

In The Mix With AOD

Draft: In The Mix With AOD Episode Three- Effects of Alcohol/ Drug Use on Mental Health

As the beginning of the fall season comes over us with the first week of October marking the start of pumpkin spice and cold mornings, it also marks the beginning of Mental Illness Awareness Week. The National Alliance on Mental Illness dedicates October 3rd through the 7th across the country to raise awareness on mental illness, fight discrimination and provide support to those experiencing a mental illness. Some statistics on mental illness among the United States population found on the NAMI's website include that 1 in 5 adults experience mental illness each year, and 50 percent of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75 percent by age 24. It's important to witness how common mental illness truly is, so we can all have a better understanding of its personal and social impacts. Mental illness can feel as though there is this weight on our shoulders keeping us from moving forward, and sometimes substance misuse, or even substance use disorder can exacerbate that weight. This combination of substance use disorder and another mental illness occurring at the same time is called coexisting disorders. Either disorder can develop first, and having one doesn't mean you will develop the other. In this episode we are going to dive deeper into substance use disorder, coexisting disorders and their effects on one another, and the supports that are available right here at Grand Valley's University Counseling Center.

Hey, I'm Bethann Long and welcome back to another episode of "In The Mix" with AOD, a podcast provided through the Alcohol and Other Drugs Services here at Grand Valley. Welcome to fall everybody! In my opinion, this is the best time of the year. Seriously, what's better than October in Michigan? Anyways, I hope that school is going well for you all, it is flying by so quickly. I hope you are all taking care of yourself physically, but also mentally as well. Another reason why I love October so much is because of Mental Illness Awareness Week. Personally, this is a topic that I hold really close to my heart and love continuously becoming more educated on the effects of mental illnesses, and providing others with the same knowledge. However, it's also really important to understand the coexistence of mental illnesses and substance use disorder. Through this episode we are going to go over the details of Mental Illness Awareness Week, the definition of substance use disorder along with the signs, the coexistence of mental illness and substance use disorders, and the simultaneous treatment for this coexisting illness that is provided through Grand Valley's University Counseling Center.

Before diving into the heart of the episode, let's first discuss what Mental Illness Awareness Week is and the importance of it. The National Alliance on Mental Illness has dedicated October 3rd through the 7th as 2022's Mental Illness Awareness Week. This week is dedicated every year to raise awareness on mental illness, fight discrimination, and provide support. Millions of Americans every year are living with a mental health condition, but everyone is affected directly or indirectly. This year is centered around the theme "What I Wish I Had Known" where the focus will be on the power of lived experiences. Each day of the week the organization will be covering different topics surrounding mental health. This year's topics include: Stigma, Medication, Therapy, Disclosing, and Caregiving. On NAMI's website there is a MIAW video series where real people are sharing their lived experiences with some of the symptoms and conditions that are being focused on during this Mental Illness Awareness Week. Three big topics that are being covered in these videos are anxiety, bipolar disorder, and borderline personality disorder. This is a really important time to become educated on the topic of mental health and let those voices be heard on a topic that is a lot of the time shied away from. If you, or know someone who is personally struggling, please know that you are cared for, and your voice is heard. The GVSU University Counseling Center is

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equipped with certified professional counselors committed to improving the mental health of the student body through prevention, education, and counseling.

Now let's get into what exactly substance use disorder is and what the signs are to be on the lookout for. In basic terms, the definition of substance use disorder is the repeated misuse of alcohol and/or drugs. The symptoms of a substance use disorder look slightly different for everyone, but there are some common signs to be on the lookout for. These include social changes such as: sudden changes in friend groups or withdrawal from friends and family, unexplained need for money or financial problems, using substances even though it causes problems in relationships, developing a high tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, feeling like you need a substance to be able to function, or engaging in risky behaviors. There are also some physical changes that may occur, which include bloodshot eyes, abnormally sized pupils, sudden weight loss or weight gain, and slurred speech or impaired coordination. Substance use disorders can often occur simultaneously in individuals with mental illness who are using substances to cope with overwhelming symptoms. The combination of these two illnesses is called coexisting disorders- either disorder can develop first, but please know that having one doesn't mean you will develop the other.

A frequent question surrounding this topic is this: in a coexisting illness what comes first? Mental illness or substance abuse? Substance abuse and mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety are closely linked, although one doesn't necessarily directly cause the other. Abusing substances such as cannabis can cause prolonged psychotic reactions, and alcohol can make depression and anxiety symptoms worse. In co-occurring disorders, both the mental health issue and the substance abuse have their own unique symptoms that may get in the way of your ability to function at work or school, maintain a stable home life, handle life's difficulties, and relate to others. To make the situation more complicated, the co-occurring disorders also affect each other. When a mental health problem goes untreated, the substance abuse problem usually gets worse. And when alcohol or drug abuse increases, mental health problems usually increase too. According to the Journal of the American Medical Association, roughly 50 percent of individuals with severe mental illnesses are affected by substance abuse. Mental health problems can sometimes lead to substance use as some people may misuse these substances as a form of self-medication. Despite thinking that self-medicating is helping the problem, this actually causes side effects and in the long run worsens the symptoms they initially helped relieve. Substance abuse may sharply increase symptoms of mental illness or even trigger new symptoms. Abuse of alcohol or drugs can also interact with medications such as antidepressants, anxiety medications, and mood stabilizers, making them less effective at managing symptoms and delaying recovery.

Substance abuse and mental health issues can happen to any of us. However, there are resources surrounding us that are here to provide a guided path to recovery. When beginning on this path, denial is common in both substance use and mental health issues. It can be hard to admit dependence on substances or how much they have affected your life, and the symptoms of mental illnesses can also be really frightening. But, the best treatment for coexisting disorders is integrated intervention which is when a person is receiving care for both mental illness and substance use disorder simultaneously. For effective treatment, there needs to be an understanding between you and your provider on how each condition affects the other, so that a proper plan can be put in place that will best help you. Not all treatment planning is going to be the same for everyone, everyone has their own paths of treating this but there can be some similarities in a few elements. GVSU's Alcohol and Other Drugs Services is available not only to

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educate students on making healthy decisions regarding alcohol and other drugs, but also provides students with access to substance abuse treatment and recovery resources. There are recovery meetings such as Alcoholics Anonymous which are 12-step programs that welcome individuals who are trying to overcome substance problems, and share their experiences with one another to provide hope through others' recovery. therapy groups are also offered through AOD services. AOD Healthy Habits is a non-judgmental drop-in group for students who are looking to explore their alcohol or other drug use. Another group that is offered is Adult Children of Alcoholics Group which is open to students who grew up in an alcoholic or dysfunctional environment and as a result may feel different than others. Topics will address learning healthy coping and healing.

This is a time in our lives where we are faced with a variety of challenges, and life may sometimes feel like a constant uphill battle. We may find times where our mental health is taking a hit and it can be difficult to know where to turn to. It's important to remember that substances will only subside the symptoms you may be experiencing for a moment, if at all. Grand Valley does an amazing job providing students with access to help whether it is with mental illness, substance abuse disorder, or coexisting disorders. Someone is always here to provide students with the proper help that is needed. This has been the third episode of "In The Mix" with AOD and I am so excited to bring another episode to you all soon.