

“Let’s Talk”

10 Myths About Mental Illness

Misconceptions about mental illness prevent many people from getting the help they need. Stigma—the shame associated with needing mental health support—can be deeply harmful. Given that rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders are on the rise, continued stigma causes people to suffer in silence needlessly. Here are some of the most common mental health myths and facts.

Myth #1: It’s uncommon to struggle.

A long-standing misconception about mental illness is that it’s not normal to feel bad. But mental health struggles are a common part of the human condition. Nearly [20%](#) of people in the U.S. experience anxiety, and more than [8%](#) had an episode of major depression in 2020, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. These statistics apply only to diagnosable mental health conditions. There are many ways people experience mental health problems, and not all of them require a diagnosis.

Part of breaking the mental health stigma is openly discussing the fact that many people will need mental health support at some point in their lives. In a [World Health Organization \(WHO\) survey](#), about 50% of participants were diagnosed with a mental health illness at some point in their lives. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), one in five Americans will experience a mental illness in a given year, even if their symptoms are not severe.



Hi! I’m Joe Grasso, PhD

As a clinical psychologist at Lyra, my job is to share helpful, research-based insights with you—so you can lead a mentally healthy life at home and at work.

Myth #2: Mental health struggles are inevitable, so there's nothing you can do.

Although it's human to struggle at times, you don't have to suffer. If you find your symptoms are keeping you from fulfilling your goals or functioning in daily life, there are effective solutions. For some, professional mental health care is part of the solution. For others, self-care and coping skills can bring relief. What matters most is that you feel empowered to do something to support your mental health and that you speak with a mental health professional if your own efforts aren't quite enough.

Myth #3: People should be able to handle mental health issues on their own.

If you break your leg, no one expects you to walk off the pain. Just as you would seek care from a physician for a physical ailment, you should have the same expectation around receiving treatment for a mental health issue. You may feel like you have to deal with your mental health concerns alone. In reality, a wealth of support exists to help you feel better.

Signs that you might benefit from professional mental health support:

- You're experiencing prolonged stress, anxiety, or depression.
- You have decreased motivation and/or difficulty concentrating.
- Your use of alcohol or other drugs has increased.
- You're withdrawing from relationships or having recurring or severe relationship problems.
- Your own attempts to improve your mental health are not bringing you relief.

Myth #4: People with strong support networks don't need therapy.

Therapists provide a different kind of support than friends or family. Both contribute to positive mental health, but in different ways. Professional mental health support is:

Confidential. People often feel more at ease opening up to a mental health professional because they are bound by privacy laws.

Objective. The therapist's role is to listen attentively and offer tools and strategies to help you feel better. There is no risk of them judging you, taking sides, or using information against you.

Skilled. Counselors, therapists, and mental health coaches have specialized training and tailor treatment to your needs. Many use therapies that have been proven effective in research because they teach specific skills and techniques to improve how you think, feel, and behave.

Myth #5: Mental health disorders are a sign of weakness or lack of willpower.

This myth about mental illness is one of the most damaging. Mental disorders are medical conditions, just like diabetes, heart disease, and other physical health problems. They are caused by a variety of factors, including genetics, environment, and life experiences like trauma. Managing a mental health disorder requires strength and resilience. Fortunately, this mental health myth is gradually disappearing as awareness of mental illness grows.

Myth #6: Mental health treatments don't work.

Research has disproved this myth about mental illness. Therapies like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), and Interpersonal Therapy (IPT) have undergone extensive research and proven effective in helping people improve and ultimately recover from mental health conditions. Research has actually shown that, by itself, talk therapy can be [more effective](#) than medication, and the combination of both is most effective in the treatment of certain mental health issues.

[Lyra Health's own findings](#) in studies of more than 1,200 Lyra therapy clients across the U.S. have revealed the following:

- ✓ Most clients with depression reliably improved or recovered with the use of evidence-based therapies (EBTs).
- ✓ Most clients with anxiety reliably improved or recovered.
- ✓ More than half of those with depression and anxiety reliably improved or recovered.

To get the most out of therapy, make sure you and your provider are compatible, your provider practices evidence-based therapies, and you're committed to participating in the strategies suggested for your everyday life.

Myth #7: People with mental illness are dangerous.

Sensationalized stories in the media contribute to this mental health myth. But research shows most people with mental health disorders are not violent. In fact, people with severe mental illnesses are [10 times more likely](#) to be victimized than the rest of the population, rather than be perpetrators.

Myth #8: Mental health care is only for people with severe problems.

Everyone has mental health; that is—psychological, social and behavioral well-being—even if they don't have a diagnosable mental health condition. For those who have been diagnosed with severe conditions, there is no substitute for treatment from a licensed care provider. But if you have milder struggles, such as stress, you can still benefit from mental health support. Even if therapy isn't the right fit for you, there are many ways to bolster your mental health, such as:

Mental health coaching

Working with a certified mental health coach can help you build coping skills, set goals, and solve problems.

Self-care apps

These are do-it-yourself tools for learning effective self-care strategies at your own pace. While they can't replace treatment from a therapist or mental health coach, they're a useful starting point for people who don't need, aren't interested in, or aren't yet ready to meet with a professional for care.

Healthy lifestyle habits

These include consistent sleep patterns, a healthy diet, regular exercise, and socializing with people you care about.

Myth #9: People with mental health conditions can't be successful at work.

This outdated myth about mental illnesses sends a discriminatory message that people with these issues shouldn't be in the workforce. While people with severe mental illnesses are less likely to work than those with milder forms of illness, most people with mental health issues are in fact employed. [More than one-third of people with serious mental illness also work](#). Most people with mental health conditions want to work, and research shows doing so can improve their health and quality of life.

Myth #10: Children and teens don't have mental health issues.

Mental health disorders are easy to overlook in children and teens, but even young kids can show symptoms. A study by [JAMA Pediatrics](#) shows half of all mental illnesses develop by the mid-teens, and three-quarters appear by the mid-20s. Only half of these young people get the treatment they need. Getting help early on may reduce the severity of the illness and minimize the risk of secondary problems like substance abuse and trouble in school.

It's likely that we will all struggle with our mental health at various points in our lives. We all deserve support to overcome these struggles, without misconceptions about mental illness standing in our way. Destigmatizing mental health means acknowledging that this struggle is common. It is valid and normal to seek mental health care. While self-care is useful, we don't always have to go it alone, and asking for help is a sign of resilience.

Lyra Health is here to support you.

Lyra, your mental health benefit, is available for those who are interested in starting care. The Lyra provider network is made up of expert, compassionate providers of many backgrounds, lived experiences, and identities. Your mental health matters. Let's talk.

[Sign up to get matched with a provider who's a great fit for you.](#)