

The Sting of Stigma

What's the worst part about having a mental illness?

Most will say it's the stigma. Many people with mental illness not only suffer from their illness, but also from discrimination and disrespect due to common misunderstandings in our culture about mental illness.

Why is stigma still so pervasive?

FEAR: When we don't understand, we want to blame, or find an "easy" answer
Stigma stops many people from seeking the help they need.

An estimated 50 million Americans experience a mental disorder in any given year.

Many people would rather tell employers they have committed a petty crime and were in jail, than admit to being in a psychiatric hospital.

What can we do to reduce stigma?

1) **Accept that mental illness is a real illness**--like heart disease, diabetes, cancer or Alzheimer's disease. It has well-known causes and a variety of treatment options.

2) **Stop associating blame with the illness**

Uncle Joe didn't develop mental illness because he stopped going to church, or because he lost his job, or because of his strict mother, or because he's lazy.

3) **Learn about mental illness**

Take the time to learn about mental illness. Learn about the symptoms and treatments. Get to know someone with mental illness.

4) **Watch your language**

Stigma starts with labeling. Using terms such as "looney," "nuts", "crazy", or "weak" is disrespectful. Don't let labels dictate how you treat people.