



SMASHING STIGMA

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CALL FOR HELP
MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH
MAY 2022

ABOUT

Millions of Americans face the reality of living with a mental illness.

Since 1949, Mental Health Awareness Month has been observed in the United States to recognize that mental health is an essential part of one's overall health and wellbeing, and that mental illnesses are both common and treatable. In 2022, Call For Help joins the national movement to raise awareness about mental health.

This year, we are SMASHING STIGMA surrounding mental illness.

STIGMAPALOOZA

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Friday, May 20, 2022
11:30 AM - 2:00 PM
9400 Lebanon Road
East St. Louis, IL 62203

Join us in fighting mental health stigma! Come to the Call For Help pavilion for food, art, storytelling, and games.

For more information, contact Nick Miller:
nmiller@callforhelpinc.org

CALL FOR HELP

(618) 397 - 0968
callforhelpinc.org
9400 Lebanon Road
East St. Louis, IL 62203

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STIGMA

Many people with mental illness are challenged on two fronts. They struggle with the symptoms that result from living with a mental health condition and must also face stereotypes and prejudice that result from misconceptions about mental illness.

Stigma is when someone views you in a negative way because of your mental health challenges. A person may define someone by their illness rather than who they are as an individual. Labeling someone based on their mental health conditions ignores all of the other things that make up the person and perpetuates misconceptions about mental illness.

Negative attitudes and beliefs about mental health conditions are unfortunately common and ingrained in society. For people living with mental health challenges, the stigma that they experience can make their problems worse and make it more difficult to recover. Stigma has several negative effects. Some of these include:

- Reluctance to ask for help/get treatment
- Reduced likelihood of staying in treatment
- Inaccurate or unfounded thoughts and beliefs about a person, including that they are dangerous, incapable, or at fault for their condition
- Discrimination
- Feelings of shame, isolation, and hopelessness
- Lack of understanding from family, friends, coworkers, and others
- Bullying, violence, or harassment
- Beliefs that you will never overcome your illness and/or be able to achieve what you want in life
- Others may feel pity, fear, anger, and/or a desire for social distance from people living with mental illness
- Lost opportunities for work, school, housing, and social interaction
- Lower self-esteem
- Increased symptoms
- Difficulties with relationships

Stigma stems from inaccurate and antiquated beliefs about mental illness that have been repeatedly disproven. Mental illness is not a moral failing or a character flaw. Science shows that instead, it is a chronic and treatable disease from which people can recover and live long, healthy lives.

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ARE YOU AFFECTED BY STIGMA?

The thing is, everyone is actually affected by stigma. Whether you are experiencing it yourself, unconsciously perpetuating it, or acting complacent, we all have a role in working towards a society that understands and supports all mental health challenges.

Take the following quiz to see if you can uncover any stigmatizing attitudes within yourself.

1. PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES...

- A. Are faking it
- B. Are dangerous
- C. Can snap out of it
- D. Need support and acceptance

Correct Answer:

D. Need Support and Acceptance

There are several common misconceptions about what it means to live with a mental health condition. People living with these conditions are not any more dangerous than the general population. They are not faking symptoms for attention. And no, they cannot just "snap out of it." Do not assume that other people function in the same way that you do. Everyone is different.

We must work towards building an understanding of mental illnesses and acceptance of people who live with them. People need support, not antiquated attitudes.

2. MENTAL ILLNESS IS...

- A. The result of a poor upbringing
- B. A character flaw
- C. Common
- D. Untreatable

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Correct Answer:

C. Common

Millions of Americans from all walks of life experience mental health challenges. In fact, mental illnesses are among the most common health conditions in the United States. They are treatable, and many people do recover. The stigma surrounding seeking treatment is one of the biggest barriers to recovery.

Upbringing in and of itself may not cause mental illness, but traumatic upbringing can increase the risk of developing a mental health condition or substance use disorder. It is important to see the distinction and avoid assuming that mental illness is the result of "a poor upbringing."

Instead, stick to what we know: mental illnesses are biologically-based disorders and can be caused by a combination of genetic factors, environmental factors, and biochemical imbalances.

3. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING IS NOT TRUE ABOUT STIGMA?

- A. It's not a big problem for people with mental health conditions
- B. It prevents people from seeking help
- C. It makes people afraid to share their story
- D. It makes people feel alienated

Correct answer:

A. It's not a big problem for people with mental health conditions

The stigma surrounding mental health conditions **IS** a big problem. Many people with mental health conditions do not feel comfortable talking about what they're going through. This prevents them from seeking treatment and negatively affects their well-being. People with mental illness often internalize stigma, damaging hopes for recovery.

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4. IF SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS DIAGNOSED WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS, YOU SHOULD...

- A. Treat them differently
- B. Listen to them and support them
- C. Feel sorry for them
- D. Distance yourself

Correct Answer:

B. Listen to Them and Support Them

If someone you know is diagnosed with a mental illness, you should support them. Some of the ways you can do this is by:

- Listening
- Educating yourself about their condition
- Showing interest in their treatment plan and encouraging them to follow it
- Use simple, caring language such as "I want to help" or "it isn't your fault"

5. HOW LONG DOES THE AVERAGE PERSON WAIT BEFORE TELLING A LOVED ONE ABOUT A MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM?

- A. A week
- B. A month
- C. 3 months
- D. Over a year

Correct answer:

D. Over a year

The average person waits a year or more to tell a loved one about a mental health problem. This is because stigma causes fear, shame, guilt, and many other emotions. Working towards ending mental health stigma will allow people to seek help much earlier.

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ADDRESSING STIGMA

How can you help fight stigma? Challenge it!

You can help challenge stigma in a few easy ways:

1. Speak Up

When you hear negative or inaccurate comments about mental illness, address them. Calmly and respectfully the person who made the comments know that it is not acceptable to stigmatize.

2. Educate Yourself

Learn the facts about mental illness and ditch any inaccurate beliefs. Share with friends, family, coworkers, and classmates.

3. Tell Your Story

If you have personal experience with mental health challenges, share this experience with others. This will help to dispel myths and could encourage others to seek help.

4. Use Person-First Language

See the whole person first instead of labeling them by the mental health challenges they face.

Person-First Language

The use of language is an essential part of combating stigma. It is critical that people are seen as people first, and are not seen as their mental health condition. Do not define others by their illness. Person-first language maintains the integrity of individuals as whole human beings, by removing language that equates people to their condition or has negative connotations. There is power in language. Instead of saying:

"Mentally ill," "psycho," "crazy," "lunatic," say "person with a mental health condition"

"They are bipolar," say "they have bipolar disorder"

"Addict," "junkie," "user," say "person with a substance abuse disorder"

"Alcoholic," "drunk," say "person with alcohol use disorder"

The terms have a neutral tone and distinguish the person from his or her diagnosis. They also avoid eliciting negative associations, punitive attitudes, and individual blame.

Things to keep in mind:

- Emphasize abilities, not limitations
- Do not use language that suggests the lack of something
- Do not use offensive language
- Avoid language that implies negative stereotypes

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GETTING HELP

Reaching out for help or support is often the most challenging part of improving mental health, and stigma plays a significant role in that challenge.

Recall the quiz from earlier and look at some of the incorrect answers. Each incorrect assumption contributes to the barrier between seeking support for those struggling in silence. Even if they do not hear these things directly from others, these misconceptions are so ingrained in our society that it can be easy to internalize these beliefs to be true. They may think: “maybe I am faking it?” or “people will treat me differently if they know” or “I have to figure this out all on my own”. These internalized beliefs may further contribute to isolation and can impact self-esteem.

It's hard to ask for help, but we also can do everything on our own. Sometimes we need a little support. Support that is nonjudgmental and does not contribute to stigma. Call for Help, Inc. respects the importance of reducing stigma and the many other barriers that get in the way of others seeking help. We offer many programs that help provide support, including our free walk-in program (The Living Room), therapy for mental health support (Community Counseling), and a variety of support groups (Understanding Our Minds).

For those seeking support, we know that it is a huge first step. Reaching out to a supportive friend or loved one can feel safer and more comfortable. Let them know that you need some support, even if you just want them to help you get connected with other resources. If you aren't comfortable talking with a friend or loved one about your mental health, search for mental health support in your area. Many different community resources can offer groups where individuals with similar struggles can join together and support one another. Groups can be a great resource for feeling supported and not alone but may be intimidating for some. Therapy and counseling offer a safe and supportive environment for individuals to explore their challenges and move toward a better life. Counselors/therapists provide space to be heard and understood and can offer different skills, tools, and strategies for dealing with the impact of mental health challenges.

Call for Help's Community Counseling program offers these skills and more. The program was founded on the principles of providing quality care in an accessible way. We accept Medicaid and most private insurance, but we also know that financial barriers can get in the way of receiving support. For individuals without insurance, we offer a sliding scale fee based on income, and can even offer free therapy services for some individuals.

The Living Room at Call For Help provides a safe, comfortable space to get immediate help with mental health challenges. You can see a peer specialist, which is someone who has personal experience with mental illness. Services are free of charge and no appointment is necessary. We are here to listen, teach coping skills, and connect you with different resources in the area.

Understanding Our Minds is a new program at Call For Help. It is a collection of mutual-help groups and activities with topics ranging from depression to addiction and more.

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HELPING OTHERS

Anyone can experience a mental health challenge. Support from family, friends, coworkers, and anyone else can make all the difference. Not sure how to help? Use the following guide to support someone who is experiencing a mental health challenge.

Six Steps to Support Someone

1. Check In

When you are concerned about someone, the first thing to do is check in with them. It can be something simple like sending them a text message or a phone call. Let them know that you really want to know how they are doing and that you care about them. Gradually make your way to face-to-face conversation, but don't push it. Give them time and space to feel comfortable.

2. Actually Listen

Let the person explain what they are going through, and don't make assumptions about their experience. Listen genuinely.

Use open-ended questions. These are questions that cannot be answered with "yes" or "no." They allow the person to go deeper, open up more, and answer however they feel most comfortable. Some examples of open-ended questions:

"How does this make you feel?"

"What is that like?"

"How long has this been going on?"

"How would you like things to be different?"

3. Give Them Time and Space

It can take time for a person to feel comfortable talking about what they are going through. There could also be times when the person is less communicative. In these times, give the person time and space to open up. Continue to check in and support the person, but don't push it. If you continue to be there for them, they will most likely open up eventually. Be patient -- the person will most likely appreciate you staying in touch even if they are not responding.

4. Don't Try to Fix

You can't fix other people's problems. However, you can be there for the person and continue to support them. Use empathy to show them that you are listening and that you care. Use a simple statement such as "that sounds really tough" or "I can't imagine what that must be like." Thank them for opening up to you -- it is not an easy thing to do for many people.

5. Treat Them the Same

Avoid putting labels on them or letting stigmatizing attitudes change your perception of them. They are the same person they have always been. Keep including them in social activities and inviting them to do things that you would normally do with them.

6. Ask How You Can Help

Remember not to try and fix things. Instead, ask the person what they need or how they want you to help them. Anything you can help with is fine, as long as it is appropriate. Continue checking in.

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