

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Mental health myths and facts

Mental illness is a common concern for many people, affecting one out of five Americans during their lifetime. And while awareness of these disorders—and their successful treatment—has come a long way over the past thirty years, many of those grappling with mental illness still face discrimination and isolation because "mental health myths" are still very much in circulation. The information that follows helps to demystify mental illnesses and can help you get the straight facts on mental health.

Myths dispelled

Myth: People suffering from mental illness are responsible for it. Many people still believe that those with a mental illness choose to act that way, and can control their behavior if they really wanted to. In fact, research shows that mental illnesses are the result of chemical reactions that change the way the brain functions. People suffering from these illnesses are no more responsible for their condition than those with diabetes or cancer.

Myth: Mental illness doesn't affect children. Among the most common disorders found in children are Attention and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as well as anxiety and eating disorders. Researchers have also found that many serious mental illnesses, such as depression and schizophrenia, often begin to emerge in the late teens and early 20s.

Myth: People with a mental illness are dangerous. This idea is partly the result of over-dramatic films and sensationalized news reports about a tiny minority of the population. The reality? There is no proven link between mental illness and violent crime. In fact, those with a mental illness are more likely than the general population to be victims of violent crime. While there is a very small minority of people grappling with a mental disorder who may act violently at times, the vast majority of this behavior is verbal and does not involve physical aggression.

Facts Explored

Fact: Mental illnesses are often genetically linked. Countless studies reveal a connection between mental illness and genetics. While the source of a mental illnesses is rarely clear-cut—and may involve both environmental and hereditary factors—people who have a family history of mental illness are far more likely to face mental health issues than the general population.

Fact: There are many treatments available for mental illness. For most people with a mental illness there are a range of treatment options available. These include:

- **Psychotherapy.** Working with a psychological professional is usually an important part of the recovery process. This specialist can help a sufferer uncover the source of the problem, develop strategies to tackle the issue effectively and transition back to a mentally healthier way of life.

- **Rehabilitation.** These are programs that provide physical and social supports to survivors of mental illness who are trying to rebuild their lives. Rehabilitation can include job training, independent living programs and self-help programs where those recovering from a psychological disorder share experiences and provide mutual support to one another.

- **Pharmaceuticals.** Scientists have made great progress in understanding the chemical causes of mental illnesses and as a result, there are numerous drugs available which can be prescribed by a

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licensed psychiatrist or doctor. This option is usually most effective when provided together with other forms of treatment such as psychotherapy.

- **Family Awareness.** Research suggests a supportive network of family and friends can encourage successful recovery from a mental illness and prevent a relapse. That's why a large number of mental health care providers have begun to develop resources and programs aimed at showing family and friends how to better support and respond to a loved one living with a mental illness.

People affected by a mental illness often need to fight two battles: one against the illness and the other against the stigma that comes from having a psychological disorder. Only by understanding the facts can we help eliminate that stigma and allow those with a mental illness to reclaim their lives and successfully navigate a path to recovery.