



## World Mental Health Day October 10, 2019

### Disclosing mental illness



## Should you share your mental health issue?

Many people struggle with mental health issues alone and in silence. Despite changing attitudes, the fear that relationships will change or careers or reputations will suffer is real. However, whether dealing with a physical or mental issue, a strong support network is an essential part of any treatment plan – and that begins by sharing the diagnosis.

If you're wondering who needs to know about your illness, there are no rules. It's up to you.

Here are a few ideas that may help guide your decisions:

- **Remember you're not alone.** According to a [2018 mental health article by Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser](#), around **one in six people** in the world experiences one or more mental or substance use disorders. That means one in 6 of your neighbours, co-workers or friends is dealing with similar issues.
- **Not everyone needs to know.** If you need time off work to deal with any health issue, you need to inform your employer. You may choose to receive the support of a close family member or friend first.
- **You don't have to share everything.** You decide what – and what not – to share. If you feel uncomfortable with a question it's okay to say "I'd rather not talk about that right now."

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- **Practise makes perfect.** Disclosing an illness can be nerve wracking, so practice what to say with someone close to you or with your therapist or counselor. It's a good way to prepare for any questions as well as help you decide who to tell.
- **Be prepared for negative reactions.** Whether you're talking about diabetes or depression, someone is always going to react badly to your diagnosis – whether because of concern or confusion. Don't argue. Instead suggest ways that individual can support you and guide him or her to appropriate resources, including an Employee Assistance Program.

If you or a family member needs help with, or information on, mental illness, contact us.

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# Overcoming stigma

By age 40, half of us have had or will have a mental illness. In fact, mental illness is so common that it is now the leading cause of disability worldwide. So why do less than half of us seek treatment?

There are many reasons – access to appropriate mental health services, the cost of many medications, cultural and gender expectations – but the greatest barrier remains stigma.

## What is stigma?

Stigma refers to negative stereotypes and beliefs that cause people to shun and reject those with differences. Despite more openness and understanding of mental health issues over the past decade, physical and mental illnesses are not viewed in the same way. Individuals with a mental illness are still often judged and thought to be unstable, weak, unreliable and even dangerous.

Stigma can affect every aspect of people's lives, including their relationships, self-esteem and professional opportunities. In severe cases, finding employment and housing is difficult.

## Dealing with stigma

Here are some ideas to help deal with the stigma associated with mental illness:

- **Don't judge yourself.** Mental illness is just that – an illness that needs treatment. Educate yourself about mental health and don't let false and/or negative labels prevent you from seeking help.
- **Reach out.** Recovery from any illness requires a support network that includes medical professionals, family, friends and employers. Begin by confiding in a close family member or friend, talking to a therapist or joining a support group.
- **Don't isolate yourself.** **Human connection** is vital to both our mental and physical wellbeing, yet illness often isolates us. Try to spend time with family and friends and take part in social gatherings.
- **Be an advocate.** Challenge negative stereotypes, language and behaviors and correct misinformation with facts. Support others struggling with mental health issues by guiding them to appropriate resources, such as their Employee Assistance Program.

For more information on mental health, or to access mental health resources, contact us.

## Additional resource:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mental-illness/in-depth/mental-health/art-20046477>

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