



To: Our colleagues throughout Quebec From: The Lester B. Pearson School Board, SSD



Stigma and Mental Health

What is stigma?

The human brain is designed to organize input from its environment. We often notice differences between us and other people based on various personal and physical characteristics. Stigma occurs when we view someone as different from us in a **negative way**. Stigma is a **risk factor** for individuals with mental health disorders that affects both their **personal self-concept** and puts them at risk for **discriminatory attitudes** from others in their personal and professional relationships.

What are the effects of stigma?

- 1) Stigma contributes directly to negative feelings, such as sadness and depression, low self-esteem and a lack of self-efficacy.
- 2) Individuals may fear disclosing their mental health disorder and/or difficulties to other people, which in turn could reduce their social support network and access to needed accommodations.
- 3) Discriminatory attitudes towards individuals with mental health disorders can impact both personal and professional opportunities.

*Not just an adult issue - Researchers have found stigmatizing views about mental health disorders develop in early childhood and adolescence. Further, children with mental health disorders perceive stigma towards their own difficulties.

Why does stigma exist?

Lack of awareness, misunderstandings and ill-conceptions about mental health disorders all contribute to stigmatizing views. For example, popular TV/movies and stories in the media often portray individuals with mental health disorders as violent, unpredictable and dangerous; other times individuals are portrayed as weak, making excuses or simply incapable of dealing with their difficulties. Jokes about mental health disorders and terms like "lunatic" and "crazy" are common. Negative representations, discriminatory language and a lack of awareness and understanding of mental health disorders reinforce stigmatizing views.

*Research has shown that despite our increased understanding of mental health disorders, negative stigmatizing views have not changed much in the past 20 years.

What can schools do to help?

- Educate others about the basic facts of mental health disorders (For example, help dispel the myths- <http://www.mendthemind.ca/stigma/top-11-myths-about-mental-illness>)
- Explore that mental health issues exist on a continuum and not as a strict grouping of "mentally well" and "mentally ill."
- Promote an atmosphere where it is safe and comfortable to disclose one's concerns or concerns about a friend so that needed help can be provided.
- Identify individuals in the building who can be approached to discuss mental health concerns.
- Be thoughtful about language and use sensitive and accurate terminology.
- Ask if individuals have experienced adversity/discrimination and help build an individual's network of support.
- Focus on the positive contributions and characteristics of individuals with mental health disorders.
- Partner with community organizations who can offer extra support including awareness workshops, advocacy and support groups.

Did you know?

- Up to 70% of adults with mental health disorders report symptoms began in childhood but were not disclosed due to fear (mentalhealthweek.cmha.ca)
- Once identified, 42% of individuals are afraid to discuss their mental health disorder due to stigma (msss.gouv.qc.ca)
- Negative stereotypes abound, up to 46% of individuals blame mental health problems as an "excuse for bad behaviour" (mentalhealthcommission.ca)

RESOURCES

- Bring Change 2 Mind Campaign <http://www.bringchange2mind.org/?gclid=CODf4q6qvLoCFFrIOgodTgIA3Q>
- Mental Health Commission of Canada: Stigma & Discrimination <http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/issues/stigma?routetoken=4941fb5ef9a3b61b08a203e62dccc447&terminal=31>
- Canadian Mental Health Commission of Ontario: Stigma & Discrimination <http://ontario.cmha.ca/mental-health/mental-health-conditions/stigma-and-discrimination/>
- Stigma of Mental Illness and Ways to Diminish it <http://apt.rcpsych.org/content/6/1/65.full>
- My Mental Health Anti-Stigma Campaign <http://www.mymentalhealth.ca/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=BBHLyV8Jvg0%3D>

If you have found this postcard to be helpful and informative, please share it with colleagues. Dissemination of information about mental health is the first step toward promoting better mental health!

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