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Slide 1




Destigmatizing Mental Health in the  
Workplace

Presentation by:  
MHN Training & Development

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## *Participant Handbook*

## Slide 2




### Learning Objectives

- Understand mental health stigmatization
- Identify the types of stigmas
- Describe the roots of stigmatism
- Recognize the impact of mental health stigmas
- Challenge mental health stigmas
- Discuss how to be a part of the solution

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### What is Mental Health Stigmatization?

- Stigma: A negative perception is associated with a particular circumstance, quality or person. The person is seen as different or "inferior" from social norms.
- Stigmas in Mental Health: A person is identified by negative stereotypes or negative views because of their mental health condition or diagnosis
- Two Types:
  - Public or social stigma: Attitudes or perceptions of others
  - Self stigma: Internal or self-perception

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### Common Public or Social Stigmas

People with mental health issues are:

- Crazy
- Incompetent
- Weak
- Unpredictable
- Violent
- Unable to handle work loads

What else?

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### Typical Outcomes of Public or Social Stigmas

- People distance themselves
- Depersonalization
- Lack of trust
- Patronizing
- Discrimination
- Bullying and harassment
- Negative employee evaluations
- Fewer promotions/raises

What else?

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### Common Self Stigmas

- Having a mental health issue means that I am:
  - Crazy
  - Incompetent
  - Weak
  - A burden
  - Going to be discriminated against
  - Broken
  - Going to be treated differently
  - Will be judged and rejected

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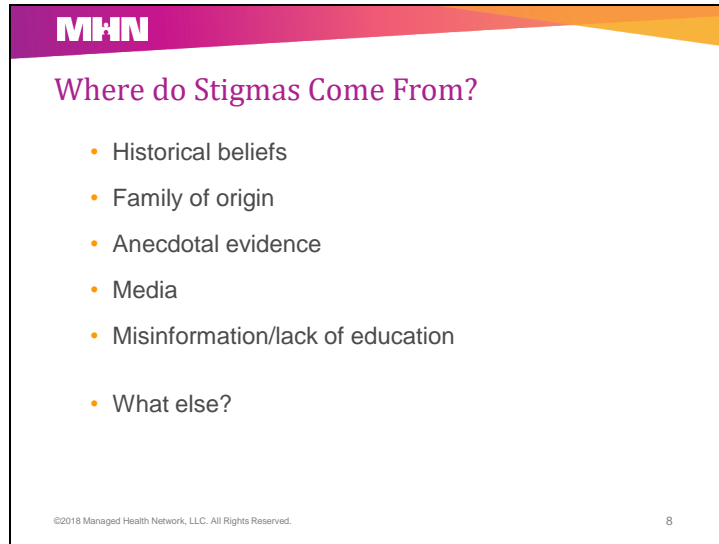
### Typical Outcomes of Self Stigmas

- Shame/guilt/self deprecation
- Isolation/disengagement
- Absenteeism /reduced productivity
- Increase in symptoms
- Reduced job satisfaction
- Worry they are a burden
- **Decrease likelihood of getting treatment**

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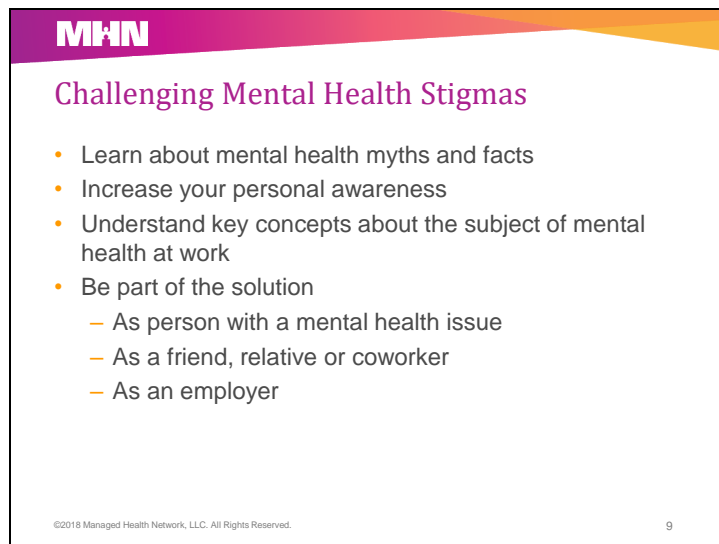
### Where do Stigmas Come From?

- Historical beliefs
- Family of origin
- Anecdotal evidence
- Media
- Misinformation/lack of education
- What else?

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### Challenging Mental Health Stigmas

- Learn about mental health myths and facts
- Increase your personal awareness
- Understand key concepts about the subject of mental health at work
- Be part of the solution
  - As person with a mental health issue
  - As a friend, relative or coworker
  - As an employer

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### Myths about Mental Health

- Mental health problems don't affect me
- People with mental health issues are violent and unpredictable
- People with mental health issues can't hold down a job
- People can be cured by using the power of positive thought and prayer
- Mental health issues are caused by personal weakness
- Therapy doesn't help
- There is nothing you can do to help

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### Facts to Challenge Stigmas

Facts are Mental Health "Myth Busters"!

- You can make a difference
- Everyone has mental health, just as everyone has physical health
- You probably have stigmas that you don't even realize
  - You can manage unconscious bias
- We all judge other people; we just need to be aware of it and manage it
- Being open to talking about mental health issues helps
- Not everyone will want to be open about mental health issues in the workplace

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### Being Part of the Solution: Dealing with your own Mental Health Issues

- Don't let stigmas prevent you from getting help
- Don't allow others to make you feel shame or guilt
- Don't feel like you have to suffer in silence
- Do become educated from reliable sources on your symptoms and forms of treatment
- Do find qualified mental health professional
- Do speak up when faced with ignorance
- Do constructively educate those around you

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### Being Part of the Solution: Supporting A Friend, Co-worker or Loved-one

- Do get educated from reliable sources
- Do watch your words and actions
- Do help them get help
- Do speak up when faced with ignorance
- Do ask your coworkers/friends if they'd like to talk
- Do be aware of your own stigmas
- Don't let stigmas guide your actions
- Don't try to diagnose others
- Don't be afraid to ask questions and offer support

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### Being Part of the Solution: Employers Supporting Employees

- Insure that mental health is given the same priority in the organization as physical health
- Create a workplace that fosters both mental and physical well-being
- Support employee efforts to become healthy
  - Model the behaviors that you want to see from your employees
- Educate and inform all employees about mental health
- Promote accessibility to services
- Don't let stigmas guide your policies and decisions
- Have strong anti-bullying and anti-harassment policies
- Don't allow stigmas to stand unchallenged

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### Points to Remember

- Mental Health is just like Physical Health
  - We all have both and need to pay attention to both
- 1 in 4 adults have Mental Health Issues
  - It is likely that you know someone that may have mental health issues
- Keep busting those mental health myths!
  - Educate yourself and others with facts about mental health
- Reaching out and getting help can make a huge difference
- Change starts with YOU, one person can have a huge impact

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### Your Personal Commitment to Being Part of the Solution

- What are 3 things that you are willing to do to reduce stigma in the workplace?
- How can you support someone you know who might be struggling with mental health issues?
- How can you reach out for help if you are struggling with mental health issues?

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### Final Thoughts

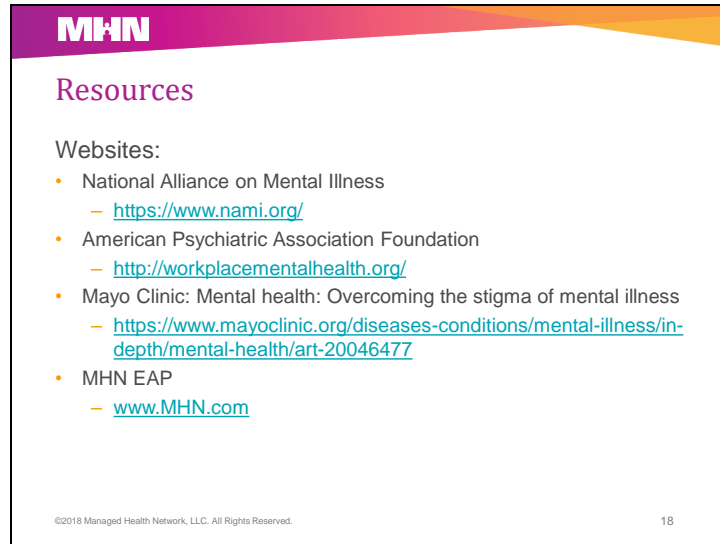
“The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking.”

— **Albert Einstein**

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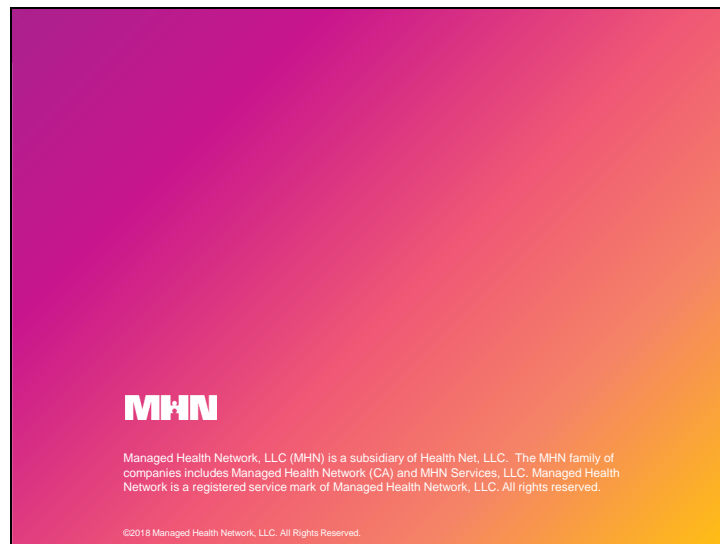
## Resources

Websites:

- National Alliance on Mental Illness
  - <https://www.nami.org/>
- American Psychiatric Association Foundation
  - <http://workplacentalhealth.org/>
- Mayo Clinic: Mental health: Overcoming the stigma of mental illness
  - <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mental-illness/in-depth/mental-health/art-20046477>
- MHN EAP
  - [www.MHN.com](http://www.MHN.com)

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## Handout A. Small Group Discussion

Use one of the following scenarios:

1. Sally walks into the break room and several folks look up and immediately stop talking. Sally knows she's been upset at work lately after the death of her father, even crying and being generally stressed.
2. John, who recently went through a divorce has been struggling some at work, feeling depressed and is finding it harder to concentrate. He shared with a couple of co-workers that he is struggling with his moods. He walks into a meeting and nobody makes eye contact. Someone mumbles, "oh boy...I hope he's not 'in a mood' today".
3. Cindy shed a few tears at work...then took the rest of the day off as a "mental health day". She told only one person (that she thought she could trust) but coming back to work the next day she is faced with folks keeping their distance, "walking on eggshells" and behaving generally uncomfortable around her.

Discussion points:

- For each scenario, what are the public and/or self-stigmas that could be occurring?
- What would you (or did you) do? If you were that person? If you are an observer and encounter this person?
- What are some proactive and healthy ways to respond to the scenarios?
- Any other thoughts?

Thoughts to share with group:

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## **Handout B. Mental Health Myth Busters--Know the Facts**

***Mental health problems don't affect me:*** 1 in 5 Americans have a mental health issue, 1 in 25 have a serious mental health condition. It can affect anyone of all races, ages, income levels and religions. Even if you don't have mental health issues it is likely that you know someone who does. (NAMI.org)

***People with mental health issues are violent and unpredictable:*** Studies show that people with mental health issues are no more likely than the general population to be violent. In fact, these people are ten times more likely to be victims of violent crime than the general population. Only 3-5 % of violent acts can be attributed to individuals with mental illness (mentalhealth.gov).

***People with mental health issues can't hold down a job:*** People with mental health issues can be just as productive as other employees, especially when they receive effective treatment.

***People can be cured through the power of positive thought and prayer:*** While positive thinking and spirituality can be a helpful component of treatment, these are not enough on their own. The most effective treatment is planned with a licensed professional that includes the client's spirituality and religion in the treatment plan.

***Mental health issues are caused by personal weakness:*** This is the same as saying "diabetes is caused by personal weakness." Diabetes, cancer or other illnesses are caused by a combination of environmental and biochemical factors. Mental illness is no different. Brain structure, biochemical processes, trauma and stress can all play a role. These issues are not just "in your head" as mental illness is a real medical condition.

***Therapy doesn't help:*** When they receive effective treatment, 80% of individuals with mental health issues report improvements in their symptoms. Some individuals will benefit from medication, some from therapy and some will need a combination of the two. Major changes can be made when effective treatment is received.

***There is nothing you can do to help:*** Not true. People with mental health issues are more likely to overcome and effectively manage their issues if they have a good support system, people they can rely on and turn to in times of need. There is in fact a lot that you can do to help. Challenging stigmas is a good place to start.

Sources: mentalhealth.gov and NAMI.org

## Handout C. Facts to Challenge Stigmas

***You can make a difference.*** Challenging and changing stigmas starts with individuals, and how people with mental health issues are perceived and treated. The change starts with you.

***Everyone has “mental health” just as everyone has physical health.*** People get headaches or the flu just as people become distressed, or sad or anxious. Our mental health has to do with our emotions, while our physical health has to do with our bodies. Each is impacted by the other. On average, people tend to be more willing to share information about their physical health rather than their mental health.

***We all have some degree of unconscious bias.*** These thoughts are typically based on stigmas or stereotypes that we are unaware of. Unconscious biases tend to influence how we behave towards others with the stereotype. Challenging unconscious biases can be difficult, but to start we must become aware of any biases that we may have, and be open to change.

***You can reduce judgment.*** By becoming more aware of your unconscious bias and your own stigmas, you are already reducing judgment. We all judge. It’s a normal human coping mechanism. Judgement becomes a problem when we hold on to a judgment even when new evidence challenges it and/or when we assume that “our way” is the only “right way.” We can reduce judgment by being more open minded, by allowing new information to come in and allowing old information to go out.

***Be open to talking about mental health.*** Consider the possibility of talking about mental health issues in the workplace, if you feel comfortable with it. You can begin to reduce stigmas by being open to having a conversation about your own emotional and/or mental wellbeing. Make it “ok” to talk about our sadness over the loss of a loved one, or some other emotionally based issue. This can help others be more open as well.

***Not everyone wants to talk about mental health at work.*** Remember to remain strong personal and professional boundaries during any potential discussions about mental health. If you have mental health issues and feel the need to talk about it while at work, it is important that you ask if the other person is willing to talk and/or listen. If you want to offer support to someone you are concerned about, you need to ask if that person is willing to talk with you about their mental health issues. The point of reducing stigma is so that people have the *option* to talk about mental health should they feel a need. Respect the other person if they indicate that they do not want to talk about mental health issues in the workplace. Do not pressure the person if they decline to discuss what may be a sensitive topic for them.

## **Handout D. Being Part of the Solution: Dealing with Your own Mental Health Issues**

***Don't feel you have to suffer in silence.*** If you suffer in silence it is unlikely you will reach out for help or find ways to improve your situation. Also, the symptoms may continue and possibly get worse. It is important to find someplace, someone, or some way to address your mental health issues. Obtaining effective treatment can lead to feeling better.

***Don't allow others to make you feel shame or guilt.*** Mental health issues are not something to be ashamed of as they are part of life. People who struggle with physical illness should not feel shame surrounding their disease. Similarly, a person with mental health issues should not feel shame or embarrassment about their illness.

***Don't let stigmas stop you from getting help.*** Believing in stigmas may prevent you from reaching out for help. You have the power to overcome stigmas and to reach out. Do not let misinformation and/or a lack of knowledge stop you from getting the help you need.

***Share wisely.*** Sharing your mental health concerns with another person can make a positive difference in your life. Remember that this is not an easy process and should be practiced with good judgement and discretion. Choose the person with whom you would like to share your mental health concerns carefully. Sometimes, the process of sharing can be accomplished by starting with small increments of self-disclosure with just one trustworthy person. Choose a time and place that provides privacy, and then simply tell the person little bit of your "truth". See how it goes. If it goes well, then decide if you would like to share a little more information. Each instance of reaching out and trusting someone with your thoughts and feelings will make it easier to do again. If you have been avoiding sharing because concerns about stigmas, then you may find that talking about these issues may take time and patience. Sometimes, when you share this aspect of yourself with another person, they may feel that they can discuss their issues with you as well.

***Obtain information and education from reliable sources.*** There is a great amount of information in electronic and print media that is incorrect, which increases and reinforces stigmas. A person's internet blog on depression is not going to teach you as much as trusted sources such as the Mayo Clinic website and MHN.com. Make sure that you are obtaining good information from reliable sources.

***Speak up and constructively educate those around you.*** If you are interacting with a misinformed individual who is perpetuating a stigma, don't be afraid to speak up. Calmly and respectfully provide the person with the correct information about the issue.

***Get Help.*** NAMI.org reports that 80% of people that seek treatment feel better and find greater life satisfaction.

## **Handout E. Being Part of the Solution: Supporting a Friend, Co-Worker or Loved-one with a Mental Health Condition**

***Do get educated from reliable sources.*** Learn the fact and dispel the myths. Find reliable sources and become more knowledgeable about mental health issues (MHN.com/NAMI.org). Be willing to learn more about the specific issues that are having an impact on the person's life. Remember that you are offering and providing support to the person, and not there to act as a therapist.

***Do help them get help.*** Offer information about available support and encourage the person to seek appropriate professional help. Be aware of the barriers to help-seeking for a person with a mental health problem—especially if this issue is something new to them or a recent development with their mental health. For example, you can research treatment options, make phone calls and review insurance benefit information, or even offer to go with the person to an appointment (if appropriate). They may feel shame, embarrassment, or they may believe that they should be able to cope with the issue on their own. Help the person understand that it will be advantageous to get help.

***Do speak up when faced with ignorance.*** If you are interacting with a misinformed individual who is perpetuating a stigma, don't be afraid to speak up. Calmly and respectfully provide the person with the correct information about the issue. If the other person is engaging in behavior that is disrespectful, then you can ask them to stop the behavior.

***Do ask your friends/co-workers if they would like to talk.*** Offer your time and support to the other person. Let them decide if accepting your offer is the right thing for them at this time. Simply offering support can begin to reduce mental health stigma. If the person does not want to talk right away, ask if they would reconsider your offer at another time. If they do want to talk, try to listen in a non-judgmental way. They may be feeling overwhelmed, embarrassed or frustrated with the situation, or with having to deal with a mental health disorder on an on-going basis.

***Don't be afraid to ask questions and offer support.*** Simply extend an offer of support. This can be as easy as, "if you'd like to talk, I'm here." When providing support, consider the following:

- Talk openly and respectfully
- Don't panic if you are not sure what to say
- Be willing to listen and allow emotional expression
- Acknowledge what the other person says
- Recognize that the situation may be challenging for them
- Avoid passing judgment on that person's feelings, thoughts or experiences
- Reassure them that help is available