

Bonus Article — 3 ways to break the mental illness stigma



The view that someone with mental illness is weak, attention-seeking, unpredictable, or violent carries a heavy cost. This stigma can prevent those with mental illness from seeking the help and support they need and deserve.

Fluctuations in one's mental health are common and manageable. Misunderstandings about what mental health issues are, and what it's like to live with them, can create a stigma around mental illness, however.

Negative views of mental illness come from:

Using harmful language. Referring to someone as “a schizophrenic” instead of “someone with schizophrenia” puts their condition ahead of who they are as a person. Likewise, terms like “crazy” and “insane” trivialize the struggle.

Avoiding people with mental illness. Over the past 20 years, people have consistently desired social distance from those with schizophrenia, depression, and alcoholism, according to a 2021 JAMA Network study.

Reluctance to hire someone with a diagnosed condition. According to a 2014 study from Psychiatry Online, mental illness was linked to low employment rates and lower earnings, especially for those over 49 years old.

To fight the mental health stigma:

1. **Learn and teach others.** Learn about mental health conditions and talk with people who have them. This helps reduce fear, judgment, and misconceptions. Teach others what you learn.
2. **Share experiences.** Personal stories can have a profound effect on others. Getting to know someone who manages mental illness makes it seem more approachable and less mysterious.
3. **Speak thoughtfully.** Knowing that words have power, be sensitive to the way you talk about mental illness. Use language that is respectful, kind, and unassuming.