“Learning about the stress-vulnerability model really helped me understand how both biology and stress contribute to mental health and substance use problems.”

— KENICA A., waitress, person in recovery from schizophrenia and alcoholism
Questions to get us started:

What contributes to developing mental illness and substance use problems?
What makes mental illness and substance use problems better?
What makes them worse?

How do biology and stress affect mental illnesses and substance use?

You will have the opportunity to discuss these questions and more in this module about The Stress-Vulnerability Model.

We will cover 3 topics in this Module:

**Topic 1:**
How do Biology and Stress Affect Mental Health and Substance Use?

**Topic 2:**
How do Mental Illnesses and Substance Use Interact with Each Other?

**Topic 3:**
Steps You Can Take to Improve Your Recovery

Reminder, set an Agenda:

Here is the format of each Enhanced IMR session:
1. Review the last session
2. Check in on
   - home practice
   - goals
   - substance use
   - symptoms
3. Learn information about a new topic
4. Summarize session and decide on home practice
Topic 1
How Do Biology and Stress Affect Mental Health and Substance Use?

In this module we will learn about two important factors that can impact mental health and substance use: our biology, and the stress we experience in our lives. Learning how these factors combine to influence your mental health and substance use can help you understand that your illness is not your fault. It can also help you find the best strategies for improving your recovery.

We encourage you to work with your E-IMR practitioner, group members, friends, and family to use the tools you learn in this module to support your recovery. Practice during sessions can improve your understanding of the topics, and increase your ability to use coping strategies on your own.

In today’s session we will learn how biology and stress contribute to developing mental illnesses and substance use problems. We will explore the following four subjects:

💡 The role of biological factors in mental illness and substance use problems
💡 How non-genetic factors contribute to biological vulnerability to mental illnesses and substance use problems
💡 Does substance use cause mental illness?
💡 How stress contributes to substance use and mental illness problems

Scientists do not yet understand why some people develop a mental illness and substance use problem while other people don’t. They also can’t predict who will have several episodes of symptoms and who will have only one or only a few episodes. One theory receiving strong support is called the “stress-vulnerability model.” According to this theory, both stress and biological vulnerability contribute to symptoms, as shown in the following diagram:
The role of biological factors in mental illness and substance use problems

Being vulnerable to something means we have lower defense levels against it, or we are more likely to be impacted by it. For example, people with asthma are vulnerable to experiencing breathing problems on days with high smog levels. Sometimes vulnerabilities are passed down from our families.

The term “biological vulnerability” means there is an increased chance of developing a disorder. People are born with this vulnerability, or develop it very early in life. For example, some people have a biological vulnerability to develop asthma, or high blood pressure, or diabetes.

In a similar way, scientists think people can have biological vulnerabilities to develop mental illnesses and substance use problems.

For example, the chances of a person developing asthma or diabetes tend to be higher if a close relative also has the disorder. The chances of a person developing depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia are higher if a close relative also has the disorder. In a similar way, the chances of a person developing a substance use problem are higher if a close relative has a substance use problem.

Let’s Talk About It

Does anyone in your family have a mental illness?

Does anyone in your family have a drug or alcohol problem?

Does anyone in your family have both?
Your Genogram

A genogram is a picture used to show family relationships across several generations. Some people call it a family tree. You may find it helpful to do a genogram that shows which of your family members has had a substance use disorder, which has had a mental illness, and which has had both. It is common to grow up with people you are not related to biologically or with partial biological relatives like half siblings. If you have these family members on your genogram, you may want to add some extra labels to help you more closely explore your family connections. See the example below, followed by a blank genogram that you can complete for yourself. The following key explains the initials used:

\[ \text{M} = \text{Mental health problem} \quad \text{D} = \text{Drug problem} \quad \text{A} = \text{Alcohol problem} \]

**EXAMPLE:**

```
Grandpa Tom  A
Grandma Sue  M
Grandpa Joe  A
Grandma Ann

Mother        A, D
Sister Kristin D
Me            M
Brother Jacob
```

```
Grandpa
Grandma
Grandpa
Grandma

Mother
Father

Siblings
Me
Siblings
```
How non-genetic factors contribute to biological vulnerability to mental illnesses and substance use problems

Genetics do not explain everything about the development of mental illnesses and substance use problems. For example, many people with a mental illness have no family history of psychiatric symptoms. And many people with a drug or alcohol problem have no relatives with substance use problems.

There is strong scientific evidence that non-genetic factors also make us vulnerable to developing substance use problems and mental illness. These factors may be physical, or they may be related to things we experience in life. For example, complications during pregnancy, or delivery (such as using forceps or the baby not getting enough oxygen) may be important early physical factors. Other examples have to do with the age or health of the parents. For example, the older the father is when the child is conceived, the greater the risk that the child may later develop schizophrenia.

Difficult childhood experiences have also been shown to increase the risk of developing a mental illness or drug or alcohol problem. For example, if a child under the age of 5 loses their mother, they are at an increased risk of developing a major depression. These experiences are often called “Adverse Childhood Experiences” or “ACEs.”

Examples of adverse childhood experiences include:

- emotional abuse
- sexual abuse
- physical abuse
- neglect
- poverty
- lack of adequate stimulation
- loss of a parent
- witnessing or being the victim of violence
- being the victim of bullying
- having early disruptions with primary caregivers, such having multiple foster care placements.
Research is underway to better understand the role of adverse childhood experiences in developing symptoms, and how to help people who have had these experiences. If you have had adverse childhood experiences, it is important to discuss them with either your E-IMR practitioner or another member of your treatment team. They will help you figure out if additional therapy could be helpful.

Some people who have experienced severe adverse childhood experiences develop a psychiatric disorder called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). You can learn more about PTSD in Module 2, Practical Facts about Mental Illness, which contains a complete description of the symptoms and the treatment for the disorder.

Does substance use cause mental illness?

There is a lot of scientific debate about whether substance use can cause mental illnesses. Some studies have shown that people who used alcohol or other drugs have an earlier onset of mental illness. Studies have also shown that people who use cannabis as adolescents have a higher risk of developing schizophrenia. At present, scientists don’t agree about whether these studies show that drug use causes mental illness, or is just associated with it. However, most scientists agree there is strong evidence that using substances can make mental health problems worse.

Let’s Talk About It

Have you experienced any of these examples of adverse childhood experiences?

If so, how do you think it affected you later in life?
How stress contributes to substance use and mental illness problems

Scientists think stress plays an important part in mental illness and substance use problems. For example, stress can trigger the onset of mental illness symptoms or make them worse. Stress can also trigger the use or increased use of drugs and alcohol.

People experience stress in very different ways. In fact, what is stressful to one person may not be stressful at all to someone else. However, there are some situations that most people find stressful, such as:

- Having too much to do in too little time (such as being expected to complete several tasks in a short period of time)
- Not having any meaningful activities to do (such as sitting around all day with nothing to accomplish)
- Having high levels of conflict in interpersonal relationships (such as people often arguing, expressing angry feelings, or being very critical of each other)
- Major life changes (such as losing a loved one, moving away from home, starting a new job, getting married or divorced, or having a child)

In Module 5, Coping with Stress, you will find helpful information about stress, including strategies for reducing some sources of stress, and coping with stress that you can’t get rid of.

Let’s Talk About It

Have there been times when you were under stress and you experienced more mental health symptoms, or your symptoms got worse?

Have there been times when you were under stress and you experienced more problems with drugs or alcohol use?
Home Practice

How do Biology and Stress Affect Mental Health and Substance Use?

Choose one of the following options to practice or make one up.

**OPTION 1:**
Share your genogram with a family member or friend

**OPTION 2:**
Keep track of when you feel stress this week and whether you notice it affecting your mental illness, your substance use, or both. You can use a chart like the one on the following page.

Make a plan for home practice this week:

- **What I will do**
- **When**
- **Where**
- **With whom**

Goal Tracking

Looking at your goal tracking sheet, which step will you work on this week?

To complete this step, I will use the following plan:

- **When**
- **Where**
- **With whom**
# Keeping Track of Stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stress I experienced</th>
<th>I noticed that it affected the symptoms of my mental illness</th>
<th>I noticed that it affected the symptoms of my substance use problem</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
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<td>Sunday</td>
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Topic 2
How do Mental Illnesses and Substance Use Interact with Each Other?

There is strong agreement among scientists that mental illness and substance use disorders interact with each other, with each disorder making the other one worse. For example, a relapse of one disorder can contribute to a relapse of the other disorder. Here is a diagram that illustrates this concept:

Using alcohol and other drugs is common in most societies today. Alcohol is legal almost everywhere, and cannabis is becoming legal in many places. Even in places where it’s not legal, cannabis is often widely available. People often use substances socially, to celebrate things, or to deal with upsetting feelings. However, using substances can lead to problems, and interfere with people’s ability to manage their lives. For people who also have a mental illness, drinking or using drugs can interfere with their ability to manage the symptoms of their mental illness. It can also cause relapses.

Mental health symptoms are also quite common, and they can also interfere with people’s ability to manage their lives. For people who also have a substance use problem, mental illness can interfere with their ability to achieve and maintain sobriety.

This handout will help you understand how substance use problems and mental illness symptoms affect each other. You will learn more about the following three subjects:

- How drug and alcohol problems impact mental illnesses
- How mental illnesses impact substance use problems
- Why it is important to maintain awareness of both mental illnesses and substance use problems
The impact of drug and alcohol problems on mental illnesses

Because problems with substance use and mental illness are so closely related (and so common), it is important to understand how they are connected. Understanding this connection will help you create a more effective plan for recovery. It can also be an important source of motivation for sticking to your plan, since problems in one area make the problems in the other area worse and harder to manage.

Using drugs and alcohol negatively impacts mental illnesses by:

- Making the symptoms worse
- Making it harder to follow through with treatment
- Creating stress (which makes symptoms worse)

How substance use impacts symptoms of mental illness

Using alcohol or other drugs causes changes in the way the brain functions. These substances can impact the areas of the brain that are associated with mental illness, or with making us vulnerable to developing a mental illness. That means alcohol or drug use can result in bringing back mental health symptoms that had been under control, or it can worsen the symptoms you were already experiencing. For example, stimulants such as amphetamines can increase the neurotransmitter (brain chemical) dopamine, which is believed to contribute to psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations and delusions. Therefore, a person who takes stimulants increases their risk of these symptoms re-emerging (if they were in remission) or becoming more severe.

Examples of common symptoms of mental illness that can be made worse by using substances include depression, anxiety, hearing voices, seeing things, paranoia, suicidal thinking, intrusive memories of traumatic events, confused thinking, and manic symptoms. Sometimes increases in these symptoms can require special appointments with a medication prescriber, visits to the emergency room, or temporary psychiatric hospitalization.

Let’s Talk About It

Can you think of a time when drinking or using drugs made mental health symptoms worse? What happened?
How substance use impacts mental health treatment

Sometimes when people use substances, their drinking or drug use becomes the most important part of their life, and they neglect other important things, including taking care of their mental illness. They may stop participating in treatment or give up other self-care behaviors. Substance use can lead people to reduce or stop engaging in activities related to managing their mental illness including:

- Taking medications regularly
- Attending therapy or medication treatment appointments
- Going to a rehabilitation program, such as supported employment
- Going to a local clubhouse or drop-in center
- Using healthy strategies to cope with stress or symptoms
- Getting social support from friends and family members who do not use
- Doing meaningful activities, like work and school
- Pursuing their goals

Let’s Talk About It

Can you think of a time when drinking or using drugs interfered with your mental health treatment? What happened?
How substance use impacts stress

Drinking or using drugs often results in people getting into risky situations, which endanger their safety and well-being. There are also negative social, legal, and financial consequences. These negative consequences can be very stressful, which can in turn lead to increased mental health symptoms and relapses. Here are some examples of ways that using drugs and alcohol can cause stress:

- Increased risk of accidents and injuries
- Getting into fights
- Being mugged
- Being physically or sexually assaulted
- Problems in relationships
- Not getting enough sleep and relaxation
- Losing housing
- Money problems
- Losing a job or having to drop out of school
- Difficulty taking care of one’s children
- Health problems related to substance use (such as liver problems due to drinking, or infectious diseases related to drug injection)
- Engaging in sexually risky behaviors
- Legal problems

Let’s Talk About It

What are some of the stressful consequences you have experienced related to your drinking or use of drugs?

What happened?
The impact of mental illnesses on substance use problems

Having a mental illness can make people more sensitive to the effects of substances. That is, even a small amount of alcohol or drugs can cause a problem for someone with a mental illness. For that reason, people with mental illnesses are at a higher risk for developing a drug or alcohol problem. Here is a chart that shows the differences in the lifetime rate of substance use disorders in people in the general population, compared to the rate in people who have a serious mental illness:

**Lifetime Rates of Substance Use Disorder:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FOR PEOPLE WITH SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS</th>
<th>FOR PEOPLE WITHOUT SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS</th>
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<tr>
<td>50%</td>
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<td>15%</td>
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We will look at each of these examples below.

1. **Using substances to cope with mental health symptoms**

When people experience an increase in mental health symptoms it can be very distressing. Examples of symptoms that can be distressing or upsetting include depression, anxiety, sleep problems, hearing voices, or intrusive memories of traumatic events. People sometimes try using substances to cope with...
these and other symptoms. This is sometimes called self-medication. Although using substances may offer some temporary relief, it usually worsens symptoms in the long run.

**Let’s Talk About It**
Can you think of a time when you used alcohol or drugs to try to cope with mental health symptoms? What happened?

### 2. Difficulty taking care of oneself and following through with treatment

When mental health symptoms get worse, they can distract people from paying attention to important things in their lives. People may stop taking care of themselves as well as they did before, and reduce or stop actively participating in both mental health and substance use treatment. This can affect substance use because people often decrease or stop activities that help them stay sober when they are experiencing mental health symptoms. They may stop:

- Attending appointments that address substance use
- Attending programs that include substance use issues
- Attending Dual Recovery or AA or NA or other peer groups
- Taking substance use medications regularly

**Let’s Talk About It**
Have your mental health symptoms ever gotten in the way of taking care of yourself, or following through with your substance use treatment? What happened?

### 3. Difficulty dealing with higher levels of stress

When people are experiencing mental health symptoms, it can be very stressful. Some common examples of symptoms that result in stress are anxiety, hearing voices, sleep problems, feeling paranoid, and having intrusive memories of traumatic events. As discussed earlier in this module, stress can make substance use problems worse, especially when people use substances as a way of trying to cope with stress. Although there is often a temporary relief from stress when people use substances, it usually worsens stress in the long run.

**Let’s Talk About It**
Have your mental health symptoms caused stress for you? Did you try to cope with it by using substances? What happened?
4. Difficulty dealing with problems related to mental health symptoms

Increases in mental health symptoms can lead to problems in people’s lives that they may try to cope with by using substances. Here are some examples:

- People who are depressed may stop eating or miss work.
- People who are experiencing a manic episode may make unwise decisions like spending money they don’t have, or having intimate relationships with people they don’t know.
- People who are hearing voices may find it hard to concentrate in class, and may do poorly on a test.
- People who are feeling paranoid may be fearful of leaving their house, even to get groceries they need.
- People who are having intrusive memories of traumatic events may find it hard to perform on their job.

The problems described above can lead to stressful situations, which people may try to cope with by using substances. That is, people who are abstinent may resume drinking or using drugs; people are using substances may drink more or use more drugs. This increased substance use can, in turn, make any of these life problems worse, and harder to manage.

Let’s Talk About It

Have your mental health symptoms led to problems that caused stress?

What happened?

How did the stress affect your substance use?
Maintaining awareness of both mental illnesses and substance use problems

This topic has described how the symptoms of mental illnesses and substance use problems interact with each other. One of the most important messages to take from this is that it is very important to be aware of both disorders and make sure you are paying enough attention to each disorder.

You will get the best result if you pay attention to both mental health and substance use problems, pursue treatment for both, and take care of problems with each of them as soon as they come up.

Make It Your Own

Maintaining Awareness of Mental Illness and Substance Use Problems

Do you think you are paying enough attention to your mental health problems?

__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

If not, what is one thing you could do to improve on this?

__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________

Do you think you are paying enough attention to your substance use problems? If not, what is one step you could take to improve on this?

__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
Home Practice

How Do Biology and Stress Affect Mental Health and Substance Use?

Choose one of the following options to practice or make one up.

**OPTION 1:**
Make a plan to take action on the step you identified to improve your attention to your substance use problem.

**OPTION 2:**
Make a plan to take action on the step you identified to improve your attention to your mental health problem.

Make a plan for home practice this week:

- What I will do
- When
- Where
- With whom

Goal Tracking

Looking at your goal tracking sheet, which step will you work on this week?

To complete this step, I will use the following plan:

- When
- Where
- With whom
Topic 3
Steps You Can Take to Improve Your Recovery

Now that you have learned more about how substance use problems and mental health impact one another, we will explore ways to use this knowledge to support your recovery. In this module, you will learn about six important steps you can take to improve your recovery:

- Taking medication
- Using skills for maintaining abstinence from alcohol and drugs
- Coping with stress
- Getting social support
- Using coping strategies for symptoms
- Using recovery management skills

The diagram on the following page shows how The Stress-Vulnerability Model can be used to help you avoid relapses (or recurrences) of mental illness and substance use. In the diagram, the arrows pointing from one box to the other mean that the first box primarily affects the other. You will also see the diagram contains a box for each of the topics listed above, along with a depiction of the relationship between mental illness and substance use symptoms as described in Topic 2 of this module.

Each part of the diagram will be explained in more detail.
The Stress-Vulnerability Model
of Mental Illnesses and Substance Use Disorders

**Stress**

**Coping Skills**
- for stress
- and symptoms

**Social Support**

**Recovery Skills**
- Pursuit of goals
- Knowledge of mental illness and substance use
- Healthy lifestyle
- A plan for staying well and preventing relapses

**Biological Vulnerability**

**Mental Illness**
- and relapse of symptoms

**Substance Use Disorder**
- and relapse of using alcohol or drugs

**Medication**

**Skills for not using substances**
Taking medication

For many people, medication helps reduce the symptoms of mental illness AND helps to keep symptoms from coming back (prevent relapses). There are several different medications used to treat different mental illnesses. There are also helpful medications for substance use problems.

It is your decision whether to take medications. It is important to be aware of the benefits of the medications, and also the potential side effects. We encourage you to talk to your doctor or nurse about medications and bring up all your questions.

Module 7, Using Medication Effectively, provides more specific information about medications and how to get the best results from them.

Skills for maintaining abstinence from alcohol and drugs

Not using alcohol and other drugs (abstaining) helps to minimize the symptoms of mental illness and keep them from coming back. Alcohol and drugs affect neurotransmitters (brain chemicals) in the brain, which can cause symptoms to come back or get worse. Furthermore, the effects of substances on neurotransmitters in the brain can prevent people from getting the full benefits of medication on symptoms, because medications work by affecting these neurotransmitter systems. Using alcohol and drugs can also lead to legal, financial, and health problems, causing stress that can trigger symptoms.

For people who are abstinent from drinking or using drugs, a “slip,” in which a person uses a small amount of a substance again, can lead to a full relapse of substance use problems and addiction. Therefore, trying to prevent slips of substance use can be important to preventing people from resuming their old habits.

Let’s Talk About It

Have medications helped you reduce symptoms of mental illness, or keep them from coming back?

Have you used substance use medications? Did they help you?
Here are some examples of skills for maintaining abstinence:

- Developing a network of sober friends and family members
- Avoiding situations that put you at a high risk of using substances (e.g., going to places where you bought or used drugs in the past)
- Attending a peer recovery support group such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Dual Recovery, or Narcotics Anonymous (NA)
- Doing fun activities that do not involve using substances

Module 3, *Practical Facts about Substance Use Disorder*, provides good information to help you learn these and other skills for maintaining abstinence from alcohol and drugs.

Let’s Talk About It

If you are currently abstinent, how do you think it has helped you reduce your mental illness symptoms or prevent relapses or hospitalizations?

If you are currently using substances, think of times in the past when you were not using. Can you identify any ways that your mental health symptoms were better during that time period?

Coping with stress

As we discussed in Topic 1, stress can cause the symptoms of mental illness to come back or get worse. Stress can also contribute to people relapsing back into drugs or alcohol, or increasing their use. Therefore, it is helpful for people to reduce the effects of stress in their lives. There are two main ways to reduce the negative effects of stress. One way is to address stressors that we have some control over, and reduce or eliminate them. The other way is to have effective coping strategies for dealing with stress so that it doesn’t cause negative effects.

Module 5, *Coping with Stress*, provides more information about reducing sources of stress and coping strategies for managing stress more effectively.

Let’s Talk About It

What is an example of something you have done to reduce stress in your life?

What is an example of a strategy you have used to cope with stress?
Getting social support

Having people to talk to and do things with is important to everyone. Social support from friends and family members helps people enjoy their lives more and cope better with life challenges. For example, many activities are more fun when you do them with others. Also, just being able to hang out with someone who understands you helps you feel supported and can help relieve pressure.

Here are some other things that people in your support system can help you with:

- Supporting you and believing in your ability to achieve your goals
- Helping you take specific steps toward your goals
- Helping you solve problems that come up in your life
- Helping you monitor your mental health symptoms
- Supporting your goal of being abstinent from using alcohol or drugs
- Helping you avoid using alcohol or drugs
- Doing fun activities together that don’t involve alcohol or drugs

Module 6, *Building Social Support*, provides more information about connecting with people and having rewarding relationships.

Let’s Talk About It

What is an example of a supportive relationship in your life, either now or in the past?

What is an example of how a supportive relationship made a difference in your mental health, your physical health, or your use of alcohol or drugs?

What is an example of how social support can help people achieve or maintain abstinence from using substances?
Using coping strategies for symptoms

For some people, the symptoms of mental illnesses become mild or go away with medication. Other people may experience symptoms that persist, or keep happening even when treated. These persistent symptoms can be distressing or interfere with their lives despite taking medication. Some examples of symptoms that can be persistent include: anxiety, depression, hearing voices or seeing things, feeling paranoid or suspicious of others, sleep problems, lack of motivation or drive, low stamina, and having lots of thoughts and memories about traumatic life experiences. However, people can learn good strategies for coping with these types of symptoms. Knowing effective ways of coping with symptoms can help people pursue their goals and enjoy their lives, in spite of experiencing some symptoms.

Sometimes people use alcohol or drugs to try to cope with troubling mental health symptoms. For example, people who have experienced traumatic events in their lives and who have posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may drink in order to try to escape or reduce anxiety related to their traumatic memories, to calm themselves, or to help them sleep better. Another example is people who hear voices (have hallucinations) and may drink alcohol or use cannabis in order to try to reduce the voices or make them feel less anxious when they hear them.

However, using substances to cope with mental health symptoms often makes the symptoms worse rather than better in the long run. It can also lead to or worsen problems with drugs and alcohol. Learning effective strategies for coping with symptoms and urges to use substances can avoid the “vicious cycle” of using substances to cope with problems and mental health symptoms, which brings temporary relief, but then worsens those problems or symptoms in the long run.

You will find helpful information about a variety of coping strategies in Module 8, Coping with Problems and Symptoms.

Let’s Talk About It
What is an example of a coping strategy you have used for a symptom of mental illness?

What mental health symptoms have you used drugs or alcohol to try to cope with? Did it work? What happened in the short-run? What happened in the long-run?
Using recovery management skills

You can take an active role in your own recovery by developing your recovery management skills. These skills include:

- Identifying one or more personal recovery goals and working toward achieving those goals
- Learning practical information about mental illness and substance use disorders
- Developing a plan for staying well (sometimes called a relapse prevention plan) for preventing mental illness symptoms from returning and for preventing relapses of using alcohol or drugs
- Leading a healthy lifestyle, which includes regular exercise, good nutrition, getting enough sleep, and taking care of personal hygiene

Let’s Talk About It

What do you think is the most important part of managing your recovery?
What is one of your recovery goals?
What steps have you accomplished toward reaching your recovery goal(s)?

Several E-IMR modules address the four major ways to take the lead in managing your recovery. See the table below for details:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recovery Management Skill</th>
<th>Module where this skill is addressed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pursuit of goals</td>
<td>Module 1, Recovery Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of mental illness and substance use and their treatment</td>
<td>Module 2, Practical Facts about Mental Illness</td>
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<td>Module 3, Practical Facts about Substance Use Disorders</td>
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<tr>
<td>Having a plan for staying well and preventing relapses</td>
<td>Module 10, Developing a Plan for Staying Well</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leading a healthy lifestyle</td>
<td>Module 9, Healthy Lifestyles</td>
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</table>
Growing up, it was just my mom and me. She had bipolar disorder and was depressed a lot. When she stayed in bed, I would take care of things around the house and cook meals for us. I didn’t have much time to make friends and when I was 13 years old, I started buying alcohol along with the groceries. I would tell the store clerk it was for my mom, but it was for me. I started drinking a little every day because it helped me feel less lonely.

My mom died of a heart attack when I was 18 and I was left all alone. I began drinking heavily and became more and more isolated. I hardly ever left the house. It reminded me of how my mom had been. Finally, I realized how bad things were and I went to see my mom’s doctor—a psychiatrist. She told me I had bipolar disorder, like my mom had, and that it ran in families. However, she also told me I could live a very different life than my mother’s, and that there were lots of things I could do to manage the disorder effectively.

The visit with the psychiatrist gave me hope. I started taking medication for bipolar disorder and seeing a therapist. Although my bipolar disorder was better, I still had some mood problems. My therapist helped me see how my mood problems were related to my drinking, and how drinking made my symptoms worse—especially my depression. She also helped me develop better strategies for coping with my anxiety and depression, and for connecting with people. I’m now working at a part-time job and just started attending college.

— Carlos
Home Practice
Steps You Can Take to Improve Your Recovery

Choose one of the following options to practice or make one up.

**OPTION 1:**
Use the Stress Vulnerability Model to identify the things you are doing effectively and the things that could use improvement.

**OPTION 2:**
Teach someone about the Stress Vulnerability Model. Ask them what things you are doing most effectively and what you could improve.

Make a plan for home practice this week:

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<th>What I will do</th>
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<tr>
<th>Where</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With whom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Goal Tracking

Looking at your goal tracking sheet, which step will you work on this week?

To complete this step, I will use the following plan:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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</table>