

Understanding Mental Health Stigma

The more we open up and talk about mental health, the better we can understand its impacts - on us, and on other people.

Unfortunately, there is still some stigma about mental health.

What is Stigma?

Stigma describes negative beliefs and attitudes about people with mental illnesses.

Mental health stigma can lead some people to be prejudiced against, avoid, fear, or reject others because they suffer from a mental condition.

It is a form of disrespect, and often makes it more difficult for individuals to seek the help they need to get better.

- Adapted from SAMHSA (2004)

Stigma often leads to many problems. Individuals with mental health conditions may:

- Struggle to find support from others, such as friends or family
- Become victims of abuse, bullying, or rejection
- Find it harder to seek professional help for their symptoms, and
- Experience feelings of low self-esteem, self-doubt, or low self-worth.

There are a few simple ways that we can avoid becoming part of the problem, and instead help to reduce mental health stigma.

Reducing Mental Health Stigma	
Get Informed	Mental health stigma often comes down to a lack of understanding, so researching and sharing facts about different illnesses can be important. Better mental health education can help avoid misunderstandings and dispel the stigma around mental health.
Listen and Learn	Mental illness affects everyone differently. Getting to know a bit more from someone who has experienced a mental illness can help you understand the signs and symptoms to look out for.
Mind Your Language	Mental health stigma often involves the use of negative language or labels. Being aware of what we say and do can help to combat the problem.
Ask More Questions	<p>Because of stigma, it can sometimes be hard for individuals to seek help and support. Asking more questions can often help them get the treatment they need, so that issues don't escalate. Do reach out if someone you know displays any of the warning signs of mental illness, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lower mood or a more frequent bad temper ▪ Seeming worried or stressed ▪ Becoming quiet or withdrawn ▪ Sleeping poorly or too much, or ▪ Showing unusual behavior.
Speak Up	When you feel others are stigmatizing individuals with a mental health condition, you can help to reduce stigma by saying something.

Now that you know what mental health stigma looks like, try answering the following questions:

1. *Why do you think there might still be stigma around individuals with a mental illness?*

2. *Can you think of three examples of mental health stigma in society today?*

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3. *Why is it important to discuss mental health issues instead of ignoring them?*