



STIGMA - An Obstacle to Recovery

People who suffer or have suffered from mental illness have many obstacles to overcome. Don't let your attitude or actions be yet another hurdle!

YOU CAN HELP

Be positive. Respond to people who have a mental illness as individuals. Learn about the person on the basis of your knowledge, not your assumptions.

Help people with mental illness reenter society. Support their efforts to obtain housing and jobs.

Respond to false statements about mental illness or people with mental illnesses. Many people have wrong and damaging ideas on the subject. Accurate facts may help change both their ideas and actions.

Help **give people** recovering from a mental illness what they need most, **a chance.**

Watch our language. Most of us, including mental health professionals, advocates, and consumers, use terms and expressions related to mental illnesses that may perpetuate stigma. We depersonalize sufferers of mental illness by referring to them generically as "the mentally ill" or by referring to individuals as their disease "a schizophrenic" rather than "a person with schizophrenia.)" Use people-first language.

Talk openly about mental illnesses. The more mental illnesses remain hidden, the more people believe it is shameful and needs to be concealed. Letting others see real people with mental illnesses who are resourceful, articulate, and creative, who are familiar already as valued friends or co-workers, people who do not fit the public stereotype, is a powerful way to fight stigma.

Mental Illness Can Strike Anyone!

Mental illness knows no age limit, economic status, race, creed or color. During the course of a year, more than 20% of Kentuckians are affected by one or more mental disorders. Instead of receiving compassion and acceptance, people with mental illnesses may experience hostility, discrimination, and stigma.

It is sometimes easy to forget that our brain, like all of our other organs, is vulnerable to disease. Many mental illnesses are believed to have biological causes, just like cancer, diabetes, and heart disease, but some mental disorders are caused by a person's environment and experiences. A mental illness can cause mild to severe disturbances in thinking, perception and behavior.

People with mental illnesses often exhibit many types of behaviors such as extreme sadness and irritability, and in more severe cases, they may also suffer from hallucinations and total withdrawal. Some physical ailments like nausea, heavy chest, headaches, indigestion, and changes in appetite and sleep may also be experienced. If these types of disturbances significantly impair a person's ability to cope with life's ordinary demands and routines, then he or she needs to seek appropriate treatment. With the proper care from a physician, mental health professional and other integrative support services, a person can recover and resume normal activities.

Scientific research and clinical trials are leading to new discoveries in both treatment options and prevention techniques. Medications are becoming more specific, psychotherapies more diverse, and treatments in general more effective. We are even starting to learn ways to build resiliency to mental disorders. More attention is being paid to children's wellness, which is leading our communities to having healthier more productive adults. And with growing collaboration of treatment teams, from all of our healthcare providers to our support systems and services, we are developing a greater understanding of how our brain and body interacts.

Common Misconceptions About Mental Illness

MYTH: "A person who has had a mental illness can never be normal."

FACT: People with mental illnesses can recover and resume normal activities. For example, Mike Wallace of "60 Minutes", who has clinical depression, has received treatment and today leads an enriched and accomplished life.

MYTH: "People with mental illnesses can work low-level jobs but aren't suited for really important or responsible positions."

FACT: People with mental illnesses, like everyone else, have the potential to work at any level depending on their own abilities, experience, and motivation.

MYTH: "Mentally ill persons are dangerous."

FACT: The vast majority of people with mental illnesses are not violent. In the cases when violence does occur, the incidence typically results from the same reasons as with the general public such as feeling threatened or excessive use of alcohol and/or drugs.

Abraham Lincoln fought depression for many years. Despite his illness he went on to become President of the United States. Others who have conquered their mental

*illness are: Dick Clark, entertainer;
Ted Turner, cable TV mogul; Alma
Powell, wife of Colin Powell; Mike
Wallace of 60 Minutes; Joan Rivers,
comediienne; Art*