

May is Mental Health Month: Help Reduce Stigma



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Stigma is when someone views you in a negative way because you have a distinguishing characteristic or personality trait that's thought to be, or actually may be, a disadvantage. Unfortunately, negative attitudes and beliefs toward people who have a mental health conditions are common.

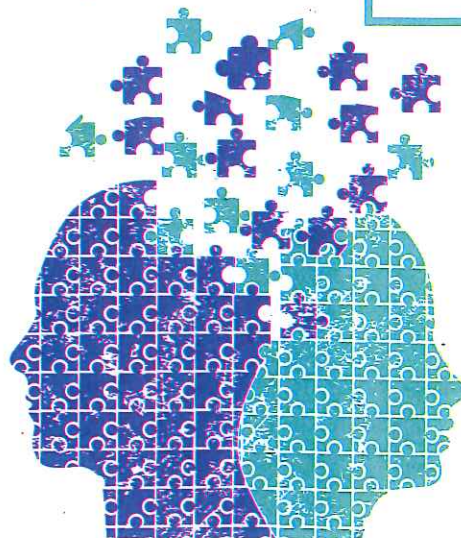
17% of people will suffer from depression within their lifetime. And those with serious medical illnesses have a 50% probability of developing depression.

Stigma concerning a mental health condition can lead to discrimination; one may even judge themselves. Some harmful effects of stigma can include: reluctance to seek help; lack of understanding by family, friends, co-workers; bullying, physical violence, harassment; or health insurance that doesn't adequately cover your mental health treatment. This is significant since the National Institute of Health estimates that 17% of people will suffer from depression within their lifetime. And those with serious medical illnesses have a 50% probability of developing depression. The World Health

Organization predicts that by 2020 unipolar depression will be associated with the #1 disease burden in the world; this means that depression will have the largest financial impact of any disease/disorder in the world. With effected numbers like these, surely a negative stigma cannot last indefinitely.

Here are some ways to deal with stigma:

- ▶ Get treatment. Don't let the fear of being labeled with a mental illness prevent you from getting help
- ▶ Don't let stigma create self-doubt and shame. It's not a matter of personal weakness. Treatment can help you gain self-esteem and confidence
- ▶ Don't isolate yourself, reach out to people you trust
- ▶ Don't equate yourself with your illness; You are NOT "a bipolar", you have "bipolar disorder"



Other's judgments almost always come from a lack of understanding. Learning to accept your condition and recognizing what you need to do to treat it, seeking support, and helping educate others can make a big difference.



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