

Counseling Corner

Removing the Stigma of Seeking Mental Health Help

from the American Counseling Association

If you had the flu and a high fever, no one would criticize you for seeking medical help. In fact, most would criticize you for ignoring such a health problem.

But mental health issues often bring a different reaction. People sometimes see mental illness not as a health issue, but as a serious defect, something that marks a person as weak, unstable, perhaps even violent or dangerous.

Such reactions have serious consequences for millions of Americans who could be healthier and happier if receiving the mental health help that is readily available. But many don't seek such help out of fear of being "labeled" with a mental illness, feeling family and friends won't understand, or that it could lead to discrimination at work or school.

Too many people who could use help instead see their condition as a sign of personal weakness. They may mistakenly believe that they should be able to control whatever is wrong without outside help.

The American Counseling Association's "No Stigma" efforts aim to educate the public, correct this misinformation and encourage seeking needed treatment. For example, researchers estimate that one in eight adolescents is suffering from depression, yet only 30% of young people facing mental health issues ever receive any type of treatment or intervention. This lack of treatment helps lead to more than 4,600 suicides by young people each year. The statistics are even scarier among senior citizens and our military warriors.

It's vital for people to recognize that mental health issues are not a reason for shame, but rather a condition that requires treatment by a professional. Anxiety, depression, panic attacks, eating disorders, social phobias and similar problems are not a sign of personal weakness. They are simply condition that, when treated successfully, can result in a happier, healthier and more productive life.

If you or someone you know is suffering from a mental health issue, don't give in to the stigma, but rather take action for better health. Talk to a friend or family members about what's bothering you and look into assistance from a mental health professional. Seeking mental health help is not a weakness; it's as logical and right as seeing that doctor for that flu.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACACorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at counseling.org

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