

OZIEL GRAND CHAPTER NEWSLETTER



Issue 011

May 2026

Mental health in the Black community is a really important topic because the challenges are often layered, shaped by culture, history, and lived experience in ways that aren't always acknowledged in mainstream conversations. There was a saying I often heard growing up, "What happens in this house stays in this house."

In the Black community, "what happens in this house stays in this house" is a deeply ingrained cultural norm that prioritizes family privacy and collective reputation over individual disclosure. While often intended to protect the family from outside judgment or systemic harm, it has significant impacts on mental health and safety. Mental health awareness is growing, and conversations are changing and that's a powerful thing. But the harsh truth still applies: it can protect people, and it can hurt people at the same time.

Why it matters

1. Historical and Cultural Context

Many Black individuals grow up learning to stay alert, adapt quickly, and endure. That's not accidental—it's a response to generations of instability and discrimination. Ongoing systemic inequities have contributed to long-term stress and mistrust of institutions, including healthcare systems. There's also a cultural emphasis in many Black communities on resilience and "pushing through," which can sometimes discourage open conversations about mental health.

2. Stigma Around Mental Health

Mental health struggles are often stigmatized. You might hear messages like:

"Pray about it"

"Be strong"

"We don't talk about that"

Faith and spirituality can be powerful supports, but stigma can prevent people from seeking therapy or diagnosis when needed.

3. Emotional suppression ("I can't fall apart")

There's often an unspoken rule:

"Handle it. Don't burden others."

This shows up as:

Not crying even when overwhelmed

Avoiding vulnerability

Turning pain into humor or silence

Over time, suppressed emotions don't disappear—they come out as:

Irritability or anger

Physical symptoms (headaches, fatigue)

Disconnection or numbness.

4. The "Strong Black Woman / Man" dynamic

This is one of the most important (and harmful when extreme) patterns.

For Black women:

Expected to be self-sacrificing, resilient, emotionally available to everyone

Often neglect their own needs → burnout, anxiety, depression

For Black men:

Pressure to be stoic, unemotional, and "tough"

Vulnerability seen as unsafe → emotional isolation

Both can lead to untreated Depression or anxiety that goes unnoticed because it doesn't look "typical."

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5. Barriers to Access

Black individuals often face:

Limited access to culturally competent care

Underrepresentation of Black therapists

Financial barriers or lack of insurance

Bias in diagnosis and treatment

For example, Black patients are more likely to be misdiagnosed with severe conditions like Schizophrenia when presenting with mood-related symptoms, and less likely to receive adequate treatment for Depression.

What healing can look like

1. More open conversations

Social media, younger generations, and public figures are helping normalize therapy and mental health discussions.

2. Culturally competent care

There's growing emphasis on therapists who understand Black culture, identity, and lived experience.

3. Community-based support

Churches, community groups, and peer networks are increasingly incorporating mental health awareness and resources.

4. Organizations doing the work

- Groups like National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and Therapy for Black Girls are working to increase awareness and access to culturally relevant care. NJ Division of Mental Health & Addiction Services Multicultural Services Group – Works statewide to improve culturally competent mental health services, training, and outreach.
- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline – Call or text 988 anytime for crisis support.
- BEAM (Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective) – National organization offering education and healing justice resources (often connected with local partners).
- Black Men Heal & Therapy for Black Girls – National platforms connecting people with culturally competent therapists and support networks (can help find NJ-area providers)

“Taking care of your mental health is not a sign of weakness—it’s a sign of strength and self-respect.”

We'd Love to Hear from You!

Any member of Oziel Grand Chapter is welcome to contribute tips, personal experiences, advice, or other topics for inclusion in the monthly newsletter. Submissions will remain anonymous if desired. **Please send your submissions to Sister Erika Bennett at healthfirst@ogcoespha.org.** Let's continue to support & inspire one another on the journey of health and wellness.