



What Is Stigma?

The word 'stigma' means a sign of shame or disgrace. Stigma is a mark placed upon you that can affect people's view of you, and even your view of yourself, for the rest of your life. There is a stigma associated with mental illness. Stigma can result in a person being denied full and equal social standing with another person.

There is a real history of prejudice, misunderstanding, confusion and mystery surrounding mental illness. It is a kind of prejudice which often begins with the application of a label, that distinguishes 'normal' or 'well' people from 'sick' or 'abnormal' people. Stigma can result in a person being denied full and equal social standing with another person.

What harm does stigma do?

Stigma adjoining mental illness causes people with mental illness and their families and friends to hide the illness. as admittance and acceptance of the illness leave them feeling at times ashamed, isolated and alone

- Employers will not hire them (too much trouble)
- No one wants to be their friend (out of fear or apathy)
- Families give up on them (out of desperation and exhaustion)

Many people with mental illness try to hide their illness in an attempt to avoid the inevitable rejection by society. Until we all learn to accept these people and lend a helping hand, we are all stuck with the stigma.

What Can We Do To Challenge Stigma?

Individually we might consider trying the following:

- Learning about the various mental illnesses
- Talking and thinking about mental illness like you would about any other illness
- Challenging and questioning our own attitudes towards mental illness
- Challenging those around us when they reinforce the myths, stereotypes and misconceptions that surround mental illness
- Expressing your dissatisfaction to media outlets that represent mentally ill people in stereotyped or stigmatising ways

As a community, we can try to:

- Eliminate discrimination against people with mental illness in the workplace, schools and in community services
- Become more educated about mental illness
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 makes it illegal to discriminate against someone because of a disability. This includes mental illness.
- Family, carers and friends of people with a mental illness are also protected from discrimination within this Act

“Mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of, but stigma and bias shame us all “

The stigma surrounding mental illness has not occurred overnight; stereotypes, myths and misconceptions can take years to develop. It will take time to eradicate much of the stigma in our society, especially if we don't think it affects us personally. There is much we can do to actively challenge stigma, and everyone can play a role.

Stigmawatch is a program of the SANE Media Centre which works with, and supports, media professionals and the mental health sector to promote accurate and responsible portrayal of mental illness and suicide. The centre is supported by the Australian Government as part of the Mindframe Initiative .
Contact details: (03) 9682 5933 or visit www.sane.org

Breaking Stigma means

- Throwing away your negative thoughts about a homeless person walking down the street
- Not complaining about your tax dollars used to improve mental health services
- Volunteering your time once per month for the cause of mental illness
- Supporting friends and relatives who have been diagnosed with a mental illness

The Mental Health Information Service is part of NSW Association for Mental Health.

They operate a telephone information and referral service between 9am - 5pm Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and between 12.30 pm – 5 pm on Wednesdays. They have access to a comprehensive database of mental health services, support groups, community services etc. They also produce a mental health services directory for NSW called the “Way Ahead Directory”.

The Newcastle Mental Health Week “*Walk of Pride*” was introduced by ARAFMI Hunter and has been an annual event since 2005. The “Walk of Pride” aims to de-stigmatise mental illness and promote social inclusion. All members of the community are invited to get involved and offer support
Contact ARAFMI (02) 49612842