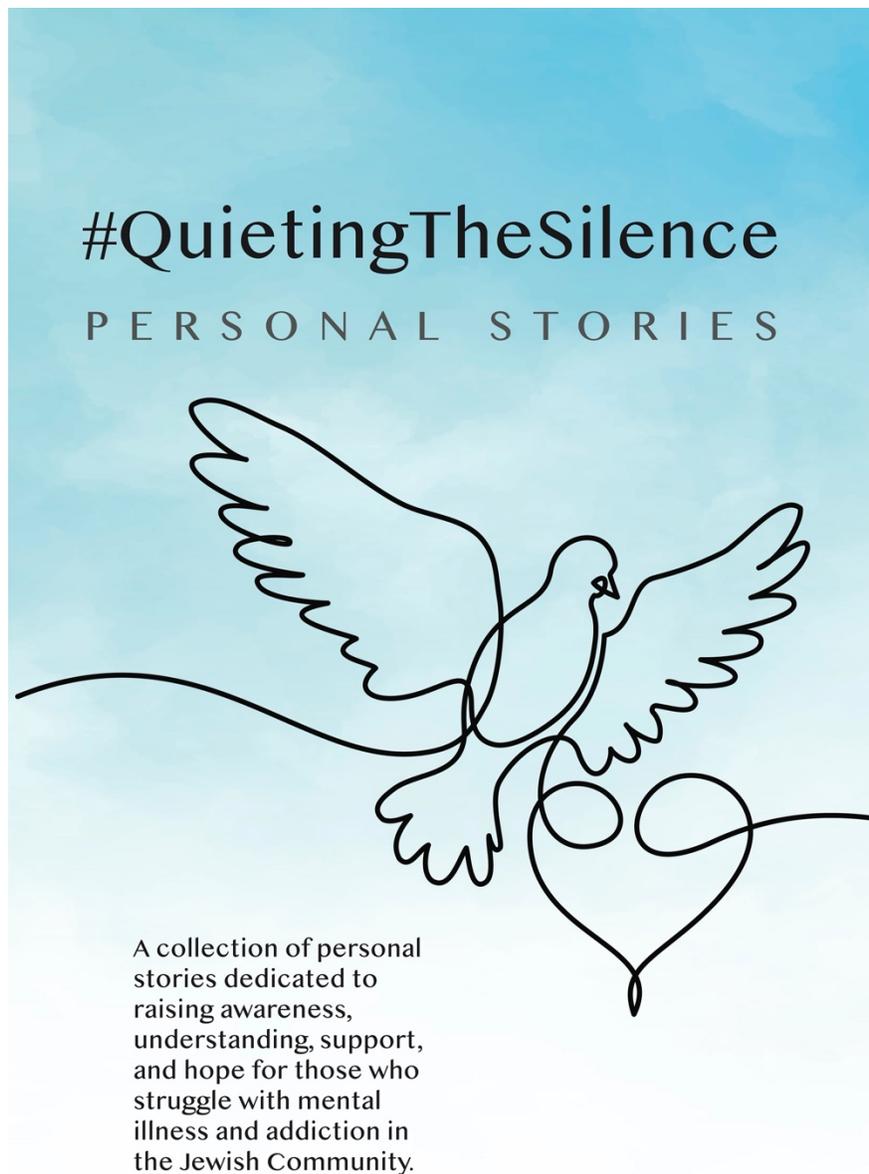


#QuietingTheSilence: Personal Stories

Book Club Guide



Book website: www.QuietingTheSilence.org.

Talking about mental health can sometimes be awkward and difficult, but incredibly rewarding and helpful to many.

This book, *#QuietingTheSilence: Personal Stories*, is a collection of personal stories dedicated to raising awareness, understanding, support and hope for those who struggle with mental illness and addiction in the Jewish Community.

The stories come from individuals with a Jewish background who have gone through a life-changing experience, either personally or through a loved one. We hope by sharing them, we can show others with similar stories they are not alone. And we can begin to eliminate the shame and stigma many feel when it comes to mental illness and addiction.

We know accomplishing that goal will take time. It isn't easy to speak out publicly. At times people wish to remain anonymous. Ideally, everyone would be comfortable sharing his or her name, but not everybody is ready. That's OK. Telling their stories at all is a start, and the more we talk more about these issues, the faster we'll get there.

WHAT IS #QuietingTheSilence

The Blue Dove Foundation created #QuietingTheSilence as a platform to help individuals and organizations create programs and events focusing on mental health and substance use.

The goal is to offer members of the community a chance to come together to share their own experiences in this arena. The Foundation has discovered that hearing personal stories of struggles and loss directly from those living through them makes a stronger impact and helps foster new perspectives, personal connections, ideas, and hope.

This book is one example of #QuietingTheSilence. The Blue Dove Foundation hosts in-person events, creates videos and shares digital media campaigns all related to storytelling and #QuietingTheSilence.

GETTING STARTED

INTRODUCTIONS

- Leaders/hosts introduce themselves first.
- Leaders/hosts ask participants to introduce themselves.
 - This could include name, professional role, interesting fact, why they're in book club, etc.
- Set ground rules for the conversation. Some rules may include:
 - Keep conversation confidential.
 - Respond from a place of support and encouragement, not judgement.
 - Don't out anyone, let them share if they feel comfortable.

NOTES

- Individuals do not need to be an expert to make a substantial impact. Your responsibility is to be caring and informed, but always aware of your limits.
- We must help our Jewish community become more inclusive, holistic and responsive.
- We can apply a Jewish mental wellness approach to our own community, organization and congregation by:
 - Increasing compassion and knowledge
 - Applying a holistic approach
 - Focusing on wellness

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a starting list of questions to consider for your book club conversations. Each conversation will take its own path.

- Have you ever talked about mental health in a group like this?
- Did any of the stories in this book touch you personally? If yes, how (if you feel comfortable sharing)
- Why did you choose to read this book?
- What do you feel after reading this book?
- What do you see as common struggles in your communities (family, organizations, congregations, etc.) related to mental health and/or substance abuse?
- Do you feel equipped to handle these struggles you see? Do you know where to seek help if you need it?
- Why do you think there is shame and stigma in our community associated with mental health and/substance abuse?
- Do you have a self-care practice? If yes, what is it?
- How do you approach gratitude in your daily life?
- How do you think we can help break down barriers to talk about mental health and/or substance abuse?
- What can we do as a group to transform the conversation around mental health and/or substance abuse in our community?

CLOSING THE BOOK CLUB CONVERSATION

- Thank everyone for joining the conversation and sharing with the group.
- Consider taking a group photo and sharing it on social media with #QuietingTheSilence in the caption along with the book website (www.QuietingTheSilence.org) encouraging others to purchase the book.

After a difficult group conversation potentially about very personal things, it might be helpful to come back together as group and look at the Jewish faith/religion for some support and offer a mi sheberach for those in recovery as a group.

Judaism acknowledges a distinction between mental and physical health while treating them on an equal plane, recognizing they both a healthy body and a healthy mind are necessary for human beings to be complete.

God, there are those among us who struggle with addiction. We offer this special prayer for those in recovery:

- Mi Sheberach, to the one who blesses: May God bless you with the courage to conquer your cravings, the strength to stay far from temptations and from people who can lead you astray.
- Mi Sheberach, to the one who blesses: May God hear the cry of your soul and bless you with the knowledge that you have the power to remake your life, to repair what has been destroyed, to recover what has been lost, to receive all the blessings that have been ignored.
- Mi Sheberach, to the one who blesses: When you fall into despair, may God bless you with hope. If you stray from the path of recovery, may God show you how to begin again. May God renew your faith in yourself. May God open your eyes to all the miracles that surround you.

Bless all those who are living in recovery. God, lead them on the path back to life, back to love, and back to You. Amen.

Source: Blue Dove Foundation High Holiday Toolkit.

JEWISH RESOURCES AND CONNECTIONS

The Blue Dove Foundation has several different types of resources available on their website to learn more about Judaism's connection to mental health and substance abuse. On the Resources tab of the Blue Dove Foundation (www.thebluedovefoundation.org) website you'll find:

- Personal blog posts and shared stories
- Suggested readings and videos connecting mental health to Judaism
- Local Jewish mental health facilities and resources by state
- Jewish mental health statistics
- A Mikveh Immersion Ceremony for those in Recovery
- Ways to celebrate different Jewish holidays including Mental Health Shabbat Dinners
- Toolkits
 - A High Holy Days Mental Health Toolkit
 - Jewish Mental Health Toolkit and Workshops for community leaders

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

This additional information may be helpful to guide your conversation and provide some statistical knowledge for the conversation.

DEFINITIONS

- *Mental Illnesses*¹ - Mental illnesses are conditions that affect a person's thinking, feeling, mood or behavior, such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia. Such conditions may be occasional or long-lasting (chronic) and affect someone's ability to relate to others and function each day.

- *Mental Health*¹ - Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others, and make healthy choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood.
- *Shame*² – Shame is a highly unpleasant, painful self-conscious emotion arising from the sense of there being something dishonorable or troublesome in one’s own being or circumstances. Shame is a mix of regret and self-hate. While guilt is a feeling, remorse about specific conduct or choices, shame affects the sense of who we are and affects the entire self.
- *Stigma* – Stigma refers to a set of attitudes that leads people to shun or reject another because of their perception as being different.
- *Addiction*² – Addiction is a complex condition, a brain disease that is manifested by compulsive substance use despite harmful consequences.
- *Recovery*³ – 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.

STATISTICS

Substance Abuse Statistics⁴

- Drug overdoses kill more than cars, guns and falling do.
- More than 72,000 drug overdose deaths in 2017.
- In 2016 there were over 64,000 drug overdose deaths. $\frac{2}{3}$ were attributable to opioids. 918 in GA.
- The sharpest increase occurred among deaths related to fentanyl and synthetic opioids with nearly 30,000 overdose deaths.
- Illicit drugs and prescription opioids—a 2-fold increase in a decade.
- From 2002 through 2017, there was a 7.6-fold increase in the total number of deaths related to heroin.

Mental Illness and Children and Teens⁵

- Just over 20% – or 1 in 5 – children, have had a seriously debilitating mental disorder.
- Half of all chronic mental illness begins by age 14 and three-quarters begin by age 24.

Mental Health Statistics⁶

Prevalence of Mental Illness

- Approximately 1 in 5 adults in the U.S. (46.6 million) experiences mental illness in a given year.
- Approximately 1 in 25 adults in the U.S. (11.2 million) experiences a serious mental illness in a given year that substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activities.
- Approximately 1 in 5 youth aged 13–18 (21.4%) experiences a severe mental disorder at some point during their life. For children aged 8–15, the estimate is 13%.
- 1.1% of adults in the U.S. live with schizophrenia.
- 2.6% of adults in the U.S. live with bipolar disorder.
- 6.9% of adults in the U.S.—16 million—had at least one major depressive episode in the past year.
- 18.1% of adults in the U.S. experienced an anxiety disorder such as posttraumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and specific phobias.

- Among the 20.2 million adults in the U.S. who experienced a substance use disorder, 50.5%—10.2 million adults—had a co-occurring mental illness.

Social Stats

- An estimated 26% of homeless adults staying in shelters live with serious mental illness and an estimated 46% live with severe mental illness and/or substance use disorders.
- Approximately 20% of state prisoners and 21% of local jail prisoners have “a recent history” of a mental health condition.
- 70% of youth in juvenile justice systems have at least one mental health condition and at least 20% live with a serious mental illness.
- Only 41% of adults in the U.S. with a mental health condition received mental health services in the past year. Among adults with a serious mental illness, 62.9% received mental health services in the past year.
- Just over half (50.6%) of children with a mental health condition aged 8-15 received mental health services in the previous year.
- African Americans and Hispanic Americans each use mental health services at about one-half the rate of Caucasian Americans and Asian Americans at about one-third the rate.
- Half of all chronic mental illness begins by age 14; three-quarters by age 24. Despite effective treatment, there are long delays—sometimes decades—between the first appearance of symptoms and when people get help.

Consequences of Lack of Treatment

- Serious mental illness costs America \$193.2 billion in lost earnings per year.
- Mood disorders, including major depression, dysthymic disorder and bipolar disorder, are the third most common cause of hospitalization in the U.S. for both youth and adults aged 18–44.
- Individuals living with serious mental illness face an increased risk of having chronic medical conditions.¹⁷ Adults in the U.S. living with serious mental illness die on average 25 years earlier than others, largely due to treatable medical conditions.
- Over one-third (37%) of students with a mental health condition age 14–21 and older who are served by special education drop out—the highest dropout rate of any disability group.
- Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S., and the 2nd leading cause of death for people aged 10–34.
- More than 90% of people who die by suicide show symptoms of a mental health condition.
- Each day an estimated 18-22 veterans die by suicide.

SOURCES

- ¹CDC <https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm>
- ²American Psychological Association - <https://www.apa.org>
- ³SAMHSA Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration - <https://www.samhsa.gov>
- ⁴CDC Wonder - <https://wonder.cdc.gov>
- ⁵CDC Mental Health - <https://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/learn/index.htm>
- ⁶National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) - <https://www.nami.org>