



Reducing the Stigma: Mental Illness

The negative stigma surrounding mental illness originates from fear or lack of understanding. Inaccurate or misleading information contributes to both. Many people still have a negative view associated with mental illness. This can affect not only those with a mental health problem but also those who support and care for them.

The stigma surrounding mental illness can result in a worsening of symptoms, resulting in the following:

- Reluctance to seek treatment.
- Loss of hope.
- Lowered self-esteem.
- Worsened or increased psychiatric symptoms.
- Trouble with relationships.
- Non-compliance with treatment plans.
- Increased difficulty at school or work

Such effects can lead the patient to experience the following:

- Self-isolation.
- Lack of empathy or understanding from family or friends.
- Fewer opportunities for employment, school, or social activities.
- Increased difficulty obtaining housing.
- A belief that they cannot succeed or improve their current situation.

You can help reduce the stigma and discredit myths surrounding mental illness by creating an open dialogue with your patients. Consider implementing the following communication techniques:

- Practice active listening, focus on what the patient is saying, and maintain eye contact.
- Speak with them person-to-person to help encourage participation in their care.
- Avoid using highly technical medical jargon or language.
- Communicate at the patient's level of understanding.
- Continue to build a relationship of trust.
- Be nonjudgmental.
- Validate the patient's feelings.
- Ask about the patient's cultural and spiritual beliefs, as these can greatly impact perception of mental illness.
- Be sensitive to the way the patient presents themselves, which may be signs of undisclosed mental illness. These signs may indicate the presence of a mental illness that the patient may be reluctant to discuss:
 - Unexplained chronic pain or fatigue.
 - Recent changes in eating or sleeping patterns.
 - Difficulties at work or school.
 - Past or current use of drugs or alcohol.

The above communication techniques may help your patients start talking more openly about mental health and eliminate the misinformation and negative viewpoint they may have of mental illness.

Thank you for your continued partnership in helping Arkansas live better. If you have questions or concerns, please reach out to us at 1-877-617-0390 (TTY: 1-877-617-0392) or Providers@ARHealthWellness.com.