



## Mental illness is not a character defect!

There are many reasons why people develop mental illness. They could have inherited it, or it may be as a result of childhood trauma or overwhelming stress at school, work or home. Regardless of the reasons, these are health problems just like cancer, arthritis or diabetes. So why does society look at people with mental illness differently? The answer is stigma.

### What is stigma?

Stigma is when someone sees you in a negative way because of your mental illness. Social stigma can make mental health problems worse and stop a person from getting the help they need.

### What's the effects of stigma?

Fear and misunderstanding often lead to discrimination against people with mental illness. It's one of the main reasons why many people don't consider it a real health issue. This leads to feelings of hopelessness and shame in those struggling to cope with their situation, creating a serious barrier to them getting the help they need.

Let's take a look at how stigma can affect a person with mental illness:

- It affects the well-being of those who experience it.
- It affects people while they are experiencing problems, while they are in treatment, while they are healing and even when their mental health problem is a distant memory.
- It changes how people feel about themselves and the way others see them.



## What you can do to reduce stigma

Everyone has a role to play in creating a mentally healthy community.

### Ways to help include:

- Learn the facts about mental illness and share them with family, friends, work colleagues and classmates.
- Take the time to get to know people with personal experiences of mental illness so that you learn to see them for the person they are, rather than their illness.
- Don't judge, label or discriminate when you meet people with mental illness. Treat all people with respect and dignity.
- Avoid using language that puts the illness first and the person second. Say "a person with bipolar disorder" rather than "that person is bipolar".
- Speak up when you hear people around you make incorrect or negative comments about mental illness.
- Share your own experience of mental illness (if you have experienced it). This will help dispel myths and encourage others to do the same. Mental illness is not something shameful that needs to be hidden.

If you feel you need help with dealing with stigma, we are here to support you. EAP Counselors **(010 133 0525)** are available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, to offer counselling and support. You are also welcome to book an appointment with one of our psychologists by calling **014 590 1700** or **080 000 6942**.