

Leader's Guide:

How to Reduce Stigma in the Workplace

Stigma is one of the most powerful barriers to workplace mental health. About 75% of employees and staff have struggled with an issue that affected their mental health. Yet, 8 out of 10 workers with a mental health condition say shame and stigma prevent them from seeking mental health care.

Goal: Knowledge and acceptance are powerful tools for reducing stigma – however, it can be hard to know where to start. Whether you are affected by mental illness yourself or your staff, here are 8 ways you can help fight stigma in your workplace.

1. **Know the facts.** Educate yourself about mental illness including substance use disorders. Examine your own judgmental thinking, reinforced by upbringing and society.

Team Activity: Play this true or false activity around [myths and misconceptions](#) around mental health

2. **Treat it like a physical illness.** [Educate your team](#) on how mental health and physical health are interconnected and a part of someone's overall health.
3. **Encourage open and honest conversations.** Set the tone by normalizing conversations around mental health within your team. Encourage everyone to speak up when they feel overwhelmed or in need of support.

Team Activity: Share your own experiences or stories of other people who have struggled with their mental health, but got help and resumed successful careers.

4. **Choose your words carefully.** The way we speak can affect the attitudes of others.
 - a. For example, instead of saying "She's depressed" say "She has depression."
 - b. Avoid using words that label others, like crazy, nuts, not normal, psycho, schizo, loony
 - c. Don't minimize their experience by saying things like, "It could be worse" or "Just brush it off"

Tip Sheet: How to Reduce Stigma in the Workplace

- Educate others to notice and respond.** Increase your team’s ability to [recognize the signs](#) of someone who may be struggling with their mental health and connect them to support resources.

Team Activity: [Educate your team](#) through role-plays and other activities. These activities offer guidance on how to listen non-judgmentally, offer reassurance, and assess the risk of suicide or self-harm. To educate your team on how to support someone in crisis, check out this [tip sheet](#).

- Focus on the positive.** Mental illness, including addictions, is only part of anyone’s larger picture. Positive thinking helps with stress management and can even improve their health.

Team Activity: Practice overcoming negative self-talk with examples provided.

Negative Talking	Positive Talking
I've never done it before.	It's an opportunity to learn something new.
It's too complicated.	I'll tackle it from a different angle.
I don't have the resources.	Necessity is the mother of invention.
I'm too lazy to get this done.	I couldn't fit it into my schedule, but I can re-examine some priorities.
There's no way it will work.	I can try to make it work.
It's too radical a change.	Let's take a chance.
No one bothers to communicate with me.	I'll see if I can open the channels of communication.
I'm not going to get any better at this.	I'll give it another try.

- Be proactive.** Offer access to programs, resources, and education on stress management and resilience-building. [Nearly 70 percent of people](#) said that their employers are not doing enough to prevent or alleviate burnout.

Team Activity: Walk through programs and resources available to employees before stress leads to more serious problems.

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8. **Support people.** Treat everyone with dignity and respect; offer support and encouragement.

Team Activity: Go over this list of ways to support helping with their mental health.

- Acknowledge each person's basic dignity.
- Have empathy for their life situation.
- Listen to and encourage their opinions and input.
- Validate each other's contributions.
- Avoid gossip, teasing and other unprofessional behavior.
- Emulate the actions of someone you consider respectful.
- Obey workplace policies and procedures.
- Be sure to be inclusive of people struggling with their mental health, at work and off work.

About Starling Minds

Starling Minds™ is a digital mental health platform that delivers immediate, unlimited, and personalized support and training for stress, anxiety, burnout and depression. Based on the principles of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Starling's leading iCBT platform is powered by an expert system that emulates the processes and practices of human-guided therapy to remove the greatest barriers preventing employees from accessing affordable and effective mental health care—cost, access, and stigma.

Learn more at starlingminds.com.