***Let’s Talk: About Mental Health!***

By: Almetrice Shavers September 18, 2023

I know mental health is a popular topic now and I am so glad it is. The importance of mental health is so vital and a part of one’s health. People brush it off, but your mental health can affect your entire well-being. What you do, how you say things and even processing information can be affected if your mental health is not in a good state. I’m so grateful to see how far we have come, especially in the African-American community. I know some older generations don’t believe in therapy and believe you can pray everything away. I just strongly believe God made therapists and therapy for a reason. It is perfectly fine to pray and see a therapist as well. I have been in therapy consistently for 2 years now. I have been in therapy for different periods of my life. In these last 2 years, I have been doing some deep work within myself. I see my therapist every 2 weeks and I also do work on my own. I have been doing alot of journaling and reflecting back to my childhood until now. I am asking myself the hard questions. Pinterest is so awesome, and I get a lot of my journal topics from there and other blogs. It has been uncomfortable but so necessary. I’m looking at negative patterns and what started it. In order to change, I’m having to do some things differently. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing and expecting different results. Truly learning yourself and current behaviors has been the most rewarding and fulfilling feeling. As I get older, I don’t want to keep doing the same things. I don’t want to keep making the same mistakes and not learning from them. It wastes time and that is the most precious gift. As my daughter gets older I want to be a better version of myself for her and I want to teach her how to be the best version of herself. There were things I lacked growing up, because I simply didn’t know how to ask for them. My parents always had an open door policy, to come to them about whatever. I just didn’t know how, was scared to and I had a tendency to overthink things. This is something I definitely don’t want my daughter experiencing. I truly believe, if I had opened my mouth and asked questions or said what I was feeling, I would have made better decisions.

I am a big advocate for mental health and taking care of yourself. I got intrigued with psychology in high school. I used to see a counselor in high school and that is what made me want to be a school counselor. When I got to college I saw mental health in a different light. People I knew that were dealing with depression and it was truly a battle for them. I didn’t know how to help them or even talk about it with them. All I could tell them was pray about it, looking back I felt so bad because that was so insensitive of me. I later realized it was more complicated than to just pray it away. I’m so grateful for going to graduate school and being in the counseling program. I’ll never forget my interview with the chairperson Dr. Michael Kelly, for the counseling program. He looked at me and stated he doesn’t know me yet but was glad I was in the program. I was stunned when he said it. He said we need you in this program and your representation. I instantly felt honored. The next 2 and half years while in graduate school changed my life forever. I learned about mental health in the textbook context but also how it affects people's lives. It was truly eye opening. I had a new respect and I took it seriously because I realized how serious it really is. I know people didn’t understand the impact on mental health and how our culture was impacted. In 2023, mental health has become a necessity in society and the millennial and Gen Z generations are taking heed toward it. There are some of the older generation that still don’t believe in and won’t give it a chance. It’s okay and should be an individual choice for everyone.

On my first day of graduate school in my class, Dr. Kelly stated in this program for the next 2 years you will have to learn to deal with your own junk. When he said it at the time, it didn’t hit. By my last semester before graduation, I felt my world falling apart. I couldn’t pass my comp exam, I had just ended a 5.5 year toxic relationship, I had gotten fired due to false allegations and they even threatened to end my career. I was in shambles and just didn’t know what to do. At that time, I wish I had gotten a therapist. I can’t change the past, but it is something I regret not doing. My mental health was all over the place, but I was always trying to be strong. While I have always advocated for counseling for everyone else I should have got into it sooner. Taking my own advice would have saved me from a lot of unnecessary things in my life to come in the next few years. I have seen family members endure because of mental health issues. Trying to educate my family on the importance of therapy and their understanding has been a blessing. When I had my daughter, it was already life changing but being a first time mom was a whole new world. I would encourage any first time mom to seek counseling from pregnancy until the first couple of years of the child’s life. Of course they go as long as they feel but that’s a good start. No one talks about the body changes from pregnancy and the hormones all over the place. Everything changes and trying to learn to adapt is the hardest part. Then there are moms who deal with postpartum depression. I’m grateful I didn’t deal with it but I also wish I had gotten into counseling. It should honestly be a recommendation from the OBGYN after confirming pregnancy.

Motherhood takes a toll on your mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health. I was trying to be the perfect mom but neglecting God, myself and my daughter’s father. I didn’t have a clue how to balance it all and kept a lot of my thoughts to myself. I had these unrealistic expectations that I was putting on myself. Most of my life I was always trying to be a strong person and felt I was almost complaining when I tried to voice my needs. I remember one day saying, God why do I always have to be the strong one? I instantly heard, Allie , who told you had to be strong? I told you to depend on me in everything you do. I quickly said God I'm sorry and you are right. You told me you would fight my battles and these burdens weren’t mine to carry. I felt at that moment I had to apologize to God because it was as if I knew better than him and I could handle things. That was definitely not accurate. I have been in therapy for the past 2 years and it has been refreshing and life changing. I continue to see my therapist every 2 weeks. So many things have happened to me in these 2 years and I've needed therapy more than anything. It helped heal me from molestation and it helped strengthen my relationship with my biological father. I had been carrying so many negative things from those situations. I got tired of holding the burdens and the pain. I’ve also seen myself evolving over time as well. It has been a beautiful transformation and I'm grateful God put it on my heart to get into therapy. I continue to encourage family, friends and anyone to seek counseling. You don’t have to continue to sit in your brokenness and trauma. It’s so much healing on the other side and it is work to get it done. It is so worth it. I have been doing some shadow work journaling as well with my therapy. It is some deep journaling prompts but necessary to figure out patterns and negative behaviors.

With dealing with your mental health, it is pivotal to incorporate outlets for yourself. Therapy can be exhausting at times, so doing things you love for yourself is a way to refuel yourself. Here are a few outlets I have learned about and experienced first hand.

* Journaling
* Art- drawing, coloring, painting and etc
* Cooking
* Music (My absolute favorite, so therapeutic)
* Driving, even if there is no destination
* Connecting with nature
* Exercising
* Cleaning your home
* Self-care ( massages, facials, manicures, pedicures, taking bubble baths etc.)
* Praying and going to church
* Being with family and friends
* Reading
* Organization
* Home decor and diy projects
* Solo dates
* Self-reflection
* Listening to podcasts

The list could probably go on and on, these were just a few I could think of. I am working on a majority of these. I am learning to do things on my own and working on my self-love. My therapist continues to encourage me to find out who I am and what it is I like. Mental health goes back to your childhood, many people don’t want to reflect that far back. It causes people to be uncomfortable and even relive some trauma. It’s the only way, in order to break free. Like I said it’s painful and exhausting, but when you can face whatever trauma upfront, you will be able to face anything after that. It’s just about taking the first first step and acknowledging an issue. Then the next step is looking for a therapist. Using [www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com) is a great resource to finding a therapist. I found my therapist there and recommended it to anyone. Just filter with your state, insurance and they have other preferences and it will narrow it down for you. Another resource is [www.betterhelp.com](http://www.betterhelp.com) I have heard nothing but great things about this one. It’s featured on a number of podcasts I listen to. Asking your PCP for a referral is another option as well. It’s so many options out there, you just have to take the initiative. You can do it and you deserve to heal. I hope this blessed you and you will find the healing you are longing for. If no one told you today, you deserve God’s love, peace and joy. I’ll see you in the next blog post. Allie loves you!!!