

Katie Johnson: Good morning, and welcome to Apple a Day, Lake Region Healthcare's health and wellness show, where we feature news and information you can use to live a healthier life. I'm Katie Johnson, your host, and my guests today are Dr. Dan Traiser and Dr. Dave Mach, both psychiatrists in our behavioral health department at Lake Region Healthcare.

Katie Johnson: Good morning, gentlemen.

Dr. David Mach: Good morning.

Dr. Dan Traiser: Good morning.

Katie Johnson: I feel honored to have both of you in the room at the same time. What a rare opportunity. But it's a really important topic. June is men's health month, and oftentimes we talk about exercise, and getting all of your screenings, knowing your blood pressure, all that good stuff, but this week I want to talk about mental health and specifically men's mental health. Before we dive into the topic, give our listeners just a little bit of background about both of you: how long you've been practicing and at Lake Region Healthcare.

Dr. Dan Traiser: I'm Dr. Dan Traiser. I've been here 21 years this summer. Here we do a combination of inpatient and outpatient work, and I also go to some of the local nursing homes.

Katie Johnson: Great.

Dr. David Mach: I'm Dr. David Mach. I've been here about six years. Before this I worked three years at a federal prison. Before that I worked for the Department of Natural Resources. So, it's been a little career change for me.

Katie Johnson: Very interesting. Well, I know that you're both very passionate about the work that you do and about helping people. As we talk about men's mental health in particular, mental health is often referred to as a silent crisis. Can you tell us a little bit about what that term means and why we use that when we talk about mental health?

Dr. Dan Traiser: I think it's considered a silent crisis for men, because men are terrible at asking for help. Whether it's directions when we're driving or any sort of medical condition, we're terrible about asking for help. So, I think a lot of men are suffering in silence out there needlessly. I do think that men, if they have appropriate resources, can get great help.

Dr. David Mach: I think it's a big problem because of the stigma related to the mental health, and they take it really personal when they're depressed or anxious. They feel like it's a personal weakness rather than a brain disease, but we're learning more it's a brain disease than that. So, a lot of this is going to be education.

Katie Johnson: Absolutely. Speaking of education, educating our listeners about warning signs, what are the warning signs to look for either in yourself or in someone that you love that maybe depression or another type of mental illness is a problem?

Dr. Dan Traiser: I think a lot of times when people start getting depressed, they start pulling out of their normal activities. They start pulling away from their wives, their kids. They're not going to the kids' sporting events. At work they're not as productive. They're maybe calling in sick more often, those sorts of things. So, there are some obvious things that happen when we look back.

Dr. David Mach: Yeah, I agree with that. Usually when it's a disorder, the first thing I look for is, they start to not function as well socially or occupationally, but withdrawal is one of the first things to look for.

Katie Johnson: One of the most serious outcomes is suicide, and we've been hearing that a lot in the news lately. The CDC has recently come out with some new statistics. We've obviously had some very high profile people in the news who have died by suicide. Why is this such a male-dominated issue?

Dr. Dan Traiser: If you think about the statistics, women are far more often to try to hurt themselves, about three times more often than men, but men tend to choose much more lethal means. Men choose guns. Women tend to choose overdosing or sometimes cutting themselves. But men use means that are very lethal. It is really frightening to see the statistics from the CDC. It seems like it's just a rampant crisis right now. I think that these high-profile suicides a lot of times set off kind of a contagion of suicide, which is very frightening.

Katie Johnson: Mm-hmm (affirmative). When you hope that the result will be greater awareness in a positive way-

Dr. David Mach: Exactly.

Katie Johnson: ... sometimes it turns out to be just the opposite.

Dr. David Mach: Well, it also shows that it affects everybody, and you can be a highly successful person and still suffer from a brain disease such as depression or anxiety.

Dr. Dan Traiser: Absolutely.

Dr. David Mach: The point of suicide is just an absolute point of despair. They don't see a way out. Sometimes people think it's a weakness that they left people behind, but really it's they don't see another way out. It's a desperate act.

Katie Johnson: What are some common misconceptions, then, that might stop men from addressing mental concerns? You've talked about stigma. There are some real personal reason, too, I think.

Dr. Dan Traiser: Well, I think what Dave said earlier is really important, that a lot of men feel it's a weakness. We have to have this tough, macho act, and if you admit to other people that you're sad or you're suffering, that somehow you're not as much of a man. I think a lot of people have misconceptions about the actual treatments themselves. Sometimes people don't feel that these medications are going to help them, or they feel there going to be addicted to them the way get addicted to opioids. I think a lot of people just feel that maybe this is not a treatable illness, which is really not even remotely true.

Dr. David Mach: I think it is pride. I think a lot of it is male ego has a lot to do with seeking help. I mean, again, it's seen as a weakness, and yet sometimes when these people get help, they actually develop more strength. It's an emotional thing, too. It's not an intellectual thing. This is an emotional disease. So, we don't address the emotional aspect of this.

Katie Johnson: Given that, what would you say to a man who's dealing with emotional and mental struggles today?

Dr. Dan Traiser: I think one of the biggest things is, don't be afraid to reach out for help. Don't be afraid to let your friends and your family know that you're suffering. There's no reason to suffer in silence these days. Just to realize, look, you're not alone. There are millions of men throughout the United States and many millions throughout the world that are dealing with this illness. If you think about it, throughout the course of history some of the most important people in our past ... Abraham Lincoln had depression. Winston Churchill had depression ... I mean, think about this ... men like Robin Williams. I mean, some of our favorite athletes and our favorite actors and actresses, they deal with this illness. You're not alone.

Katie Johnson: Mm-hmm (affirmative). You said, "Let your friends or your family know." How do you pick the right person? Or even making that first phone call to make an appointment, I think that is sometimes a little bit overwhelming. Any tips for if you're just not comfortable picking up the phone or you're not comfortable telling your wife or your best friend? How do you take that first step? We talk about it with exercise. Sometimes the hardest thing is putting your tennis shoes on. It's that simple very first step. Then, once you get moving, it's better.

Dr. Dan Traiser: Sometimes I think if you're afraid to share it with people that are close to you, I mean, there are hotlines you can call. There are local hotlines and national hotlines you can call. There are online resources if you want to learn about depression. If you're not sure if you have it, you can go online. There's questionnaires and question-and-answer type of websites. Then you can maybe find resources available through that.

Dr. Dan Traiser: It is sometimes hard to let our loved ones know that we have it or our friends know that we have it, but depression affects all families. It's always out there whether people talk about it or not.

Katie Johnson: Exactly.

Dr. David Mach: That's true. I mean, I think a lot of people have this. Nobody's really above a lot of this. Everybody has some form of depression, or addiction, or anxiety. So, a lot of times you can find that, if you do first start opening up about yourself, that often people will share with you that you have it. So, it takes a little bit of humility to say, "I've had this disease," and you'll find out that a lot of people start sharing with you they also have it or have somebody else. So, sometimes it's you taking the first step, and dropping your guard a little bit, and putting yourself out there.

Katie Johnson: We talked about stigma. What are some things we all can do to help break those down and help men in particular get the help they need?

Dr. Dan Traiser: Well, I think even programs like this are important just to get the message out that this is such a common illness, that you're not suffering alone, that you're not weird, or crazy, or weak, and I think just to realize that this is not different than any of the other medical problems that men deal with, like hypertension, or asthma, or diabetes, and just to realize that there's help out there. Don't be ashamed. There's no reason to be ashamed of having a medical illness. Our brains are the most complex organs in our entire body, and we know so little about our brains. Don't be ashamed of the fact that your brain is having an illness just like your heart could have an illness.

Dr. David Mach: That's true. I think a lot of this is also due to the fact that we're behind in the science of the brain, and that's kind of the last frontier of medical science. For some reason we separated the brain from the body. The brain is the body. It just has the same amount of neurochemistries, same circulation. It's part of the same system. We take it kind of personally when our brain doesn't work, but we don't take it personally when our heart's not working well. So, I think, as the science improves, the stigma's going to drop.

Katie Johnson: Anything else you would like our listeners to know, either men in particular or the people who care about men they know might be struggling, that you have for last pieces of advice or information?

Dr. David Mach: I would certainly reach out. Don't be afraid to drop your guard a little bit, and you'll find that you'll often receive a lot of help that way. Yeah, I think all the public education is very important, too. But one-on-one, personally, don't be afraid to share that you might be down or something, because the next person next to you might be experiencing the exact same thing.

Dr. David Mach: The other thing is, when you talk about exercise and eating, that's just as important as mental health as it is physical health, so we shouldn't separate the two.

Katie Johnson: Yeah, that's a really good point.

Dr. Dan Traiser: I think there are really two things. One is that there is just a lot of hope with this illness. A lot of people feel that if they have it, it's hopeless, and there's just doom and gloom. But there's a lot of great treatments that we have available right now, and I think there are a lot of awesome treatments coming up in the next 10 to 20 years. I mean, we're learning more about the brain every year. All the genetic testing and all this DNA testing is really showing us a lot of information we didn't know before. So, there's tons of hope.

Dr. Dan Traiser: The other thing is, kind of the main thing is, if you or somebody you know is suicidal, don't hesitate to ask for help or to break the silence and say, "Look, are you struggling?" or "What can we do to help you?" because suicide is preventable a lot of time. I think we've just got to make sure that message is out there.

Dr. David Mach: They interview people who are survivors of suicide, and over 80% of the people who did survive were regretful for making the attempt. So, most people, it's an impulsive act. It's a desperate act. If you hold on long enough, they'll get them through the despair. The other thing that they talk about is if you ask somebody if they're suicidal. Go ahead and do that, because it does not make them more suicidal. It's okay to ask people if they're suicidal. It doesn't increase their risk of suicide. In fact, it probably decreases it.

Katie Johnson: Oh, that's great advice. I want to just take this chance, too, to share the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. It's 1-800-273-TALK. So, that's 800-273-8255. The CDC also cites one website, [bethe1to.com](http://bethe1to.com). So, be the one to make the move, to make the reach out to ask for help.

Katie Johnson: Great advice from Dr. Dan Traiser, Dr. David Mach. Men in our community, women in our community are very lucky to have both of you and the full team of psychiatrists here at Lake Region Healthcare. We're very fortunate to have four full-time psychiatrists, to have our Bridgeway Behavioral Health Department, and have other great community resources available as well. Thank you for talking with me this morning about men's mental health and thank you for all that you do to make a difference in the mental health of the people in our community.

Dr. David Mach: Thank you.

Dr. Dan Traiser: You're welcome.

Katie Johnson: Dr. Dan Traiser and Dr. David Mach along with Katie Johnson on Apple a Day this morning, reminding you there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.