



PERR&KNIGHT BRINGING AWARENESS TO WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

October 10th

Hey Everyone!

As some of you may know, World Mental Health Day is celebrated each year on October 10th. The campaign's slogan according to the World Health Organization is:

*"Mental health care for all:
let's make it a reality."*

In this Perr & Knight mini newsletter, you will discover how some of our fellow PKers identify and cope in times of mental discomfort. More specifically, they share personal techniques used to promote the mental well-being of not only themselves, but others.

In a courageous interview, Rodney Joyal, who is clinically diagnosed with bipolar disorder and is an advocate of awareness and support utilization, provides insight into common misunderstandings surrounding mental health issues. He also provides his thoughts on removing stigmas and improving overall awareness. Kailey Blahut, Victor Martinez and other anonymous PKers share personal stories and tips. Lastly, and most importantly, a list of resources is provided for those seeking professional help for themselves or others.

- Kailey Blahut

INTERVIEW WITH RODNEY JOYAL

What is depression to you and how is it commonly misunderstood?

Bipolar depression is a little different than non-clinical depression as it is chemically induced. It is an out of body experience, where you see yourself differently and you know you are not behaving like yourself. You get angry, frustrated, fatigued, sad, and this roller coaster of emotions repeats. It's hard to do things you normally want to do, and you can see that from the outside. Understanding that these are different emotions and behaviors than you normally experience makes you feel worse, and the cycle continues.

It's not easy, and it takes its toll. What's misunderstood is that you are only sad and don't want to be around people. Others think that there is something that is causing it and resolving that one event will make you happy – this is not the case. People say; "Just be happy, you can get over this." It is more than being sad. Many things hit you at once and it can make you feel less than human and worthless. Resolving one thing isn't going to take all that away.

What changes in our collective society would you like to see regarding the perception of mental health issues as a stigma?

We need to become comfortable with being uncomfortable. And that applies to people who are not going through mental health issues as well. Because when people who experience mental discomfort do open up, it's not as easy as giving them a Band-Aid or a surgery to help, as help is different for each person. They all have their own journey, and they suffer in their own way. So, those who are listening to them, often feel frustrated because they can't help and tend to back off. In the end, all we can really do is actively listen. I would like to see more education and acceptance on the subject as a whole. Mental health is just as important as your physical health.



These are pictures of me with my niece and nephews playing video games. Both the games and kids have helped me through a lot.

– Rodney Joyal

What have you seen change over the years in mental health awareness?

When I was first diagnosed, I knew nothing about mental health or what it meant to be bipolar. It was taboo and you didn't talk about it because it was perceived as a weakness. Over the years it has changed as people do talk about it when they are generally not well or emotionally good. But, in all honestly, I haven't seen too much change. Sure, there is more talk about it and a presence due to the internet and social media, but not constructive talk. However, talk is better than not talking at all.

INTERVIEW WITH RODNEY JOYAL

How do you recommend you approach a friend who is experiencing mental health issues and could need help?

Don't jump into the question as it can put someone on the defensive. Instead, ease in and ask them how they are doing and try to strike up a conversation about something you both have in common. Just check in and know that it may sometimes take a few days for them to open, so be patient. When you feel the timing is right, you may say; "I noticed you haven't been around as much," or "I noticed you may not be enjoying this as much as you did before. Is everything OK?" Try to make them feel comfortable and they will be more likely to let you know that something is going on.

When they do open up, just listen and make them feel valued as a person. Acknowledge their concerns and help them walk through it. Having a sounding board helps.

If possible, I always encourage you to speak to the person directly and not go behind their back and try to get them help. But you can call hotlines if you are concerned about someone to get advice from a professional who can direct you on the next steps.

I wouldn't be here today without my support network of family, friends, and professionals I know I can trust and reach out to. I do recommend therapy. Therapy can be whatever you want. Whether it is just to have somebody listen to you, or if it gets bad, reach out to someone to give you advice, tips and tricks.



MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY RESPONSES - Anonymous PKers

How do you cope when you are feeling anxious, depressed or extremely stressed?

- » I practice yoga, go for a walk, bake, talk with my family and friends, pray.
- » Healthy: Go for a walk, drink water, listen to music without electronics. Unhealthy: Drink alcohol, "doom scroll" on my phone.
- » I go on a walk outside. There's something about being in the fresh air that always lifts my spirits.
- » I like to take breaks, such as walking for a few minutes. I exercise often, but when I need to get work done and feel anxious, I listen to a comedy podcast. I find that they lighten the mood.
- » Take deep breaths and step away from the problem.
- » It's more difficult now, but I like to splurge on a great dinner and then read a lot. Sci-fi and fantasy books are what I tend to gravitate towards.
- » Concentrated breathing exercises, read the Bible and practice guided or self-meditation.
- » I try my best to keep my mind positive by focusing on something else, having people around, or, as a last resort, entertaining myself (movies, series, videogames, etc.).
- » I usually practice breathing techniques, or cuddle with my cat.
- » I used to eat to deal with my anxiety, stress, and depression. Now I go to the gym at least 4 to 5 days a week. I try to keep active as much as possible.
- » I normally take walks and gets a lot of hugs in from my kids.



- » I try to take a step back and keep perspective when I find my mind walking down a negative path. Some of us tend to catastrophize things (when totally unnecessary), so I try to use a lot of positive "self-talk" and tell the negative voices in my head to "leave the room". This approach, combined with finding quiet time and staying connected with others has been very helpful.
- » Take a deep breath and focus on positivity.
- » In the past, I've baked but I've now moved to prescriptions to help control my anxiety and depression.
- » I get some sunshine or go out in nature. I seek help from a therapist and do an activity that consumes all my attention such as reading a book, playing with the dog, or doing a puzzle.
- » During the day I take a walk, in the evening I drink vino.
- » Take some time by myself. Perhaps do something that brings me joy, like reading or playing video games.
- » Listen to music, run, or spend time with family.
- » I exercise and/or try to keep busy focusing on something else. I've found that during difficult moments, it's important to get up, move around, go somewhere or simply talk to someone (even if it's someone at the grocery store or coffee shop).

MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY RESPONSES - Anonymous PKers

What do you do to promote or prioritize your mental wellness?

- » Take time for myself. Self-care (paint nails, take a bath).
- » Attempt to take scheduled breaks away from work, my phone, and other responsibilities.
- » I make "to do" lists because once everything is written down it seems less daunting.
- » I meditate, get enough sleep, recognize that I cannot push myself endlessly and that I need to destress.
- » I focus on self-care. I identify things that make me anxious and try to stay positive, in extreme cases I do remove things or situations that negatively impact my mental health.
- » I take time off and make time for myself. I leave work at work.
- » The issue for me was work/life balance. Now I have a work schedule that I attempt not to deviate from.
- » Maintain self-awareness of high stress and high anxiety; and I schedule daily wellness meditations.
- » I give my brain a break by either doing something trivial or mundane, or by completely staying still doing nothing (example: lying on the beach).
- » I do daily affirmations and carry crystals for a better aura and state of mind.
- » Remind myself that my health is more important than anything else. Being vocal when I am not feeling well mentally.
- » I try to understand myself better by reading psychiatric books or listen to related podcasts from trustworthy sources.
- » Maintain a work/life balance, focus on eating well and exercise.
- » I try to make sure I spend some part of each day stretching and meditating. I also try to make sure I learn something new each day.
- » I take time-off work, do family activities and I pray.
- » I watch for signs and then try to find a task or outing to occupy me.
- » Read health and fitness magazines and self-help articles.
- » Try to spend time with loved ones.



MENTAL HEALTH SURVEY RESPONSES - Anonymous PKers

Tell us how mental health (positively or negatively) has affected your life?

- » It can take over your thoughts, when stressing about something. It can make you feel physically sick.
- » Positive: When prioritized and supplemented by exercise regimen, healthy eating, and good sleep, I can enjoy the moment more while remaining optimistic about the future. I am grateful for friends. Negative: When I am in a bad spell, I am stressed more easily from routine things, have lower self-worth and have lower productivity at work despite feeling busy.
- » It affects the thought process and ability to move ahead.
- » I have been able to achieve my life goals so far and enjoy life at the same time.
- » I try to get counseling each year or every other year. Since we have annual physicals, I also get mental health checks.
- » I struggled a lot with anxiety in high school and had a difficult time falling asleep.
- » I never quite understood mental health until my mid-life crisis induced panic attacks. For a few months, I couldn't even ride in a moving vehicle.
- » Highly positive moments are when I'm happy, which makes me most productive, most social, and most approachable. Highly negative moments are when I'm depressed/stressed, making me least productive, uninterested in people/activities, and antisocial.
- » As soon as I started prioritizing my mental health, I changed the way I looked at things. I also changed my image and grew in abundant self-love.
- » Negatively, my mental health has affected me with depression and made me gain a lot of weight. Positively, I have bounced back from depression and started working out and started believing in myself again and look forward to the future.
- » Negatively: It made me just want to stay in bed all day. Positively: I created some nice art and written stories.
- » When I first got sick to the outside world, I had put on a brave face but at home I was always sad. I never wanted to do anything and just wanted to be left alone. One day it was all too much, and I had a breakdown. Now based on that experience I can cope and know when I am heading down that path to make time for myself.
- » I think more awareness has been brought up recently on mental health and I think it's a positive because everyone can learn and grow from it.
- » When I was diagnosed with a significant medical condition, my mental health spiraled and I wasn't sure how to climb out. My physician saw the signs and started meds. I also lost someone very close to me to suicide in 2017.
- » Several family members of mine struggle with severe mental illness. It is very tough for them and for those of us who love them.
- » It can really set you back, especially if events happen that can completely change how you spend your retirement years due to health issues.
- » After experiencing a very tragic event (death of a close friend due to suicide), I've tried to become a better listener and friend. You never know what someone may be going through (appearances can be deceiving) and taking the time to "truly" listen can make all the difference. I have also become a big proponent of mental health professionals and always try to encourage others to seek assistance when I think it may be helpful.

PERSONAL STORIES AND TIPS

Life is not always easy and maintaining a positive mental health outlook can be a continuous balancing act. My family experienced hardship with my younger brother Derek. In his years as an older teenager and young adult we noticed a great change in him, and he began to see a psychiatrist. During this process Derek was diagnosed as schizophrenic and showed signs of bipolar and depression. Life became difficult and someone we knew to be the happy blonde hair blue eyed 'Gerber Baby', to athletic youth baseball and soccer star, was now someone very different.

I don't think I could ever really understand how Derek felt. During this early period of Derek's illness (2014), I was struggling with my own depression from a failed seven-year relationship (young and blind love will do this to you), an almost thirty-pound weight gain, and self-image issues. Because I was dealing with my own situation and trying to find ways to get better, I became distant to others, including my family.

By the year-end holiday season of 2017, things worsened, and Derek's behavior become more difficult. He continued to seek help, but his mindset was not clear and the last time I saw him in-person, I noticed that the color of his face had changed. He had lost his ability to fight for life. On January 2, 2018, Derek left us after spending several days in the ICU for hurting himself. My father, mother, sister, brother, and I were all in the room as Derek took his last assisted breath.



Image of **Kailey Blahut's** brother
- Derek Kyle Blahut
(May 16, 1995 – January 2, 2018)

Since his passing, some members of my family have taken the opportunity to speak on our experience as you never know who you might help. We want to make it known that "it is okay to not be okay" and that life is a fluid process that is always changing. We encourage people to seek professional help when needed and be open to new professional help when the current process no longer serves you.

Personally, for those who struggle with depression and self-image issues, I recommend speaking to a therapist or family and friends you can openly trust. It's not easy looking into the mirror and not liking the person looking back, but the first step for me was admitting where I was, then creating an action plan for positive change. Luckily, I began to enjoy the process of getting back into the gym, eating mindfully, and continuing to pursue my career goals. I also found comfort in reconnecting with my family. Ultimately, the passing of my brother brought us all closer together, as we finally realized that life is too short.

– Kailey Blahut

PERSONAL STORIES AND TIPS

A couple of months ago I was dealing with depression where I had to take some time off work. I believe my depression was due to the pandemic and having a baby. I did not know how to deal with my stress and depression and just kept holding everything in. It was not until my brother-in-law passed away in February (2021) due to an overdose of drugs that I decided I needed to do something. My brother in-law had been experiencing depression, which resulted in him taking drugs and ultimately overdosing. His death hit us all very hard and pushed me to seek professional help. I started meeting with a therapist who helped me deal with my depression.

- Victor Martinez



I learned from a professional that panic lives off anxiety which in turn lives off stress. Remove the foundation of stress and the panic and anxiety cannot exist. We must find time to destress and relax, and it must be truly relaxing, especially spending time removing thoughts from your mind. Also, your body and mind can't tell the difference between good stress and bad stress. (Good stresses...having a baby, getting a promotion, building a house, graduating from college).

- Anonymous



A few years after graduating, my life felt stagnant as I was single and in a constant sleep, work, watch TV, sleep loop. That's when depression hit me the hardest. It was only after seeking therapy and making major changes in my life that I was able to start pursuing a significant other and getting married. This ultimately resulted in my depression subsiding. Now, while depression may hit me occasionally, it's MUCH smaller in intensity.

- Anonymous

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is a grassroots non-profit organization that has chapters throughout the country. They tend to be run by family members of those struggling with mental illness, and they have a wide range of resources for both those who are ill and their families who need support as well. I highly recommend reaching out to your local chapter if you are looking for resources or support. I've completed their Family-to-Family course and attended a few support group meetings.

- Anonymous

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

- » [Nami.org/Home](https://www.nami.org/Home)
- » 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)
- » info@nami.org

American Association of Suicidology

- » [Suicidology.org](https://www.suicidology.org)
- » [Findahelpline.com/i/aas](https://findahelpline.com/i/aas)

BetterHelp

- » [Betterhelp.com](https://www.betterhelp.com)

Psychology Today

- » [Psychologytoday.com](https://www.psychologytoday.com)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

- » [Suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)
- » 1-800-273-8255

Perr&Knight Employee Resources

Anthem Blue Cross

For PK employees enrolled in medical and for their enrolled dependents as well, use the prefix "JQU" or sign in. The PK group number is L03056.

- » [Anthem.com/ca/find-care/](https://www.anthem.com/ca/find-care/)

Employee Assistance Program (EAP) from Mutual of Omaha

For all PK employees and their household members.

- » mutualofomaha.com/eap
- » 1-800-316-2796

Mini Newsletter Editor

Kailey Blahut
Judy Perr
Ed Perne

Contributors

Kailey Blahut
Rodney Joyal
Victor Martinez
Anonymous PKers