



MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

1 in 5 adults in the U.S. experience some type of mental illness each year, with depression and anxiety being the most common and frequently co-occurring. However, two-thirds don't get the treatment they need due to neglect, stigma, cost, wait times, and lack of access to treatment.

This last year has shown us the negative impact stress, uncertainty and trauma can have on people's well-being. The lines between work and home have been blurred and employees may be struggling with comparing their current selves to their pre-pandemic selves. One thing we can do to help create a mentally healthy work environment is to fight the stigmas around mental health.

Mental health stigmas are negative attitudes toward people with mental health challenges. They can lead to discrimination, which is when people with mental health challenges are treated worse because of their illness. Stigmas can make it hard for people to talk about their problems and get help. We are not defined by our diagnoses, disabilities, or challenges.

Destigmatizing the need for mental health care is critical to an inclusive workplace. Marginalized populations often feel that stigma more keenly than others. The more we normalize our need for mental health support, the less frequently employees will need to hide which frees up energy that flows into their lives and into the workplace community. We must train managers and leaders to lead by example and hold space and normalize these conversations.

While it may be challenging to both recognize and treat mental health disorders, early intervention is key to preventing them from getting worse. Check-in on your teammates and colleagues to ensure no one is suffering in silence. If you're feeling overwhelmed, take time off to recharge and seek additional support if necessary.



5 WAYS TO FIGHT MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA

Stigma has various definitions, but they all refer to negative attitudes, beliefs, descriptions, language, or behavior. In other words, stigma can translate into disrespectful, unfair, or discriminatory patterns in how we think, feel, talk, and behave towards individuals experiencing a mental illness. Here are 5 simple ways that you can fight against mental health stigmas.

1. Don't label people who have a mental illness.

Don't say, "He's bipolar" or "She's schizophrenic." People are people, not diagnoses. Instead, say, "He has been diagnosed with a bipolar disorder" or "She is living with schizophrenia." You can also say "has a mental illness" instead of "is mentally ill." This is known as "person-first" language, and it's far more respectful, for it recognizes that the illness doesn't define the person.

2. Don't be afraid of people with a mental illness.

People with mental illness aren't more likely to be violent than the general population. In fact, research shows that they are more likely to be victims of violence. Don't fall prey to other inaccurate stereotypes from movies, such as that of the disturbed killer or the weird co-worker.

3. Don't use disrespectful terms for people with mental illness.

In a research study with British 14-year-olds, teens came up with over 250 terms to describe mental illness, and the majority were negative. These terms are far too common in our everyday conversations. Also, be careful about casually using "diagnostic" terms to describe everyday behavior, like "That's my OCD," or, "She's so borderline." Given that 1 in 5 US adults experience a mental illness, your words may unintentionally shame others and discourage them to reach out for support.

4. Don't be insensitive or blame people with mental illness.

It would be silly to tell someone to just "buckle down" and "get over" cancer. The same applies to mental illness. Also, don't assume that someone is okay just because they look or act okay or sometimes smile or laugh. Depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses can often be hidden, but the person can still be in considerable internal distress. Provide support and reassurance when you know someone is having difficulty managing their illness.

5. Be a role model.

Stigma is often fueled by lack of awareness and inaccurate information. Model these stigma-reducing strategies through your own comments and behavior and politely teach them to your friends, family, co-workers and others in your sphere of influence. Spread the word that treatment works and recovery is possible. Most importantly, prioritize your own mental health and reach out for support when needed.