



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.

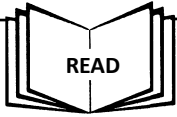
DISCUSS

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.

NEW INFO

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



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.

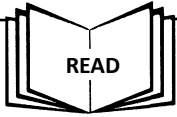
- Share your experience with mental illness. Your story can convey to others that having a mental illness is nothing to be embarrassed about.
- Help people with mental illness reenter society. Support their efforts to obtain housing and jobs.
- Respond to false statements about mental illness or people 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>

DISCUSS

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 Mental 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



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	

 DISCUSS

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