

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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Combating Stigma

IN THE MENTAL
HEALTH SYSTEM

PEER SUPPORT
SPECIALISTS

**LOOK
CLOSER**

...

See me for
who I am

When we come into our workplace, we bring our diverse life experiences with us. These experiences can 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...

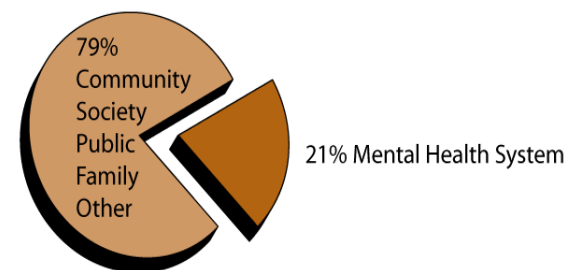
- use words like crazy, psycho, loony, etc., to describe yourself or others.
- deny individuals with mental illness of their "dignity of risk," or the ability to learn from their mistakes.
- refer to individuals with mental illness as "difficult."
- treat individuals with mental illness differently than providers.
- discourage individuals with mental illness from pursuing their goals until after their symptoms have subsided.

What Every Peer Support Specialist Should Know About Stigma

Did you know?

- Stigma deters people from seeking treatment.
- Stigma causes individuals with mental illness to feel isolated in a community. As a result, they often lack social support, positive social roles, coping and problem-solving skills.
- Peer Specialists and consumer leaders are particularly qualified to use their lived experience to educate others about stigma and the impact of stigma.
- Stigmatizing behavior can be unlawful discrimination or abuse.
- Peer Support Specialists are needed to help expand the range and availability of services and supports that other providers offer.

Who discriminated against you?



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

What You Can Do

- Partner with consumers to realize goals around self-determination and self-advocacy.
- Work to expand and support the roles of peers and consumer-run services at your agency and in the community.
- 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.
- Participate in committees charged with improving quality and guiding the implementation of evidence-based practices.
- Use your own experience to increase your co-workers' understanding of mental illness.
- Participate in advisory boards, work groups, and CMH boards of directors.
- Look for teachable moments with your co-workers when you hear stigmatizing comments. They should be reassured about confidentiality.
- Support individuals with mental illness in challenging stigma and the discrimination and abuse that arises from it.