Unpacking Myths about Mental Health

Dispelling myths about mental health can help break the stigma and create a culture that encourages people of any age to seek support when they need it. Here are ten misconceptions about mental health:

Myth: Mental illness can only be treated with medication.

FACT: Medication is just one part of treating mental disorders. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can be as effective as medication for some conditions. Sometimes medication can enhance the effectiveness of other treatments. It is important to work with a qualified healthcare professional to determine if medication is appropriate, find the best option, and add it to a comprehensive treatment plan.

Myth: Mental health issues solely reside in the mind.

FACT: Mental health conditions have a complex interplay of biological, psychological, and environmental factors. They are not just a matter of mindset or willpower but genuine medical conditions affecting brain function and emotions. Genetic predispositions, chemical imbalances in the brain, physical injuries or illnesses, past trauma, stress, negative thinking patterns, childhood abuse, poverty, discrimination, and social isolation can all contribute to developing mental health conditions.

Myth: Mental health issues only affect adults.

FACT: Mental health challenges can begin at any age, including childhood and adolescence. According to UNICEF, 14% of the world's adolescents experience mental-health problems. Half of all mental health conditions start by the age of 14. It's essential to recognize the signs and symptoms of mental health issues in children and adolescents. These may include changes in mood, behavior, or sleep, a loss of interest in activities they previously enjoyed, or a decline in academic performance. By being vigilant and proactive, parents, caregivers, and educators can help identify mental health issues early on and connect children and adolescents with appropriate resources.

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Myth: Mental health struggles wear no disguise.

FACT: Many people may conceal their struggles and put on a brave front in society. This is often because of the stigma associated with mental illness and the fear of being judged or ostracized. Therefore, it is important to cultivate a compassionate and empathetic attitude towards everyone, as we never know what battles people might be fighting in their lives.

Myth: Taking your troubles to the altar solves all.

FACT: While seeking spiritual guidance can be comforting, it is not always enough to solve mental health challenges. . Seeking professional help from a mental health expert, in addition to seeking spiritual guidance, can be beneficial in addressing mental health challenges. Mental health experts are trained to provide support, guidance, and treatment for individuals experiencing a wide range of mental health challenges.

Myth: People with mental health issues are violent or dangerous.

FACT: Public fear around people with mental illness greatly exceeds the actual risk of violence they pose. According to CAMH, only about 4% of homicides are committed by people with serious mental illness. People with mental illness are actually more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators of violence. We all know people with serious mental illness do become entangled in the criminal justice system, often because care and supports are inadequate in the community.

Myth: "What happens at home stays home."

FACT: While privacy is important, mental health concerns deserve attention beyond the confines of the home. Opening up and seeking support can lead to healing and growth, fostering a more understanding and compassionate community. Whether through therapy, support groups, or talking to friends and family, seeking help is a brave decision.

Myth: Mental illness is impossible to recover from.

FACT: With the right treatment and support, many individuals are able to recover from their mental illness completely. For example, psychotherapy and mental health treatment have been extensively researched and have shown to be effective in treating mental illness. These treatments can help individuals develop coping mechanisms and learn new skills to manage their symptoms, allowing them to function and enjoy their lives.

Myth: People with mental health conditions can't lead fulfilling lives.

FACT: Mental health conditions can be challenging, but they do not have to define a person's life. With the right support and treatment, individuals with mental health conditions can thrive in various aspects of life, such as education, work, and personal relationships. Moreover, individuals with mental health conditions can contribute to society in meaningful ways. Many well-known artists, scientists, and leaders have had mental health conditions, and their experiences have influenced their work positively. By sharing their stories, they have helped reduce stigma and promote understanding of mental health.

Myth: There's nothing I can do to help someone with a mental illness.

FACT: Friends and loved ones can have a very positive effect on an individual's mental state and their ability to seek treatment. Here's a list of some of the things you can do to help:

- Listen if they want to talk
- Treat them with respect and dignity, the way we should treat everyone
- Ask how you can help them
- If they mentioned a specific condition or disorder, find out more about it
- Help them seek professional mental health services
- Reach out to let them know you are available
- Refuse to define them by their diagnosis(es) or using labels like "crazy"

Additional Resource: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH): www.camh.ca

Disclaimer: This factsheet is for informational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. Which mental health myths surprised you the most? Why is it important to debunk these misconceptions?
2. Have you ever encountered someone who believed in these myths? How did you respond or educate them?
3. How does the stigma surrounding mental health affect individuals who are struggling? What can be done to lessen this impact?
4. How can our words impact the stigma around mental health? Can you think of alternative ways to discuss mental health that promote understanding and empathy?
5. How can we create a more supportive environment for people to talk about their mental health challenges? Why is it essential for friends, family, and communities to be understanding?