



# The Ultimate Guide to Overcoming the Stigma of Mental Illness

*10 Myths Debunked about Mental Illness*

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# How to Overcome the Stigma of Mental Illness

*Misconceptions about mental illness are pervasive. Unfortunately, these misconceptions can have serious consequences for millions of people who have a psychiatric illness. Mental health challenges, heart disease and diabetes, are ALL legitimate medical illnesses. Research shows there are genetic and biological causes for psychiatric disorders, and they can be treated effectively. Unfortunately, the lack of understanding can have serious consequences for millions of people who have a psychiatric illness.*

## Harmful effects of stigma can include:

- Reluctance to seek help or treatment
- Lack of understanding by family, friends, co-workers or others you know
- Fewer opportunities for work, school or social activities
- Bullying, physical violence or harassment
- Health insurance that doesn't adequately cover your mental illness treatment
- The belief that you'll never be able to succeed at certain challenges or that you can't improve your situation

## Here are some ways you can deal with stigma:

- Remember you are not alone: Many people from all walks of life cope with similar situations.
- Get treatment. Don't let the fear of being labeled prevent you from seeking help. Treatment can identify what is wrong and help reduce symptoms that interfere with your work and personal life.
- Don't let stigma create self-doubt and shame. Your condition is not a sign of personal weakness. Seeking psychological counseling, educating yourself about your condition and connecting with others with mental illness can help you gain self-esteem and overcome destructive self-judgment.
- Don't isolate yourself. Reach out to people you trust for the compassion, support and understanding you need.
- Don't equate yourself with your illness. You are not the illness. So instead of saying "I'm bipolar," say "I have bipolar disorder."



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- Join a support group. Some local and national groups, such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), offer local programs and Internet resources that help reduce stigma by educating people with mental illness, their families and the general public. Some state and federal agencies and programs, such as those that focus on vocational rehabilitation or the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), offer support for people with mental health conditions.
- Get help at school. If you or your child has a mental illness that affects learning, find out what plans and programs might help. Discrimination against students because of a mental health condition 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 resources. If a teacher doesn't know about a student's disability, it can lead to discrimination, barriers to learning and poor grades.
- Speak out against stigma. Consider expressing your opinions at events, in letters to the editor or on the internet. It can help instill courage in others facing similar challenges and educate the public about mental illness.

*Others' judgments almost always stem from a lack of understanding rather than information based on the facts. Learning to accept your condition and recognize what you need to do to treat it, seeking support and helping educate others can make a big difference.*



## ***Did You Know?***

*Beyond just generally being a good thing to do, giving can also be good for you. There have been a number of studies that suggest generosity and giving back could positively impact an individual's health both mentally and physically.*



# Top 10 Myths Debunked about Mental Illness

## 1 **Myth**

*Psychiatric disorders are not true medical illnesses like heart disease and diabetes.*

### **Fact:**

Brain disorders, like heart disease and diabetes, are legitimate medical illnesses. Research shows there are genetic and biological causes for psychiatric disorders, and they can be treated effectively.

## 2 **Myth**

*People with a severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia, are usually dangerous and violent.*

### **Fact:**

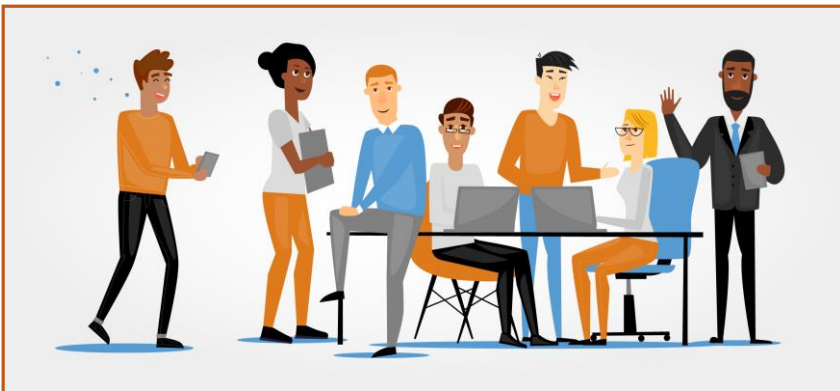
Statistics show that the incidence of violence in people who have a brain disorder is not much higher than it is in the general population. Those suffering from a psychosis such as schizophrenia are more often frightened, confused and despairing than violent.

## 3 **Myth**

*Mental illness is the result of bad parenting.*

### **Fact:**

Most experts agree that a genetic susceptibility, combined with other risk factors, leads to a psychiatric disorder. In other words, mental illnesses have a physical cause.



## *Did You Know?*

*On Average, 31% of employees experience substance abuse or emotional difficulties*

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**4 Myth**  
*Depression results from a personality weakness or character flaw, and people who are depressed could just snap out of it if they tried hard enough.*

**Fact:**

Depression has nothing to do with being lazy or weak. It results from changes in brain chemistry or brain function, and medication and/or psychotherapy often helps people to recover.

**5 Myth**  
*Schizophrenia means split personality, and there is no way to control it.*

**Fact:**

Schizophrenia is often confused with multiple personality disorder. Actually, schizophrenia is a brain disorder that robs people of their ability to think clearly and logically. The estimated 2.5 million Americans with schizophrenia have symptoms ranging from social withdrawal to hallucinations and delusions. Medication has helped many of these individuals to lead fulfilling, productive lives.

**6 Myth**  
*Depression is a normal part of the aging process.*

**Fact:**

It is not normal for older adults to be depressed. Signs of depression in older people include a loss of interest in activities, sleep disturbances and lethargy. Depression in the elderly is often undiagnosed. It is important for seniors and their family members to recognize the problem and seek professional help.



## **Myth: Debunked**

*Depression & anxiety don't affect children or adolescents.*

### **Fact**

*In the U.S., 1 in 5 youth aged 13-18 (21.4%) will experience some type of mental disorder in their life.*

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## **Myth**

*Depression and other illnesses, such as anxiety disorders, do not affect children or adolescents. Any problems they have are just a part of growing up.*

## **Fact:**

Children and adolescents can develop severe mental illnesses. In the United States, 1 in 5 youth aged 13–18 (21.4%) experiences a severe mental disorder at some point during their life. Left untreated, these problems can get worse. Anyone talking about suicide should be taken very seriously.

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## **Myth**

*If you have a mental illness, you can will it away. Being treated for a psychiatric disorder means an individual has in some way "failed" or is weak.*

## **Fact:**

A serious mental illness cannot be willed away. Ignoring the problem does not make it go away, either. It takes courage to seek professional help.



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## **Myth**

*Addiction is a lifestyle choice and shows a lack of willpower. People with a substance abuse problem are morally weak or "bad".*

## **Fact:**

Addiction is a disease that generally results from changes in brain chemistry. It has nothing to do with being a "bad" person.

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## **Myth**

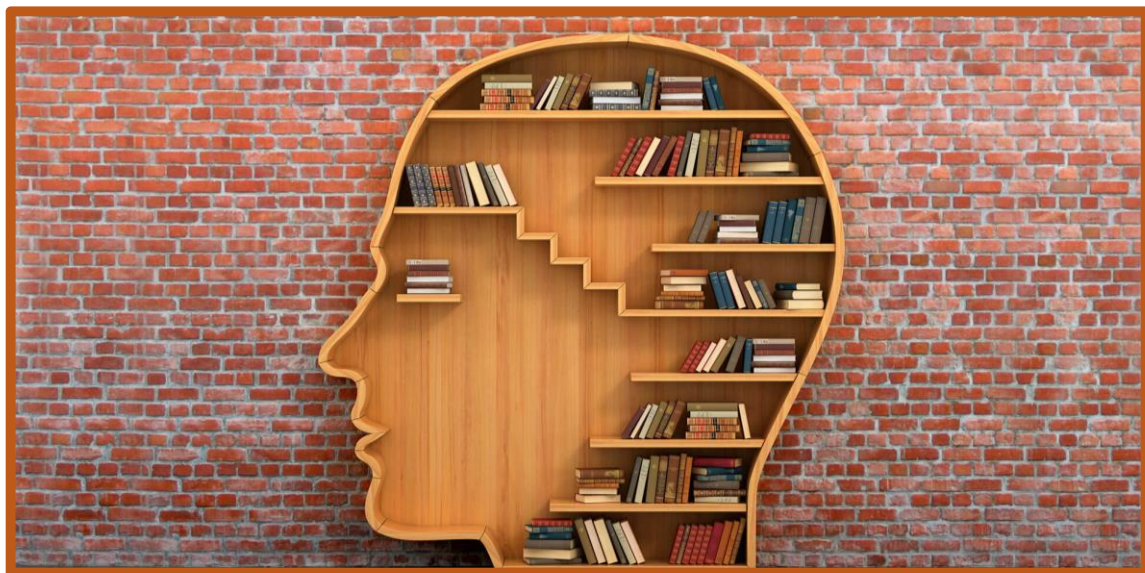
*Electroconvulsive therapy (ECT), formerly known as "shock treatment," is painful and barbaric.*

## **Fact:**

ECT has given a new lease on life to many people who suffer from severe and debilitating depression. It is used when other treatments such as psychotherapy or medication fail or cannot be used. Patients who receive ECT are asleep and under anesthesia, so they do not feel anything.

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*Mental illness is complex and often misunderstood. It is essential to get educated and get the fact. Talk to someone about how you are feeling and get help, so that you can achieve the emotional well-being you deserve to live your best life.*



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