Overcoming Stigma in Mental Health

> **People coping with a mental health problem often face stigma. Stigma is being viewed in a negative way due to a condition. You may unfairly judge yourself. Or you may even feel that your provider will treat you differently if he/she knows what you are really experiencing. Your condition is not your fault. Getting the treatment you need can help. Your provider is there to help you.**

Understand Mental Health Conditions

Mental health disorders are common. Many famous people have mental health issues. It is important to remember mental health disorders are medical conditions. Mental disorders are health conditions of the brain that involve changes in thoughts, feelings, moods, or behaviors — and sometimes a combination of these. These disorders may be caused by biologic, lifestyle, and environmental factors. As with other diseases, a mental health disorder is not your fault. Importantly, mental health conditions can be treated.

People with mental health conditions can lead successful, meaningful, and productive lives.

Feelings of stigma may include:

- Shame
- Embarrassment
- Loneliness
- Rejection
- Resentment

You are not alone. In 2016, about

45 million **U.S. adults** reported having a **mental health condition**.

TIPS Ways to Deal With Stigma

✓ **Get Treatment** — You might be afraid to get help because you don't want to be identified as someone with a mental health condition. But your care team can help you create a treatment plan and reduce your symptoms.

✓ **Be Kind to Yourself** — You may think your condition is a sign of weakness and that you should be able to control it without help. But getting help is important. People with medical conditions all need treatment. Your condition is not your fault.

✓ **Understand You Are Not Your Illness** — Don't say, "I am bipolar." Say, "I have bipolar disorder." Avoid using insulting terms for mental illness.

✓ **Educate Yourself and Others** — Knowing the facts about your condition can help build confidence. It can also help others understand it is a medical condition that you are managing.

✓ **Talk About It** — It can be hard to talk with family and friends about your condition. Sharing your feelings and what you are going through can help the important people in your life understand your condition. Talking may help you feel less alone. Friends and family can offer encouragement and support.

✓ **Find Support** — There are groups, like the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), that offer local support programs and Internet resources to help lessen stigma through education. Connecting and talking with others who have similar conditions can provide mutual support, kindness, and compassion.

✓ **Speak Out Against Stigma** — If you're able to, consider sharing your experiences and views with others. You may help others who are facing mental health issues.

✓ **Speak Up** — Tell your provider if you feel you are not being treated fairly.

Help Is Out There

The following organizations are trying to stop mental health stigma:

StigmaFree
A campaign by the **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)** to end stigma and create hope for those affected by mental illness
www.nami.org/stigmafree

Stamp Out Stigma
The **Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness** initiative to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness and substance use disorders
www.stampoutstigma.com/index.html

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Collaborating With Your Care Team

- Talk with your care team about any feelings that might be negatively impacting your care.

- Work with your care team on how to cope with triggers that may cause feelings of stigma.

- Ask your care team to recommend a local support group.

Questions? Concerns?

Never hesitate to ask. You have a right to know everything about your health and your care.

If you have any questions or concerns about your condition or your care, ask your doctor or a member of your treatment team right away. They are there to help you.