



HEALTHY MINDS  
POLICY INITIATIVE

## MENTAL HEALTH: Solving STIGMA

**The effects of stigma about mental health conditions are serious.**  
*Individuals are less likely to seek and receive treatment and support<sup>1</sup> that otherwise could allow individuals to live healthier, more productive lives.*

### WHAT IS STIGMA?

**Stigma surrounding mental health conditions has several dimensions to it, each harmful in its own way.**

#### STEREOTYPING

The act of supporting or reinforcing a broad, unfounded negative attitude about a person or group can cause people to say things like, “people with mental illness are dangerous.”<sup>1</sup>

#### PREJUDICE

When one endorses a stereotype about a person or group that results in changing feelings causing one to do or say something like, “I don’t want to associate with people who have drug problems.”

#### DISCRIMINATION

The behavioral change that occurs from prejudice, like when someone isn’t hired for a job due to psychiatric history.<sup>2</sup>

### HOW DOES STIGMA SHOW UP?



#### Language

Terms like ‘crazy’ or ‘insane’ feed stereotypes that aren’t true.



#### Media

Media coverage of mental health conditions is sometimes incorrect, reinforcing negative stereotypes.



#### Culture

Historically, people with mental health conditions were marginalized. Additionally, different cultures view mental health differently, making it more difficult for some to seek treatment than others.



#### Self

People with a mental illness sometimes internalize common stereotypes and language around mental health conditions, resulting in negative perceptions of self and abilities.<sup>3</sup>



#### Families

Some family members might think less of mental health treatment or be less likely to appreciate its positive effects, decreasing the likelihood that a person would seek help.

# HOW YOU CAN COMBAT STIGMA

## Educate yourself

- 1 in 5 adults in the U.S. will have a mental health condition in a given year, and over half will have a mental health condition and/or a substance use disorder at some point in their lives. Understanding that mental health conditions are so common can help us to normalize them and reduce stigma.
- People can recover from even the most severe mental illnesses. Knowing and believing people can change can promote more positive views of mental health.

## Promote open discussions about mental health

- When people disclose that they have mental health conditions, it often reduces stigma, especially if they speak out in relationships that are trusting, or in public situations that have been promoted by respected people in authority. Share what you know of mental health, including your own experiences with mental health conditions if you're comfortable, passing on facts and challenging incorrect information.

## Pay attention to language

- Words play a big role in stigmatizing someone and disparaging terms can lead to feelings of shame or inadequacy. Person-first language is particularly helpful – “a person with mental health challenges” or “people with substance use conditions.”

## Encourage equal treatment of physical and mental health

- Acknowledging that mental health is just as important as physical health can both reduce stigma and promote equal access to care.

## Call out stigmatizing media

- Highlight when movies or shows incorrectly portray individuals with mental health conditions and why the portrayal reinforces damaging stereotypes.

## Be supportive

- Treat others with dignity and respect. Respond with understanding and a listening ear when someone shares their experience with mental health issues. You never know what's happening in their lives and you have to opportunity to play a positive, supportive role.

## Be inclusive

- Make sure you're including everyone, at work, school or other areas of life. It's against the law to deny services or jobs due to a mental health condition.<sup>4</sup>

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Information from NIMH, NAMI, Cure Stigma and Very Well Mind. Find citations for this document at [healthymindspolicy.org/resources](https://healthymindspolicy.org/resources)

1. Corrigan. *Challenging the Stigma of Mental Illness: Lessons for Therapists and Advocates*
2. Corrigan. *On the stigma of mental illness: Practical strategies for research and social change.*
3. [Curestigma.org](https://curestigma.org)
4. [nami.org/Get-Involved/Take-the-stigmfree-Pledge](https://nami.org/Get-Involved/Take-the-stigmfree-Pledge)



## HEALTHY MINDS POLICY INITIATIVE

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