

MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERIES

JORDAN



*The words that describe my mental health journey are
Regret and Learn.*

Why were those the words you picked?

Regret - When I was diagnosed with depression at the age of 19, a lot was going on in my life. This was a time when I had to make significant decisions about some of the relationships in my life. Without knowing it at the time, my mood disorder influenced the choices I was making, and I made some that were not in my own best interest. Looking back, I now recognize that I was not able to fully understand how much depression was influencing my choices or that I wasn't always doing what was best for me. Unfortunately, I was oblivious to the chaos I created around me and its impact on the people I cared about. My family, friends, and partners. I didn't know myself, I didn't know what I wanted, and I didn't realize how the fog of a mood disorder was influencing some of the most significant decisions I was making in my most formative years of adulthood. I don't regret where I am today, but I do regret the pain I may have caused others along the way. I've made peace with much of this, but some shame definitely lingers.

Learn - I am constantly learning what it means to take care of my mental health and understand the things that impact me. I feel like my coping skills are always evolving, because my life is always changing! I've learned to appreciate it. I'm now more aware of what I need and better understand when my tools are getting dull or rusty. While it's an effort to constantly adjust, in doing so, I can have many different experiences, hobbies, and routines. Approaching these scenarios with curiosity and a sense of experimentation can be a lot of fun.

What is one internal barrier, perspective, or insecurity you hold that you feel is unproductive?

One internal barrier I still have, and continue to work through is how to effectively identify and communicate my needs.

I believe this ties into some perceptions of masculinity that I hold on to. Sometimes, the belief that it's a "man's job" to put others first, sacrifice, or protect them can creep in. I can trace some of this tendency back to my childhood and the circumstances I grew up in. I have a sibling with significant developmental needs, and my parents were doing their best to get by. Subconsciously, I didn't want to add more to already full plates, so I often deprioritized my own needs. I continue to face challenges in expressing my own needs both personally and professionally. I feel I am better at noticing the signs, but this is something I will be learning to navigate for the rest of my life. Sometimes I get it right; sometimes I get it wrong. I am still learning.

What is something you are grateful to have learnt, or skill you are proud to of incorporated into your mental health journey?

When I first heard the term [cognitive distortion](#), it sparked my curiosity. As I began to understand what it meant, I remember having a moment of "oh shit, that's me"! The ability to differentiate thoughts from facts, and even thoughts from emotions. This has been invaluable for me over the years. I can now recognize when my mind is taking me down a rabbit hole of negativity and distorted thinking. I have learnt a few key habits to help me reset when this happens.

I'd also highlight the not-so-profound realization that sleep, exercise, and quiet time are the cornerstones of my mental health for me. I've learned to be very structured about getting all three (although with a toddler, sleep has become more challenging).

As it relates to the culture of mental health and masculinity or being a "man" what is one thing you are hopeful or excited to see changing in the future?

I'm excited to see more men talking about mental health. The fact that we struggle isn't new or unique, but 15 years ago, when I was first diagnosed, I'd never once heard a male admit to having depression. This created a lot of self-judgement and added barriers to my journey. Now I hear and see stories like mine often, and although I hate that others are struggling, I'm so glad we can find support from one another.

What is a piece of advice relating to mental health that is so good or so horrible, you would want others to know or be aware of as they move through their own journey?

I am going to pick a piece of advice so horrible.

I remember when I was first struggling with my mental health. I confided in a mentor and shared what I'd been feeling, and how strange of an experience I was having (I didn't yet know to label the experience).

He said, *"You know, I think if you just focus on how, you can be of service to others, I think you'll start feeling better"*.

I do believe deeply in helping others, but what this person didn't know at the time was this advice pushed me into deeper and darker territory. This is because I started to completely ignore my personal boundaries, warning lights and needs. I have since learnt I need to stay attuned to those factors, and by prioritizing my health and needs, I will be a better person, parent, or partner.

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He lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba with his wife Caitlin and daughter Charlotte. In his spare time, he can be found cycling, backcountry hiking, and enjoying local craft beer

