

Holding to Hope

Staying Sane While Loving Someone with a Mental Illness

By Brad and Donna Hoefs

Loving someone who struggles with mental health can sometimes feel like being conscripted to ride a terrifying rollercoaster in the dark — you have no idea when or if the ride will end, and you never chose to ride the rollercoaster in the first place! Step off of the rollercoaster, and instead grab this book, *Holding on to Hope - Staying Sane While Loving Someone with a Mental Illness*. Pastor Brad Hoefs of Fresh Hope for Mental Health and his wife Donna will show you a way forward that offers practical insight, helpful ideas, dignity, choice, and clear scriptural inspiration for living well in spite of mental illness, instead of life as a victim of your loved one's diagnosis. Learn to walk alongside your loved one more effectively in spite of their mental illness, and in spite of your own pain and challenges. Most of all, there is hope – real, solid, attainable hope. You and your loved one can find hope for wellness and a better future together.

Tara Rolstad, Mental Health Speaker and Author
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If your loved one suffers with mental illness, then *Holding to Hope* will speak directly to you. Brad and Donna Hoefs use their story of lived experience and realistic examples as they navigate readers through challenging emotions and self-reflection. Loving someone with mental illness can be lonely and can leave you feeling hopeless, but this book validates the struggle and frustration while painting a future of hope and recovery. Reading this book will encourage and connect you to a community of people who feel just like you and offer you the support that you are longing for.

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Acknowledgements

Sometimes in life, the things we become experienced in choose us. Such is the case with mental illness and loving someone with a mental illness in our lives. For whatever reason, the Lord has allowed us to become well-versed with mental illness and learning to love well someone with a mental health issue.

For both Donna and me, we each had a parent who had a mental illness in the ‘old days’ when you didn't talk about it, and God forbid that you would talk openly about it. Donna's mother and my father each had bipolar disorder (at the time, it was called manic depression). We watched as our parents navigated the episodes while learning to love each other well despite the mental health challenges they were living through as a couple. Seeing it play out in front of us, at times we learned what worked, but we also learned what did not work. Plus, as children and adults, we have had to learn how to love someone with a mental health issue.

Of course, our experience has also included my own diagnosis and an excruciatingly public manic episode in 1995. It was at that point that Donna got her ‘doctoral degree’ in being a loved one. Without her, I would not have made it. I believe that I would not be here today had it not been for her loving me well through the time I suffered from the most severe period of having bipolar disorder. During that time, Donna held to hope. She held to the hope that I could recover and that the Lord could take all of the pain and brokenness and turn it into good. Her tightly holding onto hope gave me the strength and courage to begin to hope again.

Through the years, we have continued learning and growing in holding to hope for those who have a mental health issue within our circle of family and friends. And since 2009, when I started Fresh Hope's first group, up to now, we have become ‘super-learners’ in how to best love someone who has a mental illness. Shortly after starting the first Fresh Hope group, it became evident that those who were loved ones needed encouragement and support as well. So we re-wrote the tenets to include recovery tenets for loved ones. And through the years since, we have seen those tenets provide hope, encouragement, and insight for those who love someone with a mental health issue.

In this book, we offer to you that which we have learned both firsthand and by observation through the years. You are so important in your loved one's mental health journey. We hope to empower you to hold tightly to healing and hope through what we have learned and experienced. We pray that you will gain insights, strength, courage, and healing as you read these pages. Your loved one needs you to stay ‘sane’ (being as emotionally well and available as possible) as you take this journey with them. We think of hope as being the lighted lantern that you hold onto as you take each step in the darkness of a journey such as this. We pray that you will continue holding to hope (the lantern), keeping it lit with the courage, hope, healing, and strength you find within these pages.

This book has been an arduous task for us. It has required time and reflection, some of which were painful to visit once again. Thank you, Donna, for being willing to take the journey with me so that others might benefit and gain insight from how you have loved me through my worst.

We also want to thank our editor, Julie Koenemann, a dear friend and gifted editor. We thank the Lord for you. This would not have been achievable without you!

Also, a huge thank you to all in our circle of family and friends who have been on this journey with us. Because of your holding to hope for us, you have given us courage, strength, and hope. Your friendships and love have provided healing.

Our journeys with mental illness began when we were children and continued into our adult years. In spite of the mental health diagnosis back in the days of even greater shame and stigma around mental illnesses, our parents still gave us what we needed and loved us unconditionally. And while we lost Donna's mom, Stella, to suicide, we were always shown the true hope we have in Christ Jesus.

Today three of our four parents are with the Lord. My mom, Janelle, is the only one left of the four. Her strength and perseverance continue to give us deep insights into holding to hope for those we love.

Thus, we dedicate the book to our parents: Preston and Stella Smith, and David and Janelle Hoefs. Through all of you, we received the unconditional love and strength that has been necessary for this journey that the Lord has us on.

We also dedicate this book to our siblings, who, in fact, lived through our parents' mental health journey, too: Donna's brothers: Joe, David, and Keith; and my sister, Brenda. We love you guys and your spouses! You have been such blessings to us through some of our darkest days and nights!

And finally, we dedicate this book to our children, Noah and Noelle. Just like Donna and me, their journey with mental illness started in childhood. They each lived through the worst of it altogether. And while there were hurts and pains, they experienced what we wish they would not have had to deal with. They are persevering and have great compassion for others because of all they have been through themselves. In spite of some parental 'fails', you two have turned out to be loving, caring, and faith-filled adults. We are proud to call you our son and our daughter.

Brad Hoefs
Holy Week 2021

Foreword

Holding to Hope is a book about finding hope when none appears in the surrounding circumstances. While it records many examples from all walks of life, it is principally the struggle Pastor Brad Hoefs and his wife, Donna, have faced and overcome during the past twenty-five years since he was first diagnosed with bipolar disorder. The condition can present with mood swings, either up or down, sometimes one following the other. In Brad's illness, initial mania was followed by a long period of depression worsened by loss of position and professional relationships. His wife Donna has supported, encouraged, assisted, and held him accountable throughout.

In my professional practice as a psychiatrist, I have been privileged to work with Brad and Donna the entire twenty-five years. Their situation is not unique, and other forms of mental illness can present the same devastating consequences to both the designated sufferer and their loved ones. As a physician, it is my calling to ameliorate their suffering as best I am able. This includes medical treatment and as much wisdom and insight I can muster to guide them on the path to recovery. Recovery does not mean full restoration of all that has been lost, but recovering as much as possible and growing beyond the trauma of mental illness towards a future that might not have been possible without the hurdles mental illness imposes. This process of growth requires overcoming rather than succumbing.

Overcoming requires looking beyond the circumstances at the future and implies hope. Hope in what? Self? Spouse? Life in general? God? This brings us to *Holding to Hope*. It recognizes that everyone has pain, losses, and tragedies in their lives. Whether it is the loss of a loved one, financial collapse, divorce, or mental illness. You either work through it or get stuck in it. As the old adage goes, life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it. The most appropriate response is in the famous Serenity Prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr. (See Chapter 14)

You cannot change that your loved one has a mental illness, how other people react to it, or that they need treatment. You *can* change how you respond to others despite how they may react, seek those who are understanding and supportive, and live life despite loving someone with a mental health challenge. It is only a part of life, not the whole of it.

Michael L. Egger, MD, DLFAP

Introduction

When it comes to mental illness, it is an equal opportunity provider of pain, struggles, and difficulties. Those who have a mental illness and their loved ones are all subject to the layers of difficulties that mental illness brings into relationships and life itself. There is no doubt in our minds that being the loved one of someone who has a mental illness can be as difficult as having the illness itself. In fact, it is even possible for those who love someone with a mental illness to suffer even more than their loved one who has the diagnosis. It is so very difficult to watch someone you love suffer so much, and even more difficult when they refuse to be compliant in their treatment or they continually self-sabotage their recovery.

The mental illness of someone you love and care about deeply has brought you to a point of picking up this book and opening it to find hope – for the one you love and even for yourself. Their pain is your pain. Their hurt is your hurt. Their struggle is your struggle. Yet intuitively you know that in spite of your own pain, hurt, and struggle, you are a lifeline for the potential recovery of your loved one. So it is through your tears and in spite of the fear of failure that you desire to do your part – and sometimes more than your part – in the recovery of your loved one. Suddenly you are their mental health coach, mental health advocate, life coach, and their overall advocate. And yet, who is caring for you? How do you keep from being ‘done in’ by the roller coaster of mental health recovery?

How do you find hope in the midst of what seems to be a hopeless situation? How do you as their loved one hold on to hope for them and yourself? How do you give them hope much less hold onto hope yourself? That’s what this book is about. It’s about giving you hope. This book will empower you to hold onto hope while offering hope to your loved one who has a mental illness.

What this book is not:

- It’s not a book for telling you what you need to do and not do to bring about wellness for the one you love.
- It’s not a book to educate you about the mental health system or educate you about your loved one’s mental illness.
- It’s not a book to tell you about what to expect with your loved one’s illness.
- It’s not a book about you fixing what is wrong with your loved one who has a mental illness, nor is it about how you can fix any of it.
- It is not an exhaustive discourse on mental health.

Rather, this book is about:

- Coming alongside you with hope and encouragement as you give care and love to someone who has a mental illness;
- Empowering you to live well in spite of the roller coaster ride of your loved one's mental illness/health;
- Empowering you with some practical and helpful insights;
- Empowering you to care for yourself; and
- Assuring you that you are not alone.

We want you to understand that your healthy support is key in helping and caring for the one you love suffering with a mental health challenge. Please take note, it is your **healthy** support. If *you* are not healthy and at your best, your care and encouragement for your loved one will be lacking. You first need to take care of yourself, or you will be sucked into the pits of despair yourself. Chances are you might be there right now. No one can be 'on' 24/7. You need breaks. You need time for yourself. You need time to recreate. This book is about helping you replenish, refuel, and refresh so that you might be continually renewed. Loving someone with a mental health challenge is more of a marathon than a sprint. And it is an ongoing challenge and hard work that can wear you down and begin to affect your own mental health.

There is no doubt in our minds that being the loved one of someone who has a mental illness is just as painful, and sometimes even more, than the pain of being mentally ill. The recovery journey is difficult. Mental illness affects everyone around the one who has the illness. While the major focus is on the one who has mental health issues, those who love them are feeling the sting, pain, and heart wounds as a result of the disruptive behaviors due to the mental illness. It is life-altering for everyone.

And while there are no easy answers or a simple formula to follow, there is good news. There is hope. It's a real, sure and certain hope. It's not wishful-thinking hope. And this hope is not even dependent on whether or not your loved one finds their pathway to living well! *You* can live well and with hope in spite of your loved one's recovery. It doesn't mean you won't feel the pain, but you can work through it and hold onto hope *in spite of* their ups and downs. You can become the hero against the villain of mental illness in your life.

This book is for you, the loved one. Our intent is to empower you to live well, give you hope and the strength to hold onto that hope in spite of the ups and downs of your loved one's recovery journey. We hope to provide you with practical insights, cause you to think, encourage you to find healing, and most of all to assure you that you are NOT alone.

Two Parts

Part 1

Processing the Principles - Practical Insights for Staying Sane

In Part 1, our approach is to guide you through the seven Fresh Hope[®] Recovery Principles for Loved Ones. As we look at each, we will help you process each principle in a practical way. This becomes your workbook for *staying sane while loving someone who has a mental health diagnosis*. You can work through them by yourself, or you can process them in a small group of loved ones. The chapters on the Recovery Principles are created especially for use in a group setting.

Part 2

Helpful Hints - For When Holding to Hope is Hard to Do

In Part 2, we address a number of specific issues that we hear loved ones ask again and again within our groups, in shorter chapters than in Part 1. The first six chapters address topics on Living Well; the final chapters focus on relationships. We'll share with you our experiences as loved ones, and also what we have seen through the collective wisdom of the loved ones we have met through the years. Some of the chapters include simple lists of insights based upon our experience. While you may not find easy answers, what you will discover are insights that hopefully will lead you to creatively pursuing the right answers for you and your loved one.

The Fresh Hope® Principles for Loved Ones

- #1 My loved one's mental health challenge has also left me feeling helpless and hopeless. Therefore, I choose the help of others in learning about the disorder and choosing healthy boundaries for myself.

Together, we have understanding. We remind each other of the Lord's love, and that He alone can do all things. He is the source of our hope, and in Him we can overcome all things.

"I can do everything through Him who gives me strength." Philippians 4:13 (NIV)

- #2 I haven't always responded to my loved one's mental health issue in ways that were good for the relationship. Therefore, I choose to learn better ways to communicate with, support, and encourage my loved one.

Together, we commit to speaking the truth in love, healing broken relationships and viewing each other as the Lord views us.

"So let's pursue those things which bring peace and which are good for each other." Romans 14:19 (God's Word Translation, 1995)

- #3 At times I don't understand my loved one and can allow them to either wallow in their excuses, or push them too hard. Therefore I choose to learn healthy, appropriate ways to contribute to my loved one's recovery.

Together we do better than trying on our own. We will hold one another accountable for learning, growing, and choosing to push through in hope.

"Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up." 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)

- #4 At times I also feel hopeless, letting my loved one's actions and recovery define my happiness. Therefore, I choose to live with healthy emotional boundaries, and I choose my own joy despite the ups and downs of my loved one.

Together we remind each other that our hope and joy come from the Lord. He alone is able to fulfill our needs in every aspect of our lives.

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

- #5 I, too, have been part of the cycle of dysfunctional living, either thinking I had all the answers or thinking the problem didn't belong to me. Therefore, I choose to submit

myself to learning new behaviors and taking responsibility for my own healthy, balanced living.

Together we choose freedom over suffering, and joy in living through self-knowledge in action.

***“We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” 2
Corinthians 10:5***

#6 At times, I have viewed myself as a victim of my loved one’s behavior and disorder, living in resentment, anger, unforgiveness, or self-pity. Therefore, I choose to separate the disorder from the person I love, forgive and let go of the past, and live as a contributor to successful recovery.

Together, we share in each other’s victories and celebrate the whole person.

***For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and a sound mind.” 2
Timothy 1:7***

#7 I, too, have become focused on my loved one’s situation and how it has affected me. I can easily become so consumed by our issues that I fail to see those around me who would benefit from what I’ve learned. Therefore, I choose to give back by seeking opportunities to help others by sharing my insights and experiences.

Together we recognize that sharing helps both us and others heal. Sharing helps us find our voice and becomes empowering as we see our pain redeemed by the Lord. As we share, it helps reaffirm our own hope while also giving hope away to others.

***“(The Lord) helps us in all our troubles, so that we are able to help others who have all kinds of troubles, using the same help that we ourselves have received from God.” 2
Corinthians 1:4 (Good News Translation)***

Part 1

Processing the Principles

Practical Insights for Staying Sane

Chapter 1

When Mental Illness Disrupts Your Life

The Brain - Mind Difference

(Brad) In 1975, my life, as well as the lives of my entire family, was disrupted, interrupted, and changed forever. What happened? Well, my father had a nervous breakdown (that's what it was called it back then). He had his first episode of depression with his bipolar disorder.

At the time we didn't know it. This was a strong, almost 'thuggish' man with a bad temper, but who could also be lot of fun. He was busy adding on to our house and doing all kinds of things with farming and feeding the cattle, and all of a sudden he became a puddle of tears. It was shocking. I didn't know how to respond to it at all. I was a senior in high school. I was busy living, having a good life, and my father became very withdrawn, wasn't doing anything, and was crying a lot. It was very hush-hush even within our immediate family, and heaven forbid we would talk about it with anybody else. Finally, they got him to a doctor, a psychiatrist who diagnosed him right away and put him on lithium. This disruption took a while and it was painful. And I remember it yet to this day.

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If you're reading this book, then there's a good chance that you've experienced a similar kind of disruption in your life. Sometimes the disruption is sudden and unexpected, like with my dad. It was just almost overnight, and it was like, "What happened?" Other times it's like watching the cars collide and crumple in a very slow train wreck. Sometimes the diagnosis finally makes sense of what hasn't made sense for years. Or sometimes it hits like a tragic car accident: suddenly your loved one's mind crashes due to a 'perfect storm' within their life.

It's complex. When mental illness interrupts, it doesn't disrupt in the same way in every case. Like I said, sometimes it's slow; other times it's sudden. But you find yourself asking some of the same questions, like, "What happened? What happened to my loved one? This isn't the way they act. Why are they acting this way? Why can't they change back? Why can't they do something about it?"

After all, behavior is what we see. It's the symptomatic aspect of something that's wrong with the brain. "Why can't they choose to think differently? Why can't they decide to do this? Why are they acting like this? Why can't they just remember what made them happy? Why can't they just get out of this funk?" Well, that behavior is a symptom that their brain is not working properly. And in many cases such as with depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and schizoaffective disorder, it has to do with brain chemistry. Sometimes it has to do with their thinking, as in thinking disorders. But in any case, it has to do with the brain not functioning properly. For

instance, if somebody has PTSD and they've suffered trauma, that trauma and PTSD has most likely changed their brain chemistry.

Mind vs. Brain

It's really important for you to understand as a loved one that this is not something your loved one has chosen, nor is it because they're lazy and aren't doing enough to get over it. Maybe the best way to start with understanding is to know that there's a difference between your mind and your brain.

Scripture tells us that we have the mind of Christ. But if somebody's lost their mind, how is that the mind of Christ? The truth is we do have the mind of Christ, but there are times when someone's brain is not working properly.

Remember that the brain is a physical organ made up of tissue. It's physiological. It's no more spiritual than any other part of your body. Your mind is what your brain does, and that's where the problems show up. It's how the mind thinks, and how people act, that becomes the issue. When your brain doesn't work right, you're not going to be in your right mind, either. If your loved one's brain chemistry is 'off', then what they think, say, and do – how they behave – is affected. That's why in the medical profession, mental health is called *behavioral* health.

Especially in cases with bipolar disorder, schizoaffective disorder, schizophrenia, depression, and even anxiety, people can end up acting like they've been shot up with hallucinogenic drugs, and they're just not themselves. That's what happens to those who have mental health disorders. It's as though somebody comes in the middle of the night and changes their brain chemistry. The brain is not functioning properly. As the loved one, you can be mad about their brain chemistry being off, but not at your loved one. They don't choose how their brain chemistry works, any more than you do.

No, your loved one has not chosen this, nor have you. This is not a character flaw for them, but it's going to test both their character and yours. This does not make them less of a person, nor is this a moral issue, or a lack of faith. But your faith is going to be tested. It's as physical as any other illness that we have. Why? Because it has to do with our body. It has to do with the brain. Now, the one choice that your loved one and you can make is to get help, to learn as much as you can about it, and be determined to not let it rob you of life.

How long will it take? Clinical depression may go away after some period of time. If it's chronic clinical depression or major depressive disorder, it may not. And things like bipolar, schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder – those things are not going to go away. That's why you have to make the choice along with your loved one to learn how to live well in spite of the challenging diagnosis. It's certainly a disruption. But one of the signs of healthy mental health

recovery is when a person begins to take their life back. We'll talk about that later. But when people want to begin to live out their life again, as opposed to their mental illness sucking the life out of them and you, that's a good sign. That's a good sign because they're starting to recover.

A bit of reflection:

1. How has mental illness 'disrupted' your life?

2. What is the difference between your brain and your mind?

Devotional Reflection

When a crisis in life strikes, such as a mental health crisis, you truly find out what you're made of – and good for you! You're reading a book right now to help you find courage and some direction as you face this crisis. That's a good sign that you are made of some good 'stuff'. You know that you can't go it alone.

When a mental health crisis strikes, you also find out who your friends are. Some will understand. Other friends will be silent out of fear of not knowing what to say or do. They've not gone through anything like it and may not have even gone through a crisis of any kind in life. Love them anyway. It's not because they don't love you; it's because they don't understand. And those who have been broken enough in life and have walked through some type of crisis will be able to walk alongside of you. They'll know how important it is to just be there alongside of you. Love them, and let them walk with you.

And finally, when a crisis in life such as a mental health crisis happens, you find out that the Lord has not gone anywhere. In fact, He draws near. The scriptures tell us that God draws near to

the broken-hearted. He is with you every step of the way. He has promised to take all the things that you go through and work them out together *for your good*, and because He loves you and has called you, you are His.

Mental illness has disrupted your life, and it feels like you are walking through hell. Well, don't stop. Keep walking, one step at a time. We hope to help guide you through your journey in the coming pages, that you may come through it stronger, more courageous, and more faith-filled and hope-filled than ever before. It's our hope and prayer that you and your loved one might be living well in spite of a mental health challenge. Yes, it can happen, even for you and for your loved one.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for giving me the courage to pick up this book. I pray for continued courage to face the hard things that I need to learn, and do, in loving a person with a mental health diagnosis.

Forgive me for putting blame on my loved one for their behavior, as if they can willingly control the chemistry of their brain. Keep me mindful that they are just as upset with this 'disruption'. Give me the mind of Christ, that I may be compassionate, empathetic, and wise. Most of all, please grant me the ability to be encouraging and supportive as we travel this journey together.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Chapter 2

Can My Loved One Recover?

Mental Health Recovery: A Hope and a Future

Some folks will tell you that there is no such thing as mental health recovery. They view mental health issues, such as bipolar disorder or schizoaffective disorder, to be lifelong illnesses that people have to learn how to live with or live in spite of. Now that's an interesting concept, because in one respect they are correct. Many of the diagnoses that someone would receive from a mental health issue would be things that you're going to have your entire life. For instance, Brad has bipolar. He will have it when he dies, but as he says, "I will not die from it."

There's an interesting faction of people that have a mental health diagnosis who perceive themselves as being permanent victims of their mental health challenge. We, in Fresh Hope, look at it differently, as does SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the federal branch of the mental health recovery. They see it more as we do, that recovery is possible. They define recovery as 'A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.'

Now, we want to be clear and define what recovery exactly is. First of all, recovery is an individual journey. It's not a sprint, but it's a marathon – and it looks different for everyone. While there is no simple direct line and linear way to go through to the point of recovery, there are certainly principles as we have in our Fresh Hope tenets that help move people through recovery. You might say it's a little bit like grief work, because working through grief is not linear or ordered. All recovery journeys include similar aspects, but each journey is different. No two individuals go through it in the same way. That's true for mental health recovery as well.

It's important to note that there are no easy answers, but there *are* answers and that's part of the journey to living well in spite of having a mental health diagnosis. By the way, that's how we like to look at it from a Fresh Hope perspective, that it is quite possible for people to live well *in spite of* having a mental health diagnosis. Now, living well will look different for different people, but it is feasible to be more than just coping, trying to survive life. You *can* have more than that. SAMHSA has a definition of mental health recovery that we find very helpful: "Recovery is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential." (samhsa.gov)

Through the Recovery Support Strategic Initiative, SAMHSA has delineated four major dimensions that support a life in recovery (samhsa.gov/find-help/recovery):

- Health
- Home

- Purpose
- Community

SAMHSA cites ten marks of recovery. The first one is hope. Imagine that - hope is the foundation of recovery. Person-driven is the second. Third, recovery may take many paths. The fourth mark of recovery is that it is holistic. Peer support is involved. It's relational; it's cultural; it addresses trauma. Number nine, that every person brings unique strengths and responsibilities to their own recovery; and number 10, that respect is always given.

The belief that recovery is real provides the essential and motivating message of a better future; that people can and do overcome the internal and external challenges, barriers, and obstacles that confront them. Being the initial catalyst of the recovery process, I believe that it's not only fostered by peers, families, providers, allies, and others, but also by faith. With the faith of Romans 8:28, God can take all things and make them work out together for our good.

When that faith is added to internalized hope, that life can be better, that there can be a future, now we have a phenomenally strong hope. One important thing to do is to nurture your loved one in understanding that you believe they've got a great future; that you believe there's a way through this to a new day. Assure them that things won't always stay this way, and that there is hope and healing ahead.

Hopelessness comes about when you feel that you've lost your future. So if someone has a life-altering diagnosis – physical, emotional, or mental – and it alters their desired future, it is going to bring about some hopelessness. But starting to internalize hope is a process of coming to terms with the fact that in spite of it not being the future they want, there is, in fact, a future. And it can be a good future, possibly even better than what they planned.

You may notice that we use the phrase ‘living well in spite of’. This is because many people get tripped up on the word ‘recovery’, interpreting it to mean that the condition is eradicated. Since we learn to *manage* our mental health challenge and can never be rid of it, we follow SAMSHA’s working definition of recovery:

A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.

Can your loved one really recover? The answer is, yes. They do recover in the sense of that they improve their health and wellness, they live a self-directed life, and they can strive to reach their full potential. How that looks is different for everybody, but it can be done.

One determining factor in recovery is attitude, both of your loved one and everyone around them. It's interesting to note the death rate of people with different types and stages of cancer. Numerous studies show that the stage of cancer doesn't predict the time of death. Sometimes people in Stage 2 die, while a person diagnosed when in Stage 4 of the same cancer lives. Who

knows why that happens? We believe that some of that can be attributed to attitude. Doctors will tell you that for any of our physiological issues, attitude matters in recovery. The same is true with mental health issues. Your attitude – your belief that things can be better, that they have potential, that this is not over, that there's an answer for it – can really make a difference for your loved one and for you.

Do as much as you can to keep your loved one from believing that this is some kind of life sentence and this is all they are going to get out of life. I think of the scene in *As Good As It Gets*, where Jack Nicholson asked, “What if this is as good as it gets?” The truth is, that if a person believes they can't recover, they won't.

In research conducted by Dr. Shane Lopez on hope, he proves that it is clinically possible that hope is catching, and that you can borrow hope from someone. This tells us that you can ‘loan’ hope to your loved one in your attitude and belief that they can have a future, and they can have their life back.

Within Fresh Hope® we look at recovery from a three-phase perspective. The three phases to Living Well in Spite of a Mental Health Disorder are **surviving**, **coping**, and **thriving**.