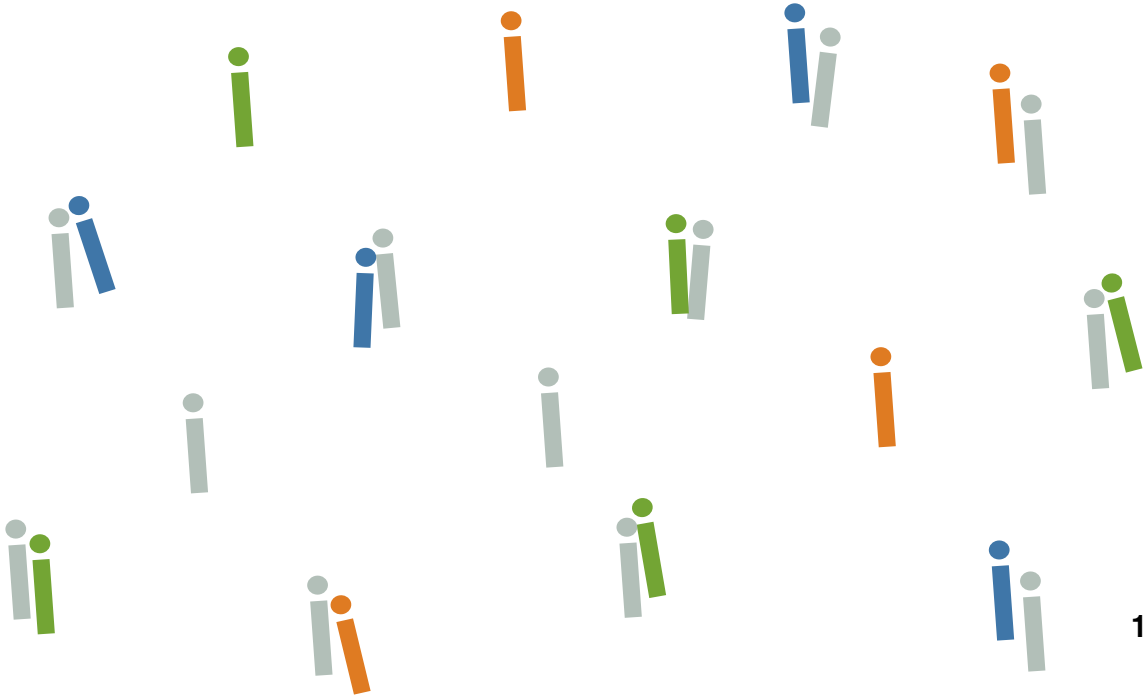
WHAT A DIFFERENCE A FRIEND MAKES

This brochure is designed to provide you with the tools to help support a friend you know is living with a mental illness in the recovery process.

100%. YES, INCLUDING YOU

Every single one of us is affected by mental illness in one way or another. If that number seems high, keep your eyes open you'll find more surprising stats throughout the brochure.



CONTENTS

MENTAL HEALTH: WHAT IS IT? 2

RECOVERY 6

SUPPORT 8

MYTHS AND FACTS 12

WHAT WOULD YOU DO? 16

RESOURCES 17

MENTAL HEALTH: WHAT IS IT?

WHAT IS IT? Mental illness is a health condition that causes changes in a person's thinking, mood, and behavior.

Mental illness is very common. Mental health and mental illness can be pictured as two points on a continuum with a range of conditions in between. When these conditions are more serious, they are referred to as mental illnesses and include depression, schizophrenia, anxiety and others which may require treatment and support. They are also widely misunderstood. People with mental illnesses are often stigmatized by others who think it's an uncommon condition. The truth is, mental illness can happen to anybody regardless of age, culture, race, gender, ethnicity, economic status, or location.

Arm yourself with the facts, then use your knowledge to educate others and reach out to those around you with mental illness. Understanding and support are powerful, and they can make a real difference in the life of a person who needs them.

- Among 18-25 year olds, the prevalence of serious mental health conditions is high, yet this age group shows the lowest rate of help-seeking behaviors.
- Those with mental health conditions in this age group have a high potential to minimize future disability if social acceptance is broadened and they receive the right support.
- People with mental illness need to be treated with respect, compassion, and empathy, just as anyone with any other serious but treatable condition.

One of the most important factors in recovery is the understanding and acceptance of friends. Friends can make a difference by offering reassurance, companionship, and emotional strength.

RECOVERY

GETTING BETTER ALL THE TIME. One of the most important things to remember about mental illness is this: people can and do recover. If you have a friend with mental illness, or if you have a mental illness yourself, remember that recovery is possible. Reach out to those around you with compassion, empathy, and understanding.

Here are more things to keep in mind: mental illness can affect anybody regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, age, or background. You probably know somebody with mental illness. And mental illnesses are not caused by poor decisions or bad habits. They affect a person's physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing, much like heart disease or diabetes.

The stigma associated with mental illness is a big barrier to recovery. If we want to be a truly healthy society, we need to break down the stigma and treat mental illness like any other healthcare condition. It starts with you.

People with mental illness can recover or manage their conditions and go on to lead happy, healthy, productive lives. They contribute to society and make the world a better place. People can often benefit from medication, rehabilitation, psychotherapy, group therapy, self help or a combination of these. One of the most important factors in recovery is the understanding and acceptance of friends.

SUPPORT

HOW TO HELP

If somebody told you he had diabetes, how would you react? If you're like most people, you'd express sympathy and concern, offer your support and reassurance, and feel confident that your friend's condition would improve with treatment. Now, if that same friend told you he had a mental illness, what would you do?

Too many people respond negatively when confronted with a friend's mental illness, and this only fuels the stigma surrounding the diagnosis. The reality is, mental illness is no different from physical illness. Conditions like depression, schizophrenia, and anxiety disorders affect a person's health. The emotional and psychological aspects of mental illness make supportive friends and family even more important to a person's recovery.

So, now you know you can help just by being there and offering your reassurance, companionship, emotional strength, and acceptance. You can make a difference just by understanding and helping your friend throughout the course of his or her illness and beyond. We're here to help you learn how.

RESPOND

Imagine that you've just been diagnosed with a serious but treatable physical condition. You're scared and confused, so you tell a friend. How would you feel if your friend laughed, called you names, made rude gestures, and told you to just snap out of it? People with mental illness face these reactions every day.

We all know better than to hurt people—especially when they're already hurting. Mental illness causes physical, mental, and emotional symptoms that make an added stigma even harder to bear. So put aside any preconceived notions you might have about mental illness and embrace a more helpful way of relating to people.

Instead of blowing off a person's worries, express your interest and concern. Don't change the subject when a mental illness diagnosis comes up—ask questions, listen to ideas, and be responsive. Ask what you can do to help. If other people make insensitive remarks, don't ignore them—educate people so that they understand the facts about mental illness. If someone you work with or go to school with has a mental illness, don't discriminate. Treat people with mental illness just as you would those with any other serious but treatable condition: with respect, compassion, and empathy.

HELP A FRIEND

If your friend tells you he or she has a mental illness, read the tips below for what you might say or how you might want to respond:

- Express your concern and sympathy.
- Ask for more details about how he or she is managing. Really listen to the answers and continue the conversation. Make sure your friend understands that you honestly care.
- Ask what you can do to help. You can leave this open-ended, or you can suggest specific tasks that might help your friend in his or her specific situation. Rides to medical appointments (or keeping the person company in the waiting room) can ease some of the anxiety and reluctance that people feel when faced with a life-changing diagnosis.
- You might also offer to help your friend with errands, but be careful not to patronize or make the person feel disempowered.
- Reassure your friend that you still care about him or her, and be sure to include him or her in your everyday plans—going out to lunch, catching a movie, taking a jog. If your friend resists these overtures, reassure and re-invite without being overbearing.
- Remind your friend that mental illness is treatable. Find out if the friend is getting the care the friend needs and wants. If not, offer your help in identifying and getting the right kind of care.

- If a friend needs immediate help for mental illness, ask them what kind of help they need and respond immediately. It is important to give them hope and encourage them to seek support, including calling a crisis line, or the National Suicide Prevention Line at 1.800.273.TALK.

- Encourage your friend to seek immediate medical attention if your friend tells you your friend is weak or ill from an eating disorder.

MYTHS AND FACTS

Myth: There's no hope for people with mental illness.

Fact: There are more treatments, strategies, and community support systems than ever before, and more are in the works. People with mental illnesses lead active, productive lives.

Myth: I can't do anything for a person with mental illness.

Fact: You can do a lot, starting with how you act and speak. You can create an environment that builds on people's strengths and promotes understanding.

For example:

- Don't label people with words like "crazy," "wacko," or "loony" or define them by their diagnosis. Instead of saying someone is "a schizophrenic," say he or she "has schizophrenia." Don't say "a schizophrenic person," say "a person with schizophrenia." This is called "people-first" language, and it helps reduce the stigma associated with these labels.
- Learn the facts about mental health and share them with others, especially if you hear something that isn't true.
- Treat people with mental illnesses with respect and dignity, just as you would anybody else.
- Respect the rights of people with mental illnesses and don't discriminate against them when it comes to working with them. Like other people with disabilities, people with mental health problems are protected under federal and state laws.

Myth: People with mental illnesses are violent and unpredictable.

Fact: Actually, the vast majority of people with mental health conditions are no more violent than anyone else. You probably know someone with a mental illness and don't even realize it.

Myth: Mental illnesses don't affect me.

Fact: Mental illnesses are surprisingly common; they affect almost every family in America. Mental illnesses do not discriminate—they can affect anyone.

Myth: Mental illness is the same as mental retardation.

Fact: These are different disorders. Mental retardation is characterized by limitations in intellectual functioning and difficulties with certain daily living skills. In contrast, people with mental illnesses—health conditions that cause changes in a person's thinking, mood, and behavior—have varied intellectual functioning, just like the general population.

Myth: People with mental illnesses cannot tolerate the stress of holding down a job.

Fact: All jobs are stressful to some extent. Anybody is more productive when there's a good match between the employee's needs and the working conditions, whether or not the worker has a mental health disorder.

Myth: People with mental health needs, even those who have recovered, tend to be second-rate workers.

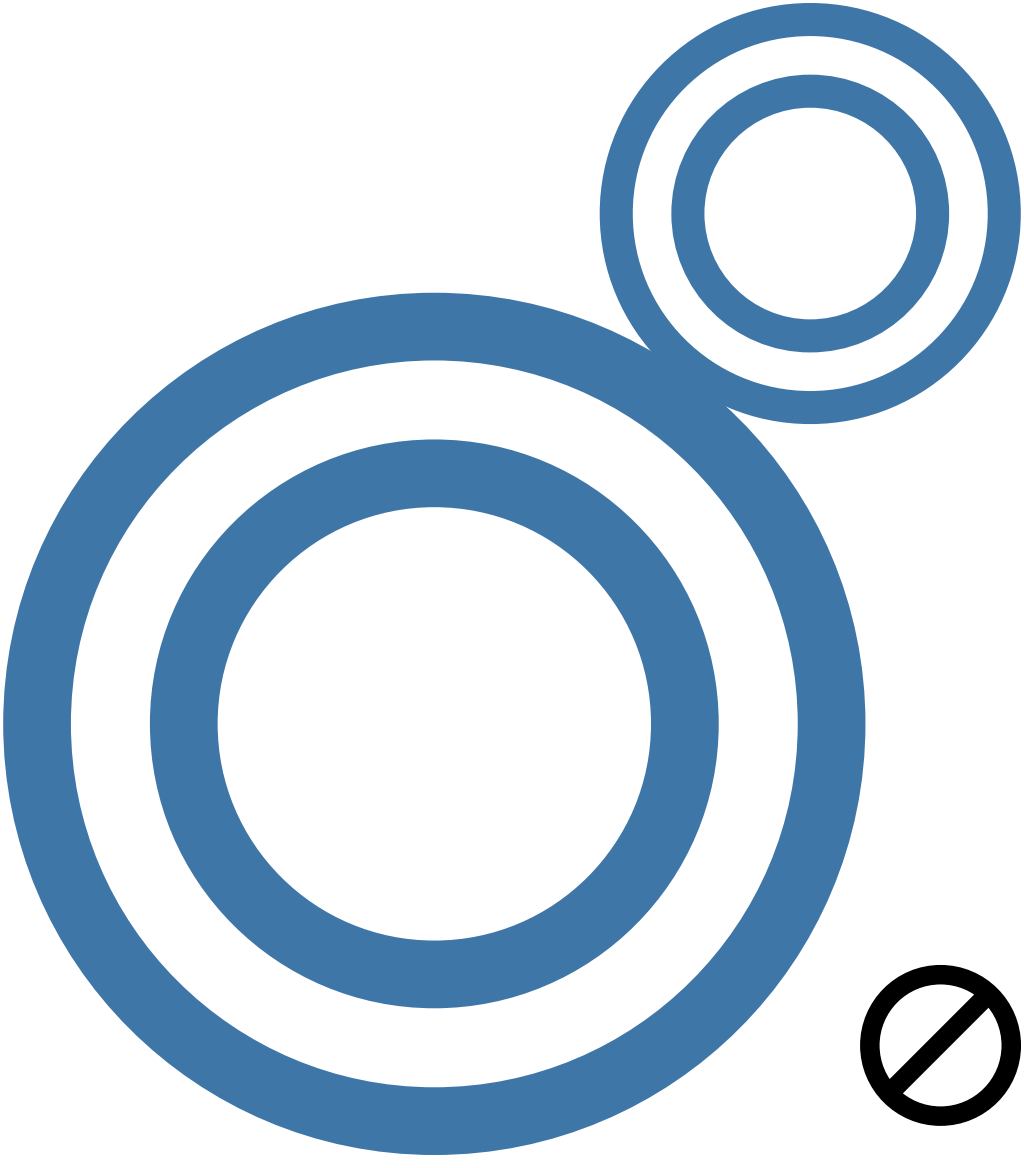
Fact: Employers who have hired people with mental illnesses report good attendance and punctuality as well as motivation, good work, and job tenure on par with or greater than other employees. Studies by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) and the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) show that there are no differences in productivity when people with mental illnesses are compared to other employees.

Myth: Once people develop mental illnesses, they will never recover.

Fact: Studies show that most people with mental illnesses get better, and many recover completely. Recovery refers to the process in which people are able to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities. For some individuals, recovery is the ability to live a fulfilling and productive life. For others, recovery implies the reduction or complete remission of symptoms. Science has shown that hope plays an integral role in an individual's recovery.

Myth: Therapy and self-help are a waste of time. Why bother when you can just take a pill?

Fact: Treatment varies depending on the individual. A lot of people work with therapists, counselors, friends, psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses, and social workers during the recovery process. They also use self-help strategies and community supports. Often they combine these with some of the most advanced medications available.



WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Q1. If a friend with a mental illness starts sleeping much of the day...

Q2. If a friend with a mental illness repeatedly does not want to go out...

Q3. If a friend with a mental illness is not attending class or work regularly...

Q4. If a friend with a mental illness is very anxious...

Q5. If a friend with a mental illness cuts off communication with you...

Q6. If a friend confides in you about his mental illness...

Q7. If you hear others talking about people with mental illnesses in negative terms...

Q8. If a friend confides in you about her mental illness...

Q9. If you notice a friend with a mental illness having significant changes in how he is acting (e.g., appetite, sleep)...

Q10. If you notice a friend with a mental illness is not performing as she usually does at work or in school...

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

A1. You can encourage him to get out of the house–take him to a movie or out for coffee.

A2. You can go to her home and be supportive by hanging out with her, talking, and by just being a friend.

A3. You can call or visit him and be understanding, empathetic, and encouraging.

A4. You can be reassuring and avoid belittling or patronizing these concerns.

A5. You can be persistent by continuing to call and visit her–to let her knows that you are there for her.

A6. You can be non-judgmental, treat him as you always have and continue to be a support for him.

A7. You can educate them that people with mental illnesses deserve respect and dignity.

A8. You can find out information about mental health problems by going to www.whatadifference.org.

A9. You can encourage him to talk with you about what's going on.

A10. You can check in with her to see how she is doing and how you can help. It can be as simple as helping her with studying.

RESOURCES

What do you know about mental illness? If you're like most people, the answer is probably, "Not a lot!" But that's OK—we've pulled together some of the best resources for you so that you can learn about mental illness and how people can recover from it.

- SAMHSA's National Mental Health Anti-Stigma Campaign
  http://www.whatadifference.org

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
  http://www.samhsa.gov

- National Mental Health Information Center (NMHIC)
  http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov

- Resource Center to Address Discrimination and Stigma (ADS Center)
  http://www.stopstigma.samhsa.gov

- National Institutes of Mental Health
  http://www.nimh.nih.gov/HealthInformation/index.cfm

- What To Do When a Friend is Depressed
  http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/friend.cfm

To find treatment and support programs, look in your phone book for mental health services. Your health care provider, clergy or friends may know of resources in your community. Or visit the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration's National Mental Health Information Center at **www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov** (click on Service Locator) or call the Center at 800.789.2647 (English/Spanish).

www.whatadifference.org

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration

Ad Council