



MENTAL HEALTH AFFECTS US ALL – LET'S BREAK THE STIGMA.

Ever wondered what the most burdensome disease is in the world today? According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the disease that robs many adults of the most years of productive life is not AIDS, heart disease or cancer; it is depression. As with many conditions, mental health is widely misunderstood. When people are diagnosed with a physical health disorder like diabetes, they typically don't think twice about seeking treatment or telling others that they are doing so. However, when people are diagnosed with a mental health condition, such as depression, they are much more likely to keep things to themselves. This is largely due to the negative stigma associated with mental illness.

Much of the stigma and discrimination around mental wellbeing is rooted in old-fashioned myths and misconceptions and fuelled by media stereotypes, as well as misinformation. For example, those suffering from depression may be perceived by some to be weak or attention seeking – but this couldn't be further from the truth. Mental health conditions are illnesses, not signs of poor character. Similarly, people with a mental illness cannot 'snap out of it' any more than someone with diabetes can immediately recover from their condition.

Stigma, prejudice, and discrimination against people with mental illness can be subtle, or obvious. Either way, it is harmful. It can contribute to worsening symptoms and reduce the likelihood of getting the treatment that is needed. With those suffering from a mental illness, stigma can reduce hope, lower self-esteem, and make it difficult to maintain relationships. Essentially, it creates an often insurmountable barrier to both treatment and recovery.

That's why taking steps to break the stigma is important, for everyone. Mental illness is treatable, and recovery is possible. Often people would rather speak with a friend or family member before talking to a mental health professional. By educating yourself about mental health, and taking steps to combat stigma, you will be able to support people in your life in the recovery process and help them to seek the professional support they need.

HOW TO BREAK THE STIGMA

- Talk openly about mental health – it is both common and treatable.
- Educate yourself and others – learn about mental health recovery, and about recognising signs that someone might need help.
- Be conscious of your language – language matters. Always address the person, not the illness. Referring to someone who has been diagnosed with schizophrenia as a schizophrenic reduces the person to that label. Someone isn't bipolar; rather, they struggle with bipolar disorder. There's so much more to an individual than the illness with which they struggle. For a person with mental illness, that is just one aspect of who they are.
- Treat physical and mental health equally – and pay attention to both.
- Show compassion toward those with mental illness. Provide support, love, and connection. Engagement within a community can greatly assist in recovery.
- Speak up – let others know when they are stigmatising mental health; don't silently endorse stigma by not speaking up.



Click on the link below to watch a video about preventing burnout when working from home.



► **Preventing burnout when working from home - Part 2**

References:

Prevention of Mental Disorders: Effective interventions and policy options: WHO.int.

Mental health: Overcoming the stigma of mental illness: Mayoclinic.org

The impact of illness identity on recovery from severe mental illness: A review of the evidence: Psychiatry Research Journal Volume 288, June 2020, 112950

Self-stigma as a barrier to recovery: a longitudinal study: Pubmed.gov

► Education department toll free:
0800 111 011

► Send a USSD to:
***134*664*38#**

► Email:
wced@mhg.co.za

Let us stay mindful of caring for one another and ourselves

