

# BEING A stigmafree FAITH COMMUNITY

## LEARN THE FACTS ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

If you have a mental health condition, you're not alone. One in 5 U.S. adults experiences some form of mental illness each year, and 1 in 17 has a condition such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or long-term recurring major depression.<sup>1,2</sup>

Despite their prevalence, we often have a hard time understanding mental health conditions. There are so many misconceptions about what mental illness is and what it means to live with a mental health condition. For example, mental illness is not the result of a personal weakness, lack of character or poor upbringing. Likewise, it isn't about "getting over it" through willpower. Without meaning to, we may send those messages to a friend or coworker, neighbor or family struggling with a mental health condition. These kinds of offhand comments can often add to the stigma that many living with a mental health condition experience.

## RECOGNIZE THAT STIGMA IS REAL

None of us likes labels, and you certainly don't want to be labeled by a mental health condition. This can make you feel the pain of stigma—or a sense of disgrace that makes you feel different in a negative way. Faith and spirituality can be a very helpful component of someone's recovery from mental illness. A place of worship is a safe space for people where they can feel welcomed and have an instant sense of support and community, but how they are treated within this environment is crucial to that feeling of security. If you are afraid of being misunderstood or unsupported, you might think twice about reaching out to your faith community, especially crucial at a time when health and healing are needed.

## UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT

Someone you know, families in your faith community are affected by a mental health condition. Churches, temples,

mosques and faith communities reach 70% of the American population each month. In the United States, clergy outnumber psychiatrists by nearly 10 to one and are more equitably distributed geographically than health professionals.

The faith community can fight stigma by educating both youth and adult congregations. Families affected by mental illness are often challenged by some serious faith questions, as are others going through experiences that ask much of them. Educated faith communities can offer emotional, relational and spiritual counseling to persons touched by mental illness.

## EMBRACE A STIGMAFREE CULTURE

When a faith community pledges to be stigmafree, it makes a big difference! Encouraging a stigmafree culture a priority visibly shows and reinforces that your faith community values your community members spiritual, emotional and physical health. A stigmafree faith community might:

- > Encourage sermons or homilies specifically about mental illness to your faith community
- > Within services, pray openly for people who are affected by mental health challenges
- > Provide space for no-cost NAMI programs and support groups
- > Put families and individuals struggling with mental health challenges on the prayer or intentions list (with permission)
- > Offer hope and encouragement by emailing, texting, calling and sending notes to those struggling
- > Offer to take a meal to a family or individual who is struggling
- > Create and provide a list of referrals to local mental health services and supports that are available in your community

### Sources

1. Any Mental Illness (AMI) Among Adults. (n.d.). Retrieved Oct. 23, 2015, from <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/any-mental-illness-ami-among-adults.shtml>
2. Serious Mental Illness (SMI) Among Adults. (n.d.). Retrieved Oct. 23, 2015, from <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/serious-mental-illness-smi-among-us-adults.shtml>
3. NAMI Massachusetts. Bad for business: The business case for overcoming mental illness stigma in the workplace. Retrieved April 13, 2016, from <http://bit.ly/1q56mn>

# BEING WELL

## HOW TO PROMOTE A SUPPORTIVE CULTURE IN YOUR FAITH COMMUNITY

Stigma, the hidden burden of mental health conditions, can be as hard to deal with as the condition itself. It affects people's well-being, prevents them from seeking treatment and damages self-esteem. The effects can last long after someone has engaged in recovery.



### EVERYONE CAN PLAY A ROLE

- > Use respectful language to talk about mental health conditions.
- > Challenge misconceptions when you see or hear them.
- > See the person, not the condition.
- > Offer support if you think someone is having trouble.



### AVOID LABELS SUCH AS THE FOLLOWING:

- > Challenged
- > Crazy
- > Demented
- > Lunatic
- > Normal/not normal
- > Psycho/psychopath
- > Schizo
- > Special
- > Sufferer/victim
- > Wacko

## USE RESPECTFUL LANGUAGE THAT DOES NOT DEFINE SOMEONE BY AN ILLNESS:



### INSTEAD OF...

She's bipolar  
Schizophrenic  
Manic depressive  
The mentally ill  
Committed suicide

### TRY...

She has bipolar disorder/She's living with bipolar disorder  
person with schizophrenia  
person with bipolar disorder  
people with a mental illness/mental health condition  
died by suicide



*stigmafree*

 **NAMI** FaithNet  
National Alliance on Mental Illness

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