

## Breaking the stigma of Mental Health and Illness

### What is the stigma of mental illness?

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

“The impact of stigma is twofold, as outlined in [Table 1.1](#). Public stigma is the reaction that the general population has to people with mental illness. Self-stigma is the prejudice which people with mental illness turn against themselves. Both public and self-stigma may be understood in terms of three components: stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination” (*World Psychiatry Journal*).

Many people who live with poor mental health and diagnosable mental illness such as depression, anxiety and bi polar disorder say they have experienced discrimination and social stigma at some level and this can make their difficulties worse and make it harder to recover.

Mental health problems are both common and costly and affect thousands of people in the UK, and their friends, families, work colleagues and society in general.

10% of children and young people (aged 5-16 years) have a clinically diagnosable mental health condition.

Many people who experience mental health problems can recover fully, or are able to live with and manage, especially if they are able to access help early on.

Society in general has stereotyped views about mental illness and how it affects people. Often there is a belief that people with mental ill health are violent and dangerous, when in fact they are more at risk of being attacked or harming themselves than harming other people.

There are many factors that affect our mental health and wellbeing and some of these are linked to:

- Social isolation
- Poor housing
- Unemployment
- Poverty

There is also the “nature (our genes) vs nurture (our upbringing and environment)” debate which looks at the how they impact our mental health and wellbeing.

From poor mental health, mental illness can develop and professional help is needed, not just to help, but to diagnose where appropriate

Everyone's experience of their "situation or illness" is unique to them...one size does not fit all in this case! Therefore, it is important to treat each person as an individual in their own unique situation as we may not know what "risk factors" have contributed to their current "state". We all see the same world, but we all see that world through different eyes.

The World Health Organisations Diagnostic and Management Guidelines stresses that the approach to mental health should be same as to physical health and states that "All people with mental disorders have the right to receive high-quality treatment and care delivered through responsive health care services. They should be protected against any form of inhuman treatment and discrimination" (WHO).

The Six Equality Strands are protected characteristics from the *Equalities Act 2020* they cover the following:

- Mental health and age
- Mental Health and gender
- Mental health and disability
- Mental health, race and ethnicity
- Mental health and religion or belief
- Mental Health and sexuality

We can help to put right the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health and illness by being open to and accepting of the 6 points above. It is about suspending our own beliefs, values and attitudes and seeing the person as a person first and foremost, their illness should not be the thing that defines them.

We should listen to what is being said. This approach goes a long way to allowing the individual to "tell their story" without interruption or judgement.

It is important to remember that mental illness is common and that 1 in 4 of us are likely to experience some form of mental illness.

It is okay to feel sad, down, low or miserable - these are all normal emotions with which we can all identify with. Remember it is "okay not to be okay" and be able to talk about that openly.

If you feel you may need some support, you can contact Care first. Care first is a leading provider of confidential, professional counselling, information and advice services. All employees are eligible to use Care first, our services include; telephone counselling, information services and online support. Call Care first on the Freephone number provided by your organisation and you can speak to a professional in confidence.

If you would like to view the Webinar on '**Breaking the stigma of Mental Health**' this is being delivered live on **Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> January at 12pm**, please use the below link to register for this session:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/5651122941279953933>

If you are unable to join the webinar live, a recording of the session can be accessed using the same link above after the webinar has taken place.