

# MYTHS & FACTS: The Stigma of Mental Illness and Resulting Discrimination

MYTHS	FACTS
<p><b>Mental illness is something that only happens to “other people.”</b></p>	<p>One in four American adults suffers from a diagnosable mental disorder in any given year.<sup>i</sup></p> <p>Approximately 9 million children in the U.S. have serious emotional problems, but only 1 in 5 of these children is receiving appropriate treatment.<sup>ii</sup></p> <p>Children and adults alike experience a variety of mental health issues, from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder to post-partum depression to bipolar disorder.</p>
<p><b>Mental illness can’t be treated, you’re ill for life.</b></p>	<p>Not only is treatment available, but full recovery is possible. Today we are learning how to prevent mental illness and promote mental wellness.</p> <p>With support and treatment, between 70 and 90 percent of individuals have a significant reduction in symptoms and improved quality of life.<sup>iii</sup></p>
<p><b>My son/daughter is acting out, but that’s just part of being a kid.</b></p>	<p>Research shows that half of all mental disorders start by age 14 and three-quarters start by age 24.<sup>iv</sup></p> <p>But, an average of 6 to 8 years pass after the onset of mood disorder symptoms – 9 to 23 years for anxiety disorder symptoms – before young people get help.<sup>v</sup></p>
<p><b>People who have been diagnosed with mental illnesses are dangerous and should be avoided.</b></p>	<p>Mental illness accounts for, at most, 3 percent of all violence committed in the U.S.<sup>vi</sup></p> <p>People with serious mental health challenges are more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators. More than 25 percent of people with severe mental illness report being victims of a violent crime within a given year, a rate nearly 12 times higher than that of the general population.<sup>vii</sup></p>
<p><b>I don’t discriminate against people who are diagnosed with a mental illness, but I don’t want to work or live near them.</b></p>	<p>In addition to being unfair and ethically unacceptable, it is also illegal to deny someone any rights due to their real or perceived mental illness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 made it illegal for employers or public services to discriminate against someone living with a mental illness.</li> <li>• The Fair Housing Act (Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968) made it illegal for landlords or other real-estate entities to discriminate against someone living with a mental illness.</li> </ul>
<p><b>I’m not a psychiatrist, I can’t make a difference for a person living with a mental health challenge.</b></p>	<p>Many people say that stigma and discrimination can be a bigger challenge to their quality of life than their mental health challenges are.</p> <p>You can help to end stigma by openly accepting people who are diagnosed with a mental illness in your work and in your community.</p> <p>You are in a unique position to give people who are living with mental health challenges what they, just like anyone else, truly deserve – a job, a lease, a public service or simply a respectful conversation – that helps them live a full and productive life.</p>

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- <sup>i</sup> Kessler RC, Chiu WT, Demler O, Walters EE. Prevalence, severity, and comorbidity of twelve-month DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R). *Archives of General Psychiatry*, June 2005.
- <sup>ii</sup> SAMHSA, Developing a Stigma Reduction Initiative resource kit, 2006.
- <sup>iii</sup> National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).
- <sup>iv</sup> Kessler, Berglund, Demler, Jin, Walters, Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication, *General Psychiatry*, July 2005.
- <sup>v</sup> Wang, P., Berglund, P., et al. Failure and delay in initial treatment contact after first onset of mental disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R), *General Psychiatry*, June 2005.
- <sup>vi</sup> H. Harwood, A. Ameen, G. Denmead et al., *The Economic Costs of Mental Illness*, 1992, Rockville, Md.: NIMH, 2000.
- <sup>vii</sup> Linda Teplin et al., *Crime Victimization in Adults with Severe Mental Illness: Comparison with the National Crime Victimization Survey*, *General Psychiatry*, August 2005.