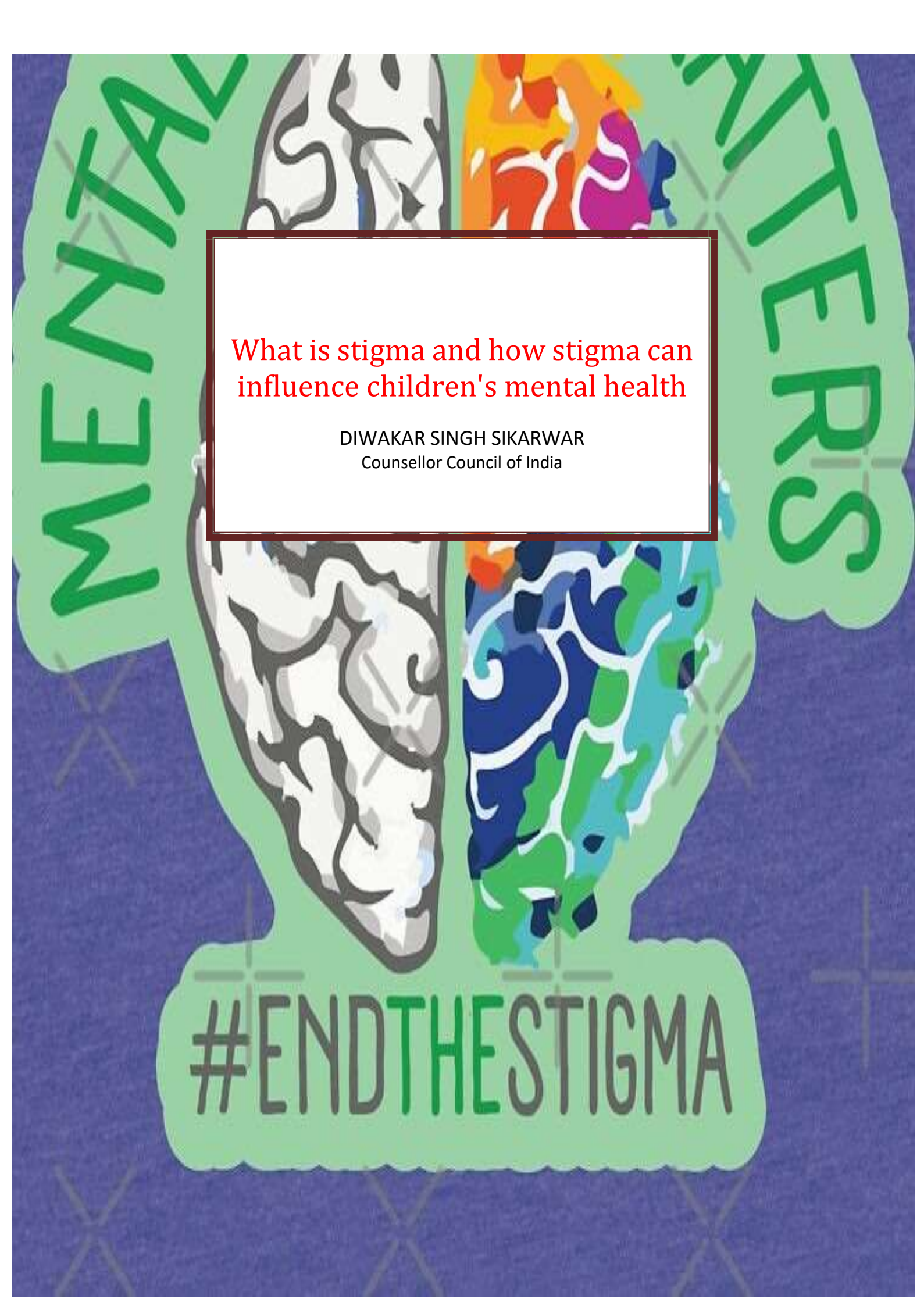




What is stigma and how stigma can influence children's mental health

DIWAKAR SINGH SIKARWAR
Counsellor Council of India

#ENDTHESTIGMA

Overview

Fear of stigma is present worldwide. Research in the United Arab Emirates, on a sample of 325 parents, in which they studied the factors that influenced the parents to seek help for mental health problems of children; showed that only 38% of respondents said they would ask for help from a mental health professional if their child has a mental health problem. The stigma of the use of health services and scepticism about the usefulness of mental health services have been identified as key factors that prevent them from seeking help for their children (Eapen & Ghubash 2004). Studies on the stigma experienced by parents of children with developmental disabilities in poorly developed countries show that most caregivers reported experience of stigma: 43.1% worried about being treated differently, 45.1% felt ashamed about their child's condition and 26.7% made an effort to keep their child's condition secret. Stigma did not depend on the type of developmental disorder, the child's age or gender, or on the age or level of education of the caregiver (Tilahun et al. 2016). Most children and adolescents with mental problems (between 60 and 90 percent) do not seek or do not receive the services they need (Knopf et al. 2008). The reason for this is the social stigma associated with mental disorders which is why many adolescents do not seek professional help and treatment. Also, parents, school staff and providers of medical services often miss an opportunity for prevention and early recognition of mental disorders in this population. Additional barriers include services that are poorly coordinated (for example, between schools, providers of primary health care and social services); lack of health insurance (although most adolescents have it provided); restrictions for certain services etc. (National Research Council & Institute of Medicine 2009).

Stigma is a problem with which parents / carers face child emotional and behavioral problems when they seek professional help. Very often they avoid seeking professional help due to existing stigmatized attitudes leading to lack of treatment. Poor mental health is strongly related to other health and development concerns in young people, notably lower educational achievements, substance abuse and violence.

List of key words with short definitions

Stereotype: “a person or thing that conforms to an unjustly fixed impression or attitude” Stereotypes are the attitudes about a group of people (e.g. “All people with mental illness are dangerous”).

Prejudice: “A preconceived opinion” Prejudice is agreeing with the stereotypes (e.g. “I think people with mental illness are dangerous”) without knowing or understanding, literally prejudging.

Discrimination: “unfavourable treatment based on prejudice” Discrimination is a behaviour that may result from stigma (e.g. “I don’t want people with mental illness around me, therefore I discriminate against them by not hiring them, not being friends with them, etc”).

Stigma: A stigma is a negative and often unfair social attitude attached to a person or group, often placing shame on them for a perceived deficiency or difference to their existence.

A mark or sign of disgrace or discredit; a visible sign or characteristic of disease.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1990

An attribute which is deeply discrediting.

Goffman, E., The management of Spoiled Identity. 1963

A distinguishing mark or characteristic of a bad or objectionable kind; a sign of some specific disorder, as hysteria; a mark made upon the skin by burning with a hot iron, as a token of infamy or subjection; a brand; a mark of disgrace or infamy; a sign of severe censure or condemnation, regarded as impressed on a person or thing.

The Shorter Oxford Dictionary, Fourth Edition, 1993



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The Stigma of Mental Illness

“Stigma refers to a cluster of negative attitudes and beliefs that motivate the general public to fear, reject, avoid and discriminate against people with mental illnesses. Stigma is not just a matter of using the wrong word or action. Stigma is about disrespect. It is the use of negative labels to identify a person living with mental illness. Stigma is a barrier. Fear of stigma and the resulting discrimination discourages individuals and their families from getting the help they need.” (SAMHSA 2004)

The Seven Types of Stigma

TYPE 1	TYPE 2	TYPE 3	TYPE 4	TYPE 5	TYPE 6	TYPE 7
Public Stigma This happens when the public endorses negative stereotypes and prejudices, resulting in discrimination against people with mental health conditions.	Self Stigma Self-stigma happens when a person with mental illness or substance-use disorder internalizes public stigma.	Perceived Stigma Perceived stigma is the belief that others have negative beliefs about people with mental illness.	Label Avoidance This is when a person chooses not to seek mental health treatment to avoid being assigned a stigmatizing label. Label avoidance is one of the most harmful forms of stigma.	Stigma by Association Stigma by association occurs when the effects of stigma are extended to someone linked to a person with mental health difficulties. This type of stigma is also known as “courtesy stigma” and “associative stigma.”	Structural Stigma Institutional policies or other societal structures that result in decreased opportunities for people with mental illness are considered structural stigma.	Health Practitioner Stigma This takes place any time a health professional allows stereotypes and prejudices about mental illness to negatively affect a patient’s care.



PUBLIC STIGMA

This happens when the public endorses negative stereotypes and prejudices, resulting in discrimination against people with mental health conditions.

SELF-STIGMA

Self-stigma happens when a person with mental illness or substance use disorder internalizes public stigma.

PERCEIVED STIGMA

Perceived stigma is the belief that others have negative cognitions about people with mental illness.

LABEL AVOIDANCE

A person chooses not to seek mental health treatment to avoid being assigned a stigmatizing label. Label avoidance is one of the most harmful forms of stigma.

STIGMA BY ASSOCIATION

Stigma by association occurs when the effects of stigma are extended to someone linked to a person with mental health difficulties. This type of stigma is also known as courtesy stigma and associative stigma.

STRUCTURAL STIGMA

Institutional policies or other societal structures that result in decreased opportunities for people with mental illness are structural stigma.

HEALTH PRACTITIONER STIGMA

This takes place any time a health professional allows stereotypes and prejudices about mental illness to negatively affect a patient’s care.

Source: Overcoming Stigma | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness
www.nami.org | Blogs › NAMI-Blog › October-2018

Statistics and studies around the stigma of mental health

2021 study Trusted Source explored the trends of mental health stigma in the United States over a period of more than 20 years, between 1996 and 2018. In the study, researchers reviewed surveys from across the country on attitudes toward various mental health conditions, including schizophrenia, depression, and alcohol dependence.

According to the study results, from roughly 1996 to 2006, people became more knowledgeable about mental health — including acknowledging differences between daily experiences and symptoms of diagnosable conditions.

And from around 2006 to 2018, there was a significant decrease in social stigma against depression — specifically, less desire to be socially distanced from people with depression. However, when it came to schizophrenia and alcohol dependence, not only did social stigma increase but so did negative perceptions of these conditions.

Another earlier study from 2018 took a slightly different approach in analyzing the social perception of mental and physical health conditions. In this study, researchers used automated software to track over a million tweets related to mental health and physical health over a 50-day period.

According to the results of the study, mental health conditions were more likely to be stigmatized and trivialized than physical health conditions. And the results varied by condition — with schizophrenia being the most stigmatized, and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is being the most trivialized.

A study from India on “Stigma toward individuals with mental illness among Indian adolescents: Findings from three secondary schools and a cross-cultural comparison” shows only 42% of adolescents reported that they were “probably or definitely” willing to talk to someone with a mental illness and 41% were willing to become friends with someone with a mental illness. Additionally, only 36% said they were willing to invite someone with a mental illness to their home. The greatest social distance was reported for going on a date with someone with a mental illness; 67% of adolescents were unwilling and only 14% were willing. Overall, these findings suggest that stigma toward individuals with mental illness is highly common among Indian adolescents.

Another study in India on “Perception of stigma toward mental illness in South India” inform, The overall prevalence of stigma toward PWMI was found to be high. The stigma toward PWMI was associated with gender with respect to AU, BE and CMHI. Hence, the study suggests that there is a strong need to eliminate stigma associated with mental illness to improve the mental health status of the region.

Effects of mental health stigma

Stigma against a person living with a mental health condition can make their symptoms worse and make it hard to recover. A person may also be less likely to seek help if they live with stigma. Stigma may not be obvious or be expressed in large gestures. It can come in the words people use to describe a mental health condition or people living with mental illness. This can involve hurtful, offensive, or dismissive language, which can be upsetting for people to hear. This can cause them to feel alone and that no-one understands what they are going through.

What are the effects of stigma ?

Mental health stigma can have a hugely negative impact on the lives of people living with mental health conditions. In fact, stigma can often lead to mental, social, or even professional consequences for the people who are stigmatized.

Mental Effect

People living with mental health conditions are more likely to experience **low self-esteem** and **lower self-confidence** if they're stigmatized.

Stigma may lead to difficulty seeking treatment or even following through with treatment. And some people may experience increased symptoms of their condition, or even develop new ones — like **anxiety or depression** — because of experiencing stigma.

Self-stigma may even hinder someone's ability to recover from a mental health condition. In one smaller study from 2018 Trusted Source, researchers found that higher levels of self-stigma were associated with a **decrease in recovery from mental health conditions**.

Social Effect

Social mental health stigma may lead to **isolation** from friends or family. People with mental health conditions may experience **bullying or harassment** from others — or possibly even physical violence.

And when others have a judgmental view of mental health, it can be difficult for people living with these conditions to build **relationships** with them.

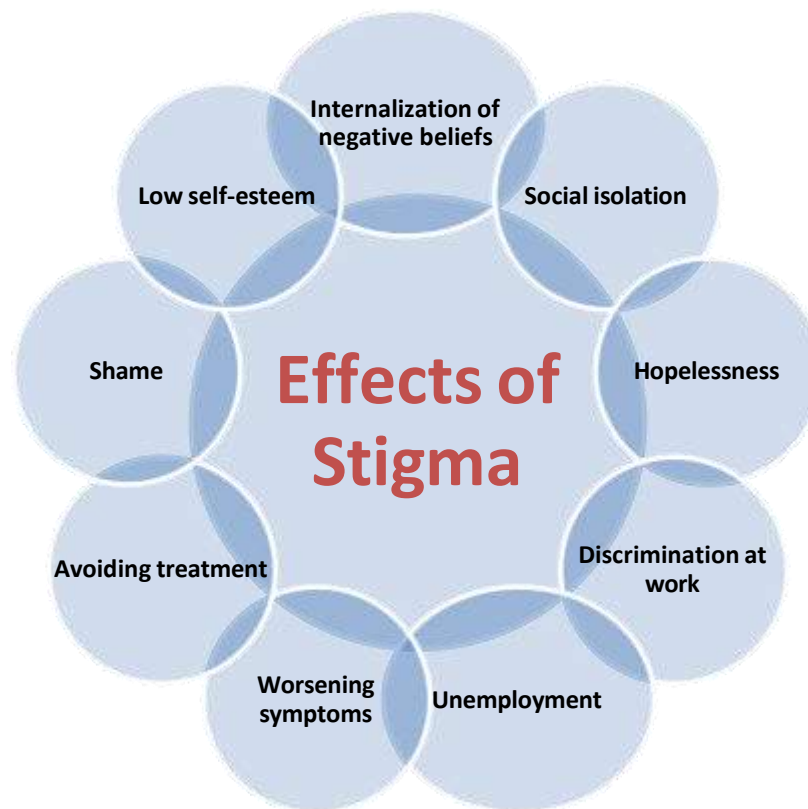
Research Trusted Source has shown that perceived and experienced social stigma may also play a role in **suicidality** among people with mental health conditions. According to the literature, people who experience discrimination (even anticipated discrimination), social stigma, and self-stigma may be more likely to experience suicidal ideation.

Professional Effect

Stigma in the professional world can lead to fewer opportunities to excel at school and fewer opportunities to advance at work. People living with mental health conditions may have difficulty fulfilling school or work obligations — especially if they have trouble with classmates, teachers, coworkers, or bosses.

It's not just classmates or colleagues who contribute to mental health stigma in a professional setting, either. Research suggests Trusted Source that when healthcare professionals exhibit negativity toward people with mental health conditions, or have a lack of understanding about these conditions, it can prevent people from accessing high quality care.

Some other effects of stigma can include:



Bridging theoretical knowledge, practical skills and community intervention into action.

How to overcome mental health stigma

It is important to review reliable sources of information on mental health conditions and become better informed when learning that a friend, family member, or co-worker is living with a mental illness.

At the individual level, a person with a mental health illness can get actively involved in their treatment. They could also consider getting an advocate if they feel that stigma impacts their ability to navigate day-to-day circumstances, such as employment, housing, or healthcare.

An advocate is a trained professional who helps people work through employment disputes, medical appointments, financial claims and appointments, and housing problems. They support the rights of others who may not have the strength or knowledge to do so on their own.

Getting support

To reduce mental health stigma and for mental health care some resources exist to help provide education, awareness, and support:

- The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) has a full resource page on mental health inequities (plus a helpline for more resources).
- The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has information about how you can report mental health discrimination in the workplace.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Trusted Source has a page dedicated to steps you can take to reduce mental health stigma.
- The American Psychological Association (APA) has a resource dedicated to learning about and addressing racism in mental healthcare.
- The National Center for Transgender Equality helps connect trans people to support and information about their rights in healthcare.

Tips to cope with mental health Stigma

Here are some ways for students / children to deal with stigma:

- **Get treatment:** You may be reluctant to admit you need treatment. Don't let the fear of being labeled with a mental illness prevent you from seeking help. Treatment can provide relief by identifying what's wrong and reducing symptoms that interfere with your work and personal life.
- **Don't let stigma create self-doubt and shame:** Stigma doesn't just come from others. You may mistakenly believe that your condition is a sign of personal weakness or that you should be able to control it without help. Seeking counseling, educating yourself about your condition and connecting with others who have mental illness can help you gain self-esteem and overcome destructive self-judgment.
- **Don't isolate yourself:** If you have a mental illness, you may be reluctant to tell anyone about it. Your family, friends, clergy or members of your community can offer you support if they know about your mental illness. Reach out to people you trust for the compassion, support and understanding you need.
- **Don't equate yourself with your illness:** You are not an ill person. So instead of saying "I'm bipolar," say "I have bipolar disorder." Instead of calling yourself "a schizophrenic," say "I have schizophrenia."

- **Join a support group**: Some local and national groups, such as the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), offer local programs and internet resources that help reduce stigma by educating people who have mental illness, their families and the general public.
- **Get help at school**: If you or your child has a mental illness that affects learning, find out what plans and programs might help. Discrimination against students because of a mental illness is against the law, and educators at primary, secondary and college levels are required to accommodate students as best they can. Talk to teachers, professors or administrators about the best approach and resources. If a teacher doesn't know about a student's disability, it can lead to discrimination, barriers to learning and poor grades.
- **Speak out against stigma**: Consider expressing your opinions at events, in letters to the editor or on the internet. It can help instill courage in others facing similar challenges and educate the public about mental illness.

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