



## **May is Mental Health Month Help #EndTheStigma**

May is Mental Health Month. During May, Sinnissippi Centers is committed to raising awareness about mental health and encouraging individuals to take care of their emotional wellbeing. This year we want to focus on the impact stigma has on putting up barriers to those seeking treatment for mental illness.

James Shover is a Recovery Support Specialist at Sinnissippi Centers. He gave us his thoughts on mental illness and stigma. What follows is entirely written by James.

The stigma of mental health is something that unfortunately, will never go away. However, at Sinnissippi, we are working our best to help curb that stigma and normalize mental health issues. When people hear that someone has a mental health issue, they are generally dubbed as someone who is unstable, but that isn't always the case. Mental health issues can range from anxiety, depression, to some of the more extreme cases, such as schizophrenia or psychosis. We need to understand that all these are an illness, and no one chooses to feel that way. That is the biggest part of the stigma in my opinion. We don't judge someone if they have diabetes or cancer, because they are an accepted illness, whereas mental health illnesses are still frowned upon. The irony is that these illnesses, like many others, can be helped with therapy and/or medications.

Another part of the stigma comes from the movies or television shows where people lie on a couch, with their hand on their head, and blame everything on their parents. Counseling or therapy sessions are nothing like that. The easiest way to explain what a regular session is like, is sitting in a room, on a chair and venting to someone about your problems who will never judge you, or maybe more importantly, never repeat what you have said to anyone else. That is the part I have always appreciated, the anonymity of therapy. There are also some clinicians who will have your session outside at a picnic table, or go on a walk, or even on the telephone. Whatever the client is comfortable with.

In regards to the stigma of mental health treatments, I think the biggest misconception is that once you start therapy, you will always be in therapy. That couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, most people will not always need therapy. Maybe life has just been kicking your butt lately and you need someone to vent to. There are people who only need a couple months of therapy and there are others who need a little bit longer, but both are equally viable, depending on your situation. Some people are also afraid of getting into therapy and then realizing they have a lot more issues than they thought. I ask, is that such a bad thing? We all have things about ourselves that we would like to change, and therapy is easily the simplest thing you can do. You don't have to join a gym, lift weights, run on a treadmill in front of 30 people. No. While you are working on yourself, it is just you and your clinician in a room, by yourselves. There are no judgmental or condescending looks or glances, only simple conversation.

The last stigma that I will touch on is that some people think therapy is for the weak minded. Another inconceivable lie that has been proven wrong many times over. Modern day NFL, NBA and MLB teams have therapists on staff that even travel with the teams. These are people who are at the pinnacle of their jobs and have a very strong mental fortitude to reach that plateau and sometimes they need help as well. If million-dollar athletes who are consistently in the public spotlight rely on the help of mental health professionals, why can't you?

Sinnissippi has offices as far as Freeport and as close as Sterling with many different types of clinicians and programs to assist everyone. It also goes without saying, but we have different clinicians that specialize in LGBTQ matters as well. It doesn't matter what your race or sexuality is, we have clinicians that will understand and represent your best interests at heart. We also have many youth and veteran programs that can range from groups to solo sessions. We are truly a community mental health



organization that is aiming to stop the stigma that is associated with mental health. So, if you have been on the fence about reaching out to us, or feel the need to come back, please reach out, because there is nothing wrong with having a little help to reach your goals.