

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.

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](#), the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#), and the [Washington Recovery Help Line](#).

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