



# MENTAL ILLNESS

## JOIN THE FIGHT TO BREAK THE STIGMA!

A mental illness is tough to handle, and even more so with daily commitments like work, university and home life. And then, there are the stigmas surrounding the issue.

Social stigma is where people have prejudiced attitudes and ideas about mental illness.

For example, some may think of people who have a mental illness as “mad”, “dangerous” or “psycho”. Other common stigmas include that all people with schizophrenia are violent and that depression is just something people can snap out of.

Both of which are not true.

Self-perceived stigma, on the other hand, is internal, where the person who suffers from a mental illness holds stigmas like these against themselves.

## THE EFFECTS

A stigma has serious emotional and physical effects on people with mental illness. It can lead to isolation, discrimination, shame and sadness. It may also lead to harassment, bullying and even violence. Worse, stigmas may inflict shame to such an extent that those who have mental illnesses may be hesitant to open up about their experiences or get professional help.



## BREAK THE STIGMA



According to the South African Depression and Anxiety Group, 2017 stats show that mental illness is extremely common, affecting around one in four university students. Furthermore, over 20% of 18-year-olds have had one or more suicide attempts.

Here are steps you can take to tackle the mental illness stigmas.

## GET CLUED UP

Generally, ignorance is the root of many prejudices, including those surrounding mental illness. The weapon against this and most things – is information. Attend lectures on mental health or listen to free talks by experts online. Read mental health pamphlets, keep up with the latest health news or book a free session with your on-campus therapist to ask questions.



## CHECK YOURSELF



Once you understand a bit more about mental health, assess your own judgements and attitudes towards those with mental illnesses. Make an effort to unlearn common myths that you may believe and check yourself when you indulge in harmful stereotypes. For example, if a new student in your class has a disorder, do not give in to gossip about the person. Do your own research about the illness or better yet, get to know your classmate.

## TALK ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

While social stigmas create negative ideas about mental illness, positive and engaging conversations can help counteract these problems. Bring up mental illness and share the reality with your peers. If you hear others being prejudiced, speak up and challenge the stereotypes. This will show those who are mentally ill that they have your support. It also teaches others to question their own prejudice.



## SHARE HOW YOU FEEL



Most people with mental illness are not comfortable sharing their symptoms or experiences. Help normalise mental health by speaking about your own experiences. It feels good to know that others have similar issues as it makes you feel relatable and understood. Disclose only as much as you feel comfortable with and do not share only negative experiences. Always try to provide solutions or ways you have been able to successfully tackle different issues.

## ENCOURAGE MENTAL HEALTH CARE

If someone suspects they are mentally ill, do not tell them it is probably not serious or just a phase. By making their symptoms out to be temporary or like it is no big deal, you could be causing extra harm down the line. If they actually are ill and do not get help, your advice could make their symptoms worse. Show your support. However, remember: you do not have the tools that a mental health professional has to help them to recover.



Education department toll free:  
**0800 111 011**

Send a USSD to:  
**\*134\*664\*38#**

Email:  
**wcged@mhg.co.za**

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one another and ourselves**