

How to Overcome the Stigma of a Mental Health Challenge

Social stigma is the disapproval of, or discrimination against, an individual or group based on perceivable characteristics that differentiate them from other members of a community or society. More specifically, mental health stigma can lead to prejudice or discrimination against people based on their diagnosis or challenge; and unfortunately, this type of stigma remains common.

Stigma can lead to discrimination as overt as someone making a negative comment about a mental health diagnosis or treatment or as subtle as avoiding certain individuals in fear they may be unbalanced or too emotional. Stigma can also internally affect someone – impacting the way an individual feels about themselves and their own capabilities.

The effects of mental health stigma on outcomes can be severe. Individuals may be reluctant to seek help, lack family support, unable to secure employment or housing and feel isolated and even harassed.

So, while mental health stigma remains strong, here are some tips to consider in combatting it:

- Always seek treatment. Never let a stigma or perceived thoughts prevent you from seeking treatment.
- Work with your therapist on regaining your self-esteem and overcoming self-doubt and shame.
- Stay connected with your family, friends and loved ones. Sharing your condition with people you trust can be immensely helpful.
- You are not your illness. Avoid using language like, “I am bipolar.” Rather, try to say “I have bipolar.”
- Consider joining a support group. It is a great way to meet other people and be reminded that you are not alone.

Stigma is almost always based on a lack of education or understanding – not facts. Learning to accept your condition and recognize what supportive steps to take will have a positive impact on your outcomes and life.