

Myths and Facts About MENTAL HEALTH

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

Often people are afraid to talk about mental health because there are many misconceptions about mental illnesses. It's important to learn the facts to stop discrimination and to begin treating people with mental illnesses with respect and dignity.

Here are some common myths and facts about mental health:

Myth: There's no hope for people with mental illnesses.

Fact: There are more treatments, strategies, and community supports than ever before, and even more are on the horizon. People with mental illnesses lead active, productive lives.

Myth: I can't do anything for someone with mental health needs.

Fact: You can do a lot, starting with the way you act and how you speak. You can nurture an environment that builds on people's strengths and promotes good mental health. For example:

- ✓ Avoid labeling people with words like "crazy," "wacko," "loony," or by their diagnosis. Instead of saying someone is a "schizophrenic" say "a person with schizophrenia."
- ✓ Learn the facts about mental health and share them with others, especially if you hear something that is untrue.
- ✓ Treat people with mental illnesses with respect and dignity, as you would anybody else.
- ✓ Respect the rights of people with mental illnesses and don't discriminate against them when it comes to housing, employment, or education. Like other people with disabilities, people with mental health needs are protected under Federal and State laws.

Myth: People with mental illnesses are violent and unpredictable.

Fact: In reality, the vast majority of people who have mental health needs are no more violent than anyone else. You probably know someone with a mental illness and don't even realize it.

Myth: Mental illnesses cannot affect me.

Fact: Mental illnesses are surprisingly common; they affect almost every family in America. Mental illnesses do not discriminate—they can affect anyone.

Myth: Mental illness is the same as mental retardation.

Fact: The two are distinct disorders. A mental retardation diagnosis is characterized by limitations in intellectual functioning and difficulties with certain daily living skills. In contrast, people with mental illnesses—health conditions that cause changes in a person's thinking, mood, and behavior—have varied intellectual functioning, just like the general population.

Myth: Mental illnesses are brought on by a weakness of character.

Fact: Mental illnesses are a product of the interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors. Research has shown genetic and biological factors are associated with schizophrenia, depression, and alcoholism. Social influences, such as loss of a loved one or a job, can also contribute to the development of various disorders.

(continued)

Myth: People with mental illnesses cannot tolerate the stress of holding down a job.

Fact: In essence, all jobs are stressful to some extent. Productivity is maximized when there is a good match between the employee's needs and working conditions, whether or not the individual has mental health needs.

Myth: People with mental health needs, even those who have received effective treatment and have recovered, tend to be second-rate workers on the job.

Fact: Employers who have hired people with mental illnesses report good attendance and punctuality, as well as motivation, quality of work, and job tenure on par with or greater than other employees. Studies by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) show that there are no differences in productivity when people with mental illnesses are compared to other employees.

Myth: Once people develop mental illnesses, they will never recover.

Fact: Studies show that most people with mental illnesses get better, and many recover completely. Recovery refers to the process in which people are able to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities. For some individuals, recovery is the ability to live a fulfilling and productive life. For others, recovery implies the reduction or complete remission of symptoms. Science has shown that having hope plays an integral role in an individual's recovery.

Myth: Therapy and self-help are wastes of time. Why bother when you can just take one of those pills you hear about on TV?

Fact: Treatment varies depending on the individual. A lot of people work with therapists, counselors, their peers, psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses, and social workers in their recovery process. They also use self-help strategies and community supports. Often these methods are combined with some of the most advanced medications available.

Myth: Children do not experience mental illnesses. Their actions are just products of bad parenting.

Fact: A report from the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health showed that in any given year 5-9 percent of children experience serious emotional disturbances. Just like adult mental illnesses, these are clinically diagnosable health conditions that are a product of the interaction of biological, psychological, social, and sometimes even genetic factors.

Myth: Children misbehave or fail in school just to get attention.

Fact: Behavior problems can be symptoms of emotional, behavioral, or mental disorders, rather than merely attention-seeking devices. These children can succeed in school with appropriate understanding, attention, and mental health services.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

http://allmentalhealth.samhsa.gov/myths_facts.html