

Myths and Facts about Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders

Mental Illness

Myth: Mental health problems don't affect me.

Fact: Mental health problems are very common. In 2011, about:

- One in five American adults experienced a mental health issue.
- One in 10 young people experienced a period of major depression.
- One in 20 Americans lived with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death for [youth ages 10 to 24](#), and the [10th leading cause of death](#) for all ages in the United States. In 2014, [20 percent of 10th graders](#) in Washington reported that they seriously considered suicide in the past year. It accounts for the loss of more than 38,000 American lives each year, more than double the number of lives lost to homicide. [Learn more about mental health conditions.](#)

Myth: Children don't experience mental health problems.

Fact: Even young children may show early warning signs of mental health concerns. These problems can be caused by biological, psychological and social factors. Half of all mental health disorders start to show signs before age 14. Addressing risk factors, such as trauma, and promoting the social-emotional well-being of children and youth, can prevent mental illness or reduce its severity.

Myth: People with mental health challenges are violent and unpredictable.

Fact: The majority of people with mental health challenges are no more likely to be violent than anyone else. In fact, people with severe mental illnesses are over 10 times more likely to be victims of violent crime than the general population.

Myth: Once a person develops a mental illness they never recover.

Fact: Studies show that most people with mental illness get better, and many recover completely. Recovery is a process in which people are able to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities. For some, recovery is the ability to live a fulfilling and productive life. For others, recovery means their symptoms are reduced or completely gone. Hope plays a key role in recovery. See the [working definition and guiding principles of recovery](#).

Myth: I can't do anything to help a person with mental illness.

Fact: You can do a lot, starting with how you act and speak. You can create an environment that builds on people's strengths and promotes understanding. For example:



Transforming Lives

- Treat people with mental illnesses with respect and dignity, just as you would anybody else.
- Ask a person with mental illness how you can support their recovery when they are having difficulties.
- Learn the facts about mental health conditions and share them with others, especially if you hear something that isn't true.
- Instead of saying "John is a schizophrenic," say "John has schizophrenia" or "is a person with schizophrenia." This is called "person-first" language, and respects the difference between the person and their illness.

Substance Use Disorders

Myth: Alcohol and other drug addiction is voluntary behavior.

Fact: A person starts out as an occasional alcohol or drug user, and that is a voluntary decision. But in time, that person becomes a compulsive user. Continued misuse of addictive drugs changes your brain and can lead to compulsive and even uncontrollable drug use. Addiction often begins in [adolescence](#), so if you are a parent, visit www.StartTalkingNow.org to find out how to prevent teen alcohol and other drug use.

Myth: Drug addiction is a character flaw.

Fact: Drug addiction is a [brain disease](#). When drugs are misused, they can "hijack" the brain, affecting your mood, memory, judgment and motor skills. These changes have a huge influence on a person's behavior.

Myth: You have to want treatment for it to be effective.

Fact: Many people with drug use disorders do not seek drug treatment on their own, often because of stigma and shame, or because they don't think they can afford it. It often takes a personal crisis, legal action, or [encouragement](#) from someone they care about to begin treatment. Treatment works regardless of why someone enters treatment. Treatment is covered by most [Washington health plans](#) as an essential benefit, and by [Washington Apple Health/Medicaid](#).

Myth: We should strive to find a "magic bullet" to treat all forms of addiction.

Fact: There is no "one size fits all" form of treatment. People have unique drug use-related problems. They respond differently to similar forms of treatment, even when they're using the same drug. People with substance use disorders need an array of treatments and services tailored to address their unique needs.

For 24/7 emotional support and referrals to mental health or addiction treatment, call the Washington Recovery Help Line: 1-866-789-1511.

Sources: [U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services](#) and [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)

