**Minding Mendocino**

By Jessica Maness, LCSW, Long Valley Health Center

We go through our days and lives often bombarded by challenges, stress, loss, frustrations, and various stimulus. While these experiences are part of life, indeed, they certainly can be overwhelming at times and over long periods of time can be quite disruptive to our well-being. As a mental health therapist, I ask myself frequently, “Why don’t we all seek out help more often?” Asking for help can seem like a “sign of weakness” to some, or perhaps a “waste of time” to others. Certainly, we all have other things we would prefer to be doing, or even have to do in our busy schedules. Though, when the disruption we experience begins to affect our other roles and goals, it could be a sign to open to the gift of help.

Here’s the thing: I talk with people every day that are by no means, “crazy” or “weak”. To the contrary, most of the individuals I have worked with are quite strong, resilient, and gifted. It takes a courageous person to ask for help, after all. There are many reasons why a person may decide to do this, such as having anger issues, having experienced a challenging loss in life, having experienced a traumatic event, or having a mood disturbance such as depression or anxiety. None of these are reasons that any one of us can help or control, yet many people are judged simply because they “can’t get it together”, “get over it”, or even “grow up”. We certainly wouldn’t say this to someone with diabetes, cancer, or another physical disease. Why do we judge others, and even ourselves, for having natural emotional hardships to very challenging life events?

It is for this question that I have decided to write for our community. It is my hope that regular, informational columns on common mental health issues can help our community to be more informed, more understanding of the challenges that affect us all, and more knowledgeable about the resources that are available in the area. If there is a topic you are curious about, please write me at: The Long Valley Health Center, 50 Branscomb Rd., and I will include your question in a column if at all possible. Future writings will include mental health specific information, information on community resources, anonymous questions from community members, and general suggestions for improving our emotional and behavioral outcomes in response to life stress or trauma.

If you decide that it is time for some help, don’t hesitate to make an appointment either with me or another professional in the area. There are some very good support groups in Willits if one is able to travel, as well as some untapped resources in the Laytonville area as well. Many struggles become significantly less so with improved tools and support. The thing is: you never know until you try. I also encourage the community members to continue putting a stop to the association of mental and emotional problems with weakness. I propose a new motto in response, “We are all doing the best we can”. Until next time, Laytonville, thanks for reading!