Q: I know I need to get help, but am worried what people will think. What can I do?
A: The first thing you can do is congratulate yourself for acknowledging that you need additional support in your life right now. Sometimes it feels easier to pretend we are OK and avoid our problems, rather than accept that life feels difficult, dark, or out of control. You are not alone in feeling scared to reach out for help. Asking for help can feel similar to the nightmare people have where they find themselves naked in a room full of people – it is vulnerable!

Unfortunately, there continues to be mental health stigma that sometimes makes it difficult to seek services. That stigma can lead to shame or the feeling that there is something wrong with us. The best defense we have against shame is to be open and honest about where we are and allow people to help us.

The second thing you can do is drill the following phrase into your mind: “I am not alone.” According to the National Institute of Mental Health, over 40 million American adults live with a mental illness in any given year. That's nearly 1 in 5 people! So try not to get caught up in the worry of what people might think if you ask for help.

Self-care is the foundation for a healthy, happy life. You may have been taught that asking for help is a weakness, but it is actually a tremendous strength. Asking for help shows that you value yourself and your wellbeing.

Counselor Corner, on Back

LEARNING TO BE STIGMA-FREE

If you have a mental health condition, you’re not alone. One in 5 U.S. adults experiences some form of mental illness each year, and 1 in 17 has a condition such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or long-term recurring major depression. Despite their prevalence, we often have a hard time understanding mental health conditions.

There are so many misconceptions about what mental illness is and what it means to live with a mental health condition. For example, mental illness is not the result of a personal weakness, lack of character or poor upbringing. Likewise, it isn’t about “getting over it” through willpower. Without meaning to, we may send those messages to a friend or co-worker struggling with a mental health condition. These kinds of offhand comments can often add to the stigma that many living with a mental health condition experience.

None of us likes labels, and you certainly don’t want to be labeled by a mental health condition. This can make you feel the pain of stigma – or a sense of disgrace that makes you feel different in a negative way. In the workplace, this may lead to teasing, harassment, lack of advancement opportunities, or discrimination. Plus, if you’re afraid of being misunderstood or unsupported, you might think twice about telling a supervisor, seeking treatment, or managing a loved one’s condition. Secrecy doesn’t help anyone.

Stigma-Free, on Back

"Keeping in Touch" is a monthly publication for employees covered by The Village Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through their employer’s benefit package. If you have questions about your EAP benefit, or if you would like to access services, call 1-800-627-8220.
WHY STIGMA IS A PROBLEM

Stigma is when someone, or even you yourself, views a person in a negative way just because they have a mental health condition. Some people describe stigma as a feeling of shame or judgement from someone else. Stigma can even come from an internal place, confusing feeling bad with being bad.

Navigating life with a mental health condition can be tough, and the isolation, blame, and secrecy that is often encouraged by stigma can create huge challenges to reaching out, getting needed support, and living well.

Learning how to avoid and address stigma are important for all of us, especially when you realize stigma’s effects:

• People experiencing mental health conditions often face rejection, bullying and discrimination. This can make their journey to recovery longer and more difficult.

• Mental health conditions are the leading cause of disability across the United States.

• Even though most people can be successfully treated, less than half of the adults in the U.S. who need services and treatment get the help they need.

• The average delay between the onset of symptoms and intervention is 8-10 years.

• Suicide is the second leading cause of death of youth ages 15-24 and the 10th leading cause of death for all Americans.

SUPPORTING A COLLEAGUE

One of the biggest challenges for people experiencing mental health challenges is overcoming stigma. Your words and actions can make a difference for people in need of support.

• Pay attention to any significant changes in someone’s behavior and recognize possible warning signs. Ask yourself: Does my colleague exhibit any warning signs, such as being distant, withdrawn, overly tired, or down?

• After noticing these behaviors, talk with them to see how they are. Find a quiet place to talk with them. Be non-intrusive and compassionate. Ask them: “How are you?” and “What can I do to help?” Listen carefully to their response.

• Encourage them to connect with resources. Refer them to any resources available through your organization or a mental health nonprofit group. Follow up with them to see how it went.

• Avoid trying to diagnose them or suggesting treatment options, suggesting the problem will resolve itself on its own, or assuming they aren’t trying hard enough to be happy or feel better.

Don’t let stigma stop you or those you care about from getting needed support.

Information from National Alliance on Mental Illness: Visit www.nami.org/Get-Involved/StigmaFree to learn more

IMPROVE YOUR WELL-BEING

Mental health affects how you think and feel on a daily basis. Practice healthy habits to improve your well-being.

• **Connect**: Feeling close to and valued by other people is vital to your health.

• **Be active**: Physical activity helps lower rates of depression and anxiety.

• **Pause**: Being aware of the present moment allows for more enjoyment and awareness of life priorities.

• **Learn**: Continued learning enhances self-esteem and encourages social interaction.

• **Give**: Regular acts of kindness are associated with increased well-being.

Counselor Corner, from Front

If you still feel hesitant, try this: Imagine how you would respond if your best friend came to you and said, “I’m struggling, but I am scared to get help. What should I do?” We are typically more compassionate, understanding, and accepting of others than we are of ourselves. Perhaps you are being harder on yourself than you deserve. Everyone struggles in life, and everyone deserves to get help when they are struggling. You included.

The final step is to find mental health resources in your community when you feel ready to reach out. It might be helpful to ask trusted people in your life for recommendations. The internet is another helpful tool for finding a local counselor.

Because you have access to The Village EAP, all you have to do is call 1-800-627-8220 to get started. A healthier, happier you is only a call away!

TO RECEIVE THIS NEWSLETTER IN YOUR INBOX, SEND AN EMAIL REQUEST TO VBI@THEVILLAGEFAMILY.ORG