

REDUCING THE STIGMA SURROUNDING MENTAL ILLNESS



The stigma surrounding mental illness originates from fear or a lack of understanding.

Inaccurate or misleading information contributes to both. Many in society still have a negative perception of mental illness. The stigma surrounding mental health not only affect those with a mental health illness, but also those who support and care for them.



This stigma can result in a worsening of symptoms and result in:

- A reluctance to seek treatment
- Loss of hope
- Less self-esteem
- Worsen or increase psychiatric symptoms
- Trouble with relationships
- Non-compliance with treatment
- Difficulty at work



These effects can lead to:

- Self-isolation
- Lack of family or friends understanding
- Fewer opportunities for employment, school or social activities
- Difficulty obtaining housing
- A belief that they cannot succeed or improve their current situation



How can you help your patients begin the dialog about the stigma associated with mental illness?

Use some of these following communication techniques:

- Practice active listening, focus on what the patient is saying and use good eye contact
- Speak with them person-to-person to help encourage participation in their care
- Avoid using highly technical medical terms or language
- Communicate at the patient's level of understanding
- Continue to build a relationship of trust
- Be nonjudgmental
- Validate the patient's feelings
- Be sensitive to the way the patient presents themselves, which may be signs of undisclosed mental illness. These signs may indicate the presence of a mental illness that the patient may be reluctant to discuss:
 - Unexplained chronic pain or fatigue
 - Recent changes in eating or sleeping patterns
 - Difficulties at work or school
 - Past or current use of drugs or alcohol

The use of the above communication techniques may help your patients to begin discussing their mental illness and bridge the barrier related to its stigma.



Thank you for your partnership.

Please contact your Provider Relations Representative if you have questions or need assistance.

Sources:

American Psychiatric Association. (2024). *Stigma, prejudice and discrimination against people with mental illness. Stigma and Discrimination (psychiatry.org)*

Wu, B. (2016). *What you should know: Talking to your patients about their mental health.*

<https://www.studentdoctor.net/2016/03/15/know-talking-patients-mental-health/>