

ROADMAP TO WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

**THE MENTAL
HEALTH
COALITION**

Gender is a major part of life. It influences how we move through, how we see, and how we are viewed by the world. Although mental health among women looks similar to mental health in general, there are some unique considerations that are important to recognize. Whether you identify as a woman yourself or are looking to support women in your life, read on to learn more.

WHAT IS WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH?

There are nearly 4 billion women in the world today, and just as many unique, individual experiences related to mental health. In addition to this vast diversity, there are some common experiences that tend to impact women specifically. These are also not exclusive to women, and can be attributed to femme folk in general. By focusing on women's mental health, we can address the health of all people who identify as women, which can include but is certainly not limited to individuals who identify as transgender, nonbinary, gender-nonconforming, and cisgender.

Women, generally speaking, are impacted by the realities of sexism and misogyny, which can impact self-esteem, mood, career, and relationships. Many women also experience racism, classism, ableism, heterosexism, and/or xenophobia. Each of these can add to the effects of sexism. Fortunately, there are clear ways to manage the impact that these can have on mental wellness.

More info from: [The Trevor Project](#)

What does women's mental health look like?

Women's mental health captures everything from the daily stressors that women-identified individuals face to the clinical conditions that tend to disproportionately affect women. Most of these are tied to the experience of being undervalued by society. Below you will find useful information on how mental health can take a hit under the pressures that women face, as well as what can be done to foster mental wellness and strength among women.



DAILY WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

On the following pages are some common aspects of daily life that can be particularly stressful for women. Take a look and consider which of these impact you. Awareness comes before action and growth.

DAILY NUISANCE

Double Standards

EXPLANATION

Ever feel like your male counterparts are given **more leeway** or freedoms around certain activities? Those are double standards and can leave you feeling confused, not valued, and boxed in.

EXAMPLE

During the same performance review, you are criticized for your directness, and your male colleague is praised for his.

Toxic Positivity

Some women feel like they are supposed to **constantly smile and be positive**. This can wear you down, get in the way of sharing your authentic feelings, and even prevent meaningful connections with others.

When you start telling a friend about a stressful situation with your family, your friend quickly changes the topic to something more upbeat, and you're left feeling shut down.

Toxic Guilt & Shoulds

Because there are **so many "shoulds"** that women live with, guilt can arise when you feel like you're not doing what you are "supposed" to. If you've ever noticed that you feel bad when: you do what you want to do, take care of yourself, or say no to others – that is the all-too-common guilt that can leave many women stuck in situations they're not comfortable with.

You feel anxious when you're relaxing because you feel like you should be doing something more "productive."

Impossible Expectations

A cousin of the "shoulds" that women experience is impossible expectations of others. Have you ever felt like people or society expects you to be **completely selfless or to never complain**? Those are impossible expectations that only set you up for self-disappointment. These can be especially strong among women of color, as expectations can be even higher.

You know you will be letting your family down if you stray from their expectations to pursue goals that make you happy, but you feel like you can't challenge that.



DAILY WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH (cont.)

DAILY NUISANCE	EXPLANATION	EXAMPLE
Role Strain and the Superwoman Syndrome	Women, because of the way we are socialized, are often tasked with holding down too many roles at once. That “role strain” can be exhausting to say the least. And then there’s the “superwoman syndrome,” which is the internalized version of this and happens when you neglect yourself in order to take care of everyone else while “doing it all.”	You are praised for being a full-time professional while taking on childcare duties and handling the cleaning at home, but no one has asked you if you’re happy with this setup.
Self-Doubt	Women generally experience doubt in their worth and abilities more often than men, which can negatively impact job or academic performance, relationships, and self-worth. It can take a lot of careful work to build up trust in yourself.	After sharing your thoughts in a meeting, you second-guess if what you said was smart or valuable to the conversation.
Chronic Shaming	Women tend to get criticized more often than men in ways that are demeaning. One common form of shaming is body shaming, or mocking a woman’s body shape or size. Chronic shaming from others can leave you feeling like there’s something wrong with you or that you’re not enough.	You see tabloids and social media posts criticizing celebrities for physical features that you have as well.
Negative Self-Appraisals	You know that little voice in your head that sounds awfully like a bully towards yourself and doesn’t seem to ever be quiet? Those are negative self-appraisals and not only cause self-doubt but can lead to serious mental health concerns, like those outlined below.	When a friend cancels her dinner date with you, you think, “it’s because I’m no fun to be around.”



Clinical women's mental health

Although individuals from all gender backgrounds experience all clinical mental health concerns, below are some that tend to disproportionately affect those who identify as women. Knowing what these mean and their warning signs can prevent further issues from developing. If you are experiencing any of these warning signs, especially if they are interfering with your ability to function at work, school, or socially, follow the links below for more information. This knowledge can also help you support other women who might need it.

EATING & WEIGHT DISORDERS

Women are often taught that their worth is tied to the way their bodies look, and that their bodies must meet an impossible standard. Women are more than two times as likely as men to experience eating and weight disorders.

Strong dissatisfaction with how your body looks and fear of gaining weight

Frequent checking of how your body looks

Taking actions to avoid weight gain that are harmful to your body

A sense of loss of control over your eating

More information from: [ADAA](#), [NAMI](#)

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

(PTSD) Women, given how they are treated and viewed by society, are more prone to experience gender-based traumatic events. It is therefore not surprising that women are more than twice as likely as men to develop PTSD in their lifetimes.

Witnessing or experiencing a traumatic event

Experiencing dreams, flashbacks, or intrusive memories of the event

Feeling constantly on edge or on high alert

Strong reactions to or avoiding things that remind you of the event

More information from: [ADAA](#), [MHA](#)

DEPRESSION

Women are also roughly twice as likely as men to experience clinical depression. Many believe this is due in part to the chronic stress related to the daily concerns outlined above and because women are socialized to internalize negative emotions, which can lead to depressed mood.

Feeling hopeless, guilty, or worthless

Low mood that impacts your ability to function

Loss of interest in what you used to enjoy

Notable changes in appetite, weight, or sleep

More information from: [MHA](#), [NAMI](#)

PERIPARTUM MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

This refers to the mental health conditions that affect women during pregnancy and the postpartum period. These include perinatal depression, anxiety, and bipolar conditions. Notably, depression and anxiety are the most common complications associated with pregnancy and early motherhood, although they are not often discussed.

Experiencing any of the above warning signs during pregnancy or the postpartum period

Having trouble feeling joy about new parenthood

Intrusive, unsettling thoughts that you feel you cannot control

More information from: [MHA](#), [NAMI](#)

WARNING SIGNS

WOMEN'S MENTAL WELLNESS

Women's mental wellness refers to a sense of emotional and cognitive wellbeing ([more info here](#)), and those who identify as women are uniquely equipped with the ability to foster it. This is because women tend to have a higher level of these incredibly important strengths:

Emotional Intelligence

Empathy for Others

Creativity in Problem Solving

Mental Flexibility

Transformational Leadership Skills

Each of these contributes not only to your own wellbeing but to the wellbeing of those around you. Of course, women have many more strengths than this, but these top the list in terms of what research has found.



Tips for women to foster mental health

You might face a lot of challenges, but you are also well-prepared to handle them. Below are some tips. Take a look, think about what you need and what you can start practicing today.

THE SKILL	THE WHY	THE HOW
Look within before looking out.	Since women tend to over-focus on others, if you practice focusing more on yourself, you will create more energy and wellness for yourself.	When you consider making plans or setting goals, pay special attention to separating out what others want and what you want. If you really tune into yourself, you'll be better able to find the best option for all without hard feelings later on.
Bring "no" into your vocabulary more often.	Women are taught to say "yes" more often than "no," but setting boundaries around what you do and don't want to do is important.	When you feel pulled between someone else's expectations and what you're comfortable with, remember that saying no is both difficult and a strength. The more you practice, the easier saying no will get.
Connect , connect, connect.	Being with others (when safe) is healing. The more you can connect with the people you care about and who care about you, the better.	Think about who is important to you. Who do you miss? Who do you always feel better after talking to? And then make a plan to connect with them.
Let yourself shine .	Women often shrink themselves in order to not be a threat to others. Sometimes the humility we're taught becomes constricting. Hiding yourself only keeps you in the dark and less able to attain your goals.	When you find yourself downplaying your accomplishments, remind yourself that you shining doesn't harm anyone else. There's room for everyone to shine.
Delegate! Ask for help! Just don't do it alone.	It is common for women to take on all of the responsibility so as not to burden others. This usually leaves you depleted and burned out.	Think about what you could take off your plate, big or small, and ask someone for help. Don't worry about if it's an inconvenience – they can always tell you no if it is too much for them.
Let go of guilt .	Guilt can be crippling! Because women are taught to operate from what they "should" do and to think of themselves last, you might feel guilty when doing things that are very important for your wellbeing.	Practicing most of these skills is bound to bring up guilt. After all, you're likely not used to prioritizing your own wellbeing and feel that doing so means you are selfish. Whenever you feel a wave of unnecessary guilt coming over you, notice it, visualize it, and take a breath to let it out.



Tips for women to foster mental health (cont.)

THE SKILL	THE WHY	THE HOW
Foster self-love .	As a result of internalizing negative messages from our culture, women can often be too hard on themselves. Self-love is the antidote to this.	See the Mental Health Coalition's Roadmap to Self-Love .
Trust your gut .	Letting yourself be guided by your own instinct rather than others' expectations of you will allow you to feel freer. You'll also be more likely to accomplish your goals.	Rather than "what should I be doing?" Ask yourself "what feels right for me?" And then, go for it.
Seek out women-affirming content .	Seeing yourself represented feels good. It can also serve as a reminder that your experiences are valid. In other words, you are not alone.	Look for content that depicts women who have had similar experiences to you and takes into account factors like race, class, and sexual identity. This could be in TV, movies, podcasts, books, news, or art.
Take social action .	It can be exhausting to consider all of the challenges that you and other women face. Taking social action can help reinvigorate you while connecting you to a larger cause.	Connect with a local advocacy group doing work that's meaningful to you. Write a blog post that speaks to a cause you care about. Take action that feels important.
Create mini-moments for yourself.	Finding time for yourself to relax can be challenging, especially now. Creating mini-moments for yourself means finding bite-sized bits of time in the day to care for yourself.	Even if it's 60 seconds of deep breathing while you're in the bathroom or 5 minutes of tech-free mindful walking, look for the smallest ways you can introduce moments of calm into your day.
Seek out professional support .	Sometimes, especially if you are experiencing clinical mental health concerns, support from a professional is important. This can be scary, but there are accessible ways to do it.	Take steps to find a licensed mental health clinician by searching for local mental health organizations, the mental health department of hospitals, or online therapist directories. With these, you can select your location, preferences, and price point.

More information from: [Active Minds](#), [BBRF](#), [CMI](#), [DBSA](#), [NAMI](#), [The Steve Fund](#)



KEEP IN MIND THIS IS JUST A START WHEN IT COMES TO LOOKING AT WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH.

**THE MENTAL
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COALITION**

And remember, you've got company—your experience is both completely unique and shared by billions of sisters around the globe.

If you would like to learn more, be sure to also check out the Mental Health Coalition's [Resource Library](#) for resources related to gender and other social group identities.