

LET'S TALK MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health and stigma:

If you have a mental health condition, you may worry about what other people will think. In many cases, no one can even tell if you are struggling but sometimes the fear that someone can tell is enough to cause concern. Mental health conditions can include, but are not limited to, bipolar disorder, depression, obsessive compulsive-disorder (OCD), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and schizophrenia.

Remember: you have a say in how others see you.

The way you act and treat others can help influence people's attitudes toward you and toward mental health conditions.



Stigma:

People sometimes have negative views about things they don't understand, such as mental health concerns. Some people may believe things about mental health conditions that aren't true. Other people may have good intentions but still feel uncomfortable when they find out you have a mental health concern. This can make people treat you and your family differently. This is called stigma - when others judge you because you have a personal quality, trait, or condition. Stigma occurs when others:

- Don't understand the mental health problem or think it's a laughing matter.
- Don't realize that a mental health problem is an illness that can be treated.
- Think that a mental health problem is "your own fault" or that you can "get over it."
- Are afraid they might someday have a mental health problem themselves.
- Are nervous around you.

You may feel shame or guilt about having a mental health condition. You may not want an employer or even your friends to know. This is called "self-stigma," and it can keep you from getting treatment or finding work.

Breaking the Stigma:

Respecting yourself is an important part of your recovery. Try to remember that there's nothing to feel ashamed of, the problem is brain chemistry, not you. You can reach goals that are important to you even if you have a mental health condition.

Your attitude and actions can influence what others think. Be honest with people and show them who you really are. When you help people to understand your mental health condition, they are more likely to get past their negative views. Here are some ways you can help others better understand mental health problems.

- Let them know that your mental health condition is a medical problem that can be treated.
- Talk about your recovery.
- This will help them understand the challenges you face.
- Show them your strengths and talents.
- Remember that "you are the message." Treating yourself with respect can set an example for everyone.
- Accept that you may need breaks. Your symptoms may make it harder to focus on things for a long time.
- Work with your supportive people and professionals to set attainable goals.

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