



Columbus

With more than 1,200 affiliates, NAMI is America's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to improving the lives of all individuals affected by mental illness.



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NAMI Columbus

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Georgia Crisis & Access Line

Single Point of Entry to access mental health, addictive disease and crisis services 24/7/365
 Adults, Children & Adolescents
 1-800-715-4225



Peer Support "Warm Line"

1-888-945-1414 (toll-free)
 The Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network operates a state-funded, consumer-directed "warm line" for anyone struggling with mental health issues, 24 hours a day



Columbus ACT Team

AmericanWork, Inc.
 706-641-9663

Happy New Year, NAMI Columbus!



We're wishing all of you and your loved ones a very happy, healthy New Year!



The NAMI Columbus Mission

We will use **Support**, **Education** and **Advocacy** to throw out lifelines of hope and help to families and consumers seeking recovery. Our vision is to create an effective and active affiliate which delivers what consumers of mental health services and families need. We work to build an area where leaders and citizens work well together to create a caring, compassionate and educated public that realizes mental illness is a biological illness and is not a character flaw or due to bad upbringing.



Upcoming Trainings

January 2021

Jan 20 – In Our Own Voice Presenter Training

You can register for the In Our Own Voice State Training on January 20th using the following link.

When: Jan 20, 2021 02:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Register in advance for this meeting:

https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJlvcuCoqjosHdSVYzV_4PnSetVvSM6-vdMo

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

February 2021

Feb 19-21 – NAMI Connection Recovery Support Group Facilitator Training

[Connection Support Group Facilitator Application](#)

Trainings are delivered online through the Zoom platform

Please note that all applicants must meet the following requirements:

1. Applicants must be current NAMI members.
2. Applicants must be actively involved in their local NAMI Georgia affiliate.
3. Applicants must be endorsed and approved by a NAMI Georgia Affiliate Board leader. A letter of recommendation from a NAMI affiliate leader must accompany your application.



Great news! We have 2 NAMI Columbus members who were recently trained as Family Support Group facilitators by NAMIGA. **Teresa O'Donnell** and **Tawana Farley** were certified in December to facilitate our Family Support Groups. They will be joining our current Family Support Group facilitators for our Monday night Family Support Group meetings which begin again this month. See below for details.

Congratulations Teresa and Tawana!



NAMI Columbus Family Support Group Meetings Resume

Have you been missing something? NAMI Columbus has been missing the Family Support Group (FSG). When the pandemic began, NAMI Columbus leadership thought the quarantine would be a temporary thing. But 10 months later, we are still not meeting in person, so some family members have pushed to begin having ZOOM SUPPORT MEETINGS for family & friends. We are proud that our NAMI Connection meetings, for people with a diagnosis, have been successfully meeting using Zoom twice a week for months.

Beginning **Monday, JANUARY 25TH at 6:00 PM until 7:30 PM**, we will once again have weekly facilitated support meetings for family members and friends of an individual with a mental health issue, and they will currently be held using Zoom.

We hope you will join us for these Monday night FSG Zoom meetings. If you would like a meeting invitation to be sent to you, simply send your email address and cell phone number to Teresa O'Donnell, tblankenbeker@gmail.com or Tawana Farley, farleytawana@yahoo.com.

We look forward to seeing you at one of our virtual meetings soon!

NAMI Columbus Connection Recovery Support Group Meetings will continue to be held virtually at the following times:

Saturdays 1:00pm – 2:30pm

Thursdays 6:30pm – 8:00pm

Email Vanessa Vivas, Vanessa.M.Vivas@gmail.com or Teresa O'Donnell, tblankenbeker@gmail.com for an invite/link to either group.

Please email at least 24 hours prior to the session.



The Use of Language and Imagery as a Tool for Managing Anxiety

JAN. 06, 2021

By Susie Moore

Anxiety is a universal emotional and physical response to danger, stress, uncertainty or change. Anxiety serves a valuable purpose. It tells us to pay attention, be prepared, use precautions and look out for ourselves. It is a potentially life-preserving force. Even people with the most steady, calm temperaments have the potential to experience anxiety from time to time when faced with a particularly daunting or scary situation.

I remember learning about the difference between state and trait anxiety when I was in graduate school, pursuing my masters in counseling psychology. State anxiety refers to the feeling of tense, fearful hyper-arousal that occurs during a stressful or potentially threatening situation. Trait anxiety, on the other hand, is the degree to which an individual is likely to experience anxiety in any given situation.

While some people experience anxiety infrequently, others are hard-wired to respond anxiously often and in many situations. We might say that people with a higher trait anxiety have anxious predispositions, or are more susceptible to anxiety, the way some people are more susceptible to developing strep throat or ear infections.

I have an anxious predisposition and have struggled with chronic anxiety for much of my life, and as a counselor, I have treated people with anxiety disorders. I have spent a great deal of time reading, writing, thinking and talking about anxiety, and a great deal of time experiencing and observing anxiety. One thing that has helped me, both on personal and professional levels, is the use of imagery and language to find ways of describing, envisioning and managing anxiety. Here are four examples.

1. Getting to Know Your Anxiety

Think of this not as you would get to know a friend or loved one, but as you would get to know an opponent. Once you get to know your opponent's strategies and signature moves, you can better prepare yourself to put up a good fight and possibly even win or end up ahead. Similarly, when we get to know our own brand of anxiety, we can develop tools and strategies for handling it. We can begin to see that even though symptoms of anxiety — and the situations that cause us to feel anxious — might indeed be unpleasant, scary and overwhelming, we can get through it.

2. Taking a Step Back from Anxiety

This involves recognizing when your anxiety response has been triggered, and being able to keep a small part of our awareness separate from the experience. Once we do this, we have the capacity to talk ourselves through it, to remind ourselves that it will pass and to choose how we want to respond or which tool/strategy might help us.

3. Seeing the Two-Sided Scale

It might be helpful to envision a two-sided scale: with you standing on one side of it and anxiety on the other side. First, this image reminds us that although we might have anxiety, anxiety does not define us. Regardless of how often anxiety comes to visit, we are still our own person. Additionally, this image can help us to gauge where we are with our anxiety at any given moment. Once we assess the degree of anxiety, we can adjust our behavior and expectations accordingly.

4. Acknowledging the Layers of Self-Imposed Suffering

Often, with chronic anxiety, comes feelings of guilt, shame and self-loathing. It is common to hear people with anxiety say things like:

- "I feel like a burden on others."
- "I feel weak or like I'm a coward."
- "I've tried everything and I'm still anxious. I must be doing something wrong."

I've come to see these kinds of thoughts and feelings as extra layers of suffering that we put on ourselves, the way a person might put on a hooded sweatshirt before going outside during a heat wave. It is normal to feel frustrated and discouraged at times when dealing with a chronic condition like anxiety. But, if we can learn to be gentle and compassionate with ourselves, we are more likely to make progress than if we weigh ourselves down with extra layers of pain and suffering.

I encourage anyone who is struggling to use these images and analogies, or to find your own way of using language and imagery as a tool for managing symptoms and relapses. And for those who do not struggle with a specific condition, other than the human condition, these ideas may be helpful to you, too, as you strive to maintain a sense of balance, perspective, purpose and meaning.

The Remarkable Human-Animal Bond

NOV. 20, 2020

By Katherine Ponte, BA, JD, MBA, CPRP



Why do people all over the world find solace from cat videos and dog Instagram accounts? It's because animals soften our souls, appealing to some purer, loving part of ourselves. It's an inexplicable human-animal bond, enduring friendships and emotional support, which many humans struggle to find in other humans. They brighten so many people's lives, with an estimated 67% of U.S. households (or 84.9 million homes) owning a pet.

These bonds can be greater still between a person living with mental illness and their pet. In one study, [60%](#) of people with chronic mental health conditions considered their pets to be as important as family members. The healing power of our little friends can be indescribable.

This was the case with my dearly departed cat Dude. Way back when I got him, I could have never imagined the critical, pure loving role that he would come to play in coping with my severe depression. He sensed it, and he lived it with me. He never left my side even when everyone else did. He never left me all alone. He rescued me many times in his instinctive caring way. I'd speak to him in the depths of my depression: "You love me, you'll always love me no matter what," and I'd hear his silent response.

Many pets have a natural talent to support us, and they can play a valuable role in addressing mental health issues.

Benefits Of The Human-Animal Bond

Pet ownership has many possible [mental health benefits](#). It has been [shown to reduce](#) stress, depression and anxiety and improve overall quality of life in many ways. Pets provide a calm presence, can divert negative thoughts and promote exercise. Caring for pets can help commit owners to routines, such as daily walking, create a sense of purpose and accomplishment, and facilitate social and community interactions and [integration](#). Some of these benefits can come from just petting or playing with pets. However, the greatest direct benefit of pet ownership is emotional companionship. All loving pet owners know this, but the impact on people living with mental illness can be profound. It can even be life-saving.

A [literature review](#) of people living with mental illness shows convincing evidence of this "pet effect." According to this review, which is consistent with my own personal experiences, pet ownership can reduce feelings of [isolation and loneliness](#). Pets are an important, trusted and consistent source of unconditional love and affection. They intuitively provide this support in times of need and can be a helpful distraction from ruminations on negative thoughts, including suicidal ideation.

They are also valued as a "person" to speak to, because a person may speak to them without fear of judgment or the sense of being a burden. As they seemingly listen without response, there is no fear of interruptions, criticisms and advice, and there is respect for boundaries and confidentiality. A pet is accepting of their owner without regard for their illness. As a result, they make people feel good about themselves and provide reasons to live.

Types Of Support Animals

There are [many](#) types of support animals and interventions. The most common animal types are emotional support animals, service animals and therapy animals.

Emotional Support Animals (ESAs)

ESAs provide emotional support and comfort to their owners on a daily basis. They are not trained and do not perform specific tasks. ESAs can include dogs, cats, rabbits, birds, hamsters, horses and others.

For your pet to be considered an ESA legally, you must have a prescription letter, which is renewed yearly from a licensed therapist or doctor, that states you have a mental disability and that an ESA is

necessary for treatment. This is the only legal document governing ESAs.

ESAs are considered a reasonable accommodation under the [Fair Housing Act](#) (FHA), which allows tenants to reside with an ESA in a no-pet dwelling for no additional fee. Under the [Air Carrier Access Act](#) (ACAA), airlines must allow ESAs to accompany their handlers in the cabin of the aircraft at no cost subject to review of your prescription letter. Unusual animals, such as snakes and rodents, are not permitted to be ESAs. It may be possible to file an appeal if a [landlord](#) or [carrier](#) denies your request.

Service Dogs

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) [defines](#) a psychiatric service dog as:

- “a dog that has been trained to perform tasks that assist individuals with disabilities to detect the onset of psychiatric episodes and lessen their effects. Tasks may include reminding the handler to take medicine, providing safety checks or room searches, or turning on lights for persons with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), interrupting self-mutilation by persons with dissociative identity disorders, and keeping disoriented individuals from danger.”

Service animals are “working animals” and not pets. Only [service animals](#), including dogs and miniature horses, are accorded special [privileges](#) or considered a reasonable accommodation under the ADA. Service dogs are allowed in all public facilities, even when a no-pets policy exists, and an employer may be required to allow a service dog in a place of employment to work alongside their handler. An employer may ask if your dog is required because of a disability and what work has your dog been trained to perform. Service animals are entitled to the same rights as ESAs under the FHA and ACAA.

Service dogs have been [shown](#) to especially benefit veterans suffering from PTSD in many ways, including reduced PTSD symptoms and improved quality of life. They have also been shown to reduce anger and anxiety and enhance sleep. They are trained to help veterans cope with anxiety or panic attacks, and create space between the handler and other people. The best place to source a service dog is [Assistance Dogs International](#), including [Psychiatric Service Dog Partners](#). Training and costs of ownership can be prohibitive with some costing upwards of \$20,000 for training alone. There are non-profits that provide veterans service dogs at no cost, such as [K9s for Warriors](#).

Therapy Animals

Trained therapy animals are typically certified dogs that accompany handlers in visits to hospitals, including psychiatric units, nursing homes and others medical facilities. They can offer structured therapy or simply provide comfort to patients. An absolute highlight of two of my psychiatric hospitalizations were the therapy animal visits. [Pet Partners](#) is the leading therapy animal non-profit program. Volunteers can have their dogs certified as therapy dogs by the [Alliance of Therapy Dogs](#).

Psychiatric daytime and residential programs have also incorporated farm animals as part of daily living activities. Farm animals offer some of the same benefits of pet ownership. A few examples of the programs include [Fountain House Farm](#), [Gould Farm](#) and [Hopewell](#).

If you can't own a pet, there are ways you can interact with animals up close. These include volunteering at a local shelter or even visiting animal sanctuaries.

Animals can be a wonderful part of life. They are an underutilized mental health intervention that could benefit many more people. Research has shown their benefits, and anecdotal accounts are plentiful. They can ease the loneliness so many of us with mental illness suffer from, one of the most painful experiences of our illness.

Animals can offer the support that we may lack and complement the support that we have. My personal experiences are similar to possibly millions of people. My Dude helped give me the gift of life when I struggled in the depths of my suicidal depression. He will forever be with me.



“I carry his heart with me, I carry him in my heart. I am never without him.” – E.E. Cummings.

Author's note: I miss you Dude.



Columbus

P.O. Box 8581
Columbus, GA 31908
(706) 320-3755
Our Area's Voice on Mental Illness



Many people find their way to our classes by first attending a support group. If you are a NAMI Columbus "long timer" (we don't want to call you old), please attend either of the two weekly NAMI Connection support groups or the weekly Family support group. Newcomers can use your wisdom and hard-earned experience. Sharing a message of recovery gives the hope they are searching for. Many people tell us that the NAMI motto "You Are Not Alone" is the initial feeling they realize at their first meeting. If you are willing to train to be a support group facilitator, let us know!

I want to support NAMI Columbus and NAMI's mission.

✂ Please Cut and Mail ✂

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone Numbers (do not enter a number if you do not want to be listed in the Membership Directory (members only).

E-Mail (Please include so we can be green and email you our monthly newsletter.)

Please check type of membership desired:

- Individual Membership - \$40 Dues
- Household Membership - \$60 Dues
- \$5 Open Door Membership (financial hardship)**
(All dues are for 1 year and are tax-deductible.)

All memberships include NAMI National, NAMI Georgia, and NAMI Columbus membership.

I am not joining at this time, but I would like to make a contribution of \$ _____. (Thank you!!!)

NAMI National, NAMI Georgia and NAMI Columbus are dedicated to eradicating stigma and improving the lives of persons with mental illnesses thereby also benefiting their friends, family and community. Catch the wave and be a part of change.

NAMI Columbus is an affiliate of NAMI Georgia, which is a 501(c)3 non-profit charitable organization. Dues and donations are tax deductible. Membership includes a subscription to our monthly newsletter and access to immediate news on advocacy, treatment and support issues from our national, state and local organizations.

Please make checks payable to:
NAMI Georgia & enter "NAMI Columbus membership" in the memo field.

Mail your check and membership form to:
NAMI Columbus
P.O. Box 8581
Columbus, Georgia 31908

You can also join safely online at www.nami.org/join .