

FOREWORD

How do you know when you've gone *too far*?

That's a provocative question.

Life is a series of choices, and our lives are often defined by those we make – and others that are made for us.

More than sixty years ago, Mental Health America made a choice – that we would bring our fight for mental health out into the open by asking our public officials to declare May as Mental Health Month. We wanted to educate people that mental illnesses were as real as other physical illnesses, and that they could be treated effectively. And by acting early and effectively (Before Stage 4), we could prevent many of these illnesses from progressing, or even occurring in the first place.

This choice we made has been validated over the years. Millions now celebrate Mental Health Month, and millions more benefit from the materials Mental Health America, its affiliates, and its associates produce, and thousands of supporting agencies distribute.

Mental Health Month works not just because it is about what others can do for us, but what we can do for ourselves.

And where our mental health is concerned, that means making the choices we need to make to recognize and understand signs and symptoms of mental health concerns, and seeking help as soon as we need it.

That brings us to this year's Mental Health Month theme – Risky Business.

Take a look at our #mentalillnessfeelslike microsite (<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/feelslike>) that we developed for Mental Health Month last year. It will tell you something very important – that people experience symptoms of mental illnesses differently.

Sometimes people—especially young people—engage in potentially risky behaviors to manage, avoid, or cover up symptoms of a mental health problem. It is often hard to distinguish these behaviors from “normal growing up,” and, as a result, the people who care about people engaging in these struggles sometimes under-react, and other times over-react.

What Mental Health America is offering in 2017 are educational materials, tools, references, and more to help people decide – is this particular behavior a risky behavior for me or for someone I love? And if it is, what can I do about it before it harms me or someone else?

Some of this year's materials may make you just a little uncomfortable, because we'll be talking about some things that are often left unsaid. But “fighting in the open,” as inspired by our founder Clifford Beers, means speaking up early to educate people about risky behavior and its connection to mental illness—and doing so in a compassionate, judgment-free way.

For us, it's all about choosing to offer effective programs, services, and supports, long Before Stage 4.



Paul Gionfriddo
President & CEO



SUMMARY

By using the toolkit materials, you will help members of your community:

- Understand how certain seemingly common behaviors are risk factors for, or indicators of mental health or substance use disorders;
- Start talking about mental health B4Stage4;
- Assess their own mental health through use of MHA's screening tools; and
- Share their perceptions of when a behavior becomes risky, learn about the perceptions of others, and learn about accepted guidelines for when a behavior becomes indicative of a mental health or substance use disorder by taking the "What's Too Far" quiz.

This year's toolkit includes:

Media Materials

- Key Messages
- Sample Press Release
- Drop-In Article
- May is Mental Health Month Proclamation

Social Media and Web Components

- Sample Facebook and Twitter Posts
- Facebook Cover and Profile Images
- Twitter Header and Profile Images
- Additional Image for Sharing
- What's Too Far Quiz Call to Action Image
- Horizontal Banner Image
- Vertical Banner Image

Fact Sheets and Handouts

- Fact Sheet - Risky Business: Marijuana
- Fact Sheet - Risky Business: Prescription Drug Misuse
- Fact Sheet - Risky Business: Exercise
- Fact Sheet - Risky Business: Sex
- Fact Sheet - Risky Business: Compulsive Buying
- Fact Sheet - Risky Business: Internet Addiction
- May is Mental Health Month Wellness Tips Poster
- Worksheet: Filling the Void
- Worksheet: A Letter to Risky Business

QUESTIONS?

If you have further questions about Mental Health Month, please contact Danielle Fritze, Senior Director of Public Education and Visual Communications at dfritze@mentalhealthamerica.net.