

## Common Misconceptions About Mental Illness

(from [mentalhealth.gov](https://www.mentalhealth.gov))

### **Myth: Mental health problems are rare and unusual.**

**Fact:** Mental health problems are actually very common.

- One in five American adults experience a mental health issue within their lifetime
- One in 10 young people experienced a period of major depression
- One in 20 Americans lived with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression.

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### **Myth: Children don't experience mental health problems.**

**Fact:** It is estimated that more than six million young people in America may suffer from a mental health disorder that severely disrupts their ability to function at home, in school, or in their community.

Half of all mental health disorders show first signs before a person turns 14 years old, and three quarters of mental health disorders begin before age 24.

Unfortunately, less than 20% of children and adolescents with diagnosable mental health problems receive the treatment they need. Early mental health support can help a child before problems interfere with other developmental needs.

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### **Myth: People with mental health problems are violent and unpredictable.**

**Fact:** The vast majority of people with mental health problems are no more likely to be violent than anyone else. Most people with mental illness are not violent and only 3%-5% of violent acts can be attributed to individuals living with a serious mental illness. In fact, people with severe mental illnesses are over 10 times more likely to be victims of violent crime than the general population. You probably know someone with a mental health problem and don't even realize it, because many people with mental health problems are highly active and productive members of our communities.

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### **Myth: People with mental health needs, even those who are managing their mental illness, cannot tolerate the stress of holding down a job.**

**Fact:** People with mental illnesses, like everyone else, have the potential to work at any level job depending on their own abilities, experience and motivation. When employees with mental health problems receive effective treatment, it can result in:

- Lower total medical costs
- Increased productivity
- Lower absenteeism
- Decreased disability costs

**Myth: Personality weakness or character flaws cause mental health problems. People with mental health problems can snap out of it if they try hard enough.**

**Fact:** Mental health problems have nothing to do with being lazy or weak and many people need help to get better. Many factors contribute to mental health problems, including:

- Biological factors, such as genes, physical illness, injury, or brain chemistry
- Life experiences, such as trauma or a history of abuse
- Family history of mental health problems

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**Myth: There is no hope for people with mental health problems. Once a friend or family member develops mental health problems, he or she will never recover.**

**Fact:** Studies show that people with mental health problems get better and many recover completely.

Recovery refers to the process in which people are able to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities. There are more treatments, services, and community support systems than ever before.

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**Myth: Therapy and self-help are a waste of time. Why bother when you can just take a pill?**

**Fact:** Treatment for mental health problems varies depending on the individual and could include medication, therapy, or both. Many individuals work with a support system during the healing and recovery process.

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**Myth: I can't do anything for a person with a mental health problem.**

**Fact:** Friends and loved ones can make a big difference. Only 38% of adults with diagnosable mental health problems and less than 20% of children and adolescents receive needed treatment. Friends and family can be important influences to help someone get the treatment and services they need by:

- Reaching out and letting them know you are available to help
  - Helping them access mental health services
  - Learning and sharing the facts about mental health, especially if you hear something that isn't true
  - Treating them with respect, just as you would anyone else
  - Refusing to define them by their diagnosis or using labels such as "crazy"
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*Citation/Reference:*

Mental Health Myths and Facts, <http://www.mentalhealth.gov/basics/myths-facts/>