

BUILDING BETTER BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PATTERNS

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WHAT IS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH (BH)?

IF YOU WORK IN THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH FIELD, YOU KNOW THAT THE FIELD INCLUDES THE STUDY AND TREATMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS (CHALLENGES WITH ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS). HOWEVER, THE TERM "BEHAVIORAL HEALTH" CAN ALSO REFER TO OUR STATE OF HEALTH AND/OR CHALLENGE WHEN IT COMES TO OUR THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, BEHAVIOR PATTERNS, RELATIONSHIPS, AND GENERAL WELL-BEING. HEALTH AND CHALLENGE EXIST ON MANY LEVELS, FROM THE INDIVIDUAL TO SOCIETY AS A WHOLE.

LATELY IT HAS BECOME MORE AND MORE CLEAR THAT WE NEED TO TAKE A PUBLIC HEALTH AND PREVENTIVE APPROACH TO BEHAVIORAL HEALTH. TO DO THAT, WE NEED TO "MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE" RATHER THAN JUST WAITING UNTIL PROBLEMS EXACERBATES THAT INDIVIDUALS NEED TO COME TO US FOR PROFESSIONAL HELP. WE ALSO NEED TO STAY MINDFUL OF PEOPLE'S STRENGTHS, THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARD BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CONDITIONS, AND THEIR EXPERIENCE OF HARDSHIP, TRAUMA, AND RACIAL INEQUITIES.

WE MIGHT START SIMPLY BY HELPING PEOPLE—INCLUDING OURSELVES—NOTICE AND DESCRIBE HOW OUR EVERYDAY COGNITIVE PATTERNS—OUR THOUGHTS AND OUR WAYS OF REACTING TO THOSE THOUGHTS—AFFECT OUR OVERALL WELL-BEING. BEING MORE AWARE OF OUR PATTERNS IS A GOOD FOUNDATION FOR LEARNING ABOUT OUR OWN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH, SO WE MAY IDENTIFY AND CHOOSE HEALTHY BEHAVIOR PATTERNS AND COPING STRATEGIES.

IT IS ALSO AN IMPORTANT RESPONSIBILITY OF BOTH BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP TO WORK HARD TO DECONSTRUCT STIGMA—THE OLD MYTHS AND ATTITUDES THAT KEEP SO MANY PEOPLE FROM SEEKING HELP, PARTICULARLY IN AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES. WE ALL NEED TO PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR THOSE WHO ARE STRUGGLING WITH OR IN RECOVERY FROM BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CONDITIONS. WHEN WE ADVOCATE FOR POSITIVE OUTCOMES IN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH, WE ARE INVESTING IN A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE AND A HEALTHIER FUTURE FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS.

MINDING OUR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

NO MATTER WHO WE ARE OR WHAT OUR ROLES MIGHT BE, IT IS IMPORTANT TO BE MINDFUL OF OUR BEHAVIORS. OUR MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WELL-BEING ARE INTERTWINED AND INSEPARABLE, SO THE BEHAVIORAL CHOICES WE MAKE AFFECT THE WHOLE PERSON, AND THE PEOPLE AROUND US. THROUGH OUR ENGAGEMENT IN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES—AS PROFESSIONALS AND/OR AS PARTICIPANTS—WE LEARN HOW TO INCORPORATE POSITIVE COPING MECHANISMS INTO OUR DAILY ROUTINES.

HOWEVER, WE MUST ALSO RECOGNIZE AND UNDERSTAND THE BARRIERS THAT LIMIT SOME INDIVIDUALS' WILLINGNESS AND/OR ABILITY TO SEEK, RECEIVE, AND/OR PARTICIPATE IN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES. OUR HISTORY AND OUR SOCIETY HAVE LEFT US WITH A LEGACY OF:

- SOCIAL STIGMA,
- SYSTEMIC RACISM IN POLICIES AND PROCEDURES,
- UNCONSCIOUS BIASES IN PROVIDER/PARTICIPANT INTERACTIONS, AND
- MISTRUST OF HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS IN MANY AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES.

THESE AND OTHER CHALLENGES ALL CONTRIBUTE TO THE LACK OF ACCESS TO AND MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT IN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH TREATMENT. WITH ALL THESE THINGS CONSIDERED, HOW CAN WE ADVOCATE FOR INDIVIDUALS, COMMUNITIES, AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROVIDERS AND SYSTEMS TO BUILD BETTER, MORE SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CHOICES—AND HOW CAN WE DO IT TOGETHER?

JOIN US

AS WE BEGIN TO PREPARE FOR THE NEW YEAR, PLEASE JOIN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CENTER OF EXCELLENCE IN BUILDING BETTER BEHAVIORAL HEALTH. WE WILL DISCUSS WAYS OF IMPROVING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS BY:

- DECONSTRUCTING STIGMA IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY,
- ADDRESSING UNHEALTHY COPING MECHANISMS,
- IDENTIFYING HEALTHY COPING STRATEGIES, AND
- INCREASING ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION IN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND APPROPRIATE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES.

THE ATTACHED FLYER, "TIPS FOR BUILDING BETTER BEHAVIORAL HEALTH HABITS FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS," WILL HELP YOU RAISE INDIVIDUAL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING. WE ALSO INVITE YOU TO CONNECT WITH US THROUGHOUT THE NEW YEAR ON FACEBOOK AND ACROSS OUR SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS. PLEASE LET US KNOW HOW YOU PLAN TO BUILD BETTER BEHAVIORAL HEALTH IN 2022 AND BEYOND.

