



Fort Bend County Podcasts

Podcast Episode 39- Mental Health Awareness, Pt. 2

May 22, 2025

Gina: Welcome to this week's Benefit Detective Podcast. I'm Gina.

Wendy: And I'm Wendy. Let's welcome back Dr. Connie Almeida, Director of the Behavioral Health Department, for our part two of Mental Health Awareness.

Gina: Dr. Almeida, as you were saying, we understand that this is the month of May is Mental Health Awareness Month. Can you give us more insight to Mental Health Awareness?

Dr. Almeida: Definitely. So, I think it's really important to focus on this because in order to, you know, in order to get people connected with the appropriate services, you have I believe, we have to reduce the stigma and the shame that's associated with, the fact that somebody might be struggling with a mental illness. I also wanna point out the difference between, like, mental health and mental illness. Like, mental health is just something we all need.

Mental illness and a mental health disorder, of course, is, you know, when something has become problematic, really interfering with people's daily functioning, and it's persisted for a while. So, you know, I think that's a really important distinction. You know, we're all sad. We all have bad days. We all have anxiety at times.

However, we need to pay attention when those things are persistent and they're showing up, you know, every day and they're showing up at work and they're showing up at home and they're impacting our sleep and our ability to get along with other people or our own emotional regulation. And sometimes they're even contributing to really bad thoughts. Thoughts of, not wanting to be here, thoughts of wanting to hurt ourselves. We have to pay attention to those and we have to be comfortable talking about those things. Nobody chooses to have a mental illness, but the fact is that they are prevalent.

They impact about one in five individuals, one in five children. Again, wanna make sure that people understand mental health, mental illness, mental health disorders, you know, kind of part of a continuum here. So, the awareness part is really important, like, being aware of it, you know, reducing the stigma. It happens. And treatment works, you know, getting people to care.

Early on or intervention is critical, like so if something's happening, pay attention to it. You know, reach out and get the help that you need. I mean, I'm a strong believer in that, in terms of early intervention, prevention services, support, taking care of our bodies. You know, our brain is part of our body. We need to take care of our brain just like we need to take care of our bodies.



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Dr. Almeida: You know, after COVID, we all saw an increase in anxiety disorders, mood disorders, depression. I mean, clearly, when we're maybe in an environment where, you know, we don't really know what's gonna happen the next day, where we lose the support services that we that we've had. Maybe we even lose some of the financial stability that we've had. All those things can contribute, and they can make a mental illness worse.

Gina: Right.

Dr. Almeida: They can exacerbate those conditions and you need to pay attention to those. You know? So, reach out to somebody, reach out to family, and then reach out to professionals. I and I know we're gonna talk about our EAP services in Fort Bend County. There's also a, just wanna point out there's a 24/7 hotline that's called, "988".

Just like we have 911 for emergency services and public safety, there's a helpline that's called, "988". And so, basically, it's a crisis line. And you can call that at any time. So, if you're struggling and you just don't know where to go, 988. Of course, there's a local community mental health center, which is also Texana. They have a 24hr hotline also. But the 988 is easy to remember.

Gina: I love that.

Dr. Almeida: I don't know if I answered your question.

Gina: No, that's perfect. Yes. Because, honestly, I was not aware of 988, and I'll be honest with that. So that is very good information, especially now during the month of May for it being Mental Health Awareness. People need to be aware. I'm glad you're here to provide that information. Thank you.

Dr. Almeida: Thank you.

Gina: That is so good. And you were stating also about it was children?

Dr. Almeida: Oh, yeah. Children's Mental Health Day. Yeah. So, yeah, May 7 is a national day to recognize children's mental health. So, I I've been very fortunate. I guess I've had many years that I actually worked as a school psychologist and, and I've worked with children and, you know, and know a lot about child development and, I don't know, just a little fact, but most of the brain develops actually between birth and three. And it's like 85% of the brain and so those early years are critical. So, you know, like, how are we supporting children? And I have to say, you know, in order to support children, we have to support parents, especially maternal mental health.

Gina: Yes.

Dr. Almeida: Like, we we know there's such an increase in postpartum depression.

Gina: Yes.



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Dr. Almeida: And, you know, the struggle that moms have in terms of returning back to work and how can we support that. And so, but children's mental health, we have seen an increase in, again, anxiety disorders, and depression among children. They're real. You know, they often impact, of course, the child's ability to learn, relationships with peers. And unfortunately, all we also see, suicide, among our children, and we need to pay attention to that. We have a lot of resources in Fort Bend County. I know that there's, Juvenile Probation has a lot of programs. There's an Exposed Excellence Program which is great. But we need to do more for our kids. Paying attention to what's going on in their lives. You know, there's so much research now about the impact of social media on children.

Gina: Right.

Dr. Almeida: Bullying is real

Gina: Yes.

Dr. Almeida: And has, devastating impacts on children. We, I know I've seen much more anxiety disorders and depressive disorders among children. So, again, this is, a day to recognize mental illness and the importance of mental health in children. There needs to be more resources for kids. There needs to be more services for children. If we invest now, we have better outcomes later. I mean, children are our future. I know that we often say that, but they are our future. I have three little granddaughters and, I wanna make sure that we're doing everything we can for their mental health.

Gina and Wendy: Absolutely.

Gina: Yes. Definitely. Gosh. Thank you so much, Dr. Almeida, for this information. That is really great information. And thank you for joining us today.

Dr. Almeida: Thank you. Oh, I was gonna mention one other resource that, so, the Mental Health America is a great research. So, if you just, you know, Google MHA, they have a variety of resources in terms of, you know, what you can do. They even have some online screenings, and they also have a lot of resources on, of course children's mental health.

Gina: So Awesome. And can you give us that one more time?

Dr. Almeida: Yeah. It's just, Mental Health America. So, if you just Google MHA, you'll be able to find it. We actually work with our greater Houston MHA, but they're a great resource. There's national organization out there, and they have they always have great information.

Gina: So Perfect. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Wendy: Well, thank you for joining us today.

Dr. Almeida: Thank you for having me, and thank you for all that you all do in, for our employees and for the county. So, I think this is really an exciting opportunity for all of us to work together and see how we can support not only our staff but our community.



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Gina: Absolutely. And we loved having you here and getting all this information. That is great.

Dr. Almeida: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Wendy: If you're needing to speak with someone in regard to mental health, remember, you're not alone. All One Health can help. Contact them at +1 (888) 993-7650. This is a free service for all full time and part time Fort Bend County employees and their family.

Gina: Not to forget, anyone 18 years of age and older that is on the Fort Bend County Medical Plan has the option to use Teladoc for mental health as well. Download the mobile app today and set up your account to get started. And as Dr. Almeida was stating, there is also the number of "988" to use in case for suicide and crisis lifeline.

Gina: Well, that's a wrap for this week's Benefit Detective Podcast. I'm Gina.

Wendy: And I'm Wendy. And don't forget to listen to our podcast every second and fourth Thursday of the month. Also, more information on All One Health or Teladoc, visit Risk Management, EAP, or LINKS on eConnect.

Gina: And remember, the Benefit Detectives are here to help.