



Canadian Mental
Health Association
Champlain East
Mental health for all

Association canadienne
pour la santé mentale
Champlain Est
La santé mentale pour tous

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Submitted by: Canadian Mental Health Association Champlain East

How to fight mental health stigma

Unfortunately, we are still confronted with the stigma associated with mental illness in our surroundings. Stigmatization occurs when we perceive a person negatively because of a particular characteristic or attribute. One type of stigmatization occurs when a person is defined by their mental illness rather than by who they are as an individual. When people are treated negatively because of their mental illness, this is discrimination. Stigma and discrimination are often the result of a lack of understanding or fear. Social stigma and discrimination can exacerbate problems and make recovery more difficult for people living with a mental illness.

There are many ways to combat stigma. **If you are a person living with a mental illness,**

- **Educate others:** If you feel ready, you can share your personal story and struggles with mental illness around you. This can be done on social media or in person with people in your surrounding. If you over-hear a conversation about mental illness, you can use this as an opportunity to share your knowledge and experience. If someone is making disrespectful comments, you can gently express how it makes you feel and how it is important to stop this behaviour as it adds to the stigma.
- **Encourage equality between physical and mental illness:** When people realize that a mental illness is also a disease, just like cancer and diabetes, they are less inclined to make fun of someone living with a mental health condition.
- **Be honest about your treatment:** Don't be afraid to say that you are seeing a therapist or a psychiatrist. People don't fear being judged by saying they have an appointment with their family doctor. We can encourage the same openness with mental health support.
- **Let the media know when they are being stigmatizing:** If you watch a TV show that portrays a negative picture of people who have a mental illness, you can write a message to the broadcasting company or the show itself. The same strategy can be applied when you read stories on social media in which negative or ignorant comments about mental health are made.

If you are not living with mental health issues and want to fight stigma, here are a few suggestions for you to try:

- **Educate yourself and others:** learn about mental illness including substance use disorders and share your knowledge with people around you. You can pass on facts and challenge myths and stereotypes.
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- **Be aware of your attitudes, behaviour and the words you use** when talking about mental illnesses. Examine judgemental thinking you may have coming from society or you upbringing.
- **Support people:** Offer support and encouragement to individuals struggling with mental health issues. Make it a point to treat everyone with dignity and respect.



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- **Focus on the positive:** Pass on positive attitudes and focus on people's strengths. Mental illness, including addictions, are only one part of someone's life story or larger picture.

Sources:

<https://ontario.cmha.ca/documents/stigma-and-discrimination/>

<https://www.camh.ca/en/driving-change/addressing-stigma>

<https://www.nami.org/education/9-ways-to-fight-mental-health-stigma/>

DO YOU NEED HELP?

Dial or text 2-1-1 for free and confidential service that easily connects people to the critical social and community supports they need.

If you are thinking of suicide, please call 9-8-8 which is a mental health crisis and suicide prevention line.

The information provided is not a substitute for professional advice. If you need advice, please consult a qualified health care professional. For further information or if you want to access our services at CMHA, please call 1-800-493-8271 or visit our web site at www.cmha-east.on.ca