



Overcoming the Stigma of Mental Illness

“Stigma” describes the shame, fear and discrimination that result from stereotypes surrounding mental illness. It can affect people with a mental illness psychologically and even economically. Stigma can cause family tension and rejection. It also leads to fear, mistrust and violence against people with mental illness.

Myths about mental illness

As a society, we are bombarded with negative images of mental illness. Media stereotypes often portray people with mental illness as failures or villains, and terms such as “schizophrenia” and “psychotic” are frequently misused. Here are some common myths, and facts, about mental illness:

Myth: People with mental illness fake symptoms. They’re really just being irresponsible.

Fact: Behaviors resulting from mental illness can’t be controlled at will.

Myth: Severe mental illness can’t be treated.

Fact: The efficacy of treatment for severe mental illness can be compared to that in other branches of medicine.

Myth: People with mental illness are violent.

Fact: The overall contribution of mental disorders to the level of violence is very small.

Myth: Children and teens don’t experience mental illness.

Fact: One in five children and adolescents has a diagnosable mental illness, and for one in 10, the illness is severe enough to cause the child difficulty in functioning.

You can help

Educate others and gently point out stigmatizing behavior. Contact your local mental health organization or the offensive media outlet when you hear stereotyping. Treat people who have a mental illness with the same dignity and respect that you would give to anyone else.

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