



# Mental Health Subcommittee

## Stigma and Mental Illness

Stigma causes people to feel ashamed for something that *is* out of their control. Worst of all, stigma prevents individuals with a mental health disorder from seeking the help they need. For a group of people who already carry such a heavy burden, stigma is an unacceptable addition to their pain. And while stigma has reduced in recent years, the pace of progress has not been quick enough. Unfortunately, negative beliefs, and attitudes directed at those suffering from mental health conditions are prevalent among peer groups. Click the following link to learn more about removing the stigma, <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mental-illness/in-depth/mental-health/art-20046477>.

**SEEKING HELP IS NOT  
A SIGN OF WEAKNESS**



## Tips for Dealing With Mental Health Stigma

**Seek treatment.** You may be reluctant to admit you need treatment. Don't let the fear of being labeled with a mental illness prevent you from seeking help. Treatment can provide relief by identifying what's wrong and reducing symptoms that interfere with your work and personal life.

**Don't let stigma create self-doubt and shame.** Stigma doesn't just come from others. You may mistakenly believe your condition is a sign of personal weakness or that you should be able to control it without help. Seeking counseling, educating yourself about your condition and connecting with others who have mental illness can help you gain self-esteem and overcome destructive self-judgment.

**Don't isolate yourself.** If you have a mental illness, you may be reluctant to discuss it. Family, friends, and members of your community or church can offer support when needed if they know about your mental illness. Don't be afraid to reach out to those you trust when in need of compassion, support, and understanding.

**Don't equate yourself with your illness.** You are not an illness. So instead of saying "I'm bipolar," say "I have bipolar disorder." Instead of calling yourself "a schizophrenic," say "I have schizophrenia."

**Join a support group.** Some local and national groups, such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), offer local programs, and internet resources to help reduce stigma by educating people who have mental illness, their families, and the general public. Some state and federal agencies and programs, such as those that focus on vocational rehabilitation like the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), offer support for people with mental illness.

**Get help at school.** If you or your child has a mental illness that affects learning, find out what plans and programs are offered. Discrimination against students because of a mental illness is against the law, and educators at primary, secondary, and college levels are required to accommodate students as best they can. Talk to teachers, professors, or administrators about the best approach and available resources. If a teacher isn't aware of the presence of a disability, it can lead to unintended discrimination, barriers to learning, and poor grades.

**Speak out against stigma.** Showing support for mental illness can instill courage in others facing similar challenges and help educate the public about mental illness.



Suicide Prevention Lifeline: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

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