

Accepting your Diagnosis

So here you are. Most of your life you haven't quite felt like everyone else. You felt things in ways that other people didn't understand. You acted out. You disappeared. You made choices that in the end weren't quite right. You struggled to fit in.

Now you've been given an answer. Now you've been given a reason.

So many feelings are going through your head. A feeling of being thankful. Maybe a sense of fear.

Maybe even a sense of embarrassment. Maybe a sense of relief.

With those feelings there is a question of what do I do now.

First, educate yourself about your disease. Read books, medical journals, case studies etc. Learn as much as possible about causes, treatment options, therapeutic techniques, medications, and the latest treatment advances. The more you know about your mental illness the less scary it will be and you will feel more in control. This is like any other medical condition; you owe it to yourself to be as educated as your doctor about what is happening in your mind and body. Things you need at this time are books, articles and other reliable sources of information. Trusted and qualified medical professionals. A strong support system and self-confidence.

Second, separate your mental issues from your actual personality. It may be hard to remember that you were once a real person with sound judgment, unique personality traits, and valuable skills. Those characteristics are still there!! The wonderful, worthwhile person you were born as has not changed.

Just because your condition may cause mood swings, irritability, hallucinations, and change in behaviors does not mean that's all you are now. Manage the symptoms with the help of doctors, therapy, and medication, but don't let it define YOU. Practice saying I have ____, not I am ____.

Third, get rid of shame. It is not easy to share your diagnosis with the other people in your life. There is great fear, embarrassment, and general misunderstanding about mental illness. Start by telling those who really need to know first, like immediate family, spouses, children, and very close friends. It is absolutely your choice who to share your private business with, but the more people you tell the easier it gets. Most people just need time to adjust and comprehend. Educating others will empower you and make the situation seem less daunting.