

How To  
**Combat Stigma**

Within the Mental Health System

Human Resources

Psychiatrists

Administrators

Finance Directors

Quality Improvement

Customer Service

Program Supervisors

✓ Front Line Workers

Peer Support Specialists

Created by the  
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Steering Committee

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# Combating Stigma

IN THE MENTAL  
HEALTH SYSTEM

FRONT LINE  
WORKERS

**LOOK  
CLOSER**

...

See me for  
who I am

When we come into our workplace, we bring our diverse life experiences with us. These experiences affect our attitudes and behaviors, whether we are aware of it or not. If we're not careful we may find ourselves behaving in ways that could be considered stigmatizing by the people we serve. We all want to be the very best we can in our interactions with those who have come to us for help. The following are a few statements that can be used to identify stigmatizing attitudes and behaviors:



## You Know You're Stigmatizing If You...

- use words like crazy, psycho, loony, etc., to describe individuals.
- refer to individuals with mental illness as "difficult" or "non-compliant."
- treat individuals with mental illness differently than providers
- are not making information on whole health available to individuals with mental illness.
- do not promote prevention, early intervention and wellness programs at your agency.

## What Every Front Line Worker Should Know About Stigma

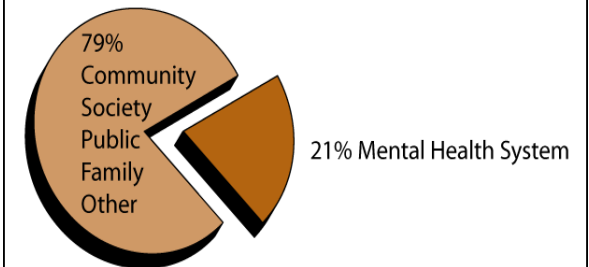
### Did you know?

- People who seek help for mental health problems feel disrespected and discriminated against by front line health care workers, either intentionally or unintentionally.
- The attitudes of mental health practitioners are important for good treatment outcomes and good quality of life.
- In their roles as educators and members of their communities, professionals' views shape the opinions of future practitioners and other influential community members.

## What You Can Do

- Examine your own attitudes and beliefs toward individuals with mental illness.
- Identify and support individuals with mental illness and family members who have a desire to participate in focus groups aimed at eliminating barriers and improving the quality of services your agency provides.
- Use person-first language: use terms such as a person with mental illness, not a mentally ill person. For example, a person with bi-polar disorder is not "a bipolar."
- Look for teachable moments with your co-workers when you hear stigmatizing comments.
- When confronted by a individuals with mental illness who is upset or agitated, ask yourself if it is a teachable moment for you; think about what your own behavior and attitudes might be contributing to the situation.

### Who discriminated against you?



SAMSHA's ADS Center (2007) Improving Provider Attitudes and Practices toward People with Mental Illness