

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS

Myth #1: Mental illnesses aren't real illnesses.

Fact: The words we use to describe mental illnesses have changed over time. What hasn't changed is the fact that mental illnesses are not the regular ups and downs of life. Mental illnesses create distress, don't go away on their own, and are real health problems with effective treatments. When someone breaks their arm, we wouldn't expect them to just "get over it." Nor would we blame them if they needed a cast, sling, or other help in their daily life while they recovered.

Myth #2: Mental illnesses will never affect me.

Fact: All of us will be affected by mental illnesses. Researchers estimate that as many as one in five Canadians will experience a mental health problem or illness in any given year. You may not experience a mental illness yourself, but it's very likely that a family member, friend, or co-worker will experience challenges.

Myth #3: Mental illnesses are just an excuse for poor behaviour.

Fact: It's true that some people who experience mental illnesses may act in ways that are unexpected or seem strange to others. We need to remember that the illness, not the person, is behind these behaviours. No one chooses to experience a mental illness. It's also true that people with a history of a mental illness are like anyone else: they may make poor choices or do something unexpected for reasons unrelated to symptoms of their illness.

Myth #4: Bad parenting causes mental illnesses.

Fact: No one factor can cause mental illnesses. Mental illnesses are complicated conditions that arise from a combination of genetics, biology, environment, and life experiences. Family members and loved ones do have a big role in support and recovery.

Myth #5: People with mental illnesses are violent and dangerous.

Fact: Researchers agree that mental illnesses are not a good predictor of violence. In fact, if we look at mental illnesses on their own, people who experience a mental illness are no more violent than people without a mental illness. Excluding people from communities *is* linked to violence. And people with mental illnesses are often among those who are excluded. It's also important to note that people who experience mental illnesses are much more likely to be victims of violence than to be violent.

Myth #6: People don't recover from mental illnesses.

Fact: People can and do recover from mental illnesses. People who experience mental illnesses can and do lead productive, engaged lives. They work, volunteer, or contribute their unique skills and abilities to their communities. Even when people experience mental illnesses that last for a long time, they can learn how to manage their symptoms so they can get back to their goals.

Myth #8: People who experience mental illnesses can't work.

Fact: Whether you realize it or not, workplaces are filled with people who have experienced mental illnesses. Mental illnesses don't mean that someone is no longer capable of working. Some people benefit from changes at work to support their goals, but many people work with few supports from their employer.

Myth #9: Kids can't have a mental illness like depression. Those are adult problems

Fact: Even children can experience mental illnesses. In fact, many mental illnesses first appear when a person is young. Mental illnesses may look different in children than in adults, but they are a real concern. Mental illnesses can impact the way young people learn and build skills, which can lead to challenges in the future. Unfortunately, many children don't receive the help they need.

Myth #10: Everyone gets depressed as they grow older. It's just part of the aging process.

Fact: Depression is never an inevitable part of aging. Older adults may have a greater risk of depression because they experience so many changes in roles and social networks. If an older adult experiences depression, they need the same support as anyone else.