication, type, and dosage.
- **Side Effects** – Communicate with your doctor about challenging side effects.
- **Progress** – Monitor your overall progress, don't feel stuck with medications.

+ Relaxation

Relaxation techniques, like muscle relaxation and paced breathing, can be done daily to decrease stress and can be helpful during episodes of panic and anxiety. Over time, they help build mental and emotional resilience.

+ Nutrition

Evaluate your overall eating habits. A healthy diet helps your brain function and can enhance the effectiveness of medication.

+ Active Lifestyle (exercise)

The body needs motion to release pent-up stress (stress hormones). Simple, daily physical activity is recommended. This can help relieve anxiety and depressive symptoms and recalibrate your brain and nervous system towards soothing relief, leading to more hope.

What are my mental needs?

+ Psychotherapy / Counseling

Therapy has been proven to be effective for mental health recovery and support. Each mental health professional has different specialties or therapies they are trained in, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).

+ Healthy Thinking Tools

Simple tools to address ongoing negative thinking, identify stressors, and discover healthy thinking solutions are essential for the mental health recovery process. Professional therapists, mental health coaches, and supportive community environments can help reinforce these mental tools. Simple exercises may include:

- **Gratitude** – List three things and people you are thankful to have in your life.
- **Affirming Security** – Remind yourself they are just thoughts, not really you.
- **Reframing Security:**
 - a) Understand what the specific negative thoughts are (normal to everyone).
 - b) Understand that they are irrational thoughts and can be challenged.
 - c) Understand that you can reframe to positive and secure thoughts.

+ Positive Coping / Stress Management

Identifying stressors and simple solutions, like relaxation tools, to create healthy coping skills will significantly aid in defusing difficult symptoms. Some examples include:

- **Breathing exercise**
- **Muscle relaxation**
- **Mindfulness**
- **Healthy distractions**

+ Creative Mental Activities

Mentally refreshing and stimulating activities are highly therapeutic and will help create opportunities to experience positive rest. Ideas could include:

- **Painting**
- **Puzzles**
- **Games (e.g., word games, Tetris, Solitaire, etc.)**
- **Playing music**

+ Knowing Cycles and Triggers

Understanding the patterns and cycles (e.g., depression every winter) and triggers (e.g., holidays) of your or your loved one's specific symptoms is vital in being prepared to manage ongoing stability and mental and emotional resiliency.

- **Cycles** – Be aware of when throughout the year you or your loved one experience different episodes of depression, anxiety, or other challenges. Are they the same time every year (e.g., seasons, end of school year, work calendar)? Do you see them more often due to stressful events?
- **Triggers** – Take note of certain things that trigger depression, anxiety, or other challenges (e.g., school, work, relationships, finances, spirituality, crowds, holidays, etc.).

What are my spiritual needs?

[See our free devotional materials for extra encouragement.](#)

+ Identity (Self + In Christ)

Circumstances, struggles, and disorders do not define you or your loved one; God does. We are uniquely created with a beautiful personality to live in life-inspiring community. A mental health challenge does not exclude us from opportunities – they may provide more in-depth wisdom about life. A mental health challenge is a condition like any other health “condition” impacting our lives; it does not cancel out your or your loved one's redefined identity in Christ. No matter the condition, God's love is at rest within us.

+ Spiritual Growth

Focus on God's loving nature and character to be faithful to us, even in troubling times. Remember that God gives these to you; He never demands them from you. Spiritual growth or formation is based on our “in Christ” relationship, not a performance for God's pleasing.

+ Purpose

Having a healthy view of our identity and “in Christ” partnership, we can begin to discover our gifts, talents, and skills that can bless others. This encompasses our daily occupations or volunteering opportunities. Mental health challenges can limit our energy or capacity on varying levels, but we can bring creative value to others at any level. This is creatively lived out.

+ Prayer

Even when we feel far from God or unable to connect with Him, He is still there. First, know that Jesus is your intercessor; He is always for you (never against you). Second, keep prayer simple and authentic regarding your life and others. In other words, if you care about it, He cares about it; share in the conversation with Him about it.

What are my relational needs?

+ Life-Giving Community

Isolation can be common when you're experiencing difficult mental health symptoms. Yet, comfort, encouragement, and support from a caring community and church are vital in your and your loved one's overall healing and mental health recovery. This is why we've created our Grace and Thrive Groups. Thousands use Grace Alliance materials in small groups (Grace and Thrive Groups) or on their own all around the world.

- [Family Grace](#) is a simple 16-week introductory topical curriculum to help families and spouses support a loved one's mental health challenge.
- [Living Grace](#) is a simple 16-week introductory topical curriculum for those with a mental health challenge.
- [Redefine Grace](#) is a simple 10-week introductory curriculum for students with mental health challenges.
- [Living Hope](#) is a simple 16-week introductory curriculum for those with trauma-related mental health challenges.
- [Thrive Group](#) is a 20-chapter, in-depth, step-by-step mental health recovery course for those with a mental health challenge.

[See our website for group locations.](#)

+ Stigma and Shame

While secular and spiritual stigma may still be present, learning about other men and women who have endured severe mental health challenges, like Martin Luther and Mother Theresa, can offer great encouragement. Many of the greatest heroes in history and Christian leaders who have helped shape the Church have had significant mental health difficulties and disorders. Mental health does not limit purpose; it enhances it. Your or your loved one's mental health challenge is an opportunity to see a beautiful expression of life and God. Our resources explore this topic more with examples and exercises to help discover greater value, worth, and purpose.

+ Opportunities to Serve

As stability is regained, you or your loved one can look for simple ways to serve and bless others. Helping others leads to restoration as it reinforces our value and worth. Everyone has a role in blessing our "neighbor."

— Additional Needs —

+ Celebrate Progress

Sometimes, recognizing or seeing positive progress may be difficult. To stay encouraged, celebrate even your or your loved one's small steps to build confidence and empower resilience for difficult times that may come.

+ Employment or Education

As your or your loved one's mental health improves with extended periods of stability, you or your loved one may want to find a job or return to school. This is an important step so that you or they can thrive and be successful without escalating symptoms. Take it step-by-step; jumping back in quickly can feel overwhelming. Take it slow, and don't push too hard.



How to Navigate Professional & Community Support

There are excellent resources, tools, and support to aid you on your journey toward mental health recovery. Like any health condition, it is a journey that takes time to find the proper treatment and support. God is with you through each step of your or your loved one's process, and He can provide for your needs in various ways. In addition to professional intervention, an empowering mental health community can aid you and your loved one's mental health recovery process, relationships, and overall life purpose.

Who can help me?

The Professionals

+ General Practitioner

Family Doctors or Physicians can do an initial evaluation and refer you to a specialist. Due to the mental health demand, it may take weeks or months to get an appointment with a mental health professional. Sometimes, the best person to help you evaluate your mental health condition is your family doctor or general practitioner. Your general physician can assess your mental health distress and, if needed, prescribe a simple entry-level medication to help with general symptom relief. We encourage you not to rely on the medication alone. As noted before, therapy combined with needed medication has more beneficial results.

+ Psychiatrist

These physicians are specialists who treat mental health conditions with psychotropic medications. Psychiatrists will help evaluate specific mental health symptoms and prescribe and monitor medications for symptom reduction/relief.

+ Psychotherapist (PsyD/Ph.D.)

These professionals work with various mental health diagnoses and therapies, like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and other specialized therapy models. When contacting these professionals, ask which mental health challenges they specialize in.

+ Counselor (MFT/LPC/LCSW or LMSW/other)

These professionals work with various therapy models for interpersonal and internal challenges. Some specialize in mental health diagnoses by incorporating CBT and other specialized therapy models. When contacting these professionals, ask what their specialties are.

+ **Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP)**

These programs are provided by professional therapeutic programs to offer education and tools. They are facilitated during the week (half/full days). Depending on your insurance, financial means, or community, some IOPs are covered by insurance or are free from community services.

+ **Certified Specialist Coach/Mental Health Coach (peers)**

These individuals often have their own lived experience with mental health challenges and are certified as mental health coaches or peer specialists (sometimes offered in State service programs). They often work well with professionals. Peer services and coaches effectively use evidence-based research/results.

Community Strength

Patience within community is the key. Due to the overwhelming mental health demand, finding mental health professional treatment and support may take weeks or months. Thus, the best help is to find an understanding community that can provide ongoing support. Mental health can often lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation. However, research shows that community is imperative to mental health recovery! Thankfully, some great options are available, and more are being introduced every day.

+ **Grace Alliance Grace Groups and Resources**

We offer grace-filled, practical resources and mental health curriculum for community small groups that work in any denomination and church. We have a list of groups (in-person and online) on our website.



***With our Living Grace, Living Hope, and Thrive showing positive outcomes published in psychological journals, these encouraging mental health groups can provide significant symptom relief and reduction that will help support the individual while waiting for a mental health professional appointment and beyond.**

+ **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)**

Free educational courses and support groups for those on the mental health journey and their families. We have seen many of our Grace and Thrive groups offered in collaborative support with NAMI educational courses and groups.



How do I navigate the system for support?

Mental Health Care & Community Support

+ Consult with a family physician / general practitioner.

- Have a complete physical and blood work evaluated for possible primary or secondary causes.
- Consult with your doctor concerning recommendations and referrals to trusted psychiatrists. Many psychiatrists not presently taking new patients will accept someone if referred by another physician. If you do not have a family physician or clinic, consult with any urgent medical care facility to conduct initial lab work evaluations and utilize their referrals to other professionals.

+ Find a psychotherapist/counselor and psychiatrist.

These mental health professionals are equipped to conduct psychological evaluations and start a process for care (medication, therapy, etc.). Quality mental health care should be purposeful, consistent, and ongoing (as needed).

+ Find local community mental health support.

Seek mental health agencies, organizations, or ministries that provide support, education, and resources (The Grace Alliance, NAMI, etc.).

+ Develop a whole-health plan.

As you gather support and resources, evaluate each area of life (mental, physical, spiritual, relational) to establish a care plan. For more information, refer to our [Thrive workbook for a supportive, in-depth resource.](#)

+ Know the acute crisis support and hospitalizations (dial 988 for immediate help).

Many cities have a crisis response team to help provide an assessment during difficult times. Find these numbers at local mental health agencies (NAMI affiliates or hospitals). If hospitalization is necessary, it usually only lasts 2-4 days. You can dial 988 on your phone and reach certified personnel who can assist with mental health distress.

Finances / Insurance

+ Insurance

Consult your insurance plan for available doctors/therapists in your network. If you can't get an appointment, your family doctor can refer you to a psychiatrist or therapist.

+ No Insurance

Consult with the various family clinics or state-run services in your area that provide professional mental health services. Be patient because these state-run services are generally full and have a more extended waiting period to see a professional.

+ Can't Afford Services

Look into government claim programs (SSI, SSDI, Medicaid, Medicare, food stamps, assisted housing). This type of assistance will significantly increase the number of mental health care options available. **This is not a sign of failure!** These services were intended to help when mental health disorders interfere with life.

Other Items to Be Aware Of

+ Release of Information Consent

If you are 18 or older, consider signing a release form with the overseeing doctors, therapists, and insurance to discuss your care and treatment with other medical professionals and trusted family members. This will help your professionals and support system work as a team! This can be a sensitive topic for families; however, if this is your personal journey, consider including trusted individuals who can help you navigate your overall care (not to control, but to partner and support you in your journey).

+ Keep Your Information Organized

There will be a lot of paperwork, so keep a record of your professional care, including:

- Dates of diagnoses
- Hospitalizations
- Copies of psych. assessments
- Medical records
- Contact info for doctors/therapists
- History of medication/treatments
- Insurance/Medicare/Medicaid info



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 and restoring life, relationships, and purpose.

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