

Intervention – how and when to get involved

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There are times in our lives when we witness a certain situation or behavior that is so powerful we feel moved, or almost obligated, to respond to it. For example, when you see a car accident happen...you react. That is because it's our human nature to feel compassion for and to want to help those in need. We all have it. It's instinctual. Accidents, catastrophes, natural disasters, and acts of God are all unfortunate situations which cause us to instinctively drop everything and dive in to help our fellow man. In these situations, the fight or flight response instinct kicks in and we just do it. An excellent example of this is the response to September 11th. It was such a powerful event that everyone across the country and even around the world stopped what they were doing to refocus their efforts on how to help their fellow men and women through this tragic event. Many of whom lost their own lives because of their deep desire and commitment to help "strangers" in dire need.

But what happens when the catastrophe is slow moving? How do we react when we know that there is something wrong but we can't quite put our finger on it? Or when we think we see something that others don't? This can be the case when we suspect that someone we know is depressed, angry, or isolating themselves from others. We sense that something is wrong but we aren't sure. Or we encounter someone we don't know very well acting strangely and we disregard them. The danger in doing nothing is that people who exhibit these feelings and behaviors may actually be suffering from a much more serious mental health issue. And they could pose a danger to themselves or to others.

There can be many "red flags" that are revealed during the progression of a mental health disorder. Sometimes these people will "self-medicate" with excessive alcohol or drug consumption. Others with more serious mental disorders will sometimes hear voices, see things, and appear disorganized in their thoughts or behaviors. Some will have an inexplicable hatred and rage which is revealed through writings, artwork, or other creative outlets. Unfortunately, when we witness these events, most of us don't do anything in response. There is the much-believed **myth: if we ignore it, it will go away** but in **reality: if we ignore it, it can and probably will get much worse!** Remember, if you are wrong in your suspicions, you can always say you are sorry. But if you are right and didn't say anything, you may have to live with the consequence of wondering - if you had done something, would it have made a difference?

However, please be cautious in your choice of response. It is not recommended that you "do something" on your own (i.e. without the help of a mental health professional) like confronting that person directly. In the best case scenario, they may try to convince you that they will know when 'it' gets worse and will get help then or they may try to convince you that they will take care of it on their own or they may outright deny to know what you are talking about and make you feel crazy. But in the worst case scenario, they may react angrily or violently toward you. Therefore, it is best to take a non-confrontational approach. Go on the internet, research the signs and symptoms you are witnessing, and if you find that these are the signs of a defined mental disorder, contact a mental health professional immediately.

Mental health professionals have experience dealing with people with all types of mental disorders from those suffering from mild depression to those with more serious mental health conditions to those on the verge of a full-blown mental breakdown. They are trained to know the signs and symptoms of a variety of mental health disorders and can usually provide assistance if they are brought in to intervene in time. If they are unable to personally treat the person because they lack experience in that area or if the person they are treating has escalated to a more dangerous level, that therapist will refer that person to another therapist or to a facility which can provide a more appropriate level of care.

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