



# 10 Things You Should Know About...

## *Mental Health Stigma*

1. *Stigma* is defined as "a mark, blemish, or defect; a symbol of disgrace, shame or reproach and often involves fear of that which is different."
2. Stigma has been identified as a major reason that only about *half* of all Americans with a serious mental illness seek treatment.
3. In one survey, many people reported they would rather tell employers they committed a petty crime and served time in jail, than admit to having been in a psychiatric hospital.
4. Stigma is perpetuated in the media, which often portrays individuals with mental illness as violent and unable to contribute to society. However, research consistently shows that mental illness—by itself—is not significantly linked to violence. In fact, those with serious mental illnesses are much more likely to be a victim of violence than a perpetrator.
5. Language is closely related to stigma. Using negative labels such as calling someone "crazy" or "a schizophrenic" (not "a person with schizophrenia") or language that emphasizes limitations, not abilities, strongly influences our and others' perceptions.
6. Science tells us that mental illness is caused by a combination of genetic and life experiences, much of which a person has little or no control over.
7. Organizations such as the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI), [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org); the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA), [www.dbsalliance.org](http://www.dbsalliance.org); and the "It's Up 2 Us" campaign, [www.up2sd.org](http://www.up2sd.org); serve as advocates and educators to reduce the impact of stigma.
8. The VA has an interactive website "**Make the Connection**" to reduce stigma of Veterans obtaining mental health services at the VA. Visit <http://maketheconnection.net>.
9. What can you do to fight stigma? Communication is key. Seek knowledge, and don't be afraid to talk to trusted others about your mental health concerns.
10. For more information about ending the stigma surrounding mental health, visit the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA) Resource Center to Promote Acceptance, Dignity and Social Inclusion at <http://www.stopstigma.samhsa.gov/>.

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Visit the Rural Clergy Training website for more information about caring for our Veterans,  
<http://www.ruralhealth.va.gov/ruralclergytraining>.