

Responding to Stigma

What is stigma?

Some people with illness have experienced negative judgements and discrimination. This is called **stigma**. Stigma can be public, coming from society, or internal (self-stigma).

What is public stigma?

Public stigma often takes the form of stereotypes, prejudice, labeling, and discrimination. There are many ways to respond to stigma. It may be helpful for you to develop your own personal response. Different strategies have benefits and risks, and using these strategies is a personal decision.

Strategies for coping with public stigma:	How to use this strategy:
Educate yourself about your illness and symptoms.	
Correct inaccurate statements and misunderstandings about the illness without bringing up your own experiences.	
Disclose (share) your personal experience with your illness only with people you trust.	

Educate yourself about your legal rights and seek assistance if your rights are violated.	
Other strategies:	

What is self-stigma?

You may believe that you are responsible for your symptoms, that you cannot take care of yourself, or that you do not deserve to be part of the community.

These inaccurate and unhelpful beliefs are called self-stigma. Self-stigma can lead to feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness. It is important to learn how to deal with self-stigma because it can affect your recovery process.

Self-stigma
Occurs when a person with a health issue is aware of the stereotypes, agrees with them, and then applies them to themselves.

Strategies for coping with self-stigma:	How to use this strategy:
Practicing mindfulness: being aware of your thoughts & feelings and how they affect you	
Challenging negative self-talk	

Connecting with a support system	
Reading about others who have struggled with similar health issues	
Other strategies:	

What is disclosure?

Selectively disclosing your experience with illness is one way to combat stigma. By carefully disclosing your illness, you can educate the public and reduce misunderstandings that cause stigma in society. This can help you feel a sense of control and well-being over your experience.

Disclosure
Telling someone personal information about yourself

Disclosure could involve talking to friends or family members, discussing your illness with an employer to request accommodations, or speaking publicly about your illness. Deciding what to disclose is a very personal decision that involves weighing risks and benefits.

What laws protect against discrimination of people with physical or psychiatric disabilities?

- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):
It is illegal to discriminate against people with physical or psychiatric disabilities in employment, recreation, transportation, communication, and public places. An individual with a disability is defined as a person with a

physical or mental impairment limiting at least one major life activity, who has a history of such an impairment, or is perceived by others as having such an impairment. For more information: <http://www.ada.gov>

- Fair Housing Act (FHA)

It is illegal to discriminate in housing based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, family status, or disability (physical or psychiatric). For more information: <http://www.hud.gov>

Where can I find more information about employment and housing discrimination?

- U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC): <http://www.eeoc.gov>
- Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO): <http://www.hud.gov>

Where can I find more information on support and advocacy?

- Bring Change to Mind: <http://bringchange2mind.org/>
- Michigan Medicine Depression Center Depression Toolkit: <http://depressiontoolkit.org/rise-above-it-all/learn-from-others/overcoming-the-stigma-barrier.asp>
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): <http://www.nami.org>
- National Empowerment Center (NEC): <http://www.power2u.org>
- Self-Compassion. Dr. Kristen Neff. <http://self-compassion.org/>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Mental Health Resources <https://www.mentalhealth.gov/index.html>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Programs for People with Disabilities <https://www.hhs.gov/programs/social-services/programs-for-people-with-disabilities/index.html>

References:

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2. Michigan Medicine Depression Center Depression Toolkit <http://www.depressioncenter.org/health-information/depression-toolkit/>
3. National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). www.nami.org
4. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2010). *Illness Management and Recovery Evidence-Based Practices (EBP) Kit*. Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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