



2026
odd
Socks day
sock it to stigma

2026 Information Kit

GROW | mental
wellbeing
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WHAT IS STIGMA?

Myths and misunderstandings about mental illness can lead to stigma and can be extremely damaging. Reducing stigma through understanding the truth about mental illness leads to better outcomes for everyone.

A stigma occurs when a group of people are not treated fairly and with the same respect as others.

According to the World Health Organisation, stigmas are:

A major cause of discrimination and exclusion: it affects people's self-esteem, helps disrupt their family relationships and limits their ability to socialise and obtain housing and jobs. Mental health stigmas start from myths and misunderstandings. They are negative and unfair. They can be extremely subtle – ranging from exclusion, silence, and hurtful representation, to labelling and stereotypes.

They come in the form of:

- Ignorance or misinformation (knowledge)
- Prejudice (attitudes)
- Discrimination (behaviour)

TYPES OF STIGMA

Personal stigma

a person's stigmatising attitudes and beliefs about other people ('you're so bubbly, you can't be depressed')

Self stigma

the stigmatising views that individuals hold about themselves ('I've got a great life, I shouldn't feel depressed')

Perceived stigma

a person's beliefs about the negative and stigmatising views that other people hold ('people with depression don't work as hard')

Structural stigma

the policies of private and governmental institutions that restrict the opportunities ('mental health research shouldn't get as much funding because it's not a real disease')

WHAT ARE SOME COMMON STIGMAS??

FACT

Mental health issues are common: one in five Australians will experience a mental illness.

Mental illness is not a character flaw. It is caused by a range of genetic, biological, social and environmental factors.

Mental illness isn't caused by weakness and it's not 'cured' by just being strong either.

With appropriate treatment, many people can - and do - recover from mental ill-health.

When a person experiences mental ill health they may not be as productive as usual. But recovery generally means they will return to their full capacity at work.

FICTION

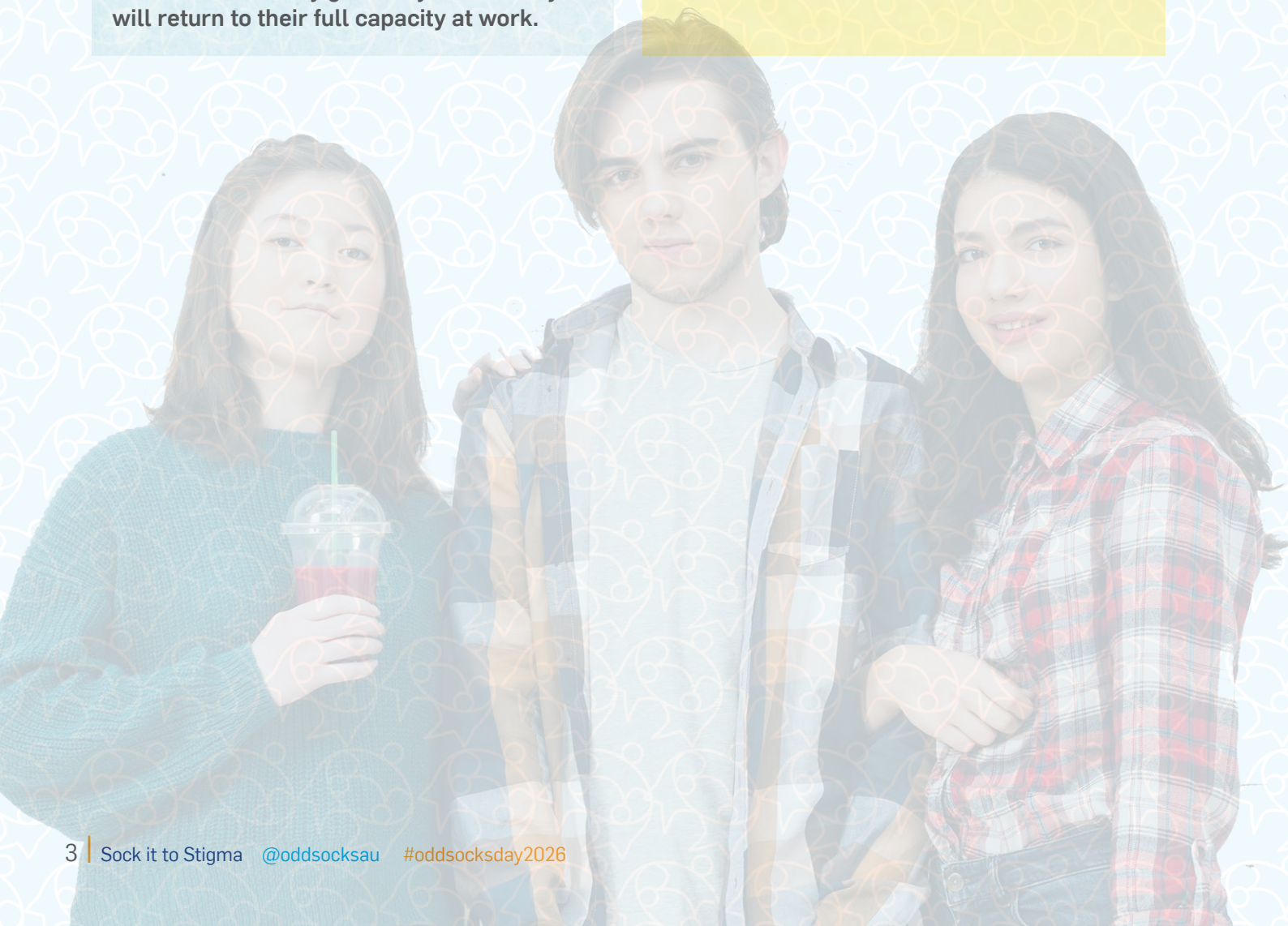
Mental illness only affects a few people.

Mental illness is caused by weakness.

People with a mental illness can 'pull themselves out of it'.

People with a mental illness never get better.

Mental illness permanently reduces a person's capacity to function at work.



WHAT HARM DOES STIGMA DO??

Sadly, Aussies with mental illnesses and their family and friends still experience high levels of stigma and discrimination. People who have a mental illness may feel ashamed. They may hide. They may not get the help or treatment they need.

Costs Lives

About 5 million Australians will experience a mental illness each year, but roughly 60% of people will not seek help.

Delays treatment

people feel discouraged from telling others about their symptoms and getting help when they need it. This reduces quality of life and can even increase risk of suicide and severity of mental illnesses.

Impacts recovery

self-stigma can impact behaviour and works against effective treatment, support, and recovery.

Impacts personal relationships

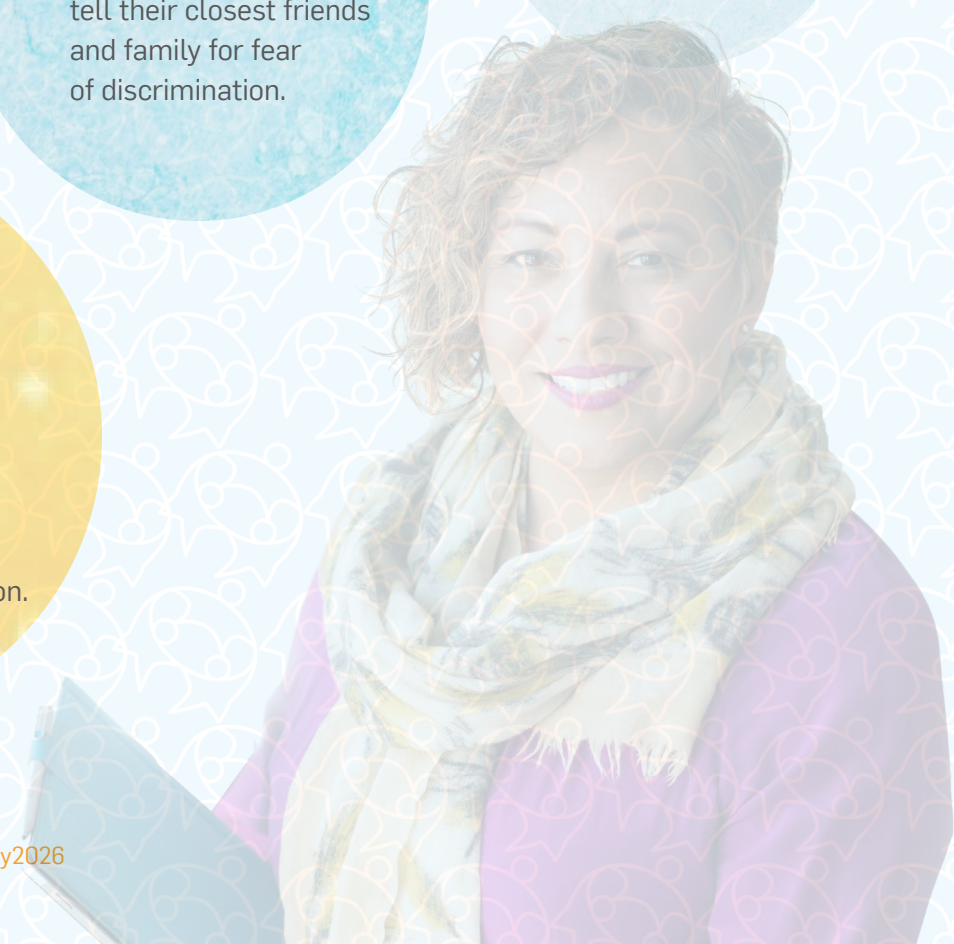
people feel ashamed to tell their closest friends and family for fear of discrimination.

Limits access to basic rights

including housing, employment and insurance.

Causes social withdrawal, isolation and loneliness

caused by self-stigma and not feeling worthy. Also accepting others' prejudiced beliefs can make people believe they aren't worthy of respect and inclusion.



WHAT CAN BE DONE TO REDUCE STIGMA??

Stopping the stigma isn't easy, and we have a long way to go breaking it down and creating a safe and inclusive world for people doing it tough. Understanding the truth about mental illness is the first step.

Evidence suggests that there are 2 key strategies to reduce stigma:

Educational approach which provides people with information and resources to challenge stigmas. In practice this could mean that you:

- ▶ Call out stigma when you see it – in the real world, workplace, and media.
- ▶ Check your own attitudes and behaviours: We've all grown up with prejudices and stereotypes that are passed on in society and reinforced by the people that we know. These can influence our attitudes and behaviours without even knowing.
- ▶ Take the time to review what you think, write and say. How will it impact on someone affected by mental illness?
- ▶ Know the facts: get educated with resources and information about research, treatments, and diagnosis of mental illnesses.

Contact-based approach which facilitates personal contact with people with a mental illness in a respectful and solutions-based environment.

Stopping the stigma isn't easy, and we have a long way to go breaking them down and creating a safe and inclusive world for people doing it tough. Understanding the truth about mental illness is the first step.

Collectively, we can:

- ▶ celebrate and accept difference
- ▶ affirm human rights
- ▶ encourage conversation
- ▶ encourage recovery-orientated practices
- ▶ challenge attitudes and behaviour

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO REDUCE STIGMA??

Keeping in touch

Regular, simple, informal conversations help build a sense of belonging and connectedness which has been shown to promote wellbeing. Find the time to ask about the weekend, have a chat about what you watched last night, ask how their holiday went or just ask how things are going.

Checking in regularly with colleagues, friends, and family also means that we are more likely to notice when things are different or their behaviour changes. It can make the person we're talking to more open to sharing information with us, and make a 'difficult' conversation easier because you've already shown that you're interested and care.

Having the conversation

If you notice any changes in behaviour in yourself, a colleague, friend or family member, consider whether this is a mental health issue. Starting a conversation with someone whom you're concerned about can help them open up, share their worries with you, and seek further support if necessary. Talking to someone about their mental health isn't always easy, but it could help them get better.



WHAT CAN BE DONE TO REDUCE STIGMA??

Conversation starters

- ▶ Choose a good time and place to talk where you are both comfortable and relaxed.
- ▶ Mention the change in behaviour you've noticed and add something positive, e.g. 'I've noticed that you've been.... You're usually so...'
- ▶ Encourage the person to talk by using open-ended questions, e.g. 'What's on your mind?' If the person is reluctant to talk, ask more questions, don't give up.
- ▶ Listen actively, giving the person time to talk without interrupting or giving advice.
- ▶ Avoid the temptation to fill the silences. Reflect back some of the things you've heard to show you understand.
- ▶ Encourage them to talk to their GP or another health professional if they need help.

DO SAY

Thanks for opening up to me

Is there anything I can do to help?

How can I help?

Thanks for sharing

How are you feeling today?

DON'T SAY

It could be worse

Just deal with it

Snap out of it

Everyone feels that way sometimes

Maybe try thinking happier thoughts

GROW wishes to acknowledge The Black Dog Institute for the contents of this kit.

Everyone is welcome at GROW



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