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

Mental illness in the workplace: removing stigma



Mental illness in the workplace is a reality for most organizations. Though mental illness is widespread, its stigma often prevents people from seeking help or even talking about it with a coworker, family member, or friend.

What is stigma?

Stigma can be associated with any number of health conditions, especially with mental illness. It is the result of negative perceptions and stereotypes, and reflects a lack of understanding. External stigma often involves negative judgements, opinions, comments and assumptions made by others; internal stigma can occur when the person affected with mental illness internalizes these negative messages.

Steps to remove stigma in the workplace

Educate yourself and your team – The more you know the less powerful stigma becomes. By educating yourself and your team about what mental illness is (and isn't), you can reduce stigma, discrimination, negative stereotypes, and fear in the workplace. Awareness can help to create a culture of empathy and understanding.

Speak up – When you hear someone saying hurtful and/or stigmatizing comments about mental illness or a person with a mental health condition, share some of the information you've learned that may counter those negative perceptions. Remember it is important to use respectful language.

Raise awareness – If your organization does not have a comprehensive health and wellness program, you can help raise awareness by starting one. Create workplace policies and programs that promote physical and mental health, and share helpful resources – articles, blogs, local events, support groups – with your coworkers via email, bulletin boards or a company-wide initiative.

Be a leader – Start with a commitment to removing stigma. Through open and honest communication with your co-workers about the importance of your commitment, you'll play an important role in the battle to end stigma.

Leading the way – How will your organization chip in? You don't need a large budget to make a difference. Start by educating yourself, speaking up when appropriate, raising awareness, and encouraging others to do the same.

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it's possible – and imperative – to counter negative stereotypes with the truth about mental illness.