

Check Yourself: Understanding Your Own Beliefs

Mental illness stigma is all around us. We may overlook subtle biases, such as stigmatizing messages in the media. Subtle or not, bias has the power to hurt and isolate people. Your work as an ally includes recognizing and challenging your own biases concerning mental illness and those experiencing mental illness. Answer each question honestly and consider how these will affect your work as an ally to students with mental illness.

1. If a student were to disclose their mental illness to you, what would your first thought be?

2. How would you feel if your child disclosed to you that they have a mental illness? How would you feel if your mother, father or sibling disclosed to you having a mental illness?

3. Would you go to a physician whom you thought had a mental illness? Would you go to a therapist or other mental health professional whom you thought had a mental illness?

4. Have you ever been to a social event or march organized for people with mental illness, such as a NAMI Walk? Why or why not?

5. Can you think of three historical figures who had a mental illness?

6. Have you ever laughed at or made a joke at the expense of people with mental illness?

7. Have you ever stood up for a person with mental illness being harassed? Why or why not?

8. If you do not identify with having a mental illness, how would you feel if people thought you had a mental illness?

9. Would you engage in a romantic relationship with someone you thought/knew had a mental illness?

10. Would you live with someone you thought/knew had a mental illness?

Recognizing your own biases is an important first step in becoming an ally. Based on your responses to these questions, do you think you have internalized some of the stigmatizing messages pervasive in our world? How might your beliefs influence your actions as a peer or an educator of students with mental illness? The more aware we are of our own biases and their impact on our behavior, the easier it is to ensure that our personal beliefs don't undermine our efforts to support students with mental illness.