

Be a Stigma Buster

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Mental illness can strike anyone! It knows no age limits, economic status, race, creed or color. Medical science has made incredible progress over the last years in helping us understand, cure and eliminate the causes of many diseases, including mental illnesses. However, while doctors continue to solve some of the mysteries of the brain, many of its functions remain a puzzle. Even at the leading research centers, no one fully understands how the brain works or how it malfunctions, but we are getting closer and closer.

Researchers have, however, determined that many mental illnesses are probably the result of chemical imbalances in the brain. These imbalances may be inherited, or may develop because of excessive stress or substance abuse. It is sometimes easy to forget that our brain, like all of our other organs, is vulnerable to disease.

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. Instead of receiving compassion and acceptance, they may receive hostility, discrimination and stigma.

The five major categories of mental illness are: **Anxiety Disorders** that include, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder, and generalized anxiety disorder (a flurry of worry); **Mood Disorders** like depression, bipolar disorder, post-partum depression, unipolar disorder and seasonal affective disorder; **Schizophrenia**; **Dementias**; and **Eating Disorders** like anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa.

Here are three ways you can combat stigma.

1. Share your experience with mental illness. Remember, every family has someone who experiences mental health issues, including perhaps, substance abuse.
2. Help people with mental illnesses re-enter society. Support their efforts to obtain housing and jobs.
3. Respond to false statements about or images of people with mental illnesses. Many people have wrong and damaging ideas on the subject. Accurate facts and information may help change both their ideas and actions. Never use language that hurts people feelings like “crazy”, “weirdo”, or whatever. Check our website at www.mhalc.org or call me for information and education at 740-788-0302. You may want to email me at mhalc@alink.org

Recovery is possible. With proper assistance and treatment, symptoms can be reduced or eliminated. By mobilizing personal strengths, learning good self-care skills, and

obtaining appropriate professional services, people are able to overcome the impairments caused by mental illness.

Remember, people who have a mental illness, their family and friends all have many challenges to meet. Get the facts. Give hope and respect to all. Be a stigma buster!