

Mental health stigma and its negative impact

DON'T FORGET

Show compassion
for all people -
many are struggling

What is stigma?

Stigma is a negative stereotype. It occurs when people are judged negatively because of a perceived 'flaw.' For many people with a mental illness, stigma is a reality and it can cause intense shame and fear.

It acts as a barrier against treatment for many young people. In fact, people living with mental health disorders often say the stigma they encounter is worse than the illness itself.

The stigma associated with mental illness can take one of two forms:

- › External or social stigma, which involves other peoples' prejudiced attitudes towards those with mental illness.
- › Internal or self-perceived stigma, which involves how a person suffering with mental illness think of themselves or feel about themselves.

What's the difference between stigma and discrimination?

Stigma is not the same as discrimination. Stigma is the result of negative and prejudicial stereotypes, attitudes and behaviours that are expressed by people towards those living with a mental health problem or a mental illness. Discrimination on the other hand, is unfair treatment due to this negative stereotype, attitude and behaviour.

Stigma shows up in a variety of ways and consists of three elements – a lack of knowledge (ignorance), negative attitudes (prejudice), and disadvantage of those experiencing it (discrimination). Some of the most damaging examples of stigma are:

- › The widely-held belief that mental illness is a sign of weakness
- › That sufferers are somehow responsible for their predicament and
- › That mentally ill people are violent and dangerous.

Anti-stigma measures

Research has shown that one of the best ways to break down mental health stigma is through a contact-based approach. That means an approach whereby people who have had mental health challenges share their experiences with people who have not. This approach breaks down misconceptions and stereotypes. The Activities Toolkit that accompanies this learning toolkit includes several activities and tools that can help prevent stigma and overcome its effects.

If you suspect that you or someone you care about is struggling with their mental health, talk to someone. It may help to talk to a friend or someone your own age at first, but a supportive and understanding adult is your best option for getting help.

DON'T FORGET

How you think
determines everything.
You can change your mind

