

Overcoming Stigma in Mental Health

What is a Mental Health Stigma?

Mental health stigma is a set of negative attitudes, thoughts, biases and unfair beliefs directed toward individuals with a mental health condition. Mental health conditions, just like physical health, are real health concerns that require assessment and evidence-based treatments.

Language Matters

Staff may not be aware that words commonly used to describe residents with a mental health disorder could be stigmatizing and harmful. It can also prevent residents from seeking help, lead to shame, and even worsen their symptoms. Words and terms such as:

- Crazy
- Anti-social
- Lazy
- Attention-seeking
- A crybaby
- A drama queen/king
- Feeling sorry for themselves
- Should just snap out of it
- Being difficult

Use words to heal, not harm.

Stopping Stigma

Nursing facility staff play a key role in reducing stigma. Use these tips to stop mental health stigma:

- Treat all residents with dignity and respect
- Avoid using harmful labels and terms
- Speak out about stigma
- Provide facility-wide education on mental health conditions
- Recognize that the mental illness is not under the resident's control