



### What is stigma?

Stigma is putting down or shaming a person because of something about them or their situation. Unfortunately, people with mental illness often feel stigmatised. Three out of four people say they have experienced stigma, and that the stigma can be harder to deal with than the illness itself. Being stigmatised can leave people feeling ashamed, distressed, hopeless and excluded. And it can mean that people don't speak up to get support and treatment.

### What can I do?

Stigma often comes from misinformation, stereotypes and ignorance. The language we use, how people with mental illness are represented in the media, and how they are treated, perpetuates it. We can all help to break down stigma regarding mental health.

#### Education

Learning about mental illness helps to challenge common myths, understand symptoms, and gain some perspective on what it's like to live with a mental health condition. There's plenty of great material available, from books and websites, to documentaries or online content like Ted Talks. Or ask someone in your life if they'll share their experience with you. Once you've learned more about mental health, share what you've learned.

#### Language

Words are powerful, and the language used to talk about people with mental health conditions is often derogatory. Think about every slang word you know to describe mental health. Are any positive or empowering? And people with mental illness are often described as their diagnosis, like calling someone 'a schizophrenic'. We wouldn't describe someone with cancer like that. We can help break down the stigma around mental health by being mindful of the language we use. Be a role model; don't use words that put people down, and challenge others who do. Be aware of the language used in the media, and when it is unacceptable, use the power of your words through feedback or social media.

#### Support

Aim to be respectful and supportive of people with mental health conditions through care and kindness. The smallest acts can make a big difference – a cup of tea or a compliment. Make sure that your community or workplace is inclusive of people with mental health conditions. Does your team rally around to offer support and adjustments, as they would for someone with a bad back or a broken leg?

If you have, or have previously had a mental health condition, think about whether you want to share your story. Stigma thrives in silence and ignorance. Support can come hearing others' experiences of mental health.