

## Mental Health- Overcoming the Stigma of Mental Illness

April 2023



*“The strongest people are those that win battles we know nothing about”*

With Mental Health Awareness month quickly approaching, our support staff at Cassadaga Valley Central School think it is extremely important to understand the stigma attached to mental illness. We hope the information provided below will help put an end to the stigma and help others be the best version of themselves.

### Mental health and stigma

These days mental health is a very common term to hear amongst adults and youth. Mental health does not discriminate between socioeconomic status, race, ability level, and/or gender. Even though mental health impacts a large number of people at some point in their lives there is still a major stigma when someone suffers from a mental health disorder. Mental health stigma is when someone (including yourself) views a person in a negative way and has a negative attitude or belief towards another individual who may be experiencing a mental health issue. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), 1 in 5 adults experience mental illness each year, 1 in 6 youth aged 6-17 experience a mental illness disorder each year, 50% of all lifetime mental illness begins by age 14, and 75% by age 24. These numbers are staggering and since the COVID-19 pandemic the number continues to rise.

### Harmful effects of stigma

Mental illness is not something someone chooses to experience. Unfortunately mental illness affects so

many people worldwide and can have long lasting effects on a person due to the stigma attached. Some harmful effects of mental health stigma are as follows

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

This is just some of the ways that stigma impacts individuals with mental illness, and all of these can range in severity depending upon the person. Others' judgements almost always are based on the lack of understanding rather than the facts of the situation. Understanding your condition, recognizing what you need to do to treat it, seeking support, and educating others can make a huge difference. Below are some suggestions on how to best cope with stigma and make a major change for yourself and others.

### Steps to cope with stigma

#### Seek understanding:

- Stigma doesn't just come from others. Sometimes we mistakenly believe that our conditions are a sign of weakness or that we should be able to control it without help. Having full understanding of what our condition consists of leads to acceptance and healing

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### Get help:

- Don't let the stigma stop you from finding peace and understanding. Treatment can provide relief by identifying what is wrong and reduce symptoms that interfere with work or your social life. Trained professionals are available to lead you through difficult times and to help explain that there are others that are experiencing the same thing and that you are not alone.

### Don't equate yourself with your illness:

- Don't let your illness define who you are. You are not a "disorder" or an illness. Instead of saying "I am Bi-polar" say "I have Bi-polar disorder." You are human with many strengths and weaknesses. Just like everyone else.

### Get Help at School:

- Find out what is available at school for yourself or your child. In many schools now there are social workers or mental health providers that can help with these issues.
- Advocate for yourself and get the academic assistance you or your child needs to be successful. Many children that suffer from a range of mental disorders may qualify for specific educational services that may improve upon their academic and social life.

### Resources:

[Make it OK](#)

[National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)

[National Institute on Mental Health](#)

[Kick Stigma to the Curb](#)

[Kidz Bop Celebrates Mental Health Month](#)

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