

More information is available through our website:
[www. quakeragingresources.org](http://www.quakeragingresources.org)

National Alliance on Mental Illness: <http://www.nami.org/>

Edited by Patricia McBee, Grounded in God: Care and Nurture in Friends Meetings, 2002, Quaker Press of Friends General Conference, Philadelphia

Rosalynn Carter, Helping Someone with Mental Illness, 1999, Three Rivers Press, New York, NY

Multigenerational:

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Christopher Myers, Wings, Scholastic Inc., New York, NY

Regina Hanson, Illustrated by Linda Saport, The Face at the Window, 1997,



Aging Resources Consultation Help



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Quaker Aging Resources is a collaborative project of New York and Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Quakers and is funded by the Thomas Scattergood Foundation and Friends Foundation for the Aging.

Stigma



Q: What can we do as a Meeting Community to create a more loving and accepting environment, so that Friends can feel safe in seeking support of their faith community when they are facing mental health issues?

“Is our Meeting supportive and loving toward persons among us who may be struggling with mental illness?”

Query from Grounded in God, Care and Nurture in Friends Meeting, edited by Patricia McBee

In the past, mental illness was often labeled “nervous breakdown.” spoken of only in hushed back room conversations, not to leave the family, and not always discussed openly even with the person facing the illness.

Today, we have words that identify various mental illnesses and a bit more willingness to talk about emotional or behavioral health the same way we might discuss diabetes or stroke. We may be willing to accept that mental illness is hereditary or has roots in brain makeup or body chemistry. Nevertheless, we continue to grapple with fear and stigma. There may be more tolerance and understanding, but knowing how to provide engaged support for those with behavioral or emotional health challenge presents a challenge compounded by stigma.

Consider this, from an online community newspaper: “The...Museum will host a special lecture, ‘The Treatment of Mental Illness: A Historical Perspective’ to ‘explore how attitudes about mental illness and care have changed in the past 200 years,’ according to a statement released by the...board of trustees. It will be held early next year.

The announcement was made in the wake of objections made by some mental health advocates to the ‘Asylum of Terror,’ a haunted house staged as part of the museum’s annual fundraising event. Material promoting the Haunted Mill promised, ‘Dementia, paranoia, violent sociopathic behaviors... these are but a few of the afflictions that torment the wretched souls’ of the asylum.”*

Kudos to the museum for hosting the lecture in response to the public outcry, and to those who spoke up, but one must wonder, have attitudes changed that much in 200 years if such an event theme were not questioned to begin with? In talking about our fears surrounding aging, you may have heard, or said, “I can accept anything, as long as I have my mind.” With such pervasive stigma associated with behavioral health differences, no wonder we fear that more than anything. However, there are ways that you and your Meeting can learn together to counter stigma with loving, supportive care.

“Our life is love, peace and tenderness; and bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, and not laying accusations against one another; but praying for one another, and helping one another up with a tender hand.”

Isaac Pennington, 1667

What is our role as Friends in advocating for those with emotional or behavioral challenges?

Educate. Stigma is reduced by knowledge. Seek learning opportunities for your meeting to provide truthful information about mental illness.

Check your own feelings. Try to understand one’s own assumptions and fears. Exploring how your life experiences might be affecting your feelings can help you overcome your own resistance and be a better support to Friends in need.

When you feel your attitude is genuinely open, make it known. Be willing to talk. If you have experiences of your own to share, speak openly if you can.

Let others know you are concerned. Speak gently, with honesty and integrity. Offer facts and unconditional support, and listen, do not lecture. Provide meals and visits for someone who is struggling with behavioral or emotional health issues as you would after the birth of a child or hospitalization.

Know what professional resources are available in your area and be prepared to provide that information. Offer transportation and/or additional support as needed.

* Clinton Reed, “Red Mill Museum in Clinton responds to critics of its ‘Haunted Mill,’ plans special program” November 13, 2009, Hunterdon County Democrat, http://www.nj.com/hunterdon-county-democrat/index.ssf/2009/11/red_mill_museum_in_clinton_res.html