

# Mental Health Stigma

## Learning Objectives

The student(s) will:

- Understand the stigma around mental health problems, and the impact of stigma and discrimination on help-seeking behavior.
- Be aware of the myths and realities of mental health.
- Consider attitudes about mental health.
- Exhibit a realistic and positive understanding of mental illness.

## Activities:

Activity	Activity type	Time	Notes/Vocabulary
1 <b>Defining Stigma</b>	Discussion/reflection	10-15 min	Supporting Vocabulary: Stereotype, Prejudice, Discrimination
2 <b>Exploring Attitudes</b>	Survey and discussion	15 min	LINK to Tally document LINK to Survey
3 <b>Reducing Stigma</b>	Discussion/activity	5 min	Creating an action plan
Extension Activity			
4 <b>Stigma in the world</b>	Interview and presentation	2-3 days	Interview family and works as a group to create a presentation and present.

### **Activity 1: Defining Stigma**

1. Ask students if they know what the word “stigma” means.
2. Hand out Activity 1 Handout—Defining Stigma.
3. Lead a whole-class discussion of the definition of “stigma,” and the relationship between stigma, stereotyping and discrimination.

### **Questions to Guide Discussion (this can be used via Socratic seminar, group discussion, small group discussions, gallery walk input, etc.)**

1. What are some of the negative things you have heard about people with mental illness? (Responses may include things like a link to violence, etc.)
2. What are some of the positive things you have heard about mental illness? (Responses may include things like a link to creativity.) While this may be seen as positive, remind students that generalizing can also be a form of stereotyping.
3. Why do you think people with mental illness are stigmatized? (Possible answers include “They are seen as being different” and “People don’t really know the facts about mental illness.”)
4. Can you think of any other health conditions or social issues that have been stigmatized throughout history? (Possible answers include same-sex relationships, leprosy, AIDS, unwed motherhood, divorce.)
5. What factors have contributed to changing public attitudes about some of these conditions or issues? (Possible answers include education, public policy, open dialogue, scientific research, changing social mores.)
6. What do you think influences perceptions about mental illness? (Possible answers include the media, films, news, newspaper headlines and stories that associate people with mental illness with violence, the fact that people with mental illness sometimes behave differently and people are afraid of what they don’t understand.)
7. How do you think stigma affects the lives of people with mental illness? (Possible answers include people deciding not to get help and treatment even though they would benefit from it, unhappiness, inability to get a job or find housing, losing their friends, stress on the whole family.)

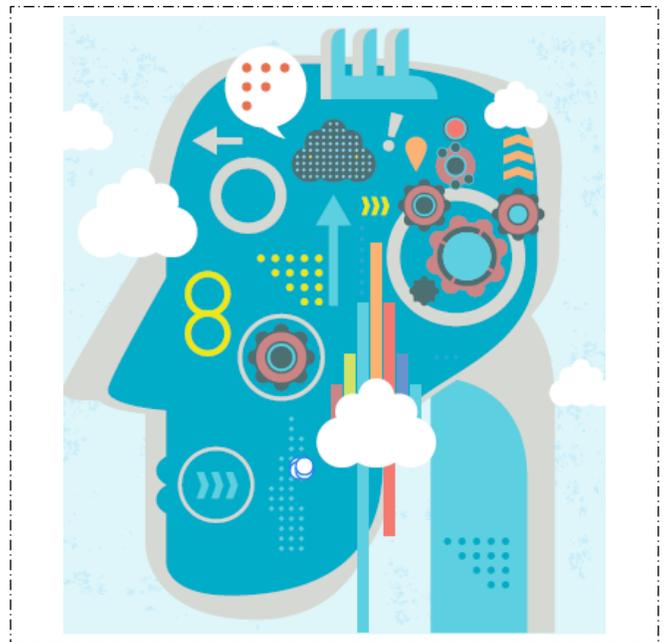
# Activity 1 Hand Out Defining Stigma

The following are definitions of “stigma.”

The following are definitions of “stigma” taken from different sources and different historical periods.

- **“A mark or sign of disgrace or discredit; a visible sign or characteristic of disease.”** -The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1990
- **“An attribute which is deeply discrediting.”** -Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, 1963
- **“A distinguishing mark or characteristic of a bad or objectionable kind; a sign of some specific disorder, as hysteria; a mark made upon the skin by burning with a hot iron, as a token of infamy or subjection; a brand; a mark of disgrace or infamy; a sign of severe censure or condemnation, regarded as impressed on a person or thing.”** -The Shorter Oxford Dictionary, Fourth Edition, 1993
- **“Stigma refers to a cluster of negative attitudes and beliefs that motivate the general public to fear, reject, avoid and discriminate against people with mental illnesses. Stigma is not just a matter of using the wrong word or action. Stigma is about disrespect. It is the use of negative labels to identify a person living with mental illness. Stigma is a barrier. Fear of stigma and the resulting discrimination discourages individuals and their families from getting the help they need.”** -SAMHSA, *School Materials for a Mental Health Friendly Classroom*, 2004

Stigma is not just a matter of using the wrong word or action. Stigma is about disrespect.



## Terms related to Stigma:

**Stereotype** - “A person or thing that conforms to an unjustly fixed impression or attitude;”  
Stereotypes are attitudes about a group of people (e.g. “All people with mental illness are dangerous)

**Prejudice**- “a preconceived opinion”; Prejudice is agreeing with stereotypes (e.g. “I think people with mental illness are dangerous).

**Discrimination**: “unfavorable treatment based on prejudice;” discrimination is the behavior that results: “I don’t want people with mental illness around me; therefore, I discriminate against them by not hiring them, not being friends with them etc.”

-*The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1996*



## Activity 2 Personal Attitudes Survey

(students can raise their hands or you can pass this out and then do a visual account).

Digital Survey LINK Example: <https://forms.gle/Rf3Q76J7GUEierST6>

1. People should work out their own mental health problems.
  - a. Agree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Not sure
2. Once you have a mental illness, you have it for life.
  - a. Agree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Not sure
3. Females are more likely to have a mental illness than males are.
  - a. Agree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Not sure
4. Medication is the best treatment for mental illness.
  - a. Agree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Not sure
5. People with a mental illness are generally violent and dangerous.
  - a. Agree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Not sure
6. Adults are more likely than teenagers to have mental illness.
  - a. Agree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Not sure
7. You can tell by looking at people whether they have a mental illness or not.
  - a. Agree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Not sure
8. People with mental illness are generally shy and quiet.
  - a. Agree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Not sure
9. Mental illness only happens to certain kinds of people.
  - a. Agree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Not sure
10. Most people will never be affected by mental health illness.
  - a. Agree
  - b. Disagree
  - c. Not sure



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## **Activity 2 Resource: Personal Attitudes survey best results.**

### **1. People should work out their own mental health problems.**

Not true. When people have a physical health concern, they generally take some action and often go to the doctor or seek some other kind of help for their problem. Mental illness is associated with changes in brain functioning and usually requires professional assistance. Because of the stigma surrounding mental illness, many people are reluctant to seek help.

### **2. Once you have a mental illness, you have it for life.**

While it's true that most mental illnesses are lifelong, they are often episodic, which means that the symptoms are not always present. Just like people who live with chronic physical illnesses like arthritis and asthma, people with mental illnesses can, when the illness is managed, live positive and productive lives.

### **3. Females are more likely to have a mental illness than are males.**

Men and women are equally affected by mental illness in general, but women may experience higher rates of specific illnesses such as eating disorders and depression. Men have higher rates for some disorders such as alcoholism and ADHD. Some illnesses are relatively equally shared by men and women, like bipolar disorder. It may seem that women are more likely to have a mental illness than men, but this may be because women are more likely to seek help for mental and emotional difficulties and to share their concerns with friends than are men.

### **4. Medication is the best treatment for mental illness.**

Medication can be a very effective part of managing a mental illness, but it is by no means the only type of treatment or support that helps people recover. A wide range of appropriate interventions, including medication, counselling, social and recreational groups, self-help, holistic health, religious support, hospital care, exercise and nutrition are options for helping people recover and stay well. The best approach is to have a combination of strategies that have been proven to be effective.

### **5. People with a mental illness are generally violent and dangerous.**

People with mental illness are generally not more violent than the rest of the population. Mental illness plays no part in the majority of violent crimes committed in our society. In fact, a person with a mental illness is more likely to be a victim of violence than the perpetrator. The assumption that any and every mental illness carries with it an almost certain potential for violence has been proven wrong in many studies. Often, it is the misrepresentation by the media that leads to this false belief.

### **6. Adults are more likely than teenagers to have a mental illness.**

Some illnesses are first diagnosed in childhood but many more begin to appear during the late teenage years and into early adulthood.

### **7. You can tell by looking at people whether they have a mental illness.**

Sometimes if a person is experiencing symptoms of their mental illness, how they are feeling, thinking and behaving may be different from what is normal for them, but generally, you cannot tell if a person has a mental illness based on his or her appearance.

### **8. People with a mental illness are generally shy and quiet.**

There is no strong causal relationship between personality characteristics and a tendency to develop mental illness. Some mental disorders, however, such as depression, anxiety and schizophrenia can lead people to avoid or limit social contact.

### **9. Mental illness only happens to certain kinds of people.**

This is incorrect; mental illness can happen to anyone.

### **10. Most people will never be affected by mental illness.**

The statistic in Canada is that one in five people will experience a mental illness at some point in their life. When thought of in this context, everyone is affected by mental illness, either directly (by having a mental illness themselves) or indirectly (by knowing someone with a mental illness).

## Activity 3 Handout Reducing Stigma- Works

### Reducing Stigma—What Works?

There is no simple or single strategy to eliminate the stigma associated with mental illness, but some positive steps can be taken. Remember the acronym “WALLS” to help reduce stigma.

**Watch Your Language:** Make sure you are not using language or comments that stigmatize people with mental illness.

**Ask Questions:** A lot can be learned by asking questions of a mental health professional like a counselor or doctor, or a person who has lived experience with mental illness.

**Learn More:** Great resources are available online to help educate you on different mental illnesses. Increased education means fewer misunderstandings and less stigma.

**Listen to Experiences:** Once you have learned a bit about mental illness, consider asking someone you know about their experience with mental illness. If you are considerate and respectful, they may be comfortable speaking about their experiences. If you have lived experience, consider sharing your story with others.

**Speak Out:** Help reduce stigma by speaking out when others stigmatize people with mental illnesses or spread misconceptions.

### Create an action plan!

1. Goal (what are you going to try and address around mental health stigmas)?

2. How are you going to achieve your goal? (steps)

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3. What might be some roadblocks and how will you get around them?

4. Who can you go to for help to reach your goal?



## Extension Activity: Interview and Presentation

Activities:

1. Have student come up with 3-5 questions they want to ask someone in the family, or close to them about the stigma around mental health.
2. Have students interview their chosen subject (homework)
3. In groups have the students put together a 3-5 min presentation on:
  - a. What they learned from this experience.
  - b. What are the stigmas around mental health that they gathered?
  - c. How do these stigmas help/hinder mental health perceptions?
4. Have students present in their groups (1-2 days).
5. Grading rubric

Student(s) Name:

Date:

	1	2	3	4	Score
Ideas/content/ knowledge level	Topic given with much prompting and support needed. Information about item- lacks purpose. Unable to demonstrate knowledge of item.	Describes topic with some promoting and support. Information is not always logical/sequential order. Able to demonstrate some knowledge of item.	Clearly describes topic with little promoting and support. Information is logical and sequential. Able to demonstrate knowledge of item	Clearly describes topic without prompting and support.	
Delivery of Information	A lot of moment with no eye contact with audience	Some movement and has some eye contact with audience	Little to no movement. Maintains good eye contact with audience	Excellent delivery of information.	
Vocal Delivery	Little expression. Does not speak clearly where others can hear.	Uses some clear expression of thoughts, feelings or ideas while speaking. Speaks in an appropriate volume.	Very good expression of thoughts, feelings or ideas. Speaks in an appropriate volume	Excellent delivery and use of voice.	
Language Skills	Limited Vocabulary is not descriptive	Good use of vocabulary. Can at times be very descriptive	Great use of vocabulary. Very descriptive.	Excellent use of vocabulary and description.	
Use of Visual displays	Did not have presentation or could not been seen.	Presentation did not match what was being spoken about.	Presentation was easy to see and the followed the speakers.	Excellent visual presentation and flow.	
Collaborative Conversation	Would not answer questions or take turns listening/speaking	Hesitant about answering questions or did not answer questions clearly to maintain a conversation. Has some trouble listening to others/taking turns speaking.	Clearly answered questions to maintain a conversation. Listens to others/takes turn speaking.	Excellent collaborative conversation.	
<b>Total</b>					