



## OVERVIEW

### BIG IDEA

Stigma against mental illness delays treatment and creates barriers to recovery.

### OBJECTIVE

1.6 Describe stigma and its relationship to mental illness.

### AGENDA

1. True or false?
2. Defining stigma & mental illness
3. Readings
4. Contributing factors to mental illness
5. Stigma skits

### HOMEWORK

Find representations of stigma in the media OR create an anti-stigma PSA.

# LESSON 1.6

## Stigma

### SUMMARY:


This lesson will prepare students to learn about specific mental illnesses with a healthy and respectful attitude and an understanding of the pervasiveness of stigma in mental illness. Students will begin by guessing whether statements about mental illness are true or false. They will then define and make connections to the terms “mental illness” and “stigma.” Next they will complete short readings about stigma and mental illness. After that, students will determine what contributing factors lead to a person developing a mental illness. Finally, they will create brief skits depicting stigma and choose between two homework options: finding representations of stigma OR creating an anti-stigma PSA.




UNIT 1: MENTAL HEALTH LESSON 1.6


## Stigma

**PH1.6:** Describe stigma and its relationship to mental illness

 Mark the following statements as true (T) or false (F).

- All people with mental illness are crazy.
- All people with mental illness are dangerous.
- If someone has a mental illness, they have that illness for their entire lives.
- Teens *never* have mental illnesses.
- No one who has mental illness can function normally.
- All people with mental illness suffer from a break from reality.
- All people with mental illness think about hurting themselves.
- No one recovers from mental illness.
- If a parent has a mental illness, the child will automatically be mentally ill.
- All mental illnesses are triggered by a nervous breakdown.

 With a partner re-read the statements above, sharing your answers. Did you disagree on any of the answers? Choose one statement that you disagreed on OR one that you found more difficult to answer than the others and defend your answer.

 Read the definitions for mental illness and stigma below. Then make one connection to each word and write it down. A connection can be any association (something the word makes you think of), experience, memory, or idea. (Hint: there are no wrong answers!)

Term	Definition	Your Connection
<b>MENTAL ILLNESS</b>	medical conditions that disrupt a person's thinking, feeling, mood, ability to relate to others and daily functioning	
<b>STIGMA</b>	disapproval, prejudice, or unfair judgement on a person/group based on characteristics that distinguish them from others in society	

**(OPTIONAL)** Prior to the Do Now, show clips from any of the following films, posing the question: Are these people normal? Why/why not? (Answer: YES they are all normal. But they all have mental illness)

- Shutter Island: Delusional Disorder/Schizophrenia
- Virgin Suicides: Depression
- Donnie Darko: Schizophrenia
- Fight Club: Dual Identity Disorder
- Sylvia: Bipolar Disorder (true)
- As Good as it Gets: OCD
- A Beautiful Mind: Paranoid schizophrenia

**DO NOW Answer Key:** All are false. It is not necessary to review answers or say that they are all false because later in the lesson it will be revealed. If students seem to find these questions easy, ask them to think about where they see these false beliefs being reinforced. For example, news headlines reinforcing the connection between mental illness and shootings seems to reinforce the idea that “all people with mental illness are dangerous.”

**DISCUSS:** Students should defend their statements with specific evidence, examples, or logical explanation. This is also a great time to set norms: we do not use the words crazy, psycho, lunatic, etc.

**NEW INFO:** Students can share connections with a partner if time permits. Students should be told that they do not need to share anything personal that they are not comfortable sharing.



### Stigma: Building Awareness and Understanding

Mental illness can strike anyone. It knows no age limits, economic status, race, religion, or color. During the course of a year, more than 54 million Americans are affected by one or more mental disorders.

Medical science has made incredible progress over the last century in helping us understand, curing and eliminating the causes of many diseases including mental illnesses. However, while doctors continue to solve some of the mysteries of the brain, many of its functions remain a puzzle. Even at the leading research centers, no one fully understands how the brain works or why it malfunctions. However, researchers have determined that many mental illnesses are probably the result of chemical imbalances in the brain. These imbalances may be inherited, or may develop because of excessive stress or substance abuse.

It is sometimes easy to forget that our brain, like all of our other organs, can be diseased. People with mental illnesses often exhibit many types of behaviors such as extreme sadness and irritability, and in more severe cases, they may also suffer from hallucinations and total withdrawal. Instead of receiving compassion and acceptance, people with mental illnesses may experience hostility, discrimination, and stigma.

#### Why does stigma still exist?

Unfortunately, the media is responsible for many of the misconceptions that persist about people with mental illnesses. Newspapers, in particular, often stress a history of mental illness in the backgrounds of people who commit crimes of violence. Television news programs frequently sensationalize crimes where persons with mental illnesses are involved.

#### How You Can Fight Stigma.

- Share your experience with mental illness. Your story can convey to others that having a mental illness is nothing to be embarrassed about.
- Help people with mental illness reenter society. Support their efforts to obtain housing and jobs.
- Respond to false statements about mental illness or people with mental illnesses. Many people have wrong and damaging ideas on the subject. Accurate facts and information may help change both their ideas and actions.

Source: <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/action/stigma-watch>



#### Post-Reading Extension:

1. What are some other ways you can fight stigma of mental illness?
2. What other populations or groups of people face stigma? Why? How can you decrease that stigma?



Perhaps the True or False statements at the beginning of this lesson were easy for you. Did you answer **FALSE** for all of them?

Now let's take a look at some **TRUE** facts about mental illness:

- Mental illnesses can affect persons of any age, race, religion, or income.
- Mental illnesses are serious medical illnesses. They cannot be overcome through "will power" and are not related to a person's "character" or intelligence. Mental illnesses are not the result of personal weakness, lack of character or poor upbringing.
- Mental illnesses are treatable. Most people diagnosed with a serious mental illness can experience relief from their symptoms by actively participating in an individual treatment plan.
- The National Institute of Health reports that One in four adults—approximately 57.7 million Americans—experience a mental health disorder in a given year.
- The U.S. Surgeon General reports that 10 percent of children and adolescents in the United States suffer from serious emotional and mental disorders that cause significant functional impairment in their day-to-day lives at home, in school and with peers.
- Stigma erodes confidence that mental disorders are real, treatable health conditions. We have allowed stigma and a now unwarranted sense of hopelessness to erect attitudinal, structural and financial barriers to effective treatment and recovery. It is time to take these barriers down.

Source: [http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=about\\_mental\\_illness](http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=about_mental_illness)



How does someone get mentally sick? Most of the time, mental illness develops due to a combination of contributing factors, some of which are listed in the table below. Use the space in each row to describe the relationship of each factor to mental illness.

Contributing Factor	Relationship to Mental Illness
Physical factors	
Heredity	
Early experiences	
Recent experiences	

**READ:** These bullet points summarize some of the big ideas in this section of the reading:

**Important points to remember:**

- Affects any age, race, religion, income
- Serious medical illnesses
- Treatable
- Affects 25% of adults (in a given year)
- Affects 10% of children
- Stigma creates barriers to treatment & recovery

**THINK:**

Possible answers:

**Physical factors:** injury, tumor, poison, drugs

**Heredity:** genes can increase the likelihood for mental illness

**Early experiences:** negative childhood experiences (Freud)

**Recent experiences:** major recent events, death of loved ones. Most mental illness onset at prime of life (18-25 years)



Based on what we have learned so far and the table we just filled in, discuss this question:  
**Do people have control over whether or not they suffer from mental illness?**



Create a short informal skit that depicts STIGMA relating to mental illness. You may use the space below to outline your skit.



Choose **one** of the following two options:

- 1) Find 3 (or more) representations of stigma in the media. These could be in movies/ television, magazines, the news, images, etc. Describe each in the space below.
- 2) Create a 15-second anti-stigma Public Service Announcement “ad spot” on the radio. Write the script in the space below

**DISCUSS:**

Guide students to look back at the causes table we just filled in. Can we control any of those?

**ASSESS:**

Determine whether to assign students to work in partners or small groups, or whether to give them the choice. Skits can focus on any aspect of stigma, but should depict some form of disapproval, unfair judgment, or prejudice.

**HOMEWORK:**

The goal of the homework is for students to have an opportunity to increase their awareness of stigma in society OR work to creatively address stigma through a solution. In either case, students will have a chance to internalize the definition of stigma and it’s impact on those affected by mental illness.