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MONTHLY
Life Advisor Well-being
NEWSLETTER
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Revisiting Mental Health Stigma

The word 'stigma' has been around for many years, and as a result, it has a long history. Synonyms for stigma include *stain, mark of infamy, blemish, mark of disgrace, label, stereotyped group, brand*. When we move into its association with mental health concerns, associated words are *view negatively, disapprove, discriminate, attitude, shame, deficiency, difference, not fitting in, disability*. (Yikes.)

COVID may have had one positive outcome for us – its existence helped create a greater awareness of mental health concerns AND helped shift the use of mental health services from something 'abnormal' to something that is an accepted way of getting assistance when needed. Great quantities of literature on mental health topics are readily available now - in even the most popular mediums that typically did not include information of this type in their publications. As information about stress, anxiety, depression, and other conditions is now widely available, a greater awareness of mental health and its importance is likely.

The requests for help with depression, anxiety and a number of mental health concerns have risen during the last 18-month period, with people seeking help for situations they find they can't "tough it out" on their own. Why? We have a situation now in which new stressors are piling on top of the stress we already have: more (or more intense) community, national and global stressors. The outcome? Levels of stress that exceed, even greatly exceed, our natural ability to manage them.

This is not the time to add to our overall stress. Rather, it's a time to accept and value available resources. It's time to help each other by not stigmatizing the need for help.

Here are 6 simple ways that you can help:

1. **Get a greater awareness of times when you categorize people as 'not like me' or 'not one of us', even in subtle ways**. It takes time and intention to make this change, and the first step is simply recognizing when your thinking goes in that direction. Try taking a step back and look at the whole person. Try to find at least one positive thing to focus on.

2. **Recognize when you are stigmatizing yourself.** This sometimes takes the form of name-calling yourself. If you can catch yourself doing it, you can stop it with practice. This can also help you recognize when you are doing it to others.

3. **Say something if a friend or acquaintance uses a mental health term with derogatory or casual intent: "He's crazy" or "she's a psycho" or "you're so 'schizo'" or "what a nutcase" or "I'm so OCD (or ADHD)" – you get the idea.** Be careful about the use of mental health terms in normal conversation, making sure that the terms are respectful.

4. **For a few minutes, put yourself in the shoes of someone you know who is struggling with a mental health** concern and imagine how derogatory language affects them.

5. **Know the facts about mental illness and how it manifests itself.** (Most people with mental health conditions don't look different than the average person.) If you see someone struggling, however, ask if you can help.

6. **If you've experienced a mental health concern and choose to talk about it, use language that is respectful of yourself and others who have mental health concerns.**

**For more information, tools, resources, or app information,
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for you & your family.**
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