



Let's

Rethink

Mental

Illness

It's time to end stigma and discrimination around mental illness. Use this guide to help change lives.

Introduction

Over half a million people in the UK are severely affected by mental illness. But it's not just what's going on in their minds that makes life hard... it's what's going on in ours. One of the most difficult things about living with a mental illness can be the judgement of others.

This guide is full of advice and information on what to do if you're worried about your own or someone else's mental health. It will also help you understand the stigma and discrimination faced by people severely affected by mental illness, and how you can help change lives.

Contents

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------|
| What are stigma and discrimination? | 2 |
| Understanding stigma | 3 |
| Concerned about what to do? | 4 |
| If someone discloses their mental illness | 4 |
| If you are worried about someone's mental health | 5 |
| If you are worried about your own mental health | 6 |
| If you need urgent help | 7 |
| A useful reminder | 8 |
| About Rethink Mental Illness | 9 |

The quotes featured throughout this guide reflect real people's experiences, but their photos were changed to protect their identity.

What are stigma

and discrimination?

Stigma is when someone sees you in a negative way because of your mental illness. Discrimination is when someone treats you unfairly because of that mental illness. These experiences can make mental health challenges worse and could stop you from seeking help.



“

One day, Chris rang me after work, shivering and crying. To my horror, I found out two police officers had called him out of the pool. Someone felt it was necessary to call the police, to ‘protect the children’, because Chris disclosed to the lifeguard that he had a mental illness.”

Georgie

carer for son, Chris, who lives with schizophrenia



“

I often heard people talk about the emotions displayed as ‘attention seeking’, making comments about the individual’s unstable state.”

Nadia B

lives with BPD (borderline personality disorder)



“

I lost my ex-fiancée, she didn’t want to know me. My friends disappeared off the face of the earth.”

Keith

lives with bipolar disorder



“

My Dad didn’t ‘believe’ in mental illness. His response when I told him I thought I was depressed was, ‘depression doesn’t exist, just smile more, go for a run, get over it!’ We continued to keep my suicide attempt a secret from my Dad and still do.”

Nadia T

lives with EUPD (emotionally unstable personality disorder)

Understanding stigma

There is still stigma around mental illness. Taking a moment to think about what you say can help to reduce it. Throwing away comments and 'jokes' can feel very personal and hurtful to those affected by mental illness.

Challenging misconceptions

Stigma can be caused by harmful misconceptions about mental illness. Like the idea that living with a mental illness is a weakness, or a choice, that it has to make you violent or irrational, or means you can't necessarily live a fulfilled life.

Challenging these misconceptions will help us oppose stigma and discrimination.



“

One misconception that frustrates me is the misdiagnosis of all people with BPD as crazy or manipulative. Often we are just struggling to deal with our pain, and such judgements are not only harsh and reductive, but also unfair.”

Lucy
lives with BPD (borderline personality disorder)



“

One of the most frustrating misconceptions about psychosis is people associating it with 'psycho' and thinking it means psychopath. People with psychotic conditions are not necessarily dangerous, they need help and to feel safe.”

James
lives with schizoaffective disorder



“

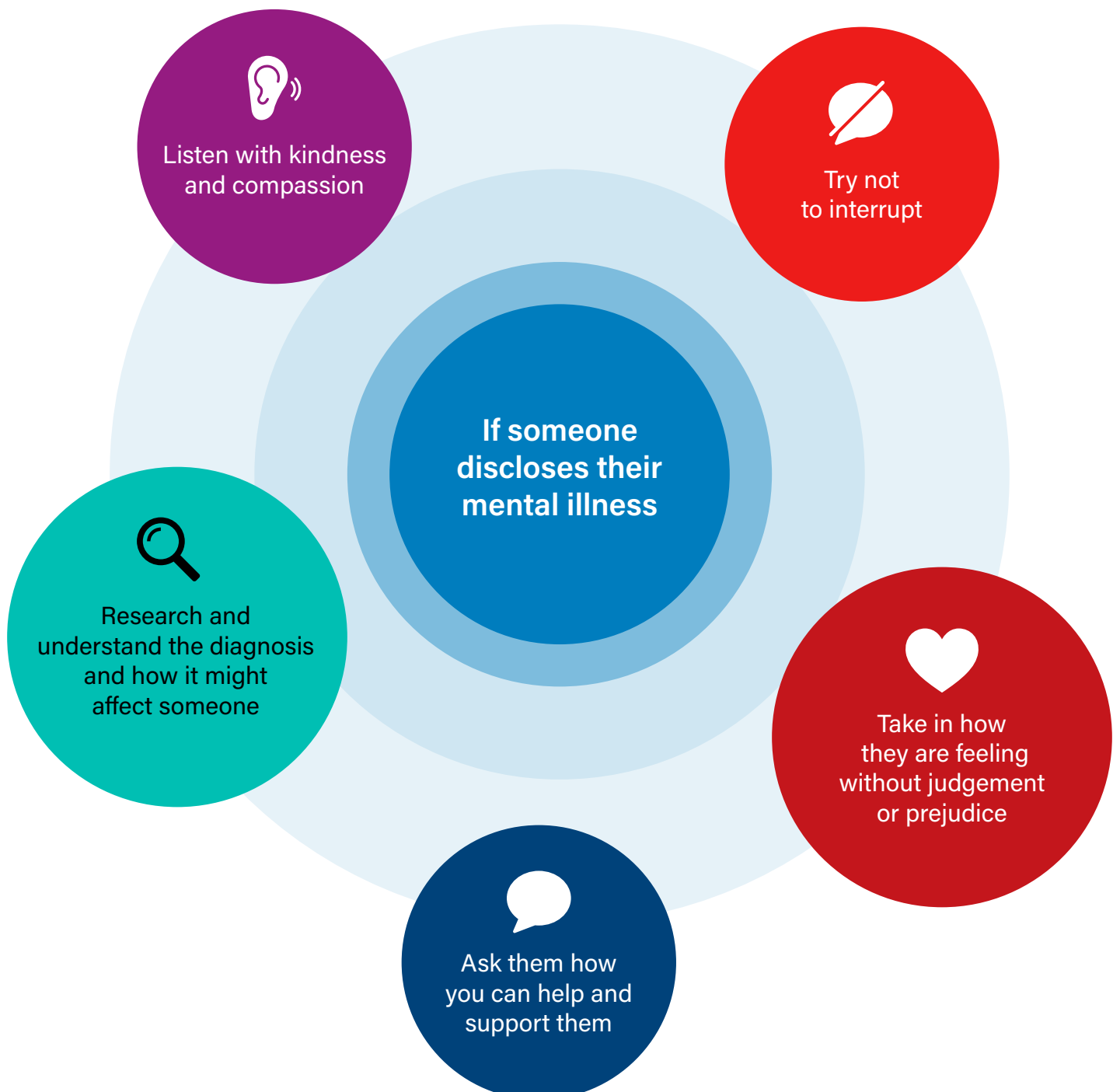
When OCD is misunderstood as a cute personality quirk, it is not taken seriously. Inaccurate depictions of OCD literally stop people from getting help. This is why it is essential to educate people about what OCD really is.”

Georgina
lives with OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder)

Concerned

about what to do?

Worried about your own or someone else's mental health? We're here to help. We're all unique and there's no 'one-size-fits-all' way to support someone living with a mental illness. But here are a few things to keep in mind.



From time to time, we can all feel more stressed, angry or sad than usual. But if you have a friend or relative who experiences these changes consistently over a long period of time, it could be a sign they are developing mental illness.

Here are some common changes to look out for:

- mood and behaviour changes
- work, family or social life issues
- changes in energy or concentration
- sleeping or eating too much or little
- increased use of alcohol or drugs

A natural first step might be to say seeing their doctor is a good idea. The person might not want to, but the earlier they get help and treatment, the quicker they will start to recover. Below are some other ways you can help:



“

My Dad told me that he didn't understand my condition because he hadn't seen anyone in his family go through it before, but that he still wanted to stand by me.”

Keith
lives with bipolar disorder



Try saying:
“I can come with you to your doctor's appointment if you would like?”



Try saying:
“If you are not coping as well as usual, your doctor could help”

If you're worried about someone's mental health



Reassure your loved one that doctors cannot usually share their information unless they agree



Remind them 4 in 10 doctors' appointments are about mental health



If you're worried about your own mental health

More than half a million people are severely affected by mental illness in England, and many more live with common mental health problems.

If you've noticed changes in the way you think or feel which cause problems in your day-to-day life, getting help early can speed up your recovery – **you can get support and treatment from the NHS.**

1 in 4

people experience a mental health issue in England every year

Your GP can:

- refer you (or help you refer yourself) to NHS talking therapy services.
- give you advice on things like sleep, exercise and diet, and refer you to a specialist NHS service like the Community Mental Health team (CMHT).
- offer you suitable medication.

Your GP might refer you to a specialist NHS mental health team if they:

- have tried all options available to them and you're still very unwell.
- think your symptoms are severe or feel you're at risk of suicide or self-harm.

If you need urgent help you can:



Contact NHS 111 for urgent mental health support

You can call NHS 111 or visit 111.nhs.uk/triage/check-your-mental-health-symptoms. You will need to answer some questions. They will refer you to an appropriate service or tell you what to do next.



Contact your local crisis team

They support people who need urgent help. Sometimes you may need a professional to refer you.

Find details of your local team by asking your GP, calling NHS 111 or searching online. Try search terms like 'Crisis team Leicestershire,' or 'Crisis team Camden.'



Ask your GP for an emergency appointment

GPs usually keep a number of appointments free for urgent cases and can make a referral to the local crisis team if necessary.



Go to the accident and emergency (A&E) department of your local hospital

A&E will assess the situation and may arrange for a professional to see you. You might be admitted to a mental health ward in hospital or referred to the crisis team.



Call the emergency services on 999 if you can't get to A&E

They may then get in touch with mental health services such as the crisis team or take you to A&E.



Contact an emotional support line

These can provide support if you are feeling vulnerable and need to talk to a skilled listener. They can be a good option while you are waiting for professional help.



Use Shout text service

You can text Shout to 85258 to connect to a trained person to help you. See giveusashout.org for more information.

A useful reminder

Thanks for helping to create a world where everyone living with severe mental illness is treated with dignity and respect. Here are the key things to remember:

1

Stigma and discrimination can have a profoundly negative impact on people living with mental illness.

2

Understanding misconceptions about mental illness is key to challenging stigma.

3

If someone tells you they are living with mental illness, make sure they feel heard.

4

Keep an eye out for signs of anxiety, irritability and changes in sleeping patterns and mood.

5

If you're worried about your own mental health, the NHS can give you support and treatment. Your doctor would be a good place to start.

6

Find more information on our website (rethink.org), or from other organisations which can help. You're not alone.

About Rethink Mental Illness

No matter how bad things are, we can help people severely affected by mental illness to improve their lives.

As a leading charity provider of mental health services in England, we're on a mission to bring about meaningful change: to our health and social care system, to the way society views mental illness, and to people's lives across the country.

People severely affected by mental illness are at the heart of everything we do. The rich diversity of their experience shapes our advice, information, and around 200 groups and services, and drives our campaigns to change the law and tackle discrimination.

Our trusted advice and information is accredited by the Patient Information Forum.



Email us at lets@rethink.org



Visit us at rethink.org or
scan the QR code



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