

# Health Beat

## HEALTH, MIND & BODY

### MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS: STOP THE STIGMA



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Many people still believe they need to keep their issues bottled up — even if it becomes debilitating or all-consuming. Mental illness is not a phase or something you will get over if you try hard enough. If you have a mental illness, you already carry a heavy burden. It is important to receive support from your inner circle and your doctor. Know that the stigma in society today causes feelings of shame and helplessness, but there are resources available and there is hope.

#### Tips to Start a Conversation About Mental Health

A 2015 study by American University said that Millennials are more likely to talk about mental health than their parents or grandparents. They are the generation that grew up hearing about anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and suicide. Here are some tips we can all learn from them:

- Talk openly about mental health. Don't be afraid to talk about your mental conditions as easily and freely as you talk about your physical conditions.
- Learn about mental health and help teach others. The person sitting next to you every day may also be dealing with mental health issues. Learn as much as you can and share your struggles. Normalizing the conversation will help stop the stigma of mental health conditions.
- Be aware of the language you

use. Mental illness is a disease, not something you can control. If you think of it more like a chronic illness, you may think twice about making fun of someone or shaming them.

- Show compassion and empathy. The act of simply caring can show someone they are not alone. Let them know you understand. Mental illness is a lonely disease and knowing someone else cares can help someone living with mental illness make it through the day.
- Avoid being judgmental. If someone trusts you enough to open up about their struggles, don't tell them they are overreacting. Respond with statements that do not minimize what they are going through.
- Seek treatment and talk about it. You wouldn't be shy about telling someone what your primary care doctor tells you, so why should you be ashamed to mention something your therapist says. Don't be afraid to share your journey.
- Use technology to help you communicate. If talking to a loved one face-to-face is too intimidating, maybe a simple text can start the conversation. But once the conversation is started, it is time to sit down and talk. Support is so important

for anyone dealing with mental illness, and there is nothing that can replace a personal connection.

- Don't add to the stigma. Having a mental illness doesn't mean you aren't a productive member of society. Show everyone around you that you can live a meaningful life even if you are dealing with mental health issues.

The conversation is just the first step in the process of stopping the stigma and helping those with mental illness. It is important that anyone dealing with mental health issues get the professional support they need. If you're having feelings that you cannot explain, start the conversation today. You may need to talk to more than one person to get the help and support you need, so don't give up. It takes time to feel better. Mental health issues are common and treatable, but it can take time to find the combination of treatments that work for you.

Lindsay Sauers is a licensed psychologist with UPMC Susquehanna's Outpatient Behavioral Health Services. UPMC Susquehanna's Behavioral Health Services are located at UPMC Williamsport Regional Medical Center, Divine Providence Campus, providing complete care to evaluate, manage, and treat behavioral health conditions. For more information, call 570-320-7525 or visit [UPMCSusquehanna.org](http://UPMCSusquehanna.org).

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