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**Stigma: Myths & Realities of
Mental Illness
Module 1**

MYTHS AND STIGMAS

- Myths, which are stories that are used to explain what we do not know, contribute strongly to stigma against people who have a mental illness
- One way to help decrease stigma is to challenge myths with data and with scientific knowledge
- “Myth Busting” may help decrease stigma



MENTAL ILLNESS MYTHS: CATEGORIES

- Myths about what causes mental illness
- Myths about what people who have a mental illness are like
- Myths about treatments for mental illnesses
- These Myths need “Myth Busting”



MYTHS ABOUT CAUSES: PART 1

- Mental illnesses are caused by witchcraft, spells or possession by demons
- Mental illnesses are the result of punishment by a “Higher Power” (such as God or Karma)



REALITIES ABOUT CAUSES: PART 1

- Mental illnesses are the result of disturbances in usual brain function that lead to difficulties with the control of feelings, thinking and behaviors
- Mental illnesses are not caused by spirits, witches or demons
- Mental illnesses are not the result of punishment from God or bad Karma



MYTHS ABOUT CAUSES: PART 2

- Mental illnesses are caused by food that we commonly eat
- Mental illnesses are the result of a “moral failure” or laziness



REALITIES ABOUT CAUSES: PART 2

- Rare vitamin deficiencies (such as thiamine, B12) can be associated with some symptoms found in some mental illnesses, but foods we eat do not cause mental disorders.
- Mental illnesses are not caused by a “moral failing” or laziness. Sometimes people with a mental illness experience severe fatigue or lack of interest as part of the illness, not as its cause.



MYTHS ABOUT CAUSES: PART 3

- Mental illnesses are caused by the usual stresses of everyday life
- Mental illnesses are caused by poor mothering



REALITIES ABOUT CAUSES: PART 3

- Everyday life stresses are normal and necessary for learning and developing life skills. They do not cause mental illnesses. For some people, severe and persistent stress (e.g. living in a war zone) increases the risk for developing a mental illness.
- Mothers have been blamed for many things, including causing mental illnesses. Poor mothering may not help children grow and develop well but by itself does not cause mental illness.



MYTHS ABOUT PEOPLE: PART 1

- People with a mental illness are violent
- People with a mental illness should not have the same rights as the rest of society



REALITIES ABOUT PEOPLE: PART 1

- A mental illness rarely leads to violence. Most violence is not due to mental illness. People with mental illness are more likely to be victims of violence (including bullying).
- A person who has a mental illness has all the human and social rights that every other person has.



MYTHS ABOUT PEOPLE: PART 2

- People with a mental illness cannot be good friends
- People with a mental illness cannot achieve anything



REALITIES ABOUT PEOPLE: PART 2

- People who have a mental illness can be just as good a friend as someone who does not have a mental illness.
- Sometimes a mental illness can make it difficult for a person to work (same as a physical illness), but with proper treatment a person with a mental illness can work very well. Some of the world's greatest achievers have had a mental illness.



MYTHS ABOUT PEOPLE: PART 3

- Mental illness is a sign of personal weakness
- People with mental illness are to blame for their own problems
- People with mental illness are self-centered
- People with mental illness could snap out of it if they wanted to



REALITIES ABOUT PEOPLE: PART 3

- Mental illness is a brain disorder and not a personal weakness.
- People with mental illness will get better if they are appropriately treated.
- People with mental illness may often feel embarrassed, or that they are inferior to others, experience low self-esteem and low confidence. This is called “self-stigma” and is made worse by the myths others have about people with a mental illness.



MYTHS ABOUT TREATMENT: PART 1

- People with a mental illness will never get better
- Mental illnesses are too difficult to treat



REALITIES ABOUT TREATMENT: PART 1

- Most people with a mental illness will get well and stay well with the right treatment. Sometimes treatments will not be effective (just the same as with physical illnesses).
- Mental illnesses, because they affect how the brain functions, sometimes need more complex treatments. But this does not mean that they are too difficult to treat.



MYTHS ABOUT TREATMENT: PART 2

- Treatments for mental illnesses are not as good as treatments for physical illnesses
- Treatments for mental illnesses are “common sense”, and everyone knows what should be done



REALITIES ABOUT TREATMENT: PART 2

- Treatments for mental illnesses are as good (and as bad) as treatments for physical illnesses. Unfortunately, not everyone gets well with treatments – for mental or for physical illnesses.
- Treatments for mental disorders are based on best scientific evidence, not people's opinion about what works.



BUST MYTHS – SPEAK REALITIES

- Many people do not know about the realities of mental illness and so they continue to believe myths
- Once you know the realities about mental illnesses, you can help **Bust Myths** by letting others know the Realities
- Everyone can **Bust Myths** when they **Speak Realities**





TeenMentalHealth.org



teenmentalhealth1



@TMentalHealth



info@TeenMentalHealth.org