

The Stigma of Mental Health Issues

People who experience mental health issues in their lives are prone to reoccurring symptoms. When this happens, they often have a stigma placed on them by other people. Often the stigma attached to this issue stops one from moving forward—being unable to talk about it for fear of being judged or labeled. We can erase the stigma of any mental health issues by starting to discuss it with one person at a time, and taking the time to explain the anxiety you lived through in the past.

Let's start with people with whom you have already shared your story.

With whom have you discussed your issues?	What did you say?	What was this person's reaction? What did the person say?	How did you feel?
Family			
Friends			
Acquaintances			
People in your community or your house of worship			
Other			
Other			

If any one of the above reacted in a negative way, to what do you attribute that reaction?

If we stamp out the stigma attached to mental health issues, shed the shame and eliminate the fear, then we open the door for people to speak freely about what they are feeling and thinking.

~ Jaletta Albright Desmond

Journal about what this quotation means to you. How can you do your part to erase the stigma of mental illness.

Glenn Close said, ***“The most powerful way to change someone’s view is to meet them ... People who do come out and talk about mental illness, that’s when healing can really begin. You can lead a productive life.”***

Name a time when you have changed someone else’s view – about anything.

How did that feel to you?

Name a time you were tempted to talk about your anxiety issues, but didn’t? Why not?

Write about a situation in which you talked about your anxiety issues.

How did that feel? How did it work out?

Who is a trusted person you can talk with and begin to heal? Anyone else?

Who is a trusted person you can ask for a referral of someone to talk with in order to begin to heal

Anyone else? In an ideal world, how can you lead a more stable life?

How can you contribute to changing stigma?

Ways I Am Treated

Think about some of the ways that people treat you because of the symptoms you show due to your mental illness. In the spaces below, write about those who treat you unfairly and why.

I am criticized by my family and/or friends ...

I am ignored by my family and/or friends ...

I encounter problems at work ...

I encounter problems at home ...

I am subjected to teasing or harassment ...

I am laughed at ...

I treat myself unfairly by ...

I treat myself fairly by ...

The Stigma of Going to a Mental Health Therapist

Many people have pre-conceived ideas about anyone seeking therapy.

Do you know of anyone who has gone to a mental health therapist? Write what you know about the experience. _____

Here are some facts about mental health and mental health therapy.

- Mental health includes how you act, feel, and think in different situations.
- Mental health problems can be caused by many different things including medical health issues, abuse (emotional, physical, verbal, sexual), stress, worry, loss of a relationship, food issues, ADHD, STD's, family changes, addictions, traumatic event, problems, wanting to build up self-confidence, etc.
- If someone goes to a mental health therapist, this does NOT mean the person is crazy. Mental health therapists treat people the same as any other medical doctor treats problems.
- There needs to be a good connection between you and the therapist. Your therapist should be someone you feel you can trust.
- This might take a few meetings and/or a few therapists, to find the right one for you.
- Non-judgmental people who truly care about you will not judge you in a negative way. They will be proud of you for seeking help.
- The therapist does not assume that you have a mental illness. The therapist assumes something is troubling you, knows that no one leads a perfect life, and admires you for trying to make changes in your life.
- The therapist's job is to help you understand what's going on.
- The therapist will not tell you how to live your life, or how to think, act, or believe.
- The therapist is not an advice-giver, but will help you think about how to increase your quality of life.
- The therapist may have some thoughts, and with you, will help you make changes.
- The therapist can help you to increase your life management skills.
- The therapist will help you recognize and express your feelings in a healthy way.
- The only person who can "fix" your problems is you, but a therapist will help you with an action plan.
- The mental health therapist may suggest that you see a medical doctor for medication.
- Therapy can be a slow or long process. Being open and honest, and wanting to feel better, will make the difference.

Place an X by the facts that you were not aware of.

What are your concerns about talking with a mental health therapist? _____

After learning about these facts, make a commitment to speak with a counselor or therapist.