May is Mental Health Month:  
Learn the Myths and Facts about Mental Illness

**Mental illness is common and can happen to anyone.** One in four adults, and one in 10 children, experiences a mental health condition each year. People with these conditions are frequently stigmatized by others who don’t have accurate information, and have negative perceptions (Surgeon General’s Report on Mental Health).

**Understanding and support are powerful**, and they can make a real difference in the life of a person who needs them.

**Myth:** Children don't experience mental illnesses. Their actions are just products of bad parenting.  
**Fact:** Five to nine percent of children experience serious emotional disorders. These are clinically diagnosable health conditions resulting from biological, psychological, and social factors. (President’s New Freedom Commission on Mental Health).

**Myth:** There's no hope for people with mental illnesses.  
**Fact:** There are many effective treatments, services, and community support systems, and more are being developed. People with mental illnesses lead active, productive lives.

**Myth:** Mental illnesses are brought on by a weakness of character.  
**Fact:** Mental illnesses are caused by biological, psychological, and social factors. Social influences, like the loss of a loved one or a job, can also contribute to mental health conditions.

**Myth:** Children misbehave or fail in school just to get attention.  
**Fact:** Behavior problems can be symptoms of emotional, behavioral, or mental challenges, rather than merely attention-seeking devices. Children can succeed in school with appropriate understanding, attention and services.

**Myth:** Once people develop mental illnesses they will never recover.  
**Fact:** Studies show that most people with mental illnesses 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** at [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov).

**Myth:** I can't do anything for 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:

- 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 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.

**Resources:** [Caring for Every Child’s Mental Health](http://www.namic.org), the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](http://www.nami.org) and the [Washington Recovery Help Line](http://www.wahetrofit.com).

For more information: Office of Consumer Partnerships: dbhrconsumerpartnerships@dshs.wa.gov or 1-800-446-0259.  
Washington State Department of Social and Health Services – Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery.