STOP Stigma Survey – Factsheet / Teachers’ Notes

1. Anyone can have a mental health problem.

**ANYONE** can experience a mental health problem. **Up to one in four people** will experience some kind of mental health problem at some time in their lives. Many of these problems are mild and temporary and are often related to life circumstances such as what’s going on at school, in the family or at work.

2. I would be too embarrassed to tell anyone that I had a mental health problem.

Embarrassment, and fear of being stigmatised, is a major stumbling block for people who need help with a mental health problem. Yet, being able to talk with someone can help recovery. Remember, most problems in life, especially mental health problems, get worse if they are left.

3. I would be happy to have someone with a mental health problem at my school or place of work.

One in four of the people in your school, street or family may experience a mental health problem at anytime in their lives. Many stressful life events can make it difficult for people, such as relationship break ups, bereavement, exam stress, pressures to do well and worries about money. We all need to respect and support people who experience mental health problems because support from family, friends and community are vital to recovery.

4. Mental health problems are not real illnesses in the same way that physical illnesses are. People should just pull themselves together.

Mental health problems are real illnesses and can be treated. In the same way there is a reason for every physical health problem so there is a reason for a mental health problem and it is not our fault. Just like our physical health, our mental health can fluctuate as a result of a range of factors and our life experiences. Mental health problems, like physical ones, can affect anyone at any time. If, for example, you’re depressed, no matter how hard you try you can’t just pull yourself together.

5. People with mental health problems are likely to be violent.

This is **NOT** true. This is a very common myth. In fact, people with mental health problems are much more likely to be victims of violence. The reality is that, at odds of 1 in 10 million, you are as likely to be struck by lightning as to be killed by a stranger with a mental health problem. The violence myth makes it harder for people to talk openly about their mental health problems and may cause them to delay seeking help. It can also make friends and family reluctant to stay in touch.

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6. It’s easy to spot someone with a mental health problem.

From the outside you would hardly ever know. Sometimes you may see signs and symptoms but it is not always clear that someone is experiencing a mental health problem.

7. Once you have a mental health problem you have it for life.

Many people can and do recover completely from mental health problems. Professional help and the support of friends and family are important in helping people recover, as is getting back to work or study. People with longer term conditions can be offered treatment and support to help them manage their lives.

8. Medication is the only treatment for mental health problems.

Medication is not the only treatment. It is just one form of treatment that can help some people with some mental health problems. Other treatments include ‘talking therapies’ such as counselling or psychotherapy. Being able to talk to some you trust among your family or friends is an effective ‘treatment’ too.

9. Someone with a mental health problem should have the same right to a job as anyone else.

The vast majority of people with a mental health problem are perfectly able to work, and many do, in every sort of job and profession. People with mental health problems have the highest “want to work rate” out of all the jobless population, with up to 90% wanting to work10. However, stigma and misunderstanding around mental health problems can make it very difficult for people to find work. Fewer than 40% of employers would consider employing someone with a mental health problem (source Rethink website) and only 20% of people with long term mental health problems have a job, compared to 50% of people with a disability overall. (ONS Labour Force Survey 2009). Not being able to find work can cause more problems for someone experiencing a mental health problem.

10. I would not want to live next door to someone with a mental health problem.

The reality is that you might do so already without being aware. There are often no outward signs that someone has a mental health problem. They won’t look different or behave differently. You won’t be at risk from them (people with mental health problems are much likely to be victims of violence than be violent themselves). Remember, one in four of the people in your school, street or family may experience a mental health problem at anytime in their lives. Many stressful life events can make it more difficult for people, such as relationship break ups, bereavement, exam stress, pressure to succeed and worries about money.

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10 Stand to Reason’s “Glass ceiling” campaign quoted on http://www.disabilitynow.org.uk/living/features/questions-of-balance-work-and-mental-health
11. Anyone with a history of mental health problems should be excluded from public office (e.g. from being Prime Minister or in the Government).

There are many brilliant, creative and successful people, of all ages, who have also had mental health problems. Many people with mental health problems lead perfectly ordinary everyday lives and are quite capable of holding down even the most stressful jobs. **Winston Churchill** was considered to be one of the greatest Prime Ministers ever and he had a mental health problem – severe depression, which he referred to as a ‘black dog’. Other famous people have also maintained their successful careers whilst experiencing depression. For example **Angelina Jolie** (actress), **Alicia Keys** (singer) and **J. K. Rowling**, author of the Harry Potter books.

12. As soon as a person shows signs of a mental health problem they should be put into hospital.

Most people with a mental health problem can be successfully treated and supported in the community and will never need hospital treatment. Research shows that in every 1000 people, only 6 will become patients in hospital, 24 will be referred to a community mental health service and 300 will need other help and support. (*source: www.mind.org.uk*).

13. If I thought a friend had a mental health problem I would stay away from them.

Sometimes friends feel that they don’t know enough to be able to help, or feel uncomfortable. You don’t need to be an expert on mental health to be a friend. It’s often the everyday things, like a phone call or a text, that make a difference. If someone you know is experiencing a mental health problem, just staying in touch can really help.

14. It is important for a person with a mental health problem to be part of a supportive community that includes family and friends.

One of the best therapies for people with a mental health problem is to be part of a supportive community, including family and friends, where they are not left out or stigmatised because of their mental health problems. This can really help the person to recover or to manage their mental health problem.

15. I have heard a person I know call someone names like ‘nutter’, ‘psycho’, ‘loony’

This demonstrates how widespread the problem of mental health stigma still is. While it is intolerable nowadays to use sexist or racist language in our society we do not find stigma around mental health problems unacceptable. These derogatory and discriminating words and many others are widely used in the media and elsewhere. Such language increases the stigma faced by people experiencing mental health problems, and makes it more difficult for them to seek support.
16. If I thought a friend had a mental health problem I would want to help them.

As we’ve already said a good therapy for people with a mental health problem is to be part of a supportive community that includes family and friends. People often think they won’t know what to do or say. Embarrassment and fear can make them stay away. Better understanding of mental health problems can reduce the fear and it is often just very simple, ordinary things that you can do to help a friend.

17. If I thought that I had a mental health problem I would talk to someone about it.

Stigma is one reason why many people don’t get help. They are fearful of being mocked, teased, bullied or treated unfairly if they tell people about their problems. If we can reduce the stigma around mental health problems we can help more people sooner. Getting support is a VERY positive factor in treating mental health problems and promoting recovery. **It’s good to talk!**

18. People are born with mental health problems.

Although there is some link between, for example, a parent with a mental health problem and an individual’s chance of developing one, people are NOT generally born with a mental health problem. They can happen to anyone at anytime in their lives. The belief that you can be born with a mental health problem possibly arises from confusion between mental health problems and some learning disabilities. Mental health problems and learning disabilities are very different. Sadly, they are the same in one way: people experience very high levels of stigma because of their conditions.


Using such negative language increases stigma, and stigma hurts and can make a person’s mental health problems harder to cope with.

Describing people with mental health problems as ‘nutter’, ‘psycho’ or ‘loony’ dismisses them as people not to be taken seriously, whilst the perception that they are dangerous – ‘psycho’ or ‘schizo’ – can result in them being excluded from everyday life. Labels like these prevent understanding and respect.

20. Mental health problems only affect adults, not children and young people

Children and young people may experience mental health problems. Estimates vary, but research suggests that 20% of children have a mental health problem in any given year, with about 10% at any one time severe enough to need help. The rates increase as young people reach adolescence.

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11 What is a learning disability? There are many different types and most develop before a baby is born, during birth or because of a serious illness in early childhood. A learning disability is lifelong and usually has a significant impact on a person’s life. People with a learning disability find it harder than others to learn, understand and communicate. There are around 985,000 people with a learning disability in the UK. Like all of us they are individuals who want different things in life and need different levels of support.
Translated into an average school this could mean:

**In a primary school with 250 pupils:**
- 3 children will be seriously depressed
- A further 11 will be suffering significant distress
- 12 will be affected by phobias
- 15 children will have a conduct disorder.

**In a secondary school with 1000 pupils:**
- at any one time around 50 pupils will be seriously depressed
- a further 100 will be suffering significant distress
- between 5 and 10 girls will be affected by eating disorders
- 10 to 20 pupils will have obsessive compulsive disorder.

Roughly 50% of all lifetime mental health problems start by mid teens and 75% by age 25.

**21. If I thought that I had a mental health problem I would know how to get help.**

There are lots of ways for people, including young people, to get confidential* help. For example from school pastoral staff, the school nurse, counsellor, youth services, or GP. There are also websites that can help, such as [www.eefo.net](http://www.eefo.net) or [www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com) which will tell you about help available in Cornwall.

*Discussions with these professionals will remain strictly private unless the professional has concern about an individual’s safety or the safety of others.

**22. Only certain kinds of people develop mental health problems.**

ANYONE can experience a mental health problem. Male / female; rich / poor; young / old… anyone. About one in four people will do so at some time in their life. For some these will be serious problems with long term effects, for others the problems will be brief and linked to a difficult time in their life.

Many of the world’s most famous, creative and influential people have had a mental illness. The list includes great artists, writers, entertainers, political leaders, scientists, entrepreneurs and many others. It is clear that many people experience mental health problems. Just imagine what the world would be like without these people. Some of them have been highly influential in world history during very critical times and others have simply given us great pleasure by being great entertainers.

**23. It’s more important to spend NHS money on treating physical conditions rather than mental health problems.**

It is just as important to treat mental health problems as it is to treat physical illness. You can’t really separate one from the other. Some mental health problems can cause physical symptoms which need treating. If mental health problems weren’t treated, not only would it be very unjust but it could also mean that the NHS would need to spend even more money in the longer term. There is often a relationship between physical and mental health problems. For example, sometimes people with severe physical illnesses can become depressed.